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Is modern women's roller derby a form of feminism, and what role do men play within it? I propose that women's roller derby is born out of radical feminism, while male volunteers and supporters act as important nodes in broad support networks. In this article, I examine the history of male supporters of women's movements as well as feminist perspectives of Title IX and women's sport. I then contrast the findings with survey and interview data from a women's roller derby league from the east coast. As roller derby's revival exemplifies radical feminism as sport, survey respondent's views on roller derby as a women's movement correlated with their level of active involvement with the league. The interviewed athletes, volunteers, and fans, however, were primarily interested in roller derby as an athletic outlet and not as a form of feminist expression. Regardless of their view on derby as a women's movement, the majority of respondents had positive reactions towards male involvement, and understood that they played important roles in creating the league's formal and informal support networks. While roller derby allowed women's gender maneuvering and the creation of alternative femininities, it also allowed for alternative masculinities, inviting the participation of men who are "not like the others."

A MAN IN A WOMAN'S WORLD: MALE SUPPORT
NETWORKS IN WOMEN'S FLAT
TRACK ROLLER DERBY

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The scholarly study of the women's roller derby revival has been relatively sparse. The all women full contact sport has seen a tremendous explosion in popularity since its early 2000's resurrection, spreading from a single league in Texas to become an international phenomenon, complete with a unifying governing body and multiple yearly international tournaments. Those researchers who have published on the sport have discussed it primarily through the lens of female empowerment, through the creation of women's only spaces, allowing gender maneuvering and open defiance of socially ascribed gender roles. The women who play the sport also own it, running the organizations as a non-profit and fulfilling all of its necessary duties, from league governance to physical setup and breakdown of the track on game day. However, while derby is an outlet for female expression, male involvement in the sport cannot be ignored, despite its absence from prior study on roller derby. Men in women's derby serve not only as referees, coaches, and fans, but are also important nodes in the derby community's support networks. Whether as an active participant or a supporting friend, family member, or significant other, men have played integral roles in supporting the resurgence of women's roller derby.

In this paper I seek to examine the roles filled and social networks created by men in derby, as well as explore relationships between players, volunteers, and fans in

general. I will frame male participation within the broader context of male involvement in historic women's movements as well as discussing prior study of derby and those researcher's findings on gender construction within it, and the knowledge gaps created by failing to explore male participation. I will begin by discussing the history of roller derby, beginning with its creation in the 1930s before examining its revival in the early 2000s. I will briefly outline the game and its structure as well as my personal history within the sport across multiple roles.

I will explore male involvement in women's movements across history, citing both primary and secondary sources from male participants advocating for equality in women's education, suffrage, and health, as well as political and social equality. Cited figures include Thomas Wentworth Higginson, John Neal, W.E.B. DuBois, Horace Mann, John Dewey, William Sanger, Isaac Asimov, and Senator Joe Biden.

I then shift focus to existing literature on women's roller derby, discussing the creation of alternative femininities and women's only spaces, and exploring roller derby's DIY nature and punk ethos. I close the section by focusing on gendered power dynamics within general sport culture, while comparing and contrasting those patterns within the sport of roller derby. I also briefly touch on the language embedded within derby culture, and how that language is rooted in traditional masculinity despite evolving out of a women's sport.

The data collection in this paper took the form of exploratory, inductive research. While initial attempts at mixed methodology were attempted, the absence of available

respondents lead to a shift in method. In its place, qualitative interviews were performed, and then thematic analysis was used to explore meanings expressed by the respondents.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF FLAT TRACK ROLLER DERBY

Roller derby's original incarnation dates back to the 1930s. At its inception, roller derby was as its name described: a race on skates. Seeking to draw larger crowds, Leo Seltzer (the owner of the Transcontinental Roller Derby, a touring skate competition) began to craft a new sport that featured physical contact, with participants in the race seeking to impede or pass other participants. As the audience enjoyed the increased emphasis on collisions and falls, the sport began to evolve into banked-track roller derby, a co-ed physical competition on a raised track, with two teams of five skaters seeking to score points by passing members of the opposing team (WFTDA History 2015). While teams were comprised of both male and female players, gameplay itself was segregated by gender, with each group taking turns on the track. Gameplay alternated between all male and all female jams.

The sport began drawing larger and larger audiences, thanks to both its touring company and its television broadcast in the 1940s. As the sport continued to evolve over the next 30 years, competing franchises emerged. While some focused on the competitive nature of the sport itself, others shifted their focus to theatrics and spectacle, creating over the top characters who engaged in a game that looked more like professional wrestling on wheels. As derby's popularity waned, the Seltzer family shut down their organization in 1973 (WFTDA History 2015). Roller derby would be

remembered largely as it existed in the 1970s, a scripted match between athlete actors who sought to please the crowd with fake hits and over-the-top action. Several attempts to revive the sport were made, but these, too, focused heavily on roller derby for its theatrics rather than its athleticism. These attempts were all short-lived in their popularity (WFTDA History 2015).

Modern flat-track roller derby saw its inception in early 2000s Austin, Texas. Flat-track roller derby's founding league, the Texas Rollergirls, created a model of sport that rapidly spread across the U.S., eventually becoming international. Interestingly, roller derby's revival began as the brainchild of Daniel Policarpo, a local musician who went by the name of Devil Dan. Dan sought to organize a group of women into a local spectacle, a rockabilly circus with flashing lights, musical acts, hard hits, and beautiful women. However, after organizing the participants and raising the funds, Policarpo left the group, taking the money with him. Rather than walk away, the women organized and decided to continue without him (Brick 2008).

Naming their organization "Bad Girl Good Woman Productions," the skaters began to craft their own version of Devil Dan's vision. To avoid being again cheated out of their work and finances, the group agreed to take full ownership of the sport both on the track and behind the scenes. They combined the kitsch of derby from yesteryear with punk rock's do-it-yourself attitude. The skaters may "dress in costume, adopt stripper-type stage names and endure sexually suggestive penalties, but they also deliver real hits, mind the business end of their leagues and disassemble their skate tracks by hand at the end of each competition (Brick 2008)." The women involved in derby's revival

recognized Policarpo as being responsible for the idea for the sport's revival, while simultaneously crediting themselves for bringing it to fruition. April Ritzenthaler, one of the founders of Bad Girl Good Woman Productions, stated "This wasn't my vision, it was Dan's original vision... But once he checked himself out of it, we were the ones who took the reins" (Brick 2008). Ritzenthaler continues: "It was him saying, 'I can control 80 girls,'... We have committee after committee, and we still can't control each other" (2008).

Ultimately, Bad Girl Good Woman Productions were responsible for creating the first version of roller derby's modern revival. It was their negative experience at the onset that led to the women maintaining ownership of their league, a practice that is continued by an overwhelming majority of leagues today. Eventually, Bad Girl Good Woman Productions would dissolve as the group split into two factions: those that wanted to skate on a banked track and those who preferred the widespread availability of the flat track. The flat track group rebranded themselves as the Texas Rollergirls, and the sport began to grow.

Abandoning the banked track, modern flat track roller derby is played in any space with a clean skating surface and room for a taped-down rope track. The flat track allowed the game to become much more viable for small groups of people to organize and play, as you no longer needed to construct a large skating surface. As the game spread, leagues continued to pop up, crafting themselves after the Texas Rollergirls' original all female, player-owned-and-operated model. By 2010, more than 450 flat-track roller derby leagues existed worldwide (WFTDA History 2015).

Greatly aiding derby's spread was the creation of a governing body, allowing unified rulebooks and standard practices to exist. This governing body was the United Leagues Coalition (ULC), created in 2004. The first meeting of the ULC in 2005 was attended by representatives of 20 member leagues with a focus on creating roller derby as a legitimate modern sport. Following the meeting, the ULC voted to change their name to the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, or the WFTDA (WFTDA History 2015).

By allowing leagues to exist independently of one another, while still encouraging interleague play, the WFTDA has assisted in spreading locally-owned, not-for-profit leagues across the globe. These leagues are female owned and operated, with the athletes performing most of their league's duties, from fundraising, league governance, and even setting up and tearing down the track at their events. The WFTDA's model of league ownership is the prevailing one, with the vast majority of leagues existing as non-profit entities.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE OF GAMEPLAY

Modern roller derby has become a complex sport that centers on the contest between two teams, played on an elliptical track taped onto a flat surface. Each team can have up to 14 players (and an additional two coaches or bench staff). The game is played in two 30 minute halves, with each half comprised of an unlimited number of jams. A jam is a unit of gameplay with no minimum time length and a maximum length of two minutes. Each jam allows five skaters per team to participate, for a total of ten players on the track. Each team fields four blockers, and one point-scorer who is called the jammer (indicated by a printed star on her helmet). At the beginning of each jam, the blockers line up on the track in a group (referred to as a “pack”), with the jammers lining up behind them. At the jam-starting whistle, each team’s jammer attempts to make it through the pack, while the blockers who make up the pack attempt to assist their jammer in getting through while simultaneously preventing the opposing team’s jammer from passing. On the “initial pass” (the first pass a jammer makes through the pack on each jam, prior to all subsequent lapping passes) the first jammer to emerge from the pack is declared “lead jammer.” The lead jammer has the ability to end a jam by repeatedly tapping her hands on her hips. Both jammers are able to score points, regardless of whether they have been declared lead jammer. Jammers score points by lapping skaters on the other team, with one point being awarded per skater passed following the initial

pass. The status of lead jammer allows an element of strategy, as the lead jammer will seek to pass opposing skaters and quickly call the jam off before the opposing jammer has the same opportunity. Following the conclusion of a jam, a thirty second timer is started which allows the teams to field a new group of blockers and jammers, with the next jam beginning at the conclusion of the thirty seconds (WFTDA 2015).

The game is full-contact, with skaters engaging in hip and shoulder checks and blocks. No participants are allowed to use their arms while hitting or passing one another, nor are they allowed to trip one another or make contact to an opponent's back. All contact between skaters must be between their shoulder and mid-thigh. Skaters who hit one another using illegal blocks (or hit them in illegal places like the head, back, or legs) are subject to being sent to the penalty box, forcing a team to skate short for the duration of their penalty time (WFTDA 2015).

With a complex system of scoring and penalties in place, the game is officiated by a crew of seven referees. These referees are positioned both inside and outside of the track boundaries. Three referees are positioned outside of the elliptical track, while an additional two are positioned inside the track. These referees are "pack referees," and they skate in formation around the pack of blockers, watching for illegal behavior. One of the two inside pack referees is designated the head referee. The head referee is the ultimate authority of each game, and their decisions are binding. The remaining two referees are "jam refs," who follow the jammers from inside the track boundaries as they score points. Each team is assigned a single jam ref per half who is responsible for counting all points scored during every jam (WFTDA 2015).

Further managing game duties are volunteers called non-skating officials (or NSO's). NSO's perform the routine tasks that are necessary for the game to run, but most are unable to perform other official duties such as calling penalties or starting/stopping the game outside of its structured stoppages. A few examples of NSO duties would be the scoreboard operator, penalty box manager (who, along with two others on a crew, times penalties and assigns seats in the penalty box for incoming skaters), game timer (who whistles the start and end of each jam as well as counting the 30 seconds between jams and timing time-outs), and score keepers (who track the official scores reported by skating jam refs, record the points and relay the count to the scoreboard operator for display to the teams and crowd). These volunteers typically dress in all black (or alternatively wearing pink "official" t-shirts or polos) and serve under both the referee crew and a managing Head NSO, who oversees all NSO duties and ensures the games run with as few stoppages as possible.

CHAPTER IV

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

One of the largest driving forces in my personal interest of gender dynamics in women's roller derby is my own experience volunteering in the sport. My personal journey through the sport has seen me playing several volunteer and support roles, with the bulk of my experience coming from participating as a roller derby referee. I have also served as a team coach for a season, as well as providing personal support to my wife, whose league I volunteer for.

From August of 2011 until December of 2015, I have been an affiliated referee for my hometown league on the east coast of the US. Since then, I have refereed over one hundred games in five different states, for both WFTDA affiliated and non-WFTDA teams. The bulk of my refereeing has been through traveling with my wife and her league as they play along the east coast, though I have periodically traveled to other leagues to volunteer out of personal support of their league (or more frequently, at the request of their head referees). As the community of experienced referees is significantly smaller than the community of players, it is common for those officials to travel up to four or five hours each way to staff games for each other's hometown leagues. Due to the dearth of experienced officials and the friendships developed by those who work together frequently, there is a system of reciprocity developed among officials. By traveling several hours to assist other leagues one weekend, the officials can ensure they

have experienced referees willing to make the return trip to help staff their own games the following weekend. The outcome of this has both positive and negative effects on the derby community; while games are staffed by the most experienced officials (and are therefore more fairly and accurately officiated), referees who are more local but less experienced are given fewer opportunities to gain the experience necessary to join this core group.

The experience earned by working my way into this traveling group of skilled officials, as well as the relationships built with other highly qualified referees recently gave me the opportunity to referee at the East Coast Derby Extravaganza (ECDX), a large international derby tournament hosted by the Philadelphia Rollergirls. Traveling around 10 hours each way for a weekend of back to back games, I worked with the Boston Derby Dames and Victorian Rollergirls from Victoria, Australia, who are currently ranked number 21 and number 2 in the world, respectively. I have also had the opportunity to work other roller derby tournaments and multi-bout events, such as the Got To Be NC Derby Tournament hosted by the Carolina Rollergirls of Raleigh, North Carolina, as well as the Low Down Throwdown hosted by the Soul City Sirens of Augusta, Georgia and Virginia is for Shovers, hosted by the Charlottesville Derby Dames of Charlottesville, Virginia. These events all require applications and submissions of game histories and referrals by other experienced referees to be staffed, with only the highest qualified applicants being offered officiating positions.

My home league (the majority of referees affiliate with a home league for training and informational purposes) became a full member of the WFTDA in 2013, and I have

been acting as one of their Officials Representatives since. The Officials Representative is a chosen referee that is the liaison between the home league and the governing body of the WFTDA. This grants me access to the official's side of the WFTDA forums, the internal communication hub of all players and referees in the WFTDA. There, I have insider access to the governing and decision making processes of the WFTDA, especially as it pertains to rule creation and interpretation. This experience has not only assisted in my own officiating and understanding of the sport and ruleset, but also benefits the league as we have immediate access to a knowledge bank of officials for clarifications and interpretations. Further, I contribute to the sport as a whole, discussing rules theory and voting on rules drafts for future publication. I was even able to find a small section of the rules with an undefined outcome, position the issue to the WFTDA governing body directly, and have the issue corrected through an official publication. While it was a small and minor change, the rules of the sport as played internationally by thousands of leagues were changed as a direct result of my own participation.

In addition to extensive experience as a traveling WFTDA affiliated referee, I have also been an active participant within my home league. My knowledge of derby rules as well as my role as an Officials Representative lead to a position on the league's training committee, where I served from early 2012 to mid-2015. On the training committee, I assisted with planning practices and setting league policy concerning training issues. My position was not strictly advisory, as I also directly lead practices and skating drills for the league as a whole, including players from all skill levels. I was particularly involved in training "fresh meat," the term used for new, incoming skaters

who have yet to pass the minimum skills testing set by the training committee. In addition to my rules knowledge, my relatively high level of skating ability made me an important asset in teaching footwork and skating skills to new league members. Due to my heavy involvement in training new skaters, I was voted as the league's Fresh Meat Coordinator for the 2014 and 2015 season, and was responsible for all practice planning as well as teaching skills.

My involvement with my home league also saw me serving for a single season as a league coach for one of their three home teams (teams who strictly played one another throughout a year-long season, but did not play teams from other cities). As a coach, I planned weekly practices and developed skills and strategies which the team (and league as a whole) still use. I also developed close friendships with several of the skaters on the team and was able to form a sense of camaraderie with league members that would not have been able to develop when I served the league strictly as a referee.

Whereas serving as an official allowed me to develop close relationships with other officials in the surrounding cities and states, it did not allow for close bonds to form with the athletes themselves. Moving into a coaching role allowed me to completely change my relationship with the skaters, with my role becoming less authoritative and more aligned with the athletes. I was no longer an oppositional force to the skaters (who previously saw me as antagonistic, a governing volunteer who punished infractions with penalties), but instead was a member of the team who encouraged them to push themselves. Despite leaving coaching after a single season (primarily due to time

constraints), these relationships continue, with several athletes still referring to me affectionately as “coach.”

Finally, I have assisted my league in ways that can't be directly measured in terms of my own participation. My wife has been an active player since late 2010, and has been a member of the league's all-star charter since early 2012. Since the beginning of her participation, I have provided necessary financial and logistical support in encouraging her to play. As we are both graduate students at the same university, have a two year old child, and I work a full time job (with her staying home with our son during the day and going to school and playing derby at night), our derby participation requires cooperation and partnership with one another. Through the purchase of required safety equipment and skates, the payment of her league dues and required insurance, my financial support has enabled her continued participation, both benefitting her personally and the league overall, as she is an integral and talented jammer and blocker for the chartered travel team.

Additionally, I assist my wife's participation through logistical support, planning my work and school schedule around her practice times. As we have a two year old child, this enables me to guarantee child care during practice, granting her the freedom to play with neither the financial burden of securing a babysitter nor the need to miss practices due to my own conflicting work schedule. Her involvement as a player requires a schedule adjustment from the entire family, as I work to balance my own practice, work and school schedules around her practice and class schedule. Neither of our participation in the league would be possible without the support of the other. By supporting my wife's

participation, and her supporting my own, we each are able to benefit the other personally as well as the league as a whole. Without our continued cooperation and support, neither of us would be able to participate and the league would lose both a talented player and a dedicated volunteer.

CHAPTER V

MALE GATEKEEPERS OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Historically, social progress towards gender equality has not been an effort made by women alone. Male involvement in women's movements has been a constant indicator of their success. The necessity of male involvement lies within the patriarchal power structures of society itself. As men have historically occupied the primary seat of power in society, women's movements have been filtered through their ability to recruit male supporters. While the women may be the driving force behind their own social progress, men have been the gatekeepers of their success. When questioned on the likelihood of women's suffrage, Mrs. R. L. Craig, a California suffragette, stated "I believe [the woman suffrage amendment] will carry, and the greatest argument I can find that points conclusively to that fact is the number of men who favor the movement." (Taylor 1998: 297) Despite suffrage being viewed as a women's issue, Craig realized that its success depended wholly on the recruitment of male supporters as they were the voting class who would grant or deny them their rights.

The different movements towards equality and their proponents (both male and female) have here been organized into three main topics. Excerpts from male activists will be organized around women's suffrage, women's education rights, and women's social and political rights.

Women's Education

Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a proponent of women's equality, was outspoken on women's rights to education as he recognized their subservience in 1800's society was entirely due to systematic oppression rather than natural differences in ability between the sexes. In his 1859 article titled "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet," Higginson stated "I have shown that woman's inferiority in special achievements, so far as it exists, is a fact of small importance, because it is merely a corollary from her historic position of degradation. She has not excelled, because she has had no fair chance to excel. Man, placing his foot upon her shoulder, has taunted her with not rising." (1992: 111)

Higginson understood that women were unequal entirely due to male refusal to grant her equality, and also pointed out the irony of men pointing to that inequality as an indicator of a woman's lowered abilities. Rather than understanding that the iniquity was perpetuated by the standing social order, men pointed to women's subservience as evidence that they didn't deserve equality or else they would have already attained it. Higginson continued, claiming:

There is the plain fact: woman must be either a subject or an equal; there is no middle ground... But, as matters now stand among us, there is no aristocracy but of sex: all men are born patrician, all women are legally plebeian; all men are equal in having political power, and all women in having none. This is a paradox so evident, and such an anomaly in human progress, that it cannot last forever... (1992: 144).

Higginson advocated for granting equality of opportunity for education, and claimed that it was an inevitable outcome. When viewing history and the "natural order," Higginson stated that it was logical that men would be the dominant sex as history was

full of war and only the strong would dominate. However, as the world settled into an era of peace, men's natural place of power was suddenly not-so-natural. The world did not require physical strength, it required education, and while men were naturally gifted strength above women, they were unnaturally gifted their education; it was a byproduct of their previous reign. Higginson advocated that women should be allowed education, and from that would come the rest of her rights – the right to vote, the right to work, the right to equality (1992). He concluded his article by pointing out the irony of public expectations on women and the denial of women's rights:

What rational woman can be really convinced by the nonsense which is talked in ordinary society around her, - as, that it is right to admit girls to common schools, and equally right to exclude them from college; that it is proper for a woman to sing in public, but indelicate for her to speak in public; that a post-office box is an unexceptional place to drop a bit of paper into, but a ballot-box terribly dangerous? (1992: 114).

Other advocates of the equality of education were Horace Mann and James Angell, who fought in the late 1800's for the desegregation of higher education by sex. In his 1854 dedication of Antioch College, Mann wrote that co-ed higher education was the only acceptable step if men and women were to receive equal education. Segregated learning would either lead to unequal treatment, or would mean lowering the level of education for men. A segregated learning environment could not serve the function of raising women's education to be on an equal footing to male colleges. If resources were unfairly allocated, the education provided would surely be of a lower quality than a man's, while if resources were split evenly, the quality of existing schools would drop due to siphoning off talent and finances. Mann realized the only option for equal

education was through the integration of the sexes at existing schools, particularly in the Ivy League (Mann 1992).

