On the Outskirts?:
Exploring the Sydney Roller Derby Scene

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And now, with the thesis completed, I remember the words of a lovable scoundrel: ‘Great, kid. Don’t get cocky’.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Jade Alexander
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARDL</td>
<td>Adelaide Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMRDL</td>
<td>Blue Mountains Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRDL</td>
<td>Canberra Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNN</td>
<td>Derby News Network. DNN is an online, international roller derby news website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERRD</td>
<td>Eastern Region Roller Derby competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAM</td>
<td>Hit &amp; Miss magazine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARD</td>
<td>Hawkesbury/Hills Area Roller Derby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWRDL</td>
<td>Inner West Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRDL</td>
<td>Newcastle Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSO</td>
<td>Non-skating Official. NSOs are members of leagues who support roller derby through their volunteer efforts, such as by assisting with ticket sales, managing the penalty box, recording points, or preparing venues for live bouts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMGWTFBBQ</td>
<td>Pronounced ‘Oh-my-god-what-the-fuck-barbeque’. An event for league members, family and friends hosted by roller derby media personalities, including Viva la Derby, RDAU, and Grand Slam TV hosts. Held in Western Sydney 21/1/12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDX</td>
<td>Roller Derby Xtreme is the name of a banked track tour of Australia by American roller derby skaters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDAU</td>
<td>Roller Derby Australia. RDAU is an Australian roller derby news page, including information on previous and upcoming events, league histories and contact information, and article about roller derby submitted by various media volunteers around Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>South Side Derby Dolls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>Sydney Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSRG</td>
<td>Sun State Roller Girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRDL</td>
<td>Victoria Roller Derby League.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFTDA</td>
<td>Women’s Flat Track Roller Derby Association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIRD</td>
<td>Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Western Sydney Rollers.</td>
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Abstract

On the Outskirts? is an interdisciplinary ethnographic study of the Sydney roller derby scene. Roller derby is often described as a ‘subculture’ that is ‘alternative’, ‘extreme’, and/or ‘counter-cultural’, and gender resistive. Scholarly research has focused almost exclusively on skaters’ experiences. This thesis argues that although ‘subculture’ has been employed effectively in the analysis of skater experiences, it is less useful for capturing the contributions of diverse non-skating members such as spectators, non-skating officials and contributors to roller derby media. A further problem with the analysis of roller derby as a subculture is the tendency to theorise in binary terms such as gender resistive/gender conforming and mainstream culture/alternative sub-culture. As the recent work of Pavlidis and Fullagar, and Breeze demonstrates, the reality is more fluid.

Often credited to Will Straw, the concept of scene was developed by scholars of popular music and provides an anti-essentialist framework which, in focusing on social relations and spatiality, perceives culture and involvement as heterogeneous and loosely bound; it is not encumbered by the kinds of dualisms—resistance/conformity, alternative/mainstream, ‘in’/‘out’—typically associated with ‘subculture’. This research into roller derby as a scene offers a thematic analysis of data generated through a year of participant observation, 26 semi-structured interviews with diverse scene members, and visual and textual analysis of roller derby media and promotional material. This combination of methods allowed me to access the multidimensional nature of scenic life as it is mobilised within and across spaces and places, is collaboratively performed, and circulates through official and unofficial channels of communication.

A focus on the micro-level performances of cultural life in the roller derby scene illuminates the complexity of participants’ involvement and of the transitive nature of roller derby culture as it moves between spaces and places. Rather than operating simply as a stage for skater performances, roller derby supports a myriad of embodied, affectively charged activities across various sites—including live bouts, training sessions, social activities—in which the role of non-skaters is
central. Adopting Longhurst’s use of ‘elective belonging’ I explore and analyse scene members’ involvement in roller derby as an ongoing, elective process embedded in the flows of everyday life. Scene members are constantly engaged in fluid and highly mobile negotiations of spaces, places, and roles—often in the pursuit of ‘more’ involvement—and boundaries between roles often merge, blur, and overlap. Through social interaction, as well as media production and consumption, participants generate, draw on, and contest, diverse forms of capital—social, cultural, physical, and erotic—that circulate as social resources. This thesis emphasises the scene-making practices evident in roller derby, and argues that central amongst these are its DIY ethos, the valorisation of pain and injury, and competing discourses around the ‘nerd’ quality of participants and the functioning of local celebrity. This thesis uses an innovative conceptual framework to revisit and explore ‘what’, and ‘who’, roller derby is, and examines how roller derby is collectively—although not necessarily harmoniously—constituted through fluid, ‘messy’, and multi-faceted forms of involvement that neither sub-cultural theory nor binary gender analyses can capture.
Introduction

‘A dazzling carnival on wheels’

I first heard about roller derby at the end of 2010. I had been driving home from Wollongong University Library, and I remember feeling irritable. I had recently submitted my Honours thesis that explored the subjective understandings of community and identity amongst women in a lesbian soccer club in Sydney, and I was due to submit a PhD research proposal but I could not decide on a topic. I was sitting at a red light, peering out the open window with the radio on in the background, when the presenter for the local station caught my attention: ‘You might have heard of it, it’s the new big thing! Roller derby, the women’s sport where the girls are hot, tough, and hard hitting is in Wollongong!’ I turned the volume up. The presenter introduced Lady MacDeath, a skater and founder of Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby (WIRD), who was advertising her league and putting a call out for new recruits. She explained that roller derby is a women’s full contact, team sport played on quad skates and that it is owned and operated by the skaters. ‘It’s a really tough sport and we’re all competitive, but we also have a lot of fun’ she said. ‘We pick our own names and we wear what we like and we manage it ourselves; it’s a community. So, strap on some skates and come check it out: I dare you’.

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1 This sub-heading is a quote from Joulwan (2007, p. ix).
2 Radio commentary was recorded in my journal from memory upon returning home.
3 ‘Lady MacDeath’ is a pseudonym used to maintain the anonymity of the skater.
I can clearly recall sitting there, transfixed, my mind in overdrive. I did not even realise the light had changed until the car behind me beeped, snapping me out of my reverie. I was not sure what this thing called roller derby was, how it was played, where it came from, or if I would like it, but I was intrigued by the picture Lady MacDeath painted of a vibrant women’s sporting culture.

I went straight home and read everything I could find. At that stage, few scholars had published on roller derby. Those who had, focused on its history and revival (Coppage 1999; Mabe 2007; Storms 2008), or explored roller derby’s unique gendered interplay between ‘masculine’ physicality and atypical feminine performances by arguing that it challenges normative understandings of femininity, the female body and sport (Beaver 2010; Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Krausch 2009; Peluso 2010). These works almost exclusively focus on skaters and the American context, emphasising roller derby’s association with the punk music scene in Austin, Texas, and the socio-political ideologies of the Riot Grrrl Movement. Some also claimed that roller derby is an alternative and sub-cultural sport predicated on the idea that hyper-sexualised sporting performances are empowering (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Krausch 2009).

This ‘dazzling carnival on wheels’ (Joulwan 2007, p. ix) instantly sparked my interest in the pleasure-oriented spectator experience. Informed by my recent work on a lesbian soccer club, I was also drawn to the intricacies of diverse individuals’ contributions to, and subjective understandings of, roller derby culture that I felt were lost in scholars’ focus on skaters and on roller derby as an alternative space of gender resistance. Due to my interest in roller derby’s dynamic social and cultural activity, and the shared processes and practices I believed to be involved in
performing and constituting roller derby, I thought that what was needed was an ethnographic study of roller derby as a spectator, exploring it as a *scene*.\(^4\)

*Scene* enables the exploration of looser forms of connectedness increasingly seen in contemporary society, by directing attention to how these connections affect one’s identity, sense of belonging and manifest in local spaces and places (Peterson & Bennett 2004). In focusing on social relations and spatiality, *scene* enables me to perceive culture and involvement as heterogeneous and loosely bound (Stahl 2004b); it is not encumbered by the dualisms typically associated with subculture and that often underpin roller derby research, such as gender resistance/conformity, alternative/mainstream, and in/out. *Scene* assists in articulating widely different forms and degrees of involvement—such as potentially exists between spectators and skaters—as it does not prioritise forms of production or consumption, but rather directs attention to shared scene-making practices in the performance and circulation of cultures (Kahn-Harris 2007). The application of scene theory to the study of roller derby directs attention to micro-level performances in diverse roller derby sites and illuminates the complexity of participants’ involvement in roller derby culture. It also extends the discussion of significant topics, such as sociality, embodiment, and belonging, beyond the limitations of binary frameworks as it explores how individuals negotiate roller derby spaces, places, relationships, and forms of commitment.

\(^4\) Throughout this thesis, I italicise scene to refer to ‘scene theory’ as a body of work and analytic perspective, distinguishing it from the specific roller derby cultural formation that I refer to as a scene.
The aim of this study is to explore how roller derby is collaboratively (although not necessarily harmoniously) constituted as a scene. The following research questions guided my analysis:

- ‘Who’ is roller derby, and how does the inclusion of diverse critical perspectives affect understandings of ownership, belonging, and the representation of roller derby as a women’s sport?
- What does the study of diverse perspectives reveal about involvement in roller derby, and contemporary leisure scenes in general?
- How do scene members in the Sydney roller derby scene negotiate contemporary discourses around the sporting body, sexuality, and gendered subjectivities?
- How does a focus on socio-spatial dynamics and forms of social interaction expand the scope of roller derby analysis, and what does it reveal about the constitution of roller derby culture?

To address these questions, this ethnographic study used mixed methods, including over a year of participant observation as a spectator, 26 semi-structured interviews with scene members, and visual and textual analysis of roller derby media and promotional material. Participating in the scene as a spectator, I attended live bouts, and social and charity events, and observed training sessions with two leagues: Western Sydney Rollers (WSR) and South Side Derby Dolls (S2D2). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with roller derby skaters, non-skating officials, referees, spectators, business owners, contributors to roller derby media, and a photographer. To explore roller derby texts, I subscribed to the magazine *Hit & Miss* (HAM), and engaged in visual analyses of leagues’ promotional material: league and
team logos, live bout posters and recruitment advertisements. This combination of methods allowed me to access the multidimensional and multisensory nature of scenic life as it is mobilised within and across spaces, is collaboratively performed, and circulates through official and unofficial channels of communication. Analysis of this diverse data was conducted with the aim of achieving a greater understanding of roller derby as an embodied, affectively charged and collectively produced sporting culture.

**Skating out: The origins and development of roller derby**

Roller derby was invented in the late 1930s by Leo Seltzer as a mixed-sex endurance race although it quickly evolved into a full-contact, team-based sport in response to fans’ desire for violence (Mabe 2007). Early roller derby versions were played on a banked track (a wooden construction with raised turns) and provided highly theatrical and violent sporting spectacles, promoting personality skaters, rivalries, and fistfights on the track (Coppage 1999). Such antics produced a sport focused on theatrical displays rather than serious sporting performance (Breeze 2015). Today, these earlier versions, including *Roller Games* in the 1960s and *RollerJam* in the 1990s, are seen as kitschy, fake entertainment that is far removed from contemporary roller derby (Barbee & Cohen 2010; Mabe 2007). While organisers insisted games were not scripted, the predictability of the contests, and the outrageous actions (such as live alligator wrestling) undermined roller derby’s legitimacy as it became an ‘unabashed celebration of the lowbrow’ (Joulwan 2007, p. 47). The theatricality foregrounded across various incarnations of roller derby relegated it to the periphery of sporting culture and aligned it with the spectacle of the World Wrestling Federation (Mabe 2007). This theatricality and the oversaturation of roller derby on
television resulted in fluctuating popularity, eventually leading to declines in audience support (Coppage 1999).

Scholars’ historical accounts of roller derby are limited to the American context (see Coppage 1999; Mabe 2007; Storms 2008). Anecdotal evidence and non-academic sources suggest, however, that roller derby was also popular in Australia from the mid-1960s up until the 1980s (Donohoe 2010). During this period, roller derby’s popularity in Australia was due to television coverage of American banked track companies including Roller Derby and its competitor, Roller Games (Los Angeles Thunderbirds Roller Derby 2012). Roller derby was further established in Australia by a tour of Roller Games’ Los Angeles Thunderbirds in 1966 (Yates 1966). This resulted in the development of an Australian Thunderbirds team in the same year (Stevens 2012; Yates 1966). However, as in America, roller derby’s popularity fluctuated in Australia, and finally dissolved in the 1970s.

Roller derby was revived in 2001 by ‘Bad Girl Good Woman Productions’, a group of women in Austin, Texas who formed the Texas Rollergirls (Mabe 2007). Unlike previous incarnations, this version was reinvented as a women’s, do-it-yourself (DIY), not-for-profit sport that supports a democratic ethos of sisterhood (Chananie-Hill, Waldron & Umsted 2012; Paul & Blank 2015). As women’s sporting participation has traditionally been restricted and organised around the maintenance of dominant feminine ideals that foreground grace and beauty rather than muscle development and aggression (see Cahn 2015; Hargreaves 1994; Lenskyj 1986), roller derby’s combination of masculine physicality and feminine signifiers (such as mini-skirts and fishnet stockings) is often seen as a challenge to normative gender relations and sporting culture (Beaver 2012; Carlson 2010; Finley 2010). While the
revival initially incorporated highly sexualised forms of theatricality and spectacle that often detracted from a focus on athleticism—such as a Penalty Wheel where skaters were awarded a ‘punishment’ that was often given by a spectator (Barbee & Cohen 2010)—over the last few years, roller derby has undergone a shift towards a greater focus on sporting seriousness (Breeze 2015).

Since its revival in 2001, roller derby has grown exponentially and there are ‘nearly 2000 roller derby leagues, spread across 53 countries, and 100,000 women play the sport regularly, as do many men’ (Lampert 2015, p. 1). It has spread to countries as different as Australia (Bertola 2010; Martin 2012, May; McClelland 2008), England (Breeze 2015), Brazil (Deadwards 2014), Japan (Graves 2012) and Lebanon (Huck HQ 2016a, 2016b). In Australia, the first leagues in the revival were established in 2007, including Sydney Roller Derby League (2014), Victoria Roller Derby League (2016), and Sun State Roller Girls (2017). The current scope of roller derby in Australia is unclear. Pavlidis (2015) suggests that there are around 60 leagues operating national-wide. Some non-academic sources, however, claim there are closer to 130 leagues in Australia (Lampert 2015).

Roller derby is a team-based, pass-for-points sport involving two teams of five skaters competing on a flat oval track to accumulate points. Each team consists of a ‘jammer’, a ‘pivot’ and three ‘blockers’. Blockers and pivots from both teams form ‘the pack’. The pivots, who can be identified by the stripe on their helmet, regulate the pack’s speed, and are often responsible for strategy (Joulwan 2007). Jammers (identified by a star on their helmet) are point scorers. Starting behind the pack, jammers must work their way through the pack, accumulating one point for every 5

Contemporary roller derby is predominantly played on a flat track, although some American leagues use a traditional banked track made of wood, with raised turns, and barriers that separate skaters and spectators.
opposing skater they pass on their second and subsequent laps around the track. All skaters in the pack use their bodies—hips, shoulders, and buttocks—to assist their own jammer, and hinder the opposition’s jammer where possible. It is a highly physical and strategic competition, as skaters must engage in offensive and defensive actions simultaneously.

Roller derby competitions are called ‘bouts’ and are made up of two thirty-minute halves, each of which is divided into a series of two minute ‘jams’ (Peluso 2011). Roller derby is a fast-paced full-contact sport where members are likely to incur injury (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a; Peluso 2011). This high intensity competition requires at least four referees at any given bout (although seven is preferred) to ensure players’ safety and judicious officiating. While live bouts foreground skater activity, they are also sites in which the role of non-skaters—non-skating officials (NSOs), referees and spectators—is central, particularly in relation to the production of the sporting atmosphere. Unlike many traditional sporting events, at roller derby bouts there are no barriers between spectators and competitive play. Spectators who are over 18 years olds can sit in ‘suicide seating’, a space on the floor 10 feet from the track.

Roller derby supports a distinctive culture, combining elements of theatricality and sexualised performance with an emphasis on athleticism (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010). These elements vary between and within leagues. Skaters’ uniforms, for example, have attracted popular and academic interest due to their non-traditional design, as they often incorporate fishnet tights, ripped clothing and visible underwear (Beaver 2014; Oler 2005; White 2010). The use of sexualised clothing is commonly perceived as gender resistive and empowering, enabling women to negotiate
alternative femininity by experimenting with desirability while engaged in ‘masculine’ forms of physicality (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010). However, Cohen (2008) has questioned whether roller derby is a sport, or is ‘selling sex’. Cohen (2008) argues that rather than representing a divergence from traditional gendered norms, the use of sexuality as a social resource to gain and maintain spectator support may reaffirm the widespread sexualisation of women in sport. Furthermore, while many skaters continue to wear sexualised clothing, scholars such as Breeze (2015) and Liu, Bradley and Burk (2016) have recognised a cultural shift towards sporting legitimation and being ‘taken seriously’. This desire for legitimisation has contributed to a widespread introduction of standardised uniforms. Popular in the Sydney roller derby scene, particularly during intraleague competitions, skaters are increasingly competing in athletic skins and jersey-style singlets akin to those worn in the Australian Football League (AFL).

Scene members commonly adopt a derby name, a ‘tongue in cheek’ pseudonym typically referencing violence, gender, popular culture, or incorporating sexual innuendo. Some examples from this study include Dita Von Bruiser, Scarlett O’Harmer, Pepà la Pow!, Mikemare and Captain Shutterspeed. While most skaters, NSOs, and referees use a derby name, many are critical of the overemphasis often placed on an assumed associated derby persona, and the use of derby/non-derby and by day/by night dualisms in media and academia (Breeze 2015). Such dualisms suggest a separation between a ‘by day’ average person—‘a mother’, ‘a teacher’, or having a ‘shy’ temperament—and their powerful ‘by night’ roller derby persona who is tough, assertive and fearless. This distinction between a derby and non-derby ‘self’, can undermine members’ sense of belonging and sporting seriousness (Breeze 2015). While roller derby may facilitate numerous transformations, the by day/by
night and derby/non-derby dualisms also misrepresent the fluid reality of roller derby involvement as members move between spaces, places, relationships, and roles in the scene.

It is also common for leagues to develop a bout theme. Featured in promotional material, a theme can range from a specific event, such as Halloween or Christmas, to popular culture references, such as famous films. Sydney Roller Derby League appropriated *Pulp Fiction* for their live bout ‘Pulp Friction’, while Western Sydney Rollers (WSR) drew on the famous western *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* for their bout ‘The Good, The Bad, and The Derby’. Bouts also commonly incorporate performances, including ‘skate-outs’ (the theatrical entrance of roller derby teams onto the track, often to music and involving a brief dance routine) and entertainment before and/or at half-time. Extra entertainment may include a ‘mini’ bout, pole dancers, live bands, or stunt artists. Bout spectacles vary greatly between bouts and leagues and are often enmeshed in tensions over desires for sporting legitimacy. The contemporary revival of roller derby, while often described as a highly sexualised and theatrical women’s sport, is a heterogeneous cultural formation that supports a diverse range of representations as well as theatrical and sporting performances. This diversity in performance, experience and representation is at the centre of this thesis and the exploration of roller derby as a scene.
‘You’re popping your roller derby cherry!’: The thesis journey and structure.

It is December 8th, 2011 and my mum and I are on our way to the Sports Hub at the University of Wollongong to attend our first ever roller derby bout. ‘The Vixens’ are playing ‘The Vipers’ in Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby’s (WIRD) last bout of the year. As we dart through the streets trying to find parking, my mum tells me how excited she is; she recently watched *Whip It*, and as a result, has dressed in her most punk outfit: a pink and black top, a black skirt, knee high boots, and a pair of fishnet tights. Her attempts to ‘look the part’ are why we are now running late. But I am just as excited; I recently received ethics clearance and can finally start my fieldwork and begin my research on roller derby as a spectator!

After finally finding a parking spot, my mum and I head towards the sounds of voices on campus, and the well-lit venue ahead of us. Reaching the door, we are met by a middle-aged woman and a young girl waiting behind a foldable picnic table. On the wall behind them are signs with prices for entry and a reminder to visit the cupcake stall, both written in black permanent marker. There are no fancy ticket machines, hand-held scanners, or security barriers.

As we approach, the woman greets us, saying ‘Hi! Do you ladies have tickets?’ ‘Yeah, we got them online’ I say, handing her the folded pieces of paper. Placing them in a messy pile, she asks us if we have been to roller derby before. ‘It is actually our first time’ I tell her. The woman, smiling broadly exclaims ‘You’re popping your roller derby cherry!’ My mum and I look at each other and then suddenly burst out laughing as the girl reaches forward with a small stamp; we each get a purple star. ‘I guess you’re right at that!’ my mum replies. ‘Well, I hope it’s as good for you as it is for us!’ the lady exclaims. Still smiling, we turn and head into the venue.

We find a spot to stand close to the track, right behind the people on the floor in ‘suicide seating’ as we wait for this thing called roller derby. Everything feels close, clear, energised, yet it isn’t a big venue, nor is it full. I can see people of all ages: families, young children, groups of teenagers and people in their early 20s, as well as a surprising number of older people. ‘I hadn’t expected so many families’ my mum says, looking around. ‘I know what you mean, I thought there would be more guys’ I reply as I spot some older spectators wearing ‘Watch out! My daughter is a derby girl’ t-shirts. Several children are also walking around with homemade signs displaying a skater’s name or simply ‘Go Mum!’ written in glitter.
Whether working the door, selling cupcakes, setting up equipment, or warming up on the track, those around us are supporting either ‘The Vipers’ or ‘The Vixens’ by wearing anything and everything in green or purple with an apparent disregard for styles, hues, or the overall result. I am reminded of *Harry Potter*, thinking they look like Wizards amongst Muggles as a man walks passed in olive-green chinos, a bright green t-shirt with a Mario Bros. mushroom on it, and a shiny lime coloured party hat.

Suddenly music is playing and skaters are moving out onto the track. As the skaters pass near us during their warm-up lap, my mum nudges me and says, ‘Isn’t roller derby supposed to be kind of raunchy?’ Looking at them I realise there is no ‘uniform’ in a traditional sense, only colour to tell teammate from opponent. Some are wearing ‘skins’ and others are in hot pants, and while singlets are popular, many are just wearing t-shirts, but all have protective gear; I see nothing sexy or raunchy about them. ‘It is what I’ve read, but obviously not always… Maybe it is different in Australia?’ I reply. I am as surprised as she is.

The skaters and referees move into position. Grouped along the starting line, the skaters are a mass of green and purple bodies. The whistle sounds and I am lost to the movement and sound of roller derby. The bout is fast, with bodies braced against each other in the pack. The jammers—a star visible on their helmets—sometimes slide between those around them in smooth, practiced movements to appreciative ‘ohhhs’ from the crowd. Other times they meet a wall of flesh and muscle before slamming into the wooden floor. The crowd surges in these moments; we all cringe, yelling as one, and lean back as a skater slides across the floor towards us. The noise—from the collision, from the spectators—is truly deafening and I find myself joining in. Even my mum, who is not a ‘sporty person’, yells along with the rest of us (JA fieldnotes, 8/12/2011).

Driving home with my mum that evening, our conversation focused on contradictions that we felt WIRD’s bout had revealed. It prompted me to revisit some of the arguments in roller derby scholarship as well as my own assumptions.

For instance, the family-dominated crowd and athletically focused attire did not fit with our preconceived notions of roller derby as a hyper-sexualised sport predominantly supported by male spectators (Cohen 2008; Finley 2010). This dissonance prompted questions regarding the tendency to associate roller derby with alternative sport studies. It also drew attention to the localised nature of roller derby
as a DIY amateur sport that enables, and potentially encourages, cultural plurality as each league may ‘do’ roller derby differently. My first experience of roller derby, therefore, highlighted the need for critical discussion of the ‘place’ of roller derby within the sport and leisure landscape and associated scholarship. It also drew attention to the importance of locality and the associated implications this may have on cultural life, social relations, and roller derby performances, as well as on the heterogeneity and mutability of roller derby’s cultural formation.

I begin by ‘setting the scene’ (Chapter 1), where I review the existing field of study and outline, and identify the analytic potential of, scene theory. This chapter offers a brief discussion of gender and sport before exploring the implications of associating roller derby with alternative, extreme and lifestyle sport and leisure activities. This discussion draws attention to dimensions of roller derby—as a team-based, institutionalised, and commercially oriented sport—that potentially trouble its positioning amongst other alternative sporting practices. I also critically evaluate roller derby research, situating this study within, and in response to, the field’s developing complexity. Lastly, I demonstrate the analytic potential of scene to extend the field of roller derby study and open new areas of inquiry.

The methodological implications of this analytical framework and methods used in this ethnographic study, namely, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of media and promotional material, are detailed and discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter foregrounds my own empirical knowledge gained as a spectator as I moved between spaces and places, relationships, and forms and degrees of involvement in the development of this thesis. In so doing, I emphasise the need to focus on the multisensorial embodied experiences of roller derby. I detail
my use of mixed methods that, I argue, facilitated access to, and analysis of, the multidimensional nature of the roller derby scene as it is mobilised within the urban landscape, is collaboratively performed, and circulates in local, translocal and virtual ways. In detailing the ethnographic dimensions of this thesis, I also illuminate my ongoing negotiation of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ positions, including being named Dr Derby and its associated impact on my social position and renown in the scene. In discussing the methods employed in this thesis and their relationship to the conceptual framework implemented in this study, I foreground their potential to shift the analytic perspective away from (albeit important) gender-based analyses and the privileging of skater experiences. Instead, I contend that my approach explores the myriad of social, cultural, and embodied dimensions of roller derby experience from an array of members’ perspectives.

The live bout is central to the roller derby scene, and scholars have drawn attention to it as a stage for hyper-sexualised, parodied, and drag performances, arguing that it operates as a site for the reconfiguration of normative gender relations (Beaver 2014; Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Gieseler 2014; Krausch 2009) and the normalisation of diverse gender and sexual identities (Sheehan & Vadjunec 2016). As reflected in my field notes above, when I attended WIRD’s live bout, I was often caught up in the shared visceral intensity of the crowd; that pushed me to act—to raise my arms, to yell and laugh and clap with everyone else—as I responded to competitive play and the bursts of emotion from those around me. This enlivening and the affective flows that I and other scene members were entangled in, is both central to roller derby’s sporting experience and illuminates the role of non-skaters and place in scenic performances. Consequently, by using scene and researching roller derby as a spectator rather than as a skater, I am able to explore the live bout as a pleasure-
oriented leisure environment and spectator sport, focusing analysis on consumption, collectivity, and shared affective and emotional experiences and performances.

Recognising the centrality of the live bout to the roller derby scene, I begin my analysis (Chapter 3) by investigating the micro-level processes and interactive practices involved in performing roller derby. My analysis draws on Crawford (2004) and Rinehart (1998), who investigate the dynamics and performances of sporting events in post-modern Western societies, to make sense of the live bout as a sporting experience that incorporates sport and spectacle. By analysing roller derby’s entertainment package and the embodied thrill of spectatorship, I aim to demonstrate some ways that live bouts are synonymous with more traditional contemporary sporting events, as they aim to ‘ensure that customers are (and remain) entertained’ (Crawford 2004, p. 82).

