This is Men's Derby: Identity, Belonging, and Community in Men's Roller Derby

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ABSTRACT

The emerging sport of roller derby was initially conceived as an inclusive, DIY/ 'alternative' sport. Tensions exist around the competing desires to retain this focus, but also to become commercially viable and professional. Existing research positions roller derby as women-only and interprets the sport as a space for identity and gender expression.

Offering an insider account, I develop an ethnographic case study of a men's roller derby team. Through data gathered during a year-long participant observation and sixteen in-depth interviews, I examine the relationship between identity, belonging, and community in the development of a specific, localised roller derby culture. Underpinned by an interest in the realisation of gendered identifications, this thesis explores the interdependence of inclusivity and exclusivity, performance and professionalism, and self-image and public image. It also considers those more prosaic tensions of 'doing' roller derby that exist between playing and officiating, ethos and administration, and continuation and change. In doing so it attempts to provide a sociological lens through which roller derby can be seen to be achieved, experienced, and understood in the practices of those who engage with the community.

Whilst ethnographic accounts are necessarily situated within specific contexts, this thesis extends the literature on roller derby by highlighting how the competing and dislocated ideals associated with the sport are experienced within very particular places. Moreover, it provides an account of the process through which sports teams within a 'DIY culture' get made and re-made, and, ultimately, how they are variously transformed by the people who experience them. Additionally, through this exploration of the perceptions and experience of men, the thesis seeks to add to the literature redefining what it means to be 'masculine' within sport, in a site where mutual support, comradery, and acceptance are more important than the will to win.

DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work, apart from where otherwise indicated, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Dawn Fletcher

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis takes the form of an ethnography. It explores the relationship between identity (including gender), belonging, and community in a UK-based men's roller derby team. Through this central focus, the thesis examines the interdependence of inclusivity and exclusivity, performance and professionalism, and self-image and public image, and explores the tensions that exist in 'doing' roller derby between playing and officiating, ethos and administration, and continuation and change. This thesis also offers an account of the process of making, remaking, and transforming a DIY culture, and discusses how this is achieved, experienced, and understood in the practice of members.

Although the thesis is concerned with how the dislocated 'ideals' associated with roller derby are experienced in very particular places, as roller derby is still quite a niche sport, some explanation and context is required before turning to an introduction of the research and its setting. Below, I offer a brief history of roller derby, outlining its initial development in twentieth century USA and its resurgence in the twenty-first century. I also point to areas where the tensions found in my research are present throughout roller derby history.

Once this overall context is provided, I introduce the team itself, exploring its place within roller derby and situating the period of observation within the overall timeline of the team's existence. Additionally, I offer an exploration of my place within roller derby and the team, providing necessary background to the points within the thesis where I discuss my experiences as a roller derby participant and a researcher. Additionally, a glossary of key terms is provided at the end of the thesis.

1.1 The Roller Derby

The sport of Roller Derby was invented by promoter Leo Seltzer in 1935. The first event, dubbed the 'Transcontinental Roller Derby', was held in Chicago, on August 13th, 1935. Initially, it was billed as an endurance contest, with teams of two (one man and one woman) skating against others for prize money. Sources differ on exactly how far the teams skated, but it was billed as the distance between New York and San Diego (Coppage, 1999; National Museum of Roller Skating, 2016), which is just under 3000 miles. Teams skated up to 110 miles a day (Coppage, 1999, p5) and the contest lasted somewhere between a month (National Museum of Roller Skating, 2016) and seven weeks (Coppage, 1999). In Depression-era America, this was an attractive prospect, as it at least guaranteed food, shelter, and $25 a week (Coppage, 1999).

Leo Seltzer modified the game over the next three years, increasing team sizes, and playing up the speed and the contact. The popularity of the sport waxed and waned over the years, with boom periods during the 1940s, when it was first televised, and from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, when Leo Seltzer's son, Jerry, had taken over the reins. The Roller Derby, as the Seltzers called it (always with capitalised R and D) had competition in the form of the Roller Games, or the National Skating Derby, run by Bill Griffiths, which was "flashier and more theatrical than the Derby" (Deford, 2014, loc.334), but ultimately, both versions became less and less successful, and were shut down in the 1970s (Coppage, 1999, pviii).

Roller Derby and its competition were 'sports entertainment'; commercial enterprises existing to make money for the organisers. Skaters were 'professionals';

they were paid to skate, and though some had other jobs in the off-season, many lived off this money year-round (Deford, 2014).

In writing about Jerry Seltzer's Roller Derby, Deford focused on his impressions of the skaters and noted "a great sense of belonging, as well of place, is evident; there is a strong feeling of community" (2014, loc.1915). Skaters lived and worked together, and were part of the same group, regardless of the team for which they might be skating. It was more than a job for the skaters and became an integral part of who they were (Rutter, 2001). Thus, notions of identity, belonging, and community have long been regarded as important aspects of roller derby.

In the years since the original Roller Derby closed its doors, there have been numerous attempts to stage a revival, including *RollerGames*, a TV spin-off of Griffiths' version, and the short-lived UK based *Roller Blaze*. In one of the most successful attempts, Stephen Land and Ross Bagwell, having sought advice from Jerry Seltzer, produced the cable television show *RollerJam*, first shown in December 1998. They put together the 'World Skating League'; skaters who were paid to train to be part of the show (Coppage, 1999, p102). The focus was on creating a television show, and the rules were modified to appeal to contemporary audiences, notoriously a heavily banked figure of 8 track with an alligator pit in the centre (Mabe, 2007, p.48). *RollerJam* lasted only two seasons. These attempts to recreate a once successful formula had a similar mix of professional skaters and entertainment for audiences, but there was clearly something missing. It seemed that the glory days of roller derby were gone forever.

1.2 Modern Roller Derby

Undeterred by the failure of others, in Austin, Texas, in 2001, 'Devil' Dan Policarpo gathered together a group of women to try to revive roller derby once more.

> A few girls were invited to join in a circus-infused, punk-rock themed version of the game that focused more on staged antics than athleticism. That formula had already been proven a failure and almost killed the sport again when the man heading up the production left the idea, the sport, and the skaters behind. (Mabe, 2007, p61).

After Policarpo disappeared with over a thousand dollars of money they had raised, the women he had recruited decided to pursue the plans for a roller derby revival. Styling themselves the SheEOs (a play on CEO or Chief Executive Officer), they created a for-profit business called Bad Girl, Good Woman Productions (BGGW), and set about creating their own version of roller derby. This time, there were no men allowed, and the focus would be on athleticism as much as theatrics; 'professional' in the sense of taking the sport seriously, rather than focused on 'performance'.

Joulwan (2007), a member of the Texas Rollergirls, discusses some of the problems associated with running the league for profit and writes a very personal account of the acrimonious split of the league in 2003, thus acknowledging the gulf between the ethos of the original modern roller derby league and its administration. Jerry Seltzer had talked about the barriers to getting a Derby project off the ground (Coppage, 1999, p98), but he had been talking about the idea of a league owned and operated privately and run for profit. He had not been considering a grassroots plan. BGGW became Texas Roller Derby Lonestar Rollergirls, a banked track league, which continued to run for profit, but the majority of skaters left to form Texas Rollergirls, a flat track league, which was "skater-owned-and-operated" (Barbee and Cohen,

2010, p46). This model of ownership is replicated in most flat track roller derby leagues today, under the auspices of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), created in 2005. This organisation, run by volunteers from member leagues, standardised the rules, instituted a minimum-skills policy, and developed a rankings system. Its motto was "by the skaters, for the skaters" (Mabe, 2007, p80). This new mission statement encapsulated the desire to move away from roller derby as a profit-making, commercialised form of sports entertainment towards a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) model, which explicitly distanced the sport from its roots. Though there are many roller derby leagues that are not part of the WFTDA, its ruleset is the most widely used.

The rules of roller derby are quite complex. The current ruleset and accompanying casebook run to 67 pages (WFTDA, 2018). In reading this thesis, although a thorough grasp of the rules is fortunately unnecessary, an awareness of the basics is useful. Briefly then, flat track roller derby can be played anywhere there is space to lay a track, though sports halls tend to be the most common venues. For each game, a roster of up to fifteen skaters is allowed, plus up to four bench staff. Each game will also have up to seven referees, and up to thirteen non-skating officials. Games consist of two periods of thirty minutes, split into a number of sections, called 'jams', of up to two minutes each. At the beginning of each jam, five skaters from each team take their positions on track. The track is an oval, with an infield and outfield for referees, and two lines marked the jammer start line and the pivot line. One skater for each team per jam is designated the jammer; the points scorer. They wear a helmet cover with a star on, and line up behind the jammer start line. The other four skaters line up between the jammer line and the pivot line. They are called blockers, and blockers from both teams form what is called the pack. One of these

blockers wears a striped helmet cover; that blocker is the pivot. The pivot is the only blocker who may start touching the pivot line, and if in that position, all blockers must line up behind. When the jam starting whistle blows, the jammers must try to skate through the pack. The first jammer through is signalled lead jammer. Then they must lap the pack and pass the blockers again. When a jammer passes an opposing skater, they earn a point. The blockers' job is to stop the opposing jammer from passing them, whilst also helping their jammer to get past. The lead jammer can 'call' the jam at any point, usually after they have scored points, and before the other jammer has the chance to score. Then a new group of skaters will line up on track, and the next jam will start.

Books written about the early days of the modern roller derby revival (Joulwan, 2007; Mabe, 2007; Barbee and Cohen, 2010) might more accurately be termed 'love letters' to roller derby, so passionately do these writers feel about the sport. Members are involved in all aspects of running a league and there is much more to it than a dry description of the rules can express. Writers focus on the names and outfits and partying but are also at pains to stress the athleticism. Joulwan (2007) writes about the experience of being a 'rollergirl', and the joy of the game, but also of the deep friendships and connections that are made. It is not clear what exactly sparked the growth of this version of roller derby, but it seemingly created the same feeling of belonging as the original Roller Derby. Modern flat track derby quickly gained the attention of other countries, and in April 2006, the London Rollergirls became the first roller derby league in the UK (London Rollergirls, 2015). Although men were always involved as officials and supporters, these books make it clear that to the writers, roller derby is very much "all-women" (Mabe, 2007, p.16), or "all-girl" (Joulwan, 2007, p.3), which represents another break from its roots.

1.3 Men's Roller Derby

Modern roller derby may be discussed as a women-only sport, but in practice, it did not remain that way for long. The first men's roller derby team, Pioneer Valley Roller Derby's Dirty Dozen, was created in 2006 (Barbee and Cohen, 2010). After the appearance of several other men's teams, the Men's Derby Coalition (MDC) was founded in 2007 to represent the interests of men's leagues, promoting the sport, and offering support to each other as they developed (MRDA, 2017a). This was renamed the Men's Roller Derby Association (MRDA) in 2011. From a group of eleven member-leagues all based in the US, MRDA has grown into a larger organisation which offers member benefits such as insurance and an annual competition; the Men's Roller Derby Championships. As of October 2017, the MRDA has 74 member-leagues from eleven countries, of which 45 are ranked, having played the required number of 'sanctioned' games against other MRDA member leagues. Though initially there was little support within the WFTDA for men's roller derby (Vecchio, 2012), the two organisations have begun to work more closely together to advocate for the sport of roller derby in all its forms (MRDA, 2017b). Despite gaining in popularity, the growth of men's roller derby is not as fast as that of women's roller derby and it is still regarded as something of a "niche sport within a niche sport" (Goodman, 2016).

1.3 The Inhuman League

FIGURE 1.1 TIL LOGO. COURTESY OF JAMES T WALMESLEY. 2011.

In 2011, some five years after the appearance of the first men's roller derby team, the Inhuman League (TIL) was formed during a meeting in a pub. Initially the league consisted mostly of men who had been associated with the established women's league Sheffield Steel Rollergirls (SSRG); as partners or siblings of SSRG skaters, as referees, or as non-competing members. TIL was one of the first men's teams in the UK, along with London's Southern Discomfort Roller Derby (SDRD), Newcastle's Tyne and Fear (T&F), Manchester's New Wheeled Order (NWO), and

Lincoln's Lincolnshire Rolling Thunder (LRT), and were at the forefront of the development of men's roller derby in the UK.

Official recognition as a sport by the British Roller Sports Federation (BRSF) in February 2011 (UKRDA, 2011) had brought a new seriousness to roller derby in the UK. Tensions existed within the roller derby community arising from conflicting desires around the sport's future. Participants variously wanted a commercially viable sport, a professional sport, a sport in which skaters retain control of all aspects of production, an inclusive sport, and a fun, recreational sport. For men's teams, however, roller derby was very new.

For a while, SDRD was the only men's team capable of putting together a full roster, so teams banded together to play games. In September 2011, for example, TIL members teamed up with T&F members to form The Inhuman Fear, beating SDRD by 68 points in that game. By 2012, TIL had enough members who had passed the minimum skills assessment to field a team, and played their first game against T&F, beating them by 1 point. During that year, the team played sixteen games, which included travelling to Toulouse to play the Quad Guards, Toulouse's men's roller derby team, and participating in the 2012 Men's European Roller Derby Championships (MERDC), in which they finished sixth out of seven teams (Flat Track Stats, 2017).

The year 2013 was pivotal in the development of TIL. The team had grown in numbers, leading to competition for roster spots. The league's response to this was to create a B team, Zom B Cru, which consisted of mostly newer members and a few established members who had not made the A team. The A team, newly dubbed Army of Darkness, played Birmingham's Crash Test Brummies (CTB) in the first

United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA) sanctioned men's game (UKRDA, 2013), and competed in MERDC again, this time finishing fourth out of fifteen (Flat Track Stats, 2017). By the end of July, Army of Darkness were fourth in Europe, and Zom B Cru were twelfth (European Roller Derby Rankings, 2014). In terms of rankings, this represents the high point for the league, as both the A and B teams began to slowly slide down the European Roller Derby Rankings, in part due to the founding of more men's teams, and hence more competition.

But there was also tension in the team ranks. The next year was marred by poor performance from the A team, disagreements around attendance policies and training, and the eventual disbanding of Zom B Cru in September 2014. The team lost several of their most experienced members, who said they were not being challenged enough, but also many newer teammates who said they were unhappy that training had become less enjoyable. TIL could no longer sustain two teams, and they could no longer compete against the best men's teams in Europe.

When the British Championships began in 2015, TIL were in Tier 2, finishing the season mid-table. In 2016, the year during which my observation took place, they won the tier and were promoted to Tier 1. Despite this resurgence, the tensions never completely dissipated, and the league continued to be a turbulent place.

1.5 My Experience

Having made the decision to place myself clearly in the data as researcher and participant (explored further in chapter 3), some explanation of my place within roller derby and the Inhuman League becomes necessary. I first became aware of roller derby in 2010. I saw a flyer inviting new members to join SSRG at a tattoo convention in early October. I went to the introduction session on 16th October, and

despite not talking to anyone, I enjoyed it enough to go back. What I had at first thought might be an interesting and slightly different way to get a bit of exercise, became the most all-consuming activity I had ever known. As my involvement continued, I learned new physical skills and the many rules of the sport. I also acquired a new language that revolved around roller derby, and began to refer to things like default strategy, and skate maintenance. I became part of the subculture.

I wrote for a roller derby magazine (Billie Viper, 2011) about how I thought I had found my 'tribe', though, in reality, while I enjoyed skating, I wasn't really sure I belonged in this group of self-consciously 'alternative' people. In the early days, we talked about roller derby as a sport for people who didn't like sport (Breeze, 2014); a place for people who hadn't played sports at school and who weren't particularly athletic. It was clear that many of the Sheffield Steel Rollergirls were reflexive about their involvement and that, in part, roller derby was a quest for belonging (Packington, 2012).

As well as learning to play a team sport, I gained experience in event management, and things like sponsorship and promotion. There was always so much to discuss and so much to do, that it slowly took over corners of my life, until there was very little that wasn't roller derby. I didn't mind at all, because before roller derby, my life was very quiet, and I wasn't doing very much else with my time.

Quite a few men joined SSRG around the same time I did, and later went on to join TIL. Initially, TIL had very close connections with SSRG. They trained once a week, on Sunday evenings, after the SSRG training session, and several members of both teams attended both sessions. I had been on the periphery of TIL for a while, being friendly with members, and occasionally attending training sessions, but it

was during 2013 that I became much more involved. I had just broken my wrist whilst playing for the B team of SSRG, the Crucibelles, and in searching for ways to stay involved, had volunteered to be a line-up manager for a mixed scrimmage that TIL had organised. I enjoyed it so much that, when TIL had advertised for a line-up manager for Zom B Cru, I jumped at the chance.

1.6 The Research

I had wanted to do a PhD for a long time, and the same injury that led me to reconsider my involvement in roller derby, gave me space to question my professional life. As roller derby had become such an important part of my life, it seemed natural to me to make the sport my focus (again, see chapter 3 for a discussion of the importance of reflexivity and standpoint within this research). I had read a number of theses about roller derby and had been struck by how much the focus was on gender and women. I liked roller derby a lot, but I *loved* men's roller derby; it seemed less rule-bound and offered more freedom. At the point I joined, men's roller derby had the feel of something new and exciting, and retained the fun and silliness that women's roller derby was increasingly rejecting. I recognised a significant gap in the academic literature. Many of the studies I read told me that men didn't, *couldn't*, play roller derby, and that it was a women-only sport. I knew that not to be true, and for a while I felt quite angry about these studies that spoke to the life-changing impact of roller derby for women, and how women were challenging gender norms through this sport. I could see the lives of the men around me changing, and I could see them challenging gender norms too. I realised that I felt passionate enough about men's roller derby to choose it as a topic for PhD research. At the moment when my friend, Phallic Baldwin, wore black hot pants with a green zombie hand on the crotch and got lead jammer to thunderous cheers in

the final jam on Zom B Cru's first bout, I knew I had found my PhD topic. Men were challenging gender norms in roller derby. A man who was not typically athletic could succeed in this sport, and do it in an outfit deemed feminine, and hence, ridiculous (see chapters 5 for a discussion of outfits such as this). This subject was worth exploring further.

At this time, there were various articles and blogs posted debating the view that men had no business playing roller derby; that it was a women-only sport, and they should stick to playing their own sports (Rodriguez, 2015; Copland, 2014; Rider, 2014). Well-known derby skaters, such as Bonnie Thunders, were outspoken in their disdain for men's derby (Vecchio, 2012). Male skaters faced ridicule for wearing feminised clothing, and for wanting to join in a women's sport. My reading and experiences suggested that gender, specifically how male skaters did masculinity differently, should be the key focus of my research. Also, within the traditional context of sport, which defines athletic identities and performance very narrowly, roller derby appeared to offer men significantly more freedom to express emotion without fear, and to develop different kinds of identities.

I had told my teammates in TIL about the research I hoped to do, and they were aware of it long before the fieldwork officially started. I became known as a champion of men's boutfits, and the perception was that my research was all about hot pants. However, by the time my fieldwork began, TIL had changed significantly. Many members had left, new ones had joined, skaters were less interested in wearing boutfits. The early days of excitement and newness had given way to a different period, but one that was no less interesting, because of the continued importance of creating a community, which now seemed to offer a clearer lens through which to explore the league than simply gender. The aim of this study is

therefore to add to the growing body of academic research on the sport of roller derby, offering an alternative view of the sport, as seen through the lens of male participants. This thesis seeks to answer two main questions:

1) How are notions of identity, belonging, and community connected?

2) How are these relationships constructed and experienced by those who engage with the community?

The study will raise additional questions concerning the broader sociological theorising of identity and belonging, offering evidence to further support the possibilities of alternative gender expressions through sport, and the importance of belonging to both masculinities and sport, and will explore possibilities for gender equality and equal participation in contact sports.

The literature review begins with a consideration of the overarching framework of social interaction, locating the concept of everyday practice within a broadly interactionist framework, followed by an analysis of the concept of identity, and a brief discussion theorising gender coupled with a consideration of the literature on embodiment, masculine sporting identities, and gender integration in sport. The review continues with an overview of the literature on belonging and community, which highlights links with the previous section. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of how issues of identity and belonging, or 'inclusivity' have been explored in existing roller derby literature.

Rather than traditional grounded theory, I wanted to use a situational analysis methodology, as this seemed more suited to the reflexive standpoint I had taken. The rationale for these decisions is developed within the methodology chapter, where I discuss the use of feminist methodologies and epistemologies to allow me to account

for my own place in the data, and to help me think through some of the difficulties inherent in insider research.

Chapter 4, on engagement and community, offers both an extended contextualisation of the place of TIL within Sheffield, and the wider roller derby community, and an analysis of how TIL and its members engage with these communities. Chapter 5 explores the processes of identification undertaken by TIL members and the league, focusing on practices of naming, choosing numbers and wearing boutfits as sites of individual identity, and how discourses of 'good impressions' and 'inclusivity' serve to create an identity of the league. In chapter 6 I explore how specific practices engender feelings of belonging, focusing on banter, 'teamliness', and acceptance. I also include an extended case study of one member to highlight the interconnectedness of these practices. Chapter 7 involves an examination of the barriers to belonging, evaluating through the experiences of marginal group members how everyday practices may result in exclusion.

Throughout the data chapters I have tried to maintain a sense of the constant negotiation at work within TIL. Each example I use represents a moment, and though I focus on a specific thing within the exploration of each moment, there was always more going on that I could hope to replicate. Throughout the year-long observation period (November 2015 to October 2016), it became apparent that 'masculinity', my original focus, was not on the radar of most members of TIL. In field notes, there are times when it is clear I was trying to think about how events and behaviour fitted into masculinities theories, but often it did not. When I interviewed members, I didn't ask specifically about masculinity, and they didn't talk about it directly. One member asked me: 'how can you write about masculinity when you haven't asked me about it?' It became clear that the men playing roller

derby were not as reflexive about how they experimented with gender norms, and that this worked in a very different way to how research into women's roller derby was suggesting. Here, the focus was on identity as a whole, and creating a community. I had wanted to write a rebuttal to all those studies positing women's roller derby as subverting gender norms and demonstrate that men's roller derby did it more successfully, but I was finding more and more as time went on that gender and masculinity were part of a larger identity project. The members of TIL were engaged in presenting an image of themselves and the team, which changed continually, but was always something of which they were conscious. They were concerned with feelings of belonging, and their community was important to them. But above all, they were interested in getting on with the business of 'doing' roller derby.

The discussion chapter explores this thread in more depth, to consider how notions of 'being' and 'doing' roller derby run through each of the themes explored in the data chapters. Roller derby is constantly shifting, and so participant and team identities must constantly shift, and this process is never complete. I conclude with a look at how the findings in this thesis add to the body of knowledge on roller derby and on identity and community. I also suggest some of the implications of this research, and areas where questions remain. I end this thesis with a postscript, an update of the changes within TIL that takes us to the present moment.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This thesis uses a broadly symbolic interactionist framework. Symbolic interactionism, as defined by Blumer (1969), involves three linked premises: "human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them" (p2); "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (p2); "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (p2). Thus, the meanings people attach to objects are central to an understanding of their behaviour. These meanings are not static, and "the actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his actions" (Blumer, 1969, p5).

Dennis and Martin (2007) argue that symbolic interaction is empiricist in method and dependent on context. The approach is concerned with an understanding of social lives in particular times and places. Thus, they argue that:

> There is no reason to believe that social phenomena necessarily have essential features in common, that these features could be specified on an a priori basis, or that they could be unproblematically applied in different cases as a theoretical framework for understanding something novel (Dennis and Martin, 2007, p291).

The logical consequence of this is that although an ethnographic study engages with the relevant literature, this literature must be taken as a collection of sensitising concepts. The focus must be on empirical investigation and the possibility of discovering something new. An understanding of how roller derby is experienced in other contexts may be useful, and there *may* be features in common, but this must be discovered anew. A symbolic interactionist approach is especially appropriate for a

study of roller derby, given the acknowledgement of the mobile and shifting

(Downes et al, 2013; Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014) nature of the sport, and the place

of symbolic interactionism as "a perspective which seeks to *empirically* overcome

dualisms" (Dennis and Martin, 2005, p205). By acknowledging the messy and

disorganised nature of real life, this perspective enables a researcher to account for

the multiplexity of a situation.

In order to be effective within such a concise review of the literature around identity

and sport it is necessary to be highly selective. For that reason, this review will

begin with a brief consideration of the concept of practice as a lens through which to

explore identity, community, and belonging. I then move to explore debates around

identity (including gender), belonging, and community to more precisely locate the

proposed research, and then focus on the work of a few key academics in the field of

sport. Additionally, a review of the roller derby focused literature will outline the

gaps in current knowledge and point towards the importance of bringing a focus on

masculine identities into this new sport.

As discussed in the introduction, modern roller derby was conceived as a women's

sport. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the majority of studies focusing on roller

derby to date have focused on women. These studies discuss the potential of

Women's Flat Track Roller Derby as a site for expressions of identity, frequently

seen through expressions of masculinity and femininity. This gap in the literature

needs addressing as men's derby becomes more widespread.

Roller derby studies also explore the concept of inclusivity and discuss the extent to

which everyone can belong in the roller derby community. Again, such explorations

focus on 'feminine' attributes such as co-operation. It is important, therefore, to

explore how notions of belonging and community can be explored through the lens of masculinity. Such considerations are increasingly brought to the fore through changes due to the professionalisation of the sport.

What follows, then, is a discussion of major contributions to the fields of identity, gender, sport, and belonging, and an exploration of how these concepts are discussed in existing studies of roller derby. Taken as a whole body of work, this research brings into focus the tensions that exist within roller derby. Researchers find that skaters can disrupt gender norms, but also that they reinforce these norms. Roller derby is also found to be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. This differs from research into sporting masculinities, but also reflects Messner's (2002) argument that sport can be different away from the centre, and that women can have more intimate friendships than men.

There is also the sense that increasing moves to make the sport professional impact on both gender disruption and inclusivity. This suggests that organisational changes within the sport through WFTDA/MRDA governing bodies has a significant impact on how roller derby is experienced in everyday practice. Lacking in the literature is any real discussion of whether this alternative, away from the centre sport can positively benefit men and trans skaters. The literature suggests that like other 'lifestyle' sports, roller derby has the potential to offer men a different way to experience sport.

2.2 Everyday Practice

This thesis engages repeatedly with the concept of everyday practice. Therefore, it is important to evaluate this concept, and explore how ideas of everyday practice link strongly with theories of identity, gender, community, and belonging. Morgan (2011) offers a detailed analysis of practice, theorising it in terms of family practices. Everyday practice is conceptualised as having to do with routine concerns, sometimes trivial activities that are unremarkable but commonly experienced, and regular; often it has a taken for granted quality. In 'doing family' there is a sense of process. Practices are active, involve action, and grant agency. This reflects discussions of identity (Jenkins, 2014) and gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) in which 'doing' is key, and also Goffman's theorisation that identity exists in the repetition of performances (1959).

The work of Barry (2018) on hybrid masculinities and dress, for example, indicates how identity and gender practices can become routine, everyday practices. The practice of dressing is used to mark, unmark and re-mark gender. Dressing in clothing that reflects dominant masculine ideals (such as a formal suit), for some men, serves to un-mark gender, whilst still allowing an engagement in feminine performances of following fashion. Participants re-marked their performances as masculine in the way they talked and thought about clothes and fashion. Barry (2018) argues that an interrogation of such practice highlights how hybrid masculinities work in everyday settings, thus demonstrating the everyday practice that exists in gender performance. Sections 2.2 and 2.4 explore theories of identity and gender in more depth.

Barry's (2018) research also highlights how practices include thinking and talking in addition to action. Morgan points to the contrast between "what we say we are about and what we are actually doing" (2011, p20), however, the distinction between practices and discourses is not always clear, as they are mutually dependent. This suggests a point of similarity with symbolic constructions of community, which for Cohen (1985), exist in thinking about and talking about, as much as in action. The everyday practice of a type of talk that Haugh (2014) terms 'jocular mockery', or teasing, for example, functions in a variety of ways, including the creation of a sense of solidarity, exclusion, aggression, or bullying. These interactions serve to delineate the boundaries of community, and allow for the possibilities of the same action, the same practice, to have different meanings. Community, its construction, and its boundaries, are discussed further in section 2.3.

Morgan (2011) argues that practices are necessary for the maintenance of relationships, owing much to Bourdieu's discussion of habitus, whereby "each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning" (Bourdieu, 1977, p79) and Goffman's (1967) notion of interaction.

Everyday practices are also at work in the concept of embodiment. In a study of tombois (individuals who are female-bodied, but identify as men) in West Sumatra, Blackwood notes the "body knowledge" (2009, p456), that is physical feelings of comfort, pleasure, unease etc., and how these feelings change as individuals move through different social spaces; household, community, and public. Woodward notes the "embodied everyday practices" (2014, p87) of boxers, for whom the physicality of training and sparring, and of injury, becomes part of the everyday routine. In

ways such as this, physical and emotional feelings and responses become everyday practices. Embodiment is discussed further in section 2.5.

Throughout the following discussion, it is important to note the ubiquity of everyday practice. Often implicit, and seldom overtly theorised, in discussions of actions, interactions, talk, and behaviour, theorists explore examples of everyday practice. These everyday practices can be found in the routine, mundane, regular 'doings' of people. When performances of identity and gender and practices of belonging become regular actions and interactions, they become everyday practice. For women in roller derby, for example, studies of whom are discussed in section 2.7, performances of gender and sport become everyday practices in their regularity.

2.3 Identity

Jenkins maintains that "as a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what')" (Jenkins, 2014, p6). In writing about social identity, Jenkins prefers the term identification to identity, because "identification, whether of ourselves or of others, is a process: something that we do" (Jenkins, 2014, p2). This understanding of process is implicit in Goffman's concept of presentation of self (1959), which uses a dramaturgical perspective to explore how people present themselves in public. Both theorists argue for the importance of thinking about identity, and for its impact beyond individuals.

Jenkins disagrees with Hall (1996, p4) and Gilroy (1997, p301) that identities are more about difference, contending instead that difference and similarity are interdependent, and that "whatever else might be involved in knowing who's who, it is undeniably a matter of similarity and solidarity, of belonging and community, of

'us' and 'we'" (Jenkins, 2014, p24). Thus, he shares with Mills (1959) the view that the individual and the collective are linked and that to understand one it is necessary to understand the other. Goffman focuses on the identity of the individual, and of teams, and his theories are rooted in an appreciation of this connection through his framework of individual, interaction, and institutional orders.

Goffman theorises identity as a performance, making the distinction between deliberate and unintended impressions. Deliberate impressions are 'given' through such methods as verbal communication, modes of dress, or actions designed to influence the audience's response, such as, for example, wearing professionally-made sports clothing and using sports lingo correctly to foster the impression of being a serious athlete. Unintended impressions are 'given off' in "the more theatrical and contextual kind, the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind" (1959, p16). These unintended impressions may support the deliberate impressions, or undermine them, perhaps if the sporting language is used incorrectly. He discusses this through reference to face-to-face interactions or encounters, which involve the performer, the audience or observer, and co-participants, and defines an individual's social role as the repetition of such actions or routines (Goffman, 1959, p26).

In Goffman's view, any performance setting involves both a front and a backstage region. He defines front as "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (1959, p32). A personal front involves 'equipment' which may be deliberately selected for the particular performance, but also aspects of an individual's identity which are more fixed: "insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial

characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like" (Goffman, 1959, p34). He states that for an actor to carry off a role successfully, the audience expects the performance to be consistent. Moreover, it must fit within expected parameters and "when an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it" (Goffman, 1959, p37). This indicates that an actor is free to take on any role they see fit, but not to create it however they like, thus potentially resulting in the selection of a front that doesn't quite fit. For example, the role of sportsman, or athlete, carries with it a set of expectations for behaviour, which individuals may find restricting. Goffman's concept of front, and Jenkins account of institutions, which set out "the way things are done" (Jenkins, 2014, p160), both suggest that there are areas of life where the status quo is accepted, and it is difficult to imagine how to recreate them in a different way.

Goffman views success in carrying off a performance as a matter of "creating or projecting a definition of a situation" (1959, p235). But Jenkins insists that it is not so simple, and there must be a consideration of power, and an understanding of whose definition counts in any one situation: "it is not enough simply to assert an identity; that assertion must also be validated, or not, by those with whom we have dealings (Jenkins, 2014, p44).

Both Goffman and Jenkins attempt to account for difference within groups; they argue that it is not necessary for every group member to think or act the same: Jenkins maintains that "it is possible for individuals to share the same nominal identity, and for that to mean very different things to them in practice, to have different consequences for their lives, for them to 'do' or 'be' it differently" (2014,

p46). How a group or category is defined can be experienced in different ways by individuals, whether through their own behaviour, or the treatment they receive from others. Jenkins argues that group identities are formed through "*collective internal definition*" (2014, p107) and that group identities can readily incorporate both similarity and difference. Rather than using the term 'group', Goffman refers to 'teams', theorising team performances in terms of "reciprocal dependence" (1959, p88), which necessitates an acceptance of difference for its success, since "each member of such a troupe or cast of players may be required to appear in a different light, if the team's over-all effect is satisfactory" (1959, p84). He explains that individuals have different roles within a team performance, and that sometimes, for example, one member might take the lead or be the 'star'. He cautions that the starring role might not always confer the most power, and that "whenever inexperienced or temporary incumbents are given formal authority over experienced subordinates we often find that the formally empowered person is bribed with a part that has dramatic dominance while the subordinates tend to direct the show" (Goffman, 1959, p106). Thus, he also acknowledges the role that power plays in defining a situation.

Whilst Goffman uses 'team' to analyse any group involved in collective interaction, Cohen (1985) explores groups in terms of more explicit membership. Cohen later critiqued his own work that suggested boundaries are negotiable and shifting, but Jenkins insists on "the continuing usefulness of Cohen's original model of the 'symbolic construction' of communal and other collective identities (1982, 1985, 1986)" (Jenkins, 2014, p136-137). Jenkins also refers to Berger and Luckman's (1967) concept of 'symbolic universe', which he defines as the story which a collectivity tells about itself, the world and its place in the world" (Jenkins, 2014,

p163). Membership of groups, then, is, in part, determined by symbols and shared rituals (Cohen, 1985). Jenkins argues that "what matters is not that people see or understand things the same, or that they see and understand things differently from other communities, but that their shared symbols allow them to *believe* that they do" (Jenkins, 2014, p139). Membership depends on affirmation, and ritual allows a feeling of belonging (Jenkins, 2014, p178).

Goffman does not refer to symbols, but a sense of shared understanding is implied in his discussion of 'teams'. He explains that a team's position is unanimous, but that they are secretive about the way this unanimity was arrived at (1959, p93). Team members wait for the official word before taking a stand, "maintaining the line during a performance" (1959, p94). Contrary to Jenkins' point, this does not necessarily mean that team members believe they see things the same way, but that they maintain the front that this is the case. When in a group, or teams, individuals are engaged in creating a performance together, and therefore, there is a communal backstage area where the public performance is created:

> It is apparent that if members of a team must cooperate to maintain a given definition of the situation before their audience, they will hardly be in a position to maintain that particular impression before one another. Accomplices in the maintenance of a particular appearance of things, they are forced to define one another as persons 'in the know', as persons before whom a particular front cannot be maintained (1959, p88).

Goffman discusses the existence of "destructive information" (1959, p141) within groups, which must be subject to some form of information control. He categorises this information as 'secrets', and identifies a range of different types: dark, strategic, inside, entrusted, and free (Goffman, 1959, p141-142). 'Dark' secrets "consist of facts about a team which it knows and conceals and which are incompatible with the image of self that the team attempts to maintain before its audience" (Goffman,

1959, p141). 'Inside' secrets "are ones whose possession marks an individual as being a member of a group and helps the group feel separate and different from those who are not 'in the know'" (1959, p142). Goffman argues that these secrets mean that each member of a team could potentially disrupt or spoil the performance if they were to behave inappropriately (1959, p88), however, a team member who becomes an embarrassment, or whose behaviour is "beyond the pale" (1959, p88) is still part of the team.

Jenkins suggests that "two motivations inspire conforming behaviour: the desire to be correct, and the desire to remain in the good graces of others" (Jenkins, 2014, p152). He also explores non-conforming behaviour, which is similar to that which Goffman characterises as inappropriate or embarrassing. Interestingly, he observes that "non-conforming behaviour, deviance if you like, may come most easily to those whose group membership is secure in the mainstream. Insecure membership may thus encourage conforming behaviour" (Jenkins, 2014, p152). Both these arguments imply that deviance only occurs from inside the group, not from the margins.

In teams, as defined by Goffman, there is the same separation of insider and outsider as discussed by Cohen (1985). "Logically, *in*clusion entails *ex*clusion, if only by default" (Jenkins, 2014, p104). Goffman outlines a variety of discrepant roles, which complicate the binary of insider/outsider, and suggest the existence of individuals who are neither audience nor performer. One of these roles is the confidant: "confidants are persons to whom the performer confesses his sins" (1959, p158).

Several theorists argue that action at the boundary is the most interesting. Barth explains that "boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them" (1969, p9,

in Jenkins, 2014, p122). Goffman points to "a wonderful putting on and taking off of character" (1959, p123). While Jenkins argues that "shared common sense, common knowledge and behaviour are better understood as products of processes of boundary maintenance, rather than as defining characteristics of group organisation" (Jenkins, 2014, p123). The margins, or the boundary is commonly agreed to be a place of ambiguity. Additionally, Goffman outlines the double function, whereby "many regions which function at one time and in one sense as a front region and at another time and in another sense as a back region" (1959, p127).

Goffman's arguments concerning performance could be seen as rather cynical. Goffman explains that a performer "must offer a show of intellectual and emotional involvement in the activity he is presenting, but must keep himself from actually being carried away by his own show lest this destroy his involvement in the task of putting on a successful performance" (1959, p210). This suggests that identity exists in the behaviour and the action; that there is no inner self at the heart of things. The sense of empty pretence is highlighted by a lack of morality: "*Qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realising these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realised" (Goffman, 1959, p243).

Jenkins offers a critique of Goffman's theories, claiming they are too "rule-governed" (2014, p94), preferring instead Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) "embodied habit – habitus" (2014, p95). The concept of habitus describes embodied dispositions and tendencies that influence the way an individual perceives and experiences the world, and hence their actions (Bourdieu, 1977). This concept includes an appreciation of the impact of an individual's background and life experiences, allowing for an

explanation of why people do and see things differently. Jenkins (2014) acknowledges that neither theory accurately accounts for the messiness of real life. Instead, conceptions of community can be useful in understanding individuals and how they come together.

2.4 Community and Belonging

In order to situate this thesis within the context of community, I will further discuss the concept of community as envisioned by Barth (1969) and Cohen (1982, 1985), linking these ideas with postmodern concepts of community outlined by Delanty (2010).

There is no single definition of 'community'. Different approaches emphasise a number of aspects. Approaches include: a conception of community linked to disadvantage; community as political consciousness and collective action; the approach of cultural sociology and anthropology characterised by a search for belonging and with an emphasis on cultural construction; and a global/transnational notion, which includes virtual communities (Delanty, 2010). Delanty argues that whatever the definition, community is always linked to belonging (2010, p18).

In writing about ethnic groups, Barth (1969) theorised communities in terms of boundaries. As mentioned above, he defined the boundary as a process of exclusion and incorporation and as such, the boundary, and therefore the group adapts to changing circumstances and external changes with internal adaptation. Barth described how ethnic groups exist in interaction and that membership of a group is ascribed by the actors themselves. He claimed that members may behave in dissimilar ways, but that there was also a recognition of similarity; that the recognition of another group member "entails the assumption that the two are

41

fundamentally 'playing the same game'" (1969, p15). In terms of change, Barth outlined three possible strategies – incorporation, accommodation, and assertion:

> (i) they may attempt to pass and become incorporated in the pre-established industrial society and cultural group; (ii) they may accept a 'minority' status…participating in the larger system…(iii) they may choose to emphasise ethnic identity, using it to develop new positions and patterns to organise activities in those sectors formally not found in their society, or inadequately developed for the new purposes (Barth, 1969, p33).

As stated above, Cohen (1982, 1985) developed Barth's concept of boundaries to analyse the symbolic construction of community. He, too, argued that communities contain both similarity and difference. He described community as imagined, but not imaginary, and explored how symbols might be perceived differently by members; that conformity was an illusion (1985, p37) and multiplexity (1985, p30) was key. Cohen, following Barth, argued that communities exist in interaction and that "community…is where one learns and continues to practice how to 'be social'" (1985, p15). This is discussed as the acquisition of symbols, which are versatile and do not necessarily mean the same thing to members, but do give people the "capacity to make meaning" (Cohen, 1985, p16). The symbols are shared, which connects all members, but understood individually, and so underlying the appearance of similarity is the reality of difference.

Through his work on crofters, Cohen focused on the experience and meanings group members constructed for themselves, rather than being concerned with "precise analytical definitions" (1985, p38). He suggested that community exists in thinking rather than doing, and that both routine behaviour and ritual involve symbolism that group members ascribe meaning to marking them as insiders (1985, p43). Cohen also makes clear that these rituals may also hold different meanings for group members (1985, p55). In dealing with change, these rituals are important. Ritual can

incorporate change and bridge the disjunction between the familiar and the

unfamiliar, enabling a sense of continuity; the past is used as a resource to manage

change (Cohen, 1985, p99). This explanation is, again, similar to Barth's discussion

of how groups deal with change.

The symbolic construction of community is linked with identity in that:

> The reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture. People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity (Cohen 1985, p118).

Delanty criticises Cohen for focusing too much on symbolic rather than objective

reality (2010, p33). This fails to properly take account of Cohen's view that whilst

boundaries exist in the mind, they are nevertheless real (Cohen, 1986). Delanty also

argues that Cohen's concept of boundaries is shaped by what separates people rather

than what they have in common (2010). He outlines the postmodern notion of

community as determined mainly by ties of belonging and offers possibilities for

self-transformation (2010, p34-35). This gives a clear link between community,

belonging, and identity. Cohen (2002), too, acknowledges that boundary

construction is only one aspect of community and that self-identity is another.

Although Delanty claims that:

> The issue is largely whether community is determined by boundary construction, where the identity of the community resides largely in self-other relations or whether community can be determined primarily by ties of belonging (2010, p34-35),

I would argue that they are not mutually exclusive and both concepts are necessary

for a deep understanding of how communities work.

Delanty argues that "postmodernism emphasises multiplicity" (2010, p105), the

many and varied aspects of the subject under study. However, the similar notion of

multiplexity, which accounts for the interlinking of such aspects and thus encompasses the idea of multiplicity, already exists in Cohen's work. Cohen clearly identifies the interconnected nature of similarity and difference. His discussion of symbols and the differing meanings made demonstrates how community members do not need to think the same, only to believe they do. Lash (1994) writes about community as chosen and reflexive, May (2011) says belonging is dynamic and relational, and Bennett (2015) theorises belonging as a practice, something people do. Despite this contrast between thinking (Cohen, 1985) and doing (May, 2011; Bennett, 2015) there are links and commonalities between Cohen's conceptualisation and more recent explorations of community. These commonalities suggest that Cohen's analysis is still relevant and of use to contemporary ethnographies.

A variety of studies on the broad themes of community and identity in sport have concluded that, although many sporting spaces, especially alternative ones, make claims for inclusiveness (Burdsey, 2008; Adjepong, 2015; Rannikko et al, 2016), such spaces often reproduce exclusion. This exclusion occurs through adherence to the dominant gender order (Burdsey, 2008) and hegemonic masculinity (Rannikko et al, 2016) or norms of race (Adjepong, 2015). Such findings suggest the existence of boundary maintenance and group identities based on a collective internal definition, but also that the question of whose definition counts is still a matter of power (Jenkins, 2014).

Behind a stated desire for inclusivity within the Amsterdam World Cup, an amateur football competition and multicultural festival, Burdsey finds "overt displays of masculinity, narcissism and heteronormativity (2008, p266) which marginalises "men who do not embody the dominant masculine script" (2008, p274). Adjepong

finds instead a "reproduction of white heterosexuality" (2015, p218) in women's rugby, whereby participants emphasise these aspects of identity in order to mitigate the inequality of gender, thus potentially marginalising non-white, non-heterosexual identities. Though lifestyle sports make claims of 'openness', these communities "quickly begin to regulate the habitus of their members…revealing, for example, who actually is or can be an authentic member of the community" (Rannikko et al, 2016, p1096). Members possessing subcultural symbolic capital tend towards characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, muscular strength and agility (Rannikko et al, 2016). Interestingly, despite the typical image of a member of a lifestyle sports community as 'masculine', Rannikko et al find a shared ideology of equality to be considered as an essential characteristic for participation (2016, p1106). However, they identify significant differences in the roller derby community due to its explicit aim to provide a space for women and non-stereotypically athletic bodies. Rugby is also a space where expressions of male identity tend towards the hegemonic (Spracklen, 1996). Women in the game express masculinity, but, despite this, are the recipients of banter, including abuse, hostility, and sexist remarks. Mary, a female referee, "has had to face abuse and disinterestedness at every step of her refereeing career" (Spracklen, 1996, p191).

More positively, research demonstrates the importance of a "feeling of belonging" (McHugh et al, 2015) and this is achieved through shared values and practices (McHugh et al, 2015), opportunities for reciprocity (Mynard et al, 2009), and shared experiences (Stone, 2017). These findings reflect Cohen's argument that a belief in shared values is an important aspect of community construction. This belief contributes to "whether an individual *feels* that they fully belong" (Stone, 2017, p4). Stone argues that this feeling is enhanced through the structure of an organisation,

and that it is an individual feeling that "emerges and disappears within the living of everyday life" (2017, p10). This simple outward appearance of similarity hides complexities within, and these shared experiences and values are seen differently by different members (Wichmann, 2015). Wichmann explores the 'temporary community' of Word Gymnaestrada and claims that it becomes an idea – this community exists in the minds of its members, where it is imagined, but not imaginary (Cohen, 1985. See also Walseth, 2006).

Delanty's criticism of Cohen for focusing on the symbolic not the real is worth bearing in mind when considering Spracklen's work on rugby. He points to the "imaginary community of 'the game', and the real community of place" (1996, p135). Such distinctions as 'imaginary' and 'real' are unhelpful. Cohen's point remains relevant – communities are imagined, but they are not imaginary. There exists a difference between the ideal type and how this is experienced in everyday practice. Spracklen (1996) argues that community is associated with shared meanings and mutual knowledge (see Cohen, 1982, 1985), but points to a polarisation within rugby communities between traditionalists and expansionists (rugby league) and between professionals and amateurs (rugby union). Such a divide creates tension as different meanings come into conflict.

Carter and Baliko call for "a reconceptualisation of community that is based on complexity and struggle" (2017, p696), foregrounding the importance of recognising community as a space which is both inclusive *and* limiting. These notions, under different terms, have long been part of the concept. Carter and Baliko point out the transformative possibilities of a notion of community fraught with tension and always in flux. This links with ideas of belonging as something people do (May, 2011; Bennett, 2015). Just as community and belonging are intimately connected,

there is a clear link between thinking (Cohen, 1985; 1986) and doing (Bennett, 2015).

Community and belonging have been theorised as "a process of becoming roller derby" (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014). Before I turn to an exploration of the literature on roller derby to see how existing studies have examined identity, community, and belonging within the sport, I will discuss major theoretical contributions to the field of gender; an important aspect of identity.