Twenty years after Mann's dedication of Antioch College, James Angell continued Mann's arguments in his article "Shall the American Colleges be Open to Both Sexes?" Angell stated that it was impossible for segregated education to reach true parity between the sexes. How can a women's only college reach the heights of education achieved by Harvard, Yale, and Brown? "How can we duplicate the libraries, the scientific collections, and all the apparatus for illustrating instruction? Must our sisters and daughters wait for such achievements before they can enjoy equal intellectual privileges with our brothers and sons?" (Angell 1992: 135)

Angell continued his essay, rebuking the main arguments against integration. Segregationists claimed that mental habits and processes of women were so different from men, the two sexes could not work profitably in the same classes or in the same institutions. Angell, however, pointed out the obvious flaws in the logic which perpetuated that idea. If their differences render them incapable of learning in a mixed environment, what justification did they have for the existing integration of primary schools? Are the sexes similar enough through all of childhood, but as soon as they hit adulthood they drastically split? Further, did the segregationists believe that all men were the same, or did they just fail to acknowledge that despite their differences in aptitude and temperament, different men were still capable of learning in the same institutions? Further, Angell stated that while differences between men and women do naturally exist, their similarities far outweigh their differences. Also, would their differences themselves

not serve to enhance the education of both sexes? “May not the difference in the mental constitution of the sexes be such that each sex may furnish suggestion, inspiration, and help to the other?” (Mann 1992: 136)

An 1871 editorial to *The Amherst Student* outlines what was truly at stake by offering integration. In response to those stating certain rights and privileges would be lost by admitting women to higher education, the author stated:

The privileges which would be taken from us are the very same which our parents, our friends, the Faculty, and trustees have been for years trying to induce us to forego. The privilege of abusing innocent Freshmen, the privilege of destroying college property, the privilege of making night dreadful with hideous noises, the privilege of transforming a literary society into an organized mob, the privilege of screaming our insults at the women who visit our cabinets or even ride through our grounds, and the privilege of being sent home in disgrace – these, forsooth, are the “privileges” which would be “materially abridged” by the admission of women to our monastic community... (*Amherst Student* 1992:137).

The article continued by pointing out the thoughtless many who are in need of constant restraint, and how the presence of women would only serve to provide that restraint. The author argued that “her presence would effect a complete reformation in many of those immoralities which now disgrace our college.” (1992:137) In addition to the admittance of women benefitting the college by providing restraint to the crassness of men, the advancement of women themselves would also serve to benefit both sexes. Women have demonstrated power and authority in every sphere where they had been granted a position of authority, and the realms of society, literature, and art particularly were evidence of the influence of powerful women. It only logically followed that equality of education would also see a positive impact were women granted admittance and positions of authority.

The authors closed with “Twenty students firmly believe that her coming will ‘materially abridge’ our dangerous privileges. She will prevail where College Law is a failure. ‘For what the law could not do in that it was weak,’ she, coming to us in all strength of purity, will speedily accomplish.” (1992:137)

John Dewey furthered support of the equality of education, and in his 1911 article, titled “Is Co-education Injurious to Girls?” he continued the arguments of Higginson, Mann, and Angell before him. Dewey stated that at the time of writing, 19 of 20 of the boys and girls in public schools (through high school) are educated together. When it comes to college, however, Dewey was quick to point out the failures of the academic institution and public views of it. Society at large equated co-education with “the education of women in colleges for men.” (Dewey 1992:140) Dewey pointed out the failure inherent in that idea: “Permitting a few women to enter ‘colleges for men’ is one thing; co-education, conjoint education of women and men, is quite another.” (140) Dewey realized the importance in distinguishing the two ideas as separate. Allowing women into colleges for men still maintained that the right to education was primarily the right of the patriarchy, and while women may be allowed to participate, they are still participating in a right that is distinctly masculine. True co-education would not have colleges for men; it would simply have colleges that were open for all.

Just as the argument made by the students at Amherst, Dewey believed that women in higher education would increase morality among college students. He stated that forbidden fruit is the sweetest; by allowing women into higher education, the temptation for more iniquity would certainly decrease. Dewey also wrote that those who

believed co-education would overly feminize higher education, and the boys who graduate from it, were wrong and their ideas were unfounded. He claimed that the differences between men and women in strength of mind is nonexistent. The idea that women are feeble of mind and constitution has no grounds in reality; women had proven themselves just as capable as men in the classroom. Dewey further supported past claims that differences in ability have been due entirely to the inequality of opportunity in education and the oppression of women rather than innate biological difference (1992).

As a feminist, John Dewey understood the oppressive practices and beliefs of the men in power. He makes note of the habits of men to quickly determine the abilities and traits of women rather than allowing women to determine them themselves:

Oftentimes those who make the most extreme statements regarding the distinctive innate traits of women seem to think that it is absolutely necessary for men to lay down the law regarding what traits really are – and what are not – natural to women; they have been totally unwilling to allow and encourage these traits to work themselves out by furnishing them a free and congenial environment in which to operate (Dewey 1992: 143).

By refusing women the ability to define themselves, the ruling men were able to maintain an oppressive power structure while at the same time rationalizing women's inequality as the natural order of the world. Men were either unable to see or unwilling to admit that it was their own actions that prevented women from attaining equality. By disallowing women the ability to define themselves, men used existing inequality to further support their own rights to superiority, a cyclical argument which Dewey claims had no basis in biological difference and was solely rooted in existing social hierarchy.

Women's Suffrage

From the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention to the passing of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, the struggle for women's voting rights was fought and debated fiercely by the populace, both male and female. Men, making up the entirety of the voting class, were divided on the issue, and without the support men, women did not have the power to secure their rights to suffrage. While women were the primary driving force in the struggle, male participation was a necessary fact for their success. Thomas Wentworth Higginson inadvertently outlined this, stating:

The woman suffrage movement in America, in all its stages and subdivisions, has been the work of women. No doubt men have helped in it: much of the talking has been done by them, and they have furnished many of the printed documents. But the energy, the methods, the unwearied purpose of the movement, have come from women: they have led in all councils, they have established the newspapers, got up the conventions, addressed the legislatures, and raised the money (Kimmel 1992:3).

Despite recognizing that women were the primary laborers in the movement, his quote directly outlined the primary hurdle to be tackled by the motivated women: they were forced to filter their movement through the body of the male legislature and voting class. Women were certainly doing the work, and while their political fervor had them leading councils and organizing conventions, when they addressed the legislature, they were addressing the very men who were denying them their rights and who alone had the power to grant them.

Nineteenth century author John Neal was an outspoken supporter of women's equality, and made pointed observations on the power imbalance inherent both in

government and in society at large. Neal recognized that women were disempowered, not through any natural divide between the sexes, but rather by overwhelming social forces which maintained existing power structures. He stated that that “women’s helplessness, passivity, and dependency were the results, not the causes, of their oppression (1992:82),” an unpopular claim that predated similar arguments by other feminists by nearly a half century (Neal 1992). Neal described the imbalance of power between the sexes and recognized that women are given only the power that best benefits men, stating “Everywhere, among Barbarians as well as Christians, they are admitted to a sort of qualified companionship – everywhere, they are allowed to enjoy just what Man may happen to think will best promote his comfort – and nothing more.” (1992:82-83) Like many who would come after him, Neal observed that men were the gatekeepers to social equality, and as such they would open the gate only as far as would benefit them. Any change in the social order would require the support of men to allow it.

Realizing the dominant power structure obviously favored white males, supporting men began organizing and publicly aligning themselves with women’s groups to support their advocacy for suffrage. A 1912 editorial to the New York Times titled “The Heroic Men” discussed not only the importance of male support for suffrage, but also the difficulty of publicly supporting women’s rights in the view of other men. The editorial addressed a public march through New York City, consisting of 800 men who supported women’s right to vote. Past rallies saw men belittled and attacked, while antisuffragists catcalled them from the sidelines and questioned their manhood. The editorial publicly supported the men and their willingness to be belittled by others to

support a woman's right to vote. It began "The men who have professed to believe in woman suffrage have always been numerous. But these men are going to do more than profess, they are going to march before the eyes of the more or less unsympathetic multitude." (New York Times 1992:261)

Men's willingness to face that "unsympathetic multitude" was not without reason. As supporting men, they realized that it was their duty to sway the opinions of other men, as without male support (and the votes that came with it), women's suffrage was destined to fail. The 800 men who publicly marched for women's rights believed their cause to be righteous, while also understanding the value that their public presence brought to the women's movement (New York Times 1992). The heroic men were willing to open themselves to public scrutiny and ridicule, feeling it necessary for the advancement of women's rights. The editorial ends with fond acknowledgement of their support, stating "They are courageous fellows. The march of the 800 may be renowned. We hope they will all hold out from Thirteenth Street to Carnegie Hall, and we extend to all the 800 our sympathy and admiration." (1992:261)

Further adding to overall public support, notable public figures also realized the power of their voice and the necessity of women's equality. W.E.B. DuBois openly supported women's rights to vote, and called on black voters to support women at the polls. DuBois realized the hypocrisy of the black community to be forced to fight for their own rights based on race while systematically denying others their rights based on sex. As a public supporter, he made his appeal for support, listing five reasons that black voters should openly support women's suffrage. First, he stated that in order for

democracy to function, the populace should constantly be engaged in open discussion of the fundamentals of that democracy. Second, he realized that the same logic which would deny women to vote based on their sex could easily be extended to deny people of color the right to suffrage based on their race. Third, women's suffrage would increase the furthering of black rights overall, as allowing women to vote would increase the "proportion of unselfish intelligent voters among Negroes." (DuBois 1992: 253) Fourth, he claims that the North allowing women to vote would force the hand of the South to also extend that right, as if they did not then the North would double its voting bloc in proportion to the South.

DuBois' final point was his strongest argument on rallying black support for women suffrage. DuBois stated that women's voting rights allow "a better chance to appeal to a group that knows the disadvantage and injustice of disenfranchisement by experience, than to one arrogant and careless with power. And in all cases, the broader the basis of democracy the surer is the universal appeal for justice to win ultimate hearing and sympathy." (1992:254) By aligning the black vote with women suffrage, DuBois understood he would be uniting two oppressed groups who would continue to fight together to further dismantle the inherent disadvantages embedded in the system which would continue to undermine their groups if they stood divided. DuBois ends his plea simply: "therefore: Votes for Women." (1992:254)

Women's Social and Political Rights

As women have progressed in their fight for equality, their focus would constantly shift to the next battle to be won. Following the rights of equal education and women's suffrage, focus shifted to other important topics. A controversial area even until today, the right to women's healthcare, contraception, and abortion has been a constant struggle to bring into public discourse. Margaret Sanger, a champion of early contraception, spent her life fighting for access and education on women's health and planning. An advocate for women's health and a political activist, Sanger authored a column labeled "What Every Girl Should Know" before it was eventually censored due to the Comstock Act, an anti-obscenity law used to stamp out public discussion of sex and women's health (Yasunari 2000).

Margaret would go on to publish many articles and pamphlets discussing birth control measures, one of which would be titled *Family Limitation* in 1914. Following its publication (and continuing for many years into the future), her literature detailing pregnancy prevention was hunted and confiscated under Comstock's anti-obscenity laws. Sanger would eventually be driven to move to London for a short time, before ultimately deciding to return to the US in order to face those who would seek to prosecute her (Yasunari 2000).

Margaret's husband, William Sanger, would eventually be arrested for distribution of *Family Limitation* while Margaret was abroad. William Sanger was coerced into providing a copy of the pamphlet to an undercover officer who sought to arrest Margaret. Realizing she was in London, the officers offered William a plea deal if

he would plead guilty to the distribution of obscene materials. Rather than to cooperate, Sanger used the opportunity and publicity of his trial to challenge the law itself and to advocate both for his wife and women's rights to contraception (Sanger 1992).

In his public statement, Sanger openly admits to having broken the law by distributing information regarding the prevention of conception. Using his admission, however, Sanger states "I admit that I broke the law, and yet I claim that, in every real sense, it is the law, and not I, that is on trial here today." (1992:349) Throughout his defense, Sanger never backed down from his conviction that the law, and thus his own prosecution and the sought after prosecution of his wife, was unjust. He proudly defended his wife and her works, stating "I cannot claim the honor of connection with the writing, publication, or circulation of this pamphlet. But it is true just the same that I had original convictions on this most vital subject years ago." (1992:350) He continued his praise for Margaret while simultaneously denouncing the law and its claims of lewdness: "I am proud to be identified with the work of that noble woman, Margaret Sanger. Even if she were not my wife I would consider it an honor to link my name with hers. I stand for everything in this pamphlet as written by this illustrious pioneer. I absolutely deny that there is anything obscene, indecent, lascivious or disgusting in this pamphlet." (351)

William Sanger continued to rail against the law, and claimed that the true nature of their hunt for his wife had less to do with the content of the literature and more to do with her ultimate goals: public education. Sanger pointed out that the information found in the pamphlet was no different than that which would be found in medical books on the same subject. If his pamphlet was obscene, would the medical texts not also be guilty of

the same obscenity? His true crime, then, was not the content of the pamphlets but rather their free public distribution, as medical texts were only truly available to those who could afford them. Sanger pointed out the absurdity of obscenity laws, likening them to witch hunts: “The race has long ago emerged from the era of witchcraft, but yet today witchcraft exists in a different form, in the shape of obscenity laws... Obscenity, like witches, will cease to exist when men cease to believe in it.” (Sanger 1992:351)

According to Sanger, the law existed as a method for denying rights both to women and to the poor. He stated that by restricting access to free public information, the law was directly responsible for the deaths of thousands of women yearly due to complications from miscarriages and abortion. While the public openly mourned the loss of life due to the sinking of the Lusitania, they openly praise their righteousness in denying health education to the poor on account of obscenity, which ultimately causes more lives to be lost than a sinking ship or other large scale disaster. Yet, because the lives being lost were the lives of the poor, the public had no concern or moral outrage. Sanger’s closing remarks indicate his own morality as he publicly shamed the law and those who would support it, while stating that his own support of his wife and her work were born out of his own sense of masculinity:

Comstockery, Prudery, and its offspring Ignorance, stalk behind every miscarriage and abortion. The State has given power to an irresponsible official of an irresponsible society; therefore the State is the real malefactor, the law is on trial, not I. Every fibre of my being revolts against the inhumane spectacle of insidious murder which this statute carries in its wake... The court has the physical power to send me to prison, but it cannot take away from me my convictions and ideals. They are mine. I would rather be in prison with my ideals and convictions intact, than out of it, stripped of my self-respect and manhood (Sanger 1992:352-353).

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were filled with activists, like the Sangers, who would struggle for equality in education, in suffrage, and in women's health. These fights were obvious struggles that needed to be won. As women continued to secure the rights owed them, the causes activists fought for became more abstract and less easily noticeable. Several of the large victories had already been won, though it continued to be obvious that women were still not viewed as equals. Several prominent public figures then continued their struggle for equality in a sphere where victory was not as easily won: public perception.

Moving forward in time, one outspoken proponent of equality was science fiction author Isaac Asimov. In 1969, Asimov released an article titled "Uncertain, Coy, and Hard to Please." In it, he explored historical contexts of gendered inequality while arguing that it is the duty of men to grant women equality in the public sphere by recognizing the ways in which men continue to oppress them (and in turn teach them to oppress themselves). Asimov opened by exploring popular literature and the irony of public praise of Shakespeare by those who would view women as subservient. He stated that Shakespeare had always written his female characters compellingly, earning praise for his depiction of strong heroines. So why, then, would a society which views women as subservient simultaneously praise a male writer for his depiction of strong women? How can men celebrate the strength of fictional characters while simultaneously publicly discussing the weakness of women in the real world? Asimov asked "How is it, then, that so many of us nevertheless remain certain that women are inferior to men? I say 'us' without qualification because women, by and large, accept their own inferiority."

(Asimov 1992:435) We praise strong fictional women, and oppress real women into believing themselves inferior.

Why did this concern Asimov? He stated that it is his role as a science fiction writer to dream of future societies, and he hoped that in the future humanity could be more rational in their treatment of women than the current society. Asimov then explored the historical context of public views of women, and like Higginson, he stated that the natural world led to inequality due to the physical differences between the sexes, but as the world has moved out of being purely physical and into the social, empowered men continued to use their physical superiority as their rationale for inequality. However, as the world shifted out of being rooted in physicality, social explanations were required to continue this inequality. The largest of these social forces was organized religion, with the Bible's creation myth immediately crafting a story of subservience just as Eve was subservient to Adam. Religion had then "enabled dozens of generations of men to blame everything on women. It has made it possible for a great many Holy Men of the past to speak of women in terms that a miserable sinner like myself would hesitate to use in referring to mad dogs." (Asimov 1992:437)

With inequality being so firmly rooted in the social conscious, it was to be expected that women have had to continuously struggle for the rights. The belief in the superiority of men is ingrained into men and women alike from birth. Out of that belief, it is no wonder that women have had to fight for their rights. Asimov pointed out, shamefully, that it was not until 1920 that women received the right to vote, a right that was "freely granted to every drunkard and moron, provided only that he happened to be

male.” (Asimov 1992:437) By cementing into young minds that inequality is normal, men rationalize that this must be the natural order of things. Asimov pointed out the reasons behind men’s difficulty in admitting equality among the sexes:

We begin by teaching a young man that he is superior to young women, and this is comforting for him. He is automatically in the top half of the human race, whatever his shortcomings may be. Anything that tends to disturb this notion threatens not only his personal self-respect but his very virility.

This means that if a woman happens to be more intelligent than a particular man in whom she is (for some arcane reason) interested, she must never, for her very life, reveal the fact. Not sexual attraction can then overcome the moral injury he receives in the very seat and core of his masculine pride, and she loses him (1992:437).

Men were trained that despite any of their own shortcomings, they were naturally superior. Women, in turn, learned to know their place as subjects and hide their strength, lest they end up alone and uncared for.

Asimov concluded his argument by predicting a coming revolution, as technology had so drastically removed us from the physical world and our roles within it. The strength of men has no attached meaning in a social world. The invention of and rights to birth control have divorced sex from parenthood. Women can now choose not to have children without being forced to give up sex. The two physiological differences between the sexes (physical strength of men and the ability of women to birth and feed children) have lost all meaning in the modern world. As modernity marches towards mechanization and automation and women have been granted control of their fertility, a sexual revolution was inevitable. Men, in their final attempt at maintaining the status quo, have turned to the only remaining power they had left: social stigma. Men

controlled fashion and dress, as it was important to be able to instantly tell men and women apart at a glance so that one could immediately categorize the other (and treat them appropriately). However, Asimov predicted that the coming sexual revolution would remove the boundaries between dress and thus take with it the social stigmas between the sexes (1992).

Asimov closed his writing with a remark concerning Greek homosexual love; he wrote that the Greeks believed male homosexual intercourse to be the greatest form of sex, as it was the only love that was committed between two equals. Asimov framed his call for equality within this, stating “I think that the Greeks were right in a way, and that it is much better to love an equal. And if that be so, why not hasten the time when we heterosexuals can have love at its best?” (Asimov 1992:441)

Through history and into modernity, women have been placed into subservient positions in society and forced to fight for recognition and equality. As recognized by Higginson, women have been the driving force behind the social changes, but ultimately it is men who have been the gatekeepers to their success. Until such a time that women have true social parity with men, the imbalance of power will continue to force social movements to require male support in order to effect change. Whether it be the right to education, suffrage, healthcare, or recognition of equality in the social consciousness, men have been necessary filters for social change, not due to any physical or mental superiority but rather simply because they have occupied the seats of power and thus held the authority to effect a change or protect the status quo. A final example of this can be

found in the arguments of Vice President Joe Biden, then a Senator, in his opening statements to Congress concerning the 1990 Violence Against Women Act.

The Violence Against Women Act sought to classify domestic violence as a civil rights violation, and had several key changes to the way that these cases were handled with the ultimate goal being both greater protections for women in need, while also opening a public dialogue on an issue that was frequently swept under the rug. What was notable about Biden's opening remarks, however, is the audience that he had invited to participate. Biden submitted the legislation and then openly stated that it was not perfect. However, had had invited that day both experts in the field as well as female victims of domestic violence. He stated that his goal was to work with them to ensure the legislation is meeting their needs, not his. Biden recognized that in this matter, women are not only the experts on the topic, but the victims and the served population. However, as they were a vulnerable group, they alone did not have the power to bring about change (Biden 1992). Biden, as a Senator, realized his position of power, and in proposing the legislation while simultaneously opening the floor for feedback, he used this authority to allow the women to publicly discuss the issue of domestic violence and their needs as survivors. As a man in power, the needs of the women and their movement were filtered through him.

Higginson, Angell, and Mann realized the importance of male participation in the fight for women's coeducation. Through their writing, it was clear that their goal was simple: to convince other men in positions of power to accept the equality of ability between the sexes. The students at Amherst themselves called on the male administration

to admit women to their school, realizing it was for the betterment of both sexes. Neal, DuBois, and the heroic men who marched for woman suffrage realized that equal rights for political voice would be for the betterment of all, and that suffrage was not just a women's issue, but a rights issue. By forbidding the female vote, men were ensuring that their government remained subject to an oppressive class who could use the same logic to deny others of their rights.

