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Turning Passion Into Profit: When Leisure Becomes Work In Modern Roller Derby

Amanda Nicole Draft
Wayne State University, ay8209@wayne.edu

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**TURNING PASSION INTO PROFIT: WHEN LEISURE BECOMES WORK IN
MODERN ROLLER DERBY**

by

AMANDA DRAFT

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2019

SOCIOLOGY

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

DEDICATION

For past, present, and future roller derby enthusiasts.

This work is for us, about us, by us.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks first go to my advisor, Heather Dillaway, and the members of my dissertation committee: Krista Brumley, Sara Flory, and Heidi Gottfried. Thank you for bearing with me as I struggled to keep myself on track to complete this mountain of work and for reminding me that a dissertation does not have to be perfect, it just has to be done! Thank you for believing in my work and for pushing me to think of how my findings mattered to the world outside of derby, because sometimes I forget that there is such a world. Special thanks to Sara for always checking on my progress when we ended up at the same derby tournaments, and for validating my work as a skater yourself. I would also like to thank my fellow sociology graduate students who went through the program with me, especially those in our informal qualitative research meeting group. Even though we came to the program at different times, we supported one another and were able to laugh, cry, and vent about the world around us. That is what a cohort should be.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: LOOMING QUESTIONS, FRUSTRATING ANSWERS

Nashville, Tennessee: the site of the 2014 Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) Championship tournament. My teammates and I have just finished playing an early morning game against Bear City. Living up to our Derby News Network-bestowed nickname, “the 800-pound gorilla in the room,” we’ve beaten the Berlin team by just over 250 points. For us, this is a prep for the first place game in the Division 2 finals on Sunday. The main show, however, is the Division 1 championship bracket. An entire weekend is devoted to the top twelve teams duke it out for the Hydra—quite literally, the best flat track derby in the world.

The weather is gray and dreary, but I’m just grateful that I don’t have to wear a heavy coat in November here. A small group of us walk through the Nashville Municipal Auditorium parking garage back to Claire’s¹ car, covered in dried sweat and lugging our skate bags, to join the team for breakfast.

“What type of jobs do these skaters from the top-level teams have?” Claire asks incredulously. “I mean, it’s usually something related to derby, isn’t it? Like Carmen Getsome and Smarty Pants do coaching...” Some of us list other examples: Bonnie Thunders and OMGWTF co-own skate shops. Atomatrix has Atom Wheels (or had, at the time). “How do they make it work?” she asks. What happens when skaters miss practice because they’re teaching boot camps or coaching overseas? One of us points out that the faces of these top skaters are plastered all over various companies’ marketing media; people have been taking selfies with the life-sized Scald Eagle cardboard cutout at the Bont booth all weekend. They probably have reduced costs through various sponsorship deals, but to what extent? “I wonder how much the vendors will make from

¹ Pseudonym.

this weekend.” The conversation lasts as long as the walk from the venue through the parking garage, and then it is seemingly forgotten by the others as we begin talking about devouring pancakes, bacon, and eggs. But because I can never turn off my sociologist lens, the discussion and the questions we raised won’t leave my head: How do they make it work?

Take Bonnie and OMG, for example. In between competing with Gotham the entire weekend, they have also been working their vendor booth for Brooklyn Skate Company, meeting with skaters/fans, selling and signing limited edition Gotham T-shirts, and answering questions about gear. Between off-skates training, on-skates practice, coaching and running boot camps, league and WFTDA responsibilities, and their skate shops, they have made derby their lives—and with their status, skill, and knowledge of the sport, they can sustain it for as long as derby can make bank. It must take a special person to devote themselves to derby.

I didn’t know it then, but at that point, a dissertation idea was conceived. One that didn’t just ask the tired question of how we uphold and break gender in this sport. To me, it mattered.

Having completed my Master’s thesis on the construction of the skater body in women’s flat track derby (Draft 2013), I was initially a bit lost as to how to expand upon this work for my eventual dissertation. Asking the same questions to skaters within the sport whose brains have yet to be picked—men, trans and non-binary skaters, juniors—seemed like the obvious route to go, but I wanted to approach my inquiry from a more macro-level perspective. My continued search for relevant derby literature only brought me more frustration, as I kept digging up articles, theses, and dissertations that produced the same basic message: derby is a space in which women play with conventional norms of gender and sexuality, sometimes resisting them and sometimes upholding them, usually at the same time. If not specifically dealing with gender norms, the works

consider whether or not derby is a (third wave) feminist activity. Either way, the answer is the same—as Breeze (2014) refers to this, borrowing from Sedgwick, “Kinda hegemonic, kinda subversive.” As a gender scholar, I never thought I would be in a position where I wanted to see *less* studies of gender resistance. Even though I myself had originally begun my inquiry with this slant, by the time I finished, it was obvious that other graduate student scholars had the same idea (Cotterill 2010; Gieseler 2012; Glorioso 2011; Malick 2012; Molloy 2012; Mullin 2012; Murray 2012; Newsom 2013; Toews 2012; Whitlock 2012). The missing pieces beg the question: if skaters themselves are tired of reading journalistic accounts of their passion that linger on the most eye-catching surface elements (emphasizing fishnets or the “by day...by night” trope), then why should the same go for academic accounts? While I gratefully acknowledge the additions to the literature by the pioneering derby scholars, I believe the initial ethnographic description phase has served its purpose: to introduce the wider academic audience to the subcultural community, and to spark a critical discourse surrounding the sport. Now it is time to, for lack of a better phrase, get down to business.

Having been embedded within the derby community for eight years (so far), I have watched the sport evolve. Over the eighteen years since Devil Dan Policarpo initially recruited for “all-girl roller derby” in Austin, Texas, the sport has grown from a casual experiment in a few states to an international athletic endeavor. Retired skaters occasionally lament a loss of the “old days,” when skaters drew Sharpie numbers on their arms, prepared elaborate bout-fits, and thought nothing of playing a morning game while still hung over from the previous night’s after-party (hence the term “hangover bout”). Blog posts regarding derby’s “identity crisis” (Chexx 2011) and the possibility of Olympic inclusion (Grohmann 2011) spurred conversations regarding the future of derby—would it become corporate, as skateboarding and other alternative sports? The swan song issue of

now-defunct derby 'zine *HELLARAD* was aptly titled “The Death of Fun,” chiding skaters for taking ice baths, eating Paleo diets, and doing CrossFit—in short, being athletes. It sounded very much like the “selling out” debates within skateboarding and snowboarding.

However, I was setting myself up for disappointment again. The role of the X Games and the Olympics in furthering along commodification of alternative sports has already been well documented (Humphreys 2003; Rinehart 2008a, 2008b; Thorpe and Wheaton 2011). Yet I became more frustrated with what I *did not* find in the literature. Where were the explorations of local entrepreneurs running skate shops? Where were the narratives of those who decided to turn their passion into profit? Do rider entrepreneurs like Stacy Peralta or Jake Burton ever feel on some days the last thing they want to do is go riding—or that they don’t even have time for it anymore? If met with a gap in the literature, some seasoned scholars claim, “Maybe it’s not a worthy question.” Yet how can we know if derby as a “small punk rock global economy,” as one of my interviewees called it, exists—if the \$59 million industry is the “big fucking deal” that Hard Dash argues it is (Steeves 2013)—if we never ask? I still felt stuck.

Claire’s above question was still fresh. “How do they make it work?” It led me to think of my own experiences. While I love the sport, more often than not, I have days where the last thing I want to think about is derby from *any* perspective (academic, athletic, or business). This confusing web led me to think about the dualistic, arbitrary boundaries between leisure and work, and the meanings I attached to each activity. If my participation in derby is unpaid, on a “volunteer basis,” and, as most participants refrain, “for fun,” then why at times does it feel like rote drudgery, despite the intrinsic motivations and benefits? Why do I at times feel as if, with all the time and resources I dedicate to this sport, I should be getting paid for my labor? And just exactly *how* do those who own the skate shops I patronize develop the skates on my feet, print the uniform on my

back—*how* do they *live* derby while I try to and fail? At what point does an amateur pastime intended for *leisure* become *work* (or vice versa)?

This project examines the interplay between work and leisure as a false dichotomy, using modern derby entrepreneurship as an exemplar. More specifically, the experiences of two groups within derby will be compared and analyzed: 1) derby participants who provide goods and/or services for the sport as their paid labor (hereafter called “derby entrepreneurs”) and 2) derby participants who serve in organizational leadership roles for the sport, such as boards of directors, committee heads, or executive staff (hereafter called “organizational leaders”). To clarify, examination of how athletic training may be considered “work” or “labor” in a leisure setting is beyond the scope of this project. The justification for comparing the groups is twofold. First, in order to better interrogate derby as an industry, both aspects of the “business side” must be considered: 1) derby leagues as businesses in their own right, and 2) derby-owned enterprises that produce/sell derby-related products. Second, this offers an opportunity to compare structures and experiences of paid and unpaid labor within the same sport. In my previous work, when I asked participants asked about the importance of skater ownership in derby, many were ambivalent about their status as “business owners.” Examining the perspectives who oversee a league’s day-to-day operations on an unpaid basis may shed light on this ambiguity and tease out the gray areas that exist in between work, leisure, and voluntarism.

My specific research questions are as follows: How do roller derby participants make sense of their everyday experiences performing paid and unpaid labor for the sport? How are these experiences gendered?

First, I problematize concepts such as “work” and “leisure,” adding to the larger literature on leisure studies and work/organizations. My own writings and field notes throughout my

derby/research career have reflected a dualistic understanding of these concepts. For example, I came to derby because I wanted a constructive, athletic way to spend my “free time,” which I defined as any time not used toward master’s level coursework (I was not employed in paid work at the time). However, feminist scholars have long contested the dualistic understanding of work versus leisure, arguing that patriarchal structures have made it possible to demarcate the two as separate realms. Work is what one performs for wages, ignoring and devaluing the contributions of unpaid carework. Leisure is essentially defined by what it is not: “not work.” Unlike most other “serious leisure” (Stebbins 2001) pursuits, derby leagues are skater-owned and operated local businesses with the specific mission “to promote and foster the sport of women’s flat track roller derby” (WFTDA n.d.), rather than as externally-owned clubs, organizations, or individual pursuits. Thus, the sport does not fit neatly into current conceptualizations of work, leisure (including serious leisure), or voluntarism.

Second, in grappling with work and leisure as concepts, I use a gendered lens in exploring the commercialization of modern derby, adding to the existing literature of action sport and commercialization, as well as gender and work. Much literature already exists on the processes of commercialization, commodification, and institutionalization of male-dominated sports such as skateboarding, snowboarding, surfing, and BMX (Beal and Wilson 2004; Booth 2005; Edwards and Corte 2010; Honea 2004; Humphreys 2003; Rinehart 2008b; Stranger 2010; Thorpe and Wheaton 2011). Most of these industries began in the same fashion as derby is currently: participants creating their own equipment and apparel to fill a need. However, work on the perspectives from owners/participants within these subcultures is lacking, and what exists is not examined from a gendered institutions perspective (i.e. processes themselves are not looked on as gendered).

While modern derby is at a primordial stage compared to these other sports in terms of its industry development, this project potentially richens the “commercialization of sport” dialogue by moving outside of men-dominated sport terrain. WFTDA-rules women’s flat track roller derby is currently the most visible version of the sport. From anecdotal evidence and interviews with participants from my master’s research, the “by the skater, for the skater” DIY organizational structure has given many women opportunities to learn and apply business skills, whether running their own leagues or derby-related businesses. However, women in business leadership is still a relative rarity. Furthermore, while the role of men in derby has been contested, the increase in men’s leagues and businesses run by men derby participants cannot be ignored.

Finally, I build on the foundation of previous derby literature, moving past questions of whether the sport is a form of feminism or gender resistance, and dig deeper into the organizational structure and industry surrounding the sport. Modern derby is close to twenty years old. It is shifting out of its awkward adolescent stage toward a more mature adulthood, with the typical growing pains of a movement that began as an outlandish idea for punk rock women and is now a youth sport for children. I extend Breeze’s (2014) exploration of being taken seriously to the business realm – how far does her concept of “non-/seriousness” extend to derby when there is money to be made and sustainability to keep in mind? What does the work that is being done to sustain the community look like, from both inside derby organizations and the small businesses that support them? Who are the people giving their lives to this sport, and just how *do* they make it work?

The layout for this dissertation is as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the multiple academic literatures with which I engage in this project. Chapter 3 provides the study context describing the evolution and current state of modern roller derby. Chapter 4 describes the methodology and

methods used to obtain and analyze the data. Chapters 5-10 outline my main findings. Finally, in Chapter 11, I discuss the contributions my findings make to the larger bodies of literature, note study limitations, and suggest possible avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review several bodies of existing literature relevant to my study of modern derby as paid/unpaid work. First, I cover the conceptualization of work, with particular attention to feminist scholarship on gender and work and women's entrepreneurship, followed by the conceptualization of leisure. I then discuss scholarship that demonstrates work and leisure as a false dichotomy, narrowing the focus to how this appears in sport with an outline of commercialization within alternative sports. I close the review with the current literature related to roller derby.

Conceptualizing work

Work tends to be defined in terms of obligated time. A criteria-based definition of work summarizes it as a “purposeful expedient activity requiring mental and/or physical exertion, carried out in the public domain in exchange for wages” (Ransome, cited in Beatty and Torbert 2003:244). Work as an institution has also been described in previous scholarship as a “greedy institution” (Coser 1974), competing for individuals' limited time and energy to the point where members can no longer devote much time to anything else. Unlike total institutions, which overtly coerce and confine their members, greedy institutions foster demands for loyalty and compliance while implicitly pressuring members to cut ties with competing demands. In the case of work, longer working hours and technological advancements enable 24/7 accessibility between company and employee, slowly creeping into non-work life and leaving little time to devote to other pursuits (Sullivan 2014). Even work contexts that are deemed supportive of non-work lives, usually by means of family-friendly policies, can be interpreted as using these policies as a tool to foster loyalty and commitment to the workplace, especially when the cost of leaving outweighs staying with a company (Brumley 2014b).

Feminist writers have long critiqued the gender-neutral theoretical construction of work, its emphasis on paid labor, and the repercussions on divisions of labor (Bradley 2016; Daniels 1987; Gottfried 2013; Reskin and Roos 1990; Taylor 2016).² Theories of gendered institutions (Acker 1990, 1992; Britton 2000) suggest that gender differences within organizational behavior is due to structural, not individual, characteristics. Joan Acker defines the concept of gendered institutions as “gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life” (1992:567). Classical and contemporary theories of work are based upon the premise of the public/private dichotomy (founded on white middle-class men’s experiences), in which work takes place within the public sector and social reproduction within the private sector. Thus, the definition of work as performing tasks for pay in the “public” realm has historically excluded and devalued unpaid social reproductive labor.

Despite economic realities that force dual-income households, this ideology remains strong within many families and is evident within the division of household labor. Women are responsible for the majority of domestic labor in addition to their own paid careers, resulting in a “second shift” of labor (Hochschild 1989).³ Regardless of additional stressors that arise from trying to multi-task, many women see the workplace as an escape, a source in which to build self-worth and recognition that is rendered invisible within the home (Bradley 2016; Hochschild 1997). While Acker’s original theory of gendered institutions is still a foundational component of gender and work literature, more recent focus has turned to the need for problematizing institutions as essentially gendered and looking more at situation and context (Britton 2000). Intersectionality has been a growing addition to this subfield in response to that call, exploring the influence of race,

² For a full account of feminist theories of work, see Gottfried (2006, 2013).

³ Women may also face a possible “third shift” if volunteer work and other forms of unpaid labor (exempting household labor) are included (Taylor 2016).

class, and citizenship, among other categories (Acker 2006; Glenn 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Furthermore, scholars are now examining how economic and industry changes have caused the form of work organizations, and the resulting gendered processes, to mutate (Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012).

A crucial component of gendered work organizations is the ideal worker norm, which describes a worker that is free from non-work obligations and is able to focus solely on their career as their primary responsibility (Brumley 2014a; Kelly et al. 2010; Williams 2000). By organizational design and the resulting workplace culture, ideal workers are expected to work long hours, arrange their non-work lives around their paid labor, and to relocate as needed. These behaviors signal a worker's dedication, commitment, and devotion to their job, and are widely viewed as such by both men and women workers. Rather than a disembodied abstract position, feminist scholars have argued that the ideal worker norm most closely describes the experiences of men full-time workers who rely on domestic labor performed by others. This construction of "worker" limits and even excludes women from many paid careers and positions, as their experiences and obligations cannot fit this mold. Because women are still primarily responsible for familial carework and other social reproductive tasks, they are less likely to follow a path of uninterrupted full-time employment. In Brumley's (2014a) study of professionals at a Mexican-owned beverage corporation, workers who were mothers explained that their men counterparts did not have to choose between work and family as they themselves struggled to combine these, while still feeling the pressure to work long hours. Childfree women are more likely to have fewer outside commitments, having a higher probability of obtaining the necessary credentials to advance. However, the ideal worker norm is also typified by masculine traits, such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, and strength, further limiting even childfree women's fit into this

norm. Women in men-dominated fields especially face a dual standard for behavior. By performing these traits, they may be considered annoying or bitchy, but to not perform them may give the impression that they are ineffective (Pierce 1996).

Fitting paid and unpaid labor within the rest of life has been a conceptualization task since the 1960s, when research initially revealed the links between work and family roles (Gregory 2016). Within the literature, this concept has been referred to as “work-family balance,” “work-life balance,” and “work-life fit,” among a myriad of other terms.⁴ Moen proposes that the concept should be reframed as “life course fit,” which she defines as “the cognitive assessments by workers or family members of the congruence (or incongruence) between the claims on them and their needs and goals, on the one hand, and available resources on the other” (Moen 2011:91). Not only is this phrasing inclusive of childfree workers without family obligations and other performed unpaid labor, it recognizes the myth of “balance” and attempts to displace the pressure on individuals (mostly women) to fit a system that does not meet their needs. Furthermore, this avoids conflation of work with employment and the treatment of life and work as distinct spheres.

Life course fit that is framed as work-family conflict represents a struggle between what individuals consider meaningful and worthwhile pursuits (Blair-Loy 2003). Constructed as opposites, one cannot have full devotion to both work and family, as both require full attention and have their own attached demands and rewards. Naturally, reality does not match these ideal type schemas, yet these are reinforced by parenthood social ideologies and ideal worker organizational cultures that combine to reproduce gender inequality. Because the demands of motherhood (especially intensive forms of mothering) most readily clash with the demands of paid labor careers, women are most often forced into choosing between these competing devotions.

⁴ For a history of terms surrounding negotiations of paid/unpaid labor and the life course, please see Gregory (2016) and Moen (2011).

Regardless of what negotiations or choices are made, women who commit themselves to one or the other may feel ambivalent, resentful, or guilty about the sacrifices they have made, even while staying dedicated to their chosen path.

Because of these limitations, a higher proportion of women are restricted to part-time or flexible work in order to juggle all their obligations. Companies that incorporate flexible work arrangements are focused more so on the needs of employees and employers, structuring practices around “how, when, and where people do their best work” (Families and Work Institute n.d.). Examples of flexible work arrangements include flexibility in time and place worked, reduced hours, increased leave from work, and choices in managing work time. Most importantly, however, a culture change of support is required for these arrangements to be legitimated and used (Kelly et al. 2010). Otherwise, use of these policies are typically low due to “flexibility stigma,” as flex users face wage penalties, lowered chances of promotion, and lower evaluations (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013). This stigma is also classed and gendered. As an example, fathers who use flex arrangements are often called out as poor workers or not “real men,” failing to live up to the ideal worker norm.

Women entrepreneurs have been responsible for much of the recent growth in self-employment and small business start-ups, with most of these in knowledge-based fields such as consulting (Rehman and Frisby 2000). While self-employment is considered an attractive option for women due to greater flexibility to achieve life course fit, it is possible that the increase has been due to women being “pushed out” of the formal workforce rather than “opting out” (Budig 2006; Stone 2008). The literature on women entrepreneurs is split regarding self-employment as either “liberation” from oppressive organizational culture or another source of “marginality,” given the precariousness attached to this type of work (lack of benefits, job security, etc.). Rehman

and Frisby's (2000) research on women consultants in the fitness and sport industry demonstrates that these workers make meaning of their labor as neither wholly liberating nor marginalizing, highlighting some of the constraints and enablers in this line of work. For example, while some women freely chose their occupation due to dissatisfaction with other forms of employment, others had no other form of employment available to them. They also noted the difficulties in juggling their work and family lives, with or without children. Furthermore, being young, white, fit, and highly educated facilitated entry into the field, pointing to the importance of social location.

Conceptualizing leisure

Leisure is traditionally conceptualized as "not work," the time that is left over once other obligations are completed with the assumption that it is freely chosen (Lewis 2003).⁵ Historically, leisure was more highly valued than work. Early Christian traditions viewed work as atonement for one's sins, and the Greek words for leisure (*scholē*) and work (*ascholia*) reflect the latter as the negative of the former (Beatty and Torbert 2003). With the introduction of Protestantism, hard work became the best way to demonstrate religiosity. In turn, work became socially valuable, while leisure became rejected as sloth and associated with aristocracy. However, as industrialization and routinization of work increased and left working class workers alienated from production, leisure regained the compensatory quality with which it is commonly associated.

Sustained academic interest in leisure sparked with the prospect of increased non-work time in the 1970s, initially from a functionalist perspective that conceptualizes leisure in relation to work (defined as paid labor) as a social institution in its own right for the function of recreation (Frey and Dickens 1990; Wearing 1998). Leading from this functionalist definition of leisure, the concept has been commonly defined as time-based or activity-based (Beatty and Torbert 2003). If

⁵ Definitions of leisure vary depending upon the theoretical framework used to explore the concept. For an overview of leisure as applied to multiple schools of thought, refer to Wearing (1998).

time-based, then leisure and work are mutually exclusive by definition; activities that are “not work” are free time. Activity-based definitions determine leisure by the consumption of activities, which readily lends itself to the goal of improving efficiency by fitting in more leisure activities into the same block of time but does not consider that activities themselves are not always considered leisurely.

Functionalist perspectives of leisure as time-based, compensation from labor, or discretionary time are based on male models of paid labor and omit gender from analysis, and do not address inequalities of access to leisure (Wearing 1998). Within the leisure studies literature, gender is typically viewed as an independent variable that constrains or enables leisure, not as an organizing principle in its own right. Inquiries into access to and participation in leisure is often framed in terms of motivation, without digging too deeply into social-cultural context (Raisborough 2006). Similarly to that of work, feminist authors have critiqued the assumption of free choice in most definitions of leisure, noting that these seemingly “free choices” are made within a framework of societal and cultural constraints (Lewis 2003; Woodward, Green, and Hebron 1989). In a study of UK mothers engaging in physical activity as leisure, Woodward and colleagues (1989) found that income level, age, presence of children, and access to public transport were crucial factors in enhancing or restricting the choices of leisure available to them. Women with higher incomes had higher rates of participation, with the ability to seek leisure outside of the home if desired. Younger women with full-time jobs and no children also had easier access to personal spending money, further enhancing leisure choices.

Between the demands of paid labor and domestic labor, women are already at a disadvantage in their choices of leisure. They are often in the position of having to ask to enjoy leisure, rather than be entitled to it (Woodward et al. 1989). Women who participate in serious

leisure activities with their own “cultures of commitment” (Gillespie, Leffler, and Lerner 2002; Wheaton 2000a) are especially vulnerable, adding another potentially greedy institution to juggle along with work and family. Women who are also mothers feel the impact of parental status more strongly than men who are fathers when making allowances for their leisure. In these cases, maintaining access to serious leisure can become more important than the actual participation itself. If leisure is made the top priority in one’s life at the expense of other perceived threats (which may include intimate relationships and paid labor), in order to maintain the justification for this privilege of serious leisure and continue regular access without question, an “illusion of commitment” is kept to avoid the disruption the expectation of time spent at leisure, shutting down the possibility of negotiation (“you missed it once and it didn’t fall apart”) before it can begin (Raisborough 2006).

As these authors demonstrate, points of access and the process by which one forms a serious leisure career are affected by gender, as well as race, class, and other social divisions. Gender discourses on “acceptable” leisure choices may funnel individuals into or away from leisure activities (Bartram 2001). Particularly in adventure or action sports, risk-taking, aggression, and stoicism come with the territory, values typically linked to constructions of hegemonic masculinity. In some cases, even when women exhibit these behaviors, they find themselves excluded within male-dominated activities, as the lack of women mentors and men’s reluctance to provide this mentorship restricts women’s ability to develop and solidify an interest in the activity.

Blurring the boundaries of leisure and work

Early scholarship regarding leisure is based on an assumption of leisure and work as concrete categories that may converge but retain their distinctions (Rapuano 2009). Previous scholarship has examined certain leisure activities through the lens of greedy institutions, such as

amateur chess (Puddephatt 2008) and CrossFit (Dawson 2017). The latter is particularly known in popular culture for its all-encompassing “cult-like” following, by means of expensive membership fees, encouraged nutrition plans, mutual athletic surveillance and regulation, and fierce loyalty to the program. Likewise, as a potentially greedy institution, some forms of leisure more closely resemble a professional career in terms of its challenges, required knowledge, perseverance, and commitment. Robert Stebbins has devoted much of his academic career to the study and conceptualization of what he calls “serious leisure.” While casual leisure is immediately rewarding, short-lived, and requires no special training, serious leisure is defined as follows:

the steady pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or career volunteer activity that captivates its participants with its complexity and many challenges. It is profound, long-lasting, and invariably based on substantial skill, knowledge, or experience, if not on a combination of these three. It also requires perseverance to a greater or lesser degree. In the course of gaining and expressing these acquisitions as well as searching for the special rewards this leisure can offer, amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers get the sense that they are pursuing a career, not unlike the ones pursued in the more evolved, high-level occupations. But, there is no significant remuneration—in fact, there is usually no remuneration at all. (Stebbins 2001:54)

Serious leisure is characterized by a sense of flexible obligation. While one wants to do an activity, they make it a priority in their lives because they feel bound to do so, but the responsibilities, demands, and overall time bind may at some point become wearisome. However, especially within volunteer and non-profit organizations where burnout is a key issue of retention and volunteer morale, there is not always a ready replacement for the role and one is “forced by obligation to remain indefinitely in what has by this time turned into anti-leisure” (Stebbins 2000a:154). When leisure is willfully accepted and agreeable, participation may bring several personal and social rewards. Personal rewards include self-actualization, having cherished life experiences, development of a valued identity, and regeneration for later obligations. Social rewards include

meeting new individuals, the immersion of the self into a new social world, and a sense of feeling needed and contribution.

Serious leisure is not a livelihood, yet the amount of time and investment toward serious leisure activities may equal the amount of work done for earnings. Furthermore, especially among those in professional occupations, the very attitudes that underlie the approach to serious leisure may become “an imitation of work life, a continuation of work attitudes now applied to the uses of discretionary time” (Wilson, cited in Anderson 2011:147). Individuals who experience components of flow within their work may seek an equivalent in extra-professional life, particularly when the work is socially important, challenging, absorbing, complex, and appealing (Stebbins 2000b). Stebbins calls this outlook “the spirit of professional work,” claiming that the demands and level of involvement of serious leisure offers a greater challenge and personal fulfillment that more closely resembles their paid work.

Following the argument of some scholars that distinctions between “work” and “not work” may be overstated (Fincham 2008), more recent scholarship has begun to move past a dichotomous understanding in favor of viewing work and leisure as fluid and simultaneously existing. Viewing work and leisure as integrated, Beatty and Torbert argue that it becomes possible to be *leisurely* about *work*: “When an amateur piano player becomes a professional piano teacher—when leisure becomes imbued with quantifiable material and practical gain—is piano playing still leisurely or does it start to feel like work instead? Or can it be both at once?” (Beatty and Torbert 2003:243). Inversely, Rapuano (2009) considers how the commercialization of leisure blurs the lines between the two with the addition of a profit motive—“work in leisure.” She coins the term “leisurework” to describe “how the profit motive and subsequent rationalization of the workplace are applied to the organization of leisure time” (p. 634). In her exploration of Irish traditional music pub sessions,

she demonstrates that these sessions function as both work and leisure simultaneously. In this case, however, what was once considered spontaneous leisure has now become rationalized and commodified for commercial use. Instead of musicians showing up to play in a pub under their own control, gigs may now be organized by pub owners to attract tourists under the guise of getting an “authentic” Irish pub experience for profit. Thus, she concludes that “under certain conditions, organic grassroots leisure activities that are commercialized for profit can open a space where *work is disguised as leisure*” (p. 634).

In Lewis’ (2003) piece dissecting work and leisure, she argues that post-industrial work may become the “new leisure,” as some choose to spend their time on work and enjoy doing so. Here, work and non-work life become indistinguishable. Particularly in knowledge industries, time and spatial boundaries become extremely blurred. However, she briefly notes that the issue of “choice” must be situated within the context of a gendered world, and so this idea does not emerge without problems, as other authors have noted regarding choice rhetoric (Stone 2008). While this idea has been underappreciated within leisure studies more generally, it has been a foundation for scholarship on gender and work.

“Doing what you love:” turning leisure into paid work in alternative sport

Fitness and sport may be defined as work, leisure, or both. Garrigou (2006) argues that, in some cases, sport has become so similar to work that it should not be considered leisure, and that more focus is needed on the growing significance of the economic aspects of sport. The adage “it’s just a game” stands in stark contrast to the material realities of sport as an institution and big business, especially when considering the multitude of controversies surrounding performance-enhancing drug abuse. Professionalization of sport has altered this; for pros, sport *is* paid work and not just a game. With increasing emphasis on competitiveness, even amateur sport has developed

in ways in which it becomes a complement to work, “for example when it is consciously played as a means of improving one’s capacities to ‘perform’ in one’s job” (Garrigou 2006:666). Waring’s (2008) work is an example of this phenomenon, as she examines how UK urban professionals utilize health clubs as not only a restorative mechanism but also to engage in body projects to enhance their physical capital at work.

Sport as serious leisure may become an organizing principle that dictates one’s entire life. In Wheaton’s (2000a) study of windsurfers, core participants structured their lives around windsurfing, such as working part-time, living by the water, and limiting their participation in other social events. Participation may be costly, particularly when clashing with other institutions that also require substantial time and/or financial investment (Gillespie et al. 2002). Participants who prioritize their leisure activity equally with or more so than other everyday obligations (e.g. family, domestic tasks, paid work) may find themselves at odds with loved ones who object to the extent of these priorities, which can dilute any rewards (Stebbins 2001).

What happens when individuals become so embedded within their leisure activity, or are unable to reconcile the clashing demands of paid work and leisure, that they decide to make it their paid work? In alternative sport subcultures, this often translates into going pro, but it also includes participants who create enterprises related to their activity (e.g. skate shops, apparel, equipment design/distribution, niche media). These businesses are described by Edwards and Corte (2010) as “movement commercial enterprises,” or entities owned and operated by individuals who claim a space within the corresponding subculture. These entrepreneurs are typically more attentive to the needs of those within the respective community. A quote gathered by Edwards and Corte from a skateboarding entrepreneur exemplifies this:

Tom Strober and I were sitting in our house and we started complaining about knee pads. It’s not that we hated any of the pads out there but there were things that were good about

this one, but terrible in a different way. Every pad that we talked about seemed to be like that. So we decided to do our own thing. We took some ideas from each pad but the most important parts were new ideas that Tom and I came up with. Put all of those ideas together and that is where we started. We said who cares if the company even does good or not, at least we will have pads that we will be stoked on... (p. 1144)

Early entrepreneurs typically work out of their garages or trunks to build specialist equipment (boards, bikes, shoes) in order to fill an immediate need. Logically, the best people in a position to know what riders need are the riders themselves. The desire to create a product is intrinsic—it is something that they themselves would use or feel that they need in order to have the best ride possible, and none of the currently available products are adequate or are missing. There may be a demand for it, but this is not the initial goal. The product is made and marketed toward other riders and participants within the subculture. As an example, major corporations within the surfing industry, termed the Big Three (Stranger 2010), were each founded by surfers or surf product manufacturers within the subculture: Rip Curl, by surfers making surfboards for the local market and later wetsuits; Quiksilver, by surfers who left Rip Curl to focus on apparel; and Billabong, by a surfboard maker switching to board shorts. Prominent figures such as Stacy Peralta of skateboarding and Jake Burton of snowboarding are known for their corporate success and long-term participation within their respective industries.

The career opportunities within alternative sport have been generally overlooked, as this runs counter to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) school of thought that views subcultural activity as a style-based mode of resistance (see Atkinson and Young 2008 for an overview of subcultural theory). Snyder (2012)'s fieldwork within the L.A. skateboarding scene is a rare exception. In his work, he argues that "subcultural enclaves" are created by a migration of talent to hub cities where the industry flourishes (such as Greenville, North Carolina, widely considered the Mecca of U.S. BMX), thus creating economic roles related to production of the

sport, equipment, and its media (e.g. photo/videographers, equipment manufacturers/designers and distributors, artists, professional skaters). Similarly, Booth (2005) describes the editorial surfer, those who are photographed surfing in exotic locations using products from a sponsor, as another career opportunity to make money (so long as they have the “right” image) through their ability to “create and mobilize cultural authenticity” (Booth 2005:117). However, subcultural careers are not stable and have few benefits, as one is often working freelance or is self-employed. While flexible work practices and expectations that one will still surf or skate while working allow the perception that one has a semblance of control over working conditions, “flexibility does not equate to control over job security, wages, insurance coverage, or pension rights” (Booth 2005:119). Only a small percentage of those within the industry can make enough profit through their activity alone to retire. Furthermore, as McRobbie (cited in Snyder 2012) notes, subcultural careers may allow individuals to “do what they love,” but the young people who find themselves drawn to this idea may be deflected against class solidarity in favor of a more individualistic approach.

Beyond lack of stability, a further threat to subcultural careers is the risk of corporate takeover. In Honea’s (2004) work on alternative sport consumerism, one entrepreneur notes that his own demonstration and tour company had been taken over by a bigger company with corporate sponsorship. Starter equipment for many alternative sports is now available at big-box stores such as Wal-Mart, excluding rider-owned businesses from the equation. In order to stay profitable and retain “core” consumers, establishing authenticity becomes paramount within alternative sport industries. Products made by movement commercial enterprises are perceived as more authentic and credible than those only interested in capitalizing on the popularity (Edwards and Corte 2010). Because these owners ride, they are legit, their products are to be trusted, and they have the sport’s

best interest in mind. The common refrain “support skater-owned” reflects this idea. Yet Dinces (2011) argues that the most successful companies and entrepreneurs manage a balancing act: only by straddling the line between “authentic” skater and co-opted media darling does a company remain profitable over time. To this end, corporate entities may be quick to promote that their employees still ride or incorporate underground elements in their mass-marketed and distributed products.

With the historical exclusion of women from alternative sport, women-dominated roller derby as a new leisure and entrepreneurial space is important for contesting what is “acceptable” leisure and power relations more generally—and is better to address questions of who is able to turn their leisure into paid work. Throughout its existence, the sport/spectacle of derby has struggled with “seriousness” and has alternated between being paid work and unpaid leisure.

Roller derby literature, or we’ve come a long way from fishnets

As derby scholars have previously noted (Donnelly 2012; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2014a), the sport is evolving faster than academia and peer review can keep up, resulting in literature that may already be obsolete by the time it is published! As a result, some of the findings described in the derby literature may not be as applicable in the current year, and so readers should be aware of this limitation.

Scholarship on modern derby is grounded in negotiations of gender and sexuality, and evaluations of feminism within the sport.⁶ This work is focused mainly on the experiences of women skaters. Overwhelming, the literature suggests that derby is a space in which participants can express alternative modes of gender and sexuality (Breeze 2010; Carlson 2010; Finley 2010;

⁶ With the exception of Pavlidis’ series of articles on the role of affect (Pavlidis and Fullagar 2014b), derby literature that does not deal exclusively with the “gender/sexuality question” or the “feminist question” are mostly methodological (Donnelly 2014; Pavlidis 2013; Pavlidis and Olive 2013; Wehrman 2012).

Gieseler 2014; Murray 2012; Pavlidis 2012; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2013; Peluso 2010). Alternative femininities are constructed mostly with parody and subversion of traditional gender norms through discourse and appropriation of symbolism. An oft-cited example is combining feminine- and masculine-defined items, such as a skater dressed in fishnets while wearing safety equipment. Strength and sexiness are equated, and skaters claim to take their sexuality into their own hands when wearing sexualized attire. The few articles focusing on body image provide evidence that the derby space is safe for constructing a positive body image (Peluso 2011) and that participants report an increase in body image through their participation, often crediting the sport's inclusive "size doesn't matter" mantra (Eklund and Masberg 2014; Strübel and Petrie 2016). However, there are some caveats regarding the role of increasing athleticism on derby bodies that have yet to be fully explored (Draft 2017).

Further evidence seemingly contradicts the notion of derby as a women's utopia within sport. Skaters attempt to legitimize derby as a sport by highlighting its violent nature, claiming injuries to be "badges of honor" yet evidence of body autonomy and cultural capital (Peluso 2011). Other practices paralleling more masculine-dominated sport exist, including awarding informal authority in the organization based on power on the track and the policing of more traditional expressions of femininity, such as acting "too emotional" (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010). Alternative femininities created within derby are largely heterosexually normative and cisgender (Finley 2010). While outlets for sexual minorities exist, such as the Vagine Regime (an all-queer pick-up team), some skaters still describe feelings of isolation. Media productions of derby tend to compound this invisibility (Gieseler 2012; Kearney 2011). Claims in contrast to the dominant narrative of inclusion and empowerment are often marginalized in digital spaces (Pavlidis and Fullagar 2013). While the derby space is actively constructed as "women-only" via boundary

marking and gender-typing (e.g. team names), maintaining these boundaries relies in part on essential gender stereotypes, specifically about men (Donnelly 2012). Some scholars go as far to argue that derby is in fact *not* gender transgressive but continues to perpetuate the mainstream ideal of femininity as “hyper-feminine, sexualized, and youthful,” with the addition of piercings, tattoos, and hair dye (Whitlock 2012:16).

Scholars have also considered the degree to which derby operates as a mode of feminism. In theory, derby embraces several main principles of third wave feminism, such as inclusiveness, cooperation, empowerment, resistance, and challenging traditional gender norms (Chananie-Hill, Waldron, and Umsted 2012). Similar to the riot grrrl movement that arose from the same philosophy, the sport also emphasizes a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic in its organizational structure (Beaver 2012). Skaters become empowered in ways that extend to social arenas outside of the derby space, and they cite themselves as being positive role models for girls (Toews 2012). However, derby as feminist empowerment operates primarily on the individual level. In the tradition of “free market feminism,” the sport focuses on providing personal freedoms and outlets rather than eradicating structural oppression (Toews 2012). Within the sport, the use of feminist rhetoric is not interrogated but freely incorporated. Media accounts often frame skaters and the sport through the lens of violence or sexiness rather than raw athleticism, shutting down any potential threats posed by claims as feminist (Glorioso 2011). In addition, some leagues rely on marketing techniques that use the sexual aspects of the sport as an initial draw, hoping that fans will return for the athleticism, a divided debate within the sport as a whole (Gieseler 2012; Toews 2012; Whitlock 2012). While WFTDA as a governing body can be classified as feminist due to its commitments to social justice and inclusiveness, this idea is nearly invisible from its marketing (Chananie-Hill et al. 2012). Therefore, derby is unable to confront larger issues of social

inequality, even those limiting women's leisure, and its own internal emphasis on competition limits its possible critique of athleticism (Carlson 2010). However, the organization's revised gender policy and recent statement regarding inclusiveness (WFTDA 2016a) offers some hope that issues of visibility become part of the larger conversation.

With the sport's greater visibility naturally comes questions of "seriousness." Noting that mainstream sport is itself a (masculine) gendered institution, Breeze coins the term "non-/seriousness" to describe "what happens when participants make claims for serious recognition simultaneous with refusing the terms of such legibility" (Breeze 2014:202). Through the combination of traditional athletic expectations (e.g. athletic apparel, nutrition) and various social rituals (derby names, derby weddings, embracing "power animals"), Breeze contends that skaters play with the meanings of sport at the same time as trying to carve a niche within that definition, arguing that "*neither and both* sport and roller derby are taken seriously" (p. 225). However, this ambivalence comes from not being taken seriously in the first place. Apart from prolific ESPNW coverage from Andy Frye and Jane McManus, mainstream media has tended to view derby as a sideshow, more worthy of the Entertainment pages than in the Sports pages. This is not new for derby, as Rinehart (1994) makes a passing reference to Roller Derby as a form of kitschy, marginalized programming alongside *American Gladiators* and professional wrestling.

The new pay-to-play status of the sport, as well as the derby name tradition, seems to further contribute to derby as an identity that can be removed at will just by taking off one's skates—and a form of labor that is finished once one leaves the rink. "Alter egos" reinforce the foundational divide between work and leisure, as the popular "by day...by night" trope of derby human interest stories is based on this assumption. Bangbangin' (2014) points out the falsehood in this trope:

No matter how long you've been involved in derby or been a fan, you've inevitably come across the overdone news article that starts something like "By day, Jane is an innocent preschool teacher. But by night, she straps on a pair of roller skates and transforms into Skaty Perry, a fierce roller derby girl! Gasp!" These articles make us sound like super heroes, which we totally are, but there's something about them that is sorely mistaken. I think it's high time we dispel the notion that there is any real separation between derby and our "real lives". Anyone involved in derby and their family/coworkers/neighbors/baristas can tell you that derby isn't something that we just do from 7-10 p.m. a few times a week before returning to our regularly scheduled lives. We live derby. *All the time.*

Conclusion

It is clear from the existing literature that concepts of work and leisure have evolved beyond functionalist understandings of rigidly bounded arenas never to meet. Instead, current scholarship reflects an experience of work and/or leisure as greedily consuming all other areas of life, whether desired or not, or becoming one and the same. In addition, scholars demonstrate that these concepts are not gender-blind but facilitate the reproduction of gender inequality through access, type of work/leisure, and entitlement to it. Sport as a leisure activity has overtime become professionalized, opening opportunities for paid careers to emerge particularly within alternative sports. However, like other forms of entrepreneurship, this work is not always stable. Roller derby occupies a small women-dominated space within a larger men-dominated sports world. As such, the sport faces continuous struggle to maintain its foundational qualities while also trying to achieve recognition and legitimization, which are often defined in male terms.

Finding a way to describe derby based on current theorizations is difficult. Wheaton's "lifestyle sport" is typically used to describe individual pursuits that are high-risk yet emphasize more aesthetic qualities than competition. While derby is described by many participants as a lifestyle, it is a highly competitive team sport. Speaking to Stebbins' serious leisure perspective, competition in a largely non-professionalized sport is considered a hobby and not an amateur pursuit—the definition of amateur assumes that an amateur operates within an already existing

professional field, while hobbyists have no professional counterparts. While derby does not yet have a professional counterpart, it cannot be defined as merely a hobby. Furthermore, the serious leisure perspective has been critiqued as relatively apolitical (Raisborough 2006), with little theorization on gender, accessibility, or commitment as achieved through interaction (Breeze 2013). I argue that derby is yet another example of a greedy institution, given the amount of time, money, labor, and bodily resources participants must expend in order to keep their leagues and the sport afloat.

Before moving onto the current study, in the next chapter, I offer a historical outline of roller derby from its origins to the current-day modern reimagination, including an overview of modern roller derby's organizational structure, mission, and values.

CHAPTER 3: STUDY CONTEXT

In order to understand modern roller derby as participants experience it today, it is necessary to understand the roots, the sport's evolutionary trajectory, and its current mission. First, I explain the origins of 20th century Roller Derby, the version most vividly remembered in U.S. popular culture. I then detail derby's revival as it took place in Austin, Texas, and the subsequent birth of modern derby's preeminent governing bodies and the surrounding industry. I close this context chapter with an explanation of modern derby's organizational structure and subcultural values.

Historical roots (1935-1999)

Roller derby⁷ originated during the Great Depression as one of several forms of marathon-length entertainment intended to be a temporary escape from financial troubles (Coppage 1999; Mabe 2007).⁸ Leo Seltzer, a former Portland movie theater owner, devised a skating marathon in which men and women pairs would alternate skating laps around a banked track equaling the distance between New York and Los Angeles in a race of stamina and speed. Seltzer introduced what became known as the Transcontinental Roller Derby on August 13, 1935 in Chicago to a crowd of 20,000. Although not in the original rules, fighting and body checking became frequent occurrences. With the suggestion of New York news reporter Damon Runyan, full contact and a pass-for-points system became a regular part of the game. The extreme popularity led Seltzer to take the show on the road, traveling to cities around the country. Joining Roller Derby offered steady employment for teenagers and young adults left unemployed in the bleak Depression economy. Skaters were paid \$25 per week with profit sharing, in addition to having their basic

⁷ I use the term "roller derby" in order to refer to the sport in general. "Roller Derby" refers to the version created and managed by the Seltzer family. "Modern derby" refers to the reimagined version originating in Austin in 2001.

⁸ For comprehensive histories of Seltzer-era roller derby, see Coppage (1999) and Deford (1971).

food, clothing, shelter, and medical needs met. On the track, men and women skaters were considered “separate but equal.” However, inclusion of women was more a box office ploy than a political move, as Seltzer knew that the women skaters attracted the most attention from fans, sportswriters (who noted their “unusual” aggressiveness), and possible vendors (Coppage 1999).

Despite the Seltzer family’s efforts, press outlets considered Roller Derby little more than a traveling circus with no lasting appeal once it had left town. At best, the sport enjoyed modest media coverage throughout its existence. Furthermore, the inclusion of women competitors limited its coverage to the entertainment pages. To revamp Roller Derby’s waning popularity post-World War II, Seltzer sold the rights for a 13-week television series to CBS. The first Roller Derby game was broadcast live on November 29, 1948. Fans were able to watch matches without leaving their homes, and popularity and media attention rose once again. Over three years of coverage on ABC, Roller Derby brought in \$2.5 million. Following the move to CBS, oversaturated markets and questions of the sport’s legitimacy eventually slowed the growth in popularity. After relocating what was left of the Roller Derby to California, Leo Seltzer handed over management duties to his son, Jerry. The invention of the video camera allowed games to be taped and played in syndication, though Jerry believed that television was only an avenue to promote live events, not a revenue generator on its own. Skaters continued to be paid with profit sharing, receiving between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year, though crowd-pleasers like Joan Weston and Charlie O’Connell were paid \$50,000. While Roller Derby enjoyed renewed success after movement to the Bay Area, the 1970s brought oil embargoes that restricted fan leisure choices, arena operations, and player transportation. A small group of skaters also went on strike, asking for a 40-week season and increases in travel stipends and salary. A failed venture with the computerized ticketing company Ticketron demonstrated that “in 1973, Roller Derby was no different than it had been in 1935; a

small, reputable family business and, when the going got tough, on its own and friendless” (Coppage 1999:94). Unable to continue, the final game of the Seltzer family’s Roller Derby was played in December 1973.

Attempts at a revival came during the 1980s and the late 1990s. In 1986, Bill Griffiths’ *Roller Games* made its television debut. Resembling professional wrestling in its staging and over-the-top fights and stunts, this was a more theatrical version of the sport that was viewed with disdain by some of the more traditional athletic skaters. The show aired for half a season before cancellation due to a waning audience, financial troubles, and poor production value (Mabe 2007). The inline skating and extreme sport boom of the 1990s, alongside renewed nostalgia for roller derby upon the death of celebrated skater Joan Weston in 1997, set the foundation for a second show called *RollerJam*, which began airing on *The Nashville Network* television channel in 1999. The show debuted to 2.9 million viewers, with males aged 12-34 as the main viewer demographic. While skater athleticism was highlighted, the competition was scripted and dramatized—a mishmash of reality television and sport. With a slide in ratings, the producers emphasized plotlines over the competitive athleticism of the game, turning off viewers in the second season; the last episode of *RollerJam* was shown in 2001 (Coppage 1999).

Roller derby’s revival in Austin (2001-2003)

Shortly after the conclusion of *RollerJam*,⁹ Dan Policarpo envisioned a new wave of roller derby as “all-girl” and held in the midst of attractions such as “clowns fighting each other with knives” (Corcoran 2008). Inspired by a traveling circus, Policarpo’s vision of roller derby would be more akin to the James Caan film *Rollerball* than the Seltzer-owned Roller Derby. An eager group of almost fifty women from the local Red River Street punk scene attended a January

⁹ For histories of modern flat track roller derby, see Atwell (2015); Barbee and Cohen (2010); Joulwan (2007); Mabe (2007); and Miller (2016).

recruitment meeting at the Casino El Camino bar. Following a fundraiser in March at the Mexican American Cultural Center, the money the group had compiled had disappeared, along with Policarpo. The skaters' version of events is that he took the money and ran; Policarpo claimed that he had never been reimbursed for the venue and other fundraiser expenses, and his attempts to contact the skaters after the benefit had failed (Atwell 2015; Corcoran 2008). Despite this setback, the women were determined to resurrect the sport, taking ownership of the fledgling league and structuring as a business called Bad Girl, Good Woman Productions (BGGW). The four team captains—Anya Jack, April Ritzenthaler, Nancy Haggerty, and Heather Burdick—took the main leadership roles for the business, collectively referring to themselves as the “She-E-Os.”

From the beginning, the leaders were clear that this entity was to be treated as a business, and that it was to be women-owned and -operated. Men were limited to serving in support roles such as coaches, officials, security, and EMTs (Ray 2007). Looking to outside help such as free business seminars and advice from a business manager, leadership and members were creating the league from scratch and learning how to run a business as they went. The gameplay rules had to be created in this fashion as well. Because there were no other existing derby leagues at the time, skaters relied on vintage books and the Internet to recreate the game as they remembered it, hammering out the basic rules and training any woman who showed up and was willing to skate (Barbee and Cohen 2010). The ultimate goal was to play on a banked track as in Seltzer-era Roller Derby, but as the skaters did not yet have the financial or spatial resources for a banked track, Amy “Electra Blu” Sherman modified the banked track dimensions for a flat surface (Joulwan 2007). New aspects to the game included sexy uniforms and the Penalty Wheel, which penalized skaters who broke the rules with outlandish punishments such as being spanked by fans in Spank Alley and wearing the Jackass Helmet. According to Ritzenthaler, the added production was needed to

mask the still-evolving skating skill: “We basically just wanted people to show up” (Atwell 2015:43). Recalling fighting as a memorable part of the original Roller Derby, skater coaches emphasized entertainment and practiced moves such as whips, tackles, and clotheslining opponents. Jack acknowledged that they played along somewhat with the hot-girls-on-skates spectacle knowing that “sex sells,” and Haggerty expressed that playing with sexuality as performance was a way to bridge feminism with sexy (Ray 2007).

The first public game was held June 23, 2002 to a crowd of 600 at Playland Skate Center in Austin, and a second followed on August 22. Following this initial success, the She-E-Os discussed structuring the league as a corporation, envisioning that eventually they would be able to pay salaries, sell stock, or give stock to members. They struggled to find a business structure option that would allow the four of them to retain operational control and streamline decisions—as Haggerty voiced in a council meeting, “You cannot have a business run by 50 people”—yet offload some of the labor (Ray 2007). Eventually, they formed a limited liability company (LLC) in which they named themselves owners of the league. Feeling overwhelmed with the labor of leadership, the She-E-Os retired from skating and were rarely present at practices (Joulwan 2007). Meanwhile, a growing number of member skaters vocalized concerns about power issues and disenfranchisement, believing that their labor to maintain the league and paying \$25 a month in dues entitled them to a say in business functions. On the surface, the league continued to benefit from media exposure, such as an appearance on Dave Attell’s show *Insomniac*. Yet the rift between the She-E-Os and the skaters only widened with a disastrous gamble on a derby girl calendar (costing the league \$7000) and the untimely death of Amber “Diva” Stinson, a member of the league who served as the Penalty Mistress. Ritzenthaler resigned from the league, citing discomfort with the ownership structure and the degree to which derby consumed her life: “It’s

not my dream. It's never been my dream. It's just something that I got involved with and that has totally begun to take over my life in a larger way than I ever imagined possible" (Ray 2007). The perceived mishandling of a major injury of Lacy "Whiskey L'Amour" Attuso at the Austin Music Hall, an uninsured venue, was the final blow (Joulwan 2007).

Having lost trust in the She-E-Os, a group of skaters presented their grievances to the owners as part of a restructuring agreement that would give skaters an equal vote (at the time, the four owners had three votes to each member's single vote on league matters). Members claimed that they were treated like unpaid employees and that they were not consulted about financial decisions. They also perceived the She-E-Os' vision of the league to be more about making money and claiming ownership to roller derby rather than creating a positive experience. The She-E-Os refused to sign the agreement, with Jack saying that "we will never give equal control to anyone" and that the owners controlled the creative properties of the league under the LLC (Ray 2007). With that, sixty-five of eighty skaters left to form their own flat track league, the Texas Rollergirls.¹⁰ The transitional leadership of the new league created a structure that mirrored a corporate organizational chart, with elected managers in areas such as finance, marketing, merchandise, game production, and training, but the underlying principle was that each skater would have a say in the business—"by the skater, for the skater" (Joulwan 2007). Commitments to relationships with small businesses and local charities were other foundational components that, in addition to a democratic governance style, future skaters would use as the base model for creating their own leagues.

¹⁰ BGGW changed their name to TXRD Lonestar Rollergirls and retained a banked track style of play. Following restructure as a democratically governed league, Jack, Burdick, and Haggerty eventually resigned.

The birth of the WFTDA and the derby industry (2004-present)

Following the Austin leagues' formation, other women within the United States formed leagues of their own. Internet chat groups and forums bridged the information gap, with Texas Rollergirls skaters responding to posts and emails seeking advice on how to implement their “by the skater, for the skater” business model and flat track gameplay. While the skaters debated how much insider information to share, the logic that they could play other teams quicker if they helped more leagues to become operational won out (Joulwan 2007). In 2004, enough leagues had sprouted to form an alliance, the United Leagues Coalition (ULC), in the hopes of creating a nationally recognized version of the sport, though participating leagues were limited to flat track play (Barbee and Cohen 2010). Only a year later, in July 2005, 22 leagues sent representatives for a national meeting in Chicago to create a standardized set of rules and requirements for membership in the organization. The result of their work is the WFTDA, the international governing body for the sport.

WFTDA operates with the explicit mission to promote and foster the sport “by facilitating the development of athletic ability, sportswomanship, and goodwill among member leagues. The governing philosophy is ‘by the skaters, for the skaters’” (WFTDA n.d.). WFTDA operates based on democratic principles, meaning that member leagues each have one vote in business and gameplay matters, (e.g. rules changes, bylaws), Board of Directors positions are elected, and votes/elections are decided by majority-rule. Leagues themselves must also adhere to this structure to be members of the WFTDA. How often and which matters are subject to vote vary depending on the league and the leadership currently serving. In theory, democratic governance ensures that skaters have input into the direction of their organizations and their sport. At the organization’s inception, the mission statement specified that only all-women, skater-owned and -operated flat

track leagues qualified for membership. As an evolution toward greater inclusivity, the most current policy on gender released in 2015 states that transgender women, intersex women, and gender-expansive individuals may skate in WFTDA sanctioned games “if women’s flat track roller derby is the version and composition of roller derby with which they most closely identify” (WFTDA 2015a). Skater-owned requirements that 51% of league owners and 67% of league management must be flat track derby skaters have remained the same since inception. Adult derby governing bodies give member leagues a great degree of autonomy in developing their infrastructure, so long as they follow organizational guidelines for democratic governance and skater operation. Per the current WFTDA Bylaws:

Each Member Organization belonging to the WFTDA shall have the right to regulate its own Organization and affairs, to establish its own policies, and to discipline, punish, suspend or expel its own managers, players, or employees, and these powers shall not be limited to cases of dishonest play, but shall include all questions of conduct which may be regarded by the Member Organization as contrary to its best interests or the interests of the WFTDA, so long as the action taken by the Member Organization does not conflict with any provision of these Bylaws or the WFTDA Regulations. (WFTDA 2019)

According to the 2015 World Roller Derby Census, over 27,000 individuals participate in derby regardless of affiliation or ruleset, with nearly 16,000 within the U.S. alone¹¹ (WFTDA 2015b). The website Derby Listing lists 2,000 derby leagues globally across all rulesets, genders, affiliations (or lack thereof), and ages; however, given that the list relies on user-submitted updates, this number may not be accurate. Currently, WFTDA is the most widely recognized modern derby ruleset and governing body. As of June 2019, there are 463 WFTDA member leagues around the world (WFTDA n.d.). The Men’s Roller Derby Association (MRDA) and the Junior Roller Derby

¹¹ These numbers reflect respondents from 20 countries that had at least 100 respondents. The survey was online-only and distributed via WFTDA; therefore, this total is very likely underestimated.

Association (JRDA) also play by WFTDA rules, though juniors' play has modifications based on age and/or skill level.¹²

Originally created as the Men's Derby Coalition in 2007 with three founding leagues, the MRDA operates by the same democratic principles as their older sister organization: "In the tradition of flat track roller derby, we will only accept leagues and teams that are skater owned and operated. The MRDA is operated by skaters, for skaters, by democratic principles" (MRDA 2015). Women and gender-expansive individuals are welcome to (and do) skate with men's leagues. Notably, a year prior to the release of the WFTDA Gender Statement, the MRDA established a non-discrimination policy that did not limit participant gender identity or expression (MRDA n.d.). There are currently 67 member leagues as of June 2019.

Established in 2009 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 2010, the JRDA serves as the governing body for junior skaters 7-17 years of age. Leagues cannot be owned and operated by the junior skaters themselves, but eligibility requirements stipulate that one adult volunteer per league actively works for a committee within the governing body. Unlike the adult organizations, the JRDA's mission primarily emphasizes character building and youth empowerment; fostering junior derby as an athletic activity is a secondary concern (JRDA n.d.). The governing body has historically operated separately of the adult organizations until 2018, when the WFTDA and JRDA signed a collaborative agreement for two years (WFTDA 2018). Junior skaters may compete in girls, boys, or open (all gender) divisions. As of June 2019, 138 JRDA member leagues exist across North America, Australia, and Europe (JRDA n.d.).

¹² Other governing bodies include USA Roller Sports (USARS), the banked track Roller Derby Coalition of Leagues (RDCL), Modern Athletic Derby Endeavour (MADE), and the now-defunct Old School Derby Association (OSDA). These governing bodies (for USARS, the Roller Derby discipline specifically) were created by skaters who felt that the WFTDA's requirements and style of gameplay did not meet their needs—for example, banked track play, all-gender teams, or a streamlined ruleset closer to the original Seltzer-era Roller Derby. Each has their own ruleset.

At the same time skaters were building a sport from the ground up, a small economy for equipment was also being crafted in the same fashion. In the beginning years of modern derby, skaters were limited to purchasing gear from pro shops inside of roller rinks, skateboard shops, online distributors, or even big-box sporting goods stores. Very little information existed on what type of gear to use or the best gear for derby's physical gameplay. Manufacturers such as Riedell Skates, 187 Pads, Triple 8, Bones, Roll-Line, and others marketed to other skating disciplines, such as skateboarding, figure skating, and speed skating, but skaters soon found through (often painful) trial and error that these products could cross over to derby. In 2003, Lisa "RollerGirl" Suggitt, a Canadian aggressive skater, had started to customize skates and sell them online via her website, Rollergirl.ca. While she was initially skeptical about derby and would not join the sport until years later, the store's online Skate Forum served as an informational tool that played a major role in developing Canadian roller derby (Miller 2016).

The first brick and mortar derby-specific store, Sin City Skates, opened in 2005, owned and operated by Las Vegas skaters Ivanna S. Pankin and Trish the Dish. The store's "About Us" page tells the shop's origin story:

Ivanna started the shop doing mail-order in her living room in Las Vegas in November of 2005 when she got tired of buying crappy gear at inflated prices from stores that knew nothing about roller derby or equipment for our sport. Ivanna's co-captain, best friend and biggest rival, Trish the Dish, joined the crew shortly after to help her with the first "Christmas Rush" and the shop has just grown from there! (Anon n.d.)

Finding quality gear with an underlying derby-specific knowledge base was a desperate need for early skaters. Ivanna had previously founded Arizona Roller Derby before starting Sin City Rollergirls with Trish; between the two, they had years of collective derby experience in terms of building infrastructure and gear testing. The shop has always promoted the owners' and employees' vast derby expertise as a draw: "Every one that works at Sin City Skates is or was a

high level player. We have the knowledge to help you because we skate ourselves. If we wouldn't use it, we won't sell it” (Anon n.d.). Most derby-owned businesses use similar wording in their promotional material and websites. Skater-owned and operated, they encourage customers to trust their insider and technical expertise.

Like the original Roller Derby, the modern revival has had its own periods of expansion and plateau within its eighteen years of existence. The 2006 A&E reality show *Rollergirls*, starring skaters from TXRD Lonestar Rollergirls, had a small cult following and spurred an exponential jump in the number of existing leagues, tripling from 50 known leagues in 2005 to 140 leagues in 2006 (Barbee and Cohen 2010). The 2009 Hollywood film *Whip It!* continued this momentum, inspiring women around the world to “be their own heroes” and join the growing sport. Miller (2016) refers to the film’s impact on the sport’s growth as the “*Whip It* bump.” He recalls that Toronto Roller Derby, his affiliated league at the time, had 10-20 women attending introductory skater training each year prior to the film’s release; in 2011, the league welcomed a class of 90 would-be skaters. *Whip It* led to an explosive short-term gain for the sport, but the momentum could not be sustained at the same intensity for the long term, and what followed was a decline in fan attendance and engagement. As a singular example, in 2010, 5703 fans attended a Rat City Rollergirls (Seattle) bout in Key Arena, the current attendance record for a modern derby game (Anon 2010). Not four years later after this record-breaking event, Rat City created a GoFundMe campaign to raise \$45,000 to keep their practice space, a goal they exceeded (Anon n.d.). However, while new fans are not flocking to the sport as before, the number of participants continues to grow at a steady rate, especially outside of North America (Miller 2016).

