

SKATING THE METAPHORICAL EDGE
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF FEMALE ROLLER DERBY
ATHLETES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how and why women challenge traditional gendered norms through their participation in roller derby and sports in general. This study attempts to further the scholarship on sports through an examination of how female athletes work to create alternative means of expressing their femininity. This thesis examines two research questions: (1) Do the women participating in roller derby come from a wide range of income and education levels, ages, professions, marital statuses and world views, as is the image put forth in the media and by the roller derby community? And (2) what are the reasons these women choose to participate in roller derby, particularly as opposed to other activities? Ethnographic research methods, both participant observation and in-depth interviews, were used in this thesis to answer the research questions. The participants for this study were the members of Diamond State Roller Girls (formerly Wilmington City Ruff Rollers). This thesis draws heavily on the concepts of edgework (Lyng 1990) and doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) to examine how these women find pleasures in the athleticism of the sport, use the activity to escape the constraints of their daily lives, and find rewards in challenging traditional gender boundaries. This thesis found that women participated in roller derby for at least one of eight different reasons: outlet for aggression, escape from daily constraints, comradery, exercise, empowering women, self-fulfillment, the culture, and love of the sport. The findings of this study also showed strong support for the gendered edgework framework.

Chapter 1

SKATING THE METAPHORICAL EDGE

Roller derby provides a unique environment where athleticism, physical violence, and femininity intersect; it allow the athletes to assume the role of a roller derby athlete who is permitted to engage in hitting, blocking, and other physical contact without negative societal repercussions. Roller derby has seen a massive resurgence in the last decade, with new rules, new skaters, and new media attention. Roller derby receives a lot of media attention, with new teams cropping up in large cities and small towns all over the country. The media suggests both that roller derby participants can be anyone, doctors, lawyers, stay-at-home moms, but that they are also a little different, a little unfeminine. This thesis examines those social expectations and structures that influence the media's and society's image of female athletes, particularly those who participate in risky contact sports, such as roller derby. Further examining this issue, this thesis delves into the image of female roller derby athletes, and asks the athletes themselves who they are and why they participate in a sport that it is risky, considered un-feminine, and has a rough and rowdy image. Drawing from the concepts of edgework and doing gender, this paper examines how these women find pleasures in the athleticism of the sport, use the activity to escape the constraints of their daily lives, and find rewards in challenging traditional gender boundaries.

This thesis attempts to further the scholarship on females in sports, by examining why female athletes decide to participate in roller derby and sports in general. Even as this study examines why women choose to take on the role of roller derby athletes, it must be acknowledged that these athletes cannot escape their other statuses. The single unifying demographic of all female roller derby athletes is that they are female. Participation in sport has been traditionally viewed as a masculine activity, involving power, aggression, and violence (Kidd 1990; Messner 1988; Pronger 1990). Women have been excluded from, or at least discouraged from, participating in sports, with the exception of a small number of “sex appropriate” sports (Coakley 1998). Even after the passing of Title IX, a significant gender divide continues to exist in sports. Even in the rhetoric of gender equality in the sports, male athletes continue to receive more social acceptance, higher pay, more sponsorship, and more professional opportunities (Giulianotti 2005). Women who do participate in those sports that are not deemed to be sex-appropriate have been regarded as unfeminine and their participation has been marginalized (Lenskyj 1986). In some cases they are seen as *psychologically deviant*, because they choose to participate in an activity that is not seen as “normal” for their gender (Hall 1988). Roller derby provides an exceptional environment in which gender norms and scripts, risk-taking, and other reasons for participating in sports can be examined. The sport, in its current incarnation, is founded, owned, operated, and maintained by the female athletes themselves. Roller derby is a sport in which the female athletes are both the numerical

and dominant majority. A recent study by Finley (2010) examined how female roller derby athletes challenge hegemonic femininity through their participation in the sport. This thesis continues this critical examination of an activity that allows women to negotiate the boundaries of gender norms, to find new ways to express their femininity.

Roller Derby History

Roller derby is one of the only two American sports to have ever been created from scratch (the other is basketball); however, what is known as roller derby today differs dramatically from the original concept of roller derby architect Leo Seltzer (Deford 1971). Roller derby has existed in many manifestations since its conception. In its original incarnation, during the Great Depression, roller derby was a roller skating race around an oval track in which teams battled their way past opponents in a competition to finish first. These were professional, mixed-sex teams with equal numbers of males and females (Young and Young 2007). Males were paired with female skaters who would serve as their replacement in the game. This structure was derived from the dance marathons on which roller derby was partially based. Roller Derby was a huge success: twenty thousand people attended the first Roller Derby on August 13, 1935 (Deford 1971). In the late 1930s and early 1940s a point scoring system was introduced in which teams, consisting of 10 skaters (5 male, 5 female) gained points for passing skaters on the opposing team (Mabe 2007). As the number of

spectators and the atmosphere of roller derby as a spectacle grew, a banked track replaced the original flat track, allowing for faster speeds and faster action. On November 29, 1948, the first live roller derby game was televised from New York City. By the late 1940s roller derby games were being televised as often as three times a week (Mabe 2007).

During the 1950s, with the rising popularity of other television programming, interest in roller derby games waned. Roller derby games were eventually cut from television. The number of spectators at events dwindled. In an effort to save the sport, roller derby entrepreneur Leo Seltzer moved the professional teams to a new market in Europe. However, Seltzer returned in 1953 and retired shortly thereafter (Mabe 2007).

The sport saw resurgence in the 1960s, with major leagues forming in California. Movies like *The Fireball*, *Kansas City Bomber*, and *Rollerball* helped to spur a renewed public interest in the sport. Traditional Roller Derby teams began skating against new Roller Games (a televised rivalry sport that incorporated more theatrics and stunts) teams, essentially pitting the roller derby equivalent of a football and rugby team against each other with little attempt to unify the rules. Roller Derby lived on in this form until December 7, 1973, when the organization that hosted the events held its last game. Roller Games managed to continue televised games until 1975; however, both sports almost completely disappeared from the public attention by mid-decade (Mabe 2007).

Roller derby did not revive until 1999 when *RollerJam* appeared on TNN. This television series featured female skaters in tight uniforms and inline skates (as opposed to the original ‘quad skates’). This series, which used real athletes, was highly dramatized although the athletes did perform all their own stunts. The series was short-lived and cancelled after only three seasons (Mabe 2007).