2.5 Theorizing Gender

As gender (and masculinity, specifically) is such a key part of the performance and process of identity, it is illuminating to consider some of the ways gender and masculinity have been theorised. Therefore, I now turn to a number of gender scholars, who outline in more depth how ideas around identity, many of them complementary to the theories of Goffman and Jenkins, play out in the arena of gender. Debates exist within gender studies around the meaning of 'gender', and therefore 'masculinity', and the various positions have implications for views on sport and sportsmen. One such position is that gender is not biologically determined, but socially constructed. Kessler and McKenna (1978) suggest the scientific world heavily influences common sense understanding of the existence of 'sex differences', arguing that "Unless and until gender, in all of its manifestations, including the physical, is seen as a social construction, action that will radically change our incorrigible propositions cannot occur" (p164). One of these 'incorrigible propositions' concerns the belief in the superiority of men in the sporting world, and Kessler and McKenna (1978) argue that this belief leads to scientists discovering new 'facts' to preserve the gender binary as old ones are

disproven (p55). This suggests that the assumption that men are naturally more athletic than women is untrue. West and Zimmerman (1987) view social constructionism as too simplistic, expanding the concept to define gender as a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment [and] contend that the "doing" of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production" (p126). Gender is both interactional and institutional, and 'doing gender' is something that is ongoing, every-day, and unavoidable; it creates difference, and reinforces 'essentialness' (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p137), an active conceptualisation which echoes both Jenkins' view of identification as a process, and Goffman's ideas of social roles and 'fronts'. This view of gender also creates somewhat of a double bind, in that "if we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals – not the institutional arrangements – may be called to account" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p146). Sport could be used as an example: success in sport reinforces the notion of sport as a test of 'proper' masculine traits, but failure means a lack of masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p138; Goffman, 1977, p322). Therefore, whatever the 'truth' of biology, sport is seen as masculine, and men are expected to perform well in sports.

Butler (1990) argues, however, that there is no pre-existing identity to 'do' gender, that

> in other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and their discursive means (p185).

Gender is performative, and contingent on public and social discourse, and this performance of gender; the various acts that form part of a gender strategy, create gender through repetition (Butler, 1990). This performance comes to be seen, and believed as a complete identity, even though it is "internally discontinuous" (Butler, 1990, p192). So, men only become masculine through the performance of a range of socially prescribed acts. Bricknell (2005), however, argues that as Butler's theory lacks a defined 'subject' to 'do' gender, it is "mired in difficulties around agency, interaction, and social structure" (p25), and the exact mechanisms for the possibility for doing gender differently are unclear. He instead suggests a reconsideration of Goffman's (1959; 1977) work, which includes a notion of self that is socially constructed, but also has agency to 'do gender' in different ways, albeit within pre-existing 'frames' and cultural conventions (Bricknell, 2005, p36). Again, the reference to frames and conventions is echoed in West and Zimmerman's (1987) point that individuals are called to account for failing to do gender appropriately (p146), and in Jenkins' discussion of power (2014).

Risman et al. (2012) recognise the socially constructed nature of gender, but argue classifications of masculine and feminine are harmful, advocating a world "beyond gender" (p1). They suggest there are crises in the gender order, arguing that "girls and women, as subordinates in the gender order, are allowed, even encouraged, to strive for what used to be solely the province of men. But boys and men are not similarly encouraged, nor even allowed, to move into the province of what was feminine" (Risman et al., 2012, p13). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) echo this view when they suggest that "gendered performances are available to everyone, but with them come constraints on who can perform which personae with impunity"

(p2). Risman et al. (2012) suggest "people take the risk" (p19) inherent in deviating from norms, in order to change those norms.

These theorists, then, share a common understanding of gender as a social construction, which constrains the actions of individuals, and moreover, suggests that even as gender expectations become less rigid and women and girls become freer to cross boundaries, men (to be considered 'successful') are still limited to masculine performances. This view that men's freedom of expression faces constraint is to some extent shared by both Connell (2009, 2005, 1987) and Messner (2002, 1992).

Connell (2005, 1987) situates her own theories within critical social science. She argues that social constructionist theories of masculinity, such as those generated by Messner's (1992) use of 'life histories' to explore the meanings men associate with sporting performance and athletic identities, represent a significant step forward from both positivist and postmodern approaches. This is demonstrated through their focus on "the construction of masculinity in everyday life, the importance of economic and institutional structures, the significance of differences among masculinities and the contradictory and dynamic character of gender" (Connell, 2005, p35). Like Kessler and McKenna (1978), Connell (1987) draws attention to the lack of evidence of psychological difference between sexes, highlighting instead the differences within either sex. In setting out an overview of differing approaches to masculinity and sport, Messner and Sabo (1990) also suggest "what is needed is a conceptual scheme that theorizes the varied and shifting manifestations of male domination as they interact with other forms of social domination" (p7), in agreement with theories suggesting that gender performance is affected by both interactions and institutions (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p137). Messner and Sabo

(1990) and Connell (2005) all argue for the importance of feminist approaches to the study of sporting masculinities. Messner and Sabo (1990) assert that gender is a relational process and therefore feminist theory must also discuss men's experience: "A feminist study of men and masculinity, then, aims at developing an analysis of men's problems and limitations compassionately yet within the context of a feminist critique of male privilege" (p13). Within the context of sport, such 'men's problems' include: narrow definitions of success, which lead many men to experience only failure; competition, which is rife with homophobia and misogyny, disenabling men from expressing emotions freely; and the hypermasculine and physically brutal aspects of sports, which can cause injury and harm (Messner and Sabo, 1990). Though Connell (2009, 2005, 1987) explores the meaning and role of gender within a wider context, and Messner (2002, 1992) focuses largely on men and mainstream sport, their theories are broadly complementary.

Connell (2005) calls the stage on which issues of gender are played out the *reproductive arena*, and the current dominant model of gender relations, the *gender order*. Connell (2009, 2005, 1987) describes the current gender order through the concept of hegemonic masculinity; a form of masculinity which is highly prized and powerful within society, dominant over complicit, subordinated, and marginal masculinities. Messner (2002) accepts this theory, and argues that though the mid-twentieth century dominance of the institutional 'centre' of sport (in the US, men's baseball, football, and basketball) is waning, and participation rates amongst women, and in new alternative sports (to which groups might be added roller derby) are rising, this centre, located by "following the money" (xviii), continues to serve as a reference point for other practices. This suggests that alternative sports are both a reflection of the ideals of the centre, and also defined in opposition to mainstream

sports. So, although they exist within the larger cultural gender order of sports, they may have the potential for "greater space for the development of a range of (sometimes even subversive) meanings, identities, and relationships around issues of gender and sexuality (Messner, 2002, xxi), and may be a site for doing gender differently.

Connell (1987) suggests that within the overall gender order, the specific forms of gender relations within an institution could be termed the *gender regime*. She argues that a gender regime which holds different values from the gender order does not guarantee change or disruption to the gender order, but can leave it vulnerable to further challenges (Connell, 1987, p141). This vulnerability, where historical developments within the gender regime call into question the validity of the gender order (characterised by the gender division of 'breadwinner' and 'housewife', modern definitions of masculinity and femininity, hegemonic heterosexuality, and the overall subordination of women by men), Connell (1987) terms 'crisis tendencies' (p159), also noted as above by Risman et al. (2012). The gender regime of alternative sports could be said to represent such a crisis tendency.

2.6 Embodiment

In viewing gender as socially constructed, Connell (1987) contends that social practice transcends the natural, and that they are connected though practical relevance rather than causation: biology does not cause gender, rather, biology is incorporated into social practice (p78). She argues that a hypermasculine ideal, and conversion of average differences into categorical differences 'proving' the superiority of men is necessary to maintain current social definitions of gender because "*the biological logic*, and the inert practice that responds to it, *cannot*

sustain the gender categories" (Connell, 1987, p81), thus further supporting Kessler and McKenna's (1978) arguments. Connell (2005) also criticises the postmodern theory that gender exists only as a series of discourses, instead arguing that "bodies, in their own right as bodies, do matter" (p51). This is a particularly powerful idea – there are physical differences between genders, and though a binary way of thinking about gender is increasingly inappropriate, it isn't possible to completely escape the physical body one has, even if it is possible to permanently change aspects of it through surgical techniques. In such cases, it is changed, not erased. "We make our own gender, but we are not free to make it however we like" (Connell, 2009, p74).

The move towards theories of embodiment is illuminating in studies of masculinity. Studies of embodied experience point to an interdependence of the body and social processes (Brown et al, 2011). Thurnell-Read (2011b) analyses stag group tours in terms of embodied masculinity. He argues that practices of clothing, such as costumes (whether hypermasculine or pseudo-feminine) and displays of bodily failings, act as self-parody that offers a momentary escape from masculine ideals and gender roles. However, these moments fail to offer a direct challenge to hegemonic masculinity, and in fact, serve to reinforce those same ideals.

Wellard (2002) explores this same notion with reference to sport. He argues that attempts to 'do' sport in alternative ways can end up reinforcing established sports practices, and that social capital is still based on successful performances of 'exclusive masculinity': i.e. competitiveness, aggression, power and assertiveness (Wellard, 2002; 2006). Displays of exclusive masculinities exclude many people from sport, because "experiencing the thrill of physical activity is invariably incumbent upon one's ability to conform to social constructions of what is

understood to be appropriate sporting performance" (Wellard, 2006, p106). An inability to perform the right sort of masculinity, then, limits a person's enjoyment of sport and physical activity, so that even if not excluded, they are unable to experience the same pleasures as one who embodies hegemonic masculinity more successfully.

Wellard later refigured this concept to discuss instead "expected sporting masculinity" (2016, p3), suggesting that rather than excluding, these bodily displays compelled a specific performance of accepted forms of masculinity. Critiquing Anderson's (2009) concept of inclusive masculinity, Wellard (2016) maintains that although there is slippage in the meanings associated with 'real' and 'authentic' masculinity, his research demonstrates continued beliefs and ideas that there is an authentic version of masculinity, which in turn reinforces gender binaries. Both 'exclusive' and 'expected' concepts of masculinities suggest that Wellard's call for a determination of "whether there are forms of competition which are more inclusive" (2002, p245) remains unanswered.

Within the gender order, Connell (2005, 1987) suggests the development of masculinity and femininity is a process of engaging in *gender projects*, and uses the phrase 'body-reflexive practice' as a way of explaining the interplay between a body and society in terms of gender (Connell, 2005, p61). This concept of body-reflexive practice differs from Butler's (1990) theory of performativity because of the clear focus on the body as the site of acting and acting-upon. Connell (2005) describes how the physically male body only becomes masculine through social practice and the meanings of that practice that are conferred by society, and uses the phrase "onto-formative" (p65) to describe this process. In terms of sports, Messner (1992)

suggests that "through participation in sport, boys and men learn the dominant cultural conceptions of what it means to be a male (p19). So, sport could be described as a body-reflexive practice that confers masculinity on the body, and becomes what Connell (2005) terms a 'moment of engagement' with hegemonic masculinity (p122). Sport is an embodied practice and there is a distinction between 'the body' we have and the 'body we are'; "performances of masculinity through these 'bodies' are complex and interactive" (Robinson, 2008, p135).

Wellard expands Connell's concept of bodily-reflexive practices in an exploration of 'body-reflexive pleasures', in which social, physiological, and psychological processes contribute to "pleasurable moments" (2012, p28). These moments are both experienced and remembered, and may involve a blurring of pleasure and pain, or even pleasure *in* pain, and are central to a desire to return to the sporting arena and repeat the experience. An understanding of how and where these 'pleasurable moments' occur could be key to developing more inclusive forms of sport.

2.7 Gender, Masculinity, Identity and Sport

Sporting Masculinities

Messner (2002) introduces a framework to "demonstrate that the center of sport is constructed through (1) the routine day-to-day practices of sports participants, (2) the structured rules and hierarchies of sport institutions, and (3) the dominant symbols and belief systems transmitted by the major sports media…interaction, structure, culture" (xxi-xxii). At the interaction level lies an analysis of how individuals 'do gender', and the structure and culture levels suggest how the gender regimes of sport create the conditions for naturalising differences between men, and between men and women, supported by cultural representations (Messner, 2002,

p2). This framework supports Connell's (2005) concept of gender regimes, and suggests that though options may exist for doing gender differently outside of mainstream sport, they are still affected at the institutional and cultural levels, as West and Zimmerman (1987) also argue.

The ways of 'doing masculinity' outlined by Messner (2002), including violence against women, other men, and themselves (p27-28), may present differently in non-mainstream sport, but these identities still exist within a gender regime of male dominance, and within an institution he refers to as the sport-media-commercial complex, which both enables *and* constrains individuals' choices and actions (Messner, 2002, p76-77). The types of masculinity valorised within this sport-media-commercial complex, exemplified by strength, aggression, and violence, "codify a consistent and (mostly) coherent message about what it means to be a man. We call this message the televised sports manhood formula" (Messner, 2002, p123). This formula is an ideology in support of hegemonic masculinity, "constructed partly in relation to images of men who *don't* measure up" (Messner, 2002, p126), which he argues succeeds because of the complicity of the silent majority of men (Messner, 2002). As this is partly a commercial construct, designed to sell (whether that be a lifestyle, or a product), very few men *do* measure up. Messner (2002) acknowledges the importance of considering how athletes and audience respond to this formula; whether they accept it, or form what might be termed negotiated or oppositional readings (Hall, 1980). Messner (2002) discusses the instability of the centre, and the way "boys and men have their very human need for closeness, intimacy, and respect thwarted by cutthroat competition, homophobia, and misogyny, which leave them cut off and fearful of becoming vulnerable with

others" (p166). This suggests it is possible for male athletes to gain this closeness, intimacy, and respect outside the centre, at the margins of sport.

Messner (1992), considering psychoanalytic theory of importance within a social constructionist theory of masculinity, argues that because females and males have different experiences of separation from and attachment to the mother, males tend to develop more "positional" identities (with fears of intimacy)" (p20). These positional identities are characterised by a sense of self that is based on *separation* from others, and as Messner (1992) uses the term, in *comparison* or *competition* with others (p34). In consequence, boys enter sport with an already gendered identity (Messner, 1990, p100), but specifically masculine identities are constructed through interaction between internal and external (social) forces (also differing along lines of class, race, and sexuality), and sports, or athletic careers, involve "a process of developing masculine identity and status in relation to male peers" (Messner, 1992, p30). He argues that the socialisation of boys leaves them with ambivalence towards intimate relationships, and suggests that the rule-bound structure of sports offers an emotionally 'safe' connection, but one that comes to be limited and distorted through institutional hierarchies and homophobia (Messner, 1992, p33). The "Lombardian ethic" (Messner, 1992, p45) highlights the importance of winning, leaves men with feelings of failure, low self-worth and problems with personal relationships. Within this structure, the attachment and closeness between men lasts only as long as they are performing in the sport, which leads to men continuing to play whilst injured; drug and alcohol use becomes common as it allows expressions of intimacy which would otherwise be suppressed for fear of being labelled un-masculine (Messner, 1992, p81).

Messner (1992) refers to research that shows "women have deep, intimate, meaningful, and lasting friendships, while men have a number of shallow, superficial, and unsatisfying 'acquaintances'" (p91); linking this with the idea of 'antagonistic cooperation', and arguing that even within teams and friendships, sportsmen are ultimately competing against each other (p88). Messner contends that in the locker room, it is the overt homophobia of "heterosexist masculine culture" (Messner, in Messner and Sabo, 1994, p50) that prevents the development of sexual relations amongst athletes. He regards the denial and denigration of gayness and femininity as an important aspect of locker room culture, but also maintains that covert intimacy may exist, and suggests the importance of not judging men's relationships by standards of women's, but by how they affect men's relationships with women, as in this locker room culture, which also encourages negative views/treatment of women (Messner, 1992, p106).

Outlets for the development of a sporting identity beyond the dominant model do exist. The Gay Games is one example. "The purpose of the Games is "to educate people through sport in a spirit of understanding." (Messner, in Messner and Sabo, 1994, p125). The Games also offers an alternative structure in which gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and even heterosexuals can forge their own definitions of athleticism, unfettered by the often oppressive stereotypes of the dominant sports world" (Messner, in Messner and Sabo, 1994, pp125-126). Messner (1992) is careful to point out that as the Gay Games lies outside the dominant structure of sports, it does not change that structure, though he does note the value of such alternatives (p159), which may offer a challenge to the gender order, thus leading towards 'crisis' (Connell, 1987).

New Masculinities

Anderson (2009) argues, however, that, post-twentieth century, in a culture of reduced homohysteria, new theories are needed. His inclusive masculinity theory both incorporates and challenges Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. In a culture of elevated homohysteria, defined as a fear of being homosexualised, (Anderson, 2009, p7), Anderson (2009) suggests that orthodox masculinity, characterised in part by the existence of homophobic discourse, retains dominance. This 'orthodox masculinity' is a challenge to hegemonic masculinity in Connell's (1987, 2005) theory, which Anderson (2009) sees as unattainable for the vast majority of men. He contends that sport, as a 'near-total' institution within orthodox masculinity, is negative and damaging, and that "much of the cost that men pay for their adherence to orthodox masculinity comes from the same institution that builds their masculine capital, the violent ether of men's teamsports" (Anderson, 2009, p47). Masculine capital is possible, he contends, for the majority of men, as "one can achieve orthodox masculinity without being capable of achieving hegemonic masculinity" (Anderson, 2009, p42). There is considerable benefit to the achievement of masculine capital, since Anderson (2009) argues that "boys at the top of the masculine hierarchy are actually provided more leeway to temporarily transgress rigid gender boundaries that few other boys are willing to challenge" (p43). In a culture of diminishing homohysteria, Anderson (2009) argues for the existence of two dominant types of masculinity, conservative (orthodox), which retains homophobic discourse, and inclusive, which does not (p8). Whilst both versions of masculinity are esteemed, neither are hegemonic: "The men who ascribed to inclusive masculinity did not aspire to or value orthodox masculinity and those aspiring to orthodox masculinity felt no cultural sway to become more

inclusive" (Anderson, 2009, p94). He suggests that in this culture, homophobic discourse loses its homosexualising effect, there are improved social attitudes towards women, and also men have more freedom to express different forms of masculinity (Anderson, 2009, pp96-97), Inclusive masculinity refers to the social unacceptability of homophobia, decreased policing of boundaries, and valuing of emotional intimacy. In such an environment, femininity loses its stigma. In a culture of diminished homohysteria, homophobic discourse is lost, and multiple masculinities exist with fluidity and social cohesion (Anderson, 2009, p97).

Anderson (2009) stresses a "subtle but increasingly institutionalised gender ideology" (p57) within sport, which emphasises the importance of winning, and the policing of masculinity. He argues that sport is resilient to change, but that change is possible, and orthodox masculinity can fail, though "as long as we believe that the ethics learned in teamsports generalise to other areas of one's life, we will continue to value sport. And, as long as sports are gender-segregated, we will continue to privilege men" (Anderson, 2009, p77). This suggests Messner's (2002, xxi) argument that opportunities for doing masculinity differently away from the centre of sport are increasingly salient, with the rider that, given the decrease in homophobia since the 1990s, such opportunities are becoming more available even within mainstream sport.

Robinson (2008) suggests that rock climbers, engaged in a risk sport, which is increasingly commercialised, experience the sport at the "boundaries of the extraordinary and the mundane" (p4), and for some climbers, the extreme becomes routine, or mundane: 'mundane extremities' (p38). Robinson (2008) stresses the importance of considering the interaction of men's multiple identities in both of these situations: "It is one thing to state men's identities are multiple, but how do

those different identities interact in mundane and in extreme contexts?" (p40). She also considers how men interact with each other in relationships; how men 'do' friendship and intimacy (Robinson, 2008, p97). Contrary to Messner (1992), Robinson (2008) finds that, whether fostered through emotional control or vulnerability, in both extreme and mundane contexts, these relationships can be deep, lasting, and intimate (p105-108). Climbing also has more opportunity for friendships across groups than in other sports (Robinson, 2008, p108).

Also referring to rock climbing, alongside hang-gliding, skydiving and scuba-diving, Lyng's focus was on risk. Lyng (1990) used the term 'edgework' to discuss a gap in the literature of risk; that of voluntary risk-taking. To qualify as edgework, Lyng (1990) suggests a practice must "involve a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence" (p 857), and that edgeworkers "typically seek to define the limits of performance for a particular object or form" (p858), and therefore seek control and the exercise of skill, not fate or reliance on others. Edgework involves "the commitment to get as close as possible to the edge without going over it" (Lyng, 1990, p861). He argued that edgeworkers placed a higher value on the experience of risk-taking, and that it was even *necessary* for the well-being of some edgeworkers, a response to feelings of alienation, allowing for the possibility of self-actualisation (Lyng, 1990, p852; p860).

Although voluntary risk-taking is seen here in terms of extreme sports, and the risk is to life and bodily health, other ways of conceptualising risk and edgework are equally interesting. Robinson (2008) questions whether extreme sports offer greater potential for self-expression than mainstream sports. Her participants view rock climbing as more than a sport; for them it is a special lifestyle. Their relationships

with sport and everyday life change over time, and she questions whether climbers

develop a more reflexive masculinity, "a different kind of hard" (p50), such as one

climber who found "confidence gained through extreme climbing translated into a

resource in his mundane, working life" (p129). The opening up of the sport to wider

participation created "a 'safe' space to construct something different through both

dress and an identity as a climber" (Robinson, 2008, p57), further supporting

Messner's (2002) argument that sports outside the centre offer potential for a greater

range of meanings around gender.

Exploring this possibility for self-expression in a different research setting,

Robinson (2014) has theorised men's footwear choices in terms of 'risky practices',

suggesting that

> risk is evident…in terms of how masculinity is displayed in relation to men's
> vulnerability, should they 'get masculinity wrong' through their choice of
> shoes. And yet, risky footwear practices also allow them to express creativity
> though their choice of shoes and the sensory pleasures associated with that
> agency (p152).

Footwear can present "challenges to traditional forms of masculine identity" (p159),

and:

> fitting in versus being 'original' are therefore two positions that
> men…negotiate when managing their own sartorial masculinity and identity
> in relation to others, and reveal how masculinity is displayed in relation to
> men's risk of lack of face, or peer disapproval, if they 'get masculinity
> wrong' through their footwear choices, but also admiration for those other
> men who push the boundaries of accepted masculine ways of dressing
> (p162).

According to Fletcher (2008), "sports, like any social form, constitute a particular

field that defines the activities and qualities conferring symbolic capital. In engaging

with a particular sports field, individuals become subject to and assimilate the

particular habitus characteristic of the field" (p317), and this extends to presentation

of self and clothing choices. Laurendeau and Gibbs Van Brunschot (2006) suggest that, within skydiving, edgeworkers can experience forms of social control, as they are monitored "to perform edgework in an acceptable manner" (p1). Functioning in the same way as edgework in extreme sporting environments, the social dimensions of edgework include an escape from and resistance to conventional forces, and neoliberal values (Fletcher, 2008).

Gender Integration in Sport

One area theorists consider is the possibilities for greater gender integration in sport. It is a 'common sense' view that women can never be as strong as men, or as fast as men, and this is often the excuse for not viewing female sport as on a par with men's (Kessler and McKenna, 1978). Despite arguing for the importance of allowing boys to discover that girls and women can be equal or better than boys and men in sport, Messner (in Messner and Sabo, 1994) appears to agree with this view when he states that "since succeeding in the "money sports" – football, basketball, hockey, etc. – requires attaining the most extreme possibilities of the male body, it is unlikely that females will ever be able to compete equally with males in the higher levels of these sports" (p200). However, he also argues that "as long as we are simply attempting to incorporate women within an institution that is, in its dominant structure and values, a masculine construction, "equal opportunity" for females will ultimately serve to affirm and naturalize masculine superiority" (Messner, 1992, p166). This mirrors Anderson's (2009) attempt to problematise the gender-segregation of sports. The 'proof' of men's superiority in part lies in the value placed on "sports that favour whatever biological advantage men as a whole maintain" (Anderson, 2009, p29), while, ironically, support for gender-segregation (including feminist separation) relies on these 'naturalised' notions of male superiority (Anderson, 2009, p54).

In exploring the potential for change, Messner (2002) criticises advocates of using commercialisation to raise the profile of women's sport, and female athletes, on the grounds that the centre is not necessarily a good place to be: "The centre, after all, is a place of athletes and individualism; the margins are where people play sports and where there may be more space for individuality to thrive" (p151). He describes how commercialisation leads to marginal sports losing their relative autonomy, instead becoming more like the sports in opposition to which they were once developed, while the athletes themselves become part of the institution that once oppressed them (Messner, 2002, pp148-152). Equally, he criticises the 'ghettoization' model of women's sport, explaining that by refusing to operate within the structures of the centre, and remain in the margins, women's sport will not challenge the centre (Messner, 2002, p141). Instead he advocates a social justice model of equity in sport, "adopting a simultaneous quest for simple fairness and equal opportunities for girls and women *along with* critical actions aimed at fundamentally transforming the centre of men's sports" (Messner, 2002, p153). This transformation involves change in other power institutions, such as law, education, and the media, and confronting the sport-media-commercial complex, and its ideological model, the televised sports manhood formula (Messner, 2002, p153).

In calling for this examination of the current system, Messner and Sabo (1994) recommend asking "fundamental questions about the kind of athletic experiences we want to create for ourselves and society" (p172). The athletic role can be dehumanising to men, and so equal opportunity in sports, as they are currently constructed, is not necessarily unambiguously positive: as Connell (2009) notes, the masculine domain of sport is just as dangerous for men as for women. Despite this, Messner and Sabo (1994) partially reject the Left/counterculture criticism of sport as

"a threat to a healthy self-image, as a barrier to intimacy between men, and as an impediment to building an egalitarian, cooperative community" (p183).

Taking this position further, and locating his work in 'emancipatory research' and advocating for change, Anderson (2009) calls for academic examination of gender-integration, arguing that "whatever one's theoretical position on gender-integrating sports, empirically, my work on cheerleaders and fraternities shows that the more contact men have with women, the more men upgrade their perspectives on them" (p140), and hence, that gender integration benefits both men and women. Robinson (2008) offers a counter to this perspective, when arguing for the importance of considering gender relations and femininity in sport. According to her research, "it could be argued that climbing is a sport where women can compete on virtually equal terms with men…However, an examination of female climbers' experiences reveal this not to be the case" (Robinson, 2008, p139). Higher participation of women does not necessarily mean they are valued (Robinson, 2008), and so, gender-integration does not necessarily benefit all women. She concludes that men's behaviour and attitude towards women climbers at the elite level is more likely to change, although positive changes may not be evident through all sites, and may remain unchanged in private spheres (Robinson, 2008, p94). This suggests that the changes in sport do not always filter down into other areas of social life, and therefore, it is important to also consider how far different ways of organising sports impact upon men's behaviour in different contexts.

The foregoing discussions on gender integration have focused on possibilities for men and women engaging in sporting activity together. Such discussion would not be complete, however, without an awareness of the experiences of transgender

athletes, which are framed around a constant process of identity work (Sarfaty, 2016).

In a systematic review of the literature on transgender sport participation and policies Jones et al (2016) conclude that "the majority of transgender people have a negative experience when engaging in competitive sports" (p2), and suggest "the lack of inclusive and comfortable environments to be the primary barrier to participation for transgender people" (Jones et al, 2016, p2). It is commonly accepted that transmen do not have an athletic advantage, and therefore were not included in the IOC's 2004 policy, whilst the 2016 policy simply states that transmen may compete in the male category without restriction. The 2004 policy has been adopted by several sports organisations, and in practice, discriminates against both those in the process of transition, and those who choose not to undergo medical transition, whilst simultaneously failing to provide adequate provision for transmen. (Jones et al, 2016). The failure to properly account for those Travers (2006) terms 'gender transformers' is common throughout the policies of sports organisations, although Jones et al (2016) acknowledge that some sports (including roller derby and Quidditch) may be more inclusive than others.

Despite inclusive policies such as these, and in line with the conclusions of Jones et al, many transgender people continue to experience difficulties with sports participation. Changing rooms are often mentioned as a significant barrier (Hargie et al, 2017; Cohen and Semerjian, 2008), along with the discomfort of incorrect pronoun use (Semerjian and Cohen, 2006). However, perhaps the most challenging barriers for transgender people to overcome are the negative experiences of sport in school, the focus of several studies (Morris and Van Raalte, 2016; Caudwell, 2014;

Jones, 2013). Less attention is given to the experience of adults transitioning within a sporting environment outside of formal education.

2.8 Roller Derby

Identity in Women's Roller Derby

To consider how concepts of identity, community, and gender are explored within the specific context of roller derby, it is now necessary to review this niche subfield. In this section, I will explore how researchers have theorised identity in roller derby. To date, the majority of roller derby studies have focused on the potential of *Women's* Flat-Track Roller Derby as a site for expressions of masculinities and femininities; a site which is overwhelmingly women-only. Femininity in roller derby has been described as hegemonic (Whitlock, 2012), emphasised (Carlson, 2010), alternative (Krausch, 2009), non-mainstream or exaggerated (Becker, 2009), pariah (Finley, 2010), subversive (Murray, 2012), heteronormative (Cohen, 2008), and capable of queering convention (Gieseler, 2012). The concept of 'doing gender' is considered in many papers, explored through ideas such as: construction of identity (Becker, 2010); challenging gender norms (Cotterill, 2010; Peluso, 2010a; Beaver, 2009); the female significant (Carlson, 2010); gender manoeuvring (Chananie-Hill, 2012; Mullin, 2012; Finley, 2010); bodily practices (Peluso, 2010a); performativity (Peluso, 2010b); the feminine unapologetic (Murray, 2012); commodity feminism (Burger, 2012); and gender marking (Donnelly, 2012). Implicit in these concepts is the assumption that 'gender' can be explored in all its forms with sole reference to female skaters. Few academics have adequately considered male, trans, or non-binary skaters: Breeze (2014), Gieseler (2012), and Murray (2012) acknowledge the presence of identities other than cis-woman, but remain focused on roller derby as a

women's sport. These 'femininity' studies explore how women 'do gender', but do not consider how it might be possible for men to also 'do gender' in a sport which is considered to be a sport for women, or how roller derby can allow for the existence of masculinities embodied by men.

Women's roller derby is seen to both challenge and reinforce dominant discourses of sport, and in discussing this, Cohen (2008) concludes that skaters' identities are heteronormative. Werhman (2012) argues that "the renaissance of roller derby leagues has been almost entirely grounded in women's organizations. As a result, and defying gender normative expectations in sports, women's leagues became the default category" (p.72): evidence that derby does not conform to heteronormativity. The idea that performances of gender by roller derby participants act to disrupt or challenge the gender binary, or mainstream ideals of femininity and gender expectations, whilst simultaneously reinscribing, embracing or supporting the gender order, and heteronormativity, appears throughout the literature (Carlson, 2010; Finley, 2010, Peluso, 2010b). Becker (2009), for example, suggests that contesting the boundaries of sport, and destabilising the hegemonic and heteronormative, is, in part, achieved through appearance, and that skaters are both sexualised and athletic, which she argues is non-mainstream. She discusses how roller derby offers a unique cultural space to subvert gender norms, as exemplified by concepts of emphasised (Connell, 2005) and hegemonic (Schippers, 2007) femininity (Becker, 2010).

More recent research (Breeze, 2010) downplays the significance of clothing, which reflects the move in the sport towards a more uniform style of dress, and an increasingly professionalised approach for many leagues, and it is noted that this performance of gender fails to undermine the gender binary, as it still explores the

practice of women performing as women. Breeze (2010) highlights one of the key difficulties in analysing gendered practices is that "It is not too wild an assertion to argue that 'femininity' can be stretched, as a concept, to include whatever traits happen to be done by women in a particular context" (p127).

Carlson (2010) argues that roller derby skaters play with their femininity through derby personas, but don't cross gender boundaries. She adopts the term Hebdige used in his analysis of punk subculture (1979), "significant": "to suggest that skaters engage in 'gender significant' practices that do not necessarily abolish norms surrounding femininity and athleticism so much as expose their contingency" (p430). Cotterill (2010) argues that skaters do challenge gender norms, in that "roller derby allows them to be feminine and to engage in socially acceptable gendered activities in new ways" (p15), suggesting that 'doing gender' for these skaters is a form of edgework (Lyng, 1990); an escape from gender expectations, and a way to negotiate with the boundaries of gender, though again, stopping short of crossing the boundary. Finley (2010) suggests that the humour and irony associated with skaters' conscious adoption of sexualised clothing is a way of appropriating pariah femininities (Schippers, 2007), and therefore disrupting hegemony. Peluso (2010b) agrees that skaters are challenging gender norms through bodily practices (a concept similar to Connell's (2005) bodily reflexive practices), and points to "*performative opportunities* for women to transgress cultural norms" (p5), but adds that some skaters express concern over the impact of sexualised clothing (Peluso, 2010b). These studies suggest that women in roller derby can either expose the existence of gender norms, or begin to subvert them, through overt expressions of sexuality, but critiquing third-wave feminism and superficial narratives of empowerment, Whitlock (2012) disagrees, arguing that "roller derby imagines the same ideal

woman as hegemonic society just with superficial additives" (p16), and claims to have refuted "previous research about the transgressive possibilities of roller derby" (p66).

Gieseler (2012) suggests "that with any marginalized group, specifically the extreme sporting world, there are opportunities to do identity differently away from mainstream controls" (p57), an idea previously explored by Messner (2002). In the feminine context of roller derby, male skaters are a marginalised group. For Murray (2012), "If big, strong and powerful are no longer categorized as masculine traits, then something new is emerging in the way the genders, once binary opposites that privileged masculinity, are constructed, performed, and perceived" (p128). However, despite evidence of some blurring of the boundaries between masculine and feminine, Murray acknowledges that genders are still divided, and the binary remains (Murray, 2012, p251). Thus far, research has not found the same challenge to gender norms from male skaters. At least, Australian "men in derby tend towards 'practical' sport attire – short and t-shirt/singlet being the standard outfit" (Connor and Pavlidis, 2014, p5).

Common to the literature is the insistence that the roller derby environment is women-only, and "The Riot Grrrl movement in Third Wave feminisms that would determine the direction of flat track roller derby was largely based on its efforts to create female space rather than attempting to enter pre-existing male institutions" (Storms, 2008, p80). Peluso (2010b) states that in roller derby, there is an acceptance of all bodies, though it is clear that this means all female bodies; regardless of performances of gender and displays of masculinity and femininity, these women remain *women* in her analysis, and the binary is firmly in place. In trying to explore what makes up this female space, the various and conflicting

conclusions of researchers strongly suggest that it is correct to say, "derby is an imagined community that is profoundly fractured, and fractious, because of a complex range of affects that are evoked in the desire to identify an alternate space of belonging" (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2013, p19). Conflict between the desires of skaters is ever present, seen in the literature in the tension between the desire for expression of alternative identities and recognition as a serious sport, and this becomes more apparent as roller derby becomes more popular, and people who identify as something other than 'woman' fight to find a space to belong in this 'women-only' sport. Gieseler (2012) argues that sport is "always already masculine" (iv), but these studies suggest that modern roller derby is always already *feminine*.

Belonging, Community, and Inclusivity in Women's Roller Derby

Whatever the choices made by women in roller derby, it remains a team sport, therefore explorations of the community are common within research. Frequently couched within discussion of how roller derby creates a women-only 'safe' space, and the focus on its DIY ethos (Beaver, 2012) and 'sisterhood' (Cotterill, 2010), several studies explore the nature and extent of inclusivity within roller derby as a whole and its individual league organisations. In an early study, Cohen (2008) concludes that the supposedly all-inclusive environment is anything but, and that "the social pressure to fit in with the culture of derby is such that non-conformity leads to alienation. Yet, derby touts itself as a space for individual expression" (p.29). In a pessimistic account, Cohen (2008) finds the only acceptable form of self-expression to be one that confirms to the counter-cultural ideal; a strict and rigid model of femininity was required to be welcome in the roller derby league she studied. Other researchers discuss how 'rookies' (new skaters), can feel excluded and marginalised (Krausch, 2009); how all are welcome, but 'all' really means the

right kind of person: in addition to those deemed too focused on recreating the image of a 'rollergirl' (Cotterill, 2010), the "vulnerable "girlie girl" is not welcome in derby" (skater quoted in Finley, 2010, p378). These studies suggest that, within the sport, it is possible to do gender differently, as it is a non-mainstream sport (Gieseler, 2012; Messner, 2002), but this possibility is still constrained, echoing the arguments of West and Zimmerman (1987).

Despite such issues, it is clear in the research that there has been a consistent attempt by leagues to eschew the methods of traditional sports organisations, and focus instead on reflecting a sense of collective identity and community (Beaver 2009), and there are indications that this has worked to support inclusivity in some leagues (Beaver, 2012; Becker, 2010). With reference to Texas Rollergirls, Beaver (2012) states roller derby's organisational form doesn't "reproduce the hierarchical structure found in other sports" (p45). Researchers demonstrate that "derby welcomes women of all shapes, sizes, and skill levels" (Becker, 2010, p12), and there exists a strong belief amongst skaters that there is no 'typical' roller derby girl; instead, a space for every woman, especially those who previously struggled to fit in, or had no sporting background (Cotterill, 2010; Finley, 2010; Peluso, 2010a; Beaver, 2009). Although it is common for research to suggest these alternative femininities are more desirable in roller derby, Mullin's (2012) research finds a clear acceptance of any type of femininity in the league she studied, including 'girly girls'. She contrasts Carlson's (2010) study with hers, which "more accurately reflects the current crop of derby girls who may be less "alternative" and less explicitly engaging in the sport because of its rebellious stigma" (Mullin, 2012, p8), and criticises the rebellious/alternative derby girl stereotype. Drawing upon Risman et al. (2012), Mullin (2012) suggests roller derby could indicate the possibility of

some sort of gendered utopia, where skaters possess a mix of masculine and feminine (p20). There are clear issues with this argument since she is talking strictly of *women* skaters, and so her conclusion that roller derby is inclusive is still wedded strongly both to the women-only rhetoric, and to the gender-binary system. Similarly, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014) equate study of female bodies with the realisation of "opportunities for a more just, equitable, inclusive society" (p23). It can be said that the motif of 'inclusivity' masks the reality that "it is only a certain kind of woman that leagues are targeting for recruitment (read: one that is appropriately sexual and feminine)" (Whitlock, 2012, p32). This notion of appropriate femininity is further explored in a study (Chananie-Hill, 2012), of the ways in which third-wave feminism (characterised by freedom of expression, inclusiveness and social justice) is reflected in roller derby and found that, in important ways, it really was not very inclusive at all, "because leagues are women-only, the viewer is encouraged to assume that all players are biological females, so transmen and transwomen must be uninterested, invisible, or unwelcome" (p42). The "WFTDA's implementation of a gender policy with the hope of promoting inclusion" (Murray, 2012, p20) has been noted, however, at the time Murray wrote this, the policy stated that trans skaters must be able to produce on request a doctor's note confirming hormone levels within the range accepted for females (WFTDA, 2011). Far from being "an accepting community in otherwise oppressive cultures" (Murray, 2012, p.133), the WFTDA had a far less inclusive policy than is possible (UKRDA, 2014a).

Breeze (2013) discusses the impossibility of being completely inclusive. Not all skaters want same thing, so although there is a level of collaboration, as the league moves towards serious competitiveness, selection becomes also about exclusion:

"To borrow from and bastardize Orwell, while skaters remained equal, some became more equal than others" (Breeze, 2014, p173). Breeze (2014) argues that this form of exclusion is necessary for the sport to develop, and that "without competition, the chances of roller derby's recognition as a sport are very slim indeed" (p173). This idea is echoed further in a paper (Paul and Blank, 2014) on roller derby boutfits: "As the sport begins to change its framework to fit a more traditional framework of institutionalized sports we wonder whether or not derby will continue to exist as a unique venue for women who wish to express alternative visions of femininity and sport itself" (para.28). Breeze (2014) separates her participants' thinking on roller derby into a 'like sport' versus 'not like sport' dichotomy, with, on the 'like sport' side, an increasingly narrow definition of 'skater' (p187) and increasing pressures to dress like 'serious athletes' (p204), wherein the 'rollergirl' becomes a symbol of not taking the sport seriously (p208). These narrow definitions and increasing pressures indicate that the sport is becoming increasingly aligned with the values of mainstream sport, as in the 'Just Do It' model explicated by Messner (2002) "as though the institutional center is the place to be" (p148).

These ideas suggest that a desire for professionalisation may prove an insurmountable barrier to inclusivity. There is a tension between professionalisation and commercialisation, which can be seen in the conflicting ways theorists discuss roller derby. For example, discourses of DIY models include discussions of sponsors, hierarchies, and commercialisation; concepts which are held to be antithetical to this approach (Beaver, 2012, 2009; Krausch, 2009). Researchers grapple with ideas of sports versus entertainment (Breeze, 2014), and explore the ways roller derby has changed to fit in with concept of 'sport' (Breeze, 2014). Ironically, this includes the declining and use of boutfits/names, practices which are

increasing in some areas of professional and commercial sport (Paul and Blank, 2014; Newsom, 2013).

Donnelly (2012) challenges the assumptions of theorists that women's sport, and hence, roller derby, should be a "reconstruction or transformation" (p40) of mainstream sport, and this is reflected in Breeze's (2014) findings that "seriousness is about hegemony and dominant ideology, and a dazzling utopic potential for renewal and radical change is attributed to seriousness' opposite" (p199), and so Breeze (2014) explores the way roller derby athletes seek to distance themselves from the past roller derby image, and promote the sport as serious, as "sport rather than entertainment" (p115). Being taken seriously suggests a problematic relationship between roller derby, as skaters wish it to be, and professional sports. Pro-sports *are* money-making entertainment; they are commercialised. The continued presence of the boutfit and alter egos, often seen as incompatible with mainstream recognition, may not preclude professionalisation seen in terms of attractiveness to mainstream media and big business sponsorship. It is ironic to note serious professional sports are making moves towards displaying nicknames on jerseys (Paul and Blank, 2014), suggesting that making a show of individuals' personalities, increasingly discouraged in roller derby, is important to mainstream sports.

Breeze (2014) suggests that "claims for serious recognition disrupts the precedents set" (p201) in academia, to see roller derby as a potential site for revolutionary responses towards sport. With a focus on rankings, this opening up of access, i.e. 'inclusivity', becomes harder to maintain, as successful skaters are those with time and disposable income. Though this drive to be taken seriously has been explored through observation of women's teams, the research has yet to uncover what male

and trans skaters want, and why they play. The presence of other genders suggests roller derby still has revolutionary potential, not just for men to "accept women as key leaders and allow themselves to play second fiddle to the women's game" (Copland, 2014, para.17), which is a questionable assumption in any case, but for skaters of all gender identities to compete in a full contact sport on equal terms, as can be seen in the growth of co-ed teams. Connor and Pavlidis (2014), however, acknowledge the tensions in co-ed roller derby and "argue for mixed sex/gender derby as an important step forward for the sport" (p5), highlighting both "the problematic denial of the role of men in derby" (p8) and "the challenges in negotiating gender and sexuality in mixed derby" (p8).

2.9 Conclusion

To reiterate the research questions, this thesis explores how notions of identity, belonging, and community are connected, and examines how these relationships are constructed and experienced in practice. Therefore, there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the literature that have an impact upon the ethnographic study that forms the major part of this thesis.

The first is that identity is a process and a performance; one that must be validated by others. Communities, likewise, are created through both thinking and doing. Conducting ethnographic observation and interview allows for an understanding not only of how my participants conceptualise identity and community, and how they do it in practice, but also of power dynamics at play, and an awareness of whose definition of a situation counts.

Individual and group identity is inextricably linked, but although groups and communities involve shared understandings, they also incorporate difference.

Therefore, a distinction can be made between the two, and it is possible to account for conflicting ideas and positions taken on matters of interest to the community. It is also clear that communities involve processes of both inclusion and exclusion, therefore this thesis will explore how the boundary is maintained within the research field, and how notions of belonging and barriers to belonging are experienced by members of the community.

The literature suggests that cultural capital is attained through successful masculine performances, but the question remains whether this is still the case in roller derby. Men are positioned as "the 'outsider' entering an established field of action" (Connor and Pavlidis, 2014, p6), and so this thesis considers whether this context affects beliefs around gender difference, in the same way that more contact with female climbers affected the men Robinson (2008) studied. As the modern version of roller derby was initially conceived as a *women's* sport, there is the possibility that it evolved to suit women's particular strengths and abilities. In the roller derby community, it is common to hear the view that men don't play as well as women. This reversal of the usual argument raises interesting questions about whether roller derby is a sport in which men and women can compete equally. Mixed gender, or open to all (OTA) roller derby is becoming increasingly popular, though the sport is still very new, and mixed games are largely amateur affairs. OTA does at the very least provide opportunities for men and women to compete together. This sort of opportunity benefits men directly, as "relationships with feminist and athletic women have given some men a context within which to transform their relationship with sport, rather than blindly accepting – or rejecting – sport altogether" (Messner, 1992, p164). As a result of entering play in a women's sport, it is possible that derby men are readier to acknowledge their feminine side and not see it as wrong or

shameful. I argue that the inclusion of male skaters in studies of masculinities and femininities serves to reinvigorate arguments around transgressive acts. Whilst it remains questionable how empowering sexualised clothing is for female skaters, or how female skaters use such clothing to negotiate boundaries, or skate the edge, I believe that male skaters using similar clothing are necessarily *more* transgressive, and skate *closer* to the edge when compared with female skaters.

Additionally, the literature raises questions about differences that may exist between the men who play roller derby and the athletes studied by others. These apparent differences need to be accounted for. The thesis explores how members of one roller derby team construct and develop their identities as sportsmen. Most roller derby skaters are not career-athletes, though there are differing levels of seriousness and engagement, so it is illuminating to explore whether there is a difference between the attitudes of serious player and social skaters; those who consider themselves to be 'athletes' and those who view their involvement as more of a hobby. Messner's athletes found "the rule-bound structure of organised sports became a context in which they struggled to construct masculine positional identities" (Messner, 1990, p100). In roller derby, the men come to the sport at a variety of different ages (the Inhuman League currently has members aged between 21 and 54). Some of these men have a history of sports participation, whilst some do not. Potentially, these men have constructed positional identities through channels other than sport, so it is important to explore what brings them to this sport now, and how their identities are affected through playing roller derby.

As roller derby is currently far removed from the centre of sport, as outlined by Messner (2002), it may have the potential to provide a different model of masculinity; for skaters to do gender differently. Far from the Lombardian ethic that

winning is the only thing, roller derby rankings systems are set up to reward even a loss, if the losing team played well. Additionally, there are frequent games and tournaments where mixed teams play for the sheer enjoyment of competing, and 'winning' encompasses things such as communicating well as a team, playing cleanly, having fun, and achieving personal goals, not simply the final score. This structure of sport may allow male athletes to gain a sense of closeness, intimacy, and respect that Messner (2002) finds lacking in the centre, and Robinson (2008) finds in rock climbing. Therefore, it is important to consider how these theories, trickled down into popular thought, affect the lived experiences of research participants.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The conclusions drawn from the review of the literature highlight the usefulness of conceptualising identity and belonging as processes. A recognition that gender and masculinity involve 'doing' requires attention to notions of embodiment, risk, resistance, transgression, and transformation. These conclusions have methodological implications. The key challenges are to find ways of capturing multiple experiences through explorations of the differing processes that are implicated in developing identities and creating belonging, and through analysing the different meanings associated with those processes. For these reasons, a qualitative framework was used, combining participant observation and interviews. Participant observation is a method that has been used in the majority of roller derby studies to date (for example, Breeze, 2014; Gieseler, 2014; Murray, 2012). Interviews have been used in many well respected, key studies of masculinities in sport (Messner, 1992). Both these methods allow participants' voices to be heard, an important antidote to positivist/masculinist methodology (Haraway, 1988) and both allow for rich description (Geertz, 1973) and analyses of the lives of these participants.

As a key step towards accounting for this multiplexity, it is important to acknowledge the perspective and experiences that impact upon my position within the research; my 'standpoint' (Harding, 1986). Additionally, though the importance of the body has been noted (Connell, 2005; Wellard, 2012; 2015), it is also useful to consider the body as a tool for research (Haraway, 1988; DeLyser, 2001). Therefore, to open up this methodological discussion, I explore my experiences of roller derby

and the Inhuman League, up to, and at the outset of, fieldwork. With reference to feminist epistemologies, I draw upon these experiences to elucidate my position as an 'insider', and to reflect upon how this experience is embodied. An exploration of partial, located knowledge leads to an awareness of the limitations of notions of 'truth' and 'objectivity'. Using the concept of 'faking' (Beere, 1979; Klein, 1983), I discuss the difficulty inherent in reconciling many 'truths', and the importance of not privileging my experiences through my position as researcher.