William Sanger saw the importance of supporting his wife's work and the publication of contraceptive information. He used his own trial to publicly shame Comstock's anti-obscenity laws, and was able to frame them as being oppressive against not just women, but the poor. Sanger believed that the action that was being punished was not obscenity, but rather the dissemination of privileged information to poor women at no cost. Just as the others, Sanger realized that women's rights were ultimately human rights, and they should be supported by all. Finally, Asimov spoke publicly on the need for equality in social discourse, as a free, educated nation could not simultaneously view half of its population as innately inferior without justification. By publicly supporting the strength of women, Isaac Asimov sought to encourage his fans and fellow authors to realize and celebrate the strength of women in their lives, not simply applaud them in fiction.

By advocating for educational, political, and social equality among the sexes, these men realized the importance of their social power. While women were the primary organizers and ultimately the fuel for the fire of social progress, men were the gatekeepers for their success for no other reason than the existing social hierarchy that

granted them their privilege. To secure the right to co-education, the change had to be admitted by men in power. To win the vote on suffrage, men were obviously necessary to the movement, as they alone were casting the votes in favor of equality. Even in the realm of public discourse, outspoken influential men were needed to speak openly on the strength of women. While women's movements have ultimately been driven by and for women, men's reflexivity of their social power is necessary for progress towards equality.

CHAPTER VI

TITLE IX AND EQUALITY IN SPORT

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 required gender equity for all federally funded educational programs, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex. (Yuracko 2005). While Title IX concerns equitable funding of any educational program, and is comprised of ten primary areas of focus (access to higher education, career education, education for pregnant and parenting students, employment, learning environment, math and science, sexual harassment, and standardized testing and technology), it was not initially applied to athletics (Title IX 2016). High school and collegiate athletes have used this legal precedent to fight for equality in sport, arguing that by funneling finances solely into male athletics, schools are denying women equal opportunity to compete.

It was not until a series of protests by women student athletes that the law was used to ensure equity in funding for women's athletics. Four years following Title IX's passing, Yale's women's rowing team stood topless in the office of the athletic director, "Title IX" written across their bare backs and chests. They did so in protest of unequal funding and treatment of Yale's female athletes, highlighting their denied access to changing rooms and hot showers following a meet (both of which were available to their male counterparts). Tired of boarding the bus home soaked in sweat and icy lake water, the Yale women's rowers invoked Title IX and brought it into the realm of sport (Brake

2010). Title IX's application towards athletics provided legal precedence for male and female sports teams receiving the same federal funding, a first step towards creating parity in athletics.

In order to be in compliance with Title IX, a school must meet one of three criteria: First, they may provide opportunities to participate in athletics proportionate to enrollment rates of students by gender. Second, a school may demonstrate an historical and ongoing expansion of programs for the underrepresented sex. Lastly, a school may accommodate fully the interests and abilities of whichever sex may be underrepresented (NCAA 2016). Of the three methods available for compliance, the majority of schools use the first method: proportionality. Varsity athletic spots must be available for each gender based on the proportion of students enrolled at the institution. A school that is split evenly between males and females, then, must ensure that half of the varsity spots available to students are reserved for females (Yuracko 2005).

Title IX's ruling, however, could hardly be argued to have brought about equality in sport. By and large, women's sports are viewed as secondary to male sports, and in some cases even exist as slowed down versions, such as the differences between men's baseball and women's softball. The majority of private funding, as well as the majority of public interest, is poured into men's varsity athletics, with women's games being attended primarily by friends and family, not fans (Suggs 2006). Further, Title IX only applies to the world of federally funded school athletics. Following the opportunities for sport present in public schools and universities, women have little guarantee of continued athletic outlets post-graduation. Recreational and professional sports are still dominated

by male sports' culture. Title IX may have been able to secure equal opportunity to participate in high school and collegiate sports, but a legal ruling can do little to change public perception and culture of sport. Women's athletics are still largely far from equal in the eyes of most.

Some authors would argue that Title IX and its push for proportionality are not practices ensuring equality, but rather the opposite. Leo Kocher states that the impact of Title IX being applied to sport does not result in anti-discrimination for females, but rather is actively discriminatory toward males. Kocher points out that one can't state that the prevalence of men in sport is due to sexism and inequality in funding. Rather, it is due to men's greater interest in sport, whereas women are largely less interested in competing (Kocher 2005).

Kocher states that a single assumption is responsible for school's adopting a "proportionality at any cost" mindset. This assumption is that sex discrimination is the only possible explanation for the fact that females participate in intercollegiate sports at a lower rate than males (2005). Kocher writes:

The quota advocates are not interested in surveys that demonstrate differing interest and preferences between the sexes. They do not care that in college intramural athletics (where every person who wants to play gets to play) males outnumber females by at least 3 to 1. They view the fact of a million more male athletes than female athletes in our high schools not as evidence of more males than females being interested in varsity competition, but as an affront to gender equity. They see no significance in the fact that females outnumber males in virtually all other extracurricular categories in high school (Kocher 2005:148).

Kocher makes his point concerning proportionality being discriminatory towards males due to natural interest in sports, but fails to see the larger picture: female disinterest

in athletics is the result of a gendered upbringing, where boys are taught that being an athlete is “manly” and girls are raised to focus on more feminine activities. Since these gendered expectations are ingrained into a patriarchal society, it logically follows that high school and college women are proportionally less interested in sports than men.

Roller derby as a women-lead sport addresses this, even if not intentionally. Derby is spreading the appeal of being physically tough to young women and encouraging them to participate in athletics. Roller derby came about as the result of the culture of Title IX, where women are technically allowed to participate in “watered down” athletics, but not encouraged to participate in anything overtly physical; there are no women’s football teams, no women’s wrestling teams.

Feminist Perspectives of Title IX and Sport

Feminist theory has evolved and fragmented into multiple perspectives, each offering its own paradigm through which to view the world. At its core, feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality, focusing on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Gender is a core organizing principle of social life, existing across time and space, both creating and requiring gendered difference (Hattery 2010).

Feminism to date has existed primarily in three waves. First wave feminism focused on two issues: the status of women in the family (marriage, economic self-sufficiency, reproductive rights), and women’s suffrage. During first wave feminism, the institution of sport was not viewed as central to the lives of either men or women; men’s participation was limited to those who could attend elite male colleges such as Harvard or

Yale. As such, sport as an institution was ignored by first-wave feminists (Hattery 2010). After women were granted suffrage, first wave feminism took a hiatus, returning during the 1950s and 1960s as feminists adjusted their sights.

Second wave feminism brought about modern feminist theory, focusing on reproductive rights (the fight of Roe V. Wade), economic freedom (the equal pay act of 1963), and equal rights (in the form of the equal rights act, which while never passed, eventually culminated into Title IX) (Hattery 2010). Second wave feminism ultimately developed into two strains: liberal and radical feminism, each offering a different perspective on women's equality.

Liberal feminism is based on the assumption that the primary driving force of gendered inequality is the domination of institutions by men, and demanded that women have equal rights to those that men held "naturally" (Scraton 2002). Men dominated the economic, political, judicial, educational, and medical spheres, and liberal feminism sought to transform these structures so that membership and power was shared across gender lines (Hattery 2010). Modern liberal feminism focuses on equality of access and opportunity (Scraton 2002). Many feminist social movements, such as those for reproductive rights, equal rights, and ultimately Title IX, involved strategies proposed by liberal feminism and focused on sharing power between genders. Liberal feminism, then, would support Title IX as a clear strategy for achieving equity between genders in the realm of sport (Hattery 2010).

Radical feminism is also concerned with equality between the sexes, though their explanation of inequality primarily centers on underlying structural power relations

which are the byproduct of patriarchy, a systematic maintenance of male power whereby men as a group dominate women as a group (Scraton 2002). Radical feminism, then, stands in stark contrast to liberal feminism as it does not seek to transform power structures in existing institutions. Rather, radical feminism “assumes that the very structures themselves have been so poisoned by patriarchy that they cannot be transformed but must be completely eradicated and rebuilt from the ground up” (Hattery 2010:100). Further, as male power is the root of women’s oppression, radical feminism adopts a separatist mentality, ranging from women’s-only events to complete separatist lifestyles (Scraton 2002).

In relation to sports, radical feminists would state that the entire system of organized athletics, from high school and intercollegiate to professional, would need to be razed and rebuilt, holding gender equality at the center as its core organizing principle. Radical feminism focuses heavily on sexuality, with heterosexuality being a power structure whereby men dominate women. As such, discussions of femininity in sport is actually a discussion of heterosexuality, whereby women are attractive and available to men. Women’s participation in athletics is controlled and restricted by clothing and dress, with a need to present a “heterosexy” image (Scraton 2002). Radical feminism would create a system that “is not fundamentally based on the exploitation and dominance of women as cheerleaders, wives, sex objects, and victims of sexual and intimate partner violence” (Hattery 2010:100). From the perspective of radical feminism, Title IX would be woefully inefficient at creating equality and would only serve to

further reinforce patriarchy in athletics, pacifying those who seek equality without making true efforts to achieve it.

The final iteration of feminism to date is third wave feminism, or postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism criticized second wave feminism for assuming gender was the key status around which all oppression was organized. Second wave feminism ignored the intersections of race, class and gender, and the ways in which these other factors further supported inequality (Hattery 2010).

Third wave feminism assumes that systems of oppression and domination exist independently and are woven together into what Patricia Hill Collins would call matrices of domination. A matrix of domination would focus in the interactions between existing power relations running along the lines of race, class, and gender. Rather than focus on any one power structure, postmodern feminists realize that multiple forms of domination exist and must be understood. While postmodern feminism has not focused explicitly on the realm of sport, the focus on power and its reflexivity with gender make it a useful lens through which to view the institution of sport as well as the social construction of gender, masculinity, and femininity applied to athletes themselves (Hattery 2010).

Title IX itself is the result of concentrated efforts in second wave feminism and its struggle for equality. Second wave liberal feminism brought about equality of access to sport through proportionality, ensuring that the minority gender is granted a proportionate ability to play. Proportionality, however, can hardly be credited for bringing about true equality in publicly funded athletics. The primary focus of Title IX is access, so the majority of research has focused on participation by girls and women by counting how

many girls and young women play organized sports and how many women coach athletics. However, less study has been done on providing equal opportunity in sport, as opposed to equal access. Title IX should be viewed according to the tenets of postmodern feminism, as sponsored athletics are an issue of power; the power to control the institution of sport and allocate its most highly guarded resource, money (Hattery 2010).

That money would be used to reinforce typical power structures in athletics is unsurprising. Sport itself has been socially constructed to be hyper masculine, and thus access to and interest in them has been heavily limited to men. However, since the passing of Title IX and the increased acceptance of women's interest in sport, men in power have been forced to discover new ways to limit access to sport and its masculine culture. A primary way this has been accomplished has been to accentuate the differences between the genders while painting women's athletics as being "less than." That gendered difference is then used to justify disproportionate resource allocation.

Hattery states:

The more access women have to sports participation and coaching, the more media exposure women athletes have, the more important it becomes for men to remind women that they are still just women. One way to articulate gender is to focus on gender differences: Women can't dunk the basketball. Women's sports are less interesting to watch. And one way to enforce gender boundaries is to allocate resources according to power rather than need. (Hattery 2010: 111)

As proportional equality of access has been granted and practiced since Title IX, yet obvious disparities exist between male and female dominated sports, it becomes increasingly clear that Title IX's effects on sports culture should be viewed less through

the lens of second wave liberal feminism (which achieved its goal of equal access) and increasingly through the lens of third wave postmodern feminism (with increased emphasis on structural systems of power). The application of a postmodern theoretical framework to the study of sports equity clearly shows that there is little evidence supporting claims for equality in athletics. Further, when equity is found, it is typically less likely to occur in sports that are highly masculinized and prestigious (Hattery 2010).

Feminist Perspectives on Roller Derby

The sport of roller derby, however, has emerged as a tremendous force in women's athletics and sports culture. Referred to as the "fastest growing sport in America" (WFTDA Roller Derby 2016), women's roller derby breaks the mold created by other women's dominated sports. Women's flat-track roller derby is one of the few sports pioneered by women, gaining legitimacy as a sport without simply being a "women's version" of a male dominated game.

Roller derby's "for the skater, by the skater" mentality further sets it apart from other women's sports, as it has not simply evolved out of a men's game, and has not relied on support networks created and maintained by men. Other women's sports have involved "borrowing" space and time from male teams who share practice facilities, and when men have controlled the practice spaces they have been able to control the nature of the sports practiced within them. Women's ice hockey leagues often find great difficulty securing ice time at their local rinks, as indoor ice rinks are stereotypically masculine spaces that often favor the men's leagues (Theberge 2002). When the spaces are

controlled by men, the policies put in place for the organizations often benefit the male leagues, or even go so far as to intentionally cripple women's sports in the name of safety and modesty. This is made apparent when viewing women's hockey, which places significantly stricter rules on full body contact for women's teams.

Aggressive behavior is a defining characteristic of hockey as a sport, and the mere mention of hockey for most would immediately conjure images of two bodies in contact. However, full body contact (or "checking") is typically severely limited in women's hockey, if not blatantly disallowed by the rules. Nancy Theberge outlines the views on checking in women's hockey: "Some see body checking as just one aspect of the aggressive physicality that characterizes the men's game, including the fighting that frequently occurs in North American professional hockey. Critics fear that the inclusion of body checking in the women's game would inevitably lead to an increase in other forms of unacceptable aggressions" (2002: 294). That the inclusion of body checking was under debate is a clear indicator that women's hockey was created as a neutered version of the men's game. That a fundamental aspect of the sport must be removed in order for it to be considered appropriate for the women who play it (and the spectators that attend) demonstrates the patriarchal view of aggression in sport, belonging only in the masculine version of a game. Modern roller derby, however, exists as a female dominated sport that did not originate out of male aggression, and yet allows for full physical contact.

The creation of roller derby as a women's sport may have been done out of frustration with a lack of other avenues of athletic expression and not necessarily with the

intent of creating a women's movement. However, by focusing on creating a space which allowed for alternative femininities and gender expressions, roller derby can accurately be described as a women's movement when viewed through the lens of second wave feminism.

Liberal feminism focused on equality of access across gender, and by this definition the majority of athletics are making efforts to reach this equality. A liberal feminist view would state that the creation of women's sports is a step in the right direction for equality. While fundamental differences exist between hockey and women's hockey, these differences can ultimately be resolved, leading to greater equality. While the women's game may currently disallow full body contact, liberal feminism would view the creation of a women's game as a step in the right direction for equality of access. Ultimately, the creation of women's version of a sport is better than the absence of sport at all. Liberal feminism would view women's roller derby as being a failed attempt at equality, as liberal feminism is concerned with the domination of institutions by men and seeks to change the institutions from within. By refusing to work for change within established institutions, women's roller derby maintains its separateness and does little to make active efforts at changing mainstream sports culture. The creation of and participation in women's roller derby does not address inequality in other women's athletics.

Alternatively, radical feminism would view the creation of women's versions of sport to be a patriarchal tool of oppression which only serves to demonstrate that women are less than their male counterparts. By this view, playing mainstream women's sports

would require women to participate in their own oppression as they conform to a patriarchal view of women's abilities and place in sports culture. As radical feminism seeks to raze existing institutions before creating new ones centering on equality, radical feminism would view roller derby as a prime starting place for the creation of new sports culture. Roller derby centers on women owning their own labor and has not evolved out of another sport; while it may be a reimagining of a historic spectacle, modern derby is the result of women taking control of their own bodies and interests while refusing outside ownership. Derby eschews male support structures and has been created from the bottom up to be for women, by women. It is open to the inclusion of men, but the agenda has always favored the women athletes.

Homophobia in Sport and Roller Derby as a Safe Space

The issue of "lesbians in sport" is at worst contentious, at best swept under the rug. Men label threatening female athletes as lesbians in an effort to assert their own masculinity; they seek to avoid feeling threatened by labeling strong women as "others" who are outside the social norm. Women in sports often attempt to avoid outright discussion of lesbianism, and assert that it is a personal issue, not a social one which should be publicly acknowledged. Derby flies in the face of this, asserting itself as a safe space for homosexuality, and being flamboyant in its expression of sexuality. Both gay and straight participants celebrate in gay culture and participate in gender bending.

In mainstream sports culture, strong female athletes who fail to engage in traditional heterosexy imagery are accused of lesbianism in an effort to publicly condemn

their failure to participate in expected social norms. This homophobia exists to further patriarchal control of the institution of sport, and it manifests itself in six ways: silence, denial, apology, promotion of heterosexy images, attacks on lesbians, and preferences for male coaches (Griffin 2002). The first half of these (silence, denial, and apology) in particular are not only conspicuously absent from derby, but are actively railed against.

Silence is encouraged among women athletes so that their advances toward equality are not removed. States Griffin: “Women live in fear that whatever meager gains we have made in sport are always one lesbian scandal away from being wiped out” (2002:195). Continuing, she discusses that silence is the first strategy when women in sport are striving for social change in a society so rooted in sexism that it does not seem that change is possible.

Denial, the second tool of homophobia in sport, is often practiced when silence has failed. When athletes, families, and friends suspect that a respected and loved peer or coach is homosexual, they actively deny or overlook her sexuality to avoid struggling with a social contradiction: “a lesbian who is competent, loved, and respected. In other instances, a respected lesbian coach is seen as an exception because she does not fit the unflattering lesbian stereotype most people accept as accurate” (Griffin 2002: 195).

The third tool of homophobia, apology, exists as a tool for heteronormative athletes to pressure homosexual athletes into social invisibility. Women are coached to practice overt femininity outside of the gym. They are told to wear dresses and makeup to social functions. Before conferences, they are offered free hairstyling and other services intended to present themselves as more feminine (unsurprisingly, male

participants are not offered free services to enhance their looks). The message is clear: outside of sport, athletes are to present themselves as appealing to the men around them, lest they be labeled a “dyke” or even be publicly outed as one (Griffin 2002).

Roller derby, however, not only avoids these methods of homophobia, but openly expresses its alliance with gay and gay-friendly culture. Lesbian participants are not silenced; they are celebrated. Rainbow flags are not uncommon at events, nor are public displays of affection between female athletes. As such, denial is also uncommon in derby. Just as the homosexual participants do not hide their sexuality, their heterosexual teammates make no attempts to hide it or explain it away. Heterosexual participants who are uncomfortable of homosexual teammates are quickly weeded out from the group. As such, leagues make no apology for the openness of the sexuality of its participants. The sexual imagery on display at roller derby events do not serve to advertise the availability of the women to the men; rather it functions as an expression by the women that they are powerful and in control of their bodies and its presentation to others.

Women’s derby stands apart from other women’s sports in that it has no fear of being cast as “a lesbian game.” It strives to show that women of all sexualities can be strong (both personally and physically). It eschews silence to be outspoken. It embraces its lesbian participants, making no apology for who they are. It lambasts traditional heterosexuality imagery. As a culture and within its local and national governing bodies, it promotes positive gender and sexual policies. It involves itself with educational groups who teach acceptance of homosexual and transgendered individuals. It forces itself into public view. It presents a safe space for solidarity. Importantly, men who become

involved in derby exist within this same space, and perpetuate the same ideals and standards lest they are removed from their leagues.

Roller derby's existence as a safe space for expressions of alternative sexuality and women's empowerment cement it firmly as a form of feminist expression. Roller derby as a sport breaks from normative, societal gendered expectations. However, it also allows open expression of the skater's sexuality, an act that is delicately avoided or even sanctioned in other women's athletics. Not only does derby exist as an outlet for expressions of derby skaters, but it exists apart from the majority of other sports and their cultures. Roller derby as a sport is ripe for study as a form of feminist expression, however as women's flat-track roller derby is still a fairly new phenomenon, the extent of its scholarly study is relatively short. Those studies that have been completed focused almost exclusively on roller derby as a women's sport, with discussions centering on the creation of women's only spaces and the gender maneuvering within those spaces. While the studies explored women's-onlyness, few outright categorized roller derby as feminism, and all seemed to neglect the experiences and roles of men within the movements.

CHAPTER VII

PRIOR STUDIES ON ROLLER DERBY

The existing scholarly narrative is that male involvement in roller derby is minor, with men being involved only in peripheral roles and in gender-flipped duties, serving as cheerleaders and managing childcare at games. While a few studies do recognize men in coaching or refereeing roles, they seemingly write them out of the story, addressing them only as a method to reiterate why roller derby remains women's-only despite their presence. This has left a large knowledge gap in the study of the sport, and does the authors no favors in legitimizing their understanding of derby. Further, the incredible rate of change within both the sport itself, as well as the sport's culture, has quickly made these past studies out of date within only a few years of their publication. As roller derby has made recent moves towards "legitimacy," the visibility of men within the sport has grown tremendously. It is no longer enough to understand roller derby as a women's only space where men are quickly written away. Rather, roller derby needs to be studied as a women controlled space where men's participation is allowed and policed by the female athletes. This stands in stark contrast to men's previously necessary roles as gatekeepers to success in women's movements. Men are welcome in women's derby, but their presence is not requisite for derby leagues, or the sport, to continue. While the role of men within roller derby has yet to be discussed in depth, the common themes present in the history of derby's study provide a useful lens with which to view the roles of men

and to more completely discover the gaps in knowledge created by excluding them from study.