In 2000 the first modern roller derby teams were born in Austin, Texas. These teams were all female and featured sexy outfits, skater alter egos, and new rules. Leagues were grassroots organizations - run by the skaters. Some leagues continued in the banked track tradition, though many leagues moved to flat tracks. In 2004, the leagues came together to create a unified structure and rules for the sport and formed Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA). Today leagues all over the country, and even some outside the country, are members of and skate by WFTDA rules (Mabe 2007).

Today, flat track roller derby takes place at skating rinks, stadiums, conference centers, or just about anywhere that roller derby teams can find room to host their games (bouts). Bouts consist of two 30 minute periods made up of a number of ‘jams’ that can last up to two minutes. Teams skate five players: four blockers and one jammer. The jammer must battle her way through the pack of blockers, every time she passes a blocker from the other team she gains one point. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins (WFTDA 2009).

In the media, modern roller derby has been characterized as rowdy, edgy, “bad-ass”, and burlesque (Testa 2010; Oler 2005; Davies 2010). Skaters are considered to be sexy but scary, rowdy, risqué, and “punk-rocking, we-don't-take-no-crap-from-no-one, elbow-throwing queens” (Testa 2010; Beech 2010; Ebright 2010). Many news articles feature skaters who are covered in tattoos and members of punk culture (Wachter 2009). However, women’s roller derby leagues describe themselves as drawing from a diverse group of women. Media portrayals of female roller derby athletes claim that no true uniformity exists in the everyday lives of these women: some are in high school, some are graduate students, some are professionals, and still others are stay-at-home moms. A October 2007 *Washington Post* article characterized the diversity in the women who participated in one roller derby league as including “elementary school teachers and mothers, scientists and artists” (Wilcox 2007). Leagues also proclaim to have women of a range of body types, not just the thin, muscular body image common among female athletes in other sports (Oler 2005).

In addition to the rough and rowdy image of roller derby put forth by the media, roller derby is often stated to be un-feminine. One article stated, “It's a full contact sport and there's nothing lady-like about it” (Zuluaga 2010). The *Washington Post* article made the claim that the women who participate in roller derby “never fit easily into more girly society” (Wilcox 2007). The implication of this popularized media image is that women who participate in roller derby are atypical. These women may not be the same age, the same size, or have similar life circumstances, but they are

all equally *different*. This characterization of female roller derby athletes is not new, athletes from the previous incarnations of roller derby also saw a public image of roller derby a “tawdry, sideshow image” (Deford 1971: 48) and the athletes as tough, promiscuous, “foulmouthed” and a “hard drinker”. Even with the changing social norms regarding women’s participating in sports, they are expected to engage in gender-appropriate behaviors. Women who are seen as engaging in a sport that does not match this conventional understanding of society are still considered un-feminine.

Objective

This thesis examines an image of roller derby that is seen in the media – one that portrays roller derby participants as punk-rock, burlesque, rough and tumble, and asks: Are these women from different backgrounds and living diverse lives, as claimed by those newspaper articles that describe vast diversity among roller derby participants? Are some teachers and others tattoo artists? And 40 year-old mothers and 18 year-old high school students? If no true uniformity is found amongst these women, then what is it about roller derby that brings them all to the sport? Why do these women, seemingly so different in their ordinary social lives, turn to roller derby? Is it that they are, as some media articles imply, unfeminine, and must find an outlet outside of traditional feminine activities, or is there some other reason these women choose to participate in this sport? What is the appeal for all these women in participating in roller derby, a sport that is popularly characterized by the physical

violence? As these questions are answered through a gendered edgework lens, the thesis aims to understand how women use roller derby to express alternative femininities

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ball (1975) stated that the ultimate goal of the sociological examination of sport is to develop sociology through sports, to use those examinations of sports to contribute to an understanding the larger social world. Though this study is contextually situated in roller derby as a sport, the implications of this study extend beyond roller derby.

Sport Participation as Edgework

Observers have noted that participation in roller derby can be understood as a means of escaping the constraints and boundaries of everyday life. One newspaper article quoted an athlete as saying, “It takes me back to a time of freedom and fearlessness we all used to have as children. I'm not worried about work, bills, kids, or the mortgage when I'm on the track. I'm just playing with my friends!” (Hills 2010). Reasons for participating in roller include escaping external pressures to perform in a certain role (for example, fulfilling duties as a full-time caregiver) or escape expectations for those roles outside roller derby (for a full-time caregiver, this may include expectations of being caring, reserved, organized, and parental).

Lyng (1990) argued that individuals participate in *edgework*, voluntary risk taking, as a means of escaping constraints found in other social spheres. Though not all sports are forms of edgework, Laurendeau (2008) argued that it is useful to examine many sports through an edgework lens. Roller derby can be viewed as edgework because observers often note the risk-taking aspect of the sport. CNN characterized the sport as a part of the “extreme sports craze” (Willingham 2009). Roller derby is portrayed in the media as risky, and many athletes do sustain serious injuries. One newspaper article quoted a skater discussing breaking her ankle while skating: “I sort of like the adrenaline of the whole thing” (Hills 2010).

Lyng (2005) argued that edgework requires skillful practice and implementation. Often popularly deemed to be “adrenalin junkies” who take uncalculated risks, performers of edgework actually tread carefully defined boundaries and draw upon their experience and skills to allow them to negotiate potentially dangerous situations while taking precautions. Risk taking, particularly in physical activities can be dangerous and without the properly developed skills, can result in serious injury or even death. Edgework is defined as such because the actors use risk-taking as a form of boundary negotiation, an exploration of the edges (Lyng 2005). Like other sports and activities that may be viewed as edgework, roller derby athletes train, often several times a week, in order to gain the necessary skating, hitting, and defensive skills needed for successfully engaging in the sport without serious injury. To minimize the chances of injury, edgeworkers must maintain control and composure

in what may appear to be a chaotic situation (Laurendeau and Brunschot 2006). Roller derby athletes learn how to avoid injuries by “falling small” and to return to a standing position quickly to avoid being a hazard to other skaters. Because these individuals are attempting to maintain control in risky situations, they are less likely to be interested in participating in a situation that is controlled more by chance than skill – that is, edgeworkers tend to participate in skillful sports and physical activities.