In Chapter 3, I also seek to situate spectators and other groups at the centre of analysis. This is achieved through a focus on the affective and emotional dimensions of people’s embodied experiences and by investigating the role of non-skaters in the development of the live bout atmosphere. Affect theory has been used in roller derby scholarship. Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2013, 2014b) draw on the work of Deleuze to analyse subjectivity in terms of multiplicity, rejecting a singular identity, ‘truth’ or representation of roller derby and roller derby identities. By employing affect theory, they ‘position difference as productive, while also acknowledging the importance of community, as an effect of power, for the women involved’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b, p. 37). In focusing their analysis of affective experience on skaters, they have opened a space ripe for further enquiry and in this thesis, I extend analysis to consider some affective dimensions of roller derby as a spectator sport.
I utilise Wetherell’s (2012a) concept of ‘affective practice’ to draw attention to the dynamics of being ‘in place’. This concept brings into focus the plurality of subjective experiences that live bouts generate, while simultaneously recognising the intersubjective feelings they can evoke, such as belonging, happiness, and excitement. I also draw on Ahmed (2004), Anderson (2014), Bissell (2010), and Wetherell (2012) as I seek to illuminate the collective, atmospheric, ‘contagious’ and ‘circulating’ dimensions of affect produced and maintained by the energies of the audience at live bouts. In identifying the relational activity between the venue and live bout performance, this chapter highlights the impossibility of a singular definition or description of what roller derby ‘is’.

Using scene and investigating roller derby as a spectator, I was particularly attuned to the social interactions between individuals and groups of individuals (such as skaters and spectators) unfolding in the public space of the live bout. As I moved amongst fellow spectators, and began conducting interviews, it became apparent that some members of the scene—skaters most commonly—had gained fame and were often attributed celebrity status. In Chapter 4, I employ Ferris’ (2010) concept of ‘local celebrity’ to examine how members negotiate shifts in status, between being ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’, and to investigate fan and celebrity relations. Ferris (2010) theorises that local celebrity reflects global and mass mediated forms, and suggests that increased accessibility and the hybridisation of consumer/producer roles in local settings may alter interactional dynamics as social, cultural, and economic divides are potentially reduced.
In roller derby, spectators can often interact with individuals they valorise; they can see, talk to, and even touch them. Informed by Ferris (2010), Chapter 4 explores the ways that scene members gain roller derby capital as they accumulate value and status from their individual achievements, contributions to the roller derby scene, and/or media visibility. This approach also illuminates how such relations play out in social interaction. Incorporating interview and observational data, I argue that roller derby’s local celebrity is characterised by accessibility and a sense of being ‘ordinary’ and real. Furthermore, as some skaters, referees, and media personalities in this study have acquired fame in the scene, this study provides the opportunity to investigate the lived experience of celebrity and individuals’ negotiation of changes in social and cultural status. Using scene and remaining sensitive to messy social relations and forms of involvement, this analysis also seeks to demonstrate the web of celebrity, as members who have acquired fame and celebrity status are also often fans of someone else.

As Dr Derby—a spectator researcher—I often had to negotiate a space between being an insider and an outsider. While my status and growing renown as a roller derby researcher often opened doors in social situations, my role as a spectator was, at times, questioned. I was frequently asked, ‘why are you a spectator when you could be a skater?’. This recurrent question prompted me to consider ‘who is roller derby?’ and produced a desire to compare and contrast diverse individuals’ involvement in the scene and the associated issues of ownership and belonging. Expanding on findings in Chapters 3 and 4 concerning the fluidity of involvement, in Chapter 5 I draw on Longhurst’s (2007) use of ‘elective belonging’ to explore participants’ subjective, ongoing and fluctuating forms and degrees of involvement in the scene. This chapter illuminates the desires, processes of transformation, forms
of social and embodied mobility, and internalised sense of identification with the scene that is shared amongst scene members as, to draw on Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014b), they ‘become’ derby. By incorporating diverse perspectives, I also aim to demonstrate that roller derby produces a social and cultural formation of loosely connected clusters of activity that cannot be reduced to a binary formation of women/included and men/excluded. The aim of this chapter is to illuminate the similarities between scene members (regardless of gender), and to recognise and explore the ways non-skaters (such as spectators) see themselves as ‘being derby’ rather than as passive outsiders.

Skaters are, of course, central to the scene, and understandably, their experiences dominate the scholarship. Research on skaters has commonly focused on the subversion of gender norms, and the transformative dimensions of roller derby participation, particularly in relation to the body (see Paul, Steinlage & Blank 2015; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a, 2014b; Peluso 2011). My analysis of roller derby media, including HAM magazine, reveals not only the centrality of skater bodies, but that injuries are valorised. I was intrigued by the place of injury and pain in social and cultural relations, and the implications of their circulation in various forms of textual and visual media. While Peluso (2011), Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted (2012) and Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014a) have identified injury and pain as central to skater experiences and processes of transformation, analysis largely focuses on gendered dimensions. Such analyses draw attention to how injury and pain function as ‘badges of honour’ (Peluso 2011), and as modes through which skaters may distance themselves from feminine frailty (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a).
In Chapter 6, I extend this body of work by analysing skaters’ embodied experiences in relation to sociality, systems of cultural value, and subjective bodily pleasure. Using a scenic perspective, I argue that what is revealed is more than embodied gender identification, a desire for ‘toughness’, and resistance; participants generate, draw on and contest, diverse forms of capital—social, cultural, physical, and erotic—that circulate as a complex system for establishing roller derby capital. The attainment and display of bruises ‘play out’ in various mundane social interactions, are distributed through various media and are central to one’s intelligibility as a skater. This analysis also situates skaters’ bodily experiences in relation to roller derby’s principles of ‘safe play’ that emphasises mutual safety and controlled violence. In this analysis, I seek to expose the limits often imposed on expressions of bodily toughness as participants articulate the need to avoid serious injury, primarily to stay ‘on skates’ and as participants in an amateur sport, to ensure that roller derby does not impact work or family responsibilities. I also argue that by maintaining safe play, roller derby supports a normative sporting discourse of regulated competition through controlled violence and legal physicality.

Roller derby is typically defined and described as alternative, non-mainstream, and punk (Beaver 2012; Becker 2009; Coppage 1999; Finley 2010; Krausch 2009; Pavlidis 2012), but there has been limited analysis of how such descriptions of the sport manifest visually or how they fit with participants’ experiences of roller derby. Being interested in the diversity of roller derby representations, in Chapter 7 I engage in a visual and textual analysis of roller derby imagery. In this analysis, I focus on the ubiquity of women’s bodies in league/team logos, exploring the propensity for sexualised depictions and the tendency to represent skater bodies as slim, non-muscular, and white. It is common for roller derby imagery to utilise
sexuality as a social resource (Parry 2016), but through visual analysis I argue that roller derby logos often provide ambiguous depictions of women’s sexual agency.

Part of my interest in S2D2 as a focus league was due to their appropriation of Star Wars in promotional material and as a theme for scene events, including live bouts. For instance, their league launch in 2012 was attended by members in official Star Wars Stormtrooper costumes, while their league is shorthanded to ‘S2D2’ after the droid R2D2, and their team is called ‘The Force’. In Chapter 7, I expand my visual analysis beyond the commonly utilised pin-up and punk aesthetics to explore S2D2’s use of Star Wars in promotional material. Using Breeze’s (2014) concept of ‘non-seriousness’, I argue that the incorporation of Star Wars as ‘gimmicky’ and playful operates alongside, rather than negates, the emphasis on sporting seriousness; it is a way roller derby members negotiate sporting seriousness while still maintaining a sense of fun.

A central aim of this thesis is to shift the analytic perspective towards the dynamics of its cultural formation, foregrounding relational scene-making practices. This involves recognising roller derby as a mutable, fluctuating, and heterogeneous social phenomenon. A central aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that ownership and belonging are practices requiring members to negotiate relationships, spaces and places, and forms of contribution and throughout this thesis I argue that the ‘who’ of roller derby is expanding. In the conclusion, I therefore consolidate the thesis argument that roller derby is a scene that is constituted through fluid, ‘messy’ and multi-faceted forms of involvement that neither sub-cultural theory nor binary gender analyses can capture.
Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the major theoretical influences that inform this thesis and that are used to frame and analyse roller derby as a scene. Central to the following discussion is an investigation of how roller derby has been situated within scholarly fields and sporting culture as an alternative to mainstream sporting practices. First, I begin with a discussion of the contemporary sporting landscape. I focus on issues and debates associated with the gendering of sport as masculine and explore the ways that traditional sports shape and reproduce a binary and hierarchically structured set of gender relations that code full contact sports as male domains. Second, I discuss the rise of non-traditional sports and evaluate the ways they potentially offer alternatives to traditional sporting structures and values. Third, I critique the methodological and conceptual frameworks that inform much of the literature on non-traditional sports and that are reflected in roller derby scholarship. Specifically, I examine the use of dualistic formations—such as alternative/mainstream, in/out and gender resistive/conformity—and argue that they limit the analytic scope of roller derby research due to their focus on skaters and exclusion of diverse non-skaters, such as NSOs, referees, and spectators. I also critique some scholars’ characterisations of roller derby as a subculture, emphasising its conceptual limitations. Central amongst these are the ways it homogenises cultural groups and limits scholars’ abilities to recognise diverse looser or more sporadic forms of involvement.
Fourth, I explore recent conceptual developments in roller derby research—particularly by Breeze (2015), Pavlidis (2012, 2013, 2015), and Pavlidis and Fullagar (2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c)—that move analysis beyond dualisms and a focus on resistance and gender conformity. These recent studies are distinguished from previous roller derby scholarship by their focus on cultural heterogeneity, multiplicity, and ambiguity and their attention to members’ subjective constructions of what roller derby is and how it is experienced. Specifically, I explore Breeze’s (2015) analysis of skaters’ negotiation of seriousness, and Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2014b) that focus on relations of power and, using affect theory, explore skaters’ subjective experiences of roller derby as a feminist sport.

In the fifth section I return to the issue of what roller derby is and situate this study within a broad conceptual field, including subculture, neo-tribe, and community, and expand on my decision to use scene. Lastly, I establish my conceptual framework, expanding on my use of scene and demonstrating its analytic potential to extend the field of roller derby study and open new areas of inquiry.

**Gender and sport: Frameworks, debates and the contemporary context**

Sport is widely recognised as a social institution where relations of power, including gender, are constituted and challenged (Cahn 2015; Hargreaves 2007; Messner 2007). Sporting culture and contact sports in particular, are coded as masculine, privileging traits such as physical strength, endurance, and aggression (Hargreaves 2007). This produces a seeming ‘incompatibility between women, or femininity, and sport’ (Breeze 2015, p. 21). Historically, this association between sport, men and masculinity has led to women’s relegation to sports and sporting practices that align
with traditional Western forms of femininity (specifically, grace, slimness, poise, and flexibility) such as gymnastics, figure skating, and netball (Burroughs & Nauright 2000; Hargreaves 1994).

These gender relations are compounded by ‘women’s’ versions of ‘men’s’ sports. One example is netball, that was established as a women’s version of basketball and enabled women to engage in sporting competition while conforming to traditional constructions of femininity and the female body (Burroughs & Nauright 2000). Other sports, such as ice hockey and tennis, adjusted rules and regulations in women’s competitions to reflect narrow gendered ideologies. For example, in ice hockey, women cannot intentionally ‘body check’ opposing players (Gilenstam, Karp & Henriksson-Larsén 2008), while women in tennis play fewer sets than their male-counterparts (Cohen-Zada et al. 2017). Such modifications reproduce distinctions in sport that categorise men as strong and capable, and women as weak, fragile, and Other, and lead to claims that women’s performances are inferior to the ‘real’ thing (Gilenstam, Karp & Henriksson-Larsén 2008; Griffin 1998). Due to these gender relations, women’s sporting performances are typically subordinated, marginalised, and trivialised as they are ‘classified as ‘less than’—less hard, strong, tough, fast and crucially in the increasingly commercialized sporting world, less watchable and therefore less profit making’ (Pavlidis & Connor 2016, p. 1351). This normative gender formation and the sex-segregated organisation of traditional competitive sports, naturalise gender identities and reaffirm a hierarchical structure that prioritises male-bodied masculinity and subordinates and marginalises women and femininity (Messner 2007).
Women’s gradual movement into ‘men’s’ sports was largely brought about by second wave feminists and trailblazing female athletes (such as tennis player Billie Jean King, sprinter Wilma Rudolph, Boston Marathon runner Katherine Switzer, and golfer Nancy Lopez) during the 1960s-1980s (Delaney & Madigan 2015; Ware 2011). By destabilising normative and determinist constructions of gender, second wave feminists produced social, cultural, legal, and political reform both in and outside of sport (Delaney & Madigan 2015; Hargreaves 1994).

In America, this led to the enactment of *Title IX* in 1972 that overturned gender-based restrictions on sporting participation (Duncan 2006). In Australia, this movement contributed to the passing of the *Sex Discrimination Act* (1984), that—amongst other things—helped encourage women’s sport by making it illegal to restrict women’s access to community sporting institutions based on sex (Adair 2011; Nicholson & Hoye 2011). This period also heralded a national interest in sport with the establishment of the ‘Australian Institute of Sports’ (AIS) in 1981, and the ‘Australian Sports Commission’ in 1985 (later combining in 1989) (Adair 2011; Nicholson & Hoye 2011). Up until this point, sport in Australia had traditionally been managed and funded by local governments and community-based clubs and leagues, often resulting in women’s sporting participation suffering from a lack of funding, recognition, and institutional support (Burroughs & Nauright 2000; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b). The ASC has helped advance women’s sport, specifically, by allocating grants and developing programs intended to address gender disparities in coaching, officiating and competition, while also producing women’s sporting leadership courses to support women’s movement into organisational and managerial roles (Australian Sports Commission 2017).
According to Messner (2007, p. 4), women’s movement into ‘men’s’ sports led to it becoming ‘contested terrain’. Women’s competence in ‘men’s’ sports demonstrates some of the instabilities of the sex/gender binary, yet simultaneously reinforces many gendered dimensions of embodied sporting practice. This is apparent when we consider women’s proficiency in contact and combat sports, such as soccer (Dunn 2016; Woodward 2016), rugby (Ezzell 2009; Hudson 2010), and various martial arts (Mierzwinski & Phipps 2015; Owton 2015; Velija, Mierzwinski & Fortune 2012). As women at local and elite levels engage in ‘masculine’ sporting practices, exhibiting their ability to perform aggression, violence and strength, they destabilise determinist perceptions of sporting ability and capacity as rooted in male bodies (Miller 2001). Yet, through such performances, masculine benchmarks are maintained, and when women do ‘measure up’ and exhibit ‘masculine’ traits, they are frequently seen as unfeminine, ‘mannish’, and as lesbians (Griffin 1998; Hargreaves 2000b). This often leads many female athletes—especially at elite levels—to ‘apologise’ for their masculine sporting performances by emphasising their heterosexuality and femininity (Davis-Delano, Pollock & Vose 2009; Hardy 2015).

While women participate in greater numbers and in a wider range of sports, media, advertising, and sporting commentary are areas of continued gender disparity. While representations of women as ‘sexy’ and ‘strong’ have been promoted—particularly in advertising by brands such as Nike (Kachgal 2010)—more often, media (re)produces heteronormative representations of femininity and the female body by promoting slimness and grace as both healthy and sexy (Bruce 2015; Daniels 2009; Fink 2015). Women are also often marginalised and trivialised in sporting commentary which tends to reinforce normative gender relations—calling female
athletes ‘girls’ for instance—and positioning women as sexual objects, as well as wives and mothers (Gat 2010; Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993). This reinforces the incompatibility of ‘woman’ and ‘athlete’. Burroughs and Nauright (2000) refer to this process as ‘heterosexiness’, arguing that it maintains a binary gender formation, supports heterosexuality, and limits women’s recognition as athletes.

In recent years, there have been attempts to challenge the perception of sport as a masculine domain, to encourage women and girls to participate in a greater range of sporting activities, and to redress the heterosexiness that often characterises the promotion of women’s sport. In Australia, this includes the ‘Girls Make Your Move’ campaign developed by the Department of Health that is focused on ‘inspiring, energising and empowering young women to be more active’ (Australian Government Department of Health 2016). Targeting girls’ sporting participation across an array of sports (such as soccer, boxing, rugby, skateboarding and tennis), this campaign involves circulating representations of strong, happy, and active girls via social media, television, and at schools and sporting clubs. In focusing on many traditionally ‘masculine’ and male-dominated sports, ‘Girls Make Your Move’ aims to counter the gendered perception of full contact and competitive sporting practices and spaces as bastions of male-bodied masculinity by producing ‘new’ cultural imaginaries (see Figure 1 below).
Netball and the NAB AFL Women’s (AFLW) competition have also been targeted in various promotional campaigns. The #PlayLikeAGirl ANZ Championship Netball advertisement (Field 2015) and Samsung Australia’s #RethinkRoleModels (2016) campaign both showcase netball players’ muscular physiques, intense training regimes and competition, and the fortitude and determination of individual players through short videos. Samsung Australia’s #RethinkRoleModels incorporates players’ commentary, illuminating their individual narratives and subjective understandings of women’s position in the contemporary sporting landscape, and accompanies these with slogans such as #ProveThemWrong, #WorthTheSacrifice, #NeverGiveUp and #RiseAboveIt. Similarly, Holden has incorporated the AFLW in their ‘Lets Get There’ campaign, highlighting discrimination, diversity and issues surrounding body image experienced by female athletes (Canning 2017; Holden Australia 2017).

ESPNW has also released a short film designed by women called ‘When I play’ (Glock 2017). Unlike some other campaigns, this film showcases the diversity amongst women in sport, depicting athletes of different ages, body shapes, and racial and ethnic backgrounds participating in sports such as boxing, swimming, ballet,
fencing and roller derby. The film confronts the subordination, marginalisation and objectification experienced by women in sport. For example, the voice-over begins by stating:

To whom it may concern, what I am doing here is not for you, not for your judgement or your appraisal, not for your assessment or your arousal. No boy has ever been told he couldn’t play, shouldn’t play. I am no longer interested in shouldn’ts or couldn’ts (Glock 2017).

Collectively, these campaigns and projects seek to redress the association between women and weakness and challenge notions of women’s sporting practice as inferior to ‘men’s’. In showcasing women’s bodies and sporting practices in a range of sports—from full contact team sports such as AFL, to the controlled grace of ballet—they also work to destabilise notions of ‘men’s’ and ‘women’s’ sports and associated masculine benchmarks that undervalue the quality of women’s sporting practice. Furthermore, roller derby is included in the ESPNW film due its popularity as an unapologetic full contact sport played predominantly by women sport and often regarded as a women’s sport, rather than being a version—modified or otherwise—of a men’s game (Donnelly 2012). Positioning roller derby amongst the array of traditional sports also legitimises it as a serious and note-worthy sporting practice. These institutional and commercial projects promote women’s sport as serious and intense performances worthy of recognition and as sites of belonging rather than exclusion, where women are transformed and liberated, active and social, and negotiate identity and feelings of community while contesting and re-envisioning gender relations.
Yet, despite these developments and while women’s sporting participation is at unprecedented levels, research has repeatedly shown that the contemporary sporting landscape remains enmeshed in oppressive and pervasive social, cultural, and structural systems that perpetuate gender inequalities. Women remain under-represented (and sexualised) in media (Fink 2015; Kane 2013), occupy fewer organisational and managerial roles (Allison 2016; Burton 2015; Stronach & Adair 2009), represent a minority in coaching and officiating (Kane 2016; LaVoi 2016; Norman & Rankin-Wright 2016; Robertson 2016), and receive less pay and fewer sponsorship deals than men (Cahn 2015; Shephard 2016).

Not only does women’s sporting participation receive less media coverage than men’s (Cooky, Messner & Hextrum 2013; Fink 2015; Kane 2013), recent results released by the Australian Sports Commission reveal that coverage has actually decreased from 11% to 8.7% over the last decade (Chalkley-Rhoden 2015). This is despite national campaigns such as ‘Girls Make Your Move’ and increases in women’s sporting participation across diverse sporting practices (Australian Sports Commission 2017; Nicholson & Hoye 2011). Evidence also indicates that women’s participation in ‘men’s’ sports continues to generate debate concerning women’s ability to ‘live up’ to masculine standards (Davis 2017; Pippos 2017; Staley & Stephen 2016). For example, while the AFLW has maintained high television ratings and attendance at live games, the quality of sporting performance continues to be challenged on gendered terms with some people claiming it is of a lesser sporting quality (Davis 2017), while others suggest that ‘if [women]… are good enough they should compete with men’ (Pippos 2017, p. 1).
These gender disparities in sport also intersect with other forms of social stratification, most notably, race/ethnicity, (dis)ability and class (Shephard 2016; Wegner et al. 2016). These interconnecting dimensions maintain a normative system that continues to privilege white, male and able-bodied masculine sporting performances within a complex and highly commercial industry that perpetuates the notion that women’s sport is less marketable (Cooky, Messner & Hextrum 2013; Fink 2015; Kane 2013). For female athletes, this also impacts their financial opportunities (such as for sponsorship and advertising), as these intersecting axes of difference continue to perpetuate heterosexiness, where being a white, able-bodied, heterosexual and conventionally attractive woman is privileged (Hargreaves 2000a; Kane, LaVoi & Fink 2013).

**Challenging ‘masculine’ sport culture: Alternative sports, roller derby, and gender resistance**

Frustrations over the highly commercial, institutional and frequently exclusionary structure of sport has contributed to the rise of non-traditional, often do-it-yourself (DIY) sport and leisure activities (Rinehart 2000). Variously (and often interchangeably) labelled alternative, lifestyle, risk, subcultural, whiz, extreme, panic and action, these non-traditional, counter-cultural activities or ‘post-sports’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b, p. 4) are typically seen as ‘having presented an “alternative”, and potential challenge to traditional ways of ‘seeing’, ‘doing’, and understanding sport’ (Wheaton 2004, p. 3, emphasis in original). Rinehart (2000, p. 506) identifies an extensive and growing array of sports often characterised as alternative, including skateboarding, windsurfing, caving, white-water kayaking, surfing, hang gliding, jet-skiing, and ultimate fighting, amongst many others. Many of these alternative sports
are underscored by desires to commune with nature, to pursue more hedonistic (i.e. fun) and individualistic rather than competitive experiences, and to engage in high-risk behaviour (Booth 2003; Fletcher 2008a; Wheaton 2003). Studies into these non-traditional sports are also often focused on whether they ‘offer different and potentially more transformatory scripts for male and female physicality, than the hegemonic masculinities and femininities characteristic of traditional sports cultures and identities’ (Wheaton 2004, p. 16, emphasis in original).

Roller derby is often associated with this field, as it is seen to extend ‘beyond traditional sport by embracing the non-gendered, anti-authoritarian, antihierarchical ethos of alternative cultures’ (Strübel & Petrie 2016, p. 348). Emerging out of alternative music cultures such as the Austin punk scene, and the political ideologies of the Riot Grrrl Movement (Finley 2010; Pavlidis 2012), roller derby’s DIY culture maintains an alternative sensibility, particularly in relation to forms of entertainment and performance. According to Gieseler (2014, p. 761), where ‘Riot Grrrls became a defiant response to the male-dominated punk scene, derby skaters create sport and identity through performative resistance against institutional sports’. Most scholarly works focus on roller derby’s gender dynamics, with numerous scholars claiming that the combination of masculine physicality and atypical feminine performances are evidence of a counter-cultural gender regime (Beaver 2012; Carlson 2010; Cohen 2008; Finley 2010; Gieseler 2014; Krausch 2009; Peluso 2011).

Early works, such as those by Finley (2010) and Carlson (2010), offer feminist analyses of roller derby that investigate skaters’ potential gender subversion and performance of alternative femininities. Finley (2010) draws on Schippers’ (2002) concept of ‘gender maneuvering’ to claim that roller derby skaters disrupt normative
gender relations in face-to-face interactions by mobilising ‘pariah femininities’—such as the ‘femme fatale’ and ‘punk rebel’—to produce alternative gender interactions. Pariah femininities exhibit characteristics of strength or assertiveness and may blur distinctions between masculinity and femininity, and between femininities. For example, skaters often incorporate styles that accentuate aspects of the traditional ‘perfect woman’ image of subordination to male dominance, such as 1950s housewives or ‘pin-up’ girls. By incorporating tattoos, visible injuries, or by wearing ripped or torn clothing while engaging in masculine forms of physicality, skaters create new gender relations that disrupt male dominance and the hegemonic gender order.

Similarly, Carlson (2010) foregrounds many symbolic aspects of roller derby—including derby names and highly sexualised clothing such as mini-skirts, fishnet stockings, and visible underwear—and claims that such aspects are central to the constitution of alternative gender relations. According to Carlson (2010, p. 438), by disrupting the association between signifiers (feminine clothing and make-up) and their signified meaning (emphasised femininity), skaters expose ‘the contingency of emphasized femininity as a coherent system of gender norms’. Drawing on Connell’s (1995) conceptualisation of emphasized femininity, and Hebdige’s (1979) work on subcultural style, Carlson (2010) refers to this process as the ‘female significant’. Like Finley (2010), Carlson (2010) argues that skaters challenge the often-presumed incompatibility of women, femininity, and sport. However, Carlson (2010) also identifies a tendency to vilify traits perceived as ‘too feminine’ such as being highly emotional, ‘catty’, or by gossiping. This indicates that while roller derby may appear to offer opportunities to disrupt hegemonic gender relations, it may also in some ways reaffirm the normative gender order.
While most scholarly works predominantly focus on roller derby’s alternative cultural sensibilities, as a full-contact sport it has also been represented as a site of embodied gender resistance (Eklund & Masberg 2014; Gieseler 2014; Liu, Bradley & Burk 2016; Peluso 2011; Storms 2008). Through the visibility of diverse body sizes, the incorporation of alternative cultural styles (such as tattoos and ripped clothing), and by imbuing injuries with value, roller derby skaters reconfigure and ‘broaden cultural definitions of the “sporting” body to include a wide range of corporealities’ (Peluso 2011, p. 43).

Injury is central to such discussions. For Peluso (2011), injury operates as ‘subcultural capital’ as:

> The accumulation of bruises and breaks conveys to fellow members one’s knowledge of the game, one’s skilled or “expert” status, and one’s overall toughness; they may also be worn as badges of honour that distinguish skaters from women embodying traditional femininity (Peluso 2011, p. 44).

Informed by Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’, subcultural capital was developed by Sarah Thornton (1995, p. 11), in her study of ‘club culture’—such as raves, and musical subgenres like techno and party—to make sense of the system of cultural value and forms of social distinction that operate within subcultures. Subcultural capital ‘confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder’ (Thornton 1995, p. 27) and is derived from one’s ‘hipness’ and ‘being in the know’, such as by using culturally specific language (e.g. slang), or staying up-to-date with subcultural fashion trends. Thornton’s (1995) analysis of club cultures foregrounds
the importance of media in subcultural contexts and is focused on the ways members ‘come to see themselves as authentic (as opposed to the false/phony or mainstream) and how they avoid ‘selling out’... [as they negotiate] the ever-present threat of popularization’ (Jensen 2006, p. 263). In adopting subcultural capital, Peluso (2011) foregrounds injury as a form of embodied gender resistance and identifies it as a system through which skaters distinguish themselves in roller derby. She concludes that injury is central to skaters ‘battling for cultural space for the (radical) sporting female body—an overly political act’ (Peluso 2011, p. 45).

The acceptance and visibility of skaters’ diverse bodies and the celebration of injury in roller derby, is seen as challenging the narrow heteronormative expectations of the female athlete as a passive and fragile object of male desire (Gieseler 2014). This can lead to shifts in women’s self-esteem and body image as women become ‘more accepting of themselves and others and not tied to traditional views of femininity’ (Strübel & Petrie 2016, p. 350). Injury (and associated experiences of pain) can be transformative (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a). Rather than being ‘something to simply push past in demonstrating the primacy of (masculine) mind over (female) body… [roller derby] offers a relation, between toughness and vulnerability, hurting and nurturing, which enables a reimagining of women’s corporeality’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a, p. 496).