Alternative Femininities

One of the most frequently recurring themes present in the literature is the creation, alteration, or resistance to traditional gender norms. Jennifer Carlson discussed what she referred to as “the female significant,” a depiction of the intentional creation and exaggeration of gender norms in an effort to expose their contingency. Via the creation of derby personas, skaters are able to lampoon traditional gender norms and create a new femininity which “splices aggression, sexual assertiveness, and femininity in a way that exposes the contradictions inherent in emphasized femininity” (Carlson 2010). Derby players co-opt risqué pinup attire and sexualized clothing and makeup, repurposing them as athletic wear while engaging in traditionally masculine activities. The mash-up between feminine and masculine creates a new femininity which is distinctively neither, existing in the divide between traditional genders.

The navigation of alternative femininities and the divide between the typically masculine and feminine reveals the ways in which intra-gender relations can challenge traditionally hegemonic gender relations. By over-emphasizing stereotypically sexualized behaviors and imagery, derby girls concurrently mock and embrace the expectations placed on them as women (Finley 2010). Further, the skater’s exaggeration of sexual imagery defies stereotypical ideals of “tough girls.” In pop culture, tough girls are also typically beautiful. Roller derby’s embracing of alternative femininities and

value placed on body types, images, and relationships that fall outside of the norm serves to undermine pop culture's expectations for strong women. "So, as is the case of the sexually aggressive wild girls, popular culture does not seem to generate or embrace images of physically and emotionally powerful women unless they are also conventionally beautiful and sexualized, not to mention white, slim, heterosexual, able bodied, and middle class" (Currie 2009: 43). By providing a space for women who fall outside of the stereotype to publicly engage in aggressive sport and spectacle, roller derby is able to showcase the strength in alternative femininities and defy social expectations on what it is to be a "tough girl."

Consideration has also been given to ways in which male participants also blur the boundaries between masculine and feminine as well. Finley discusses the ways in which male volunteers (frequently the skaters' significant others) work to support the female athletes, including acting as "security" for the children's play area, or engaging in role play as cheerleaders (complete with short skirts and pom-poms), mocking traditional gender roles (2010). It is difficult to say, however, whether the placement of men into roles as babysitters or cheerleaders was done as a genuine act of support or as a form of humor adding to the kitsch of derby's gender-bending. Finley neglected to address other ways in which men legitimately volunteer with leagues, or within the actual games themselves, working as referees or coaches.

Adele Pavlidis outlines the discussion of whether the creation of alternative femininities can be seen as a true form of resistance to traditional gender roles. On one side, she quotes Finley, stating "Women can now kick ass, but it might not bring the

society any closer to societal support of child care, of equal pay, or sports that do not glorify bruises” (Pavlidis 2013: 684). Opposed to this view, however, she states that leisure activities can indeed be a form of resistance, as the athletes intentionally challenge ideologies pertaining to normative gender roles. Similarly to Carlson, Pavlidis discusses the ways by which exposing gender norms brings light to their contingency.

Perhaps one of the strongest examples of derby’s creation of alternative femininities is the juxtaposition of powerful female athletes in a society which encourages extremely conservative femininity. Cairo, Egypt saw its first league, empowering women to demonstrate their strength in a society that would typically deny them the opportunity. Called the CaiRollers, they often take segregated train cars to practice, simultaneously wearing a hijab and carrying their derby gear (Dowsett 2014). Once they arrive, however, the women work together to find a strength within them that they didn’t previously know they had. CaiRollers’ cofounder Angie Marie states:

You pick yourself up off the ground from falling 20-30 times at the beginning when you learn to skate. This creates mental toughness. Then when you get stable, you play the game and you are hit hard and have to learn to hit hard back. So first comes mental strength then physical strength. The entire time, you are supported by a group of women who become like your sisters and this creates emotional strength. You never realize just how strong you are until you play this sport (Egyptian Streets 2014).

This strength stays with the women even after they leave the track. Roller derby has done more than give them toughness as a skater, or as an athlete. It has empowered them to be stronger in their everyday lives. Rahma Diab, a 22-year-old member of the CaiRollers, states “In terms of harassment, girls now are more open about telling their

stories and more open about defending their rights and not being silent about it. I hope [roller derby] gets more attention from local people ... because I think it's very liberating for girls and women" (Dowsett 2014). Another CaiRoller, Lina El-Gohary, discusses how the toughness of derby motivates her outside of the sports as well: "We hit each other, fall down and in a few seconds - no time - we get up again and complete the game. No pain, no crying, nothing... If we can do something like that for fun, we can do something for our career, or for the country" (Lynch 2014).

It is clear that roller derby is more than a revival of 70s kitsch. It is an extension of the feminist movement, focusing on how women can use their bodies in sport to change traditionally gendered ideas about women's roles on society. By controlling public perception through the creation of alternative femininities and creating "women-only" spaces which empower their participants, roller derby has quickly expanded across the globe as a legitimate outlet of an alternative femininity.

The focus on alternative femininities fits into the view of roller derby as a feminist movement, as post-structuralist feminism focuses on the multiplicity of power structures and the dialogues and discourses that accompany them. It focuses on how these discourses are the way meanings and people are made, and through which power relations are maintained or changed (Scraton 2002). "Post-structuralist feminism challenges the dichotomy of femininity/masculinity and argues for multiple femininities, which can be experienced both between women, and by individual women as diverse subjectivities and identities" (Scraton 2002: 40). This exploration of gender norms and

the ways in which they can be subverted will be of interest to the study of male support networks and participation in women's roller derby.

Roller Derby's Punk Ethos

A second recurring theme in derby's study is its punk inspired do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos. Women participants are able to maintain ownership and control of their leagues by running it themselves; outside owners of teams are almost completely unheard of since derby's revival. The original modern roller derby league, the Texas Rollergirls, was founded on the idea of restricting male access. The rationale for male exclusion was to prevent the introduction of "cigar chomping managers' who, in earlier versions of roller derby, exploited women's participation for profit" (Donnelly 2011: 160). For the Texas Rollergirls, it logically followed that the exclusion of men allowed women to control all facets of derby's revival, including its mode of play as well as its organization and promotion (2011). This sense of ownership is succinctly stated as "for the skater, by the skater." Derby's DIY style and ownership by women is relatively unheard of in other sports' cultures. Even following the rapid increase in female participation in sports following the passage of Title IX, women have continued to be dramatically underrepresented in leadership roles of sports organizations (Beaver 2012). Other sports featuring primarily female participants are still typically owned and operated by men.

Further, the DIY nature of roller derby leagues not only ensures the responsibility of decision-making remains in the hands of women, it also necessarily means the leagues go against a corporate sports structure. Roller derby has thus far resisted

commercialization, perhaps to the detriment of its own popularity. Still, by refusing corporate control, roller derby leagues (and their primarily female members) are able to maintain authority in decisions which determine league direction (Beaver 2012).

This system of ownership is distinctly Marxian, and further cements roller derby as a feminist movement. Marxist feminism finds gender inequality as stemming from capitalism, class, and economic exploitation. Capitalism itself benefits from the sexual division of labor, as unpaid domestic labor (and the maintenance of the future labor force through childcare) is essential to the success of male laborers and a patriarchal accumulation of wealth (Scraton 2002). Athletic performance in sports is ultimately a form of labor. While other sports leagues funnel the profits of that labor towards the owners of the organization, roller derby leagues reject that model and instead maintain control of their own work (Beaver 2012). Derby's "for the skater, by the skater" method is an expression of Marxist feminism, as it necessitates ownership of their own labor and the rejection of outside ownership. The empowerment often found by derby skaters does not stem solely from participation in the sport; it is also created by the satisfaction of owning their labor, their bodies, and their passion. By maintaining ownership of their work, derby leagues resist the alienation present in capitalist modes of production; leagues have no corporate interests to satisfy, no owners instructing them in their decisions. Their labor and their species-being remains their own (Beaver 2012). Rebecca Toews perfectly sums up the system of ownership and diverse roles navigated by female derby leagues:

Women's participation in roller derby goes far beyond skating around the track. Women are involved in all promotions and media releases, they sell the tickets (with the help of some local businesses), they organize fundraisers for the league as well as for other non-profit organizations in their communities; they "set-up" and "take-down" the track at the facility they are performing in, they are in charge of all rule-making, coaching, training, and safety procedures in practice and bout atmospheres. Overall, skaters are much more involved in all aspects of production and organization than players of most other sports. If alienation from the production of a commodity is a problem with capitalism, roller derby stands in stark contrast to the neoliberal model of production (Toews 2013: 54).

The creation and ownership of derby leagues by the women involved also serves to create extended support networks that exist outside of the sport itself. Derby's culture of self-sufficiency expands into "the real world" as league participants rely on and support one another as they navigate day-to-day life. Elizabeth Garber and Erin Garber-Pearson, a mother and daughter who play (and research) roller derby together, documented these networks in an interview with another member of their league:

The real power lies in the social and financial network we have created... I buy skates from a roller girl. I get my hair cut from a roller girl. I order pizza from a roller girl. My vet is a referee. My barista is a beerleader. My massage therapist is a volunteer. Everywhere there is a roller derby team, derby girls are turning to other derby girls to cater their parties, file their taxes, walk their dogs, trade their stocks, fix their cars, rehab their knees and plan their funerals (Garber 2012: 99).

Gendered Power Dynamics

With such emphasis on female ownership and derby's DIY nature, it is interesting the roles that men typically play in the leagues. The vast majority of referees in women's roller derby are men. While there may be a higher percentage of female officials in roller derby than in other sports, it is still commonplace for roller derby referee crews to be completely male. Male participation in derby mirrors the roles of women in punk; Punk

was a male dominated subculture where women were allowed to participate, but only from the sidelines. They were accessories while men had all of the power in the movement. Men created the “rules of engagement” for the subculture, and women participated as they could (Leblanc 2002). While male involvement in leagues is typically “as permitted” by women, that men would be as pervasive as a game’s ultimate authority opens up many areas of exploration. The published literature concerning derby’s DIY ethos, its “for the skater, by the skater” mantra, and its existence as a space for women-onlyness all stand in stark contrast to the prevalence of men in positions of authority during the games themselves.

That men would be permitted in authoritative positions can to some extent be explained by further exploration of the recruitment process of male volunteers. Donnelly briefly touches on male involvement, explaining that male volunteers do not take away from derby as a women’s-only activity, as women remain the “active subjects (athletes and decision makers) and men are their supporters; men’s participation is both determined by women and dependent on women’s approval” (2011: 143). That male volunteers participate only following women’s approval leads to an interesting power dynamic; men depend on women for permission to participate, while women depend on men to support their participation. Male supporters, then, are not placed into permanent positions of authority, but rather they are allowed into authoritative roles which are contingent to them first being trusted members of derby leagues. Male supporters tend to stand out as “exceptional men,” individuals who are “not like the others.” One skater Donnelly interviewed claimed of men: “they’re not like the macho jocks that would be

attracted to other sports” (2011: 149). Further exploration of the demographics of male participants and their relationships with the female athletes can serve to deepen understanding of the power and gender dynamics between men and women in derby.

Exploring power dynamics between players and officials has a long history in the sociology of sport. However, when examining those power dynamics by gender, the field becomes far less saturated. Sports officiating has a history as a bit of a “boys club.” Female referees are nearly unheard of at the highest level of play in mainstream sports. It wasn’t until 2012 that the NFL saw its first female referee, Shannon Eastin. Even still, Eastin was not a permanent fixture in officiating; she only officiated as a replacement during that year’s referee strike. Eastin was simultaneously heralded as a female role model by feminist scholars and called a scab by male fans, and when the NFL’s labor dispute with the referee union ended, Eastin left with the other replacement referees (Antunovic 2014). Other studies of sports officiating lead to further insight into gendered power dynamics. Nicolas Souchon’s study of the influence of participant’s gender on male handball referees showed that male referees tend to judge female athletes more strictly on infractions to the rules, and that sanctions for those infractions were also more severe for female athletes (2013). Decisional bias against women was most obvious when it came to acts of aggression, as the heavier criticism of female athletes stemmed from gendered expectations that females are more tame and less aggressive than males. Therefore, when male and female athletes committed the same transgressions, male referees viewed the female’s as more extreme as they fell further outside of expected gender norms (Souchon 2013). These insights into gendered referee culture

will provide a baseline by which to judge derby volunteers, and will provoke further questions concerning the dynamics of power between male supporters and female players, especially as those players are engaging in aggressive and traditionally masculine behaviors.

Alternative Masculinity

The discussion of masculinity within derby is important both in discussing ways that women engage in typically masculine behavior as well as viewing male participation within the sport. The term “masculinity” refers to male bodies, but is not determined solely by male biology. “It is, thus, perfectly logical to talk about masculine women or masculinity in women’s lives, as well as masculinity in men’s lives” (Connell 2002: 165). Masculinity is not one set idea, but fluid; there exists not one but many forms of masculinity. The patterns of conduct viewed socially as “masculine” may be found when viewing the lives of individuals, but they primarily exist outside of the individual. “Masculinities are found collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions” (Connell 2002: 163). As masculinity is rooted within particular institutions, navigating between different social institutions often means navigating between multiple forms of masculinity. Particular forms of masculinity are then discovered and expressed when committed to action through social interaction. Connell states “masculinities are neither programmed in our genes, nor fixed by social structure prior to social interaction. They come into existence as people act. They are actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting” (2002: 164).

The primary social interactions around which the varieties of masculinity are organized are the overarching social relationships between men and women. Gender's structure is characteristic of patriarchal gender orders, and masculinity exists as an oppositional force to femininity. When an individual or group's form of masculinity exists in agreement with socialized views of femininity, their masculinity becomes subordinated (they are abused, labeled "sissies" and "nancy-boys") (Connell 2002). As masculinity is rooted in opposition to femininity, and the different forms of masculinity vary across social institutions, it logically follows that social institutions which allow for alternative femininities require, by nature, alternative masculinities.

In certain situations, men's relationships with women, children, or groups including the two will create interests that are stronger and more compelling than men's shared interest in their own masculinity. When participating in these groups, men's general interest in patriarchy wanes, taking a back seat to their investment in their immediate social group. In this space, male ties to patriarchy become contestable (Connell 2002).

Masculinity, then, is defined for the individual by the institutions in which he is engaged and his current social setting. He can fluctuate between multiple masculinities as he adjusts to those settings. As derby culture intentionally contrasts heteronormativity and focuses on the empowerment of the female (and her embracing both her own femininity and masculinity), it exists as a social setting in which men can construct a new masculinity as well. Male participation in women's roller derby leagues further reinforces a culture of gender maneuvering within the sport. Derby as an institution

allows for a form of masculinity that may not be available to some outside of it. As part of a women's movement (while also being embedded in a culture of defiance to heteronormativity), stereotypically masculine men are able to perform in a way that approaches gender bending (wearing kilts, women's tights, rainbow attire, etc.). While not true of all male participants, derby creates a safe space to express a feminized masculinity. When players refer to male participants as "not like the others," it begs the question of whether the men become involved initially because of their "differentness," or if they become "not like the others" as a result of their involvement. Does the alternative masculinity lead to derby involvement, or does derby involvement shape and push a new masculinity?

CHAPTER VIII

TERMS AND LANGUAGE

Roller derby further cements itself as a space of alternative femininity through the use of the terms and language used both to describe it and by players within it. These phrases and concepts exist uniquely within the sport, standing in stark contrast to mainstream femininity. While some titles are holdovers from derby's inception in the 1930s, other terms and phrases have evolved to describe gameplay in ways that imply extreme violence and even border on the grotesque. By embracing the graphic nature of the language used within it, derby girls push themselves further outside of mainstream sports culture and openly reject ideas of civility embedded in modern femininity.

Language itself exists as a social mirror, always reflecting the organization and dynamics of the society it emerges from (Adams 2000). Society and its language are forever engaged in a constant dialogue; as the society is formed, a new language emerges, and that language in turn shapes the society. This tension between language and society exists in two forms: references and usage. References are the ways in which individuals are referred to within their society, what cultural attitudes those references suggest, and the implications for the ways the individuals in turn see themselves and their roles within that society. Usage, then, is the characteristic speech habits of both those who are part of the society as well as those who are outside of it looking in. It examines the way that

these speech habits affect the individuals, and the implications for the ways they lead their lives and participate in the society (Adams 2000).

In the context of roller derby, we can equate references to the titles of players, positions, and gameplay elements written into the rules of the game. They are the formal terms that are used to explain gameplay. The point-scorer in roller derby is called a jammer in the same way that an American football team's primary playmaker is called a quarterback. The references are necessary for the understanding of the game and its structure. These references in modern roller derby are largely holdovers from the game's inception in the 1930s and its subsequent evolution before fading into obscurity. Roller derby's revival did not invent the game and its positions from the ground up; rather, it co-opted an historical spectacle and brought it into the 2000's as an outlet for female expression (and aggression).

Where roller derby has truly taken ownership of its language has been through what Adams and Ware referred to as its usage (2000). If usage describes characteristic speech habits of members of a society, we can view the usage of language in roller derby as the specialized jargon that has emerged within the culture over the last fifteen years. Usage is not embedded into the rules of the sport and has no written guidelines. Rather, language usage in derby is immediately familiar to those within it, and nearly unintelligible to those outside of it. Whereas a first year NBA player may be referred to as a rookie, a new roller derby player is given the name "fresh meat."

The language used in derby's references are easily enough found in the WFTDA's official rulebook (WFTDA 2015). While these terms were not created at the time of

derby's modern revival, the fact that they were embraced by a women's athletic movement despite the absence of femininity is noteworthy. The official titles all share hints of aggression, masculinity, and violence. The sport does not consist of plays, but rather is made up of "jams," with the only players allowed to score points being called "jammers." The remaining players, then, are called "blockers," and naturally their "blocking" exists as strategic hits against the opposing team. The players can only be "engaged" within an "engagement zone," the area of the track where one can legally hit another player. To ensure safety, the players must also be sure to only hit others within legal "target zones," which prevents contact to a player's legs, back, or head. Until only a year ago, the game itself wasn't referred to as a game, but rather as a "bout," taking terminology from boxing to emphasize the violence of the sport. The term was only officially changed to "game" in the rulebook within the last two seasons, and only as an effort to bring in new fans who may have been confused by its prior name.

What these references all share are subtle hints at the aggressive nature of the sport. The implied violence becomes more apparent when compared to terms used by the NFL, America's most popular contact sport. Whereas derby has a jammer, American football has a quarterback, a running back, or a receiver. Derby's blockers are comparable to the NFL's linesmen. WFTDA's engagement zone would be most similar to football's field of play or concept of "breaking the plane" of the end zone. While thousands of fans may go to the stadium to watch "the game," only hundreds might be present in the warehouse to watch "the bout." Whereas roller derby's official terms emphasize the violence of the sports, football's positions are relatively neutral in

comparison. That a grassroots women's sport would officially embrace terminology with such aggressive connotations, particularly when juxtaposed with comparable terms from America's most popular contact sport, demonstrates the violent imagery the players attempt to evoke.

While roller derby's references subtly suggest the sport's aggression and violence, its language usage sweeps away any doubts about the sport being outside of the mainstream. This specialized jargon exists in the sport both as a way for insiders to describe action on the track and for derby players to communicate to one another that they are "in the know." The terminology that has evolved in the community (and continues to shape and be shaped by it) describes the sport in terms of violence and the grotesque. A blocker who has been pushed by her own team into the opposing team becomes a "cannonball," while executing a block on a skater behind you by forcefully rising and driving the back of your shoulder into her chest is referred to as a "can opener." A pack of blockers that successfully catch and envelop an escaping jammer is said to be "eating the baby." A lone blocker who knocks a jammer out of bounds and forces her to reenter the track behind the pack, making her fight through the blockers again, is performing a "soul crush." Even outside of the game itself, the culture of derby has formed its own language to describe its members and their relationships. New skaters are not rookies, but "fresh meat." A player's significant other becomes a "widow," as derby begins to consume so much of the player's free time. Large bruises

become “derby kisses,” and an unfortunate fall on one’s own skate is referred to as “skate rape.”¹

Language usage within roller derby further serves to exaggerate its place within counterculture. While the violence inherent in the terminology certainly reflects the mental and physical toughness required for the sport, the excessiveness of implied violence is remarkable as it evolved naturally out of a primarily female culture. In addition to serving as an indicator of the violence of the sport itself, this language game also functions as a way for the women involved to own the sport and demonstrate to the world that they don’t require men or their imposed civility to exist or succeed. Adams and Ware state that “an awareness of sexist language is essential if we are to understand that traditional rules of interaction between women and men. Once we know these rules, we can work to modify them, to defy them, and to use them to our own advantage. Men and women can only benefit from the eradication of sexism in the English language.” (2000: 75) Female ownership of the sport and the violence inherent in language reference and usage provides outsiders with an immediate notification that these women aren’t like the others. The player’s language usage lets the world know that they are tough, brash, vulgar, violent, and aggressive, and they are here to be noticed.