Viewed in terms of edgework, athletes are not participating in these activities solely for pleasure; they also do so out of necessity to escape the structures of modern social life. That is, in the modern social world, very few experiences are unexpected; the individual becomes “pacified” by the circumstances that dictate all facets of life (Milovanovic 2005). Edgework allows individuals to escape from the routine, the institutionalized. Although Lyng (1990) originally conceptualized edgework as tied to an individual’s participation in the labor economy, Donnelly (2004) argued that participation in voluntary risk taking is largely affected by social relationships in a particular setting. Edgeworkers are not deviant individuals, but those who feel a need to escape from the constricting structures of everyday life (Fletcher 2008; Lyng 2005). By taking risks, the individual is allowed to set new expectations and to experience events outside the safety of ordinary social spheres and particularly outside the expectations of the gendered social relationships. Through risk taking, actors are able to transcend their identities within the ordinary social sphere and escape those

social conditions that rarely allow for fully realized identity and character development (Lyng 2005).

As the individuals in these activities attempt to transcend their ordinary identities, they take on a new role – one that is defined by and shaped through their involvement with the edgework activity. The athletes go through a process of *role taking* that allows them to perform their new role outside the normal boundaries of society. They take on the additional role of an athlete in their sport, which may be governed by a different set of norms and expectations than their other roles (Donnelly and Young 1988). Adoption of these new norms and expectations allow the roller derby athletes to express themselves in new ways and to challenge social expectations about behavior.

Sport Participation as Doing Gender

Participation in all sports, and especially risk sports, has long been understood in the sociology of sport literature as a gendered experience (Lois 2005; Laurendeau 2008). In addition, men and women experience edgework differently. Unlike men, for whom participation in sports is accepted as a consequence of their masculinity, female athletes are forced to justify both their participation in the sport as well as the risky activity.

Almost every media narrative of roller derby athletes explicitly points out that these are *female* athletes participating in a rough and aggressive sport. One athlete was

quoted as saying, “Women have systematically been taught to suppress their aggression and strength and I revel in the idea of reviving and celebrating female power” (Hills 2010). In addition to participating in roller derby as a means of escaping the constraints of daily life, women may choose to participate in roller derby as a means of challenging societal gender norms.

West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender is not a set of traits, but rather something that people do in their interactions with one another. American society is oriented around sex categorization of a male/female dichotomy and every action of every individual in a society is held accountable along these sex category lines. Gender is not a role, it is a script that is not situated in one identity, but rather cuts across all social spheres and situations to create a master identity. Gender fundamentally shapes each individual’s every interaction. Men and women must negotiate their participation in all activities, including sports, through gender scripts that are shaped by traditional social spheres. Even the ways in which men and women approach and engage in risk-taking and edgework is structured by the gender relations. Women who engage in edgework are often criticized or marginalized for doing so, showing that even participation in edgework is a process of ‘doing gender’ (Walby and Doyle 2007; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Roller Derby as Gendered Edgework

Roller derby can be understood in terms of its *separatism* from male sports. Because roller derby is owned, operated, and governed by female athletes, those females are actively engaged in constructing the norms and behaviors of participants in the sport. The social structure of roller derby itself allows for the female athletes to participate in a sport, yet continue to engage in those “emotional intimacies” that are suppressed by masculine sports values. (Hargreaves 1994). For many women who participate in roller derby, involvement in the sport is not a means of rejecting their femininity as but is a means of attempting to find alternative and new ways of expressing their femininity. Finley (2010) stated that roller derby athletes actively work to create alternative femininities. Despite the “not feminine” image of roller derby athletes perpetuated by the media, these same news articles report stories of women who participate in roller derby for many of the same reasons that women participate in yoga and book clubs. Articles routinely point out that the women participate because they “love the comradery” (Zuluaga 2010). CNN stated that the women who participate in roller derby are “tired of Pilates and Jazzercise” and that they are “looking for more exciting outlets to stay in shape” (Willingham 2009). These women are still “doing gender” in their participation in roller derby; they are engaging in acceptable gendered social activities: they are working out and staying in shape, and

hanging out with female friends. However, they are not taking typical paths to these social activities; roller derby allows them to be feminine and to engage in socially acceptable gendered activities in new ways.

Research Questions

This thesis examines two related research questions. The first research question of this thesis is: are the women participating in roller derby are, in fact, from a wide range of income and education levels, ages, professions, marital statuses and world views, as is the image put forth in the media and by the roller derby community? If the participants in roller derby truly are diverse in their backgrounds, life experiences, and personalities, then there may actually be some underlying, unifying characteristic or motivation that drives them to participate in this sport. The second research question of this thesis looks for this reason and examines the reasons why these women participate in roller derby. Possible reasons for participating in roller derby, as identified in the literature, include participating as a means of escaping constraints of daily life, and challenging societal gender norms. Drawing from the concepts of edgework and doing gender this paper seeks to understand why participants in women's flat-track roller derby choose to engage in a sport that is popularly characterized by displays of physical violence and has been depicted in the media as risky and un-feminine.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The data from this thesis comes from an ethnographic field study that employed both in-depth interviews and participant observation. Sociology, and especially sociology of sport, has a rich history of qualitative field studies. Qualitative research is especially useful in seeking answers to questions of how social experiences are created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

Sampling and Recruitment

This study uses purposive sampling. As this study aims to explain individual reasons for participating in roller derby, individual roller derby athletes are the unit of analysis. The participants for this study were members of Diamond State Roller Girls (formerly Wilmington City Ruff Rollers). Participants in the interviews were league members who had been skated in at least one game (bout) with this team or another team with whom they have previously skated (“rostered skaters”). At the time that interviews were taking place, Diamond State Roller Girls had 19 rostered skaters. The purposed sample size for this study was 10-19 participants. The sample size was determined on the basis both practical constraints and theoretical saturation.

Participants were recruited at practices to participate in the study. Rapport had been built with members of the league through my participation as a referee, member of the roller derby league, and as a spectator at many roller derby events. Because of the rapport that had already been established with the league members, rostered skaters were individually asked to participate in the study. Recruitment efforts for this study were successful and 17 of the 19 rostered skaters completed interviews.

Data Collection

Data for this thesis were collected through in-depth interviews with each of the participants. Qualitative interviews are useful for eliciting detailed information that can be used in analysis, providing the opportunity to explore the topic fully (Lofland and Lofland 1995). These interviews examined (1) demographic variables of the participants, (2) reasons for participating in roller derby, and (3) subjective experiences of the participants as roller derby athletes.