In a recent article, Parry (2016, p. 309) expands this focus on skaters’ embodied resistance and empowerment, claiming that ‘the derby girl is not a victim vis-à-vis sexual objectification by fans, but rather is in control of her erotic capital and knows how to use it for the betterment of the sport and herself’. Erotic capital emerges from a combination of various social and aesthetic qualities (including being attractive and
having sex appeal) that are consciously employed for individual and/or collective benefit (Parry 2016). According to Parry (2016), skaters are empowered by their sexualised performances as they are exercising agency by controlling the manner through which they use their bodies and market their sport. Alternatively, Cohen (2008) questions the potential of roller derby as a gender resistive sport and culture. For Cohen (2008, p. 33), the incorporation of sexualised clothing (such as mini-skirts, fishnet stockings, and visible underwear) is ‘no different from Olympic teams that sell calendars of its players in skimpy swimwear’.

This scholarship demonstrates the ways gender relations can be read in contradictory ways—sometimes resisting and other times reaffirming traditional gendered patterns—while also illuminating scholars’ focus on gender resistance. Yet, these analyses offer limited discussion of the fact that these alternative femininities are largely performed by white, heterosexual, cis-gendered women, or how the resistive quality of roller derby is affected by the rise in sporting seriousness and consequential movement away from hyper-feminine, theatrical performances. While numerous scholars have recognised that roller derby is dominated by white women (Carlson 2010; Parry 2016; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2013; Strübel & Petrie 2016), the ways these alternative femininities are specifically white femininities has often been obscured. There has also been no engagement with the ways roller derby leagues and teams, as a DIY sport, choose to represent women through imagery in their promotional materials. It is, therefore, unclear whether imagery reflects alternative gender relations. A contribution of this thesis is the inclusion of visual analysis in Chapter 7 that engages with debates and tensions surrounding the representation of women and bodily diversity in roller derby.
Throughout this section, the discussion of relevant literature has indicated that in characterising roller derby as an alternative sport, scholars have largely been driven to address whether or not roller derby challenges the hegemonic gender order and sporting culture. Like other studies of non-traditional sports, underpinning such works are a few dualistic frameworks, such as alternative/mainstream, gender subversion/conformity, and new/old, that can limit the scope of analysis.

**Dualisms and other dead ends**

Studies of non-traditional sports have been critiqued by numerous scholars who argue that the findings and conclusions drawn are often limited by the methodological and conceptual frameworks used. Specifically, Donnelly (2006) and Wheaton (2004) argue that many scholars of non-traditional sports rely on dualistic models—such as alternative/mainstream, authentic/inauthentic, new/old and in/out—often target highly invested or ‘core’ participants, and focus on spectacular elements of cultural style or performance. Although the use of dualisms ‘is not inherently paradoxical, the inability to exist in multiple poles ultimately leads to paradoxical junctions’ (Clasen 2001, p. 37). Such frameworks can hinder scholars’ ability to provide a critical examination of the range of sporting practices and modes of participation that operate in diverse sporting contexts (Donnelly 2006; Wheaton 2004). They also often lead scholars to over-emphasise resistant or oppositional aspects as they are inevitably drawn to the ideological and practical dimensions that distinguish non-traditional sports from those of the ‘mainstream’ (Wheaton 2004).

Much of the scholarly work on roller derby that characterises it as an alternative, extreme, or counter-cultural sport utilises similar theoretical and methodological frameworks. In arguing that roller derby disrupts gender hegemony by providing an
alternative set of gender relations, Beaver (2012), Peluso (2011), Carlson (2010) and Finley (2010) assume and reproduce a dualistic formation that relies on the notion of a ‘mainstream’ or ‘dominant’ culture to which roller derby is positioned in opposition. However, the ‘mainstream’ is a perpetually omnipresent yet absent “other” that defies definition’ (Wheaton 2007, p. 286). Furthermore, such studies of roller derby are dependent on (and tend to reaffirm) a binary formation where the resistive nature of skaters’ gender performance is predicated on the combination of female skaters’ physicality that is read as ‘masculine’, and the use of feminine adornments (such as mini-skirts and fishnet stockings).

The continued use of dualisms in these analyses of roller derby is surprising given that current works, particularly in the areas of gender and queer studies, have signalled a move away from such models because of their limitations in the analysis of gender, sex, and sexuality (see Aitchison 2007; Johnson & Kivel 2007; West & Zimmerman 1987). In particular, works that provide an analysis of the construction of gender and performance, gender and performativity, or that ‘queer’ (hetero)normative understandings of sex, gender and sexuality—particularly as they relate to sport—draw attention to the conceptual limitations of binary formations (Butler 2004; Caudwell 2003; Davies 2003; Delphy 2002; Johnson & Kivel 2007; Sanger 2010; Schilt & Westbrook 2009; Valocchi 2005). Such works emphasise the inability of dualisms to capture the complexity and nuances of lived experience and challenge many presuppositions regarding sex, gender, and sexuality as ‘natural’, ‘normal’, or ‘authentic’.
By employing scene theory, the focus of this thesis shifts analysis away from questions of gender resistance to instead explore the interactive processes that contribute to the production of roller derby. Rather than foregrounding whether skaters are ‘doing’ or ‘undoing’ normative gender conventions, the centrality of socio-spatiality to scene theory facilitates an investigation of the processes of skaters’ socialisation. This approach foregrounds an investigation of the ways skaters learn, through immersion in the roller derby scene and interaction with other members, what behaviours, displays and actions are acceptable, valued, and discouraged as they become part of a collective within the scene. Consequently, in this thesis I recognise gender as one—albeit important—dimension of members’ lived experience, enabling the exploration and analysis of aspects that do not ‘fit’ or support the argument that roller derby is a gender resistive sport.

The use of dualisms such as alternative/mainstream, in/out, and authentic/inauthentic, is also compounded by the use of subculture, that is a common conceptual tool used by sport sociologists investigating non-traditional sports (Donnelly 2006; Wheaton 2007). This is primarily because ‘implicit in using the label subculture is that a relationship of difference exists between the subculture and the mainstream culture to which most, if not all, members of that society belong’ (Wheaton 2007, p. 286, emphasis in original). Haenfler (2016, p. 3) defines subculture as a ‘relatively diffuse social subgroup recognisable by its non-normative values, beliefs, symbols, and activities, as well as its marginalization from or resistance to “mainstream” culture’.
Much of the literature on sporting subcultures is conducted by scholars who drew on works associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Wheaton 2007). The central theme of CCCS subcultural research is class. Throughout the 1970s, British working-class male youth formed unique subcultural formations as modes of resistance to the confines of a capitalist society, within which they were often marginalised by their low socio-economic status (Gelder 2007). According to Haenfler (2013, p. 8, emphasis in original), ‘for the CCCS, subcultural identities and resistance were most visible through spectacular youth styles and rituals… [as] people take and remake cultural texts as a form of resistance’. However, subcultural theory associated with the CCCS has received extensive and wide-ranging critiques. Central to these criticisms is a perceived overemphasis on the subcultural members as working-class male youth that homogenises subcultures as coherent and stable social formations, their focus on semiotics and limited use of ethnographic approaches, and the almost exclusive focus on British experiences and cultural formations (Haenfler 2016; Muggleton 2000).

According to Young and Atkinson (2008):

with direct links to both CCCS-inspired research and risk research, considerable sociological work has been conducted on youth subcultures in sport as resistance-oriented. Over the course of the past two decades, surfers, BASE jumpers, kite surfers, hang-gliders, BMX riders, rock climbers, windsurfers and even street lugers, have all been studies as youth sport subcultures with unambiguously resistant orientations (Young & Atkinson 2008, p. 33).
Roller derby scholars reflect this trend and share many aspects of CCCS commentaries on subculture. According to Storms (2008, p. 80), roller derby emerged from the punk scene and Riot Grrrl Movement in Austin Texas, and reflects a ‘subcultural, antiauthoritarian, anti-hierarchical consciousness, that is suspicious of pre-existing male-dominated cultures’. Shields (2008, p. 10) describes roller derby as having a ‘circus-like atmosphere and subculture’ that is compiled from a bricolage of rock, punk, rockabilly, pin-up, porn-star and metal icons. Gieseler (2014) and Peluso (2011) focus on embodied resistance, describing roller derby as an ‘extreme’ sporting subculture where skaters utilise diverse strategies (such as celebrating injury) to challenge normative gender relations. Alternatively, Carlson (2010) and Beaver (2012) provide more implicit connections with subculture by situating their analyses of roller derby amongst diverse subcultural studies and utilising concepts associated with subculture. For instance, Carlson (2010) draws heavily on Hebdige’s (2005) work on subcultural style to develop her concept of the ‘female significant’.

However, Frith (1983), and later Bennett (2001), have criticised the rigid boundaries typically implied by subculture, arguing that leisure-focused social formations are in fact more fluid in nature as members move between groups as part of a system of interconnected relations and ‘floating memberships’. Individuals’ social affiliations and belonging in contemporary society, they argue, is often looser, more sporadic, and can involve virtual forms of connectedness (Bennett 2001; Peterson & Bennett 2004).

Rather than applying a subcultural framework that explores roller derby as a resistive or sub-cultural formation, Pavlidis (2015, p. 207) argues that, for skaters, subculture is ‘a key mechanism for positioning themselves within… internationally popular,
and contested, leisure/sport space’. Roller derby’s cultural formation should not be
over simplified as a single imaginary, instead, researchers must remain sensitive to
subjective meanings (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b). In Pavlidis’ (2015) study, skaters’
meanings of what roller derby is, and their understandings of subculture, were
largely dependent on how they perceived roller derby’s position within a broader
sport and leisure landscape. For example, two skaters in Pavlidis’ (2015) research—
Tia and Dee—represent roller derby as a sub-cultural space, operating as an
alternative to other sporting formations and distinguished by its unique gender
relations. However, Pavlidis (2015) also shows that for a third skater—Suzanne—the
desire to be taken seriously influences her perception of roller derby’s cultural
formation, leading to a rejection of subculture.

Downes, Breeze, and Griffin (2013) found that some participants critique the
association between roller derby and subculture on the basis that it conveys counter-
cultural meanings and suggests alternative styles. This, the authors argue, is due to a
growing desire amongst participants to be taken seriously and recognised as a
legitimate sport. However, Downes, Breeze, and Griffin (2013, p. 105) also
emphasise the need for researchers to recognise multiplicity, stating that ‘roller derby
can be and is ‘just a sport’ at the same time as existing in many other confusing,
wonderful, ridiculous and inspiring forms’.

Some roller derby scholars have challenged the use of subculture. According to
Sheehan and Vadjunec (2016, p. 542), subculture restricts analysis of the relationship
between skaters and spectators as it constitutes roller derby culture as
‘seemingly…separate from society’. Scholars who frame roller derby as a subculture
also often represent spectators as a male-dominated mass and/or as ‘non-participants’
in roller derby performances (Cohen 2008; Finley 2010; Krausch 2009). While several roller derby scholars incorporate spectators in their research design (Gieseler 2014; Paul, Steinlage & Blank 2015; Peluso 2011; Thompson & Üstüner 2015), these voices are often lost in the ensuing analyses that instead target skater experiences. This also results in a failure to recognise the live bout as an interactive site where ‘spectators actually co-create scenes of embodiment that are micro, close, and permeable’ (Sheehan & Vadjunec 2016, p. 544). Sheehan and Vadjunec’s (2016) commentary exposes further limitations of the concept of subculture in roller derby research; firstly, its rigid and bounded structure, and secondly, its inability to capture different levels of commitment or fluid involvement.

**Beyond dualisms: Multiplicity, ambivalence, and fluidity**

Recent scholarship, particularly that of Breeze (2015) and the extensive body of work by Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), is distinguished from earlier works by their sensitivity to cultural heterogeneity, multiplicity and ambiguity, and their focus on members’ subjective experiences and understandings of what roller derby is. Where Breeze (2015) focuses on the mobilisation and negotiation of seriousness in skaters’ lived experiences of roller derby as a DIY sport, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014b) investigate relations of power, and by utilising affect theory, explore skaters’ subjective experiences of roller derby as a feminist physical sporting culture.

In a recent study of roller derby in the United Kingdom, Breeze (2015, p. 2, emphasis in original) found that participants were ‘overwhelmingly concerned with “getting taken seriously”, with demonstrating roller derby’s similarity with other sports practices and with its recognition as a “real, legitimate, serious sport”’. 

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Central to this process is the ongoing negotiation of modes of ‘doing’ roller derby and representing what roller derby is, particularly in relation to the deployment of sexuality as a social resource. For instance, Breeze (2015, p. 38) identifies a sense of passage or trajectory in skater experiences, where wearing tutus or fishnet stockings is not evidence of a subversive culture, but illustrative of ‘temporary episodes on a journey that individual skaters go through on the way to more sports-like dress’.

A central contribution of Breeze’s (2015) work to the field of roller derby research (and to this thesis) is the development of the concept of ‘non-/seriousness’. Being interested in the ways skaters negotiate seriousness in practice, Breeze (2015, p. 3) developed the concept of non-/seriousness to articulate skaters’ dilemma as they ‘pursue “serious” recognition (as “a sport for people who really, really like sport”) without entirely becoming what they initially defined themselves in opposition to (as “a sport for women who don't like sport”)’. Non-/seriousness draws attention to the processual and often ambiguous work involved in ‘doing’ roller derby, articulating such practices as subjective and intersubjective negotiations of social and cultural forces operating within, outside of, and through, roller derby as a gendered sporting culture (Breeze 2015). Importantly, Breeze’s (2015) analysis foregrounds cultural plurality. This approach enables Breeze (2015) to explore some of the ways roller derby operates and is experienced at the local level, and is enmeshed in broader transnational flows. Breeze’s (2015) conceptualisation of roller derby as an environment of fluid and changing social and cultural practices, and site of blurred ‘sport’ and ‘spectacle’ performances, resonates with the foci of this thesis, and therefore informs my analytic perspective and data analysis.
Pavlidis and Fullagar (2013, 2014b) foreground multiplicity rather than foreclosing analysis in the pursuit of a singular identity or representation of roller derby or ‘derby grrrls’. Affect theory, they argue, directs attention to ‘the complexity of derby power relations [so] the centrality of embodied affect becomes apparent: love, anger, aggression, fear, shame, pride, joy’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b, p. 2). This innovative approach is encapsulated by Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2012, 2013, 2014b) conceptualisation of ‘becoming derby grrrls’, as it redirects analysis away from questions targeting whether roller derby is gender resistive or empowering, to instead explore the relationship between subjective and intersubjective meanings, experiences and representations of roller derby. Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b) conceptualise ‘becoming’ as processes of bodily transformation, engagement with cultural norms, behaviours and ideals, and an internalised sense of identification. ‘Becoming’ is an ongoing process of agency, engagement and desire; it is a state in opposition to ‘being’. ‘Becoming’ contests replication, instead enabling a multiplicity of meanings (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b). Utilising ‘becoming’ offers new ways of thinking about women in sport, female sporting bodies and negotiations of cultural imaginaries beyond binary dualisms that restrict analysis, obscuring the nuances of lived experience.

This approach extends roller derby scholarship, in particular, in relation to bodies and the place of injury and pain, previously identified by Peluso (2011) and Gieseler (2014) as central dimensions of the transformative and resistive potential of roller derby. Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014a, p. 495) found that in roller derby, ‘painful affects were mobilized in particular ways; to imagine collective belonging, to invent alternative subjectivities, and to mark out the limits of self and other’. Their analysis worked with the ‘messiness’ of subjective experiences where skaters are ‘tough and
vulnerable, forceful and caring’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a, p. 495). Doing so reimagines women’s corporeal experiences as an ongoing negotiation of embodied, social and cultural dimensions, rather than reducing them to a distinctly two-dimensional representations of gender resistance. Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b) analyses situate roller derby skaters’ experiences in relation to broader questions of identity construction, cultural norms, affectual and emotional responses, social difference, and social relations, including of power, and like Breeze (2015), their work offers new and exciting analytic possibilities.

From subculture to…?

Some roller derby scholars have recognised the limitations of subculture, and have used other terminology to ‘open up’ the field of study. These include neo-tribe (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2012), community (Paul, Steinlage & Blank 2015; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b), and scene (Pavlidis 2012; Sheehan & Vadjunec 2016).

According to Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, p. 6), while ‘roller derby communities can be viewed as a tight knit subcultural group: spectacular, subversive and resistant to dominant modes of behaviour’, neo-tribe offers greater flexibility as it is able to bring diverse identities and affective experiences into focus. While subculture suggests rigid boundaries and a homogenous degree of involvement, neo-tribe refers to ‘diffuse collections of people that gather intermittently, primarily to have a good time, and share some sense of collective identity’ (Haenfler 2013, p. 11). Neo-tribe has been a popular conceptual tool in studies of diverse music cultures, particularly those manifesting around raves and underground electronic and techno dance cultures as while ‘people gather, [they]… do not share much in the way of an underlying identity or ideology’ (Haenfler 2013, p. 11). In one of their later works,
Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014b, p. 34) claim that neither subculture nor neo-tribe ‘necessarily enable a reimagining of sport and of women… nor do they support the type of questions—of authority and authenticity—raised by roller derby that are so central’ to their analysis; instead, they ‘write roller derby as a community’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b, p. 35). Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014b) also recognise that ‘community’ facilitates their interest in the issues of social organisation, authority, and authenticity that are not central to the concept of neo-tribe.

Alternatively, when exploring the relationship between roller derby and music cultures, Pavlidis (2012) suggests that scene theory offers unique conceptual insights. The loose and independently organised formation of roller derby leagues within the urban landscape makes scene theory both an applicable and useful conceptual tool as it ‘allows a sense of movement and fluidity to be emphasised rather than structure and formality’ (Pavlidis 2012, p. 167). For Pavlidis (2012), scene theory is used to articulate the comingling of music and sport tastes. It is also used to identify connections between local and translocal roller derby activities, particularly in relation to interleague roller derby events or community events, such as the roller derby World Cup.

Sheehan and Vadjunec (2016) have also used scene when they explore spectators’ experiences of live bouts in the Bible Belt, USA. For Sheehan and Vadjunec (2016, p. 541), such sites operate as ‘scenes of embodiment’, and they observe that the spatial dynamics of live roller derby bouts, enables recognition of diverse genders and sexualities in a highly conservative context. Unlike Pavlidis (2012), however, Sheehan and Vadjunec’s (2016) use of scene appears to be a colloquial or ‘common sense’ description as they do not situate their analysis within the field of scene
research. Yet, they do emphasise the importance of spatiality in their analysis which is a central characteristic of scene theory.

Subculture, neo-tribe, community, and scene each ‘open up’ or ‘foreclose’ specific analytical avenues. I contend that while subculture is a viable conceptual framework in analyses focused on skater experiences, its tendency to reproduce a resistance paradigm, dualistic frameworks, and limit recognition of diverse groups associated with roller derby makes it ill-suited to this study that instead seeks to explore the collaborative constitution of roller derby. While providing a similar fluidity to neo-tribe, scene is distinguished by its focus on spatiality, and the blurring that occurs between local, translocal, virtual and global forms of cultural activity. In the following section I extend this discussion, outlining the concept of scene and arguing that it is best equipped to attend to the aims of this thesis.

**Making a scene**

*Scene* was developed by scholars of popular music as a more flexible alternative to subculture (Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004; Driver & Bennett 2015; Haenfler 2016; Weinzierl & Muggleton 2003). Often credited to Will Straw (1991, p. 379), scenes ‘reflect and actualize a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups as they coalesce around specific coalitions of musical style’. For Straw (2001, p. 6), *scene* articulates the circulation of cultural activity operating in local and translocal forms as it simultaneously ‘evokes the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life’.
As *scene* rejects the idea of a singular essence, identity, or representation of ‘what’ a culture ‘is’, or who is a part of it, it offers new analytic possibilities for exploring roller derby. While other scholars have been able to offer analyses that account for roller derby’s heterogeneity (such as by using concepts such as neo-tribe or community), *scene’s* advantage is its ability to situate social interaction between individuals, and groups of individuals, at the centre of analysis, helping to deepen our understanding of the ways roller derby is collaboratively produced. In this sense, *scene* is innovative in the ways it can bring widely different forms and degrees of involvement into focus—such as exists between skaters, referees, NSOs and spectators—as it does not prioritise forms of ‘production’ or ‘consumption’, rather, it directs attention to shared scene-making practices in the performance and circulation of cultures (Kahn-Harris 2007). This approach facilitates an analysis of live bouts as sites of belonging and collectivity central to the joint production and performance of roller derby (see Chapter 3 and 4).

In highlighting the ways that culture and sociality play out in everyday life, *scene* facilitates the exploration of a myriad of embodied and collectively performed activities across various sites (Longhurst 2007; Shank 1994). Focusing on interactional processes and spatiality, it conceives of culture and involvement as heterogeneous and loosely bound (Stahl 2004b; Straw 1991; Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015); *scene* is not susceptible to the dualisms typically associated with subculture. In doing so, it draws attention to the ways social activity *shapes* culture. Through social interaction, as well as media production and consumption, participants generate, draw on, and contest, diverse forms of capital, including social, cultural, physical, and erotic as they operate as social resources and contribute to the constitution of roller derby’s system of cultural value. The elasticity of scene theory
in relation to differing forms and degrees of involvement makes it a uniquely suitable concept in this investigation of roller derby, that is driven by the research question: ‘who is roller derby?’.

Exploring the extreme metal scene, Kahn-Harris (2007, p. 13) argues that ‘[s]pace is both an epistemological and a material concept; both real and imagined; both representation and practice (Soja 1989), relating in complex ways to ‘place’ (Lash and Urry 1994)’. Sporting spaces and places in particular are often distinguished by their bounded nature, affording particular social interactions and affective intensities, and discouraging others (Bale & Vertinsky 2004). Spaces and places are not ‘universal, absolute and neutral container[s] in which objects are “placed” and events occur’ (Mansvelt 2005, p. 56); rather, they have subjective meanings produced through social interaction, emotional attachment, and experience as individuals move throughout the urban landscape. Local contexts—such as sporting venues—are also important as they operate as sites where global cultural sensibilities and styles are negotiated through micro-level social interactions and practices (Overell 2014). Focus on local sites of social and cultural activity therefore draw attention to the ways scenes are performed; in roller derby, this foregrounds the role of the live bout and the relationships between different groups of individuals therein.

In various cultural analyses of sport and entertainment, the audience ‘has frequently been viewed as the end-point or even a by-product of processes of cultural production (Crawford 2004, p. 3). This trend is reflected in roller derby scholarship as skaters are frequently the focus of analytic attention, contributing to the construction of skaters as ‘the whole’ of roller derby. Spectators and fans are, however, crucial to sporting events as they ‘become performers (integral parts of the
performance) as well as a spectatorial presence’ (Rinehart 1998, p. 8). Scholars, however, have largely ‘impose[d] rigid distinctions between ‘types’ of supporters, which tend towards caricature and force diverse patterns of behaviour into restrictive categories’ (Crawford 2004, p. 32). This often manifests through dualistic and restrictive frameworks that attempt to classify and often hierarchically organise different forms of social and cultural activity, consumption, and social practices. Such stratification tends to centre on perceptions of authentic versus inauthentic commercial practices and a bipolar distinction between production and consumption (Crawford 2004; Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992).

_Scene_ ‘prioritizes neither production nor consumption, recognising that both ‘moments’ are constituted relationally by participation and circulation’ (Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015, p. 288). Consequently, in this thesis I do not classify spectators based on their practices or degrees of involvement. This is primarily because doing so often ‘promote[s] the activities of certain ‘types’ of supporters over others …[as] only fan behaviour that is seen to conform to certain prerequisites of ‘authentic’ behaviour receives any detailed consideration’ (Crawford 2004, p. 33). In relation to roller derby, adopting such frameworks would also be counter-intuitive to my use of _scene_ as they would restrict the analysis of participants’ fluid and elusive forms of involvement. Instead, I investigate how diverse scene members ‘do’ spectatorship by exploring how they practice roller derby fandom, and represent their place in roller derby.

My analysis of the micro-level processes and interactive practices operating at live bouts led me to recognise that some scene members have gained fame in the roller derby scene, and have become roller derby celebrities. Within the field of celebrity
studies, however, there remains a restriction on the definition of celebrity as primarily mass-mediated, global, and founded on a dichotomous framework of fan/celebrity as consumer/producer respectively. In this study, I utilise Ferris’ (2010) concept of ‘local celebrity’. Local celebrity draws attention to co-present fan/celebrity interactional dynamics and the lived experience of celebrity. According to Ferris (2010), the interactional dynamics central to celebrity—namely, recognisability, relational asymmetry, lack of mutuality and in most instances, a lack of physical contact or interaction—are relevant to mass media generated and local celebrity forms. However, these interactional dynamics, she argues, may be less distinct in local fan/celebrity formations as there is a higher degree of accessibility (Ferris 2010). In this study, I employ the concept of local celebrity due to its ability to account for spectators’ role in the production and maintenance of celebrity, and for its ability to direct attention toward the ways participants experience fame and celebrity. Local celebrity expands the scope of analysis and provides a unique contribution to roller derby scholarship as it stresses the relational quality of scenic activity by focusing on the dynamics that unfold between different groups of individuals within roller derby. This analysis also helps redress the limited analytic engagement with roller derby spectators in the scholarship, positioning them ‘in derby’ rather than as an elusive group of ‘outsiders’ who lack agency.

In attempting to understand ‘who’ constitutes roller derby, I adopt Longhurst’s (2007) use of ‘elective belonging’ to explore the specificity of diverse scene members’ involvement. Longhurst (2007, p. 50, emphasis in original) argues that elective belonging ‘combine[s] modes of agency and the processes of belonging, that are affected by external forces (job moves, for example)’ and are both subjective and highly fluid. In seeing scenes as sites of elective belonging, Longhurst (2007)
advances scene theory by directing attention to modes of collectivity, framing analysis of how individuals negotiate scenes, specifically, by attending to participants’ mobile involvement and media consumption. That is, Longhurst (2007) emphasises both the locatedness of scenic activity (such as local bars and sporting venues), and the need to explore the ways members are positioned within global flows through their everyday use of scene related media. In roller derby, participants frequently identified the importance of new media in their processes of involvement, often listening to roller derby podcasts, reading roller derby blogs and vines on their smart phones, or using social media (such as Facebook) to connect to a wide ranging global roller derby media and social activity.

Longhurst’s (2007) approach draws attention to the ways belonging to a scene ‘surfaces’ in some moments, while in others remains dormant. In Chapter 5 I utilise elective belonging to trace participants’ belonging and highlight the similarities between groups (such as skaters and spectators) in their experiences of ‘being derby’. I also incorporate discussion of new media in participants’ involvement practices, and in Chapter 7 provide an analysis of the ways roller derby is represented through media and league promotional material. In doing so, roller derby’s social imaginary—the ‘imagined’ sense of a social formation as having a shared, and singular, way of seeing, living, and representing a social world (Yar 2014)—is, in fact, inherently heterogeneous. To capture this heterogeneity, I argue that roller derby supports a ‘scenic imaginary’, an array ‘imagined’ and lived roller derby realities.
Scene has, however, been criticised for its limited engagement with micro-level social relations and embodied activities with theorists instead focusing on local-global relations (Driver & Bennett 2015; Glass 2012; Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015). According to Driver and Bennett (2015), Straw’s (1991) work in particular often obscures the significance of localised sociality in producing and maintaining scenes, due to his focus on the translocal flows of musical texts and tastes. While these are important considerations in analyses of social and leisure activities in a globalised society, this focus fails to recognise the importance of routine interaction in scene-making (Glass 2012; Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015). It also fails to capture individuals’ corporeal experiences and investments in scenes (Driver & Bennett 2015).