¹ <http://rollerderbydictionary.tumblr.com/Dictionary>

CHAPTER IX

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

One of the largest obstacles I faced as a researcher was finding willing respondents to participate. My initial strategy was to use a mixed methods approach to collect data on the league, administering surveys to spectators, volunteers, and skaters, discovering feelings on roller derby as a women's movement and men's participation within it. Survey questions focused on demographics such as age and self-identified gender, as well as length of participation within derby. Questions were also included measuring views on the importance of male participation within the women's derby league and respondent views on roller derby as a women's movement. My initial intent was to establish baseline views on male involvement and derby as a women's movement, comparing and contrasting responses based on demographics and participation. I would then triangulate cases for further interview by selecting individuals who either fit the baseline or stood apart from it, giving greater depth of understanding to the opposing views.

Due to my history as a volunteer and the relationships born out of that, the league chosen for study was my own. My assumption was that my trusted insider status within the league would allow for greater response rates and allowing for more depth of understanding. I felt that a mixed methods approach was the best fit for an exploratory study such as this one, providing both the breadth of focus for a foundational study and

the depth of understanding of experiences within derby. Ultimately, several factors quickly caused this strategy to become nonviable. I originally planned to distribute the surveys at a public game in the city's coliseum complex, averaging between two and three hundred spectators per event. The chosen event was also a double-header, with the home league's A and B teams playing leagues from other cities, for a total of three leagues participating in the event, creating a large respondent pool. Disappointingly, scheduling conflicts lead to me missing the opportunity to distribute the surveys at the event, forcing me to reschedule for the final game of the league's season. The game attended was a private, intraleague bout, open only to friends and family, and was held in the league's warehouse often used as a practice space. This significantly reduced the respondent pool, as the game was attended by only around fifty spectators, and only a single game was held, with all participating skaters being members of a single league.

On the night of the game, packets were distributed to participants in each of three groups: volunteers, spectators, and skaters (see appendices A, B, and C). Each packet contained an informed consent waiver as a cover page (see Appendix G), and a short survey. The surveys were specific to the group filling them out. As approved by the school's institutional review board, each individual was asked to read the consent form to completion, and indicate their consent to participate by filling out the attached survey. Folders were made available for each respondent to return their survey, located on a table next to the bleacher seating for spectators and on top of the lockers for skaters and volunteers. Individuals who declined to participate were advised to return the blank survey as well. All surveys were anonymous (unless the respondent consented to

interview by providing their name and phone number on the final page). As surveys did not require identifying information, and those who declined to participate were asked to return a blank survey along with other's completed ones, I was unable to either identify individual survey respondents' answers or who may have agreed or declined to participate.

Respondent Selection

Following survey collection, it became clear that my initial mixed methods strategy was not the best fit for the respondent pool. Due to a significantly smaller sample size than originally hoped for (skater group N=36, volunteer group N=16, skater group N=17), meaningful quantitative analysis became difficult. Similarly, my original strategy for finding interview respondents was through triangulation using survey data. The low N survey was not suitable for triangulating interview respondents, as baseline feelings towards roller derby as a women's sport or male involvement within it could not be established with statistical significance. Without meaningful trends, I could not select cases that fit or stood out from them. Ultimately, case selection resembled convenience sampling more than triangulation.

Respondents chosen for interview were selected by first coding the survey responses. All respondents were given a case ID, and those that provided contact information had their names and phone numbers removed and saved in a second database along with their assigned ID. With all identifying information removed, responses were organized into three spreadsheets, one for each responding group (skaters, volunteers, and

spectators). On each spreadsheet, a column was created indicating whether the survey respondent consented to a phone interview. Those who agreed were coded as 1, those who declined were assigned 0. The columns were then sorted so that only respondents consenting to interview were visible.

Respondents for follow-up interviews were chosen based on survey responses. When it became clear that triangulation of potential interviewees based on trends within data would not be possible, I created a new metric for selection of the different participants. Three skaters were asked to interview, chosen based on their length of participation in roller derby and their views on male involvement in the sport, as indicated by their responses to the survey. I chose skaters with greater lengths of participation in an effort to provide a greater range of experiences with males within derby; skaters who have participated for five years would naturally have more experiences with male participants than skaters who have been involved for only one. Three consenting spectators were asked to participate based the number of games they had attended, as this was a measurement of how long they had been following the sport; those who had attended more games had been fans for longer periods of time, and again would be able to discuss a greater range of experience. Finally, three consenting volunteers were chosen as they were the only respondents who were actually volunteer members; the other responding volunteers were skaters filling in for volunteer positions.

Nine individuals were contacted and consented to participate in interviews. However, despite their initial agreement, two of the volunteers and one of the spectators declined to participate, primarily due to scheduling conflicts. From the

respondents who consented to interview (by providing their contact information on the survey), six individuals participated in the follow-up interview. Two spectators, one volunteer, and three skaters were interviewed by phone on the nights of December 30 and 31, 2015. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

Interview Procedure

The phone interviews for spectators (See Appendix D) focused primarily on the level of involvement in the league, asking how long the respondent has been watching derby and what types of events the respondent attends (such as fundraisers and after parties in addition to the games themselves). I also asked how they originally became fans of roller derby, including who introduced them to the sport, their relationship with that person, and if that person was a player or league member. Spectators were questioned concerning newly established relationships with skaters since becoming fans of the sport, with a follow-up focusing on if those relationships exist outside of derby functions. I also gave them the opportunity to elaborate on their favorite aspect of roller derby (such as its athleticism, its focus on empowerment, the hard hits, “flashiness,” family fun, etc.). Finally, I asked the respondent if they considered derby to be more of a sport, a women’s movement, or a combination of both. They were then given the opportunity to expand on their answer, discussing why they held that view. The spectator was also asked if they would be equally interested in watching a men’s derby game, and if they attended other women’s sporting events aside from derby, with the opportunity to discuss which sports they attend (if they stated they did attend them), and how they

became fans of those sports as well. If the interviewee indicated that they were not interested in other women's sports, they were encouraged to discuss what made roller derby more appealing to them than other women's athletics.

The volunteer interview (See Appendix E) also centered on support structures and social networks between respondents and league skaters. The interview began by discussing the respondent's role as a volunteer for the league, as well as her history in that position. She was asked to describe how she assisted the league before, during, and after games, and how her role functions outside of game days. Did the volunteer participate in other league events? How often did she assist at practices? After discussing her current role, the respondent was encouraged to describe how she became involved as a volunteer for the league by discussing who recruited her into participating and what her relationship was with that person.

Similar to the interviews with the spectators, the volunteer was invited to discuss new relationships created with others since joining the league, as well as if these relationships existed outside of derby functions. She was also invited to discuss whether she viewed roller derby to be more of a sport, a women's movement, or a mixture of the two, as well as why she chose her response. She was asked to elaborate on if she felt it was important to have men involved in the league, as well as what personal rewards she felt she got from being a member of a women's athletic organization. The interview concluded with a discussion of if the volunteer participates in any other women's events and organizations, and if so which ones and in what ways she participates.

The skaters were the final group to be interviewed (See Appendix F). Just as the spectators and volunteers, the skaters were questioned concerning their history with roller derby, including the length of time playing and their initial recruitment into the sport. However, as this focuses on the most active participants in the league, I also asked the respondents questions about their own recruitment of others. Skaters were invited to discuss how many of their friends and family they have recruited into either playing or volunteering with the league, and asked to describe their relationships with those people. I also allowed them to expand on why they targeted others specifically to recruit them to participate. Skaters were then allowed to elaborate on ways that their friends and family support them in playing roller derby. Was there one person in particular who supports more than others? If so, who? And what makes that support more valuable than the rest?

As with the spectators and volunteers, the skaters were allowed to discuss their views on roller derby and its place on the spectrum between women's movement and pure sport. After discussing their view and reasoning behind it, I probed whether they thought it was important to have men involved in the league. Why? If so, what do men bring to the league that makes it important for them to participate? And if not, how did the skaters feel about having men involved in the league already? The topic was concluded by discussing patterns of male behavior and possible ways men are "policed" by the skaters. I asked each skater if they have ever had an experience with men in derby that has made them feel uncomfortable, or if male volunteers have acted in ways they found unacceptable. After describing the situation, we discussed the outcome of it and

their continued involvement in the league. Were the men still involved? If so, were there any repercussions for their behavior? If they weren't, did they leave the league on their own or were they asked to discontinue their membership?

CHAPTER X

INTERVIEW RESPONSES

The interview process was completed via phone over the course of a single weekend, with interviews ranging in length from just a few minutes to just under an hour. The skater interviews were the longest, as they provided the most insight into the league and male involvement within it. The significant others, chosen from the spectating group, were much more succinct in their responses, with interviews lasting only around fifteen minutes each. The sole volunteer interview lasted only around five minutes.

Interviews were conducted following attached interview guides (see appendices D, E, and F), with discussion tailored to each group being interviewed. Each guide was specific to the group for which it was made, though some questions were asked of all three groups. While all respondents were prompted to discuss roller derby as a women's movement and men's participation within the sport, the skaters, volunteers, and spectators each had questions unique to their method of participation. Skaters were asked about "problem men," individuals who went against the norms created within derby as a social space. Volunteers were asked to discuss what they personally felt they got out of their participation. Spectators, meanwhile, were asked about their relationships with the athletes and the ways that they supported both the league in general as well as individuals within it.

Reported first are respondent answers and general views on roller derby as a movement and men's participation within it. This portion explores the answers to questions as posed during the interview and as they relate to gendered relationships, power dynamics, and roller derby as radical feminism. Following discussion of their responses is thematic analysis and a more in depth look at the culture of derby and player's depictions of their participation within it and relationships born out of it.

Roller Derby as a Women's Movement

Despite past studies' findings and my own classification of roller derby as radical feminism, discussions with all respondents found that those interviewed were largely unconcerned with participating in a women's movement. Through nearly every discussion with skaters, volunteers, and spectators, responses overwhelmingly agreed that it is first and foremost a sport. While the game grants opportunity to express oneself in nontraditional ways, the players viewed themselves as athletes first, activists second (or even not at all).

Kristin, the only volunteer to interview, gave the most credit toward the idea of roller derby as a women's movement. In her interview, she stated that she viewed derby as a combination of sport and movement, requiring athleticism while being founded on the idea of empowering women. Her experience in derby was unique, as though she was a volunteer member at the time of the interview, she had originally began her relationship with roller derby as a player. As such, her response was more heavily rooted in her history on the track than her current role off of it. She described roller derby as a sphere

where she was allowed to be aggressive, despite feeling as though that's something society tells her she is not supposed to do. Ginny, a founding member of the league, partially agreed, claiming that roller derby may have originated as a women's movement, but it has ultimately shifted into more of a sport as the focus has been less on women's empowerment and more on athleticism and competitiveness.

While Kristin and Ginny agreed that roller derby exists somewhere between pure sport and women's movement, they were perhaps the two respondents who gave the most credit towards roller derby's physicality as a movement. While other respondents agreed that derby was not solely physical, their responses seemed to indicate that they did view it primarily as a sport, and any feelings of women's empowerment were coming out of the game's athleticism rather than an idea of activism. Their views, however, are not contradictory to past findings on roller derby. The women's enjoyment of derby's athleticism stems from derby being a safe space to participate in alternative femininities and alternative gender expectations. Roller derby's appeal stems from the creation of a space where the women were allowed to be powerful and physical. While the participants may not feel they are engaging in a movement (and in some cases, they actively campaign against the view of derby as a movement), they are still key players in the maintenance of a space where women can perform alternative femininities and masculinities. They are participating in radical feminism, even in the absence of a radical feminist consciousness.

Not all respondents were quick to embrace the idea of derby as a movement, and one of the more experienced players in the league, Catherine, expressed extreme

dissatisfaction at the idea, as she felt that viewing it as such turned it into a novelty and only served to undermine the game's legitimacy as a real, athletic endeavor. While she does note that other people may have a very different experience than her, she doesn't want to call it a women's movement, because she is not there to be empowered, she is there to play roller derby. For her, there was a recognition that she was participating in the early stages of a new athletic endeavor, and she recognized the potential for a movement to grow outside of that. However, she made it clear that any views of roller derby as a women's movement should happen organically, and that in order for it to occur, the focus should always be on roller derby as a sport only.

Catherine's emphasis on athleticism over empowerment was one that was shared by spectators as well, as evidenced by interviews with Rick and Steve, two derby fans (and husbands to active players). Rick states that derby is primarily a sport, and while it may lead to feelings of female empowerment, he doesn't believe that is its primary motivation. Athletes play roller derby for the sport, though there are certainly other benefits that are more social. Steve, Ginny's husband, agreed, claiming it is a sport more so than a movement. Despite the relationships between the spectating husbands and participating wives, each of the two men only expressed interest in viewing roller derby as an athletic endeavor.

This reluctance to view derby as a movement was a consistent feeling expressed among skaters and fans alike. Rick exemplifies this attitude within the league, placing his focus squarely on roller derby as a competition, and though he acknowledges the draw of it being a women's sport, he still clarifies that his main interest lies in the

athleticism, not in any sense of empowerment. As a fan, he was initially drawn towards the violence of bodies in contact, and as he continued to spectate he became appreciative of gameplay and strategy. As a spectator, Rick states that it appears the women participating in the sport are more focused on it as an athletic endeavor than a movement as well, indicating he believes the audience and athletes are both there for the same purpose: athletic competition.

Laura, a recent transfer into the league who was just beginning her 9th season as a player, viewed the tension between derby as an athletic endeavor and female empowerment as existing in a unique space that no other respondents observed. For Laura, roller derby existed in two parts, with each part playing a particular role in creating the culture of derby as a whole. The first piece of roller derby was the game itself, including the practices, the competition, and the constant drive to improve oneself physically. In this aspect, roller derby for her was pure athleticism. However, Laura also took the opportunity to discuss the other half of league participation. She discussed its DIY nature and self-governance, the league's existence as a non-profit organization, and the organization and community that came out of essentially running a business as a small group of women.

Laura discussed how, prior to her involvement in roller derby, she had never had the opportunity to be a contributing member of a functioning organization or to take on leadership roles. She saw great value in building a community and support network outside of her workplace or immediate family where she could find value in her labor. As a woman, Laura not only found value in finding leadership opportunities for

herself, but also assisting in creating these same opportunities for other women to take ownership of their work out of necessity, as without outside ownership it was up to the athletes themselves to ensure the wellbeing of the league. Laura explained that she had witnessed many women find the ability in themselves to be leaders or take on serious responsibilities in ways that they otherwise would not have been able to. She recognized that without derby and its constant need for leadership, many of these women would not have had the opportunities to organize teams, coordinate non-profit work, or feel free to speak and have their voices be respected.

Laura's view of the value placed on these leadership opportunities aligns closely with Marxist feminism whereby women are tasked to take ownership of their own labor. By creating these leagues which function not only as athletic organizations but also government recognized non-profit entities, the women were claiming their work and its products as their own, to do with what they wish. Their end goal was not profit, but instead the experience itself was its own reward. The DIY nature of roller derby requires the women to cooperate with one another to succeed. That this was not a job but rather a chosen responsibility was important to Laura, as she recognized that maintaining the league was hard work, but at the end of the day it was work that they had chosen to do on their own.

In addition to the maintenance of an athletic league and the creation of a non-profit organization, support structures emerged from participation in the form of interpersonal networks. Laura discussed these social networks created between skaters as a source of empowerment. These interpersonal relationships between athletes extended

beyond the confines of the league's day-to-day operation. Like the support networks described by Elizabeth Garber, Laura recognized the creation and expansion of new social networks as being an important part of the roller derby experience. The rise of the supportive social networks, in addition to the leadership opportunities embedded within the league's governance lead to a sort of organizational empowerment that Laura recognized as being rooted less in derby's physical space and more in its social one. Her empowerment did not come from expressing herself physically or owning her body, but rather from leading a group of women and serving on the board of a nonprofit organization and assisting others in doing the same.

Despite past studies' views on roller derby as a women's movement and its feminist roots, it is clear when exploring the topic in more depth that there are a wide variety of views on what that actually means. Some appreciate the opportunity to be aggressive in a society that typically disallows it. Others view the league as an opportunity for community building that grants women opportunities for leadership roles. Still others appreciate derby as a sport first and foremost, and while positive aspects of women's empowerment may come out of playing sports, it is ultimately not the primary goal of derby. Despite these differences, nearly all interview respondents clearly indicated that for them, personally, roller derby is a sport first and foremost, and their passion lies in playing that sport.

Male Participation in Roller Derby

With a focus on roller derby's athleticism and explicit ideas of empowerment taking a back seat to competition, player views on male involvement were not surprising. Players and volunteers were relatively unconcerned with male involvement in derby, neither advocating for it as a necessity nor feeling the need to create a women's-only space. Some, like Ginny, claimed that male involvement has been positive, but that it wasn't necessary for the sport, and others stated that men were important only in that they were bodies filling duties; it was not their gender that defined them as important or unimportant, but rather their willingness to help. While a few participants did express past negative experiences with men in derby, they seemed to feel that these negative experiences were neither different than other experiences they would have outside of the derby community nor were those experiences exclusive to the male gender; female participants were equally likely to engage in negative behavior.

Ginny had been a participant in the league since it began, and with her husband, Steve, had helped with organization and recruitment from the very start. Ultimately, her feelings were that male involvement in roller derby has been a constant since the game's inception, and without male influence the sport may have ultimately evolved into something completely different. The fact that men may be involved in something typically viewed as a women's sport was not a concern for her, but rather she believed that it lent more credibility to it.

In addition to recognizing men's historical role in the creation of roller derby (though it was ultimately the failures of those men that lead to derby's focus on

women's-onlyness), Ginny was also cognizant and appreciative of how male involvement facilitated women's participation. While Ginny did not state that men were necessary for the sport, she recognizes the roles that they play and how allowing their participation was important for the success of the league. Similarly, Catherine expressed an appreciation for men who are involved, but did not necessarily claim it was important to have "male involvement." Rather, the real importance lies in having as much participation as possible, regardless of gender. This distinction was important for Catherine as she attempted to make it clear that men were not necessary, but neither were they unwanted. The primary importance of male participation was not that they were men, but simply that they were participating. In order for the league to function, there was a need for as many supporting bodies as possible, and it simply was not important if those bodies were male or female. Catherine then went on to clarify her experiences with men in the sport, and made it clear that she views them neither as different nor unwanted because they are men, and also that she feels that within derby, the men involved respected her as an athlete as well, despite their gender difference.

When asked about male involvement overall, Catherine again made clear that in the women's game, it is only important to have participants, regardless of their gender. When discussing men's or co-ed roller derby, Catherine referred to it as "fantastic," having no concerns of men stealing the spotlight from the women's game. She also elaborated on the prevalence of male referees and coaches in women's derby, understanding that these are the only roles available to men who sought to be involved in women's leagues. She understood that their participation came from a

willingness to help, and did not believe that any men had come into the league with an end goal of controlling women or assuming positions of authority over them. Positively, Catherine made it very clear that she had never felt tension with participants of the opposite gender, stating that she has never felt objectified or marginalized by them. This aligns with past studies on derby, when other respondents claimed the men involved in women's-only spaces were "not like the others." The alternative femininities in derby required the creation and maintenance of alternative masculinities, and out of that came a respectful working relationship whereby both men and women in derby were able to recognize gendered differences but not perpetuate normative gender stereotypes. Within the space of roller derby, male's ties to patriarchal expectations become contestable, and men either no longer hold those expectations or recognize they are in a space where they are unwelcome and thus they do not express them.

Laura echoed Catherine's sentiment, stating that derby is a welcoming space for all, and while men are welcome participants, they are not necessary for the sport or league as a whole. She discusses her journey through roller derby, outlining that while her initial views may have created hesitancy to appreciate male involvement, that as she had more contact and interaction with male athletes and support figures, she became more comfortable recognizing them as members of the community. Like Catherine, Laura indirectly expressed agreement with the idea of men in derby being "not like the others." Previously, Laura praised roller derby as being an outlet for female expression, creating opportunities for women to fill leadership positions and participate in important decision making processes. She recognized that roller derby created a space that allowed

women to fill roles that they may not be able to fill outside of the league, as a patriarchal society does not allow the equality of opportunity to fill these roles. In this way, she sees the limitations a male dominated society places on women. However, within derby, Laura celebrates the opportunities created for women but does not feel it is necessary to ensure that derby remains women's-only. She expresses that the more she has interacted with men inside of derby, the more comfortable she has become, as she recognized that these men were not seeking to co-opt the movement, but rather to assist in the growth of it. Despite recognizing the limitations placed on women outside of derby, Laura does not desire to place those same limitations on men within it.

All three skaters, when discussing male involvement in roller derby, eventually expressed their observations concerning men's derby. While they all viewed roller derby as being women's first, they did express tacit support of male players. The fans interviewed, however, agreed that while they don't view roller derby as a women's movement, men's place in derby is ultimately more interesting as supporters of women's leagues than as founders of their own. This does suggest a disconnect between their statement that they view derby primarily as a sport and not a movement and their disinterest in watching men play. Both fans indicated they had no interest in watching men play derby. Kristin, a league volunteer, had no clear opinion on male derby leagues. While she understood that some were adamant about only women being involved, and others rallied behind the idea of co-ed leagues, Kristin described herself as existing somewhere between the two ideas. Ultimately, Kristin described her feelings towards men in derby as simply "indifferent." Similarly, Rick generally was

disinterested in men's derby, despite stating that he viewed roller derby as a sport rather than a women's movement. However, Rick expressed that his disinterest in men's roller derby directly stemmed from his passion for the sport, as male playstyles simply weren't appealing to him as they revolved more around showboating and less around teamwork.