Derby league organizational structure and values

Leagues and the governing bodies themselves are typically structured as LLCs or 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations (Atwell 2015). As such, they are business entities in and of themselves. LLCs have variance in ownership structure, ranging from 1-2 members to all members are considered owners. Regardless of number of owners and league size, leagues and governing bodies almost always have a board of directors or an executive board with roles such as President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Additional executive roles may be added based on the league's needs or member skillset. The board of directors may or may not also be owners in an LLC. Levels of hierarchy depend partially on the size of the organization. A board of directors with worker bees may be sufficient in a small league (roughly 15-30 people), but multiple layers of oversight (e.g. committee heads, board oversights) may be necessary in a medium (31-60 members) or large (61-100 members) size league. Board members may be involved in day-to-day tasks as a working board, depending on league size and member participation. Ideally, board members can delegate day-to-day responsibilities to oversights and committee heads so that they can focus on governance and long-term strategic planning.

Leagues may have one of or a combination of the following groups: intraleague teams (home teams) that play against each other, interleague teams (travel or charter teams) that play against other leagues' travel teams of comparable skill (labeled as A, B, or C teams), a farm team or pool of skaters who have passed their minimum skills requirements but have not yet been selected for an interleague or intraleague team, "fresh meat" or beginner skaters who are learning minimum skills, and a recreational group for skaters who are not interesting in formally competing due to time or physical restrictions but still enjoy playing the sport at reduced intensity. Competitive structure can, but not always, go hand in hand with size. Medium or large size adult

leagues tend to have at least one travel team (up to three) and at least two home teams (up to five). There is not a clear connection between league size and ranking, especially among men's leagues as they tend to be much smaller than comparably ranked women's leagues. Interleague teams do not have to compete for rankings but may play against other local leagues for bragging rights. If leagues are not affiliated with a governing body and do not compete for international rankings, they are often called "rec leagues." While some junior leagues operate independently, more adult leagues are starting to create their own junior programs. Men's teams are their own separate entities, though working relationships with big sister leagues are common. Formal affiliations between men's and women's leagues are rare. Officials, announcers, and other volunteers often claim affiliation to one league, but this does not prevent them for volunteering for other leagues in the area. In fact, depending on the number of leagues and volunteers in a given geographical area, it is possible for a volunteer to work at least one game every single weekend in a calendar year, as I was told by three participants who served in these roles.

Unlike the Seltzer-owned Roller Derby, modern derby participants are not paid to skate (Atwell 2015). Ticket sales from public games, sponsorships, and membership dues are the main sources of a league's income, most of which is funneled back into business operations, which can include but is not limited to practice space rental, travel stipends/reimbursements for skaters and officials, and event production costs. Sponsorships take the form of in-kind donations (e.g. event food, skating gear) or cash. Skaters may directly benefit from receiving gear, but individuals do not receive cash, as this goes to a team or the overall organization. Paid staff are extremely rare in roller derby, and these tend to be league executive directors or full-time positions within the WFTDA (no other governing body yet has paid staff).

In most derby leagues, members are collectively responsible for business operations. The “by the skater, for the skater” foundation sets the tone that derby at all levels, from an individual league to governing bodies, operates as a DIY venture. Participants invest their own time, energy, and money into developing the sport’s gameplay and its infrastructure (Miller 2016). Each league has its own specific participation policies, but in general, leagues require some level of labor from their members in terms of working games (e.g. selling tickets, laying track, crowd control), promoting the league in their local community, and running business league operations (e.g. ordering merchandise, marketing, scheduling games, handling grievances). Governing bodies also require at least one volunteer from each member league to perform a job at the governance level, which ranges from copy editing documents to heading a rules development committee. In several advice books for new derby skaters, authors emphasize that each skater contribute their part and that derby is not a part-time activity: “Don’t expect to cash in on all the fun stuff without getting your hands dirty doing some manual labor. We can smell a derby dilettante a mile away. They don’t smell good” (Barbee and Cohen 2010:116).

Another component to derby’s DIY roots is the reluctance to engage with mainstream media markets for promotion or broadcast (Miller 2016). This trend directly contrasts with Seltzer’s Roller Derby, which benefitted from filling empty slots on television channels. Word of mouth is how the vast majority of new skaters learn about derby and leagues in their area (WFTDA 2012), but modern derby’s birth was facilitated by early social media such as Yahoo! Groups and MySpace (Barbee and Cohen 2010; Joulwan 2007). With the sport growing during a time when the Internet began replacing traditional media outlets for entertainment and promotion, it made sense from a cost perspective - and adhered to derby’s alternative DIY ethos - to instead rely on social media and web-streaming services. To make live derby available to those wanting to watch

but unable to travel, derby-specific web streaming began with early websites such as Derby News Network (launched in 2008) and Canuck Derby TV (started in 2010), each brought to life by a small group of derby volunteers passionate about bringing derby games to the online masses. WFTDA.tv was created in partnership with Blaze Streaming Media in 2012 as the official broadcast service for WFTDA-rules derby. With the aforementioned sites now shuttered, WFTDA.tv is one of the only consistent sources for live derby, and the sole source for watching post-season WFTDA games. If host leagues wish to live stream their games/tournaments, they must either partner with WFTDA.tv or another local service.¹³

While reluctant, leaders have not entirely shied away from attempting to break into mainstream sports broadcasting. WFTDA negotiated a deal with ESPN3, the network's online streaming channel, to broadcast the final four games of the 2015 Championships; the agreement was renewed for 2016 (WFTDA 2016b). An initial agreement was brokered to broadcast the 2017 Championship game live on ESPN2, lauded as the return of roller derby to network television (WFTDA 2017a). However, the event was pulled from ESPN2's live broadcast nine days before the scheduled broadcast. Coming fresh off controversy over cancellation of the show "Barstool Van Talk" due to its misogynistic undertones, ESPN cited heightened concerns over content, which manifested in greater scrutiny toward derby names such as Bicepsual and Mary Fagdalene, both of which were censored in broadcast. This controversy in combination with later choices surrounding the sport's promotion on the network prompted interim WFTDA executive director Erica Vanstone to write an open letter calling in ESPN regarding their practices, citing that "roller

¹³ Some derby-specific video production companies, such as Derby Duck Productions and Hit Squad TV, operate at selected tournaments and individual games depending on resources. Leagues may also have working relationships with local individuals or companies who live stream games and tournaments without requiring payment from viewers. With the evolution of portable video streaming technology (e.g. Facebook Live), skaters have been able to livestream games if a service is unavailable or unaffordable. While at a lower production value, Facebook Live makes footage more accessible and reflects the sport's amateur roots.

derby does not need ESPN to be legitimate. ... You and other networks are the ones who need organizations like the WFTDA to legitimize *you*” (Vanstone 2018). A deal with ESPN was not renewed for 2018. Instead, WFTDA opted to continue a collaboration with Internet-friendly streaming platform Twitch, a partnership that began in 2017 with broadcasting selected sanctioned games throughout the season (WFTDA 2017b).¹⁴

Conclusion

Tracing the evolution of derby, a direct line is visible from the original Roller Derby’s structure to that of modern derby. Save for the name roller derby and basic rules/terms, what modern WFTDA-rules derby eventually became embodies much of which Seltzer-era derby was not: an unpaid, women-led, collectively governed enterprise that actively resists being relegated to the Entertainment column. Ideological differences in how roller derby should be defined and operated (and by whom) also led to the split between the She-E-Os/BGGW and the Texas Rollergirls, with the latter Texas model serving as the standard for future organizations of flat track roller derby. The brief explosion of mainstream success with *Whip It*, paralleled by the longer growth of derby-related businesses and paid positions within the sport, have continuously provided debate fodder for just how much derby should be considered “work” or “business.”

With the previous literature and the study context established, I now turn to the current project’s methodological details.

¹⁴ ESPN is not the only mainstream network to broadcast derby. The BBC provided coverage of the 2018 Roller Derby World Cup in Manchester, UK (Anon 2018). The World Cup is currently organized by the Roller Derby World Cup Advisory Committee, a separate entity from the three main governing bodies.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

When a new subculture emerges as a topic worthy of academic study, initial studies tend to be ethnographic, describing some aspect of the subculture. Research on alternative sport, such as skateboarding (Beal 1995; Beal and Wilson 2004; Dupont 2014; Snyder 2012), BMX (Edwards and Corte 2010), windsurfing (Wheaton 2000a), and surfing (Stranger 2010), follows this pattern. This is especially true when the work focuses on gender resistance and/or compliance within these subcultures (Beal 1996; Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie 2005; MacKay and Dallaire 2012; Pomerantz, Currie, and Kelly 2004; Wheaton 2000b; Young and Dallaire 2008). With derby's novelty and nearly singular focus on gender resistance/feminism, most academic work on the sport has relied on qualitative techniques, with the exception of quantitative surveys on skater body image (Eklund and Masberg 2014; Strübel and Petrie 2016). Scholars who study these areas are frequently, but not always, members of the subcultures that they study, resulting in much narrative and autoethnographic research within the sociology of sport subfield (Barker-Ruchti 2008; Drummond 2010; Duncan 2000; Fleming and Fullagar 2007; McMahon and DinanThompson 2011; Scott 2010; Sparkes 1996; Tsang 2000).¹⁵ While my research is also qualitative, I move forward from this well-established foundation of descriptive ethnography.

A phenomenological approach was used for the study. Stemming from philosophical inquiry regarding consciousness, phenomenology is used when the goal is to interrogate the meaning of a certain phenomenon from the perspective of lived experience (Englander 2012). Obtaining rich description is the key to understanding what it means for a participant to live this experience. The phenomenon in question for this study is the act of performing paid and unpaid

¹⁵ Toby Miller (2008) argues that the emphasis on confessional tales within sport is faulty, as these are used to claim authenticity and a sense of understanding—"Yes, I played, so I can speak to this and I know what I'm talking about"—and they may overshadow political economy analysis and socio-historical contexts.

labor for an amateur sport, focusing on the meanings that participants attach to their labor. Qualitative interviews are very commonly used within phenomenological studies (Englander 2012), as they are most appropriate for learning about participants' lived experiences and knowledge of the social world that cannot be fully tapped by other modes of inquiry (Hesse-Biber 2007; Weiss 1994). Particularly in feminist-oriented research practice, interviews are considered partnerships of meaning-making between researcher and participant, and close attention is paid to power relations between the two parties during the process. The meanings that participants give to their labor for the sport cannot be directly observed, so in-depth interviews are the best fitting method.

Having been embedded in the derby community for eight years and counting, I am considered an "insider" and thus come to the project with a much different perspective than an "outsider" would. The research cannot be decoupled from my personal experience—I am *living* this struggle. My insights are from the perspective of an all-star veteran skater competing in a WFTDA Playoffs-level league in the Midwestern United States. I have never made money from derby, but I have served in various local league leadership positions prior to and during this project. I was a committee head for three years before I officially began research but was in the formulative stages of my dissertation prospectus. I was elected as a skater trainer in 2014 and have served in that role since. Halfway through this project, in 2017, I was elected to the Board of Directors as secretary, and I served two years in that role. During my time in the sport, I have watched the derby community grow exponentially, plateau, and wane. I have wondered myself how other derby participants make lives out of the sport. As a rookie beginning in 2011, I threw myself into every possible activity the league held to increase my skills and as participant observation for my master's research. Yet with each passing year, I have found myself on bad days wanting to cry in

my league's practice venue parking lot because I was at practice again for the seventh day in a row between travel, home team, league, and speed skating training; my phone was exploding with text messages from captains and committee members regarding a skater's ineligibility to bout because she had not completed her monthly committee work, and I had no idea how I was going to be able to get anything academic done, much less the laundry. The idea for this project stemmed from my own experiences attempting to fit league business with training, practicing, and my paid work, circulating around the question: "Is it ever too much derby?" At a basic, most personal level, I wanted to know if other leadership felt the same pain I did—and if those entrepreneurs who, to my view, made derby their life, experienced this to an even greater degree.

I benefitted from a shared derby insider status with interviewees, which may have made them more willing to talk with me or facilitated the interview once begun, especially for local league leadership. My personal experience granted me a great degree of insight to this topic and helped me write my interview questions, but I had to be careful to avoid projecting my own views or assuming that I knew exactly what my interviewees were talking about (putting words into their mouths, "you know what I mean"). Some interviewees' stories were very similar to my own experiences and I could not help but nod and answer "yes" as a show of rapport and understanding, and I acknowledge this may have blocked me from digging deeper into their narratives. As a fellow insider, some local leadership had questions for me about my own experiences and my league's operations. While I tried to make the interviews flow like a conversation as much as possible, in most circumstances, I told them that I would share my stories after the interview was complete so as not to influence their answers. I had post-interview conversations with four participants that lasted up to 30 minutes, in which I shared my personal feelings on league organizational structures

and the future of the sport. Interviewees also shared stories that directly named individuals and leagues that they did not feel comfortable discussing while being audio-recorded.

Derby academic literature is split between authors as spectators (Beaver 2012; Finley 2010) and authors as full participants in the sport. I follow in the tradition of those in the latter group, though at a different point in my derby career. Donnelly (2012) and Pavlidis (2013) each joined their respective leagues during their doctoral studies to gain access to the field. Breeze (2014) began her research after helping to found her league, but she was forced to retire due to injury during her work. Ferreira (2017) balanced perspectives by acting as both spectator and non-skating official, roles considered invisible given the current climate of derby. In my own work, I decided to stay in derby to maintain my level of access to my potential sample, though I attempted to pare down my responsibilities. When I officially started the project in 2016, I had already dropped skating for a home team to focus solely on travel team play and stepped down from committee head leadership, though I retained my skater trainer duties to fulfill my league committee work obligations. I did not intentionally seek board leadership because of the project; indeed, I had previously been nominated for the board in years past and each time declined. I decided to accept my nomination in summer 2017, and again in 2018, for the same reason that many of my leadership interviewees did: out of fear that no one else would step up to do the work.

My passion has brought me to burnout multiple times throughout my career, but this feeling has strengthened with the additional burden of writing a dissertation about it. While I was analyzing data and beginning to write my findings, several situations occurred within my league that tested my ability to negotiate my personal feelings with my duty as a board member. These situations augmented my frustrations with serving as leadership and my desire to be done with the role as soon as possible. The most prominent example concerned a skater who had been accused

of multiple instances of bullying other league members and volunteers. The board discussed what course of action to take, including suspending the skater from competing in a home game only a few days away. The board took no action at the time, requesting that the skater come to discuss it with them at the next board meeting and they would make a decision after that. The skater did show, told her side, and called out the board as a collective for abusing their power. Meanwhile, league members and volunteers were divided between crying for punishment and outrage that this was even an issue. The incident resulted in lost productivity and emotional drain for all involved, as well as the resignation of one of the board members. I found that my fellow board members, whom I had been unable to recruit for interviews due to time, were echoing similar themes via personal email and at public board meetings that I was writing about, and that I also felt personally: making decisions based on emotion vs. objectivity, taking time away from paid work to discuss a league problem, and the emotional toll of each ordeal. Because I was completing analysis while experiencing these issues myself, I had to carefully avoid cherry-picking data to fit this pattern with a greater conscious effort than would normally occur in a research topic where the researcher is not as emotionally invested or could be considered part of the sample. I made sure that if I was trying to make a claim, I had multiple sources of evidence and did not overextend beyond what the data were saying. However, given that newer board members were unprompted in citing similar strains that other leadership had disclosed to me prior during interviews, I see these events as further validation of my findings.

Sample parameters

My sample is broken into two sub-groups: derby entrepreneurs and organizational leaders. These individuals were selected for study because of their unique perspectives on making derby labor fit into their lives and, specific to entrepreneurs, what happens when one decides to transform

their unpaid love for a sport into a business. Simply put, these individuals are the backbone of derby. While I acknowledge that derby participants who are neither leadership nor entrepreneurs also have trouble making derby fit among their other commitments, individuals in each group have made a “choice” to become involved in derby beyond what is expected of a participant. Entrepreneurs operate derby-related businesses usually on top of actively participating in the sport at some level, sometimes even in a leadership role. Leaders take on a greater share of responsibility to run the business operations for their organization. Overall, they spend more hours per month engaged in derby business than those limited to typical committee work (for example, comparing head of finance to a league attendance tracker). As such, these two sub-groups more acutely feel time crunch and spillover between life arenas and are in the best position to speak to what happens if and when a leisure activity becomes more like work.

I use the term “derby participant” to include individuals who are considered part of the derby community but are not currently skaters (e.g. officials, announcers, retired skaters, etc.).¹⁶ “Organizational leaders” refers to derby participants who had ever held a committee head position, a Board of Directors position, or a position with a similar workload and expectation of leadership (e.g. coach, interleague coordinator, head skating official). Leadership can be within an individual league or within any of the three prominent roller derby governing bodies recognized by the derby community (WFTDA, MRDA, and JRDA)¹⁷. When devising my sample parameters, I anticipated

¹⁶ It should be noted that the tendency to focus on “core” participants within alternative sport literature has been critiqued, with a call for scholars to reach beyond the riders and athletes to interrogate the experiences of consumers and others further removed from the insider circle (Donnelly 2006). Unfortunately, because I focus on derby-owned businesses, going beyond the core is beyond the scope of this project. Yet I would argue that this limitation is partially due to the structure of the derby industry in its current state, as the skater-as-fan is still the dominant consumer (and producer) of derby paraphernalia.

¹⁷ The visibility of other governing bodies (USARS, RDCL, and MADE) is extremely low compared to WFTDA/MRDA/JRDA derby. The former groups are, in a sense, a niche within a niche. It is a limitation of this project that the perspectives of these leaders were not included.

a small degree of overlap between the two sub-groups, meaning that one individual could have both entrepreneur and leadership experience.

“Derby entrepreneur” refers to anyone who has ever made money, whatever the amount, from a derby-related enterprise. Derby-related means that the enterprise markets goods and/or services that are to be used in the sport of derby or that reflect the derby lifestyle. Derby participants may be the entirety of the intended market or only a portion; the latter is the case with retailers, manufacturers, and distributors that cater to multiple skating disciplines. Derby-related is distinct from derby-owned, meaning that a current or former derby participant is the sole or co-owner of an enterprise.

There are typically three ways to tell if businesses are derby owned: 1) if they specify “derby owned” in their marketing materials, 2) if owners detail derby experience in the “about us” sections of their websites or social media pages, or 3) if photos of owners (such as in Etsy profiles) show them participating in derby. Businesses are not necessarily both derby-owned and operated—for example, a skate shop may be owned by a non-participant who employs derby players—but the two tend to coincide. For the most part, I focused on businesses that were currently active, which I defined as having updated their website/social media pages within the last 12 months. In the case of Etsy businesses, this meant having items available in the shop with sales made in the last 12 months. This broad definition ensured a range of businesses in product/service, size, and length of time in operation. Intentionally, this definition does not exclude enterprises that are not owned by people directly involved in the sport but are still considered “honorary members” of the community due to their support. While my focus was on derby-owned businesses, I did not want to turn away potential enterprises that were not derby-owned out of the belief they may have a different perspective on the industry.

Recruitment

After gaining ethics review board approval in June 2016, I began recruiting for in-depth interviews. Data collection took place between October 2016 and March 2018. I used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling to recruit all participants in my sample. In qualitative research, statistical generalizability and representativeness is not the goal. Furthermore, there is very little information on derby businesses as a collective, so it is impossible to tell how closely this sample matches the overall population. Because the spread of derby has occurred primarily via the Internet and word of mouth, recruitment tactics mirrored these avenues. While information sources differed slightly based on sub-group, the mode of recruitment was basically the same. For both groups, I directly contacted individuals within my own personal network, referrals from teammates, or sent cold emails to their business/organization. I started the interview process with leaders in my own league and local entrepreneurs I knew personally (eight total) in order to become comfortable with my interview guide before I moved onto recruiting more high-profile participants with whom I did not already have an existing relationship. At the end of each interview, I asked participants for referrals to others that met my research criteria. Three participants went above and beyond my expectation of referrals and personally contacted a significant number of other business owners/leadership, using their broad networks to help benefit me. Cold emails were responsible for finding 22 participants, followed by referrals (18) and personal contacts (11). Referrals were more successful for obtaining interviews with entrepreneurs, while cold emails and personal contacts worked better to find leaders.

For entrepreneurs, I emailed all currently active derby-related businesses from “The List” provided by the now-inactive website Derby Owned (www.derbyowned.com). This directory includes 271 listings for derby-owned businesses. However, not all of them are derby-related and

the list was not regularly updated nor exhaustive. To account for businesses not on “The List,” I searched for derby businesses with accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Etsy. I found businesses advertised in derby media, such as commercials during online broadcasts of tournaments on WFTDA.tv, print ads in *fiveonfive* magazine, print ads in tournament programs, or shout-outs/features in blogs (e.g. Derby Central, The Apex, NoxTalks). After compiling a list, I selectively emailed 88 total businesses to get a broad sample range based on business type, geographic location, size, and gender of owner. I also posted an ad with permission to the Roller Derby Run Businesses and Derby Friends Facebook groups. For Etsy shops, I sent messages to shop owners via the platform’s messaging system. Personal networks were especially helpful to contact entrepreneurs who did not own a business but otherwise made an income because of derby (e.g. paid organization staff). Like in any other niche industry, businesses ebb and flow. During the course of my research, new enterprises opened and long-standing ones closed, and my entrenched position within the community allowed me to hear about these new developments.¹⁸

For organizational leaders, I relied on DerbyListing.com for a list of currently active leagues. DerbyListing.com is an online directory of 2000 leagues across rule sets, genders, and ages (the author of the list states that they use leagues’ Facebook pages as a gauge of their current status). Similarly to Derby Owned, this list is not exhaustive nor regularly updated; it is volunteer run and relies on user-submitted revisions. Nevertheless, it is currently the best source of all derby leagues available. I initially limited my sample to leagues within the state. Beyond practical reasons of manageability and ease of access, as of January 2019 per Derby Listing, there are 37 derby leagues within the state, containing a wide variety in terms of affiliation (WFTDA, MRDA, JRDA, unaffiliated), size (30 members and under, 31-60, 61-99, 100+), structure (recreational,

¹⁸ By the time this dissertation was completed, three entrepreneurs I interviewed closed or lost their businesses.

travel teams only, home teams plus travel), and ranking/skill level (Playoffs-level to unranked). The only constant is that all leagues play flat track derby. As such, I decided that the level of variation was sufficient. I sent emails to all active adult¹⁹ leagues in the state asking for participants that served as committee heads or on the Board of Directors. This strategy yielded only six participants from five different leagues, and after multiple attempts to contact the remaining leagues via email with no response, I considered my recruitment of leagues within the state exhausted and expanded to leagues in neighboring states to remain based in the Midwestern United States.²⁰ This expansion enabled me to interview more leaders, particularly those in men's derby. In addition to local leadership, I sent emails to the Board of Directors from WFTDA, MRDA, and JRDA asking for participation.

To gain an additional perspective on what happens when derby as business fails, I attempted to reach out to a small number of leagues and businesses that had closed as deviant cases, but I was unsuccessful in reaching those specific organizations. However, throughout my recruitment process, I connected with one former business owner/league leader, two retired league leaders, four business owners who had significantly curtailed their business operations, and nine leaders who had either considered or definitely decided they were not seeking reelection after the end of their current term. In addition, several well-known derby businesses closed during the span of my research; some business owners explained the reasons for which they were closing down

¹⁹ From the beginning, my project focused on adult leagues, as participants perform labor for leagues while doing the sport. As explained in the context chapter, junior leagues are owned by adults, whether as part of an existing derby league or as a separate entity. However, near the end of my data collection phase, I decided to seek out junior organizational leadership given the growing visibility of junior leagues. This is a blind spot that I would argue (and as participants discussed with me) stems partially from the historical lack of formal ties between adult and junior governing bodies.

²⁰ While my primary target for leadership was the Midwestern US, I did interview entrepreneurs and governing body leadership who had prior leadership experience in leagues outside of this region. It is possible that my results on leadership more strongly reflect derby from a specific region. However the stories from outside the region touch on the same themes, suggesting that my findings are reflective of derby as a whole.

their businesses on social media “farewell” posts. With the perspective of these individuals, I believe I have gained some sense of the circumstances that may lead to derby participants exiting their business or their league. It is possible that people on their way out may have been more willing to talk to me or that the topic of trying to achieve “balance” strongly resonated with them.

Data collection and analysis

I interviewed a total of 52 participants. All but two interviews were conducted one-on-one. The remaining two were conducted jointly for convenience because both participants met the research criteria (a husband and wife who were leadership in their respective leagues, and two sisters who co-owned a business). Eighteen participants were within driving distance and were willing to be interviewed in person at a location of their choosing. These interviews took place at participants’ homes, coffee shops, their league practice venue, or their place of business. One participant requested to answer questions via email due to time constraints. Twenty-one other participants were interviewed by video call on a platform of their choosing (Skype, Google Hangout, or FaceTime). Twelve were interviewed by phone. While I preferred video interviews to capture non-verbal communication, some participants felt more comfortable speaking by phone, so I later included that as an option in my recruitment email. Interview length ranged from 50 minutes to 3 hours, averaging about 1.5 hours. Early in my recruitment, some participants told me that they would only be limited to 1 hour due to their schedule, so I created a truncated version of my interview guide specifically for these individuals and emphasized in my recruitment ads that I could limit the interview to 1 hour if needed. Seven participants did the truncated interview. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. I transcribed all audio myself and sent transcript copies to each participant for their feedback and approval. Eighteen participants did not respond. Of those who did, most approved their transcript, with only five

requesting minor omissions or changes that did not otherwise take away from the message they had conveyed originally. One participant requested to make major changes but did not respond to further communications, and so her interview is not included in this dataset. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms chosen by me.²¹

Interviews were semi-structured, and questions fell under several key themes for all participants: 1) day-to-day experiences as a derby entrepreneur and/or organizational leader (describe a typical day and week, describe their busiest time, best/worst experiences); 2) negotiation of derby labor with other obligations (how they would describe derby labor, life course fit with derby/paid job/rest of life, burnout, “doing what you love”); 3) influences of gender (negative and positive experiences, importance of business opportunities for women/minorities, how these characteristics may have impacted their careers); and 4) the future of the derby industry (where they saw their business and the sport in five years, the ‘for the skater, by the skater’ model, advice for business owners or leadership). The first two sets of questions are designed to tap into the participants’ everyday experiences and perceptions of being a derby entrepreneur or organizational leader. Though gender may be implicit in these question sets, asking more explicitly in the third set was intended to get participants to directly consider how gender has or has not played a role in their experiences. The final set of questions is designed to capture participants’ thoughts regarding the state of the derby industry more generally and what they envision for the sport’s future, to speak to the commercialization of sport.

I analyzed the interview data using NVivo, relying on an iterative process of data collection and analysis. I used a combination of open and focused coding (Esterberg 2002; Saldaña 2013). I allowed all open codes to emerge organically from the data. In open coding, I relied heavily on in

²¹ Given that many derby participants have derby names that reference fictional characters, any pseudonym that matches a person’s actual derby name in part or whole is purely coincidental.

vivo codes to capture participant words (sacrifice, lucky, I can do what I want, it's on you). Certain emergent codes resonated with previous derby literature and my own experiences (20% of people do 80% of work, don't take it personal, skater-as-fan market), and so I was pleasantly surprised to find these echoed in the interview transcripts. Focused codes were primarily related to my interview questions and overall research questions (advice for business owners, paid to do derby, how hear about derby). I coded for the different ways that participants described their derby and non-derby labor (paid, unpaid, work, real job, hobby, passion), reasons why they chose to make derby their paid career and/or become involved in running league business (no one else would do it, making a difference, hard to get gear), their struggles/triumphs in "balance" or making their lives work (making it fit, balance, boundaries, schedule), and any references to how gender may impact their experiences or that of derby participants in general (gender in leadership, gender at work, gender in derby). During the coding process, I kept memos about emerging codes and patterns (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Hesse-Biber 2007) and developed a codebook to find redundant codes and develop definitions.

Sample description

Demographic tables are broken down by sub-group. Tables 1 and 2 detail information for entrepreneurs, and Tables 3 and 4 list information for leaders. Tables 1 and 3 focus on personal demographic information (age, gender, race, education, relationship/parental status), while Tables 2 and 4 focus on details pertinent to the participants' derby involvement, businesses, and organizations (years in derby, years in business/leadership, type of business).

The overall sample consists of 23 entrepreneurs, which includes 3 that make an income from derby but do not own a business, 23 leaders (including 1 retired), and 5 who have been in both roles (including 1 retired from both). Overall, participants were overwhelmingly college-

educated, White, cisgender women, representing the sport's overall demographics. Of the 8 men in the sample, they were clustered into leadership. The average age was 36 years old, with a range of 19-53 years. The average length of derby involvement in some capacity was 7 years, with a range of 1-14 years. I did not explicitly ask about sexual orientation, relationship status, or number of children, but many participants volunteered this information during their interviews. Of those who did so, at the time of interview, 27 were married, 1 was engaged, 16 were in a relationship or cohabitating with a partner, and 7 participants were single. 7 participants disclosed queer identities during their interview. 31 participants were child-free and 20 had children, though one child-free participant was actively trying to conceive at the time and discussed it at length in her interview. Aside from a slightly larger concentration of child-free participants in leadership (see Tables 5 and 6), there were no significant differences between the sub-groups in terms of demographics. Some participants needed to end their interviews due to time before I reached the demographics questions and attempts to further contact them for this information did not succeed. I was able to deduce most missing information (age, years in derby) from publicly available information or personal networks, but the remaining missing information is noted accordingly in the tables.

Categorizing entrepreneurs by type of business owned, eight owned skate shops, eight owned coaching/training services, five owned apparel/printing companies, five owned accessories-based businesses, and two were in equipment/gear manufacturing. Three entrepreneurs owned multiple businesses. Twenty entrepreneurs made their derby business(es) a full-time venture, which meant leaving their jobs if they had previously been employed. This was an easy process for most, as their non-derby jobs were unfulfilling or boring (Emma Frost, Raven, Tank Girl), had unsympathetic or frustrating bosses (Betty Boop, Gaia, Captain Marvel), or required long hours that were no longer worth the stress or pay (Aurora, Gambit). Some

entrepreneurs had previously left paid employment when their children were born (Moonstar, Karma), and others were unemployed at the time of starting their business because they were unable to find work (Daria, Quartermain). The remaining eight entrepreneurs remained employed in a second job, either full-time or part-time, because they currently could not afford to subsist solely with their derby enterprise and/or they enjoyed their non-derby paid work and did not wish to quit. Length of time with their current business officially ranged from less than a year to eighteen years (average five years), with eleven entrepreneurs having opened their businesses within the *Whip It* bump (2010-2012) and a clustering of eight businesses open or sold to new ownership in 2015 and onward.

Based on league affiliation, four leaders were members of an unaffiliated women's adult league, fourteen were from WFTDA member leagues, six were from MRDA member leagues, one was from a JRDA member league, and five were from the WFTDA, MRDA, and JRDA governing bodies. Twenty-one leaders served on their organization's board of directors (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, etc.), six leaders had committee-level roles (sponsorship head, interleague coordinator), and one co-owned her league with another individual. Some participants are double counted because they were leadership at both the local and governance level, or they were leadership in both WFTDA and MRDA leagues.

With the methodology for the current study now established, Chapters 4-9 dive into the main findings. In Chapter 4, I show that participants who decide to create businesses or lead organizations are motivated by the passion they have for the sport. They detail how they find joy in their paid/unpaid labor by making a difference for others. In Chapter 5, I argue that, despite the belief that derby participants who work for passion "do what they love for a living," this work is precarious and most readily accessible to those who are privileged. Chapter 6 and 7 can be read as

two separate parts of a larger argument that passion work is “real work” that can be tedious, exhausting, and repetitive, and that the ideal worker norm presents pressure to overwork and to be constantly available – whether this is paid or unpaid work. Chapter 6 presents the entrepreneurs’ side, while Chapter 7 covers the leaders’ side. With Chapter 8, I argue that like other alternative sports, entrepreneurs and leaders battle with fears over how becoming a “real business” potentially conflicts with derby’s anti-capitalist founding and DIY ethic. I close with Chapter 9, arguing that the very foundational structures of derby as an alternative women’s sport help produce an environment where overwork, burnout, and obligation puts organizational sustainability at risk.

Table 1: Entrepreneur Social Demographics

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Parental Status	Education	Race	Gender
Aurora	37	Partnered	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Betty Boop	38	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Captain Marvel	35	Partnered	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Cipher	42	Partnered	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Daria	40	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman
<i>Emma Frost</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Partnered</i>	<i>Childfree</i>	<i>Bachelor's</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Woman</i>
Furiosa	40	Cohabiting	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Gaia	41	Married	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Gambit	39	Married	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Man
Harley	32	Cohabiting	Childfree	College diploma	White	Woman
Jean Gray	43	Married	Parent	Associate's	White	Woman
<i>Jubilee</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Some college</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Woman</i>
Karma	34	Married	Parent	Master's	White	Woman
<i>Lightning</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Bachelor's</i>	<i>Multiracial</i>	<i>Woman</i>
Mockingbird	35	Cohabiting	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Moonstar	35	Married	Parent	Master's	White	Woman
Quartermain	53	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Man
Raven	36	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Red Sonja	26	Partnered	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Rescue	34	Married	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Rogue	44	Partnered	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman
Shadowcat	50	Partnered	Parent	NP	White	Woman
<i>Tank Girl</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Some graduate</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Woman</i>
Thunder	30	Married	Childfree	Bachelor's	Multiracial	Woman
<i>Tico</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Partnered</i>	<i>Childfree</i>	<i>Bachelor's</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Woman</i>
Tigra	38	Married	Childfree	High school	White	Woman
Wonder Woman	38	Married	Parent	High school	White	Woman
Wren	32	Engaged	Childfree	Some graduate	White	Woman

Note: NP means the data were not provided. Italicized names indicate entrepreneurs who were also leaders.

Table 2. Entrepreneur Derby/Business Demographics

Name	Type of Business	Years in Derby	Years in Business	Employment Status
Aurora	Training/coaching	10	6	FT derby, supplemental non-derby
Betty Boop	Apparel	3	2	FT derby
Captain Marvel	Training/coaching, apparel	14	6	FT derby
Cipher	Apparel	9	8	PT derby, FT non-derby
Daria	Skate shop	4	1	PT derby, FT non-derby
<i>Emma Frost</i>	<i>Skate shop, training/coaching</i>	9	6	<i>FT derby</i>
Furiosa	Accessories	10	5	PT derby, FT non-derby
Gaia	Paid staff	12	10	FT derby
Gambit	Skate shop (paid staff)	0	5	FT derby
Harley	Apparel	5	7	FT derby
Jean Gray	Accessories	4	2	PT derby, PT non-derby
<i>Jubilee</i>	<i>Training/coaching</i>	4	2	<i>FT derby</i>
Karma	Training/coaching	7	2	FT derby
<i>Lightning</i>	<i>Accessories</i>	1	2	<i>FT derby</i>
Mockingbird	Training/coaching	8	5	PT derby, PT non-derby
Moonstar	Skate shop	12	1	FT derby
Quartermain	Paid staff	13	8	FT derby
Raven	Skate shop	10	10	FT derby
Red Sonja	Training/coaching	6	5	PT derby, PT non-derby
Rescue	Accessories	9	6	PT derby, FT non-derby
Rogue	Skate shop	5	18	FT derby
Shadowcat	Skate shop	12	8	PT derby, FT non-derby
<i>Tank Girl</i>	<i>Manufacturer</i>	11	6	<i>FT derby</i>
Thunder	Accessories	1	2	FT derby
<i>Tico</i>	<i>Skate shop</i>	9	5	<i>PT derby, FT non-derby</i>
Tigra	Apparel	7	7	FT derby
Wonder Woman	Manufacturer	9	2	FT derby
Wren	Skate shop, training/coaching	9	2	FT derby

Note: Italicized names indicate entrepreneurs who were also leaders. FT = full-time. PT = part-time.

Table 3. Leader Social Demographics

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Parental Status	Education	Race	Gender	Employment Status
Amilyn	30	Single	Childfree	Master's	White	Woman	FT
Black Widow	36	Married	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman	FT
Bubbles	33	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman	FT
Eleven	19	Single	Childfree	Some college	White	Woman	Student
Hera	37	Married	Childfree	Master's	White	Woman	FT
Janeway	42	Partnered	Childfree	Master's	White	Woman	FT
Mothma	52	Married	Parent	Some college	White	Woman	FT
Mystique	37	Married	Childfree	High school	White	Woman	FT
Nite Owl	32	Single	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Man	FT
Obi-Wan	38	Partnered	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Man	FT
Oracle	36	Married	Parent	Master's	White	Woman	No paid work
Padme	31	Partnered	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman	Student
Phoenix	33	Married	Parent	JD	Black	Man	FT
Piers	34	Married	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Man	FT
Poison Ivy	36	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman	FT
Princess Peach	30	Married	Childfree	NP	White	Woman	FT
Rey	25	Single	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman	FT
Sage	40	Single	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Woman	FT
Scarlet Witch	40	Married	Parent	Bachelor's	White	Woman	PT
Sentry	41	Partnered	Childfree	Master's	White	Man	FT
Storm	43	Married	Childfree	JD	Black	Woman	FT
Xavier	36	Single	Childfree	Bachelor's	White	Man	FT
Xena	32	Single	Childfree	Master's	White	Woman	FT

Notes: NP means that the data were not provided. All leaders' employment is non-derby. FT = full-time. PT = part-time.

Leaders who were also entrepreneurs are not included in this table to avoid redundancy.

Table 4. Leader Derby Demographics

Name	League Size	Years in Derby	Years in Leadership
Amilyn	Medium	4.5	2
Black Widow	Medium	5	2
Bubbles	Large	5	2
Eleven	Large	10	2
<i>Emma Frost</i>	<i>Governance</i>	9	8
Hera	Small	5	2
Janeway	Medium	11	9
<i>Jubilee</i>	<i>Large</i>	4	3
<i>Lightning</i>	<i>Small</i>	1	1
Mothma	Medium	11	9
Mystique	Small	12	2
Nite Owl	Governance	6	3
Obi-Wan	Small	13	10
Oracle	Governance	10	9
Padme	Small	6	3
Phoenix	Small	4.5	3
Piers	Small	12	3
Poison Ivy	Small	8.5	4
Princess Peach	Governance	9	5
Rey	Large	3	2
Sage	Governance	12	9
Scarlet Witch	Medium	4	4
Sentry	Governance	8	4
Storm	Large	6	5
<i>Tank Girl</i>	<i>Large</i>	11	9
<i>Tico</i>	<i>Medium</i>	9	6
Xavier	Small	3	3
Xena	Large	5.5	5

Note: Italicized names indicate leaders who were also entrepreneurs.

Table 5. Sub-Group Comparisons of Relationship Status

Relationship Status	Leaders	Entrepreneurs
Married	15	16
Partner	6	12
Single	7	0

Table 6. Sub-Group Comparison of Parental Status

Parental Status	Leaders	Entrepreneurs
Childfree	19	14
Parents	9	14

CHAPTER 5: “I CAN’T IMAGINE BEING IN A DIFFERENT INDUSTRY”: DERBY WORK AS PASSION WORK

In this chapter, I detail entrepreneurs’ and leaders’ motivations in performing their paid/unpaid labor for derby. I argue here that derby entrepreneurs in particular do not fit the typical (gendered) norm of entrepreneurs as heroic, proactive, and concerned primarily with economic growth and firm expansion (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004; Lewis 2013). Rather, for the most part, entrepreneurs are accidental or reluctant, starting businesses or adding items that come about as a result of finding a passion for derby. They are driven by their love and support for the sport’s community rather than capitalizing on a popular trend, even those who later added derby products to an already existing business model.

Businesses and leagues tend to start as a reaction to a missing need, or derby-related products become an accidental addition to a pre-existing enterprise. With the intent to produce needed products for the community, most derby businesses are thus movement commercial enterprises, similar to rider-owned and -operated businesses within other sport subcultures such as BMX (Edwards and Corte 2010). Guided by providing for others, leaders and entrepreneurs alike emphasize that what they love most about their work is that they are making a difference for individuals or for the greater derby community. In practice, making a difference looks various ways, such as teaching skills, creating organizational change, offering resources, and building community.

Motivations in starting businesses

Timing of derby involvement and type of business influenced the decision-making process for turning an unpaid passion into a for-profit business enterprise or a derby organization. Entrepreneurs usually found derby before they started a business (this was always the case for leaders starting a league), but there were several cases where their business was open before they

stumbled upon derby. Participants began their derby work endeavors in *reaction* to a specific need, by *accident* rather than intent, or by taking an *opportunity* presented by need or circumstance. For clarity, while some cases had elements of multiple motivations, they are separated for analysis.

Reactive entrepreneurship

Eleven entrepreneurs created a product or service in reaction to a missing need, whether this was personal, local, or for the community more broadly. Original skate shop owners, physical trainers, and some apparel/accessories business owners fall into this category. All of these entrepreneurs' derby involvement preceded their business launches. These entrepreneurs did not have traditional business expertise, relying on experience from non-derby paid work (e.g. nonprofit organizations, direct sales, teaching).

Similar to the story behind Sin City Skates (see Study Context), shop owners who started skating prior to the *Whip It* bump shared an initial frustration with obtaining gear and opened businesses to alleviate the process. Shadowcat explains that she started her shop “because I was tired of ordering shit off the Internet and never getting what I wanted. Wrong size skates, shitty skates, crap wheels, etc., etc. I wanted to provide locals with a way to put on skates and then buy, not ordering online and crap-shooting.” Raven, whose shop preceded *Whip It's* release, seconded the difficulty in obtaining gear: “You were fending for yourself. We were doing a mix of ordering things on the Internet and going into skateboard shops and piecing together our safety equipment there and going to roller rink pro shops, mostly.” Piecing together a skating setup from whatever one could find reflected early derby's DIY ethos, though it did not make the process any less frustrating. Lack of knowledge and unknown commitment often led early skaters like Tico to purchase cheap gear not adequately designed for derby's physicality, as she recalls her beginning days as a skater: “I had no idea what I was getting into. [The league] gave me a list of stuff [to

buy], and I was like, I'm just gonna buy whatever's cheapest because I don't know anything about anything.” The impetus that drove Tico to later open a local shop was the overwhelming number of gear requests a teammate received when she was planning to stop by a skate shop hours away:

One of our teammates was coming down after a work event or something and emailed the team, “Hey, I'm gonna stop by this shop up here, see if they've got such and such, does anybody want me to pick up anything?” And there's this huge thread from the whole all-star team that [said] “these wrist guards, these knee pads, these laces, these toe covers.” It was just tons of stuff. And then a whole bunch of “if they don't have that, then I guess I'll take this,” and trying to figure out money and who was gonna PayPal who, and it was just irritating. And I was like, “All right, that's it. I'm gonna start a skate shop.”

Tico's story highlights the pain in outfitting an entire team in trusted, quality gear. Skaters living outside of the United States have an even more difficult time doing so, and they are often forced to buy cheaper gear due to availability and cost even if they would rather support derby-owned companies. Emma Frost recalls the ordering process when she started skating:

Everything had to be ordered from the States. ... 'Cause at the time, we would place group orders for an entire fresh meat intake, and you would hope that they didn't forget your skates or (laughs) that the skates you ordered fit, and if they didn't, there wasn't a possibility to send them back because of customs and exchange and all of that, shipping. So you were stuck with them or you had to sell them off to somebody else and then you'd have to wait for the next couple months later when another fresh meat intake would come 'cause it just wasn't worth ordering them on your own. ... And after a couple years of that, that's also why we decided to open our own shop because it was just such an unsatisfactory experience, and an expensive one at that. Those two things just shouldn't go together.

Refusing to continue dealing with long waits, expensive costs, and the risk of an incorrect order, Emma Frost saw a desperate need to open a shop for the local community. Following that trend, more shops have now opened in the Global North to ease accessibility for European and Australian skaters.²²

²² Within the Global South, Derby Without Borders (DWB) has been at the forefront to increase accessibility of the sport. Campaigns include equipment distribution and travel fundraising. Several derby-owned businesses, such as Quad Roller Skate Shop, Double Threat Skates, and Strong Athletic have previously collaborated with DWB in collecting equipment and donations.

Jean Gray's accessories business is another that was launched in reaction to a need, albeit more individual. Tired of dealing with bacteria-ridden, sweaty gear, she used her crafting skills to create her own deodorizer: "I didn't like that we'd have practices that were stacked two nights in a row, 'cause you end up putting your stuff on and in the winter, we couldn't get it to dry, and I didn't like the thought of bacteria growing in there. Some girls would use Lysol spray, and I didn't like the chemicals. So I kinda hem-hawed around and I came up with [this item]." Being a new skater when she came up with the item, Jean Gray kept silent until the other skaters saw her item. "[A teammate] was like, 'These are amazing!' So I started making them for the team." Her teammates encouraged her to sell her product online, which she eventually did. Note that initially, Jean Gray did not intend to start a business; she was just looking to fulfill a personal need. It was through her teammates' encouragement that she shared her once-individual item with the derby community. Her shop is a valuable resource online, but it now also fills a vital local need: "In our area, there's no skate shops, no nothing. So to find any type of gear or mouth guards, there just isn't much out there."

Physical trainers were spurred to fill a knowledge deficiency in derby-specific athletics training. The lack of expertise partially stems from the sport's DIY ethos and the desire to counter mainstream sports almost to a fault, as Aurora explains: "[In other sports] people know what they should be doing for training. Whereas roller derby, it's this weird like, 'oh, we're gonna invent everything for the first time and we're never gonna look at any other sports and what they do.'" While there has been a definite shift since 2010 toward derby as an athletic endeavor, particularly for top-ranked teams (Filasky 2013), early skaters tended to react ambivalently or dismissively toward the idea of being an athlete (Breeze 2014). Aurora recalls that when she started skating prior to *Whip It*, "people were still taking smoke breaks in the parking lot between drills and stuff

like that. So [derby] definitely wasn't [a] super kind of health-focused thing.” When a dramatic increase in teams following *Whip It* meant more opportunities to play, the result was a greater amount of physical intensity without necessarily a balanced attention to recovery: “Suddenly there were people who were going from basically 0 to 60, and putting their bodies through a lot without any kind of maintenance and care on the other side, like how to prepare their bodies for all that abuse and how to rest and take care of themselves and things like that.” Being embedded within the community helped lead her to the realization that training insight was needed and welcomed. Aurora recognized that the passion of her fellow skaters to get better at their sport could be channeled into simple training regimes: “There’s so many people who are so fervent about roller derby, and they just want to do anything [to get better], but...a lot of people are missing this one big piece that doesn’t take any talent or time on your skaters or anything like that.” There is still no commonly accepted standardized training regimen for roller derby, and many individuals come to the sport without previous athletic experience. As a result, Aurora saw a “vacuum of knowledge that needed some filling for people to not hurt themselves” playing derby. After writing some initial blog posts, she launched a derby-specific training business to help fill this knowledge gap.

While Aurora’s business addressed community needs from the start, Karma had a personal motivation for launching her enterprise beyond filling a knowledge gap. Experiencing firsthand the bodily abuse Aurora alludes to above, she soon realized that she needed to take better care of herself for the sake of her child:

When you have a kid, you realize that if you die, there's no one else to take care of this thing, that you trust enough to raise your own child. Even though I'm gonna fuck up and that's fine, but the way I fuck it up is better than the way anyone else could fuck up my child. So it was just this [realization that] I'm not doing enough to take care of myself in general. I come home from practice and I have to wrap my whole body in ice and I can barely walk sometimes.

Watching her teammates suffer similar problems with injury and exhaustion sparked the idea to devise a training program. After measuring improvement in their skating performance, it was then that Karma decided to spread this knowledge as a training service for the derby community:

Then I started to see other skaters having some more problems where they had high rates of injury, they were training a lot, they were exhausted, their performance wasn't improving. And so I took some of those skaters under my wing a couple years ago, and I was like, "Just let me try something with you for 3 months and if you hate it, you can stop." And they all saw lots of improvement and I was like, "Maybe this is something that I should bring to the larger community."

Karma notes that although her business is derby-related, she started it as a mother wanting to better care for her son, not specifically as a skater. A personal trouble (taking care of her body for her child) and a lack of success with other training programs led her to create her own. She did not intentionally seek entrepreneurship. It was not until she saw results in her teammates that she decided to share the program with the larger derby community.

Though league founders do not create enterprises in the traditional sense, they start leagues as a reaction to an unfulfilled need. Twelve leaders helped to start leagues so that they could play derby in their area, or to give their city an adult leisure activity. The common thread to their league origin stories was that they or an acquaintance had watched a derby game out of town and wanted to recreate it locally. After seeing men's derby for the first time at a tournament, Nite Owl wanted to start a local league: "I went to ECDX²³ in 2011, 2012, maybe. And I was first exposed to men's derby. I loved it, thought it was great, and I started a league back in my hometown to be the first men's league in that area." Aside from bringing derby to their neighborhood, league founders cited other personal reasons. Janeway was drawn to the fact that she could see herself in the competitors, unlike other sports: "[I thought], 'This is amazing, I can't believe I'm watching this, these people look like me, they have bodies like me, they're my age!' I just got so excited then that I said we

²³ East Coast Derby Extravaganza, hosted annually by Philly Roller Derby.

have to do this [in my city].” Obi-Wan, who volunteered for women’s leagues, decided he wanted to have the same fun that the women were having: “We wanted to play. It was, 'Hey, the girls are having a lot of fun doing this, and we have a ton of fun helping.' Like [you] kinda wonder, why are they doing this? It must be super fun!” Poison Ivy, who had drifted between leagues for a short period, decided to build a league to meet people and to offer a needed social activity for her area: “There was this big hole [in my area] where there was no roller derby. ... And I didn't know anybody when we moved up here. But also, there's not much to do around here. And I just thought that it would be a good fit for giving people things to do.”

When met with barriers to doing their passion – buying the wrong gear, dealing with injuries, no league in the area – some entrepreneurs and leaders will decide to take matters into their own hands and fill the need themselves. Whether the initial motivation is for the individual or for the community, each benefit in the long run.

Accidental entrepreneurship

Compared to reactive entrepreneurs who intently filled a need themselves, accidental entrepreneurs were approached about filling a need and were reluctant to do so for pay (at least at first). Entrepreneurs in this category used phrases like “I just ended up with it” (Tank Girl) or “it happened by accident” (Captain Marvel) to signal that they did not intend to be derby business owners. More so, derby found them, and they cautiously answered the call.

Eight entrepreneurs were asked if their preexisting product or service could apply to derby. Apparel, accessories, and some skate shops fall into this category. This includes the seven entrepreneurs whose businesses preceded their derby involvement (Betty Boop, Harley, Tigra, Rogue, Wonder Woman, Thunder and Lightning) and Furiosa, whose father initiated a product

design and asked her about its application to derby. These entrepreneurs also did not have traditional business expertise but rather learned from their past hands-on experience.

Within my sample, Rogue is the only skate shop owner whose business preceded her involvement in derby. Because her store carried skateboard equipment, she was approached by an acquaintance about stocking derby gear after *Whip It's* release. She heard about the difficulties skaters had in ordering gear, learning that the traditional business model of buying from skate rink pro shops was no longer applicable: "I was like, 'Can't you just buy that at your rink?' 'Cause when I grew up as a kid, there were the pro shops there. So [I told her] just go to the rink and she's like, 'No, the rinks don't sell that stuff. I can't find it, I gotta order everything online.'" After conducting some initial research at her customer's encouragement, Rogue decided that she could start with a small amount of inventory and gradually increase her stock. She recalls the glee she and her employee had upon seeing the first bit of inventory come in: "As soon as the first pair of roller skates came through the door, both [my employee] and I were like, 'We need roller skates! (laughs) We need them!'" Eventually, her inventory grew and she joined a local league, thinking it would be a fun activity. Looking back, she feels derby was an ideal addition to her shop specifically because it catered to women and crossed over mechanically with skateboarding: "Skateboarding mostly caters to men, boys. And being a female and [my employee] being a female, we wanted something for women, for girls, for women of all ages. Something. And we'd been looking and looking, and...derby was perfect." Not knowing firsthand how hard it was to obtain gear, it was through research and encouragement that Rogue decided to stock derby items, and it was an accidental fit that worked perfectly.

Prior to joining derby, Betty Boop had a side job of sewing children's items, which slowly transitioned into creating derby clothing when her teammates learned of her sewing skills:

When I started roller derby, I had a girl on my team who asked if I could make her some shorts. And I was like, “No, I’ve never made women’s clothing, so...” She’s like, “Well, just try,” and I was like, “OK.” So I made a pair of shorts, and then everybody on the team wanted a pair. And two pairs and three pairs. And... I was like, “This is really fun,” ‘cause I love sewing and I love roller derby, so maybe we could make that work.

Betty Boop was initially reluctant to make the clothing because she felt it was out of her purview, but she went with the encouragement from her teammate to “just try.” After some trial and error with custom orders for teammates, she decided to launch a derby apparel company to combine her love of sewing and derby. She did not anticipate the company going viral shortly after launch: “It was crazy. I think in the span of 24 hours, we had like 3,000 orders. And I just freaked out and was crying ‘cause I was like, ‘I’m only one woman!’” An accidental and literal overnight success from a gamble that paid off, she has been able to maintain this work full-time ever since.

Harley had an existing apparel line when she stumbled into the world of derby, thanks to a piece that crossed over well with the sport’s aesthetics of the time:

I found [some] really cool sparkly pink leopard print spandex. At the time, it didn’t suit my collection at all, but I just loved it. I was like, “Oh my God, what are we gonna do?” So I made a pair of booty shorts out of it. And then it was kind of fun, so I made a couple other shorts out of them, just had [them] at the bottom rack of my collection. And I was set up at this festival, and a bunch of girls came up and were looking, and they were like, “Oh my God, you sell roller derby bottoms!” [And I said] “Oh, I guess you could wear them for that.”

After this chance encounter, the women connected Harley to a local skate shop owner who was interested in carrying her items. Harley was initially reluctant to categorize her apparel as for derby, saying “I don’t really make derby stuff,” but she was willing to make some custom items. It was not until the owner started consistently placing large orders that Harley started paying attention, thinking that this niche might be worth exploring. She initially joined derby for product testing and to gain insider knowledge, but a growing love for the sport surpassed these motivations for sticking with it: “I started getting more interested in seeing exactly what derby people needed,

and then the best way to do that is to join, so I joined the [local league] near my area and started playing derby so I could test out my gear. And then I just fell in love with it, so I stayed with it.” Harley quickly recognized that in order to learn what the community needed, she had to at least engage with the community if not become part of it. Upon seeing derby, her story is like that of most who enter the sport: love at first sight.

Four other entrepreneurs can be classified as having a specific form of accidental entrepreneurship: their paid labor is an extension of a service they were already providing to the derby community upon request for free. Coaches and paid staff fall into this category. All participants in this category were involved in derby prior to their work. Of these entrepreneurs, one had prior business experience, one had education, and two had neither. As time passed, circumstances shifted so that these individuals were compensated for their labor.

Paid staff were offered employment in part because their skills and time devoted to building derby were recognized by others who felt they should be compensated. Gaia, for example, had experience in building her league’s infrastructure, conducting research on how to run a nonprofit organization and making sure it would be operated by the book: “I [wanted] to make sure we’re doing this all right. A lot of leagues just kind of treated it very much like it was a club.” Gaia was determined from the start to treat the upstart league as a business rather than a recreational sports club, suggesting twofold that she viewed her derby labor as work and that this orientation was rare at the time. On top of starting a league, she was working 60+ hours per week at her paid job. “I was basically working more than two-full time jobs,” she recalls. “It was insane. I was exhausted all the time.” To sustain the organization, Gaia was offered employment at a time when her unpaid derby work noticeably spilled over to her paid work: “My boss, he was tired of derby being such a huge part of my life, and [at the] same time [my leaguemates said] you’re really splitting your

time, you're exhausted. We need to hire you. This is too big." Gaia was not clear on whether she felt her labor should be compensated, but her story indicates her eventual employers saw monetary value to her time and labor, and that they could ease the burden of splitting her time by offering her a salary. She agreed to quit her paid job and go full-time for derby, a post she has held since.

Similarly to athletics training, the notion of coaching derby as a serious endeavor was laughable at first, as Captain Marvel reflects on the years prior to starting her business: "That first Rollercon, there was an afterthought to have a meeting about coaching derby. I remember we walked past the room and kind of giggled at these people sitting around a whiteboard...and they were talking about how to coach derby. We were just like 'ha!' and then we walked past it." When derby-specific coaching began prior to *Whip It*, they were often in the form of requests for help from newer leagues, which was how Captain Marvel started coaching: "[A visiting skater] was like, 'Yeah, I'm starting a roller derby league,' and I was like, 'That's awesome, I'll come coach you all!' And so it was just an offer, and we stayed in touch."

At first, it was the norm to offer these services for free, despite the amount of labor involved (e.g. travel, planning content, interacting with clients). "I actually coached for free forever," says Tank Girl. "A lot of us coached for free at first." However, as she notes, this was only a sustainable venture if coaches had additional employment: "I always had another job. ... I made as much money as I needed to make, and I didn't necessarily need to make money from coaching. But other coaches did." The rationale behind receiving compensation was to recoup lost wages and time from their non-derby paid work. Captain Marvel also did not charge in the beginning, but that changed when she started traveling internationally: "I was like, well, this is rad, but when I go do this, I can't actually make income at my job, so I need to start charging leagues." Determining the value of her time and expertise meant striking a balance between a fair price for clients and a fair

wage for herself. She wanted to keep rates affordable for the community, comparing the going rates for other sports coaches: “If you went and [said], ‘Yeah, I’ll coach your roller derby league, it’s gonna be \$50 per person per hour,’ that would be \$5000 for a weekend. And...that would be unaffordable. People couldn’t give that.” At the same time, because this was her full-time work, she needed to earn enough to live: “I remember one time I coached the longest clinic ever and I was literally stuttering at the end of the very last session. I was like, I can’t do two 13-hour days for \$1000. That’s just exploitation.”

In these stories, while both Gaia and Captain Marvel appeared to view their labor as real work, Captain Marvel was more conscious about earning a living wage from it. Other coaches, including Tank Girl (who did so reluctantly, given she had other employment), followed the trend and began charging an amount with which they were comfortable. Nonetheless, their labor still originated out of a place of passion for the sport.

Opportunistic entrepreneurship

Five entrepreneurs “saw an opportunity,” to use Daria’s words, to purchase a preexisting business. From their view, the opportunity presented itself as a result of them being in the right place at the right time, still suggesting a degree of accidental luck. Manufacturers or skate shop owners who were not the business founders fall into this category. It should be noted that the original intent of the businesses was to fill a need within the derby or skating community, and the new owners continue that mission even though they (more so than the other groups) actively pursued derby as a career. All business owners in this group were involved in derby before taking over ownership. Of this group, only one had traditional business education, while another had access to someone with education.

The typical story was that the original owner was no longer interested in maintaining the enterprise, and the new owner was able to take over. Moonstar had left paid employment in order to care for her child, whose health needs required her to take leave from work to pick him up from school or take him to doctor's appointments: "That made me feel like I really wasn't a very desirable candidate for employment where, yeah, I have all these qualifications, but I'm gonna be kind of unreliable." She considered opening her own business but did not have an idea of what skills she could bring to market except for her derby-related technical knowledge: "The only thing I really know much about is, I'm kind of a roller derby gear geek. I really get into reading about wheels and plates and giving people advice on what they should do and fixing their stuff. I was already doing that with my teammates." Like other accidental entrepreneurs, Moonstar already had a passion for the sport and was giving gear advice for free before a paid opportunity presented itself. Yet she held off on the idea because there was already a skate shop in the area and she did not want to risk putting both of them out of business: "It's such a niche market, to have two brick and mortar shops with that little distance in between them, it just didn't seem to me like it'd be a great idea." This decision demonstrates the care for other derby entrepreneurs in not wanting to harm their business (while it is antithetical to capitalist competition). By coincidence, the shop owner announced that they were closing the store in order to pursue other interests. The shop was profitable, but it was no longer rewarding for the original owner. Moonstar approached the owner about selling the shop to her, to which the owner agreed. "It was kind of a right place at the right time kind of deal," she says.

Receiving sponsorships is distinct from owning a business, but two participants in my sample who benefitted from sponsorships²⁴ noted that landing one can require an entrepreneurial approach – networking and being in the right place at the right time. Mockingbird described her ability to sell as “hustling,” while Quartermain referred to it as “bartering.” Both gave examples of how they negotiated a deal with a sponsor.

One of Mockingbird’s friends introduced her to a new apparel/accessories brand that, at the time, did not have their products available for sale in the United States. Because she loved the product design, she asked for the contact information of the company and made an inquiry to them about purchasing:

I [sent an email saying], ‘Hey, I’m in [the US], [someone I know] was raving about your pants and they looked super comfy and I would love to try some on! By the way, tee hee hee, I noticed you don’t have any Americans on [your sponsored team].’ And [the owner said], ‘How about this, I’ll make you a deal – you do English content for me on social media and my blog, you’re [sponsored].’ I’m like, “(claps) Done.” So she sent me about \$400 worth of merchandise.

The accessories brand is one of Mockingbird’s “unintentional” sponsorships, all of which she attributes to her ability to sell, not necessarily her skating skill: “All of my sponsorships came by accident. There was not a single company that I actively went after. ... It just happened. I’m just good at hustling, that’s it.”

Quartermain had been trying to launch a derby apparel business but was otherwise unemployed due to the Recession. He had become acquainted with the founders of a derby-friendly promotional company by sharing booth space at Rollercon.²⁵ Still unemployed two years later, he made a proposition to them: “One day, I just sat down with the founder and I said, ‘What do you

²⁴ Individuals who benefitted from sponsorships were not explicitly included in my calls for participants until after a year of data collection. These two participants were entrepreneurs who had also received sponsorships – hence, an accidental find.

²⁵ Rollercon is an annual roller derby convention hosted in Las Vegas. For the entrepreneurs in my sample, having a presence at Rollercon was key to their business trajectories.

think about sponsoring me to go out on the road? ... I could take along all the different information about your company. In exchange for me going out there, most leagues would be more than willing to let me put a banner up or give you an ad.” The exchange was a win-win for all involved. The company gained the business of leagues looking for promotion, and Quartermain was offered employment by the company a year later.