Recognising these factors, I again draw upon feminist research to consider alternative measures of robustness and suggest ways to manage the fieldwork to ensure a more accountable discussion. I discuss the ethical implications of ethnographic fieldwork, and the challenges of interviewing men, contextualising the specific process of gaining access and consent within wider literature on research methods.

I discuss the process of data analysis, using a situational analysis framework (Clarke, 2005). I explain how this choice of method was informed by the literature and, in conclusion, briefly outline the content of the four data chapters.

3.2 Situated Knowledges

> One thing that stood out, is how different groups of people can have radically different views of the same event. As refs, we had discussed stopping the game if things got any worse. Skaters and bench crews seemed to think it was all fine" (Field notes, 22nd November 2015).
>
> Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges* (Haraway, 1988, p581).

As an insider in both the roller derby community as a whole, and the Inhuman League specifically, there are many methodological and ethical issues to consider.

The impossibility of complete objectivity necessitates an explication of the researcher's position within the research; where is the researcher *situated*, and what implications this has for the *knowledge* the researcher can have.

In outlining possibilities for feminist epistemologies, Haraway explains that "only partial perspective promises objective vision...Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge...It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" (1988, p582-583). Situated knowledges, in Haraway's view, can be objective; more so than the "unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims" (1988, p583) of positivist, masculinist theorists. Haraway is not advocating relativism but "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (1988, p584), as a preferred, but not perfect, alternative standpoint.

I opened this section with an extract from my field notes, highlighting the differing perspectives of one event. My experience of that evening is best summed up here:

> By the second half of the second half, I told Skye I wanted to start as rear OPR because I didn't want to have to stand near the TIL bench. It's a measure of how different things are now that I don't even want to stand near my own team, but actually, reflects how I felt when TIL played LRT in Feb 2014, at my first open game as a ref, so maybe things haven't changed that much. It didn't help that Zoya called an OR to ask for a cutting penalty to be assessed on a CTB jammer for what they thought was a cut and I didn't call. The OR was not upheld. They were not happy. I sensed disapproval radiating from them. How much of that was my imagination, I don't know (Field notes, Sunday 22nd November 2015).

This extract highlights my awareness of change, but also a suggestion that things *had not* changed. It also clearly shows my emotional involvement in events, which I acknowledged may have affected my 'impartiality'. The following week, I briefly noted my thoughts on a conversation with Wilma, the line-up manager:

> Also talked to Wilma about the Brummies' scrim. She said she didn't see a lot of what was happening on track, but that the boys seemed pretty happy with how the game was going, and felt it was calm and controlled. I suggested that it had not been like that from my perspective, and explained that it was more fraught with tension, but she said, no, she had not noticed that. (Field notes, Sunday 29th November 2015).

Discussion between team members suggested their views were almost diametrically opposed to mine. Dorny said that "they eventually just had no answer to how we played", and Hoof "loved every minute of that game. Seriously great work tonight. Heads were calm, played our game and it showed out there" (Field notes, Sunday 22nd November 2015). For Haraway, positioning is key:

> I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden (1988, p589).

It is crucial, therefore, to recognise that my positioning led to a different awareness of events to team members, and my emotional responses led, at times, to a rather more negative view of the team and team members than they expressed. However, in addition, "situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource" (Haraway, 1988, p592). Therefore, in order to properly speak of 'situated knowledges' in research, it is necessary to place oneself in the research; to acknowledge the part the researcher plays in the data. As insider researchers suggest, ethnographers must not write themselves out, rather, learning to see themselves as part of the research helps to ground them in the field, and negotiate the challenges of being an insider, which includes insider blindness (DeLyser, 2001; Taylor 2011; Leigh, 2013). Having an understanding that my vision is partial, and situated, I hope ensures that I do not

privilege this perspective over those of my participants. My truth is not *the* truth, and I had to take care to separate my personal views from my academic, reflexive understanding of the situation as a whole.

In discussing Rich's (1986) concept of the 'politics of location' and Haraway's (1988, 1991) theory of 'situated knowledges', Stanley (1997) argues that, though these ideas stem from different feminist traditions, they both convey this idea that it is possible to know events in different ways, and that

> …this way of thinking about and theorising knowledge- as something which is specific to time and place and person, and so which is contextual, grounded and material, as well as being rooted in the 'point of view' of particular knowledge-producers who share these ideas with a group of other people who think similarly- is a fundamental contribution which feminist thinking has made (Stanley, 1997, p204).

An awareness of multiple meanings is especially important to a study of roller derby, since "from the perspective of a participant-researcher, the meaning of roller derby is multiple, shifting and not necessarily coherent" (Downes et al, 2013, p104). Roller derby means different things to different people at different times and places, hence "a commitment to ontological multiplicity is helpful here: roller derby can be and is 'just a sport' at the same time as existing in many other confusing, wonderful, ridiculous and inspiring forms" (Downes et al, 2013, p105).

In line with this tradition, it was vital that, at the outset of research, and on an ongoing basis, I explored my position, the context in which my knowledge was situated, at that time, and in that place. Similarly, Chavez argues that

> insider scholars…need to get into their own heads first before getting into those of participants; they need to know in which ways they are like their participants and in which ways they are unlike them; they need to know

which of their social identities can advantage and/or complicate the process (Chavez, 2008, p491).

What follows, then, is an exploration of my experience of roller derby, as I work through my own shifting position and identity to highlight the ways in which these shifts impact upon the knowledge I can have.

After a rocky start upon joining SSRG, I got better at roller derby. I passed a minimum skills test and I took on a role within the bout organising team, worked as a non-skating official (NSO) in several games, skated a roller marathon, played a couple of 'cherry popper' games, and eventually I was allowed to play for our B team. I even trained with an Australian team for six weeks whilst visiting my sister. I won 'best blocker' three times in a row, was voted captain of our B team, and was convinced I was ready to play for the A team. Unfortunately, about forty minutes into my seventh game with the B team, and first and only game as captain, I went down awkwardly after a heavy block, and broke my wrist.

One of the stories I tell about myself, is that this event changed my relationship with roller derby. Whilst recovering, I got into doing line-ups, and was voted line-up manager of the Inhuman League's newly formed B team, Zom B Cru, and events co-ordinator not long after. On my return to skating, I felt safer training with the men's team, and went to more of their training sessions than the women's team. I went on to play more games since than before I was injured, but I never regained quite the same confidence as I had before; although I felt strategically more aware, I remained conscious of vulnerability, and was a much more cautious player. I also began to referee with more regularity, becoming an MRDA recognised official in December 2014, and a UKRDA affiliated official soon after. Becoming head referee for my league signalled my unofficial retirement from playing roller derby. Haraway's

(1988) argument that knowledge claims must come from a body is echoed by DeLyser (2001), who suggests including the body as research site; having a focus on bodily experiences – and others' interpretation of that body. In such a physical environment as roller derby, this makes sense. My physical limitations have impacted upon my choice of role, my emotional responses have impacted upon how I performed that role, and hence this research begins with the view from this body.

My involvement in the two teams has ebbed and flowed over the years, and I did not manage to maintain heavy involvement with both teams at the same time. Zom B Cru played their last game in June 2014. Due to illness, my attendance at TIL training was patchy throughout 2015. As I started my observation, I was aware that I was not as much an insider as I had been previously.

In the winter of 2014, TIL suffered somewhat of a crisis; skaters were dissatisfied for a number of reasons, and many left – either to go on to new teams, or give up the sport altogether. The setting I 'entered' for fieldwork was quite a different setting to the one I was part of in 2014, at the time I was making preparations for beginning PhD study: there was a different committee, coaches, team management, members, and fewer of each. The TIL Facebook group numbered 23, of whom only 13 were bouting skaters who had passed the minimum skills assessment. Given that a full team numbers 14, this was a far cry from the heady days when TIL boasted an A team in the top 5 in Europe, and a B team in the top 15.

Insider/outsider status, however, is more complex than a binary suggests. In terms of the Inhuman League, my position had shifted to that of outsider because, no longer a line-up manager, as a female skater, I was, at the beginning of the research, ineligible to skate for the team, and chose not to do so after the change in policy. As

a referee, I was also in a sense 'outside', both physically, and psychologically. During fieldwork I was an associate member, the event organiser for the committee, and officiated for them in training and at games. It is important to remember that "in home fieldwork, multiple axes of commitment must be integrated with one's research agenda" (DeLyser, 2001, p444), and thus, my fieldwork had to be integrated with both my roles within the Inhuman League, and my role as head referee of the local women's team. This was not always easy; these roles afforded me a level of familiarity with the research site that could be both beneficial and detrimental to understanding and analysis.

It has been suggested that with insider research, "the research process can also reveal harmful behaviours, alter friendships, undermine passion and enthusiasm, and even end DIY cultural participation" (Downes et al, 2013, p115). As much as I claimed at the outset that I was prepared for this, I am not sure it is possible to be fully aware of the impact becoming a researcher can have. Ultimately, though my passion and enthusiasm for the sport of roller derby itself remains undimmed, the relationship I have with the Inhuman League *has* changed. However, I am not sure how much this is because of the research element and how much is down to my decision to referee. As an official, it is important to retain a sense of impartiality – to focus on upholding the safety and rules of games, and the mental shift from teammate to official necessitates a certain level of withdrawal. Breeze (2014, p193) notes difficulties in focusing on transcribing interviews because of a reluctance to change roller derby from a pleasurable hobby into work, and DeLyser cautions "those of us whose place of research may also be a personal space of refuge would be well advised, before undertaking insider research, to attempt to tease out and contemplate the potential repercussions that professionalizing the personal may

have" (DeLyser, 2001, p446). However, as a referee, in a sense roller derby was work, and was already in some ways *professional* to me.

3.3 Truth and Faking

Issues around 'truth' further complicate the methodological approach. To elaborate, I explore my 'rocky start' a bit further. On joining a women's roller derby team in October 2010, I became part the roller derby community, and in a way, roller derby has become part of me. My entrée into the sport followed a common path: I'd never really quite felt I fitted in at school, and, beyond the age of about twelve, didn't see sport as something that was for me, which led to a lack of engagement with sport as an adult. I saw a flyer for roller derby at a tattoo convention, and decided it looked like a fun way to get a bit of exercise. Rather than a quick training montage à la *Whip It!* (or any sports film you've ever seen), I found learning the game difficult – almost as difficult as learning how to work in a team. In an article for roller derby magazine *Inside Line*, I explained how, despite these struggles, I felt I'd found my 'tribe':

> But when I watch my team play - when I'm in the audience, or officiating - I feel so proud to be a part of it. I feel so lucky. It's easy to forget that not everyone in the whole world is in a roller derby team. It's easy to forget that I'm so lucky to be involved in something so new, so exciting. In the excitement of a bout, I remember those things. I remember why I'm there and why I'm going to continue to beat the terror and the fear every time that voice tells me I don't belong. (Billie Viper, 2011, p17).

This was actually the second version of this piece. The first was rather different:

> I don't feel quite at home and I don't feel that many of my team-mates are sympatico, if that makes any sense. One of my team-mates recently said that one reason she loves our team is that we are not like a typical group of bitchy women. I kind of think we are, just like that. The worst aspects exist in undercurrents and things not generally said, but of course we are like that. Of

course we are. We are a group of women (and men), so how could we be anything else? (Bobusmaximus, 2011, para.9).

This version of the article was shared on my personal blog and was probably never read. So, which version is the truth? Both, and neither. Each version represents *a* truth, but not *the* truth. Moreover, although I meant what I wrote in the blog post, I did not feel able to share this negativity in a widely read magazine, knowing my teammates would read it. So, I chose to pretend that I felt much more positive than I did. This suppression of negativity is common in roller derby (see chapter 6 for further elaboration).

Klein has argued that "an important factor that has been ignored so far in most research on women (and men) is the phenomenon of 'faking.' As Carole Beere describes it, faking is 'to give socially desirable responses rather than honest attributes,' and does happen consciously and unconsciously (1979, p. 385)" (Klein, 1983, p91). In roller derby, so much is shared publicly, and there is such pressure on members of the community to show positive images of the sport, it is inevitable that there be an element of 'faking' involved. Just as I decided not to share the negativity I sometimes felt in a magazine, skaters within the team environment sometimes 'faked' socially desirable and acceptable responses. Klein recommends recognising that 'faking' occurs, and incorporating it into research methods, and that "by accepting and taking it seriously, we accept and take ourselves seriously" (Klein, 1983, p91).

The importance of faking in a roller derby context is twofold. Firstly, insiders want to present a positive view of the sport to outsiders. Secondly, insiders may sometimes choose to fake emotions and responses to other insiders. Adler and Adler explain that "existential sociolog[ists]…believe that…most groups in the society

have things they want to hide from other groups, [and that] people present fronts to nonmembers. This creates two sets of realities about their activities: one presented to outsiders, and the other reserved for insiders" (1987, p20-21), a view which draws upon Goffman's (1959) concept of 'impression management'. I argue that, more than this, insiders sometimes want to hide things from other insiders; a point I consider when explaining the interview process later in this chapter (see also Chapter 4 for an in-depth exploration of how this became apparent within the research).

It is also important to acknowledge the role faking plays for the researcher as well as the participants. Researching stag tourism in Eastern Europe, Thurnell-Read (2011a) discusses how managing

> ambivalent emotional responses to our participants, those who have been benevolent in allowing us access, for a time, into their lives, can be a challenging and ultimately draining component of fieldwork practice. However, while a social researcher might seek to develop their skills in impression management and in many cases stifle or hide their 'true' emotional response to the comments and actions of participants, there is considerable value in acknowledging the epistemological nature of such emotions (p44).

Whilst Thurnell-Read (2011a) considers the practicalities of embodiment – his dress, presentation of self, his "embodied masculinity" (p44) – in managing the impression he creates, Leigh (2013) borrows the phrase 'dirty secret' from Morriss (2014) to explain the desire to keep things back from her participants: "In this context, my dirty secret involved not wanting to show participants my analysis of their words for fear (or shame) that I would disappoint them or fail them in some way." (Leigh, 2013, p123). In my own research, faking occurred when I disagreed with some of the practices of my participants, and for much of the time during early field work,

my 'dirty secret' was that I would much rather not have been there, and found

engaging with several members of the team rather difficult and emotionally

challenging.

Given the existence of faking, where is the place for 'truth' in this kind of research?

It is clear that, within qualitative research, claims of absolute 'truth' are naïve and

unhelpful. Taylor, for example, acknowledges that one can write "truthful, yet

always partial accounts" (Taylor, 2011, p4). The shifting nature of truth, as

represented by ethnographical research is summed up by Geertz: "Cultural analysis

is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less

complete it is" (Geertz, 1973, p29). This partial nature is also highlighted by Breeze,

who states that:

> writing field-notes is an exercise in deciding what to write down and what to
> leave out, from here it almost makes no sense to write anything down, as
> even if it were possible to write down 'what actually happened' it is such a
> partial thing, and anyway – how do I even know what happened? (Breeze,
> 2014, p231).

I experienced this same problem in writing field notes. It was not always possible to

record everything, and difficult to know what might prove important or illuminating

later on. In addition to the problems associated with defining 'truth', there was an

additional issue:

> Schutz (1964) argued that meanings are constructed on the basis of memory,
> meaning that participants' actions were often grasped retrospectively. I would
> add that we, as researchers, cannot always assume that our participants are
> fully aware of that which goes on around them; or why certain people behave
> the way they do and why particular decisions which affect them are made by
> others whom they work with (Leigh, 2013, p122).

This is especially pertinent in interviews, as can be seen in the interview with

Grievous Quadily Harm, who explained that his "last ever game was Tyne and Fear

A team, but [he] went out in the first jam with concussion" (Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016). In fact, the records I kept at the time indicate that this game occurred before Grievous' last game with Zom B Cru, and photographic evidence suggests that he played a mixed game 3 months later.

So, "In short, anthropological writing are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot" (Geertz, 1973, p15). As Geertz writes, "In finished anthropological writings…that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (Geertz, 1973, p9). I conclude from this, that there is no essential 'truth', but that what is important to capture and explore are the many and varied reasons participants might have for representing events in the way they do. Klein suggests that researchers "open ourselves up to using such resources as intuition, emotions and feelings both in ourselves and in those we want to investigate." (Klein, 1983, p95). As discussed in the literature review, identities (and roller derby identities are no exception) are complex. In my fieldwork I encountered many contradictions and varying accounts of events. In addition to this, accounts were sometimes carefully phrased to imply, rather than explicitly state views, and analysis often required attention to emotions. It is the emotions that counted for Grievous. Despite being physically present at other games, his response indicated he had emotionally left the sport during, or shortly after the game when he suffered a concussion.

In response to the partial and situated nature of truth, Taylor cautions against privileging the insider position, arguing that it is always "multiple and contestable" (Taylor, 2011, p6), drawing upon Wolcott's claim that "'There is no monolithic insider view…every view is *a* way of seeing, not *the* way of seeing' (1999: 137)"

(Taylor, 2011, p6). Taylor also suggests that friendships with informants have an impact that remains undertheorised (Taylor, 2011, p6), which further complicates the issue.

Geertz notes the multiplicity and complexity of social structures, and hence the difficulty for the researcher in trying to understand and somehow render them intelligible on the page (1973, p10). Downes echoes this view to suggest there are significant difficulties in writing an enthnography that deals with "multiple competing versions of' reality in the world and push for social transformation (Denzin 1997)" (Downes, 2009, p103). In studying roller derby, Downes et al suggest the situation is even more complex:

> However the participant-researcher is more likely to encounter tensions in established data collection methods, ethical protocols and modes of research dissemination that arguably constrain accounts of the multiplicity, complexity and contestation at the heart of DIY cultural life (Downes et al, 2013, p102).

One challenge, then, is to find ways of representing this multiplicity.

Researchers argue that it is not enough to recognise that there can be 'situated knowledge', but that knowledge must also be accountable (Stanley, 1997; Downes, 2009), which means a deliberate recognition of the stance of the observer, and also, that "it is not possible adequately to account for 'the researcher' and the situated knowledge they produce without pinpointing more precisely the different activities involved in 'research': just what does it mean, to 'observe', to 'describe' and to 'explain'?" (Stanley, 1997, p214-215). Thus, accountability requires detailed explication of the methods used to conduct the research; retrievable data, the analytic method, and the how the interpretation of data is achieved (Stanley, 1997, p215). Leavy (2007) further argues that postmodernism rejects thinking in terms of

binaries and allows for ways of conceptualising multiple viewpoints. In the next section, I outline the specific methods and mode of analysis I used to try to capture this multiplicity.

3.4 Ethical Risk Taking

Research is an exercise in risk, especially in insider research, where the researcher risks not just professional reputation, but personal and social reputations also (Browne, 2003; Taylor, 2011). Choosing methodologies which lean towards postmodernism means that traditional ways of judging research quality are inappropriate. Bryman (2012) suggests a range of alternatives to reliability and validity to ensure the robustness of qualitative research, among them, trustworthiness, authenticity, and reflexivity. These are important standards, not just for the written thesis, but for actions towards participants. These standards are also compatible with the forms of knowledge production I have discussed.

Throughout the process of recruitment, it was necessary to consider ethical issues, and how best to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity. Long before the research began, I approached the chair of the league and obtained an agreement in principle to observe the league. By 2015, when I was ready to begin fieldwork, a new chair was in place. Therefore, after my application to ethical review had been approved, I met with the new chair and committee to outline my research plans and gained a new agreement for access to the team. I met with the team after a training session and explained my research focus and their part in it. I gave out information sheets and consent forms (see appendix iv), in addition to sharing them in the Inhuman League Facebook group, and invited members to ask questions.

Several members signed on the spot. Some took the sheets home to think about, and some gave verbal consent, but took a while to sign. I faced two significant ethical issues at the outset: by what names would I refer to participants, and how would I handle league members who chose not to participate in the research? The first issue was carefully thought through prior to starting fieldwork.

I could not promise anonymity to my participants. The roller derby community remains relatively small, and those active within the community often become well known. I took the decision not to disguise the name of the league I was studying because it would be obvious to anyone in the roller derby community, and very easy to discover for anyone outside the community. Similarly, with pseudonyms, I gave participants the choice of being identified by their skate name, or an alternative made-up name. Most participants opted to allow me to use their skate name. Skate names assume a level of importance in skaters' lives, as part of their identity, and are valuable data in themselves. The use of pseudonyms in such a small roller derby group would not guarantee anonymity. Ethnographic details, such as pen portraits of participants (see appendix i) could also allow for identification. In an example from another study of roller derby, skaters were happy to forgo anonymity:

> An atmosphere of playful name-taking and lack of concern for anonymity was made explicit when 'The Beefcake' and 'Aladdin' began using their pseudonyms to refer to themselves and each other in posts they made to the league's online forum discussion space, thus outing themselves and removing the possibility of anonymity in papers previously produced and disseminated (Downes et al, 2013, p107-108)

There are ethical and moral dilemmas present in naming participants. Browne suggests that for her participants wanting to be named, anonymity implies further marginalisation. "By naming Pat I may have inadvertently identified other women

who may wished to remain anonymous. Conversely, in removing Pat's autonomy to choose whether she was named in the study, I feel I have redeployed the potentially negotiated power relations and not enabled Pat to make her own choice" (Browne, 2003, p139). I chose to use skate names where participants consented, and alternatives where they preferred; an imperfect compromise.

How to manage members who did not consent to participate was a much thornier issue. Ultimately, I obtained written consent from twenty-four members of the league. However, difficulty in securing consent from all arose from a lack of certainty about who was a member and exactly how many members we had. In committee meetings throughout the observation, neither the treasurer nor the membership officer could give exact numbers. What constituted membership was fuzzy and ill-defined. Was it payment of dues? There were people who attended training and were rostered for games who had not paid a membership fee in months. There were people who paid a fee but had not been to a training session in months. Attendance was therefore not an accurate marker for membership. The members Facebook group contained people who neither paid nor attended, and new members who paid and attended were not in the Facebook group. In the end, membership seemed to work on the basis of a feeling of belonging and team management were reluctant to ever explicitly bar an individual from membership (see Chapters 5 and 6 for in-depth discussions of belonging).

Practically, I signed up as many as I could, choosing only to directly refer to those members who had signed a consent form. There were a number of people from whom I did not gain consent. Some left the team before signing, others joined close to the end, or their attendance was so patchy that they were never around when I had

forms to hand. It was not that these members refused to take part, rather they just never got around to formally agreeing. They are either left out of the account where practical or referred to as 'a skater' or 'a member'.

There is one notable exception to this compromise. One member (interestingly enough, part of the committee who granted me access to begin with) actively refused consent. Initially, I intended to leave him out of the account, but it quickly became clear that he played such a dominant role in the group that to write him out would have rendered the observation unintelligible. McKenzie (2017) argues that one of the difficulties of resolving ethical issues involving consent lies in the importance to the data of those who refuse consent. He claims that "to write out individuals from the research would be an impossible task because their impact on the data direct or indirect would be difficult to isolate" (2017, p.5). McKenzie rejects the idea of leaving the field, since there is already so much invested. Instead he advocates a frank account of ethical decisions, and an acceptance of compromise. My compromise was that I devised a pseudonym, Donald Thump, and made the decision to only include my observations and others' responses to him, as they were necessary for discussion and analysis. Reading chapter 4 and chapter 6 especially, it will become clear how often that was necessary.

There are measures that can be taken to prevent potential harm to participants despite these dilemmas. As Bryman (2012) suggests, it is vital to combine sensitivity to context, with commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and an awareness of impact and importance. The lack of a commonly agreed definition of informed consent (Wiles et al, 2007), which in any case remains partial (Emerson et al, 2007) raises difficulties but nevertheless, it is not a one-time agreement; it has to

be ongoing. It was clear to all participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time (although this still left the problem of non-consenting non-participants). But, more than that, sharing work with participants was important. Giving participants the opportunity to view work they were cited in, and sharing ideas and directions as they evolved, helped to ensure participants were happy with the way they had been represented. For example, I set up a Google Drive folder and shared conference papers. This acted as not only an ethical step, but also a way to try to increase fairness and transparency in the research process. Such procedures are necessary: "a situated and flexible approach towards negotiating meaningful informed consent in a way that makes sense within a specific DIY culture is more productive" (Downes et al, 2013, p112). Not only within a DIY culture, but also as an insider in that culture, "The constant re-negotiation and re-mapping of personal and relational ethical judgements is then vital" (Birch and Miller, 2012, p17). Related to the continuing problem of Donald Thump, there was also the problem of work I was less willing to share: often work that discussed the difficulties with Thump.

After gaining access, I made the decision to immerse myself into the league as a total participant for a period of a year. During this year, I trained with the team on average twice a week, sometimes participating in scrimmages as a skater, and sometimes as a referee. I also attended league games, and mixed games in which league members were involved. In addition to this, I attended social events. During these times, I took field-notes. Sometimes these were mental notes, sometimes written. Whichever method of note-taking used, they were written up into full field notes as soon as possible after the event. Often, it was not practical to write field notes during training sessions. Joining in contact drills or refereeing scrimmages and

games made it impossible to take notes. At times, especially towards the end of fieldwork, I found it useful to be much more obvious about my note-taking. This served as a reminder, for myself as much as the participants, that I was there as a researcher. This enabled me to begin the process of withdrawing from the field (see chapter 6 for a fuller exploration).

Moreover, what of potentially harmful information? Donnelly (2014) made the difficult decision to omit data collected during drinking alcohol with her participants, but later suggested that decision was "unfortunate" (Donnelly, 2014, p355), and due to concerns about how her work would affect public perception of the sport of roller derby. Taylor (2011) notes the awkwardness of dealing with data which may damage social reputations and argues that "omission is political; it is also tricky, yet it is often necessary" (Taylor 2011, p14-15), and Downes et al (2013) argue that omission is essential to situated ethical practice. Again, there remained the issue of what I could not omit.

Potential harms exist not only for the participants. Thurnell-Read (2011a) discusses the emotional impact of conducting fieldwork, suggesting that researchers acknowledge these feelings: "Negative emotions experienced during fieldwork are often important sources of knowledge about the topic under research. They can shed light on the researcher's own perceptions, assumptions and prejudices as being in themselves important sources of understanding (Holland, 2007)" (Thurnell-Read, 2011a, p41). I have previously acknowledged my 'dirty secret' about not wanting to be present in the field. This could be regarded as a failure, however, in discussing postgraduate researchers' experiences, Okely suggests that these feelings are valid and worth exploring: "aspects of fieldwork which interviewees regarded as failures

and sources of guilt were potentially key avenues for knowledge" (Okely, 2009,

p.1). The difficulties experienced throughout the research process are also data, and:

> Postgraduates should be encouraged to value their own resources. Individual personality, biography, ethnicity, nationality and gender will all have specific implications. The anthropologist should recognise that seeming weaknesses, along with incomer naivety, are qualities to explore creatively. The traditional, often masculinist mask of competence has to be dropped (Okely, 2009, p3).

Breeze (2014) writes of the difficulty of keeping field notes, the desire to somehow

keep roller derby separate from work, in a way that proved increasingly impossible.

This underlines a key risk of insider research. Taking a hobby, a pleasurable leisure

activity, and turning it into the subject of research, risks the researcher losing interest

in the one, and failing to complete the other. How, then, is it possible to negotiate

this risk; to skate this edge without falling off? Ethically, I was already taking a risk.

I found interviews to be invaluable in acting as a check upon any tendency to

privilege my experience, and to over-dramatise negative feelings or occurrences.

Talking with interviewees was always illuminating and demonstrated the plurality of

meanings that was more difficult to discern in the field. The interview with Andy

Social (arguably the most similar to me in terms of position within the league) was

especially valuable in jolting me out of a rut of negativity (see chapter 6 for more

discussion on this). This next section, then, explores the practicalities of

interviewing.

3.5 Interviewing Men

To allow me to look further into how individuals develop masculine identities, and

to enable a fuller exploration of multiplicity, I conducted sixteen interviews with

both current and ex-members of the Inhuman League, and one non-member. This

allowed for a more in depth understanding of individuals' thoughts and motivations. Including ex-members also facilitated a more thorough analysis of group dynamics, and the development of athletic identities, especially though discussions with those who were 'unsuccessful' (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014). Individuals' knowledge and feelings are important, and talk is a meaningful social process and requires in-depth understanding.

I sought consent for interviews separately (see appendix v for information sheet and consent form). I identified individuals I wanted to interview partly on the basis of availability and interest (interviewees were often self-selecting) and partly according to a very basic sampling process, which entailed seeking out participants who were new members, high level skaters, and less experienced skaters, in addition to ex-members and volunteers. This was in an attempt to include as wide a variety of experiences as possible. At times, this created tension. In one committee meeting (11th April 2016), I was questioned about why I wanted to interview ex-members, and about the relevance of talking to people who were not part of the team as it was at the current time. I wanted to account for change and for differences in experience and meaning, but in my surprise, I failed to adequately explain. Later I shared my proposal and methodology, and the subject was not brought up again.

Interestingly, another topic under discussion at this meeting was the plan to delete the current committee Facebook group and start a fresh one with the new committee. This was on the grounds that new committee members did not need to read about difficulties and arguments that had occurred in the past – a similar argument to the one I had been presented with. It seemed that these discussions stemmed from the

same desire to hide negative aspects from the team (see earlier discussion on truth and faking, and also chapter 4).

These interviews took the form of life histories, focused specifically on sport, and their time with TIL. They were deliberately conversational, and semi-structured in the sense that I had an interview schedule or map which outlined specific questions I was interested in asking (see appendix vi), but also with potential to be rather unstructured in that interviewees were encouraged to take the conversation in any direction. I explored ideas around inclusivity, gender equality, and professionalisation. As I transcribed each interview, I sent a copy to the interviewee to confirm they were happy with it. One interviewee requested I redact a specific comment about another member, and one requested I reword a phrase he used because of a concern that his point might be misunderstood. Given the potential for harm, I agreed to the omissions. The interviews were transcribed, and coded, and then analysed alongside field notes within a situational analysis framework (Clarke, 2005).

Kleinman et al (1994) argue that "spending time in the field gives fieldworkers "visceral validity"; they become confident of their interpretations. Having less involvement can make fieldworkers believe that their data are thin and their understandings are incomplete" (Kleinman et al, 1994, p41). As a novice researcher, I had doubts that my observation alone would be enough to fully explore the range of positions and discourses within the situation, therefore, I recognised the importance of interviews to get at deeper understandings of the motivations and identities of my participants. It can be argued that "interviews enable the researcher to learn how members of a social category maintain, transform, or challenge an

identity" and that "interviewers can access respondents' self-reflexivity" (Kleinman et al, 1994, p43). As an interviewer, I had access to feelings, ideas, thoughts, either hidden or not shown in the research setting:

> Fieldworkers examine the dominant culture of the group, the salient roles within it, and how members reproduce or subvert that culture...interview-based studies can offer more than an account of role-occupants' experiences and relationships. Rather, interviewers can tell us how people make sense of their lives as a whole (Kleinman et al, 199, p45).

It was not my intention to analyse only the dominant culture, but to explore some of the many competing discourses and positions available within the situation. Interviews offered a way to interrogate the silences and absences of the group setting. Kleinman et al suggest a strength of fieldworkers in an interview setting is their tendency to "take contextual data into account (in their interviews)" (Kleinman, et al, 1994, p46), thus potentially providing rich data.

Having made the decision to interview, it was also necessary to consider the impact of gender. Most of my interviewees were male, and cross-gender interviewing has its own challenges. Ortiz (2003) discusses some of the methodological challenges of cross-gender interviewing: "When, why, and how is the ethnographer's gender a disadvantage in the field? More specifically, must a male fieldworker be at a disadvantage when doing research in a female world?" (Ortiz, 2003, p601), or in my case, must a female fieldworker be at a disadvantage in a male world?

Ortiz (2003) found that gender was negotiable in the field, and that 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) was possible, through 'muted masculinity':

> Muted masculinity is a form of impression management that allowed me to be an acceptably incompetent outsider. In negotiating an acceptable gender identity, the qualities of muted masculinity proved an effective way of

establishing collaborative relationships and cultivating trust and rapport with the wives in my long-term ethnography (Ortiz, 2003, p608).

On the other hand, Pini (2005) suggests that "it can be problematic for women to interview men, as the availability to men of masculinity discourses presents them with greater opportunities to exert power when interacting with a female interviewer" (Pini, 2005, p203). However, she stresses that things are not that simple, and argues "that we need to go further and question 'Who is asking whom about what and where?', because the gendered context of the research environment also informs the interview relationship" (Pini, 2005, p204). Pini suggests that male interviewees perform masculine heterosexual identities as busy, powerful and important, and as knowledgeable (Pini, 2005). As I was a female interviewer, participants often assumed a greater knowledge and understanding of the topic than me. I propose that this was an advantage; that by allowing the impression of me as 'acceptably incompetent', despite being an insider, participants were more open to sharing their thoughts. Browne suggests that

> the empathy and identification researchers can practice over the course of an interview (described by Bondi, 2003) should perhaps be supplemented with an understanding that researchers may not be in control of the research situation. Despite being the leader of focus groups, coupled interviews and individual interviews, I seldom felt in a powerful position (as described by Wilkinson, 1999) (Browne, 2003, p137).

Recognising and accepting that I was not in control of the direction the interviews took allowed me to focus instead on attempts to understand how and why the participants responded in the way they did.

In addition to the gendered context of interviews, it is important to consider the impact of friendship and insider knowledge. The interviewees were mostly friends and fellow team-members, a situation which brought its own set of challenges.

DeLyser argues that "when someone knows that you already know an answer, any probing for details may just aggravate the interviewee. Insider researchers need strategic alternatives to the traditional interview" (2001, p444). It is for this reason that I decided to use a more conversational interview style; to allow for the potential to say 'This is how it was for me. How was it for you?' to explore the different responses to the same situation, rather than pretend I was not present. It was also necessary to begin interviews with the disclaimer that we may have already discussed topics or questions before (DeLyser, 2001; Chavez, 2008), but that I was interested in hearing their thoughts again.

There were benefits to interviewing friends. As a less formal arrangement, these interviews were more flexible, and there was greater potential for rearrangement (Browne, 2003). Also, it became possible to reward participation in a myriad of intangible ways. As Browne explains in reference to her research "because participants were friends I was able to repay them for their involvement in my research and negotiate potentially one-way exploitative relationships" (Browne, 2003, p140). I was able to offer participants rewards for their time such as dinner, or time spent with my dogs (Grievous, in particular, found this to be a fair trade). Interviewing people I already had a personal relationship with also made it possible to opt "for a truer form of communication than the artificial mood of a research interview" (Chavez, 2008, p484). I am unsure to what extent this was the case, but, almost certainly, I obtained a different kind of response in these situations than a stranger might have done. Interviewing in either my home or the homes of participants, with friends and partners present allowed for a more natural dialogue, and for the inclusion of their responses also. However, due to the additional emotional factors inherent in conducting fieldwork and interviews with friends, I

propose that clear processes and boundaries to the research are vital. Situational analysis provided those processes for my research.

3.6 Situational Analysis

As a student, I was drawn to Grounded Theory because it seemed to offer both a more clearly explicated structure than some methods – useful to the novice researcher – and a check to ensure the analysis is properly connected with empirical evidence, not least the requirement to undertake ongoing coding and analysis, thus avoiding the temptation to leave the 'scary' part until the end. However, as I became more familiar with the method, I became more certain that traditional Grounded Theory as espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967), with its positivist leanings, was an unsuitable method to use for this research. Whilst more suitable, constructivist grounded theory, such as that explored by Strauss and Corbin (1998), or Charmaz (2006), still did not allow me to explore the research site in the way I wanted to. Reading Clarke's Situational Analysis (2005), I recognised a way to use the theory/methods package that is grounded theory in a way compatible with my commitment to situated knowledges and multiplicity. Postmodern in approach, Situational Analysis is suitable because it seeks to acknowledge the multiple, the fractured, and the shifting nature of a situation. Where Geertz (1973) calls for "thick description" (p6), situational analysis yields "thick analysis" (Perez and Cannella, 2013, p506). For each, detail is key. Grounded Theory (GT) is a contested concept, and there are arguments that researchers do not always use it correctly, or that the work they do is not actually GT at all. Situational analysis, however, is deliberately flexible. Although Clarke clearly outlines the method and the individual steps and task to be undertaken, it "is not a method that should be replicated or followed

explicitly, rather it can be used as part of continually emergent research design, implementation, and reconceptualization" (Perez and Cannella, 2013, p515), thus it retains the GT focus on non-linear conceptual development evolving through the research process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). My prior engagement with the research setting allowed for the use of sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1954) – conceptual work done up front driving the research question. I was already familiar with many of the current themes in roller derby, and those which were of especial importance to the Inhuman League. Situational analysis required theoretical sampling; areas of silence could be followed up, and the maps could be used as a guide towards specific areas of focus, which led to some purposive sampling for interviews for example, as discussed above. By focusing on the *situation* as the unit of analysis, it prevented over-reliance on key informants.

Situational analysis is about opening up the data, and works better with data which had been coded (using a GT approach to coding). I used preliminary codes for field notes and interviews, in part by hard and also using NVivo. These codes helped to stimulate thinking, which in turn helped the mapping session be more productive. Situational analysis involved creating situational maps which include *everything* in the situation (see appendix vii). Clarke (2005) suggests including human/non-human elements, material, discursive/symbolic, ideas/concepts/discourses/symbols/sites of debate/cultural stuff. She also recommends researchers use their own experience of doing the research as data for making these maps, and conduct simultaneous memoing, noting new things in data, areas of inadequate data, and areas of theoretical interest (to support theoretical sampling). The memos I wrote led towards sites of silence, which it was fruitful to pursue. Keeping a running research journal or audit trail – chronicling changes of direction, rationales, analytic turning points

etc., was also useful. Maps helped to bring the big picture back into view and encouraged me to notice even small and infrequently occurring aspects. The next step was a relational analysis; mapping the relation between every element and every other, which also helped me to decide what to pursue (see appendix viii).

A social worlds/arenas maps involved a focus on meaning making social groups, or universes of discourse. It was a meso level analytic framework at the level of social action. Clarke (2005), suggests the researcher can 'see' collective action directly and empirically, and recommends asking what are the patterns of collective commitment and what are the salient social worlds operating here? One major analytic map was requisite to ensure that collective action analysis was adequately undertaken (see appendix ix). Describing the big picture requires the analyst to take several steps back from the phenomenon of interest and is intended to reveal broader conditions.

The third type of map suggested is the positional map (see appendix x). Mapping the variety of positions that are held within the situation, rather than mapping the positions of individuals, allows the researcher to account for the way in which multiple contrasting and conflicting opinions may be held by a single individual, group, or institution. The purpose of these maps, and situational analysis as a whole, is to work against essentialism, and to focus on "their uncoupling of persons and groups from positions; their documentation of the multiplicity of positions, including contradictions; and perhaps most, their capacity to articulate sites of silence, unoccupied positions" (Clarke, 2005, p297). Given the shifting and complex nature of the roller derby community, situational analysis was therefore a highly suitable approach to the exploration of the Inhuman League, allowing me to think through the 'situation' without overly privileging individual participants or

positions. I mapped throughout the process of analysis, which ran concurrently to fieldwork, and I include my maps in the appendix.

The key themes apparent as a result of this mapping process were identity, belonging, and community. Therefore, the data chapters are structured accordingly: 4) community and engagement, 5) image and identity, 6) belonging and inclusivity, and 7) barriers to belonging. Codes relating to belonging were by far the most numerous – both in positive and negative terms. It is for this reason that the theme of belonging is given greater space.

CHAPTER 4 COMMUNITY AND ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Introduction

Community is one of the central concerns of this thesis. However, before discussing in any depth the nature of the roller derby community, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of how members conceptualise 'community'. This chapter will explore the various meanings of community that are used by TIL members, and how these members engage with these communities in some way, both as a collective entity, *the Inhuman League*, and as individuals who represent the league. Additionally, this chapter serves to expand upon points made in the introduction to more precisely locate the Inhuman League in the context of global roller derby.

I begin with an analysis of the local roller derby community. This notion of community includes the people and teams that TIL members engage with (or not) on a regular basis. Through this analysis, I explore the connections between TIL and other local leagues and officials, especially the Sheffield Steel Rollergirls, and how these connections have changed over time. I continue with a consideration of how TIL members engage the non-roller derby local community, such as businesses TIL might be engaged with, and the public, who are potential fans and audience members. In practice, this means negotiation with venues, and processes of recruitment and engagement. I round out the chapter with a look at the wider roller derby community, which may be informal networks such as exist on Facebook, but also more formal networks in the form of the British Championships (a UK wide roller derby competition) and roller derby governing bodies. From these discussions, it is clear that there is no one roller derby community, but rather, a series of linked *communities*.

However, I conclude with the suggestion that 'community' is mostly used in the local sense, with little regard for the importance of global communities, except in the interests of developing and maintaining a 'good' reputation (which is discussed further in chapter 5). In terms of the various definitions outlined by Delanty (2010), community as a search for belonging and with an emphasis on the construction of a culture is the most useful lens through which to explore the community of TIL. As will be explored further here and in the following chapters, a feeling of belonging was important to members; this was far more than just a sport. Therefore, members were engaged in constructing and maintaining their community, in ways that brought members closer together, but also caused tension.

4.2 The Local Roller Derby Community

Women's Teams

There are two women's roller derby teams in Sheffield. One, Sheffield Steel Rollergirls (SSRG), started in 2008. The other, Hallam Hellcats Roller Derby (HHRD), split off from SSRG in 2012. While it sometimes seems like there are residual negative feelings between the teams, on the whole they are supportive of each other, although most members do not have a great deal of contact. Having said this, there has been a lot of crossover over the years, with members switching teams, and sometimes switching back again, and with members of one team occasionally guest skating in games with the other. Many TIL members are connected with these teams also. Bench team Zoya and Wilma are both members of HHRD (although Zoya used to be a member of SSRG), and Nuke and Fin have both been on the bench team of SSRG and HHRD. Additionally, as TIL draws its membership from a relatively wide geographical area, members have had, or continue to have,

connections with teams from Hull, Grimsby, Leeds, Barnsley, and Mansfield, with members serving as bench team or referees for several women's teams throughout the region. Whilst membership of TIL was often fuzzy, with confusion over membership status of those on the edge relatively common (as discussed in chapter 3 in reference to the difficulty of obtaining consent from every member), despite this back and forth flow of members, and a few individuals maintaining dual membership, the boundaries between the teams remained much clearer, a feature of communities identified by Barth (1969). This was not always the case. When TIL was created, links were stronger, and the communities overlapped considerably.

TIL's founding members were originally part of SSRG. In 2010, when I joined SSRG, there were a few men involved, learning to skate with us, and often becoming referees. At that point, there was no real opportunity for them to play roller derby, and though many of SSRG's members were happy to engage in contact with men at training, some were not. By 2011, it seemed that there were enough men interested in forming a team of their own to make it happen. Blocktopus remembers there being around eight or nine people at the first meeting, and during it, TIL became one of the first five men's roller derby teams in the UK.

> It was recognised as being so close to the start of men's roller derby in the country that we were learning everything very quickly and not really caring about particularly how well we did it. It was sort of, we'll do it, see what comes of it, try to improve and – but we were very much feeling our way with it.
>
> Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

Without much in the way of models to draw upon from the men's roller derby community, TIL maintained a close connection with SSRG, relying on their knowledge to build the team and its structures. As many of TIL had relatives or

partners in SSRG, the social circle was initially very similar. Additionally, both teams held training sessions at the same venue on Sunday afternoons and early evenings, and so there was a lot of crossover with skaters joining in each other's training sessions. Despite this closeness, TIL began to strive for independence.

> We did go through a phase where we, I think it's when I were chair, I started to deliberately want to put some separation between TIL and SSRG, 'cos I thought it felt a bit one-sided. They'd been very helpful and supportive, but I also felt it were time for TIL to stand on its own two feet. Um, and to forge its own identity. But it was never – the aim was never to break the links with SSRG, it was just to stop relying on them for everything.
>
> Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016

At the start of 2013, an influx of new members meant that TIL was big enough to have a B team. For a time, this renewed the connection between TIL and SSRG as there were, again, several relationships between members of this B team, Zom B Cru, and SSRG's B team, the Crucibelles. This sense of community was valued by members and added to the enjoyment of roller derby.

> We were really lucky as well because, er, I hate to sound like a nostalgic arsehole, but, you know, it was a really golden time as well where Crucibelles and Zom B Cru had a real affinity. You know, there was several, sort of, courtships between the two teams and that seemed to really – really bring the two groups together.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

Grievous highlights the feeling of togetherness that was apparent during this time. Romantic relationships helped to cement ties between the two teams and build a greater sense of one community.

By the time my fieldwork officially started in October of 2015, many of the original members of TIL had left, and because of dwindling membership, Zom B Cru had been shelved for an indefinite period. The close relationship between SSRG and TIL had faded to the point where the chair, and several committee members, struggled to

remember a time when SSRG had offered any support to TIL at all. Whilst ex-members such as Grievous could continue to look at the past with rose-tinted glasses, roles within the teams' structures had changed, and those who remained with TIL, now spoke of SSRG from the position of outsider.

Still connected to roller derby through coaching the junior team at the time of interview, ex-member Grievous felt that, at times, TIL had been hostile towards SSRG, and that members actively resisted being part of a local roller derby community.

> I approached TIL about the junior derby and tried to get them involved with junior derby, and they've just put up barrier after barrier. You know, they've said in essence, 'yes we're interested', but then put up every road block possible, erm, and it just seems…perverse to me, why wouldn't you want to have a good relationship with your sister league?
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

Grievous interpreted the tensions and difficulties as stemming from TIL members and perceived them to be the ones preventing the two teams from working together. At that time, SSRG members were setting up a junior team, open to all genders. Whilst Grievous felt that TIL members should want to be more involved, TIL committee discussions suggested that as a junior team was not on TIL's agenda, and as there was a hesitation to be involved due to questions around safeguarding that the chair felt had not been properly addressed, it was better to not be involved initially. The TIL committee were themselves dealing with low membership and low engagement, struggling to get team members engaged in TIL business.

> When I was chair I would look at people and say, why aren't you doing something and I'd be lying if I said it didn't piss me off when I saw people doing nothing, when I saw people who just wanted to turn up to training and that's all they'd like to do or not even turn up to training sometimes, just turn up and expect to play a game. It pissed me off loads and that was one of the

major things that we tried to deal with when I was chair, trying, how do you engage people?

Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

Under Coogan's leadership, a skater who had no previous connection with any other roller derby team, TIL had become more insular and inwardly-focused. TIL were more independent, but they suffered through lack of strong links to other teams, especially at a time when numbers were low, and some members were a little disengaged.

This narrow focus could be seen as a natural development in the construction of the community. Jenkins' (2014) discussion of group identity offers a useful way to explore these changes in TIL. Members were seeking to define the team in a way that granted them independence from the women's league, and in this independence, they sought validation of their identity as a men's league. The problem for TIL, which offers a point of contrast to the literature, is that the league appeared weaker and more fragile when members were so inwardly focused, as discussed in the following sections. TIL's relationship to local officials, for example, had also become weaker during this time.

Officials

During my time as a member of TIL's committee, there were regular discussions about the lack of officials at training. As discussed in more depth in chapter 7, I had several experiences that negatively affected my desire to referee for TIL, and Andy Social also found continued engagement difficult to sustain. Whilst the discussion in chapter 7 focuses on the barriers to belonging experienced by officials and volunteers and the emotional responses to those barriers, here I want to explore the structural reasons for a lack of officials. Within Sheffield, there were few dedicated

officials. Most people who refereed or NSO'd also skated. This meant that to officiate for another team, a person would have to commit to double the time of a non-official. Also, several of the more experienced skaters/refs in Sheffield were members of TIL, so in order to referee for the team, they had to take time out from skating. In a team with low numbers, this was problematic.