The dominant attitude across all respondents was not that men were necessary or needed, but rather that the sport hoped to gain the participation and support of as many people as possible, which obviously meant the inclusion of men. This indifference towards defining involvement by gender roles sets derby apart from historical women's movements, as in their fights for education, for suffrage, and for social equality, men were often the gatekeepers to success. Historically, men have held the primary seats of power, and women have had to petition their support. In derby, however, women do not find themselves navigating the same social hierarchies that historically required male participation. Instead of struggling to secure equality of rights, derby players and participants are instead struggling to secure legitimacy as an athletic endeavor, an issue that is as much rooted in public opinion on rollersports as in perception of traditional gender roles. This is even more evidenced by the perception of men's roller derby, even among other derby players and fans. While women's roller derby struggles to find acceptance in mainstream sport, men's roller derby is still fighting to gain interest within the derby community itself. It is clear that within derby, women do not require men as the gatekeepers for their success, but they also make no efforts to disallow them from participating. Women in derby have created a new power structure unique to their sport

that neither requires nor denies male participation, provided the men involved do not try to take ownership from the women.

In this way, roller derby as both a sport and social movement align closely with the ideals held behind second wave radical feminism. Roller derby's revival ultimately is an endeavor built from the ground up around the idea of creating a space for women to express their athleticism, their aggression, and their passion. While liberal feminism centers on shaping existing institutions to be more inclusionary, radical feminism calls for razing patriarchal institutions and rebuilding them around the concept of gendered equality. Both derby's original inception and its revival were pioneered by men, but its modern resurgence truly picked up steam when the women rejected male leadership and rebuilt the game to fit their own needs. In the spirit of radical feminism, it seems the sport and its athletes are seeking an end goal of equality, as all respondents to the interviews made it clear that men were welcome in the environment despite the fact that the space is controlled by women. This has created an atmosphere that is far more equitable between sexes than traditionally male dominated athletics.

Problem Men in Derby

The interview respondents all seemed to appreciate male involvement while simultaneously not seeing it as a necessity for league functioning. Overall, they indicated that roller derby existed as a welcoming space, and despite it being primarily female, men were welcome to participate in whatever capacity they liked. When asked about any past history with "problem men," men who didn't fit in, follow derby's social norms, or who

displayed overtly sexist attitudes towards the athletes or the sport, most of the respondents did not seem to think of it as an issue. One interviewee stated that obviously some men were interested in derby more as a dating pool, but also stated that was true of some women who played. Another stated that derby was significantly more welcoming and supportive than her workplace, and indicated that she was far more likely to be mistreated at her job than in derby. A final respondent claimed that she was witness to a few men who had caused issues, but those issues were dealt with by the league through both formal and informal sanctioning. However, she goes on to state that most respondents who were given a bad reputation were done so unfairly, and women were often equally deserving of scrutiny.

Ginny was quick to defend male volunteers, despite recognizing that some men had become involved with the ultimate goal of meeting women. She made her feelings clear that despite those negative experiences, it had little to do with their gender, as women were equally likely to commit the same mistakes. While she views flirtatiousness as something she has witnessed of men, she points out that there are women who have put themselves into the same situations, to the point that they have been asked to leave. Ginny does not believe the league has had “problem men” as much as it has had “problematic people” of both sexes who have engaged in similar behavior.

Laura had experienced similar behavior, having viewed individuals who were more interested in dating than true league participation. Laura outlined the way the league self-policed problematic behavior, and the way in which informal sanctioning sent the message to the individual that his advances were not wanted. At her prior league,

Laura and her teammates experienced inappropriate behavior by an official. Describing him as “creepy,” the male referee in question would frequently initiate physical contact and engage in heavy flirtation with the athletes. As the attempted affection was undesired yet did not break any written rules of conduct, it was informally sanctioned by the league; skaters simply went out of their way to avoid interaction with this individual. Laura reported that this shunning quickly discouraged his advances.

In this instance, what Laura described as creepy behavior was ended by the athletes making it known that his advances were unwanted. By building a league structure which is overwhelmingly female, advances that may have been tolerated in male dominated environments are quickly curbed by peer pressure, showing the participant that his behavior was not going to be tolerated. This informal sanctioning would be less likely to succeed in an environment where women did not have such a high numbers advantage over male participants. By engaging in alternative femininities and exercising their strength in numbers, the women in turn force an alternative masculinity on their male volunteers, whereby they must either comply or face formal sanctioning or removal from the league.

Laura had also seen more serious infractions at her prior league. When discussing problematic (and potentially illegal) behavior by a male participant, Laura was witness to the way in which the league’s female board of directors used formal sanctioning to end a relationship with a problematic individual. When a new male volunteer transferred into Laura’s prior league, rumors of a history of sexual assault came with him. With no concrete evidence or legal history, the volunteer was allowed to participate but was

advised his behavior would be monitored. While the volunteer did not commit any transgressions toward any of his new league mates, a visiting skater from another league later reported that he had attempted to assault her at a social event. Following this report, the volunteer was immediately removed from the league and the visiting skater was encouraged to report the event to the police.

Of all participants interviewed, Laura was the only respondent to have been witness to problematic behavior of such serious nature. Despite her experience with two separate negative men, she is also quick to point out that often those who are under scrutiny are undeserving of it, and that women were just as likely to engage in some negative behavior. Catherine and Ginny, however, reported that their prior history with men was overwhelmingly positive, and that they had not experienced either the formal or informal sanctioning outlined by Laura. Catherine discussed how the environment within derby was significantly more accepting and positive than the environment at her job, where she was more likely to feel objectified. She continues to wonder whether the differences are due to the types of men being involved in derby being more welcoming and supportive overall, or if the fact that women so thoroughly outnumber men in derby tends to naturally stifle negative behavior, where at her job the proportion of women to men is inverted.

Catherine's experience with men in derby aligned perfectly with Connell's theory of alternative masculinity. Catherine admits that she has had negative feelings towards male participants, but quickly clarifies that her frustration stemmed from their authoritative role in the sport and not from their gender. Any anger between them has

existed in the relationship between athlete and referee, not female and male. Catherine also explains that in her personal experience in the sport, she has never encountered negativity based on her sex, or been made to feel uncomfortable by a male participant. This stands in sharp contrast to her professional life, where she works in an overwhelmingly male environment and frequently experiences harassment.

As Connell explained, alternative masculinities are formed when their relationships with women, children, or both create interests that are more compelling than their interest in their own masculinity. As women's roller derby is primarily female owned and operated, and the women participating are practicing their own forms of alternative femininity, the male participants are likely to form their own alternative masculinities when participating in that space. For Catherine, this meant that the typical behavior of men at her workplace and in her social life was not exhibited by the men involved in roller derby. That she had never experienced a problem male in roller derby is especially notable, as behavior that is a daily occurrence in her professional life has not been encountered a single time in more than five years of playing the sport. While Catherine's experiences with men in derby does align with prior studies claiming the men were "not like the others," it still does not allow insight as to whether the men's participation lead to their difference, or if their difference encouraged their participation.

Within the league studied, it seemed that issues concerning "problem men" had been relatively few and far between. Laura's two experiences, leading to both formal and informal sanctioning, had been at her prior league on the west coast of the U.S. Of the negative behavior exhibited by men, both Ginny and Laura were quick to come to their

defense, stating that it had little to do with the men's gender, as they had also seen the same negative behavior exhibited by female players and volunteers. Catherine's experience in the league had been very positive, particularly as compared to her professional life where she often felt objectified and devalued. Overall, it appears that the respondents did not view male participation either as a necessity or a threat, as the issues exemplified by the discussed problem men were quickly rationalized as being disconnected from the concept of gender; women were equally likely to commit the same transgressions. It seems that the respondents all believed that these types of issues were going to occur any time you had a large group trying to function as one, despite any differences in gender. Catherine further elaborated that derby's culture naturally prevented problematic behavior, either through discouraging "those types" of men from joining or through the creation of new social norms due to the significantly heightened ratio of women to men and the relationships formed between them.

Support Networks in Roller Derby

Nearly all respondents echoed one another in their descriptions of supportive individuals in their network. Significant others and immediate family were the primary supporters existing outside of active league participants, and their support types ranged from emotional encouragement to hands-on assistance with league responsibilities.

The relationship between Ginny and Steve exemplifies the ways in which significant others became nodes in a support network without becoming active league members themselves. Ginny outlined how, at the league's inception, Steve designed and

maintained the website as well as lent his projector and set up the scoreboard. Ginny goes on to describe how even their children had been active supporters, volunteering at events and advertising for the league. While Ginny's family started out being incredibly supportive through her first four years of playing, ultimately she felt that her time in derby became more difficult to justify as her youngest daughter needed her to be home more.

Steve further elaborated on his involvement, not just as a husband who supported his wife, but also as an individual who was supporting the league in general. He outlined how his and his wife's involvement ultimately built a larger social network which continued outside of the league itself, despite some of those individuals involved having left the league. Through his wife's participation, Steve met and befriended several other players, maintaining those relationships even after their league participation had ceased. Interestingly, Steve included that he had become such good friends with one of the athletes that he performed her wedding several years after her roller derby retirement.

While Ginny primarily recognized Steve's support as centering around her personally, Steve outlined the ways in which this interpersonal support also benefitted the league as a whole. While Steve may have become an active participant as a way to spend time with his wife, he simultaneously assisted in laying the groundwork for the league in its infancy. By allowing the league to use his projector, he was able to offset technology costs that would have otherwise been incurred. Similarly, performing with his band at half time shows and other events, the league was able to provide additional entertainment to spectators at no cost, increasing future attendance and decreasing production

costs. Hosting sewing parties meant that the athletes were able to perform a necessary duty to participate while also building their own relationships with one another. Not only did Ginny benefit from Steve's support, but the league as a whole was able to decrease expenses, increase spectator turnout, and provide a congregational space for the league to bond and create their early uniforms. Out of this interpersonal support for Ginny, Steve also created new bonds with other participants, which strengthened the network as a whole and encouraged others to remain involved.

Rick, who is also the husband of a league skater, outlined his support of his wife and the ways in which he assisted with her participation. Like Steve, Rick's role as a husband and father meant a lot of logistical support to coordinate time away for his wife, while also giving emotional support following a derby-related injury. While Rick states he was not personally friends with any league members, he recognizes a weak social bond with them, befriending them on Facebook and talking with them in public. Rick, a self-described introvert, appreciated these relationships but states he is primarily involved as a way to support his wife. This support takes the form of financial budgeting of dues and expenses, logistical support in planning childcare during practices and games, and emotional support in encouraging his wife to return to the league following a broken leg sustained during practice.

Rick's interpersonal, logistical, and financial support was focused solely on allowing his wife to continue her own participation in the league. While he may not feel that he is contributing to the league as a whole, by allowing his wife's participation he is in turn contributing to the league's wider support network. His wife is known as being

overwhelmingly positive and supportive to her teammates, and is often cited by others as being a great motivator and source of emotional support. As Rick supports his wife's participation, she in turn supports the participation of others. While Rick may recognize only weak relationships with others, he is contributing vicariously to overall, league-wide emotional support through his wife's participation. Though Rick may only identify himself as supporting his wife specifically, he ultimately becomes a valuable node in a larger support network which benefits the entire league.

Laura was unique in her experiences, as her significant other, Brad, was also an active volunteer member in the league. Brad was serving as one of the main coaches for an intraleague team as well as for their all-star roster, which competed against other leagues. Interestingly, despite her boyfriend's heavy involvement as a league member, Laura spoke primarily of his interpersonal and financial support of her as an individual. She placed far more emphasis on his role in enabling her derby career as a boyfriend than as a coach. Brad provided financial and emotional support by assisting her with securing her derby gear and paying league dues, by listening to her frustrations with the sport and her interactions within it. While her boyfriend was also an active volunteer within the league and had his own motivations for participation, she found the most value in his interpersonal support, not his official league support.

The support structures in place, both through immediate family members as well as supporting significant others, all ultimately resulted in more positive experiences for the athletes. Catherine, however, was vocal about her frustration in her lack of support in derby, and believed this was rooted in the fact that roller derby was not viewed as

feminine. Catherine stated that growing up, she was more active in typically feminine activities which lead to positive encouragement from friends and family. However, as most people in her life do not view roller derby as a true athletic endeavor, and with the sport's violence being so far removed from stereotypical femininity, they have not provided the same support to her. Not only does she feel that her friends and family are disinterested in watching her play, but she perceives that they blatantly ignore her requests for help or support. This frustration is especially poignant when compared to her prior support riding horses as a teen. In that activity, her mother purchased three horses for her over the course of ten years. In derby, she is given Christmas gifts she doesn't want in the absence of gear she asks for, and was left to care for herself following knee surgery and recuperation to return to derby. While Catherine mentions the lack of financial support, her complaint was not solely that she is not being supported financially; that was just one indicator of the ways in which her family did not respect her athletic endeavors. When Catherine was riding horses, her mother was willing to commit to serious financial investment. However, when her interests centered on an aggressive, full contact sport, Catherine doesn't get support despite specifically requesting assistance. When she looked for support to continue playing after surgery, all she received in turn was questions about when she would decide to quit hurting her body. While Catherine felt supported in typically feminine endeavors, engaging in an aggressive sport left her feeling alone with friends and family who were disinterested.

Other respondents, however, detailed their own experiences with supportive others and demonstrated that the support offered them is not only beneficial to them

individually but also to the league as a whole. While Catherine and Laura's friends and family may not be active nodes within social networks supporting the league, they are still able to benefit from the support structures surrounding other individuals. They have benefitted by having their jerseys mailed to Steve and Ginny's home. They've benefitted by having a teammate return to the track following an injury, thanks to the encouragement and support of her husband Rick. They have benefited by having a strong coach, whose primary involvement is driven by his relationship with Laura. While Catherine has sincere feelings of frustration due to her own lack of personal supports, she is still indirectly able to benefit from the personal support of others in the league. These interpersonal support networks are necessary for the success of the league.

Just like male participation within the league is a benefit but not a necessity, so too is male participation in informal league support networks. While the league as a whole benefits from informal male involvement, the benefits do not stem from the sex of the participants at all but rather by the willingness to sacrifice time and effort for the betterment of one another, and thus the league. Once again, men play important roles in sustaining the league, but their importance is not rooted in the fact that they are men, only in the fact that they are willing to help. Even individual support coming from the significant other of a skater plays a role in maintaining the health of the league; that interpersonal support spreads out through the network as each person enables another to continue participating.

CHAPTER XI

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Following completion of the audio recorded phone interviews, all responses were transcribed for later reference. While the transcriptions created ease of reference for documenting responses to survey questions, they also allowed for qualitative analysis by theme. Thematic identification is one of the most common forms of qualitative analysis, and obviously centers on parsing out themes from textual qualitative data.

Gerry Ryan and H. Russell Bernard (2003) outline thematic analysis and its usefulness to qualitative researchers. They identify themes as underlying ideas that shape the way narratives are created in society. Each theme has an expression (or multiple expressions), which is the ways that a theme is discussed and described. Thematic analysis, then, involves analyzing expressions to find the theme that they represent. Using methods outlined in their text, I used an inductive approach to find themes embedded in the data, the interview transcripts.

Due to the short nature of the interviews and transcripts, one manipulative technique and one observational technique were utilized in discovering themes native to the text (Ryan 2003). To manipulate the data, I used a simple cutting and sorting technique. Each transcript was printed on paper, and then the responses were physically cut apart so that each individual's response to each individual question became a single chunk of text. In this way, each interview transcript became several smaller transcripts,

organized by topic. After the transcripts were cut, I then used an observational technique to search for expressions of themes.

The transcripts were read multiple times prior to any initial analysis. After several readings, I took multiple, differently colored highlighters and began a new reading of the text. Expressions of themes were identified primarily through repetition, one of the simplest observational methods for theme identification. Repetition is simply identifying those topics that are recurrent in the text (Ryan 2003). By searching for keywords and phrases that were repeated both by either individual within the full context of the interview or by multiple people through different interviews, I was able to discover thematic expression and begin sorting the responses. Expressions of themes were highlighted based on keywords within the sentence that indicated the ideological root of the expression. For example, sentences which made reference to friends, family, husbands, wives, boyfriends, or significant others were highlighted orange, identifying them as fitting within the relationships theme. As new themes were discovered based on arriving at new expressions of them, they were then highlighted in a different color. Sentences which had no immediately discoverable expression or which were unique to the chunk were not marked; to be recorded, the theme had to be expressed either by multiple individuals or by a single individual multiple times across different responses.

By the time each transcript was cut, sorted, and analyzed, five main themes had been identified. The themes discovered were: roller derby as revolutionary; roller derby's legitimacy as a sport; societal gendered expectations (both patriarchal

expectations of the female athletes and the athlete's expectations of male volunteers); support types (both official and unofficial support of the leagues); and relationships (both between skaters and volunteers as well as interpersonal relationships). Following thematic identification, each chunk was then sorted into stacks based on the primary colors with which they were highlighted, indicating the main themes present in each response. Relationships between themes were then found by viewing which colors most frequently occurred together within the same chunk. Frequent recurrences indicate relationships between different themes, which can then be explored. After sorting all chunks by recurring color groupings, three of the five themes were discovered to be frequently expressed within proximity to one another. These themes are roller derby's legitimacy, support types, and relationships.

Legitimacy

By far, one of the most frequently occurring themes was roller derby's legitimacy as a sport. The theme was referenced most frequently by Catherine, though others also approached the topic. The two most frequent expressions of the theme were the words "real," and obviously "legitimate."

Catherine's perception of derby's illegitimacy was a recurring expressed frustration for her; many of her responses lamented the fact that she felt obligated to refer to roller derby as a "real" sport. Her frustration was particularly evident when deriding the stipulation that the league must serve not only as an athletic club, but also a state registered non-profit group:

You're supposed to also have this expectation that we're a real sport. It's real. I have to keep using this word real. And it's frustrating that you have to do both things. You have to function as this not-for-profit organization that gives back to the community, and we can't profit and we can't keep any of our sales, and we can't pay ourselves, we can't help ourselves, there's this stipulation where you have to be this way, but we also have to be a sports league, and at the same time somehow expect everyone to take you seriously (Catherine. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Echoes of this sentiment would continue to ring out throughout her discussion of the league's mandated non-profit work, whereby participation in charity events was a requirement to play in league games. Catherine felt it was a burden and was holding derby back from widespread legitimacy as a sport:

That's a frustrating caveat, you know, is that... if you want to be at all a legitimate league, it also forces you to be grassroots, because you have to function as a non-profit. This is the thing that's really convoluted to me. You have to function as a not-for-profit organization, and in order to be a not-for-profit organization you have to give back to the community, and there are all of these checklists, and a lot of them are like "empowering youth" and "doing good in the community" and so it's really strange that we're boxed in that way, because you can't be for profit, you have to function as a grassroots, do it yourself, by your bootstraps, for women by women organization..., blah, I hate that crap (Catherine. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Catherine's concerns surrounding legitimacy were expressed by several of the respondents, but Catherine was the most vocal and outspoken that derby's existence as a women's movement or DIY organization was a direct threat to the legitimacy of the sport. Catherine's emphasis on roller derby being solely a sport had led to much focused frustration on the WFTDA model of roller derby and its DIY requirements. For Catherine, the efforts to be DIY and to maintain ownership of themselves felt hollow and forced; she was not engaged in community involvement out of any desire to help others

or create ownership of the league, but rather solely out of stipulated requirements that these things were necessary to play. It led to a real resentment of the community surrounding derby and its governing body as it took focus off of derby being an athletic endeavor, and thus made her feel illegitimate as an athlete. In discussing roller derby as a women's movement, Catherine again takes the opportunity to emphasize that roller derby is a real sport:

That's the thing that doesn't make sense to me about the whole WFTDA platform, that I'm hoping that one day that will change, maybe this is just what it takes to be accepted as, you know, again a "real" sport, and then one day you can be a for-profit... It's almost like a half-hearted, half-assed thing where we're doing non-profit work because we have to, not because we want to. And that kind of defeats the purpose, because we're not invested in the work that we're doing, we're just saying "who should we give money to this month, ok, let's cut them a check" and that's truly the extent that we do. We haven't done anything in the community in years.

And I don't blame people for hating that shit. I hate it too. I do not do this crap so that I can go to a god-damn PR event and stand around, I want to just play this sport. And so I don't blame people for feeling bogged down by that. It's annoying that we have to do this sort of stuff. And it's hard to rally interest, because we do just want to play. We want to hit each other and play roller derby. End of story. We aren't fundraisers and non-profit organizers and not everyone knows what they're doing. It's hard. You know so to be internationally ranked, we also have to give back to the local animal shelter. Like how is that related? (Catherine. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

After emphasizing again that roller derby is a real athletic endeavor, she continued to point out the ways that its mandated non-profit work ultimately discouraged public perceptions of derby's legitimacy. She ends her quote by pointing out a disconnect between attending a mandated volunteer event so that the league can maintain their

international ranking, referencing the WFTDA's policy that all leagues run as non-profits to participate in the governing body.