Both stories have elements of accidental luck and purposive solicitation. Mockingbird characterizes her sponsorships as accidental, meaning that she did not contact companies requesting sponsorship outright. Yet in the above vignette, she slyly gave the sponsor an opening for a possible exchange of labor to obtain a new product she loved (“I noticed you don’t have any Americans on your team”), from which the sponsor made her an offer. Quartermain happened to share space with his eventual employers, an accident of circumstance, but he worked it into his favor by actively seeking sponsorship. That relationship worked to his advantage when the company later solicited him for employment (he did not apply).

The above business origin stories are mostly characterized by a “I’ll do it myself” reaction to fill a need, accident, circumstance, and reluctance. Entrepreneurs were encouraged by their teammates and friends to take their product/service to market because they saw it could help the community, even if the entrepreneur did not see it themselves right away. Recent finance blogs have described the rise of the “accidental entrepreneur” (Coleman 2018), business owners who do not fit the typical image of an entrepreneur destined to open their own enterprise. My data suggest that derby entrepreneurs predate this “rise,” not intending to be business owners but instead reacting to a chance to facilitate their passion.²⁶

²⁶ Daria was the only entrepreneur in my sample who said that she had always wanted to own a business of some kind – and she was also one of the few participants who had a business degree (BBA).

Entrepreneurship/leadership as making a difference: How passion motivates practice

Roughly half of the participants (25/51) used the word “passion” to describe their affinity for derby, whether they were describing the people, elements of the mission (e.g. women-led, DIY ethos), gameplay, or all three. Use of the term was unprompted by questioning.²⁷ Two other participants used synonyms such as “excitement” and “fervent” to describe emotions toward derby. Gaia’s statement about both her paid work and derby in general is representative of what others say about derby as a passion: “I can’t imagine being in a different industry. I love roller derby. I love the people in roller derby. I love being a part of something that’s just growing in an organic and awesome way. I have a ton of passion for it.” Here, Gaia’s passion for derby is multi-faceted: the sport itself, the type of people that flock to it, and being part of a larger grassroots community. Twelve entrepreneurs specifically used “passion” to describe their love for their derby work, with some like Gaia, Raven, and Tigra unable to envision doing any other work as their occupation.

Beyond the business origin, how does this passion play out in practice? An individual’s passion for the sport can lead them to give back to a game and a community that has given them a beloved social activity, a healthy lifestyle, or even a chosen family. My participants consistently claimed that what sparked or renewed their passion was *making a difference*. Eleven participants, leaders and entrepreneurs alike, explicitly referred to their work as “making things happen,” “making a difference,” “making a change,” or “doing their part.” Regardless of how “making a difference” looked in practice, a common thread that ran through all of these types was participants’ joy of “seeing people happy.” All but one participant discussed how their paid or unpaid derby work made a difference in some way, thinking beyond their needs to those of the collective.

²⁷ However, the title of my project, “From Passion to Profit,” was listed on the information sheet distributed to participants prior to the interview.

When closely examined, “making a difference” means facilitating the sport of derby in some way for an individual, an organization, or for the derby community. While they are separated for clarity, some participants did accomplish multiple types and/or multiple levels simultaneously. For example, a shop owner may provide gear to individuals locally and provide online educational resources for the derby community at large.

Creating skater-athletes

Four entrepreneurs and eight leaders found joy in teaching skating skills and watching clients/teammates accomplish goals. Except for Mothma, all had paid/unpaid roles as coaches, trainers, or team captains. This form of making a difference was done for individuals or teams.

Participants in this group, whether performing paid or unpaid labor, spoke about watching their clients/teammates transform their bodies and learn new skills. Jubilee (former entrepreneur/leader) was very proud of her work to help transform her clients into beasts on the track: “I took them sometimes from these shy girls to these over-egotistical women. (laughs) ... They’d come in like sheep and I’d send them out like lions. That was my best part. Seeing them own their shit... It felt like, ‘Come in, little lamb,’ we would work together, and then they would go out and they would be a wrecking force.” In addition to meeting virtual clients in person, one of Aurora’s (entrepreneur) favorite parts of her work is “getting an email from someone that tells me that they succeeded in something, they made their roster or they made their 27-in-5²⁸ laps.” When Red Sonja (entrepreneur) coaches hands-on classes, she feels most rewarded with her clients’ “aha” moments where they accomplish a daunting skill: “In every class I teach, there’s always a moment...where someone just gets this look on their face and you know that you’ve

²⁸ “27-in-5” refers to a WFTDA/MRDA minimum skills requirement that evaluates endurance and skating form. Skaters must skate at least 27 laps in 5 minutes in order to pass. For many new skaters, this portion of skills testing is the most worrisome, and there are multiple derby blogs written about how to pass it.

helped them achieve something that they didn't think they were gonna be able to do. [By the end of the session] you just see this overwhelming sense of joy and accomplishment come out of them. For me, that's the biggest reward.” As a skater development trainer for his league, Nite Owl (leader) experiences a similar rewarding feeling of watching new skaters grow and achieve their goals:

I just have a genuine joy of seeing people who have never skated before—in some cases, never having come from an athletic background—really fall in the sport, stick to it, progress, learn stuff that they didn't learn at the beginning of practice. It gives me a very sincere happiness to see new skaters do new things. I can't tell you how many 27-in-5s that I was just elated to see that person pass and do it, and after weeks and weeks and weeks of trying, they just nail it. I love it.

Mothma's (leader) joy comes from watching her leaguemates gain confidence in themselves through skating and fashion an athletic identity, perhaps for the first time in their lives. For her, the payoff is seeing the psychological mindset change in addition to the physical ability:

Being able to see the progression of somebody who had never had the confidence, that kept the sport in their life, to see them progress. To see their self-confidence build. To see them become comfortable in their own skin. Comfortable enough to be who they want to be. And not have to kinda fit into a specific mold. To see people develop the self-confidence and a good body image is nice. ... It is good to see [people] develop into an athlete and come to the realization that they are an athlete. It's a good feeling.

Watching others develop a passion for the sport and succeed at it in ways that can expand beyond the track, such as positive body image, helps to sustain the passion of these trainers and leaders. While this work is done for the benefit of others, Red Sonja jokes that there is also a “selfish” component to watching someone achieve a skill: “It's the selfish thing, when you're like, ‘I know this is all about you right now, but I feel really good about what I just did. (laughs)’” Making others happy about accomplishing a goal also works for the trainer, who accomplished evoking that feeling.

Oracle (leader) experiences a similar feeling of pride both as a coach and a leader when she watches “her kids,” as she refers to junior skaters in her organization, age out and succeed at

the adult level. She explains that this is because, until recently, junior skaters were largely ignored by the world of adult derby:

We always said these kids are gonna walk out [of junior derby] and they're gonna take your charter spot, and you need to start paying attention to our kids. As a mom, like we were screaming it, "You need to watch these kids!" ... And now they're aging out and they're taking those charter spots... Every time I see one make the charter, I just want to point and go, "I told you so. I told you." Makes me happy. There's a lot of joy in that.

Oracle makes a difference in the lives of "her kids" by coaching them and then shares their glory when they succeed as adults. She is both a literal and figurative mother feeling success by watching her children achieve. Having advocated for them "as a mom" for years, she also feels personally vindicated that her efforts and belief are paying off ("I told you so").

Creating organizational change

Ten leaders were drawn to the administrative aspects of serving their organizations, specifically the desire to "fix" or solve problems (Storm, Gaia, Janeway, Rey, Amilyn, Nite Owl, Xavier, Piers, Sage, Tico, Oracle). Emma Frost describes herself as having a "natural affinity" for leadership. Others like Piers, Scarlet Witch, and Black Widow describe themselves as "Type A," suggesting that they are well suited to organization, solving problems, and accomplishing tasks without much interference. Piers says that the administrative tasks can be stressful but fun for him: "I like helping people. I like being organized and effective and getting things done. Like that's fun for me. So running things business-wise is kind of fun. Telling people what to do is fun. It's stressful, but it's fun." Amilyn saw her administrative skills as more valuable to her league than her skating skills, and thus was encouraged by the outgoing president to step into a leadership role: "I'm good at the administrative stuff. ... I think I'm detail-oriented and pretty good writer, good communicator. Yeah, I guess willing to be a little bit bossy."

Problem solving was a motivation for leaders like Xena, Hera, Oracle, and Scarlet Witch to step into their current leadership role. All shared the sentiment that stepping into leadership to improve their organizational aspects would be more productive than just complaining about them, summarized here by Scarlet Witch:

There were things that I saw that I felt like we could change, we could do better. And my feelings are, you have two choices. You can either complain about it or you can do something about it. I don't like when people complain about it 'cause it creates bad vibes and drama. So I put my money where my mouth is and I put my name on the ballot. And I got it and here I am, two years later, still doing it!

If not an initial primary motivation, other leaders like Rey eventually realize that they are in the best position to create the change they want to see. Describing herself as a “pretty motivated person,” Rey sees her role in PR as a way to “put my love for this sport into my work and leadership to better the league.” In this way, passion for derby and an itch to solve problems guide her work: “I can do projects, create events, do stuff that I've been wanting to do since I first joined the league and was wondering why don't we do this. That's what I like about [my position]—being able to get something done. I'm very much a ‘if I see a problem, I want to fix it’ type person. So I'm able to start trying to fix problems.” Indeed, in Oracle's advice to those considering leadership, she makes the point that being a bystander will not bring about desired changes:

The main reason I think anybody should get into leadership of any sport that they're involved in or anything they feel passionately about is if you feel passionately about it, watching from afar is not going to shape it into what you think it should be. The people that are passionate about it but don't get involved are the people that are gonna have complaints. Because they have unmet expectations. So they're expecting something from this sport and they're not getting that expectation met. Where if you get involved at a board level or even a committee level in a part that you think that you have the ability to better, you're part of shaping the sport.

Seeing problems, she put herself in a position in leadership so that she would be able to do something about it. Recognizing that those who come to her with complaints have the same passion, she harnesses their energy spent complaining and redirects it to a more productive end:

“Somebody told me that I was the Oprah of roller derby, but instead of giving out cars, I gave out jobs.” Oracle advises engagement rather than passive acceptance, which falls in line with the “for the skaters, by the skaters” DIY ethos of the sport.

Fifteen leaders discussed seeing how their work directly impacts their organization in terms of tangible and intangible outcomes as a rewarding part of leadership. Outcomes included “seeing people happy” (as Xena put it), running a successful event, securing sponsors, recruiting more members, and accomplishing long-term league goals (e.g. leasing a warehouse for practice space). These leaders suggest there is personal satisfaction in working toward something larger than oneself. Mystique describes it plainly in terms of having a hand in her league’s success: “Just knowing that certain things happen just because of you, or certain things were a success because of you. It's kind of uplifting.” Hera says also: “You feel the success. You’re not just on the sidelines. You get to feel that you are a part of something.” As sponsorship chair, Eleven’s work to land a prestigious sponsor is both a personal achievement and an achievement for the league. She speaks with a collective mindset when gushing about the “for the skater, by the skater” operations model of her league:

You're not just showing up at practice and playing, like you're actively trying to make sure that your league is successful and continues. And it's something that when you go home, you can be proud about. My league is like this because I helped it be there. For me, I get to be like, 'I obtained [company] as a sponsor and they're still there.' That's something that I can be proud of 'cause it helps my league.

Ensuring the longevity of the league can be a task with immediate and visible repercussions, in the cases of founding a league or, in Scarlet Witch’s unfortunate case, bringing back a league from the verge of collapse. When she was elected into leadership, her league had lost their practice venue and all the previous board members, who had stepped down. With that starting point, finding another venue and gaining enough recruits to form an additional team have been significant

accomplishments for Scarlet Witch and the rest of her board. Watching the league bounce back is the best part of her work, she says:

Being able to see us go from this point to where we only had one team and now we have two teams. And at one point, we were thinking we were going to have to throw in a third team. And that we're still financially stable, and for the most part people are happy with the policies. They're happy with what we've done. That's where I'm at. I think that's the best thing. Just that the league is still OK, we're still OK.

In other cases, leaders' decisions may have long-term consequences that do not become apparent until after their term is finished, and it can be difficult to see one's contribution. Yet some leaders are content to play the long game, doing their part to ensure their leagues are still standing for the future – making sure derby is here for others. Bubbles (leader) sees one of the best parts of her work as being able “to direct [the league] towards a positive future, one that can sustain itself. ... It's been kind of rough, but it's kinda reassuring to know that we [the board] had a part of it, make sure that it's going in the right direction.” Gaia's (paid staff) joy similarly comes from making sure that her organization is still standing to spark passion for future waves of derby participants: “I've been here for many, many generations of derby girls, right? ... And I absolutely love to be here to make sure that [derby] is here for all those people who come to this and for whatever it fulfills in them. I like providing that.” Janeway (leader) harnessed her passion for the sport not only into initially building her first league, but by making sure that it would outlast her when she left. This has been a motivation for her to seek leadership in each subsequent league she has been involved in: “The passion for me, it was just like, I wanted to put everything into [derby] that I could because I cared so much about the league continuing once I was gone. And that's sort of been a theme in all the leadership that I've done is that I want to leave it better than when I got there.” Obi-Wan (leader) has held several roles that have granted him opportunities to travel and volunteer in large-scale events such as Championships and World Cup. Yet his end goal has “never

been about running everything.” Instead of being in charge, he would rather devote time to training others to take his place so that the organization can survive when he decides to turn his attention to other things:

It's all about training up those people who want to do it. Give them all the help to get there and then take my job, please. There's other stuff I can do. I don't want to be on top of everything. I would rather see 20 people kicking ass in 20 positions than one person running everything. But...if I hand off a specific position, that gives me enough time to help... If I'm not commander in chief, I'm gonna go out there and train foot soldiers.

Two leaders specifically talked about the group of people (rather than the organization structure) they serve as being a motivation to keep going. For Poison Ivy, a group of skaters she has known since the formation of her league is like family to her. On bad days, she remembers that they are the reason she continues her leadership labor:

That's what keeps me going. I'll get so frustrated sometimes and overwhelmed...just like today. ... I was totally overwhelmed and feeling bad. I walked in and as soon as I walked in, [one of my teammates] just came over and said “Hug me.” (laughs) And I hugged her. And then I felt better. And I've had some crazy crap go on in my life in the last year or two, and they just kinda remind me of what's important and why I keep doing this. So that's why I keep doing it. Believe me, probably at least [on a] biweekly basis, I want to throw the towel in. But I don't.

Poison Ivy is the president of a smaller rec-style league. While camaraderie is present regardless of league size, it is harder to share that with everyone the larger the league grows. When days are tough for Poison Ivy, her small cluster of chosen derby family comforts her. Having the league exist as a social outlet is important both to her and her teammates; without it, those bonds risk dissipating.

Providing local resources/capital

For 24 entrepreneurs in this sample, “making a difference” is providing tangible (money, goods) or intangible (knowledge, support) resources. At multiple levels, this can look like selling

an individual a pair of skates, giving a team a gear sponsorship, or teaching a regional officials community best officiating practices.

Seven entrepreneurs who provided derby goods highlighted the joy in selling products to customers that in turn make them happy. Moonstar describes how she helps skaters solve the problem of ordering the wrong skates, accompanying them at every step in the process:

I've had a few people come in so far who bought skates online and they don't fit right, and they're just so upset that they've got these skates and they don't fit right, and they're in pain every time they skate. And I'm like "OK, well..." [and I can] sit down and talk to them and find a boot that works for them. And then we build it and we put it on their feet—I've got nice wood floors in the shop, so I let them kinda skate around a little bit and feel it. And that look on their face when they're like "Oh, my God, this is it! I'm not in pain! This is the best thing ever!" That's really exciting. I get really happy for those people.

Recall that one of the major problems with finding gear is buying skates that do not fit, which drives the desire to open brick and mortar storefronts despite the high overhead. Moonstar's store gives skaters a space to try different options with a knowledgeable person who knows how a skate should feel—and who shares in the exciting moment when her skater-customers find the perfect set of skates. Cipher similarly shares her customers' joy when they express their love for an apparel piece she has made for them. She considers making other people happy her version of success:

I do have a lot of people that are so excited for their order to arrive and they tell me about where they're gonna wear it, and I am too [excited]. Sometimes I hear from them afterwards and after they wore it wherever, and it's really rewarding, I guess in a way...knowing that you created something that someone liked that much that they paid money for, their hard-earned money, on something that I make that they love, and they are so excited to wear somewhere. It really feels good.

Wonder Woman explicitly discussed deriving joy from serving the same community to which she belongs. She is invested in going above and beyond to make a difference for her customers, feeling like she is making dreams come true in terms of giving them the gear they want: "I get to be involved with the whole process from the start to finish, and be their point of contact if they have questions, or they need help, or they ordered the wrong size. I feel like we can go the

extra mile. If they ordered the wrong size, change their size for them at no charge. I would say that's [the best part], when you positively impact your customer and...my fellow skater, we just love it." The customer-seller relationship is also a skater-skater relationship. This extra care is taken in mind that making a difference for skaters makes a difference for the community.

Providing goods was often coupled with sharing knowledge, especially for skate shop owners. Ten entrepreneurs discussed sharing knowledge as part of their passion for their work, including three who also served as leaders. In addition to being a resource in terms of "getting people what they need," Tico loves being a source of information: "I've been around long enough that I know my shit, and if I don't know it, I know where to get it. And I really love that." Skate shop owners and others with mechanical knowledge recognize that there is a need for education within the derby community, as Daria describes: "There's so many people that don't even know basic skate maintenance, stuff like that. So just even having that knowledge available to help my friends that are in derby that don't know that kind of stuff has been great." To this end, entrepreneurs like Emma Frost, Furiosa, Raven, and Gambit provide educational resources for local customers and the greater derby community through in-person skate maintenance classes and online content. Like the shop owners who were frustrated with the lack of resources, they have created their own content to meet a need.

Prior to taking over her shop, Wren educated herself on skate brands and their business practices so she could give her customers "real legit" knowledge on what they were buying to ensure a good fit. Indeed, one of her motivations for becoming a shop owner was to directly counter the experience of skaters having product pushed toward them: "[To] actually know all the [skate] brands and be able to get people into genuinely something that made their feet feel happy. Just having the actual knowledge and applying it and not pushing product." It is important to Wren to

“not just be another store” that prioritizes sales and moving merchandise at the detriment of customer service. In addition, the brands she sells align with her business values in this regard:

I guarantee what you're gonna buy from me is gonna last and gonna feel good. So if it doesn't, I'm gonna take the product back and fix it so that people are working with me directly. And that's something that a lot of businesses don't do. So when you go on my website, you might not see every single product, right? Or every single brand. And there's a reason for that. Even though they might be great for some people, I can't put brands on there that don't have good business ethics or return products appropriately...if they're not gonna work with me to help work with a customer, I can't do it. I want to guarantee the stuff. I want to tell my customer that we're here for them.

Ten other entrepreneurs mentioned the importance of excellent customer service, sharing Wren's approach to some degree – at minimum, resolving issues quickly, and at best, having generous return policies and forming a personal rapport with customers. Wren emphasizes her customers (derby participants and other skaters) over profit, framing herself as going above and beyond what “a lot of businesses” do – even though this is par for the course among my sample of entrepreneurs. While excellent customer service is an ingredient for success in any industry, these entrepreneurs are also part of the community they serve. Putting the customer first is doubles as giving back to the community's people and upholding its anti-capitalist values.

In addition to selling hard goods, derby-related businesses try to offset expenses by providing skater/official discounts or team/league sponsorships; ten entrepreneurs mentioned that they did so. While Rescue cannot afford to give large sponsorship amounts compared to manufacturers such as Riedell, she considers this her way of giving back to the community:

I've never taken a profit [from the business]. Everything that I [make], so far, I will try to give back. I sponsor teams, I sponsor leagues, I help with fundraisers, I'll donate as much I can. Because I know I'm not in this to make a bunch of money. I mean, I should be, but I'm not. I'd rather sponsor a team or [do] something else besides (laughing) worrying about the profitability.

Rescue's derby business is part-time. While this factors into her decision to deemphasize profit, it is still worth noting that her priority is support the derby community rather than make money for herself (viewing this as a peculiar way to think about a business).

Beyond giving back to the community, a reason for hiring within derby (as a predominantly women's sport) is to support women in business, as Emma Frost explains further:

In this world that I live in right now, myself and many of the people that I care about are at a disadvantage for no other purpose than because of our perceived gender. And there are things that I can do both large and small to try to push back, to fight against that—and I think that taking each of those opportunities, however small are meaningful, and that a lot of the change that can happen in the long-term ideologies that we talk about have to do with [the] day-to-day. Just showing up and running this business. Or just making sure that when we're looking to contract people that we pass [money] in the direction of women as opposed to male contractors, or roller derby people as opposed to non-roller derby people.

To Emma, having a women-owned and operated business is an intentional “small wins” (Correll 2017) approach to remedying gender inequality. She recognizes that hiring women and derby contractors is a way to facilitate their lifestyle. While small, it is an everyday opportunity that is meaningful to the person who receives it. Tico is the only other entrepreneur who explicitly talked about helping other women entrepreneurs.²⁹ She acknowledges that her “labor of love” skate shop will not be very profitable, but the mission underlying its existence (to support derby, and by extension women) is more important: “It's still not ever going to be a giant money maker, but it's something that supports the local community and supports small businesses. Supporting people in derby is important. Supporting women entrepreneurs, that's really what we were more about. I'm OK with being mission-driven if it's a good thing.”

To a much smaller extent, some entrepreneurs also saw the value in (and benefitted from) creating a network of derby business owners. Thunder and Lightning's derby lifestyle business

²⁹ Thunder and Lightning did discuss the importance of belonging to a women entrepreneurs social support group, but this was not a derby-specific group.

introduces items to customers made by themselves and other derby business owners (stickers, apparel, bearings). If the customer likes an item, they can also support the business owner directly. While they have not been skaters for as long as other entrepreneurs, their intention has always been to help the derby industry grow. Thunder views this as part of her and Lightning's dedication to supporting small businesses:

Our goal from the beginning has always been to bring more awareness to the derby community in derby shops so that people will continue to shop small and shop local and all of that good stuff. "Hey, you didn't know about this small Etsy person that makes gear spray, but now you fucking do! Go check them out and see what they have, and see all the other awesome products they have." That gives me chills. ... [We] love the idea of, if we can bring even 5 more people to this person's shop, we've done our job.

Boosting other derby entrepreneurs has been embedded within Thunder and Lightning's business model from the start. Rather than compete for the limited market share, their service encourages customers to give their money to other businesses (and small business in general), demonstrating a mission-driven philosophy out of passion for the community.

Individual entrepreneurs also benefitted from support from other derby business owners through Facebook groups, in-person meetings at events, or direct solicitation. When Betty Boop's business went viral, she suddenly had more orders than she could humanly handle and was considering shutting down her website until she was able to catch up on the backlog. Talking with another business owner who had more years of experience gave her an alternative that saved her in a moment of panic: "I was like 'Uh, I don't know what to do! I shut the website down!' And she's like, 'Don't do that! Don't shut it down! Just put a lead time.' And I was like, 'Oh! Yeah! That's a great idea! I never thought of that!' I just was so freaked out and panicked, I just shut it down. If I would have shut it down and not opened it until I caught up, I would have lost all those sales." Rescue believes that the level of collaboration between entrepreneurs has increased in the past few years, which has helped reduce the sense of isolation: "There's good discussions that

happen every Rollercon, and then there's webinars and there's FB groups where we chat and give each other advice. So that has helped a lot because then you don't feel like you're a lost little person trying to figure out what on earth is going on.” This has been especially helpful when negotiating vending fees at large-scale events like Rollercon, where a collective means a stronger voice with more power: “Some of the tournaments and some of the events that were held, they would charge a whole lot for their booth space. And sometimes that's all you've got and you don't know, but if you can band together and say, ‘Look, this is ridiculous’ ...you can make suggestions in numbers that this cost is too high and give feedback that's consistent, and it's just not you by yourself yelling into the darkness.” Individual derby entrepreneurs giving advice and creating networks is consistent with Jean Gray’s sentiment that “derby likes to help each other.” It is also contrary to expectation when competing for a limited market share. Yet, aside from Rescue’s example, entrepreneurs did not elaborate further on a cohesive community, so this idea may be limited to those individuals who have the interest and time to help.

Building (inter)national community

For some leaders and entrepreneurs, it is not enough to support their local derby community, but to also aid in building and supporting the international derby community to ensure a positive, mission-driven future of the sport. Those who spoke about performing outreach for derby or women’s athleticism in general (Emma Frost, Red Sonja, Quartermain, Tank Girl, Shadowcat, Captain Marvel, Princess Peach, Sage, Nite Owl) emphasized building a welcoming, sustainable community. Except Red Sonja and Nite Owl, these entrepreneurs and leaders have all been involved in derby for a decade or longer.

Entrepreneurs here who provide both knowledge and hard goods, like the ones described above, go a step further and extend their efforts to a national or international scale. Shadowcat’s

business is part of a greater national organizational effort to support new derby leagues. She has since stepped back from the organizational aspects of her work, but she recalls the extent that she was willing to support a national derby program in its early growth stages: “[The organization] helped in so many ways. [We gave] info on how to start a league, how to run practices and we even traveled to run the practices. One time I drove 5 hours to run a 2-hour practice and then drove 5 hours back.” Making a cross-country trip for the sake of helping a new league is a significant investment toward the creation of a community and putting others above self. At the same time, the effort brings a great deal of joy to the community builder, as Red Sonja highlights: “It’s been this amazing blessing to be able to do something that makes me so happy but also makes others happy. Like that is what I love about it, is that it really does create a sort of community and a sort of environment where people just want to learn, they want to share, and they want to encourage and nurture and grow the sport.”

Emma Frost sees her shop’s success intertwined with the sport’s success, with facilitating the sport as the ultimate goal: “If we’re interested in ‘making more money,’ then what we really need to be doing is making sure that the sport is more visible, that more people are finding [it] and therefore more people are able to find us.” These efforts go beyond selling equipment and offering sponsorships, and include equipment drives and skater education. Emma sees these actions as creating a community in which skaters can thrive and become autonomous - to proactive build derby rather than allow derby to happen around them:

Creating a bunch of roller skaters is not the same as creating an environment inside of roller derby where people are passionate about the activity and what they’re doing. It’s always been a part of our shop’s culture that we go out and we do this training and this education...it’s not just about selling them equipment. It’s about making sure they know how to use it. ... [Success is when] skaters are able to facilitate their own autonomy, and knowing either what equipment it is that they want, or knowing who their representative is on a national level or how they get involved in learning all the rules.

In Emma's view, anyone can give a potential player a pair of skates and say they have helped. But to teach skaters in areas ranging from technical to governance is a transformative action, one that feeds directly into empowerment and ensures the sport remains in the hands of the skaters.

Tank Girl believes that giving derby participants the tools they need for success is as important as (or greater than) profit: "There's more to derby than sport. And there's more to business than making money." In fact, derby's collective, anti-capitalist ethos influenced how she runs her various business operations. Recall earlier that she initially offered her coaching services for free. While she now charges, she is still willing to create free content, advice, or help at fundraisers: "I will literally give you as much as I can from my company until I need to sell enough to keep the lights on." She believed that in order to keep derby alive, it needed to be spread internationally regardless of the amount of money she made, and so she concentrated her efforts to that end: "That was the best strategy for my own survival in the sport - for the sport itself, as far as I saw - was to just proselytize people with it." She recalls one of her many travels in which she saw firsthand the impact of her community-building work: "The first ref camp that ever happened in Australia, people cried. Like grown men. (laughs) Grown men were weeping that this had brought meaning and joy to their lives, and we were here to give them resources and tools and strengthen them. And that was really important to me."

Even if derby participants do not come to the sport initially focused on building community, this mindset can develop over time and with greater exposure to derby outside of their own backyard. In the first few years of Quartermain's derby career, he was more focused on personal opportunities within the game itself – for example, working high-profile events like Roller Derby World Cup or WFTDA Championships. Once offered employment, while he continued the same unpaid labor he had been performing as a volunteer, he felt a greater degree of

responsibility now that his labor came with a paycheck: “It actually gave me a stronger sense of responsibility to the community because that's how I'm wired. ... It's a different kind of commitment. ... It actually feels like more of a social commitment to do something right for society.” Now he is selective about his involvement, looking for partnerships or actions that will have a greater community impact: “I take all of my actions a lot more seriously, and they're done with more calculation and [are] thought through as to what the final outcome is going to be and for how many people more so than I ever did before.” He recalls his experience at the Roller Derby World Cup as an example of a shift in mindset away from the game and toward the *people* within the game. He recognizes that, in years prior, he would have been more concerned with being selected to work the tournament's championship games: “I was kinda laughing to myself...thinking about [being] in a room with 47 [other volunteers] and they had everybody nervous as to whether or not they're gonna work the last day or not. Which, probably 6-7 years ago would have been something I would have my ear to the wall about.” He was not selected to work the last day of the tournament, but he was able to connect with an international derby outreach group and offer logistics assistance in spreading their mission. Brokering these connections are the bigger wins for Quartermain: “That puts a lot more skip in my step than finding out I'm gonna [work] the final game of the WFTDA Playoffs, something like that. Because I know this is really gonna do something for somebody. ... I mean, I love that kind of stuff. Because that's the stuff that really matters, and that's the stuff that can really make a difference.”

Eight leaders, most of whom had been involved at the governance level in some capacity, talked about their determination not only to improve their organizations, but to make sure that derby overall would be an available, welcoming space for future participants. Nite Owl is driven

to make men's derby a more inclusive and diverse space, on a personal level and as an organizational representative:

My personal role is to just keep trying to be that person who is welcoming of change and welcoming of diversity and inclusion for everyone in [my league], men's roller derby, wherever. ... Trying to foster an environment where those things can happen is going to be what I want to focus on and what I want to do—if I were to leave a legacy or whatever behind, that is what I would want it to be, is to be the person who helped facilitate that change.

Similarly, Xena's positive experience in derby has given her a personal mission to make sure that derby is available to all, to give others the same gift that she has received by being in derby.

However, her motivation toward leadership is unique in my sample in that it comes from a place of explicit personal gratitude to the sport:

This sport has done so much for me as a person...that's definitely what motivates me to want to make it a place where more people can experience the awesome that I've experienced because of it. It's made my life so much better. If I can make other people's lives better through making this sport available to them, that's what's important to me. I want it to be available to everybody. Men, women, children, absolutely every gender, I want there to be a place for them. That's kind of my personal mission.

Princess Peach used the same phrase as Xena, referring to “giving this gift [of derby] to other people,” when she described her inspiration to become involved in leadership. When I spoke to her, she was preparing to step down from her position after years of service. She noted that one of the things she would miss the most was having a direct impact on creating an international community. Speaking in light of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and alt-right political shifts elsewhere, she has seen firsthand how derby participation broadens individual perspectives:

It means so much, not just to me, but giving this space to other people. Especially after this election season. ... There are so many people who I know who are different people and have different views, now that they've been a part of our community, and they're spreading that outside of roller derby. And they're not just saying it because they're a roller girl. They're saying it's because it's what they truly believe...

Having this community is important now more than ever, she says, because “not everyone has this space.” While she will have difficulty adjusting to not being directly involved in the sport, she can still look back on her role in building derby with happiness. She recalls acquaintances showing her online news videos of emerging derby leagues in the Middle East and Asia, demonstrating that her work to make derby visible has been meaningful:

Princess Peach: When you see the videos of skaters in India...

AD: Or Lebanon. Yeah.

Princess Peach: Yeah. Where you're like, I know I didn't give them their skates, but we as a community contributed to that. Like us being as visual as we can be, us making other people feel as positively as we have has really sent that ripple to change people's lives. Which is crazy. I mean, it's crazy in such a good way and just feeling like you can be a part of that, getting that feedback without someone telling you directly but sharing this [video] with you on Facebook, and you're like, “Holy shit. Really?!”

Conclusion

Whether leader or entrepreneur, virtually all the participants in my sample each saw something in derby that evoked a love and passion for the sport. This passion led them to seek leadership, entrepreneurship, or both to facilitate access to and enjoyment of the sport. League founders wanted to create a space for derby in their city. Eventual shop owners were frustrated with barriers to playing derby and wanted to make the process of obtaining gear to do their passion less burdensome. Apparel and accessories business owners either created a product to improve the derby experience (not having stinky gear) or make it more fun (wearing sparkly shorts). Coaches, trainers, and paid staff were already fulfilling their passion of teaching or building the community before receiving monetary compensation for it. Once in leadership or entrepreneurship, participants' passions are sparked or renewed by making a difference for the community. This is done through teaching skills to neophytes, fixing organizational problems, providing resources, and ensuring that an organization or the community will continue to thrive in the future.

Dominant images of entrepreneurs are wrapped in masculinity, with expectations of risk-taking, being decisive, and economically capitalizing on demand. Derby entrepreneurs' motivations are much closer to those of the knee pad manufacturers from Edwards and Corte's research (2010), driven by their desire to make a product that worked for them and not worrying about profit or even failure. Even with accidental or reluctant starts, they are still entrepreneurs. In conjunction with research that suggests women entrepreneurs are delegitimized for failing to meet this gendered criteria (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Bruni et al. 2004), this suggests the definition of success and entrepreneurship should be broadened.

Making a difference for the community directly feeds into derby's operation as a collective. Individuals come to derby to fulfill whatever individual need the sport fills, like exercise, meeting people, or building self-confidence. Yet as players and volunteers for a team sport fueled by collective volunteer labor, doing derby as "something for me" quickly becomes doing "something for others." Indeed, most leaders take on their unpaid labor to help their fellow athletes, their organization, or the sport as a whole. The community devotion is similar to the "helping ideology" observed among Black beauty salon entrepreneurs (Harvey 2005), in which salon owners assist stylists through hiring, giving business advice, and teaching skills. Among my sample, though, community generally meant the derby community. Only in rare cases did "community" refer to one's city, such as Poison Ivy's motivation to start her league as an adult leisure activity. With the extent of community service efforts variable depending upon each league's mission and member requirements, there is thus a tenuous connection to derby businesses and leagues as important spaces for the local community in this sense, and limited parallels to Black beauty salons and barbershops as community and socialization spaces.

Even though they are paid for their work, entrepreneurs are also motivated to serve as a resource for others, suggesting some limited categorization of derby businesses as social entrepreneurship. The closest direct examples are Tico's and Emma Frost's examples of providing capital and experience to other women entrepreneurs, as well as Karma's and Jubilee's examples of teaching their mostly women clients to recognize themselves as athletes and using their power. It is arguable that businesses and leagues with the explicit mission to create or facilitate an inclusive sporting space (especially for children) could also be interpreted as a form of social entrepreneurship. This comes with two caveats. First, as other authors of derby literature have argued, empowerment is limited to the individual. Second, as I propose in the next chapter, it is limited to individuals with enough societal privilege to persist in an entrepreneurship niche that is not financially lucrative, or to lead organizations with time-intensive requirements.

CHAPTER 6: DO WHAT YOU LOVE...FOR A LIVING? PRIVILEGE AND PRECARITY IN DERBY WORK

Working for passion, especially in the derby industry, is not always a feasible move, whether financially or otherwise. In this chapter, I make two arguments regarding the nature of derby as passion work. First, both leaders' and entrepreneurs' work for derby is enabled by "selfish choices" undergirded by societal privilege. Second, this privilege feeds the ability of entrepreneurs to persist in passion work because of its precarious nature.

I open the chapter with entrepreneurs' perspectives on "do what you love" as a way of life. To various degrees, entrepreneurs buy into that mindset, with those who were more mixed recognizing that doing what you love as employment is not for everyone. To explain the discrepancy, they invoke different rationales such as luck, hard work, and to a lesser extent societal structure.

Next, I discuss the role of flexibility and autonomy as "selfish choices" in entrepreneurs' and leaders' lives. Entrepreneurs are enticed by the idea of doing what they want, whenever they want, without an overseer for employment, and thus seek to become self-employed because of the promise of (in addition to passion) flexibility and autonomy that was not present in their previous jobs. This logic applied mostly to childfree entrepreneurs, some of whom were looking to balance derby as play with work. Entrepreneur parents, on the other hand, faced more of a constrained choice, seeing entrepreneurship as a mode of work that would allow them to better reconcile work and family conflicts. With flexibility, however, comes a price. Derby entrepreneurship is precarious, meaning that it is not well paid, unpredictable, and offers no benefits expected with employment, such as insurance or retirement savings. As most entrepreneurs cannot subsist solely from their paid derby work, they must rely on income from (men) partners or seek multiple sources of employment.

Leaders, on the other hand, are more likely to already have non-derby paid jobs that give them a level of flexibility and autonomy needed to take on unpaid derby work. In some cases, leaders are willing to stay in a job that allows them flexibility to do derby, even when given the opportunity for career advancement. Having the time to do leadership (thus being socially unfettered) matters more to being a leader than necessarily having the skill set, which impacts those who are parents or have caregiving responsibilities – and tends to prevent them from fully devoting themselves to derby.

Luck, hard work, or structure? Perspectives on “do what you love”

Thirteen entrepreneurs believed that they were doing what they loved for a living, and that this was an ideal way to live. “I’ve always dreamed of just staying at home and working with my husband,” says Betty Boop. “I’ve always wanted that.” Moonstar’s shop had recently celebrated its grand opening when I spoke to her, and she had nothing but positive things to say about “doing what you love”:

Any time that you’re able to do what you love and then still...be able to support yourself with it, like there’s no downside to that. Even with the long hours that I’m at the shop and I’m often by myself, I still really like it. I never come home feeling stressed out by work. I come home and I’m like, “Guess what I learned about today!” and I get excited about it. Yeah, it just feels good.

Similarly, Thunder and Lightning were new to the derby industry (but not to entrepreneurship) in that their business had been in operation for a year. Thunder recognizes the cliché in believing that “doing what you love” means that one never feels as if they are working, but she feels it is accurate all the same: “It’s such a cliché, but when you love what you do, it’s not work. It’s such a lame thing to say, and I wish there was another way to voice it, but that’s truly how I feel. I love everything that we do.” Even long stressful days have a silver lining around them, because they indicate that hard work pays off: “I love that we struggle because it just makes it that much sweeter

when we have these successes.”

Because Moonstar, Thunder, and Lightning are in the beginning stages of their derby entrepreneurship, it is reasonable to argue that the passion has not yet burnt out for them. Yet Wren and Quartermain have each been employed for derby for several years, and they talk about still doing what they love in the same ways: that even if their employment ended tomorrow, it was worth the experience and that it took hard work to get to it. Wren believes that in retrospect, her life decisions to prioritize her own needs (moving solo to a new state, for example) set herself up for the path she is on:

I feel so lucky. I mean, I know I did it for myself, but [I] look back and [I'm] like, every decision I made, even though they seemed selfish at the time, selling everything I owned [at home] and leaving... It seems selfish, but it literally put me on the right track to do exactly what I'm doing, to do what I love. Even if it doesn't work out in the long run, I'm one of the few people in life that can say, “I tried.”

Wren suggests that in order to “do what you love,” one must make decisions for their best interest – to be selfish. Not everyone is as willing to make the choices she has made (“I tried”). Being child-free, she has an easier time of doing so. Starting over in a new state and struggling financially were difficult decisions, but Wren believes that the struggle means that the end result will be worth it: “[Doing what you love], it's not gonna be easy, but I don't think anything worth it is ever easy. That's probably more indicative of how awesome it will be is how hard it is to get going or to maintain.”

Quartermain also believes that the “do what you love” mantra “absolutely applies to my life.” In concert with Wren, he believes he is part of a select portion of the population who is able to accomplish this dream: “It's gotta be a fraction of percent of people who will ever feel that, even if my job ended tomorrow, would ever feel like they ever got to experience anything quite like I did.” His children, who are college age, are worried about translating their passions into practical

jobs and are considering more stable options. When I asked him if he thought “do what you love for a living” was something to aspire to, he said, “I tell my kids that all the time,” using himself as an example: “The funny thing—and I laugh of course, 'cause I look at ‘em and...I'll throw my hands in the air and go, ‘Here I am! I'm the example! It doesn't get any better than this! (laughs) What do you want me to say? Seriously, what do you want me to say?’” He attributes his success to meeting the right people and being opportunistic:

I have a lot of people that tell me, “You're really lucky for what you got.” And I'll turn around and say—and I do this now, I didn't use to—I turn to them and I say, “You know what, I made my luck. I put everything I had into what I was doing. I was in it for the right reasons. I always made it a point to make sure that I got to know the people that were around me. When I realized that there was some opportunity, I asked for it.”

Quartermain's children's concerns reflect coming of age in a post-Recession era with increasingly unstable employment options, suggesting a generational divide. Acknowledging their environment, they are hesitant to take the risk that their father did in working for passion rather than for stability. Quartermain's experience is grounded in networking, bartering, and having good intentions, leading to his change of mindset from being “really lucky” to “making my luck,” and explaining this to others. From his perspective, his work resulted in a job he loves – he is the success story he can point his children to (“seriously, what do you want me to say?”).

Raven was unique in that she expressed some guilt about being employed in the derby industry. The guilt comes in knowing that she has fun at work and is paid for the privilege, and not everyone has that opportunity. However, she rationalizes those feelings by emphasizing the hard work she has done:

I do sometimes, I'll admit, feel a little guilty that I make money doing what I do. Because I have a lot of fucking fun doing it. I can skate around all day and do my job, with skates on if I wanted. And a lot of people don't get to do that. ... And some days we fuck around a little bit and have a lot of fun doing what we're doing. I'm conscious of the fact that not everybody has that. So sometimes I do feel a little bit of guilt for that. But I shouldn't. Because it's all by design. Like it didn't fall in my lap. I worked to get where we are.

Raven did not describe her decision as “selfish” like Wren did, but she did leave a corporate job that she considered “super boring” in order to work full-time at her skate shop – a decision made in her interest, in addition to providing for the community. Work is not supposed to be as fun as it is for her, and she feels guilty being one of the few who can experience this. Again, like the participants above, she draws on the discourse of hard work to demonstrate that she has earned the right to have fun at her job, despite the guilt. Working for passion takes an enormous amount of effort, but when done right, it does not feel like “work.” Wren and Quartermain’s comments suggest that they are also willing to ride the wave of passion work until it burns out (acknowledging that this is a real possibility) because regardless of outcome, the opportunity itself was valuable. Getting into passion work with no explicit worries about a backup plan in case of failure assumes confidence in being able to pivot out of this work to something else – and a level of privilege to not worry about making ends meet in the meantime.

Compared to those who indisputably believed in “do what you love,” nine had more mixed thoughts. Except for Rescue, these were full-time entrepreneurs who had been in business for at least three years. They believed that they were working in employment that they enjoyed but were more critical about “do what you love” as a life philosophy, at least when it applied to others. They were doing what they loved, but they recognized it is not for everyone, pointing more to cultural and societal explanations for the limitation.

Harley feels that she is doing work for passion rather than for money, acknowledging that it is hard to do so. At the same time, like Emma Frost, she recognizes that there are others who are content to have paid jobs not grounded in passion:

It’s not for everybody. Some things that you really, really love to do are not profitable, and you can’t pay your mortgage with a smile. So I see the benefits of having a 9-to-5 job that you go to, and you come home, you don’t need to bring your work home. You have

benefits. You have [retirement plans], all that adulting stuff. And then whatever your passion and your love is, you just do it on your own time, and when you want to.

Emma Frost believes that doing what you love “is awesome, if you can swing it,” and seconds Harley’s ideas in not discounting the experiences of those who need or prefer job stability over passion: “I think that if it’s something that you can do, that’s lovely and that’s wonderful. I think that not being able to choose but having a secure job that you know is going to feed, clothe, and shelter you, is also nothing to sneeze at.” She adds that the cultural expectation that people should “do what they love” is unrealistic and can impose unnecessary pressure on someone to figure out what that is:

I think that there are a lot of people who don’t know what they want to do, and so the idea and the pressure of “well, you should do what you want” is not freeing. It’s incredibly terrifying and stifling. I think there are people who honestly genuinely don’t want to feel the need to have to innovate or step outside of their comfort zone. I think that there are people that are happy to get up and go to work every day and come home and enjoy their family or enjoy whatever it is that they enjoy.

Rescue hints at societal structures standing in the way of everyone fulfilling their passion through paid work. Passion work may not produce a living wage, and “crappy” jobs (low paying, low status) still need to be filled: “What people love is probably not something you can live off of. Someone’s gotta do the crappy jobs. Someone’s gonna have to do them...” Captain Marvel has firsthand experience working a “crappy” job, and tells this story with Rescue’s same assertion:

I think that there’s a real drive right now to tell people “everyone can do what they love.” And I think that’s just not true because there’s some people that won’t get hired for anything but being a janitor... I’ve been a janitor, actually. (laughs) I cleaned a nightclub. And I didn’t love cleaning a nightclub, but I loved getting paid \$40 cash after cleaning a nightclub.

The above four share an understanding that working for passion is a privileged choice. They understand that financial instability comes with the territory of passion work, yet they are willing to take the risk themselves. Rescue, Emma Frost, and Captain Marvel hint at a mismatch between the ideal of doing what you love for a living and the realities of social stratification. Though they

are not specific about what barriers exist, beyond passion work not being lucrative, they suggest that structures *and* individual tastes rather than just work ethic prevent pursuing passion work, or make it less of an attractive choice for those who are content with routine and stability. Harley and Emma Frost each have friends and loved ones who work for stability rather than for passion (citing them in their longer responses), and do not pass judgment on those who are not necessarily doing what they love for paid work. Captain Marvel also has personal experience putting the need for income over the desire for enjoyable work. They appreciate that others work better with firm boundaries between their work and passion, even though they do not fall within that category themselves.

Flexibility and autonomy through entrepreneurship: a constrained “choice”

As is evident in Moonstar’s business origin story from the previous chapter, passion was not always the sole driving force to work for derby. A desire for flexibility was an accompanying reason for fifteen entrepreneurs. Child-free entrepreneurs were more likely to want flexibility to avoid working for someone else in a structured environment, while parents were more driven toward flexibility to fit in work, family, and derby (although some parents also wanted to personally avoid structure).

Entrepreneurs enjoyed flexibility and autonomy as two of the best things about their work. “I like the flexibility of not having to be here 9-5,” says Tigra. “I can sort of come and go as I please, and I get to do things like bring my dogs to work and stuff that I probably couldn’t do in a normal office.” Wonder Woman iterated multiple times throughout her interview that autonomy was important: “We have control of everything. We get to call our own shots.” Not being held to others’ expectations was another motivation shared, here by Rogue: “It’s not like I’m clocking in with someone else and following someone else’s list of rules. It allows me to kind of do things

how I want them when I want them within reason.” Distaste for corporate office environments was cited by Raven, who had previously worked in such a setting: “I don't think I could go back to doing the corporate thing ever. ... I think once you work for yourself, it makes you a little jaded against working for other people again.” Given derby’s anti-establishment foundation, the same type of people that are drawn to the sport may overlap with the type of people drawn to self-employment – not wanting to be told what to do by others, but to play by their own rules.

Certain types of businesses, such as brick and mortar shops or distributor warehouses, are limited in flexibility by having to appear at a physical location in certain hours (even if one creates the hours themselves). With online knowledge-based enterprises, such as coaching and training, business can be done virtually anywhere provided there is an Internet connection and a technological device available. Being geographically untethered was important to Aurora’s choice in business model as a subscription-based service:

The business that I chose to start was specifically modeled and selected so that I don't physically have to be anywhere to make money. So I'm not a person who's coaching 150 boot camps a year, I don't have to be at every tournament with a table kind of a thing. So that was really important to me (laughing). That's like the best part for sure. (laughs)

Not only does this flexibility free Aurora from an intense travel schedule to promote her business and earn money, it enables a day-to-day schedule that allows her to more fully participate in derby as a sport, especially when compared to her previous paid career:

I think honestly, it's easier for me than it is for someone who works, like if I was working [in my old job] because the number of days I was in this studio until 8 or 9pm and missed practice because I'm trying to get a deadline out or something, it was a lot more than the number of days I am at home working on my own business. I mean, many days I could work until 9pm if I wanted to, but I try not to. (laughs) And so it's easier for me to get away in the middle of the day to go to the gym or get away at 5pm to be able to have dinner before I get in a car or on transit for an hour to get to practice or whatever. Yeah, having a business that I typically don't work a 40+ hour work week on makes fitting in all the roller derby requirements a lot easier.

Note that even when Aurora was in her previous job, she still worked to make her requirements for derby; having a flexible job makes it easier in theory. Yet she was not explicit about seeking the job for the sole reason of doing more derby, as there are other activities she enjoys beyond the sport.

Entrepreneurs spoke generally about having the flexibility to “do whatever I want.” When talking about having flexible employment for the purpose to do derby, entrepreneurs did not explicitly refer to themselves as having this reason but to others who did, as Daria’s comment illustrates: “I see so many girls who are working this waitressing job and that...so they can have the flexibility so they can do derby. I see that a lot.” Yet other comments suggest that derby is included in “whatever I want.” Mockingbird strings together her sponsorships, coaching, and part-time paid work to make her income work. While she acknowledges hard times, she prioritizes the time flexibility to do what she wants, including train and play for derby: “I would rather have less money and bike to practice, you know, if that means that I have the days to do my derby work or watch stuff, or go for a run or bike. Or take care of the house.”

The desire for flexibility and passion for derby feed each other. Wren was the only participant in my sample who actively sought doing derby for pay and then made life happen around that desire. It was never the case that an entrepreneur was purely interested in flexibility and not guided by passion for derby. Entrepreneurs wanted flexible work in general and they just happened to find it in something they liked, or love for their derby business gave them the confidence to finally leave a job environment that made them miserable, as in Raven’s and Aurora’s cases. Accidental and opportunistic entrepreneurs opted for flexibility (Tigra, Rogue, Mockingbird) or had life circumstances push them in that direction (Moonstar, Daria, Quartermain, Betty Boop), and derby just happened to be a passion that drove them toward employment in the

industry. Reactive entrepreneurs (Raven, Aurora) were guided by a mix of both, already employed in another sector before leaving it for full-time derby work or stay-at-home mothers who later added employment (Jean Gray, Karma).

Lightning's comments highlight how both passion and flexibility come together in doing derby work. She had been struggling to find a job that was something for which she had passion *and* was also flexible. Derby work just happened to fit both of those criteria:

I've tried to do the whole 9-to-5 job before. But it's always random jobs. I've gone to school to get a bachelor's for a while. I've worked at a gas station. And...having to work with people that I don't like, and having to have hours I didn't like, that kind of thing was very annoying. And it was usually something that I cared nothing about. You know, like those book-end jobs where you're just doing whatever to make money. That's the kind of job that I hate because I don't want to be a gas station owner. I don't want to deal in gas. So to do this job is amazing. Actually being able to do something I have a passion for.

Not only does she balk at externally imposed constraints (structured schedule, annoying coworkers) but also having to work solely to make ends meet, not for passion. Finding derby as a new passion, and then applying her already existing business model to the sport, is a perfect marriage of the two.

As parents, Jean Gray, Daria, Quartermain, Moonstar, and Betty Boop each noted that having a flexible schedule allowed them to fit in paid work around playing derby and family. Being able to adjust one's schedule made room for family time and derby obligations without the pressure of impending deadlines or needing to request time off. Daria noted that, between traveling for the business and her daughter's derby skating, "There's probably a lot of things over the past year, if I didn't own the store, I probably wouldn't have been able to do because I would have had more of a restrictive schedule." Quartermain's job requires him to be on the road often, but he sees the flexibility in deadlines and scheduling as a trade-off for the high level of commitment:

There's [been] very few times where I had a deadline that was so pressing that I've had to say, "No, I can't do this." So as the kids have had their concerts and their games and all

that kind of stuff, I've just been able to go ahead and grab a jacket and fly out the door and make sure I was there for that. If I needed to, I could put some time in after they went to bed. ... If I would have had to work in an office, it could have gotten pretty damaging. But the ability to be home and having your time and your schedule be your own made up for the commitment. ... I might be on the road 3 months out of the year, but that doesn't really seem so bad when Dad's at home when [my kids] come home from school 80% of the time. So that's really been the trade-off, I think.

Working from home facilitates flexibility even further, as Betty Boop notes: "Since I do [the business] at home with my husband, if the kids are sick, it's not a big deal. We just stay home and have a sick day."

"Derby is my life": Flexibility and autonomy as an enabler to leadership

Derby is already an activity enabled by societal privilege, but being a good leader means being even less burdened by life or making everything fit to the absolute limit. Regardless of the initial draw, once someone begins derby, the excitement of belonging can cause them to devote themselves to anything and everything in the name of derby. If one is unfettered by other life arenas such as age, family, or an intense work schedule, one is better able to accomplish this level of devotion. Tico (retired leader, entrepreneur) had this experience when she first joined derby in her mid-20s:

It hit me like a ton of bricks. I went from doing next to nothing to be entirely invested in derby. I gave all my free time to it, and I was happy to do that. I was willing to have an hour commute across the city to get to practice. I absolutely loved the physicality of it. I loved the teammate stuff. I loved the nonprofit and the business side of things. Everything about [derby] was like, this is so cool. And yeah, I was absolutely one of those people who was like, "Derby takes over your life!" And "I can't, I have practice!"

Tico's statement that she was "one of those people" refers to the insider joke within the community that derby enthusiasts turn down all other social events because they already have prior derby commitments: "I can't, I have derby" (Prime 2017). As she describes, she was willing give her free time exclusively to derby – to throw her life into the sport out of passion for it, which she did for a period of years before retiring. Not limited to the socially unfettered, participants who come

to derby later in life also experience a similar sense of devotion. Scarlet Witch (leader) jumped into volunteering for her league quickly after joining. She explains her eagerness as being a “doer”:

“Once I started to get comfortable and got to know everybody, there were things that needed to be done. So I jumped in. And I volunteered to handle this and I volunteered to handle this, and I would say, ‘OK, I have an idea about this!’”

An additional reason why people may be so willing to throw themselves into derby is because they perceive it as a temporary phenomenon. Five participants who had joined pre-*Whip* It mentioned that when they started, they were not sure how long the sport would last. Speaking about her derby origin story, Sage (leader) said, “I tried it kind of on a whim and [thought], ‘I’ll do this for however long it lasts, which will just be a few months or maybe a year.’ Um, (laughs) that was 12 years ago.” Janeway (leader), who participated in derby for just over a decade before she retired, had no idea that she would remain in the sport that long. Because she perceived her derby career as short, she gave herself permission to devote her life to it. Similar to Tico, she did not have many life barriers at that point to surmount:

In the beginning, it was my life. I think that I didn't have much going on outside of that. And I don't think I ever thought I was gonna be doing it for like over 10 years. I thought...I'm gonna burn it until it burns out. And I didn't end up doing that. I felt this time crunch to get everything done correctly, and I don't know what I thought was going to happen. ... I don't think I ever predicted that the play was going to get as good as it did, like people were going to be really superstar athletes. But I did think ‘I can probably only do this for a couple of years, so I'm gonna put my all into it,’ put every part of me into it full-time. So it didn't feel like a job then.

The initial enthusiasm prevented Janeway from viewing her derby labor as work, as it would become closer to her retirement. Because derby excited her at the start, it did not feel laborious to devote her full self to it, assuming that she would only need to devote a couple of years before derby imploded and not a decade. Furthermore, she did not anticipate derby’s transition from

spectacle to sport, which requires even more devotion to training and strategy for those aspiring to be “superstar athletes.” This additional labor was not yet part of the equation.

For leaders, the structure of unpaid derby work and of participants’ non-derby paid work facilitates being able to mix the two, or even the ability to do leadership at all. Leaders’ organizational work is largely Internet-facilitated and computer-based (e.g. answering emails, posting to forums, filling spreadsheets), so it is easy to conduct business from a smartphone or an office computer, provided that social media or forums are not blocked by a participant’s paid workplace. The leaders in my sample tended to have white-collar jobs with regular daytime hours (9-5, 10-6), flexibility in scheduling, and access to a computer or smartphone. Only three leaders said that they could not do derby work at their non-derby workplaces because the nature of their job did not involve sitting at a computer or their building had poor cellular signal. Bubbles (leader) says that the computer-based labor is one of the factors that enabled her to run for leadership in the first place: “It’s more just computer type stuff, answering emails, making decisions, less being physically somewhere, so...now you have smartphones, it’s pretty easy to answer emails and make decisions on the fly.” Shifting from a more flexible job to a more restrictive job can be a shock to leaders who no longer have the same amount of time to spend on their derby work. Mothma (leader) uses her league co-owner as an example of this: “[My co-owner] took on a new position where I think she has less time during her workday to respond to [questions]. Sometimes I’ll be like in the back of my mind, ‘Yeah, now you’re like the rest of us, honey.’”

With the view that running a derby organization can teach entrepreneurial skills, having the time to devote to the position was considered by some to be more important than having business skills or leadership experience. When asked to give advice for those considering taking a leadership role, five participants included a variant of “if you have the time, go for it.” Sentry

(leader) emphasizes in his advice to potential volunteers that before agreeing to serve, they will need to “think about the balance they want in their life and to see how volunteering will impact their personal and private life, and see if that is something that they are willing to accommodate.”

Volunteering as a derby leader involves work, and standing by a commitment to the collective is important. Mystique (leader) suggests that when someone fills the role out of desperation and really cannot do the work due to time, this hurts an organization in the long run:

[I would say] make sure that they have time. If they have kids or school or job or spouse or all of the above, then seriously consider if they have time to do a job on the board. Because sometimes leagues are begging for people to get on the committee boards 'cause nobody wants to do it. But then there's some people that are just like, because they have too much going on in their life, they're just not suited for it. And it ends up being a worse situation when you can't do what you're supposed to, something that your league needs to continue, and that you're just too busy with your life to do it, so it ends up being a worse situation than it was before.

Her comment points to the cycle of leadership void: with the lack of volunteers, someone takes the position out of desperation, cannot follow through, and members must scramble again to find someone to fill it. Notice that Mystique does not cite lack of skills in not being suited for leadership but lack of time, and that having a family or an inflexible, intense job compete with time that needs to be spent on derby to fulfill one's commitment to the organization. Doing what one is supposed to do means being available.

Mystique's point about family, school, paid work, and derby as competing devotions is a backdrop to the observation that only eight of the 28 leaders in my sample had children (Lightning, Tank Girl, Jubilee, Oracle, Bubbles, Phoenix, Poison Ivy, and Scarlet Witch). In addition, these parents tended to have jobs that allowed for some time flexibility: three owned a derby business (Lightning, Tank Girl, Jubilee), one worked nights at a hospital (Poison Ivy), two new parents had careers that allowed them to work from home or use flex time (Bubbles and Phoenix), and one had recently returned to teaching after a period of freelancing (Scarlet Witch). Oracle did not have paid

employment, considering her unpaid derby work her job. Mystique does not suggest that doing leadership is impossible with these competing priorities but that it is more difficult, hence the “serious consideration” needed.

The four leaders³⁰ in my sample who referenced derby as their lives in the current moment have several structural factors in common. First, they have chosen jobs with optimal flexibility and sufficient salary/benefits to participate, or they have chosen not to pursue career goals in order to keep doing derby, similarly to the entrepreneurs who chose being self-employed to do what they wanted. Second, they do not have children or spouses of their own, or their families have supported them making a full commitment, usually by joining derby themselves. Finally, they were relatively young when they started derby (20s to early 30s).

For Xena, derby as life means devoting nearly her entire derby career (5 years) to travel team, home team, and league leadership (including three years as president at her current league). She is self-employed, so she can choose her schedule and how much time she devotes to her paid work. She notes that she is privileged in this regard and that it is not without disappointment from her family:

I am lucky that I work for myself. So I can make derby a priority. And it definitely is. My business has definitely come second to it. And that has had its downfalls. I am not as focused on my own business as I could be. But I’m OK with that because I don’t have forever to play roller derby. ... I also have to balance my dad’s disappointment (laughs) that I don’t take it as seriously as he would like. So that’s always a struggle whenever he sees me working on derby stuff or that I’m leaving early for derby or gone for a week for derby or whatever, there’s always little comments. But I just have to, I’m willing to sacrifice that.

Xena’s rationale to make derby a priority is her time to participate in derby, particularly at the charter level, is limited by how long her body can remain healthy. Because she considers the sport

³⁰ Wren was the only entrepreneur who referred to derby as her life at the time of interview. As explained later, it was more often the case that derby was no longer entrepreneurs’ lives.

a passion and perceives derby as temporary, she is willing to sacrifice financial success and growth of her business and deal with her father's resulting disappointment in order to make derby her life for as long as she can.

For Obi-Wan, derby as life means devoting over a decade to multiple roles that span multiple leagues and are embedded within the larger derby community. "Derby is my life," he says. "My girlfriend plays derby. I do derby on the weekends. So, yeah, it's life." Like Xena, job flexibility is a major enabler; his paid job at a non-derby apparel business allows him to maintain his lifestyle: "One of the reasons I still have kept up with the job I have and never went beyond or a different direction was because of the flexibility. As long as I get my work done, I can take a three-day weekend. I got paid enough to get there and cover it." Being able to leave for a three-day tournament weekend and not have to worry about work is more valuable to Obi-Wan than career advancement, so he has made a conscious choice to remain in his line of work.

Making conscious choices regarding paid work to fit in derby applies to other participants. Rey describes derby as her "way of life," saying that she picked her current job despite disliking the traditional 9-to-5 structure because the schedule and benefits allows her to participate: "I'm not a morning person. I've never really wanted to ever work a 9-5 type job, but I got a 9-5 office job with 401k and all of that boring adult stuff so I could play derby." Sentry, who considers his role in derby as both official and leadership as "a public service," has also not sought career advancement because his current job with the government gives him enough free time to perform his various labors for the sport: "I have not actively pursued finding other jobs, or even within my job taking up more responsibility, because of roller derby. I know if I would change jobs that it would probably mean the end to a lot of my volunteering for roller derby. So finding that balance has a lot to do with not pursuing other goals."

Participants who did not have children often noted that this was an enabling factor in their derby activities. Xena considers herself lucky that she does not have to move around derby for children or a spouse, as she has neither and is able to put first her own needs and wants. Janeway is the same, noting that she did not have to feel bad by “selfishly” prioritizing her needs through derby: “It was about me and achieving things and goals that I wanted for myself and not feeling bad about that...And I was able to make some of those decisions 'cause I wasn't in relationships and I didn't have children, so I could be very selfish in my travel and I could do whatever, I could go to as many practices as I wanted. I didn't have to negotiate with anybody.”