Alternatively, in his analysis of rock music in Austin, Texas, Shank (1994) mobilises scene to explore the embodied, interactional enlivening produced through localised activity. For Shank (1994), the utility of scene emerges from its ability to articulate the multidimensional nature of loosely bound, leisure-focused clusters of social and cultural activity. Overell (2014, p. 12) uses a similar approach. By focusing on participants’ embodied experiences of the grindcore scene in Melbourne, Australia and Osaka, Japan, Overell (2014, p. 12) argues that such ‘processes generate a feeling of being in place’. For Overell (2014, p. 13), the focus on embodied experiences at grindcore events illuminate the ways the ‘self, as a bordered, individualised subject, is effaced via the affective intensity of the gig’. Focus on the corporeal investment and experience of scenes, is important because ‘bodies are not just the ends of doing music scenes—they are also the means by which scenes must be continuously re-produced’ (Driver & Bennett 2015, p. 100, emphasis in original).
The ‘key here is the process whereby the affective richness of scene (as a cultural phenomenon) is produced’ (Driver & Bennett 2015, p. 110).

Where Overell (2014) focuses on affective experiences, Glass (2012), in her study of a punk scene in a small American college town, argues that members ‘do’ scenes. A focus on ‘doing’ shifts attention to scene-making as the accomplishment of routine practices in local settings by emphasising the ‘building blocks by which people originate, create, and manage social life as a whole’ (Glass 2012, p. 698). I draw on this approach as it brings the embodied, relational, and patterned praxis of scene activity that is often lost in studies focused on gender resistance, into focus.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) explore the affective dimensions of skater experiences and of roller derby as a women’s, and feminist, physical sporting practice. By focusing on skaters, their analyses produce a ‘gap’ ripe for further enquiry. Alternatively, my use of scene that focuses on the socio-spatial dimensions of roller derby and incorporates non-skater perspectives, extends roller derby scholarship by exploring the affective experience of roller derby as a spectator sport. Seeking to illuminate the energies of the audience at live bouts, I draw on the work of Ahmed (2004), Anderson (2014), Bissell (2010), and Wetherell (2012) to advance discussion of the feelings of enlivening and being ‘caught up’ in collective euphoria often expressed by participants, and obscured in most roller derby research. Specifically, I incorporate Wetherell’s (2012) concept of ‘affective practice’, and scholarship on ‘affective atmospheres’ (Anderson 2014; Bissell 2010; Edensor 2015) to explore the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of live bout experiences.
Affective practice:

focuses on the emotional as it appears in social life and tries to follow what participants do. It finds shifting, flexible and often over-determined figurations rather than simple lines of causation, character types and neat emotion categories (Wetherell 2012, p. 4 2012).

For Wetherell (2012, p. 23), the term practice ‘is elastic enough to guide thinking about the patterning of extraordinary, spontaneous, and one-off affective activities’. As a result, focus on affective practice directs analysis towards the ongoing, typically unconscious, bodily ‘meaning-making’ processes operating at live bouts. It is useful in this study of roller derby as it draws attention to the experience of being ‘in place’, enabling analysis of the plurality of subjective experiences, while simultaneously recognising the intersubjective feelings the live bout can evoke, such as joy, excitement, belonging, and happiness. This concept draws attention to affective responses as frequently ‘patterned’, surfacing in response to the relationships unfolding between individuals (and material objects) at social events.

At live bouts—as with other sport and leisure events—one is enveloped in an atmosphere of shared intensities. The collective, atmospheric, ‘contagious’, and ‘circulating’ dimensions of affective experience have gained substantial scholarly interest and are at the fore of a new direction in studies of affect. Scholars such as Ahmed (2004), Anderson (2014), Bissell (2010), Edensor (2015) and Wetherell (2012b)—amongst others—theorise the ways affect ‘moves’ between and across bodies rather than being confined to the individual.
I utilise the concept ‘atmosphere’ to explore the affective experience of the live bout for two reasons. Firstly, it is a term widely used by participants to ‘make sense’ of the tone or ambiance of roller derby bouts as it used to explain the ways they are ‘caught up’ in the energies of those around them. Secondly, it extends my socio-spatial analysis of roller derby as a scene as ‘the term atmosphere reminds us of situatedness and immersion within an environment rather than a hyperactive world of endless flows and relations’ (Anderson 2014, p. 148). Yet, ‘atmospheres do not simply take over a subject, enveloping the individual without resistance or participation’ (Edensor 2015, p. 83), instead, they draw attention to the ways affects may be produced through an array of interactions between subjects, objects, and sites. Exploring live bouts as affective atmospheres therefore facilitates an analysis of the ways live bouts operate as ‘living’ formations that suffuse places and spaces, yet ‘exceed the ensembles from which they emanate’ (Anderson 2014, p. 160); that is, they ‘are a kind of indeterminate affective excess through which intensive space-times are created and come to envelop specific bodies; sites, objects, people, and so on, all may be atmospheric or may feel and be moved by atmospheres’ (Anderson 2014, p.160). This concept reinforces my argument that the roller derby scene is inherently heterogeneous and collectively produced as it draws attention to the specific spatial contexts—such as the nature of the venue and location, degree of illumination, and the intensity of team rivalries or competition—within which affective intensities unfold and are maintained (Bissell 2010; Edensor 2012, 2015).

Using *scene*, brings non-skater contributions into focus as it foregrounds the relational nature of performances (Longhurst 2007; Shank 1994). Throughout this thesis I argue that spectators are not passive consumers; instead, they are part of relational practices of scene-making as they are enveloped in, and actively contribute
to, the performance of the scene (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998; Longhurst 2007). The roller derby scene is composed of diverse members whose involvement varies in kind and degree. Involvement also often fluctuates as interest and available time causes ebbs and flows, and is messy, as members move between roles and/or occupy multiple positions simultaneously; they are skaters and spectators, referees and media personnel, or, they move through the scene, being spectators then NSOs, skaters then referees. These complex arrangements and forms of belonging and involvement emphasise the need to recognise diverse roles and thus enrich analysis by incorporating the complex and unfixed role of non-skaters to the analysis of roller derby. In this thesis, I trace involvement as an ongoing, multi-dimensional negotiation of scenic spaces, places, embodied experiences, and relationships, beyond restrictive in/out and authentic/inauthentic frameworks that concepts such as subculture cannot capture.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature that informs this study of roller derby as a scene. First, I explored frameworks and debates associated with gender and sport and contextualised women’s sporting participation in the contemporary context. This revealed that despite numerous campaigns, women’s sport continues to be marginalised, subordinated, and trivialised, while female athletes (particularly at elite levels) remain highly sexualised and under-represented within a masculine sporting culture.

Second, my analysis turned to the field of non-traditional sports, often referred to as alternative, extreme, or lifestyle sports. These activities have been seen as offering opportunities to challenge mainstream sport and values, and as providing sites for the
reconfiguration of relations of power, including those of gender, class, and ‘race’ (Rinehart 2000). Roller derby, as a DIY women’s full contact sport has frequently been associated with this field. From reviewing this literature—specifically, the contributions of Finley (2010), Carlson (2010), Gieseler (2014), Peluso (2011) and Parry (2016)—it is clear that roller derby scholars are overwhelmingly focused on whether the sport supports forms of gender resistance or conformity. In response, in the third section I argued that while such approaches provide useful insights on some of the ways skaters negotiate femininity, the use of dualistic frameworks (alternative/mainstream, in/out) and focus on gender resistance, limits the analytic potential of much of the research on roller derby. Specifically, I contend that such analyses are ill-equipped to explore the experiences of diverse non-skaters in roller derby, or the forms of social and cultural activity that operate alongside gender resistive behaviours. For instance, there are no known analyses of roller derby imagery in the scholarship. There are also almost no studies that explore the experiences of non-skaters, such as NSOs, referees, and spectators in the constitution and experience of roller derby.

Fourth, a review of recent literature indicated that roller derby scholarship is becoming increasing sophisticated, particularly in the work of Breeze (2015) and the numerous publications by Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). This research offers new analytical directions in the study of roller derby that have previously been obscured by scholars’ focus on gender resistance. Yet, while Breeze (2015), and Pavlidis and Fullagar (2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) foreground the need for researchers who explore roller derby to remain sensitive to the diverse and highly mutable dimensions of involvement and experiences of roller derby, their analyses remain focused on skater narratives. Recognising the insights they provide and the
potential of their analytic frameworks and findings, in this thesis I incorporate many of their ideas, extending such work to an analysis of roller derby as a scene.

In the fifth section I examined the diverse conceptual tools employed in analyses of roller derby, and evaluated their applicability to this study. The aim of this section was to establish and justify the choice I made to use scene rather than concepts such as subculture, neo-tribe, or community in this study of roller derby. I contend that these concepts offer different avenues of analysis, and that while each is relevant to the study of roller derby, scene is best suited to my research interests due to its elasticity, and focus on socio-spatiality. Finally, I established my conceptual framework and demonstrated the analytic potential of scene to extend the field of roller derby study and open new areas of inquiry.

The next chapter brings together these concepts and debates with a discussion of the thesis methodology, to enable a thorough understanding of the research questions.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This thesis is the product of an ethnographic study of the roller derby scene. Ethnography is an embodied approach to researching social and cultural phenomena, enabling the researcher—through participant observation and other methods—to immerse themselves in the social, cultural and interactional elements of specific domains (Boellstorff et al. 2012). It is a specific ‘way of knowing’ that ‘constitutes a radically distinctive way of understanding social activity in situ’ (Atkinson 2014, pp. 3-4). Ethnography focuses on the emplacement of people’s lived experiences, drawing attention to places, spaces, practices, interactions and sensory dimensions of social worlds (Pink 2015). It has the ‘ability to integrate the materiality and meaning of actions and practices at local, translocal, and global scales’ (Low 2016, p. 3), making this qualitative approach uniquely suitable for this analysis of the roller derby scene.

This investigation offers a thematic analysis of data generated through a year of participant observation, 26 semi-structured interviews with diverse scene members, and visual and textual analysis of roller derby media and promotional material. This combination of methods facilitated the analysis of the multidimensional nature of the roller derby scene as it moves between different spaces and places in the urban landscape. Using a mixed method approach also enabled analysis of the ways roller derby is produced through shared performances, and circulates through diverse forms of media and communication. This chapter will discuss the methods employed
in the collection of this data, and their relationship to the analytic framework utilised in this thesis.

**Focus Leagues**

My analysis of the Sydney roller derby scene was located within the urban landscape through a focus on two Sydney-based leagues: Western Sydney Rollers (WSR) and South Side Derby Dolls (S2D2). WSR was established in September 2008, while S2D2 was founded January 2012. WSR operates in Greater Western Sydney, training and holding bouts at Penrith Valley Regional Sports complex in Cambridge Park, Penrith. S2D2 is based in Sydney’s South West, their member catchment area includes St George and Sutherland Shire, and they have many members from the Macarthur region. S2D2 host bouts at the Whitlam Leisure Centre in Liverpool, Sydney’s South West. During the period that I conducted fieldwork, WSR maintained a league of almost 100 members. As a newly formed league, S2D2 initially supported less than 30 members. Both leagues are community-focused, emphasising sociality, athleticism, health and fitness, and comradery.

WSR was chosen due to its longevity and proximity to the researcher, while S2D2 was approached due to its extensive appropriation of *Star Wars* in the formation of their league and promotional material. Given the dominance of punk, rockabilly, and pin-up styles in roller derby, the use of *Star Wars* represented to me what seemed an intriguing and original approach to roller derby.

Both leagues maintain interleague teams; WSR has ‘The Boutlaws’, and S2D2 has founded two: ‘The Force’ and ‘The Empire’. Between December 2011 and May 2013 during the period that I conducted fieldwork, WSR had four intraleague teams:
‘The Hellfire Honeys’, ‘The Zombees’, ‘The Circuit-Break-Hers’, and the ‘Fearleaders’. These have since been replaced with ‘The B-52 Bombshells’, ‘The Riot Squad’, and ‘The Blackheart Brawlers’. WSR has also founded a junior roller derby team, and in 2016, established a ‘co-ed’ team. The establishment of a co-ed team reconfigures normative sex-segregated sporting practice, and requires further analysis both to extend our understanding of roller derby and to explore an alternative sporting structure. Such an analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

Participant observation

I just arrived at the ‘OMGWTFBBQ’ [a social event hosted by roller derby media for scene members] and have already spoken to the only person I know: Big Kahuna. I look around at the small groups of people chatting and laughing, setting up tables and games. I don’t know any of them yet. I overhear two skaters discussing the turn to a greater focus on athleticism; some leagues are dropping ‘skate outs’ from live bouts. Interested, I look over and one of the skaters notices me. ‘Hey there, I don’t think I’ve seen you before. I’m Pepà la Pow!’ she says, extending her hand. Smiling, I reply, ‘Yeah (laughs), I don’t know many people yet. I’m Jade’. I reach forward to shake her hand. ‘No, no, no’ she laughs, ‘what’s your derby name?’. ‘Oh’ I say, ‘I don’t have one’. Seeing her questioning expression, I explain, ‘I’m not a league member, I’m not a skater, I’m studying roller derby for my PhD’. Instantly her eyes widen and she exclaims, ‘Fuck! Really?! That’s friggin’ awesome! You can get a Doctorate in roller derby? We’ll have to think of a name for you… How about ‘Dr Derby’?! Fuck yeah, that’s what I’m calling you now’. Laughing, Pepà la Pow! turns and taps someone on the shoulder, ‘Hey, have you met Dr Derby?’ she exclaims, pointing over her shoulder at me, ‘She’s studying roller derby! For her PhD! Awesome, right?’. Suddenly, a bunch of smiling faces turn my way and I find myself being introduced. Then questions emerge, and we are chatting and joking and laughing as we discuss this thing called roller derby (JA fieldnotes 21/1/12).
Central to ethnographic study, participant observation produces studies rich in detail by being attentive to the micro-level processes and sensory dimensions of experience that define involvement in social and cultural activities (Atkinson 2014). This method facilities exploration of cultural life as ‘not simply a series of memorable events’, but rather existing ‘above all in the minutiae of everyday life’ (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 81). Exploring roller derby as a scene, participant observation provided access to the multidimensional nature of roller derby, drawing attention to the field of social activity to explore how roller derby is collectively constituted. This focus reflects what Pink (2015, p. 28) calls ‘emplaced ethnography’ which, she argues, ‘attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds, and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment’. This focus further directs attention to ‘both the emplacement of people who participate in our ethnographic research and the ethnographers’ own emplacement as individuals in and as part of specific research contexts’ (Pink 2015, p. 28).

I engaged in participant observation for over a year, between December 2011 and May 2013. I conducted observation at training sessions with WSR and S2D2, at live bouts with a range of leagues in New South Wales, and at numerous social and charity events throughout Sydney. Participating as a spectator was a methodological choice that facilitated direct personal engagement with scene-making practices and the multisensory dimensions of roller derby events that are often obscured in analyses of skaters’ experiences.

As a spectator, I was sensitive to the collective performance of the scene, my position amongst the crowd facilitating analysis of the relations between individuals and groups of individuals (such as skaters and spectators). Attending training
sessions and various social and charity events (such as the ‘OMGWTFBBQ’ described in the excerpt above) I participated in scene-making activities beyond the public event of the live bout. My participation as a spectator and researcher, therefore, did not foreclose access to the inner workings of leagues or the unique experiences (physical, social, or otherwise) of skaters. I chose to research roller derby as a spectator because it is uniquely suited to exploring the relations between scene members as they collectively constitute the roller derby scene. In this section I detail the different field sites of participant observation, including training sessions, live bouts, and social and charity events. I also discuss how such experiences were ‘captured’ and translated into language.

During fieldwork, I attended 20 training sessions evenly divided between S2D2 and WSR, held at Hurstville Aquatic Leisure Centre and Penrith Regional Valley Sports Centre respectfully. For skaters, training sessions are sites of physical transformation involving extensive exercise—including on-skate fundamentals and off-skate endurance and strength training—and for more experienced skaters, training sessions provide scrimmage practice that is on-track pack and strategy training. Training sessions are also integral to non-skater development, including referees and NSOs. While referees often train alongside skaters in fundamental skating drills, referees and NSOs also conduct specific role-based training either concurrent with skater sessions, or at alternate times.

Training sessions provide opportunities for members to be socialised into the roller derby scene and encourage a sense of community (Cohen 2008; Donnelly 2012). Attending training sessions facilitated the exploration and analysis of naturally occurring interactions outside of the theatricality of live bouts, while also providing
insights into routine processes and embodied practices of ‘becoming’ skaters. An incident I witnessed at a WSR training session draws attention to their importance as spaces of physical, social, and cultural activity.

[The Hellfire Honeys] are lined up against the wall of the venue. They have been instructed by their (male) coach to skate one at a time toward the track turn, and at the pinnacle, jump over their coaches’ outstretched legs as he lies across the track. Standing at the turn exit, I see the first skater, looking determined and focused, skating into the turn and picking up speed. As she reaches her coach she, landing solidly on the other side. Her teammates cheer and she heads back to the group, receiving high-fives. The second skater makes the turn, jumps, and lands successfully, and again the team voices their approval. The third skater, making her way to the turn looks to be coming on a lot faster. She pushes off the track, her skates clearing her coach’s legs, but she lands badly. Her arms windmill as she seems to run on her toes, her momentum pushing her forward as she tries to keep her balance. Inevitably, however, she falls. There is a resounding smash as her body hits the floor, her arms just managing to protect her face as she slides across the wooden floorboards, coming to a stop almost directly at my feet.

There is a moment of stunned silence, and then the skater’s teammates suddenly cheer as one; the sound is deafening. They raise their arms in the air, they whistle, yell, and laugh, pointing at their fallen teammate, nudging their friends, and clapping their hands at the stack they have just witnessed. Amongst the roar of noise, I can hear skaters yelling; ‘Fuck! That was a mad stack!’, ‘It was better than mine last week!’, ‘She’ll get a real beaut’ from that!’’. The skater slowly gets to her feet, and as she turns she raises both hands in the air with closed fists, acknowledging her teammates’ display as one of praise (JA fieldnotes 21/6/12).

*Scene* opens discussion of roller derby as a field of social relations beyond a gender resistive/gender conforming framework. While injuries have been recognised as ‘badges of honour’ and part of the reconfiguration of femininity and the female body (Peluso 2011; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), using a scenic perspective highlighted the ways injury, risk, and pain are negotiated in practice and are embedded in specific fields of social relations. This incident, in glorifying the skater’s tenacity and
demonstrating skaters’ intersubjective negotiation of risk and potential injury, draws
attention to an underlying system of roller derby capital—including social, cultural,
and physical dimensions—that I analyse in Chapter 6.

Conducting observation at training sessions assisted in establishing a rapport with
league members and negotiating ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ positions. Attending my
first S2D2 training session I used my own fandom and identification as a ‘nerd’ to
initiate conversation.

As I walk amongst the skaters putting on their gear, I look around and
I know I made the right choice in wearing my Star Wars Stormtrooper t-shirt. Everywhere I look skaters and NSOs have
elements of nerd culture on their clothing, or as stickers on their
helmets. The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy ‘thumb’, ‘42’ and
‘DON’T PANIC’ written on the back of a helmet; Star Wars’ rebel
alliance emblem and Yoda stickers; leggings printed with characters
from Adventure Time and Star Wars, and one referee with a Pac-Man
tattoo. By the end of training it seems like half the league has
approached me to compliment me on my ‘cool shirt’ and to chat
about derby. I think I’m in! (JA fieldnotes 29/3/12).

Wearing my Star Wars t-shirt functioned as an ‘ice-breaker’, conveying my ‘nerd’
identity to league members in a distinctly informal cultural setting. I also
demonstrated my ‘nerdy’ knowledge in social interactions. Seeing ‘42’ on a skater’s
helmet, I started conversation with a quote from Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy:
‘what is the answer to the ultimate question?’ [to which the answer is 42]. Such
exchanges provided a shared point of interest, helping to cultivate a rapport with
scene members and normalise my presence in the scene.

Participant observation also involved the cultivation of informal relationships. ‘Key
informants’—‘individuals who prove particularly benevolent and helpful as we
navigate an unfamiliar culture’ (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 78)—were invaluable in
this study or roller derby. Such individuals facilitate the research process, conveying their expert knowledge, assisting with recruitment, and functioning as advocates (Boellstorff et al. 2012). Of particular assistance were media contributors: Big Kahuna, De-Nominator, and Pepâ la Pow!. Big Kahuna and De-Nominator are both members of S2D2 and part of the Viva la Derby podcast. Enthusiastic about the research, these members provided introductions to fellow members, extended invitations to various social events—including the ‘OMGWTFBBQ’ and post-training dinners—and each volunteered to participate in an interview. Pepâ la Pow! functioned as a mediator between myself/my study and WSR. She was invaluable in gaining access to WSR. After I contacted WSR via email to no avail, Pepâ la Pow! provided unsolicited assistance, raising the issue of the study in a committee meeting, and receiving approval for me to have access to training sessions and WSR skaters. She volunteered to participate in an interview and assisted with the recruitment of other participants. Most importantly, Pepâ la Pow! shared, often in very causal ways, her experiences and passion for roller derby that produced a lasting impression of the affectual and emotional dimensions of scenic life.

I engaged in participant observation as a spectator at 13 live bouts hosted by various leagues, including WSR, S2D2, Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby (WIRD), Sydney Roller Derby League (SRDL), Newcastle Roller Derby League (NRDL), and Canberra Roller Derby League (CRDL). I also attended Eastern Region Roller Derby (ERRD) competition in 2012 that was hosted by WSR. ERRD is a competition between leagues from the East coast of Australia—such as SRDL and WIRD—competing in a round robin over multiple days. ERRD encourages interleague relations and helps advance the sporting professionalism of Australian leagues. Live bouts are focal points of scenic activity; they are where roller derby is
collaboratively performed, fostering interactive scene-making practices such as the post-bout high-five, and they are sites where roller derby culture is generated, circulated, and contested.

I predominantly attended live bouts with members of S2D2 or WSR. Meeting at the venue, such as at the State Sport Centre at Sydney Olympic Park, we would generally find a spot along the track in suicide seating. Members would typically wear league t-shirts, and would sometimes bring homemade signs to support a team or player. Sitting with league members was a highly sociable event that involved ongoing communal commentary on strategy, discussions of social relationships and tensions between players or leagues, and criticisms of referee decisions or skater actions. S2D2 players were vocal about what they saw as ‘dirty derby’ (unsportsmanlike behaviour or illegal moves) and the need for ‘safe play’. The significance of such aspects was reflected in interview data, and this is discussed further in Chapter 6. Accompanying scene members and sitting in suicide seating afforded interactive and intense bodily experiences of roller derby. The affective experiences produced—such as excitement and joy—informede the direction of interview questions and avenues of data analysis that shaped this thesis, and form the basis of analysis in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

I attended some live bouts with friends and family. These events were less conducive to data gathering. As roller derby is a complex sport, at these events I was often bombarded with questions regarding ‘what’ roller derby is, how it is played, and what was happening on the track. Attendance at live bouts with friends or family also frequently involved sitting in the stands rather than in suicide seating. The distance from the track made me feel disconnected and I was less likely to engage in
the post-bout high five, which, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, is a significant, collaborative scene-making practice that defines skaters’ accessibility in the roller derby scene. Participating as a spectator, however, demonstrates how bouts are not simply the stage for skater performances, but are embodied and collective productions in which the role of non-skaters is central.

I also conducted participant observation at various social and charity events, including S2D2’s league launch party; multiple WSR’s bout after-parties; post-training dinner and drinks with S2D2 and WSR; the ‘OMGWTFBBQ’; S2D2’s Christmas picnic; trivia nights, and a roller derby blood drive with members of S2D2. Most events were held in local bars. Similar to Donnelly’s (2014) experience of roller derby, drinking alcohol was integral to these social situations and while I participated in these events to develop social relationships and a rapport with scene members, concerns for the quality of the research ensured that I remained below the legal limit.

Participant observation attends to the embodied experiences of social and cultural phenomena within specific social worlds. Yet, according to Pink (2014, pp. 592-3), ethnographic study needs to more fully engage with the experience of ‘doing’ research to explore the ways this is ‘neither dominated by nor reducible to a visual mode of understanding’. Pink (2015) argues that while the observable dimensions of social worlds—including social practices and forms of sociality—is of central importance, researchers should also attend to their own multisensory experiences. Pink describes this approach as ‘emplaced sensory ethnography’. A focus on emplacement involves recognising and reflecting upon the ways researchers’ sensory experiences are also central to the production and interpretation of social
phenomena. This, therefore, meant I that I needed to attend to the ways I too was an agent in the constitution of the roller derby scene and the performance of roller derby events.

Conducting participant observation across diverse sites, I found that sound was particularly salient and was central to the distinctions between different scenic events.

The venue is large; a giant open room of basketball courts set out in a long row, with stands at the end furthest from us. S2D2 have booked the last two courts, creating a makeshift track with tape over the permanently marked out basketball courts of Hurstville’s local sports centre. We are divided from a series of couples playing badminton by a net that spans the width of the building. The sounds are echoing off the walls, producing an atmosphere heavy with an assortment of conflicting sounds: from the excited incoherent babble of badminton players and the squeaks of tennis shoes, to the chorus of solid thuds as skates come down on the wooden floor, the skaters propelling themselves around the track in a series of casual warm-up laps.

While some skaters are geared up—with helmets, knee, wrist, and elbow pads—and are already on the track, other skaters are sitting in twos or threes along the wall, strapping on skates and fishing through their massive derby gear bags for a stray pad or other piece of equipment. They are all in brightly coloured garments, wearing a mismatched combination of athletic gear and clothing patterned in nerd culture. Purple, S2D2’s league colour, is particularly dominant. The atmosphere is one of routine and excitement. These members are all relatively experienced skaters who have come from another league, their preparations are practiced—steady and quick but not rushed—and I can feel the excitement in the air as they are eager to get onto the track (JA fieldnotes 29/3/12).

As leagues often share and negotiate local spaces and places, training sessions with WSR revealed a similar soundscape. Sound also distinguished training sessions from live bouts, and from social and cultural events. Live bouts are not just seen, but as they produce an overwhelming cacophony of sounds—yelling, clapping, talking, cheering, whistling, thumping, crashing—they produce a stimulating atmosphere that
is heard and felt. This kind of sensuous knowledge is obscured or omitted when focusing only on the visual dimensions of experience (Allen-Collinson & Owton 2014; Sparkes 2009). According to Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007, p. 116), ‘we are still lacking a more ‘fleshy’ perspective, a ‘carnal sociology’ (to borrow Nick Crossley’s [1995] evocative expression) of sport’.

Using scene and ethnography, in this thesis I investigate some of the ‘fleshy’ dimensions of roller derby as they are experienced across different sites. Chapter 3 explores forms of embodied enlivening at live bouts, Chapter 4 focuses on the importance of haptic communication in fan/celebrity interactions, and in Chapter 5 I investigate the importance of proximity and the sensory experience of the live bout to participants’ feelings of being ‘more involved’. Capturing such phenomena, however, can be difficult.

While some researchers record notes digitally (Boellstorff et al. 2012), take photographs, or record soundscapes (Atkinson 2014; Makagon & Neumann 2008), I predominantly journaled my observations and reflections. I felt that journaling would enable me to ‘not only observe and document other people’s sensory categories and behaviours but seek routes through which to develop experience-based empathetic understandings of what others might be experiencing and knowing’ (Pink 2015, p. 98). I have endeavoured to capture the life of the scene through a series of first person accounts written in a narrative style that is intended to evoke an affective response in the reader by drawing them into my experiences of roller derby. Consequently, while there are limitations to the ways one can articulate the multisensory dimensions of embodied experience through language (Sparkes 2009),
I have attempted to overcome this through the ways that I write about these experiences.