Catherine's frustration stemmed out of public perception of derby as a novelty instead of genuine athleticism. In her fight to prove legitimacy, Catherine hoped to push away any distractions from the ultimate goal of being taken seriously as an athlete, which included rejecting the idea of roller derby as a women's movement and its DIY requirements. Later, however, Catherine herself would explore the way that her gender was a contributing factor towards her feelings of derby's illegitimacy. When discussing a knee injury and subsequent surgery, she states:

Don't even get me started on the doctors, because that's the same sort of paternalistic bullshit... if I hear one more time about how I should switch to golf or another sport... it's just like, ugh... I can't help but feel it's not just because it's not paid, it's because I'm a woman participating in a marginalized sport that is not mainstream, and it's just a lack of understanding about what the sport entails and what it means and what it physically demands of the body (and what it doesn't physically demand of the body), and an assumption that...you're like on the fringe of something that should not be pursued. "You should not be doing this, you're hurting yourself." ... I just can't help but feeling like it's because I'm a woman and it's a sport that they don't understand (Catherine. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Catherine again signals her concern for legitimacy by stating she is in a marginalized sport, that it is not mainstream, and derby is a sport that "they don't understand." Interestingly, she also states that the sport's illegitimacy partially stems from her status as a female athlete. The irony of Catherine's frustration is found when viewing her beliefs on derby's tension between sport and women's movement. While she realizes that others view her as not being a legitimate athlete, and those views originate

from social norms based on her gender, she also aims to fight a notion that roller derby should exist as a women's movement rooted in female empowerment. Catherine simultaneously is struggling for legitimacy and acceptance for herself and her sport despite societal gendered expectations while also rejecting claims that derby should be recognized as a social movement. This creates a large amount of frustration for her, as she feels that her perceived illegitimacy as an athlete is rooted in her gender, but efforts to shape roller derby as a form of female empowerment also distract from derby's legitimacy as a sport. This leaves her in a position where she is not able to reconcile an acceptable path towards the legitimacy that eludes her.

Though no other respondents were as passionate about focusing on derby's legitimacy, others did hint towards similar views concerning public perception of roller derby as a "real" athletic endeavor, and the importance of focusing on derby as a sport rather than a movement. Both Steve and his wife Ginny made reference to this, expressed both with the terms "legit," "gimmicky" and "novel" to express its legitimacy or illegitimacy:

It's doing what plenty of men's sports do in a way that's revolutionary, but it shouldn't be revolutionary so I don't want to think about it that way. Because I don't want to take away from it being legit, you know? I think if it's just sort of a cause or something, that it gives it a gimmicky nature that I don't really like. (Steve. Phone Interview. 30 December 2015).

Ginny continued:

When I first started, I would say that it was definitely more of a women's movement, but we watched the sport develop. It's definitely come into its own way as a sport. It's moved away from the novelty and more toward actual

athleticism and competitiveness (Ginny. Telephone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Both Steve and Ginny indicated tacit agreement with Catherine's concern for legitimacy and a desire to avoid thinking of roller derby as a movement due to that concern. By thinking that his wife is participating in a movement, Steve can no longer view the sport as "legit," but rather as "gimmicky." Ginny, a founding member of the league, states she watched derby develop from a women's movement into a sport. Interestingly, she immediately follows by equating the women's movement with a "novelty," but the sport with "actual athleticism." Like Steve and Catherine, Ginny places for more importance on roller derby as a sport, rejecting distractions from it as an athletic endeavor.

In relationship to the tension between sport and women's movement, concerns for derby's legitimacy could also be found in references to public perception of the sport itself. This is particularly interesting, as modern roller derby was born out of a rejection of traditional sports structures which required third party ownership, financial contracts, and the loss of control of the end product. Yet Catherine expresses that to feel legitimate as an athlete and for roller derby to be legitimate as a sport, outside support was necessary. Again, Catherine expresses desires for legitimacy and public perception of derby as a real sport:

I feel like if we are going to make it, and if we are ever going to be a part of society and going to be on ESPN and have sponsors we should be becoming "a real and true sport". I feel like it can't be about it being a movement... You know, if you're looking for legitimacy and looking to get on ESPN, you know ESPN is not in the business of airing women's movements, they are in the

business of showing sports, and so you have to make it about the sport aspect of it. You can't say "look how strong we are as women" but "look how strong we are as athletes" (Catherine, Telephone Interview. 31 December 2015).

It seems for Catherine that legitimacy would take the form of mainstream acceptance and derby's shift towards being like other sports. This desire seemed to be far removed from the ideals of derby's modern resurgence, yet it was one that was shared by Steve and Ginny as well. However, roller derby's legitimacy was not only discussed in relation to roller derby as a social movement. Expressions of concerns for legitimacy were also found when discussing male participation in derby and social support networks, indicating that legitimacy was not only found through widespread support, but also through interpersonal support as well.

While Catherine continued to discuss legitimacy using the expressions "real" and "legitimate," the theme was also expressed using terms like "credibility," and conversely "novelty." Though it was again Catherine who discussed it in the most depth, Ginny and Laura also discussed legitimacy (or the lack of it) in interpersonal and male support. Ginny addresses the increased credibility male support brings to roller derby:

I'd love to see men involved, and I'd love to see them involved in what is typically seen as a women's sport, it gives more credibility to it. I don't know what's going to happen in the world of women's roller derby, and it's a little fluid with co-ed derby developing, but I think it's important to have their input and their help and it lends credibility to the sport that it's not just women, but men can be involved... (Ginny. Phone Interview. 31 December 2016).

By discussing derby's credibility, Ginny calls for the respect of others in viewing roller derby as a real endeavor. Unlike Catherine's statement that legitimacy is found in

mainstream success, Ginny believes legitimacy, or credibility, can be rooted in other's acceptance of the sport. This is an important distinction to make, as Ginny's acceptance does not necessarily include televised games and eventual pay days. It is rooted instead in public perception, an equally valuable commodity.

Laura also makes this connection between legitimacy and interpersonal support, both discussing her immediate family's views on derby as legitimate (they see it as a sport) and her extended family's views on derby as illegitimate (they see it as a novelty):

You know my parents and siblings, they see it as a sport that I've dedicated a lot of time and effort into, so they've supported it and me because they know it's important to me. Whereas extended family, it's more of like a novelty thing. You know, my grandmother gets to say "oh, you know, that's my granddaughter, she's a social worker by day, rollergirl by night." Super cliché, you know, like the life and interest section of the newspaper. Whereas my immediate family supports it I guess in the way you'd hope a family would support a serious athlete (Laura. Phone Interview. 30 December 2015).

The support offered Laura was rooted in the views of derby's legitimacy as an athletic endeavor, and those views in turn were molded by the family's closeness with the skater. As her immediate family knows derby is important to her, they support her as a "serious athlete." When referencing her extended family, however, Laura expresses their views of illegitimacy by using the word novelty. As the strength of the social bond weakens (only the immediate family recognizes the sport is important to Laura), so too do views on derby as a real endeavor as Laura moves from serious athlete to participating in a novelty.

Catherine uses these same expressions of legitimacy when discussing her relationship with her mother, extended family, and friends and their views of roller

derby. Again, Catherine uses the word “real” to indicate legitimacy, and like both Laura and Ginny, she uses the word “novelty” to express illegitimacy, while also expressing frustration at individuals who don’t “take it seriously” or view her as an athlete “just like any other athlete”. Catherine’s connection between interpersonal support and views of legitimacy were so connected that she expressed the theme immediately before or after every discussion of support (or her lack of it). In response to a question concerning interpersonal support in roller derby, Catherine mentioned support types six times. However, she also expressed concerns or frustrations stemming from legitimacy the same number of times:

There seems to be like basically just a sort of pervasive sense of not understanding my commitment, or not respecting it, or thinking that this is somehow not a real endeavor. That’s probably the best way I can describe it, maybe because it’s not mainstream...

Every year, my family asks me what I want for Christmas, I say “I need stuff for roller derby. If you’d like to ask me what I want, I’ll say ‘X, Y and Z.’” Nope, they’ll send me perfume and a purse instead. Literally that’s what I got for Christmas this year. And we go over this every year, and if anyone asks you what you want, I’ll say “hey I could really use some new wheels” and it’s like that’s not a valid or real thing...

When I rode horses, I mean I rode horses for 25 years, my mom bought me three horses in the course of ten years. That she obviously respected to be like a real and purposeful thing that I was doing...

Maybe if junior derby was around and I was playing that she would have bought me skates. I don’t know, there’s something about it that just seems like it’s not a real thing. It’s not...

I do have these two coworkers, and they did sort of turn into my superfans and league superfans... and they are very supportive of me, and they’ll talk to me about it... But they don’t think it’s funny. They don’t think it’s a novelty. They take it seriously...

And nobody is offering to help me pay my dues or offering to buy me skates, nobody is taking it that seriously that they're like "do you need help with this? I know you just had knee surgery" and... no one really seems to care that "she's an athlete just like any other athlete, and she just had surgery, and she had the surgery so that she can continue to play, and obviously takes this very seriously." (Catherine. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Feelings of illegitimacy had very strong connections with Catherine's feelings of interpersonal support. When Catherine did not feel supported by her mother, her extended family, or her friends, she immediately followed with expressions indicating how they did not view roller derby as a legitimate endeavor. Similarly, when discussing her coworkers who she felt supported by, she made it clear that they didn't think it's a novelty. They aren't laughing at her participation. They take it seriously. Feelings of legitimacy as an athlete and feelings of interpersonal support were completely married for Catherine, and without fail one could use one theme as a predictor of Catherine's expression of the other. In fact, it was this repeated connection made within a single chunk of transcript which first lead me to discover the firm relationship between legitimacy and support types across all connected responses. This connection will be further discussed following exploration of relationships and support types.

Relationships and Support Types

In discussing their experiences in derby, the respondents all expressed desires for legitimacy and public perception that this was a real endeavor. Their concerns for legitimacy were often preceded or followed with discussions of public and interpersonal support and the relationships that it is born out of. I here pair these two themes together,

as while they are two separate themes with different expressions, they are so inherently connected that respondents rarely discussed one without also expressing the other.

Relationships were frequently, but not solely, expressed using relational nouns. This included obvious indicators of relationships such as the words “family,” “mother,” or “daughter.” However, less formal relationships were also expressed by respondents with terms of appreciation, affection, or conversely, distance. These relationships were expressed with terms such as “appreciated,” “friendships,” “close,” or “roped in.”

Discussions of relationships were explored naturally when exploring support types in roller derby. These support types include both formal and informal support. Formal support took the form of referees, volunteers, or other officials. Informal support includes emotional, financial and logistical support from family members, or the absence of that support. While relationships and support types are not inherently the same, it was difficult for a respondent to reference a relationship without expressing their support type or vice versa. Support type expressions used were primarily verbs discussing how a relationship acted to improve the league or support the individual. These words included “hosted,” “coaching,” “refing,” “paying,” and obviously, “supporting.” Discussions of relationships and support frequently lead to exploration of how these relationships are formed for different individuals. For example, when discussing how he supported his wife’s participation, Steve began with a discussion of supportive behavior but naturally shifted towards discussion of relationships born out of it:

My band played some things, and yeah I was pretty involved. We've hosted, especially in the early days, all of the sewing parties and the measuring parties to get the uniforms figured out, they happened here. All the stuff used to get shipped here before the bouts. It was pretty in my face for a couple of years there. And we're a family with three kids and I run a business, so making the time and making it work for her to be gone as much as it required her to be gone I guess would be something like supporting it...

I got to be really close to several other players. I definitely built some real friendships that last until now. You know, I performed [one of the retired player's] wedding, and I met her in the first year. I'm still pretty good friends with lots of people that used to skate (Steve. Phone Interview. 30 December 2015).

Steve's original response focused on the ways in which he supported his wife and the league in general, expressed here through the verbs "played," "hosted," "making the time," "making it work," and "supporting." Immediately following these expressions, however, his theme switches to discuss the relationships born out of his support. The new theme is expressed with terms such as "close" and "friendships." Tracking Steve's participation, one can map the path between his relationships and support. Steve, in a relationship with Ginny, then becomes a supportive figure in the league. Out of this support is created new relationships in the form of friendships with new skaters. Steve's path could be viewed as a relationship, leading to league support, leading to new relationships.

A similar link between relationships and support types is expressed by Catherine when discussing the place of men in roller derby. Here, she starts with a discussion of support types: "coaching," "volunteering," or "reffing." She then expresses the relationships which lead to those support types: "just sort of roped in." Catherine states:

So, until the day we are co-ed, that is sort of the only role for men to have is to be coaching, or volunteering, or reffing. That's fine with me. Do I think we need a male presence? Absolutely not. We don't need men, we just need bodies, and the women that are participating are playing and so the men are just sort of roped in (Catherine. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Here, Catherine explains what she views as the typical relationship between supporting individuals and their relationships. Men are “roped in” to participation, implying they have existing relationships with skaters who are playing. After being roped in, they then become coaches, volunteers, or referees. Once again, the link between themes follows a path: An existing relationship with a skater leads to support of the league as a whole.

While this path between existing relationships and official league support was one of the more common links explored, respondents also expressed the strength or weakness of bonds between informal support types and the relationships they are born out of. Here, Rick expresses his relationship with the league as a whole, using words such as “friendship,” “chat,” and “hanging out.” However, his expressions are unique in that they are negative: Rick is detailing the weakness of his relationships with league members other than his wife. He then follows this with expressions of the informal support types offered to his wife, using words and phrases such as “keeping track,” “paying,” and “emotional support.”

I'm mostly an introvert, so I'm not sure how much I try and develop friendships, but I have a number of players that I'm friends with on Facebook, and I would chat with them if I saw them in public, if that makes sense. I'm friends with a handful of players, but you know, I don't go spending time hanging out with them if [my wife's] not there...

Definitely having kids, and with the one being five, he needs attention, and so yeah, keeping track of kids during play is hard. Financially, too, I mean [my wife] works too so it's not like I'm footing her bill to play derby, but I mean paying dues and stuff like that is something that has to be budgeted for. So yeah, it's family support...

And emotionally, I mean especially when she broke her leg last year, and trying to get her to a point where she could make a decision about whether or not playing was something she wanted to continue doing or if that was, you know, the danger of it became far too real... and so there was a lot of emotional support as well. And yeah, just finding time to let it happen, you know practices are three days a week and so that's, you know, making sure we have childcare for that and that we don't schedule other events (Rick. Phone Interview. 31 December 2015).

Here, Rod begins his response with an expression of the weakness of his bonds with other players before beginning to discuss his informal support of his wife. Whereas Steve and Catherine explained the strength of relationships leading to formal support, Rod's relationship with his wife does not necessarily require league volunteerism or activity to be supportive. Rather, Rod's primary contribution to the league is the informal support offered to his wife; by assisting with childcare, budgeting, and offering emotional support, he encourages her participation. However, this informal support leads to weakened relationships with other league members, a fact that does not concern Rod, a self-described introvert. Once again, however, an existing relationship lead to a support type, albeit an informal one.

Other pathways between relationships and support types were also expressed, as it was not always the case that existing relationships lead to league support. Rather, Laura expressed the opposite path, whereby relationships were born out of support. When discussing male involvement in roller derby and derby being "women's-only," Laura briefly touched on her participation within male leagues. Here, she expresses support

through the phrase “got involved,” and indicates budding relationships by stating she “felt differently” after her experience:

I think my feelings on it have really evolved over the years. When men’s derby first started [on the west coast], I did see it as kind of intrusive. And then I got involved with the men’s league and volunteered and coached and realized that I definitely felt very differently than I did at first (Laura. Phone Interview. 30 December 2015).

Laura’s initial reaction to men’s roller derby is rejection of it, she wanted to keep derby as her own. However, through her decision to offer support to the league rather than reject it, she “felt differently,” showing that new relationships were created. This path stands opposed to the ones so far explored. Existing relationships did not lead to official league support, but rather the offering of official league support lead to the creation of new relationships. This is important to understand, as it implies that the link between relationships and support types is dialogical rather than one way. Relationships lead to support types just as support types lead to relationships.

Interrelations Between Expressed Themes

The idea of legitimacy was a recurring theme expressed by nearly every respondent, and some, like Catherine, constantly framed their responses within this search for acceptance. Similarly, expressions of relationships and support types were explored naturally by the respondents; few who replied expressed one theme without concurrently expressing the other. Just as relationships and support are connected, however, so too is the idea of legitimacy. Respondents, when discussing legitimacy,

often included that those with whom they shared stronger relationships were more likely to view the sport as legitimate. As the strength of the relationship weakened, so too did the likelihood of being viewed as a legitimate athlete. This creates a model whereby relationships lead to (and are created out of) both feelings of legitimacy and support for the individual and league. Similarly, supportive individuals were naturally inclined to believe the sport as legitimate, else why would they offer their support? Finally, feelings of legitimacy lead to the creation of support networks.

Laura expressed this connection between legitimacy, relationships, and support. Here, she outlines how closer relationships lead to greater support as her family views her as a legitimate athlete. However, more distant relationships offer no support due to roller derby's perceived illegitimacy:

I'd say my parent and siblings are, you know, very supportive, whereas extended family, they, I don't know. You know my parents and siblings, they see it as a sport that I've dedicated a lot of time and effort into, so they've supported it and me because they know it's important to me. Whereas extended family, it's more of like a novelty thing. You know, my grandmother gets to say "oh, you know, that's my granddaughters, she's a social worker by day, rollergirl by night." Super cliché... Whereas my immediate family supports it I guess in the way you'd hope a family would support a serious athlete (Laura. Phone Interview. 30 December 2015).

Above, the three explored themes are expressed as being completely interconnected. Her family supports her as a "serious athlete", and they view her efforts as legitimate because of the closeness of their relationship; they know it is "important" to her. When discussing her extended family, however, she expresses the opposite: the sport is not legitimate, but a "novelty". Rather than support it, they view it in "cliché" terms. This is

born out of the overall weakness of their relationship, as they do not understand derby's importance to her.

Catherine had much the same experience as she discussed her frustration with her family and their lack of support, as she clearly framed that lack of support as being rooted in roller derby's perceived illegitimacy. When Catherine was younger and lived with her mother, she rode horses, which her mother perceived as a legitimate feminine endeavor. As such, her mother offered her both financial support by buying her horses, as well as emotional support through encouraging her participation. However, Catherine is now an adult who lives on her own. As she no longer shares a home with her parent, her mother is not as involved in her activities, and thus does not understand derby's importance to her. Derby's illegitimacy stems both from not being perceived as feminine as well as from a weakened relationship between Catherine and her mother. As such, Catherine is not offered the same support to encourage her participation.

Catherine continues her discussion by detailing two coworkers who have become fans of the league:

I do have these two coworkers, and they did sort of turn into my superfans and league superfans, I mean they take it totally serious, they learned the sport from coming to our games, and now we have serious assessment of the games afterward, like we'll talk about things, they understand penalties, they understand the reffing now, and it's amazing from seeing these people go from nothing and now they understand the sport, and if the WFTDA playoffs came to [our town], they would go to them. I mean, they are super into it and take it seriously and they are supportive of me and they'll talk to me about it... But they don't think it's funny. They don't think it's a novelty. They take it seriously...

Above, she referenced them as “league superfans,” indicating not only interpersonal support of Catherine but of the league as a whole, offering financial support through event attendance and merch support as well as granting more legitimacy to the sport through word-of-mouth advertising. Oppositional from Catherine’s mother, whose lack of support stemmed from a weakened relationship with Catherine and a perception of derby as illegitimate, Catherine’s coworkers were initially encouraged by their relationship with Catherine to attend a league event. This relationship lead to league support, through repeated event attendance. The support then lead to perceived legitimacy, as they became fans of the sport overall, viewing it as a “real” endeavor.

The themes explored here are simply an introduction to the dialogues between legitimacy, relationships, and support types. This study was exploratory, taking an inductive approach; I was not able to test the depth of knowledge, but rather aimed to find the bounds of the phenomenon. These themes are ripe for exploration now that they have been discovered, and other unnamed themes are still left for discovery. A targeted study with an increased sample size would be able to go into far greater depth, testing the relationships between these ideas. While some respondents reported their relationships lead to support and legitimacy, others, like Laura, had established legitimacy through her own participation before offering support to men’s leagues and ultimately creating new relationships. Finally, Catherine and Laura together outlined the ways in which weakened interpersonal relationships lead to decreased support due to perceptions of illegitimacy. While the data suggests that increasing any one of the attributes would lead

to an increase in all attributes, it is still a hypothesis waiting to be tested. My hope is that, now that the boundaries have been defined, further work will be able to be conducted.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that male participation in women's derby and the sport's existence as a women's-only space is significantly different than past studies have indicated. While the respondents do discuss the empowerment felt by stepping outside of traditionally feminine roles and being more free to explore stereotypically masculine aggression, they all also state that they place little meaning on derby being exclusively by and for women. While some members delight in derby's DIY ethos and view it as an opportunity for women to participate in leadership roles, others, like Catherine, become frustrated at the requirement for social involvement. Within this small league and across only a handful of participants, it is clear that roller derby has no single clear meaning and is not easily defined as a single, unique experience. Rather, roller derby engages the skater in a way that allows her to craft her own experience and find her own meaning within it. That meaning is not necessarily rooted in women's empowerment or the creation of women's-only spaces. While there are certainly those who may celebrate it for those themes, it seems within this small sample that the primary aim of the group was a fight for legitimacy, and that was a fight they were happy to engage in alongside their male counterparts.