On the other hand, having a supportive family can also enable greater levels of participation. Like entrepreneurs, leaders consistently remarked that they were grateful for the various modes of support (financial, household labor, emotional) their families provided them. Obi-Wan is in a serious relationship with someone who is “pretty hardcore” in her own derby participation, and he can pull on financial support and volunteer labor power from his parents. He acknowledges that he could not have participated as deeply as he does without their help: “There's a lot of derby stuff I couldn't have done without them. ... For sure, a third of everything I've been able to do is because of them, at least.” Women participants contrasted expressions of gratitude for the support (“I'm lucky that my husband is so supportive”) against stories of unlucky teammates with unsupportive husbands or boyfriends who forced them to quit derby or to end the relationship, as Jean Gray (entrepreneur) describes here: “I've known a number of girls who end up quitting because their husbands aren't supportive, one way or another. They don't want to help with the kids while they're at practice or they don't like it. There's a lot of them out there that aren't supportive of it.” Black Widow's (leader) husband has no problem with the amount of time she spends on her derby duties as president, and she sees his approval as allowing her to spend as much

time on it as she needs or wants to. She compares her experience to that of her vice president, whose husband specifically requests time with his wife:

I know (laughs) my vice-president occasionally gets put in time-out by her husband. And I mean that in the nicest way possible. She's like, "OK, I've been on the computer talking to you all night, my husband wants attention, I gotta go." I think our relationship allows me to be like this. (laughs) ... Since he doesn't have a legit problem with the amount of time that I spend on derby, it gives me the freedom to devote all this time to it.

Devotion to derby takes time away from family and loved ones. Women already have less time to devote to leisure compared to men (Mattingly and Blanchi 2003), one of the reasons being that they must do the brunt of reproductive labor. Spending time on "something for me" clashes with the expectation that wives, mothers, and girlfriends must be available to do emotional and reproductive labor for others. Even then, being able to take time "for me" is characterized as being "selfish," a term strictly limited in use by women in this sample.

Rey and Karma were the only participants who offered gendered structural explanations for taking on more or less derby work. Rey first points to the influence of U.S. busyness culture (Evitts Dickinson 2016): "We're a culture that really idealizes constantly being busy and living off of coffee and that whole thing." This can account for the comments throughout this chapter that imply part of leadership is overworking, especially for those who take on extra tasks "by choice." Derby tends to attract people who are already busy. Karma says, "[To be in derby] you have to be the type of person that's willing to sacrifice to meet those requirements. And that often means that you're the type of person that sacrifices a lot of things to do a lot of things." Rey agrees, adding that while derby participants sacrifice time, sleep, and money to do the sport, there comes a point when they hit their busy limit: "A lot of people [in derby] have already filled up their lives with stuff, and then derby is one more thing or maybe derby already takes up a large part of their life and they don't wanna do anymore." Karma also suggests that it is because derby is run by women,

and that women do a lot for nothing: “Women have a harder time saying no, I feel like, 'cause we're conditioned from a very young age to just go along to get along. And that often means that we do way more than we should. And eventually that becomes the norm.” To support this, Rey recalled she had learned in college that women are more likely to engage in volunteerism.³¹

A self-described Marxist feminist, Rey was the only person who highlighted unequal distribution of unpaid reproductive labor as a barrier to greater participation in operations:

A major barrier is probably also that many of the women in our league who have children are the primary caregiver for their children. ... We have single moms who play for our teams... I can't imagine taking on that much responsibility on top of a pretty intense physical sport and being the only person raising your kid, as well as providing for [them] financially. As well as women having to do more labor in the house... I think the unequal distribution between men and women in all aspects of society is probably also a major barrier in a women's sport to asking women, “Hey, do you want to do even more work now and not be recognized for it?”

As most of my participants reiterated, derby labor is volunteer and unpaid. It is an activity that many women join during life transitions or because they need “something for me,” as argued in the chapter on passion work. This structure crosses with business culture and the staunch pattern of women in families bearing the brunt of unpaid reproductive labor, though Rey notes this is slowly changing and occurs regardless of partner gender. If leisure becomes another arena in which they are begged to take on more unpaid labor, it makes sense why participants are reluctant to do anything but “just skate.”

“You can’t pay your mortgage with a smile”: Derby entrepreneurship as precarious work

Like small business ownership in general, paid derby work is precarious, meaning that it is insecure and relatively low-paying. Entrepreneurs’ experiences reflect struggling for some time before maybe seeing a tiny profit. Wren claims that her experience validates the common warning

³¹ Research on gender differences in voluntarism has been mixed, depending on other factors such as employment and type of volunteering (Wemlinger and Berlan 2016).

that half of new businesses do not survive beyond five years: “When that model says five years, they’re not joking. (laughs) It’s five years before you’re going to see anything at all.” She elaborates on how her business is more financially solid now compared to when she started: “It’s been 2.5-3 years, so we’re starting to see everything kind of breathe, like breathing room. We’re not struggling as much, but it’s hard. Those first three years are like, man, nose to the grindstone. And sometimes you gotta borrow money, you know, rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul type of deal. Just to make sure you’re making ends meet. Ugh.”

Tank Girl sees “doing what you love,” especially if that is working in a sports/leisure market, as a high risk-high reward decision. While it is an incredible opportunity that comes through privilege and “dumb luck,” there is always the potential risk of the market crashing because the popularity declines. She draws on the experience of George Powell and the skateboarding industry in the early 1990s to illustrate this point: “When [skateboarding] died, he lost 65% of his factory, all of his earnings, of all everything he ever had. And then he was bought out by Skate One, and so now he works in the Skate One building. And he’s still the man and in charge of stuff but doesn’t actually own it all. He’s kind of stuck. ... That’s not doing what you love, right? You’re fucking stuck.” Any business comes with risk, but when an entrepreneur is the face or name of their brand (as is typically the case with coaching businesses), Tank Girl claims that makes it harder to transition out in case of failure or fatigue: “How [are you] gonna sell your coaching business, you know? You’re not. So there’s no value to it if you’re not doing it.”

Derby paid staff jobs are also variable in terms of their stability and level of compensation. When discussing her current salary, Gaia notes that she has previously needed to hold additional employment in order to make ends meet. Her recently increased income is a suggestion that if she were to step down, passion would not be enough to draw a pool of qualified replacements:

I mean, I love this and I have passion for it. If we tried to recruit somebody to replace me—so my salary is \$64,000. Which is in the 25th percentile of [my position] for the [city] area, which means we're really on the bottom end of the scale. I made \$30,000 for the bulk of the time that I was [staff]. I had to have a second job working in a bar 'cause I couldn't cover my mortgage. And so yes, I'm high-paid in the realm of roller derby, but...[my employer] looks at it from the perspective of, "If [I was] gone tomorrow, how would we replace [me]?" ... So yeah, I mean, it's high compared to other derby jobs that are all kind of in the \$30,000 range. But, at the same time, we have to look at the environment that we live in and how would we be able to recruit another person.

Gaia puts numbers to the derby industry, where \$30,000 in annual earnings is the typical amount, supporting the comments in the previous chapter that derby business is not lucrative.³² As a derby participant, she is willing to take the bargain of being paid less (even if it means seeking supplementary employment) because she has passion for the community and her job. However, not everyone will take that same bargain, and by raising her salary, her employers also seem to be aware of that. Tico seconds the idea that companies and organizations must bank on the assumption that whoever takes the job is willing to do it because they love the sport and not for the pay:

Bloody Mary got hired at \$48,000 or something as the first executive director of WFTDA. That's not much, and they were damn lucky that she's incredibly passionate and she believes in tiny living in weird Austin, Texas. Her cost of living was incredibly low. But I'm not about to accept \$50,000 a year to run an international nonprofit that's the size of WFTDA. For \$50,000? I mean, that's real money that they need.

Tico's non-derby paid work is for a nonprofit organization, so her knowledge of salary rates is grounded in that experience. With the phrase "real money" suggesting again that the industry is not lucrative, finding someone with the needed experience "who's probably a skater and willing to give up their highly paying day job to do this for peanuts" is not a sustainable venture.

Fourteen entrepreneurs expressed that their businesses were profitable at the time of interview. All but two (Red Sonja and Furiosa) were full-timers. Yet they were cautious about suggesting profitability (or even being open for business) as a sign of success. Emma Frost notes

³² I did not ask for income in my interview guide. Gaia and Aurora were the only participants who told me their incomes.

that having a shop open for business with paid staff does not always equate to stable financial health: “We’ve got a pretty extended staff, and that doesn’t mean that there aren’t still months where I can’t pay myself a salary and I’m gonna have to wait. That’s the reality of being a small business.” This phenomenon is not limited to derby business specifically, it is par for the course and the risk of being a small business owner.

Karma and Jubilee did not describe their businesses as profitable. Karma’s business, in her words, is yet to become viable, which she defines as having a consistently monthly income close to what she had in her previous job (teaching). As such, she has trouble thinking of her business as a business instead of a luxury: “I still feel really self-conscious calling [my business] a business 'cause I don't make any money. I don't see any money. It's something that everything I make goes back into the business, and then also some other money that my husband makes goes back into the business.” Among my sample, Karma was unique among full-timers in stating that she was reluctant to label her business as such because of low profitability. However, part-timers like Rescue and Red Sonja did refer to their non-derby work as their “day jobs” or “real jobs” because, as Rescue says, it “pays the bills.” In these instances, making money is the defining characteristic for a business to be classified as real work, regardless of how much time and effort is expended.

Raven, Gambit, Rogue, Captain Marvel, and Emma Frost each briefly mentioned that they had given up a guaranteed income and benefits such as retirement savings and health insurance to go into business for themselves. For Captain Marvel, who is child-free and “not a big consumer,” this is less of an issue to her: “I pay for my own insurance. A company doesn’t pay for my insurance. I don’t get paid time off. But all of that I really don’t care about, ‘cause I’m pretty financially savvy.” Lack of benefits presents a greater challenge to Rogue, who is a single mother: “I have no retirement plan. Unless I provide one for myself. I have no benefits. I have nothing,

unless I take care of it myself. So I do have to pay for my own health insurance, which is a challenge because I have to find—and my son, I have to find stuff that’s affordable for us that’s still decent.”

Sustaining oneself is a real, material worry. Even when businesses are profitable, this does not mean that entrepreneurs are able to pay themselves. Overall, eight entrepreneurs either chose or were not able to pay themselves at all, and twelve others noted that while they paid themselves, it was not always consistent or enough to live on by itself. Harley, Emma Frost, Rogue, and Captain Marvel were the only ones able to subsist on derby business income alone. Three of the four are child-free (Harley, Emma Frost, Captain Marvel), and two have diversified businesses that preceded their derby involvement (Rogue, Harley). For those entrepreneurs unable to subsist solely on derby business income, they needed additional employment, whether this was full-time (Rescue, Cipher, Tico, Shadowcat, Furiosa, Daria) or part-time/contract-based (Red Sonja, Mockingbird, Aurora, Jean Gray). If not another source of employment, then a partner’s income covers the rest, as was the case with seven entrepreneurs (Thunder, Lightning, Raven, Karma, Moonstar, Wren, Tank Girl). These were all married/engaged women with husbands³³ who had intensive, well-paying jobs (e.g. engineering, military, healthcare, general contracting). The exception was when the husbands also worked for the derby business, which was the case for three entrepreneurs (Wonder Woman, Tigra, Betty Boop). Gambit, Quartermain, and Gaia were in dual-income marriages, but they were not clear on the extent to which they currently relied on their partner’s income (though, as mentioned above, Gaia did need additional income for a time). If not married or engaged, some cohabitating men partners were “the money earner of the household,” to use Mockingbird’s words. Entrepreneurs considered themselves lucky that their partners made

³³ There were no married same-sex couples in my entrepreneur sub-sample.

the money that they did. “My business, we can’t guarantee that it’s gonna bring anything in,” says Wren. “[My fiancé’s] income is the one we have to look out for. ... His business has done triple as well as mine.”

Other entrepreneurs noted that either partners or parents helped financially to get their businesses up and running. As she mentioned in a previous quote, Karma’s husband’s income occasionally helps cover expenses for her business. Daria calls her husband a “silent partner” of the shop, in that he does not assist with the day-to-day tasks but he “pretty much paid the money to get started.” When Red Sonja initially formulated her lifestyle brand idea, her romantic/business partner at the time suggested that she focus on it full-time with his financial help: “When we first started [the business], he said, ‘Look, quit your job and do this, and because we’re growing the company together, you take a pay cut and I’ll basically make sure that we’ve got rent and food.’” Furiosa’s father gave her start-up funds without expecting anything in return, yet she still worries about what would happen in the case that her business capsized: “How am I ever gonna pay my parents back? And they’re like, ‘Don’t worry about it!’ ‘Yeah, [but] you gave me thousands of dollars.’ And to them, they just want to help.” Moonstar’s parents, whom she calls “wonderful angels from heaven,” loaned her money from their retirement fund so she could purchase her shop outright instead of making monthly payments to the previous owner.

Partners’ and parents’ financial assistance to start and keep going with the business keep entrepreneurs from taking substantial business loans and driving themselves into debt in case the business fails. Raven jokes that her husband’s paycheck is the reason why she can keep her “hobby” operational:

I’ll be brutally honest with you about one thing. My husband and his job, he’s our breadwinner. So if sales are down or something, I can forego my paycheck and it’s not the end of the world. I could essentially work for free sometimes if need be. Because he’s the

one that's paying our mortgage and stuff. So I sometimes joke that he's the reason I get to keep my hobby of [the business]. (laughing)

Raven is aware of her privilege in being able to keep her job as her “hobby,” as she jokingly calls it. With her husband’s income to rely on, she is able to withhold her own pay when sales are down and still survive. She does not have to frame her shop as a business that ensures her livelihood to the extent that those without partners footing the bill (like Rogue) do.

Yet even when an entrepreneur has financial support from a partner, it can still be frustrating to feel like one is not contributing to their household. In addition to Karma’s worry that she will have to go back to her old job, Daria’s story is an example of this conflict. At the time I spoke to her, she had been running a previously owned skate shop for just under a year. She captured a torn feeling of having something but nothing to show for her labor:

It is tough working your butt off and feeling like [you’re] doing all this work for nothing. I don’t have any money to show for it! I mean, you do, ‘cause you’re reinvesting money, but you don’t have a paycheck, and you know how hard you’re working. I don’t want to say you don’t have anything to show for it, ‘cause you do. You have the store. But when you don’t have money to buy things for yourself, it’s—I don’t wanna say I’m working for free, but it’s almost like, you kind of feel that way a little bit.

Daria struggled with having something to show for her efforts at her skate shop in the first year, before it turned a profit. While she had a storefront, inventory, and sales, these achievements are less tangible day-to-day than, for example, sewing a stack of sequined shorts. From other business owners, she had learned to invest everything into her shop and that she would be unlikely to see profit for several years. Yet this knowledge did not ease the frustration of not having her own income. She found a second full-time job, the income from which gave her a sense of accomplishment for herself (“I like to have a paycheck”) and in providing for her family (being able to buy “real groceries”).

I know I’m married, but when you don’t have your own money coming in, I didn’t like the feeling. And it’s nice to just be like, “I can buy real groceries again!” ... It’s hard when

you only have the one income and then I feel like I'm not contributing. I know I have [the business], and I was working and doing this and that, but when you don't actually have money to show for it, I think a lot of people feel like they're not contributing. I mean, yes, I do stuff at the house. I like to have my own money, I guess is what I'm trying to say! (laughs) I like to have a paycheck.

As with Karma's example, money is the defining characteristic of whether a derby business is actually a business or whether it is contributing to a household income in Daria's case. She acknowledges she had done work for her shop and unpaid reproductive labor for her family, but it was not until she started getting paid from a full-time non-derby job that she felt like she was contributing and not dependent solely on her husband's income. The comments from Karma and Daria suggest a struggle to attach worth to labor when it is unpaid.

Thunder and Lightning are supported financially by husbands who are "extremely understanding" about the work they must do to make their business thrive in its first years. Other than noting that they were "not full-time pay, unfortunately," they did not discuss being frustrated about not making money. They labor under the perception that the hard work and sacrifices made for their passion now will be worth it later. Thunder elaborates: "If we want to truly succeed, we're gonna do everything we can now, put all of our time into it now, and then maybe in a couple years we'll be able to hire people out and they'll do all this stuff and we'll just be on the beach drinking fricking Mai Tais. (laughs)" With their husbands' incomes and blessings, they have the freedom to devote themselves full-time to a passion-based business – to do what they love for a living.

In contrast to Thunder and Lightning's experience, Cipher's story is a cautionary tale of learning the hard way about putting passion first, and what happens when the hard work is not worth the payoff. She recalls that her main goal was to be able to "phase out my day job" by combining her passions for derby and fashion through her apparel business: "I had in my mind that this is gonna be so awesome! My job's gonna be so cool and I get to do all this fun stuff and going

to all these cool events, and I'll be making money at the same time!" However, in retrospect, she had "unrealistic expectations" of what operating such a business would entail. Having dropped to part-time in her non-derby work to try to build her business, she ended up chasing sales out of financial desperation. Cipher kept putting time, money, and effort into her business, believing (as Thunder and Lightning did) that her hard work would eventually be rewarded: "I kept thinking in the back in my mind, 'If I just work really hard and sacrifice this, sacrifice that for a couple years or whatever, it'll pay off.'" One of the major sacrifices was time with her son and her boyfriend, which was worth more than the modest sales she was making. "It wasn't like I was selling that much stuff to make it even remotely worth it, you know what I mean? 'Cause once you take into account the time and energy and cost of things, I had to measure all that and be like 'OK, is it worth this? Is it worth that?' Yeah, the answer is no." Realizing the cost was too great, she decided to return to non-derby work full-time and keep her derby business as a side project "out of love." Surprisingly, once she stopped actively trying to market and sell her product, her sales started to rise. She still only operates when she has the time to create. Rather than based on sales numbers, her version of success is "providing things for people that make them happy, 'cause that makes me happy. It's not really about the money."

Cipher's passion for derby ceased to be a passion when she tried to turn her business into her primary income source. In her view, passion should not be financial desperation, which is what her business eventually became. This desperation came from shifting to part-time at her day job (in the hopes the derby business would hit big) and needing income as a single mother. Sacrificing time and money was not something she was willing to do anymore: "[Friends of mine] know [by] owning their own business that they're gonna lose time with their family. And that's a sacrifice that they make... I'm a single mom, so that plays a lot into the toll that all that kinda took on me. It's

not for everybody, that's for sure.” Stepping back from full-time derby business allowed her to regain the passion she once had, and she rationalized a new form of success to fit that vision. Hard work is not enough, one also needs “luck” to make it. In saying that entrepreneurship is not for everybody and acknowledging her limitations as a single mother, she falls just short of suggesting that structure – not lack of hard work – prevented her from realizing her dream job.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurs believe they are “doing what they love,” but some suggest that this requires making selfish decisions, whether this is directed toward their life in general or toward their business operations. How flexibility factored into the decision to become an entrepreneur that could be selfish depending on the need for it. Child-free individuals discussed more selfish decisions in terms of doing what they wanted, whenever they wanted for work. Leaders operated in the same fashion if they decided to prioritize derby over their paid work or extended family, also seeing these decisions as “selfish” and being “lucky” that they were able to make them. Some parents, in comparison, desired flexibility to raise their children. This aligns with previous literature on women entrepreneurs’ becoming self-employed to reconcile work-family conflict in the face of otherwise inflexible policies and workplace environments (Carrigan and Duberley 2013; Ekinsmyth 2014; Weiler and Bernasek 2001).

Entrepreneurs who were more critical of “do what you love” were more likely to draw on rationales grounded in social stratification, compared to those who embraced it without critique. Not everyone is socially positioned to make their passion paid work, whether it is because they cannot afford it (because passion work is not lucrative) or because they are not “cut out” for it. Hard work and sacrifice are necessary to make a passion-based business work, and this was understood as a natural part of being a business owner. Participants seemed to fall just short of

linking those who cannot “cut it” to societal structures. For example, a single mother will have a much harder time becoming and staying an entrepreneur than a child-free married woman, and this was reflected in the stories of my participants. Rarely did leaders explicitly link the time needed to devote to derby to societal structures, but the notion that women with families have less time than men to devote to leisure more broadly was also reflected in comments and advice regarding “having the time” to do leadership, as well as the limited number of mothers who served as leaders compared to entrepreneurs.

Considering that most entrepreneurs relied on income sources beyond their derby work, and that typical derby job income is around \$30,000 a year, it takes a degree of privilege to be able to pursue passion work for pay. These entrepreneurs are, for the most part, highly educated White women and men who could pivot to another job if needed, or they can rely on partners’ income. They can afford to be focused on passion or they do not prioritize material wealth. Thus, for most entrepreneurs who framed profit and passion as a dilemma, passion wins out. Even if one needs to be realistic about profitability, it is never an easy decision that does not take into account passion for the sport to some degree. If businesses downsize, it is because chasing profits took away from an original sense of passion or passion keeps the business alive rather than closing it down completely. Entrepreneurs keep working to try and make it; some do for the moment, while others hit a point where the sacrifices become too much and close up shop.

Though a small number in the overall sample, leaders and entrepreneurs who maneuver their paid work and families to do derby as work/play see derby as an organizing principle in their lives, similar to devotees in other lifestyle sports with “cultures of commitment” (Wheaton 2000a). Yet, as I discuss in the next chapter, flexibility combined with a willingness to move other life

priorities around to stay committed to derby can easily tip the scales from commitment to overwork.

CHAPTER 7: “IT’S REALLY ONE OF THOSE ALL-OR-NOTHING THINGS”: REAL WORK AND THE IDEAL WORKER NORM IN DERBY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

“If you do what you love, you’ll never work a day in your life” is a common refrain in the United States, and several participants in my sample recited it. Yet this notion renders invisible tedious, exhausting, and repetitive tasks that must be done for the sake of the job, even in passion work. In this chapter, I first illustrate what happens behind the scenes when passion work ceases to be fueled by passion and becomes more laborious – in a sense, “real work.” Derby entrepreneurs make clear that getting paid to do derby is a dream job, but it still requires business planning and acumen, physically and mentally exhausting labor, and having to do tasks that one hates, even though they may have once been fun.

Not only do entrepreneurs do real work, their workload consumes their time and energy to the point where they are always working. I show how the ideal worker norm appears in paid derby work. First, entrepreneurs report constantly working or thinking about work, to the point where work exchanges creep into time spent with family or during derby play. Providing excellent customer service means being available via mobile technology, and this is spurred both by devotion to the community and economic survival. Next, I show how entrepreneurs attempt to reconcile work-family-derby conflict. Individuals vary in their level of conflict. Some struggle to avoid drowning in their work, while others are content with being “always on.” Those who want more balance, particularly parents, attempt to draw boundaries by “turning off” their devices, blocking off time for tasks, refusing to conduct business after hours, or even retiring from skating. Yet all suggest that boundary-marking is a personal responsibility requiring discipline. Finally, I touch upon an explicitly gendered component of the ideal worker norm in this industry. While the niche of derby is women-dominated, the larger skating and roller sports industry is led by men. As such, women entrepreneurs confront gendered expectations regarding their technical

and business expertise when they encounter customers and representatives who are non-derby men and boys. Some entrepreneurs reported that acting more in line with masculine-typed expectations, such as using direct communication and appearing confident, made interactions smoother, supporting the notion of the ideal worker as masculine.

“Shattering the illusion”: When dream jobs become real work

Likening passion for derby to a romantic relationship, Tico (leader/entrepreneur) makes a distinction between initial excitement and the everyday effort to keep passion going. Both are needed, but the latter may be more important: “It takes that much passion of a bunch of crazy people in Texas to bring back this crazy thing that we all love so much. You need that fire and you need a little bit of crazy to get it off the ground. But then to keep things going, like any relationship, it's not always gonna be a raging inferno. You need that long slow burn.” The chapter on motivations explored the “raging inferno” of passion, what drives entrepreneurs and leaders to invest their time and money into derby work. This section focuses on the “long slow burn” for entrepreneurs. When passion has a paycheck attached to it, how does the experience change?

Whether one is conflicted about claiming they “do what they love” or firmly entrenched in that camp, every entrepreneur I spoke to acknowledged that with the good aspects of the job, there comes the bad or annoying. Ten entrepreneurs in my sample spoke to some degree about the gap between passion on the surface and the everyday practice of work. Except for three, all were employed for derby full-time as opposed to part-time. Because part-timers had at least one other job, they were better able to keep their derby entrepreneurship squarely within the realm of passion – as a “hobby job,” to use Rescue’s words. Full-timers, on the other hand, live with the derby industry as their “real job.” They are clear that while they love what they do, it is not a “dream” job in the sense that it never stops being exciting. In this vein, while Tigra is reluctant to “shatter

the illusion,” she is adamant that a derby job must be treated as any other employment: “It's in the field that I'm more interested in, so it's definitely better than working anywhere else. But it's still work. It's not just turning up to work and just chatting about skates all day and then going home.” Entrepreneurs were clear that one could not run on passion alone, but business planning and acumen was needed for success. They also discussed repetitive, hated, and exhausting tasks that they needed to push through to do the more creative and fun aspects.

Business planning and acumen

Before coming into derby entrepreneurship or any passion-based work, prospective owners must understand that their level of passion may not directly translate into running a viable business. Aurora uses a restaurant as an example to illustrate the disconnect between the “intense inferno” of starting a business and the “slow burn” of running a business: “I think a lot of people want to open a restaurant ‘cause they want to design the menu, and they want to pick out the plates and the tablecloths and design the decor, print out the business cards and hire the staff and get it all going. But very few people want to run a restaurant. Right? It's like, creating the most amazing title page and then there's no recorded side.” She suggests that people with the idea to go into business focus primarily on the creative and building tasks, where the excitement is – the “what” of a business. Yet the underlying mechanisms of operation, the “how,” is left in the background as an afterthought. Unless they figure this out, they run the risk of failure.

Like the misinformation about the profitability of skate shops suggested by Raven, Rogue poses that there may be unrealistic expectations of the job, especially if there is a disconnect between level of passion and business experience/acumen:

Just because you love skating, skateboarding, doesn't mean you're good at running a business. It just means you're gonna be around things that you like. I get people all the time that want me to hire them because they love [derby]. I'm like, “Just because you love [derby] doesn't mean you're gonna be a good employee here.” Because loving [derby] is

great, but it's not gonna help you be a good salesclerk or a good employee. You're not gonna stand here and watch [derby] all day. You're just gonna be selling [derby] products to people. ... [But] I think if you enjoy retail and you enjoy skating, and you enjoy helping people and you want to pass your knowledge along, then yes, if all those things come together, then it's great.

At the prospect of working for a passion, it may be easy to forget that passion work is still work. It is not enough to like skating, but one also needs to like retail work in order to be successful at running a skate shop. Even then, it is not a guaranteed success. As highlighted in the previous chapter, there are some months when skate shop owners, like Rogue and Emma Frost, earn negative income and cannot afford to pay themselves.

Moonstar, like Tigra, is grateful but cautious about working in the derby industry: "Yes, this is my dream job... [but] it's a business. It's not a dream. It's real. And so I have to approach it in the most realistic manner." To highlight the contrast between treating derby work as a dream job versus a real job, she shares a story about an initial business planning meeting with a friend who was interested in being a co-owner. Borrowing Aurora's language, Moonstar's friend had created plans for opening the business, while Moonstar pushed to plan for running the business:

[My friend] was kinda coming into the idea of operating a skate shop as this dream job, where I'm like, "OK, we need to sit down and have a planning meeting." And [at the meeting] I'm talking about figuring out what kind of business structure we're gonna have, figuring out what is the division of labor gonna look like because she was employed full-time. I'm [asking her], "So how are you gonna be involved in this business and operate this business while also being employed full-time?" Figuring out all of that kind of stuff. And she came to the meeting with notes, and the notes were things like ideas on what products we could sell, and "oh, maybe we could find a place that has a warehouse and build ramps in the back!" And I'm like, "Hold on! This is way down the line stuff! We need to plan on the real stuff." ... She was gonna rent a booth, have a corner of the shop be dedicated to renting to a tattoo artist who would do tattoos in the shop that I would sell skates at. I'm like, that's completely ridiculous. (laughing) That sounds very cool on paper, but that would make it subject to health code, we would have health inspectors in there, we'd have to have a completely different insurance plan, probably our liability would be much higher. And when I started spitting these things out to her, she's like, "Oh yeah, maybe we won't do that."

Moonstar's friend ultimately decided not to become a co-owner. It should be noted that Moonstar does not have formal business education (her degree is in English), but she knew enough to have an organized business mindset in her planning. More grounded in "the real stuff," she had to bring her friend's passion back down to earth by highlighting the work that it would take to make dreams like skate ramps and a tattoo booth happen, such as insurance liabilities and constructing a building in line with health codes. Moonstar's question about the division of labor, while not answered in this recollection, also highlights her orientation toward working the shop as real work. While it is possible to run a skate shop and be employed in a second full-time job (Daria, Tico, and Raven have all done so), it is a difficult fit to maintain.

Tedious, repetitive, and hated tasks

In the beginning years, the initial passion can fuel entrepreneurs enough to get through even the dullest tasks so that they do not feel like work, or they at least feel worth the trouble. But Karma claims that beginning entrepreneurs underestimate the time they must invest in less satisfying tasks for little reward: "The problem with that idea of following your passion and doing what you love is that no one ever tells you that you have to do what you don't like for a really long time before you can do what you love." She believes that passion-based businesses such as derby can fail if this is not addressed:

I think you have to be willing to face up to the fact that sometimes what you love is also what you hate. Because it happens, right? I really love coaching, but I can't do those things independent of being on social media or doing my own bookkeeping. Or putting my own website together. Those things aren't independent of each other. So in order to do what I love...I have to do a lot of shit that I hate. I have to run my website. I have to post on Facebook. I have to do all these things that I legitimately do not like to do in order to do the thing that I love. And I think a lot of businesses fail, just any business, because you forget that you have to do all those things. And doing what you love is great and amazing, but you have to be willing to put the work in to get to that point.

Karma's least favorite tasks are social media marketing, bookkeeping, and making sure that her website remains functional. In order to do what she loves, which is coaching, she must also do the less desirable tasks. Relying on the discourse of hard work, she places a caveat on "doing what you love": it is great if you are willing to invest time past the creative and fun tasks.

At events, Wonder Woman frequently hears people within the derby community express that they want to work for her, as they view her entrepreneurship as an amazing dream job. She cautions them that vending at events is the more glamorous side to the job, and that underneath is a lot of work that is "not fun":

It's not all fun. We all wear all the hats. It's not you just get to sit down and work on marketing ideas or designing ideas. No, that's not what pays the bills. You gotta bring in product and ship product and sell product and mount product. Do things that aren't fun. Run to FedEx at the last minute because a skater needs [an order] overnighted or who knows. ... At events, it's true. That is the fun part. I love going to events 'cause you get to interact with your customers and it's fun. You get out of the daily grind of the office and paperwork, and it's like vacation honestly for me. So I don't like people to think that that's all it is, it's all fun, 'cause it's not.

Being a small business owner, Wonder Woman's responsibilities for her business include everything from customer service to product design. Tasks that "pay the bills" (i.e. not fun) include hours of mounting skates and eleventh-hour shipping runs, which are more tedious and day-to-day than an annual event weekend. Paperwork is her least favorite part because there is no direct connection between a customer's joy and doing taxes: "Sometimes I feel like I could be doing so much more productive work that makes a difference, but I'm stuck doing paperwork!" Building skates and communicating with customers is the work "that makes a difference," and is thus more enjoyable for her. Paperwork, on the other hand, is tedious and not something she looks forward to doing, but she knows it must be done in order to get more "productive" work done. Thus, when told this is a dream job, she wants those who are interested in the industry to be sure that they receive the entire picture.

When a business exists for multiple years, work that was once exciting starts becoming repetitive. Aurora, who has been in business for six years, says that at the beginning, the work is exciting and the creative aspects “feed you.” After a period of years, however, innovating the same content becomes a struggle. Referring to her restaurant example, she has long since created the title page for her menu and is now left with the daily grind:

I love my members and I love [that] they're so loyal, and people have been with me for [multiple] years and all, that's great. But one of my least favorite things is doing my weekly task of putting together my content for them. Just because it's repetitive and I've done it for 150 weeks. It's just like, “OK, again, this task.” So there's some monotony to this stuff now. ... All the super cool title page stuff is done, and so now you just have to kind of keep chugging along.

While Rogue enjoys working for her passion and does not see herself giving up the job, she also admits that repeating the same tasks on a daily basis can be wearisome: “Sometimes starting a business, especially a retail business in an area that you have a passion for, it can have a negative effect. It can make you start to get a little bit of resentment for it, or a little burnt out, you know. You’re like, ‘Oh my God, if I have to talk about knee pads one more time...’ Sometimes it can do that.” She draws from skateboarding to illustrate it can impact one’s business approach: “If you’ve got a passion for something, sometimes your opinion becomes jaded and you become, you’re not open-minded. So I’ve noticed it happens a lot in the skateboarding industry. You get a skateboarder who only likes one brand of skateboards and he gets really bitter about all the other brands and doesn’t want to carry them or sell them to people.” Rogue has not yet reached the jaded point she references, but helping customers find the right knee pads has become an everyday experience. The “raging inferno” she and her employee felt when the first pairs of skates came through her shop is long gone, and she must now rely on the “long slow burn” love of retail and skate gear.

The longer one is in business, the more likely one's responsibilities will shift. When Tigra's shop was in its beginning years, she handled "fun" roles such as social media and customer service, which she readily enjoyed. As her shop has been able to take on more part-time staff, her role in the company has transitioned from specialized tasks to general operations, where she now does "exciting" tasks like "arguing with the tax office" regarding pensions for her staff. This transition has made her labor feel more like work than in the past:

In the past, the job that I enjoyed most, I do less of [now]. So that's social media, having to talk to customers. And I've moved more into sort of operational financial roles. So whilst I'm kind of in the industry that I love, it's become more work-like, and it made more sense for me to look after that side of things than the more fun side of things.

In line with her earlier comments regarding passion work as "still work," handling paperwork and making long-term financial decisions are less fun but necessary – even if those decisions are about derby gear.

Physical labor

The experiences detailed above describe work that takes place in front of a computer (e.g. paperwork, creating written content) or behind a counter selling product, which are less physically oriented. Physical jobs among entrepreneurs are limited to apparel/accessories designers who create their products by hand, manufacturers and shop owners putting together equipment, and coaching/training. Knowledge-based jobs are no doubt mentally exhausting, but Tank Girl's job as a coach is "tiring in a way that normal business is not tiring." Recall from the findings chapter on motivations that coaches initially performed their labor for free. As more coaches have begun to charge, this is at the chagrin of others in the community who are skeptical that they are doing real work that deserves their rate. This sentiment is supported by a comment from Princess Peach (leader) while describing the intense workload for derby paid staff: "It's not like they're a roller derby coach, you know what I mean? They're still doing administrative work. They're still doing

a real job that's not this fantasy life." This suggests that the perception of derby labor as "real job" may depend on the form of labor (in this case, coaching vs. administration). Tank Girl confirms this perception from her own experience: "I think there was a negative stereotype about it. Like, 'oh, you guys just want free travel or you're getting all these vacations.' But boy, it's a lot of work, I'll tell you what." She outlines just how mentally and physically exhausting a coaching trip can be:

I do like coaching, but there's not a lot of good boundaries set between coaches and campers when they come to things. So...you have to literally hide in the bathroom or something for your lunch break. Sometimes I eat my lunch in the bathroom so I can just have a couple minutes to decompress. And then usually they'd like you to go do something with them after. Now it's the skate park, so it's several more hours of intensive skating. And I do almost everything when I coach as well. Like I explain it, watch them, I do it with them, I get in and out [of drills], so there's a lot of skating. It's pretty intensive for me. And often [at events like Rollercon], there's as many all-star games as they can possibly smash in, and they want you to play every game, all the time. So if it's a big international event, usually you coach 6-8 hours a day. You do travel a lot, you don't eat any kind of decent food. And then you play three hours of the most intense roller derby of your life at night. (laughs) And then nobody goes to sleep 'cause they're all partying... I mean, it's not all bad, but it's just exhausting, I guess, at the end of the day, you know?

Tank Girl's hands-on approach to coaching means that she is on skates demonstrating and participating in drills with her clients for the entire time. With an increasing overlap between the park skating and derby communities, there is usually a park meet-up for skaters to shred after an already hard day of skills and elite level pick-up games. Add on top the usual travel fatigue, especially when traveling internationally, and it makes for a rewarding but exhausting endeavor. Mental fatigue comes with teaching skills to groups of skaters and, as Tank Girl notes, not much time to recover during a break in the program. The lack of firm boundaries between coach and client has pros and cons. Being able to ask coaches questions and for selfies shows that one is personable and approachable, and will likely lead to clients recommending the coach to other skaters, but all of the attention can be mentally taxing for the coach. Even if the subject is roller

derby, the act of teaching is still exhausting. As such, Tank Girl oscillates between years of “light” and “heavy” coaching schedules, six events being a “light” year and twelve events being a “heavy” year. However, the current coaching cycle, as she explains it, runs so that most of the major coaching events take place during summer in the Northern Hemisphere, which coincides with the WFTDA/MRDA competitive season. For coaches who also skate for Playoff-level teams, as nearly all of them do, this can lead to struggles with making attendance for their own team practices.

Even a “fun” task like vending at events, as Wonder Woman described earlier, has a significant amount of labor attached to make it feel more like work than a vacation. Rescue briefly describes the labor involved in a Rollercon trip, noting that the sheer number of exhausting tasks can make it easy to forget the fun of meeting people:

Travel is fun, right? I go to tournaments and that's fun to go see. But it's a shitload of work (laughing) to get prepared and to guess how much of what you need and what people are gonna like, because it changes from what area you are in and even year to year. ... So you can't take everything 'cause it costs too much, and then figuring out how you're gonna get there. And you have to get there early and set up, and setting up is a pain in the ass. But when you're sitting there, just enjoying it, it's fun. Rollercon during the middle of it where you're talking to all the people, watching skaters, whatever, it's great. That's not really the job part. But it is, because I'm still networking. But it doesn't feel like a job. But then you get to the breakdown where you have to take everything down and clean up and pack, and it is exhausting. Having a bookend like that, it's easy to forget the fun part. 'Cause it's surrounded by a whole lot of work.

Rescue’s behind-the-scenes labor is what she considers “a shitload of work.” Logistics such as booking travel, shipping, cost effectiveness, and anticipating product sales take place weeks before the event occurs. Setting up a display table is both physical and mental labor that is still work. It is not until the event officially begins that the “work” ends and the “fun” begins. Rescue is still technically working by selling product to people and networking. She is not on vacation, she needs to make sales and contacts. However, it does not feel like a job. Notice that the “fun” payoff is

smaller, or at least is less memorable, than the amount of work, which fits with Karma's claim that one must do a lot of unenjoyable tasks before getting to the enjoyable ones.

Also speaking to Rollercon experience, Mockingbird's labor to pay her way for the event (volunteers who work a certain number of hours receive a free pass for the next year) and gain experience in her various roles has overshadowed one of the purposes of going, which is to have fun in Las Vegas: "Next year, I'm gonna have a Rollercon. I keep saying that, and it doesn't actually happen. I coach and announce and ref and play so much that I feel like I never get a chance to just chill the fuck out." The strict and packed scheduling of the event contributes to her harried feeling: "The last four years of Rollercon, I've coached a minimum of 12 hours [each year]. ... It doesn't sound like a lot 'cause you're like, 'Oh, it's spread over five days.' No. You don't get a chance to do anything in between because everything's so scheduled there." In this instance, Mockingbird views her various roles as work. This is logical, given that she is exchanging labor hours for free entry the next year. It is arguable that she chooses to keep herself busy by doing other roles besides coaching, but just the physical and mental toil of coaching alone is enough to prevent her from completely relaxing.

Rollercon, like derby in general, is an event that participants choose to do, in theory to have fun and meet people. But for Mockingbird, Rescue, and other coaches and vendors, it is not a vacation. The trip is costly, as coaches are not paid (though they earn credits toward a free pass) and vendors must pay a fee for space. Part-time entrepreneurs must also take time off from their non-derby paid jobs to go to the five-day event, and they are still working even if it does not feel laborious. Working Rollercon and other events requires time, energy, and especially money. Considering the financial instability of small businesses, this can be a great investment.

Flexibility negated: Overwork and constant availability

Within my sample, multiple competing derby roles of entrepreneur, leadership, skater, and volunteer were the norm (the only person who had a single role was Gambit).³⁴ Shadowcat is a single mother, has a full-time paid job, operates her derby shop part-time, and has an owner/leadership role in a national roller derby organization. Her workload demonstrates derby involvement at an intense level: “I am ALWAYS working. Like always. I work at my regular job and then go to the store and then come home and do [organization work]. And then I work on the website, and in between I must cook and clean because for the last year, I have actually been in a successful relationship.” Shadowcat considers all her various roles as “work,” whether they are full-time, part-time, paid, or unpaid. Participants like Gaia, Janeway, Rescue, and Tico had worked what they considered the equivalent of two or even three full-time jobs between all their paid and unpaid labors, talking of those days not knowing how they had survived. “At one point, I had my full-time job, the skate shop, and running the league,” recalls Tico. “It was essentially three full-time jobs. I don’t know how I slept. I don’t know how my friends put up with me (laughing).”

Derby is a passion-based business based on a volunteer sport, but like other industries and small businesses in general, entrepreneurs here can feel like they are working all the time. Wonder Woman acknowledges that working all the time just comes with the territory of being a small business owner regardless of industry: “It kind of feels like we’re working 24/7, but anyone that owns their own business will tell you that they feel like they work 24/7.” There is always more work to be done, and the pressure to keep going is keenly felt. Tigra and her husband work a typical 9-5 schedule during the week, but “we always say we could work ‘til midnight every night and

³⁴ This is an intended effect of my sampling criteria, as I purposefully wanted the perspectives of those most heavily involved in the sport. This also makes sense considering that 7 years was the average number of years spent in derby. The longer the derby career, the greater the likelihood of performing multiple roles.

still not get everything done.” Aurora says that an infinite workload is one of the worst parts of owning a business: “Never feeling like you're done. I could always do more work. I could always answer some more emails or do some more marketing or work on another program, whatever. So it's hard to let go and kind of just leave work at the door at the end of the day.” Having a “never-ending list” and never getting through it, even with attempts to assign tasks to days of the week, can contribute to stress, and the infinite workload sometimes prevents her from making time for friends: “People are like ‘oh, you wanna hang out this week?’ I’m like, ‘(sighs) I have to work all weekend.’ Just that unspecified ‘I just feel a whole lot of work hanging over me.’” Instead of taking breaks for leisure, work can creep into flex time and dominate it. Entrepreneurs need to consciously remind themselves of the reasons why they wanted to own a business in the first place, as Aurora does: “That's the other crappy part about (laughing) running your business is that you forget why you did it, and you just work and you forget that one of the reasons you wanted flexibility was so that you could go for a walk outside in the sunshine when it's nice out or things like that.”

Constantly connected technology exacerbates this feeling. While it is a boon to flexibility, it is also a potential disaster when trying to be off-the-clock, if that is possible or desired. Wonder Woman says that people perceive that she works all the time because she is able to complete some business tasks from her phone: “I can do social [media] on my phone and I can answer emails from my phone, ‘cause a lot of times, people are like, ‘she works all the time!’” At the time of interview, Lightning had a broken leg, but she could still update the business social media accounts from her couch: “I can Instagram!” Rogue describes her laptop as “tethered” to her, whether at her shop or at home. Captain Marvel considers her laptop her workspace to develop coaching plans and to write, saying that “anytime I open my laptop, it’s game on,” but she may continue to think about

work even without this tool readily in front of her: “My laptop is closed, so it doesn’t look like I’m working, but I’m thinking about what I want to do. And I’m approaching work from a different way.” In contrast to Captain Marvel’s full-time coaching work, Rescue’s derby business is part-time, so the amount of creative energy she devotes to it must fit in any available space left over from her full-time paid work: “This business is me fitting it into any nook and cranny that I possibly can to get stuff done. So if I’m on a lunch break, read an email, figure out if I can sponsor something or what I can send, and I’ll do it then. And just kinda keep it always running in the background, I guess. Kinda like some of the apps on your phone.” It is not clear if entrepreneurs explicitly desired being “always on,” but it is the reality that they deal with.

Accessibility via technology is partly motivated by business decisions. Quick response times can be crucial to customer service, a practice Betty Boop delivers based on her own dealings with other companies: “If there’s [an email] question, sometimes I’ll run downstairs ‘cause I think it’s really important to answer somebody just as quick as you can because if you’re waiting to hear from a company, I know how irritating it is just to feel like ‘did you get that?’ or ‘hello?’” This is even more important for businesses that provide Internet-based content. In this story about a technical malfunction during one of her training programs, Karma iterates that the onus was on her as the business owner to address it immediately, even if it meant sacrificing time with her family for the sake of customer service:

With [my website] it was like every time something went wrong, I’m the only one to fix it. ... And I have to do it immediately because that’s customer service. And so I’m in the middle of dinner with my family and I’m like “I gotta go deal with this! I’ll be back!” That happened last night. My web designer was like, “Something’s horribly wrong with your website!” And I was like “Fuck, I gotta go, I gotta go deal with this!” So I left in the middle of dinner and sat in front of my computer and dealt with my website.

Karma’s website needs to function so her clients can access their paid content, and the expectation that this must be done immediately is part of “customer service.” She must either take care of it or

run the risk of receiving numerous messages from frustrated clients who are unable to access their content. Though she was not happy about the interrupted family time, Karma considered this an emergency that must be prioritized.

With reliance on portable technology, the benefits of flexibility (“I can do what I want whenever I want”) can be negated because the flexible time is continuously interrupted by work. Wren notes that social media gives customers an expectation of always being able to reach a shop owner with queries or requests for service, even during off-hours. When this expectation is broken, it can quickly lower the perceived customer service quality:

I can have people sending me a message in like freaking 5-8 different ways. And it's like, I'm so accessible, if you can't get a hold of me, people get angry. Legit angry. [They say] “Where are you? I have an emergency.” “Oh, well, I'm sorry.” (laughs) I mean, it's not just the accessibility, but with accessibility becomes more expectations. And when you do not fulfill your customers' expectations, you then become the lesser of the companies, right?

Part of Wren’s mission in running her shop is to avoid becoming like other shops that do not “work with people” in obtaining the perfect gear. Adhering to that mission means being accessible (which technology enables) as a show of customer service and caring for the customer and community. However, if she decides to draw boundaries and be unavailable for a period, that expectation of accessibility still remains and can result in an unhappy customer. In this sense, Wren runs the risk of her availability backfiring on her.

Entrepreneurs with businesses that are not bounded by location or hours, like online coaching/training, face a harder time imposing their own boundaries because they can be done virtually from anywhere. The comments from Captain Marvel, Aurora, and Karma support this idea. They do not have a physical location to come and go from, like entrepreneurs with brick and mortar shops do. Karma experiences a catch-22 situation with technological flexibility. It can be either helpful or harmful, depending on when her business interferes with time spent with her son:

If I have my one hour that I'm supposed to be doing social media stuff, I can take [my kid] to the indoor playground and he can run around like a maniac and I can do my work and we can both kind of be happy. But then in times when I'm supposed to be sitting down eating lunch with him and paying attention to him, and my phone's going off and I need that hit of affirmation or gratification or whatever and I need to look at my phone, then I just wanna throw it out the window and never see it again.

Here, Karma touches on the addictive quality of social media, which relates to her business success as quality customer service. If her clients are positively engaging with the training group or asking questions on Facebook, that “hit” of instant gratification allows her to feel like her business is working, or to address a potential customer service issue to ensure her clients stick with her. At the same time, the need interferes with flexibility, “which is the exact opposite of what I wanted to happen” by starting her own business. In these moments, flexibility is no longer freeing, and it frustrates her to the point of wanting to get rid of her phone.

For those who allow more and more work to slowly creep into their flexible time meant for other activities, flexibility can become more oppressive than freeing. Indeed, one of the reasons Cipher downsized her business was because this had become the case for her:

The flexibility and lifestyle that I thought I was gonna have, how freeing it was gonna be, it's like the opposite, basically. So then I started to actually think, it would be nice to actually be able to clock out at 5:00 and not carry that weight around about 'oh my god, I gotta do this, I gotta do that' and let somebody else deal with that, and you just do what you're supposed to do, and then go home.

These experiences of overwork and technology-facilitated boundless work, as mentioned by Wonder Woman above, are typical of small business entrepreneurship in the 21st century. Entrepreneurs recognize that hard work, especially for the first few years, comes with the territory. Yet for them, this is a worthy trade-off because they are working in an industry they enjoy with a community to which they belong. While they may feel like they are working all the time, having the control over how they work and what they work for makes it a bargain worth taking. Working for a passion-based sport that is already greedy with its requirements can further legitimate always

working. To reiterate Lightning's point, "If you love what you do, it's not work." If labor does not feel like work because it is something one enjoys, it can be easy to let it creep into all hours of the day, as the following comments illustrate.

Wonder Woman has experienced working all the time in a business controlled by a third party. Now in her new business, despite the current workload being "crazy," owning the business rather than working for someone else makes their hours feel less like toil: "[My husband] used to get so frustrated when I would work all the time. And now he doesn't mind at all. It's just kind of interesting how when we feel like it's all ours and on the right page or we're on the right track, things are all making sense, he's fine with, yeah, we need to work." It becomes less important to track the amount of time spent because it is done as a passion for pay. Ownership and working for oneself justifies spending more time on work.

Furiosa specifically cited passion as enabling the feeling of being "always on." Anyone she meets is a potential customer for her business. Her previous work as a bartender makes her used to networking. During an upcoming weekend trip with her partner, she plans to have product on hand: "I'm taking [some product] with me in case I see a gun store, you know what I mean? ... You're always networking. I think, if it's something you're passionate about, you're always doing it no matter what." Furiosa operates on the idea that passion for derby will lead entrepreneurs to preach its gospel wherever they go, so they always need to be representing their brand. To her, networking for her business does not feel like work. Similarly, for Quartermain, shifting from volunteer work to receiving a paycheck as paid staff was a "be careful what you ask for" moment for him in terms of hours worked: "Suddenly it made it OK to want to do derby all the time. I think I became less cognizant of the time that I might be putting into it because all the sudden, it was part of my job."

Reconciling work-family-derby conflict: Creating boundaries

Gaia delivers an inconvenient truth to those who would “die to get paid to do derby,” as Princess Peach described: if you want a sense of work/life balance, unless you are willing to self-discipline and impose your own boundaries (or do not care), do not apply for the job. She says, “It’s really one of those all or nothing things. ... It’s so horrible to say, but there’s not really good work/life balance in derby. Unless you’re somebody who, you’re really good at working hard and fast. But if you’re somebody who kind of works at a medium pace, a derby job really isn’t for you.” To Gaia, derby work is hard, fast work, and anyone looking to get involved must be responsible for scheduling and knowing when to take a break. The onus is on the individual to figure it out for themselves.

Contrary to my expectations, when I asked people if they had ever experienced “too much derby” between their competing roles of paid work, skating, leadership, and volunteering, I did not receive many answers in the overall sample that indicated being completely overwhelmed. What I found was that most of the entrepreneurs found ways to manage their time and boundaries in various ways, the primary way being Gaia’s suggestion of dedicating time for non-derby events and people. With varying degrees of success, they attempted to set boundaries between their paid work and other life arenas, especially between derby as work and derby as play. Parents specifically discussed setting boundaries between paid work, family, and derby participation.

Learning how to “turn off”: Paid work vs. everything else

Among the entrepreneurs in my sample, the most common experience (for 14 individuals) was starting derby with minimal boundaries in place between derby, paid work, and free time, then creating boundaries over time for various reasons, such as gaining employment or family. The four entrepreneurs who said that derby had previously been their entire life, but it was no longer such,

are included in this group. This was especially applicable to those who began derby in their 20s (Tico, Emma Frost, Moonstar, and Jubilee) and were still competing or recently retired. Emma Frost recalled feeling that at the beginning, passion and youth made her feel as if the sport had no bounds: “There’s a freedom of being fresh in roller derby, and yeah, being younger, I think that just made it feel like it could go on forever.” Nine years later, she has much less time to freely give: “I am significantly aware of my own limitations at this point in a way that they didn’t feel applicable at the time.” Similarly, Tico did not feel the need for balance when she started: “I was like, ‘I don’t need life balance! I’m 26 and I can do anything!’ Because 26 year olds have very little respect for their own health and safety and well-being.” With her business partner’s income and help, Red Sonja was working 24/7 because of her availability to do so: “I was doing every job that the company needed to have done, but I was doing it all the time. ... Everything always got done, but because I didn’t sit down and do my emails in a load, I was constantly on them.” But once the two had split and she moved, her need for employment and a more intense skating regimen led to creating a more manageable schedule: “I had to kinda set more realistic boundaries around when I could do [tasks for the business], how I could do them. . .so I had to start sort of figuring out what my [business] 9-5 was.”

Creating a working schedule by means of blocking off time was a way that eight entrepreneurs were able to impose structure if not already bound by specific hours. For example, Emma Frost refuses to conduct business or check her phone after 10pm, which works for her: “It’s what helps me set a boundary with regards to my day and my time and my mental thinking process, and just making sure that between the hours of 10pm and 7am, roller derby doesn’t exist. And I might be sleeping through most of it, but it doesn’t matter.” Tigra’s refusal to answer business messages past a certain point in the evening is based on the reasoning that answering creates the

expectation that she is open for business at that time, something she wants to avoid: “If people are messaging me late in the evening, I’ll ignore messages. ... People would message [me] at 11:00 at night and be like, ‘Hi [Tigra]! Could you just order us some uniforms?’ It’s 11:00! I’ve got my pajamas on!” In addition, Tigra makes sure that she scheduled off-days to avoid becoming ill if she works too much: “I always have to remind myself taking time off is a good thing because you’re relaxed. You can sleep better. You’re more refreshed and then you work more effectively.” Wren’s life is centered around derby as a travel team skater, head of her league’s training, and a shop owner, with a fiancé who was her team manager at the time. As such, she believes “it’s really important for me to have those times where my brain can go somewhere else.” The ability to “turn off,” to the point of leaving her phone at home, and spend time away from derby has helped her to avoid becoming overwhelmed: “Sometimes you just have to be like, ‘You know what, my phone, it doesn’t matter.’ I have to stop. Like it just doesn’t matter. This is time for me to go out to dinner, be with my fiancé, whatever the case may be. But it’s not time to do business.”

Depending upon level of commitment, non-derby relationships risk deteriorating upon entry into the sport. Four entrepreneurs said this was an area of their life that had suffered, and seven additional individuals discussed the importance of having friends and a life outside of derby to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Taking her own advice about being disciplined about scheduling, Gaia has been laboring for derby long enough to know when ebbs and flows in a typical season fall, and she is conscious in organizing her schedule to account for them: “I think the main thing is when you know you’re gonna have these huge piles of work to be able to go, ‘OK, I’ve gotta schedule time to go do things.’ And block it off on your calendar so you actually do it.” Because many of her evenings are filled with meetings, she and her husband (who owns his own business) have lunch together, and she makes plans to go shopping during an afternoon. She schedules

vacation in July during off-peak business time. “You have to be disciplined about plugging in when your downtime is,” she advises. “And making it so you get the most out of it. Don’t try to plan downtime when you know that you have an event going on and you’re gonna get 80 text messages.”

For four entrepreneurs, three of whom were also leaders, boundaries were currently a work in progress, as they appeared to struggle more than those who had them established (Captain Marvel, Thunder, Lightning, Tank Girl). Considering that Tico also had difficulty maintaining boundaries prior to her retirement, working in multiple roles has an impact. Length of time in derby, depending on how much one’s identity is invested into the sport, may also be at work. Thunder and Lightning are new and fresh with plenty of passion behind their work, while Captain Marvel and Tank Girl have spent most of their adult lives in derby. This small group who struggled to create boundaries were also trying to use blocking off time as a strategy with varied success. When it comes to her businesses, Tank Girl’s devotion to the community hinders her from seeing a permanent solution to spreading herself too thin. Using the visual of a Venn diagram, she sees herself at the center of 30 different circles. She describes her situation as “drowning all the time” in both the logistics of her paid work as well as “the ethos of it”:

People are like, “Can you come here and coach? Can you do this thing? Can you do that thing?” And then my team is upset when I’m not there, and my family, and—although my family is probably the most understanding of all, to be honest. But it’s like I’ve put myself into a position where people want and expect a lot from me, and sometimes those things are conflicting. And that personally is a challenge that I don’t exactly know how to solve.

Tank Girl’s ethos of sharing resources to progress her community and sport is an example of laboring for others with less regard for her own time. She sees herself as “not scalable,” suggesting that others see her as one of the few who can help with their problems, adding pressure on top of her devotion to help. Having given herself to multiple parties, the time they want from her

inevitably conflicts, like being at her team's practice *and* coaching at events. While she has tried to turn down more offers, the resources she has are valuable. This plus the willingness to do projects based on personal ethos make it difficult for her to direct inquiries to someone else: "I'm so interested in a lot of [projects] and I feel like I could offer value or help or be of service to them, and I get myself sucked into it even though I try not to accept more now than I can handle. I tried to learn that. But there's so much work to be done..." With multiple obligations pulling her in all different directions, Tank Girl says blocking off time has been a work in progress for her, but it has been successful so far. Previously, she would binge work on one portion and ignore everything else: "I would work 16 hours on bookkeeping. ... And then everybody in that 16 hours that wasn't bookkeeping would be so mad at me that I hadn't responded." She now breaks her workday into chunks to manage multiple projects: "I'm better now about having an operational calendar and I break my day up into like, 2 hours of derby work and 4 hours of business work, and then an hour or two of coaching, and an hour of planning or logistics for travel or whatever."

Both Thunder and Lightning struggle to mentally "turn off" at the end of the day. Thunder compares the lack of work boundaries to that of her husband, who works in healthcare: "When he leaves, he literally doesn't have to think about [work] until he goes back the next day. Us, we go to sleep with it. Wake up with it. Literally nonstop." The frustration results in a cyclical pattern of attempting to set boundaries with work stoppage, then forgetting and allowing work to creep in until it becomes too much, only to repeat. Thunder and Lightning both acknowledge that they are the ones ultimately in charge of their schedule, which makes it even more frustrating:

Thunder: I just messaged [Lightning] a couple weeks ago and I was like, "OK, I'm gonna stop work at 4pm, I'm gonna not do anything after 4pm, I'm gonna cook, I'm gonna hang out with my husband, I'm gonna do this!" And she was like, "You know you just said that three months ago." I was like, "This time, I mean it, god dang it! This time, I'm serious! No more of this working late, I'm sick of it!" And it's so irritating. It's like, we're our bosses.

Lightning: Nobody's telling us that...

Thunder: We are not—nobody's forcing us to do this!

Lightning: Exactly.

Thunder: But we do have that maddening voice in our heads that's like, you have to do this or it's not getting done. (sighs)

While they love their work because of the industry and their control over their business, Thunder and Lightning perceive their success as ultimately resting solely on their shoulders – “if we don’t do it, no one else will.” They are not working for someone who is telling them how to run their schedule, and they stand in their own way of working within boundaries. Thunder places the onus on she and Lightning to manage their time: “If we could just manage our time and organize it better to get everything we need to do done in a 9-to-5, it’s possible.” To that end, Thunder has begun to set a timer that alerts her to the end of her workday, which she has determined should be around 4pm. She and Lightning jokingly suggest that they need to physically “clock out” of their business time to spend time with their families or go to practice:

Lightning: We should get those little clock-out things, go (*imitates pulling a lever*)...

Thunder: We need to have a pterodactyl that squawks for a clock. (laughs)

While a joking reference, their suggestion of having a physical timeclock suggests that they desire those boundaries to prevent work from creeping into time with their families.

Derby as work vs. derby as play

One boundary that can be hard but sometimes necessary to impose is between work and skating derby – the reason why entrepreneurs went into business in the first place. Tank Girl’s previous quote that her “team is upset when I’m not there” highlights the conflict between contribute to her team given her other paid and unpaid work for the sport. Captain Marvel, who

does not see herself as having “healthy boundaries” around her work, also struggles making time for derby as play on a highly competitive level and derby as paid work:

The boundary that's hardest, I'd have to say, is playing derby at the level that I play at and wanting to continue to play it at that level. Which is an unpaid professional athlete, you know? And running my businesses. Because I could also be in the gym for two hours a day, which I have in years past, but [my businesses] totally just sat on the shelf. So which one am I gonna put first, my athleticism or my derby businesses? My derby career or my derby businesses? So that is hard.

Captain Marvel describes herself as a binge worker, like how Tank Girl previously worked. Her approach is very much all or nothing, even though this may negatively impact whatever arena of her life does not receive attention in the meantime (her businesses sitting on the shelf). When I spoke to her, she explained that for years she had given herself permission to hyper-focus on derby, making it her life and crucial to her identity. Finding that she wanted to move onto other chapters of her life, her approach for the coming year was to follow Emma Frost’s suggestion of creating mental boundaries around derby and everything else: “What I've decided for [this year] is that when it's time to focus on derby, I'm gonna be really deliberate about it. I'm gonna be very diligent in my actions and what I do. But when it's not time to focus on roller derby, I'm just gonna like not even fucking think about it.”

Nine entrepreneurs reported that at some point they had stepped back from derby (or in Furiosa’s case, used time while recovering from injury) in order to focus more on their businesses. This can mean transferring to a less competitive league, taking a break, or retiring from skating altogether. Rescue left a Playoffs-level league for one with a more relaxed practice schedule in order to find her version of balance: “Practicing five days a week. I worked out five days a week. And I had the full-time job and running this [derby] business. And I honestly can't tell you how in the hell I survived that. (laughs) ... I decided I was kinda done with that higher end competition level, so I came back to this other league... It was a little bit easier to focus on the business at that

time.” When I spoke to Karma, she had returned from a leave of absence to focus on her business.