Downes, Breeze, and Griffin (2013, p. 115) identify some of the difficulties associated with taking field notes, and explain that ‘the performance of being a researcher visibly making fieldnotes can contribute to a feeling of discomfort among participants aware of being researched’. Using an A5, hardcover notebook I was able to negotiate the tension Downes, Breeze, and Griffin (2013) identify as it was functionally useful—enabling me to write easily while walking, sitting, or standing—yet inconspicuous, enabling me to take notes discreetly.

Training sessions were conducive to recording observations; participation was minimal and league members were mostly engaged in various participatory activities. Live bouts involved greater bodily participation; I responded to competitive play and the pulsing enthusiasm of the other spectators pressed in around me: clapping, thrusting our arms in the air, brandishing signs, and yelling, often incoherently but also to each other, to the skaters, to the referees. Being part of the performance often made note taking difficult. Furthermore, attending bouts with WSR or S2D2 were social events where taking field notes would have been both disruptive to the social dynamics of the group, and would have distracted me from the competition and the feeling of immersion in the live bout, undermining my participation as a spectator. In these situations, I typically took shorthand notes where possible (such as at half-time or in the bathroom line) and produced more detailed notes after a bout. These were written while travelling home on public transport, or via an audio recorder while driving that I later transposed to my fieldnote journal.
Semi-structured interviews

Ethnographic studies often compliment participant observation with interviews as they provide opportunities to explore individual narratives and subjective forms of representation (Ritchie et al. 2013). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they combine sufficient structure for the comparative analysis of central themes and an inherent flexibility that enables the researcher, through co-constructed exchanges, to pursue new or unexpected information (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2015). Using open-ended questions and maintaining an informal researcher/participant dynamic provides a space for participants to convey their own meanings, experiences, and representations of social phenomena (Lapan 2011). In this study, data was generated through a co-constructed narrative and reciprocal relationship, typically involving the exchange of personal observations and experiences of roller derby. Consequently, while I developed a series of interview question guides (see Appendices), interviews were conversational rather than structured using a question-answer format. This method enabled me to obtain original and detailed data on scene-making practices and participants’ subjective understandings of the roller derby scene.

Data was gathered from 26 semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Most interviews lasted around 90 minutes, with two lasting almost three hours. The participants of the longer interviews were particularly passionate, yet I maintained focus on participant care and principles of ethical research. While I asked on multiple occasions if they would like to conclude the interview, they preferred to continue discussion beyond the usual interview duration.
All participants were informed via an information sheet of interview requirements and foci, and all gave their written consent to participate in an audio-recorded interview. All participants with a derby name were also given the option to be de-identified via a pseudonym, or have their derby name utilised in this thesis and related work. This was completely optional and is further discussed later in this chapter. All participants with a derby name enthusiastically consented to its use, except one, who was subsequently de-identified. All other participants have been given pseudonyms. Interviews were conducted at the participants’ discretion, and in public locations—parks, cafes, University campuses, and local sport venues—convenient for the participant. All interviews were recorded using a digital hand-held device, and transcribed in their entirety by the researcher.

Most of the participants are female. Only 4 are male and, while completing this study, none participated in men’s roller derby. Participants’ ages range from 22 to 59 years old. The participants range in sexual orientation and gender identity: 6 identify as lesbians, 2 as bisexual, 1 as queer, 12 identify as straight, and 5 did not disclose their sexual orientation. One non-binary gender participant, Cameron, identified as a lesbian. While Cameron does not identify as transgender, they prefer either female (i.e. her) or collective pronouns (i.e. ‘they’), and often shifted between such terms when referring to themselves throughout the interview. In respect for Cameron’s identity, I also use collective pronouns when referring to them in the thesis.

Of the 26 participants in this study, 23 are Caucasian, 1 is Asian, 1 Hawaiian, and 1 Latin American. This reflects findings in other roller derby research (Breeze 2014; Donnelly 2012; Liu, Bradley & Burk 2016; Parry 2016; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2012). Due to the demographic make-up of this study—and the roller derby scene—an
intersectional analysis of lived experience is beyond the scope of this thesis. Analysis of roller derby imagery in Chapter 7, however, explores the intersection of gender and race in representations of women in promotional material and logos.

Most members of WSR or S2D2 live in either Western Sydney or South West Sydney, although four live in Sydney’s Inner West. While league membership is typically determined by proximity to leagues, spectatorship is more mobile. Participants (including myself) regularly travelled an hour or more to and from bouts. Some participants often travelled 3 or 4 hours to attend bouts in Newcastle, or longer when travelling interstate for bouts in Queensland, Victoria, or Australian Capital Territory.

Interviewing this array of scene members necessitated the development of loosely defined groups, namely: Group A, skaters (see Table 1); Group B, ‘non-skaters’ (see Table 2); and Group C, spectators (see Table 3).6 This division was a logistical decision aimed at managing the interview process; however, as will be discussed later in this section, categorising participants based on their role in the scene posed its own issues as the fluid nature of participants’ involvement blurs boundaries between interview groups. Following tables of demographic information, the remainder of this section focuses on recruitment, the interview process, and details issues encountered throughout this research.

6 See Appendix 6 for copies of Tables 1, 2, and 3.
Table 1: Group A – Skaters’ demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>League</th>
<th>Secondary role/s</th>
<th>Skating Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pepâ la Pow!</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Media – writer for RDAU.</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BatNataZ</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elleter Skelter</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe Da Belle</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Captain – Hellfire Honeys</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meg 4 Mercy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dame Dead’na</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killabee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Happiness Commissioner</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-Nominator</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Media – Presenter on Viva la Derby podcast</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dita Von Bruiser</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>League President</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Dirty Boots</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hell Pixie</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Committee member - Media</td>
<td>Inactive - Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlett O’Harmer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Inactive - Injury</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Group B – Non-skaters’ demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>League Association</th>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Secondary Role/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SuziEphedrine</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Blue Mountains Roller Derby League (BMRDL)</td>
<td>Roller derby Business owner – Sydney Derby Skates</td>
<td>Skater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikemare</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>BMRDL</td>
<td>Referee</td>
<td>Roller Derby business owner – Sydney Derby Skates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Shutterspeed</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Kahuna</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Media – Via la Derby founder and presenter</td>
<td>S2D2 Vice President; bout commentator; fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theda Bastard</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Media – Roller derby website founded</td>
<td>WSR Skater (Injured)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sintax</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Wollongong Roller Derby League (WIRD), and S2D2</td>
<td>Referee</td>
<td>Fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zipee Sweetfeet</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Ex-Skater</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Group C – Spectators’ demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Spectator of:</th>
<th>Secondary role/Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Husband of S2D2 Skater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Mother of WSR Skater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>Skater with Sydney University Roller Derby League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>Non-skating official for SRDL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>WSR Fresh Meat Skater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment**

I employed different strategies to recruit participants. All participants in Group A (skaters), and some from Group B (‘non-skaters’), approached me at training sessions. Announcements were made at WSR and S2D2 training sessions, detailing the research, introducing me as Dr Derby, and requesting interview participants. Interested members could volunteer or request further information during training sessions.
Most participants, however, were identified through ‘snowballing’. Snowballing refers to the act of developing a rapport with one or more participants, from whom—through social interaction or a direct request—other potential participants are identified (Ritchie et al. 2013; Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2015). This is a useful resource when attempting to access close-knit or elusive social networks, such as in studies of criminal activity (Atkinson & Flint 2001). Snowballing does have disadvantages, primary amongst them is, in relying on referrals, selected participants may be confined to a particular relationship network (Atkinson & Flint 2001; Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). However, as snowballing is only one strategy amongst many used to recruit participants in this study, and as snowballing was used in both leagues rather than confined to a single social context, I am confident this thesis overcomes such potential issues.

Alternatively, some Group B (‘non-skaters’) participants were identified through discussion with scene members and engagement with roller derby media, including HAM. This combined activity resulted in the identification of important personalities and/or roles in the scene. For example, subscribing to HAM resulted in the identification of renowned Sydney-based roller derby photographer, Captain Shutterspeed. As a roller derby photographer, Captain Shutterspeed who was included in this research because he provides a unique perspective on live bouts and broader social and cultural dynamics as he moves between roller derby sites and is a well-connected member of the scene. Initial contact with participants identified through snowballing or observation was via an email that included an information sheet detailing the research and interview process. Respondents were typically enthusiastic, often suggesting a convenient time, place, and location to conduct an interview within the week.
Recruiting Group C (spectators) participants was more difficult. The initial recruitment strategy involved printing hundreds of information sheets and distributing them to spectators at the entrance to live bouts. This process was approved by WSR and S2D2. As a bout commentator, Big Kahuna also announced the research project at live bouts. However, this approach proved unsuccessful, yielding only three potential participants. Of the three, two asked if it was paid research—it was not—then opted out. The third resulted in an interview.

A second strategy to recruit Group C (spectators) participants involved displaying information sheets on University campuses, including at Western Sydney University, Macquarie University, and Sydney University. This approach yielded one interested participant and resulted in an interview. The third, and most successful strategy, was snowballing. WSR and S2D2 members suggested potential participants, such as friends and family. Other participants were recommended by friends or colleagues of mine who were aware of the study. All Group C (spectator) participants were initially contacted via email.

**Interview process**

Participants’ wide-ranging forms and degrees of involvement necessitated the development of interview question guides tailored to each group and/or the specific role of the participant. All efforts were made, however, to ensure data was also comparative. This was primarily achieved through the inclusion of common questions/themes, particularly relating to initial contact with roller derby, and their live bout experiences. As this thesis explores roller derby as a scene, all interviews were informed and directed by the conceptual framework, focusing on interaction
between members, embodied experiences of local events, fluid forms of involvement and use of media in the circulation of roller derby culture.

Group A interviews explored participants’ initial contact and attraction to roller derby, their feelings about the sport’s physicality and theatricality, the contact between skaters and spectators at live bouts, and their experiences with, and recovery from, injury (see Appendix 1). The use of simple, open-ended questions such as ‘how do you feel about the physicality of roller derby?’ and ‘what’s your favourite part about a live bout?’ enabled participants to ‘make meaning’ and establish points of interest.

Using semi-structured interviews also provided scope to deviate from intended themes or topics and pursue new or unexpected aspects, including experiences of fame and the ongoing difficulties of managing involvement in roller derby amongst an array of other commitments, such as in relation to work and family. Such unexpected topics have become central to the thesis argument. For instance, in Chapter 4, I explore the celebration of specific individuals and groups of individuals in the scene, revealing that roller derby supports a unique system of local celebrity that valorises scene members as both ‘extraordinary’ and ‘real’, ‘ordinary’, and accessible. As roller derby skaters are often accorded social and cultural status in the scene, and individual skaters are also often idolised for their abilities and performances, interviewing skaters provides a unique opportunity to explore the lived experience of celebrity from the perspective of celebrities. Informed by scene theory, Group A (skaters) interviews therefore aimed to explore the social, cultural, and physical dimensions of skater experiences, situating them as one group amongst many in the collaborative production of roller derby.
Due to the need to balance focus on the specificity of participants’ involvement with the need for a comparative analysis of main themes, all Group B (‘non-skaters’) interviews contained two sets of questions/topics. The first incorporated general questions used in all interviews (see Appendix 2), including, ‘What first attracted you to roller derby?’, ‘What is your favourite part about live bouts?’, and ‘What do you think about descriptions of roller derby as a ‘women’s sport’?’. Such questions targeted the mobilisation of social and cultural activity within and across spaces and places, scene members’ negotiated involvement—exploring how they navigate different roles, forms and degrees of contribution—and how broader aspects, such as ‘ownership’ and ‘belonging’, are defined, contested, and play out amongst diverse scene members.

The second set of questions was unique to each Group B (‘non-skaters’) interview. I focused on participants’ specialised contributions; for example, I discussed Mikemare’s and Sintax’s training and development as roller derby referees (Appendix 3), and Captain Shutterspeed’s journey to becoming a roller derby photographer (Appendix 4). Each interview explored the participant’s subjective narrative, probing their role in the collaborative production of the roller derby scene. Doing so revealed the scope of roller derby’s cultural formation and reaffirmed the inadequacy of rigid conceptual frameworks (such as subculture) in articulating the fluidity of participants’ roller derby involvement.

The aim of Group C (spectators) interviews was to explore how spectators negotiate involvement in the roller derby scene. While interviews primarily focused on spectators’ embodied experiences and their role in roller derby performances, I also asked about participants’ involvement beyond this localised space. I asked broad, open-ended questions such as, ‘How would you describe your involvement in roller
derby?’, ‘What do you enjoy about going to a roller derby bout?’ and ‘What do you think is similar, and what is different, between bouts you have been to?’ (Appendix 5). These questions enabled participants to define their relationship to roller derby—for instance, whether they identified themselves as ‘fans’—while providing data on what elements spectators attach importance to, and what is superfluous or ambiguous in their experiences of live bouts. Most Group C participants emphasised the atmosphere of the live bout, commonly describing it as ‘electric’, and as having a ‘buzz’ or a ‘strong vibe’.

An unexpected theme that emerged across all interview groups was the importance of the venue in participants’ experiences of roller derby. Primarily, interviewees commenting on the location, size, and socio-historical reputation of the different venues. This data reaffirmed the importance of place in the constitution of the scene and the collaborative performance of roller derby. As a result, the venue is central to the analysis of the live bout provided in Chapter 3, and the forms of fandom and local celebrity in Chapter 4.

There are, however, issues with dividing participants into groups when researching roller derby as a scene, as members typically contribute to roller derby in multiple ways. SuziEphedrine in Group B (see Table 2) was interviewed primarily as a roller derby business owner, even though she is also a skater and founding member of Blue Mountains Roller Derby League. Similarly, while all participants in Group A are skaters (see Table 1), they also frequently spectate at live bouts and identify as fans of roller derby. For example, Pepâ la Pow! is a skater and a spectator, who contributes to roller derby media, and is active in the organisation and management of WSR. I have attempted to account for this diversity and the focus of the interview
by detailing the primary and secondary roles of each interview participant in the supplied demographic tables (see above and Appendix 6).

I also attempted to manage this ‘messiness’ and the aims of the thesis by prioritising interview questions and arranging groups by the intended focus of the interview: Group A focused on skater experiences, Group B explored diverse forms of involvement and contribution (from starting a roller derby business to funding roller derby photography as a hobby), and Group C delved into fan practices and embodied experiences of live bouts. The prioritising of primary and secondary focus detailed in Tables 1, 2, and 3, therefore, may not reflect participants’ self-identification. For example, while I interviewed SuziEphedrine primarily as a roller derby business owner, she may identify primarily as a skater. The focus on roles, therefore, both enables and constrains the analysis of the scene, demonstrating the messiness of roller derby membership and the fluidity of involvement. To explore issues of role-based identification, in Chapter 5 I investigate participants’ elective belonging, and conclude the thesis by returning to question both what and who roller derby is, arguing that ownership and belonging are ongoing, open-ended practices.

This is a small-scale thesis and as a result, there is no scope for a representative sample. Of the 7 ‘non-skater’ interviews in Group B, two (Sintax and Mikemare) are referees and four others (Big Kahuna, De-Nominator, Pepa la Pow! and Theda Bastard) are involved in roller derby media. These interviews are not representative of roller derby referees or media personalities. Instead, they provide diverse critical perspectives that illuminate previously unexplored dimensions of roller derby experience. The breadth of interviews is useful for exploring points of tension, ambiguity, similarity, and difference between roller derby members engaged in very
different activities and social relationships and how they represent roller derby as a sport and culture. Furthermore, the messiness of role-based identification discussed above, and the fluidity and movement inherent in scenes, challenges the idea of representative sampling in this context.

**Media and promotional material**

According to Longhurst (2007, p. 59), a central aspect of *scene* is to ‘point to the way in which a range of media interact with other aspects of social and cultural life to produce ways of belonging that involve active choices’. This dimension of the roller derby scene is significant because it recognises participants’ diffused involvement beyond the live bout, contributing to a greater understanding of roller derby’s cultural formation and members’ multidimensional elective belongings. This ethnographic study of roller derby therefore augmented participant observation and semi-structured interviews with visual and textual analysis of roller derby media and promotional material. Visual and textual data are understood as modes through which we make sense of our social and cultural worlds (Brennen 2012); through visual communication or language, this data constructs roller derby’s scenic imaginary.

This thesis includes media and promotional material gathered from a year’s subscription to the Australian roller derby magazine *Hit & Miss* (HAM), roller derby promotional material, and photographs of roller derby events taken by Captain Shutterspeed.
HAM illuminates common forms of representation, provides insights into systems of cultural value and, by including articles on skate maintenance, referee hand signals, and team/league profiles, targets diverse scene members and demonstrates collective investment in roller derby’s cultural formation. For example, subscribing to HAM revealed reoccurring features—such as ‘Battle of the Breaks and Bruises’ and ‘Glamour Stacks’—that perpetuate the glorification of injuries as a ‘winner’ is identified from members’ submissions in every issue. The coverage included in HAM complements my analysis of bruises in Chapter 6, allowing for more complexity in the analysis of the construction and circulation of various forms of roller derby capital.

The promotional material analysed includes league/team logos, live bout promotional posters and recruitment advertisements that were gathered from local Sydney leagues, including S2D2, WSR, and SRDL. Data selection was informed by a desire to explore both the common trends in visual communication, and aspects that diverged from the norm. This resulted in the inclusion of ‘The Brawling Bar Belles’ logo from SRDL, the only representation of a woman of colour in the Sydney roller derby scene yet identified. Foregrounded in Chapter 7, data analysis highlighted the forms of representation used to establish ‘what’ roller derby is, contributing to discussions of sexual empowerment, objectification, racialisation, and sporting seriousness in roller derby.

This thesis also includes images taken by Captain Shutterspeed, capturing collective scene-making practices and the moments of energised activity that often characterised live bouts. I use these in Chapter 3 when discussing live bouts, and in Chapter 4 as I investigate the constitution and experience of fandom and celebrity in
roller derby. Photographs are used in conjunction with observation and interview data. Any photographs included in this thesis are credited to Captain Shutterspeed and are used with his permission.

This method is used to interpret ‘what’ roller derby is through representation, and explore how such data shapes, and is shaped by, cultural trends and organising principles, such as sporting seriousness and the maintenance of roller derby as a women’s sport. Incorporation of media is also used to expand discussion of roller derby capital, exploring how media cultivates and circulates a system of cultural value, and is embedded in the flows of everyday life.

The following section outlines processes of data analysis, detailing the application of scene theory to data, and elaborating on the use of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) ‘grammar of visual design’ that is used in Chapter 7 as a method of visual analysis.

**Data analysis**

Interview and observational data were analysed using a thematic analysis, and visual materials were evaluated using Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) grammar of visual design. Thematic analysis focuses on ‘identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes’ (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2011, p. 10). The benefit of thematic analysis is its versatility; exploring data in the pursuit of patterns (commonalities, tensions, contrasts) and aberrations, thematic analysis can be used to explore interview transcripts, observational notes, and media (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2011; Rapley 2011). Thematic analysis involves being immersed in data to generate a series of codes that are, over the course of analysis, constantly being refined and reviewed as the research ‘maps’ relevant themes.
As I immersed myself in the data, I could identify patterns and common themes that I then coded. I assigned each code a colour to distinguish relevant sections. This process was entirely tactile, using highlighters and corresponding coloured tabs to mark hard-copy data. Instances of overlap were identified by multiple tabs, producing coloured clusters that marked particularly complex data for further analysis. For example, in Figure 2 (below), the participant’s discussion of injuries and the circulation of associated images relates to multiple themes, including ‘physicality’ (pink), ‘culture’ (green), and ‘sporting seriousness’ (orange).
Coding was constantly refined as the research progressed. For example, what was initially coded as ‘spectatorship’, was later refined to include ‘spectator/skater interaction’, ‘touch’, and ‘celebrity/fame’ to recognise the nuances within broader themes. Analysis also involved alternating back-and-forth between data and theory. This is evident in the analysis of data broadly coded ‘spectatorship’. Examination of this coded data identified patterns concerning spectator/skater interaction—such as emphasis on ‘touch’—that led to research surrounding fandom and celebrity. Such research, including the work by Ferris (2010; 2011), Hills (2002, 2006), and Crawford (2004, 2009), provided the conceptual tools to make sense of the data and enabled a more critical analysis of spectatorship and associated social interactions at live bouts. Analysis of spectator/skater interactional dynamics was advanced through the application of Ferris’ (2010) ‘local celebrity’ which, unlike global forms, is distinguished by accessibility and reduced asymmetry. The incorporation of fan and celebrity studies is a central contribution of this thesis and these are analysed in detail in Chapter 4.

The analysis of media and promotional material was largely informed by the processes of thematic analysis described above, but also involved the application of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) approach to visual analysis. Their method of analysis focuses on the modes of visual communication evident in, and across, various texts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 2) argue that, ‘like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction’. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provide a systematic approach to visual communication that focuses on composition, colour, layout, style, and relationships between image and text, and between the ‘viewer’ and the represented participants. This approach ‘breaks down’ images and draws attention to
the modes of meaning making, exploring the communicative functions of image
design. Analysis of roller derby logos (see Chapter 7), for instance, involves
identifying the ‘visual language’ used to represent roller derby.

Logos are usually representations of women, often in sexualised poses, such as
riding a rocket or leaning seductively. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) method of
image analysis assists in understanding how such images convey meaning: a direct
gaze can be ‘powerful’, centralised aspects can convey emphasis, and diagonal lines
(a raised arm or extended leg) can direct attention to salient aspects. This analysis is
then situated within broader discussions concerning ‘what’ and ‘who’ roller derby is,
by returning to topics such as erotic capital, sporting seriousness, and gender
resistance. As I demonstrate in Chapter 7, this analysis indicates that while
participants may emphasise gender resistance through performance, roller derby
imagery is more ambiguous and often maintains normative gendered and racialised
ideals. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2016) systematic approach to visual
communication is, therefore, useful because of its versatility (it can be applied to a
diverse array of images), and its ability to both frame and support further analysis of
social significance and meaning.

Ethics
Exploring roller derby as a scene posed ethical dilemmas regarding the anonymity of
leagues and participants. Central to this study is the focus on place and the unique
social and cultural dynamics of roller derby leagues, including how they are
represented through promotional material and logos. Consequently, I sought
permission from S2D2 and WSR to identify the leagues in this research to enable
analysis of the specific forms of representation associated with each league, and
connect this to interview and observational data. Both leagues were amenable to participation in this study, and agreed to be identified.

I also made the decision early in the research to give participants with a derby name the option of being de-identified using a pseudonym, or to have their derby name included in the thesis and related academic works. This decision was made for four reasons: (1) this is a basic research practice; (2) this research is a low risk project; (3) derby names are, themselves, pseudonyms, providing anonymity outside of the Sydney roller derby scene; and (4) exploring roller derby as a scene involves investigating and analysing key personalities, resulting in instances where references to specific individuals and their unique contributions to roller derby is important. This option was discussed with participants before commencing research, and I received written consent before progressing with the research. Almost all participants with a derby name enthusiastically consented. The one participant who declined was de-identified in the research and was given a pseudonym. When using observational data, any scene member directly referred to who has not given consent to be named or included in this research has also been given a pseudonym.

This research required the submission of a National Ethics Application Form that was lodged with the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee where it gained approval (H9398).
Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological framework, detailing the methods employed in this thesis and their relationship to the conceptual framework implemented in this study. Using an ethnographic approach and mixed methods facilitates access to, and analysis of, the multi-dimensional nature of scenic life. The data obtained from these methods is analysed using a scenic perspective that directs analysis towards micro-level interactive practices, and participants’ lived negotiations of cultural sites and elective belongings. I have also outlined the significance of media in the diffusion of participants’ roller derby involvement. By addressing this aspect of cultural life, I can explore representations of the scene that transcend the localised, embodied dimensions of scenic events.

In the following chapters I interrogate themes and patterns that emerged from the data, and explore and analyse the collaborative formation of the roller derby scene. In these analysis chapters (Chapters 3-7) I highlight the fluid, messy, and multi-faceted nature of the roller derby scene and of individuals’ involvement that neither subcultural theory, nor binary gender frameworks can capture.
I couldn’t see anything as I was herded through the entry-way of the Sydney Olympic Park State Sport Centre for Sydney Roller Derby League’s 2012 home season final. The sound was deafening; rock music was pounding through the sound system, but was largely drowned out by the clamour of thousands of excited spectators. Holding cups of cheap beer, we pushed our way through the mass of people, heading towards the white light shining on the track at the centre of the venue. Finding a small section of space, we squeezed in amongst other groups in suicide seating. There was almost no space; we were all pressed in together, our bodies touching, our knees crossed or hugged to our chests. My leg rested against a woman I didn’t know. Shifting her position, she leaned a massive home-made sign against me. Turning to me with a big grin, her eyes wide and bright with excitement, she said ‘I get a bit carried away—with the sign and everything—so I’d drink that beer quickly’. Laughing, she nudged me with her elbow, grabbed her sign and thrust it into the air, abruptly yelling ‘MOTHER FUCKING DERBY, YEAH!’. Laughing, and a bit shocked at the sudden display I took her advice and quickly downed my beer as my friends, picking up on the vibe, started yelling and wolf whistling. The bout felt alive tonight, the thousands of spectators around me were buzzing with anticipation, waiting to cheer on their team to being the ultimate Sydney Roller Derby League champions (JA fieldnotes 23/9/12).

Introduction

At every live bout I attended during this project—regardless of who played or where it was—I felt the scene come alive. Sitting in suicide seating and voicing my enthusiasm and excitement with my fellow spectators, I felt that I was part of the performance; I was part of the scene. The live bout constitutes the central site of social and cultural activity of the roller derby scene. It is what Shank (1994, p. 126) would describe as a ‘situated mass of transformative signs and sweating bodies, continually reconstructing the meaning of a communion of individuals in a primary
group’. The live bout captures this interactive and enlivening dynamic, functioning as *the* roller derby scenic event. As it is a DIY sport, the live bout is the product of extensive organisational and creative efforts (Beaver 2012; Donnelly 2012; Krausch 2009). Furthermore, unlike previous incarnations, the contemporary version of roller derby is not televised. While some bouts are streamed online (such as the roller derby World Cup), emphasis is placed on the live bout as a site of shared performances, high-intensity spectator experiences, and scenic belonging. In this sense, the live bout is similar to a concert or ‘gig’ in a music scene (Kahn-Harris 2007; Overell 2016; Stahl 2004a), or ‘Dyke Night’ in the Sydney Lesbian scene (Drysdale 2015) as it facilitates the emplacement of scenic activity.

For skaters, live bouts operate as spaces of competition; they are the stage upon which skaters provide sporting competition and atypical gender performances (Carlson 2010; Gieseler 2014; Owen 2014; Parry 2016). Yet bouts are significant for their central role in bringing together individuals (and groups of individuals) who, together, constitute the roller derby scene. In this chapter, I investigate the micro-level practices of the roller derby scene, arguing that rather than operating simply as a stage for skater performances, live bouts are collaboratively performed, support a diverse array of embodied experiences, and involve a relationship with ‘place’.