In addition to in-depth interviews, I engaged in participant observation. The purpose of the participant observation was to understand the context in which the participants interact with other skaters, as well as to serve as a means to verify the participant's subjective reporting of their experiences with the roller derby league.

Data Analysis

Audio-recordings from the interviews were transcribed and coded for pertinent information in answering the research questions. Coding was based on the findings

and categorizations were redefined, changed, combined, or expanded based on the findings. Coding allowed for an understanding of the categories of the phenomena being studied and the relationships between the categories (Goetz and LeCompte 1981).

Data from observations were collected through field notes. These field notes provided for more in-depth background and analysis. Participant observation was useful in gaining an understanding of the physical and social contexts of practices, bouts, scrimmages, and other roller derby events in which the participants take part. These field notes were kept in a notebook, which was brought to practices, bouts, and other events. These notes were typed afterwards.

Human Subjects Ethics

Participants were asked to complete interviews of their own free will and were asked to provide informed consent. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, they could refuse to answer any question, and could end the interview at any time. All interviews were audio-recorded; however, in order to protect the privacy of the skaters, any information identifying the speaker was not included when the interview was transcribed.

Additionally, participants were informed that they were being observed during practices, bouts, and other roller derby events. They were asked to provide their

consent to be observed, and informed that all identifying information would be removed from field notes.

All considerations were given to ensure confidentiality and minimize any potential harm. Any potential ethical issues were highlighted in the request for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to begin research on human subjects. The IRB approved the study on May 17, 2010.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

What follows are two examples of roller derby participants. These two women, Venus and Iris, are members of the same team and are both considered to be strong athletes. They have different jobs, different backgrounds, different home lives. They like different kinds of music, have different perspectives on life, and have different reasons for participating in roller derby. So what makes them both similar? What draws them both to roller derby and keeps them working together on a team? Are they unfeminine or is there some other characteristic or motivation that draws them both to roller derby? These questions are examined in this thesis.

Venus

Venus is an energetic, hard-working mom in her late 30s. She considers herself outgoing and athletic, enjoying working out and participating in a number of sports. She has two Master's degree and works as a private consultant. Roller derby is very important to her and her family; her son comes out to support her at every bout. She appreciates the comradery and friendships she has developed through her participation in roller derby, but her main reason for participating in roller derby, as she puts it, is the "whole psychology of roller derby." She explains that derby challenges her as an

individual, but also empowers women to grow, to be strong, and more confident. She likes how roller derby challenges everyone to work together with so many people who are different. She calls it a personal challenge “to find your own roller derby person inside of you.”

Venus takes pride in her ability to help people break down barriers they have created in their minds that keep them from understanding other people. She shows understanding when people have misconceptions about those who are different, but is quick to correct those who make judgments about others without showing compassion and a willingness to understand. Perhaps this characteristic is what gives her hope for the image that she feels the larger society has of roller derby. She states:

These ideas about roller derby, as far as being ‘trashy girls from the sticks’ are such misconceptions. I have met doctors, lawyers, teachers to housewives and former professional athletes. I think it takes a group of strong-minded and physically strong girls to do it.

But Venus states that there is a lot of potential for this image to change. She points towards a roller derby that isn’t tied to the former incarnations of the sport through misconceptions and looks forward to a day when roller derby athletes can be respected for what she sees as “their incredible contributions to the world of sport nationally and internationally.”

Iris

Iris is 21 years-old. She likes punk music, tattoos, and piercings. She has a potty mouth and says that nothing offends her. She works for a bank and has finished one semester of technical school. Though she isn't sure what she wants to do in the future, but she knows she needs to go back to school. Iris describes herself as social and outgoing; she doesn't feel that she is a party-girl, but she definitely enjoys going to the bar with her friends, many of whom are also roller derby athletes.

Iris likes roller derby because it allows her to let out some aggression and get exercise. She likes the opportunity to not think about bills and work. But she especially likes the people who do roller derby. The first time she heard of roller derby she realized that these roller derby girls would be people with whom she could get along. She finds something appealing about the culture of the sport, which she calls a "bad-ass edge." She likes that girls like her, who are athletic but not "your typical high school athlete" can find a place in roller derby.

While Iris thinks that some of the images she sees of roller derby girls in the media, like the tattoos, and punk-rocker look, describe her pretty well, she finds herself annoyed at how the media portrays roller derby as a "burlesque-type fashion show." She wishes the larger society would focus less on the sex appeal of girls in fishnets and realize that roller derby is a sport and the participants are real athletes.

Who are the ‘Derby Girls’?

Just as Venus and Iris are very different people with different backgrounds, life experiences, jobs, family situations, and outlooks on life, one general theme in the way that roller derby athletes are described in the media is that they come from a broad range of backgrounds. This theme was echoed in the findings of this study, despite their own personal background and life situation, most of the participants stated that the women who participate in roller derby have high levels of education, are married, and hold professional jobs. One participant described the athletes as “...independent females that are educated. There are people from all walks of life: lawyers, teachers, and people with Masters degrees.” Many of the participants talked about the number of people on the team that were married and had children, stating that the sport is not just for young women with no familial obligations. One participant stated, “It is surprising how many moms are on the team.”

The participants also had a range of educational levels, from having a college diploma to having graduate degrees and one currently working on completing a PhD. About one-third (n=6) of the participants were married or living with a long-term partner and four of the participants had children. Some of the participants hold part-time jobs while in school, while others work in corporate and professional jobs including clinical supervisor, accountant, drug and alcohol counselor, small business owner, and Air Force mechanic. Thirteen of the participants identified as white and four identified as mixed-racial or as another race other than white. Eleven of the

participants identified as heterosexual while six identified as other¹. The participants also came from a variety of religious and social class backgrounds. One participant summed up the range of people that participate in roller derby:

Here is this strong group of women who come out and play this sport to the best of their ability but when they leave they are moms and wives and girlfriends, and they work in Corporate America, or they are tattoo artists. It is such a broad range of people from a broad range of backgrounds that all come together and do amazing things.