The irony of leaving derby for derby is not lost on her:

Last year, when the business was just starting...it just became so much that I had to pull back from something else that took up a lot of time, and that thing happened to be roller derby. Out of everything, right? I took a leave of absence at the end of last year for six months and just had to focus on the business. And that was a really big sacrifice in part because I'm building a roller derby business and I'm not even playing right now.

At the time of interview, Wonder Woman was not skating competitively. Shortly after her youngest child was born and her business started, she suffered a major injury during gameplay.

She describes having the moment of clarity that led her to step away from playing derby:

I have a baby and a new business, and I thought, “You know what, I think this is God trying to tell me that maybe I’m doing too much, and I should just focus on the business and the baby right now.” I could hold the baby in bed, but I couldn’t carry the baby. I couldn’t take care of our kids. I’m like, “Wow.” This really was a reality check. Like what are my priorities? I have kids to take care of. I have my business to take care of. And I need to step away.

Wonder Woman was trying to manage competing devotions of playing derby, starting a derby business, and raising a family with a new baby. She saw her injury as a sign to show her that despite her attempts to “have it all,” she could not. Her business and her children needed to take priority over playing. After her injury, she returned to skating recreationally, but not on the competitive level. She sees this less as a sacrifice, thinking that she will always be a skater and will come back to it when she is ready.

Parent entrepreneurs: Work vs. derby vs. family

As the above stories of Wonder Woman exemplifies, compared to child-free individuals, parents tend to be firmer on boundaries between derby and non-derby. Already busy with her shop, Rogue went into derby knowing that she would limit her skating commitment to make time for her son: “I won’t be one of those girls that goes and practices four days a week. Won’t do it because it’s not fair. My son’s 16, only got a couple more years before he’s done with high school, out of

the house, and I don't wanna have regrets about missing things because I put too much into the derby." Rogue has a limited time to spend with her aging son, and so for the time being she will put any extended commitment to a hobby on hold for his sake. Other parents also discussed having boundaries in place if they had kids prior to derby. For example, Betty Boop stops working when her children come home from school, Daria does not talk about derby when she leaves the shop, and Jean Gray prioritizes family mealtime above derby practice and her derby work. Those with home-based businesses, like Betty Boop, Jean Gray, and Lightning, face the issue of their home serving as the place for family and paid work. In addition to limiting work hours when their children are home, Jean Gray and Betty Boop have spaces in their home specifically dedicated to their workspace, which helps create a physical boundary. Even though Lightning's work boundaries are a work in progress, the needs of her daughter do force her to stop working: "I know I have to cook dinner or else she does not eat. Which is terrible, I can't have that. So I stop working about 4:00, cook, feed her, all that stuff."

The remaining parents, whose children were born after starting derby, created boundaries along the way. When Karma first joined derby, she considered it her life. "It was everything," she recalls. "I would put aside everything to go to practice. I would make every practice. I'd play in every game. I'd do 15 volunteer hours a month. It was really important to me." Giving birth to her son changed her priorities, and she acknowledges the struggle that mothers can face when they have a child during their derby career: "Life changes when you have a kid. And you think it's not gonna change. You're like, 'Oh, I'm gonna come back, I'm gonna do all the things that I did.' And then you're like, 'Oh right, roller derby is not actually as important as I thought it was.' Now I have to adjust to that understanding." With her son now a toddler, she has limited the time she gives to derby, now thinking of the sport as a hobby but still a serious venture: "Right now, it's a hobby

that I take very seriously. But I won't give that hobby more time than I feel like it deserves anymore.”

Raven intentionally tries to set a positive example for her son regarding her technology use, which leads to the expectation that her employees may not be able to contact her after a certain time of day:

I have a little kid and I don't want him to see me glued to an electronic [device] 'cause they take their cues from their parents and the people they're around, and I don't want him to be one of those people that's disconnected from the world around them because they're into this little screen device thing that they're on. ... They kinda know. Like she's gonna be available until about 2:30, and then after that, it's hit or miss. She might not have her phone on her at all, or if she's gonna hear it ring.

In addition to selecting projects with the biggest potential social impact (as explained in the previous chapter), Quartermain's children have been another factor in protecting his time from derby work as the years have passed:

Yeah, I think the first 2-3 years, I probably went pretty nuts. Just pouring everything I had into it. But I've always been very conscientious about the amount of time that I have spent with my kids. For the most part, I've always worked around all of their events and their games and those kinds of things unless I was gone. But I probably spent a lot of nights working that I don't spend doing anymore. A lot of weekends working in the office that I don't do anymore, I'd say since about [three or four years ago]. It's almost kind of funny, I think, to some people, 'cause they'll be, “I sent you a Facebook message over the weekend,” and I'm like “I'm not looking at Facebook over the weekend!” (laughing) I gotta go to the movies with my kids or something else.

The above parents' experiences illustrate, in their view, good parenthood by limiting their derby work/participation for their children. Rogue's quote on how “it's not fair” for her to be gone for multiple times a week for derby supports this point. They are already trying to make fit work with family, showing the ways that they prioritize family. If they have additional roles as volunteer or skater, they are also trying to make leisure fit into that matrix (and for some, it does not fit as well as it used to).

While many of the entrepreneurs' stories demonstrate a linear path beginning with unfettered devotion and ending with stepping back, Moonstar's story is an example of changing boundaries based on life events. Having been in derby for 12 years, she identifies key points where her orientation toward the sport shifted between hobby and passion:

When I first started, it was definitely more like "oh, this is just a hobby I do." I'd go to practices, I'd skate, but I wasn't really doing anything from the back end of things. I didn't have a job in the league. ... It wasn't until maybe my third year of skating that I actually took on a job in the league, and that was coaching. And I feel like that's when, after a few years, I felt like it kinda turned into...like I had built this love for this sport and I wanted to do it more. So I started attending more practices and investing myself into being a very good derby player. And making my team as good as they could be, so that took work. It took watching video and reading articles and all that stuff. And at that point, I think it went beyond just a hobby and more into that...you know, passion. Then after a while, I had to kind of reestablish where it fit into my life. Turns out having a child can take up a lot of your time. So I couldn't commit quite as much to roller derby... I took myself off the charter team. I devoted more time to being a brand new mom. And after the first year or so, then I kinda moved back into giving it more time, more of a hobby—not like a hobby, more of that passion. Where I started being captain for our charter team and putting a lot more effort and time into it. And now this year with opening up the shop...I've taken a year off of competition so that I can focus on making sure the shop is strong and sustainable.

Moonstar's entry is a little different from skaters like Tico who dove into derby headfirst. Derby began as a hobby because she was not yet heavily involved – she would skate and go home. It was not until she took on a leadership role within her league that she started to develop an overwhelming passion for the sport, allowing herself to spend more time on the sport to become a better player. When her child was born, she left paid work to be a stay-at-home mother and had to reevaluate the role of derby in her life; family was now a competing devotion. She stepped back temporarily until her child was older, and then gave herself permission to do derby as a passion once again. Looking for a source of income that would fit best with her family, she acquired the shop and now found derby as paid work. Because the shop is in its first year, derby skating was a sacrifice she was willing to make to build her business. Overall, Moonstar's story shows that one's

orientation toward derby is flexible and relies partially on stage of life course – and that derby can be as much of a competing devotion as work and family.

“They think a girl couldn’t be running the place”: Facing “the good old boys’ club” and gendered expertise in the industry

Despite the growth in women and girls participating at the retailer level, the most prominent and powerful figures on the business side of skating are still white men, as is also the case in other alternative sport industries. Women at the manufacturing or distribution level are rare, as Tank Girl confirms: “In manufacturing or the distribution of roller skate goods in North America and abroad, with the exception of one very powerful female distributor in Australasia, [it’s] all just crusty old white dudes.” Two entrepreneurs explicitly referred to the network of long-standing skate goods manufacturers and distributors as “a good old boys’ club.” Furthermore, beyond the owners of the top tier manufacturing companies, the individuals who work as sales representatives for these companies also tend to be men. Most retailers and resellers, at least among the businesses that cater to roller derby specifically, are women. Tico notes that in the vendor village at tournaments or events, such as Rollercon, “there’s the skate shops and then there’s the vendors, and the vendors by and large send men. So when it’s [any of the larger gear companies], the big distributors are usually staffed by men. And they don’t really know what to do with all of these very strong women around them.” That is, according to Tico, the men sales reps who come to the women-dominated space of derby are not always prepared to handle knowledgeable women consumers who know what products they prefer.

Loyalty and longevity in the skating industry are factors in how well an entrepreneur can negotiate with a distributor about carrying product. Tank Girl describes the reality she faces in this task: “If you haven’t been selling stuff to them since 1965, or you can’t offer them some exorbitant margin that’s only available if you make stuff overseas, even though now you could work them

down...they just won't take you seriously, basically is all it is." Daria has run into this problem as a new owner to a small shop: "I've had certain vendors, because I'm a smaller business, they don't care. They're like, if I need something—I don't wanna say something special, but there are some that aren't willing to work with you because you're a small place and you don't order thousands and thousands of dollars from them every month." In addition to indifference, Gambit's company was once the subject of hostile rumors and backstabbing from several manufacturers. He attributes this to them trying to run his shop out of business "because we're the new kids on the block," as he elaborates on the treatment they received:

We would go to Rollercon and we would hear the types of rumors that were being spread about us and that were just completely unfounded and completely untrue. And these were from manufacturers who were more than happy to take our money and sell us product and then turn around and...say bad things about us behind our backs, and then also giving preferential treatment mainly in the form of pricing to other businesses and denying it and telling us that we get the same price as everybody else.

Gambit's experience is reminiscent of Rescue and her business partner were subject to rumors, though it is unclear whether manufacturers or individuals started the "corporate people" rumors in Rescue's case. Gambit clarified that his business's relationship with those certain manufacturers has improved since then, but he is still hesitant to trust them.

Gender further compounds the problem. Here Tank Girl tells a story that exemplifies this point, and what happened when she attempted to call out not being taken seriously:

I was getting the run-around pretty hard by one of them. ... They'd be like, "Oh my God, [this product] is so amazing," they loved it, and then I kinda feel like once they figured out it was me—like a lady, and a young woman, and the independent athlete—then it kind of slowed down. And so I was getting the run-around and I was starting to feel a little rude, so I drafted them a letter. And generally I don't have a lot to say. But I drafted them the letter and I told them exactly what I thought of their good old boys' network and named it as such. Of course, then they write me back in a minute, and they're like, "Oh no, no, you misunderstand, you've got it all wrong, you're being irrational," like all the things you tell women in business. And then they're like, "Yeah, yeah, send more samples, we'd love to carry it!" And I was like, "You know what, just fuck you guys. I'm done."

An outcome of being shut out of the traditional networks is that Tank Girl had to create her own dealer network, cutting out the middleman and interacting directly with resellers. She rationalizes this as a blessing in disguise, arguing that the old model of distribution is behind the curve on how individuals shop in the 21st century: “Really makes no sense to go through distributors anymore because they’re kind of from another era. ... [People purchase] kind of more on demand, more from their computer, more from home. It’s a very postmodern situation, like it’s all fragmented into a million different pieces.” While she partially credits her success to the rejection from the good old boys’ network, “[that] doesn’t mean I like ‘em.” With this view, this is both a business- and ethos-based decision: an adaptation to emerging consumption trends, and a strong “fuck you guys” to an elite white male establishment.

Derby-specific businesses, such as coaching/training, apparel, and accessories businesses (Furiosa’s business is a notable exception), cater to derby clientele almost exclusively. This means that if men patronize the business, it is most likely they are from the derby community. But a business-driven decision that derby entrepreneurs may need to consider for financial survival is diversification, selling and marketing products to people outside of derby. Businesses with diversified products and applications interact with individuals outside of the community, whether these are customers, sales reps, or distributors. For example, Betty Boop reported that a significant proportion of her sales come from dancers. Unlike apparel or accessories brands that cater mostly to women or female-identifying individuals, skate shop owners and skate manufacturers fall more squarely into the men-dominated industry of alternative sports (e.g. skateboarding, park/ramp skating). As such, the typical clientele at a general skate shop reflect this demographic and expect to see people like themselves running the shop. Furthermore, there is an underlying assumption that women do not have enough technical knowledge to assemble or fix gear. Several entrepreneurs

(Rogue, Tico, Tigra, Tank Girl) shared instances where men or adolescent boys would ask for “the boss” or for technical help from anyone else but the women owners and employees. Rogue gives an example of this:

We’ve had a lot of instances—a man will walk through that door, come in here asking for a skateboard. I’ll be standing here like this [*stands behind the counter, ready to help*]. ... And sometimes they’ll look at me and then they’ll turn to [my man friend] and then they’ll ask [him] a question about the skateboard. ... But they tend to look for a male in this atmosphere, and they want a man—they’ll ask customers. They’ll ask just people hanging out. They’ll ask people just walking through the store instead of people, literally the people who are working, who are behind the counter, who are touching the register. And all of the time, they’re like, “I need some help putting this together. Is there anyone here who can do this?” [And I say,] “Yes, as a matter of fact!” But yes, we run into that all the time. All the time. They think a girl couldn’t possibly be running the place. A girl couldn’t possibly understand anything about this. A girl couldn’t know how to build something.

The gendered expectation becomes clearer with an example from when Rogue’s teenage son worked in the shop during the summertime and waited on customers. Customers expected him, as a boy, to build their skate deck: “My son would be like, ‘My mom will be building that for you. I will ring you up.’ (laughs) And the look on a lot of the faces are like, confusion. ‘Why are you male and don’t know how to put a skateboard together but that girl over there knows how to do it?’” To these customers, technical knowledge is expected in a teenage boy, but not in a woman in her mid-40s.

The assumption that women entrepreneurs are merely selling items without possessing technical knowledge is also supported by experiences of knowledge testing by men and adolescent boys. Coaches and trainers tend to stay within the realm of derby due to specialization and familiarity; as Karma puts it, “roller derby understands roller derby and that’s nice.” When there is the potential for crossover into other athletic realms, trainers may be subject to the same type of mansplaining that skate shop owners face. Karma talks about her experiences within online general

fitness industry groups, noting that her knowledge is frequently discounted. She explicitly attributes this to being a woman in fitness:

Men are seen as understanding the subject matter better for some reason, I don't know why. They're never second-guessed when they say something. Like whenever I say something online, it's like the world exploded. Like how dare she? How dare she say that? She doesn't know what she's talking about. I got in a fight with a male nutritionist who was like, "There's no way that you need to be eating that much protein." And I was like, "Well, actually, this is what I do, I do [derby] and I lift weights and I'm this active, and if I'm only subsisting off of 46 grams of protein you tell me I need, I'm gonna die. I'm gonna be anemic and I'm gonna die."

Tico also expresses irritation with the mansplaining that accompanies being a woman skate shop owner: "We've been studying this stuff for, between [me and my business partner], almost 20 years now. And we've always been interested in the nitty gritty gear parts of skating. And to have some dude come in and be like, 'Well, I don't know if you've heard about these PowerDyne plates...'" Like listen, mother fucker. Yes, as a matter of fact we have." What is encouraging is that, from these comments, Tico, Karma, and Tank Girl take their discouragers to task and respond.

Some entrepreneurs made a distinction in that it is gender expression, specifically masculinity, that facilitate an easier connection to men and boys. Wren, who owns a multidisciplinary skate shop, suggests that her gender expression may have hindered her initial success in this fashion:

On the skateboarding side, I probably would have done a lot better a lot faster if I was a guy. Or at least a little bit more masculine, like you know what I mean? I'm a little bit of a ditz, so I'm like "[in cheery voice] Hey guys!" (laughs) I think maybe on the skateboarders, 'cause it's a bunch of teenage dudes, that maybe they would have taken me a little bit more seriously a little bit faster. They wouldn't have tested me as much as they did with knowledge of skateboarding. ... They'd come in and just tell me to grip their board, and I'm like "Really? OK." Tell me what I do wrong, how they need to do it, it's just weird shit.

Femininity may compound the issue; while being a woman regardless of presentation creates customer skepticism unless proven otherwise, being a feminine woman deepens this hole and makes entrepreneurs like Wren have to work harder to prove herself.

Emma Frost makes a link between masculinity, confidence, and competence, citing that societal definitions are femininity as making oneself small “are actively antithetical to our business model,” which is based on women’s empowerment. Her direct approach, as a woman, surprises people: “Women tend to be a little bit louder and crasser in the States than they do in Europe. So my approach and my delivery to things here, it’s something very surprising to a lot of people there. They’re not always sure why I’m so confident about whatever it is that I’m talking about... And I think if I was a man, I think it would be a less surprising thing. And I think less impressive to them.” The more masculine the presentation, “the more [sales reps or owners] enjoy working with you. It’s quite interesting. (laughs)” Practicing direct communication (asking for what one wants) is impressive and unexpected for women whereas it is the norm for men, and using direct communication leads to a more pleasant exchange for women entrepreneurs.

Furiosa drew on a discourse of confidence as what allows her to be taken seriously, yet she also acknowledged experiences of being treated differently as a woman. She has gradually become a chemist in practice as her business has grown, though she does not have formal credentials or past experience in the field. Her first experience selling at a gun show (a business decision to diversify) demonstrates that while women may draw attention by virtue of being women in a men-dominated space, their knowledge is stringently tested, something that was noticeably absent when she traveled in the same spaces with her father.

My first gun show that I did, I was really nervous to talk to these older men—I mean, they just want to quiz you. “Hey, you’re a woman selling a product to men.” At a gun show. Like, “What are you doing here?” But you draw them to your table because you are a woman at a gun show, you know what I mean? And they’re like, “What is this [product]?”

What is going on here?" ... People definitely treat you different as a woman. Sometimes better, sometimes worse. Maybe they think maybe I don't know exactly what I'm talking about. And maybe sometimes I don't, really, honestly. But that just comes with time. But at this point, I think that I know enough about our products that I really do know what I'm talking about. And that comes back to the confidence thing. Like you have to be able to build up enough confidence and knowledge to be able to look knowledgeable to that person. And the second that you, even for one split second that you don't look knowledgeable, they're gonna immediately [be] like "*(frowns)* Mmmm." You get this "OK, well, then, what about this?" Then they keep drilling and trying to twist questions to make sure that you either do or don't know what you're talking about. But I think you probably get that more as a woman. I can't really say for sure. But I felt that a lot at the gun show.

Furiosa's first thought is that it is gender that leads to differential treatment, whether this is attracting positive attention or testing knowledge ("they just want to quiz you"). As she continues, she then makes a secondary link to confidence. One must thoroughly know their product and its competitors, lest they look incompetent. She still notes at the end that "you get that a lot more as a woman," suggesting that confidence is gendered. The men at the gun show may have been more likely to overlook one instance of tripping over a talking point if it had been Furiosa's father talking, but not Furiosa.

Confidence may be a tool that helps women entrepreneurs at the retail level (the same does not apply to competing manufacturers such as Tank Girl). Yet Wren suggests that too much confidence, especially when exhibited by men, may backfire. Acknowledging that the view is stereotypical, she suggests that there are gender differences in selling tactics:

I think that anytime a guy comes in that has confidence and is like, "No, this is what you need," girls don't wanna hear that. ... I find that a lot of guys, when they come into the business, they're very confident, which is great, and once they know the product, they're like "this is what it is"... And if it's a skater that's particular in what they like, and then you have this hard-selling dude—or a hard selling anybody for that matter—that immediately turns them off.

This links to Tico's comment about sales reps being unprepared for strong women: a hard-selling sales tactic that may work for a boy buying a skateboard may turn away an equally knowledgeable woman customer. In this way also, confidence is gendered. While Wren does state later that "some

people just like the hard sell” depending upon personality and hard-selling is not limited to men, her initial thought of “girls don’t wanna hear” a man telling them what they need is a reflection of derby as a strong women-dominated space.

Conclusion

While entrepreneurs work for passion rather than financial stability, they reveal that there is a lot of behind the scenes work to maintain their businesses. They were clear that derby work is a dream job, but not in the sense that one will never have to do any unpleasant tasks. Passion work is real work. More time is invested in rote and repetitive tasks, physical and mental toil, and struggling before one can even get to the fun travel and “making a difference” part – if an entrepreneur even gets to that point at all before they call it quits.

Real work also means that desired/needed flexibility in opening a business can be negated by working all the time. 24/7 access and overwork are aided by constant technological connectivity and passion for the community to be available for customer service (which doubles as a business decision). Being available for the community creates a bind. Being unavailable drives away customers but being too available risks having no time to oneself. Some entrepreneurs with a long, deep devotion to the community did have issues creating boundaries for themselves because of their inclination to do for others above themselves. This suggests that the collective ethos of the derby community exacerbates the ideal worker norm in derby paid work, setting a difficult dilemma to reconcile between doing for self and doing for others. Because most of the entrepreneurs are self-employed, Tokumitsu’s (2015) structural critique of “do what you love” as passion masking employee exploitation takes on a slightly different tone. As Thunder and Lightning said, no one is forcing them to work overtime but themselves. However, the onus is on the individual to change to make sure they discipline their own schedule if they want to achieve

“balance” between their competing devotions of derby, work, and family – not on the society in which they operate.

Entrepreneurs’ experiences of the ideal worker norm are also gendered. Those who have diversified their businesses to attract customers beyond the derby niche step into the men-dominated world of alternative sports and roller sports more generally. From the women entrepreneurs’ stories, when men and boys enter their shops or interact with the boss, they expect to see someone like themselves and doubt that the woman behind the counter has the technical or business knowledge to grip a board, much less run a shop. Being a woman in a man’s space may get initial notice, but once entrepreneurs begin to talk business, gatekeepers ignore them, decline to take them seriously, or ask for the (male) boss. When these women exude confidence and directly communicate, they find it is easier to work with men to make sales and connections, as this is more in line with what is expected of entrepreneurial behavior. Especially within alternative sport industries, workers are held to masculine-typed behavior. This reduces chances for advancement even for child-free women if they do not play the game, as other research has demonstrated (Acker 1990; Brumley 2014a; Kelly et al. 2010; Pierce 1996).

Whether a side hustle or a full-time job, entrepreneurs know that they are going into business with the promise of being financially rewarded for their efforts, even if being able to subsist on that income never comes to pass. But what happens when one’s derby labor is unpaid, with the only expected reward as skating? When those labors prevent skating, what then? In the next chapter, I discuss how unpaid leaders attempt to tackle these boundaries between derby as work and play, what happens when derby becomes an obligation – and how the ideal worker norm presents itself even in unpaid leadership work.

CHAPTER 8: “BEING A RESPONSIBLE ADULT IS NOT WHY I JOINED DERBY”: REAL WORK AND THE IDEAL WORKER NORM IN DERBY LEADERSHIP

Whatever entrepreneurs’ expectations are regarding profitability and flexibility, they know going in that they are creating a business and that work is part of the process. Comparatively, leaders have a harder time differentiating between derby as work/business and derby as a recreational hobby. As they are unpaid, this rationale of “nobody’s getting paid” becomes a common refrain as they try to explain why derby more sinisterly creeps into other arenas of their life and greedily takes over. In this chapter, I outline the issues of real work and the ideal worker norm as experienced by unpaid leadership.

Participants are split in how they define their unpaid labor for derby. Those who view it as a job rationalize this characterization based on the time invested, the responsibility required, and the fact that it requires “work” in terms of physical and knowledge-based labor. Those who view it as a hobby, or more than a hobby but not quite a job, point to derby’s pay-to-play status and the idea that the obligation to stay is not the same as in paid work, even when they know it takes time. Whether they view it as a job or hobby, leaders agree that their position requires a degree of work not expected of general membership. Unfortunately for them, this workload often remains invisible, unintentionally or purposefully. Invisibility of their extra work can lead to resentment for members who do not appreciate the effort and just expect work to be done.

Leaders act like entrepreneurs in terms of the ideal worker norm in that they also overwork, in part due to technology. The ideal worker norm combines with passion for the sport, as exemplar leaders are considered those who devote themselves to the sport and do derby all the time. Leadership work creeps into leaders’ non-derby paid work and family time, essentially adding a third shift of labor. Unlike entrepreneurs who claim that they alone are responsible for their successes and failures (structural factors notwithstanding), leaders are part of a collective in which

everyone is expected to do their part to keep their organizations running. In reality, the brunt of the work falls to leaders who often try to delegate and cannot stand by while delegated work is left undone. If leaders are unable to meet a commitment, they can feel guilty for not fulfilling their role for the collective. In some cases, guilt can keep leaders staying in their positions out of obligation if there is not a willing replacement or if they feel it would cause harm to the organization. Collective responsibility then turns to individual responsibility, prompting even more overwork, but no longer out of passion. At some point, leaders who may have started derby by making it the center of their lives lose interest or experience life events that become a higher priority (becoming partnered or married, childbirth, etc.). Blocking off time, learning how to say no, limiting their leadership responsibilities, or retiring from skating is how leaders tend to draw boundaries.

While this chapter focuses on derby leadership in theme, all but one participant in my overall sample has been a member or volunteer for a derby league. Entrepreneurs also have experience that speak to these issues, and their perspectives are included as appropriate.

Is it a job, a hobby, or what? Defining derby as work, or not work

While there is an expectation that derby is a lifestyle, participants vary widely in how they choose to make the sport fit into their lives, making decisions that work for them based on personal interests and life stage. Among all participants, five considered derby their life, eight viewed derby in general as a hobby, and ten viewed it as a job (six of these were entrepreneurs). Four saw derby as more than a hobby but were unsure what word was best, and eight felt that derby was *no longer* their life. The remaining participants viewed derby as a combination of job and hobby (two entrepreneur/leaders) or used a different word to describe it, such as “my getaway” (Thunder, entrepreneur) or a “vocation” (Sage, leader). Other than slightly more leaders believing derby was their life compared to entrepreneurs (4 to 1), there was no difference in perception by demographic

characteristics. Participants' perception of derby as a job were grounded in either the number of hours spent or others' dependence upon their labor. However, the main factor that keeps individuals from considering derby as a job – regardless of the amount of work involved – is the fact that (as iterated by 21 participants) the sport is run and played by mostly unpaid volunteers.

In retrospect, leaders remarked that they had no idea of the labor involved when they first began – that they would be the ones running practice, selling merch, and laying track. Padme (leader) says that, had she known the workload, she might not have joined the sport in the first place:

AD: Did you have any idea of the responsibilities and other things that you had to do?

Padme: Hell, no. (laughs) Not at all. And I guess, had I known back then, I wouldn't have even started [derby]. Had someone told me back then that I would ever be so involved in a hobby, I wouldn't have believed them. Never.

Storm (leader) also did not know what responsibilities were involved with joining derby. Having participated in an adult recreational soccer team housed within a fitness/sports complex, she was under the impression that derby would operate similarly: “I probably just assumed it was like soccer, like the rec leagues I had been playing... Yeah, I had no idea that we would be owning and running the business ourselves.” Also seeking a more recreational atmosphere, Phoenix (leader) sees the mismatch between his prior expectations and his current reality: “Being a responsible adult is not why I joined derby. I sort of hoped for a beer league kind of sport and midnight hockey with your friends, but that's hard to achieve in your 30s.”

Harley (entrepreneur) had trouble putting a label to derby, describing it as “a little bit more than a hobby” due to the extra labor involved besides showing up and skating:

I think it's all the different committees...you have to be either on finance or you have to help out with running practices or all the other things that are in the background, right? So I think that's what makes it a little bit more than a hobby, is you really have to be into it and dedicated to your team to bring in all these extra man hours. It's not just about going

and skating and then showing up for games and going home. You gotta help lay down the track. You gotta help sell the merch.

Raven's (entrepreneur) comments are representative of those who recognized the sheer amount of work involved in derby, but the lack of payment led to confusion over what to make of derby as an activity:

Anyone who's playing roller derby, that could constitute a job with what's expected of them. What their involvement is with the league and the things they do. There's people that volunteer a ton and the ones that don't. So yeah, I suppose you could argue either. 'Cause you are expected to do more than just show up and skate to keep the league going. So yeah, I'm gonna stick with job. (laughs) Even though we're not getting paid. Our payment is that we get to be on a team and skate. But I guess the definition would be that you were paid, right? For it to be a job? So it wouldn't fit the definition.

Harley and Raven each hedged on what to call derby based on their descriptions of labor expected for the sport. If derby were just a hobby, participants could show up to skate for two hours and then go home, as is the case for most recreational sports teams. However, the extra work of operating the league and producing events requires more time investment than a typical hobby. But, as Raven notes, even though the labor can be job-like, it would not fit a wage-based definition of a job.

Mockingbird (entrepreneur) was less hesitant about her definition of derby as a job, comparing unpaid labor for derby to unpaid internships: "To me, derby is a job. If internships are considered a job in our society, then this is definitely a fucking job. ... The amount of hours you have to pay attention to things. It's a business. ... It requires as much work as [a job]." As a board member of his league, Xavier (leader) explains that, in addition to the amount of time spent on derby functions, derby's year-round operational schedule adds to the perception that it is a job:

Oh man, it's pretty ubiquitous. It is definitely a job. ... Just the amount of hours that go into it. And there's always something coming up. Even if it's the off-season, then we have elections coming up and have to figure out what direction we want to go for the next year and who's gonna run for the board.

Mockingbird and Xavier each use a time-based definition of job rather than a wage-based one. Because derby is time-intensive to the point where it requires “as much work as a job,” they do not hesitate to call derby, as they currently participate in it, as a job.

When taking on leadership roles, in addition to more hours spent, there are greater responsibilities in setting directions and making sure things happen for membership. Jubilee (entrepreneur/leader) was in her second season of skating when she was voted home team captain. Her new position intensified her approach to derby, leading her to treat it as a job because as a captain, now her teammates expected more from her:

I immediately was like, “You better step up your game.” It turned into “now people expect things out of you.” It was all fun and games before, like learn as you go! (laughs) It’s just a fun experience! Try hard! And then it turned into “you better get your shit together, you’re a leader.” And so I did. I got my shit together in the most detailed possible way. I organized all my workouts to mock movements in derby. I skated harder. I skated faster. I went to everything. It became my duty. I did derby like a job.

For the typical member, derby is how Jubilee experienced it before she became captain: Try and learn as you go, do not be too serious because this is a fun activity. Upon becoming captain, she assumed people would look up to her as a leader, and so she put in extra work (going to every practice, off-skates training) to be that example. She immediately saw a difference between her rookie experience and having leadership responsibilities in terms of how her teammates reacted to showing up on time for practice: “It was fun when nobody expected anything out of me, and they were just like, ‘Yay! Jubilee showed up! Great!’ (laughs) And then [after I became captain] it was like, ‘Where the fuck is Jubilee?! Oh my God, she showed up five minutes late!’” As a leader, derby became a job because people now relied more extensively on her. They had expectations for what she accomplished, and they let her know when she failed to meet them.

Oracle (leader) considers her position a full-time job, even though she does not receive monetary compensation for it, even listing her organizational leadership position as her occupation

on intake forms. Having been able to quit paid work, she has an office space in her home dedicated to her derby work, and her family understands that “just because I’m not collecting a paycheck, this is still a job and it’s hard work.” She explains her description of derby as a job in that if she does not show up, it negatively affects the organization:

It is my job in that it takes priority over other things. So if I don't check my email, things get missed. Or if I'm not going to a meeting, things get missed. And it is a company. I may not be collecting a paycheck, but it is a company, and if I didn't show up for work, it would be a detriment to my company, which ultimately would affect the sport of junior roller derby. So I take it really seriously that this is my job.

Oracle, like Jubilee, uses a responsibility-based definition of work. If she fails to perform her job because she did not make it a priority, then the organization does not operate as efficiently or immediately as it should. This in turn could have a broader cascade effect on other aspects of the sport beyond normal business operations. For example, missing an urgent email could impact a game’s sanctioning, which then impacts team rankings and post-season eligibility. Oracle is clear that her unpaid work is a job, and that the derby organization she works for is a company.

Like the entrepreneurs who go to Rollercon to make sales and network, when leaders who build the sport travel³⁵ for derby, it is for work and not a vacation. Although entrepreneurs risk losing money if they do not make enough sales, unless unpaid leaders have paid time off, they lose income and personal days that could be used for other needs. Princess Peach makes it clear that although doing derby work is incredibly rewarding, “I haven’t gotten paid a dime to do this. I’ve used all my paid time off the past two years for roller derby. I don’t get to take a vacation because when I go to Berlin, I’m in a conference room almost all day.” When telling me about her recent

³⁵ For leaders involved only at the local level, there is no travel expected for board members or committee heads, but the amount varies for travel team management/captains depending on the team level (A/B/C). For leaders in governance, travel is part of the job expectation.

trip to Australia on behalf of her organization, she notes that while it was a worthwhile experience to help the sport's international growth, it was a "work trip" with no time for tourist stops:

Princess Peach: When I went to Australia, I was literally there for four days because I didn't have any time [from my job] that I could take to do that. So I flew there, I was at the tournament for the four days of the tournament, and then I flew back. I didn't, you know...

AD: *Didn't sightsee or anything.*

Princess Peach: Right. No. And [the organization] paid for that. And so it was a work trip for me... And I got to meet a bunch of amazing people, and I feel like I was able to bring back a lot of feedback that helped us understand where roller derby is in Australia. I was able to make a lot of contact, and I feel like it was a good thing that I went. But I mean, when you think about it, when I tell people that "oh yeah, I've been to Australia," they're like, "Where were you?" I'm like, "I was in Adelaide." They're like, "Oh, did you see the—" No, I didn't see anything. I didn't do wine tours. I didn't even see the ocean except when I was flying over it. And I don't think of it as a missed opportunity, but I don't know how many more of those that I have in me.

Watching a derby tournament is only a small piece of the work, as most of it takes place in a conference room. Princess Peach spends her vacation time doing work, preventing her from having a derby-free and work-free vacation. Because of the lack of downtime and international travel, she notes that she does not know how many more of these trips she can take without feeling completely depleted.

The refrain of derby as unpaid labor (i.e. "we pay to play," "nobody's getting paid for this," "derby doesn't pay the bills") has a different meaning depending upon the context. The phrase can serve as a bolster to derby's amateur, grassroots structure and reminds participants of the "real" reason why they do this: because they have a passion for it, and that passion should be enough reward instead of a financial gain. Red Sonja (entrepreneur) says, "You have to be passionate about it to spend as much time and as much money as we do. We all pay to play." Coming from a leader, it can be a reminder to members that running a league is a hefty responsibility and they have "real jobs" they need to do while still devoting their unpaid off-time

to derby work. Mothma (leader) speaks of her league co-owner role in this way: “Both [co-owner] and I, we don’t get paid for what we do. We volunteer a lot of hours for doing what we do.” Princess Peach also uses this rationale in her story about traveling to Australia. For entrepreneurs specifically, as explained in the previous chapter, the statement confirms that there is no significant money to be made in modern derby. For those who cannot afford or do not wish to run a business full-time, that they need a “real job” to help keep their “hobby job” going. This can also be a rationale used by someone who has needed to step back to a less intense commitment or to renew their passion for the sport, as Padme (leader) did after a year of burnout-inducing travel: “Although it is a lot of work, I still try to regard it as a hobby and remind [myself] that although I love doing it...that it does not pay my bills, that it is something that I started as fun, and that it should stay fun for me.” To Padme, unpaid derby cannot replace her paid salary no matter how fun it is – and it should stay a fun hobby that she does not feel obligated to stay in if it stops being that way. Poison Ivy (leader) thinks the idea of getting paid to do derby “would be lovely,” but that would tack on expectations of her as a skater that she is not willing to do: “I do this for fun, not for a job, and not to be a professional athlete, which I’m definitely not. I don’t wanna be disciplined for eating a hamburger because if I work out for 3 hours straight in 90 degrees, I’m gonna go get a fucking hamburger after practice! And have a beer, you know?” Professional sports are done for a paycheck, the key factor that keeps amateur modern derby from becoming a complete obligation in her mind.

While it may be difficult to exit a life-consuming activity, as Padme’s and Jubilee’s comments each highlight, that choice is ideally still there. Princess Peach (leader) compares her voluntary role as leadership to financially compensated staff, noting that she has the ability to step back if she needs to: “It’s not my job. I can step away when I need to, and people just understand

because we all do this because we love it. Whereas those people who do it for a living, they don't get to say that." She contrasts her role with that of the first WFTDA executive director, Bloody Mary, who was paid for her labor and could not step away as easily: "I know how hard we work Bloody. ... Because this was her living. Championships weekend, [she's skating and] she's up on the dais if we need her. She's pulling her credit card out if we need to run to the store. She is there on call the entire year." Princess Peach perceives that the job of running roller derby must be made more difficult if there is a paycheck attached to it because of its dream-like quality: "We make it that much harder for them. The job has to be that much more difficult 'cause so many people would die to get paid to do roller derby." Those who referenced Bloody Mary in their interviews also referred to her as "incredibly passionate" (Tico), so her passion also informs her perceived "always on" ethic, not just the paycheck. However, Princess Peach and others in leadership are not held to the same obligations as the executive director is. They can decline to go to a meeting if life happens without the fear of losing their position. Being unpaid gives them (in theory) a freedom to step away and create boundaries.

Leaders' hidden workload: time-intensive yet invisible

The requirements for leadership include day-to-day tasks like laying track and participating in league discussions, and much more. As referenced previously, part of the allure of leadership is that one is not just passively interacting in derby but actively working to improve league infrastructure and making broader business decisions that impact the organization's future. Naturally, "making a difference" in this regard requires more labor than merely showing up once a month to help run a derby game. Recall from the precarity chapter that for leaders, having time is deemed more important than having the skills, and lots of time is needed.

Leadership workload varies with the time of season, and whether one is dealing with normal league operations or reacting to a situation (in Nite Owl's words, "putting out fires"). Regardless, participants reported a wide range of hours spent on derby administrative tasks in an "average" week. At the low end, they spend 1-2 hours, typically on maintenance tasks or checking in with oversights and committees. At the high end, they spend 20+ hours fielding questions, writing policy, research, and meeting with other leaders. Some leaders at the high end (Xena, Emma Frost, Black Widow, Mothma, Janeway) acknowledge that their level of involvement is not typical. They may take on tasks that they perceive to help the league but may not be completely necessary for business operations. If it brings extra work, this burden is framed as a choice. For example, as a league president, Xena spends 20 hours a week at most on unpaid "an extra part-time job during week that I don't get paid for." She quickly explains that this is her choice: "A lot of that is not really required but just kind of me going a little bit extra, trying to educate myself on nonprofit organizations or other roller derby structures and stuff like that. So it's not necessarily a requirement for the job. It's just what I choose to do." She clarifies that she does not hold this expectation for others who might take her position: "I would not expect any volunteer to do what I'm doing, and I wouldn't expect anyone to do what I'm doing for any number of years." Says Black Widow, "I don't want to make it sound like nobody in the league does anything. I take tasks upon myself that weren't necessarily even asked. ... And I do these things voluntarily because I enjoy them. Because I like being on the computer. And I want to make their life easier." These leaders who intentionally put in more hours than what is perceived as necessary do it to help the league. Xena takes her own advice on comparing her league to other derby organizations, and researches nonprofits to help her league make a smooth business structure transition. Black Widow proactively created a calculator for her leaguemates to track their practice attendance so that they

would be able to tell if they were in danger of not making a roster – an individual responsibility that she made partially hers by creating this tool. By voluntarily making more work for themselves to help the league, these leaders demonstrate their devotion, as well as their willingness to give any free time to the task.

Derby participants are not always cognizant of the exact time they spend on their derby work. Phoenix (leader) guessed that he spent seven hours a week between his board duties and captain duties but believed that the actual workload was “probably more than what I’m guessing [because of] all the little things.” Even with a vague expectation of hard work, the number of hours actually spent on derby gradually outstrips the initial perception. With late night practice during the week, it is normal for participants who skate to come from a full day of paid work to a grinding practice only to sleep, get up, and do it all the next day. When Mystique’s (leader) paid job was on an early morning shift, this significantly impacted her schedule: “I lived, I think it was 45 minutes from my practice rink, and I’d get home really late at night and I’d only get like 2-3 hours of sleep, and have to go to work again.” In leadership, though, derby can become especially greedy with time. In Janeway’s early years as a league founder, she quickly found how doing unpaid work for derby could devour her time: “I remember being up at 3am counting cash that had been handed in by skaters for the first game. There’s just this giant pile of cash, and I was like, ‘I can’t believe this is my life right now, that I have to go to [my paid] work tomorrow.’ So yeah, I had no idea how consuming it was gonna be.” Black Widow (leader) often works full days between her paid work and her unpaid derby work: “I cannot even count the number of nights that I have come home after leaving the house at 6 in the morning, getting home after 6 at night, grabbing a quick bite to eat, and then sitting on my computer until 11 or 12 at night, working on things.” Says Tico about her struggle to balance both of her paid jobs, leadership, and skating: “I’m not gonna pretend that

I was the most healthy person. (laughing) I know I was super stressed. My derby wife would be like ‘OK, get out of the house, get off the laptop, stop emailing people at 2:00 in the morning, we're getting ice cream, go to bed.’”

If derby participants are only vaguely aware of the workload expected of them as a regular member, a leader’s workload is even less visible. When presented to the league, final decisions or organizational changes only show a small portion of the work that went into them. Behind the scenes are conversations, policy drafts, pros and cons lists, and nebulous email threads, which general membership typically does not see. Janeway is able to see perspectives from both leaders and those who have never been in the role: “I know that when you're not on the board, [you think], ‘What are they even doing?’ And I felt that. And then when you're on the board, you're like, ‘Nope, that's not what it's like!’” Leadership exists in a black box unless one is actively involved in its workings.

In some cases, the actual workload may intentionally stay hidden to attract volunteers. If members do not know how much work it entails until they sign up for the job, it may become harder to back out. At the governance level, Sage (leader) says this about the leadership workload: “On paper, the job description, I think, says 10 hours a month or something, which is—no. That’s just so we don’t scare people away.” Padme’s (leader) statement that she might not have joined had she realized the extent of the workload supports this notion. Storm (leader) was motivated to accept her nomination for secretary in her first year of derby in the hopes that community leadership would look good at her paid job and “because I didn’t realize how much work it was gonna be.” Lack of information may ultimately backfire and prevent people from serving the league in the future. After being voted in, Storm only spent a year in the secretary role: “It was a

lot of work. And I did a terrible, terrible job. Terrible. I don't even know if I was nominated the next year, but I did not accept any nominations.”

Rendering the job invisible may also be done to protect membership from realizing that there is trouble in paradise. Janeway's roles as a league founder and president for two different leagues has ensured that she has always been in the middle of difficult decisions: “I always laugh when people start being on the board or something like that, and they're like, ‘I had no idea all this bad shit was happening.’ And I'd never had that. I never had like any time in roller derby where I didn't know what the bad shit was.” Not wanting to expose her leaguemates to anything but positivity, she takes it upon herself to protect them from “the bad shit.” This is a practice she carries over from her paid work as a social worker, though she is not sure if protecting her teammates is “helpful or hindrance to them.” For members without aspirations to leadership, this may suffice, but the deeper one dives into operations, again, this approach may backfire. Sentry (leader) noted that one of the worst things about leadership was the realization that under the surface, derby organizations do not always live up to their revolutionary ideals: “The higher up you get, so that the more involved you get, the more volunteer work you do, the more interest you take...[you see] that in the end, it is not so different than other sports or other organizations. That we do face a lot of the same issues like sexism, bullying, and assault.”

Removing the “rose-colored glasses”: Resentment over unseen responsibility

Regardless of the reason, not being open with the actual workload can backfire. Not knowing what lies behind the scenes leaves an opening for members to come in and expect things to be done. Invisibility of workload can thus lead to resentment and negative appraisals. Black Widow (leader) feels frustrated when her leaguemates who have never been derby leaders expect things to happen without acknowledging the work it takes to get there. Leaders know that one must

“eat your vegetables before you get your dessert,” but skaters who have never served in that role “never had to worry about eating the vegetables...they just want dessert.” Black Widow further explains that if participants were shown the behind-the-scenes view from the beginning, they may have a greater understanding and appreciation of the work that goes into keeping their beloved leagues afloat.

I had this very rose-colored glasses view on derby when I joined it. It’s just this, this great, this enormous thing, all these people are participating. It’s this great community. And these things just happen the way they’re supposed to happen. But now that I’m behind the scenes and I see how much work actually goes into it, it frustrates me now to see the skaters still having the rose-colored glasses. Like I wish...if there was a way to, without being a dick about it, impress upon my rose-colored glasses skaters how much work is actually put into being able to put on that game a month, send the team out [to travel], I feel like they would have a greater appreciation for it and respect it a little bit more instead of just assuming, “Well, I paid my \$30 a month, this is what’s gonna happen.”

Black Widow’s “rose-colored glasses view” symbolizes the passion and positivity that newcomers to derby have about the community. She also signals that there is a lack of understanding that in order to sustain this passion, it takes collective work. Now in a leadership position herself, the rose-colored glasses have come off. She still has passion for the sport and her league, but she recognizes that it cannot be sustained without work. Therefore, she is frustrated to see that others do not share that understanding, for it leads to a sense of entitlement that derby will always be there. While she is willing to show them what life looks like without the rose-colored glasses, she hesitates out of not knowing how to express this without “being a dick about it,” suggesting lack of infrastructural support or a protectiveness toward membership.

Oracle’s perspective is colored by the fact that she considers derby her full-time job, but she wishes that more individuals held the view of derby as a job rather than a volunteer activity. She explains that when considered volunteer work, it is too easy for people to step away and leave work undone, which could impact how smoothly an event goes (if at all):

I think that's part of the problem with derby being such a volunteer sport, is when life gets hard, people don't really look at it as a job. They look at it as volunteering. So it's easy for them to quit and step away, but you'd never step away from a job that you're being paid for that easily. And I think if more volunteers in derby would look at it as a job, we would lose less volunteers. When it gets difficult, I try to remember that people are depending on me to do my job so that they can go on doing their stuff. So if I wasn't here, something would be missed in junior derby. And it may not happen, but it might happen. If I wasn't here, there might be somebody didn't get to play a game this weekend, or there might be a game de-sanctioned, or something might get missed if I'm not doing my job. So even if it's hard, I still need to find a way to get the job done so that other people can enjoy their sport. And I think if everybody looked at that as 'if we don't do our job, somebody's not going to get to play' and took some responsibility for it even though it's a volunteer position, it would just be better for the sport as a whole. ... They don't think of that butterfly effect just because they look at it as a volunteer position.

Oracle retains her responsibility-based definition of job here, arguing that if more people considered derby with the same priority as their paid work, as an obligation to fill, organizations would face less scrambling when individuals drop. She labors with the view that people are depending on her to act so the organization can run smoothly, and thus it is her responsibility to play her part within the larger collective. Her perspective is holistic; she can see how different components of her organization and what could happen if one link in the web drops. It should be noted that she was the only participants who explicitly stated that others should consider derby a job.

Oracle's role is at the governance level, adding to the gravity of her work, but even at the local level, leaders' desire for others to treat derby as an obligation exists. Mothma co-owns a medium-sized league and is willing to sacrifice personal time if something needs to be done for the organization, a quality she sees as lacking in other league members:

With [co-owner] and I, we take on the responsibility and if I'm really busy at work or if something's going on in my personal life, I know I've got a responsibility and I still need to make sure that things get done. So other people are like, "Sorry, I couldn't do it, I worked extra this week." I think some people don't see it as a big enough responsibility, I guess, to really have to inconvenience themselves to make sure that it gets done. I mean, if I had to complete something and that means I don't get as much sleep that night, well, that's what it means. This thing has to get done. And then some people are like, "Oops, I'm sorry."

Both Mothma and Oracle view derby as their obligation and express some frustration that others do not come to it with the same amount of willingness to sacrifice as they do. If Mothma needs to spend a late night preparing marketing materials, for example, she does it for the sake of the organization. By sacrificing free time and sleep for the collective, they take on a large amount of individual responsibility, and wish that others would do the same. This also assumes that it is easy for volunteers to drop responsibility, or that everyone should (and is able to) have the same level of devotion.

At the same time that leaders acknowledge that derby is a volunteer effort, they also deal with the reality that they are running a business or non-profit structure that requires attention, and they can even harbor general resentment toward others whom they perceive are not doing enough labor. Black Widow shared that she had been attempting to have a conversation with another board member about the league's finances; after the initial request, a week had passed without a reply. Repeated attempts to contact the other board member finally came through, with the addendum that the delay had been because there was only so much time that the other board member was willing to devote to the position. This revelation infuriated Black Widow, as she shares here:

After we have this little conversation, she's like, "Well, I'm sorry, I only have like 30 days a minute to spare to this." 30 minutes a day? So you're putting in 3 hours a week? That's it? Like...I know you work. I know you have a family. Your kids are in sports. Your husband's in sports. You're in derby. I get all this. But you've committed to doing this. So you need to make the time, or you need to step down and let us figure out something else to do. 'Cause we're relying on you to do this. I nearly lost my shit. Three hours a week. Really. ... I'm like, "I'm sitting here working on Excel spreadsheets to automatically populate the attendance percentage so you can just figure out what you need to attend! I'm helping them! I'm making them a calculator, for the love of God! And she's complaining about 30 minutes a day? Really?!"

Black Widow has some sympathy for her fellow board member's plight in that she has a multitude of competing commitments, but her sympathy does not extend as far as letting her off the hook for

falling short of the commitment made to the league as a board member. In Black Widow's view, she is making time to do extra work (albeit by her own "choice"), and when the workload is uneven, this is unacceptable. Whether the unnamed board member and Black Widow are on the same page on the definition of "commitment" is unclear, but the perception here is that there is a large mismatch, which leads to resentment.

"It's hard to put it aside and work on my life": Overwork and constant availability in leadership

Because of the passion that derby can evoke from participants, the idea that one makes the sport their central focus in life is present to some degree (depending upon whom you ask). Through serving the community and being active participants, entrepreneurs like Captain Marvel and Aurora, who have each been in the sport for over a decade, especially appear to center their lives around derby. When I asked them how they felt derby fit into their lives at the moment, they both answered that they did not consider derby it lives, prefacing this with a variant of "I know this sounds strange, but..." Aurora, for instance, does other outdoor activities that have nothing to do with roller derby: "I'm probably a little unusual...because I'm not one of those people who's always been kind of like, roller derby everything, both feet in, 100%. ... I'm not the typical 'this is my whole life' person." Similarly, even though she has spent her adult life in the sport, Captain Marvel does not see derby as the sole component to her identity: "So this may sound absurd, but I don't consider roller derby my life. And I've met some people in the world that say, 'I'm a derby girl, that's what I do.' And I've never ever wanted to identify just as a derby girl. ... 'I'm a roller derby player' is too confining for me, because I actually have so many interests in the world." Prefacing with an explanation that the next words out of their mouths may sound peculiar is likely a nod to my insider status as a fellow derby participant. Because I am part of the same community, I understand the same norms, and they may have anticipated confusion on my part to hear a tale in

contrast to what Aurora calls “the typical ‘this is my whole life’ person,” which demonstrates how strong that norm is.

This expectation of all derby, all the time, can influence the type of people league members see as potentially good candidates for leadership. When Amilyn (leader) was nominated for league president, she was initially reluctant to run for the position. One reason was because she was worried that her job in healthcare might interfere with the extra responsibilities. The second was that she felt she did not live up to the level of derby devotion that past presidents had exhibited, as she explains:

Just that level of talent for derby and passion for derby, that I don't know that I have compared with the presidents that I've worked with, or been under in [my previous league] and now [my current league]. They had both been really long-term skaters who have been on the charter, who have been really active in all the higher-level WFTDA stuff, and will be at every tournament viewing party, everything. And I think for me, derby has always been a hobby, and it's something that I'm passionate about and I care about, but at the end of the time, like I care about a lot of other things. So it hasn't been as all-consuming for me.

To Amilyn, a good leader is involved in derby from every angle. They have spent years dedicated to the sport and are good enough to compete at the charter level. They are active at both the governance level and at the local league level. They live and breathe derby. Comparing herself to these ideals, she did not see herself as someone who should be leading a roller derby organization because her life was not in it and was thus reluctant to accept her nomination partially for that reason.

As a result of the “derby is life” norm, potential leaders may run into the expectation that one is always working at derby. Now retired, Janeway (leader) recalls equating overwork with being a good leader, something she now recognizes as an unfair characterization: “I've seen presidents that I thought didn't do a good enough job because they weren't overworking as president. (laughing) Which is not particularly fair to them.” Like Amilyn, Sentry (leader) drew

comparisons to prior leaders in forming his expectations for leadership, using the first WFTDA executive director as his example: “I looked [at] what she was doing, and for me, she was working all the time. The expectations I set for myself are mirrored from the expectations or from the assumptions I make on the work people do or did before me. And I probably expect too much of other people, and as such expect a lot of myself.” Sentry acknowledges his expectations toward derby work may be unrealistic, whether they are for others or himself, but did not suggest changing them. The link between overworking and being a good worker from larger societal norms comes to roost within derby’s subculture. As a leisure activity, passion helps to normalize this pattern further.

Like entrepreneurs, leaders also experienced the pressure to be constantly available via portable device and Internet, depending on the issue. During some of my interviews, leaders were also checking their phones or had devices ringing with notifications related to derby business. Nite Owl, who describes himself as “always on his phone” for both personal and derby business reasons, says, “I think on our board, that if it's an important topic, we're on our phones like messaging back and forth for the entire day sometimes (laughing).” Scarlet Witch laughs when I ask her how she manages to fit all her obligations into her day: “I don’t even know if I know that!” She suggested that I ask her president counterpart for a better idea: “She’ll tell you ‘she’s insane and she doesn’t sleep,’ which is true. Get yelled at all the time, ‘people are in bed, turn off your phone, [Scarlet].’ Oh, we’re done now, it’s 1:43am.” Sentry felt that leadership was a burden “if you have too many messages to catch up on,” feeling tense from “all the little red balls with the number of messages that you have to read” on his iPhone when he has been away from his device for a while.

There is an expectation that availability is a necessary requirement for leadership, though *how* available is up for debate. Leaders acknowledge a tension between being available and the volunteer-run nature of derby, as Nite Owl does here: “It’s kind of a catch-22, ‘cause when you sign up for this, you need to be available for things. Stuff in derby happens in real time and I can’t just, especially if it’s a board thing, we need to be able to react and deal with issues as they come. So there’s maybe been a handful of instances where I didn’t have time or want to talk about something but we had to because it was an important issue.” Xena believes the rest of her board may be following her lead on open availability and quick response rather than an explicit rule, but she reminds them that being always available is not required of them for this labor: “I try to maintain an emphasis that it’s a volunteer-run organization and you are also a volunteer, so you’re not expected to be available 24 hours a day.” Black Widow, who describes herself as “always tied to Facebook” for leadership duties, summarizes the confusion she feels on how much work she should be doing. She acknowledges that derby is an unpaid activity but simultaneously driven by passion, making it harder to put aside:

It’s really hard to separate myself from not getting sucked into it because (sighs) it’s a hard dichotomy to keep in your brain. Roller derby is a passion and it is a hobby. Nobody’s making money on this. No world will end if I don’t respond to this Facebook message right now. But it’s hard not to answer. It’s hard not to do that one final thing that I need to get done. It’s hard to just stop and put it aside and work on my life. Whether it be my job-job or spending time with my husband (laughing).

Black Widow’s words illustrate conflict toward what derby is supposed to be as a structure. The passion for her sport and expectation that this is life pushes her to keep answering messages immediately. However, she recognizes that this is neither her paid work nor a life-or-death situation, and she has other important devotions that need attention (paid job and husband). Derby is supposed to be a hobby, not an obligation, yet this is the reality for Black Widow.

Part-time entrepreneurs experience the dilemma of needing to take time away from non-derby paid work for derby work. In the cases of Betty Boop and Gaia, the inability to reconcile non-derby and derby work can push someone fully into one or the other. Unless they have a partner with enough income to support their derby habit, unpaid leaders must stay employed in paid work while taking time off to do their derby work. Janeway told me of an extreme case of trying to fit derby work with paid work while her league was trying to organize a tournament for the first time:

I had to take a week off of work and stuff in order to do the tournament, and it was just so consuming. That one was probably the most out-of-work time. I remember pretty much not working for like three months and just doing [tournament] stuff while I was at [paid] work, which I feel sort of terrible about. I don't think it negatively affected clients, but it certainly is like stealing from work. But I know a lot of people say that too, about doing derby during their day job.

Tasks for tournaments include booking the venue, finding a host hotel, coordinating day-of volunteers, marketing, inviting teams to play, recruiting officials and announcers, finding medical support staff, and creating the game schedule, among a myriad of other tasks. Because this was a first-time tournament, building from the ground up is more time-intensive than running an event in subsequent years, and Janeway felt it made sense for her to take time away from paid work to focus on tournament organization. She regrets “stealing from work” and taking time off to do derby work, not skate (being the only one in the sample to do so). However, she contextualizes this extreme experience with the notion that doing derby work at work is a common phenomenon. Twelve leaders in my sample reported doing derby labor during their paid job, with two others reporting that their flexible schedules could allow them to do so if they wished. While some did comment to me “please don’t tell my boss” as they disclosed doing derby work at their paid jobs, none reported that they had experienced any serious repercussions as a result, though they did not work to the same extent that Janeway did.

Even in one's off-time, derby can creep in. Hera gives me an example of how her derby work begins on her commute to practice before elaborating on how derby creeps into her headspace in general:

Let's say, my drive is 45 minutes. So I could be thinking about my dogs. I could be thinking about my family. Could be thinking about my husband. Or I'm rehashing whatever we just discussed on our interleague committee or athletics committee on how we wanna move the team forward. And so maybe you just think about it. It does become, for lack of a better term, obsessive in your head where you think about either--so we're focusing on just how to run the league vs. how you can even progress as a skater. That's a whole other enchilada of thinking, right? So you have the 'I'm gonna try to move the league and move other people and move the team forward,' and you're thinking about all those things, and then somewhere maybe you have some time to think about how you're gonna move yourself forward and you can fit that in. And then my husband and I, we talk a lot about derby. Who's progressing at a decent pace and who isn't and why and what could we do to progress that one skater faster or maybe we need to talk to her to see what she wants to do. Does she realize she's kind of plateaued? Because she might not realize she's kind of plateaued. And then you think about it at work. Like those things pop into your head. And so then you think about them, right?

Hera's role of head of training keeps her focused on evaluating her teammates' individual athletic development and that of the league, leaving her with little time to focus on her own progress. Because her husband serves as league management, this is an area where both partners devote much energy together. Hera bears responsibility for raising the league's skill levels with an accompanying level of mental load towards this end, a load that may not even register to the individual skater that needs it. These "obsessive" thoughts creep into her commute, her conversations with her husband, and her paid workday.

As a league owner, Mothma's mental load is like Hera's, and it sometimes interferes with her sleep: "Sometimes you just can't go to sleep, you can't turn your head off, you're worrying about something. At some point, it might be I'm just like, 'Fuck it, I'm just gonna get up and start doing some of this stuff that I'm stressing about. Maybe I'll go to sleep.'" Other leaders, such as Poison Ivy and Black Widow, report the same problem. At games or tournaments where skaters

are responsible for running the event, operational details can creep in during off-time to the point where one cannot even enjoy watching derby, as Princess Peach details here: “Sometimes you don’t even think about watching it. You’re like, I have to be worried about production. I have to be worried about, oh, this person fell down the stairs. Did they sign a waiver? Do we have an insurance claim? I need to get their name. I need to make sure they’re OK. Just that sort of stuff that no one else is thinking about.” Hera’s and Princess Peach’s comments are an illustration of the invisible labor done to help keep leagues and events running. Leaders do work so that others can enjoy derby (relatively) unburdened.

Derby work can greedily take so much time that the purpose of originally joining derby – to skate, to meet new friends, to have fun – becomes lost in the administrative work. Making fit leadership duties a competitive schedule skating at the charter level or officiating at events can stretch participants’ time and energy to the limit, with fifteen leaders ever having done this or currently attempting to make that work. Because of the heavy time investment, Janeway believes that it is common that those in board positions, especially league presidents, are “only able to do the bare minimum of the skating or the training expectation.” For governance-level leaders, however, travel is part of the job, as they must appear at annual meetings, post-season tournaments, outreach events, and other highly visible derby events like Roller Derby World Cup. Leaders who travel extensively experience the same misperceptions as coaches do about their work, that they are on vacation. Sage jokes that “there’s not winning any attendance awards [for practice] when you’re doing this much stuff” at the governance level.

Not only does Princess Peach’s unpaid derby work encroach on her paid time off from her job, but it also encroaches on her skating time. She has taken derby business calls on her drives to and from practice and has even needed to leave early to do so. The day of our interview, we spoke

before she skated in a home team game. She was willing to give her time to me as we waited for the event to start, but she was not willing to do so for the organization because this was game day:

We have an emergency conference call that we're trying to schedule with the board right now, and for me to be able to say, "I have derby today, so I really can't do it," and them be like, "But are you sure?" And I'm like, "Guys, this is why we do this! You can't tell me to not be able to take Saturday for my roller derby day when this is the reason we do it!"

The second-guessing ("are you sure?") was a test of Princess Peach's boundaries between derby work and derby play. She held firm, not willing to give up her skating time and deeming it necessary to remind her fellow board members that administration was not the reason why they joined derby.

Leadership work at the local level can also interfere with skating. From the reading Scarlet Witch has done on derby leadership experiences, this also appears to be a normal phenomenon, informing her attempts to be as visible in the league as possible: "I've seen a lot of comments for people, like 'our board members or our LLC members, they don't skate.' ... 'Cause you have so much work, you almost have to choose between this or skating. And I've had weeks especially this year since going back to [paid work], I've had to choose practice or derby business." Rey (leader) is in her second year of leadership, but her first on her league's board. Her current dilemma is attempting to fit her travel practice schedule with her board obligations. She periodically experiences bitterness that she must put the needs of the collective over her personal goals, as she describes here:

If it's between my strength training workout and PR stuff, especially if I need to do it, PR's gonna come first. And I am playing this sport to better myself. It's one of those things where it's this obligation I have supersedes the reason that I have the obligation in the first place, which is that I'm here to play roller derby. And it feels kinda sucky that I have to put aside my own personal goals sometimes for the betterment of the league. Especially if I'm getting bitter or really immature about it, I'll think, "Well, other people in the league don't have to do that." Or "other people in the league complain if I ask that they maybe do that once, and I'm doing it on the regular, especially during bout season."