Training times were also an issue for those who would otherwise volunteer. During the period of my observation, SSRG trained from 10:30-15:00 on a Sunday, whilst TIL trained from 17:00-20:30 on the same day. SSRG did not scrimmage on a Sunday, so they managed more easily without officials, whereas TIL did regularly scrimmage. However, for SSRG members who might have been interested in officiating to commit to attending TIL sessions on a Sunday made for a very long day, especially if they had other commitments. Both teams had a training session on a Wednesday at similar times, so attendance at each other's session was limited. SSRG trained and scrimmaged on a Tuesday evening, and TIL members often attended these sessions for a little extra skating time, and to referee the scrimmage. That it was easier in some ways for TIL members to attend on Tuesdays than it was for SSRG members to attend on Sundays was rarely acknowledged. TIL members, especially the committee, pointed to this varying attendance as proof that they offered more support to SSRG than they received in return, and grumbled about the inequality.

The level of engagement between the teams remained unequal because there were more TIL skaters who were willing and able to referee than SSRG skaters. Inexperienced referees have in the past volunteered at TIL training, only to refuse to return due to poor behaviour and attitude from TIL skaters. Comments in both

committee meetings and casual conversation suggested that several TIL members believed that referees should 'toughen up' or accept that there would be a certain amount of grumbling or arguing from skaters, but that it shouldn't be taken personally, and referees should rise above it and ignore it. Whilst this appeared to be a widespread belief, in this specific instance it failed to solve the problem. TIL have previously attempted a zero-tolerance approach to abuse towards referees, but, though most members were able to modify their behaviour, some were not, and it often only takes one negative experience to put off a rookie referee completely.

The lack of officials was flagged as a cause for concern during all the committee meetings I attended throughout 2015 and 2016. However, there was rarely any concrete progress made towards fixing this problem. In December 2015, I suggested a plan for officiating, with training plans to be shared with referees so a complementary referee training plan could be implemented. This never happened, in part because the training group didn't like to publish training plans in advance. Coogan wanted to see more support from SSRG and said he hadn't seen that happen since he had been a member of TIL, but attempts to build bridges with SSRG were limited, and the belief seemed to be that SSRG members should be taking the initiative.

At times, outside referee support was solicited – usually through contacts members had with officials from other leagues. Referees from Dundee came to Sheffield for TIL's home game in March 2016, and Skate Mail, a local referee, was drafted in to function as HR throughout the summer of 2016, until he moved away. These were temporary solutions at best, and failed to help improve the number of officials in the local area. Despite the Dundee referees running a boot camp after the home game,

which Sheffield referee school members were encouraged to attend, numbers didn't improve. Trainee referees in attendance at both these initiatives were drawn from a wider area, including Mansfield and Wakefield, and these referees took their learning back to their local leagues, rather than to TIL or SSRG. There may have seemed for a time to be a wider pool of referees to draw from, but though they were sometimes available for games or planned scrimmages with other teams, they were rarely available for practice sessions. Non-skating officials (NSOs) are often the most invisible of the officials, and so, despite frequent volunteers from local women's teams, they were acknowledged much less than skating officials (referees).

TIL as a league consistently failed to recruit and retain officials from a more local area. One local unaffiliated skater asked if they could attend training sessions for free in return for offering support with coaching and officiating, but this request was turned down as it was felt that this would set a precedent for people attending without paying if they helped out in some capacity. Committee members felt that they worked hard and if they still had to pay dues as well, no one else should get free membership. On the one hand, this decision seemed fair, but considering the longstanding concern regarding lack of officials at training, it was either short-sighted or contradictory; TIL members expressed a need for referees, but did not always respond positively to offers to do so. In February 2016, Broot was struggling to pay dues, and suggested that he was intending to focus on refereeing until he was in a better position. However, he was discouraged from doing so, and told he was not needed. Shortly after this, Broot left the league.

In addition to my and Andy's feelings regarding our place in the league as discussed in Chapter 7, other potential referees have felt less than welcomed at times. In

August 2016, the partner of a TIL member attended a scrimmage as a referee. She said she had not refereed for TIL in a long time because "someone was being a complete douche" (Field notes, 7th August 2016) when she did, and she decided not to come back. Again, this sort of response suggested some TIL members behaved in a contradictory way when it came to referee volunteers. The argument discussed previously that referees should 'toughen up' might have merit in the long term, but the refusal of some TIL members to moderate their attitude towards newer referees had not proven effective in encouraging these referees to return. Additionally, there was little done by the league or its committee to clamp down on this negative attitude, in part because the attitude has originated with one or two members of the committee who did not seem to see the connection.

In my field notes, I frequently recorded a lack of engagement between officials and coaches. Attending officials were often ignored and not given direction or asked to participate until an hour or more into the session. Potentially, an experienced referee would be able to use their initiative to watch drills to focus on their development, but it is unlikely that a newer official would be confident enough to do this, especially given that TIL members tended to call penalties in drills too, often disagreeing with calls made by officials. In addition, numbers at TIL training sessions were often too low to have a scrimmage, so if a referee did attend, there was no guarantee they would be able to practice refereeing a scrim, and they were not informed in advance. This happened occasionally at SSRG sessions too, and volunteers from TIL expressed their frustration with this, not seeming to realise how this same issue affected potential TIL referees.

Sometimes, TIL members officiated too. They stepped out of training to referee a scrim, or they volunteered to referee SSRG training sessions or games. When TIL members volunteered with SSRG, they considered it to be a favour that should be returned, expecting volunteers to then turn up to TIL training, which again ignored the issues around training times. Seen in terms of Mauss's (1990) exploration of gift exchange, the collective entity TIL 'gifts' SSRG with time and officiating skill, resulting in an obligation to return the gift. That it was not returned created tension in that TIL members, especially the committee, viewed SSRG as having broken some kind of unspoken agreement. It is also interesting to note that, although I regularly refereed for TIL, I was not seen as an SSRG member returning the favour. This highlights one of the difficulties of simultaneous membership of more than one community.

Sheffield Roller Derby

The disconnect between skaters and officials soured the relationship between the two leagues, and even when skating together, there was tension and difficulties in gelling as a single team. TIL held Sheffield Roller Derby scrimmages twice during the period of fieldwork, with skaters drawn from TIL, SSRG, and HHRD. In the first one, I observed a lot of sloppy play from several skaters, including deliberate illegal blocks, and a number of revenge hits, which resulted in a disadvantage for the team using these tactics. Despite this, the skaters seemed to enjoy the scrim. The second scrim was much friendlier and enjoyable to officiate. I was a penalty box timer, and skaters would chat and joke when they were sent to the box, sometimes disagreeing with penalties, but politely, and with good grace. It is difficult to account for why the mood of each scrimmage was so different, considering there were many of the

same people present. Perhaps, because I was a referee for the first and an NSO for the second, my perspective affected the way I read the game. Alternatively, the differences could stem from specific events within the games. In the first, one skater blocked another enough to cause injury, and this was perceived by another skater to be a deliberate, illegal hit, although it was not called as such by the referees. This skater then targeted the offending blocker with several revenge hits, and this behaviour seemed to spur others on to play in an aggressive manner. In the second game, Hoof was injured, and the scrim had to be stopped for a while until he could be taken to hospital. There was some tension during this stoppage, as some people helped Hoof, whist others just went back to skating.

> Nuke comes back shortly after, saying there is a car blocking the ambulance pathway, and asking if anyone owns a red car; a small red car. People shout out 'what kind of car?', 'is it blue?' (Coogan) and unhelpful things like that. Thump could potentially just be clarifying, as he drives a red car, but the other questions were clearly facetious. Nuke was annoyed by this and said to Coops on his way out that he didn't need this shit. He had given up his skating time to help sort Hoof out, whilst everyone else who were skating just went back to it and left Hoof to the non-skaters (Field notes, Wednesday 27th April 2016).

Although this suggests a certain amount of bad feeling, the skaters continued playing, and were friendly and obviously enjoying themselves. The second scrim represents a collective will to ignore the negatives and focus on the positive aspects of skating together. These scrimmages had the potential to bring the teams together more effectively than committee discussions, which focused on the things that were not happening. Although this was recognised by some members of TIL, there were no more Sheffield Roller Derby scrimmages after this point. Lack of action on both sides prevented the togetherness that both teams profess to want.

4.3 Non-Roller Derby Locals

Venues

As briefly alluded to in the previous section, outside forces, specifically venue managers, acted as an additional barrier to Sheffield teams maintaining close links. Venues proved difficult for TIL for several reasons. Sheffield International Venues (SIV) controls many of the available sports halls in Sheffield, and though ostensibly not-for-profit, venues were expensive, and bookings were subject to cancellation if another event was booked for which SIV could charge a higher price. When I initially joined TIL, practices were held once a week at Hillsborough Leisure Centre, taking place after the SSRG session. This meant that numbers were often higher, as SSRG skaters would stay for the TIL session. Also, officials would often attend both sessions. This helped the teams remain closer.

In the early part of 2013, TIL members also attended SSRG-run skills sessions on Wednesdays at Ponds Forge. This meant that new skaters were introduced to roller derby in an all-gender environment, and the small number of new TIL skaters could immediately feel part of something. Grievous remembers these early days fondly.

> But you know, I enjoyed it. I think my first six months I would say was probably the most fun I had at TIL. Partly because I think pre-mins, I see this when I train fresh meat you know it's such a great time because you've got a clear goal…you're chasing, passing your mins, erm you're not worrying about you know the pressure of being part of the bouting squad or anything like that. It's much simpler really, and obviously it's all new and fun and also you're not kind of involved in all the politics of it either because you're pre mins.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

However, given this and Grievous' comments about 'courtships' between TIL and SSRG, it is clear that during his interview he was feeling nostalgic. Other

interviewees focused much less on memories of the two teams training together, although Blocktopus and Daddy Longlegs did both discuss venue changes in negative terms. Later that year, TIL Wednesday sessions were moved to a different venue, Paces, further out of town, but cheaper. This was seen by some as part of a deliberate attempt to distance TIL from SSRG, but also encouraged by some from SSRG to create a women-only space, as not everyone enjoyed contact drills and scrimmage with male skaters. As part of TIL at the time, and not being privy to parallel discussions in the women's league, Grievous saw the men's team as the driver of this change.

> I mean I definitely missed training with the girls, because to me that was, always felt like what we should be doing, what derby should be. It should be like an inclusive, we're all doing this together. I think it quite upset me how much some of the guys were anti-SSRG, you know, I was like 'dude, we're all playing the same sport, can we not just get along?' But there were elements of the team that were actively resisting sort of being part of…and that's still going on today, you know.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

At the time of the change, Nuke was developing his coaching skills,

> The coaching progressed to the point where I became head coach for SSRG and I setup, I was kind of, as I was part of that league and part of TIL, a joint session on Wednesday's for pre-mins which was open to both TIL and SSRG and I committed to developing that. Got coaches in place for and even were sharing the work between the two teams for the financial and coaching responsibility of it.
>
> Nuke Interview, 22nd August 2016

He had worked hard to develop this session as a space for newer skaters in both teams to learn together. As Nuke is committed to inclusivity in roller derby and wants to see the men's side of the sport become 'open' rather than gender based, this sort of development was important to him. After the change in venue for TIL, Nuke made the decision to continue coaching SSRG rather than attending TIL's

Wednesday session. He felt committed to this session, and "[he] enjoyed doing it and [he] thought it went well" (Nuke Interview 22nd August 2016).

The change in venue clearly had impacts on individuals within the team, and though it was proposed partly on the basis of cost-saving, there were clearly other agendas. The training sessions worked well for a while, but did impact numbers attending, and did separate the two teams, as the skills sessions were now run concurrently, in different parts of the city.

From this point, then, the teams were not training together, although they still shared the same venue on Sundays and there was still a fair amount of crossover in attendance at each other's sessions on this day. The closure of Hillsborough to put in a sprung floor, unsuitable for skating on, meant, however, that both teams had to find a different Sunday training venue. Eventually, SSRG settled on Springs Leisure Centre, whilst TIL moved to Forge Valley. Although at opposite sides of the city, training was now at different times, and it was still theoretically possible to attend both sessions, albeit with the additional complication as discussed in the previous section, of attendance at both leading to a very lengthy training day. Largely because of this, team crossover declined considerably, with no TIL members attending SSRG sessions on Sundays, and very few SSRG members only infrequently attending TIL Sunday sessions. This lack of crossover meant that newer skaters on each team had less opportunity to get to know each other, and already strained links became even weaker.

During the 2015-2016 season, TIL trained at Forge Valley from 8:00-10:00pm on Wednesday and 6:00-8:30pm on Sunday. They seemed to have built up a good relationship with the managers of the sports hall, leaving equipment in the

storeroom, and having laid a permanent track. This saved time at the start of each session, and also allowed for more accuracy, as there was a defined track boundary rather than an approximate edge marked with cut up mouse mats, as had previously been the case.

However, the hall was only big enough for training and the occasional scrimmage, as there was no room for outside pack referees. TIL were still able to hold a few games there against other teams, or as part of Sheffield Roller Derby, but it was unsuitable for open events due to its size. TIL could host games that were 'closed' and this was useful for training, but the lack of an OPR lane prevented its use for sanctioned games, and the general lack of space prevented 'open' events which would attract paying audiences. This limited the league's ability to generate income from games, and therefore, retaining members and recruiting new ones becomes more important.

Another issue with the venue was its location. Although transport links are relatively good, members struggled to get to the venue if they were outside Sheffield or if they relied on public transport. This was discussed within the committee as a poor excuse for not attending. Nevertheless, it remained an issue, not least as regards retaining members.

For open games, then, venue choice was limited, and often expensive to the point that making any kind of profit was difficult. There existed a tension between the desire to have events which were as cheap as possible to run, and the desire to get as many people in the audience as possible. The money made at games through entrance fee, refreshments, and merchandise could be used for subsidising travel, guest coaches, and promoting the team. TIL's 2015 home Champs game was held in

Dewsbury, as the venue was significantly cheaper than any in Sheffield. A cheaper venue hire meant TIL could charge less for tickets, which potentially could encourage a bigger audience. This event was a modest success, demonstrating that TIL could organise a game without support from other leagues, but also, it failed to make a profit.

> Overall, I would call this event a qualified success. We did not make a profit on the day, but the loss was small. Venue issues came to the fore, and we were forced to decamp to Dewsbury. Although the leisure centre there is a good roller derby space, it was commonly felt that straying too far from home ground prevented us really making the most of the opportunity to rake in some much-needed funds. It also made organisation more difficult, and attendance (both spectators and potential staffing) lower than it could have been.
>
> TIL AGM Statement, April 2015

Members felt that, in future, they would rather hold their home game at home in Sheffield, weighing up the greater venue outgoings with potential for a bigger audience.

This decision proved to be a good one, as TIL did make a small profit from their next home game:

> The home game was more profitable than last year, probably due to being held in our home city, and because of greater involvement of TIL members both in the run up to the game and on the day.
>
> TIL AGM Statement, April 2016

This does strongly suggest that greater engagement from league members, including a push on promotion, and a wider variety of stalls and merchandise on offer at the event, meant a greater attractiveness to home audiences. These considerations have always been finely balanced, and regardless of the level of work and input from league members, spiralling venue costs remained the number one barrier to the success of TIL.

The cost of venues represents a significant challenge to the growth of the sport as a whole, and to TIL as a league. Rainy City Roller Derby, based in Oldham, have their own venue, the Thunderdome, an old warehouse they have transformed into a training and bouting space. Although this required hard work over a long period of time from league members, it allowed them to train more often and build their league to the point where their A team are playing in Division 1 of the WFTDA, and they have a B and C team. A venue of one's own is a dream for many roller derby leagues, and there was discussion of this within TIL. Although the league had never been in a financial position to consider doing this themselves, there had been many cross-league discussions regarding a warehouse for Sheffield teams.

A training and bouting space of their own would solve many of the venue problems – they would not be so reliant on expensive SIV venues, and depending on location, it could be more convenient for members. One sticking point, however, was the level of engagement that would be required from all league members to make it a realistic prospect. Members who rarely showed up for training were unlikely to give up extra time for the running of a warehouse space. Additionally, it would require good communication and support between the Sheffield leagues, which, given the feelings on both sides, was unlikely during the period of fieldwork.

Doing-It-Yourself

Coogan spoke extensively of his views about the sport and what he thought was holding it back: those who join for derby's alternative, DIY image, and not for the sport itself.

> Roller derby comes from a DIY ethos which I'm very familiar with I'm you know I've listened to punk music my whole life you know that whole DIY thing that you do it yourself, don't rely on anybody else it's all about hard graft… [but] it's not like it was back in the DIY days.

Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

However, in saying this, Coogan did not make the connection that roller derby still was very much a DIY sport. Although the focus is changing to be less about the peripheral entertainment and more about the athleticism on track, leagues and events are still run by members, often without any kind of sponsorship, and relying solely on fundraising efforts through the events themselves, and merchandise. As chair, he did encourage greater involvement from all members, and often embodied this notion of 'hard graft', but in conversation he sought to position roller derby as a sport, not as part of an 'alternative' lifestyle. Coogan's view also failed to take account of the showmanship and spectacle that is often part of mainstream sport – that commercial sport *is* entertainment, and so, there are arguments to suggest retaining some of the 'sillier' aspects of roller derby.

Another barrier to TIL's growth was the lack of any co-ordinated approach to promotion and recruitment. In a DIY league, it can be difficult to ensure the right people are performing the right roles, and often people took on a role simply because they were the only person willing to do it. I was TIL's events co-ordinator for two years despite having no prior experience of events management. During that two years, the sponsorship position was vacant more often than it was filled, recruitment

was run by the membership officer, whose time was often filled with chasing non-payment of dues, and non-attending members, and promotion was under the remit of the media officer, which involved running the leagues social media sites and not much more.

Although members had ideas, not all were prepared to put the time in, and those that were often didn't have the expertise to fully realise these ideas. Committee meetings were often taken up with dealing with day-to-day matters, or excuses as to why things were not done. Engagement of members was variable. Both Coogan and Frank, as chairs of TIL, struggled to get members involved with supporting and helping to run the league. Both explained that they had never wanted to be chair, and didn't believe they were particularly good leaders, but they wanted to give something back to the league, and, each time, were the only ones volunteering to do it, so they were both elected unopposed.

Coogan took over as chair during a difficult period after a lot of members had left, so he saw his role as rebuilding the league; asking what members wanted and taking it from there.

> Like, I'd seen two previous chairs and then a mish mash of a lot of shit. And it was always obvious to me that people have no idea what they're doing, they're not listening to the league, they pretend to listen, they say what do you want? Then pretend to listen and then do whatever the fuck they wanted to, but it wasn't right for the team. And so yeah, I do think that the way I was helped.
>
> Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

After discussing what the team wanted, he felt empowered to make decisions on behalf of the league. He could be quite autocratic and justified this by arguing that other league members should step up to vacant roles if they wanted more influence

in the league. TIL was more stable by the point Frank took over, and he ran things

differently; more democratically.

> You know you've got to try and make it as open to league members as much as possible, so you try and keep them involved in certain situations which are going on and it's difficult to sort of stay impartial as well. Because you are meant to be as impartial as possible. Things get on my nerves as well I want to sort of like tell people what I think is a bullshit, but you've got to try your hardest to sort of not lead people on to things. Or not lead people into decisions. And it's quite difficult to do.
>
> Frank Interview, 17th August 2016

Despite differences in leadership style, both chairs tried hard to engage members,

and both found it very difficult, with low numbers, and lack of enthusiasm for doing

league work outside of skating. With such reluctance on the part of members, it is

perhaps not surprising that members also fail to engage with those outside the sport.

Engagement and Recruitment

Within Sheffield, roller derby did not seem to be widely known or supported outside

the central derby community. There were three teams in Sheffield, but engagement

both with and from the local community was sporadic at best. Whilst SSRG was

involved with national initiatives, such as Sport England's *This Girl Can* campaign,

there were no such initiatives for men's sport. Stuntman and Andy Social were

involved in fundraising for Sheffield Children's Hospital, and Fin was engaged in

the support and promotion of issues of concern to the trans community, but these

actions were largely individual, rather than league wide. Teammates supported these

efforts but were not engaged themselves. Some members just wanted to skate twice

a week and not think about it for the rest of the time. There did not seem to be the

same passion for raising the profile of the sport in the men's league. Engagement

was minimal.

Engagement with ex-members was also minimal. As membership officer, Jason would occasionally message ex-members to let them know that the door was always open should they want to return, but many ex-members found they had little reason to keep in touch. The majority of current members did not know those who left prior to 2016: high turnover, and low membership led to a lack of continuity and many ex-members had become strangers.

Recruiting new members was another area beset by lack of engagement. In 2013/2014, the committee decided on a large-scale recruitment process they referred to as 'Dead Meat'. Interested people were recruited for a twelve-week programme to teach them the basics of roller derby and pass their minimum skills. This was the first time the league had approached training in this way. They hired a hall in Stocksbridge, and one member, who owned a skate shop at the time, loaned kit for the new skaters. Dead Meat was a resounding failure. New skaters were not properly integrated into the league, it was expensive to train them, coaches were not always available, and some potential skaters disappeared with hire kit and never returned, overall, the programme lost the team around £1200, money they could ill afford to lose. Very few Dead Meat skaters graduated to the main league. Since then, TIL have ceased recruiting in this way, instead continuing to have members join and train them in an ad-hoc way. In any league discussion on recruitment, Dead Meat invariably gets a mention, with one or two members making snide and sarcastic comments. The refrain "ask about buy-back", in reference to a tagline on a recruitment poster offering new skaters loan kit to keep at a reduced price, was often used to derail conversations about the best ways to get new people interested in roller derby.

Although the more recent ad-hoc approach was a very slow way of recruiting,

members felt it was more successful. Pipkin joined in this way, and, as discussed in

chapter 5, felt a sense of belonging from the start. New skaters were more

successfully integrated into the league and saw gameplay early on, giving them a

better understanding of both the league and the sport.

Social media is a potential tool for recruiting, but it was rarely used to its full

potential in TIL. The league had a website, a Facebook page, a twitter account and

an Instagram account. The media officer on committee was responsible for the

upkeep of these, and though other members chipped in on occasion, it was largely

left to a single person to manage. There were several periods where a member with

this responsibility left without passing on any information to others, and so, the post

was vacant, with very little outward communication happening.

FIGURE 4.2 TIL WEBPAGE. 18TH JANUARY 2016.

The website changed several times over the years, with the version used during

2015-2016 being very basic and containing very little historical information. For

example, there was no reference to Zom B Cru at all. This could be seen as the

previous media officer, Beat Monkey, and the committee's, wish to break with the

past and focus just on the team moving forward. It could also be seen as an attempt

to whitewash the past, and curate the public image of TIL, as discussed in chapter 4.

This break with the past, however, ignored the rich history of TIL, which though not

always pleasant, was interesting, and was sometimes more successful in engaging with the wider community.

4.4 The Wider Roller Derby Community

Beyond the local community, there is a wide world of roller derby. The sport is played in over fifty countries, including twenty-seven countries that have men's or inclusive teams, and there are a number of recognised governing bodies. Men's roller derby is governed by the MRDA worldwide, and the UKRDA within the UK. TIL had been members of the MRDA since 2013. Though they were also members of the UKRDA, they had discussed letting their membership lapse, MRDA membership being considered more important. Membership of either is voluntary but can confer advantages.

The United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA) is a voluntary organisation set up to promote the sport of roller derby in the UK. It is run by volunteers from the roller derby community and is recognised by the British Roller Sports Federation (BRSF). During 2016, leagues paid £100 a year for membership.

It was difficult to find information about the inner workings of the UKRDA. As they are a private limited company, information about their directors and accounts should be made public, but it was apparent that much of the publicly accessible information was out of date. The information that could be found suggested that the UKRDA were not particularly active. They raised money through membership dues but had not done anything with that money. As of April 2016, their assets were £7562, a figure that had been steadily rising over the last five years (Companies House, 2017).

UKRDA continued to post on their website occasionally, but other than organising an annual roller derby tournament at the Tattoo Freeze tattoo festival, they were very quiet. As a result of this lack of action, TIL discussed whether or not it was worth continuing to be members of the association, as they were seeing no return for their money. UKRDA offered a potential link between roller derby leagues throughout the UK, but it was failing to offer anything of value.

The British Roller Derby Championships, often known as British Champs, or simply Champs, is a national interleague tournament divided into four tiers for women and three tiers for men. The tournament began as the End of the World Series, a competition between six women's teams based in the Midlands. Rebranded the following year as the Heartland Series, it grew over two years to twenty-four teams. The first British Roller Derby Championships in 2015 featured 72 teams, including, for the first time, men's teams (British Championships, 2015).

Although it runs with the support of the UKRDA, they are separate organisations, and British Champs is funded through entry fees (UKRDA, 2014b). Although the first season did feature UKRDA sanctioned games, due to the silence of that organisation, few games were sanctioned by them in 2016, in fact, TIL had not had a game sanctioned by them since September 2015 (Flat Track Stats, 2017).

British Champs has had its share of controversy in the roller derby community. As British Champs are not a legal entity, it was difficult to find out anything about the organisers, or what happened to the entry fees. During the season, leagues took financial responsibility for putting on games, but Champs paid for the Playoffs, which was a two-day event held to decide which leagues would be promoted and which demoted for some tiers. Entry fees to the competition were £72.50 per league,

and in 2016, 86 teams took part (66 women's teams, and 20 men's teams). It was unclear what this entry fee was spent on. In addition, the organisers issued demerits for leagues who failed to supply officials or rosters on time, and games were forfeit under certain circumstances, such as if players were fielded who were not on the published roster. A forfeit game resulted in a 300-0 victory to the other team. This caused problems in that teams finished in the relegation zone whilst performing better than teams who benefitted from a forfeit. Also, the lack of transparency of the organisation meant that some leagues received demerits or had games forfeited where they felt it was undeserved.

The organisation of Champs was a little opaque, and it was difficult to be certain who was in charge, and who made the decisions. Tournament and Tier head officials were publicised on the website, but beyond that, it was silent. Roller Derby on Film experienced difficulties with the British Champs organisers with their photography waiver, which he said was "bizarre" and "ridiculous", being very restrictive and showing a lack of understanding of how photographers work. He suggested that the organisers wouldn't listen to his concerns until the top names in the sport responded to and supported his position. This does suggest a hierarchy within the sport, where those with a talent for self-promotion get heard more than others and underscores how difficult communication with Champs can be.

Despite these issues, many leagues continued to engage with Champs, as did TIL, because it offered a season structure and a guaranteed five games a year against opponents of a broadly similar standard, and only one of those would be a home game, which reduced the financial burden considerably, whilst still allowing for gameplay. TIL took part in all seasons of British Champs. In 2015, they were put in

Tier 2, winning three out of their five games, losing only to Manchester's New Wheeled Order, and Barrow Infernos. Both of these teams went up to Tier 1 in 2016. TIL stayed in Tier 2, going on to win four of their five games, and at the end of the 2016 season, were promoted to Tier 1 for 2017.

The MRDA run along the same lines as WFTDA. Member leagues make the decisions: the organisation is democratic, and volunteer-led. Not everyone was happy about this.

> We keep on getting shit and stuff through MRDA you know they're supposed to be our governing body saying, we're looking at these rules and we're thinking about changing them, we'd like your opinion. And it's like oh for fuck's sake really. You know yeah, I've talked about listening. You need to listen but there's a point then when you listen too much. You need to get a good idea, you need to go forwards with it, test it out if you've got a good idea. We get so much stuff through on the TIL page from MRDA and they're not leaning in any direction, they're just wanting the teams to pull them forwards and it's the wrong way of going about it.
>
> Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

Coogan believed MRDA should be run along the same lines as his tenure as chair of TIL: canvas member opinion, and then get on with the job. TIL struggled to keep up to date with MRDA and UKRDA requirements due to lack of interest in the role of representative for the team. In May 2015, the plan was to merge the roles, so there would be three people representing TIL in both organisations. By mid-2016, TIL were still having difficulty in filling these roles.

MRDA require engagement from member leagues, so leagues have representatives on the MRDA forum who are expecting to take part in discussions and vote on behalf of the league. Although this was not an especially onerous task, it generally fell to members who were already part of the committee, so already taking on the bulk of the administrative work. But without members on the forum, TIL were

excluded from discussions affecting the men's roller derby community, isolating them from the wider organisation. MRDA membership fees were £175, but without the engagement, TIL received little return on this investment, as sanctioning games (which opens the door to involvement in MRDA tournaments) required engagement on the forum.

Although several members of TIL were not very involved in wider debates, there were those who felt passionate about the future of roller derby, and specific issues bound up in that future. In December 2015, the committee discussed the nature of TIL as a men's, co-ed or open league; the latter being the preferred model – i.e. people are picked on ability. They argued that the MRDA non-discrimination policy gave them the lead to be much more gender inclusive. As UKRDA policy stated that women could only play for one league and Champs would not allow mixed teams, the decision was made to contact both to raise the issue and ask for their take. By mid-2016, there had been no response from UKRDA. The committee said that any further discussion or plans would need to be discussed with the whole membership, but it was clear that this meant potentially withdrawing from UKRDA membership and/or the British Champs competition.

Nuke was keen for TIL to go down the 'open' route, believing that a policy that selected skaters on ability rather than gender was a better way to organise the league (this is discussed further in chapter 5). He saw both British Champs and UKRDA as standing in the way of that, because both organisations stated that a skater could not compete for teams in both the men's and the women's tiers, despite the tiers remaining separate. He explained:

> So, I wouldn't have a problem with somebody being in a women's league also being an open league and very few people I talk to share that viewpoint. And Champs and UKRDA also don't share that viewpoint.
>
> Nuke Interview, 22nd August 2016

In fact, MRDA and WFTDA said the same thing, so Nuke's view had very little support in the wider community. He did argue that MRDA was the most inclusive of all the organisations and would require only a change of focus to become 'open' rather than 'men's'. This would go some way to solving the issue of non-binary skaters having to choose which gender they most identify with, as currently there is no organisation that is specifically for them; there is men's and there is women's, and skaters have to decide which one is the best fit. Open would change this.

This changing environment had a positive impact within TIL, however, allowing Fin to join, and also allowing cisgender women to join the team, if MRDA roller derby was where they preferred to be.

4.5 Summary and Discussion

It is clear that engagement, or rather, lack of it, was an issue, not just for TIL, but for the roller derby community as a whole. There was strength in numbers, but the fractured nature within leagues, between leagues from similar geographical areas, and between leagues and governing bodies acted as a substantial stumbling block on the path to the development of the sport. It is a new sport, and people join for so many different reasons, behaving in different ways when they are part of it. The community of the Inhuman League demonstrates the interdependence of similarity and difference (Jenkins, 2014). Although individuals may share a nominal identity, that of TIL member, they 'do' this membership differently. As Goffman (1959) suggested, team members have different roles, and there must be an acceptance of

difference for a team to be successful, so despite difficulties, success relies on finding ways to overcome this fractured nature.

TIL exists because of a collective internal definition of what and why they are (Jenkins, 2014), and part of this definition was that they were independent; a league in their own right. However, the strained links between TIL and other Sheffield leagues, and officials, impacted their ability to put on events and the success of those events. A change in attitude is necessary to re-strengthen those links. It is not enough to complain in committee meeting that those ties are not there, and they should be: action by TIL members is necessary. This may take the form of a commitment to engage more with other teams, despite a perceived lack of return in the initial stages, or a firmer response to behaviours that alienate officials. It is difficult to suggest answers, as this chapter has shown that attempts to engage league members have been on-going for some time, with little success. But rather than bury the past, as league members have done in both outward and inward facing social media, remembering and learning from past mistakes, as well as successes, might not be a bad way to start. TIL appears weaker when the league is inwardly focused. The strength of the roller derby community lies not in clearly defined boundaries, but in the many linked communities; the multiplexity (Cohen, 1985). A failure to adequately recognise this is a weakness, and so ties with SSRG, with officials, and with potential recruits also become weaker.

The wider communities and organisations like the UKRDA, Champs, and MRDA are clearly not perfect, but again, it is only through engagement that they will improve, and likewise, must recognise the value in the multiplexity of the community. TIL have discussed leaving UKRDA, but rather than leave these

organisations, in which case, whatever happens, TIL see no benefit, a deeper involvement could enable the league to influence positive change. At the point I 'left' the field, members of TIL were beginning to take steps towards this with their championing of 'open' roller derby, so it will be interesting to see where this goes in future.

Having laid out the context of this community, the Inhuman League, the following chapters delve into the experiences of members more deeply. In chapters 6 and 7, I return to some of the issues raised in this chapter, notably the practices members engage in to create a sense of community, and the ways some members, especially officials, can experience barriers to feelings of belonging. Before that, in chapter 5, I turn to a discussion of how the identity of the group developed over time, and explore how the identities of individual members are constructed.

CHAPTER 5 IMAGE AND IDENTITY

5.1 Introduction

Having set out the wider history of the Inhuman League and noted the importance of thinking about community, this chapter picks up the threads of league development to explore how individual identities, and the larger group identity, are constructed. Considerable energy was expended in the Inhuman League on creating and maintaining an image, or a series of identities; whether that be a self-identity, a public image, an individual or a group identity. This involved constant negotiation. Identity is a process, and members were simultaneously engaged in conflicting projects and processes. This conflict brought disruption, not just on a personal level, but also to the team, as personal goals and team goals are different. This chapter seeks to discuss the concern with image and identity in the Inhuman League and account for why this was the case.

I joined the Inhuman League during its most successful period to date: the A team were fourth in Europe, and we had a successful B team. Members worked to create and maintain a public image as a friendly, 'nice' team, but within the team there were tensions, which became increasingly apparent as time went on. There was a divide between the A and B teams, and a divide between those who wanted to be 'serious' and 'professional', and those for whom roller derby was a fun hobby. Over a period of several months, a lot of members left – mostly either skaters who wanted to push themselves further and felt other teams would be better for them, or skaters who didn't like the increased seriousness and team politics, and so dropped out of the sport entirely. This meant that the B team had to be disbanded, and the league had to think about redefining itself, not just to outside observers, other teams, and

fans, but from within. Taking from Jenkins (2014) the idea of identity as the capacity "to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what')" (Jenkins, 2014, p6), and using Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management, this chapter is an attempt to capture the self- and public-image of members of TIL and the whole league; to explore how these identities were developed and maintained, an attempt which also recognises identity, or identification, as a process, rather than a thing one has (Goffman, 1959; Jenkins, 2014).

I begin with a discussion of the choices skaters made that contributed towards the development of an individual roller derby identity, examining the practice of selecting a skate name and a number, and exploring the impact clothing choices had. These aspects of roller derby have been discussed in both academic and non-academic texts, and are often gendered; being presented as a way for women in the sport to subvert gender norms, through the creation of a 'tough' sounding name, for example, or hyper-sexualised clothing. The suggestions from these texts are that such choices are not open to men in the same way (Murray, 2012), and my own observations support the argument that, especially in terms of clothing, men were often ridiculed for dressing in creative ways. Including data from my ethnography, and from a pilot study into 'boutfits' (outfits worn for a roller derby bout, or game) choices, I explore how men used names, numbers, and boutfits to express their masculinity, and femininity, in ways which were just as successful in calling into question accepted gender norms.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore discourses within the team that were focused on the image members wished to create of themselves as a collective. Many of these discourses involved the desire to make a good impression, and to develop a

positive image for the team. Through impression management, the league variously positioned itself as 'calm', or as the underdog. Importantly, the league continually attempted to foster the impression that it was inclusive, and hence a space to welcome difference. I discuss how a commitment to inclusivity worked in practice more thoroughly in chapter 6, but here I focus on the *discourse* of inclusivity, and how it was used to build a picture of what the league believed about itself, and the image it wanted to project to the rest of the roller derby community.

5.2 Names and Numbers

One of the ways members maintained an identity was through skate names and numbers. The concept of the skate name, or roller derby persona, has arguably entered the public imaginary more effectively than the sport itself. Names are written about on popular blogs and websites, and in academic articles about the sport. Popularized in books published by and about roller derby participants (Joulwan, 2007; Mabe, 2007; Barbee and Cohen, 2010), this formulation involves the idea that skaters are normal, everyday *women* 'by day', and take on an alter ego or persona 'by night'. This interest in the reasons for choosing and using a skate name has spilled over into academic texts. In sociological work on roller derby, there are many discussions of the meanings these names hold for participants (Carlson, 2010; Finley, 2010; Hern, 2010; Mullin, 2012; Murray, 2012; Parrotta, 2015), and frequently, discussion of how and why naming practices are important. Each number is unique within a team, and each name is unique within the sport (or was until participant numbers grew so as to make this unfeasible and unrealistic). Through the means of choosing a new name and number for themselves, skaters carve out a new identity within the team and the sport.

'Popular' publications document the use of derby names as part of skaters creating a 'persona'; a fictional version of themselves displaying admired, and desired, traits. Skate names have been discussed as a mechanism for engaging with and fighting against hegemonic ideals of gender, ethnicity, and class (Finley, 2010; Chananie-Hill et al, 2012). Researchers argue that the creation of a derby name or persona enables skaters to perform a partially fictionalised identity, which may be more 'masculine' than their real self, and allows them to redefine themselves in a way that is empowering (Cohen, 2008; Hern, 2010; McDonald; Chananie-Hill et al, 2012; Mullin, 2012). Carlson (2010) claims skater names question emphasised femininity, both resisting and reproducing gender norms, through their use of both feminine and masculine descriptors, also finding that "skaters refer to each other almost exclusively by their derby names at practice, at bouts (where the public knows them only by their derby names), and outside of practice; most skaters do not know each other's actual names" (p433).

In 2015, Frogmouth Clothing released a Graphical Taxonomy of Roller Derby Skate Names, introducing it in a blog on their website. This blog discussed the roller derby world as "diverse, informed, and creative: a global group of women drawing power and inspiration from everywhere—and especially from other powerful, inspiring women, both real and imagined" (Frogmouth, 2015). What the blog missed, was that many of these names were chosen and used by men. Jason Slaysthem, Dodger Moore, David Hasslehoof, and Bollock Obama, have all played for the Inhuman League, and are all male. A later blog entry suggests that "skate names reveal a lot about the culture of the sport, and the women who play it, including the fact that a lot of them are geeks, and many are science fiction fans" (Frogmouth, 2015). These writers connect the practice of using 'alter-egos' with women's roller derby, and do

not discuss whether or not naming works differently in men's roller derby. In TIL, members often did not take names as seriously as the literature would suggest women do, nor did they show respect for each other's choices of name.

FIGURE 5.1 GRAPHICAL TAXONOMY OF ROLLER DERBY SKATE NAMES. COURTESY OF FROGMOUTH. 2015.

A roller derby identity always involves negotiation between the claimed identity and the one you are given. Jenkins (2014) suggests the difficulty of changing names, but within TIL there was the added difficulty of disrupting one's own narrative without that disruption being in turn disrupted by teammates. Several skaters' real names were used interchangeably with their skate names, several other skaters had skate names that used their real names as a basis, and were often called by a shortened form of these names, which was basically their surname. Sometimes, using a skater's real name was a way of signalling a long friendship, or a close friendship (Blocktopus, for example, tended to use real names, especially for members he was

147

close to during his time at TIL, like Stuntman) but at other times, it was a signal of a refusal to engage with that skaters' identity or persona. Frank-N-Hurter, Skate Mail, and Dr Blocktopus were examples of members and ex-members whose real names were usually used.

In the case of some members, such as Phally and Pipkin, attempts to name themselves failed, as their names were imposed by the rest of the group. In both cases, these skaters were given their names by others, after spending time thinking of alternatives. Phally, or Phallic Baldwin, was given this name by Stuntman, and it stuck immediately. Pipkin had been known as such in previous employment, and members actively resisted his attempts to choose a new name. In contrast, one TIL member decided to change his name and be known on the official roster by his surname, but other members continued to use his skate name, Beat Monkey, or a variation of that (most notably Cunt Monkey or Beast Donkey). Despite nicknames and personas being an integral part of roller derby history, skaters have always discussed the idea of using their real names as a way to legitimise the sport (Malick, 2012). "But most rollergirls believe that derby names are here to stay. "We still continue to make the public take us seriously on our own terms…Choosing our own names is a big part of our culture that won't disappear any time soon, and is a time-honoured sports tradition – from Babe Ruth to Ocho Cinco"" (Barbee and Cohen, 2010, p158). In some ways, the use of real names could be seen as a resistance to the roller derby 'ethic', and an embracing of traditional sports ideologies. It is perhaps no coincidence that in TIL, the skater most interested in using his real name was the most serious and competitive skater.

What happened within the Inhuman League was a satirising of the process of naming in derby itself. Individuals' attempts to create a specific identity were deliberately subverted or disrupted. Skaters who gave themselves a potentially innocent moniker were subject to the dubious mercies of teammates intent on subverting this innocence. Frank-N-Hurter, so called in reference to the Rocky Horror Show character Frank-N-Furter, with an additional nod to the violent nature of the sport, was rarely called by this name. Instead, he was referred to by such names as Wank-N-Squirter, or Frank-N-Wank, or simply by his real name. Names can be an area of conflict between personal choice and league or community policing, with several community blogs discussing unacceptable derby names (Ginger Snap, 2011). Within TIL, Bollock Obama on occasion had to use the alternate name B. Obama so as not to cause offence, usually when junior teams were playing. The alternate names given to Frank were only used during training and within the league. In public, with the exception of Bollock, and potentially Phally, TIL had all chosen family-friendly names. This tied in with the league's efforts to create a good impression, discussed later in this chapter.

It is clear that there was no suggestion of creating an alter-ego as such, more that naming reflected an existing aspect of identity, as with I Am Broot: "G/Broot is self-explanatory...tree huggerish looking vegan comic art nerd, bit of gentle giant...etc.". Often names were chosen on the basis of favourite films - for example, Dorny Darko (from the 2001 film, *Donnie Darko*) and Stuntman Psyk (from the character Stuntman Mike in Quentin Tarantino's 2007 film *Death Proof*) - or the love of a bad pun (Brian Damage). Frequently, these names ended up shortened to whatever was easiest for teammates to shout on track, and so the initial reason behind the name was lost, as Dorny Darko became Dorny, and Stuntman Psyk became Stuntman.

Skaters chose names because it was allowed, even expected, but they did not seem to feel the name was part of some semi-fictionalised identity, rather it was a nod to some small part of themselves, or something they liked.

Finley suggests that "names of teams are also signs of a clever irony that indicates to spectators that they are performing something unusual. Often the names are parodies of community monikers." (2010, p377). The Inhuman League's (so called in reference to Sheffield band the Human League) name reflects this idea. Despite practices of its members having in many ways gone past the idea of irony and the performance of something 'unusual', in the early days, TIL played up the zombie element of the name, making promotional videos using skaters as zombie characters, and naming the B team Zom B Cru (a stylised version of the words zombie crew, highlighting the 'B' for B team).

In addition to choosing a skate name, members must also choose a number. Whilst skate names are to some extent optional, for members who wish to play the sport, a number is essential as it is this identifier that will be used by referees and in game statistics. Numbers can also be quite a personal thing. Beat Monkey

> chose 808 after the Roland drum machine that was instrumental (fnar) in the early development of hip hop and techno. That's when I was Beat Monkey. Was going to change to 16, after footballer Roy Keane…but realised I'd grown attached to 808.

Skaters had to learn to respond to their number, so it makes sense that over time, skaters will become attached to their number, at least in an auditory way – whether that necessarily translated to an emotional attachment is debatable.

People in skaters' lives are also commemorated through numbers. Frank's number, 514, was "based on the birthdays of [his] children". Broot chose 318 because it "was

[his] sisters birthday" He explained "She passed away around the time I first gave skating a try and when I saw my first live game". Sometimes, skaters chose a number based on some aspect of their identity, which might be either something they felt strongly about, such as Fin's choice of 1010 "because I'm obviously hilarious and thought having something binary would be a fun contrast. Also - in roman numerals it translates as 'MX' which is the title by which I choose to go by", or some otherwise inconsequential detail, like Dorny, who "was originally 4x as I race 4x/4cross but again just going for a simple 4", and Damage "6.6e-34 is Planck's constant which is both a vital astronomical figure and a good description of my first year in roller derby".

Sometimes skaters liked to have an obvious link between their name and number, like Dodger Moore, who "originally came up with 007 for my number (love Bond films) and then tried to combine a Bond name with something relating to derby". These choices seemed to have less to do with sport, or mocking sport, and more to do with wanting to highlight some part of their lives, whether that be a person who was important to them, a piece of popular culture, or part of their identity; choices that were more about everyday lived experiences than political commentary.

However, as an example of the policing of numbers, in November 2014, the WFTDA announced that from December 2015, skaters would no longer be able to use alphabetic characters as part of their roster number. Jason Slaysthem expressed disappointment with this. When asked about his number he said "0N1 because I was on a mission, stupid rule change stole my thunder so 041". Rule changes such as this align roller derby more closely with mainstream sports and seriousness, and made it more difficult for skaters to be as subversive as they would like.

5.3 Boutfits

Beaver (2009) outlines the failure of research to find examples of men's sports that provide alternatives for expressions of gender, but roller derby provides just such an example, in the views and experiences of male skaters in relation to costumes, or outfits. When worn by men, outfits or 'boutfits' (outfits worn for a roller derby 'bout' or game) subvert both gender norms and norms of sport. The conflict inherent in this subversion arises as a result of the risk skaters face from wearing boutfits. Some skaters negotiated by wearing 'sports' leggings, and some resisted by wearing hot pants. For skaters with greater skills capital, there was less conflict, less risk, and more ability to subvert these norms. Whatever their choices, clothing formed a big part of skaters' public image.

Like women's roller derby (Becker, 2010), in men's roller derby, skaters sometimes choose outfits which could be called sexualised, or feminised, whilst still being athletic. Such skaters risk condemnation more than women in roller derby, because men are not expected to be recipients of the gaze (Mulvey, 1975), and sports participation form men typically confirms masculinity (Messner, 1988).

As discussed in the literature review, Cotterill (2010) explores 'doing gender' as a form of edgework (Lyng 1990). Focusing on the skill and control aspects of edgework, Cotterill concluded that, for women, the sport is about escaping constraints; experiencing "events outside the safety of ordinary social spheres and…the expectations of the gendered social relationships" (2010, p11). The transgressive and performative opportunities to challenge gender norms through dress have been discussed only in terms of women (Peluso, 2010; Whitlock, 2012),

and the professed acceptance of all bodies implies all *female* bodies. As stated earlier, few roller derby studies have considered male, trans, or non-binary skaters.

Men's roller derby can also be theorised in terms of edgework and risk. Roller derby allows men to escape the expectations of gendered social relationships, and by expressing feminine aspects of their identity, by skating on the edge of masculinity and femininity, arguably, the 'performative' opportunities for men to challenge gender norms in this arena are even greater. Entering such a female space, it could be argued that men risk the social and symbolic capital they have within a homosocial society each time they play.

Analysis of both responses to a pilot study on boutfits, and comments in interviews with TIL members suggested the concept of 'risk' was a helpful way to look at boutfit choices. Several skaters saw boutfits as requiring 'courage' and potentially offering a 'thrill'. Some respondents said they would like to wear a boutfit, or a more outlandish boutfit than they currently wore, but they lacked the confidence, which was often discussed in terms of body confidence. One respondent expressed a negative view of boutfits in general, but added "I probably would wear a boutfit for a friendly scrim if I plucked up the courage!" Comments like this suggested that, at times, negative responses did themselves stem from a lack of comfort with one's body. Others suggested that wearing a boutfit can *give* a skater confidence; boutfits were 'freeing' and, wearing them, skaters experienced 'acceptance' of who they were. Rather than 'edgework', the ability to express aspects of their identity otherwise kept hidden was more important:

> My boutfit is the expression of my personality that I have to keep toned
> down during most of my public life. I came to terms with my more feminine

personality a long time ago and so I relish the opportunity to wear more feminine clothes in public.

Professor Chaos, Pilot Study, April 2015

Several respondents discussed the importance of wearing clothing they saw as feminine, and explained that this was not always possible in day-to-day life. Roller derby offered these men a space to experiment and express themselves. It is important to note that not all participants in men's roller derby are cisgender, heterosexual men, and therefore this space also allowed marginalised and less privileged identities to be expressed too:

> I wear a boutfit that would be described as feminine because my gender is non-binary and this allows me to express that. They simply allow me to feel more normal within myself in a context that won't ridicule me for doing so.