The first section of this chapter explores the venue as a site of social relations and cultural activity, arguing that it ‘shapes… play, while also providing a context for differential experiences and a panoply of social interactions within and beyond it’ (Vertinsky 2001, p. 11). The meaning of venues for scene members in the performance of roller derby is largely shaped by wider cultural understandings. For example, the Hordern Pavilion is widely recognised as an entertainment venue, and this therefore, potentially increases feelings of excitement and enthusiasm. In this
section, I argue that the nature of the venue and its reputation within Sydney’s cultural consciousness affects participants’ perception and experience of the live bout. The differences in size, location and the associated ‘sense of place’, affect scene activity and members’ embodied experience of the live bout. Thus, venues contribute to the heterogeneous cultural formation of the scene and highlight the impossibility of a singular definition or description of what roller derby ‘is’.

Throughout the sporting landscape, presentation styles and forms of entertainment comingle and are appropriated, as they are adopted in order to ensure spectator interest in an increasingly competitive and commercialised leisure market (Crawford 2004). Roller derby is enmeshed in these flows. In section two, therefore, I investigate the appropriation of different forms of entertainment by leagues with the aim of gaining and maintaining spectator interest. I argue that this process produces an ‘entertainment package’. I focus analysis on the significance of diverse theatrical devices (such as skate-outs and pre-bout entertainment) to the experience of the live bout. Through this analysis I demonstrate that while there are continuities between roller derby and traditional sports/sporting events, leagues’ entertainment packages typically convey a sense of playfulness that is distinctly ‘derby’. Drawing on Breeze (2015) and her concept of non-/seriousness, I argue that roller derby leagues incorporate culturally recognisable forms of event entertainment, while simultaneously mocking serious sporting practice and sporting events as skaters make sure to infuse their performances with a sense of fun, creativity, and playfulness.
The live bout—like other mass sporting and leisure events—‘is also the scene of a spectacle of a spectacle’ (Bromberger, cited in Crawford 2004, p. 85) as the audience is not merely passive but contributes to the performance of the bout. The third section of this chapter examines the role of spectators at live bouts, arguing that they are crucial to the performance of roller derby, contributing to the atmosphere circulating at live bouts. In this analysis, I aim to demonstrate the centrality of non-skaters in performing the live bout and constituting the scene.

‘They just don’t have that wow factor’: The importance of place in experiences of the live bout

Using scene in this thesis means ‘looking for the holistic but differentiated meanings of places’ (Silver & Clark 2015, p. 426) in the manifestation of Sydney roller derby’s social and cultural activity. Across all interview groups, participants frequently foregrounded the importance of the venue in their experiences of roller derby, typically emphasising the size and location of venues as influences on the subjective experience of live bouts.

Just going down to the basketball stadium in the middle of Cambridge Park isn’t as exciting as going to Sydney Olympic Park. That has a lot to do with it. The fact that, you know, we get a thousand people—a thousand plus—to our bouts and that’s massive. Well, they get four thousand. It’s going to create such an atmosphere (Pepà la Pow!, WSR skater).
There is quite a big difference in the staging of it, so it goes from thirty, fifty people watching in a sports hall in the middle of nowhere wherever, to the Hordern Pavilion or Sydney Olympic Park where there’s three thousand spectators... The game is basically the same and the way it’s sort of run is basically the same, but it just comes down to, is it a small town, small time league in the suburbs? Or is it the main Sydney teams playing each other? (Mikemare, referee).

The little ones—like the local centre my wife trains in—they just don’t have that wow factor. But some of the big ones, like bouts at the Hordern and or going to Homebush—I remember Sydney puts stuff on there—you get thousands of people cheering together. I don’t go all the time, it’s my wife’s thing, but those one’s were better and I enjoyed them a lot more. It is just a bigger, more powerful thing (Justin, spectator).

Evident across all three accounts is an emphasis on the ‘locatedness’ of venues, and an association between capacity and participants’ experiences of live bouts. For Pepá la Pow!, ‘Cambridge Park’ is her local league venue, and while it is not ‘as exciting’ as going to Sydney Olympic Park, it is where her league frequently holds training sessions, where she engages in friendship networks, and where WSR hold local bouts. Mikemare’s description of local venues as ‘small’, ‘in the middle of nowhere, wherever’, and ‘in the suburbs’ evoke feelings of isolation and ‘ordinariness’; they are defined by their unremarkable quality. This sentiment is reflected in Justin’s account. By describing larger venues as having a ‘wow factor’, Justin emphasises the influence of the more-than-human on the subjective experience of the live bout, identifying a correlation between larger venues and ‘more powerful’ experiences.

7 ‘Hordern Pavilion’ is a leisure venue situated at the Old Sydney Showground, now the Entertainment Quarter, Moore Park, Sydney. Participants also refer it as ‘The Hordern’ or ‘The Pavilion’. It is a venue renowned for hosting dance and rock music concerts.

8 Participants tended to refer to ‘Sydney Olympic Park’ as the venue used in several SRDL bouts. However, ‘Sydney Olympic Park’ is an extensive sport and leisure complex in Homebush encompassing numerous diverse sporting and leisure venues. Roller derby bouts held at Sydney Olympic Park are in the State Sports Centre, a venue within the larger Olympic Park complex. While inaccurate, I will be utilising the language used by participants. Therefore, I often ‘short-hand’ the name of the venue to ‘Sydney Olympic Park’.
These participants distinguish between venues as large/extraordinary/exciting and small/ordinary/everyday sites. Large venues are represented as leisure sites, as opposed to local venues which, in focusing on training and ‘everyday’ activities, are perceived more as working sites; they are crucial for the ongoing development of DIY leagues and skater ability, but are represented as comparatively ‘small’ in size and in the experiences they potentially afford. This distinction is reinforced by the recognition of the Hordern Pavilion and Sydney Olympic Park as illustrious entertainment venues in Sydney’s cultural consciousness. Furthermore, due to local venues’ close proximity to other spheres of life (such as work and family) they can undermine feelings of escapism as the space and place may be too familiar to encourage the kind of affective enlivening sought after by participants (Jeuring & Haartsen 2017). Consequently, distance from ‘everyday’ life is an associated factor in participants’ experiences of live bouts.

Focusing on the emplacement of the roller derby scene in the urban landscape draws attention to social distance and participants’ movement between spaces and places. As participants live predominantly in southwest and Greater Western Sydney, travel to Sydney Olympic Park or the Hordern Pavilion can frequently take between an hour by car or almost two hours by public transport. Yet, when attending bouts at Sydney Olympic Park in Homebush or the Hordern Pavilion in the Entertainment Quarter, Moore Park, I often felt a sense of excitement as I approached the sprawling complexes. Travel can be important to leisure experiences as:
distance is consumed as part of the journey, both as the enjoying of movement itself, which can be a sensuous experience, as well as with the land – or cityscapes the journey makes a trajectory through (Larsen 2015, p. 199).

My experiences going to the Hordern Pavilion for roller derby bouts reflect this sentiment. I would often catch a bus from Sydney’s Central Station and moving out of the city heading down Anzac Parade, the first thing I would see would be the bright white haze of the flood lights coming from the Sydney Cricket Ground at the edge of the Entertainment Quarter. As the bus drew near, I would look out the window and see a series of posters advertising upcoming bands and comedians plastering the outer wall of the Entertainment Quarter. I was often coming from work so these fleeting moments became a ritual exercise that marked passage into the roller derby scene, helping (re)orient me to the leisure event. I was there to research roller derby but also to be a spectator and have fun; my short trip on the bus was a savoured act, of ‘simply basking in the present moment, taking it in and appreciating it’ (Kurtz & Simmons 2015, p. 165). In this sense, the Hordern Pavilion’s distance from spaces associated with the mundane, the routine, and the everyday was a central element in heightening my experience of the live bout.

Exploring the socio-spatial dimensions of roller derby is to recognise the live bout (and sporting events) as a series of interconnecting moments given significance through social interactions, embodied and sensory experiences, and various patterns of consumption. Part of the excitement and enthusiasm produced at, and through, live bouts in venues such as Sydney Olympic Park and the Hordern Pavilion, is derived from their position within a broader complex that caters to an array of social
and leisure needs. Such venues are part of the turn in post-modern Western societies towards holistic entertainment experiences as they provide bars, restaurants, cinemas, shopping and access to transport (Crawford 2004). When attending a bout held at the Hordern Pavilion or Sydney Olympic Park, I felt that the experience was enhanced by the tendency to socialise with roller derby members or friends before the bout at a bar in the surrounding area.

I am running a little late—it took me almost 2 hours to get to Sydney Olympic Park tonight—but walking into the bar, I instantly see the group of S2D2 members I am meeting. They are sitting at a long wooden table, jugs of beer and cider haphazardly arranged down its middle. I walk up, smiling and waving, and apologise for my lateness. ‘It’s cool, we haven’t been here long’ one skater says, quickly making room for me around the table. She picks up a jug of beer and points it in my direction; she doesn’t even need to ask. ‘Jesus, I’d love one. Public transport is ridiculous; not a bad trip, just bloody long. Next time I’m driving’. Laughter breaks out as almost everyone gets public transport, and we all know we will be doing so again. Those around me are a mix of league members, including skaters, both male and female referees and non-skating officials, and almost all are wearing their league t-shirts: purple with a giant S2D2 league logo on the front. Sipping my beer, the conversation turns to the bout ahead. The Beauty School Knockouts are playing Team Unicorn: The Horny Rollers. Team Unicorn is the favourite, and we are all hoping they will win. Looking around the bar, I notice diverse groups of people. There are two couples chatting quietly but mostly, we are surrounded by groups of loud and energetic individuals.

Several people are dressed in rainbow coloured clothing and I assume that they must also be going to the bout and are supporting Team Unicorn. One woman at the next table catches my eye. She looks about my age, in her mid-twenties, and is wearing a unicorn hat, metallic gold hot-pants, a white singlet with a rainbow on it, and a pair of high-top pink converse. Her hair is mostly white-blonde and shaved on one side. Chatting with her friends, she catches me looking at her. She winks at me then lifts her drink and calls out ‘Go Unicorns!’ ‘You know it!’ I say, laughing as I raise my glass to her. Still grinning, I turn back to my group as the S2D2 skater next to me tops up my beer, and I think, tonight is going to be a lot of fun, I can feel it (JA fieldnotes, 23/6/12).
Through their inclusion of bars, restaurants and shops, contemporary sport venues produce spaces of loosely bound and diverse forms of sociality and collectivity, which, while heightening patrons’ sense of excitement, also work to define the event itself. Yet, according to Rinehart (1998, p. 17), there is ‘no simple, and clear-cut separation between “sport” and the “surrounding experiences,” or context’. Taking a scenic approach is useful in this context as it can help capture social and cultural activity in the urban landscape that is not easily mapped. That is, drinking with S2D2 members before live bouts blurs distinctions between ‘derby’ and ‘non-derby’ spaces, practices, and forms of social interaction. The sporting experience of the live bout is enhanced as roller derby ‘spills out’ into these entertainment complexes as the bar in the excerpt above fosters an array of social possibilities; it helps make the live bout an experience.

While participants overwhelmingly preferred attending bouts in larger venues (such as the Hordern Pavilion), smaller local venues are nevertheless crucial to the constitution of roller derby by providing spaces suitable for skater and league development. Local venues (such as school halls, skating rinks and local sporting complexes) can also, however, afford intimate forms of connectivity, both with the performance of roller derby and other members in attendance, that may be less possible in large sport or entertainment venues. For this reason, one participant preferred attending bouts hosted in smaller, local venues.
[The first bout I went to] was at this little roller rink, kind of in a dodgy part of town, so we were like, “What are we doing?!”. Then when we got in it was just like, almost like a party or like a rave or something! There were a lot of people around, and it was just really different and social. [Whereas] the one at Sydney Olympic Park has the seats up along the sides. I guess it can accommodate more people or more spectators, but I felt more removed from it. Even sometimes when I would go to a Gridiron game, I would be like if you’re sitting so far away, I would rather watch them on TV or something! At least then I would feel like I’d be almost more involved in it. So yeah, I noticed the difference in the venues, but I know in The States the league that we used to see is now in a venue like that, because they’ve had to accommodate the number of spectators. It feels almost more commercial. It just has a different feel to it (Michelle, spectator).

For Michelle, larger venues produce a sense of isolation and distance. This is reminiscent of criticisms of large, post-modern sport and leisure complexes. Some scholars, including Bale (2000, 2003), Hubbard (2005), and Mansvelt (2005), argue that post-modern leisure complexes (including sports stadiums) provide a wide array of socially-oriented facilities that lack a ‘sense of place’, making them feel ‘place-less’. According to Mansvelt (2005, p. 59), the immensity of these contemporary multi-purpose sport and leisure structures can be ‘disorienting, fragmenting and anxiety producing’. Descriptions of venues as ‘place-less’ is predicated on assumptions that through a growing propensity for uniformity in stadium design, such complexes are sanitised and lack the strong emotional attachment often associated with many older, single purpose venues, such as Liverpool FC’s Anfield Stadium in the UK, or ‘The Gabba’ Cricket ground in Brisbane, Australia. The move towards multiplex stadiums (and the rise of televised sport) represents what some scholars see as the degeneration of the topophilic relationship between sport fans and stadiums (Bale 2000; Bale & Vertinsky 2004).
Crawford (2004), however, disagrees with representations of modern sport complexes as place-less. The notion of placelessness is often driven by nostalgia that fails to recognise the reality of many older sporting venues as unsafe and lacking in facilities or public transport, or other social and leisure needs. Instead, he argues that sport venues have been re-imagined with the aim of constructing safe sites that cater to a wider array of sport and leisure needs in a competitive leisure market. In so doing, contemporary venues produce a more ‘imagined’, and less geographically bound, connection to place (Crawford 2004).

For Michelle, the small local bout is defined by a sense of familiarity produced by close-knit social networks. At a WSR bout in 2012, when Blue Mountains Roller Derby League (BMRDL) played their first public bout against WSR, I observed forms of sociality reminiscent of Michelle’s experience. The crowd included a large group of BMRDL skaters’ friends and family. Walking around the venue I observed people frequently bumping into or calling to people they knew. The bout held a cupcake stall and particularly for children, a ‘create your own sign’ stand, emphasising the family-oriented nature of the bout. Filling a section of the stands, BMRDL supporters (wearing blue league t-shirts and waving home-made signs and blue and white pom-poms) performed chants and cheered throughout the bout.

The bout was close, with BMRDL scraping a win against ‘The Zombees’, 104-101 in the last jam. As the final whistle blew, the BMRDL supporters ran from the stands and rushed their skaters. This was a rare display, as it went against the social and cultural conventions of roller derby that, for safety reasons, separate skaters from spectators at live bouts. Yet, the familiarity between both WSR and BMRDL, and amongst the diverse individuals present at the bout indicated that such a display was
more socially acceptable within this distinctly local event. Places are not stable or neutral agents in social and cultural activity; rather, a ‘place can be viewed, felt, and experienced differently depending on one’s relationship to the scene and other participants’ (Yoshimizu 2015, p. 467). While smaller in size, local venues can be distinguished by their associated focus on localised social networks, enabling a more intimate and familiar atmosphere to develop.

The functionality and intended purpose of venues also acts on participants’ subjective understandings of live bouts. Cameron, a roller derby spectator, describes a SRDL bout held at Sydney Boy’s High School, explaining, it ‘just looks like the inside of – I mean, it is a high school! It is a boy’s high school gymnasium!’ (emphasis in original). They further stated that SRDL bouts held at Hordern Pavilion are ‘definitely the best’ as they are ‘more professional’. Distinguishing between the same league performing at two different venues—one ‘small’ and local, the other ‘large’ and ‘professional’, Cameron highlights the reciprocal relationship between venue and scenic activity, as intentionality imbues places with meaning (Crang 1998). In contrast to the Hordern Pavilion or Sydney Olympic Park, Sydney Boys’ High School gymnasium is an everyday school space, undermining recognition of the event as ‘extraordinary’; it is less ‘professional’ and thus more ‘amateur’. Furthermore, Sydney Boys’ High School is a highly surveilled and disciplinary space that is less conducive to feelings of leisure, freedom, and sociality. Cameron’s perspective indicates that the venue impacts the experience of the live bout outside of the sporting performance or entertainment it houses (Crawford 2004, 2009; Gaffney & Bale 2004). This is also reflected in Mikemare’s comment (p. 97) where he explains that bout differences lie in the ‘staging of it’ as ‘the game is basically the same and the way it’s sort of run is basically the same’.
Often, according to Crawford (2004, p. 67), ‘the sport venue itself can constitute one of the primary attractions to attending ‘live’ sport’. Throughout this research, participants frequently revered certain venues, associating them with a sense of place.

[The Hordern] is a place where a lot of bands play… it’s very dark and intimate. Whereas Sydney Olympic Park has got—I mean, it was built for the Olympics. It has got a great big arena feel to it, it’s a lot more lighted, so you can see everything that’s going on… Whereas at the Hordern, the light is on the track. All you can see is the track. And because it’s so dark and intimate and you know it has got that band thing, it feels like you’re in there for that, except it’s more exciting than rock’n’roll, it’s derby. [With] the spotlight there it’s almost like they’re playing derby for me, not everybody else. They’re there for me! But I can feel all these other excited people around me (Pepâ la Pow!, WSR skater).

The Hordern Pavilion is a sprawling structure, with low ceilings, reduced illumination and a wide, open floor for sitting and standing in groups. It has an historical, social, and cultural reputation as a music and performance venue and was designed as an entertainment venue; as Pepâ la Pow! said, it has ‘that band thing’.

Pepâ la Pow! frequently foregrounded Hordern Pavilion’s ‘rock’ association throughout the interview. She described her experience attending an SRDL bout at Hordern Pavilion as ‘just amazing!’ as it ‘felt like a rock venue, cos that’s a real rock venue’ where ‘thousands of people are jammed in’ to watch. Meg 4 Mercy from WSR described the Hordern Pavilion as having a ‘grunge vibe’ because ‘so many bands play there’, similarly, roller derby business owner SuziEphedrine, states that is has a ‘grungy, underworld vibe from the bands that play there’. In contrast, the State Sport Centre at Sydney Olympic Park was designed for international sporting competition, and evokes feelings of Australian sporting pride, professionalism, and
high calibre sport, and has been designed, through steep circular stands and high illumination, to ensure transparency (Magdalinski 2004).

Participants’ perception of venues’ sense of place—distinct emotional attachments influenced by historical, social, and cultural aspects—are connected to some debates about whether roller derby is a ‘sport’ or a ‘spectacle’. The sense of place attributed to the Hordern Pavilion heightens a sense of intimate sociality, blurring distinctions between roller derby as sport or spectacle; yet, it encourages feelings of excitement and affords experiences of mass spectatorship. Sydney Olympic Park, as a place of legitimate sporting competition, promotes roller derby as a serious professional sport rather than one that is amateur or simply a spectacle. This is largely due to the correlation between venue facilities and design, and one’s sensory experience. For instance, the lighting and structure of the State Sport Centre at Sydney Olympic Park, ensures transparency and that spectators have unobscured views. Alternatively, the experience of roller derby in smaller venues blurs the boundaries between sport and spectacle, and due to the reduced space, can produce a more local, intimate, ‘party’, or amateur feeling.

While ‘scenes invest spaces with meaning, anchoring social and cultural practices in particular places’ (Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015, p. 290), analysis of the data relating to live bouts indicates that this relationship is reciprocal; venues have affective value, and they influence social and cultural activity, and perceptions of what roller derby ‘is’. As venues act on the experience and performance of the live bout, they contribute to the scene’s heterogeneity as each place produces distinctly different scene realities. As roller derby participants move between venues, and their experiences of roller derby shifts with these movements, the transience of the roller
derby scene is revealed. This highlights the plurality of roller derby and problematises readings of roller derby as a subcultural, alternative sport that occupies a place ‘on the outskirts’ of the sport and leisure landscape.

While the specificity of the venue contributes to the mobilisation of scenic experiences and subjective meanings of roller derby, this operates in tandem with activity within the bout, including the skaters’ athletic performances and the use of additional entertainment such as live bands or pole dancers. The following section analyses roller derby’s entertainment package, further questioning the adequacy of dualisms—such as sport/spectacle and alternative/mainstream—that shape some of the debates about the position of roller derby within the sport and leisure landscape.

‘A little glitz goes a long way’: ‘Skate-outs’ and roller derby’s ‘entertainment package’

According to Crawford (2004, p. 82), ‘contemporary sport, competing in such a fierce entertainment market, must ensure customers are (and remain) entertained’. The Vice President of the Chicago White Sox (cited in Rinehart 1998b, p. 16) explained that sporting organisers need to ‘present a total entertainment package’. Roller derby is no different; it needs to be sold to spectators because, as a DIY, grassroots level sport, roller derby relies heavily on the financial support provided by spectators’ attendance at live bouts. The need, therefore, to provide an entertainment package that attracts spectators, and importantly, encourages them to attend other bouts, is crucial to the constitution of the scene. This, I argue, is achieved through the combination of sporting competition and various additional forms of entertainment that, collectively, produce an entertainment package.
This is also an idea commonly emphasised by participants.

The reason I think of Sydney [roller derby league] as a product, as a package, is simply that they’ve got great uniforms, great production values and entertainment, they skate really hard so the derby’s really good; it’s a really slick looking organisation. So it looks like you’re going to a professional sporting event. That’s why I think Sydney is a product because I would be just as happy going to Sydney and paying the same money as I would going to watch an NRL or a professional sporting event (Pepà la Pow!, WSR skater).

Take away the costumes, just sports uniforms, whatever, make-up, take it all away and the names. Then we’ve got an amazing sport that athletic women can play. Rules and regulations, referees, all that sort of stuff is there. Still a great sport. What’s our point of difference to soccer or netball or any other women’s sport? Why is roller derby getting so much press? Why do we get a full page spread in Cleo? Because it’s different and it’s putting it out there in the public eye. I know there’s a school of thought about not having a derby persona or any derby names, but I think it’s a fun, catchy part of the sport and it’s something that we can sell to other people. A little glitz goes a long way (Hell Pixie, S2D2 skater).

Using scene in an analysis of roller derby’s entertainment package draws attention to roller derby’s position amongst other forms of entertainment and can provide fresh insights into the constitution of roller derby as a marketable commodity. This approach draws attention to the ways roller derby is ‘sold’ to spectators by incorporating forms of additional entertainment appropriated from other social fields as ‘boundaries between sport and other forms of entertainment have blurred’ (L'Etang 2013, p. 97). Mass spectator sports are increasingly incorporating spectacle (live music, half-time games and dance acts) with the purpose of maintaining spectator interest (Crawford 2004; Rinehart 1998). In fact, the benefits of providing an entertainment package have also been realised by various religious groups and churches. Various modern churches, particularly those associated with Pentecostalism such as Hillsong, have incorporated live bands, lighting, visual and
audio equipment, and large digital screens to ensure those in attendance are kept entertained (Goh 2008; Jennings 2014).

Yet, sport has been classified through a classist system of sporting value and aesthetics (Fletcher 2008b; Rinehart 1998; Wilson 2002). Sports incorporating theatrical devices or that appear ‘staged’ (such as the World Wrestling Federation (WWF)) have commonly been represented as ‘kitsch’ and ‘fake’, and classified as ‘low’ culture (Rinehart 1998). In contrast, traditional, institutionalised and highly regulated sports that also facilitate spontaneous athletic performances (such as tennis, cricket and golf) are perceived as ‘high’ culture (Wilson 2002). Furthermore, tensions over roller derby as sport versus spectacle are rooted in the history of previous incarnations of roller derby as ‘lowbrow’ and associated with the WWF and therefore, as lacking legitimacy (Barbee & Cohen 2010; Coppage 1999).

This sport/spectacle dualism oversimplifies sporting events, and fails to recognise both the power and widely employed use of spectacle in the sporting experience and in sports event management. In numerous sports, including women’s University volleyball games, WWF events, the National Hockey League, and the Super-bowl:

The athletes are spotlighted and individuated, emerging from a tunnel-like enclosure into the sensory frenzy of a game-show-like atmosphere. Of course, the spotlight itself is a theatrical device. The laser lights, the dusky smoke, the intense sound—all are theatrical devices. Each sport form borrows what works to intensify the experience for the paying fan, and what works is not necessarily what purists in the sport studies professions would constitute as sport (Rinehart 1998, pp. 7-8).
Contemporary sporting events frequently incorporate team mascots, cheerleaders, bands, and dance routines. Some entertainment emphasises and is thus intricately intertwined with national identity, such as the famous ‘Haka’ performed by the New Zealand Rugby team ‘The All Blacks’ (Robinson 2006). Many sporting events incorporate spectator and community involvement through mini-games at half time. Sporting athletes also provide unique spectacles. Central to many sporting competitions are athletes’ dramatic and often iconic celebratory performances, such as Brandi Chastain’s famous shirt-less display after scoring the winning goal in the Women’s World Cup final against China in 1999 or Usain Bolt’s iconic ‘point’ pose. These spectacular elements facilitate competitive rivalry, increase anticipation, intimidate the opposition, and are examples of playful entertainment performances aimed at increasing the entertainment value and experience of sport.

In roller derby, a common theatrical device is the skate-out. While skate-outs are used to introduce teams and individual skaters, they are intended to entertain spectators, typically through a brief dance routine and often by performing rivalry.

In near darkness ‘Ice-Ice Baby’ by Vanilla Ice starts to play. Formed up in tight ranks, skaters emerge, dancing, onto the track; sitting in the stands, the light on them blackens out everything else. It’s punchy and powerful, and the crowd voice their approval and excitement. Suddenly the music stops; the skaters on the track freeze. Everyone seems to hold their breath. The music starts again, but this time it’s ‘U can’t touch this’ by MC Hammer, and the second team move into the light from the opposite end of the arena. Doing their own dance routine, they move towards the other, still frozen team. As they reach the centre and face the opposition, the music again stops and the second team freezes.

It's a dance-off skate-out!
The music and opposing teams alternate, each team trying to “out do” the other, and each time moving closer and closer together. The anticipation is building; the crowd is really getting into it as the sound of clapping, yelling and wolf-whistling nearly drowns out the music. Finally, the dance off reaches a climax. The two teams are mere feet away from each other, when the MC Hammers, as a group, rise up on their toe-stops and shuffle first one way then the other in time to the music. It is amazing and the crowd goes absolutely crazy! As the voice of the commentator pierces the cacophony and asks who won the dance-off, the renewed explosion of noise identifies the MC Hammers as the clear victors (JA fieldnotes 21/4/12).

As a relatively new sport, emphasising competitiveness (such as through a dance-off skate-off) encourages spectators to form emotional connections to teams. This is even more important in exhibition matches such as the one described above. Some leagues/teams, such as SRDL, engage in very creative, highly choreographed, and spectacular skate-outs that incorporate music and light displays (see Figure 3 below).

![Figure 3: Beauty School Knockouts Skate-out, 2012, at the Hordern Pavilion, Entertainment Quarter, Sydney. Photograph taken by Captain Shutterspeed.](image-url)
Some skate-outs are minimalist or emphasise athleticism. At a WSR bout in 2012, S2D2’s ‘The Force’ played WSR’s ‘The Hellfire Honeys’. ‘The Force’ marched onto the track, military style, to ‘The Imperial March’ from *Star Wars*, while ‘The Hellfire Honeys’ skated out to music but rather than dancing, performed a warm-up drill. While performing the same function, the use and form of skate-outs varies between, and within, leagues and can influence experience of the live bout.

As a performative entrance the skate-out is not unique to roller derby. Instead, it is reminiscent of other sports and sporting events (such as various football codes), where the entrance of sport stars onto the field is infused with anticipation and is frequently dramatised using music, lights, banners, and accompanying mascots. In America, ‘pep rallies’—large gatherings of school students and their families before sporting events such as men’s football and basketball—revolve around the dramatic and highly ritualised entrance of (typically male) athletes onto the field (Hansen 2013; Hollingworth, Dude & Shepherd 2010). Similarly, at Australian National Rugby League games, entrance onto the field is accompanied by enthusiastic spectator responses and recently, has been enriched using stylised digital representations of players on stadium screens. These practices facilitate spectator enjoyment as leagues engage in evermore creative and entertaining displays. For instance, recently players in the NRL have been depicted on stadium screens as superheroes, surrounded by flames, lightening, or wielding super powers as part of their entrance onto the field.