Rey's individual needs take a backseat to the collective. When Rey feels most upset, it is because she does not see her level of sacrifice, which is giving up her training and skating time to do organizational work, reciprocated by other skaters who are not in leadership. They can do derby for themselves, but as a leader, that option is not completely available to Rey.

Nite Owl skates for a competitive charter team and struggles to balance his new skater trainer job with his need to practice his own skills to retain his spot on the team. He has tried to reorganize the workload so that he operates in a managerial role rather than a direct observer, but to no avail yet:

I get the most satisfaction out of seeing new skaters develop, but then I want to be on my team. I want to be playing games. I want to be improving my own skill. So I've tried to reach out and I've tried to have maybe somebody who's not on the charter focuses more on the new recruits so I can participate in more drills and I just am more of like a manager of that. But I haven't quite found that balance yet, so it's hard to explain to somebody, who's just like really new and really enthusiastic and really wants to get good, that "sorry, but I gotta go do my own stuff now."

Recall from the motivations chapter that one of Nite Owl's joys is watching new skaters develop skills. His passion for training conflicts with his passion for skating, but due to scheduling, his own practice and new skater practice occur at the same time. Again, doing for the individual ("working on my own stuff") currently comes after doing for the collective, but as Nite Owl feels his job is less of an obligation than Rey does about hers, there is a different emotional pull for the former.

"If I don't do it, no one will": Overworking for the sake of the collective

When I asked leaders about their responsibilities, seven answered with a variation of "I do everything." These were mostly presidents and vice presidents, half of whom belonged to smaller leagues. The remaining leaders had more specialized tasks and areas of oversight, such as coordinating marketing materials (Nite Owl, Mockingbird, Rey), scheduling games (Obi-Wan,

Padme, Xavier), designing and selling merch (Jubilee), or maintaining relationships with sponsors (Eleven). Five leaders explicitly noted that a small group of people in an organization tends to handle most of the work: “20% of the people do 80% of the work.” Participants like Janeway and Mockingbird, whose careers span multiple leagues, note that this has been the case with every league they have been with. Most, if not all, of this 20% is leadership. Leaders of smaller leagues or who were newer to leadership discussed having to take on tasks that would otherwise be forgotten or unfinished. Says Poison Ivy, about the negatives of being league president, “I guess there's times where the feeling is that there are certain things that nobody wants to do. And if I don't do them, they wouldn't get done, quite honestly (laughing).” Rey (leader) believes that one of the worst things about being in leadership is having to constantly be dependable, “having to be the person to do the work when nobody else will” – to be a responsible adult, to use Phoenix’s words. Mothma agrees: “That's one of the things about being [an] actual owner that you have to know, that when somebody doesn't take on their part of the responsibility, that means we have to. If we can't find another member who says ‘OK, yes, I'll do [this task],’ that means we have to do it.”

Learning how to delegate labor was one of the most widely shared pieces of advice for potential leaders, regardless of success in this endeavor. “You don’t have to know all the things or do all the things,” advises Sage (leader), “and in fact you will burn yourself out doing that. (laughs).” In practice, delegation has varying degrees of success. Scarlet Witch learned the hard way to delegate more work: “Last year, when I started, the first season, I wanted to do everything. And I exhausted myself trying to do everything. And I have since learned don’t do everything. Talk to these people, talk to these people, let them do.” Poison Ivy likes to delegate the tasks that she does not like to do, and reminds the other leaders in her league that they do not have to

overwork themselves: “I've seen it so many times where our committee heads have gotten so overwhelmed and I have to constantly remind them, ‘You have 10 people on your committee. You do not have to do everything 'cause you're head. Delegate.’”

Leaders who had taken a position from an overworked incumbent sometimes noted the problem, from their view, was that their predecessor had not properly delegated, which increased their workload and stress and eventually led to burnout. Lightning’s approach to leadership is not to micromanage (“I’m not standing over her shoulder”), as she compares her approach to her predecessor: “The problem with [the previous president] was that she was trying to do everything. She was trying to...have a hand in every pot and try to make people do stuff and nobody wanted to do it. But me kinda stepping in and stepping back, [I] kinda let everybody do their own thing to shine where they're [strong].” This approach is likely influenced by Lightning’s entrepreneurial experience working with Thunder. Each of them takes on the tasks for which they are better suited or enjoy more. For Lightning, this is social media, and for Thunder, this is product design.

Sometimes leaders do receive feedback that they are resistant to delegating—if they would just delegate some of the load to others, they would not be so overworked. In cases where leaders insist on doing extra work, this feedback is logical. However, leaders like Rey, Mystique, and Black Widow expressed that they have tried to delegate, but things were still missed or not done at all, leaving them to pick up the slack. Black Widow and her vice president acknowledge that they take on too much, but they are stuck with the work for fear it will not be done: “We want to delegate. We ask to delegate. People say that they will do the things, but then if they don’t do them, then it falls to us because if it doesn’t get done, then something horrible is gonna happen. And of a league of 57 people, like I don’t wanna let them down. So we probably shoulder more than we

should.” Having been a member of several leagues, Mystique transferred to her current league after experiencing overwork in her prior one. She had the same problem when trying to delegate:

My [former] league told me that I didn't ask for help, but the truth was I asked for help or tried to assign people to something and they weren't dependable, and these were things that were important. For example, on bout day, things are required to make that day happen. And so when people weren't dependable, I was just kinda like, “Well, I'll just do it myself.” And then I ended up just getting overloaded... There were people to do the jobs, but they just wouldn't do them. They would say they would, and then they wouldn't. And when you need something done so that you can have a game or sustain your league so that you can have a league, I just ended up doing it myself so that the games would happen and the league would stay together.

Both Black Widow and Mystique share a key motivator for taking on the extra work: they do it for the collective. Black Widow does not want to let down the league by neglecting to fulfill a task, believing that “something horrible will happen” if something gets missed (similarly to Oracle, who used the example of games being unsanctioned). Mystique took on more responsibility for the sake of her organization, so that events could proceed and “the league would stay together.” Rather than let the league down, they take one for the team. Unfortunately for them, this happens all too often, and they perceive themselves taking far more for the team than others do.

Both Piers and Mockingbird note the most significant league duties fall to board members. Piers recognizes that when trying to delegate jobs to other league members, these jobs are small, and that leaders take on most of the work. But even when jobs are delegated, members are more reactive than proactive in doing them, leaving it to Piers to remind them that their work keeps the league running: “I find that being the president, I basically have to push everyone along and remind them that this is important to do. ... I'm like the bossy guy that tells everyone to do their job, which I'm OK with, I guess.” Mockingbird believes that some leaders intentionally hoard larger duties and give “little jobs” to the rest of the members, something she has seen in each league she has been with:

It tends to be a core group of people who try to do all the work who will give little jobs out. So those people do a ton of work and then one board member leaves who did all the work and someone comes in who's actually good at delegation, everyone around them is not used to doing anything, and then bitch and complain that they have to now do things. So then that board member has to pick up all the slack, and it's just this fucking cycle.

Mockingbird sees overwork as a cycle. Leaders overwork and give out smaller jobs, perhaps because members cannot be trusted with larger responsibilities. Leaders leave, whether due to burnout or other life reasons, and if they are replaced by someone who delegates larger tasks, members complain because they must now take on more responsibility. In their complaining, the tasks do not get done, and the leader is stuck doing those tasks, taking on the overwork they tried to avoid. This leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy of distrust in delegating.

Xavier noted that his league was an “outlier in terms of structure” in that they relied more on individual autonomy and accountability to handle business operations. Whereas other leagues structures may go through multiple levels of approval, discussion, and oversight, in his league, “we don't do a lot of group planning or group communication. ... You don't have to go to a bunch of other people to get your decisions approved. You're just expected to make them.” This structure, in his view, speeds up the process, gives more weight to league elections, and helps members feel more invested in the tasks they perform. That said, while Xavier did not discuss issues with delegation, a fellow board member added a different perspective of his workload when I asked if she herself felt overloaded with her current league (as compared to her previous league): “[For me] it's not really kind of overload at all. As a matter of fact, [Xavier's] the one that overloads himself. Especially for all the events. There's so many events that our league hosts, so for all of the events, I try to help out behind the scenes and stuff when I can, because he's literally trying to handle it all.” This is a protective action, as “I don't want him [to quit] because there was just too much going on that he had to do.” Having been in the position of feeling overloaded and quit because of

it, she worries that the same might happen to Xavier. Knowing all the work he performs, she tries to “keep the league together” by sharing his burden and reducing his (perceived) overloaded workload.

When the passion burns out: Working out of guilt and obligation

Despite being able to “walk away” from derby as it is not a paid job, guilt sometimes keeps participants from doing so. The community tends to be supportive in times of need, which can help ease any pangs of guilt. Tico (leader/entrepreneur) needed to miss travel team practices to spend time with her ailing grandmother. She initially felt guilty about having to do so, but upon hearing her teammates encourage her to go, that gave her the permission to let go of the guilt and the expectation of being at practice:

Derby's also really good about supporting people as people. So telling [my teammates], like “Hey guys, I'm really sad about this, my grandmother's not doing so well,” they'd be like “Get out of here! Go, go, go! You're fine.” So that lifted the guilt from missing practice. And that permission from teammates was helpful, too. Because you're always hardest on yourself, but that second thing you feel most guilty about is letting the team down. And knowing that my team had my back for the hard parts was pretty freeing.

Karma (entrepreneur) further explains the weight of meeting community expectations in showing up and not letting down fellow leaguemates: “I think that roller derby, as a community, makes it feel heavier than it actually is. So the weight of your team's expectations, even though that weight doesn't actually exist, feels really heavy, right? So this idea that all of the other people on my team are relying on me and if I let them down, I'm a piece of shit.” Karma recognizes that this weight is only a perceived weight, yet it becomes real in its consequences. Even if the perception that the team will think “I'm a piece of shit” for not showing up to practice (and as Tico found, quite the opposite was true) that fear of disappointment still dictates emotions. Karma needed to take time away from practice to work on her derby fitness business, and while she knew it was important, it was still a difficult choice: “I didn't make my practice requirements last month because I had

business stuff to do. It's hard. It's hard not doing that. That feeling of like, my team is relying on me and now I'm letting them down, so now I'm a huge piece of shit, when really I have other stuff to do that's important to me and roller derby is not the #1 priority anymore.” Acknowledging that derby is not top priority breaks the expectation of giving one’s all for the sport. Karma rationalizes that this is acceptable, but not without guilt.

Princess Peach acknowledges community-wide support, but for others. When it is someone else stepping away, participants are quick to accept their reasons for doing so, but when it is themselves who need a break, they do not grant themselves that same courtesy:

I think everyone’s accepting of it, but no one themselves feels comfortable like admitting that like I can’t handle these responsibilities I signed up for, even though this isn’t your job. I think it’s easier for me to tell my boss I need a morning off than it is for me to tell my team I can’t come to practice that night. And I don’t know why we do that to ourselves. And I think it’s just because we do care so much and we feel that ownership and that investment in the same way most people don’t feel in their jobs.

It is this devotion and investment in their teammates, their leagues, and the sport that helps create this guilt for not being there. Derby fills a void in many people’s lives. Doing leadership can be more fulfilling than paid work, as was the case for Storm, who joked that this realization “is sad, (laughs) ‘cause I don’t get paid for derby.” It can be hard for participants to justify stepping back when their priorities shift, especially with the perceived weight of their team’s and organization’s dependence on them. Recall Black Widow and Mystique not wanting to let down their leaguemates by allowing forgotten tasks to potentially impact the league’s operation. Mystique also spoke of not wanting to fail her travel team in a previous league. Her life had reached a point where she needed to step away, but she had trouble doing so at first: “I didn't wanna let my team down. And I didn't wanna be that person that like couldn't handle all the work, all the requirements. I didn't wanna be looked down as a lesser person or a lesser skater.” Mystique shares Karma’s perception

that skaters who cannot do for the team face negative reprisal, but instead of imposing it on herself, Mystique fears this from others.

The inverse also occurs: guilt when one does derby instead of spending time elsewhere. Bubbles and Phoenix both serve as derby leadership and are first-time parents to a 1 year old. They can call upon their parents to help watch their son when they need to be away from home for derby, and they also use daycare services while both parents work. However, despite the support, both feel a sense of guilt when they are not taking care of their son. In Bubbles' view, this guilt is expected for a mother, compared to fathers in general: "As a mom, I feel guilty a lot when I'm not taking care of my kid, when he's elsewhere. I think, it's probably a generalization, but I think dads probably don't feel that same way. I don't think they feel guilty. [If I were a man] I think I might have a little bit more freedom with what I choose to do." Phoenix nuances this generalization from his standpoint as a Black man: "So fathers in general perhaps wouldn't have that same feeling of guilt. But the dominant image of Black fathers in media for the last three or four decades has been that Black fathers are absent. So I absolutely do feel guilt when I'm unable to take care of my child. And [it's] part of why I don't sleep as much." In order to be both dedicated to parenthood and to derby (and presumably to help alleviate both of their guilt), Bubbles and Phoenix would often bring their baby to practice, swapping caring roles halfway through so that each could skate and spend time with their child.

Noting the association between motherhood guilt and work, Oracle rationalizes away guilt by framing her job as being *for* her children, who are junior skaters. Compared to when she was working for pay away from home, she feels better about her work:

I don't feel guilty about doing it while my kids are home. 'Cause that's something that people ask me. They're like, "Don't you feel guilty taking all this time from your kids?" No, 'cause I'm doing it for my kids. ... I felt more guilty working a job that I got paid. I

would work 70 hours a week and I would feel guilty about not seeing my kids. With this, at least I'm home and I'm still there for my kids.

Oracle relieves her guilt in two ways. First, while she adheres to a schedule and has a separate office space for her derby duties, she is at least at home with her children and can attend to them if she needs to. Second, her former paid job was in banking, the only direct benefit to her children being her paycheck. Her derby work, while unpaid, directly impacts her children being able to do an activity that they enjoy, and she sees this as a much more valuable use of her time.

Guilt helps to produce a sense of obligation for leaders to stay within their positions, feeling less motivated by passion than by fear. They perceive that if they left, either abruptly or at all, the organization would suffer, so they take one for the team so that the collective survives. Simultaneously, this illustrates the importance of the individual (if I don't do this, who will?) *and* the collective (I can't just walk away from it). Black Widow has days where she struggles to sleep because of her derby work, but "despite the really bad days, I couldn't just drop it like a bad habit. I couldn't just walk away. There would have to be a transition period. And because overall, at the end of the day, I want [my league] to succeed." Piers, who had been a founding member and league president for several years, was debating on whether he should run for another term, unsure that the organization would stay the course if he was not at the helm:

I don't know if I'm gonna run again or not. Part of me would like to take a break from the business side, just 'cause starting the business has been intense, right? So I'd like a little vacation. But at the same time, I'm not sure I have enough faith in my friends to continue it on in a positive direction. ... Because I won't be able to watch it fail. But I don't know who else would do the job.

Mothma was the only one who regretted becoming a leader, specifically a league owner, explaining that she would have been able to walk away earlier had she not occupied that specific role:

Maybe I shouldn't have owned it. Maybe I should have just participated in it, and then when I couldn't do it anymore, I could walk away instead of having to be tied to it. I might have liked it more if I didn't have to be responsible. You take ownership of something, you've

gotta do the right thing by it. You can't just walk away, leave things undone. That'd be like a parent abandoning a child.³⁶ You don't do that.

Black Widow has not been in derby for as long as Mothma and Piers, but for all of them, their devotion to keeping alive their respective organizations keeps them coming back, even if their passion has waned. They attach a great deal of importance to their individual role in maintaining their organization, but to be fair to them, with a lack of others willing to put in the time it takes, they are stuck in this position.

Creating boundaries between derby as play, derby as work, and the rest of life

Those leaders who are able and willing to make derby their life “choose” to let derby fill up their time and energy without bounds. However, given that eight participants no longer viewed derby as their life, there comes a point where, like the entrepreneurs, leaders feel it necessary to draw boundaries around their derby work and the rest of their lives – to go from doing derby “for the collective” back to “something for me,” if that ever was the case to begin with. They have been able to let the idea of obligation (or pieces of it) go. This is not always a one-way linear path, as was the case with Moonstar.

Like entrepreneurs not conducting business after certain hours, boundaries on communication can be built within organizational practice to avoid problems of losing practice time to league business. For example, Scarlet Witch directs others to talk with her during non-derby time so that she does not lose practice time, noting that it has been a work in progress:

I feel like this season I did a little bit better with establishing boundaries. I had one day where I'm warming up for a game and someone was complaining to me. And I've since learned to say, “OK, I'm at practice now, you can talk to me after practice,” or “I have to

³⁶ Mothma was one of four participants, all women, who discussed their business or their derby organization in parenthood terms (“it’s my baby” or “it’s like having a child”). Given this discourse is popular within general entrepreneurship, it is unclear to what extent this is a reflection of gender for the entrepreneurs, but Mothma’s comparison to abandoning her post as abandoning a child suggests that she views her unpaid derby commitment as on par with her family commitment.

leave right after practice, you are welcome to message me, or you can call me.” Or I’ll say, “You can call me or you can go to skater relations, ‘cause that’s actually what they’re for.”

Scarlet Witch’s league also implemented a policy where individuals could only get credit for attending practices if they were on skates and participating in drills. This followed instances where leaders were handling league business at practice (not skating, but still present) and still receiving attendance credit, a practice that was considered unfair by some non-leadership skaters. In order to do derby for herself, she now tries to direct inquiries to the proper channel or to non-practice time; derby practice time is not derby work time.

Storm is attempting to reduce her workload and avoid burnout. One way she does this is by avoiding the temptation to reply to messages on her league’s forum just because she knows the answer, trusting instead that the proper person will do their job: “I catch myself wanting to respond to every single thing or question on the forum, or every single statement—I’m like, no. There’s an oversight. Or no, there’s a committee head, they’ll respond. You don’t have to like be everywhere at all times. So I’m trying to wean myself off of feeling like I need to respond to everything immediately.” Storm is protecting her time by letting other junior leaders jump into answering an inquiry, and recognizing the responsibility is not concentrated within a few hands. She is trusting that the chain of command in her league’s infrastructure will work.

Like with entrepreneurs, spending time away from derby can be a refreshing boundary for leaders alike. Tico, Gaia, and Tank Girl make it a priority to spend time with non-derby people to avoid being overloaded by the community. Tank Girl feels that having a personal life outside of derby is needed: “I hang out with all my older neighbors. My husband. And they don’t give a fuck about derby! They don’t care if people know who I am. None of that matters, you know? And I prefer that.” Amilyn has learned that when it nears the point of being overwhelming, she removes herself from derby settings:

When I sort of hit the wall is situations where we have practices and meetings and a PR event and then a bout, and then I look at the calendar and I realize I have been with these same people five out of the past seven nights this week, and that's too much. So then I'll say, "OK, I'm gonna take a week off...I can reply to emails, I can do the things that I can do from the comfort of my own home, but I'm not going to see these bitches again for a week."

Leaders who renegotiate priorities are not always parents with children. Sometimes negotiations happen for a romantic partner, in addition to other life reasons. Padme's derby career has consisted of helping to start a league, serving as leadership within her home league, and traveling the world announcing. As a student in a joint university/industry program, being in university gave her more time flexibility to do derby, but at the price of an exhausting burnout. After a year of extensive travel, she and her boyfriend agreed that they did not see each other enough, in addition to Padme's family and friends "complaining" about the same issue, so the two negotiated a limit on her travel to once a month and plan their vacations around her derby events. She has learned to take a step back when derby is not "fun": "I really reminded myself... 'this is a hobby, this is something you took up because you liked it and because it was fun.' And I remind myself a lot that it should still be fun, to take some me-time when it's not fun. And that took a lot of work to get to that realization."

For Padme, derby is no longer life but has been reprioritized to an unpaid hobby, one that should remain fun. Given that she has enough experience to be more selective, she does not feel guilty about saying no to opportunities to maintain her sense of derby balance: "I'm past the point where making any excuses is just, by now I say, 'No, sorry. Not possible.' I don't feel a need to defend myself anymore why I cannot come. I think it was probably the hardest part to recognize at some point that I do not owe anyone an apology why my time is not available now, that it was basically my decision if I offer my time or not." Padme does not feel guilty in that she does not

offer more to the collective. She has already done plenty of that, and she does not feel selfish in saying no.

In my interviews, several leaders disclosed to me that they were unsure if they would still be in leadership, or that they were not planning to run for reelection when their term ended. Having served as the founder and president of her league for four years, Poison Ivy explained that she could feel burnout coming, especially after experiencing a family crisis, a mass exodus from her league, and the birth of her youngest child within the same year. She has prioritized derby over her “normal” job, knowing that she does not have forever to play derby, but now her age is making her consider when she will retire: “I do know that the end is near for me in derby. I’m getting old, too. (laughing) I would think probably around—I’m 36 now, probably around 40, I might hang up my skates. But we’ll see.” She has been in the sport for nine years, and in competitive sports since childhood, so she now looks to her league as a non-serious social gathering as she winds down her career: “Our league is generally, our average age is much older than a lot of other leagues. And so a lot of us have priorities way more important than derby. And so [I’m] kind of at the point after skating for nine years that I just wanna have fun, you know, and everybody else, we all recognize that we wanna have fun.” Poison Ivy’s league is intentionally structured to account for life outside derby, but she is still searching for a replacement in leadership so she can finally do derby for herself.

Age is also a motivation for Scarlet Witch to not seek reelection, though she phrases this as more selfish: “I’m one of the older skaters. I’ve got limited time in this, you know. I’ve already had injuries. I’ve already had medical leaves. I wanna skate. I wanna see how good I can get. And in order to do that, I need to [not have] all of this other stuff. It’s very selfish, but it’s time. It’s time.” To Scarlet Witch (and others who commented on attendance issues), it is not possible to be

the best skater and the best leader at the same time. She wants to make the most of her remaining time in the sport to improve her skill, and that requires making a “selfish” decision to step down from leadership and let someone else handle the responsibility – let someone else do for the collective.

Jubilee's example of negotiating roles of entrepreneur, parent, skater, and leader is among the more extreme priorities conflict stories in my sample. Her story also highlights what happens when passion is no longer enough to remain within any realm of derby. Jubilee was attempting to attract clients to her training service, from which she was already struggling to make money. In order to network, she started performing unpaid labor at derby's governance level, all while skating for her league's home and travel teams. While at an annual meeting representing her league and dealing with internal staffing changes, she received a communication from travel team management that she had missed her attendance requirement:

I'm at WFTDACon doing work for our governing body and giving credit to our league...it's me spending time away from my family to help the community...all at the same time, travel team's telling me I'm not meeting attendance. And I was just like, something's gotta give. And so that the charter could still be active, I took a bullet for being on travel team so that the charter could stay active³⁷ by me doing WFTDA, instead of being on the travel team, which is what I really wanted.

Jubilee had been doing for others rather than doing for self, but too many wanted her attention, which was a problem Tank Girl shared. Caught between two heavy commitments, she took the path that was for others (quitting the travel team but keeping the league active within the governing body) and not for self (staying on the travel team). This moment triggered a breakdown followed by a moment of clarity that allowed her to see what her priorities had become. Between her paid and unpaid derby work, she had sacrificed time with her family and eventually came to regret it:

³⁷ At the time, in order to be considered “active,” WFTDA leagues were required to have at least one representative with a volunteer job in the governing body. Being inactive risked ineligibility for postseason play. Jubilee was the only active skater rep for her league, hence the weight of her “taking the bullet” for the team.

“I felt like I was neglecting my kid. I felt like I was neglecting my home. My husband. And I felt like the exchange that I was receiving was not compensating what I was losing.” Feeling guilty, she realized that her efforts for derby were no longer worth sacrificing for if it operated more like an unpaid job rather than the passion she started with: “The moment when you realize ‘I am not getting paid for this,’ it sets a different tone. Because you have sacrificed so much to do it, and you’re not getting anything in return, not nearly what you’re losing, and then that’s when it becomes a job.” This statement became a justification for backing off from her duties and eventually leaving due to a lack of appreciation. In other words, it became acceptable for her to leave because this was not her livelihood. She reframed her commitment to derby in these terms, subsequently withdrawing from her responsibilities one by one: “I was like, ‘Fuck it! I don’t have to! Guess what—volunteer! Fuck you guys.’ So that helped me transition, knowing that I wasn’t getting paid for any of this shit.”

Conclusion

Prior to feminist theorizations of work, unpaid and volunteer labor have been left out of traditional definitions of work that rely on compensation or exchange (Taylor 2016). This is reflected in participants’ confusion about the nature of derby. Though individuals initially come to derby to do a leisure activity, they quickly find that it involves “real work,” whether this is measured in terms of time or responsibility. There are those who enjoy the “boring admin shit” that comes with derby administration, but this does not describe the majority of general membership. The lack of pay keeps the lines between derby as play and derby as work blurred. Participants come to derby because it is a fun thing to do, and older adults who no longer have a competitive sports outlet beyond softball beer leagues enjoy that derby is “something for me,”

especially if they are parents. Unfortunately, even if leaders enjoy making people happy and making derby available, the “for me” portions can become eaten away by “doing for others.”

In theory, when derby stops being fun, it should be easy to step away, as most people do not work for derby as their livelihood and in fact pay a lot of money to participate. In times of stress, the fact that leaders are not being paid is a reminder to themselves that this should not be so stressful. Yet despite statements that “we can just walk away,” the reality is that leaders have a hard time doing so. With the expectation of devoting oneself out of passion as ideal derby workers (even with espoused beliefs to the contrary), leaders who think of their work as part of a hobby struggle against overworking and constant availability. Those who consider it a job still overwork, but the cognitive dissonance is not as strong as it is for those who question why they do so much work for no pay. When there is a mismatch between expectation and reality, those who take on work can feel resentful and bitter that they are doing more to keep the organization together than they perceive others doing, especially if they must sacrifice their time participating in the sport. The devotion to derby can produce guilt to take on extra work and to stay long past the passion has burned out due to obligation. Once an expectation of availability is set to membership, it becomes harder to take it back, and it often takes quitting leadership or quitting skating to regain work-family-derby balance.

Given that there is a greater number of childfree women in leadership within my sample, it is possible that, like within paid work, women who are unencumbered are on par with men to meet the demands of the ideal worker norm, at least in terms of availability. They have enough disposable income and lack of caretaking responsibilities to justify the “selfish” decision to devote themselves to derby, even to the point of sneaking it into their paid workday or limiting their career advancement to retain their commitment.

In line with Stebbins' (2000b) observations regarding "the spirit of professional work," derby as an intense, challenging, and almost addictive leisure activity tends to attract those who may have those elements present in their non-derby paid work. In addition, observations from lifestyle sport literature show that the professional (and predominantly white) middle class makes up the largest proportion of participants in various risk sports, like mountain biking and rock climbing (Fletcher 2008). Considering derby's level of physical contact, it fits well alongside these activities. As explained in the precarity/privilege chapter, leaders tended to have white-collar office jobs, and these were in fields such as engineering, law, social work, chemistry, healthcare, and biological/environmental sciences. Thus, the spirit of paid work expands into their leisure activities. Leaders may seek derby and other leisure because it is very work-like – at least, until the passion burns out and it no longer becomes fulfilling.

Having laid the groundwork of derby work as precarious, privileged, and underlined by the ideal worker norm, in the final two findings chapters, I move toward showing how these societal factors combine with the foundational values of the sport to produce a situation where sustainability and growth may be at risk on an organizational level. At the same time that derby enthusiasts experience work-family-derby conflict whether paid or unpaid, there are other internal derby-specific conflicts. Chapter 9 is devoted entirely to the conflict between anti-capitalist ethos and turning derby into a job/business, and Chapter 10 links that conflict to infrastructure to explain why leaders eventually stop working "for others" and what that means for the organization.

CHAPTER 9: COMMUNITY AND/OR CAPITALISM? RECONCILING ETHOS AND PROFIT

Given that derby's roots stem from other subcultures that operate with a DIY ethic, debates over commercialization and professionalization have long had a place within the community. These discussions have reemerged at pivotal points throughout derby's evolution, such as the *Whip It* bump, petitioning for inclusion of roller sports in the Olympics, and the WFTDA-ESPN saga. The corporate/grassroots dichotomy has been explored in other alternative sports like BMX, skateboarding, and snowboarding (Dinces 2011; Honea 2013; Humphreys 2003; Rinehart 2008b; Rinehart and Grenfell 2002). Derby's trajectory parallels these other sports to a point, as derby has not yet achieved the same level of mainstream success. In the current moment, derby seems to be trying to do it all – holding fast to DIY ethic while trying to become a household name. How does this impact industry players and organizations?

In the opening two sections of this chapter, I focus on the experiences of entrepreneurs and the derby industry more broadly. First, I show how the values of anti-capitalism and women-owned and operated demonstrate authenticity within the sport. Participants are aware that there is little money to be made in derby and making money should not be the focus of their efforts. Those who attempt to capitalize on derby, or even give the perception of doing so, have historically been viewed with skepticism. Community members draw symbolic boundaries in this fashion; those looking to gain monetarily do not have the best interests of the sport in mind and are thus outsiders. To be authentic also means to be an active participant in the sport. As a women-led sport, this is gendered to some degree. Participants see men as “outsiders within,” having a harder time breaking into the industry unless they demonstrate devotion and passion for the sport. Second, given the emphasis on passion over profit, I explore the degree of conflict that entrepreneurs feel working with a community-driven ethos within a larger capitalist system.

Though entrepreneurs are not primarily driven by money, compared to part-timers, full-time workers particularly experience conflict in reconciling a mission-driven ethos with the need to financially sustain their businesses, and attempt to downplay the importance of profit while still recognizing its necessity.

In the final section, I shift focus to the organizational side, as the conflict between community and capitalism comes to roost in the very structure of derby organizations and how leaders feel they should be run. Compared to entrepreneurs, leaders overwhelmingly viewed derby as not about making money and that it should remain “by the skater, for the skater.” On the other hand, entrepreneurs and the few leaders with entrepreneurial/business experience believed that in order to thrive, derby should be run as a business. In trying to reconcile financially sustaining leagues with retaining derby’s skater-driven mission, entrepreneurs suggest ambivalence in organizational structures as leagues attempt to have it both ways.

Establishing authenticity in the derby industry

Anti-capitalism

In the derby community, like in other alternative sports, to have passion for the sport and its values system without promise of a payday demonstrates authenticity, that one cares about the sport without wanting to capitalize on it. As explained in the Study Context, authenticity of modern derby has been a foundational principle from the beginning, which has translated to a pay-to-play amateur structure. The DIY ethos is both product and result of the sport largely being an underground phenomenon. Skaters do it themselves, but there is not a line of investors waiting to give them money (and they would think twice about taking it if it was from a company that did not care about the sport), so they must continue to do derby themselves.

Fourteen entrepreneurs made it clear that, as a niche market, there is little profit in a derby-related business and going in with the assumption of making a lot of money is a grave mistake. Raven (entrepreneur) suggests that the idea that derby businesses are highly profitable ventures is misinformed: “I think a lot of people [think], oh! A high-end nice pair of skates is \$600. And they look at that as, 'wow, that's a lot of money,' but they don't really look at what their profit margins are on things like that. And they kinda get into [business] and go all in, and then they're like, 'oh shit.’” Several factors contribute to the low profitability of derby enterprises. First, unlike mainstream sports that have non-participant fanbases, the only people who are willing to buy roller derby products participate in derby themselves. Emma Frost (entrepreneur/leader) says, “Roller derby players are the only people that are really interested in roller derby. ... There is no roller derby fan market that you can make a profit off of. It doesn't exist.” Second, the limited market is already saturated with plenty of businesses. Captain Marvel (entrepreneur) offered the advice of not starting a new derby business unless one has something unique to contribute:

Don't [start a boot company]. There's too many boot companies in the market. You want to sell wheels? Don't sell wheels. There's too many wheels... You want to sell uniforms? No, don't get into that. There's already a couple businesses and not enough market share. And I know that sounds like a big downer, but it's true. There are a lot of people in roller derby who want to make money, which is fucking awesome, but there's not really a ton of people to buy from them.

Finally, this already small market is limited in profitability even more so by the target market's spending patterns. The pay-to-play amateur structure of derby requires that participants pay out of pocket for equipment and travel costs, so accessories and extra services like physical training may be a luxury. On one hand, derby enthusiasts may be willing to spend extra discretionary money to improve at their sport, but it is also likely that they cannot afford another derby-related expense. Jubilee (former entrepreneur/leader) puts it bluntly: “Roller derby girls don't have money. They already spent it on roller derby.” In addition to already spending disposable income on derby,

Emma Frost suggests that the sport's subcultural elements (and the people who are drawn to it) impacts spending in general, making profitability more difficult:

Roller derby [people]—they're not lucrative spenders. It's just not in the culture in a variety of ways. There's a feminist influence, there's a female influence, anti-capitalist influence, there's a lot of different things that come into the people that play roller derby and the way that they spend their money, and it's generally frugally.

Emma suggests that people who come to derby tend to adhere to a certain set of values that clash with conspicuous consumption, which inhibits spending even on items for their passion. In addition, several entrepreneurs' comments support this argument, such as to avoid categorizing themselves as consumers (Captain Marvel), speaking with disgust about customers or business partners who bragged about wealth (Raven, Wonder Woman), or believing in supporting local business or fair-trade practices (Thunder and Lightning, Cipher).

It is unclear whether participants recognized from the start that there is little money to be made in the derby industry. None of the entrepreneurs explicitly cited money as the sole motivation to go into business, but four (Tico, Cipher, Jubilee, Wren) went in with the hope that by owning a business, derby could become a viable paid career for them. Tico (entrepreneur/leader) opened her skate shop with the end goal of earning a salary, looking to established shops such as Sin City Skates as the ideal: “[I'd always thought] wouldn't it be cool if everybody everywhere agreed to treat derby like a business, not a hobby? People can actually make a living out of this, and we can turn this feminist movement of ours into an actual career. And I didn't really know what that would look like, but that sounded really appealing. So I was hoping that that would be the case.” With the desire to make derby an “actual career,” Tico saw potential in derby becoming a real job underlined with feminist values - mission-based and money-making. However, her comment (and other comments from participants in this study) suggests that this idea is not shared throughout the community. In addition, she was only able to achieve this in a limited fashion, as a part-time job.

Making money from roller derby has historically been a touchy subject. Grounded in the anti-capitalist influence that Emma Frost highlighted, early derby enthusiasts were especially skeptical of those who might capitalize on the sport's popularity without giving back to the community or having its best interests at heart, believing that derby should not be attached to money. Harley highlighted this when I asked her about how outsiders to the sport are perceived: "Getting paid for what you do is one thing, but trying to capitalize on it and make money off of everyone—oooh, I don't think people are gonna want that." Quartermain (paid staff) notes the historical stigma surrounding making money off roller derby, which led him to worry about being accused of this himself when he started his job:

For the first 3-4 years in roller derby, few received any kind of payment. I don't care if it was a sponsor or you had a business, if anybody thought you were profiting from roller derby... I was a little concerned when I first took the job that people would point and just say, 'Oh yeah, well, you're making money off of roller derby.' So there was kind of that stigma back then. I don't think, that doesn't exist anymore, or at least not to that kind of level.

Fortunately for him, Quartermain did not disclose any instances of community members calling him out on "making money off of roller derby." Rescue, however, did not get the same treatment. When she and her then-business partner first promoted their company at Rollercon, she heard false rumors about the intent of her business – that they were there to make money off the community without any ties to it:

The first Rollercon that we went to, that we vended at—'cause we did everything, we did all the photography ourselves. My business partner and I, we did all the design, 'cause I'm a graphic designer in my real life and marketer. So all of that we did by ourselves. And so our booth looked pretty good, especially in the early days of derby when it was so DIY. It looked pretty professional. And a lot of people were like, "Don't go shop there, they're just these corporate people that are trying to take all your money and they have nothing to do with roller derby." It was really, really weird, all of these random like rumors that had popped up that [we] had no idea where they came from. I mean, granted, this is 6 years ago and it was a totally different derby world out there.

At the time, derby was still booming thanks to *Whip It*, making it hyper-visible in the public and corporate eye. Already seeing items such as roller girl Halloween costumes³⁸ for sale through online big box stores, derby participants were on high alert for outsiders who attempted to make a quick buck from their beloved sport. The company's professional-looking booth stood out in the vendor village full of DIY-crafted displays. To skaters perusing the wares, if it looked professional, it signaled money. Because the only ones with money to burn in derby were large skating manufacturers, it also signaled corporate – and a heavy dose of skepticism that the company was truly invested in the derby community rather than just making money, as demonstrated by the attempts to dissuade people from buying from Rescue. A key difference between Quartermain's and Rescue's experience is timing. Quartermain was already heavily invested and visible in the derby community for several years before starting his job. Rescue was, in her words, “a nobody skater who started this up,” which may have led to (faulty) assumptions about her intent with the business.

(Women) Skater-owned and operated

Whether entrepreneurs are first embedded in derby or they come to derby as a result of their business, their insider status grants them authenticity. Their knowledge and intentions can be trusted; they are assumed to be insiders who operate according to the community's ethos.

Tigra states that it is important to be derby-owned and -operated to build customer trust in the product and the company:

Just one person being a skater is good, but more people you have in the business actively involved in skating as well, I think the better. ... When we go away to tournaments and [I] have the store with me as well, people always come up to us and talk about their experiences. And if you're a skater yourself, you can chat about yours and it just seems a lot more authentic. Like you're part of the community, you care about it rather than you're just some business from the outside just trying to make money off it. Which obviously yeah, we're a business, but we do care as well.

³⁸ Please see Nox's (2017) video on authentic roller derby costumes for examples.

Tigra highlights the importance of establishing authenticity. If employees are skaters themselves, it is likely they follow the current trends of the sport and know what other skaters need. In this regard, there is also less of a learning curve by hiring someone who understands derby, as Emma Frost says: “When we have people who work for us that are involved in roller derby, they understand why the things that we think are important are important. And there’s less explanation and questioning that has to happen.” Partially for this reason, “we would always rather compensate somebody from roller derby than somebody from outside of roller derby if they can do the job.” Providing products is grounded in a concern and passion for the community, not solely a passion to make money on an exciting fad. Note that Tigra combines both in saying “obviously, we’re a business,” and thus she needs to make money to stay that way, but not to the point of alienating the intended customer base.

As demonstrated in previous literature on authenticity in alternative sports (Beal and Weidman 2003; Dupont 2014; Wheaton and Beal 2003), derby community members draw symbolic boundaries between as insiders and outsiders. Those who are devoted to the community for love of the game and not just for a financial pay-off are in; all others are viewed with a skeptic eye unless they can prove otherwise. Given the historical skepticism, those not part of the derby community are compelled to demonstrate their support and prove themselves as authentic. Accidental entrepreneurs, for example, joined derby after being approached to carry derby products. Lightning and Thunder were not able to join derby for several years due to life issues, but adding derby lifestyle products to their business model was the catalyst to finally do so to deliver an authentic product. As Lightning explains: “The business really forced us to [join derby] because we wanted [the business] to be authentic where...on marketing, social media, we didn't want to be posers, like trying to know what we're doing. So we wanted to know our

demographic and know their troubles and what they need gear-wise, that kind of thing.” It is easy for skaters to be able to tell who is posing and who is legitimate. Tigra gives an example of a now-defunct business who failed to present an authentic image:

There's a company that ran advertising about [how] they can make uniforms for you. But all their stuff's, it's all quite grungy and blood splattered and fishnetty, kind of like what derby was like five years ago. I think, you look at that advert and any sort of current skater would think of them as being really out of date. And it really looks like they've Googled what roller derby is, found some old images and kind of gone with that. Then you can tell that they just obviously don't know what they're talking about. And I think that just comes across as really bad.

If an entrepreneur is not part of the community, they must rely on insiders to teach them and to be able to vouch for them before they can be viewed as credible. Gambit is the only participant in the sample who has never participated in derby, though he has years of experience inline skating. The task of managing a skate shop fell into his lap, as he explains it: “My boss from the other company I was running for him said, ‘Hey, I'm starting a new company and I need you to run it.’ And I said, ‘What kind of company is it?’ And he said, ‘It's a roller derby supply company.’ And I said, ‘I don't know anything about roller derby.’ And he said, ‘Well, better learn because I need you to start running this on Monday.’ (laughs)” Gambit recognized that he needed to “put his money where his mouth is” and learn about the sport (including how to skate on quad skates) in order to be taken seriously: “You know everything about quad skates and you give people advice all day long on quad skates, and when they ask you what do you skate on, I would tell them 'roller blades,' and then my credibility went out the window.” He was able to quickly learn about derby culture and equipment through an “intensive crash course in everything derby” from a local manufacturer, who took him to games and introduced him to several high-profile skaters. These connections allowed Gambit to see an insider view of the community, which ignited his own passion: “I really found a passion for it at that point. I was like, ‘This is one of the coolest

communities I've ever known.' And I really just started to see the incredible support that they have for each other, and it was inspiring." Through the shop's financial and volunteer support of the local derby community, in addition to hiring skaters as employees, Gambit is considered an "honorary member" of the community and always tries to remain humble: "Being a business that makes its money off of derby players, but not being a derby player, we do really try to always just show a lot of gratitude that they still respect us." Though he started as an outsider, Gambit's story shows the labor and connections necessary to build authenticity in the derby industry, and that one can grow a passion for the sport given time.

Based on my participants' comments, there is some evidence to suggest that authenticity in derby business is gendered. Harley suggested that while women in the general business world face not being taken seriously, it is the reverse in the derby niche: "On the business side of things, not derby related, I feel like people take you more seriously if you're male. On the derby side of things, I feel like people take you more seriously if you're a female." The sport's unique status as a women-dominated space opens the possibility to flip the narrative of entrepreneur-as-male and input women as entrepreneurs with technical knowledge and experience. It also unconsciously casts women as insiders and men as outsiders. It is taken for granted that women who become derby entrepreneurs do so out of passion for the sport, while men are looked upon with skepticism: what do they have to gain by being part of this community? Do they believe in the same women-driven, feminist values? Men trying to run a derby business, especially if they do not have derby experience themselves, may be ignored or taken less seriously (and seen as less authentic) until otherwise proven. While the sport overall has made strides toward welcoming individuals of all genders, there is still a sense of skepticism about men's place in the community, as Wren explains:

I think that if you're a man particularly, it's a lot harder to break into the derby community. And I don't know if they do as well that fast. They really gotta rely on expert customer

service and stuff like that, having maybe some sponsored skaters and people that can help them kinda break into the community a bit. ... And from what I've seen, is that...the girls are more judgmental, it seems. And they're particularly judgmental on a man in a woman's world. And that's kinda how derby started, and I feel—even though that is fizzling and it's becoming very much for everybody—that's still there, this whole 'this is a woman's world' thing is still there. There's still a lot of that in derby.

An example from Mockingbird supports the contention that up-and-coming men entrepreneurs are (at least initially) ignored. While at a weekend derby event, looking for replacement skate boots, Mockingbird came across a relatively new skate manufacturer's booth, tried on a set of their boots, and loved them. She suggested to the company leader (a men's derby skater) that he needed to gain recognition among women in the sport. When he asserted that the women at the event knew of him, she demonstrated to his face how wrong he was:

I'm seeing people from these leagues that I just coached for the last two, three weeks coming in saying hi, talking to me. ... During one of the slow times, I'm like, 'You realize that none of these girls know who you are, right?' [He said], 'No, they do.' [I'm like], '(shakes head) Hang on.' Next flood came through, and I [tell a group of women], 'Hey, do you guys know who [skater] is?' [They say], 'Oh, he's one of the coaches, right?' I'm like, 'Yeah! Who does he play for?' [They say], '...I don't know.' And he's standing behind me... Apparently, he had this look on his face like [makes a shocked expression]. After that, I was like, "Gotta get some girls on your team. ...You need someone female because the girls from New Jersey don't give a shit about [you]."

Gambit's experience, and the fact that his company is known for its superb customer service, also supports Wren's contention. Unlike Quartermain, who benefits from his longevity (and one could argue has "proven" himself worthy), Gambit has had a few experiences with customers who in his perception were put off because he is a man in a woman's world, despite his humility and support³⁹:

I've had some people just not like me because I was a guy. Or, at least, not at first. I don't know, maybe I was a jerk, but I don't think I've ever really been a jerk. I shouldn't say not like me, but just be naturally, you know, when it's just me in the store and just kind of be, they seem naturally just kind of put off. And I definitely try to just be respectful and really

³⁹ Quartermain did not discuss any role that gender might have played into others' perception of his paid work. However, he did feel his status as a man in a women-led community impacted how involved he could be from the organizational side ("I'm a guy, and that does play into things").

understand how much it means to some people, and try to show how much I really love and respect the community. But no, I've definitely had some people that don't really like guys in the community.

When he is met with these customers, he does not force them to change their minds but treats them as he would any other customer. Fortunately, he says, these instances have been rare, and that the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Overall, authenticity in derby is linked to its amateur, unpaid status. To be real in modern derby is to not make money off the sport but to labor out of passion. Furthermore (or perhaps because of those values), there is no money to be made regardless, so those looking to capitalize without community ties are viewed as suspect until they can demonstrate otherwise.

Labor of love vs. profit margin: Entrepreneurs' tensions of anti-capitalist ethos with business sustainability

Entrepreneurs come to derby work not motivated by profit but by passion, which is important because there is little money to begin with. In addition, care for the community adds to a business's authenticity. This quote from Red Sonja highlights that derby work *must* be passionate and mission-driven if one is to survive:

I've been doing this for 3-4 years now. ... And there's a lot of work that has been done, and a lot of work that still needs to be done before I even consider this a profitable venture. I get a lot out of it because I love it and I'm passionate about it and I love sharing it, and I love seeing people have those moments where they did something they didn't do and making the sport more accessible. Like that's the end goal. I want to see more people know that it exists and then I want to see them not only know that it exists but giving to it and doing things that they didn't think they could do. And if I wasn't passionate about it and I didn't care and I was only in it for the bottom dollar, then I probably wouldn't have survived.

Red Sonja emphasizes that her mission is not based in profit, but to increase visibility of the sport, help others better their skills, and share in their joy while doing so.

To be clear, compensation and passion do not have to be mutually exclusive. Xena (leader) highlights when talking about playing derby “for the love of the sport”: “I don’t think we have to

function based on people's love for the sport or based on income. I think that we can do both. And I think that the two actually support each other. ... I dislike the idea that the two are mutually exclusive concepts." It is possible to work for a passion and make money, but at least in my sample, making enough money to live on derby work alone was exceptionally rare. If income is not or cannot be a motivation, passion becomes more important in order to keep a business running or to take a leadership position.

Even if entrepreneurs are unaware at the start that they will likely not make enough money to sustain themselves, at some point they risk running into this issue. Their businesses originate from a place of passion to serve their community and their sport, where making lots of money is not the intent. Considering that participants tended to frame compensation and passion in opposition to each other (with Xena as a notable exception), how do entrepreneurs reconcile their passion with the need to financially sustain their businesses? The amount of conflict they face depends on whether they have additional employment/income and their personal ethos.

Passion over profits: "I really don't want to be a big commercial"

Ten participants, part-time entrepreneurs and full-timers with a spouse's income, were less likely to discuss frustrations around making money, freeing themselves to focus on their derby businesses as more passion-based when they had the time to devote. Tico, for example, has a non-derby full-time job and has reduced her shop from a brick and mortar storefront to a by-request operation out of her home (customers tell her what product they want, and she places an order). While she briefly thought her shop would allow her to be paid to do derby work, the emphasis was always about being a resource rather than making money: "It's more of a passion project than anything else. We weren't in it to be sending our kids off to college, but we wanted to be a resource for people. So it's much smaller now, especially since I've retired. ... It's more of a labor of love

than anything else, but it gets people what they need, which is what I wanted.”

Despite actively seeking derby work as a “real job,” Wren markets herself as “a cheap date to coach and help spread the derby knowledge.” Part of this philosophy stems from sticker shock at the going rates of derby coaches when she was first considering coaching as a side job: “All these coaches that are out there doing the little coaching thing, they were costing a ridiculous amount of money. I got a quote for a couple of them and it was like 6, 7 grand! And I was like, ‘That's stupid!’” In contrast to Captain Marvel, whose coaching makes up her livelihood, Wren is not worried about paying the bills with her coaching gigs:

I'm not one that's looking to [coach] to pay every bill in my pocket. I'm doing it because I want the teams to do better. I want us, I want derby to be better. So as long as my bills are paid while I'm gone, I'm cool with it. But I just want to bring the knowledge I do have, the strategy and the fun shit that I can do, and let all the teams get better. So a lot of people, when you get coaches, they limit their hours, you have to pay by the hour, you have pay for them to be put up in a house...I mean, it's just all kinds of shit. And I'm just still like, I don't know, fuck, ‘can I hang out with you?’ (laughs) Some people may look at it as ‘well, you're just not being serious then.’ But I just look at it as like, derby's not professional yet. We don't get paid, so I'm not gonna put myself up on a pedestal as if I'm worth thousands and thousands of dollars. I think the trip alone, just to travel and do what you love alone is enough. That should be enough.

To be fair, when Captain Marvel began coaching, she felt she was not yet experienced enough to charge right away, and she has been coaching for longer than Wren. That said, there is a divergence in philosophy regarding coaching derby and compensation. To Wren, some compensation is acceptable, but not to the point where the job becomes elitist and expensive, especially considering that derby is still an amateur sport. Part of the issue of compensation for Wren is that modern derby has been co-created by all its participants, and as such, she sees little difference in skill between skaters on elite teams who do not coach and those who do. It would not be proper for a small number of skaters to elevate themselves above the rest unless they are able

to produce a championship franchise, in which case the money would be worth paying for their expertise:

Just 'cause you're a good skater doesn't mean that you're worth that much money. Until you start coaching teams to get medals and you're proven to make teams champions, then maybe you can get that much money. But I mean, until then, there's very few skaters that [can do that]. And even the skaters coming from some of those teams with those skaters, they're doing the same shit. They're just better at it! There's no other way around it.

Emphasizing mission over profit, the main motivation should be to progress the sport, and the trip should be reward enough. With that in mind, Wren views her worth as similar to that of her fellow skaters. She knows that by keeping her rates low, she may be viewed as not taking the job seriously enough as a “real job.” Yet for her, that is not the point, and because she also has income from her shop, it does not have to be. On the other side, coaches who make the job their livelihood wrestle with both keeping it mission-driven while earning a living wage. In their view, coaching is still real work that must be compensated as such, and lower rates risk driving down rates for the entire coaching community. Tank Girl notes that among discussions regarding going rates, one coach had customers “trying to get [them] to bring rates down below a livable level to match free coaching.” Compared to other forms of derby work, making money from coaching appears to be a sticking point.

Within this group, some entrepreneurs left a stable full-time job to make passion-based work their priority. Before coming to his current job, Gambit worked in corporate sales, the stress of which was beginning to impact his health: “I put on a lot of weight. I wasn't healthy. I was drinking way too much every night after work, just trying to calm down. My wife was worried about me. She'd always ask me ‘what's wrong?’ and I would say ‘well, I'm just under stress, the job, I have this, I have that.’” His wife expressed that quality time meant more to her than money, and hearing that helped him decide to leave his job: “I finally was just like, ‘I don't wanna do this

anymore.’ That’s when I said, you know what? I’m gonna take a chance and take a huge cut in pay and do something fun like sell roller derby equipment on the Internet.” In his new job, Gambit was adamant on not reproducing the corporate environment. He “selfishly” made decisions that focused less on profit and more on creating a fun place to work, which accidentally worked to his advantage:

It was kind of selfish that I was just like, “OK, I’m gonna take this job and just make it what I want it to be for me.” And I can’t say that all of the decisions that I made were necessarily thinking of the bottom line. It was like, I don’t want any of this corporate BS anymore, so we’re not gonna have it here. And I was doing it kind of selfishly, but it ended up creating an environment that worked for us really well in a business sense.

Initially, he feared that this style of business management would cause the shop to fail: “I kinda wondered if it was just gonna crash and burn on me (laughing). I really did.” For example, his shop offers a service where customers can return gently used wheels if they are not happy with them. At the same time, he was worried about losing money but knew that this practice was in line with his values: “In my heart, I was saying, ‘That’s the right thing to do.’ And in my head, I was going, ‘(sighs) How long am I gonna do this before people start taking advantage of it?’ And you know what? It’s never happened.”

Like Wren, Gambit describes his decisions as selfish. His were more directly linked to his business, while hers were life decisions that eventually led her to entrepreneurship. Knowing he would make less money in a less prestigious line of work, the bottom line was not about income but about fun. Even if it risked the business’s financial health, he stuck to an anti-corporate ethos, a risk that ended up paying off, and one he felt comfortable enough to take.

Wonder Woman’s experience is another example of an entrepreneur changing from a high-paying job to one that better aligned with ethos. Originally, she went into business with a partner whose idea of success clashed with hers. In her view, the business partner was more concerned

about making a profit than offering a quality product: “He just kept saying, ‘You give them the right margin, it will succeed.’ ... And we’re like, no, you have to have the right product or you won’t succeed. If the customers don’t like your product, you’re not gonna sell it.” The business was financially successful, yet money brought her neither happiness nor life balance: “I should have been more balanced when we had [the old company] because I had way more support. I had employees, I had a nanny, we had a lot of money. Everything was great, right? No. Everything was terrible.” Continuous clashes caused Wonder Woman to cut ties with her business partner and start a new company. Now in sole control, she was able to craft the new business in line with her desired community-based ethos: “We’re selling to shops that are, a lot of times, run by people just like me. ... They probably didn’t go to college for business management, but they got into skating and they’re a retailer ‘cause they love the sport.” By starting over, her family had to make financial sacrifices, such as downsizing to an apartment. Yet Wonder Woman believes “whatever sacrifice needs to happen is fine” for the sake of autonomy and selling to fellow skaters: “It feels totally chaotic, but yet to me, there’s balance. Because we are in charge of our own destiny. Everything is right. ... I order what I want to order, not what someone else is telling me to order. So we feel in control and we feel balance.”

The passion has returned to business for Wonder Woman. She gave up financial success and material comfort to regain control and sell to a market that was reflective of her background (“people like me”). Her business partner was more interested in selling to high-end distributors, and Wonder Woman couldn’t “understand that world.” Like Raven and Gambit, Wonder Woman sees herself in her customers and sells to people that reflect her background, even if it means a less lucrative market. While she works a chaotic schedule, running her own business out of passion is her version of balance.

Two additional entrepreneurs, Mockingbird and Captain Marvel, did not experience conflict because they placed a low priority on material wealth. Mockingbird detailed various “life hacks” she uses to get by with her part-time work and derby-related income streams, such as using a bike for transportation and owning a phone that runs solely on Wi-Fi. She has learned how to hustle so she can abide by her own values rather than work for someone else: “I’ve never been the punch-the-clock kind of person. I can. I’ve done it. It just makes me miserable. I am that person that I would rather survive on less if it means that I get to do what I want to do. I’m selfish that way.” Captain Marvel, described above as “not a big consumer,” told a story in which she ultimately scrapped a Valentine’s Day-themed item. She had entertained the thought that it would increase sales but decided in the end to uphold an anti-consumerist ethos: “I was like, eh, I don’t really think I want to do it. ‘Oh yeah, go buy chocolates, buy [a shirt from me]!’ Because it’s so commercialized. And one of the things I really don’t want to do [with the company] is be like a big commercial, like a Hallmark company trying to move all the holidays, ‘cause that’s not really what the fuck [the business] is about.” The message underlying her business, which is of empowerment, is too valuable to her to be watered down by gimmicky sales.

Mixing passion and profits: “This kills my soul, but I can’t just disappear”

For nine participants, mostly full-time entrepreneurs, the joy of working for passion was not as clear-cut, and they discussed a trade-off with pay insecurity. While they found their work enjoyable to some degree, they acknowledged low income as one of the worst aspects of the job. Emma Frost, whose derby work was her sole income, tried to emphasize community-building over profit while still caring enough about money to remain open. About her shop’s mission, she says, “We’re really, really not interested in hustling for every stop or sale. We’re a lot more interested in creating environments and partnerships where we can facilitate what is it we want to facilitate

without having to stare so hard at a bottom dollar just to make sure we can pay rent.” That said, she acknowledges the worst part about the job is the pay: “I don’t want to say the finances are not important because they are and they obviously are. We have, I think, a very acceptable amount of overhead and we are comfortable, but we’re not rolling in the dough.” Emma Frost tries to have a place in both camps, downplaying capitalism in the role of the business but still acknowledging that the shop needs to make money in order to realize her vision.

Some admitted they were unsure if they could keep going in their current state. Tank Girl believes in a collaborative model in which “I will literally give you as much as I can from my company until I need to sell enough to keep the lights on.” As such, her skate goods business is mission-driven to provide resources and quality equipment for skaters: “We’re all not trying to make a million dollars off people. I’m just trying to see them have some sweet skates!” However, she acknowledges she is currently struggling to make “real money” from her business that she keeps open as a “labor of love”:

I mean, honestly, it sounds pretty shallow, but the worst part is probably that our profit margin is just terrible. We just do so much work and we’re constantly in all the time, and it never ends...a lot of it’s very detailed... I think in terms of classical business sense, it’s probably not worth it, to be honest. But it’s profitable and solvent, and it seems to fill a need, so I just keep fucking doing it, even though I will never make a lot of money at this current trajectory. So I’m trying to figure out how to maybe make money, like real money one day, or any kind of money one day.

Tank Girl tries to do the same dance as Emma Frost, even acknowledging that her focus on profit margin is “shallow” and goes against her collective sharing ethos but is a necessary worry.

Aurora, who makes about \$30,000 a year, admitted that she was not sure that she would be at the helm of her business in the distant future. There are some months where she must pull on other areas of her expertise to make up what her derby business does not bring in “because I don’t get to pay myself enough to really live nicely on.” Nearing five years in business at the time of

interview, she cited that her current struggle was finding “the magic potion” to increase her profit, if such a thing was even possible:

Five years is a long time for a small business to still be in existence. It's not a very lucrative small business. And I don't know if there's a way to make it so. I don't know if the business model and the community and the size of the market would allow for it to be that much bigger than it is. So it's a consideration. I don't want to continue paying myself less than \$30,000 a year for the rest of my life (laughs). I have to be able to find the time to do something else as well, or figure out the magic potion that makes [my business] make twice as much money in a year, or whatever, without doubling its expenses or tripling expenses.

With this concern about money in mind, Aurora had more conflicting thoughts about opting into holiday sales promotions (compared to Captain Marvel, who made the decision based on values). On one hand, the idea digs against her ethos (“this kills my soul”), but on the other hand, the reality of the market is that her competitors will be running promotions:

[After 5] years in, you're like, oh god, do I have to do fucking Black Friday themed advertising? Like this kills my soul, I don't want to be part of this conversation (laughing). But are you just gonna let people put their money into your competitors? You kind of have to compete for a share of wallet, right? I can't just disappear.

In addition to serving as another example of repetitive work, Aurora’s case shows that not everyone is willing to hustle to get by and must juggle an anti-consumerist ethos with the need for income. Aurora did leave a stressful, low-paying job to go full-time with her derby business, but passion is only a small buffer, as her comments suggest she is currently looking for a solution to avoid the same thing happening again.

The above stories describe entrepreneurs who were currently negotiating or who had reconciled dilemmas about making money and working for passion by erring on the side of passion. In some cases, the dilemma can only be reconciled by leaving derby and business entirely. Jubilee shut down her physical training business in part due to her inability to reconcile her values with establishing the financial worth of her expertise. Like Cipher and Tico, she wanted to make derby her paid career: “I thought becoming a personal trainer would feel like...being so derby-

specific, I thought that would be my way of being like, ‘Yeah, I’m paid to play.’” However, as she explains, she struggled to establish the monetary worth of her labor:

The worst part was charging people. I don’t know if it’s because of who I am as a person, but I don’t like money. And I didn’t know what the appropriate amount was to charge for my services. I didn’t know what I was worth to people. ... It’s not like I could be like, “OK, well, what does a specialized personal trainer make an hour?” ... I could only speculate because the market research wasn’t there. ... I never really felt like I was ever charging the right price.

Her “moral” underlying her enterprise was to make her clients self-sufficient to the point where they no longer needed her services and could train themselves. Jubilee believed that if her expertise was priceless, “it should be price *less*,” but trying a donation-based model did not give her enough compensation from her clients to recoup her start-up costs. She did consider branching outside of derby to a general fitness clientele, which could have potentially made her more money, “but that’s not what I wanted to do. I wanted to do roller derby.” Feeling used, she stopped her business and then later retired from derby altogether to spend more time with her family, whom she had neglected while she had been so heavily invested in the sport.

Jubilee’s business reflects a mission-driven foundation, based on her self-sufficiency approach and prioritizing the community over potentially more lucrative opportunities. Money did not drive Jubilee’s life, and she struggled to attach a dollar amount to her services. By not charging, her clients also did not know what her value was and thus did not compensate her. Blind passion only held out for so long, and it became important to Jubilee that she be paid for her time. Unable to determine her own worth and unable to make others to see it, she felt her best option was to withdraw. To her, derby had become a job without pay, and that was not worth the sacrifice.

A “big kid business” or “a knife in the soul of roller derby?”: Organizational ambivalence

While there is wide variation in organizational structure and how derby participants make derby fit into their lives, the sport still needs to be run sustainably to persist at all levels of

organization. Beyond sustainability, “the pipe dream” of getting paid to play, as Jubilee refers to it, can only happen if there is an infrastructure in place to support it. Entrepreneurs (8, including 3 who were also leaders) were more likely than leaders to state that, regardless of whether they were neutral or would support compensation, there is no money or infrastructure to make it happen, so it is a moot point. Tank Girl (leader/entrepreneur) summarizes this idea: “Us not getting paid to play, I don’t care. I mean, if there was enough money to get paid to play, I don’t care, whatever, that’s fine. I don’t think [derby] necessarily always has to be amateur. But there isn’t enough money, and that’s the problem.” Karma (entrepreneur) elaborates that there is no currently existing infrastructure in place to support such an endeavor: “We can’t even afford to have [tournaments] for everybody to go to that should be going to a tournament, right? Like [WFTDA is] cutting off D2s⁴⁰, all these tournaments are getting smaller. So I support getting paid to skate, but you have to have infrastructure in place. Otherwise, you’re gonna bleed the sport dry, and then it’s not going to exist anymore.”