Professor Killa Hertz, Pilot Study, April 2015

This non-binary skater valued places to express themselves fully, in a way not possible in wider society. For them, roller derby was an accepting, inclusive community, they enjoyed experimenting with femininity, and their experience was positive[1]. Robinson's (2014) concept of 'risky practices' is relevant here, with boutfits offering a "repertoire of possibilities", with which to challenge gender norms. One respondent, for example, discussed his boutfits choices as, in part, a reaction to working in a masculine environment:

> I "came out" as a pansexual male at last years' *Clam Slam* which is a queer focused derby event held annually during pride week in Toronto. Since then I've sported the Pan flag on my helmet and I love it. I work in a very masculine male dominated industry and feel that when I put on the tights and derby gear it's very freeing. I'm happier that way. I like wearing boutfits so I feel they are a great way to express yourself as you really are.

Papa Koopa, Pilot Study, April 2015

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[1] As this participant identifies as non-binary, I have used the gender-neutral pronoun they.

Of all the past and present members of TIL, Phally was the skater who experimented

with boutfits the most. He explained how this came about as a result of skaters'

nerves due to the upcoming B team debut game, in May 2013.

> So, everyone was a bit scared and I remember talking to Rex, and saying,
> "Oh no, we'll just keep it light-hearted and just try and keep peoples' spirits
> up" 'coz he was captain and I was vice-captain. So one of the jokes that we'd
> come up with was wearing the Phally pants, I was like, "Oh, I'll just wear hot
> pants", and then it was you and Maid I think that just kept adding to the joke
> and, I don't know where the idea of the zombie hand came from, but it was
> just like wouldn't it be funny if there was like a zombie hand just sort of
> cupping the balls and stuff and Maid went away and made them and I
> remember seeing them the week before in a picture on Twitter and it came
> up saying, "Real men wear hot pants" or something like that and I sort of
> went, "Oh fuck [laughs], I've got to do that now".

Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

FIGURE 5.2 PHALLY'S FIRST HOT-PANTS (UNFINISHED). COURTESY OF MAID OF STEEL. 2013.

What started as a joke, quickly became part of Phally's identity, and although he thought it was silly, and a laugh, there was a serious point in there, that if women could do it, why couldn't men? There was also resistance to it from the beginning, with people telling him not to. We discussed how, once it became expected that Phally would wear hot pants, he decided to do something else. This culminated in him going through three costume changes at one event. Phally's choice of boutfit, which often involved colourful hot pants, sometimes worn over equally colourful leggings, but most often not, represented a subversion of his previous identity. This allowed him to behave in ways he would not have done before.

> I probably wouldn't have done half of the ridiculous stuff that we've done like, wouldn't have really been into the jokes as much and stuff like that. Starting off I was incredibly shy and quite withdrawn really and it's one of those where meeting lots of people and doing lots of things and traveling to other cities and playing with lots of people sort of brought me out of my shell a little bit.

Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

FIGURE 5.3 PHALLY'S BOUTFIT. COURTESY OF DAWN CHARLESWORTH. 2013.

Wearing a boutfit forced attention on Phally, and he had to negotiate the conflict this caused from team members, some of whom were supportive, and some of whom accused him of not taking the game seriously. In resisting attempts to police his mode of dress, he resisted the increasingly dominant discourse that roller derby was a 'serious' sport, and that, as athletes, skaters should not wear costumes; although engaged in sport, he risked his sense of masculinity through his refusal to submit to the dominant discourse, instead revelling in the carnivalesque presentation of self (Bakhtin, 1984).

The possibilities of this presentation of self are not accepted in the literature on roller derby. Murray's exploration of roller derby raises an interesting point, suggesting that "boutfits are only transformative for women" (2012, p140), and that men who play with gender are viewed as ridiculous, since "unlike masculine attributes in women's sports, femininity in men's sports was indicative of less skill and value as a "real sport"" (2012, p137). Murray argues that feminine dress in men contributes to loss of status, or capital, and is "more silly than serious" (2012, p136-7). Members of TIL other than Phally experienced this. Although his boutfit was not as showy as Phally's, 4D was particularly forceful in his rejection of this view.

> I know it's such a tiny point. I mean it's not really relevant, but the amount of times that it gets mentioned about people, men wearing leggings and, oh yeah, cos Zoya doesn't like it. What's the point? I turned round to her and I was like, well they don't restrict my movement and they keep me cool. Would you rather I overheat cos if I overheat, I'll lose my temper. And if I lose my temper, I'll hit someone. I will just-…When she said it. The last time she said it, she was wearing leggings. And I very nearly turned round and went how dare you? Look down. I was like, why is it alright for you? Is it because I have a penis? I'm sorry. I'm pretty certain I didn't choose that either cos I didn't pick my, you know?

> 4D Interview, 16th August 2016

4D enjoyed playing with gender expectations, and actively resisted expectations of dress, on occasion deliberately choosing see-through leggings to provoke a response. He enjoyed anticipating the reaction of his bench manager, outspoken in her dislike of leggings on men, and keen to ban them, if he were to take her at her word.

> I've got some -- I've got some, although granted then I'd be just wearing lycra instead, but they're like tight shorts, that I wear under my leggings. I was at the game -- And I was like, well I can take them off [laughs] take them off and wear the other ones and go, there you go [laughs] There you go, what problem did you just solve? Made it worse, didn't you? Made it worse, you know.
>
> 4D Interview, 16th August 2016

Although there was a sense of anger in 4D's comments, it was clear that he found humour in the situation, much like Phally did. This speaks to the newfound confidence of these skaters, in their appearance, and their abilities. Nuke was similarly confident, but he outlined the possible downsides of this conflict between a pro-leggings and anti-leggings stance, and the risks inherent in sexualising men. At the end of our interview, Nuke said "I'm surprised you didn't ask me about my shorts". The truth is that I forgot, but we did discuss them then. Nuke mentioned his TIL award for 'best shorts', but said that he didn't think it was really an award worth mentioning; that people of all gender should be able to wear what they want as long as it is within the rules of the game.

> I don't think it's really what we should be commentating on and if I'm, I'm very comfortable with who I am, but if I wasn't, which somebody in the team could be, and they chose to wear that as an expression of themselves, and suddenly they are getting commentators at international games bringing it up and they're getting like, people when they turn up to a skate event and people turn their backs on them and tell them they have to wear something different, and they can't even look at it. Which has happened to me but like, I mean, it's not really an acceptable thing to do that to people.
>
> Nuke Interview, 22nd August 2016

FIGURE 5.4 NUKE'S SHORTS. COURTESY OF JASON RUFFELL. 2015.

Skaters in boutfits challenged normative ideas of masculinity and manhood, but where women's choices are celebrated within roller derby, skaters for men's teams found their choices open to criticism. Though skaters did not use the term risk, there was a clear boundary between what was 'okay' and 'not okay'. If skaters crossed this line, they risked censure from others, and this was often discussed as a result of the importance of 'legitimising' the sport. They were getting masculinity, even non-normative masculinity, wrong. Crossing the line, in this context, was commonly associated with clothing that is "too penisy" (Xavier Bacon). Roller derby games were often advertised as family friendly, and so nakedness was unusual. In line with this, Phallic Baldwin suggested that "as long as it's not crossing a line and bits are falling out people should be able to wear whatever they wish". However, this did not necessarily ensure a lack of censure. Sk8 Geek described how, "one of the team

anonymously complained about "too much junk" being visible. [He] was a little shocked by this, then amused, so for a short time wore shorts over lycra". This type of complaint appeared to be common. Nuke explained that he "often got comments on the tight fit of the leggings leaving little to the imagination but I am comfortable with my body and so this doesn't bother me. I imagine it would upset others though". Exactly why certain types of form-fitting clothing were policed is unclear, but skaters were forced to negotiate between expressing themselves and facing ridicule and criticism:

> I went through a period of wearing Nike sprinter's shorts. They're black, mid-thigh and tight. They got some raised eyebrows. Many. Cherry Fury dubbed it 'a strong look'. They served the purpose but a lot of people were a bit offended by them I think!!! I don't think they were that bad...
>
> Xavier Bacon, Pilot Study, April 2015

Was 'tight' associated with femininity, or homosexuality, and therefore seen as negative? Did visible genitals represent a threat? Was it prudery? In game play, tight-fitting athletic clothing can confer advantage as the skater has greater freedom of movement, and yet, skaters were often discouraged from wearing these clothes. It was not just the 'wacky' boutfits that were criticised. Compression leggings and sport specific clothing often were too. Perhaps, in a sport that is always already feminine, such an obvious symbol of masculinity and maleness was as problematic as expressions of femininity are to traditional male sports.

According to Fletcher, "in engaging with a particular sports field, individuals become subject to and assimilate the particular habitus characteristic of the field" (2008, p317). The social dimensions of edgework include an escape from, and resistance to conventional forces, and neoliberal values, and in terms of this analysis, men's roller derby boutfits could be considered 'edgework', but I question

whether the expression of a fluid identity constitutes a risk, or whether it can actually confer capital, depending on whose identity is being expressed, and in what environment. Roller derby is an unconventional sport in many ways, and the habitus characteristic of this particular field is very different to that of other sports.

Flamboyant or feminine dress appeared to be more easily accepted when worn by higher performing skaters, with some respondents suggesting that a boutfit is "a testament to confidence of the individual's ability on skates" (I Am Broot). This suggests a boutfits' effect on symbolic capital depend on the skill of the skater. In a paper on skydivers, Laurendeau and Gibbs Van Brunschot (2006) highlight that experienced jumpers ignore attempts to police the edge from outsiders, demonstrating a lack of respect for those who do not have insider knowledge and skill, and this same attitude was observed in higher level roller derby skaters. Those respondents who played for national teams showed considerably less concern with attempts to set 'appropriate' boundaries. Chemic-Al, for example, believed that "roller derby is a hobby and hobbies are supposed to be fun, until [he gets] paid for playing roller derby, the kilt and face paint stay". Arguably, one of the best male roller derby skaters in the world, Jonathan R. connected wearing a boutfit with fun and enjoyment: "Putting on my "boutfit" makes me feel great because I am excited to have fun and skate. I love how individual expression shines through in many boutfits".

Such high-level skaters also responded positively to the notion of individual expression, and these skilled and confident skaters were more able to see the 'show' of roller derby as 'fun'. Their accumulated capital allowed them more freedom to wear boutfits without suggestions that they were not serious or professional. This

offered a contrast with often less experienced skaters who demonstrated strong preoccupations with 'seriousness' and 'professionalism'. Although, it is important to note that at the 4 Nations Tournament, and the Men's World Cup, male skaters chose to tone down their appearance, and skaters who would normally wear boutfits did not. So, it seems that when playing as part of their national team, skaters did submit to the discourse that suggests that boutfits are incompatible with taking the sport seriously. Female skaters now feel pressure to dress like 'serious athletes' (Breeze, 2014). Male skaters were also beginning to experience a similar pressure, which in turn impacted on the 'risks' associated with resistance to this pressure.

FIGURE 5.5 JONATHAN R'S BOUTFIT. COURTESY OF JONATHAN R. 2015.

Taking things seriously was a big concern. More than risk, being professional was key. Mid-level skaters were dismissive of boutfits, preferring instead a more regimented uniform. Respondents clearly distinguished between 'uniform' and 'boutfit'. Uniforms were professional and serious, and engendered team spirit. 'Unprofessional' dress, i.e. a boutfit, was sometimes seen as detrimental and viewed negatively, as "a throw-back, unprofessional and an unnecessary distraction" (Veggie Kray). In contrast to the views of high-level skaters, skaters who had a negative view of boutfits suggested that boutfits might physically "hinder performance" (Dead Hardy), although this view was more likely to be expressed towards new or low-level skaters. Phallic Baldwin explained that "there had been times where [he had] been accused of not taking things seriously because of the boutfits". It was common for those who disliked them to associate boutfits with a lack of seriousness, which was seen as harmful to the growth of the sport:

> I am not opposed to the idea of Boutfits, however as Roller Derby pushes for recognition from the wider public I feel it is something that could be more harm than help.
>
> Coogan, Pilot Study, April 2015

There was a sense that boutfits were comical and should only be worn for 'fun' games, and also a fear on the part of those who enjoy wearing boutfits, that there would be moves towards banning them in the sport. Some teams had already gone down this route, with one skater explaining that "quite a few people have asked why I don't wear leggings anymore. I am a team player, and this is the view my team has now taken" (Brawl Jukes, Pilot Study, 2015).

These changes appeared to be happening in the name of 'professionalism'. There was a very specific notion of what 'professional' means. Whilst Chemic-Al referred

to 'getting paid' as the indicator of becoming professional, several other participants suggested the important factor was outsider perception of the sport; that *recognition* was key to becoming professional – or being taken *seriously*. Being professional was equated with seriousness, which was taken to necessitate the absence of the 'fun' aspects that made the sport of roller derby different to major sports. Seen through the lens of seriousness, boutfit choices were risky because they were seen to actively prevent the sport from becoming legitimised, serious, and professional. Many participants appeared to take it as read that this was what skaters *should* strive for. Coogan was a good example of someone who wanted the sport to be more serious, and he subscribed to this view:

> Roller derby came from the whole DIY aesthetic doing it yourself, you know, women, you know, women in fishnets and hot pants and costumes and, we need to distance ourselves away from that to a certain extent.
>
> Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

There were, however, pockets of resistance to this idea. Continuing his discussion of leggings, 4D explained that "I'm still going to try really hard at training but that doesn't mean I can't have a laugh while doing it" (4D Interview 16th August 2016), and Grievous compared the 'fun' aspects with the 'serious' aspects of the sport, with a sense of regret.

> Some skaters associate boutfits with fun…You look at fresh meat and they love the fact they get to choose new names and wear leggings and hot pants, and they love all of that. Then you look at champs and half the girls are changing their names to their proper names, and they're all wearing completely matching kit down to socks and helmets and…
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

There is no doubt boutfits can be transformative for men; the sense of acceptance many felt within the roller derby context is important. However, there seemed to be a difference in how skaters experienced boutfits. Cisgender skaters seemed to suffer

more criticism for wearing boutfits, whereas skaters who were not heterosexual or cisgender reported a greater acceptance of the boutfit choices they made. On the one hand this is encouraging; the roller derby community prides itself on being open and inclusive, and that non-normative expressions of identity and gender are accepted is a positive step. However, the lack of acceptance for all skaters' free expression is troubling. Explorations of risk and capital add context to the meanings male skaters associate with their clothing choices, and perhaps other ways of 'doing gender', and suggest attempts to disrupt and subvert mainstream narratives of sport and athletes. Yet the growing preoccupation with 'legitimacy' and 'professionalism' was key, and it is through the lens of seriousness that ideas around risk and capital can be more fruitfully discussed. Boutfit-wearing skaters challenged gender norms not only through the risky choices they made regarding clothing, but through their refusal to accept the dominant (masculine) narrative that roller derby should strive to be serious. Professionalism and seriousness are discourses which themselves seek to disrupt these subversive attempts to challenge norms.

5.4 Good Impressions

A number of discourses became apparent through study of TIL, including officiating, strategy, winning, competitiveness, teamwork, skills development, professionalism, inclusivity, and recruitment. One of the most important discourses or positions that was clear in the research was the need to make a good impression. What constituted 'good' was changeable, but whether it was for an individual, the league, or roller derby as a whole, impression management (Goffman, 1959) was key. Within TIL, creating a good impression was less about dress, and more about behaving in appropriate ways. Creating a good impression of the sport was seen as

important by several of the participants, though there were different positions taken on what activities and focus might help to create a good impression; fun, welcoming, and inclusive, or serious, challenging, and athletic. There were several occasions where this was done through carefully curating an event in the aftermath to de-emphasise specific occurrences; to downplay actions which might be considered to create a bad impression. The TIL committee as a group veered between following up instances of poor behaviour – or brushing them under the carpet; ignoring certain behaviours or making excuses for them.

The dominant discourse cycled between a traditional sports model and an alternative model (see discussion on the Gay Games, p.58) whilst subordinated and hidden discourses never disappeared (even when, as with the *Zom B Cru* discourse, they were actively silenced – this discourse only rose to the surface during successful times). Discourses were constantly changing and shifting, through a process of negotiation and a struggle for power. Through disruption and cycles of traditional and alternative models the league showed signs of arriving at a workable model for inclusivity. Such a model continued to be problematic, however.

During its history, the league changed in positive ways, refocusing due to loss of members. Things changed rapidly and frequently. The league was in constant negotiation and a state of flux. At times, it could be seen that individuals were attached to a particular discourse, such as Coogan's conviction that roller derby should strive to be serious. However, skaters also shifted positions. Discourses rose and fell as power shifted. The league was more inclusive when it was more self-consciously 'alternative'. It was a better place for refs at this time. When not so serious, the league had a better reputation in the community, and more positivity.

When I began the observation with TIL, the dominant discourse used by team members to describe the team was one of calm. Team members discussed how they were calm, and this manifested in them 'playing their game' on track. This meant playing according to the strategies and tactics they had drilled, and not allowing themselves to be distracted by mind games from the opponents, or forced into forgetting their strategies, and responding to the tactics of the other team.

In November 2015, I refereed a scrimmage between TIL and another team, held in Birmingham, and in my field notes I wrote that the game had been "rough and aggressive – but needlessly so; no strategic advantage from the hits. We called a few official time-outs just to see if things would calm down. They didn't". I recall, and my field notes confirm, that players had been hyper-aggressive, shouting and yelling. The head referee had taken time-outs to talk to the bench managers to tell their skaters to calm down several times. It wasn't a particularly fun game to referee, and several of the skaters had behaved in an unprofessional and unsportsmanlike manner. However, after the fact, the other team's bench manager congratulated TIL on their win, saying they had been 'clinical'. Members who had been there agreed with that assessment, stating that heads were calm, and they played their game. A week later, I talked with the line-up manager, who said "the boys seemed pretty happy with how the game was going, and felt it was calm and controlled", thus maintaining the impression that all members saw things the same way (Goffman, 1959). 'Playing their game' and being calm were phrases that occurred frequently in discussions of games, both as a goal in the run up to the game, and an assessment in the aftermath. These strategies and emotions could be seen as vital to creating a good impression. In this context, 'calm' did not mean free from excitement or passion, rather it referred to achieving a win, using the strategies and gameplay that

had been developed and drilled in training. For TIL at this time, calm was used to describe rough, aggressive play dominated by shouting; at each other, at opponents, and at referees.

Goffman suggests that "while a team-performance is in progress, any member of the team has the power to give the show away or to disrupt it by inappropriate conduct" (1959, p.88). However, within TIL, 'inappropriate conduct' took on a different meaning. Aggression, shouting and yelling, and un-strategic hits could be termed unsporting behaviour, and yet were part of playing their game for TIL, and thus were part of the discourse of calm. To underline this, a scrimmage held the week before this one, in which the team were much less excited and passionate, at least from a referee's perspective, yielded no such discussion. TIL lost the game badly, and the post-mortem suggested skaters had lost their heads, not played their game, and effectively disrupted the show.

In his interview, Coogan talked about how this sort of behaviour signalled the passion felt by team members, and he saw it as a positive.

> My very first session, my very first Sunday session was a session that there was a big, big argument between the Dutchman and Thump. A big argument, but you know that showed me that there's proper passion in the team…it didn't faze me at all.
>
> Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

This ties in with the dominant discourse, that aggression and anger equalled 'passion', and therefore was part of playing their game. Goffman also suggests that the familiarity of team members forces them to "define one another as persons 'in the know'" (1959, p.88), for whom a front cannot be maintained. This did not seem to be the case within TIL, where, even in committee meetings (where one might

expect to see some 'back stage' work), this front of calm was maintained.

Deviations from this dominant discourse were then effectively silenced. However, occasionally, individuals acknowledged that certain behaviours could not be contained within the calm discourse, though this usually came from those outside the inner circle of team management. In his interview, Grievous talked about his first training session, the same session Coogan described as displaying passion:

> Err, yeah it was interesting, I mean my first ever Sunday session, Thump starting screaming and hollering at Dutchman and then threw his helmet against the wall and cracked it or something, and that was like my first ever Sunday, so that was quite a baptism of fire into TIL. Erm, and then I had, you know, err, Nuke and Oblivion trying to convince me to not leave because it wasn't always like that [laughing] so that was a bit kind of oh, okay. But everyone was like, oh, it's okay, he does that sometimes don't worry about it.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

The behaviour of this one individual, had become TIL's open secret. Stuntman said more than once that he didn't understand why no one else ever called Thump out on his nonsense, and that what he wanted was for people to talk to him and not just skulk off; that he wanted to be asked what he wanted and then sent off back to his corner. Grievous also said that "this is one thing I've never understood, that no one at TIL has ever had the balls to say no to Thump. I just don't, I don't get it. I don't know what his power is, what his hold over people is, I just don't understand it". In several interviews, members and ex—members talked about similar issues with the same skater; issues which had been brushed aside by team management. In the same way that high-level skaters had more freedom to express themselves through dress, it seemed that this high-level skater was granted significant freedoms to behave in ways which were detrimental to inclusivity and a positive ethos without censure.

As the observation continued into the 2016 season, the discourse of calm was replaced by another, similar in that it focused on how TIL wanted to be seen, not necessarily how they were. TIL had lost a number of skaters, and for many games in the season, they played short. Instead of the usual 14 skaters on the bench, TIL mostly played with 10 or fewer. During the visit to Brussels to play a min-tournament, the descriptor #Magnificent7 was coined by the team. Seven skaters went to Brussels, one was injured in the first jam of the first game, and therefore TIL played two games with six skaters. Despite playing so short, they held the second game to an overtime jam, against a team comprised mainly of Team Belgium skaters. This performance garnered a lot of respect from the opposing teams and the audience. So much so, that TIL returned as 'heroes', and this discourse became the dominant one for some time.

At the end of the 2016 season, TIL were promoted to Tier 1 of the British Champs. This meant that in 2017, TIL would be playing against the best teams in the country, which represented a much greater challenge than they had had in the 2016 season. Several members felt that this meant there had to be changes in how the team was run. Throughout the 2016 season, skaters had been rostered for games despite low attendance at training, and despite low skill levels, largely because numbers were too short to do otherwise. In a meeting in August 2016, members discussed changes to training to focus on the upcoming challenges.

The question remains, for whom was this impression management undertaken? In part, it was for the general public and the roller derby community at large. But it was also clear that it was for the identity of the group and for individuals' identity; a performance of professionalism and sportsmanship, to allow individuals to see

themselves as athletes. These performances formed part of the everyday practices of being a TIL member, demonstrating the importance of shared beliefs and ideals, or at least the illusion of such (McHugh et al, 2015).

Off the track, it was important to some members of the team to foster an impression of being supportive to others. During a committee meeting, Coogan expressed a desire to see more support from SSRG, claiming it had not happened since he became a member or TIL. The discussion turned briefly to all the ways TIL had offered support, and the ways SSRG had not. This was an example of how Coogan was keen to present a positive impression of TIL, even within the team, though it was not so important to him to foster good impressions of roller derby as a whole, keen as he was to denigrate SSRG. Grievous expresses a different view on this:

> I think it quite upset me how much some of the guys were anti-SSRG, you know, I was like 'dude, we're all playing the same sport, can we not just get along?' But there were elements of the team that were actively resisting sort of being part of…and that's still going on today, you know, I've had conversations with people at SSRG where they said that they've tried to erm they've tried to work with TIL, you know, on venues and seeing if the two can work together to get a cheaper deal on venues, you know, that kind of thing. And TIL have just been completely unhelpful.

> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

5.5 Inclusivity

A rather different example of impression management concerned new member, Fin. Previously a member of one of the local women's teams, Fin self-identified as non-binary, and had recently been struggling with issues around gender identity. In a discussion at the time of signing the consent form for this study, we discussed difficulties around anonymity and how, as TIL's only non-binary member, it is

likely that they[2] would be more easily identifiable. Fin acknowledged, and was comfortable with that likelihood, but it did raise a number of ethical issues. The roller derby community prides itself on being welcoming and inclusive to all genders, and as a member of that community, I would like to be able to show how inclusive and supportive TIL was towards Fin, as an example of a non-binary skater. As a close friend, also, navigating the line between good research and maintaining a good friendship may at times require additional reflexivity and a greater sensitivity to context. I discuss Fin's experience in depth, through a case study that forms part of chapter 6, on belonging. But here, I want to briefly explore how 'inclusivity' functions as a discourse within TIL, and how Fin's experience of belonging in the league is used as a maker of how inclusive TIL has become.

Throughout 2016, TIL slowly changed identity from a men's league to an inclusive league. This occurred as a direct result of Fin joining, and in many ways, they were the driver for change. For some time, Nuke has spoken of his desire to see men's derby rebranded to 'open' derby, welcoming skaters of all genders, stating his belief that whilst the was a need to have safe spaces for female athletes under the banner of the WFTDA, this was not so necessary for men. He wanted to find out about the UKRDA policy on women playing in men's Champs games. He said, "I just want a situation where people with ability can play together". Such discussions regularly arose on roller derby groups and blogs throughout the community. There were many differences of opinion and the issue was, and remains, highly contentious. Although several within TIL were in general agreement with Nuke, the possibility of women

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[2] Throughout this thesis I refer to Fin using the gender-neutral pronoun 'they'. I endeavour to minimise the potential for confusion, but I accept the argument that 'they' can be used correctly as a singular pronoun (Marsh, 2013; Meagley, 2017), and make no apologies for respecting Fin's identity.

playing was still an issue for some. Bench crew Wilma and Zoya played for TIL in a game against the Super Smash Brollers in December, but not everyone in the team was happy about it. Jason felt uncomfortable with the idea of women playing, and for a short time took a step back from TIL management because of this. Fin, still with SSRG at the time, was upset and angry about the idea of cisgender women taking advantage of a loophole in a policy designed to support marginalised identities.

When Fin asked to join TIL, Jason expressed initial reservations about their membership and whether or not they could play for TIL. In a committee discussion, Jason suggested that we should ask the league as a whole if Fin should be allowed to join. This suggestion was roundly rejected by the rest of the committee as unnecessary. As a committee member at the time, I cited the MRDA non-discrimination policy, which explicitly includes nonbinary and transmasculine members:

> MRDA does not and will not differentiate between members who identify male and those who identify as a nonbinary gender (including but not limited to genderqueer, transmasculine, transfeminine, and agender) and does not and will not set minimum standards of masculinity for its membership or interfere with the privacy of its members for the purposes of charter eligibility. (MRDA, 2015)

Other committee members agreed that Fin was eligible to join, and the decision did not require input from all league members, but that they could join through the same process as any other prospective member might. Despite this initial concern, Jason has since been one of the welcoming and supportive of Fin and made no mention of any remaining doubts they may have. Also, although members did suggest that they may have to discuss the presence of a non-binary skater on the team with

prospective opponents, this gradually seems to have been forgotten, with Fin welcomed as a skater the same as any other.

Fin's membership of TIL has allowed the league to position itself as highly inclusive. The only Tier 1 'men's' team with a non-binary skater during the 2016 season, TIL could say they were the most gender inclusive league in Tier 1. More recently, Fin's joining opened the way for other non-cisgender men to join, including a trans skater, and a cisgender female skater. The presence of cisgender women in men's roller derby is itself a controversial issue, as many feel that the MRDA non-discrimination opens membership to all bar cisgender women, and point to the MRDA not differentiating "between members who identify male and those who identify as a *nonbinary gender*", whilst others argue that since the MRDA "does not and will not set *minimum standards of masculinity* for its membership", cisgender women are welcome. But Fin's membership indirectly suggested that the league would not necessarily accept people as they were; they may be subject to change; in itself a disruption of identity. This is seen, not in the case of Fin, who was themselves disrupting their own identity, but through the experiences of Jason, who had to change, to become more accepting and to negotiate his feelings around transgender and female players on his team. This allowed for the possibility of change from a purely *men's* roller derby to an *open* model, 'Open to All', or 'OTA', as Dorny referred to it.

5.6 Summary and Discussion

This ethnographic account reveals that an understanding of 'who's who and what's what' (Jenkins, 2014) is of central concern. Both individuals and collective were engaged in a continual process of 'becoming' roller derby (Pavlidis and Fullagar,

174

2014), whilst always aware of the consequences of getting that wrong. Individual practices fed into group practices and vice versa. Collective or organisational identities were messy and shifting. What is and isn't 'okay' was in constant flux. This required constant redefinition and renegotiation on an individual level, whilst these individual changes impacted on the collective identity.

An identity can never be perfect or finished. It is always subject to change. It can only ever be 'good enough' or 'acceptable', and these terms necessitate the acceptance of change. My participants were not just 'doing' masculinity, they are doing roller derby. The risk was not only of getting masculinity wrong, but also of getting roller derby wrong. In the beginning, it was easier, as they were in a sense *creating* roller derby. The more the rules change, the harder it gets to keep up.

It is difficult to pin down the shifting nature of identifications within a linear narrative, and also to discuss the interconnected nature of the individual and the collective in a way which shows that they impact on each other at the same time. Nevertheless, in an attempt to impose order on the disorderly, this chapter will discuss first the individual, followed by the collective.

Individual identifications

Within the process of 'becoming' roller derby, there was, in Jenkins' (2014) term, the nominal identity – being a member of a roller derby team, and the categorisation as a blocker, jammer, referee etc. There was also the virtual identity; the experience of being a roller derbyist. This nominal identity encompassed a multitude of virtual identities, which were practical and negotiable. This allowed for similarity and difference to be included within the nominal identity. Getting roller derby wrong was a concern, and there were penalties for that, but there was not just one way to be

175

roller derby; to get it right enough to be considered 'acceptable' or 'good enough'. However, these identities were never finished, and there was no stable ground on which to stand. Bourdieu argued that to be successful in a habitus is to develop a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1994, p61), but the game kept on changing. In the interplay of the immediate group and the wider community, there were many holes for the unwary to fall into. Avoiding getting it wrong meant being always open to change.

Through the construction of this community, shared rituals and symbols were used (Cohen, 1985), creating a symbolic universe (Berger and Luckman, 1967), which allow members to believe they see things the same (Jenkins, 2014). Roller derbyists performed the ritual of choosing a name (or, as in the cases of Phally and Pipkin, had one chosen for them) because that is the way things were done. Names were public and visible and allowed categorisation as a member. There was a recognition that this might not always be the way things were done, so names are worn lightly. Because roller derby names were an addition to, rather than instead of, a given name, change was easier. The names were a necessary symbol of belonging to the community, and became part of the nominal identity. In practice, they were used, but equally, they were sometimes ignored, or subverted. Skaters had already experienced an enforced change of numbers to more closely align the sport with the mainstream. They recognised that the way things were done could easily become the way things used to be done.

Boutfits, including fishnets, tutus, hot pants, and face paint, were the way things used to be done. Subverting gender norms by use of these costumes was considered acceptable for women, though it was always a greater risk for men, as men's use of

boutfits was considered silly and unacceptable (Murray, 2012). The risk inherent in wearing boutfits was not due only to these attitudes to men's attempts to subvert gender norms and norms of sport, but also in subverting the way things should be done. Some men saw boutfits as freeing, they were a necessary part of their embodied identities, but they were also deviant. Jenkins argues that non-conforming behaviour from secure members of a collective is more likely (2014, p152), and this is reflected in the way that skills capital within roller derby afforded some men the freedom to continue to wear boutfits without censure, which is comparable to the way Anderson (2009) argues that masculine capital affords athletes greater freedom to transgress norms. Less secure members were taking a greater risk, but when employed as a joke (by Phally or 4D, for example) this practice was easier to carry off than when it was done seriously. This reflects Thurnell-Read's (2011b) analysis of self-parody performed by stag participants wearing feminine clothing. Equally, wearing boutfits was getting roller derby wrong. This 'deviance' was sought out by some who deliberately wore the 'wrong' clothes. They were categorised as not taking derby seriously enough, or, ironically considering how ubiquitous boutfits were in the beginning, not 'proper' roller derby.

In TIL, identity was shifting and plural; members were creating and maintaining a series of identities, for example Beat Monkey's process of becoming a serious competitive skater reflected in his desire to be known by his legal name. His experience also demonstrated the negotiation, and the conflict and disruption often involved, in that his nominal identity (Jenkins, 2014) – the identity that he chose for himself – was not necessarily taken up and accepted by his teammates, and so his virtual identity (Jenkins, 2014) continued to be Beat Monkey, or a variation thereof.

Skaters equated names and boutfits with frivolity and tended to align themselves either with or against that. These choices clearly involved impression management (Goffman, 1959). Skaters attempted to present an image of themselves, which might or might not be accepted by others. The success of the 'performance' was very much in doubt. Although Goffman (1959) talks of the importance of not being taken in by one's own performance, it often appeared as though skaters found it easier to see through others' front than their own. Jenkins' (2014) suggestion that knowing ourselves is at least equally as difficult as knowing others seemed to hold here.

Collective identifications

It is impossible to give one definitive description of the Inhuman League, because it changed so much over the last six years. The league was in a constant state of flux, with dominant discourses changing and shifting as different aspects of the sport become more or less important. The community continued to exist despite changes of membership and members moving between groups (Barth, 1969). Despite change being initially unpopular, community members adjusted, and new ways of working became normalised. As I discuss certain 'moments' within the lifecourse of the league, it must be understood that its identity was not static, that in my attempt to pin down what was happening, I inevitably flatten out experiences which were never simply one thing at a time. Nevertheless, my participants' discussions suggested that the year during which I completed my ethnographic observations could be split into two key periods with specific dominant discourses. Cohen (1985) argues that communities exist in the thinking as much as doing, although does acknowledge that boundary construction is only one part of a community, and that it also involves self-identity (Cohen, 2002). These discourses represent the thinking done within TIL

regarding the type of community they were, but also how members sought to frame the group identity.

The 'calm' phase I observed from the beginning of fieldwork (November 2015) until around April 2016 was focused on making a 'good' impression. Coogan was chair and Thump was vice, and they ran the league in a rather autocratic style, seeking to control the public impression, as seen in their response to my desire to interview ex-members outlined in the methodology chapter. On track, the league played aggressively, and unsporting conduct was common. The 'transitional' phase began as Frank took over as chair. Fin joined, and the team became more 'open' and inclusive. Frank ran the league in a much more democratic style. The changes in management coinciding with the discourses present during these periods strongly suggests an element of power involved. The chair of TIL was the one whose definition of a situation counts (Jenkins, 2014), and so, understandings of how the league should be positioned differed with leadership styles. Coogan's tenure as chair was characterised by a more traditional approach to male sports, whereas Frank led a more inclusive league.

The idea of inclusion links this discussion with the context setting of chapter 4. Under Coogan, TIL was insular and separate, but under Frank, the league sought to strengthen links within the wider community much more. In chapter 6, I explore the ways TIL strove to become an inclusive league and discuss the practices of belonging engaged in by members.

CHAPTER 6 BELONGING AND INCLUSIVITY

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 explored the concept of community in roller derby and considered some of the ways members of the Inhuman League (TIL) engage with those communities, whilst chapter 5 engaged with practices of individual and group identities. This chapter focuses on how members create a sense of belonging within the immediate community of the league – one which holds the greatest importance for them. Such a focus on 'doing' belonging also involves a discussion of inclusivity. Whereas chapter 5 explored the use of the term 'inclusive' as a discourse, this chapter explores how inclusivity and belonging are achieved in practice.

As outlined in the literature review, in sociological literature, belonging has been theorised as dynamic and relational, focused on the links between 'self' and 'society', engagement with social structures, and sensitive to changes (May, 2011), not so much feeling, as "practice, as a way of being and acting in the world" (Bennett, 2015, p956). This posits belonging not as something an individual has or feels, but something they do. The individual is therefore active and has agency. This is relevant for a discussion of roller derby, since, like Bourdieu (1990) suggests, entrants into the sport and its community have to develop a sense of the field or habitus, a feel which requires immersion, and which is of a practical nature. Thus, belonging can be seen as an everyday practice.

In a roller derby context, belonging is also understood as a process, one of 'becoming' roller derby, which is "an unstable, complex, mobile position" (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014, p55). For Pavlidis, roller derby was about "giving her a place where she felt accepted and loved and was able to be with others with whom she

could identify" (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014, p69), but it was never that simple. In response to May, Pavlidis and co-author Fullagar suggest that "roller derby is a site that highlights the virtual impossibility of belonging as a singular relation because of the multiplicities between and within women" (p108). This multiplicity is also in evidence within TIL, both between members and in the contradictory beliefs and values help by individuals. This chapter then, and the next, aim to explore this multiplicity.

This chapter is split into several sections, to enable focus on a specific range of practices. First, I discuss the use of banter, jokes, and insults to examine how a feeling of belonging is created through language (Haugh, 2014). Banter is often theorised as a masculine way of communicating (Nichols, 2016), and therefore it is absent from existing literature on roller derby, but I argue that in men's roller derby it occupies a significant place in the practice of belonging. Next, I discuss how camaraderie and 'teamliness' develop a sense of closeness and consider specific events where this is evident. Then I explore how belonging is, in theory, open to everyone through an acceptance of others' quirks and differences. In the final substantive section, I return to a focus on Fin, introduced in the previous chapter, to explore how each of these practices converge to allow an individual to feel included and welcome.

Although this chapter acknowledges some of the ways practices of inclusion can entail *exclusion* (Jenkins, 2014), I do not dwell on this here. Instead, I pick up these threads in chapter 7. This chapter is substantially longer than the other data chapters. Participants had a great deal to say about belonging, and their feelings of being part of something worthwhile, and it was clear that (as in my own experience) though the

community was not perfect and some skaters I interviewed had left the team or the sport, the good times were what they chose to remember and focus on.

6.2 Banter, Jokes, and Insults

Banter is often defined as masculine or sexual in nature. Nichols (2016), for example, discusses banter in the context of everyday sexism, suggesting her participants, members of a northern Rugby Union club, perform 'mischievous masculinities' through their use of banter. The ability to do banter equals the ability to be part of the group. However, I argue that even if it is a masculine trait, it is not necessarily performed solely by men, and is also used by women in order to fit in with a social group. Banter was used within TIL both as a form of contest, a battle of wits, and as a way to express that a group of people are the same; together. '#bants' (hashtag bants) was used, on social media and in spoken conversation to refer to almost anything, as a self-aware commentary on how banter can be opaque, and can also fall flat or be misunderstood, or else be trite and predictable. The successful performance of banter functioned as a symbol of belonging to this community (Cohen, 1985), and was one of the most apparent, regular practices.

A sense of belonging is often indicated through language, and members of TIL exchanged insults and banter in a way which suggested that this kind of language was only used towards those who were part of the group. Being polite was reserved for outsiders. If members looked for any sign of weakness to take the piss, made jokes at your expense, or just told you to 'fuck off', it was a signal that you were an insider, part of the team. This banter was characteristic of team communication, even from the early days. It was not like the usual men's sports' banter however; there were no homophobic slurs and although the banter could be sexual, *women* were not

overtly sexualised. The banter that took place would often tend towards the abstract and eclectic.

> It became a sort of running joke that everything was my fault and a few times a session I'd be asked something, I'd answer, and then be told, "Fuck off, Phally". And I've not actually had that for quite a while until I saw Bollock the other day. First time I've seen him in about two years. I was like, "My God Bollock, it's been so long", to which he replied, "Fuck off Phally, I thought you were dead".

> Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

This abstraction, and the use of inside jokes, marked the boundary between members and non-members. Of all members, Phally seemed to be the butt of the most jokes. He explained the origins of a few of the longest-running.

> The shitting in bins I still don't understand. It was just something Bear came out with one day. I was stood talking about something, and he just went, "Phally shits in bins", and then it became a thing, and it was like, "Right, brilliant".

> Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

The same member was instrumental in the jokes about Phally stealing dolly mixtures and Michael Bublé CDs. These jokes stemmed from the same away game, and so created a sense of belonging and togetherness. Understanding the jokes, and sometimes being the subject of them worked to foster a sense of belonging in that members shared the same experiences and could relate to them in similar ways, thus emphasising a *feeling* of belonging (McHugh et al, 2015; Stone, 2017). Initially, I struggled to understand and accept this, finding banter from Jason in particular difficult to deal with when in fact this was his attempt to show that he considered me to be part of the team. The outcome of such a misreading of practices of belonging is further explored in chapter 7.

> Training was nice and friendly. Even Jason wasn't being a dick with constant banter today. I think I need a bit of nice, genuine conversation at the start of

every encounter – 'hi, how are you?', 'I'm fine', 'what've you been up to?' sort of thing to reaffirm that I'm accepted/wanted before the banter. Which is strange, because I think the banter is used as a sign that a person is welcome and fits in. funny, huh? I guess it's something to think about some more (Field notes, Wednesday 30th March 2016).

His partner, another skater, told me that away from the group, Dorny was all dad jokes, but in TIL, he was "all bants, bants, bants, the banter bus, whatever" (Field notes, Sunday 7th August 2016). This suggests that individuals behaved differently when part of the group; that there was an effort (whether conscious or unconscious) to fit in. Lack of success in banter could result in alienation. Broot was never able to engage in banter, being seen by the rest of the group as *too* odd. Foul Out Boy also expressed frustration at his inability to engage successfully in banter, and eventually left the team, citing lack of enjoyment, but stayed involved in the sport. These examples are suggestive of the importance of banter to positive experiences. Efforts to fit in went so far as developing a persona for use within the group, which was established through the use of specific types of banter.

The way Zoya negotiated the masculine / feminine boundary was illuminating. She frequently engaged in banter, even beginning a round, but then would pull back and say the conversation, and the talkers were "disgusting". This was an integral part of the image of herself Zoya created, along with the dislike of, and attempt to ban, male skaters wearing leggings. During Coogan's tenure as chair, TIL committee meetings featured a lot of banter. Coogan tended to select one thing about a person, and then run with it. Some things seemed to be fair game, but then others were not touched, so the banter was focused on areas the target themselves could also laugh at, rather than being genuinely hurt. For me, it was men in shiny pants and any reference to Zom B Cru. Like Zoya, the persona I portrayed in training negotiated the masculine / feminine boundary. In contrast to Zoya, although I engaged in banter on occasion, I

was far more often the recipient, usually from Coogan. I publicly championed men wearing leggings (Fletcher, 2015a; 2015b), and also, part of my identity within TIL was as ex-line-up manager for TIL's B team, Zom B Cru. These were the aspects that Coogan usually picked up on. In one committee meeting, Coogan suggested playing some lower level games to give newer members experience. He said, "not a Zom B Cru game, Bob, wring those knickers out" (Field notes, Monday 11th January 2016). These examples suggest that banter was a way of demonstrating the validation of a member's self-identity, marking them as part of the community.

Coogan made sexualised jokes, but they were directed at everyone, and often at himself, such as when he landed on his wheel at training:

> Coogan discussed getting a skate wheel "right up the anus". We joked about this, and I asked what type of wheel, suggesting he must have done it before for it to slip right in. Dorny said it was only an Adonis [a brand of wheel smaller than standard], and we laughed about building up from an Adonis right through to a longboard wheel. (Field notes, Sunday 10th April 2016)

I only witnessed one other member make sexualised jokes aimed at female members (Field notes, Sunday 17th January 2016), but was also told that this member behaved very differently when coaching the women's team, which suggested that this behaviour was for the benefit of other men (Field notes, Sunday 28th February 2016). Fin believed that one of our members was always trying to force an alpha male competition with Coogan, but that Coogan always deflected and did not engage. I was unconvinced, seeing the contest of wits – who could make the most debased comment – as an alpha battle. Also, this battle of wits disrespected other members, such as when it was engaged in, loudly, whilst another coach like Nuke was explaining a drill (Field notes, Wednesday 23rd March 2016).

Frank and Woody framed one game as a "dick-measuring contest" (Field notes, Sunday 28th February 2016), and banter could be seen in the same way. During one scrimmage, an LRT blocker told a TIL blocker "I've got something for you", accompanied by a thrusting gesture (Field notes, Sunday 15th November 2015). LRT totally dominated this game. Their behaviour here was a contrast to the previous time the two teams faced each other. In that game, one of LRT's skaters complained that a TIL skater was sexually harassing him on the start line. I was part of the referee crew for that game, and to our shame we laughed it off and did nothing. However, we believed at the time that this was because LRT were not dominating the game as much as they had expected and were sore about it. For TIL members, when the recipient of sexualised banter, the usual response was to amp it up further than the other person until they gave up, either through lack of imagination to think of something more extreme, or through discomfort. This response could be read as a display of masculine bravado. It seemed that the enjoyment was as much in the wordplay as what the words themselves signified. Such language reveals an attempt to differentiate TIL from women's roller derby. Using sexualised and extreme banter created a distinction between SSRG and TIL through contrasting communication styles. The lack of homophobic discourse also marks a point of difference with mainstream sports (Messner, 2002).

While in Brussels, the team shared photos of the trip on the public fan page, including a montage of everyone's passport photos. I jokingly complained that mine wasn't included, showing it to the group who agreed it was an awful picture. Later, we were talking about Josef Fritzl[3], and I suggested that my passport photo looked

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[3] Josef Fritzl imprisoned his daughter in a basement for 24 years. In March 2009, Fritzl was sentenced to life after being found guilty of rape, incest, murder, and enslavement (BBC, 2009).

like Fritzl's wife. Stuntman responded, "No. Fritzl's wife was attractive". There was a shocked silence at the table, and mutterings that Stuntman had gone so far as to not be funny anymore. I think even he was a bit shocked at what he had said. There was a sense that the boys were expecting me to be upset, but I laughed and acknowledged that it was very funny, and since it was such a good feed line, it would have been disappointing if no one had taken advantage. I both became more part of the group and gained respect through taking the banter and insults in good humour. Later, we called at an off licence and Stuntman deliberated for ages over the choice of a bottle of wine or cans of beer, only to have his bag break, and his wine bottle smash in the gutter. His look of sadness was such that I couldn't help but laugh, and tell him it was karma. Afterwards, it was understood that every time he was mean to me, a bottle of wine died. Thus, we created a feeling of togetherness and belonging that functioned in the same way as Bublé CDs, dolly mixtures, and shitting in bins did for Phally.

References to my research were common, with Stuntman seeming particularly interested, often peering at my notebook when I was writing field notes during training sessions. This became more common after Brussels, since Stuntman and Fin and I had bonded, partly through banter, as discussed above. Skaters drew my attention to particular things that happened or were said. During a jumping drill conducted with more than a usual air of silliness and innuendo, Stuntman shouted to me "KD was jumping me the whole way round – Chester Fiddledicks. Write this down" (Field notes, Wednesday 29th June 2016). I laughed and did as I was told, moments such as these enabling my researcher identity to 'belong' more definitively. Sometimes, skaters used my identity as researcher to call into question others' masculinity:

> Groups of three for 'minute of pain' [a stationary hitting drill]. Coogan is left with Bollock and Fordy. He says, "I hate you all". Bollock says "Stuntman, do you want to join this group because Coogan is a pussy? Bob, you should write that down (Field notes, Sunday 3rd July 2016).

Comments such as these were said in awareness that I was writing about masculinities, and thus support Nichols' (2016) argument that sexist banter could be used with awareness that they should know better. In the same session,

> I dropped my book. Stuntman said something I didn't hear and then giggled. I said what, whilst holding my pencil poised above my notebook. Fin said "verbatim: oh, look, you've dropped it. What a nob." Fin also said something about it being almost like dropping a bottle of wine (Field notes, Sunday 3rd July 2016).

Writing this account, I recall the same sense of joy I felt at the time. The laughter that accompanies the banter takes the sting out of words that can look harsh when written down. Once I understood the purpose of the banter, I felt much more comfortable with it. The ease with which newer members such as Pipkin engaged in banter does suggest it is more common for men to use this style of conversation, and my lengthy learning process might have a gendered aspect. In addition, the inclusion of banter related to my practice of researching indicated that members had accepted and validated my identity as a researcher; it was now part of my persona, and this acceptance indicated a successful performance (Jenkins, 2014).