Many newspaper articles, and the roller derby organization, note that the athletes can be any age. Most of the participants were in their 20s; however, they ranged in age from 20 to 42, with a median age of 27. The older participants talked about being older than the other team members, and the feeling the need to work harder in order to be able to keep up with the younger athletes. They discussed how younger players had a natural advantage based solely on their age, but these women were not willing to concede to not being the best on their team – they tended to work harder, spend more time skating, and take the sport more seriously. The younger participants showed admiration for women who participate in roller derby into their 40s and older. Often the athletes discuss news stories they have read about members of other leagues who are in their 50s and beyond with admiration. One of the youngest

¹ 3 of the participants in this category stated that they were bisexual or lesbian and 3 stated that they chose not to identify with categories.

members on the team proudly stated that she was quoted in her high school yearbook, “When I am 70 years-old I will be playing roller derby.”

Besides their demographics, the participants display a range in other characteristics. In the interview the participants were asked to describe their personality. Though certain trends were noticed in the words that the participants used to describe themselves, no uniformity existed across the group. There was a fairly even split between participants who described themselves as outgoing and social and those who described themselves as reserved and introverted. This split in introverted/extroverted league members was noted by several of the participants. A few of the participants talked about how surprising it was to find that some of the most tattooed members of the team were shy, quiet, and sweet. Some stated the assumption that all roller derby participants were loud and aggressive, but only five of the participants described themselves as loud, in-your-face or outspoken. The rest of the terms the participants used to describe themselves demonstrated their varied personalities and interests. Some of these words included positive, creative, funny, caring, detailed, carefree, determined, and happy.

Interestingly, only a few of the participants described themselves in terms of how well they conformed to stereotypical gendered behavior; a few noted that they were not “girly” or had never really fit into the “girly girl” image well; however some stated that they liked to get dressed up, wear makeup, and engage in traditional gendered activities, such as shopping and talking on the phone with their friends.

The participants were asked to describe what they saw as a “typical” roller derby athlete. One participant stated: “I don't think there is a typical roller derby girl, they are all different in their own little ways.” She shared this view with about a third of the participants who said that there is not a typical roller derby athlete – that they are enough differences amongst the athletes that there is no typical roller derby athlete. These participants pointed out the differences in age, background, athletic ability, occupation, and personality of the participants.

The rest of the participants were able to describe a “typical” roller derby athlete. When they did so, they tended to describe the typical roller derby athlete the same way. The most common characteristics stated were strong and tattooed. Rough, athletic, competitive, and confident were also used to describe the typical athlete. It is noteworthy that the words most commonly used to describe the “typical” athlete did not match the words the participants used to most commonly describe themselves.

Some of the participant stated that roller derby athletes are aggressive individuals, or rather women who wanted to get out some aggression. However, only two of the participants described themselves as “aggressive” and one described herself as “short tempered.” Most of the participants stated that they had a shared love of the sport and desire to see the sport succeed. Most did not focus on personal characteristics, such as tattoos or personalities, when talking about what they had in common with the other athletes.

One of the ideas that is often discussed amongst the participants, and in the media, is that an athletic background is not required to be good at roller derby. Athleticism was a major focus of many of the participants. They talked about being an athlete and emphasized that a lot of practice is needed to be good at the sport, but that individuals of any body type can participate in the sport and learn to be a good skater. One participant stated that there are women that are “100 pounds and 250 pounds” playing the sport. Another participant pointed out that she could participate in roller derby, despite not having an athletic background and not having what she considered to be an “athletic build;” she stated, “Roller derby is a sport that has a place for a girl like me.”

The claim is that anyone can play and be good at roller derby with enough hard work and determination. Many recruitment fliers for the league make the proclamation that no skating experience is necessary to join – that with enough hard work anyone can gain the skills and ability to play roller derby. However, thirteen of the participants stated that they had a background in sports and athletes, and only four stated that they had not been athletic or participated in sports prior to joining a roller derby league.

On ‘The Media Image’

The participants did not all share the same opinions about the accuracy of the media image of roller derby, but the descriptions of what they have seen in the media, and the wider images and stereotypes of roller derby in society fell into three types: (1)

the participants in roller derby are rockers, young, punk, and tattooed, who enjoy partying and being rough on the track (2) roller derby participants are low-class, tough delinquents who use roller derby as a means of beating other people up without negative repercussions and (3) roller derby participants are average people who have jobs and families and enjoy a tough competitive sport. The second type of image was the least commonly talked about, and most of the participants did not feel that roller derby had this type of image at all in the media.

Most participants admitted that they had not read a lot of articles on roller derby, and had not often seen roller derby in magazines, newspapers, or on the news, so they were basing their opinions on the limited number of newspaper and magazine articles, tv news shows, and movies they had seen. The interviews done for this study were done within a year of the release of *Whip It!* which likely strongly influenced the participants' understanding of the media portrayal of roller derby.

Most did, however, understand the media to portray roller derby in different ways, and would touch on the different images of roller derby participants in the media. That is, that some articles show roller derby participants as young, punk rocker girls with crazy hair, while others show roller derby participants as serious athletes who train hard and have professional jobs. These different images of roller derby by the media provided for a wide range of descriptions and feelings about the media's image of roller derby.

Regardless of their descriptions, most participants felt the overall image of roller derby in the media was more inaccurate than accurate; though the participants used many of the same descriptions of themselves and their teammates and they claimed were used in the media. For the most part, participants felt that other participants in roller derby were portrayed at least partially accurately in the media. The general consensus was well summed up by the statement of one participant, “For the most part, [the media] presents the exterior well, but the personality of each girl is different.”

When discussing the accuracy of the media image of roller derby, about half of the participants stated that the image was inaccurate and/or negative, and the other half felt that the image was partly accurate or completely accurate and/or positive. For the most part, those who disagreed with the media image felt that the media did not portray them as true athletes and depicted roller derby as more of a “scene” than an actual sport. In addition, those who did not agree with the image felt that roller derby participants are portrayed negatively: as partiers, as low-class, as “big fat lesbian bitches.” Still, some participants felt as if the media image was partially accurate. They expressed their mixed feelings about the image of roller derby in the media, particularly regarding the exterior appearance of roller derby participants versus their personalities. For example, one participant recollected:

Before I joined [the league] I did go online and looked roller derby up.

Everything about roller derby is so loud and colorful and very in your face: all

skulls and crossbones. Coming in I was ready for that: girls who were loud, in your face, and crude. While that still is true, not everyone is like that; some of the girls who are covered in tattoos are some of the quietest, sweetest people you've met in your life, and we have girls who don't have any tattoos at all.