To twelve participants (5 leaders, 6 entrepreneurs, 1 both), if membership want to bring “real money” to the sport, the solution is to treat derby like a “real business.” Entrepreneurs speaking to make derby business-like is logical as they draw from their business experience, while leaders in this group tended to have a more worldly view regarding the sport by virtue of years in the community or serving at the governance level. Xena (leader) suggests that derby’s DIY ethos is a hindrance to the sport’s growth in two ways. First, a refusal to compare derby operations to that of other organizations solidifies the desire for derby to be “not like other sports,” but at the risk of making avoidable business mistakes:

⁴⁰ D2 refers to the WFTDA Division 2 tournaments. Following restructure of postseason tournaments in 2018, divisions have been dissolved and Continental Cups now serve as the competitions for teams ranked below Playoffs/Championships eligibility.

I think that sometimes every time someone references what someone else is doing, or what another sport is done, you always get the people who are like, “Well, we don’t wanna be someone else.” Well, it’s not necessarily what’s happening. ... That’s what business is all about, and that’s what successful business does. You do benchmark your competitors or you do wanna look at other similar industries to your own to get ideas of what to do right and what to do wrong. And I think that we need to start doing that a little more. We can’t live in our own little world anymore. We’re kind of at that point where we’re too big to just keep doing whatever we want to do.

By too big, Xena refers to the fact that between the WFTDA, MRDA, and JRDA, there are close to 700 derby leagues operating across six continents. These three governing bodies have also interacted with established organizations like the IOC and ESPN. Recall previously that Xena believed passion could be reconciled with considering derby as a business, and her comments here about benchmarking reflects that perspective. In her view, derby is unique in its player-run structure, but not so unique that it could not model itself in some ways that would still adhere to derby’s mission while representing successful business practice. Derby may be an insular community, but it exists within the “real world.” Without examples for success and failure, derby risks taking the “learn as you go” philosophy to create unnecessary work by reinventing the wheel.

Second, relying on volunteer labor puts a theoretical limit on what organizations can accomplish. Xena continues: “I think that there’s a lot of this idea that we don’t wanna become corporate America, so we’re not hiring, we’re not paying anybody, we’re doing it all ourselves. But then that also limits what we can do. Realistically. There’s just nobody [who] has time to put that much time into it, to make it as successful.” Xena hits on the potent fear of derby becoming “corporate America” with any approach that is anything less than by the skater, for the skater. Yet this has a consequence for the sport’s growth and sustainability, in that volunteers only have so much time to devote to a sport compared to part-time or full-time employees.

The fear of derby turning corporate and losing its values is reflected in comments from leaders when I asked their thoughts on being paid to do derby, whether as a skater or as paid staff.

Compared to entrepreneurs, leaders (10) overwhelmingly feared that derby's values would change if money came into the game, whether they were neutral ("it'd be cool, but...") or were firmly against compensation. The main rationale was that the sport would not retain integrity, becoming elitist and more exclusive. Comments from Nite Owl (leader) are representative of the neutral side:

It would be awesome if people could get any kind of financial assistance for what they love to do the most. But I don't think that would come without a cost. That would kind of be a knife in the soul of what roller derby started out as. So I would err on the side of it needs to stay DIY. ... That's what drives roller derby to the place that it's at, is that it is ever striving to be the most inclusive, accessible, revolutionary sport that it is. And I don't think that could ever come with somebody else footing the bill.

Nite Owl likes the idea of people receiving money to funnel toward their passion, but he is wary of who might be paying for it, if not the derby community, and that they may not align with derby's values of inclusivity. Oracle (leader), whose comments represent the side against, also hits the point that derby's DIY ethos makes the sport unique, and that people enjoy it because it is not like other sports:

If people were doing it for a paycheck, they would be doing it for the wrong reason. ... You're gonna have what you see in other professional sports. You're gonna see people that are there not because they're passionate about it but because it's about them. Me, me, me, my sponsorships, and my paycheck, and look at my fancy car that I got because I'm so awesome. Which is all the reasons that people dislike professional sports players. ... In adult derby, even the derby famous people, when you talk to them, they're very grounded. It's not about them, it's all about their team... They're not all about themselves.

Oracle's comments are among nine others who compared derby to professional sports with the understanding that the latter lacks integrity and is full of owners looking to make money off their players – at best, as benevolent patriarchs, and at worst, exploitative. With this view, money is the “wrong reason” to participate in derby. Introducing money into the game would change it so that the wrong people – those who are motivated by self-interest and not to do well for the community – would enter.

Community care and integrity are values that set derby apart, and participants who voiced this fear of corporate interests see a slippery slope from compensation to “business” to “corporate America.” Scarlet Witch (leader) implies that professional franchises are classified as “business,” while for her, derby is not (at least, not to the same extent):

When does it stop being this amazing awesome unique sport and become a business? Much like the way many other sports are businesses. Football is a business. Hockey is a business. It’s about getting into those playoffs. How many tickets did we sell? And it’s not that like for us, it’s about how many tickets did we sell, we have to pay our rent. ... For the [professional] players, it’s about how many millions can we make.

Business here means for-profit. Scarlet Witch sees that leagues worry about selling enough tickets to cover expenses (“to pay our rent”), and anything else is extra. Being primarily concerned with profit for the sake of more profit would put derby squarely under “business.” With this perspective, derby cannot be both an awesome unique sport and a business.

Paying people and treating derby as a business are distinct, as one can treat derby as business without paying people, but the two are linked in participants’ comments. Even the word business can have negative connotations, as reflected in Scarlet Witch’s words. The opposing dualism of derby/business shows even among some entrepreneurs who favor operating derby as a business, as they are reluctant to call derby a business outright. Rescue (entrepreneur) sees leagues trying to be all of the above: “for the skater,” for fans, and to make money. She falls short of saying that leagues are businesses, using the term “mini-businesses” and should be operated as with a “business mind”: “I think derby leagues should be run, some of them should be run as business—they should have a business mind to their structure. Just because they are mini-businesses.”

A dualism on operating for the skater or for the fan is also present in comments like Jubilee’s (leader/entrepreneur) that claim derby is currently not a spectator sport for those not already in derby: “It’s not a spectator sport. It’s just not. The way the rules are, it doesn’t allow for

it to be a spectator sport. It's like watching golf." Because of the foundational emphasis on skater-driven rules and "Real. Strong. Athletic. Revolutionary." derby gameplay, adjusting the game to be more friendly to non-derby spectators is what Gaia (paid staff) considers "the taboo that we're not allowed to touch." This contention supports the idea that for the skater cannot be reconciled as for the (non-skater) fan. Tico (leader/entrepreneur) and Obi-Wan (leader) each touched on the mismatch between desires for the sport's future and the actual infrastructure needed to make that happen. Tico says, "As much as [people say] 'derby should be in the Olympics! Derby should pay its people to play!' Well, OK, but you can't just start doing that on the same model that we've been doing all this time of begging for league sponsors every year and ticket sales and merch sales. You need a real business to do that." Like the derby goods enterprises that support the sport, most organizations are not lucrative, and most do not acquire revenue in ways that Tico would consider "real business." Relying on ticket sales as a main revenue stream would suggest that leagues pay special attention to production value, which as Gaia notes they do not, cannot, or are reluctant to do so. Obi-Wan, who has been part of the sport for over a decade, agrees with both Tico and Gaia on the points that derby will not make enough money to pay skaters until it pays attention to "the fan experience," which does not currently happen: "Until it's a spectator sport that's bringing in ticket money or TV money, the skaters aren't gonna get paid. And that's just it. Because you can't have it both ways. You can't have a sport and leagues that don't really concern themselves with the fan experience and expect them to pay all the bills."

Like the above participants, Rescue implies being "for the skater" and "for the fan" require distinct approaches, which influences her suggestion to pick one market and stick with that formula. She links the lack of supportive infrastructure and standards to this problem. While acknowledging that it is understandable that the DIY ethos results in "everyone has their own

opinions and vision,” she sees derby as structurally “all over the place” hurting the sport in the long run:

Markets need to figure out [who is] the audience and what their point is. Is it for the skater? Then make it for the skater. Is it to make money? Is it for fans? What is your purpose? And then stick to that, and build a league, build a team around that structure and have it be consistent. A lot of things are not, there's no standards. There's no guidelines. And a lot of people are just winging it and then someone else comes in and it just causes chaos. And it can hurt the reputation of roller derby, and among skaters, and then among audience as well, 'cause it's confusing. They don't know what's going on.

Conclusion

Upon settling into business, it becomes apparent that there is little money to be made in the derby industry. But, according to the sport’s anti-capitalist values, the focus is not supposed to be on profit. Deemphasizing profit and emphasizing passion helps to establish boundaries between derby insiders (those who care about giving back to the community) and outsiders (those who would capitalize on the sport without giving back). Because the community is women-dominated, men may be considered outsiders until they work to establish that they too care about the community, but length of time in derby also plays a role.

Participants’ perspectives are identical to that of other riders in alternative sports that have already achieved mainstream success, as explored in previous literature noted above. For leaders who do not rely on derby for their livelihood, and entrepreneurs whose derby-related businesses are limited to side hustles, it is easier to emphasize passion over profit. Full-time entrepreneurs who need their businesses to remain financially solvent, on the other hand, engage in bargaining between passion-based decisions and decisions best for the business along that vein. Even with bargaining, though, there were no cases among my sample where entrepreneurs felt like they had wholeheartedly “sold out” their values in order to make money without later correcting it in some form (such as Wonder Woman starting a new business truer to her values).

Taking derby seriously has been previously explored by Breeze (2014) in terms of competitive structure and gameplay, but the concept of non-/seriousness is also applicable to derby as an organization. From an entrepreneurial perspective, to take derby seriously (not like a club or a rec league) is to treat it as a nonprofit or a business. To take derby seriously means paying attention to the fan experience, even if it means changing the rules or allowing non-skaters to have a degree of control. Derby requires “real work” to sustain, but “real money” to grow.

Therein lies a conundrum – is this what derby participants want? Women’s sports within the wider social context already suffer from the perception of not being a serious venture. If mainstream women’s sports are denigrated, an alternative sport like derby that has only in recent years shifted in the public eye from a “hot girls on skates” spectacle to a sport has little chance of changing that. Women’s work and especially women’s entrepreneurship follow the same trajectory. How much of the community/capitalist conflict is based in not being taken seriously due to sexism, and how much of it is not *wanting* to be taken seriously in the first place? Perhaps from an organizational standpoint, derby participants are “refusing the terms of such legibility” (Breeze 2014:202) with ambivalence or not engaging at all. Following Erica Vanstone’s (2018) letter to ESPN proclaiming that the network needed organizations like the WFTDA to legitimize them rather than the other way around, it may be that organizations feel legitimate in their own right and, while continuing to play the game, do not need to subscribe to a capitalist version of “business” to accomplish their mission.

Ambivalence or disengagement, however, may come with a price. Rescue’s comments about the lack of a direction setting the stage for derby participants “winging it” and organizations having “no standards” suggest that issues plaguing derby membership (with leaders bearing much

of this weight) have roots in the sport's value system. Having discussed the role of anti-capitalism here, the final findings chapter explores other values to elaborate upon this general argument.

CHAPTER 10: RELUCTANT BUSINESS LEADERS IN A RELUCANT BUSINESS MODEL: NEGOTIATING VALUES WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Introduced in the previous chapter, there is a degree of ambivalence regarding the business structure of derby itself that sets the stage for wildly different views on whether derby is a business in its own right or more of a casual club, and participants view the community as trying to have it multiple ways simultaneously. The sport's anti-capitalist values contribute to beliefs that derby is not and should not be a business, out of fear that it will create a slippery slope toward corporate ownership. I continue to weave those ideas into this chapter, arguing that these conflicts in conjunction with the ideal worker norm and other issues produce a situation risking derby's sustainability.

The DIY anti-corporate ethic lays the groundwork for many derby organizational practices. Participants come to derby because it is *not* like other sports, in which the leadership structures are for the most part viewed as corrupt or undesirable. Thus, skaters are the owners and drivers of the sport, with a collective decision-making process where each person has an equal say in what happens. Collective responsibility also sets the expectation that everyone shares the load lest derby cease to exist (especially due to the perception that "nobody else cares"). For leagues that have existed for several years, structures have enough longevity so that it is expected they will not disappear overnight. Thus, skater engagement falters, with the initial "inferno" to support the organization present in a small group of people who consistently do the work. Particularly when translating derby's US-based model to an international audience with government funding, it becomes more difficult to achieve buy-in at this point in derby's evolution.

Also grounded in the importance of skater ownership, the infrastructure of modern derby emphasizes league autonomy. Provided that an organization follows the basic guidelines of collective governance and a skater-owned structure, there is little guiding on how individual

leagues should operate. The potential for individual women's empowerment is there, in that skaters can learn how to run a business and be a leader within a relatively safe space working alongside others like themselves, with no experience required. Leagues and their respective leaders are not being told what to do by a centralized body, but this also means that there are few centralized resources for reference when trying to learn how to run a league. In addition, it is highly likely that leaders come into this work without business, nonprofit, or leadership experience, the lived experience of those who have done it before notwithstanding. While "learn as you go" is valuable for teaching entrepreneurship, volunteers often do not possess business expertise or matching skill sets to their league duties. As a result, leagues vary wildly in terms of the quality of their infrastructure and the skill sets/experience of their volunteers. Besides broader societal norms about ideal workers, overworking stems partially from a lack of instructions and skill, and leaders often end up doing unnecessary work by reinventing the wheel.

Operating as a collective with anti-establishment roots, membership easily attack leaders with complaints and negativity, and participants can struggle with negotiating their own emotions on top of performing emotional labor to deal with feelings from membership. Though the vast majority of derby organizations are women-led (with the structure serving as a model for men's derby leagues), a gendered entrepreneurial norm surfaces with leaders feeling they need to put passion aside to conduct rational "business," or feeling stuck between communicating as a competent leader or a teammate and friend. These factors, which influence one another, inevitably lead to a membership that is reluctant to take on leadership.

Collective responsibility: "If we don't do the work, it's going away," but who is we?

One intention of the "by the skater, for the skater" foundation is to instill a sense of ownership into derby participants. "To [tell] other women and men and gender-fluid people that

you get to own something, fucking stake their claim...that's the reason I've spent my whole last 10 years of existence [in derby], for that idea," says Tank Girl (leader/entrepreneur), who spoke volumes about the importance of democratic governance and collective ownership to modern derby's mission. Emma Frost (leader/entrepreneur) echoes the idea of ownership in derby as a source of individual women's empowerment. She specifically links the DIY nature of the sport to self-development. While the feeling of contributing to something bigger than the self may not be unique, "there's something special" about how it is done within derby: "It's so much because of the DIY element of derby that's so empowering and so powerful. And [the] ability to be a business owner, and the act of contributing to a thing and to see it develop in real time, and to see yourself develop in real time, that doesn't happen in so many other areas of life. Especially for women." Women have fewer opportunities to learn entrepreneurial skills while also contributing to (and taking ownership of) a movement greater than themselves. Skills and mindsets can expand outside of derby, primarily confidence. Emma Frost sees the power of derby in offering that opportunity. While most do not join derby for the sole reason that the sport is run by its players, participants talked about the "by the skater, for the skater" model as a crucial component to derby (whether or not they agreed with it). Sentry (leader) in particular was drawn more to the democratic governance structure than the sport itself:

The sports I have done were all individual sports. Mostly, I think because of the aspect of the politics behind most sports, the way people are looking for positions of power and use that power to run the sport. And that was completely different with [derby] where the people that practice the sport are the people basically defining what the sport looks like. And, as such, that was something that really interested me and that I wanted to support.

Sentry draws a comparison between top-down sport governing bodies and the collective structure of WFTDA-rules roller derby. Within other sports, a small group of individuals holds ownership of the sport, and they typically have self-serving motivations (money, power, prestige) to retain

that power. Derby differentiates itself by not being like other sports – a reason why Sentry and others are drawn to it – with its grassroots ownership model where there is less opportunity for a top-down power grab.

The idea of a skater-owned and operated sport has been difficult to translate as derby has spread to new participants and beyond its U.S. adult origins. Gaia’s intention to make her organization run like a business in contrast to leagues that treated derby “like it was a club” points to this mindset from the pre-*Whip It* years. Princess Peach’s (leader) comments suggest that mindset is still present, as derby’s growth leads to incorporating more international leagues and juniors aging into adults:

There’s just a cultural difference in what roller derby is some places, because [in the US] where we think of it as this counterculture, [that] it’s so different than other sports, in other places that it’s come up, they’re just like, “This is a club team.” They don’t feel for it the same way that other people do. ... We’re creating something now that’s been around for so long that it’s becoming more generic sport. Which is great, but at the same time, when you get those juniors who filter up who are used to having their parents or their coaches do everything for them, it’s that same dynamic of—it doesn’t have to just be children, it’s adults, too. When you come into a league where things just run because you have the same five people doing everything. Or in some countries where they don’t have to pay for their practice space and they get government grants for sport, which is amazing. They don’t feel like they have to work the same way, and they don’t. There’s no shame in that, either. ... It’s a challenge, really trying to convey that ethos of “by derby for derby” and “we own this thing” and really giving people that sense of ownership.

In places where derby is an established sport, it is easier to assume that the structures will always be there, or that someone will be around to do the work. Princess Peach does not chide those who do not feel they must work the same way for derby as the original Austin founders did but acknowledges that this feeling makes it much more difficult to inspire those who fall into that camp to engage in collective ownership. Even when structures are solidified, they rely on labor from everyone dedicated to the sport to remain that way. Moonstar (entrepreneur) agrees that it is only through participants’ sustained efforts that derby continues to exist: “Without the hard work

of the skaters and the people who are participating in the sport, it would not be hard for roller derby to stop existing. I know that sounds really negative, but it's the hard work of the people who are participating and making it. People make roller derby happen. It's not just a thing that's out there." As a mother, Oracle (leader) tries to teach her children that when "Mommy's busy," she is working to keep their sport of junior derby running: "I want [them] to know that things just don't happen. ... Nobody's entitled to go play a sport just because they can. There has to be some type of work that goes into being allowed to play it." Only with hard work comes the reward of being able to participate. As noted in the Study Context, there are no free rides when it comes to derby. The leaders and entrepreneurs I spoke to share the understanding that because the only people who currently care about derby are people from within the community, it falls to the community to do the work without relying on others. "We have to do it all ourselves because nobody else cares," says Rey (leader). "If we don't do it, it's going away."

In most derby organizations, major decisions are not made in isolation or attributed to one singular person, pointing to a non-traditional style of leadership. Says Sage (leader) about the governance level, the board of directors may be in charge of setting the direction and mission, "but because as usual, derby has to be a little bit outside the norm...we have to do that in consultation with what our member organizations want it to be." Governing boards are also much more collective in nature, with individual director titles sharing the same level of authority, as Sage continues: "Yes, we have these titles, but they don't necessarily mean anything. I think there's a perception, for instance, like the president has some more power than the rest of the board. But it's actually not the case. Other than, insofar as like people will go to the president, so there's a kind of like accidental power. But it's very much like a collaborative board." At the local league level, the situation is the same. During her term as a league president, Xena (leader) made decisions in

concert with the rest of her board and implemented actions the league had voted for with which she did not personally agree. However, because they were the league's decision as a collective, she still implemented them: "Absolutely nothing is my personal decision. It's not. And all of the things that we've done, I don't agree with all of them. But that's part of participating in a member-run organization... I'm working for things right now that I don't agree with. But I'm gonna do it because that's what the league wants."

Potential derby acolytes who now come to the sport benefit from these structures already in place. Unless one is starting a league in a remote area or does not have access to resources written in one's language, there are exemplar leagues that have existed for over a decade. Tico (leader/entrepreneur) suggests that the "heavy lifting" of building the initial derby infrastructure is complete, and newer skaters do not have to take as risky a chance that their sport will be a flash in the pan:

You don't have the crazy people out of Texas willing to throw their lives away on Bad Girl Good Woman Productions. That initial 2007-2010 generation of derby that threw their whole lives into this, those people have mostly retired. And the new people that are coming in, I think, are just as passionate about derby, but they haven't had to do as heavy lifting as the OGs did to get the business licenses for derby. It was a ton of work to get that stuff off the ground.

While not an original skater from the days of BGGW, Tank Girl helped build derby's infrastructure prior to the *Whip It* bump. Her comment here also suggests that the work it took to create and sustain the democratic model may be taken for granted by newer skaters: "It's not like I just stepped into derby last week and learned that we each get a single vote and was like, 'Oh, that's fun! A vote!' I actually fought for it. Hard." *Whip It*-era and beyond, skaters today benefit from the labor of the "crazy people out of Texas" that made derby the focal point of their lives to build the sport from the ground up. It takes a different kind of passion, Tico implies, to make one's life

about something that does not yet exist versus something that has existed for almost twenty years, simply because there is more at stake.

The size of the organization and its longevity can help contribute to the “20% of the people do 80% of the work” phenomenon. Those with long derby careers hearkened back to “the good old days,” referring to the time preceding and up to the *Whip It* bump, when they perceived members as more eager to promote their leagues. At the time, derby was still an underground phenomenon with the most veteran skaters only having been in the sport for eight years or less – the community was still new and gradually growing, the “intense inferno” still alive. Now with modern derby as more of a household name, the inferno has passed, and it is harder to engage members to promote their organization and their sport. Mothma, who was at a transition period and on her way out of leadership when I spoke to her, mourned this loss of assistance from the members of her league, despite attempts to accommodate membership:

It used to be everybody wanted to go to events and talk about derby. ... We tried to do more events so people could kinda choose what worked for them. But then it was always the same people in the small groups, which really didn't make any kind of a statement to the community. So then we tried to make it just two main events, like maybe to try to do four a year and just tell people try to plan and be there. They just don't.

Despite trying to engage her membership and make it easier for them to attend events, she is resigned to the reality that “they just don't” consider this a priority like previous waves of participants used to. Beyond promoting derby locally, interest in matters at the governance level has dampened as well. Tank Girl believes that perhaps the sport is reaching a tipping point in terms of size, and that the limited accessibility to larger discussions may also contribute to leagues' lack of engagement:

[My first league] used to routinely vote on WFTDA stuff like once a month. All the WFTDA votes got collected, we voted, that's how the rep voted. When I moved [to a different league], they never even asked the league ever. And I started a shitfit about it. I was like, ‘Where's the discussion? What's happening? What's going on?’ And I think we

have moved away from that. You can't even see anything on the forum, it's like a black box now. It's not being brought back and forth, so I don't know. I like that less.

The adult derby governing bodies operate as a representative democracy. A league's level of participation within their respective governing body varies wildly. Here, Tank Girl's comment of "you can't even see anything on the forum" refers to the representatives-only access of the WFTDA forum. Instead of 20 leagues having access, there are now close to 500, so limiting access may be a necessity due to size. With the behind-the-scenes work now rendered invisible, she does not see the same level of engagement as in the early days. Because the idea of democratic governance is so crucial to her, she views this as a negative turn for the sport.

Mockingbird's and Gaia's experiences also supported reluctant engagement, that the "same five people" who attend events tend to be the most junior league members who still feel the rookie magic. Gaia sees this pattern among veteran membership in promoting games and selling tickets: "I need to get butts in seats. I need to get butts in seats by having skaters who are willing to promote roller derby. Right? But the longer skaters stay in roller derby, the less willing to help they are." Mockingbird's current league had recently imposed a requirement for attending at least two promotional events per quarter due to low turnout from veterans. As I express to her here, this was a problem I saw within my own league:

Mockingbird: What we were finding was the same five fresh [meat] skaters—five of the newest skaters who don't know roller derby but they're in that fresh new "yeah, derby is everything, it's awesome, I'm doing all the things!" They're the ones going to all the promo events.

AD: Exactly.

Mockingbird: And when people ask them questions, they're like, "Uh... I don't know! What are the rules?"

While neophytes showing up to events fills a need, as Mockingbird suggests above, it might not be the best strategy for promotion if skaters are so new that they are unable to answer inevitable

questions about gameplay and rules. From the rookie perspective, if new skaters are not properly onboarded into the league and derby before being told to represent it at various events, it can result in confusion. Lightning recalls her trial by fire experience as a rookie skater, having been thrust into fundraising and marketing efforts for an upcoming tournament before she fully understood what it was all for:

There's probably three or four of us fresh meat that started at that time, and we literally got thrown into everything. [We were told,] "OK, we're doing all this fundraising, we're doing all this going out and passing out flyers around town." We were everywhere. And I didn't even understand really what derby was about at that point. So I was only three months in, and I didn't understand the dynamics of a league, of running your own stuff. So all of us new girls, we were just like, "What's happening? What is this? Why am I paying for this?" It was a lot.

As a result of being thrown into "doing car washes every freaking weekend" to fundraise for the tournament, when it was over, Lightning recalls, "A lot of the girls were like, 'I need some downtime after [the tournament], I need to go stop skating for a while, I need to take a nap.'" In this case, the energy devoted to running the league was so exhausting that it took away from the main purpose of joining, which is to skate. Furthermore, Lightning's experience points to variability in the onboarding process for new skaters. Without proper onboarding procedure, new skaters did not see how the organizational pieces fit together or their significance. The league needed bodies to fundraise, so they were thrown immediately into the fray, which only helped contribute to feeling overwhelmed by the end.

So emerges a possible tension based on differing expectations. The "by the skater, for the skater" model sets the expectation that the sport requires labor from all involved to keep going, lest the sport disappear. However, like established social movements, there is less of a reason to fight now than in the very beginning. It is easier to get away with not pulling one's weight, or for it to appear like this is the case. Those who do not appear to be doing their share, regardless of

whether they actually are, risk being seen as a “derby dilettante” or entitled to the sport. Like the variation in organizational mission, recall from the previous chapter that levels of commitment to derby also vary widely among membership. Creating an organization in which membership works toward the same goal is easier said than done, particularly when leaders do not do derby leadership “for a living.”

“There’s no instruction manual”: Variance in league infrastructure and experience

As also discussed in the previous chapter, derby as a sport tries to accommodate multiple types of structures. The mission to “facilitate the sport of roller derby” is vague, and in practice this can look many ways. Depending on the context, derby is simultaneously a sports club, a parent-led youth sport, a countercultural movement, and a business. All these variations file under the same activity. In this way, derby is like the alternative sports that preceded it with different tiers of participation (see Edwards and Corte 2010). Provided that organizations adhere to the basic guidelines for membership in terms of skater ownership and democratic governance, leagues have a high degree of autonomy to run as they see fit. Given the sport’s anti-establishment values, letting leagues decide how to operate without sweeping demands from a centralized body is a logical byproduct. However, without an extensive set of resources to aid building infrastructure⁴¹, participants can be forced into “winging it” in terms of organizational practice. Gaia notes that having a centralized-but-decentralized governing body does little to help set common goals and successful practices:

We have this big thing [our governing body], but everybody’s on their own, right? There’s leagues all over the place. We’re all doing this on our own, and we don’t really have common goals. I mean, we kind of do. To play derby, right? That’s really pretty nebulous.

⁴¹ For example, on the WFTDA public site (wftda.com), the available resources are limited to bylaws, codes of conduct, track laying instructions, rules, minimum skill requirements, officiating education, and explaining derby to general audiences. The WFTDA forum is for internal business and is only accessible to WFTDA reps (each league has at least one). Each individual league varies as to their engagement with their respective governing body.

We don't have common goals as far as "here's how we're all being successful." And it kind of is a luck of a draw whether or not a league is successful.

Mockingbird (entrepreneur) elaborates on this idea, comparing the current structure of member organizations to restaurant franchises without the unification:

They're small businesses that we didn't realize were going to be small businesses. We're all individual entrepreneurs. But at the same time, it's like this fucked up little franchise system. But with a regular franchise, you get the plan. If you buy a McDonald's, they send you a book that says 'here's all your guidelines, here's all the stuff that you can take liberties with and be special. But here's your prices, here's your menu, here's all your signage.' Here, we have a thing and we're trying to buy into the franchise and there's no rulebook. So we're all just kind of scratching and clawing and trying to figure out how to survive. We have that umbrella going on that doesn't actually help us. With a franchise, they actually help you. They give you things. They provide. We just pay dues every month and there's no unified marketing front. The most unification we get is the ruleset. Or being told not to discuss the ruleset. (laughing) Like I feel like that's the only unification we really have across the board.

Mockingbird believes that derby is a business, saying it here and in her previous comments about derby as a job, but that this is not readily apparent upon entering the sport. She contrasts the lack of unification in derby to how "real" franchise-type businesses are run using McDonald's as a comparison – a top-down arrangement with some room for individual freedom, but the basic structural elements are the same. Mockingbird is not suggesting here that derby turn into McDonald's, but that assistance and standardization would help avoid the feeling of "trying to figure out how to survive."

Without unification in guiding structure, leagues have wildly varying degrees of success. Unofficial online resources such as blogs are available for league leaders, covering topics such as deciding an organizational structure (501c3 vs. LLC), retention and recruitment, fan engagement, writing bylaws, and fundraising. These are written by other leaders who have learned what works and what does not largely through trial and error. Lack of a larger structure sets the stage for two

other factors – varying skill sets and experience based on volunteer pool, and varying degrees of league infrastructure – to lead to the result of leagues constantly reinventing the wheel.

It is a combination of luck and location if an incoming skater has a skill set that matches a need within an organization, assuming also that the skater has the time and energy to take on a leadership role. Few leaders discussed previous leadership roles in other capacities, such as high school sports teams or college student organizations (Amilyn, Sage, Rey, Hera). Others brought business experience or skills from other sectors of their lives to derby (Xena, Poison Ivy, Lightning, Quartermain, Xavier, Gaia, Jubilee, Tico). For example, these came from college degrees (Bachelor's or Master's in Business Administration), job experience (retail, bank management, marketing firms), owning their own business, or a combination. Xavier (leader) was able to bring skills such as planning, organization, and budget projecting to the benefit of his league, seeing a need for them: “Unfortunately, the people who started the league were more ambitious than they were organized or business savvy. But my degree is in business administration, so I tried to bring some structure into it.” After two years of serving as a committee head, Xena was nominated for president, which she accepted because she saw infrastructural holes that her degree could help fill:

I could tell that there was a lot of structural type things that were lacking or things that just weren't getting done as efficiently as they could. Mostly because it's volunteers doing it, and maybe some people just didn't have the knowledge of how to improve certain processes and things like that. So I knew that I could handle it from that end in that maybe I could make a few small improvements.

Both Xena and Xavier shared success points that occurred during their leadership. Xena's league transitioned from a for-profit to a nonprofit structure, and Xavier's league hosted several profitable events that allowed them to be able to pay their officials. Each of them attribute the lack of

efficiency to the volunteer-run structure and lack of skill set within the existing volunteer pool of their organizations.

Lightning drew from her entrepreneurial experience to introduce a “business mind” to her league’s fundraising efforts. At the time of interview, she had recently been elected president. She and Thunder described a transformation in the league’s fundraising from “doing car washes every freaking weekend” to more coordinated group efforts such as T-shirt sales, skate-a-thons, and serving food at restaurants. They believe the change has helped push the league in a positive direction, though Lightning is unsure if it is directly related to her being elected:

Thunder: Being small business owners, [Lightning] knows the business side of it and running derby is almost like a business, you know? 'Cause if you're not making money, you're not skating. You won't be able to do anything. And they weren't doing fundraisers or doing anything last year.

Lightning: We were doing a lot, but not getting the money that we needed. They were always doing car washes... just stuff that wouldn't bring in money. Not enough money. I don't know if it's because of me being there, but it just started a fire under all of these asses. ... The setup of the team now, it's definitely going in a positive direction. I'd like to say that I helped with that somehow. I don't know how I did, but I mean, just maybe making people think a different way. Because they weren't thinking of the team as a business. They were thinking of it as... like intermural adult sport. Like hanging out. Just doing stuff and “oh yeah, we have to make money so that we can skate.”

AD: Yeah, like a softball league.

Lightning: Yeah, like it didn't, we weren't in the business mind of it. So turning over that leaf and [saying], “We're a business, we have to make money for ourselves and get out there, blah blah blah,” yeah, that's definitely helped with everything.

Notice Thunder’s use of the phrase “almost like a business” to describe the league, compared to Lightning’s “business mind” and “we’re a business,” even though both describe the need to treat derby as such. Prior, the league exhibited the club-like feel that Gaia and Princess Peach described in the preceding section. The change in perspective from intramural adult sport to business and

getting the buy-in from the rest of the league was necessary to increase revenue in ways that would not burn out the other skaters.

It is not just for-profit business experience that can be used to help push leagues in a more sustainable direction. Tico, who served as president of her league for five years, held non-derby employment in the nonprofit sector. She saw infrastructure from her workplace that could be applied to derby and wondered why it was not in place already:

I just kept thinking to myself, why aren't we doing this in derby? We should have these policies ourselves. All these fundraising options that [my non-derby work] does, here's how we can adapt it to derby. So [I was] kind of using derby as a testing ground for some of this. "Hey, we need a whistleblower policy, that's a question that gets asked on the 990. Hey, we need a records retention and management policy." Like that boring admin shit that nobody wants to think about—I love thinking about that! So that was a lot of stuff that I took back to derby and it gave us a ton of structure. And it really helped the board have some direction to move from everybody in roller derby, especially in the [early] years, constantly feeling that burnout because everybody wanted to do all the things all the time.

Note that Tico has an interest in what other people would consider "boring admin shit," so she was able to recognize that this was a missing gap the league should fill. Yet this again demonstrates the luck that the league had in having someone who enjoyed doing these tasks and recognized that they were needed. Like in Lightning's league, Tico's leaguemates suffered from burnout because of the lack of infrastructure. Instead of doing certain things at a certain time, they did "all the things all the time." Tico put to practice what Xena suggests about using other organizations as benchmarks, and it helped to control the overwork felt by her leaguemates. Her league accomplished significant goals during her service years, such as creating a junior team and leasing a warehouse for practice space, "big ticket items that were big money." Those goals seemed untouchable for a medium-sized derby league, but Tico's league made it happen: "To say we're gonna sign a six-figure lease on a warehouse? A tiny start-up amateur sports business? Like, what? You have no business doing that. Well, yes we do, because we worked really hard for that."

As the above success stories illustrate, when a league has enough infrastructure and people with the right expertise, skaters can shift to devoting their energy to long-term sustainability and big-ticket dream projects. However, this is not the case for many leagues. There is a wide level of variation in how successful leagues are at implementing infrastructure. Mockingbird, who has been a member of four leagues, speaks to this: “[My current league’s] been around ten years and kinda got their shit together like five years ago. My first league, they still haven’t figured that shit out. They’re still making the same mistakes.” Within my sample, leaders of smaller leagues and/or leagues that were unaffiliated with a governing body were more likely to discuss personal troubles stemming from lack of standardization or skill set. Their comments reflect a cyclical struggle of working through everyday tasks and being unable to focus on long-term governance. To leaders in these leagues, success is just seeing the organization survive.

Black Widow (leader) acknowledges that when she was voted into leadership, she and the rest of the board did not have derby leadership experience, so they were left searching for guidance on how to go about business while trying to find a new venue:

As management team, no experience whatsoever. Lots of Googling involved to go OK, so if we have a board of directors and these are our positions, what do they do? And there’s not a lot of—well, I mean there’s some, but there’s not like a ton of information online about, “Well, if you’re the president, you do these tasks. If you’re the treasurer, you do these tasks.” So we kind of built this list of things that needed to be accomplished on a daily basis, a monthly basis, yearly basis, and tried to pigeon-hole them into what we needed.

If leaders do not have experience or knowledge coming in, they must spend time trying to figure out how to do their jobs while trying to get acclimated to leadership and still perform the tasks they need to do. Black Widow and her board were able to make task lists, which will help the next board transition to the roles but was extra work for them. With a lack of experience and

infrastructure, new leaders can struggle in their first terms as they are learning on the job, which Scarlet Witch (leader) continuously reminds her members:

There's no instruction manual. Everybody who does it is flying blind. I mean, there's no school for professional derby management. You're just kind of figuring out as you go, and it's something I remind the league pretty often. I'm like, "Please remember, this doesn't come with a handbook. None of us knew what we were doing when we came into this. We're all just kind of figuring it out. So cut us a little slack."

Scarlet Witch's comments imply that her leaguemates who are not in leadership are not aware of the lack of infrastructure. They likely assume that, even with previous paid work management experience (which Scarlet Witch has), people who step into derby leadership know what they are doing. As this is not the case ("none of us knew what we were doing"), Scarlet pleads for leniency as she and the rest of the board attempt to figure out how they want to direct the league.

Not having a clear job description can result in doing more work than is necessary or catching tasks that would normally be done by someone else. Amilyn (leader) makes a direct link between a vague job description and trying to determine what constitutes as "doing enough" in her role as president:

Amilyn: I think part of what I find challenging about [my position] is that I would prefer to have a more concrete job description, right. Like when I was secretary and it was my job to schedule and make agendas and publish the minutes. Those were things that I could do and I knew that I was doing them on time. I knew that I was doing them correctly. And I felt good about it. And now [as president], I think there's a little bit more kind of uncertainty about, should I be doing more? I don't know. I think I'm doing enough. Could I be doing more? Maybe. Should I be doing more? Maybe. But it'll be fine.

AD: So what constitutes as enough?

Amilyn: I think as long as the league doesn't just completely crash and burn before my tenure is up, I'm gonna call it a success. As long as we have money in the bank and people showing up to practice...I think that's enough.

Being secretary came with time-based expectations (scheduling meetings, writing agendas). It was easier for Amilyn to feel like she was accomplishing the tasks assigned to her position. Being

president, on the other hand, is more open-ended. In addition to her feelings discussed earlier about exemplar leaders spending all their time on derby, the lack of definitive tasks makes her feel unsure that she is doing enough. Given her restricted work schedule and reluctance to put her whole life into derby, she believes she could be doing more but redefines success for her as the organization's survival.

The struggle to match roles with skillsets and expertise is a byproduct of derby's DIY ethos and volunteer labor structure. Even if outsourcing labor to an accountant or attorney is desired, leagues cannot always afford to do so. While Amilyn sees the value of learning skills and having leadership opportunities that might not otherwise be available in traditional business structures, she notes that organizations powered by skaters has the downside of volunteers trying to fill roles that are beyond their expertise. She draws on the example of a member of her league's board who performs finance-related duties:

Right now, our finance vice president is not a finance person at all. She's somebody who does breast cancer research from 9-5, right. So she's kind of learning it as she's going. And I think she is really, really smart and really, really motivated, and I think she's making it work, and she's figuring it out. But I think she took over from a finance person who had no idea how to keep a spreadsheet and kind of left a mess of things that now we're trying to sort through and clean up.

Amilyn hints at the cyclical nature of organizational work in the hands of those trying to learn as they go. The person prior to the current finance head did not have experience in maintaining spreadsheets, which impacted the league's bookkeeping to the point of becoming "a mess of things." Amilyn commends the current head for her motivation and willingness to figure it out but notes that she has a mountain of work ahead of her trying to clean up the mess from the last head. Not being a finance officer in her day job, having to learn the job takes more time, and there is no guarantee that the next finance officer will not also have a mess to clean up when this one leaves.

Red Sonja (entrepreneur) sees the same issue from her view, having been in two leagues so far. She strings together lack of skill set, lack of willing volunteers, and obligation as a potent cocktail leading to problems in organization:

I think sometimes we kind of, we do these jobs as an obligation. And we're not necessarily the right people to do the jobs that are in front of us. Everything needs to be done. And so you go into meetings where it's like, "OK, we need someone to do this," and then someone just out of pressure puts their hand up and does it, and doesn't necessarily have the capacity or the skill set or the time to do it. And therefore, it's not done to the best extent.

Mockingbird (entrepreneur) takes it one step further, linking the lack of knowledge to reinventing the wheel and overwork: "We do a lot of things more than once because we have to. Because we don't know any better." She summarizes what she calls the trial and error approach to filling leadership roles as experienced by all the leagues in which she has participated. Limited by the available skill set/expertise of the league members, and by a lack of job description, leaders and members attempt to match skills with available and willing people. Mockingbird refers to this as "throwing shit against the wall to see what sticks":

Every league I've been a part of has had this trial and error period where they're like, "Well, you like spreadsheets, so you can do the accounting. And people listen to you, so you can be president. And you think marketing's fun, so you can do marketing. (laughing) And people give you money, so why don't you try sponsorship?" And it's just throwing shit against the wall to see what sticks. And when everything explodes and half the league leaves, or they realize they haven't made any money that year, they go, "OK, let's reorganize."

Mockingbird suggests "trial and error" leadership is part of the normal growing process for derby leagues. Already strapped for volunteers, participants are willing to learn as they go to fill important organizational roles. Unfortunately, trying to figure it out along the way does not always lead to financial solvency or prevent burnout or member dissatisfaction.

Acknowledging the struggle to match volunteers to skill set, Piers (leader) feels mixed about the "by the skater, for the skater" model, liking the skater-owned aspect but "you need the

right people to come in and run your business and participate. Otherwise, you're kind of in trouble and you don't go anywhere." Participants like Quartermain, Tico, and Gaia are happy to serve as resources. Tico loves serving as a knowledge base (as stated in previous chapters), and Gaia is "down to talk with people about anything." Yet this is not a universal experience. "Everyone is weird and insular," says Scarlet Witch about her experience seeking advice on policies. "They don't want to share that information with other leagues. Like, ooh they might steal it. ... You can help each other without giving vital information." Leagues that are geographically close that share a potential market may have this concern about sharing information. Furthermore, worries about trade secrets aside, taking the time to answer questions is more unpaid labor for the sport.

Recreating a wheel due to lack of knowledge may take more labor than following an already established guide, an idea echoed by five participants. Quartermain (paid staff) experienced this repetition firsthand. Drawing on his business knowledge, he produced his own resources answering frequently asked questions about best organizational practices: "[I] kind of started realizing that I was asked a lot of individual questions from people that were very repetitive. It didn't take rocket science to figure out that the weaknesses and some of the issues that people were having are the same throughout the sport." Having been a member of multiple leagues, Hera (leader) has found that in her experience, "all the teams suffer the same crap." She voices her frustration that, even knowing that leagues have similar problems, there is no standardization that could resolve the issue of reinventing the wheel in each league. She tells me about an administrative issue involving a transfer skater and the skater's sending league, which necessitated questions about the sending league's transfer policy:

I started asking [the sending league] questions. "Well, how do you guys bring in transfers?" And then they started asking us questions, like "What do you guys do to bring in transfers?" This shouldn't be that hard. So why can't we just all get together and be like, these are

things we've found that worked for a reason, and they said, "Why are we all trying to recreate a wheel?" Dear Lord!

Like Mockingbird, Hera has found the same issues in each of the leagues she has joined. In the following conversation snippet, she and I express a shared understanding that "everyone has the same problems." For Hera, two different leagues had a similar problem of enforcing attendance policies as written in organizational bylaws. For me, I found my own league's struggles with practice attendance (another problem Hera shared) while visiting a comparably ranked league:

Hera: I left [my current league] 'cause I was frustrated with the bylaws situation. Left [the second league], one of the reasons was bylaws situation. And I'm like, "Everyone has the same issues." No matter where you go, they're the same freaking issues. If people have never transferred leagues, it's amazing. Everyone has them. Everyone has the same thing.

AD: I was [out of town] for a trip earlier this year, and I practiced with [a top 25] team. It was one of the league practices I went to. And they only had 10 people show up, and I'm like, "You have the same problems we do! No one comes to league practice!" (laughing)

Hera: (laughs) So at the same time, you're like, what is wrong with our business model, right? We're all doing the wrong things. How can we fix this? It's really funny.

By seeing the pattern across multiple leagues, Hera recognizes reinventing the wheel as due to a structural problem ("what is wrong with our business model") rather than attributing it to individuals.

Being authority in a collectively governed organization: "You're always the bad guy"

Leaders face the bind of being figures of authority in a democratically governed volunteer enterprise. Derby is populated by many individuals who, to borrow Tank Girl's words, "chafe" at being told what to do. Consider the entrepreneurs who chose to open their own business because they were able to have control over their own work. Rey (leader) cites that a skater-owned and -operated collective is the heart of derby: "It's our thing that we're doing without anybody telling us what to do." A top-down governance model without member input is the antithesis to derby.

Yet there are limitations to collective governance. First, if everything is put to majority vote to be decided by the collective, the business of derby can slow considerably and undercut the need for decisive leadership in the first place. Derby as an organization thus struggles with how much authority to invest in its leaders and in its collective membership. Quartermain (paid staff) errs on the side of trusting leaders to move things along:

Not everything is a democracy. You've been put in your position because you were voted in, so that means that people are giving you the trust to be able to make decisions. And so you and your board of directors or whatever it is has to be able to make decisions that are not going to be life-affecting for everybody else, and it can't all be held up by votes and committees and league votes and all of this crazy bureaucratic stuff that we've come up with.

Bureaucracy and collective decision making prevents one person from making a disastrous decision. Yet going too far also potentially takes away whatever power is given to leaders to actually lead. Second, Harley (entrepreneur) adds that the process of collective decision making is exhausting, and those who have the time or a vocal opinion are typically the ones who give most of the input: "I think it just runs skaters down. It's great that everyone has their input, but a lot of the time, it just goes through such voting processes that sometimes it's just the loud ones that actually have time to commit to go to all the board meetings, their opinions are heard. And sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not." Harley suggests that a collective decision in practice rests on those few who are privileged enough, or invested enough, to make time to follow all the discussions and decision-making processes.

At the governance level, authority comes with a stronger weight, resulting in the perception of being part of the "big bad overlord of derby," to use Sage's words. When I asked Sentry about the expectations he had going into leadership, he shared that while he was prepared for the workload in terms of labor hours, he was not prepared for the "mental pressure" of responsibility

for a vast organization. In his comments, he describes the bind of overseeing people who chafe at authority:

I knew it was going to be a lot. What I didn't know was the mental pressure it brings. So...first of all, knowing that the decisions you make impact more than just a small league or a bunch of skaters in a team. So that is mentally challenging. But most of all, the aspect of being seen as the Man and all of the sudden, people expecting you to either make big decisions and big statements, and on the other hand, people not accepting those big decisions and statements because they want to be free. If that makes sense. So the pressure of responsibility, basically.

By virtue of being leadership at such a high level, Sentry and the other leaders are expected to make sweeping decisions that impact the entire derby community, whether as a collective board or as an individual. At the same time, however, because of his position, whatever decision is made may be blasted with vocal disdain if it somehow infringes on people's ability to do derby as fun. Sentry's reference to the Man reflects derby's rebellion against top-down authority figures. Governing bodies are included in that characterization, regardless of its collective nature.

As established previously, unless participants have an instruction manual or previous leadership experience, what a good leader should be like and what they should accomplish is unknown or vague. Consider the mission to "facilitate the sport of roller derby" that Gaia referenced, and Amilyn's feeling of "enough work" to keep the league surviving with money in the bank. Something that is generally accepted as a mark of a good leader, as expressed by eight participants, is thinking and acting with a "league first" perspective, to put what the collective wants over what the individual leader wants. Scarlet Witch says this as part of her advice for prospective leaders: "In order to be in leadership, you have to be able to put the league first, above your own desires as a skater. Things you want to be policy, things you agree with, things you don't—it has to be about what the league wants, and what works for the league." Xavier, whose league had just experienced leadership turnover, believed "people who are committed and doing

what they're supposed to do and thinking in terms of what's best for the team are never gonna have a problem with being held accountable." Part of the "league first" mentality, as leaders framed it, is being able to distance oneself from the "intense inferno" of derby devotion and make rational decisions that are best for the organization's longevity. Thus, not only is good leadership framed as being rational, it is framed as the opposite of running an organization by emotion – when passion for the sport is what drives most to become involved.

Leaders encounter situations throughout their tenure where they deem it necessary to separate themselves as the teammate and themselves as organizational leadership (e.g. "putting on my board hat"). Black Widow refers to herself and other members of her board as having Type A personalities, which she sees as helpful in a leadership role: "We're very much cut the emotion, get this done, this is what has to happen for the next step to occur." Mothma seconds the need to make a separation between making decisions based on emotion versus business: "There have times where it's been difficult with [the league] that both [co-owner] and I are like—I kinda told her, 'All right, we're at a point where we have to put our business hats on.' You know what I mean? This is a business. So we can't always run it by emotion. So we have to be practical and make a financial decision, even if it is hard." Tank Girl (leader/entrepreneur) has a dispassionate approach to her leadership, acknowledging that a major criticism she has received from prior leagues is a "lack of emotional accessibility": "I display almost no emotion. In a leadership position, I just get the shit done. I don't give a fuck about anyone's feelings." With that said, she acknowledges that there is a difficult balance between expressing enough emotion to be "human" and not giving into constant emotional accessibility: "You can't be constantly accessible, but you have to be personable and human enough to be relatable. And that's the balance, I think, to business and derby. Which, I don't even know if you can ever find the right balance."

Despite the frames as a divide, Black Widow's previous comments about the difficulty in letting go of the passion to work on other arenas of her life, as well as Tank Girl's comments here about balancing rationality with relatability, suggest that the divide is not complete. Poison Ivy also acknowledges that keeping the two separated has been a struggle for herself and her league:

I think it took me a long time where, and also kind of just drilling it in everybody's head that there's me that's the leader and the founder and the business person, and then there's me the skater and the friend. And I try really hard to keep those two things separate. And yeah, occasionally of course, emotions happen and they cross paths. But there's sometimes I have to do really shitty things and make really shitty decisions that have to be made that I don't necessarily want to make, but they have to be made for the greater good of the team.

Poison Ivy considers her small league to be like her family. Because of the devotion she has to her leaguemates, having to do what is best for the league and not necessarily for the individual skaters is a hard but necessary task. In the end, the collective still wins out, even though feelings might be hurt along the way.

This dance of different hats can lead to a perceived distance between leadership and general membership due to the authority vested in the former. Says Scarlet Witch: "Even though you're a part of the team, you're still slightly not a part of the team because you're the one who has to tell people no. You're the one who has to reinforce the rules. You're the one who has to say 'no, you need to pay me your dues or you can't skate, I'm sorry.' You're the one making decisions that 75% might love and 25% might not love." With leaders making decisions that impact others, there is no longer an equal status between skaters. Everyone may still have one vote, but one skater has authority over the other to uphold league policy. Scarlet Witch, Janeway, and Rey have lost friendships as a result of being on the executive board side of decisions that were made that involved their friends. Having served in management roles in her paid work prior to derby, Scarlet Witch was prepared for this possibility: "[Leadership] can be isolating. And you have to be prepared for that when you take it on. I was prepared for that. [In two different paid jobs] I ended

up being the supervisor of all of my friends. And it sucks. It's not fun. I knew that going into this that there would be that shift. Not everybody who takes that on is prepared for that." Making the shift to leadership was harder for Rey. Not having the same management experience as Scarlet Witch, Rey closely empathized with her leaguemates who enjoy derby and do not want their leisure time to be bogged down with rules and responsibilities:

It's hard to be in that leadership position... [My fellow board members tell me] you're being too nice, you need to crack down. I'm like, I don't want to be that bitch. We're all friends, a lot of us are all on teams with each other, this is the thing we pay to do and our fun time thing. And it's really hard to be that person who's in charge and being the no-fun Debby Downer follow the rules person. I think for me, that's one of the biggest struggles, too. 'Cause people will lash back at you at that, and I've had friendships really kind of, not ruined but just really kind of set back several steps due to board related stuff.

Rey recognizes that derby is supposed to be fun. Telling people that they have to follow rules as an authority figure is not fun. If she upholds policy and rules, she risks her leaguemates lashing out at her for being "that bitch" and, to use Hera's words, "taking the fun out of roller derby." At the same time, if she empathizes too much and lets too much slide, she receives the feedback from other leadership that she is not being enough of a leader – "too nice." Rey does perceive there is a gendered component to this reaction:

I feel like if we were a board of men, people would not be reacting, [they] would not treat us the way they treat us. Even people who are our friends who maybe have other stuff going on and that's why they're lashing out, I think we would get more respect for the work that we put in if we were men. If a woman is telling you something you don't like, I think people are a lot more likely to not listen to it or to really vocally object about it. If a man says it, I think they're more likely to accept it, or see it from his perspective or something like that. ... That's just a common theme I hear from people on the board is they'll tell somebody, "You need to do x-y-z," and they just get back this reaction, and it's like, if a man said that to you, would you react the same way? Probably not.

Rey touches on the broader findings from scholarship on women leaders, particularly in sports organizations, that women must be careful not to overdo being too masculine or too feminine (Adamson 2017), lest they be viewed as unviable leaders (Claringbould and Knoppers 2007;

Davey 2008; Kroska and Cason 2019; Pierce 1996). Directions from men are accepted, directions from women are contested. Women leaders cannot be too lenient nor too direct. In addition to the influences of DIY and anti-establishment ethos, Xena also links gendered communication styles to the slowing of derby business: “Very often, women are taught to, instead of just making a point, they’re taught to not be offensive, so they will make their way around their point before getting to it, or apologizing in advance of what they’re about to say, or pretending like they don’t know something.” Men, by comparison, are taught to be much more direct, a view echoed by Emma Frost in the previous chapter. In Xena’s paid work, she deals mostly with men and has been able to adapt to this style, which informs her perspective: “I think if we were all men...our conversations would be a lot faster. Decisions would be made quicker. I think a lot of things would be more efficient.” While a direct communication style is great for business efficiency (and as Emma Frost notes, dealing with men sales reps and manufacturers), the same cannot be said for situations with women league members who expect a more roundabout way of communication. These expectations lead to an impossible situation for women leaders in charge of a women-run organization.

Fourteen leaders talked about negativity and pushback when asked about the worst thing about being in leadership. Given the emphasis on “league first,” one of the most disheartening parts is when membership infers a shady intention, that a leader is making decisions to benefit themselves instead of the collective. Xena bemoans the fact that her assumption of members acting with best intentions is not always returned to her in kind. This is especially because, while she intrinsically benefits from making people happy, derby leadership is otherwise not personally lucrative: “When you are a leader, people somehow make the assumption that you’re doing something to benefit yourself personally or that you have some ulterior motive. Which is so not

the case. Nobody would be putting in the amount of extra time that I put into an organization just because I have some ulterior personal motive. (laughs) So not worth it.” Internal business may need to be kept confidential until released to general membership or the public. In these cases, Sage (leader) recognizes that silence can fuel the rumor mill, saying one of the hardest parts of the job is “when people read intentions into something you’ve done that aren’t there. . . . It can be really hard to see people assuming that you’re the big bad overlord of derby and it’s like, ‘No, really! This is for you guys!’”

Gaia (paid staff) likes that people generally trust her to make decisions that end as win-win situations. Yet not all problems can be solved this way, and decisions do not come without negative reaction. Like Xena remarked, the trust that she is doing the best for her organization can sometimes be doubted:

It’s hard being at the helm sometimes, you know? I mean, rollergirls can be really bitchy. And it’s really upsetting when people assume a decision was made for one reason or another, or that I’m taking somebody’s pony away... You just gotta realize, there’s typically a whole lot of planning that goes into why something is being done. There’s a whole lot of moving parts. And so it’s hard when you’re like, “Hey, I’m trying to do the best thing for everybody,” it doesn’t always work out that way.

Gaia suggests that one of the factors that feed assumptions of shady decision making is lack of holistic perspective. As a leader in a hierarchical organization, Gaia can see how each component interacts with one another—for example, how decreased ticket sales impacts the revenue available for travel reimbursements. Those who are “bitchy” about a decision may only be able to see their angle. In decisions colored with emotion, sometimes hearing “I’m trying to do the best thing for everybody” as a rationale is not enough. It is unclear how transparent Gaia’s decisions are to the league (again, this varies depending upon league infrastructure), or if it is more a matter of members’ disinterest in organizational business until it affects them personally.

Trying to put forth change for the better of the organization can result in negativity and pushback from membership, even if it is in the direction that membership wants to move.

Amilyn tells a story from her first year on her league's board, when the group was attempting to update the organization's logo. She compares the board's direction of the process to the league's direction noting the drastic difference in time spent with a similar result:

[The board] went through a pretty careful and thorough process. We got bids from several people, I asked follow-up questions, we chose a place, we made an initial payment, we got some designs back from them, we presented the designs we got to the league, and got really terrible feedback. People just felt like they hadn't gotten enough updates through that process, we were called dictators... (laughing) And so then we said, "OK, let's make a committee and let's have this committee talk about what kind of elements we want to include in a new logo." And they spent months going through surveys and worksheets and blah blah blah. And they ultimately landed exactly the same place that we did. This executive board of eight people came up with the exact same ideas in substantially less time with less, less pain than this committee. But in the meantime, in the process, we were called dictators, and there was much mediation... My predecessor, the president from that season took a lot of that heat and ended up deciding—she's still skating, but she is doing substantially less leadership.

Amilyn and her board appeared to follow Quartermain's advice not to let all decisions get caught in bureaucracy. They did the legwork of obtaining graphic design bids and presenting a series of designs to the league. The league was presented a series of logo options, leaving the ultimate decision up to the collective. While it is unclear how much process transparency the league received, whatever it was, the league was not happy with it. Going down the collective input path ended up with the same result, but with more time spent. To league members, they were able to have their say instead of being dictated to, and so this was what mattered, not the amount of time it took. But to Amilyn and the other leaders, they were looking for the most streamlined, efficient process for a new logo.

Leaders can struggle with taking negative feedback personally. Storm describes a situation where her league voted on a series of major restructuring proposals while she served on the board.

Following the voting, she was on the receiving end of membership complaints that she interpreted as personal:

I kinda felt personally attacked by people who weren't happy with the changes that were being made. Not even made, maybe just even suggested. And voted in. 'Cause I felt like my moral character was put into question. And I feel like I never acted in such a way for people to question my moral character and ethics and whatnot. So I felt that people were saying that people weren't happy with the changes and then [the board] said, "Well, the league voted on them." But then I felt people were saying that, "Well, the voting was constructed in such a way to be shady, sketchy, underhanded, not in good faith." And I took all those comments personally. I feel like we gave people what they wanted, but they weren't necessarily happy with what they got. Or they weren't happy with how they received it. Or the speed with which they received it, or the manner in which they received it. So it was like you gave people what they wanted, but they still weren't happy, and they were saying that you were doing a bad job because you didn't deliver what they wanted in the form that they wanted it. So it makes you go, "Why did I do all that work?"

Organizational change can be a bitter pill to swallow whether it is a policy, a logo, or a complete structural overhaul. In this case, the proposals included eliminating one or more home teams, transitioning to a nonprofit, and changing the league name. They were presented during the league's annual meeting shortly following the end of the intraleague season, along with a timeline for gathering league feedback and multiple voting waves. Complaints about the vote construction were grounded in concerns that the information and the first wave of voting occurred during the summer, when non-travel members are not competing or practicing. Each of the votes came to pass by majority decision, giving Storm and the rest of her board the view that "the league got what they wanted." Yet accusations of unfairness with few public positive comments took an emotional and mental toll on her, making her second-guess the worth of the intense labor that she and her board had done.

Advice to insulate oneself from emotional fallout was commonly offered by leadership in the form of "don't take things personally" or "grow a thick skin." Bubbles hits this point: "There are a lot of nay-sayers, a lot of negative people out there who just seem to want to create chaos.

You gotta learn to ignore a lot of what is said on the forum, ignore a lot of what is said about the board of directors in general, try not to take things personally.” Amilyn has similar advice about not letting negativity prevent leaders from sleeping at night: “Don’t let all the little nit-picky political upsets, drama within the league get under your skin and keep you at night and derail all the other things you’re trying to do in your life.” Emotion is unproductive and hinders success; rationality wins the day. Oracle poignantly uses a box as a metaphor to this end:

Most of the feelings that people have around derby, I joke and say, ‘Put your feelings in a box.’ I tell that to officials. I would tell that to any board member. When you’re dealing with parents or coaches, you have to put your feelings in the box. We don’t have feelings at the board. We have a company to run. But we have to deal with other people’s feelings and not project our feelings onto them.

Obi-Wan sees himself as becoming desensitized to abuse throughout his years as a volunteer and applies the thick skin principle to officials in particular: “Early on when I was NSOing, [I would hear] ‘you’re not a ref.’ OK. And then reffing, everybody...you get called biased, you get called dumb, you get called everything as an official. So you either have to develop a thick skin or leave. And I’m still here.”

As leaders’ previous quotes in this section allude to, this work is done without pay for the sake of the organization and not for themselves. When “we’re doing this for you” is drowned in negativity or doubted, leaders who invest a great deal of their identity and life into derby at especially at risk of not being able to cope. In Amilyn’s story, she noted that her predecessor (the same who had served as an example of centering her life around derby) stepped back from leadership due to the fallout from the logo incident. Amilyn went into derby intentionally not making it a core part of her identity, having done that with horse showing in her youth, and as such was able to distance herself emotionally: “I have enough of a sense of the fact that derby is not my entire identity and entire meaning and purpose in life that I can kind of shrug it off and say ‘OK,

look, this is batshit and it's fine, it's gonna be fine.' But it's discouraging to watch other people who maybe have a more fragile sense of self struggle with that negative feedback.”

Having difficulty separating was not limited to the women leaders. One of the biggest sources of leadership stress for Nite Owl is defending men’s derby to others in the community who are not as supportive. Because of his passion to help make the sport (and men’s derby in particular) more inclusive, he is willing to hear both positive and negative feedback, though the latter comes with an emotional price:

I walk the line of wanting to hear people, negative and positive things they have to say, because of my position [in leadership], wanting to be somebody to do something about them. But at the same time, I take it home with me and I have to know that I have friends of mine who think men's derby is garbage, and I have colleagues and friends outside of derby who think derby in general is just the dumbest thing ever and don't have any attention to it. So I spend a lot of time on the defense about what I do, and that is definitely stressful at times.

Trying not to take negative remarks directed at his passion project personally puts him in a tough space mentally (“I can’t let it consume me, and I can’t ignore it”). Currently, he is working on not taking negative feedback personally, “trying to separate myself from what I do and what I participate in vs. somebody heard that this person on this team was a piece of trash and so they just are mad at men's derby in general.” Nite Owl acknowledges the validity of scrutiny placed on men’s derby from the rest of the community, hence his drive to improve it, and keeping in mind that if someone has a bad experience with someone in men’s derby, it is not reflective of him personally as he tries to better the sport.