My field notes indicate that banter, especially sexual banter, was usually started by Coogan, and less often, Zoya. In Coogan's absence, Jason would start the banter. In one session where Coogan was absent, "Jason said "I like to show people things, usually my penis". Without Coogan, that was an hour and 40 minutes into the session before somebody actually mentioned the word penis, which was quite unusual (Field notes, Wednesday 6th July, 2016). Not everyone felt that the banter was always positive or useful, however. During a team meeting, Frank suggested

that the banter had been getting away from the team, commenting that "a bit of fun is fine, but keep it down" (Field notes, Sunday 21st August 2016). Beat Monkey added that this was important in games as well, explaining that he was hyper-competitive, and needed to take it seriously, finding the banter and jokes frustrating, and stressing the need to stay focused. This was a change that reflected TIL's increased desire to perform well and chase success as a team, although experience suggested that the banter was a key part of team bonding and when members of the team felt a greater sense of belonging they performed better, so this new sense of seriousness could potentially be risky.

> Frank said that sessions need to be harder and reiterated the house rules about focus during training, keeping banter/chatter down so that coaches can be heard and concentration upheld (Team Meeting Minutes, Sunday 21st August 2016).

The meeting did not reflect on the source of the banter, and it is interesting to consider that the previous Sunday's training session was almost completely without banter, missing Coogan, Jason, Zoya, and another member who frequently led banter. It is also worth noting that this same member interrupted the flow of the meeting with banter.

After the meeting, the banter toned down, but did not stop. On the way to a game in Newcastle, we joked and bantered about not being allowed to banter (field notes 27th Aug 2016), and we made bets about how quickly the banter ban would be broken.

> Coogan still can't do a session without mentioning penises. I'd referred to the 'no banter' decision from the team meeting in the car on the way here, and Hoof had said we'll see how long that lasts with Coogan around, although Hoof was surprised it had taken Coogan over an hour to say something (Field notes, Wednesday 7th Sept 2016).

The following week, banter levels were still subdued, with only Coogan and one other member saying anything, although others laughed. By October, banter levels were again rising, although with Coogan on leave after the birth of his child, it was largely non-sexualised. However, Zoya did bring up 'pegging' at the end of the session.

> She brings up pegging, saying Coogan likes it but it isn't established yet whether Jackpot does. She says there is a questionnaire to establish whether or not skaters like pegging. Hoof says Coogan wrote the questionnaire. Fin says Coogan *is* the questionnaire. This is followed by further abstract humour about Coogan's mum being a questionnaire. A questionnairess. It was nice how Fin and Bollock took Zoya's crude sexual humour, and turned it into something much more abstract, but much less crude and potentially unpleasant. Sillier (Field notes, Sunday 2nd October 2016).

There was a nicer, more inclusive style of banter engaged in by Hoof, Phally, Stuntman, and sometimes Fin and Bollock, which was sillier and less sexualised, highlighting this quintet as engaged in a different way of doing identity. In the same way that there is greater freedom for doing identity (and gender) differently away from the centre of sport (Messner, 2002), spaces outside the centre of the community offered some freedom from hegemonic practices. Certainly, the banter here was less self-consciously 'masculine' than the wordplay between Coogan and other members.

Stuntman suggested that roller derby could help people through tough times, and Fordy said it made bad days better. Roller derby helped individuals to meet new people and brought diverse groups of people together under a common interest. Although Coogan argued that the team was not friend club, for some, it was. There was a sense of being made welcome; an open and supportive feeling that kept people coming back. The sense of 'teamliness' and camaraderie was important, and when training had a 'collegial' feel, members felt more relaxed and valued. Though

191

training included inside jokes and banter, which were a part of that friendship, the drinks after training were widely considered to be a better place for it, and were highly valued for the way they helped the league to feel like a community. The silly, off-topic banter played a greater role in bonding the team than the serious tactic discussion, or discussing past glories (this, especially, could have an alienating impact on those who were not part of the team or the event being discussed. That, or they found it boring). The sort of discussion everyone could join in and follow seemed to be the most inclusive. Language functioned as a symbol in the community (Cohen, 1985). New members, who were not able to join in with tactical discussions, or tales of past glories, could engage with banter, and thus develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the team. Those newbies who felt involved in this way tended to stay longer than those who did not.

Again, writing up this chapter, it is the more abstract humour I miss. There was a joy in the wordplay, and an undertone of *kindness* that suggested Phally, Stuntman and Hoof in particular said horrible things because they liked each other; but were also unafraid to be genuinely kind too, which ensured the banter was never taken to be cruel.

6.3 It's More of a Team Now

> Well, I seem to think about this -- this – Inhuman team now, is it's that with this team, I feel would have my back. Whereas the team before -- I don't know how they worked. Because they would say, "We're just a bunch of guys who come together to skate." I feel like this is a team now.

> Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

A sense of fun and camaraderie was important. Interviewees experienced this differently, period and duration of membership being an important factor in how they perceived it. With the participants I interviewed after they had left the team, it

was possible to detect nostalgia and selective recall. A common trajectory seemed to be that someone joined the team, and for the first six months, everything was wonderful and new and exciting. "It's much simpler really, and obviously it's all new and fun and also you're not kind of involved in all the politics of it either" (Grievous Interview 15th January 2016). Then team politics became apparent, and there was a period of time when the member struggled to balance enjoyment and disillusionment, which could continue for long periods of time. After this, a member would either reconcile themselves to the reality of being involved with the team, or they would leave. The participants who were ex-members at the time of interview tended to have quite a negative emotional response to the circumstances of their leaving, which contrasted strongly with their fond memories of early membership. In this section, although difficulties are acknowledged, I will focus mainly on the positives discussed in interviews; on the ways in which members felt like they were part of a team, in contrast to chapter 7, in which I will focus on some of the ways members might feel excluded.

During interviews, participants suggested that feeling like a team was important to them. TIL was established in 2011, created by a group of men who had mostly been involved with women's team SSRG, as partners of SSRG members, or referee members. In those early days, as discussed in chapter 4, there was a lot of crossover between the two teams. Not being able to afford more than one session a week, TIL members also skated at some of SSRG's practices, where they often joined in with contact drills. Participants who were TIL members during those early months referred to the close association between the two teams in largely positive ways, but the issue of mixed gender training did arise. As SSRG advertised itself at the time as

being a women-only team, there were those who felt uncomfortable training with the

men.

> We went through a phase where it almost felt like SSRG I suppose didn't know whether they wanted to be with us, or not with us. I think it was, from what I understand, it was maybe one or two issues with some of the blokes going down to Tuesday training.
>
> Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016

Although I was a member of SSRG at the time, I don't recall any formalised

discussion on this issue, just a widespread assumption that it was 'some of the

blokes' who were a problem. Specifically, perhaps, those few men who threw

themselves into the contact part of the sport with a little more enthusiasm than some

of the female members were prepared to deal with. Nevertheless, the teams

remained close until measures to become more independent came from TIL.

> We did go through a phase were we, I think it's when I were chair, I started to deliberately want to put some separation between TIL and SSRG, 'cos I thought-- it felt a bit one sided. They'd been very helpful and supportive but I also felt it were time for TIL to stand on its own two feet. Um, and to forge its own identity but it was never- the aim was never to break the links with SSRG, it was just to stop relying on them for everything.
>
> Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016

This desire to be independent came at the cost of close links with the women's team,

but was felt to be necessary for TIL's development. Dr Blocktopus discussed how

"the adventure of building something" was important in fostering a sense of

community.

> In terms of atmosphere, it was fun…it was recognised sort of as being so close to the start of men's derby I guess in the country that we were learning everything very quickly and not really caring about particularly how well we did with it, it was more we'll do it, see what comes of it, try and sort of improve and, but we were very much feeling our way with it, I mean, there was no sort of structure to new skaters coming along and doing a minimum skills programme and learning minimum skills and then going on to scrimmages and then going on to bouting, it was basically you'd turn up, you

> would skate for a few weeks, if you hadn't fallen flat on your face then the next week you'd be scrimmaging with everybody and then…

Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

There was a sense that there was a lot of freedom in the early days of TIL; there were few pre-conceived notions of how men's roller derby should be, and there was not a lot of structure to the team or the training sessions. Though developing through links with SSRG, TIL ran things differently, and at first it was much less structured, it "wasn't too serious. It wasn't full of athletes" (Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016). Going to the pub after training featured in several accounts from those who had been members in the beginning. Members discussed the excitement of doing things for the first time.

> Uhm, I think that first year was -- was really special, because it felt something new and exciting and there wasn't all the, "Right we need to be this." It was, "We're playing Roller Derby. We're men playing Roller Derby. This is kind of not overly accepted and things. But we're doing it. We're having fun and we went to all these places and met all these people. It was great, you know.

Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

Members were engaged in constructing a community and gained pleasure from that as much as in playing the sport. They were constructing boundaries between TIL and others. In part, this was imagined (Cohen, 1986), with the difference between TIL and SSRG a deliberate point of separation. But the boundaries were also tied to a sense of belonging, of being in it together (Delanty, 2010).

Opinion was, and in some areas, remained, divided about men's roller derby. As Stuntman alluded to here, men playing roller derby was not universally accepted by women's teams. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it was sometimes argued that roller derby was a women's sport, and that men should go and find their own, or that the men's game was inferior to the women's (Murray, 2012), and it was

195

sometimes possible to detect a fear that men's derby could potentially eclipse women's in popularity and coverage. Although there were members of SSRG who felt that way, TIL had a lot of support from women, and involvement could bring "joy" (Oblivion Interview, 19th August 2016).

When asked about their favourite moments in TIL, most interviewees talked about one of three European events, which Coogan characterised as "tours". The first one of these was a trip to Toulouse, France, to play the men's team there. What made this important to interviewees was the newness of playing, of being the first people to do something; of the end result not mattering, because of being the first to do it.

> Again it was, yeah it was a bit of a trip into the unknown…it was sort of the adventure of it and, and also with there being so few teams and no real ranking system for the guys, it didn't really matter because we were still gonna be the top five in Europe because there are only five teams.
>
> Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016
>
> The Toulouse trip was amazing, just because it felt so exciting. That was the first international men's Roller Derby bout or something like that. Our first game played in mainland, Europe. I can't remember - something exciting -- whatever. I remember being driven into the arse end of nowhere. We thought we were gonna get murdered and then we played a game. One of the most chaotically badly reffed games I've ever been in. And I know lots of blokes who'll moan about reffing in Roller Derby. But this was something.
>
> Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

Conversations about the Toulouse trip also include the recurring theme within TIL of playing with fewer skater than usual. The standard number was fourteen (and is now fifteen), but TIL frequently played with fewer than ten skaters.

> It was the first men's bout played outside of the UK and it was a big fucking deal. We went over with eight skaters we finished with four. Blocktopus was delirious with flu, somebody broke, my moron of a husband got *nine* penalties.
>
> Oblivion Westwood Interview, 19th August 2016

TIL experienced a difficult middle period. After a very successful showing at the 2014 Men's Euro's, where they finished fourth in Europe, TIL had a disastrous game against Southern Discomfort Roller Derby, the top men's team in the UK, where five people fouled out (Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016). Early enthusiasm and enjoyment gave way to disillusionment for many, and it became clear that members wanted very different things, and over a short period of time, several of the team's most experienced and skilled players left, along with many newer players, the experiences of whom will be discussed in the next chapter. This left a much smaller group of skaters, with much less collective experience than previously, to rebuild the team. During the 2016 season, there was a feeling that this had been successful.

> After that I started to see a bit more of the roughness of TIL, shall we say, they are loud and rude and made dirty jokes and it was great. Yes, there's a lot of camaraderie, I think you get the occasional bickering. It passes but most of it is just people just having a laugh. You get all the lads of TIL wanting to have a laugh. The guests, too. I think a lot of people feel comfortable in these scenarios that we make because it's not we have to do this or make it overly strict, it's more friendly.

> Frank Interview, 17th August 2016

Although, as pointed out earlier, some members felt that TIL was not "friend club" (Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016), friendship was an important part of membership for others. Also, at times, there seemed to be a certain defensiveness about the size of the team; how smaller was better, and enabled the friendships to thrive.

> The big thing for me is everyone- everyone seems to be really good friends with each other. 'Coz it's such a-- 'coz now, we're such a small team. Everyone knows each other. Everyone knows how each other plays. Everyone-- a lot of them turn up to training regularly. You know, so everyone's on the-- everyone's roughly on the same page or there about, you know. And everyone's-- really friendly to each other, the bench is happy and I just skate around with a huge grin on my face. Apparently, I am the happiest member of TIL. That's what Zoya has said anyway. Apparently I

just grin my way around the track. I just gormlessly grin when I am sat on the bench waiting for my-- waiting for my jam you know.

Hoof Interview, 22nd June 2016

This negotiation of team identity occurred frequently as members insisted the team was better at the time of interview than it had been in the past. Stuntman, who was a member in the beginning, left during the middle period, and joined again for the 2016 season, said "I feel this is a team now" (Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016), where previously, he argued, it was more individualistic. This demonstrated a need to remain positive about the team, despite the many changes that had occurred; a need to maintain the outward image that the team was strong and together, and of one mind (Goffman, 1959).

Sometimes, this positivity required a rewriting of history. From April 2013 to June 2014, TIL was big enough to have a second, or B team. Called Zom B Cru, this team gave newer members a chance to play, and less experienced skaters a chance to develop leadership skills. Over this period, Zom B Cru played at nine events, including one European tournament. Despite its success, Zom B Cru, as the second team, bore the brunt of the team exodus, and had to be disbanded in September 2014, with one member demanding "I don't want to even hear the words Zom B Cru" (EGM, 29th September 2014). In responding to change, TIL members employed a sort of ritual to enable some sense of continuity (Cohen, 1985). Seen here, one of these rituals involved TIL divesting itself of the past to focus on moving forward (also seen in the decision to delete the committee Facebook group, as discussed in section 3.5).

FIGURE 6.1 ZOM B CRU LOGO. COURTESY OF JAMES T WALMESLEY. 2013.

Removal of information about Zom B Cru from the league website functioned as a symbol of this focus on the future. Rather than the past being used as a resource in the management of change, as Cohen (1985) argues, within TIL the past was deliberately obscured and forgotten. However, members viewed this differently, and not everyone was so keen to forget the past. Despite this attempt to move on, Zom B Cru was fondly remembered, mostly by ex-members. For these participants, the existence of the B team recaptured some of the excitement of the early days.

> You know we had like Friday night skate sessions in the car park where you just take a crate of beer down and skate, or you know parties at the cocoon and that kind of thing so yeah so that was, that was wonderful. I mean that was what I really kind of expected derby to be.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

Zom B Cu was remembered in terms of being able to take the game less seriously, having fun and a laugh, focusing on the experience rather than the win, (Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016; Phally Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016; Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016). It allowed for a range of experiences and goals within the one wider league. The A team was becoming more ambitious and striving to be more serious and competitive. Zom B Cru provided a space to do derby differently, and to allow newer members to experience that sense of excitement that original members experienced in the beginning, including the close ties with the 'sister' league.

> When we had an A and a B-Team I felt that it had a quite good balance to it and the B-Team seemed to have a really good time, I mean A team was doing great things. The B-Team was clearly having a better time than A-Team -was. They had more fun; they enjoyed it.
>
> Nuke Interview, 22nd August 2016

There were moments when the whole team came together, and a real sense of 'teamliness' was evident. One of these examples is what was commonly known as 'the Phally jam'. In May 2013, Zom B Cru played their first game. We were ahead, so as line-up manager, I asked Phally if he wanted to jam. In what turned out to be the last jam of the game, Phally got lead and completed lap after lap to thunderous cheers from everyone in the sports hall. It was one of the moments that Phally remembered with most clarity. He recalled that all of TIL, and many of his friends were there, watching him jam; something he normally didn't do. He enjoyed the surprise element of it, and the chance to shine, whilst being comforted by the

security of being so far ahead in points, that he was not risking the game. He remembered which blockers were in the wall, and how much trust he put in them to make his job easy.

> I'm like, "Aah, this is brilliant", and then looking at the clock going, "I'm really tired now, still a minute to go." came round again, fucking like, "I'm sure it's been longer than 30 seconds, like how-how is there still time on the clock" and going around. By the end I was like, "I am knackered", just like-- [laughs] Um, and then the whistle went, and uh, I remember Bear ran onto the track and basically- picked me up and like threw me on the floor and was screaming at me, and like all of my mates were just so like, "Holy shit", like, "Phally jam that's the best".

> Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

Phally's memories highlight how important Zom B Cru was to the skaters on this team. They weren't the most athletic or serious, and often had not had success in sports prior to this. Certainly, Phally had not played sport much at school, or at all since, and here he was centre stage, his description showing a physical challenge, but a real sense of excitement and enjoyment that captured the attention of the crowd as much as any 'serious' sporting occasion might do, and Oblivion believed it "was the most together TIL has ever been. I feel like Phally has a way of bringing people together, 'cause he has such a kind heart that he just unites a team" (Oblivion Westwood Interview, 19th August 2016). Stone (2017) argues that feelings of belonging ebb and flow, and moments such as this, and the way memories of them were shared, highlight again that TIL was not just a sports team.

Emotions ran high at events where the team travelled together and stayed one or more nights. These were good opportunities for team bonding. The pleasure skaters had in recalling the visit to Toulouse was mirrored by recollections of the Zom B Cru visit to Malmo, talked about so much afterwards, that those who didn't go got

completely sick of it, demanding we stop, giving rise to the oft-spoken "what happens in Malmo, stays in Malmo".

> Blocktopus: I enjoyed certainly going to Malmo, and doing the competition with Zom B Cru was good fun.
> DF: Tell me about it. Pretend I wasn't there.
> Blocktopus: Am I allowed to tell you?
> DF: Of course you are. What…?
> Blocktopus: I'm under the impression that what happened there stayed there.
>
> Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

Despite the connotations of this phrase – the deliberate similarity to 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas', the visit wasn't really "going hard" (Coogan Interview, 32st May 2016), in terms of both drinking and socialising, and playing roller derby. It was about shared experiences, and shared emotions. It was an opportunity for getting to know your teammates better, for having shared experiences and creating inside jokes, and also, about doing something new and exciting. As well as fun, "nice" was a word frequently used to describe this event; not a word typically associated with athletic events or 'lads on tour':

> Well, that was just good, you know, it was a laugh. No one was taking it too seriously, there was just, it was just a sense of lads on tour just kind of having a laugh. But then you also had the added fact that we had Maud, we had Mouche there, so it kind of made it feel quite nice in that sense as well rather than just a 'woah, boys' kind of thing. It was just nice, you know, that was a real kind of part of what derby – you know.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

Skaters enjoyed the lack of enforced jollity, or manufactured 'roller derby saved my soul' aspect (Packington, 2012), and enjoyed the 'niceness' of spending time with friends, and making new ones, whilst doing something fun.

> But it, like it was fun it was, and I suppose it was coming up to the first men's World Cup and…So, I mean I think we probably went into it a bit naively in that we didn't realise until either when we got there or very close to the time that we got there that it was basically a sort of a competition for

most of the national teams from Europe. Yeah and we did alright yeah that was it but yeah. So, it was, but it was really good fun and sort of everybody was really nice, I mean there were some teams that were harder than others but they were friendly at the same time and I think they were just harder because half of them were sort of ice hockey players from Finland by the looks of it.

Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

During the 2016 season, TIL went on another of these 'tours', to play a tournament in Brussels. There was the same sense of fun and enjoyment, but this was an A team game, and the skaters were different (only Jason and I went on both trips), and hence the focus was very different. As this event took place during my official period of observation, I was well placed to observe, as well as discuss the event in interviews afterward. This enabled me to have a better sense of immediacy, since everyone's experience of Malmo was seen through the filter of time and distance, leading to a potentially more 'rose-coloured' experience. I interviewed Coogan about two weeks after we returned, Frank about three months after, and Stuntman, four. Their responses were framed by the question "tell me about some of your favourite moment with TIL?", and for various reasons, they were keen to present a positive image of the team. Nevertheless, these explanations showed the depth of impact this experience had for them.

> I came back from Brussels, I tried to explain to people the experience that I'd gone through and found myself woefully falling short of any kind of mark on trying to even begin to explain to people how much of a gooder experience it is. It's like when people talk about doing drugs like I did so and so drugs, like I wasn't there, I didn't experience it, I can't relate to you. It's, you know I feel, I'm empathising with you but to truly feel that you have to be there, you have to do in the experience and those are the best ones. When you are in the same place as someone else doing the same thing. But particularly it's having the other side of it 'cos sport's so much about, well it's a social thing,

Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

The event was framed as a triumph, despite losing both games. The focus was on having the same experience, being together, and doing well despite small numbers. Coogan also explained that he felt the low numbers helped people feel more together, that it was more likely they all experienced the games in a similar way as there were so few of them. It is clear here that community building is key. Even for Coogan, despite comments he made about roller derby being primarily a sport for him, and not a place to make friends, this experience was not just about playing a sport. There was a belief in shared goals and the sense of closeness that came from shared experiences (Stone, 2017).

Additionally, skaters were open about the emotion they felt during the games, seeing crying during the game as a positive thing.

> Brussels was incredible. We went to Brussels, and we thought we'd have about 10 people, thought, yep, take a decent team, and then Hoof broke his ankle. Prince left. I think we had somebody who couldn't afford it, and then we're down to like six or seven. We got there, as the magnificent seven, plus bench and line-up, Zoya and Wilma. And you…and then first minute of the first game we play, Fin sprained an ankle, so we're down to six. The end of the first game, Stuntman wasn't feeling his best, so we were potentially down to five, but luckily Stuntman soldiered on, he was okay, and the fact that we faced De Ronny's at the time, many of them part of an international team, and they gave us quite a good going over, but we held our own, kept going. And by the second we played, it was just six of us, and we held them to a draw after normal time, which is incredible to say that we had-- By that point, by the end of the game, I think we had four people because two had fouled out. I had been back blocked, so I had gone off, and I was so tired, I went and cried in a corner. I was like, "Can't do it anymore," came back for the overtime jam and Zoya said, "No you need to go on." It just hurt so much, I was pretty sure I suffered whiplash from that. It was painful for about five, six weeks afterwards. But the whole journey was just really fun.
>
> Frank Interview, 17th August 2016
>
> Brussels for me was a huge personal kind of thing as well…the two games were an emotional and physical wall I had to get through. Because I hurt myself in the first game. Or rather I got hurt in the first game. And I didn't think I could get through and it was -- I felt I'd let the team down. I actually got upset. That's the only time I've ever cried in a roller derby game. I gave -

- literally gave blood, sweat and tears in that game. And actually it's come out as one of the best experiences, because I kept going, kept pushing. Uhm but it was just an incredible experience.

Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

The Brussels trip was a shared affective experience that served to both include and exclude (Clark, 2006). Unlike Clark's discussion of the football chant, not only did this experience "serve to act as a boundary marker to differentiate the collectivity from the opposition" (2006, p500), but also highlights the existence of multiple collectivities within the team. One such collectivity might be characterised as the Magnificent 7 (discussed in chapter 5). Members who went to Brussels discussed a feeling of closeness to each other and a deep sense of belonging within the team for some time afterwards, effectively creating a team within a team, where members who could not go were excluded. Even within the Magnificent 7, there were different groups. The bulk of the ten people who went spent the day before the games together on a pub crawl, but Zoya, Wilma, and Foggy went off in a smaller group to visit tourist attractions. These three were excluded from one affective experience, whilst remaining included in the wider experience.

6.4 Acceptance

The first rule of roller derby is, always talk about roller derby.

Roller derby saying (apocryphal)

Academic studies of roller derby frequently quote the saying 'roller derby saved my soul' (Breeze, 2014; Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014). As suggested, my participants tended to eschew what is sometimes felt to be manufactured and trite affect. Instead, I choose to open discussions on how accepting men's roller derby is with this bastardisation of the line from *Fight Club*: "The first rule of Fight Club is: You do not talk about Fight Club" (Fincher, 1999). Roller derby is inclusive and welcoming,

and members of its community sometimes talk about very little else. In the words of one former member of TIL, "it is simultaneously the most welcoming place in the world, and the biggest clique I've ever come across" (Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016). The tendency to be so focused on the sport and surrounding community made it very difficult for ex-members to stay connected to those who still moved within the community. One reason for this was the discovery that besides a love for roller derby, members often had very little in common, which at times made it harder to maintain the front of being united. The reverse of this is that roller derby believed itself to be very tolerant of quirks and oddities, and the community was very diverse, at least in certain specific ways. Whilst the next chapter will discuss some of the impact of exclusion on marginal individuals, and ways in which TIL was not always as inclusive as it seemed, in this section I will discuss some of the ways in which the roller derby community more generally, and TIL specifically, showed acceptance.

Modern roller derby developed with a feminist DIY ethic, originally as a women-only sport. Duncombe defines this ethos as "the active creation of an alternative culture. DIY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different" (1997, p117). Seen as being alternative, and more 'authentic' than traditional models of sport, or culture, the DIY label applied to roller derby tends to refer to how "the majority of leagues are owned and operated by the participants. Of course, this also means the majority of leagues are owned and operated by women" (Beaver, 2012, p26). Roller derby is often linked with the Riot Grrrl movement by academics, in part because of the punk aesthetic of the early days, but also because of being, like Riot Grrrl, a woman-centred movement aimed at carving out a space

of their own within a male dominated culture. For Riot Grrrl, it was punk music, for roller derby it was sport.

Men's roller derby grew out of that tradition, so it was unsurprising that the validity of its existence was a topic of controversy. The idea that men don't belong often rears its head in the roller derby blogosphere (Racey, 2014; Ford, 2015), but this is increasingly contested. In a single issue of UK roller derby magazine *Lead Jammer*, there was an article discussing the negative effect of co-ed derby on the women's game (Proven, 2014), alongside coverage of the first Men's Roller Derby World Cup, and my own article on my research into men's roller derby (Fletcher, 2014). Increasingly, however, mainstream online news outlets cover men's roller derby in positive ways, heralding its potential for inclusivity (Flood, 2013; Copland, 2014; Goodman, 2016).

Women's roller derby was created out of a desire to give women opportunities to play sport that they would otherwise not have had. In the US, despite the passing of Title IX in 1972[4], the uptake of sport amongst adult women remained low. Roller derby was for women, and it strived to be inclusive; to be a sport that welcomed anyone, regardless of size or shape or prior sporting experience. In the early days, there certainly was a sense that if you had never done sport before there was a place for you. When I joined a team in 2010, the global picture was beginning to change, but in my home city, the women's team was full of the sort of people who hadn't done team sport before, or often any sport outside of school. Roller derby culture of the time, in the form of blogs, and league websites tended to make it clear that in

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[4] Title IX requires gender equity for all educational programmes in the US attracting federal funding (titleix.info, 2018). Therefore, its aim was to ensure girls and boys had equal funding for school sports, among other things.

this context, anyone really meant any woman. Nevertheless, leagues could not flourish without support, and many officials in the beginning were men, drawn in through relationships with participants, or because they too felt marginalised from mainstream men's sports in some way.

Growing as it did as a result of men being drawn into women's roller derby, but still wanting something of their own, TIL also aimed to be inclusive, welcoming those who often didn't have much sporting experience, who were more likely to be nerdy and geeky than sporty and athletic; the kind of person who probably wouldn't have been one of the 'cool' kids, or an 'alpha male' type. Breeze (2014) questioned whether roller derby was a "sport for women who don't like sport" (p.16), and that's certainly what it seemed to be when I joined. Perhaps men's roller derby was becoming a sport for men who didn't play sport.

In her interview, Oblivion Westwood, who had been with TIL in the early days, discussed the importance of non-sporting, non-masculine men bringing value to the team in a way that was not often noticed, but was vital in fostering togetherness.

> That's always been really important to me to look at someone like Phally, who you wouldn't necessary look at and think, "Oh, this guy's got major value for the team", but he did, he had a value that you cannot quantify. He was so important in bringing that team together. He brought the team together because he was so loved…Phally has a way of bringing people together, because he has such a kind heart that he just unites a team.

> Oblivion Westwood Interview, 19th August 2016

Oblivion used the example of the 'Phally jam' to explain Phally's impact on the team. The importance of that event for several interviewees suggested that Phally embodied team spirit.

FIGURE 6.2 PHALLY JAMS WEARING HIS HOT-PANTS. COURTESY OF BRADLEY WILKINSON. 2013.

Growing up, Phally found it hard to get interested in sports, but always saw roller

derby as more of a game, like a grown-up version of Tag or Bulldog. He was drawn

to the shared humour. Humour ran through Phally's interview more than any other.

His memories and descriptions of events were shot through with asides and jokes,

and the word 'brilliant', and I laughed more during this interview than any other.

Even when describing the banter aimed at him, which at times must have been near

constant, he was in fits of giggles. He described wearing hot pants for the first time

as a joke.

> And um it started off as a joke and I know at the time of the B-team game
> um, it was loads of people who literally just passed [minimum skills] and I
> think up until a couple weeks before, we were sort of worried, "are we gonna
> have enough players", like, "we need more people to pass" sort of thing **s**o
> the mins got hammered just so we'd have enough players to do it. So
> everyone was like really working hard.um, and I know those are Pi and
> Whack and quite a few people were scared 'coz obviously they'd never done
> it before, and they'd only just pass, so they'd only just got to scrim like in the
> months coming up. So everyone was a bit scared and um, I remember talking

to Rex, and saying, "Oh no, we'll just keep it light-hearted and just try and keep peoples' um spirits up" 'coz he was captain and I was vice-captain.

Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

He goes on to discuss this decision further, as outlined in chapter 5, and though he positions this choice as 'a joke', it also served to help other skaters relax and feel less nervous about their first game. This light-hearted, silly side of roller derby is where Phally was comfortable and happy. He called the serious, athletic mindset 'Team No Fun'. Humour and silliness spilled over into whatever Phally did. Roller derby was very positive for Phally, and helped give him confidence

> Starting off I was incredibly shy and quite withdrawn really and it's one of those where meeting lots of people and doing lots of things and traveling to other cities and playing with lots of people sort of brought me out of my shell a little bit and uh, I think it was mainly because everyone was there to have a laugh at the start. There was no pressure and it was just like, "I'm just going to go talk to this person, coz they're on skates, they're a like-minded person".

Phallic Baldwin Interview, 25th January 2016

Being part of the roller derby community could be very positive for people who were shy or socially awkward, as it gave them access to a whole group of people who were, sometimes, as shy and socially awkward as they were, but who had a shared interest, and therefore, plenty to talk about. Stuntman explained that he found this to be the case, when filming a documentary about Sheffield Steel Rollergirls:

> Something from *The Shredding Planner*, actually talking to people like Faithkill and Raege, who said we are completely socially difficult. You know, backwards to some extent. We wouldn't do this. And I remember, really -- we used it at the end of the documentary for a heartfelt hard screen moment. Raege said "I've got Asperger's, I wouldn't talk to people, I'd sit in a room, I didn't see the point. And actually, this has got me out of it. Talking to people, started doing things". You know, and I think that's the great thing about Roller Derby as well. It -- it does bring people together, even though it can be destructive at times as well. Because you're always gonna be, when you get that amount of people in a room.

Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

Near the end of his interview, Blocktopus and I were joined by his partner and my housemate, both members of SSRG. We were talking about how sometimes the politics within SSRG can seem anti-male, using the examples of two male bench staff who were rumoured to have been chased out purely for being male. I suggested that, despite Blocktopus being SSRG's bench manager for years, no one had ever made reference to him being male.

> DU: (laughs) He is!
> Blocktopus: (laughs) No I think I agree and I said as much, maybe not particularly with SSRG in mind, but certainly with Team West Indies, but I'd never made a secret of it, and that I…
>
> DF: What? that you're not a woman?
> Blocktopus: No, the…
> MS: I don't know, he tried to disguise it that time he wore a skirt.
>
> Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

From this point, Blocktopus continued to explain how he was more invested in women's derby but would happily step aside an allow a woman to bench, if they wanted it. DU and MS continued to interject, on tape, giving an insight into the dynamics of our friendships, but also highlighting the 'oddness' of all of us. We acknowledged Blocktopus' place within SSRG as an 'honorary woman' and discussed how, over time, Blocktopus had become the individual with arguably the biggest influence over SSRG, without any of the members expressing concerns about a man being in charge, despite that being a sticking point for other male members. This was precisely because he did display many 'feminine' traits, which support the ethos of inclusion. Grievous referred to him as "the least threatening male presence on the planet" (Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016), and this, perhaps accounts for why Blocktopus is sometimes referred to as SSRG's 'mum'.

Grievous referred to skaters as boys and girls, and referred to the 'A' teams as big boys and girls. This infantilising and childish language was in part perhaps a product of his role working with a school reception class, and partly a way of speaking which reflected his view of roller derby as a ridiculous sport that should not be taken too seriously, and the perils of forgetting "that you're all just dickheads on skates" (Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016). He also explained how he felt sympathetic to the way some people felt about men in derby, but suggested that men were always going to be involved in some way. The friendships and the links with the women's team were the most important parts of roller derby for him.

> I can see how derby would be great for guys that aren't going to be part of your regular sports team, you know like Phally, or you know Blocktopus is never gonna go and play football is he? I might do, or Jarvis might do, or take up cycling, but a lot of these guys aren't ever gonna go and do a regular sport for lack of a better word, so it's great that they've got something.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

It is interesting to note that though members (and former members) recognised the 'oddness' in each other, being aware of others' inability to fit in with mainstream, hegemonic sports, it was rarer for members to recognise it in themselves. When discussing one of the TIL members who was a former rugby player, Grievous said that he didn't think 'that mentality' had a place in roller derby, and valued the sport as a place for non-conventional men.

> I mean, I think male [derby] definitely attracts outliers. You know, I think it definitely attracts or at least it did attract guys that weren't conventional athletes, you know what I mean? As we said, you know, can you imagine Phally going and joining a football team. Umm, and then, and yes, so I think it does attract those outliers and then also has the beneficial effect of reinforcing some sort of norms and values by being around women.
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

Grievous seemed unaware that he is also considered to be non-conventional, positioning himself as more of a conventional athlete. Both Blocktopus and Grievous demonstrate that roller derby offers a space that allows men to engage with masculinity differently (Messner, 2002).

There were contrary ideas about how inclusive the sport could or should be. For Bollock Obama, the acceptance stemmed from the fact that roller derby was a niche sport, and therefore did not attract many elite athletes, meaning that it could be more inclusive:

> My brother has an athletic history very similar to mine. He said roller derby is interesting because it seems like the sport in which the ceiling is low enough that it is possible to excel as a reasonably competent athlete and I thought, that's a good point. I could never be a national quality basketball player, certainly not at 38 years old, because I'm just not athletic enough…whereas at roller derby, because it's such a small sport and because so many of the real elite athletes are elsewhere, it's a combination of my skill set and the low ceiling means that I can excel in it. That's something that Spectral said years ago, we were talking about it and he said he had no illusions that he wasn't a moderately competent athlete in an extremely niche sport.

Bollock Obama Interview, 24th August 2016

Many roller derby players were keen for the sport to grow. Bollock wondered if, as the sport grew, and more athletic men were attracted to roller derby, the raised ceiling would change the profile of the sport and affect how inclusive it could be, which reflects Breeze's (2014) conclusions on women's roller derby. Coogan argued that

> there is a massive thing of your freaks and your runts coming into roller derby thinking this is an alternative sport for alternative people and they get there and they realise that it's not like it was back in the DIY days when it first started, it is a proper developing sport. People compete to win.

Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

A view which was in marked contrast to Phally's. Coogan came from a sporting

family and had played many sports, though not at a high level, considering himself

to be a 'jack of all trades'. He said that he liked sport, but that roller derby was the

first sport he loved. He claimed it was a sport more than anything else. His

enjoyment came from playing the sport and working as a team. He argued that he

was not interested in 'alpha-male bullshit' in life, but in sport, it was all about the

win. Again, this contrasts sharply with Coogan's comments about the trip to

Brussels, which suggests roller derby was not all about the win for him, but that he

valued the community too.

Despite claiming the DIY days were behind us, as chair of TIL for a year (April

2015-April 2016), Coogan contributed a lot to the running of the league. Coogan

had clear ideas about how the sport should develop.

> Roller derby came from the whole DIY aesthetic doing it yourself you know
> women you know, women in fishnets and hot pants and costumes and, we
> need to distance ourselves away from that to a certain extent.

> Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

He argued that derby could still retain its "family feeling", but that it needed to be

more clearly open to people who were not 'alternative'. He recognised the tension

between broadening the membership base and ensuring a place remained for people

who sought a place in roller derby because it accepted them for who they were, but

he didn't necessarily have an answer for that. Instead, he suggested that the way

forward was to reach and engage people who had played other sports, to help them

see roller derby as a viable alternative.

> It's just a case of people understanding that it's an acceptable thing for them
> to do. Just as it's an acceptable thing for me to go, oh I fancy trying
> something else, I'm gonna try cricket. Oh, shit I'm quite good at this, people

> aren't gonna laugh at me for playing cricket, well they might do but you know, there's a preconceived notion whenever I've spoken to people it's a lesbian sport.

Coogan Interview, 31st May 2016

Roller derby is not the only sport facing issues of whether to foreground inclusivity or competition. Cohen et al (2014) discuss how the sport of Quidditch is competitive but inclusive, and explore how the shift towards competition and commercialisation can lead to a loss of enjoyment and increased drop outs in sport. Even within Quidditch, "intrinsic factors, such as inclusivity and equality, often take a back seat to extrinsic motives such as desires to win and success on the playing field when there is opportunity for recognition and notoriety" (Cohen et al, 2014, p232). Coogan articulated an issue facing roller derby, and Quidditch; the issue of how to engage with the mainstream of sport, without losing the inclusivity that makes them different.

Before roller derby, Stuntman was "very satisfied filling my time with being a little nerd" (Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016) and, like most of the league, had no great sporting background. He was initially involved in roller derby as a film-maker, filming a documentary, *The Shredding Planner*, centred around SSRG. He found the team to be very welcoming and was, as is common in roller derby, pestered until he agreed to join TIL. He found roller derby to be good for people who were going through tough times, and believed it was inclusive.

> If you think outside of the definition of inclusive from ticking all the boxes of who and what actually, it is inclusive because it -- it is accepting. And it's an outlet for people. And maybe because it is not structured like other sports clubs, it's a bit different as well. 'Cause there is. Even though it does gets political. It is a community. It's not perfect, but it's, it's- It is there for a lot of people and it does give people a lot.

Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

Stuntman argued that though roller derby was not perfect, though it was a largely white, middle class sport, it was nevertheless far more inclusive than other sports, and was proud to be a part of TIL, which he saw as being more open and inclusive even than other roller derby teams, without needing to make a big statement about it. Nuke, who wanted the emphasis to change from men's roller derby to open, or non-selective, agreed, saying that "my feelings are that we are the most open to anybody of any background because we'll accept people whoever they are, there is no limit" (Nuke Interview, 22nd August 2016). Both saw roller derby as accepting of people whoever they were, and therefore highly inclusive.

> But I guess people who perhaps don't behave how society believes you should in a sport. I don't know how to rephrase that. I think it just gives you -- for all the people like me and you who didn't do sports, perhaps. That's a great way to put it. It gives you the sport to do. Because there are athletic people, who want to do it, but they feel alienated by other sports. And this sport kind of has a positive stigma attached. What's the word? Positive thing attached to it, which people assume and know that it's all right to be who you are. And I think that's more -- I think that's a better way to put it, rather than saying, "Masculine, feminine, gay, straight." And this, that and the other. You can be who you are. Because you're just playing a sport. And you won't get alienated or begrudged or focused on for that.

> Stuntman Interview, 13th September 2016

These views are consistent with ideas around gender inclusivity. Discussing the sport of Quidditch in these terms, Cohen et al (2014) explore how co-ed experiences for men and women are positively linked with an increased desire for inclusivity and equality. Quidditch includes a 'gender maximum rule', which stipulates that a "maximum of four players who identify as the same gender in active play on the field at the same time. This number increases to five once the seekers enter the game." (USQ, 2017). Once the snitch is released and the seeker is active, there are seven players on the field at any one time. This is specifically written to encourage

diversity and to include non-binary and transgender players, and a player's gender is determined solely by how they self-identify.

An analysis of korfball (Gubby and Wellard, 2015), a mixed sport that is both competitive and co-operative, indicates possibilities for a level of equality on the playing court, however, participants retain socially normative understandings of gender, and these are reproduced through dress and a belief in the physical advantages of boys. Perhaps the potential of this sport is limited through the practice of women 'marking' women and men 'marking' men, thus, underlying the rules of the sport is an acceptance of the physical superiority of men. It seems that a more equal mixing of genders is necessary for participants to look beyond such normative understandings. In the openness of OTA and the MRD policy, there are indications that roller derby can function in this way.

6.5 The Bigger Boys Made Me Do It

> I don't want to start questioning my ideas of masculinity when I've got someone about to come and break my ribs
>
> Fin Interview, 13th April 2016

Inclusive is often used in the context of gender (Mullin, 2012). Since the WFTDA updated their gender policy in 2016 (WFTDA, 2016a), there has been a lot of discussion about how trans inclusive the sport has become. When discussing trans acceptance, there is, however, still a tendency to cover women's derby and focus on male to female transition (Hanna, 2015; McManus, 2015). This is despite the MRDA non-discrimination policy preceding the WFTDA's and remaining more inclusive. TIL is a member of the MRDA, which makes explicit reference to roller derby as a *community*, thus including everyone.

> With encouragement from the Women's Flat Track Derby Association
> (WFTDA), MRDA hopes to build a strong and influential organization like
> WFTDA. Our aim is to complement their contributions to the sport of roller
> derby and offer new perspectives to the derby community (MRDA, 2017a).

It is important to consider whether this merely rhetoric; a trick of language, or if men's leagues begin to provide answers to the problem of belonging and inclusivity in roller derby. In thinking about the emancipatory potential of the sport, "inclusivity matters. You need to be able to be yourself, whatever that is" (Farrance, 2014, p9). The MRDA position makes it clear that you can be yourself in men's roller derby.

As briefly touched upon in chapter 5 and in the introduction to this chapter, Fin's story demonstrates TIL's commitment to inclusivity. But whereas, in chapter 5, I explored how 'inclusivity' is a discourse used to create a good impression and position TIL as a team that is accepting, here my focus is on how this notion of inclusivity works in everyday practice. I want to focus on Fin's lived experience as the basis for this discussion. Their experiences as a member of both the women's team, Sheffield Steel Rollergirls, and the Inhuman League and the process of switching teams, also highlights the importance of banter, teamwork, and acceptance for a sense of belonging.

Fin was with SSRG for three years, but had been feeling a growing dissatisfaction with the league, in part because of a lack of goals and progression both on a personal and whole team level, but also because of unease around the gendered nature of the league: the Roller *Girls*. Fin describes seeing Facebook discussions of the gender specification criteria for men's roller derby as being "a bit of a lightbulb kind of thing" for them:

> The more comfortable I got with my own sorta gender identity, I didn't feel
> like I'd fit there and it wasn't necessarily that I was thinking oh, I'm a boy

and I need to go and play for a boys' team. Although it doesn't mean that that's completely out of left field, but it felt like I would possibly be more comfortable skating with the men's team because I felt that I identified more with being male than female if I had to, if I had to choose a particularly binary option and tick a neat little box. It would probably be more on the male side than on the female side.

Fin Interview, 13th April 2016

This discussion arose because Nuke had been questioning the precise meaning of the non-discrimination policy as set out by the Men's Roller Derby Association (MRDA), as discussed in chapter 4. Nuke's questioning of the possibility of rostering on the basis of skill not gender for MRDA sanctioned and British Champs games raised awareness of the membership criteria, and therefore, when Fin asked if they could join TIL, the question of gender inclusivity was already in the minds of TIL committee members. Only one member of the committee suggested that it would have to be put to the team first, the rest of committee were unequivocal in their welcome of Fin as a full member. TIL's membership criteria had once been "men over 18", but after Fin joined, it was changed to "skaters over 18".

Transferring to TIL made Fin much more aware of their sense of masculinity, as they became "like the new small kid in class". Fin felt that their masculinity was on the line as it was being pitched against others' sense of their own masculinity in direct competition, and that, as the only non-binary member of the league, there was a microscope effect happening, whereby they were under much more intense scrutiny to perform acceptable masculinity than other team members. Success meant opening the way for other non-binary and trans skaters, but failure meant being 'proven' to be "not male enough".

Fin acknowledged that they were acutely aware of masculinity in a way that most members were not, and this pressure to succeed as 'masculine' was internal rather than external.

> I mean especially considering the team have been super, super welcoming. Like really, genuinely inclusive. I think that it's like things like doing the footage review last week and being completely joined in with all of the foolishness and banter and very stereotypical boy kind of behaviour. I think things like that make me very aware of being incredibly included.
>
> Fin Interview, 13th April 2016

Fin cited the jokes and the banter as the things that made them feel included. Where Fin had faced questioning that made them uncomfortable, it came from guest skaters, rather than TIL members, and although Fin felt that questions regarding pronouns were usually asked with the best of intentions, they were still unwanted, and contributed to a hyper awareness of gender identity from which Fin was trying to make roller derby an escape.

> I don't think that they appreciate how much of that struggle I've had in terms of going to training and not wanting it to be an issue and then having this team that have accepted me in to the point that it isn't an issue and we're not gonna make it a big deal. So, to have like outright questions being asked during that training thing it just, I don't need that right now.
>
> Fin Interview, 13th April 2016

Fin talked about how supportive TIL members had been, mentioning Jason and Coogan especially. Considering that both of these skaters had backgrounds in mainstream sport, this is especially noteworthy.

> The biggest person, like the person that I didn't expect so quickly to change themselves was, was Jason. Who, like we're from the same area (laughs) you know, we're both from the sort of area that this sort of shit doesn't happen. So, for him to be really quite supportive, like he said "she" a few weeks ago, and he went "Oh, no, I mean Fin", like that when he was in my company and he did it in a really nice way because he didn't make it a big deal, he just corrected himself quickly. And just carried on with how he was talking, so that was better for me than someone having the big, "so how would you

220

prefer that I referred to you?" To have Mr Rotherham saying, "actually, we're just gonna, that's how we are…"

Fin Interview, 13th April 2016

The acceptance Fin found within TIL had a huge positive impact. Shortly after joining, during the interview in April 2016, Fin said that they didn't want to "be a spokesperson for the trans community", but not long after, Fin began moving much more in that direction, directing a documentary for the Transforming Cinema film festival about their experiences of *Switching Teams*. This speaks to the increasing happiness Fin felt with their gender identity, and their place within the sport.

FIGURE 6.3 STILL FROM *SWITCHING TEAMS*. COURTESY OF FIN. 2016.

6.6 Summary and Discussion

Belonging and acceptance are processes; roller derby is an ever-changing and evolving community, and levels of inclusivity change over time. Roller derby is a place where people can find acceptance, but though inclusivity may be the ideal, exclusion and the setting of boundaries are also necessary. Inclusion and exclusion

are mutually dependent and reinforcing and the processes of boundary maintenance work to define the group (Jenkins, 2014).

The inclusivity that exists tends to be gender-based (Mullin, 2012). Inclusion on the basis of class or race is not only inadequately provided for, but sometimes actively disregarded as not the sense in which inclusivity is meant.

This is problematic in itself, but even to take the view that inclusivity is possible within the boundaries of white and middle-class runs up against several obstacles. Concepts of belonging and inclusivity are open to a multiplicity of interpretations. Banter for example, allows people to feel they belong, except when it doesn't. It is a way of including people under the banner of the group, except when it is distracting and unhelpful. Such practices belie the inclusive claims, offering instead an exclusive reality (Burdsey, 2008; Adjepong, 2015; Rannikko et al, 2016)

TIL members enjoyed being TIL members most when they were working as a team. The problem with this, is that it is inextricably connected with newness, and the excitement of creating something free of preconceived notions. The excitement in the beginning, therefore, was mirrored by the excitement Zom B Cru skaters experienced in their first few games. Thus, just as TIL had a difficult middle period, TIL skaters often experienced the same. This sometimes led to skaters discontinuing membership. Where it did not, they had to find fresh challenges. For a few TIL members, the challenge of skating short provided this excitement. However, as the team strove to become more professional and hence more serious, whilst there was a clear path towards gender inclusivity, ways to continue to include and accept the less serious, and the non-sporting were murkier. The 'feeling' of belonging (Stone, 2017) could be absent at the margins. Selection makes roller derby less inclusive. (Breeze

2013, 2014) posited this as necessary for the development of the sport. But within TIL, there is a clear desire to maintain the identity of the group as a community, not just a sport.