While roller derby draws on this common form of entertainment, there is a sense of playfulness to roller derby skate-outs that appear to challenge the reverence associated with some other sports’ entrance styles. For instance, American pep rallies are taken very seriously as a collective social and cultural sporting ritual, and
they differ greatly from the fun and silliness that often infuses roller derby skateouts. The skate-out, therefore, is a unique way that roller derby appropriates a normative form of sporting spectacle and may be more clearly understood by using Breeze’s (2015) concept of ‘non-/seriousness’.

Breeze (2015, p. 118) developed the concept of non-/seriousness as ‘a way to designate ambivalence and plurality without recourse to the binary implications of unseriousness, or not-serious’. She found that while emphasising a desire ‘to be taken seriously’, roller derby members often employed elements of fiction and fantasy—using ‘power animals’ such as unicorns in their designs or laughing at themselves—in order to ‘pursue serious recognition without entirely sacrificing their ideas of roller derby as special or different’ (Breeze 2015, p. 144). Breeze (2015, p. 144) claims that such aspects enable skaters to ‘keep having fun’.

Regarding the live bout, non-/seriousness offers a way to make sense of the continuities between roller derby and other sports/sporting events identified above, while also accounting for creative forms of playfulness and fun. The skate-out, therefore, emerges as one way roller derby utilises a normative theatrical device yet, to paraphrase Breeze (2015), is an example of skaters not taking themselves too seriously. Roller derby’s success as a global sporting phenomena is, in part, due to its non-/seriousness as it provides a holistic sporting experience, yet continues to distinguish itself as a ‘different’ within a competitive market. Breeze’s (2015) concept of non-/seriousness offers an opportunity to make sense of the nuances evident in the ways roller derby bouts are sites designed to produce a culturally understood professional sporting event, while simultaneously mocking traditional sport and sporting events.
Reflecting on leagues’ entertainment package discussed throughout this section reveals that while roller derby appropriates forms of entertainment and event management used in many traditional, mass and commercial sporting events, such inclusions are not unproblematic, universally supported or enacted in the same way throughout the Sydney roller derby scene. Some skate-outs, such as the SRDL dance-off skate-out described at the beginning of this section, are highly theatrical which, for some scene members, can detract from roller derby as a serious sport. Consequently, while most participants expressed their personal pleasure in the inclusion of skate-outs at roller derby bouts, some participants recognised them as a point of tension in debates over sporting legitimisation.

While there’s a lot of leagues that don’t do the skate outs any more… I’m still a big fan of ‘let’s go out and do a silly little dance and carry on’ and that sort of stuff. The main argument of losing some of derby, is that that’s not how real sport does it. To be taken seriously we need to lose it. My personal thought is that’s rubbish! I think it’s amazing that roller derby has these crazy outfits and costumes and then when it comes to game time that’s all forgotten, and they get on and they actually play the game as hard as they possibly can (Pepâ la Pow!, WSR skater).

Skate-outs are good fun. I really enjoy them, and often the crowd likes it. But some people see them as too much, you know, too theatrical and as not really being about the sport. It is a bit of a debate. Some teams use them, others don’t. Sydney has had some great ones. I’d like to see it be professional and be accepted, but the problem is you may have to lose some of the flair. What I would hope that they can both exist (Captain Shutterspeed, photographer).

The tensions Pepâ la Pow! and Captain Shutterspeed identify are predicated on a narrow yet widely held perception of ‘real’ sport as not spectacle, where getting taken seriously seems to imply ‘changing roller derby, so as to be intelligible within the existing terms of what a ‘serious sport’ looks like’ (Breeze 2015, p. 26). The
polarised debate about whether roller derby is a sport or a spectacle obscures the complexity of the scene; it is more productive to position roller derby within a broader sport and leisure landscape, and to explore the continuities, tensions, and contradictions between sports as elements coexist, blur, and overlap. Yet, in my study, and as in Breeze’s (2015), regardless of the inherent limitations in dualistic understandings of lived experience, roller derby members tend to maintain this notion of a mutually exclusive formation; as Captain Shutterspeed states, ‘I would hope that they can both exist’, suggesting a widely accepted notion that they are oppositional in nature.

While numerous participants (such as Pepâ la Pow! and Hell Pixie, p. 108) celebrate leagues’ entertainment package and ability to rival professional sporting events, in the data I also identified a preference amongst participants for leagues to incorporate local talent. While Mikemare favours SRDL’s production values, he goes on to draw attention to the associated importance of roller derby as a DIY sport, stating that while some bouts are ‘more professional’, ‘there’s no forgetting it’s roller derby’. Other participants reflect this sentiment and foreground their preference for local performers or mini bouts with newly emerging leagues as additional entertainment. BatNataZ explains that it ‘just seems right. Roller derby is a grassroots sport; helping local bands or whatever is great for them and it adds to the bout; it is just good for everyone’. Similarly, Morgan (spectator) felt that local talent enriched the live bout. When discussing the inclusion of a pole dancer who performed at numerous SRDL bouts, she explained that ‘it was better because you knew she was from around there. That kind of stuff is fun and it helps them get their own name out there’. Such accounts indicate the pressure on leagues to produce a ‘professional’ event that nevertheless remains localised. By focusing on local entertainment (up-and-coming
bands and freelance performers) the roller derby scene mobilises local talent, and in so doing demonstrates one way leagues negotiate their increasing desire to produce a professional sporting product, while maintaining local ties and a focus on being a grassroots level, amateur sport.

Using *scene*, this section has identified the similarities, continuities, and divergences between roller derby’s entertainment package and the incorporation of spectacle throughout the sport and leisure landscape. Exploring roller derby’s entertainment package (re)focusses analysis on the ways that roller derby is ‘sold’ to spectators. Drawing on Breeze’s (2015) concept of non-/seriousness, this analysis also revealed that while there are continuities between roller derby and other sporting events, roller derby maintains a sense of ‘difference’ by infusing appropriated theatrical devices (such as skate-outs) with fun and playfulness; as Hell Pixie states, ‘it’s a fun, catchy part of the sport and it’s something that we can sell’. In the following section analysis builds on these insights to explore the production of an affective atmosphere at live bouts.

‘People are screaming their heads off, it’s electric’: Collective energies and the circulation of affect at live bouts

The live bout, like other live sporting events, is a site of consumption, collectivity, embodied experiences, and shared performances. While the live bout has largely been represented as a stage for skater performances, non-skaters (such as spectators) are crucial to the affective intensities of the live bout as a thrilling sporting environment. As a spectator, I was often part of, and contributed to, the spectacle and feeling of live bouts.
‘Oh, come ON!’ yelled Femme Furious, an S2D2 skater sitting next to me. Half raised from her sitting position, her arms were stretched out toward the track, palms up and her fingers splayed, questioning. Turning to the rest of us, one arm still directed at the track she declared ‘how was that in the back?! Can you believe that call?!’. Frowning, a crease emerging between her eyebrows, she glared at the track. I was sitting with a group of members from various Sydney-based leagues including S2D2, WSR, and SRDL. We were in suicide seating watching a semi-final match during the Eastern Region Roller Derby competition at Penrith Valley Regional Sport Centre, Cambridge Park.

Suddenly, our Jammer took the lead and was making her way through the pack. Just as suddenly, Femme Furious was up on her knees, one arm clutching my shoulder—hard—while she screamed ‘HIT A BITCH! GO! COME ON! JUST GET HER THROUGH!’'. Half rising, I leaned forward, my fist in the air with everyone else’s, my cheers mingled with those around me, producing an incoherent combination of ‘yeahs!’ and ‘come ons!’'. Clearing the pack, the Jammer abruptly struck her hips, securing points for her team and ending the Jam. But we all kept yelling and smiling, our fists pumping the air in approval and encouragement. Still on her knees and gripping my shoulder, I heard Femme Furious mumble ‘Just a few more of those, we just need a few more good ones’. Her eyes were wide and unblinking as she stared, transfixed, at the track.

The rest of us were turning to each other to chat and share high-fives. The teams on the track reset for the next jam. The whistle blew, the skaters shot forward, and once again we responded; cheering them on, supporting their successes, and lamenting their loses. My voice was hoarse and my facial muscles sore; I enjoyed every minute of it. We could still win this (JA fieldnotes, 29/9/12).

Scene draws attention to collaborative practices in and across sites of social relations, including, the affective experience of leisure events. As a spectator, I was part of affective performances, contributing to the sporting spectacle and atmosphere generated at live bouts. As captured in the excerpt above, I was often caught up in the visceral intensity of live bouts; like a force, I was prompted to act, to raise my arm, to yell and laugh and clap with everyone else. I responded to competitive play and the bursts of emotion from those around me. This enlivening and the affective
flows that I, and other scene members, were entangled in are central to the sporting experience and illuminate the role of non-skaters in scenic performances.

Affect can be understood as the pre-conscious, physiological responses that act on our bodies as they are pushed and pulled, in ways which, according to Wetherell (2012, p. 4), can be understood as ‘embodied meaning-making’. Affect is also constant as our lived experience is always embodied. As a result, affects can ‘simmer’, surge in moments of intensity, and quickly fade (Wetherell 2012); affective responses, therefore, can move in and out of focus and may surface at unexpected times and/or ways (for example, the sudden flush of embarrassment). This kind of affective response is evident in the excerpt above, as there is a clear surge of joy and excitement brought about by seeing our jammer break through the pack.

According to Wetherell (2012, 2013), affect is also patterned, leading her to claim that a fruitful analytic approach to affect is by focusing on ‘practice’. This Wetherell (2013, p. 234) argues, is primarily due to the ways ‘people both actively practice and thus are agentic in that limited sense, but they are also constituted as they practice and through their histories of past practice’. That is, affective practice, as developed by Wetherell (2013), is ‘focused on recognisable repetitions’ and emphasises the role of the subject in embodied social action and affective responses. Wetherell’s (2012) concept of ‘affective practice’, draws attention to the experience of being ‘in place’, enabling analysis of the plurality of subjective experiences, while simultaneously recognising the intersubjective feelings the live bout can evoke, such as joy, excitement, belonging, and happiness.
Focus on affective practice illuminates the dimensions of spectatorship described in the excerpt above, as mobile, fluctuating phenomena composed through ‘ebbs’ and ‘flows’. Live bouts (like other sporting events) highlight the ‘messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near’ (Ahmed 2010a, p. 30). While enveloped in this exhilarating environment, the experience is bound up in the relationship between spectators, made more pronounced by bodies’ proximity in suicide seating that facilitates the communication of affective experience (see Figures 4 and 5 below).
Figure 4: S2D2 members in Suicide Seating during ‘5x5’ competition at Central Coast Youth Club, 2013. Photograph taken by Captain Shutterspeed.

Figure 5: Yelling spectator, SRDL bout, Hordern Pavilion, 2011. Photograph taken by Captain Shutterspeed.
According to Angel and Gibbs (2006, p. 24), the face in particular ‘is an indispensable element in suturing the human into forms of visual communication, and in mediating forms of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ expression’. As depicted in Figures 4 and 5, proximity to other scene members and to ‘the action’ on the track means that faces are highly significant conduits of affective communication. Referring to the excerpt at the beginning of this section, I noted that as the jammer broke through the pack, Femme Furious’ facial expression dramatically changed: her eyes suddenly widened, her eyebrows arched, and her mouth opened to expel a burst of sound as she sat up off the floor. This affective response is an example of the ways affect is ‘patterned’ (Wetherell 2012) and part of affective practice. In this context, affects are mobilised in what Wetherell (2013, p. 235) refers to as ‘recognisable repetitions’; while appearing spontaneous, this display is a practiced response to the live bout, it is, in effect, a form of ‘affecting spectatorship’.

The surfacing of my own affective response to the event, and to Femme Furious’ bodily response, is mimetic in nature and follows, in part, from normative ‘scripts’ of emotional responses—to the ‘pattern layers on pattern, forming and re-forming’ (Wetherell 2012, p. 14)—as part of my embodied experience of the bout as a live sporting event. That is, at times ‘we are very obviously engaged in a process of ‘emotional quotation’ or ‘affective citation’, endlessly plagiarising our own and others’ past practice’ (Wetherell 2010, p. 23). This may also be seen in Figures 4 and 5, as they capture this form of affective practice, as well as the power of faces in the flow of affective intensities.
These affective practices are also related to the live bout as an ‘event of enthusiasm’ as:

Enthusiasm exists on the level of the subject and of the body, but it also exists on the level of cultural events of the scene… [E]nthusiasm is a set of subjectively experienced relations that are often mistaken for being a purely subject phenomenon; enthusiasm is social and relies on the proximity of other bodies and the movement of affect across bodies (Fuller 2007, p. 80).

Influenced by Deleuze, Fuller (2007) claims that an event of enthusiasm is experienced through the circulation of affects between enthusiasts, the experience of subjective affect and the specificity of social relations related to the event; the event of enthusiasm is dependent on the expectation of it being enthusiastic. The specificity of the venue and promotion of an entertainment package are elements that contribute to the constitution of the live bout as a place of positive leisure experiences. Furthermore, live bouts are sporting events and as such are informed—on conscious and unconscious levels—by socio-historical and cultural understandings of the normative and acceptable forms of sporting spectatorship.

Affective practices are, therefore, bound up in implicit understandings of what a live bout is, and how it should and does affect people. The social and psychic dimensions of the live bout provide the potential for enthusiasm and various other forms of embodied enlivening (Ahmed 2010b; Fuller 2007). In this way, the live bout is seen to represent a ‘moment of recruitment, articulation or enlistment when many complicated flows across bodies, subjectivities, relations, histories and contexts entangle and intertwine together to form just this affective moment, episode or
atmosphere’ (Wetherell 2015, p. 160). As an event of enthusiasm, the live bout can be seen as facilitating patterns of affective behaviour as they connect with social practices and flow through, from, and between scene members.

During my initial live bout experiences, there were times when I was unsure what we were yelling at or about; I could discern whether it was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ from the tone or form of yelling—from ‘yeah’ to ‘ohh’ noises—or the lowering or raising of brows in facial changes from ‘excitement’ to ‘consternation’, but the intricacies of the game that produced such affective responses were beyond me. While my own knowledge of the game advanced, reflection on these early experiences demonstrated the ambiguity of affective transference and of ‘reading’ faces; while ‘a face does tells us a story’… it is never the whole story’ (Edkins 2015, p. 20). For instance, in Figure 4, while it is apparent that spectators are reacting to competitive play, it is unclear if they are supportive of the downed skater in the foreground, or if they are experiencing more negative affects. Similarly, in Figure 5 the focus on the male spectator results in a loss of context. It is unclear what he was yelling about, or how he felt in this moment; is his face captured in a moment of happiness or anger? This demonstrates that affective entanglement needs cognitive understanding; it marks the moment when affective experience becomes emotional experience.
While suicide seating is the optimal place for spectators, there are other locations that provide similar affective experiences due to their proximity to the live bout.

The people who understand derby would probably sit trackside, there’s another which, from a photographer’s view, is interesting which is not available for an audience and that’s inside the track. I’ve been inside and it’s quite (pause), the- (pause) the closer you get, the more involved and into it you get. I know that some photographers actually shout while they’re taking photos (laughs) they want to get more involved. And when you get the screaming crowd it really does get you hyped up, I guess closer to the action is probably the best seat in the house (Captain Shutterspeed, photographer).

Captain Shutterspeed recognises something that develops from being inside the track. This ‘something’ is difficult to capture, as is apparent in his pause and when he attempts to explain the feeling: ‘I’ve been inside and it’s quite (pause), the- (pause) the closer you get, the more involved and into it you get’. ‘It’ develops out of proximity, to the sporting spectacle of colliding bodies, and to the mass of screaming spectators. An inability to articulate what ‘it’ is and is like, may be considered from the perspective of Anderson’s (2009, p. 78) work on affective atmospheres, where he explains that the term ‘atmosphere seems to express something vague’. It is:

Something, an ill-defined indefinite something, that exceeds rational explanation and clear figuration. Something that hesitates at the edge of the unsayable. Yet, at one and the same time, the affective qualities that are given to this something by those who feel it are remarkable for their singularity (Anderson 2009, p. 78).
Attempting to probe the ‘something’ in roller derby, I asked Captain Shutterspeed and other participants what the ‘atmosphere’ or ‘vibe’ is like at roller derby bouts.

It’s just like any other sport, you have the fans and they’ll cheer for it and so you get that atmosphere happening… That feeling! It’s probably what you feel like when you watch big time sports and the huge hundred thousand people crowds. People are screaming their heads off, it’s electric. That’s what I’ve felt a few times. It’s really again that critical mass where there’s enough people cheering and people having a good time and yeah, the atmosphere I would describe as electric sometimes (Captain Shutterspeed, photographer).

The tension and the vibe, it’s electric and it spreads and everybody feels it. It doesn’t matter if you’re a kid and you don’t know what’s going on and you’re just there for pretty colours and the girls on skates, or if you are someone that knows about the game like me; the vibe is electric! (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).

Describing the feeling of a live bout as ‘electric’ evokes the experience of circulating and contagious affective flows, as ‘it spreads and everybody feels it’. As part of the new direction in studies of affect, Anderson (2009, 2014), Ahmed (2004), Bissell (2010), and Wetherell (2012b)—amongst others—focus on the collective, atmospheric, ‘contagious’, and ‘circulating’ dimensions of affect. Such works challenge the idea that emotions originate from, and are contained within, the individual. Instead, ‘emotions are not simply ‘within’ or ‘without’… they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects’ (Ahmed 2004, p. 25).

An atmosphere is an ongoing, ‘living’ formation that suffuses places and spaces, yet is simultaneously dependent on the ‘tone’ and nature of energies produced through the relationality of individuals therein; the affective atmosphere of a live bout (or other sporting events) will differ greatly to that of a library or a classroom (Edensor 2015). The environment created is implicated in intersubjective transference of
affective intensities; it can ‘take us over’, ‘recruit’ and ‘push’ us, leading us to experience the communicable dimensions of affective enlivening. Anderson (2009, p. 80) suggests that affective atmospheres are ‘generated by bodies—of multiple types—affecting one another as some form of ‘envelopment’ is produced…[with] affective qualities emanating from the assembling of… human bodies’.

While both Captain Shutterspeed and De-Nominator identify an ‘electric’ feeling, where ‘it’ comes from and how it is sustained is unfixed. The ambiguity of ‘where’ the circulation of affect originates is not just about roller derby, but relates to larger theoretical debates concerning the nature of affective atmospheres; are atmospheres ‘finished’ or ‘unfinished’, ‘reducible to bodies affecting other bodies and exceeding the bodies they emerge from’, are they located in ‘subjects’ or ‘objects’, or are they free floating (Anderson 2014, p. 141)? Captain Shutterspeed’s and De-Nominator’s accounts demonstrate that the processes of generating the bout atmosphere are not isolated within the body, but also do not ‘float free from the bodies that come together to compose situations’ (Anderson 2009, p. 80). Instead, both participants’ accounts direct analysis to the issue of attending to the affective/emotional dimensions of leisure activities that are simultaneously impersonal—being experienced by collective bodies in public spaces and places—and yet are experienced and represented in distinctly personal ways (Anderson 2009; Edensor 2012).

Focus on affective practices and the circulation of affect between scene members, illuminates the multiplicity of scenic events. While affective flows may operate in similar ways across different roller derby sites, the tone or feeling of live bouts will be configured through the specific forms of intertwining social and cultural dynamics, subjective and intersubjective experience, and the energy produced by,
and through, competitive play. Scenic events are affectively and culturally heterogeneous and would not be possible without the performative contributions of non-skaters.

**Conclusion**

Through this discussion, I have aimed to emplace scenic activity through an analysis of the live bout as a pleasure-oriented site of collective, collaborative performances, and affectively charged experiences. In this chapter I have investigated some of the micro-level practices of the roller derby scene, and argued that live bouts afford an array of social interactions and embodied experiences that, I argued, are largely given meaning through their perceived relationship to discourses of theatricality and sporting legitimation. Analysis of roller derby’s entertainment package reveals that presentation styles and forms of entertainment comingle, are appropriated, and are used to ensure spectator interest (Crawford 2004). While identifying and exploring such continuities between roller derby and other, traditional and commercial sports/sporting events, by drawing on Breeze (2015) and her concept of ‘non-/seriousness,’ I revealed that roller derby utilises playfulness to distinguish itself within the competitive sport and leisure market. My argument that roller derby ‘sells’ itself to spectators by developing a unique entertainment package challenges sport/spectacle and alternative/mainstream dualisms, thus undermining narrow representations of roller derby as sport and not spectacle.

Extending this analysis and broadening the scope of roller derby scholarship, this chapter aimed to demonstrate the centrality of non-skaters (particularly spectators) to the performance of roller derby at live bouts and the constitution of the scene more broadly. This involved investigating the live bout as a pleasure-oriented site of
embodied enlivening. My analysis indicates that non-skaters are crucial to the performance of roller derby, contributing to the affectively charged atmosphere circulating at live bouts. Exploring the socio-spatial dynamics of the live bout, this chapter has situated roller derby within both the urban, and sport and leisure landscapes. This analysis reveals the ways roller derby bouts foster a heterogeneous scene, problematising representations of roller derby as a sub-cultural, ‘alternative’ sport that occupies a place ‘on the outskirts’ of the sport and leisure landscape.
Chapter 4: Fan and Celebrity Interactional Dynamics in Roller Derby

It’s half time at a WSR bout at Penrith Valley Regional Sport Centre. I walk into the bathroom and stop in the queue behind a group of skaters. They are red-faced and sweaty. As they are still wearing their gear in the low ceilinged and narrow bathroom corridor, they tower over us all. Two little girls, possibly about 8 years old, enter the bathroom behind me. As soon as they see the skaters their mouths fall open and they stop in the entry way in silent awe. Realising people are trying to leave, the girls shyly move into the line, their gaze fixed on the skaters ahead of me. As one of the skaters turns around to talk to a team mate she sees the little girls staring at them. Smiling, she waves and asks if they are enjoying roller derby. Blushing and looking nervous, both girls nod but don’t respond. Leaning against the wall I can’t help but smile as both girls seem to have lost their voices. The skater simply chuckles good-naturedly; I get the impression this has happened before. As the next cubicle becomes free and it is her turn to use the bathroom, the skater leans forward and stretches out her hand to high-five the little girls. Entering the cubicle, she looks over her shoulder at them and says ‘see you on the track!’ As the door closes, both girls look at each other, their cheeks till pink as they smile broadly (JA fieldnotes, 23/6/12).

Introduction

In exploring the applications of the concept of scene, and investigating roller derby as a spectator, I was particularly attuned to the social interactions between groups of individuals (such as skaters and spectators) unfolding in the public spaces of the live bout. Standing in the bathroom observing the exchange described above, I was struck by the girls’ awed reactions, and how their behaviour constructed the skaters as objects of adoration. During my fieldwork, I observed and participated in similar interactions that were made possible by the proliferation of skaters moving amongst the crowd, using public bathrooms, standing in the canteen or cupcake line, or
simply socialising with spectators throughout the venue. Drawing on interview and observational data, I argue that roller derby is not immune to the impact of what Holmes and Redmond (2010, p. 6) refer to as the ‘culture of celebrity’, as people within the roller derby scene—skaters most commonly—are gaining fame and are becoming ‘local celebrities’ (Ferris 2010).

Boorstin (1962, p. 58) famously defined celebrity as ‘a person well-known for their well-knownness’. Celebrities occupy a public, often esteemed position in our contemporary collective social consciousness; they are ‘allowed to move on the public stage while the rest of us watch’ (Marshall 1997, p. ix). While numerous definitions abound, ‘a good-enough rule of thumb would be that celebrity is a person whose image or life has any commercial value’ (Van Krieken 2012, p. 10). The extensive field of celebrity scholarship provides numerous reviews of the economic, social, and cultural function of celebrity in contemporary society (see Marshall 1997; Rojek 2001; Turner 2007b). Mass-mediated, global celebrity is the main focus of celebrity studies and scholars predominantly define celebrities as commodities and products of media and promotional industries (Holmes & Redmond 2006; Marshall 1997; Redmond & Holmes 2012; Rojek 2001; Smart 2005; Turner 2007a, 2007b; Van Krieken 2012). These analytic works situate celebrity within a complex network of social, cultural, and economic relations and structures of power that are also often founded on a dichotomous framework of fan/celebrity as consumer/producer respectively (Hills 2006).

While there are extensive terms used to describe the asymmetrical relationship between fans and the objects of their fandom—including ‘star’—this thesis utilises ‘celebrity’. Particularly in film studies, ‘star’ has been utilised to draw an on/off-screen distinction (Holmes and Redmond 2010: 4). While ‘star’ has been used in studies of fame in sport, film, and music, the term ‘celebrity’ has a wider currency and is often used to describe various states of contemporary fame, including global, mass-mediated fame, virtual fame (such as vloggers), and local fame.
In recent years, however, some scholars have recognised celebrity as increasingly fragmented and permeable, manifesting in an array of social and cultural contexts that vary in size, circulate in a variety of cultural sites, and are associated with specific, often ‘niche’ fan audiences (Chin & Hills 2008; Ferris 2010; Hills 2006; Page 2012; Williams 2016; Young 2004). While this scholarly interest has produced an assortment of concepts to articulate the specificity of small-scale celebrity forms—including, ‘micro-celebrity’ (Page 2012), ‘localebrity’ (Williams 2016), ‘ordinary celebrity’ (Dovey 2000; Holmes 2012; Williamson 2010), and ‘subcultural celebrity’ (Chin & Hills 2008; Hills 2006)—in this chapter I utilise Ferris’ (2010) concept of ‘local celebrity’.

Ferris (2010) describes her concept of local celebrity as a ‘type’ of Hills’ (2006) subcultural celebrity. According to Hills (2006), advances in media and communication technologies has enabled members of audience subcultures, particularly as they manifest around cult television shows such as *Dr Who*, to acquire fame and celebrity. For Hills (2006), fan communities manifesting around media texts provides opportunities to explore small-scale celebrity formations, what he describes as subcultural celebrity. Central to Hills’ (2006) approach to celebrity is a focus on the ways boundaries between producer and consumer blur and overlap. In a similar fashion, Ferris’ (2010) local celebrity directs analysis towards small-scale sites of social and cultural activity and incorporates Hills’ (2006) emphasis on the arbitrariness of producer/consumer boundaries. However, unlike Hills (2006), Ferris (2010) focuses on co-present fan/celebrity interactional dynamics and the lived experience of celebrity that compliments my use of scene and focus on the socio-spatial dynamics of roller derby.
According to Ferris (2010), the interactional dynamics central to celebrity, namely, recognisability, relational asymmetry, lack of mutuality and in most instances, a lack of physical contact or interaction, are relevant to mass media generated and local celebrity forms. However, these interactional dynamics, she argues, may be less distinct in local fan/celebrity formations as there is a higher degree of accessibility (Ferris 2010). I use Ferris’ (2010) concept of local celebrity because it can account for the hybridisation of consumer/producer roles in the roller derby scene, and direct attention toward the experience of fame and celebrity from celebrities’ point of view. In so doing, local celebrity enables me to gain greater depth in my analysis of the forms of social interaction in scenic spaces and places, while emphasising a unique co-constructed relationship that is central to the constitution of the roller derby scene but has yet to be identified and explored in the scholarly literature.