Reluctant leaders: “Nobody else wants my position”

In contrast to entrepreneurs, who tended to eagerly fill a need for a missing product/service, many organizational leaders were in their positions mainly because there were no other volunteers willing to do so. 16 of the 25 leaders I interviewed told the same tale about their leadership origins:

an incumbent was leaving, and no one else stepped up to replace them. Sentry's story of his first leadership post is a typical example:

The person before me wanted to quit. It was too much pressure for him, too much real work, I guess. And he just wanted to skate and have fun, and he needed to find that back. So he wanted to stop the organizational part of it. And I guess they thought I was the best victim to—I was basically the only one that did not say no. (laughing)

The initial point in joining derby is “to skate and have fun.” Taking on a leadership role involves unanticipated levels of “real work,” which cuts into the time and energy able to devote to the fun parts. Sentry's predecessor drew a boundary, needing to find the fun in derby again, and that meant leaving leadership (just as some of the other leaders decided to do, as noted in the previous chapter), thus ceasing to work for the collective and reclaim an individual need. While good to nourish an individual spirit, there was no successor waiting, likely scared off watching the workload and stress previous leader. With the void in leadership, the organization needed someone to fill it. Sentry's wording suggests he did not eagerly step up for the job, but that he at least did not say no.

Only three others used victimization terminology to refer to leadership in retrospect (Black Widow, Janeway, Mothma). Mothma used the term “abusive relationship” to refer to her ten years spent as a league owner, noting that “you remember all the good times” yet she still felt tied by her responsibility to the league to the point of sacrificing social and family life. Following a mass exodus of the previous board of directors, Black Widow's league voted for their replacements, with the five who received the most votes becoming the new board. As Black Widow received the most votes, “somehow this related to me being president.” She thus describes her leadership role as being “thrust upon” her: “It was kind of a shotgun wedding.”

Participants who eventually became leaders do have a motivation to make a difference within their leagues by taking an active role in its operation, as discussed in the chapter on

motivations. This motivation can co-exist with the lack of other willing candidates. However, if a potential leader is reluctant to take on the job, the fact that no one else will do it forces them to make a choice: to put aside their comfort for the collective, or to stay within their individual comfort zone but pass responsibility to someone else. The characterization of a leader as a “victim” rather than a person in power is a drastically different view of leadership than what is expected societally and makes it less likely someone will take the role.

When board and committee positions are open, the task of filling them can quickly become a game of attrition. Incumbents attempt to find their replacement, encouraging them that they have what it takes even if they do not believe it themselves or are unsure about the commitment. There is a degree of disbelief among participants that, one day, they could be one of the leaders. Scarlet Witch (leader) shared this belief from when she first joined derby: “When I was sitting in the car convincing myself to go in, with all these girls I’d never met for this sport that, when you’ve never done it or don’t know [anyone], it’s quite overwhelming. If I thought in four and a half-ish short years, I would be helping to run the league, I would have been like (laughing) ‘Yeah right!’” Amilyn describes receiving encouragement from her predecessor to run for president while she was secretary:

She started prodding at me several months before elections that she thought I should run. That she thought that I was capable of doing more than the basic secretary administrative sorts of roles. And I was torn about it because I don't know that I really think of myself as an executive leadership person, figurehead in that sort of capacity. And because I was a little bit apprehensive about how that workload was gonna interfere with real life workload. But when it came down to 10 days before the election and nobody else had stated any intent to run, I decided it was worth a shot, I guess.

Individual empowerment is part of the allure of derby’s DIY ethos. The sport’s model allows for opportunities to develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills that are normally limited (especially for women, as highlighted by Emma Frost in the first section). Leaders who did not have

experience being such in other realms are able to point to themselves as examples while trying to find a replacement, making the case that “if I can do it, then you can do it, too.” Amilyn’s predecessor saw in her a capacity for leadership that Amilyn herself could not, hence the encouragement. However, Amilyn was also worried about making her paid work fit with derby work (a fair worry, given the experiences with overwork detailed in the previous chapter) and was thus reluctant to run. Time investment, responsibility, and doing “real work” in derby can scare off potential candidates.

As the nomination declines stack up, a frenzied scramble arises to find anyone to accept. These accepts can come at the eleventh hour, as Storm also describes: “Nobody accepted their nominations, and I think it was at the annual meeting, I just volunteered with [Xena] to be committee head.” Once a willing “victim,” to use Sentry’s description, agrees to run for the position, this lets others off the hook; very rarely are leadership elections contested, particularly at the local league level. “Nobody else wants my position,” says Black Widow. “We opened voting and nominations, and no one self-nominates for my job, and no one else ever gets enough nominations. That’s the only reason I keep getting in. No one else wants to do what I do.” Janeway agrees, noting as a long-time veteran, “I don’t know the last time we’ve had actual contested, any kind of election that had two people running for president. I don’t think that’s ever happened in the time that I was with [my league].” If there is someone in the position that is willing (even reluctantly) to do the job, crisis is averted until the next election. Especially when league founders or long-time veterans are still working within the league, it is easy to leave the major responsibilities to them because, as Padme (leader) says, “they know what to do, and they know how to run the stuff.” This solves the problem short-term, but not for succession purposes when these individuals decide to step down. Padme sees this issue in her league of 50 people that the

“big jobs,” meaning board positions, are still filled by founders, and that others are hesitant to fill them: “I’m not quite sure if people are not confident enough to take those jobs because we built all the positions, if they're just not confident enough to apply for it, or if they by now know what kind of work comes with it and they don't want to apply for it. (laughs) I think it's the latter.”

Without successors ready, derby leadership is typically one person deep. Watching other leaders struggle or the pressure of responsibility in what is supposed to be a fun activity makes others less inclined to take the job, as Padme’s quote supports. Eventually, someone does step up, albeit reluctantly, for the alternative is to let the organization suffer without a leader in place. Thrust into the position, the workload and pressure can be immense if one is not set up for success, which can lead to burnout and a refusal to continue the job. The vicious cycle repeats.

Conclusion

Within derby as an organizational structure, from local leagues to governing bodies, is a complex web of contradictions and conflicts in its values and practice. As a sport, it is defined by a series of negatives: *not* Corporate America, *not* top-down, *not* traditional, and *not* paid. Derby’s anti-establishment, DIY ethic produces a double-edged sword when it comes to the business of sustaining organizations. On one hand, sport as business is what many people who come to the sport want to avoid. They like derby because it is so drastically different from Corporate America and fear derby turning down that road. Derby is something that is supposed to be done for enjoyment, not for profit or as toiling labor. Skaters own and operate, not a faceless outsider. Giving leagues autonomy to function how they wish plays right into distaste for large entities being too restrictive over individual freedom. On the other hand, allowing too much freedom in organization can leave league participants feel like they are drowning and do not have enough structure to draw from. Not wanting to be like other organizations can occur to a fault, especially

if those organizations have good elements from which derby could learn. To survive with little in the way of leadership training and business education, leagues often recreate the wheel, slowing growth and sustainability. Wildly varying ideas of what the sport should be – a business, a club, a countercultural movement – means that there is an attempt to accommodate all at the same time. Governing bodies especially attempt to straddle the line between too centralized and too decentralized, ending up being both at the same time with already limited resources to support derby in its various forms.

According to the leaders and entrepreneurs I spoke to, there are repetitive questions on business structure (and popular derby blog topics would support this), meaning that leagues are suffering the same problems. This suggests that running a derby business is not as unique an experience as the perception may be. The idea of derby as unique, in conjunction with the visceral reaction against any whiff of treating derby as a (corporate) business, also prevents derby organizations from comparing to other comparable groups, whether for-profit or non-profit, to see what succeeds and what fails. To some extent, other derby leagues are excluded from comparison. While some leaders are very much willing to share their failures and successes, others are not.

Derby is also accommodating in that it is flexible enough to be whatever the participant wants to make of it. It can be a recreational hobby for parents and older players who need more relaxed participation requirements. It can be a job or life for those who are able and/or willing to invest much time and money into a passion. It can be a club where individuals get together to skate and if they make enough money to pay their venue rental fees, this is enough. It can be a nonprofit or a business with lofty goals to build their own practice space, to have the best training program in the world, or to make roller derby more accessible to countries outside of the Global North. Whatever one wants out of derby, there is an organizational structure that fits that desire. Again,

this is a double-edged sword in that not everyone who comes to the same organization will want the same thing out of derby. Different levels of commitment can exist within the same group, but all are held to serving the collective in some way. In practice, though, a small number of hands do the bulk of the work, wondering why others do not follow through, as willing to sacrifice as they do.

It appears that the “for the skater” portion of derby’s mission is holding, even to the point where most spectators of derby are most likely participants themselves, or a family member or friend of one. The “by the skater” portion, however, invites a follow-up question: By *which* skaters? The ideal worker norm, derby’s foundational principle of collective labor (“by the skater, for the skater”), and the passion that most participants express for the sport can lead to the expectation that one must devote all of the time they possibly can to it, and more – even while reminding members that this is a volunteer activity without pay. The suggestion that time matters more than experience in derby leadership fits right along with “learn as you go” individual empowerment, but it tends to be those who are least encumbered by other competing devotions (paid work, family) who have the time to learn and serve. Derby participants come to the community hearing the expectation that “derby is a part-time job” or “it’s not a hobby, it’s a lifestyle,” and the passion is enough to send rookie skaters into a frenzy trying to do anything and everything for their new love. Would-be leaders see their predecessors giving their all for the sport and working all the time. If they think this is what a good leader does, they may be reluctant to step up for the job.

With lack of training and infrastructure comes a lack of expectations on how much time and effort needs to be expended. Some underestimate the time and find that it takes much more than is written on paper. Others find themselves overworking because they unnecessarily reinvent

the wheel, to fill the gap others leave, or they allow the devotion (with the aid of technology) to greedily take over any available time. Anything less than all of one's time runs the risk of being viewed as "less than," or resentment toward those who refuse to give all their time to derby. Even when this perception of not living up to the expectations of one's team or organization ends up not being true in the end, the guilt for not being able to show up for the collective is very real. There is guilt when one puts derby over other devotions, and there is guilt when one puts other devotions over derby. This sets a near-impossible dilemma to reconcile.

As the sport tends to attract individuals who chafe at authority, when one is not used to being the authority figure or serving under one, distancing oneself emotionally from complaints and negativity is difficult. Derby is a passion, but too much passion interferes with a rational (masculine) business mindset as expected by entrepreneurial and ideal worker norms. Though leaders attempt to separate the two, they can crossover regardless.

Leaders see other members able to drop responsibilities because "they're busy." From the members' perspective, a generous interpretation is that they are protecting their own time, especially if they are recovering from having devoted too much in the past. To some of the leaders I spoke to, however, it is because they are not invested, they do not care, or they do not know how much work goes into keeping the organization afloat. Without infrastructure to guide and attempts at delegation failing, leaders frustratedly throw up their hands and can either accept that things do not get done or (the most likely option) take on the extra work to keep the organization running. Without support and buy-in, "if we don't do the work, derby's going away" then becomes "if I don't do it, no one else will, and something bad will happen."

Derby organizations thus find themselves at the risk of becoming unsustainable. The work done to run them is squarely on the backs of a dedicated few with wildly varying degrees of

succession plans, documented procedures, and those with prior experience. The lack of standardization and ambivalence in trying to be something for everyone means that some organizations are succeeding at long-term planning and investment, while others are struggling to retain members and pay their rent. As some leaders suggest, perhaps the sport is large enough now that it is headed for a tipping point, where it may need to decide to pick a direction and stick with it, or to build the resources and infrastructure to support all endeavors at once. Considering both the value placed on accessibility and the refrain from entrepreneurs that there is no money in derby, the second is the likelier yet harder path.

CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This project set to answer two research questions. First, how do roller derby participants make sense of their everyday experiences performing paid and unpaid labor for the sport? Second, how are these experiences gendered? My overall goals with this project were to problematize concepts such as work and leisure, add a gendered lens to our understanding of the commercialization of action sport, and add to the derby literature with a dive into the labor that is done to maintain the sport at organizational and industry levels. To best answer these questions, I interviewed two subsets of the derby community who are most likely to experience a blurring between derby as work and derby as play: entrepreneurs who own derby-related businesses, and volunteer leaders of derby organizations.

Findings review

Chapter 5 established that entrepreneurs and leaders consider their work for derby as grounded in passion. Participants' origin stories reflected three different ways in which entrepreneurs and league founders decided to create their business/organization. Reactive entrepreneurs did not set out to own their own businesses when they came to derby, but rather they created their businesses in reaction to those missing needs. Being embedded within the community enabled them to see where there were missing needs for skate shops, training, apparel, and accessories, and their passion for the sport drove them to create businesses that would facilitate playing it. This group includes the league founders who, upon seeing derby elsewhere, decided to bring derby to their local area. Accidental entrepreneurs were already business owners in another sector before accidentally stumbling onto the derby community. Reluctant because they were unfamiliar with the sport but persuaded that there was a need, these entrepreneurs joined and found a new love. Four others were already serving the community for free as coaches or organizational

leaders but were either encouraged to receive pay for their labor or recognized that they wanted to make their derby job a “real” paying job. Opportunistic entrepreneurs, already embedded within the community, saw an opportunity available to them in taking over ownership of a previously established derby business or benefitting from various sponsorships. Across all these groups, while some entrepreneurs began their business to meet a personal need, most quickly recognized that the community could also benefit from their product.

Entrepreneurs and leaders agreed that part of their passion for derby comes in the form of “making a difference” through their work for others, which means facilitating the sport in some way for an individual, an organization, and/or for the derby community at large. Making a difference came in four ways: creating skater-athletes, creating organizational change, providing local resources or capital, and building community. Some participants engaged in multiple ways of making a difference. Coaches, trainers, and captains loved to teach individuals new skills, with the best part of their work as watching a new skater’s happiness upon finally nailing a skill that they had worked hard to accomplish, or watching a skater develop into a competitive athlete over a period of years. A significant number of leaders in my sample considered themselves as problem solvers and enjoyed serving their respective organizations to increase efficiency, inclusion, financial success, or community outreach. Leaders also enjoyed watching their leaguemates’ satisfaction with positive infrastructural changes that they helped to create and saw their motivation as creating and maintaining derby as a space that makes others happy. Overwhelmingly, entrepreneurs loved to serve as a source of intangible or tangible resources for the community, whether at the local, national, or international level. Remembering the difficulties they had in accessing gear and derby-related products, they love giving their customers the goods that they want and advice about gear. To a smaller extent, derby entrepreneurs help each other by

forming relationships and networks, sharing business advice. Hiring other derby participants, particularly women, as employees was a specific way of giving resources. Long-time leaders and entrepreneurs were most devoted to building the sport. Rather than just limit themselves to selling goods or operating their local leagues, their passion was in giving participants the tools they needed to become engaged with their sport from a governance perspective, or to build a more visible community in places where derby is still growing.

Chapter 6 shifted the discussion to passion work as precarious, privileged work. A significant portion of the entrepreneurs I spoke to absolutely believed they were doing what they loved for a living, rationalizing any struggles, selfish decisions, and hard work as putting them on the path to success. Other entrepreneurs had more mixed feelings about “do what you love” as a mantra and how well this applied to their work in everyday practice. Participants who fell in the latter group acknowledged that “do what you love” is not a lifestyle that is meant for everyone, invoking individual, cultural, and structural explanations to imply the privilege that lies underneath being able to do passion work for pay. While serving the community and filling a need certainly was one motivation to become self-employed, the desire for time and task flexibility was an accompanying reason. Childfree participants wanted flexibility to be able to do whatever they wished, implying that derby fit into this category, and have autonomy over their work. Parents, on the other hand, were more likely to be seeking flexibility to reconcile work-family-derby conflict. Leaders who were the least socially encumbered were best able to devote themselves to derby, even going so far as to stall career advancement to continue doing the sport. While fueled by passion, derby entrepreneurship is not lucrative, unstable, and without benefits. In order to survive, many entrepreneurs were supported financially by husbands, boyfriends, or parents. Thus, they serve the community through their businesses without having to worry so much about making ends

meet. For those who did not have the second option available to them, some had lifestyles that deemphasized money and consumption, and this was reflected in their attitude toward making money from their businesses.

Chapters 7 and 8 examined the characterization of real work and the experience of the ideal worker norm within entrepreneurship (7) and leadership (8). Regardless of their thoughts on doing what they love for a living, entrepreneurs were able to highlight gaps between derby work as a dream job and derby work as tedious, exhausting, and “real.” Given that others in the community commonly consider derby work as a dream job, entrepreneurs highlight that it is “not all fun.” One must have passion for operating a business rather than just creating one, one must know how to run a business, and one must do tasks that they may hate (such as bookkeeping, paperwork, or social media promotions) in order to get to the parts they love. Even aspects of the job that are most exciting, such as traveling to events, come with hard, exhausting work. Different types of businesses result in different types of fatigue. For example, running a skate shop means talking to customers about gear all day, which can be mentally draining, but coaching an on-skates clinic for an entire weekend results in mental and physical fatigue. The longer an entrepreneur is in business, the more likely that tasks that once evoked passion become repetitive and boring, or become assigned to an employee as owners take on more operation-crucial tasks.

Even though entrepreneurs saw flexibility as a benefit to having their own business, in some cases, that flexibility was negated due to a lack of rigid boundaries in terms of hours or location. Like other small business owners, entrepreneurs felt like they were working all the time and that their workload was infinite. Being constantly connected to customers by social media, email, or smartphone exacerbated the feeling of being always on. Particularly for online businesses, entrepreneurs recognized that availability was linked to providing excellent customer

service; business survival aside, serving their own community also helped facilitate the desire to be there for their customers. Because entrepreneurs enjoyed what they did for work and had control over the production process, their paid derby jobs did not always feel like “work” to them, particularly at the start of their derby business/skating careers and for younger entrepreneurs in general. However, life events like having children, moving to a new country, gaining non-derby employment, and romantic relationship changes led entrepreneurs to try and protect their time away from derby work. The most common ways of doing that were refusing to do business after certain hours or blocking off time in chunks to dedicate to certain tasks (e.g. one hour on bookkeeping, one hour on social media, etc.). Entrepreneurs had varying degrees of success in accomplishing boundaries; most parents (though not all) were firmer on creating time for not-derby plans, or restricting their level of skating/volunteering involvement, as compared to child-free individuals.

Excluding paid staff, all but two of the business owners I interviewed operate as retailers. Entrepreneurs commented that, with few exceptions, the figures in key power positions in the overall skating industry (of which roller derby is a small subset) are white men. How long one has been in business or the size of the business impacts how well retailers are able to form relationships with traditional manufacturers and distributors – the longer and the bigger, the better. For women who are also manufacturers, however, gender can be an inhibiting factor that force business owners to make workarounds in obtaining connections. Gender also impacts women retailers who diversify beyond strictly roller derby and carry goods from other skating disciplines like skateboarding that tend to be men-dominated. When selling to customers outside of roller derby, these entrepreneurs draw attention to themselves by being women in a men-dominated space, yet they experience having their technical knowledge tested by customers and are doubted to be

employees or the boss of the establishment, having been asked “who’s your boss?” Participants’ experiences also suggest that exhibiting confidence is gendered. When women retailers do it, they are able to get along easier with men sales representatives and distributors, albeit the men may be confused about why the women are so confident. When men show too much confidence in selling to women roller derby participants to the point that it sounds like telling them what to do, this approach can backfire.

Like entrepreneurs, leaders also struggle to protect their time away from derby but have a relatively harder time doing so – if they wish to do so at all. Across leagues, leaders do the brunt of the work, whether this is due to lack of delegation on the part of the leaders or lack of follow-through from the members. They must sometimes give up their time that would otherwise be spent skating, officiating, or announcing – the reason they got into the sport to begin with – in order to complete their leadership obligations. In addition, they often have paid jobs with environments that allow them to do derby work at their “day job,” further blurring the lines between paid work and unpaid work. Having worked behind the scenes, leaders express a degree of resentment when derby becomes an obligation for them, compared to members whom they perceive as neither seeing nor appreciating the work done to maintain the league. The guilt of not being there for one’s teammates, and the individual responsibility leaders impose upon themselves, is also a strong pull to keep working, and sometimes to even stay in leadership longer than one would prefer. The expectation that good leaders give their lives to derby, and that the workload will make this happen, thus results in many participants who are reluctant to take on the job. Indeed, many would-be leaders have taken one for the team in accepting a nomination when no one else would, are voted into their positions in an uncontested election, and struggle to find a replacement when they themselves are finished.

Chapter 9 discussed the clash between derby's anti-capitalist ethos and the need for businesses/organizations to make money. While a few entrepreneurs did go into business because they eventually wanted to be paid to do derby as their "real job," the individuals within my sample understood (either going in or from learning the hard way) that the derby industry is not financially lucrative. This is partially due to the limited reach of the market, and the spending patterns of that market – derby people are the only ones interested in derby merchandise, and they tend to be frugal spenders. Foundational values are also at work, in that capitalist and corporate influences in derby are considered suspect. In the sport's early years, participants recounted "too corporate" or "making money off of roller derby" as an equation to a lack of authenticity, that one did not care about the sport's grassroots values. Entrepreneurs who were not initially in derby when they started talked about how they entered the sport as a means of establishing authenticity of their business to the community. Within derby, authenticity has a gendered component to it, as participants believed (and the experience of men entrepreneurs demonstrated) that women entrepreneurs today have an easier time being noticed and supported as business owners without having to first demonstrate their loyalty to the community.

For some leaders, treating derby as a business or bringing in outside help inches too close toward derby morphing into a corporate top-down power structure; in other words, too much like other sports. Other participants, especially those who are also entrepreneurs, perceive that there is a limit to how far derby can expand with its volunteer grassroots model, because no one has the time to take on everything that is required. With the combination of the derby industry's low financial profitability and the community's anti-corporate values, compared to part-time entrepreneurs, full-timers particularly experienced dilemmas regarding the desire to downplay the need for profit while also making enough money to survive. While half of all entrepreneurs had

profitable businesses at the time of interview, they were not always able to consistently pay themselves, and they acknowledged they did not have benefits such as retirement savings accounts and employer-provided health insurance. A “high” earning annual salary within the derby industry was estimated at \$64,000, with the average being around \$30,000. This is a bargain that entrepreneurs are more or less willing to take for passion, with some even leaving jobs where they had a steady income and benefits in order to run a derby business. Otherwise, full-time entrepreneurs had the most difficulty reconciling passion with profit, experiencing pay insecurity as an unsavory trade-off of being able to work for their passion – and even characterizing their worries about making money as “shallow,” reflecting the community’s values on deemphasizing profit. Entrepreneurs I spoke to who had either left the industry entirely or significantly curtailed their operations had decided to do so because the stress of keeping the business afloat (and the lack of financial payoff) had overtaken the passion they once had. Stepping back from business was their way of finding that balance once again.

Finally, Chapter 10 weaved together the corporate/grassroots conflict and the ideal worker norm from the previous chapters to show how derby’s values may inhibit sustainability on the organizational level. The structural foundations of derby as an organization help set the expectation that derby is not “just” a hobby, but a lifestyle that requires work to maintain. The sport’s collective governance model emphasizes skater ownership. The ones who have control over the sport are the ones playing, officiating, and otherwise volunteering for the sport. Decisions are made by the collective, at the local level and at the governance level. Ideally, everyone has a responsibility to build and maintain the sport; otherwise, if participants do not do the work, derby will cease to exist. Strong adherence to a “by the skaters, for the skaters” ethos means that it is only derby

participants doing this work, and that they should not do it for pay but for the passion derby provides them.

With different philosophies on how derby should best operate, and all of them enabled by encouraging league autonomy in organizational structure, this leads to different approaches all working under the same umbrella (derby is a business, derby is a club, derby is a youth nonprofit, etc.). The trade-off to accommodating various approaches is that derby from an organizational standpoint (and its participants) is not yet sure what it wants to be when it grows up. It knows what it does *not* want to be, which is Corporate and corrupt, but that is one of the only unifying themes. Following, there is a lack of standardization and resources on best practices for running a derby business/nonprofit organization. In addition, because of the strict adherence to DIY, it is luck of the draw whether the volunteers who take on leadership positions have the training to serve as effective leadership. As a result, leagues have wildly varying degrees of infrastructure, member engagement, and success (whether financial, competitive, or community visibility). While some leagues make a five-year plan to build their own venue, others are struggling to pay their rent.

Without an instruction manual, leadership training, or centralized resources, leaders without prior business or leadership experience can find themselves woefully underprepared for the level of work running a derby organization can take. To be sure, learning valuable job and leadership skills serves as a source of individual empowerment, but it also runs the risk of unnecessarily repeating the same tasks and mistakes with each new leadership cycle (reinventing the wheel). Leadership positions already require more work than what is required from the average derby participant. Needing to take more time to learn the job further cements the expectation of working all the time for a passion. As having the time is perceived as more important to good leadership than having the skills to run a business/organization, leadership positions are primarily

filled by those participants who are able to conduct derby business at nearly any hour of the day. This suggests a level of social privilege is needed to do these jobs, so long as the pressure to be ideal workers holds (despite reassurances that “nobody’s getting paid”).

Beyond matters of workload, derby’s emphasis on collective ownership, autonomy, and tendency to attract people who balk at authority leads to the perception of volunteer leaders as “the Man” or “the big bad overlord of derby,” especially at the governance level. Participants agreed that being able to put the needs of the collective over their individual desires is the mark of a good leader. While leaders tended to give their members the benefit of the doubt that they would act in the league’s best intentions, this respect was often not returned to leaders in kind with the assumption that leaders were only looking out for their individual interests. In order to do the best for the league, leaders framed themselves as distancing themselves from the emotional passion derby evoked and operated from a rational business perspective – as they phrased it, “putting our business hats on” or “growing a thick skin” to negative remarks from members. Because people find family and camaraderie in derby, for those without previous leadership or management experience, it can be difficult to make hard decisions that one’s teammates will dislike but is for the greater good of the collective. Teammates also have trouble telling apart the leader from the teammate, and leaders have lost friends in the process. When leadership becomes too much “real work” with waning reward, leaders look to “find the fun” in derby again by opting out of responsibility – perpetuating the same void of leadership.

Revisiting the research questions

How do derby participants make sense of their paid/unpaid labor for the sport?

Overwhelmingly, entrepreneurs and leaders performed labor for derby out of passion. They love the sport and its community, and they want it to exist for themselves and for future waves of

participants. They want to reduce the struggle that early derby enthusiasts had in starting leagues or finding properly fitting gear, to make a difference for the community by facilitating others' passion for the sport. Individual motivations present in derby work were for flexibility or to enhance their own derby experience, and these were always in conjunction with laboring for the community. Without passion, there is no point to doing the work. However, leaders and entrepreneurs caution that one cannot ride on the fumes of passion forever. Derby work is not all fun. It takes tedious, repetitive, and exhausting work to maintain that passion, something that is kept behind the scenes.

Laying aside the commonality of passion work as making a difference for others, how roller derby participants make sense of their everyday experiences performing paid/unpaid labor for the sport partially depends upon their longevity in the sport, their current life course stage, if they are being paid for their labor, and if their paid derby labor is part-time or full-time. The least encumbered individuals are best able to devote themselves to derby and refer to it as their lives. They actively make choices to make the sport their priority over other life arenas. For leaders, they stay in non-derby paid work that gives them the pay and/or the time flexibility to skate, officiate, or otherwise volunteer while serving in leadership. For entrepreneurs, opening a derby business is their way of creating a flexible paid job in an industry they love; operating full-time ensures that their lives are centered around the sport, if that is the way they want it. Some participants do consider their choices to devote themselves to derby, or to mold a business in line with their values (an ethic of care) without considering the financial bottom line, as selfish. When considering prioritizing derby over other relationships, it is true that derby participants do lose ties to non-derby friends and extended family, but this was an event that participants rationalized happens over the life course regardless as people age, build careers, and create nuclear families. However,

gaining an entire community that feels like family is a second chance to build ties with other adults outside of the workplace who are all passionate about the same activity. In terms of considering “doing what I want” for a paid job as a selfish move, entrepreneurs wanted to take back control over boring, corporate, or terrible jobs, even at the risk of losing a steady paycheck and benefits. Mothers who left the workforce due to lack of flexibility and high costs of childcare felt better about contributing to their households through their businesses – *if* their businesses made money. Some used the term “adult things” to refer to retirement savings accounts and other benefits, suggesting that working for a stable job is what is expected of mature adulthood, and following a passion and “doing what you love” is more childish and selfish.

Entrepreneurs also label derby as both a job *and* hobby, demarcating for themselves clearer boundaries between playing derby and working at derby for pay as compared to leaders. One reason is practical, to avoid financial conflicts of interest when they inhabit the role of business owner and league leader at the same time. Another reason is that while they do derby work for pay and it brings them joy, skating at practice is their “getaway” and stress reliever from work. They can separate the joy of skating from the drudgery of work. That said, entrepreneurs and leaders each struggle to maintain any boundaries they decide to impose. Leaguemates who are also friends, members, and customers want to ask questions and place orders during practice time. Leadership meetings may be held during a league practice, when everyone should have the time in their schedule cleared for derby. Leaders also work on organizational tasks at their non-derby paid jobs; part-time entrepreneurs may do the same with derby business tasks. Parents may need to bring their children to practice with them if they are unable to find a sitter or opt out of practice entirely. For some, derby is a family affair where spouses and children are also participants, and meeting everyone’s needs is a constant juggle.

Entrepreneurs and leaders who understand derby as a hobby have other competing devotions that they will not allow derby to overtake, whether that is family or simply other activities that interest them. It was rarer that individuals entered derby with limits already set on their participation. More often, they devoted themselves to derby from the start and, over a period of years, stepped back from responsibility and competition to make it more in line with a “hobby” rather than “my life.” Leaders especially use the reasoning that “nobody’s getting paid” in conjunction with the hobby term when they try to rationalize the reasons why they stay in leadership or in derby while they are struggling to keep their passion afloat. For them, it is not a job for pay, so it must be a hobby. It can be an intense hobby toward which one devotes much time and money, but the purpose of doing derby is because it is fun (which jobs are not). If it is not fun and it no longer brings one joy, why do it? Why spend all the money, why devote all the time and energy? With the exception of three leaders who explicitly referred to derby as a job, leaders were more reluctant than entrepreneurs to call their labors “work,” for the reason that it was because it was not a paid obligation and they could ideally “walk away” at any time. Yet leaders acknowledged that sometimes guilt and a sense of obligation to the collective keeps them coming back to their positions, rather than just passion. Here, derby is no longer a selfish activity that is “something for me.” As an obligation, it now becomes “something for others.” To step away would be viewed as selfish, hence the guilt that participants feel when they are unable to live up to their commitments. When skating is no longer part of one’s life, this is when unpaid derby leadership most clearly becomes a job, the most burdensome without the immediate rewards of participation and camaraderie.

Participants used the term “real work” in two main ways. First, entrepreneurs talked about wanting to do derby work “for real,” meaning that they wanted to make it their sole occupation for

pay. Second, leaders and part-time entrepreneurs referred to their non-derby paid job as their “day job” or their “real job,” meaning the one that “pays the bills.” Entrepreneurs who had not yet made a profit from their derby work were reluctant to call their businesses as businesses because they had not yet made any money. Only two leaders referred to their leadership labor as “doing real work,” in this case referring to the impact that their efforts had on their local cities and the derby community overall. “Real work” was only used by one participant to distinguish between types of paid derby work. Compared to coaching, administrative work was perceived to be more in line with “real work,” but based on various coaches’ comments regarding the extent of physical and mental exhaustion they experience during a coaching session, that definition is up for debate. In most cases, to participants, “real work” means work that makes money. Payment sets labor squarely in the “work” category, but unpaid volunteer work for derby is more nebulous as a category, hence the constant refrains of “nobody’s getting paid” as either a self-reminder to leaders that this should be a hobby, or to membership that this is not their full-time paid job.

Regardless of whether derby work is paid or unpaid, participants similarly engage in overwork, attempting and oftentimes failing to protect their time from derby creep. Those who were successful at protecting their time tended to use measures like creating time blocks in a calendar or having time limits for certain tasks, attempting to find “balance” between family, paid work, derby work, and derby as play. The key is that they emphasized this was a personal responsibility. The responsibility for being diligent about scheduling falls to the individual. If they are still awake at 4am emailing league members or customers, it is their own fault for failing to set boundaries. Entrepreneurs also utilized a discourse of individual responsibility when talking about the best and worst part of their job: their successes and failures were a direct reflection of their efforts. “It’s on me, but it’s also on me” is a double-edged sword. When business is going well,

the result makes the entrepreneur's struggle well worth it, congratulating themselves by doing the work on their own. When business is going poorly, it is the entrepreneur's fault entirely, not other factors.

Leaders also impose individual responsibility on themselves when they are faced with a lack of engagement from membership, believing "if I don't do the work, it won't get done because no one else will." Derby's accommodation of all walks of life results in people coming to the sport and wanting different things out of it. They want to sustain a character-building activity for their children, to skate with their friends then go out for beers, to compete at a semi-pro level, to foster an empowering women-led and queer-friendly community, or some combination. Unfortunately, those differences in what derby means to individuals can turn into resentment when those who see derby as a business (and as a result, a job or their lives) that requires collective labor clash with those who see derby as more of a club, something that will just be there for which others do the majority of the work. Reminding members that they must do their part can result in negative backlash incorporating a familiar rationale – "nobody's getting paid for this, this is supposed to be for fun." Without help from infrastructure or leadership experience, leaders easily take on more work than necessary to keep the organization afloat, risking burnout and eventually eschewing responsibility themselves.

How are these experiences gendered?

Derby entrepreneurs attempt to carve out space as women entrepreneurs while working within an overall gendered industry hierarchy. Within the derby-specific niche, women are the dominant players and entrepreneurs. Participants perceived that within the community, it was easier for women entrepreneurs than men to be taken seriously as business owners, given that some are still skeptical of men's place in the sport. Men must prove that they are devoted to the sport's

values and to the people (being there “for the right reasons”) with a sustained commitment, or have women vouch for them. Even then, it can be some time before (women) consumers notice them. Within the larger skating industry, however, men hold the key power positions while women mostly operate as retailers. Entrepreneurs who have diversified their market to expand beyond derby overlap with other skating disciplines that are men-dominated, like skateboarding and park skating. As such, men and boy clients enter a shop, expecting to see someone like themselves, and ask the woman behind the counter “where’s your boss,” not realizing that she is. The doubt of women’s technical skate knowledge further occurs in the form of knowledge testing. Women can get their foot in the door by virtue of being women in a men-dominated space, and by playing a contact sport. Playing a sport is generally accepted as a normal part of men’s lives, but a woman who does piques more interest as this is a gender deviant behavior. Similar to the interest in derby as “all girl” entertainment, they attract attention as an oddity. But as manufacturers and other entrepreneurs found, when they attempt to talk serious business with men stakeholders, they meet with resistance. In some cases, women give up on trying to negotiate with industry gatekeepers and either stay within niches that are more women-friendly or create workarounds, limiting their presence in the larger industry.

Women entrepreneurs find that employing a more masculine-typed gender expression, mainly confidence and direct communication, make dealing with men stakeholders easier. This suggests that women who appear tougher and more masculine better fit the realm of alternative sport, but they must also prove that they know what they are talking about in a way that men in this larger space do not. On the contrary, women leaders who try to be direct with their (also women) membership in decision-making and delegating responsibilities risk receiving an onslaught of negatively toned feedback. Acknowledging that they could be perceived as “that

bitch” or “bossy,” they struggle between “being too nice” to their members who just want to have fun and “cracking down” when they do not follow through on their assigned duties.

When considering how participants made sense of how gender and other societal privileges operated in their own lives, there was a split within my sample between a downplaying of sexism and other structural factors (“anyone can do anything they want,” “you have to work hard”) and acknowledging these structures at work to some extent (“someone’s got to do the crappy jobs,” “I would have succeeded faster if I were a man”). To be fair, within a community that reverses the narratives of men as business owners, leaders, and athletes, participants may have been relying on “anyone should be able to do what they want” as an ideal. They have been part of a group of women who built an international movement and a surrounding industry from seemingly very little, bucking stereotypes of women’s inability to work together as a collective. Combined with derby’s ideal of inclusivity and its learn as you go leadership/business style, “it doesn’t matter who you are” and “it just takes hard work” sound logical in accounting for success in the current postfeminist moment, especially when participants are otherwise class- or race-privileged.

For the most part, the influences of gender were acknowledged as part of the background, setting up the circumstances that gave rise to women’s entrepreneurship – for example, mothers leaving the workforce to care for their children and wanting to contribute, and relying on men partners’ income to build and maintain their businesses. Within the structural limitations, there are some promising indications that men in this space step up to support the women in their lives. Their financial, emotional, and carework support was crucial to entrepreneurs and leaders alike, yet participants still acknowledged themselves as individually “lucky” and “grateful” that their men partners made the money they did *and* were willing to take on reproductive labor tasks like childcare, food preparation, and cleaning, echoing the larger body of work on women’s gratitude

for men's unpaid work (Hochschild 1989). While I was only able to speak with two fathers, their experiences suggest that they try to be both involved derby participants and involved fathers, which they did by working from home, setting aside time with their children, and alternating between derby practice and childcare with their help of their wives. Given women participants' comments about "unlucky" teammates who left derby because of unsupportive husbands and boyfriends, and men participants' comments about how their longevity is because they are there "for the right reasons" (i.e. they believed in the sport and were not in the space to harass women), I would argue there is a weeding-out effect, that derby attracts people who are less wedded to traditional gendered notions of women's and men's capabilities.

This weeding-out effect also works in other ways. The community's values and commitment requirements cut out those who have the resources and support to participate in derby, reinforcing privileges based on race, class, ability, parental status, and other societal demographics (gender intersecting each of these). In addition, this also cuts out unsupportive men. Once the weeding out has occurred, doing for the collective and protecting membership are less grounded in gender and rather in one's devotion to the sport. Regardless of gender, leaders stay in their positions because they are not sure who will continue the work if they step down, continuing to labor for the collective even after their passion has cooled. Men and women also each struggle with taking personally any negativity directed at them, their organization, or their sport. Both men and women participants in my sample engaged in protective acts as leaders, "taking a bullet" for newer members to protect them from negativity. The more devotion one has to derby, the more likely it is that one will make it an organizing principle for their lives. This sample reflects a highly committed subgroup of derby participants; as such, at the general membership level, there is still the possibility of other gendered mechanisms at work that go beyond the scope of this study.

Contributions to the literature

Conceptualizing work and leisure

Derby is an activity that is technically performed during one's "free time," which traditional characterizations of work and leisure cast as time not spent working for a paid job. This project uses derby as a case to demonstrate that boundaries between leisure and work are not as clear-cut, supporting other literature that posits leisure and work as a false dichotomy (Beatty and Torbert 2003; Fincham 2008; Rapuano 2009). Leisure time is not always free time, there are elements of work to be found within leisure, and leisure can greedily encroach on other aspects of life.

From participants' descriptions of their labor, leaders' unpaid organizational labor imitates entrepreneurs' paid work. Both sub-groups found their work rewarding, but they also described overwork facilitated by technological accessibility and a struggle to make derby fit alongside non-derby paid work and family. Those most dedicated to derby are working all the time, even going so far as to frame their organizational labor as an unpaid full-time job. In this light, derby may be considered a "third shift" of labor in the same vein as volunteering and care work (Gerstel 2000). Coaches and trainers in the knowledge-based sector most closely align with conceptualizations of post-industrial work as "the new leisure" (Lewis 2003), especially given that these jobs tended to start as volunteered activities out of passion and eventually became paid. The perception that coaching should be "a cheap date" in order to build the community and not oneself emphasizes that passion should drive this labor, that one should do it because they enjoy it (as a leisure activity) and not for the promise of a paycheck.

In addition to work and family, Coser's (1974) concept of greedy institutions can apply to serious leisure, derby in this particular case. Participants often do not know how much time they

would be expected to devote upon entry to the sport. Even if there was an expectation of hard work, it was quickly surmounted by the actual workload. Devotion to the sport resulted in a loss of ties to extended family and friends in exchange for a “family” of teammates and other derby enthusiasts. Family members, like spouses and partners, find that getting involved is the best way to maintain ties, further insulating participants from non-derby ties. Symbolic boundaries separate derby insiders from derby outsiders. Participants’ passion for the sport, the “by the skater, for the skater” DIY ethic, and collective governance model operate as mechanisms by which to elicit participant loyalty and labor for the collective. The passion gets people in the door, but the resulting camaraderie that is typically missing from adult life, personal fulfillment missing from paid work, and the fear that derby will cease to exist if the work is not done serve as barriers to leaving. Enthusiasts acutely feel that derby *is* one’s life, not a “by day, by night” deal. In this way, derby fits alongside CrossFit (Dawson 2017), chess (Puddephatt 2008), and dog sports (Gillespie et al. 2002) in studies of greedy leisure institutions.

Derby fits in certain aspects of Wheaton’s “lifestyle sport” in terms of the level of commitment, grassroots participation, and centering the sport as an organizing principle of their lives. Yet unlike the windsurfers of Wheaton’s work, derby is not just about showing up to skate and then going home. Operating as “by the skater, for the skater,” the sport requires labor from its members to continue. The same goes for Stebbins’ serious leisure. Derby resembles a paid career in terms of investment. Considering that leaders tended to have mentally challenging jobs (e.g. civil engineers, attorneys, forensic scientists, biologists, teachers), they may have been looking for something that would bring “the spirit of professional work” (Stebbins 2000b) in their leisure pursuits. Derby fits this mold both in terms of its complex, strategic gameplay and organizational hierarchy. In this context, there is limited application to leisure time as an obligation to better self-

production, as has been demonstrated in previous work on fitness culture (Maguire 2008).⁴² Participants enjoy skating derby because it is a stress reliever, but taking on leadership responsibility adds more stress and may consume time that would normally be spent training. Stebbins' (2000a) theorization on obligation as a part of leisure work is relevant to the derby case – his term “anti-leisure” applies to those in leadership who find themselves reluctant to step down for the sake of the organization. Passion for the sport and doing for the collective seem to keep individuals obligated. Future research could continue to examine how obligation looks in practice and the reasons for staying involved.

Entrepreneurs' jobs are easily classified as movement commercial enterprises (Edwards and Corte 2010), as they are individuals close to derby who create products they themselves would use and market to others within the community, with the exception of those who must diversify in order to survive. Derby's lack of profitability and its fiercely protective anti-corporate community ensure that the sport's industry does not have the same risk of corporate takeover as do other alternative sports. Yet some entrepreneurs' comments suggest that it is becoming harder to ignore fulfillment models like Amazon, whether they partner with them to increase their market share or face consumers who expect cheap products with free shipping. They also fit descriptions of alternative sport careers as precarious labor (Snyder 2012). If these individuals fail, though, they tend to have other sources of income or opportunities based on education. This adds to our understanding of what it costs to do passion work, to “do what you love” for a living.

Gendered work and leisure

This study adds to the small body of literature on gendered leisure, supporting “constrained” choices that women face in leisure pursuits (Lewis 2003; Woodward et al. 1989).

⁴² Storm, for example, initially got into leadership because she thought a leadership in a community organization would enhance her status at her paid job. However, she was the sole participant who expressed this.

The participants in my sample were able to do derby as passion work because of the various privileges that allowed them time and money to do so. Elements of the ideal worker appear in derby work, both paid and unpaid. Providing customer service relies on being immediately able to respond; the less burdened by other life obligations, the better one can serve customers or the collective. Younger participants without children had an easier time devoting themselves to derby and considering it their life, even to the point of seeking employment that would best fit a derby lifestyle.

Entrepreneurs' experiences align with women entrepreneurs more generally in that "choosing" flexible work for oneself is neither entirely liberating nor entirely oppressive (Rehman and Frisby 2000). Participants' stories and some secondhand accounts suggested that some women's derby participation had to be negotiated around family and significant others. It is unclear whether women kept an "illusion of commitment" as in Raisborough's (2006) study in order to retain access to derby. Rather, within this data, we see women using time with family members and family-related life course events (e.g. pregnancy, childbirth) as exit points to step away from derby. This is not a pattern that holds entirely across all contexts⁴³, but depends upon support from individuals (teammates, family members) and institutions (childcare, parental leave from work). Within derby, comments from my sample support that husbands and men partners are willing to make it work to keep their wives in a sport they love to do – with a caveat that my sample mostly consisted of participants who were in derby long enough to open businesses and become leaders, cutting off those whose partners were less accommodating.

⁴³ There is a wide variety of experiences of motherhood within the community. Anecdotally, I have teammates who retired completely upon becoming pregnant and teammates who returned to skating just two weeks after giving birth.

Leaders and their membership operate within gendered organizations that rely on discourses of rationality (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2008), with the expectation that women are more emotional. However, as some leaders found, rationality/business does not align with traditional expectations of femininity. Leaders do emotional labor in managing others' (negative) emotions as well as their own in trying to navigate between "too nice" and being "that bitch." Even though derby is a women-led community-governed sport, we see some of the same experiences of women leaders in other sports management or governance organizations (Claringbould and Knoppers 2007), indicating that the sport still has work to do from an organizational perspective before it can be truly "revolutionary."

There is some connection to the invisible nature of leadership as volunteer work, considering that women have always done unpaid volunteer work and it has been left out of traditionally conceptualizations of work (Daniels 1987; Taylor 2016). Indeed, participants were reluctant to call their unpaid labor for derby "work," and unless members had been leaders before, the work (whether administrative or emotional) was generally invisible to those outside of it except for when it impacted normal operations. While not limited to women in this sample, leadership is still hard work, and devalued work – as one of my participants called it, "a thankless job...people will bitch at you about how they don't like what you're doing for free for them."

For alternative sports specifically, while women breaking into men-dominated spaces as participants is becoming more acceptable (McCormack 2017), the same does not translate for women who would be competing business owners. The key power players are still members of "the good old boys' club." As women have created their own spaces as sport participants (Pomerantz et al. 2004), they also create their own spaces within derby to grow as entrepreneurs, albeit mostly retailers. Future work can draw on gender and work within other men-dominated

fields, such as tech (Alfrey and Twine 2017), to see how the foundations of the industry become exclusionary for those who are not white men, and how cisgender women, trans* individuals, and non-binary individuals create space for themselves.

Roller derby

Previous roller derby literature focused initially on how participants in the sport play with gender norms, before then shifting predominantly to questions about how derby reinforces and/or challenges feminist values and consumerism. Following in the path of Beaver (2012) and Breeze (2014), who each examine derby from an organizational perspective, my work adds an update and an expansion of their findings on how the very values embedded in the sport, whether DIY or non-/seriousness, impact everyday practice in leadership. I also incorporate findings from derby entrepreneurship and dig deeper into the taken-for-granted phenomenon that “derby isn’t a hobby, it’s a lifestyle!” by examining everyday practice. What does it mean that derby is a lifestyle, and how do individual do the work of negotiating how it competes with other life devotions? Though I began this work laboring under the idea that derby is a unique phenomenon in terms of its women-led gameplay and collective governance structure (an idea shared by many participants in this study), I eventually found that in terms of organizational function and everyday practice, derby is not that terribly different from volunteer work, social movements, or even paid work.

The foundational values of modern derby give rise to its current organizational structure and the resulting difficulties as experienced by the participants in this study. One can trace a direct line from the internal divide within BGGW to the current WFTDA/MRDA member league model. The skaters who eventually left to form Texas Rollergirls did so because they wanted a say in their league operations and to avoid being motivated purely by profit. The Texas model of collective governance and “by the skater, for the skater” was diametrically opposed to what skaters

experienced with the She-E-Os, and leagues that followed adopted this model without question (Krausch 2009). Beaver's (2012) data on derby's DIY ethic were collected in 2008. Derby has evolved rapidly in terms of gameplay strategy and international outreach, but not much has changed in terms of everyday league operation since that time. Skaters still complain that 20% of people do 80% of the work. Skaters still fear losing control of their sport should they ever want to be paid for participation. Skaters still learn as they go how to run a business, experiencing individual empowerment in this way. I say this not to undercut the work that has been done to maintain the sport for almost two decades – it certainly contrasts the initial skepticism my study's participants had about derby's longevity! Rather, I pose the question of how far we can go relying on the same organizational structures? More importantly, how far does derby as a collective *want* to go? Is a unified vision even possible or desirable, given the multitude of meanings that participants give to their participation in the sport?

I find that Pavlidis and Fullagar's (2014a) analysis of multiplicity of derby experience applies reaches beyond affect and applies at a material, organizational level. The community's multiple perspectives on derby as a sport and organization are reflected in my findings, ranging from keeping derby as an anti-corporate social activity to an Olympic sport with top-down governance and outside financial investment. This in turn impacts how organizations operate – building athletes to win the Hydra, providing spectator-friendly entertainment, and having a place to hit one's friends then go for beers afterward are framed as requiring different operational approaches. Viewing derby as “fun” and derby as “serious” as two opposing goals is admittedly problematic, and others in the community suggest viewing competitiveness on a spectrum (O'Guts 2014). A multiple-tiered structure similar to that in skateboarding, where various different styles (street, park, vert/ramp, Olympic) more or less coexist may be a way to have it all rather than being

forced to choose. Indeed, the few leagues that have enough resources attempt to offer spaces for each variation of derby participation: intraleague home games for fans, a competitive travel team, junior development, a casual recreational program, and opportunities for officials and announcers to hone their respective crafts. But therein lies the problem: in order to support every angle of derby, organizations need appropriate resources, and as the participants in my sample repeatedly told me, derby does not make money.

Similarly, the ramifications of Breeze's (2014) "non-/seriousness" seep into how derby organizations operate. Derby organizations (and derby-related businesses, to a lesser extent) attempt to broaden what it means to be a business while adapting pieces of traditional hierarchical models (e.g. having a board of directors) *and* clinging to derby's perceived unique qualities that make it different from other sports organizations (e.g. collective governance, deemphasizing profit). By making an association between business and Corporate America, they refuse to be part of that machine, saying "we'll do it by ourselves, for ourselves." At the same time, leagues and businesses based in the United States, including the three main governing bodies, are still part of a neoliberal capitalist economic system and cannot detach themselves entirely. I do not discount the prolific body of work on affect in derby, but my findings open the door for more work with a materialist perspective.

Study limitations and suggestions for future research

There are several limitations to my project. As is the case with all qualitative studies, I am not seeking to generalize my findings to every single derby league and business, and I note restrictions based on sampling. With 51 interviews, and many of the leaders located in the Midwestern United States, it is possible that I have not captured the entire range of experiences. I chose to limit my leadership recruitment to the Midwestern United States to keep the project

methodologically manageable. I was able to accidentally find other entrepreneurs who were current or former leaders, but future research could expand beyond a single geographic region. My sample also reflects the experiences of leaders of WFTDA-rules flat track derby organizations. Leaders of leagues that belong to other roller derby governing bodies, such as MADE, USARS, and RDCL, may have experiences more specific to how their governing bodies operate that are not reflective of the WFTDA collective governance model. The structure of derby as a business may also be a phenomenon restricted to the United States and other countries where sports organizations are not subsidized by government funds. Comparative studies of derby organizations within the European and Australian contexts may be a fruitful avenue of future research.

Even after expanding my calls for participants to anyone who had ever made money by working for derby, I was unable to recruit more men entrepreneurs/paid staff, especially those in manufacturing and distribution. I was also limited in the number of men leaders I was able to recruit, compared to women. My sample only included two fathers, so I am unable to speak at length to the experiences of men in derby who become fathers and how this impacts their participation. Researchers of other serious leisure/lifestyle sports have begun to investigate how fathers negotiate changing norms of fatherhood and commitment to their sport, such as Cohen's (2016) work on fathers in the Ironman triathlon subculture. Future research could explore more in-depth parenthood in derby across all types of family configurations (e.g. same-sex partners, different-sex partners, single parents). All participants were cisgender, so I am unable to offer trans and non-binary perspectives on gender in the derby industry or organizations. Given the growing body of literature of trans and gender-fluid individuals' experiences of the gendered workplace (Alfrey and Twine 2017; Schilt 2006), and the lack of representation in the derby literature, future research could examine how members of this group navigate men-dominated and women-

dominated industry spaces. This is especially pertinent given derby's push toward making the sport a safer queer space.

As in most studies of roller derby, there is a dearth of racial diversity in my sample, though it does reflect the overall community. Very few businesses in the derby industry (and overall skating industry) are owned by racial minorities. Derby's predominantly white status has long been a point of criticism by members of the community (Akin-Deko 2013; Q-tion 2013). In recent years, the topic of racism and white privilege has become a priority issue as governance structures strive toward greater diversity and inclusion (WFTDA 2016a), but skaters of color still suffer from systemic racism (Loseyateefa 2019). With theoretical developments into racialized organizations (Acker 2006; Ray 2019) and entrepreneurship (Harvey 2005; Knight 2006, 2016), future research should investigate how derby, as both an organization and an industry, is racialized and classed. Future research can also move beyond roller derby to the broader skating industry, examining the divide between racial minority ownership and participation across various skating disciplines. For example, alternative sports like roller derby, skateboarding, and park skating are predominantly white, but Black skating culture thrives in adult-night recreational roller rink sessions in pockets across the United States (Mixon 2019).

Because I focused on leaders' perspectives, beyond my own personal anecdotal experiences, I am unable to speak on the side of general membership in derby leagues, apart from recalled perspectives of leaders before they became leaders. This may provide an incomplete picture of what happens, for example, when leaders attempt to delegate labor and members fail to follow up. The interview study format also further limits the picture in this regard. It is possible that leaders wanted to paint themselves and their organizations in the best possible light. As I have found in my previous work on derby bodies, what is expressed in individual interviews and what

is done in social situations can contradict each other. Because I did not conduct an ethnography for this project, this was a missed opportunity to systematically observe organizational practices from varying vantage points. However, because the purpose of the project was to analyze a specific sub-group of individuals who are best able to speak to derby as unpaid/paid labor, I defer to future researchers to continue examining derby from an organizational and industry perspective as the sport continues to evolve.

Related to leaders and entrepreneurs' impression management, my status as an insider to varying degrees may have enabled conversation in some ways while inhibited in other ways. Being part of the derby community, I had a shared knowledge base and experiences to draw from. As I am not a derby entrepreneur myself, some entrepreneurs felt comfortable enough to tell me about in-the-works developments, if I agreed to mask them in my resulting transcripts. With leaders, while some willingly told me about negative instances within their leagues (masking names and individuals involved), it is possible that leaders of my own league and those closer in geographic location may have wanted to avoid discussing negative experiences even with the promise of confidentiality. As discussed in earlier chapters, the derby community is incredibly insular and gossip travels quickly, especially with social media. Leaders who were on their way out of leadership or already retired were more likely to divulge details, while leaders who were still active may have refrained.

Pertinent to derby, I propose several directions for future research and recommendations. Part of the allure of the sport is encouraging individuals who never saw themselves as leaders or business owners to become so, yet the point becomes lost when individuals find themselves drowning trying to figure out how to run organizations, to the detriment of the organization (not to mention their own mental health). I acknowledge that those who struggled the most within my

sample belonged to smaller leagues or leagues that were not affiliated with a governing body. It is tempting to suggest that these leagues join a governing body for more stability. Considering that leaders of affiliated leagues experienced similar issues, this is an incomplete solution. Derby as a community cannot continue to rely on the labors of a small group of individuals who spread themselves thin trying to sustain the sport. Leadership training may help those who are considering taking on a leadership position but do not have any experience, ideally that which addresses how gender, race, and class impact leadership structures and individual perceptions of leaders. Nonprofit and for-profit business training would first need to overcome member reluctance to consider derby as a business. Ideally, derby would be able to simultaneously teach skills as part of the mission toward individual empowerment *and* use others' skills to improve efficiency, build infrastructure, and avoid reinventing the wheel. Future research can aid in gathering statistics on the health of derby organizations, as well as derby-related businesses. A report like the skateboarding industry's State of Skate could be done for derby. This information could also be put within the greater context of the skating industry, for those researchers more inclined toward a business or economics perspective. Just how important is derby to, for example, keeping roller rinks open? How big of a slice does derby take up in the overall industry? Are we really the "big fucking deal" we think we are?

It's been nearly five years since that "how do they do it?" conversation at Champs. I still see some of the folks I've talked to for this project at various tournaments in the vendor village, as other skaters (sometimes opponents!), as officials, as announcers, or just as fans in the crowd who've come to watch derby. I get their listserv emails, I buy their products. I follow them on social media, happy when I see their businesses come out with new products or expand production,

and heartbroken when they close. Some of the leaders have stepped down, while others who said they were done have stayed around. Having talked to a fair few of them, I know now how they make it work. It's hustling, it's relying on the generosity of others, it's having something or someone to go to that is not derby. It's a never-ending work cycle. It's acknowledging that this is just like any other job. People love this thing so much, they're willing to uproot their entire lives on the hope that their business won't crash and burn, or to have a non-derby job that may not be the most challenging but gives them the time they need to focus on derby. Some of the folks that I was so sure made derby the focal point of their entire lives, they didn't, and they had tricks they used to keep themselves sane. Wish I would have known about them when I started derby.

I do have a little bit more sympathy for whatever league of the moment is facing a PR nightmare from Derby Twitter, because I've been that person that has to be glued to their device as our board scrambles to figure out how to put out the fire. I feel better knowing there is some empirical weight to Hera's claim that "everyone has the same problems." I'm not alone in struggling as a leader. A lot of us are struggling. As much as that's reassuring, it's also troubling. I chuckle remembering how Obi-Wan told me some of the tournaments over the years have decreased in quality, with the preface that "it's derby, so it's always a DIY kind of a shitshow." Maybe one of the reasons why my league kept insisting I'd be an adequate leader is because I want more for derby than for us to be a DIY kind of a shitshow. The perfectionist in me is typically never satisfied with the answer "that's just the way it's always been done," but over the years, I've become more content with settling for "well, roller derby happened and the world didn't end, it's been a good day." Maybe it's a sign that I need to be put out to pasture. I don't want to be one of those curmudgeon veterans stuck in the past and always spinning yarns about how things used

to be instead of looking forward. “Remember when we took a knee at the jammer line? Remember minor penalties? Remember when we didn’t care about ESPN?”

It’s striking how much I sound like my own participants who are feeling the end of their careers coming soon. While I haven’t done derby for pay, doing my dissertation has been a 24/7 process for three years, so in my own way, I’ve lived derby as always on. I didn’t realize how hard it would be to skate at WFTDA Playoffs-level, serve on the board, and write a dissertation about derby. That’s living derby from every angle. Maybe that’s one of the reasons why all of the other derby authors ended up retiring before their dissertations were done – it’s a hard lifestyle to sustain. But now, whether it’s from the dissertation or eight years of competition, I’m just tired. Perhaps I’ve reached the point where I need to step back, too. I feel the guilt my participants talked about, how it was their fault for not better breaking off their time, for letting derby take over their lives, if they had just been able to stick to their schedule...sounds very much like academia, oddly enough. But as a sociologist, I know it’s not entirely my fault.

What Moonstar said about her teammate who kept getting angry because derby was getting in the way of other things she needed to do, I’m feeling that. Janeway gave her 30s to derby, and I gave my 20s. Maybe I’ll take a year off like Sage did and then come back, get on the 8 years on-1 year off plan. Maybe I’ll fail at retiring like so many others have publicly done. Come back, but have more limitations on my involvement like Raven did. Or just maybe I’ll decide that I like making pancakes with my partner more than getting up on a Saturday morning to go skate in a hot drill hall.

How did I do it? The same words apply. This is my life. Sacrifice. Guilt. Obligation. “I’m lucky” my partner understands. Hell, even “I don’t know” applies. But what I do know is that through this process, I’ve learned that derby is not my life (anymore). It does not have to be my

life. That doesn't make whatever contribution I've made to the sport "less than" – and I know I'm not the only one who feels that way.

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ABSTRACT**TURNING PASSION INTO PROFIT: WHEN LEISURE BECOMES WORK IN
MODERN ROLLER DERBY**

by

AMANDA DRAFT**August 2019**

Advisor: Dr. Heather Dillaway

Major: Sociology

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Modern roller derby operates as a “by the skater, for the skater” business model, where participants are not paid but must devote a certain amount of time, effort, and money to sustaining their sport and respective organizations. At the same time, while derby is grounded in anti-corporate values, a growing industry has sprouted to support the sport, the larger share of which consists of small business retailers selling gear, apparel, and other accessories. I use the context of modern roller derby to examine the changing natures of work and leisure, specifically how they operate as greedy institutions and emphasizing the lack of boundaries between them. Simply put, what happens when a leisure activity intended to be done “for fun” becomes more like work? I answer the following research questions: How do roller derby participants make sense of their everyday experiences performing paid and unpaid labor for the sport? As derby is currently dominated by women (a rarity within other alternative sports subcultures), how are these experiences gendered? I draw on interviews conducted between 2016-2018 with 51 total participants across two sub-groups: 23 leaders of derby leagues and governing bodies, 23 derby-related entrepreneurs, and 5 who serve in both roles. I find that first, both leaders and entrepreneurs perform their derby labors out of passion for the sport. However, for

entrepreneurs, working for derby (and therefore for passion) is precarious work that requires certain societal privileges in order to have this career option in the first place. Second, passion for derby and the ideal worker norm can lead to the expectation that derby participants give all of themselves to the sport, making derby a greedy institution. Leaders experience fatigue, guilt, and obligation as they attempt to carve out non-derby boundaries for themselves. Finally, derby's foundational values such as autonomy, anti-corporatism, do-it-yourself (DIY), and serving the collective may hinder the sport's sustainability and growth. I conclude that derby and sport in general is a vantage point from which to examine overwork, the speedup of work, the dangers of passion work as exploitative, and the creep of work-like productivity and labor into leisure.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Amanda Draft received her Doctorate in Sociology in August 2019 from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Her broader area of research specialization is gender inequality, focusing on its intersections with work, leisure, sport, and subcultures. She previously received her B.A. in Sociology and Women's Studies from Central Michigan University, and her M.A. in Sociology from Wayne State University. While completing academic work, she somehow found time to compete in roller derby at the international level for eight years and counting.