The three key ways in which belonging was experienced by members of TIL highlight the importance of being part of something. For some, this creates a deep sense of belonging, and for others, it is more fleeting, as in McHugh et al (2015). Members discuss experiencing belonging during times when there is a steady level of banter. This might be in the form of one- off, or long-running jokes. They are seldom malicious and serve to create a sense of unity for the team. There is a gendered element to this, in that banter is a masculine trait. In contrast to Nichols' (2016) findings, banter within TIL is rarely homophobic, and rarely sexualises women – despite being frequently sexual in nature.

Also, skaters are accepting of others' oddities and quirks. The league developed from a women's sport, and it attracted men who were slightly more counter-cultural than mainstream, and so skaters felt they had more freedom to be other than stereotypical sportsmen, thus supporting Messner's (2002) arguments about the freedom to be found at the margins of sport.. It doesn't necessarily matter how 'true' this was – and no one had done surveys etc. – but it was believed to be true. Many of my participants expressed this view about themselves, about current and former teammates, and about others in the wider community. This belief in how 'inclusive' and 'accepting' the community is could be positive; the belief in shared values (McHugh et al, 2015) and experiences strengthen the bond between team members, but at times could obscure slightly less rosy experiences.

Observing TIL suggested there was something more at work than could be explained through concepts such as inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009), or masculinities in transition (Robinson, 2008), or mischievous masculinities (Nichols, 2016). There was an unusualness to the ways the members behaved towards each other. The acceptance of others' quirks, or oddness was different. Belonging and not belonging were inextricably interconnected. In men's roller derby, they were having to learn how to belong in the absence of stable reference points. Members made sense of roller derby and their experience of it through whatever reference point they had. Symbols were shared but understood individually (Cohen, 1985). This enabled the league, and indeed individuals within the league, to encapsulate multiple contested meanings (Pavlidis, 2013). They began to have a shared, yet non-traditional understanding of sport. In this context, the 'but' of 'yes, I belong, but…' is inevitable. In chapter 7, I explore this 'yes, but…' in more depth, moving to consider the experiences of those who faced barriers to belonging, especially officials and volunteers.

CHAPTER 7 BARRIERS TO BELONGING

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter included an in-depth exploration of inclusive practices.

Inclusivity is discussed as a contested 'ideal' (Breeze, 2014, p166), and there are

factors compromising a league's attempts to be inclusive. One of these is the drive

to be competitive. Breeze suggests that for her league, "there's a sense that

inclusivity was where the league began, and competitiveness was where it is going"

(Breeze, 2014, p173). As discussed in chapter 5, TIL also, at times, strove to be

serious and competitive. As part of this drive for competitiveness, leagues take steps

such as implementing attendance policies, as TIL did on more than one occasion.

> Developing an attendance policy was a question of how to encode and enact
> an ideal of 'fairness' or *inclusivity*. Even as team selection is about inclusion,
> it is also about exclusion and the definition of boundaries. (Breeze, 2014,
> p170-171).

Attendance policies in effect exclude those with responsibilities beyond the league,

who cannot always make roller derby a priority. The term 'inclusive' is used very

specifically to talk about including different types of women who may not be

particularly athletic, or skilled at the game. It is about including those who are

different shapes and sizes, and different age groups. Although there is a pervasive

idea in roller derby that anyone can play with "enough hard work and

determination" (Cotterill, 2010, p27), it is openly apparent that this is not the case in

practice. In her research, Cotterill found that "multiple participants talked about

women joining for the "wrong reasons"" (2010, p32). Roller derby therefore is not

open to everyone, identity is policed, and self-expression is limited (Cohen, 2008;

Pavlidis, 2013). Within TIL, however, a feeling of exclusion was sometimes the

result of failing to demonstrate sufficient skill, either through patchy attendance, or

differences in ability between the strongest and weakest skaters. At times, skaters

expressed frustration at this, but during 2016, TIL were too few in number to abide

by an attendance policy. Inclusivity became the default position, and even the

weakest skaters were almost guaranteed a roster spot, although it could be argued

that this was out of necessity, and therefore, weaker skaters could at times feel that

their sense of belonging was insecure. Therefore, although the group identity was

inclusive, members experienced this differently through, for example, the treatment

they received from others. This is in line with Jenkins' (2014) argument that

members of a group do not necessarily experience and understand a nominal

identity, in this case an inclusive league, in the same way. Additionally, Jenkins'

assertion that fragile membership status results in greater conformity (2014, p152)

would suggest that these weaker skaters are less likely to speak out about any

negative feelings or events.

Exclusion, however, is written into the very fabric of this community. The

WFTDA's mission statement itself promotes this;

> Founded in 2005, the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) promotes and fosters the sport of women's flat track roller derby by facilitating the development of athletic ability, sportswomanship, and goodwill among member leagues.
>
> The governing philosophy of the WFTDA is "by the skaters, for the skaters." Female skaters are primary owners, managers, and/or operators of each member league and of the association. Operational tasks include setting standards for rules, seasons, and safety, and determining guidelines for the national and international athletic competitions of member leagues.
>
> All WFTDA member leagues have a voice in the decision-making process, and agree to comply with the governing body's policies (WFTDA, 2016b).

It may be unintentional, but the 'by the skaters, for the skaters' ethic undermines

efforts to include those who do not skate: the non-skating officials, announcers,

photographers, etc. who work just as hard as skaters do, often for less 'reward' (Fletcher, 2017). Though MRDA make explicit reference to 'community' (MRDA, 2017a), within TIL there was still a divide between skaters and volunteers.

As far as this study goes, these issues arose continually through the data, representing significant barriers to belonging. Particular individuals had a major impact within the team, which, when negative, created tension for all members. Whilst some members had a very positive experience within TIL, and talked about the team's inclusivity, other members had less positive experiences, and talked about the downsides of membership. These tensions played out on an individual basis, but affected the whole group. Through detailed case studies, this chapter will explore the barriers to belonging in these key areas. First, I discuss the impact and influence of one member, whose behaviour and actions created tension within the league, leading some to leave, and others to feel less welcome. I theorise this as a clash between different types of masculinity, with Donald Thump (a pseudonym I have chosen to protect this member's anonymity. See section 3.4) functioning as an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity pitted against the more inclusive masculinity of the majority of members. The next section explores how this hegemonic masculinity plays out in an attitude towards referees, which impacts upon their feelings of belonging, and explores their position at the boundary of the TIL community (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1985). Whereas chapter 4 considers the lack of officials from an institutional and logistical perspective, this chapter explores the issue from a more individual perspective, and therefore includes my personal account of acting as a referee during fieldwork. Finally, I consider an outsider perspective, that of a photographer, to draw links between practices I have observed

within TIL and those of the larger community, whilst also considering how community was experienced at the boundary.

7.2 Every Team Has One

During my time with TIL, I experienced conflict with one member in particular, and this spilled over into my work as head referee of SSRG. This member also refereed, but never accepted my authority as HR, choosing to talk over me and ignore things I said whilst refereeing, and to argue my calls and shout penalties at me whilst he was playing. Initially, this made attendance at TIL sessions difficult and stressful.

> This antagonistic feeling seems to be worse since I've started doing fieldwork. Maybe I've noticed more all the little things he does to show disrespect and make me feel isolated and unwelcome, or maybe it's because I'm dwelling on it a lot. Is his presence really such a huge part of everything, or are there many more stories I'm missing? (Field notes, Saturday 16th January 2016)

It became apparent that I wasn't the only person with tales of difficulties working with this member. Observation and interviews strongly suggested that the influence of one member could have massive implications for the team as a whole, so whilst the influence of Donald Thump was not the only story within TIL, it was an important one, and should be considered.

Interviews with members suggested that there were two sides to Thump's behaviour. Blocktopus said "he's great if you do what he thinks is the right thing to do or if you are seen to be skilled and talented at something then he will give you a lot of time" (Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016), and some members were supportive of his training methods and ideas about the team, believing him to be a very good coach. For many skaters, Thump commanded a great deal of respect, and he had some good friends and supporters. He had considerable 'skills capital', and therefore was very

secure in his membership at the centre of the community. Both Jenkins (2014) and Goffman (1959) indicate that such security allows greater freedom for non-conforming or deviant behaviour, in contrast to the conformity of less secure members. Possibly for this reason, current members were much more cautious about saying anything negative, one referring to his poor behaviour as 'nonsense' and suggesting anyone with an issue should take it up with him, rather than talk about him behind his back.

But many members did have issues with Thump, and on occasion did try to raise them with him. Thump had previously been subject to a disciplinary for his behaviour towards other members, but refused to accept the legitimacy of any complaints, instead attacking the process itself. The recommendations of the disciplinary were not particularly harsh, simply insisting Thump follow the code of conduct, specifically: take part in warm up and cool down; wear a helmet; pay attention to coaches and in drills; don't undermine officials; be considerate to his teammates. However, this disciplinary seemed to cement a division between Thump, who felt aggrieved, and the committee, who felt that too much of their time was spent dealing with issues around Thump, and not enough spent developing the team.

For much of TIL's history, Thump had been a coach as well as a skater. He was one of the most skilled players in the team. Higher level skaters were awarded a sort of 'skills capital', whereby they were afforded greater licence for behaviours less likely to be tolerated in skaters with less skill. As discussed in chapter 5 and noted above, skills capital gave skaters considerably more freedom for self-expression without censure. This skills capital enabled Thump to have more of an impact on the team

than other individuals. That Thump overshot this freedom demonstrated how negative his behaviour had been in terms of group expectations.

Every training session run by Thump was characterised by focus and attention. Skaters didn't always master the drills, and didn't always make obvious progress, but they listened and they paid attention. When Thump explained a drill, the room was silent. He often explained not just the drill, but how the skills practiced in the drill translated into game play, and how they could be countered by the other team, and how you might respond. Most skaters agreed this was good coaching and had sufficient respect for Thump and his skills to concentrate through sometimes long explanations. Again, this serves as an example of the contrast between conforming behaviour and non-conforming or deviant behaviour (Jenkins, 2014). Through a desire to remain in Thump's good graces, team members listened and paid him respect.

However, Thump was not content to listen to others.

> He would deliberately talk whilst the coach was talking or turn his back and start chuckling with somebody and it was like, so it was either undermining them that way or he would ask questions that he knew were deliberately difficult. Not in sort of difficult to answer, but just if a drill was designed to do one thing, he would ask a question about whether you could do something slightly different.
>
> Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

Thump seemed to expect other coaches to run the sessions just as he did, and explain every aspect of a drill. But if they chose not to, rather than accept it, he would disrupt the session and try to derail the coach's explanation. Contrary to Cohen's (2008) claim that non-conformity in roller derby leads to alienation, Thump seemed almost immune. Given the respect he commanded, if Thump wasn't listening to a

drill, other skaters stopped listening too. This negative behaviour spread in a way that made it very difficult for other coaches.

> I noticed Coogan/Thump joking and talking during drill explanations quite a lot. Fin said after it was Thump continually trying to engage Coogan in a fight for alpha male, which Coogan continually deflected. I'm not sure I saw it like that. I saw it as both disrespecting Nuke. It was a marked contrast to how skaters behave when Thump (and to some extent Coogan) are running drills. Thump frequently interrupted Nuke to 'clarify' drills. Wilma and Zoya were talking while the drills were happening. Thump was questioning the drill. Coogan was making stupid comments about 'heavy petting'. But then, I was doing it too. Poor behaviour is contagious! (Field notes, Wednesday 23rd March 2016)

Even as I was making notes about this happening, I found myself influenced by Thump's behaviour too. Reactions like these ensured that Thump's sessions were seen as more organised and effective, simply because people listened, even though what skaters were listening to was a very long explanation, often followed by a story about how great things were 'back in the day'. Because of this, his coaching style was not appreciated by everyone.

> If we are going to have training sessions that are the Donald Thump show again, with lots of Donald Thump talking and lots of Donald Thump showing us how to do things and lots of me standing around and waiting, then I might find something else to do.
>
> Bollock Interview, 28th August 2016

Bollock expressed dislike of Thump's coaching style, and explained how he preferred to have a drill explained one-to-one if necessary, while other skaters continued with the drill. Bollock also suggested that Thump demanded similar levels of attention when he was not running training, and this was another negative.

> I dislike playing with Donald Thump because he always makes everything about himself. Even when he's not in the drill, he has taken himself out of the drill to go away somewhere else so that we can see that he has taken himself out of the drill to go away somewhere else.
>
> Bollock Interview, 28th August 2016

In roller derby, there is a penalty for 'unsporting conduct', or misconduct:

> **All participants in a game of roller derby must be respectful of one another.** [Emphasis in original] This includes but is not limited to Skaters, Team Staff, Officials, mascots, event staff, and spectators. When Skaters or Team Staff behave in an unsporting manner, they should be penalized accordingly.
>
> Unsporting conduct can take many forms. Examples include deceiving or ignoring Officials, engaging in dangerous and illegal actions that pose a real danger to oneself or another, or being abusive toward another person; other unsporting conduct may also be penalized (WFTDA 2018).

Although this rule sets out some specific examples of unsporting conduct, the final phrase remains fuzzy, and open to interpretation. During my observation of TIL, I witnessed many examples of unsporting conduct, often initiated by Donald Thump.

> Last jam – although skaters may not have realised it was the last jam, they knew it was near the end. Thump lone-wolfing at the front (in exactly the way he's told others not to), facing off against LRT jammer. Jammer comes towards him, and I (as front IPR) see Thump lift his hand to his face, scream, and go down, before there is any contact from the jammer. Classic Donald Thump (Field notes, Sunday 15th November 2015).

Thump frequently employed the tactic of what used to be unofficially termed 'flopping', and in the language of the rules was called 'embellishment'. Despite this, it was never called by a referee.

> Thump did another flopping thing – Mia was blocking him, Andy called OOP, and Thump threw himself to the floor and shouted, 'OOP block, surely?' neither of us called anything, so Thump got up and carried on. I said afterwards to Andy that it was a clear case of embellishment, but he said he didn't think it was, that it was Mia counter blocking, which assumes Thump went down as a result of the block. It was so clear, I was 100% certain it was embellishment. I didn't call it, mostly because I couldn't be bothered with the hassle it would inevitably cause – Thump would argue it and things would become unpleasant (Field notes, Sunday 8th May 2016).

In field notes, I acknowledged my reluctance to call such a penalty, for fear of unpleasantness, which again supports Jenkins (2014) discussion of conformity by those on the edge of a community, but I was also frustrated that these actions did not

seem to be recognised by other referees either. It was difficult to know whose

refereeing was at fault, given that despite such a lengthy ruleset, it was often

subjective and depended upon the individual referee's positioning and perspective

on the game. It was interesting to note the differences in referee responses. In

examples of on-track behaviour I noted in field notes as 'flopping', most other

referees simply ignored the action. However, referees who were also friendly with

Thump consistently called penalties on the other skater. In one scrimmage:

> Thump'd be doing something clearly obvious – falling over in a way that
> was obviously fake, and then Bear, every time, Bear was calling a penalty on
> the other skater. Even when it was blatantly obvious that Thump was
> flopping (Field notes, Sunday 7th August, 2016).

Thump often employed aggressive tactics on track, usually staying just the right side

of legal play, but often his aggressive style of play influenced other skaters to do

similarly. I witnessed a number of games that skaters later referred to as 'calm' (as

discussed in chapter 5), but for the referees, they were anything but. Early in the

observation period, I refereed a game that was particularly unpleasant.

> Donald Thump was blocking (he didn't jam at all) in a hyper aggressive
> manner. He'd go in for hits that were unnecessary, and too hard, spinning
> each and every way to target specific blockers in revenge hits. His aim
> seemed to be to get all the other skaters riled up…by the end, he was
> shouting at the refs, the other team, his own teammates…especially his own
> teammates. If they did something he didn't agree with, he was yelling at
> them – not in a friendly way either (Field notes, Sunday 22nd November
> 2015).

One of the other referees told me that she had not refereed a men's game since,

having had such an unpleasant time at this one. However, in discussions afterwards,

the team and bench crew agreed that heads had been calm and they 'played their

game'. In this example, members did not necessarily believe they were calm, but

were maintaining a front (Goffman, 1959) to support the image of the team, as

discussed in chapter 5. This style of play – hyper-aggression and shouting at everyone, had two main impacts on the team. In games against outside opponents, Thump's aggression and unsporting behaviour spread to other skaters, who themselves began to behave in similar ways, leading to games that were fraught with tension, and less enjoyable. In scrimmages within the team, such as at training sessions, individual skaters appeared to be targeted. I noted that in one scrim:

> Wilma seemed to be targeted by Thump quite a bit. He hit her in the face one time, and twice more in other (legal) target zones. Each time he'd apologise, once actually hugging her, but still, the hits seemed deliberate (Field notes, Sunday 20th March 2016).

This sometimes seemed to be a style of training Thump employed, being tough on skaters to encourage them to improve, but it wasn't always seen as beneficial.

> If you're playing another team you obviously look for the weak link…but within your own team, I don't think you need to make the point of continually attacking the same person and beating them down time after time after time after time to try and get the reaction of them to improve.
>
> Blocktopus Interview, 8th January 2016

At other times, it seemed to be less about a training opportunity, and more a sign of frustration. Often occurring in tandem with flopping, Thump shouted and swore at other skaters on track, and often at the referees as well.

> Jason did something, blocked him in some way, which probably was perfectly legit. I heard Thump shouting to him "what is your fucking problem?" Actually, probably should've called him on a misconduct for that, but I didn't (Field notes, Sunday 7th August 2016).

Sometimes the frustration was justified. I had noted several times, that this aggression occurred after a penalty had been missed. Frequently I note this because I was the referee who missed the penalty, which led to feelings of guilt on my part. In one particular example though:

> That guilt evaporated in the rest of the half as it became clear that Thump
> was out to get Madge big time. Revenge hit after revenge hit – not sporting,
> not necessary. I think there was one pass where Thump let the opposing
> jammer straight through because he was so intent on hitting Madge. Also, at
> least one hit caused Madge to go down and take another skater with her,
> leading her to get a penalty (Field notes, Friday 1st April 2016).

Partway through my observation of TIL, Thump left. For two months, training was

collegial and relaxed. This leaving, however, was on his own terms, and skaters

continued to speak of him respectfully, although it seemed clear that Thump had

begun to alienate members who had long supported him.

> On the way home, Frank opened up about Donald Thump, repeating some of
> the things he said in and after our interview. About how Donald Thump got
> really frustrated with things just after Brussels, and that Frank thought
> Donald Thump was struggling with being vice chair and in charge of
> training, and having too much responsibility, but then being unwilling or
> unable to relinquish control despite officially doing just that. Frank also said
> that Donald Thump had issues with him asking Skate Mail to take on the role
> of officiating officer. Donald Thump had disagreed with the decision, and
> made his feelings clear by being quite unpleasant about it, falling out with
> Frank in the process. He had then taken his frustration out on Zoya, falling
> out with her too. Frank said Zoya was really upset about it. I saw this when I
> mentioned Donald Thump to her earlier in the day. She said he still won't
> speak to her. I said I hoped they could at least find a way to work together in
> games, and she said that was up to him. (Field notes, Saturday 27th August
> 2016).

Despite Thump's behaviour on leaving, as soon as he returned, things carried on

much the same. He immediately began making comments on training and suggesting

improvements as though he had never been away – talking about the team as 'we'

and making no reference to his disappearing act after Brussels. He quickly assumed

authority again, suggesting Nuke for a fill-in LUM when the regular line-up

manager was unable to make a game, and running training sessions. The rest of the

team seemed keen to welcome him back, and focused once more on his skill as a

skater and coach, despite the issues Frank touched upon. Thus, in dramaturgical

terms (Goffman, 1959), while Frank held the lead role in the team performance as

chair of TIL, Thump was directing the show. His definition of the situation was the one that counted. Beaver (2012) argued that women's roller derby does not reproduce hierarchical structures, but informally, there was a clear hierarchy within TIL, with Thump most often at the top.

However, this new equilibrium didn't last for long. By October, Thump seemed to have withdrawn again.

> Zoya gives a skater some tips, saying 'remember…' Donald Thump parrots her, adding 'it's me who taught them that', to his son. He seems to be behaving in a very petulant and childish manner. Beat goes over to talk to Donald Thump, but they end up arguing (quietly, but it's definitely not friendly). Donald Thump says 'dunno what she's doing here' meaning Zoya. Beat says she's here because she's bench manager. Donald Thump says he's the one who's been here (over the last few weeks, he has run training, and Zoya has been away with, partly, family issues). Beat points out that, at the moment, he's just watching. After Beat leaves him, suggesting he joins in, Donald Thump continues making snide comments, loud enough for Beat to hear. Beat turns, but doesn't respond or engage with Donald Thump further. Nobody else does either, for the rest of the session (Field notes, Sunday 2nd October 2016).

As suggested earlier, Thump seemed to have approached the point where considerable skills capital was not enough to offset his unpredictable and disruptive behaviour. The destructive nature of this way of being was highlighted by comments from several interviews. Skaters suggested that the good reputation TIL enjoyed in the early days as a fun team to play, gave way to a reputation as unsporting and antagonistic due to the influence of Thump and other skaters with similar attitudes. I asked several interviewees if they really thought Thump had this much influence, and they said yes, he did.

As suggested, most of the interviewees who expressed negative opinions of Thump were ex-members. Overwhelmingly, they cited Thump himself as one of their main

236

reasons for leaving. These negative experiences echo what Pavlidis and Fullagar characterise as the 'dark side' of belonging in roller derby' (2014, p83).

> Just to make sure it's on record obviously as well, you know, I don't want to underplay, Donald Thump is you know, if Thump wasn't in TIL, I would potentially still be at TIL. And I can think of a number of people that would say exactly the same thing. You know, you had a person here that, you know, I can think maybe like three or four people that had said in private that the reason they left was because of Thump. You have referees that left, you had one of the founding members who was ostracised from attending, you had a relationship with our sister league that was broken and this is all because of one person and I think part of it for me, was a kind of umm, how can you lot not see how malignant an element this person is, and allow him to stay in your league?
>
> Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

For some ex-members of TIL, Thump came to embody all that was wrong with TIL.

> I just feel like he damages the lives of a lot of people. I don't mean to be-- [sigh]. I don't feel like I'm exaggerating there. Roller Derby is such a huge part of people's identities and people's lives and he's literally taking it away from people by driving them out, and that's awful. Some people can find other places in it but I think what he did to Phally was pretty awful…[he] would often be like, "You know, if you would just transition better, that would have been an easier drill for you"…But never in front of anyone. Only after the drill was done and he also just physically-- one of the good things for Donald Thump is that he was so aggressive to everyone that it was hard to tell when he was bullying someone physically, but he also physically bullied Phally.
>
> Oblivion Westwood Interview, 19th August 2016

In his interview, Phally made no mention of this, and was largely positive about Thump. It was not always clear whether some interviewees had greater insight into Thumps' actions, or personal feelings led to bias against him and therefore over-reporting of his shortcomings. Ex-chair Daddy Longlegs, for example, argued that Thump was a massively disruptive influence.

> Donald Thump refused to basically interact with the committee for most of it. He was very vocal in public, in public forums and social media about asking questions. Which in essence weren't anything wrong with the questions he asked, but then wouldn't accept the explanation you'd give him.

And I can't really think of a specific, but it would be something would be done, the committee would do something and then it would be, I don't know…Classic one would be, we'd be late publishing minutes, so he'd start, "Where's the minutes? where's the minutes? where's the minutes?" Put the minutes out, he'd read the minutes and gone, "Why have you done that? who said you could do that?". Well, we've done it because it's part of the committee's role. "Well, you didn't ask the team". And it would just go round and round in circles. While on the flip side, being a very good coach, just, we spent far too much time in committee talking about Donald Thump, with a committee full of people who weren't prepared to act.

Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016

Daddy recognised that the committee was at fault, and acknowledged weaknesses of leadership, but it remained clear that Thump was problematic, causing significant issues for individual members and the league as a whole.

And certainly cost me Omar. It cost me Grievous. It cost me probably Brad, Al. But I definitely know they all left and packed in committee because of their interaction with Donald Thump. Al, who took on head of coaching, Thump wouldn't talk to him. He refused to interact with him at any level.

Daddy Longlegs Interview, 3rd October 2016

Talking to the skaters, it was clear that it was not only Thump they found problematic, but the environment created and supported by his actions; the environment where disrespecting referees and teammates was commonplace, and targeting individuals to encourage improvement was seen as a valid coaching tactic. This environment seemed to capture the worst aspects of hegemonic masculinity, whereby cruelty and ridicule were seen as acceptable in the drive for athletic success.

There was a sense that this behaviour should have been challenged sooner, and more decisively; and that in a less democratic team, Thump would have been asked to leave long before now. During our interview, I explained to Grievous that the committee had been calm and much less fraught since Thump had been voted on to it.

That's a tough one isn't it, because that makes it sound like Thump was the solution, when all of those times the problem was that Thump was the problem…So he created this whole year of problems, and then comes in, joins the committee and everything gets sorted, as if has somehow been the white knight, even though all the problems were…That's really, that's bizarre

Grievous Interview, 15th January 2016

Andy summed up the feelings of many when he said, "I just don't find him a likable person…I find his cynicism and his sarcasm, and his sense of humour really destructive" (Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016).

During fieldwork, I observed Thump to be directly instrumental in making skaters feel that they did not belong. During one session, Thump was particularly harsh towards Broot. I noted that: "I was in the process of preparing to move the benches because they were in the way and dangerous. Thump skates by, knocking Broot (deliberately?) over into the bags left there" (Field notes 14th February 2016). Broot told me at this session that he desperately needed new skates because his were falling apart, but that he had been struggled to pay his membership dues, and therefore couldn't afford to both save for new skates and pay for membership. He had decided to try to focus on refereeing for a while, to stay involved, and felt that his current skates might hold up to that better than scrimmaging. However, Thump told Broot he wasn't needed to ref, so he stood in the penalty box instead and watched as three people struggled to referee a scrimmage that could have used four. He didn't continue attending training for long after that. Despite the belief that TIL was an inclusive league, the treatment of Broot supports points made by several researchers that roller derby is not inclusive for everyone (Cohen, 2008) and that there might not be a place for someone who is not the right kind of person (Krausch, 2009).

It would be unfair to suggest that any feelings of being unwelcome were entirely down to Thump. Other skaters had left without any suggestion that he was an issue. Unlike some memories of ex-skaters at times suggest, TIL would not be a utopia but for Thump. In sharp contrast with Fin's feelings of acceptable and belonging as discussed in chapter 5, there were members who found TIL much less welcoming.

> Well I know Tom left and he'd had comments made. He picked up comments not necessarily directed at him but maybe the two…He picked up some homophobic language and he had a word with committee. He came to me to say he wanted to talk about something…then he left a couple of weeks later and I don't know if the two are connected or what the decision was.
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

Thus, it seems that Thump was not the only source of practices that exclude; not the only dark secret (Goffman, 1959), only the most visible.

7.3 The Referee's Decision is Final

As outlined earlier, the conflict I experienced in TIL spread into further roller derby communities. Shortly after I became head referee of SSRG, Thump started showing up to referee at training. In an attempt to boost the number of officials, and the skill level of existing officials, I was running a referee training programme. Thump would only occasionally engage, but when he did, he undermined my coaching and session plan. During scrimmage, he undermined me at every turn – calling penalties I was in a better position to see, telling me calls I made were wrong, calling pack definition/penalties as an OPR (which is not usually done), changing referee positions after I had organised them. In part because of this, he made me feel nervous and unsure and my confidence in refereeing plummeted whenever he was at training. I did eventually talk to Blocktopus (head of training) and the chair of SSRG about it, and they were broadly supportive, but not actually that much practical help.

He disappeared for a time, but even when he wasn't at training, there was always a bit of a cloud over things for me, expecting Thump to turn up every session and not really relaxing until about half way through the session when it became clear he wouldn't. This did not last though, and at around the point I had started to relax, Thump came back.

Throughout most of the observation period, Thump and Zoya were close friends, working together frequently. Having some months with both Thump and Zoya in my referee crew was hard. They would skate around talking together for most of the session, joining up to chat between most jams and at every time out. They would frequently join in a little group with whoever else was reffing the scrim, effectively isolating me, as I didn't feel comfortable joining such a close group. They would both overrule my calls, and contradict what I was saying. In any referee discussion, they would agree with each other in opposition to me. Thump would try to lead official reviews and take it upon himself to perform the duties of a head referee, or tell me what I should be doing, when I was head referee. In any rules discussion, they would confidently assert their position, and would frequently explain the rules to me as though I didn't know them. This destroyed my confidence, even though I noticed that Thump and Zoya were both wrong, or I was right, often enough to demonstrate that there was no need to feel this way. Nevertheless, my perception of Thump and Zoya's behaviour towards me was such that I had no confidence in making referee calls when they were present. In this routine behaviour, it could be said that Thump and Zoya were doing belonging (Bennett, 2015). They were engaged in practices of inclusion, and exclusion. In my distress, I reacted by withdrawing further, isolating myself even more.

It was not only members of TIL who made things difficult. SSRG skaters were equally hard to work with. It was difficult to be the head referee when skaters liked to shout at you and tell you that you were wrong. This made for an, at times, uncomfortable training atmosphere. Combined with the lack of communication around events, I began to feel pretty isolated and unappreciated.

This lack of communication with officials stemmed from the needs of officials, and the need for officials, simply not occurring to the majority of skaters; often skaters who were tasked with organising training, games and travel. As such, volunteers seemed to become invisible, or to become a role rather than a human being. I am unsure how much my feelings about SSRG impacted on my feelings about TIL or vice versa, or how much my feelings were impacted by my researcher status or my referee status, but there were so many negative experiences all together that my overall emotions at this time were sadness, rejection/isolation, and anger, and these feelings spilled out over all of roller derby.

Taking all of these feelings into the observation of TIL made things very difficult. As I was negotiating official entry into the league, I was simultaneously dealing with these issues at SSRG training. Thus, as I was explaining my plans to the league, and explaining how, in return for allowing me to observe, they would have a regular referee at training (something which had long been an issue as noted in chapter 4), I was struggling to fulfil this obligation because of feeling so undermined and therefore not wanting to be at training. Strengthening this feeling at the time were occasions when other TIL skaters came to SSRG training to ref – such as Coogan and Frank. They deferred to Thump and huddled with Thump and Zoya, further isolating me, and becoming involved in a situation where my refereeing skills were

belittled and undermined, which then translated into a similar attitude towards me at TIL training.

I had absolutely zero confidence in my refereeing skills when I was at TIL training. During drills, I heard Coogan shout at me to ref things, whilst skaters who were coaching, or resting from the drill skated in front of me blocking my view so I couldn't ref. Skaters regularly reffed their own drills, partly because they'd had to for so long because they hadn't had enough regular referees, and partly for ongoing feedback and coaching as they run drills. It became a vicious cycle that I felt undermined, so my refereeing suffered, so skaters picked up the slack and learned not to rely on me, so I felt undermined….it was difficult to know where it started, and it was difficult to see a way back. I never knew in training sessions what coaches wanted me to do in drills – make the full call, or just say 'Jason, watch your

elbows', or if the skaters noticed I was there to ref, or needed me there at all. Regularly in training sessions, it took nearly an hour for the coach to ask me to do something. I felt useless at training partly because of the lack of confidence, but also because there seemed to be no provision for the referee's needs. The league wanted referees there to help them but had given no thought to what benefit attendance could have for the referees – it was a totally one-sided arrangement.

There were serious problems with this approach seen from a referee perspective. Firstly, being ignored by coaches and skaters was boring and isolating. Drills were set up to facilitate skater improvement, not referee improvement. There were many drills that were impossible to referee, and so it was difficult to work out how to get involved. Skaters were told exactly what to do and why to do it for a particular drill, but no one told the referees what to do or why to do it. Again, as any referees attending training were largely self-taught, we had to figure it out for ourselves most of the time. Skaters were often told they should drill as though it was for real, but referees were told not to call penalties because it was only a drill, making drills an ineffective learning experience. Skaters were encouraged to fail as part of the process of learning, but referees were expected to be perfect from the start. The impact on referees of decisions made about how to structure training was never considered, making training a very hostile environment in which to learn to referee.

Despite these things, skaters would sometimes ask why there were not enough referees at training, why referees did not want to come to training, or how to get more referees. Not enough thought was given, however, to how to retain the referees that were already there, as if those referees did not count, did not exist, or were somehow defective, and not worth bothering with. I became part of the problem,

because I was the person who should be making refereeing a supportive environment for new trainee refs, but I no longer had the time or the inclination to chase down the plans so I could organise things for the refs.

Refereeing for TIL games was also hugely problematic. I felt that, although skaters shouted at referees a lot, TIL skaters saved the worst of it for me, and that it was somehow personal. This made attending a training session the day after a game where several league members had shouted at me, or criticised the refereeing from the bench, very difficult. I did not subscribe to the view that referees should be less sensitive. I did not believe that feeling passionate about a game was a reasonable excuse for being horrible to people who are supposed to be your friends, and I found it upsetting that in some ways, when I was dressed as a referee, I ceased to be seen as a person for the duration of a game.

In a further attempt to undermine my position as head referee of SSRG (and at the time, the only HR in Sheffield), Donald Thump talked Frank into arranging 'Sheferees in the Pub', an event for Sheffield-based referees to discuss specific aspects of the rules, with drinks. He arranged this on a Tuesday evening, so it would clash with SSRG training, and I could not attend. Eventually, I lost the desire to fight for continued involvement, because I felt at best invisible and at worst victimised. Also, despite having stood for HR of SSRG twice, I didn't actually want to be in charge. What I wanted was for people to be able to work together, without egos and competitiveness, towards a common goal; without sniping, or back-stabbing, or one-upmanship. But I didn't know how to make that happen. In August 2016, I stood down as HR of SSRG, and instead shifted focus to the *observation* part of my participant observation for the remainder of fieldwork.

Despite attempting to perform an identity of experienced referee and TIL member, it is likely that I gave off (Goffman, 1959) too many impressions to the contrary. My negative feelings resulted in tension and apprehension that may have given off the unintended impression that I felt like I did not belong, as noted earlier in this section. Such a failure in terms of impression management thus may have defined my role as an outsider. Not least because, as unserious as I often was, the front of experienced official (presupposing a performance of professionalism) was difficult to maintain. Therefore, my identity was not validated by Thump, or Zoya, or either team, and it was their definition that counted (Jenkins, 2014). In addition, taking on the discrepant role of confidant (Goffman, 1959), compounded the difficulties of giving a successful performance as member of TIL.

Andy Social, a fellow referee, and also TIL's secretary and finance officer, was more resilient than I had been, and had a much more relaxed take on the tensions and criticisms that arose.

> You have to rationalise it and put it in perspective. I think whose making those criticisms and how much do I think of their opinion and actually where do I look for my validation and stuff. If there's issue is to do with the committee, I think well if you want it different get yourself on the committee or do it formally, come to the committee and put a motion and don't just slag people off behind their back.
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

Having quite a stressful job, Andy saw roller derby as a hobby; he did it for fun, and so didn't take it seriously. However, Andy talked about his experience of refereeing in a way that validated my own. Andy did suggest that his views on officiating wouldn't be listened to by the team.

> I don't think I'm seen with any authority and I don't know if that's because I haven't been a skater and I'm not a brilliant skater, but there are a lot of referees that aren't brilliant skaters, that are respected.
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

I asked if Andy felt he was respected at TIL, and he said, "No, I don't think I do". I suggested that this lack of respect for officials might have had an impact on their attendance at training.

> Well, I mean, yes, it's been a strange time at work and other things; I can make excuses, but some of it's down to it's not as enjoyable if you're not appreciated and like I said I'm not after appreciation but if it doesn't come then it doesn't motivate you to put yourself out.
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

Andy also talked about the place of officials in training, or rather, the lack of a place.

> I certainly don't feel that they use, well, I'll talk about me but probably the same as you, they don't use the referee officials that are there in a positive way or a constructive way. They're not asking you to can you go and do, can you watch them, can you do this, we're looking for this, we're practicing this, it tends to be the officials going to the people leading the training, well, what do you want us to do?
>
> I mean, it's not difficult to do but I think it's a subtle difference and not being incorporated into that practice, you're almost an additional thing that they gotta to deal with rather than an integral part of the session.
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

Andy alluded to the behaviour of skaters towards officials and how that tended to put potential officials off volunteering at training sessions.

Despite his involvement with the team as referee and as committee member, Andy talked of TIL as 'they' rather than 'we'. He supported the team, and enjoyed seeing them play well. He enjoyed the excitement of the sport, but didn't consider himself to be one of them. In describing the camaraderie of the refereeing side of things, it seemed clear that amongst like-minded officials is where Andy felt he belonged.

Officials had, or Andy believed they had, shared values and practices. This belief in

similarity led to a feeling of belonging, as discussed by McHugh et al (2015) and

Stone (2017). However, he still wanted to be respected by the members of TIL, and

to feel part of the team.

> I'd like to think that the home league was where I belonged. I'm not always sure that's the feeling I get back. That's probably why I've not been to practice as much. I think if I-- I don't know whether it'll change. I used to go very regularly and never missed. Yes. I don't know if it was that different. But there are different people there now, and some of the people I really enjoy being with and rub along with well. Yes, apart from Thump there's no one that I would struggle to get along with. I can't think of anyone. I suppose if it was an ideal, I would enhance my skills and my skating and be seen as a ref at TIL by TIL and from outside. Whether, that means me dedicating myself a bit more, and doing--
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

However welcoming the referee community could be, it was important to feel valued

and respected by the people with whom he spent most of his time in roller derby.

Andy talked of working to develop his refereeing skills. I asked if he thought TIL

would give him the support he needed.

> That's the million-dollar question isn't it? Because the officiating role is going to be put out to-- put out to people again along with a few other roles. I'm in two minds as to whether to put my name forward because I might get shot down in flames. Then if no one else does it, a bit like the treasury role and the secretary role and it's a more visible role, it's a more active role.
>
> Andy Social Interview, 18th October 2016

Andy stressed that appreciation was key to recruiting and retaining volunteers, from

officials to committee members.

7.4 Roller Derby Through a Different Lens

Because I wanted to gain an insight into how roller derby and the Inhuman League

was experienced from a different point of view, I interviewed RDOF, who had been

involved in the sport for the last eight years as a photographer. He had worked with

many roller derby teams and had covered events in a number of countries. Initially

loosely affiliated with SSRG, he was in the unusual position of being neither insider

nor a complete outsider.

> It was quite interesting in how if they had someone else, a partner or someone who was in the team who was a photographer, it meant that sometimes you were then overlooked, so you weren't really part of it because they're quite happy to shift who is doing that role to make someone else feel good…You're part of the team when they want something but not part of the team when someone else has got some sort of in into the role you're doing.

> RDOF Interview, 19th October 2016

It was clear that RDOF had experienced many frustrations through his years as a

volunteer. He suggested that the skaters got a lot out of the sport but failed to

consider the effort involved "around the edges" to help the teams become successful.

> It's interesting about what I get out of it but if go and shoot a bout I could end up coming back with 3,000 photographs. I have to sit down, usually a day after, because I know people want to see them quite quickly afterwards, to edit them. That can take between four and six hours – depends how quick I am working and how much coffee I have had. Post the pictures up and you edit as best as you can to make everyone look good…They like ones that have got their friends in, they'll comment on, they'll make little conversation between friends. The number of people that actually go, "thanks for taking photographs", I can count them on one hand or probably less than one hand to be honest. And they're people I know personally, everyone else doesn't care, it's always like, we don't care what else is going on. They don't say thanks or anything. In those sorts of circumstances, it's a bit demoralising.

> RDOF Interview, 19th October 2016

RDOF talked about the roller derby community in general. The problems he

outlined and the experiences he discussed were not limited to one team alone. This

suggested that the issues present in the Inhuman League were not unusual. He talked

about the attitude and behaviour of skaters towards officials and towards each other

as being less than supportive, and suggested that the only surprising thing about the

fight that broke out between members of two teams at the MRDA Championships

was that it was discussed and dealt with, rather than swept under the carpet and ignored.

> I also think the trouble with the management in Roller Derby teams is because-- you know it seems like every year they vote a new committee in different roles and stuff there's no consistency to start seeing those trends. Everyone is starting fresh and it's like, it's a clean slate for everybody so this behaviour starts to perpetuate. Also, that thing of going like, if they are your best player who's going to turn around and say you are not playing?
>
> RDOF Interview, 19th October 2016

Talking to RDOF, it was clear that women's roller derby was the form of the sport with which he was most interested in being involved. When asked why, he said, "probably because I've had more issues with men's roller derby", referring to the behaviour and attitude of people involved in the men's sport. RDOF didn't have a high opinion of the Inhuman League, but it didn't seem to be any worse than his view of men's roller derby in general.

> The Inhuman League. It does come down to who is actually involved, individual personalities. There are certain people Inhuman League that totally piss me off. There are others I get on with. The trouble is that the people that piss me off are people that seem to have more sway within the team. Because it's on a totally voluntary basis you can just go, "sorry I'm not gonna"…There are people out there that dedicate a lot of time and effort; so you got the NSOs that go for all the training, likewise with the refs. When you get to that level where you can pick and choose what you want to do, you're not going to start picking the stuff where people will annoy you.
>
> RDOF Interview, 19th October 2016

RDOF argued that there were no mechanisms for resolving issues within the league (or other leagues). Outsiders were simply ignored. This was another reason for volunteers choosing not to be involved with TIL. He suggested that this picture would not change until the sport became professional, or at least semi-professional.

> What they don't see is the whole emotional side of what it does to people so, "If we do this we piss off this person, they don't come back". They don't really care about it. If you say it, "If you did this you piss this person off and

you lose 200 quid" they would care about it. I think until it becomes a professional, semi-professional sports where there're easily quantifiable gains or losses, no I don't think it's going to happen.

RDOF Interview, 19th October 2016

Despite this, RDOF talked about a positive side to volunteering in roller derby.

The fact that people are participating and they'll come out with a lot more skills, and actually they'll be able to achieve stuff their own personal life that they probably wouldn't've done if they hadn't been involved with it. Perhaps that's the real story to take out of the whole sport.

RDOF Interview, 19th October 2016

This is an encouraging note to finish on. The development of skills, and the range of experiences and achievements that are possible through an involvement with roller derby are immensely rewarding even for those who never quite feel they belong. RDOF, Andy, and I placed value on these aspects despite existing on the fringes or at the boundary of the roller derby community. It may be that those at the boundary can negotiate their position more effectively than those who fail to belong but would otherwise expect to find a place at the centre. For people like Broot and Foul Out Boy, a lack of belonging may be all the more disappointing, because of their position as skater in the league, which ought to have afforded them a greater level of belonging than those of us who volunteer.

7.4 Summary and Discussion

One way of analysing the experiences detailed in this chapter is through the lens of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), with which TIL appeared to have a curious relationship. On the one hand, members of TIL replicated some of the problems of men's sport, whilst on the other, members were trying to create a different way of playing sport, which was more cooperative and open, and reflected a more inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Thus, the community of TIL was a site of struggle

(Carter and Baliko, 2017). The difficulties inherent in dealing with hegemonic masculinity as embodied by Donald Thump mirrored the difficulty the wider community of men's roller derby had in dealing with 'toxic' masculinity. This struggle could be thought of in terms of what Connell termed 'crisis tendencies' (1987).

An example of this struggle occurred during the 2018 Men's Roller Derby World Cup in Barcelona. The four-day event showcased the best of men's roller derby, with twenty-four national teams competing. Every member of every team I worked with (as one of the track managers) was unfailingly polite, respectful, and appreciative of the work I, and the other volunteers, had put in, and keen to present men's roller derby as inclusive, and supportive. Team USA was the only exception, perhaps because they were the most successful team there, and favourites to win. Failing spectacularly to read the mood of the competition, three Team USA skaters and one of their bench staff played the final sporting the number 23 on their legs, in recognition of a skater who had withdrawn from the competition due to allegations of sexual assault. In the days that followed, after much discussion and criticism on social media of both the team, and men's roller derby in general, both Team USA and the MRDA announced suspensions of these individuals (MRDA, 2018; USA Men's Roller Derby, 2018b). Although a very different situation from any that arose within TIL, this action was discussed as resulting from "unfortunate cultural norms" (USA Men's Roller Derby, 2018a) and is suggestive of the hegemonic practices present in high level men's roller derby, which are characterised by, in this instance especially, male privilege and misogyny.

Within TIL, also, subcultural social capital was gained through successful performances of hegemonic masculinity. Whether characterised as 'exclusive' (Wellard, 2002) or 'expected' (Wellard, 2016), this social capital was seemingly denied to those who failed to measure up. Therefore, although the risk of deviating from masculine norms might have been worth it in creating a more equitable training environment (Risman et al, 2012), it seems that overt displays of masculinity could still marginalise those who did not perform it 'correctly' (Burdsey, 2008). This exemplifies Messner's discussion of the Lombardian ethic that winning is everything (1992), and his notion of the televised sports manhood formula (2002), in that practices of hegemonic masculinity were rewarded. Whereas it is argued that women's roller derby functions differently (Ranniko et al, 2016), men's roller derby often did not. Although Thump's actions were unusual, several members were complicit, either following his lead or failing to censure his behaviour.

In many examples throughout this chapter, the time and effort given to the sport was not necessarily rewarded. Instead of commitment, skill, or perceived skill in the form of skills capital, led to inclusion within the league. Donald Thump's non-conforming behaviour was more likely as a result of his secure group membership (Jenkins, 2014), and his high level of skills capital. Skills capital is an important element to consider in conjunction with inclusivity, or the difficulties inherent in an intention to be inclusive. Although the league strove to be inclusive, and, on some levels, succeeded (as discussed in chapter 5), this determination to include everyone and therefore make allowances for people, resulted in a situation that was not experienced as inclusive by everyone. Because of a high level of skills capital, excuses were made for some members' behaviour, which would not be tolerated in

others. Broot, as an inexperienced skater, faced intolerance for his mistakes. He was not taught skating skills in any structured way, but when he played in a way that some members considered 'dangerous', he faced censure from the league, and suggestions that he should not be allowed to scrimmage anymore. This suggests that, even as inclusive as TIL members believed the league to be, competitiveness did lead to exclusion (Breeze, 2013). Thump, as an experienced skater, received respect for his skating. He played in ways that physically hurt other members, but because he was controlled and deliberate in his movements, therefore remaining legal according to the rules of roller derby, he did not face the same censure.

However, it is important to note that there is a hierarchy of skills within the roller derby community. Given the endurance of the 'by the skaters, for the skaters' ethic, unsurprisingly, skaters are at the top of that hierarchy. Below that coaches (who are often skaters or ex-skaters), bench staff, high level referees, high level NSOs, low level referees, announcers, photographers, medics, low level NSOs, staff and crew.

Membership of a group or community implies a recognition of similarity (Barth, 1969), but by the very nature of their role, referees are positioned as different. They stand outside the game, 'punishing' infractions of the rules. Referees are not playing the same game, and it could therefore be argued that they are not part of the group. However, a recognition of the multiplicity within communities (Cohen, 1985) allows for their continued inclusion. It is worth reiterating though, that as a result of their fragile membership status on the edge or boundary of the group, referees, like other less secure group members are thus more likely to conform.

By the time I completed fieldwork, Thump was no longer associated with TIL. His behaviour had become too erratic and damaging for the current committee to accept.

There was a recognition that he had been the catalyst for dwindling membership and low attendance, and his skill as a skater was no longer seen as sufficient to offset the negative impact he could have. Officials were beginning to see an improvement in their treatment. The team had begun to recognise their importance. Potentially, as time goes by, commitment may become as important as skills capital in terms of belonging within the league. Breeze (2014) asserts that professionalism and seriousness are about hegemony and dominant ideology, and this view indicates that roller derby is increasingly reproducing norms of sport. However, the belief that roller derby is inclusive (Becker, 2010; Mullin, 2012) offers the possibility that the sport may continue to do things differently (Messner, 2002).

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Findings and Discussion

This thesis has focused on four key areas: Community and engagement, image and identity, belonging and inclusivity, and barriers to belonging. To return to the research questions:

1. How are notions of identity, belonging, and community connected?
2. How are these relationships constructed and experienced by those who engage with the community?