Those who did agree with the media image of roller derby participants in general mainly focused on the diversity of lifestyles and experiences of roller derby participants portrayed by the media. They agreed that the media did an adequate job of showing that participants come from a variety of backgrounds, hold many types of jobs, and can be mothers and wives.

Despite their individual opinions as to the accuracy of the media depictions, almost all of the participants stated that the media image did not accurately portray them. For the most part, there is no real divide between the way the those who describe themselves as “average girls playing a sport” and those who “aggressive”, “punk” and “rock-n-roll.” Most of them discuss the same ideas and experiences. The more “punk” participants, however, were more likely to concede that the media image of roller derby participants may describe them at least partially accurately. Two of the participants felt that media portrayed roller derby participants like themselves, though they had different perspectives as to what that media image was from the majority of the other participants. For example, one of these two participants stated, “The things I've seen on TV are just average girls having fun.” However, most of the participants felt that the image was only partly accurate or not at all accurate, when applied to

them. One participant stated, “We are not all tough butch girls who are looking for a fight all the time” Even those participants who have multiple tattoos and “crazy hair” felt that the media missed the other parts of themselves: they that are nice, that they have real jobs, and that they participate for fun, not because they want to beat people up and are aggressive, for example.

The biggest criticism of the image of the sport was that the media failed to present roller derby as a legitimate athletic endeavor and rather as a spectacle. The participants often stated that this was “not the roller derby that our parents used to watch” but that many people assume it contains the same theatrical antics as the previous incarnation of the sport. One participant who felt like the media image did not serve the athleticism of the sport justice stated that the media focused more on the “burlesque-type fashion scene more than the sport itself.” Only one participant stated that she felt that the media presented the participants as true athletes.

In addition to largely missing the athletic aspects of roller derby, many of the participants also felt that the media portrayals missed the many different types of women and the types of personalities that participate in the sport. During the interviews, the participants offered descriptions of how they saw the media portray roller derby participants. The most common descriptions were: tattooed, butch, and tough. Multiple participants also stated that roller derby participants are portrayed as cussing a lot and having crazy hair. “Tattooed” was used in both the description of the image media and the “typical” roller derby participant.

What was found was that the participants recognized that the media showed roller derby participants as including older women, professionals, and mothers, but the participants still felt as if how the media missed the personality characteristics that made them diverse. The description offered by the participants match the claim that roller derby participants are shown as having a unifying characteristic, namely, being unfeminine.

Why Roller Derby?

This thesis found that these women who participate in roller derby are diverse in their backgrounds, lifestyles, personalities and opinions. No uniform characteristic was found that would draw these women to roller derby. So why do these women choose to participate in roller derby?

Though the participants discussed several legitimate reasons to participate in roller derby, interestingly, multiple participants talked about women joining for the “wrong reasons.” This specifically means that these women join because they want to be seen as a “roller derby girl”, look cute while skating, and participate in the “roller derby scene,” but the participants were quick to point out that these women are “found out” and they do not stay active with the sport for long after that. One participant stated, “I wish girls who were only in it for the looks would leave and spare us.” The participants see roller derby as a serious sport and many of the participants argued that the media image of roller derby, and the lack of emphasis on the athleticism in the

media, contributes to many women becoming interested in roller derby for these wrong reasons. Some participants pointed to the recent try-outs for which over 30 women showed up, interested in participating, and one week later, only eight remained.

The reasons for participating in roller derby given by the participants can be divided into seven themes: outlet for aggression, escape from daily constraints, comradery, exercise, empowering women, self-fulfillment, and love of the sport. Most of the participants stated more than one reason for the continued participant in the sport, and all the responses fell into one or more of these categories.

Participation as Edgework

The first three themes for participation were found to fit into the traditional edgework framework, such that they point towards participation in roller derby for the opportunity to engage in a risky activity that allows them to an outlet for expressing their frustrations from their other social spheres. Interesting to note, however, is that, though the participants acknowledge the risk of participation, they do not seem to dwell on that risk.

The risk aspect of participating in roller derby did not come up during many of the interviews, although through participant observation, it was often mentioned when the athletes were talking amongst themselves at practices. During one practice the topic of risk was discussed. One athlete commented that she was very glad she had health insurance and that she felt having health insurance was necessary for playing

roller derby. She has broken two ankles and is still skating – determined as ever to be a valuable member to the team. Though some roller derby participants do stop playing the sport after an injury, many continue participating in the sport. After being released from their doctor’s care to skate again, the athletes are skating, hitting, and taking hits again quickly.

Though many of the participants had supportive families and friends, some of the athletes pointed out that their significant others and families were not supportive of their participation because of how risky the sport is. Participants said their families felt this way because they worried the participant would get hurt. One participant discussed her family’s initial apprehension to her participation, “My mom was nervous at first, but thinks it is cool. She is worried about me getting hurt.”

Most of the participants shared a general opinion that there is a risk factor involved with playing the sport, that they will possibly get hurt, but that the enjoyment of playing roller derby outweighs the risk of injury. Quoting many of the athletes, the press correspondent for the league told the local college newspaper “It isn’t a matter of if you will be injured, but when.” Because these women have jobs, families, and other responsibilities that they must be responsible for in their ordinary social lives, some worry about the risk of injury. One participant stated:

I actually don't like the risky part. It is my least favorite part of the sport. I'm very responsible, financially and just in general, so I worry a little and I wish it was safer; however, I love the sport! Risk or no risk.

However, most of the participants, though acknowledging the inherent risk of the sport, dismiss concerns over injury as if it is not worth concerning themselves. “You have to live your life,” one participant stated during a conversation discussing injuries.

This thesis found support for the edgework framework in understanding participation in roller derby; a large number of the athletes cited participating in roller derby as an outlet for aggression (n = 14). This reason for participating seems to exemplify the image of roller derby participants as non-feminine; for example, one of the participants who cited this reason pointed to that she was “rough and tumble” and that she likes “beating people up and getting beat up.” Other participants discussed the edgy nature of the sport, and how they enjoyed participating in roller derby because of the culture, the edginess, and the roughness. Though this description seems to fit the negative image of roller derby participants as rough, rowdy, tattooed, “tough butch girls who are looking for a fight all the time,” most of the discussion of participating in roller derby as an outlet for aggression did not match this image at all; in fact, only three participants described their reasoning in this fashion.