Male engagement in derby stands in stark contrast to both past studies on derby and historical views on male participation in women's movements. Men are not

conspicuously absent from roller derby. They do not simply fill in as part of the show, wearing cheerleading skirts and waving pompoms while also serving as childcare. While the players may not place emphasis on male participation being necessary, they also are overwhelmingly appreciative of the men who create their support networks. Men are neither a requirement, nor are they to be ignored, but rather they are equal members of the league and valued partners in their relationship who are celebrated not because of their gender but because of their willingness to support the players and the game.

Similarly, male participation may assist in granting legitimacy to the sport, but the legitimacy does not stem from the men because of their gender, it stems from the roles they perform. Men are coaches, referees, significant others. Men, just like women, grant the sport legitimacy because they believe it is a worthy pastime. While beliefs on derby as a women's movement significantly vary, it is clear that men are not the gatekeepers to women's success in derby. Men are not the last obstacle to be tackled, but rather a source of support so that the women can continue play. The players view their participation as lending to their own legitimacy as athletes.

Throughout history, men have existed as part of the necessary support networks in feminist movements. Whether in suffrage, education, or political rights, men have necessarily been the filter through which women's progress has been achieved. The supporting men realized the iniquity of women's oppression and the necessity of their own involvement. Just as Thomas Wentworth Higginson observed the unfair imbalance of power and understood that it could not last forever, supporting men have worked alongside feminist activists in an effort to achieve equality. Women articulated their

rights to equal education, but it was the male boards who were responsible for allowing equal access. Women were the driving force behind their own right to suffrage, but it was the men who had to pull the lever in the voting booth. While Margaret Sanger worked to provide widespread access to literature on women's health, her husband used his own trial to advocate for her work, knowing that patriarchal Comstock laws would prevent his wife's voice from having the same impact. Through history, women have been the fire behind a movement, and men their necessary gatekeepers to success.

Following securing the rights to suffrage, education, and healthcare, first wave feminism would begin to wane. While a patriarchal society ensured that men's voices were still the ones most clearly heard, women were becoming more empowered to change the world around them. Out of this empowerment rose second wave feminism, with sides divided on how to best shape society and create further progress for equality. While liberal feminism seeks to change existing institutions in favor of equality, radical feminism sees that patriarchy is so embedded in those institutions that it is a fundamental fact of their existence. As such, the only correct step towards equality is their destruction and subsequent rebuilding from the ground up with a focus on women's empowerment and equality between the sexes.

Title IX's mandate for equal funding in education was a strong first step towards granting equality of access across sexes. As applied to sport, Title IX ensured that female athletes have as many opportunities for varsity athletics as their male counterparts. Title IX, however, only ensured equality of access, not equality of funding or support. While liberal feminism would support Title IX as a first step that can be improved upon, the end

result is still a society which encourages male participation in sport while minimizing emphasis on athletics and sanctioning aggressive, stereotypically masculine behavior within those athletics. Radical feminism appropriately sees this as a half-measure which does little to address the problem of patriarchy in sport.

Roller derby itself is a direct reaction to society telling women they are not allowed to be fierce or aggressive. It's unsurprising that derby's early days were so heavily focused on spectacle, as women created an outlet to flaunt their bodies and their sexuality, to be abrasive without fear, to commit acts of aggression while hearing cheers from the crowd. As focus shifted from spectacle to sport, the kitsch became less prevalent but the attitude remained. Roller derby is a radical feminist response to sports culture, created from the ground up as both a safe space for women's empowerment and expression as well as a legitimate athletic endeavor and full contact competition.

Interestingly, while past studies and my own research claims that derby was a women's movement, those that were interviewed were primarily dismissive of the idea and focused on derby as a sport first and foremost. Even those respondents who expressed their feelings of empowerment discovered in derby were more invested in roller derby as a sport. However, despite their personal reasons for participating, their responses made it clear that their derby league existed as a social space much different than others. That the athletes were primarily there to play the sport only strengthens roller derby as a social movement, as the women are able to participate in previously unacceptable aggressive behavior without a conscious decision to participate in a movement. They have created a space that allows radical feminist action without the

need for a radical feminist consciousness. Though roller derby is far from mainstream, it has grown enough to allow participation without implicit feelings of being revolutionary, a sign of its progress.

While the athletes may not be interested in feminist activism, roller derby culture fits squarely into the paradigm of radical feminism with Marxian ownership of labor and product. The athletes, whether willingly like Laura or begrudgingly like Catherine, control every step of the process, serving as the Board of directors, the owners, the athletes, and the event staff. There are no outside interests profiting from their work. Proceeds are given to charity as determined by the skaters and the league's Board. Importantly, roller derby was built from the ground up with two ideals in mind: women's empowerment and gendered equality.

The themes of empowerment and equality lead to the creation of alternative femininities as women were allowed to express themselves, their sexuality, their masculinity, and own their bodies in ways that are not permitted in traditional patriarchy and other sports rooted within it. This alternative femininity in turn required the creation of alternative masculinities. Men were not forbidden from participation, but rather became important nodes within derby's larger support networks. As a space, roller derby existed apart from patriarchal society, and thus the participating men also existed apart from it. In a combined ten years of experience, neither Ginny nor Catherine had experienced the type of negative behaviors or discrimination that Catherine saw as a daily occurrence in her work place. Laura, having been a transfer from another league, outlined both the informal and formal sanctioning that can take place when men engaged

in negative behaviors. For this small sample, it was clear that problem men were few and far between, and those that existed were quickly told to fall in line or be removed.

Male supporters, then, were overwhelmingly positive assets to this league, and did not only take the form of active volunteers. While men were coaches, referees, and support staff, they also were fathers, boyfriends, husbands, and children, and the support they provided was just as valuable as those who were actively engaged in the league. By providing interpersonal support to the athletes, they encouraged their participation, strengthening the league. Their interpersonal support came in the form of financial assistance, childcare planning, and emotional encouragement to continue playing. Even those athletes, like Catherine, who did not feel supported by others were still able to benefit from the networks created by other players and supporting men. She benefitted by having Steve's band play halftime shows and visiting Steve and Ginny's house for sewing parties. She saw her teammate return to the track after an injury thanks to encouragement by Rick. Her teammate, Laura, continued to be an asset to the league as an experienced veteran player partially in thanks to the support of her boyfriend. Perhaps most importantly, Catherine is able to participate in a mixed gender social network that is free from the sexual harassment and crass behavior that she experiences daily at work. The creation of alternative masculinities and the resulting support networks that grow within them allow the league to function within the spirit of radical feminism, a sport built from the ground up with an emphasis on women's empowerment and equality.

While we have far to go before we realized Asimov's ideal future society which recognizes true equality, it is also clear that men are no longer the gatekeepers to

women's success. Roller derby may not be viewed popularly as a cause as worthy of support as suffrage, education, or healthcare, but it still exists as a radical feminist snapshot of the type of communities that can exist if they are built from the ground up with a focus on empowerment and equality. In roller derby, men are not needed, but they are welcome. They do not grant access to women's success. They participate only as much as they are allowed by the athletes, and their participation is kept in check by both formal and informal sanctioning of negative behavior. The men who participate become "not like the others," because they are engaged in a social network that itself is unlike all others.

The results of this study are admittedly limited. Small sample sizes and focusing on a single league make it difficult to extrapolate results to the larger population as a whole. My own personal relationships with the respondents and my status as a male volunteer for the league may have discouraged the athletes from discussing specific negative behaviors. A survey design built from the ground up for qualitative work would have been more effective than my own last minute circumstantial shift away from mixed methods. While the results of the study may be applicable only to this league and in this area, and similar studies elsewhere may produce wildly different results, it became clear throughout my conversations with athletes, fans and volunteers that this roller derby league exists as a safe space for female expression. While other studies may yield different results, my own experience traveling with roller derby has taught me that the camaraderie that exists between derby participants is nearly universal, and finding

someone else who is “in the know” immediately creates a bond between strangers that otherwise wouldn’t exist.

This is a scholarly “first look” at men in women’s flat track roller derby. The cultures and support types created by men within derby are still vast and unstudied. The culture of officials who drive six hours to referee a one-hour game is tremendously different than that of coaches who view themselves as “one of the team.” The husbands, like Steve and Rod, who support their wives in participation will be different than the “derby widows” who remain uninvolved in their significant other’s participation. I could not fathom to cover “the culture of men in derby.” Rather, I aimed to make opening remarks, exploring the breadth of support men offered women in their participation, while surveying the women’s feelings on that support and its meaning to them. My hope is that future researchers exploring this community can use this work as a stepping stone to explore specific male populations in derby or other women’s networks.

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APPENDIX A
VOLUNTEER SURVEY

- 1) What is your current age?
 - a) prefer not to answer
 - b) 18-20
 - c) 21-25
 - d) 26-30
 - e) 31-35
 - f) 36-40
 - g) 41-45
 - h) 45+

- 2) With which gender do you identify?
 - a) Prefer not to answer
 - b) Male
 - c) Female
 - d) Non-binary/Other

- 3) What is your volunteer position in today's game?
 - a) I am a referee
 - b) I am a non-skating official
 - c) I am assisting with bout production (announcer, DJ, etc.)
 - d) I am a part of general league support (track setup, ticket sales, merch booth, etc.)

- 4) Why do you volunteer in this role?
 - a) I am an active skater, required by the league for attendance
 - b) I am a prospective player/trying to become involved with the league
 - c) I am a former participant, wanting to remain involved with the league
 - d) I enjoy the camaraderie with other volunteers
 - e) I get personal enjoyment from my volunteer role
 - f) I am here to support an individual player
 - i) (optional) Who? _____
 - g) I am here to support the league in general
 - h) Other: (8)
 - i) Specify: _____

- 5) How did you become involved as a volunteer in today's game?
 - a) I am an active skater, required by the league for attendance
 - b) I am an official affiliated with a different league, invited by the HR/HNSO
 - c) I am an official affiliated with the home league
 - d) I was invited to help by another volunteer or official
 - e) I was invited by a skater to help
 - i) (optional) Who? _____
 - f) I am a volunteer league member (not a league skater or official)
 - g) Other:
 - i) Specify: _____

- 6) Outside of game days, what is your role in [Home League]?
 - a) Skater
 - b) Coach
 - c) Referee

- d) Dedicated NSO
 - e) Friend/Family member to a league member
 - f) I am a visiting volunteer/official affiliated with a different league.
 - g) Other:
 - i) Specify: _____
- 7) How did you originally discover roller derby?
- a) Advertisement (billboard, flyer, radio, etc.)
 - b) A friend or family member was a fan
 - c) A friend or family member was a volunteer or official
 - d) A friend was an active player
 - e) A family member was an active player
 - f) Other:
 - i) Specify: _____
- 8) Would you consider roller derby to be a feminist/women's movement?
- a) No
 - b) Yes
- 9) Would you be willing to be contacted by phone for further interview if needed?
- a) No
 - b) Yes
 - i) Name: _____
 - ii) Phone number: _____

APPENDIX B
SPECTATOR SURVEY

- 1) What is your current age?
 - a) prefer not to answer
 - b) 18-20
 - c) 21-25
 - d) 26-30
 - e) 31-35
 - f) 36-40
 - g) 41-45
 - h) 45+

- 2) With which gender do you identify?
 - a) Prefer not to answer
 - b) Male
 - c) Female
 - d) Non-binary/Other

- 3) Including today, about how many roller derby games have you attended?
 - a) 1
 - b) 2-5
 - c) 6-10
 - d) 11-20
 - e) 20+

- 4) Were you personally invited to attend today's game by a skater or volunteer for the league?
 - a) No
 - b) yes (if so, what is your relationship with that person?)
 - i) Friend
 - ii) Family member
 - iii) Spouse/significant other

- 5) Have you ever been a skater for this or another roller derby league?
 - a) No
 - b) Yes

- 6) Have you ever been a league affiliated volunteer member for this or another roller derby league?
 - a) No
 - b) Yes

- 7) Have you ever assisted with event production or volunteering with this or another roller derby league (but not necessarily been an affiliated member?)
 - a) No
 - b) yes (if so, how?)
 - i) Officiating/NSO work
 - ii) Event production (selling tickets, setting up the track, etc.)

- 8) Aside from purchasing tickets, have you financially supported [Home League]?
 - a) No
 - b) yes (if so, how? Circle all that apply)
 - i) I have purchased season passes
 - ii) I have purchased merchandise

- iii) I have donated money as a gift
- iv) I have sponsored the team through my business
- v) I have supported them in other ways:

Other: _____

9) Have you otherwise supported an individual skater?

- a) No
- b) yes (if so, how? Circle all that apply)
 - i) Financially (assistance with purchasing gear, paying dues, etc.)
 - ii) Interpersonally (encouragement, emotional support, etc.)
 - iii) Logistically (driving to/from practice, childcare during practice/games, etc.)
 - iv) I have supported them in other ways:

Other: _____

10) Would you consider roller derby to be a feminist/women's movement?

- a) No
- b) Yes

11) Would you be willing to be contacted by phone for further interview if needed?

- a) No
- b) Yes
 - i)

Name: _____

- ii)

Phone number: _____

APPENDIX C

SKATER SURVEY

- 1) What is your current age?
 - a) prefer not to answer
 - b) 18-20
 - c) 21-25
 - d) 26-30
 - e) 31-35
 - f) 36-40
 - g) 41-45
 - h) 45+

- 2) About how long have you been playing roller derby?

_____ years, _____ months

- 3) About how long have you been a member of [Home League]?

_____ years, _____ months

- 4) Have you recruited your friends or family into playing roller derby?
 - a) No
 - b) yes (if so, estimate how many below, sorted by gender)

_____ men, _____ women, _____ non-binary, other

- 5) Have you recruited your friends or family into volunteering with a league?
 - a) No
 - b) yes (if so, estimate how many below, sorted by gender)

_____ men, _____ women, _____ non-binary, other

- 6) How do you feel that your friends/family in general support your efforts in derby? (circle all that apply)
 - a) financially (paying dues, buying gear, etc.)
 - b) emotionally (encouragement, attending games to cheer, etc.)
 - c) logistics/scheduling (babysitting, altered work schedule, driving to/from practice, etc.)
 - d) volunteering (assisting with league events, business, game setup, officiating/NSO work, etc.)
 - e) other: _____
 - f) I don't feel my friends or family support me in derby

- 7) How do current or past significant others support your efforts in derby? (circle all that apply)
 - a) financially (paying dues, buying gear, etc.)
 - b) emotionally (encouragement, attending games to cheer, etc.)
 - c) logistics/scheduling (babysitting, altered work schedule, driving to/from practice, etc.)
 - d) volunteering (assisting with league events, business, game setup, officiating/NSO work, etc.)
 - e) other: _____
 - f) I don't feel my significant other has supported me in derby
 - g) I do not have a significant other

- 8) How do you feel men in your personal life, specifically, have supported your efforts in derby? (circle all that apply)
- a) financially (paying dues, buying gear, etc.)
 - b) emotionally (encouragement, attending games to cheer, etc.)
 - c) logistics/scheduling (babysitting, altered work schedule, driving to/from practice, etc.)
 - d) volunteering (assisting with league events, business, game setup, officiating/NSO work, etc.)
 - e) other: _____
 - f) I don't feel any men have supported me in derby
- 9) How important is it for the league to have male members?
- a) Not at all important
 - b) Somewhat important
 - c) Moderately important
 - d) Very important
 - e) Absolutely necessary
- 10) Have you personally recruited men to volunteer with this (or another) league? Include NSO duties, event setup, or any duties that go beyond being a fan/game attendance.
- a) No
 - b) yes (if so, how many? And what was their relation to you? How did they volunteer)

(number) _____

(relationship) _____

(volunteer role) _____

- 11) Would you consider roller derby to be a feminist/women's movement?
- a) No
 - b) Yes
- 12) Would you be willing to be contacted by phone for further interview if needed?
- a) No
 - b) Yes
 - i) Name: _____
 - ii) Phone number: _____

APPENDIX D

SPECTATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) How long have you been watching roller derby?
- 2) Do you attend other derby events (like fundraisers, after parties, etc.) or do you mainly only attend their games?
- 3) Outside of game days, how do you interact with the league in general (visiting their Facebook page, website, etc.).
- 4) How did you become a fan of roller derby?
 - a) Who introduced you to the sport?
 - b) What is your relationship with that person?
 - c) Are they a player or league member?
 - i) If so, how else do you support their participation in the league?
 - ii) If not, what is their relationship with the league (their spouse/friend plays, etc.).
- 5) Since becoming a fan of roller derby, have you built new relationships with any of the skaters?
 - a) Do these relationships exist outside of derby functions?
- 6) What is your favorite thing about roller derby (athleticism, empowerment, hard hits, flashiness, family fun, etc.)?
- 7) Do you think derby is more a sport, a women's movement, or a combination of both?
 - a) Why?
 - b) Would you be as interested in watching a men's derby game?
 - c) Do you attend other women's sporting events?
 - i) If so, which ones?
 - ii) If so, how did you get become a fan of those sports?
 - iii) If not, what makes derby more attractive than other women's sports?

APPENDIX E
VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) What is your role as a volunteer for the league?
- 2) How long have you been volunteering for the league?
- 3) How do you assist your league before, during, and after games?
- 4) Outside of game days, what role do you play in the league?
 - a) How often do you participate in other league events (fundraisers, publicity, etc.)?
 - b) How often do you help at practices?
- 5) How did you become involved as a volunteer?
 - a) Who recruited you into participating?
 - b) What is your relationship with that person?
 - c) Why do you think that person invited you to become involved?
- 6) What new relationships have you built in the league?
 - a) Do these relationships exist outside of derby functions?
- 7) Do you think derby is more a sport, a women's movement, or a combination of both?
 - a) Why?
 - b) Do you think it's important to have men involved in the league?
 - i) Why/Why not?
 - c) (If male) What do you, personally, get out of being a member of a women's league?
 - d) (if male) Do you participate in other women's events/organizations?
 - i) If so, which ones?
 - ii) If so, how do you participate?

APPENDIX F
SKATER INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) How long have you been playing roller derby?
 - a) How long have you played for [Home League]?
- 2) How did you become involved in roller derby?
 - a) If invited by another player, what was your relationship to that person?
- 3) How many of your friends or family have you recruited into playing roller derby?
- 4) How many have you recruited into volunteering for the league?
 - a) What was your relationship with those people?
 - b) Why did you recruit them, specifically, to participate?
- 5) How do your friends and family support you in playing derby (emotionally, financially, etc.)?
 - a) Is there one person in particular who you feel supports you more than anyone else?
 - b) What is your relationship to that person?
 - c) What makes that person's support more valuable than the rest?
- 6) Do you think derby is more a sport, a women's movement, or a combination of both?
 - a) Why?
 - b) Do you think it's important to have men involved in the league?
 - i) Why/Why not?
 - ii) If so, what do they bring to the league that makes it important for them to participate?
 - iii) If not, how do you feel about having men involved in the league already?
- 7) Have any men in derby ever made you feel uncomfortable or acted in ways you found unacceptable?
 - a) Would you feel comfortable explaining what happened?
 - b) What was the outcome of the situation? Are they still involved in the league?
 - i) If not, did they leave the league on their own, or were they asked to leave?

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Support and Social Networks in Women's Roller Derby

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Kegan Fleming and Dr. Stephen Sills

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to discover the social relationships and support structures between both male and female league volunteers, officials, and spectators, and the female skaters. I will also explore meaning behind male participation and support in women's roller derby.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will agree to the consent form below. You will fill out the attached survey. If you provide contact information and are chosen for follow-up questions, you consent to being contacted by phone. The survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If you opt in to further contact, a followup interview will take no more than 20 minutes. All data will be kept confidential. Names, pseudonyms, league names, and locations will be changed prior to publication to ensure confidentiality.

Is there any audio/video recording?

If you agree to participate in secondary interview over the phone, audio recordings of phone interviews will be made. The recorded audio will only be accessible to the Kegan Fleming. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below:

- Recorded audio tapes will be kept either on the researcher's person or locked in a filing cabinet in his office. The tapes will be destroyed following completion of the research project.

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Kegan Fleming, who may be reached at 336-688-1867 or pkfleming@uncg.edu, or Dr. Stephen Sills, who may be reached at sjsills@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

If any questions make you uncomfortable, you may choose not to respond.

Are there any benefits as a result of me taking part in this research?

There will be no benefits to you as an individual. The scholarly study of derby may benefit from increased knowledge about women's flat track roller derby and the roles, social relationships support structures created by spectators, officials, and volunteer participants.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study, nor will there be any financial costs.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All data collected will be kept strictly confidential. All data collected will be coded before publication, and all identifying information will be removed. All data will be destroyed following publication. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Recorded interview data and tapes will be kept locked in a filing cabinet. Information saved on the researcher's personal computer will be encrypted using Apple's FileVault encryption, which can only be decrypted using his unique log in credentials. A master list linking the participant's name to their pseudonym will be stored apart from the data collected. The master list will be stored on a Google drive account which can only be accessed using the researcher's unique log in credentials, requiring both a different name and password than required on the researcher's computer (where he will store the collected data).

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from the study will in no way affect your relationship with your team, the referees, or the league in which you participate

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By participating in the survey/interview, you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing and consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By participating in the survey/interview, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Kegan Fleming.