It is clear that identities are a continual process, and that the individual and the group are inextricably linked. The central concern of these members was to 'get roller derby right', and hence to get masculinity and identity right. The difficulties faced stemmed from the constantly shifting nature of roller derby. As the sport evolved, what constituted 'right' also changed. Thus, a perfect state of 'rightness' was unattainable, and members settled for moments of being 'good enough'. Within these moments, there were opportunities for doing identity and masculinity differently.

Both observation and interviews pointed to members' conscious desire to be better at roller derby. This was exemplified through a successful performance of a roller derby persona, which was achieved through the successful performance of the game, training and drills and a focus on strategy. It was also demonstrated through knowledge about roller derby and fitting in with the current ethos of the community. A successful roller derby persona implied a successful performance of identity, and

also necessitated a successful performance of masculinity, although few members deliberated on this as consciously as Fin, the only trans member of the team.

Though there were pressures to conform, these also stemmed from the desire to get roller derby right. Members had an idea of what roller derby was *supposed to be*, which differed from person to person, though to form a working consensus, it was only necessary that they be right enough – there was room for flexibility. There existed a notion of being able to simultaneously do roller derby right for your team, and right for yourself.

Crisis moments occurred when TIL found itself at odds with the prevailing roller derby ethos of the wider community, or when a critical mass of members found their own idea of what roller derby should be, their self-image, was at odds with the ethos of TIL, and its public image. This was seen in the struggle between individuals' performances of identity and the drive for professionalisation, and also in the gap that existed between the team's ethos and how the administration of the league functioned in practice. The response to this was a redefinition of what TIL was and what the league stood for, which involved issues of continuation and change. Such moments of redefinition entailed a struggle between ideals of inclusion and the very real exclusion that members sometimes felt, which was especially visible in the divide between officials and players.

Successful performances of a roller derby persona

Members of TIL sought to subvert both the roller derby ethos and ideals of mainstream sports, albeit in different ways. The satirical treatment of 'skate' names and the refusal to accept the importance of such names implied a rejection of the dominant roller derby ethos. However, the resistance to more mainstream ways of

doing sport suggested that the members of TIL wanted to create something different, something new; neither roller derby as a *women's* sport, nor roller derby as a mainstream sport. This was *men's* roller derby, and it refused to take the history and conventions of roller derby seriously, but it also refused to take sport too seriously.

Members of TIL consistently worked towards the successful performance of a roller derby persona, but on their own terms. This 'doing' of identity was inextricable from 'doing' gender. Though West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that there are negative consequences for not doing gender appropriately, in TIL acceptable masculinity was performed in ways that challenged normative ideas of masculinity. The experience of members of TIL supports Messner's (2002) argument that opportunities exist for doing gender differently in sports that are away from the centre. Roller derby is considered to be a niche sport, and men's roller derby occupies an even more marginal place within that.

My participants took risks in deviating from accepted notions of masculinity and what men should be (Risman et al, 2012, Eckert and McConnell Ginet, 2013). This was especially apparent in the wearing of boutfits, but also in the close friendships and intimacy that developed among some TIL members, argued to be much less likely in men's sports (Messner, 2002). This research supports arguments that position roller derby as a sport that offers participants opportunities to challenge gender norms and heteronormativity (Cotterill, 2010; Werhman, 2012), allowing participants to cross gender boundaries (Gieseler, 2012) and if not actively break gender binaries, to at least question them.

The notions of body-reflexive practices (Connell, 2005) and body-reflexive pleasures (Wellard, 2012) are intelligible in participants' performances of a roller

derby identity, as seen through the adoption of boutfits. In many of the responses regarding boutfits, skaters valued the opportunity to challenge hegemonic notions of masculinity. Though this was more apparent in those who identified as non-heterosexual and non-cisgender, an understanding of the way clothing could allow a skater to play with gender expectations was apparent in responses from cisgender and heterosexual skaters, such as 4D. Whilst sometimes positioned as a 'joke', like Phallic Baldwin did, there was an undercurrent of seriousness in terms of the positive impact this joke could have on other skaters. These practices are suggestive of inclusive masculinity as discussed by Anderson (2009).

The negative connotations of boutfits expressed by some participants highlight the 'risk' associated with these clothing choices when the sport attempts to become legitimate. At such times, skaters were discouraged from expressing themselves more freely, and instead expected to conform to a single team image. This suggests that transgressive acts are only possible when participating in an activity itself seen as transgressive, such as roller derby was before the drive to 'professionalise' the sport, or when individuals possess a high level of skills capital and therefore are permitted more freedom. The impact of skills capital is apparent in other ways, such as when highly skilled skaters reproduce practices at odds with the inclusive ethos of the league, yet this behaviour becomes hidden under a collective definition of inclusivity. As one participant said in reference to such a member, "he's an arsehole, but he's our arsehole". This behaviour became accepted through the narrative of inclusivity.

Wellard (2002) argues that attempting to do masculinity differently still tends to reproduce established practices. Within TIL, it was clear that this was not always the

case. When the team's focus was on seriousness and competitiveness, such as during Coogan's chairship or after the team meeting the end of the 2016 season when TIL were promoted to Tier 1, then established practices of mainstream sport and hegemonic masculinity came to the fore. This was seen in the drive to eradicate banter (which in TIL's case works to cement bonds between team members), the encouragement to wear 'uniform' clothing, and the focus on maintaining a front of 'calm'. In such situations, the difficulty of escaping from the established social role of 'sportsman' became apparent, as skaters replicated the exclusive practices of competitive sport. However, at other times, practices were much more inclusive, such as when skaters demonstrated closeness and intimacy. Consequently, the ethos of TIL remained in constant flux. The switch between discourses and the type of image and definition of the situation projected happened quickly. The impact of one individual could have an undue influence.

Constructions of community in everyday practice

In terms of roller derby, it is more accurate to speak of communities in the plural sense. These communities were always shifting, and the 'rules' around membership shifted also. The Inhuman League could be both inclusive, offering support and feelings of belonging to a diverse group of people, and excluding.

My participants valued togetherness. The team and 'teamliness' were important concepts. Even after problems and difficulties, which in some cases led to members leaving the team, this is what interviewees chose to focus upon. Although I asked questions about good and bad memories, the responses were deeper and more heartfelt when discussing what brought these people together. Grievous talked at length about the value and importance he attached to times spent with Zom B Cru

and the Crucibelles. Dr Blocktopus and Stuntman told me stories of times they had played in France and Sweden. Even Coogan, who was at pains to stress that roller derby was not "friend club", talked of the emotion he felt when the team went to Brussels. Discussions of these events strongly indicate that positive emotions regarding togetherness are felt more keenly in the act of creating something. It was the 'new' and the 'exciting' that captured the hearts of members. The trip to Toulouse represented a first: TIL's first international game. The small collection of skaters who went over had the feeling of being part of something bigger than themselves or their team. The trip to Malmo was Zom B Cru's first international tournament. Though by the time of the tournament in Brussels, skaters for TIL had been on several such trips, this event was important in that it demonstrated the possibility of doing well with only a very few skaters. It was very unusual for a team to attempt a tournament with only seven skaters, half the standard number. The result was that Brussels also felt like something new.

Over and above the sense of togetherness created by going away as a group, this sense of being part of something larger, of creating something worthwhile, of going where no sports team had gone before, deepened friendships and forged links that continued long after returning home. Messner (1992) argues that in mainstream sporting environments, men lack deep, meaningful and lasting friendships, but in these experiences, the members of TIL demonstrated the capacity to do just that. This supports Messner's later point about such possibilities being greater away from the centre (2002).

That said, spending time together was also very important in generating a feeling of belonging and sustaining these levels of togetherness and 'teamliness' was harder in

everyday practice, especially when attendance was low. Members of TIL employed a range of strategies to ensure continued feelings of belonging. Friendships were strengthened through the use of banter and jokes, which often arose through participation in events away from home, such as Phally and I describe. Banter functioned as a symbol of belonging, and as such, reinforces arguments made by Cohen (1982, 1986) about how communities are created symbolically. This banter was often obscure and more than a little ridiculous. It could be near the bone but felt good, and ultimately served to mark you out as part of the team.

The team practiced acceptance of non-traditional men and attempted to create a "family feeling" (Coogan Interview 31st May 2016). This allowed for a recognition of both difference and similarity (Jenkins, 2014). However, there was a different idea of what inclusivity means. In its ethos, TIL was open to anyone, but in practice, the team was only open to those who sought it out. Thus, members of TIL demonstrated inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009). There was a lack of homophobic and transphobic discourse. In fact, as the experiences of Fin attest to, a marked improvement in inclusive discourse. Members displayed positive attitudes to women, welcoming them into the team and expressing a desire to work more closely with women in roller derby. There was a greater freedom to express different forms of masculinity, seen through boutfits, and the close, supportive ties of several members.

Breeze (2013) argued that exclusion was necessary for the development of roller derby into a legitimate sport, but this indicates a very traditional notion of sport, as though the centre, the mainstream, of sport, is where roller derby should strive to be, and a belief that serious recognition is incompatible with revolutionary practices. A

notion which it itself contested (Messner, 2002). Although this was evident at times during the research, the desire for inclusivity was ever-present. The challenge team members faced was in continuing to live up to their inclusive ideals as the sport developed. This tension was never resolved during my time with TIL and continued to remain problematic. Rather than a solution, what this research offers is additional evidence that there are possibilities to do sport differently. But also, that the choice is never simple. Messner and Sabo (1994) suggest that it is important to consider the athletic experiences we want to create, and TIL members were clear that they wanted to be inclusive but were not clear about how to make that happen.

However, in analysing what separated and what joined members in a community, it was clear that who is part of the community was contested. Regardless of the wording of documents, experiences suggested that 'feelings' mattered, reflecting argument made by other researchers (McHugh et al 2015; Stone 2017). Officials often reported a lack of 'feeling' of belonging, which meant they were less likely to consider themselves part of the team or remain so.

Attempts to be inclusive also included hegemonic practices, as Rannikko et al (2016), Burdsey (2008), and Spracklen (1996) found. Adherence to ideals of inclusivity meant that members whose behaviour was more closely aligned with hegemonic masculinity continued to be made welcome. Strong personalities who demanded respect and created conflict through more traditional ways of doing sport were accepted as part of the league. The league did not have structures in place to deal with such issues. In welcoming disruptive elements, the league became less inclusive. In consequence, I suggest the concept of 'acceptable masculinities' to be more useful than inclusive masculinities. Acceptable masculinities incorporate both

inclusive and hegemonic practices in a way that requires members of a community to be 'good enough'. This allows for the inclusion of women, if they can display enough masculine qualities, and the inclusion of men who display hegemonic qualities, if they can be moderated by a desired level of skills capital. This form of masculinity is not as inclusive as it might be, entailing as it does, the exclusion of those who are negatively affected by hegemonic practices and unable to accept them as good enough.

My participants experiences suggest that DIY participation is not easy, and that there can be significant barriers to creating and sustaining a grassroots sports team, which complicate the relationship between what participants would like to do and what it possible. Specific issues affecting TIL were venues, lack of money, and lack of engagement. Members valued involvement with TIL when it gave them opportunities to be part of something bigger, but TIL itself was a very small community, and often very inwardly focused. Lack of engagement meant that TIL was largely invisible to the surrounding community. During my research I frequently met people who had no idea roller derby existed, and if they did, they were unaware of any men's teams. Several existing members of the team lacked either interest or time to be involved beyond skating, and with such a small and stretched committee, lack of promotion meant it was difficult to recruit new members. Although members valued their place in the team, they did not successfully articulate to outsiders why they might want to join a men's roller derby team. It was clear that members of TIL wanted more for the sport, and the team, but were not necessarily inclined to work towards getting it.

8.2 Contributions and Implications

Empirical

This thesis adds a new dimension to the growing body of empirical research on roller derby. For the first time, the perspective of male skaters has been explored, and men have been given the opportunity to share their experiences. Roller derby is theorised as both feminising sport, and giving women space to be masculine, but this research opens out the discussion to explore how roller derby also gives men the opportunity to redefine what it means to be masculine within sport, and to experiment with femininity. It demonstrates that it is just as important for men to experience belonging and to have safe spaces within which to explore their identity.

The research also identifies strategies that may be employed to create this space, such as banter and tours, and reinforces the necessity of time spent together in fostering a sense of community and belonging. The fieldwork suggests that safe spaces are possible within a fringe sport. Although this research cannot capture how possible safe spaces and this level of inclusion are within mainstream sport, it suggests ways in which this might be discussed and explored.

Additionally, I have demonstrated the possibility for transgender skaters to be fully included within what remains a largely cisgender sporting environment. Through the involvement of transgender athletes, cisgender skaters can learn to be more inclusive, to use more inclusive language, and to become more accepting of difference. This can lead to changes in membership policies and a recognition of the value of difference in creating a strong team. Although it must be acknowledged that these are findings from one small team, the conclusion remains valid and useful.

Theoretical

In terms of theory, this research confirms the continuing usefulness of Goffman's (1959) concept of the presentation of self and expands upon the idea of identity as a process (Jenkins, 2014) to incorporate masculinities more centrally. Additionally, it expands the concept of inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009) to suggest 'acceptable masculinities' as a configuration where inclusive masculinity meets hegemonic masculinity to result in a space where masculinities are considered 'good enough'. This allows for the inclusion of difference within a community, and also accounts for the continual struggle within this roller derby team between different models of sport, both serious and co-operative.

Current debates around 'toxic masculinities' focus on the negatives of male-dominated environments, but this research suggests that alternative spaces exist where it is possible for men to relate to each other differently, and for all genders to engage in mutual support.

Methodological

This thesis contributes to methodological discussions of insider research, specifically in terms of the difficulties of dealing with a disruptive presence within the field. In terms of accountable research (Stanley, 1997; Downes, 2009), this thesis adds to the discussion of what is ethical in its inclusion of material which represents a risk (McKenzie, 2017).

This research offers a variety of perspectives on one situation, representing my 'journey' as much as that of my participants. I do not claim to offer an autoethnography, and yet, the discussion involves much that is autoethnographic.

Although the methodological concepts referenced in this thesis are not new, the freshness of the context in which they are applied speaks to their continued relevance. In considering situated knowledges, I have demonstrated that the researcher's perspective, or rather *perspectives*, are multiple, varied, and subject to change. This provides additional support to feminist methodologies which argue against the use of traditional notions of 'objectivity' as an available tool for research. I have continued to trouble the insider/outsider boundary with discussion of the place of referees within the sport.

8.3 New Questions and Future Research

How applicable these research findings are beyond this specific context is a pertinent question. Although I have explored how these people, in this place and time construct their community, it would be interesting to explore how these same issues and practices play out in other men's roller derby teams. I have opened up the field of roller derby research to explore the experience of men and trans skaters, and considered the experiences of marginal members such as referees, but further research is required to expand knowledge beyond this context.

Despite the work that has been done thus far, roller derby continues to offer potential for further research. Trans inclusion is increasingly on the public agenda, and the difficulty of opening up sporting spaces to the trans community has been established. This research suggests that the sport of roller derby is a space which offers strong potential for trans inclusion. This needs further exploration, through a larger, more focused analysis of the experience of trans skaters in other leagues, and other organisations, to more fully understand how far alternative sports can demonstrate gender inclusion as a possibility, and, as desirable. Analysis points to

the possibility that the presence of trans teammates has a positive impact on cisgender members, and the inclusive ethos of a team. This also requires further research.

Other research points towards significant barriers to inclusion for young transgender people in sport. Though this thesis focuses on the experiences of adults, it does raise pertinent questions that could be explored in a study of junior roller derby. In Sheffield, as in other teams, junior roller derby is open to members of all genders, between the ages of eight and seventeen. Training is split by skill level, not age or gender. There is a case, therefore, for studying junior roller derby with a focus on gender inclusion to answer questions about the possibility of gender inclusion. The experiences of young people of all genders who play a full contact sport *together* could offer invaluable data to bodies such as Sport England, and to schools.

8.4 Postscript

A crisis point occurred within the Inhuman League soon after I completed fieldwork. Not long after their successful Champs performance and promotion to Tier 1 precipitated a more serious and focused training ethos, several of the league's strongest skaters quit the team. TIL played in Tier 1 during the 2017 season, losing all their games, but seeming to become more stable, more pleasant and democratic, more engaged, stronger, kinder, and more fun in the process. This coincided with Donald Thump's expulsion from the league.

TIL were demoted to Tier 2 for the 2018 season, but changes within the Champs structure meant that they would again be competing in Tier 1. This news coincided with the chair, Frank, quitting the league, and the discovery that league finances

were in disarray. TIL's future was again in doubt, and the remaining team members

had to work together to redefine the league once more.

GLOSSARY

Associations

- Men's Roller Derby Association (MRDA)

  Global association for men's roller derby, based in the USA.

- Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA)

  Global association for women's roller derby, based in the USA.

- United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA)

  United Kingdom association for men's, women's and co-ed roller derby.

- British Roller Sports Federation (BRSF)

  Governing body of roller sports for Great Britain.

Bench

  Area set aside for skaters who are not participating in the current jam, the line-up manager, and the bench manager.

Bench manager

  Person who gives instructions to the skaters participating in the jam. They will often advise skaters on strategy and have an overview of what is happening in the game. They can also call official reviews.

Block

  The action of contacting an opposing skater. A block can be positional, where a blocker will position themselves in the way of an opposing skater, or physical, where a blocker will push or hit the opposing skater. In order to be a legal hit, contact must be to a legal target zone, with a legal blocking zone.

Blocker

  Skaters who participate in a jam but are not the points scorers are called blockers. They may 'block' the opposition in any legal manner, often working together to create 'walls' that the opposing jammer will try to break through.

Bout

  A game of roller derby. 'Bout' carried with it connotations of choreographed hits, and fighting, so increasingly, the term 'game' is used instead.

Boutfit

  An outfit a skater wears to participate in a bout or game of roller derby.

Events

- British Championships

  Organised roller derby seasonal tournament in the UK, consisting of an MRDA side and a WFTDA side, split into tiers and groups within tiers. Teams compete to win their group, to go on to playoffs, to be promoted to a

higher tier for the next season. Each team playing has to organise one 'home' game per year.

- Tattoo Freeze

An annual tattoo convention, which also includes a roller derby tournament.

- MRDA Championships

Annual tournament featuring the top 8 teams in the MRDA.

- WFTDA Championships

Annual tournament featuring the top teams in the WFTDA.

Flat Track Stats

A website with information about roller derby games. Teams submit results of games to the site, which they can then use for rankings, and to calculate the likely score of a match-up between two teams.

Game sanctioning

If a roller derby game is played between two MRDA teams, following the MRDA ruleset, teams can apply for the game to be 'sanctioned', meaning that the results of the game will count towards ranking points on the MRDA system. A high ranking means a team could be eligible to compete in the MRDA championships. The WFTDA have a similar system.

Misconduct

A type of penalty a skater would receive for behaving in an unsporting way. Misconduct includes such actions as attempting to deceive an official into giving a penalty to another skater and swearing at officials or skaters.

Jam

Roller derby games are split into two 30-minute periods. Each period is further split into short bursts of gameplay of up to two minutes, which are called 'jams'. The line-up-manager will send on a new line-up of skaters for each jam.

Jammer

The skater who is the designated points scorer for that jam. They wear a helmet cover with a star on.

League / Team

The league is the wider organisation which encompasses all members, such as the Inhuman League, whereas the team is the group of people who form each team within that league, for example the Army of Darkness and Zom B Cru. In the UK, the terms league and team are often used interchangeably.

Line-up manager

Person who will work with skaters on the bench during a game to decide who goes on track, and in which position, for each jam.

Minimum skills (Dead Meat)

Skaters must pass a practical minimum skills test before they are allowed to play roller derby against another team. This test includes 21 basic skills, which are broken down into a number of elements, and cover style, footwork, speed, safety, and contact skills. The Inhuman League ran a minimum skills programme for new skaters called 'Dead Meat', a variation on the common (although increasingly contested) use of 'Fresh Meat' to refer to new skaters.

Official review (OR)

In each half of a game, teams are allowed one occasion where they can ask the officials to review a penalty call that was made/not made.

Official

- Referee

Up to seven people act as referees per game. Referees wear skates.

- Head referee (HR)

The HR is in charge of the other referees, calling penalties, and the safety and flow of the game. The HR skates on the inside of the track boundary.

- Outside pack referee (OPR)

Up to three OPRs skate around the outside of the track boundary, following the action on track.

- Jammer referee (JR)

One JR per team will track the jammer through the pack. The JR counts points/passes and signals points to the scorekeeper (a type of NSO) to record.

- Inside pack referee (IPR)

One IPR skates on the inside of the track boundary, supporting the HR and the JRs.

- Non-skating official (NSO)

Up to fourteen people per game act as non-skating officials. These officials time the jams, the game, and skater penalties. They also track which skaters skate in each jam, skater penalties, and the score.

Open to All (OTA) / Co-ed

The term co-ed stems from co-educational, meaning men and women together. More recently, steps have been taken within the derby community to remove binary language such as this in favour of terms such as gender inclusive, or open to all (OTA). I use co-ed to refer to historic roller derby, and OTA to refer to modern, mixed gender roller derby.

Out of play block (OOP)

A type of penalty issued when a skater continues to actively 'block' another skater after having been warned they are 'out of play', i.e. more than 20ft in front of the foremost pack skater.

Playoffs

Games that are played between the teams who are top of the results table in their groupings to decide which teams will be promoted to a higher tier in British Championships.

Rookie game / cherry popper

Used to refer to a skater's first game, or, more frequently, mixed games organised specifically to give newer skaters game experience. These games will typically ask for skaters with 0-3 previous games' experience. The term 'cherry popper' is often considered offensive/inappropriate, and the term 'rookie game' is becoming more widespread.

Scrimmage / scrim

An informal game played during a training session, either against league members or a visiting team.

Skate name / derby name

The name a skater chooses to be known by on uniforms and in game programmes. This name is often used more widely instead of a skater's legal name.

Target / blocking zones

Parts of the body a skater may block with, or to another skater. Legal zones include shoulders, hips, and thighs. Illegal zones include the head, forearms, back, and below mid-thigh.

Leagues Mentioned in the Thesis

The Inhuman League (TIL)

Sheffield men's team that was founded in 2011.

- Army of Darkness – TIL's A team (name rarely used during fieldwork).
- Zom B Cru – TIL's B team.

Sheffield Steel Rollergirls (SSRG)

Sheffield women's team that was founded in 2008 and has had various links with TIL.

- Crucibelles – SSRG's B team.

Barrow Infernos (BI)

Men's team participating in Tier 1 of British Champs during the 2016 season

Crash Test Brummies (CTB)

Men's team participating in Tier 2 of British Champs during the 2016 season.

Hallam Hellcats Roller Derby (HHRD)

Sheffield women's team that split from SSRG in 2012.

Lincolnshire Rolling Thunder (LRT)

Men's team participating in Tier 1 of British Champs during the 2016 season.

Manchester Roller Derby: New Wheeled Order (NWO)

Men's team participating in Tier 1 of British Champs during the 2016 season.

Rainy City Roller Derby (RCRD)

Women's roller derby team. One of the highest performing in the UK.

Southern Discomfort Roller Derby (SDRD)

Men's team participating in Tier 1 of British Champs during the 2016 season.

Super Smash Brollers (SSB)

Men's team participating in Tier 2 of British Champs during the 2016 season.

Team West Indies (TWI)

International women's team that participates in the Roller Derby World Cup. Dr Blocktopus is the team's bench manager.

Toulouse Roller Derby: Quad Guards

Men's team based in Toulouse, France.

APPENDIX i

Table of Participants including pen portraits

Name (skate name or alternative pseudonym)	Role within the league	Method of data collection	Description
4D	Skater	Observation and interview	Joined in 2016, having transferred from another men's team, because he felt overlooked there. Played several games over the 2016 season but was often unable to attend due to work. Moved away from Sheffield at the end of the season, and left TIL.
Andy Social	Referee and committee member	Observation and interview	Joined TIL at the same time his wife and daughter started learning to play roller derby. Progressed through the minimum skills programme (prior to Dead Meat), passing nearly all the skills, but chose to referee instead. Was voted on to the committee soon after joining and had been the treasurer (and sometimes secretary) since 2014.
Beat Monkey	Captain and committee member	Observation	Was head referee for a women's league in Hull. Joined TIL in 2012. Took roller derby very seriously. Was captain twice during his membership. Beat was also media officer and one of the main coaches of the league. by the end of 2016, Beat had stepped back from some of his commitments.
Bollock Obama	Skater	Observation and interview	Joined SSRG in October 2010 and began refereeing. One of the founder members of TIL along with wife, Oblivion Westwood. Skated for TIL, and was selected for Team England Men's Roller Derby, but moved to a tropical island in 2015, so had to drop out of the team. When he returned in 2016, Bollock skated with TIL, but did not rejoin as a full member in the 2016 season.
Brian Damage	Skater	Observation	Joined TIL in 2013, and like Phally, enjoyed the ridiculousness of roller derby. Played for Zom B Cru and continued to train after the B team was disbanded. After becoming a father, he attended less frequently for a while, but did return to play a couple of games during the 2016 season.
Zoya	Bench manager	Observation	Joined SSRG in 2014 but left to join Hellcats in 2016. Was voted in to be bench manager of TIL in 2015, after the previous bench quit. Joined the committee in 2016 and took over as events manager after I left. Due to clashes between Hellcats and TIL, she couldn't make it to all of TIL's Champs games in 2016.

Name (skate name or alternative pseudonym)	Role within the league	Method of data collection	Description
Daddy Longlegs	Former skater and chair	Interview	Joined TIL in 2011. Skated for both TIL's A team and Zom B Cru. Was chair from 2013-2014, which was the most turbulent and difficult year of TIL's history. He left the league not long after he stepped down. For a long time after he left, he kept his skate bag ready, just in case, but never came back.
David Hasslehoof	Skater	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2012. Played for Zom B Cru and the A team. Took a long time to gain confidence but became a reliable jammer. Broke his ankle in a scrim in April 2016, which forced him to miss the rest of the season. Filled in as a line-up manager for one game, but hated it, so was glad to be able to skate again.
Dodger Moore	Skater	Observation	Joined TIL in 2013. Played for Zom B Cru and the A team. Began the 2016 season but was conscious he was not up to his previous level of fitness. After becoming a father, he took time out, but didn't return.
Dr Blocktopus	Former skater and committee member	Interview	Joined SSRG in 2011 and was one of founder members of TIL, and a committee member from the early days. He also became bench manager of SSRG and the women's Team West Indies. Being part of the committee began to make skating a chore, and he decided to leave TIL in 2014 to focus on benching.
Dorny Darko	Skater and committee member	Observation	Joined TIL in 2015 and became a committee member in 2016. He was also a bench manager of his local women's team. Due to personality clashes with another member, he left during the 2016 season. Shortly after that, he began playing for another men's team.
Fenno	Skater	Observation	Joined TIL in 2015. Made very quick progress and was soon one of TIL's strongest skaters. Left during 2016 to join another men's team, which was more conveniently located and could offer him more challenge.
Fin	Skater	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2016, having played roller derby with another team prior to that. Was injured during their first game for TIL, in Brussels, so had to watch the next few Champs games along with Hoof, who was also injured.

Name (skate name or alternative pseudonym)	Role within the league	Method of data collection	Description
Frank-N-Hurter	Skater and chair	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2015, and became chair shortly after joining, when Coogan stepped down. Had a much more democratic leadership style than Coogan, but by the end of 2016, Frank was struggling with the work involved in the role, as few members were willing or available to help.
Grievous Quadily Harm	Former skater and committee member	Interview	Joined TIL in 2013. Played for Zom B Cru and the A team. Grievous enjoyed the silliness of roller derby as much as playing the game and found working on the committee to be stressful and thankless. He left the league in 2014, although he continued to be involved in roller derby as a coach for the new junior's team in Sheffield.
I Am Broot	Skater	Observation	Broot joined TIL in 2014. It took him a long time to pass his minimum skills, and he was not the most confident skater. By 2016, he was struggling to engage with the team, and left part way through the season.
Jackpot	Skater	Observation	Joined TIL in 2016. Had a background in skating so progressed through minimum skills very rapidly. Left the team at the end of 2016 because he had too many time commitments and couldn't make training.
Jason Slaysthem	Skater and committee member	Observation	Joined TIL in 2013. From a rugby background, he was initially known for his massive shoulder hits, that weren't always legal. Voted in as membership officer soon after joining, Jason was always trying to encourage old members to return. Tried out for Team England, but fatherhood and health issues prevented him from being as focused on roller derby as he had been at first.
KD's Avin' U	Skater	Observation	KD joined TIL in 2015 and was also involved in a local women's team as a bench manager. In one Champs game he skated every single jam.
Nuke	Skater and committee member	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2012. Tried out for Team England for the 2014 World Cup but didn't quite make it. Was selected for Team Scotland, for whom he played in the 2016 Men's World Cup. He was also a coach and line-up manager of SSRG and Hellcats at different times. Nuke was the merchandising officer during 2015, and vice chair during 2016.

Name (skate name or alternative pseudonym)	Role within the league	Method of data collection	Description
Oblivion Westwood	Former line-up manager	Interview	Joined SSRG in October 2010 and was one of the founder members of TIL, along with husband, Bollock Obama. Was heavily involved from the start, coaching skaters, and working as TIL's line-up manager, as well as the Crucibelles'. Was voted in as line-up Manger of Team England Men's Roller Derby, but moved to a tropical island in 2015, so had to drop out. Although she returned in 2016, Oblivion did not go back to TIL during that season.
Phallic Baldwin	Skater (non-attending)	Interview	Joined TIL in 2011. Was initially not a confident skater, and Oblivion and others spent a lot of time training him. Found his place with Zom B Cru and loved having fun and being silly. Drifted away from training when TIL started to become more serious. Was still a paying member during 2016, but never quite made it to training. The rest of the team were always hoping he would come back.
Pipkin	Skater	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2016, after the Dead Meat programme had been abandoned. Fitted in from the start and learned the rules and strategy of the game very quickly. Prone to injury, and is always the first person to suggest going to the pub.
RDOF	Photographer	Interview	Has been involved in roller derby photography since 2008, having been introduced to the sport by a member of SSRG. Initially working mainly in the Yorkshire area, he has since photographed all three women's Roller Derby World Cups, and the first Men's World Cup.
Skate Mail	Referee and former skater	Observation	Joined SSRG in 2010 and was one of the founder members of TIL. Played in the first Men's European Roller Derby Cup, and later for Zom B Cru. Quit skating to focus on refereeing. Moved away from Sheffield but came back to help out as TIL's officiating officer during the summer of 2016.
Stuntman Psyk	Skater and former captain	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2011, becoming vice captain of the A team. He took time out because of injury for nearly two years but returned to the league in 2016, with a renewed energy, although he no longer wanted to take on a position of responsibility within the league.

Name (skate name or alternative pseudonym)	Role within the league	Method of data collection	Description
Coogan	Skater and chair	Observation and interview	Joined TIL in 2013. Was voted in as chair in January 2015, and served until April 2016, at which point he stood down. Although he initially loved roller derby, fatherhood took Coogan's focus for much of 2016, and he eventually left the league.
Wilma Wheelsmove	Line-up manager	Observation	Joined Hallam Hellcats in 2013 and frequently skated with TIL during training sessions at Hillsborough. Was voted in as line-up manager after Oblivion moved away. During 2016 season, had lots of game clashes between Hellcats and TIL, so could not make all of their Champs games.
Woody	Skater	Observation	Joined TIL in 2015. Also worked with a women's team in his hometown. Didn't live locally and so didn't always attend very often. Became known as 'gameday' during 2016, as he always showed up for games, but not training. On track, Woody always seemed to be having a lovely time, and often laughed when he was blocked.

APPENDIX ii

List of Inhuman League games that took place during fieldwork

Year	Date	Day	Home Team	HT	AT	Away Team	
2015	15th Nov	Sun	Inhuman League	32	290	Rolling Thunder	Forge Valley
2015	22nd Nov	Sun	Crash Test Brummies	-	-	Inhuman League	Leasowes
2016	28th Feb	Sun	Brothers Grim	33	432	Inhuman League	Sirius Academy
2016	26th Mar	Sat	Inhuman League	356	55	Brollers	Ponds Forge
2016	1st Apr	Fri	Sheffield Roller Derby	-	-	Sheffield Roller Derby	Ponds Forge
2016	27th Apr	Wed	Sheffield Roller Derby	-	-	Sheffield Roller Derby	Forge Valley
2016	15th May	Sun	De Ronnys	246	169	Inhuman League	Brussels
2016	15th May	Sun	Mannekin Beasts	202	180	Inhuman League	Brussels
2016	28th May	Sat	Wirral	103	239	Inhuman League	Nottingham
2016	4th Jun	Sat	Tyne & Fear B	-	-	Inhuman League	Newcastle
2016	18th Jun	Sat	Inhuman League	249	123	Quads of War	Wirral
2016	17th Jul	Sun	Inhuman League	-	-	Aire Animals	Cannock
2016	13th Aug	Sat	Inhuman League	146	150	Crash Test Brummies	Concord
2016	27th Aug	Sat	Tyne & Fear	463	47	Inhuman League	Newcastle
2016	9th Oct	Sun	Inhuman League	179	221	Barrow Infernos	Barnsley

APPENDIX iii

Table of observations and interview dates

Date	Venue	Activity
15/11/2015	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Closed game – Inhuman League v Lincolnshire Rolling Thunder
17/11/2015	Skate Central, Sheffield	Closed game – Sheffield Steel Rollergirls v Nottingham Roller Derby
22/11/2015	Leasowes, Birmingham	Closed game – Crash Test Brummies v Inhuman League
28/11/2015	Futsal, Birmingham	4 Nations Tournament – England v Wales v Scotland v France
29/11/2015	Futsal, Birmingham	4 Nations Tournament – England v Wales v Scotland v France
13/12/2015	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
11/01/2016	My house	TIL Committee meeting
16/01/2016	Concord, Sheffield	Sheffield Steel Rollergirls Intraleague
17/01/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
31/01/2016	Telford	Tattoo Freeze – Crash Test Brummies v Super Smash Brollers
01/02/2016	My house	TIL Committee meeting
14/02/2016	Forge Valley	Inhuman League training session
20/02/2016	Houghton Regis, Milton Keynes	British Champs game – TIL not playing
28/02/2016	Sirius Academy, Hull	Open game
20/03/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
23/03/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
26/03/2016	Ponds Forge, Sheffield	TIL's home British Champs game
27/03/2016	Concord, Sheffield	Referee bootcamp and Easter scrimmage
30/03/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
01/04/2016	Ponds Forge, Sheffield	Closed Sheffield Roller Derby OTA game
03/04/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
11/04/2016	Champs, Sheffield	TIL Committee meeting
13/04/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
24/04/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
27/04/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Closed Sheffield Roller Derby OTA game
01/05/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
08/05/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
11/05/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
13/05/2016	Brussels, Belgium	TIL on tour
14/05/2016	Brussels, Belgium	Mini tournament TIL v Mannekin Beasts v De Ronnys
15/05/2016	Brussels, Belgium	TIL on tour

18/05/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
22/05/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
28/05/2016	Lee Westwood, Nottingham	British Champs game
04/06/2016	Walker, Newcastle	Open game
15/06/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
18/06/2016	Wirral	British Champs game
22/06/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
29/06/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
03/07/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
06/07/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
10/07/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
13/07/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
17/07/2016	Cannock	British Champs game
24/07/2016	Calgary, Canada	Men's Roller Derby World Cup
27/07/2016	Las Vegas, USA	RollerCon
07/08/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
13/08/2016	Concord, Sheffield	British Champs game – TIL v Crash Test Brummies
14/08/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
17/08/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
21/08/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Pre-training meeting and Inhuman League training session
27/08/2016	Walker, Newcastle	Open game
07/09/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
11/09/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
02/10/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
05/10/2016	Forge Valley, Sheffield	Inhuman League training session
09/10/2016	Metrodome, Barnsley	Triple header – Crucibelles v Barnsley, TIL v Barrow Infernos, Juniors game.

APPENDIX iv

Information sheet and consent form for observation

Participant Information Sheet – Ethnographic Study Participation

Project Title: Not Just a Girls' Sport: Gender, Identity, and Masculinity in Men's Roller Derby

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

To date, no research has been done to explore why men play roller derby and what impact involvement in the sport can have on men's identities. This project aims to explore the experiences of members of a men's roller derby team: to consider the reasons why they play the sport, what they get out of playing, and how involvement in the sport can help them express, develop, or change aspects of their identity.

Over a period of one year, I plan to be involved with this league as an associate member and referee, conducting participant observation. I will attend training sessions, games, and social events. I will be keeping field notes which will include my observations of the league, and its members.

You have been chosen because you are a member of the league I plan to observe. The aim is to recruit all members of the league as participants in this study.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences. You do not have to give a reason.

If you wish to take part, I will seek to observe your activity in the league for one year: from 21/10/2015 to 30/10/2016, or until you leave the league (if you leave before 30/10/2016). There are no lifestyle restrictions placed upon you as a result of this study. I wish to observe the league as it naturally functions, and will be observing both individuals and the group as a whole, as a full participant in the league. If at any point after you consent to taking part you become uncomfortable with me observing you in a particular activity during the period of research you should indicate this to me as soon as you can so I can discuss this with you.

In addition to participant observation, I will be conducting a number of semi-structured interviews. I will recruit participants and seek consent for these separately, so consent to take part in this participant observation does not presume consent for any interviews.

There are no anticipated disadvantages or risks to taking part in this project. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will open the way for others to study men's roller derby as an important sociological phenomenon, not least in terms of its possibilities as a gender-inclusive sport, and will add

to the growing understanding of the different ways men construct and express their identities.

If something goes wrong, or you have a complaint, please contact my supervisor, Dr Lorna Warren, in the first instance, or if you feel any complaint has not been handled correctly, contact Professor Paul Martin, the Head of Department (paul.martin@sheffield.ac.uk, 01142226414), who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Although care will be taken to disguise the identities of participants through the use of pseudonyms, and you will not be able to be personally identified in any reports or publications, due to the close-knit nature of the roller derby community, the league itself may be identifiable to community insiders.

Any video recordings will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

The results of this project will be published in a PhD thesis, with the provisional finish date of October 2017. The data collected during the course of the project may be used for additional or subsequent research.

This project is ESRC funded, and has been ethically approved via the Department of Sociological Studies' ethics review procedure at the University of Sheffield.

If you have any further questions, please contact either myself, or my supervisor:

Dawn Fletcher	Dr Lorna Warren
DFletcher1@sheffield.ac.uk	l.warren@sheffield.ac.uk
07963 520 761	0114 222 6468
The Department of Sociological Studies	The Department of Sociological Studies
Elmfield	Elmfield
Northumberland Road	Northumberland Road
Sheffield S10 2TU	Sheffield S10 2TU

Upon agreeing to take part in this project, you will be given a copy of this information sheet, and a signed consent form, to keep. Thank you for taking part in this project.

Dawn Fletcher (Postgraduate Researcher)
Department of Sociological Studies
University of Sheffield

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Not Just a Girls' Sport: Gender, Identity, and Masculinity in Men's Roller Derby

Name of Researcher: Dawn Fletcher

Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *16/10/2015* explaining the above research project and I have had the

   opportunity to ask questions about the project.   ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences, by contacting Dawn Fletcher (DFletcher1@sheffield.ac.uk, 07963520761).   ☐

3. 3a) I give permission for the researcher, Dawn Fletcher, to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my legal name will not be linked with the research materials, but I give consent to use my skate name, and understand I will be identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research by that name only.   ☐
   OR
   3b) I give permission for the researcher, Dawn Fletcher to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my legal name will not be linked with the research materials, consent to the use of a chosen pseudonym, and understand I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.   ☐

4. 4a) I give permission for images of me to be used in the research.   ☐
   OR

   4b) I give permission for images of me to be used for analysis, but do not want

   them reproduced in the research.   ☐

5. I give permission for video recordings of me to be used for analysis only.   ☐

6. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.   ☐

7. I agree to take part in the above research project.   ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Dawn Fletcher   16/10/2015
Researcher   Date   Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:
Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

APPENDIX v

Information sheet and consent form for interviews

Participant Information Sheet (Interviews)

Project Title: Not Just a Girls' Sport: Gender, Identity, and Masculinity in Men's Roller Derby

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

As part of the wider project about the experiences of members of a men's roller derby team that you are already involved in, I aim to conduct a number of semi-structured interviews.

You have been chosen because you are a key member of the league, and a more in-depth understanding of your views and experiences would be valuable to the study. I aim to recruit ten participants to interview.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences. You do not have to give a reason.

If you wish to take part, you will be interviewed at a mutually convenient time and place. The interview will last approximately between 1 and 2 hours. The interview will be cover specific topics (your personal experiences of roller derby, your view of the league, your view of the future of roller derby), but you will be able to discuss any roller derby related topics you choose.

There are no anticipated disadvantages or risks to taking part in this project. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will add to the growing understanding of the different ways men construct and express their identities.

If something goes wrong, or you have a complaint, please contact my supervisor, Dr Lorna Warren, in the first instance, or if you feel any complaint has not been handled correctly, contact Professor Paul Martin, the Head of Department (paul.martin@sheffield.ac.uk, 01142226414), who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Although care will be taken to disguise the identities of participants through the use of pseudonyms, and you will not be able to be personally identified in any reports or publications, due to the close-knit nature of the roller derby community, the league itself may be identifiable to community insiders.

Any audio recordings of your interview will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. Any parts of audio recordings used for illustration in conference presentations or lectures will not contain identifying details about you or anyone

else – for example real names or specific personal details which might easily identify someone. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

The results of this project will be published in a PhD thesis, with the provisional finish date of October 2017. The data collected during the course of the project may be used for additional or subsequent research.
This project is ESRC funded, and has been ethically approved via the Department of Sociological Studies' ethics review procedure at the University of Sheffield.

If you have any further questions, please contact either myself, or my supervisor:

Dawn Fletcher   Dr Lorna Warren
DFletcher1@sheffield.ac.uk   l.warren@sheffield.ac.uk
07963 520 761   0114 222 6468
The Department of Sociological Studies   The Department of Sociological Studies
Elmfield   Elmfield
Northumberland Road   Northumberland Road
Sheffield S10 2TU   Sheffield S10 2TU

Upon agreeing to take part in this project, you will be given a copy of this information sheet, and a signed consent form, to keep. Thank you for taking part in this project.

Dawn Fletcher (Postgraduate Researcher)
Department of Sociological Studies
University of Sheffield

Interview Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Not Just a Girls' Sport: Gender, Identity, and Masculinity in Men's Roller Derby

Name of Researcher: Dawn Fletcher

Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *01/10/2015* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences, by contacting Dawn Fletcher (DFletcher1@sheffield.ac.uk, 07963520761).

3. 3a) I give permission for the researcher, Dawn Fletcher, to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my legal name will not be linked with the research materials, but I give consent to use my skate name, and understand I will be identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research by that name only.
    OR
    3b) I give permission for the researcher, Dawn Fletcher, to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my legal name will not be linked with the research materials, consent to the use of a chosen pseudonym, and understand I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:
Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.
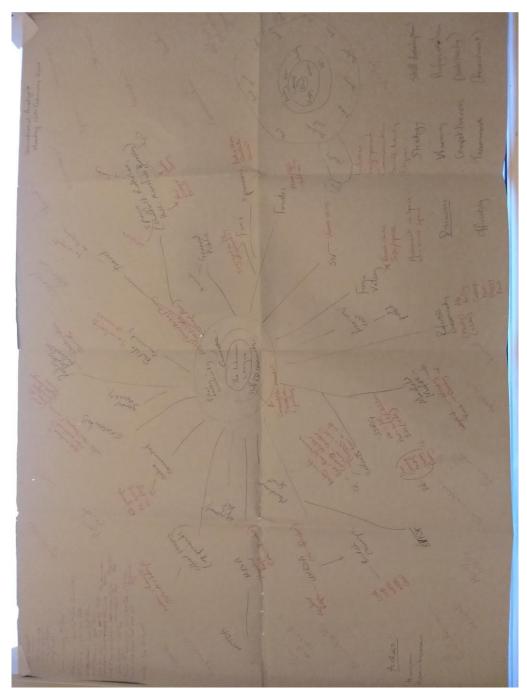
APPENDIX vi

Interview schedule

The interview schedule is deliberately broad to allow for follow up questions that are relevant to individuals, and to allow interviewees to take the conversation in different directions. Thus, interviews were much more responsive to individual opinions and situations.

- What were your experiences of sport growing up?

- How did you get involved in roller derby?

- What are your recollections of how TIL started?

- What was it like at first?

- How do you think TIL has changed? And how do you think it might change in the future?

- What are your favourite memories of being in TIL?

- What do you remember that wasn't so good?

- How did your experiences of TIL change over time?

- How has your involvement with roller derby changed since you started?

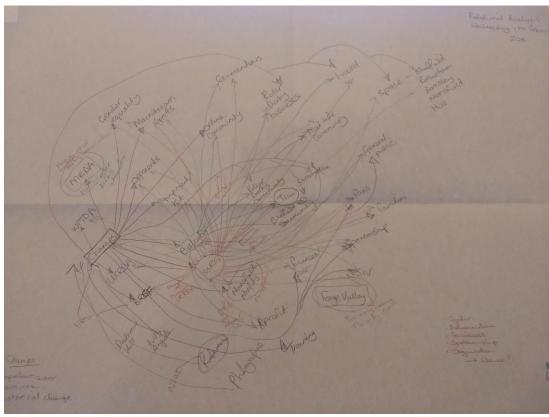- Why did you choose to leave?

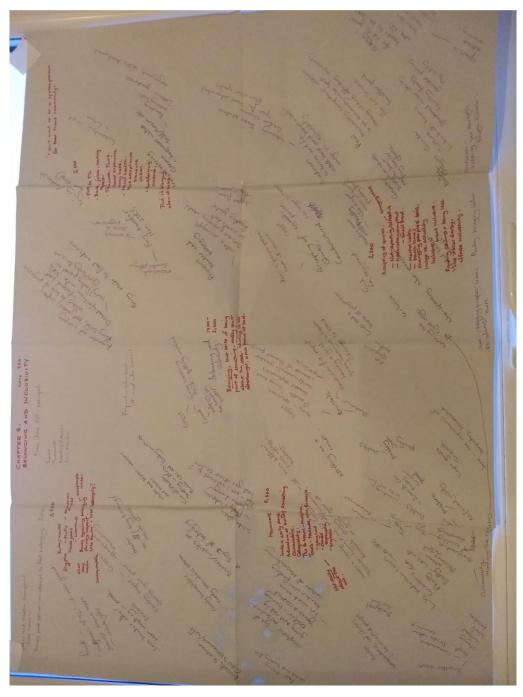- How do you see TIL now?

APPENDIX vii
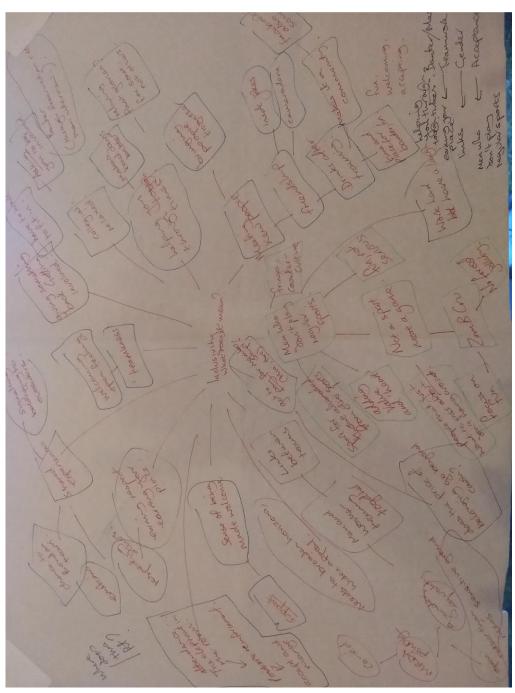
Situational map

APPENDIX viii

Relational Analysis

APPENDIX ix

Social worlds/arenas map

APPENDIX x

Positional map

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