Most of the participants did not spend much time discussing roller derby as an outlet for aggression, and those who did indicated that aggression referred to the frustration from daily life. One participant recalled her initial reason for participating in roller derby: “I knew I could take out any aggression I had, blow off some steam.” On occasion, during practices, when discussing how to improve blocking and hitting skills, the athletes have joked that they imagine their bosses or husbands when they are

hitting another athlete, such the same way that batters are jokingly told to imagine the face of someone on a baseball.

The idea that women use roller derby as a means of escaping the constraints of their daily lives is central in the discussion of how the edgework framework lends valuable insight into participation in roller derby. A number of participants did state that they participated in roller as an opportunity to not think about bills, work, children, and school (n = 7). One participant stated:

[Roller derby] is a great stress reliever: to go out there and work out and get frustrations out and concentrate on something else that isn't as serious as bills or school. It is a way to escape life in a constructive manner.

Many of the participants use their time at roller derby events as an opportunity to take their minds off worries about outside obligations, and release their frustration and aggression. Not only do they allow themselves to take time off from their commitments but also actively release that stress through skating, hitting, blocking, and yelling. One participant discussed time she had taken off from skating and recalled that she felt like she was “going crazy.” For these women, roller derby is essential to balancing their lives.

Participation as Doing Gender

Though they are participating in a risk sport, these women are still doing gender, as participating in sports or leisure activities for comradery, exercise, to

empower women, and for self-fulfillment, are all considered gender-appropriate behaviors. These four reasons for participating in roller derby fit into the traditional doing gender framework.

Matching with the media portrayal that these women do not “fit easily into more girly society,” a few participants pointed out that they might not meet the traditional feminine image. One participant stated:

I don't know what makes us different from your average girl. We aren't scared to get hurt or break a nail. We fall down and get right back up. I've never been real girly. I think a lot of similar types of girls, maybe grew up as tomboys.

Finley (2010) found that the roller derby participants rebelled against traditionally femininity and embraced a tough girl image. However, in this study some participants stated the opposite: that they do match social expectations for femininity: they do wear makeup, dress nicely, and get their hair done. One participant explained how women like her and those who do not fit as easily into the feminine image come to roller derby for the same reasons:

The stereotype that people have [of roller derby participants] is this whole punk look and covered in tattoos, and that is not me. I've got blond hair and two little tattoos that you can't even see, and I work in Corporate America; I wear high heels and makeup. What I've found is common is all of us is not our exterior, but our interior and the want of comradery and to be a part of a team.

The theme of comradery, often referred to as sisterhood, or the roller derby family, came up often in both the interviews and in the participant observation. Comradery was the second most commonly cited reason for participating in roller derby (n = 14). During one league meeting, many of the athletes voiced their opinion that the roller derby is a unique group in which they can all experience “sisterhood.” They often talked about the sisterhood or family aspect of being part of a roller derby league. Many athletes talk about their biological family and their roller derby family as if they are unique and separate, yet involvement in each is important to their individual identity.

One participant described the close bonds that athletes form with the other women on their team, “The girls become your family.” Within roller derby some of the participants form very tight bonds with one or more teammates. The athletes from a relationship they call “derby wives.” These participants are not romantically involved, but share a close friendship.

One athlete, determined to explain the concept of derby wife, wrote an article describing the relationship, though offering no clear definition. In this article the author addressed the concept of a derby wife, identifying who a derby wife is and what derby wives do for each other:

She is the one person in this whole sport of roller derby that the very instant you looked at her, you felt like you’d known her since you were a fetus. She looked just like your best friend from fifth grade, or something she did

reminded you of all the things you ever liked in anyone else. She is the first person you'd call if you ever need to get bailed out of jail (Derbygirls Blog 2010).

The article also described what the derby wife relationship is not “a lesbian thing” but fails to give a definition of a derby wife.

For the Diamond State Roller Girls, a derby wife is a close friend. This is a reciprocal relationship, like a monogamous relationship, only plutonic. The derby wives are close friends, likely best friends who often spend time together outside of roller derby events. Sometimes the athletes are close friends before joining the team, while others meet through roller derby. Often at practices, a skater will make announcements for her absent derby wife, whom she likely talks to several times a week. For example, one athlete might say, “Tina couldn't come to practice tonight, but she wanted me to remind all of you about the fundraiser.” These relationships are very important to the participants; these can be lifelong friendships and are not often entered into lightly.

The practice of having a “derby wife” is common in the sport of roller derby, and some athletes who do not have such a tight bond with another athlete, lament this fact and search out a teammate with whom they can form a tight friendship. In addition to forming close friendships, many of the participants stated that they participate in roller derby in order to have meet new people, make more friends, and to participate in social activities.

Other gender-appropriate reasons for participating in roller derby were also discussed. As many of the participants come from athletic backgrounds, participating in roller derby as a form of exercise or athletic endeavor is the third most likely reason participants were to give for participating in the sport (n = 13). Some participants discussed how they knew they needed a means of staying in shape, exercising, and keeping physically active, but joining a gym and other non-competitive activities did not push them to work as hard as they could. Roller derby, and other team sports, was discussed as providing a supportive network of friends that would encourage the athletes to continue working out and push themselves to accomplish more. While the competitive team sports aspect certainly seemed to play a strong role in many of the participants' interests in roller derby, most often they cited the need to simply be doing something active.

Some of the athletes pointed towards the good that roller derby does for them and for other women. Another reason stated for participating in roller derby (n = 5) is the desire to be involved in a sport that empowers women. One participant discussed her desire to be involved in a sport that empowered women, “[Roller derby provides] a time to express their superego and feel safe and not vulnerable about showing people their really strong ego inside of them. That is like ‘roar.’” The participants discussed how roller derby allows women to feel empowered and allowed women to take control of their health, their social interactions, and their involvement in an organized sport. Because the athletes and coaches involved in roller derby are mostly women, the

participants felt that they are involved in a movement that allows women to feel in control and empowered.

In addition to participating in roller derby because of the perceived benefits of the sport to empowering women, some athletes noted participating because they feel that a sense of self-fulfillment participating in roller derby (n = 6) Some of the participants spoke of participating in roller derby as a challenge to themselves: some to be more social, some to push themselves mentally and physically. One participant spoke of the mental and emotional rewards of participating in roller derby:

I am not getting any younger. If I am going to do this, I had better do it now.

That and when I look back when I am older, and retired and whatever. I can say, 'I did roller derby. This is what I did with my life.' [Roller derby gives me] something to be proud of, something to talk about. I want to live my life to the fullest.

Other participants discussed the sheer thrill of participating and the adrenaline rush of participating in the sport. One participant noted, "I feel great afterwards. If I am jamming, it is such a rush after I get through the pack. It really builds your self-esteem." Whatever ends these participants seek through participating in roller derby, they do to empower themselves and improve upon their lives in some way.

Participation as Gendered Edgework

The findings of this study are different from the recent Finley (2010) study. While some of the participants expressed not being “girly girls,” not all the athletes felt the same way. Some of the skaters who described themselves as more traditionally feminine talked about being atypical derby girls. One of these women said, “It has been said to me that I am not the typical derby girl.” But even the more “not girly” skaters talked about any type of girl can join roller derby, one of the participants called these women the “glam girls”. Where the participants focused on joining roller derby for the wrong reasons, they did not seem to concern themselves with women who are more traditionally feminine, but rather women who are more traditionally feminine and do not take roller derby as a serious sport.

The most commonly cited reason (n=15) for participating in roller derby is for the love of the sport. This is what roller derby athletes seem to believe is the “right reason” for participating in roller derby. The participants stated that they had a love of the sport and a desire to see the sport and the league succeed and improve. Unlike the other reasons for participating in roller derby, the last, and most popular reason is not easily explained through the gendered edgework theoretical framework. This reason speaks to a deep passion for playing roller derby and a deep commitment to the sport. That is, not to say, that edgework and doing gender do not play a major contributing

factor to this reason; however, this love for the sport appears to transcend all the reasons for participating in roller derby, emerging as the unifying characteristic or reason for participating discussed earlier in the thesis. Many of the participants talk about feeling drawn to the sport. One participant stated, “It is a love for it. A lot of people call it an addiction. It is something that I would be very sad if I wasn’t doing.”

Many of these athletes experienced what is being called here “love at first bout.” Some of the athletes had watched roller derby on TV, some had friends who were playing the sport, and some had no idea what roller derby was, but they almost all (n = 11) had the same reaction the first time they saw a live roller derby bout, summed up by one participant as “I was just in awe of what I saw and I couldn’t wait to be a part of it.” Many of the participants reported thinking, “I can do this” and “This sport is for me” the first time they watched roller derby. No one recalled having a negative impression of roller derby, not being impressed by the sport, or even not being excited about playing the sport after watching it for the first time. The participants’ love of roller derby started from the first moment they watched their first jam.

The athletes love what roller derby has to offer them. They find in roller derby something that they do not find in other sports, social activities, the home lives, and their jobs. Roller derby provides these women with a unique environment in which they can be athletic, get exercise, and have that pure adrenaline rush they so crave: “It’s the whole adrenaline of it,” one athlete stated. At the same time, roller derby allows them to bond with other women – to form lasting friendships, have other

women to laugh with and lean on. At the same time these women are participating in an activity that meets their social and physical needs in a leisure activity, roller derby also meets their need to get out their built up aggression. They are able to skate and hit away those frustrations placed on them from the constraints of their daily lives, and at the same time, they are enjoying spending time with their friends, exercising, and being a little raunchy. Their love for roller derby is a love for an activity that allows them to participate in edgework while still doing gender.

Chapter 5

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Further Research

Women's roller derby offers a wealth of interesting and insightful research topics and raises a number of questions about how female athletes are portrayed in the media, racial/ethnic and sexual minority involvement in women's sports, the involvement of women in risky sports, and the nature of the sport itself. Further systematic research into how the media presents roller derby as a sport and the participants of the sport is needed in order to understand how the stereotypes of roller derby participants are formed. Research into how roller derby teams market themselves, through fliers, websites, and the press, could also yield interesting results that would help create a more complete picture of how the public image of roller derby is formed and what kind of information informs that image. In order to understand the wider, public image of roller derby, research must be done looking at how non-participants in roller derby view the sport. Only with more research can a more complete understanding of the image of roller derby be understood.

Limitations

This research aggregates all female roller derby athletes in more universal conclusions; however, there are limitations to this approach, mainly in doing so, likely very diverse experiences of black and other racial/ethnic minority females, bi- and homosexual females, and transgender females, will be overlooked. Hargreaves (1994) stated there is no single 'shared experience' of women. Further analysis of the experiences of minority athletes is needed to reveal new understandings of how these roller derby athletes understand their experiences and negotiation gendered social spheres through their participation in roller derby.

Conclusions

One of the interesting points made by both the media and the roller derby organizations is that a broad spectrum of people participate in roller derby. If the participants do come from different backgrounds and have a range of lifestyles, occupations, and interests, then the findings point towards factors other than involvement in another subculture as a reason for participating in roller derby. For example, many media articles point out the participants' involvement in punk culture: if all of the athletes are found to be members of the punk culture, or another subgroup, then it would be possible that it is involvement in that subgroup which leads to participation in roller derby. However, this thesis did find that the women do come from different backgrounds, have different life situations, and run the gamut of

personality traits – not all the athletes are young punk rockers and not all are lawyers with three children. The participants varied in age, personalities, job type, education, and family makeup. These findings pointed to some other characteristic or reason for participating in roller derby draws this diverse group of women together. Searching for this characteristic or meaning, some media articles have stated that the women participate in roller derby because they are unfeminine and that they do not fit easily into more “girly” society. However, this thesis did not find support for that claim, and instead sought to understand these women’s reasons for participating in roller derby.

The reasons found for participating in roller derby fit into nine themes: outlet for aggression, escape from daily constraints, comradery, exercise, empowering women, self-fulfillment, and love of the sport. The most popular reasons given for participation were love of the sport, comradery, and exercise. Most participants cited more than one of these reasons for participating in the sport and provided insight into the complex reasons why women chose to participate in risk-sport. All of these categories fit into the theoretical framework of gendered edgework, and expanded on the theoretical base by providing insight into how the theories of edgework and doing gender work together to provide a strong basis for understanding participation in risk sports by female athletes.

The recent Finley (2010) article found that women who participate in roller derby find alternative femininities through their participation in the sport. While the experiences of the roller derby athletes in this study seem to be different from the

experiences in Finley's study, the ultimate conclusion is the same. It is through participation in a sport that is aggressive and tough, and has a rowdy, un-feminine image, that these women create alternative femininities for themselves. By participating in gendered edgework, these women negotiate the boundaries of their everyday obligations and society's feminine image.

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