This chapter is divided into two thematically organised sections. Firstly, I focus on the specificity and constitution of roller derby’s local celebrity. I identify athletic prowess, ‘realness’, and accessibility as common attributes of roller derby’s local celebrities. Acquiring fame and celebrity status, I argue, adds to one’s roller derby capital. Some participants in my study have accumulated fame and I explore how they subjectively understand and experience celebrity in the scene. I argue that while some participants are ambivalent about their fame, many members find their shifting social and cultural status ‘weird’, ‘crazy’, and in conflict with a sense of being ‘ordinary’. This analysis is not confined to skaters, although they do tend to gain more fame. Taking a scenic approach, in this section I identify various non-skater celebrities including media personalities and referees. The aim of this section, therefore, is to argue that the Sydney roller derby scene supports a web of celebrity that is neither confined to skaters, nor to women.
Directed by scene’s focus on social interaction, the second section of this chapter analyses the unique interactional dynamics between fans and local celebrities at live bouts. This analysis focuses predominantly on the post-bout high five and the importance placed by participants on haptic communication. I argue that accessibility, particularly the chance to ‘touch’ and interact with roller derby’s local celebrities, distinguishes roller derby within the broader sport and leisure landscape. I further argue that as a result, roller derby culture provides a unique site for the analysis of celebrity relations. Through the exploration of interactional dynamics, this analysis expands arguments developed in Chapter 3 by emphasising the centrality of non-skaters to scene-making processes and their role as active members of the scene.

‘Roller derby girls are different; they are real’: Investigating roller derby’s ‘local celebrity’

Relatability and accessibility

Scholars commonly agree that celebrity is a product of a complex media and publicity industry (Marshall 1997; Rojek 2001; Smart 2005; Turner 2007a, 2007b). Local celebrity, however, is distinguished by the accessibility of the celebrities to their fans (Ferris 2010). It is also less reliant on mass media and may be constructed and circulated via alternate channels of social and cultural communication. In the roller derby scene, this includes how it operates in and through social interaction at live bouts. In my analysis of interview data, I found that participants tended to valorise skaters for their relatability, realness, and accessibility.
It’s just that the skaters seem like more real people. Say you went to a tennis match; they just seem like sports stars. Do you know what I mean? Derby people just seem more real and maybe that’s what it is… And they come down and they’re slapping hands with everyone in the crowd… I think it’s much more personal (Suzi Ephedrine, business owner).

It is the relatability of the skaters. They’re not on a pedestal. They look like you or me. They look like your average person… It makes you feel that you can do that because you don’t have to be this superior athlete with this certain body type or this certain image… I think that’s what makes it so accessible and that’s what makes you feel like, “Hey! I could do that!” Because I look like these people and they look like me (Dita Von Bruiser, S2D2 skater).

Mass-mediated celebrity is often underscored by a sense of ‘ordinariness’, that van Krieken (2012, p. 10) claims enables ‘some degree of identification by non-celebrities’ with celebrated figures. However, celebrity is also widely recognised as a media construction that effectively elevates individuals to a position akin to being a hero (Smart 2005). This produces a complicated dynamic as celebrities are often constructed as ‘real’ people, yet are distanced from the average person and ‘ordinary’ life. Amongst these global celebrities, sports stars have been represented as ‘authentic’ and upheld as role models (Allen 2011; Turner 2007b). Yet, the commodification of sporting celebrities, and increased media coverage has led to a disassociation between professional sports stars and ‘realness’ (Smart 2005). Professional sport stars are distanced from fans through their drastically different social, cultural, and economic status and capital, and embody the inaccessibility of the ‘unreal’ and the extraordinary (Miller 2001; Smart 2005). There is also, however, a growing body of work that considers the potential degradation of sports stars due to poor behaviour—instances of drug use, domestic violence, racism, homophobia, and drunkenness—that potentially undermines some athletes’ image and status as role models (see Kennedy 2000; Lines 2001; Sefiha 2012; Skinner 2010). In
contrast, roller derby skaters are constituted as ‘ordinary’ and, as local celebrities in an amateur DIY sport, are comparatively more accessible.

Roller derby affords unique sporting experiences by reducing boundaries between individuals and groups of individuals in scenic spaces and places. This is evident in SuziEphedrine’s comment that skaters ‘come down’ to ‘[slap] hands with everyone in the crowd’. The proximity between skaters and spectators at roller derby bouts produces an environment conducive to close, personal, and even physical contact between fans and local celebrities. In Sydney at least, roller derby’s local celebrities are ‘more real’ because the scene supports reduced relational asymmetry. This is primarily due to roller derby’s maintenance as an amateur, DIY cultural formation where embodied interaction rather than media consumption is prioritised in social and cultural activity, and associated celebrity experiences. The distinctive feature of this interaction is the possibility of physical contact between fans and the objects of their fandom. The centrality of touch in participants’ accounts of fan/celebrity interactional dynamics is explored in the second part of his chapter.

Roller derby skaters are also relatable, real, and ‘ordinary’ because they resemble the average person. As Dita Von Bruiser explains, it ‘makes you feel like, “Hey! I could do that!”’. Other participants conveyed similar sentiments. Michelle, a spectator, states that ‘it’s just so different, I love that they look like the rest of us, it is probably what attracted me to it in the first place’, while Morgan explains that she has been to professional sporting events and ‘they seem superior or something. Roller derby girls are different; they are real’. The ordinary quality and ‘realness’ of skaters fosters spectator identification and contributes to a sense of intimacy and connection. Further, skaters’ diverse body sizes—in a social and cultural climate where women’s
sporting participation and musculature is often scrutinised (Burroughs & Nauright 2000; Fink 2015; Hardy 2015; Mennesson 2000)—supports the function of roller derby celebrities as role models for diverse physical, social, and cultural possibilities and ‘becomings’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b).

**Being ‘extraordinary’: Athletic ability and transformation**

Ferris (2010, p. 393) suggests that if ‘recognizability is the central element of celebrity status, the category of “celebrity” may be expanded considerably’ to include a diverse array of local personalities. While all skaters experience some degree of fame, a select group of scene members were particularly idolised; their contributions to the scene or their individual achievements were widely recognised. Most commonly, participants attributed fame and status to skaters who exhibited extraordinary athletic ability.

[Haterade’s] awesome! Some skaters you really admire because they’re really quick Jammers and can get through the pack, and then others you admire because they’re amazing hitters. She seems tactical which is kind of the style that I tend to err on, because I’m not naturally quick and I’m not built to be a hard, big hitter so I rely a lot on tactics (Dame Dead’na, WSR skater).

I love Winnie Bruise! I’m not a Jammer and it’s just that, one day, I would love to Jam like she does. To effortlessly do the laps that she does. I’m [also] a really big fan of DangerAss, just because she’s so athletic and I know that before derby she wasn’t. I like her transition and how fit she is (Dita Von Bruiser, S2D2 skater).

In foregrounding sporting performance, participants align roller derby with normative understandings of fame and celebrity in sport as ‘achieved’ (Rojek 2001; Smart 2005). In roller derby as well as sporting cultures more broadly, celebrity is ‘habitually reduced to individual qualities such as innate talent, dedication, and good
fortune, thus positioning the sport star as a deserved benefactor of his/her devotion to succeed within the popular imaginary’ (Andrews & Jackson 2002, p. 8). The meritocratic nature of sport means athletes ‘can prove they are the best’ (Giles 2000, p. 107, emphasis in original).

For Dame Dead’na and Dita Von Bruiser, Haterade’s and Winnie Bruises’ fame emerges from their comprehensive understanding of the rules and ‘flow’ of the bout: these skaters are not simply proficient, but are extraordinary competitors. Being a ‘tactical’ player, Haterade is valorised for her ability to read the game, emphasising her strategic ability. Haterade’s skating prowess was ‘proven’ through her selection for ‘Team Australia’ in the 2011 Roller Derby World Cup in Toronto, Canada; she was the only Sydney-based skater selected. Haterade also remains one of the few skaters selected for a ‘featured skater’ article in HAM (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6: ‘Feature: Haterade’, Hit & Miss, Issue 10, Spring 2012, pp. 30-31.
Winnie Bruise was identified by many people that I spoke to as the skater. Olivia once declared, ‘Winnie is just the best! She is amazing! There is no one else like her’ (emphasis in original), while her eight-year-old daughter ‘is a massive fan’, adopting ‘Mini Bruise’ as a derby name in honour of her favourite skater. Similarly, Meg 4 Mercy stated that Winnie Bruise is her ‘favourite’ because ‘she’s so awesome’ and that she just loves her, while Morgan declared that ‘Winnie Bruise is a force! She is absolutely brilliant’. Winnie Bruise’s seemingly effortless performance and being a ‘force’ on the track, indicates a high level of physical and competitive proficiency and grace. These accounts indicate that through their extensive training and bouting experience, Haterade and Winnie Bruise have cultivated a set of abilities that have marked them as extraordinary athletes in the scene. Both skaters have, therefore, acquired roller derby capital for their sporting achievements, and as a result, are represented as roller derby celebrities.

According to Marshall (2006, p. 3), celebrity is not only a ‘key trope’ of our contemporary culture, it is also, and perhaps more importantly, ‘the lingua franca of identity’ in modern times. This suggests that, whether we want it or not, we measure our own value, as well as the value of our everyday life, against popular and celebrated individuals. In roller derby, participants often represent skaters’ physical transformations as inspirational, and descriptions of skaters as scene members’ ‘ultimate’ or ‘favourite’ are often coupled with declarations of wanting to ‘be like them’, wishing they could be ‘half the skater they are’, or to be ‘as good as them’. Dita Von Bruiser likes DangerAss’ ‘transition and how fit she is’, while De-Nominator describes Aprilla the Hun as her ‘ultimate!’ , stating that ‘if I could be half the skater that she is then I’d be happy… I aim to be as good as her’. This suggests that roller derby celebrities are exemplars, each representing a possibility amongst
what other scholars have recognised as the multiplicity of derby girl ‘becomings’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2013). This indicates a possible extension of Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2013) conceptualisation of ‘becoming derby grrrls’, to include celebritisation as skaters must come to terms and navigate changes in their social and cultural status as they become objects of fandom.

This celebration of athletic ability and bodily transformation in participants’ commentary of favoured and famous skaters also reflects the turn to sporting seriousness in roller derby. It demonstrates divergence from the primary emphasis on theatrical skater performances that characterised previous incarnations. Personality skaters—such as Midge “Toughie” Brasuhn and Gerry Murray in the late 1930s, or Joanie “Blonde Bomber” Weston and Ann “Demon of the Derby” Calvello in the 1950s and 1960s—encouraged rivalry and promoted theatrical displays of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ (Barbee & Cohen 2010; Coppage 1999; Mabe 2007). As explored by Breeze (2014) and discussed here in Chapter 3, skaters have become increasingly concerned with being taken seriously. While seriousness in practice is ‘neither entirely singular nor coherent, but include[s] critiques of the gendering of serious sport in strategies of ridicule and satire’ (Breeze 2015, p. 29), the focus on individual skater performance discussed in this section indicate that sporting seriousness in roller derby can also be distinctly normative when extended to forms of fame and celebrity. This does not negate the spectacular elements of live bouts (as discussed in Chapter 3), or the ways skaters may negotiate seriousness in more playful and less normative ways. It does, however, indicate the relational quality of celebrity in roller derby as a mode of accentuating sporting seriousness, as the celebration of specific individuals is only possible through the adoration, investment, and affective and emotional practices of roller derby fans.
The ‘weirdness’ of celebrity

According to Ferris (2010), a highly under-researched area in celebrity studies is the lived experience of celebrities. Primarily due to issues over access, researchers have often had to limit themselves to textual analyses (such as of media) and/or fans’ representations of celebrities. Scholars, therefore, know very little about the lived experience of celebrity (Ferris 2010; Hills 2006). Localised, small-scale contexts, such as the Sydney roller derby scene, provide a unique opportunity to explore and analyse celebrity experience from the perspective of celebrities.

For many participants in this study, being the object of fandom can be bemusing, even confronting. When I asked participants about their relationship with fans, there was a tendency to describe such interactions as ‘weird’ or ‘crazy’.

I suppose if I thought of us as skaters having fans that would be freaky. Do you know what I mean? I would be like, “What the hell?! Go away!” But I do also appreciate that. Me, myself, I don’t know how many derby crushes I have but because I’m a skater I find it weird that potentially one day that could be either me, probably not me, but people I skate with. We’re just ordinary, like average people. I find that really bizarre (Madame Dirty Boots, S2D2 skater).

De-Nominator provided a similarly toned response when I asked her what it is like being one of the Viva la Derby podcast presenters.

I like to call myself a D-grade derby celebrity. That’s what I like to call myself because I’m not famous in any sense of the word, but people know who I am and I’ve never even met them and it’s because of Viva La Derby. Go look at my Facebook page, I am friends with the frickin’ world, I have so many people on my friends list, I have literally ten friends, the rest of them are just people that are fans of the show, it’s crazy! It’s crazy! People started recognising me at derby things by my voice because of Viva la Derby. They’re like ‘Hey, hey! You’re De-Nominator!’ and I’m like yeah, yeah (laughs). It’s seriously weird (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).
Both accounts illuminate a tension between the skaters’ ‘ordinary’ sense of self, and the acquisition of fame that suggests they are—or may one day be—‘extraordinary’ members of the scene. This is evident in both skaters’ use of ‘weird’ and ‘crazy’, and Madame Dirty Boots’ claim that the adoration directed at skaters is ‘really bizarre’. The tension over celebrity status is most apparent when De-Nominator describes herself as a ‘D-grade derby celebrity’. The ‘D-List’ is a colloquial term loosely used to describe third or fourth-rate celebrities (Palmer 2005). The composition of the D-List in contemporary society is not precise, but is ‘sometimes composed of people who have emerged from the audience [and] it may be the closest representation of the ordinary as celebrity’ (Palmer 2005, p. 39). For De-Nominator, the common sense idea of the D-list is used to marry feelings of being ‘ordinary’ with the ‘experience of being recognized by far more people than one can recognize back’ (Ferris 2010, p. 393).

Ordinariness, according to Savage et al. (2004, p. 11), is a ‘key arena around which people seek to establish the commonality of their shared position with various others’. Claiming ordinariness enables participants to ‘opt into’ a range of shared practices and activities in a situation where the multiplicity of fields may pull them into separate practices. This is because interaction with celebrities involves a ‘unique tension between stranger (for whom approach is prohibited) and intimate (for whom approach is required)’ (Ferris & Harris 2011, p. 34). To be famous is thus to become a public figure and fans may expect that these public figures should be approachable in ways not normally condoned in social interactions and that may be confronting due to their contrast with local celebrities’ self-perception as ‘ordinary’. 

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This dynamic unfolds in social interactions at live bouts. When I attended Eastern Region Roller Derby competition at Penrith Valley Region Sport centre in 2012, I experienced my own ‘derby crush’ moment that led to a ‘weird’ encounter.

From the first whistle, I was in love with Vice City’s ShortStop from Canberra Roller Derby League. She was the smallest skater on the track, and as a jammer, she claimed centre stage. Weaving in and out the pack, she was quick, agile, and unstoppable; I was unable to keep my eyes off her. Jam after jam, her performance was flawless and through the whole bout I could see her smiling. She loved it, and it was contagious.

Later that day, I went to get a drink and found myself standing behind ShortStop in the canteen line. Even in her skates she was short; she barely reached eye-level. I stood there in silence, surprised to find that I was flustered at the prospect of talking to her. Would it be weird if I said hi? What would I say? Would it be okay to get a photo? Racked with indecision, I watched as she moved up to the counter. I still hadn’t said anything. Then, she was picking up her drink and turning to go. Suddenly, I reacted. I tapped her on the shoulder, before unceremoniously—and in an overly loud voice—blurted out a less than eloquent compliment on being an amazing jamming.

I remember her shocked and embarrassed expression; her eyes had gone a little wide and while she initially gabbed at me, she recovered relatively quickly. Giving me a lopsided smile, her gaze shot up to meet mine and then shifted away just as quickly as she simply said ‘Thanks! I’m glad you enjoyed it’. Then there was an awkward silence. Embarrassed at my uncharacteristic awkwardness I simply stood there for a moment before she nodded slightly, smiled once more, then turned and skated away (JA fieldnotes, 20/9/12).

This account draws attention to the importance of an interaction-based analysis of celebrity. While my address was fumbled, and set an ‘awkward’ tone to the exchange, it reveals the co-constructed nature of fan/celebrity dynamics and sheds light on the lived experience of local celebrity in a highly accessible site. While global, mass-mediated celebrities are often highly-trained performers able to navigate diverse social situations and their celebrity status (Ferris & Harris 2011), roller derby’s local celebrities are not coached or prepared for the fan/celebrity
encounter. This experience, therefore, draws attention to the ‘shock’ of celebrity in the roller derby scene. As ‘ordinary’ people, roller derby skaters (and other famous scene members) experience a shift in status where the social situation represents the intersection of intimacy and strangeness. The encounter can, as represented in the excerpt above, be jarring as ShortStop is positioned as a ‘public’ and thus approachable figure. This experience suggests that the ‘weird’ and ‘crazy’ feeling associated with fan attentions is evidence of local celebrities attempting to manage and negotiate a shift in their social and cultural status, as well as their position and role in interactions.

While my focus has primarily been on the constitution and experience of celebrity in the Sydney roller derby scene, it is important to recognise that ‘stars often occupy a range of positions along an axis of recognition, from international or transnational stardom, to national recognition, through to more specific local fame’ (Williams 2016, p. 159). By reflecting on the accounts discussed throughout this chapter, it is apparent that roller derby’s local celebrity is differentially ‘valued’; there is a web of celebrity within the scene. Returning to De-Nominator, being a ‘D-Grade derby celebrity’ suggests that she positions herself ‘below’ other roller derby celebrities; she is famous, but not as famous as other members of the scene. This is emphasised in her admiration for SRDL’s Aprilla the Hun discussed in the first section of this chapter (p. 138), and when she describes her reaction to interviewing famous skaters as part of her role in the roller derby podcast Viva la Derby, stating, ‘I was hiding behind Big Kahuna, shaking in my boots and like oh my god, we’re talking to Aprilla and Hater! I’m going to die, I’m gonna vom!’. This indicates that while De-Nominator has gained roller derby capital for her commitment to roller derby as a
media personality, and fame because of this involvement, she is still a fan of many other skaters.

Furthermore, when discussing roller derby celebrity, participants tended to distinguish between famous Sydney players (such as Winnie Bruise and Haterade) and scene members who have attained global fame. Participants commonly celebrated American skaters, identifying them as the most accomplished and famous in the world. Central amongst these was Suzy Hotrod from New York’s Gotham Girls Roller Derby league. According to Theda Bastard, Suzy Hotrod is ‘unbeatable as a jammer’, she is what ‘everyone wants to be’; she is ‘everything’. Dame Dead’Na expressed a similar sentiment, describing Suzy Hotrod simply as ‘the shit’ who is in ‘a league of her own’.

Recognising Suzy Hotrod’s fame in the roller derby scene, Big Kahuna described an interview he conducted with her while she was in Australia to run a series of ‘bootcamps’. In our interview, he describes an exchange he had with her where he asked her about the reception she had received from local leagues, explaining that:

Everyone goes a bit fangirl around her, I mean, it is Suzi F-ing Hotrod. But it was also funny. She was like ‘I get treated like royalty. People come straight up to me when I walk in, they want to talk to me, you know, say hi. But when I go back to my own league it’s like ‘Oh. Hey Suzi’’. It’s funny how that works (Big Kahuna, media personality).

These accounts indicate that the web of celebrity is hierarchically structured, and extends beyond local sites. Participants’ reverence for Suzy Hotrod demonstrates the breadth of the scene by indicating some of the ways roller derby’s social and cultural activity operates in translocal, global, and virtual ways. Yet, Big Kahuna’s
commentary also illuminates the ways celebrity may operate differently across different sites. That is, experiences of celebrity are dependent on the specificity of the social and cultural setting.

Throughout my research, it became apparent that fame was not restricted to skaters, as referees, NSOs, and other roller derby members also experience fame and celebrity in the scene. During participant observation, I identified numerous famous personalities, including the American roller derby announcer Dumptruck; referees, Sintax, Mr Spew, and Kernel Panic; contributors to roller derby media such as Ass N Junk, DangerAss, and GodJilla Sold Separately from ‘Grand Slam TV’, Big Kahuna, De-Nominator and Psychlone Cilla from ‘Viva la Derby’; and the renowned photographer, Captain Shutterspeed.

During fieldwork, I also met Hulking Out\textsuperscript{10} a member of the Sydney roller derby scene whose contributions are extensive; he is a male referee, coach of a women’s team, and plays men’s roller derby at both local and national levels. When discussing his extensive involvement in the scene he commented on his growing fame, stating, ‘I have my own fan-pages online. Fans have actually put up pages about me. It’s a little strange, I know my girlfriend who is also a skater thinks so, but it is also pretty cool’. Such members’ acquisition of fame in the roller derby scene problematises principles such as “By the skaters, for the skaters”, and the associated in/out, by/for dualisms of ownership and belonging that are central to the question ‘who is roller derby?’. Such accounts demonstrate that non-skaters and referees, regardless of gender, experience fame and celebrity.

\textsuperscript{10}‘Hulking Out’ is a pseudonym. The individual in question was encountered at a social event but was not interviewed, nor was consent procured to use his derby name in this study.
This analysis indicates that roller derby supports a web of celebrity. Participants’ emphasis on Sydney roller derby’s local celebrities as ‘real’, ‘ordinary’, and accessible works to distinguish roller derby’s distinctive culture within a competitive and highly commercialised sport and leisure landscape. Yet, through the analysis of interview data it is apparent that roller derby’s local celebrity also includes translocal, global, and virtual dimensions; however, while extending beyond the ‘local’ space and place of the live bout, roller derby’s local celebrity remains distinctly scenic in nature. By focusing on the experience of celebrity from the perspective of celebrities, my analysis also illuminates the ways it is negotiated in practice. This indicates the fluidity inherent in fan and celebrity positions; neither are static states of being. Guided by scene theory, this analysis reveals that scene members move between different social positions, and at times, occupy multiple positions simultaneously. That is, roller derby celebrities can be, and frequently are, fans of someone else.

‘She’s touching me right now!’: Fan/celebrity interactional dynamics in roller derby

Ferris (2010, p. 394) argues that unlike global, mass-mediated celebrities, ‘local celebrities are easier for audiences (and researchers) to access, to gather information about, and to connect with interactionally’. This section broadens the analysis of roller derby’s local celebrity to explore the unique interactional dynamics identified in the previous section in more detail. Specifically, in this section I focus on ‘trophy seeking’, the post-bout high-five, and the importance of ‘touch’ in fan/celebrity encounters.
To go up and to see these skaters afterwards, you kind of go like, “Oh my god! There they are! They’re like, right there!” It’s like that really weird sensation that all of a sudden these rock stars have stepped into your space. And you feel that you’re in rarefied air. And you go, “Wow…” So, you go up and go, “Oh, can I get an autograph?” And I’ve seen them do it and go, “Wow, you want my autograph?! Really?”…Because it’s still roller derby, they’re not getting paid for this, it’s amateur sport. And they’ll kind of go, “Yeah, yeah, absolutely! Did you want more? I’ll get more for you!” And then they grab the rest of their team (Pepâ la Pow!, WSR skater).

Pepâ la Pow!’s account reaffirms the web of celebrity identified in the previous section. While she emphasises the affective intensity of the fan/celebrity encounter—of feeling like you are in ‘rarefied air’—yet, she is also a skater and thus possibly produces such feelings in others. Furthermore, according to Ferris and Harris (2011, p. 14, emphasis in original), ‘[o]ne distinction between fan-celebrity relationships and “ordinary” social relationships involves the element of trophy seeking’, such as autographs or photographs. This behaviour was identified in numerous participant interviews. Olivia (spectator) stated on multiple occasions that she and her daughter often sought autographs, particularly from skaters on Team Unicorn and their favourite skater, Winnie Bruise. Similarly, when referring to Winnie Bruise, Meg 4 Mercy stated ‘I just love her. I just, I don’t know, I just want to touch her (laughs), or get her autograph or something’. In a similar account, Cameron states, ‘I have always wanted to chat to Captain Ratz, maybe grab her autograph, but I don’t know… It might be weird’. Requesting an autograph is a normative fan/celebrity practice that assumes celebrity status, while simultaneously constituting it.

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants expressed a desire to be ‘close to the action’. Participants frequently stated that they like to be ‘nice and close’, as it lets them ‘see things more clearly’, ‘hear skaters on the track’, and just be ‘more
involved’. They pursued what Ferris and Harris (2011, p. 30) describe as ‘the mutuality and reciprocity of co-present interaction’ often desired by fans. As discussed in Chapter 3, roller derby bouts are characterised by accessibility, enabling participants to see skaters moving amongst the crowd, to ‘touch’ their ‘heroes’, or talk to skaters after the bout. Being close to the track and ‘the action’ reduces the physical asymmetry of fan/celebrity dynamics at live bouts, and this is epitomised in the tradition of the post-bout high five (see Figure 7 and 8 below).
Figure 7: ‘Battle on the Bent Track’, Hordern Pavilion, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 2013. Photograph taken by Captain Shutterspeed.

Figure 8: WSR post-bout high-five between spectators and skaters, Cambridge Park Sports Complex, 2011. Photograph taken by Captain Shutterspeed.
As depicted in Figures 7 and 8, the post-bout high-five is a common cultural practice that sanctions skater and spectator physical contact. This ritualised practice had overwhelming support from participants in this study who largely perceived the event as a fun, collective activity that distinguishes roller derby from other sports/sporting events. When asked how she felt about the post-bout high-five, Morgan replied,

You get to see [the skaters] up close, even if they’re red and sweaty and stuff. It’s a friendly thing, so it’s nice to do. And I think if spectators are there holding out their hand, they definitely enjoyed it, and they’re passing on that enjoyment to the others as well, and their excitement. Because you run to the line, like yeah! Because you’re cheering, holding out your hand (Morgan, spectator).

Meanwhile, Pepâ la Pow emphasised the connection the post-bout high-five establishes between spectators and skaters.

Afterwards everybody comes down and there’s that tradition that has come up of slapping hands. And everybody gets down and you will touch every single skater, because you can stand out on the suicide line, put your hand out and they’ll come along and every derby skater will come and touch you. And there’s that intimacy that comes with that sort of thing (Pepâ la Pow!, WSR skater).

Both accounts emphasise the importance of haptic communication to feelings of scenic collectivity and fan/celebrity relationships. According to Ferris and Harris, (2011, p. 11) ‘often, what fans wish for most is the opportunity to pursue [celebrities]…beyond their consumption of celebrity news and into the real world—to “touch greatness”’. Touch has a central place in human interactions and has the potential to be pleasurable, aggressive, sexual, comforting, or even coercive (among other things) (Finnegan 2005). Touch can be welcome or unwelcome, and as a result, it is often socially regulated in terms of who can touch whom, where, when and
under what circumstances (Classen 2005; Hearn & Burr 2008). Touch also has a long history in religious traditions and iconic art works—from the *Creation of Adam* painted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, to the role of touching in prayer and religious practices—tactile contact is often used to represent the union of humans and the divine (de Witte 2011).

This is not to suggest that roller derby skaters are akin to religious figures, rather that historically, touch has been used to represent the emotional, physical and psychological bidirectional relationship between the individual and the divine, or the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘extraordinary’. Touch, more so than our other senses, enables us to establish reality (de Witte 2011; Finnegan 2005); to know something is real is often to discover or establish that it is tangible. For many fans, the notion of having a ‘brush with celebrity’ is primarily about the close, personal, and tangible experience. Fans, therefore, often pursue physical contact with celebrities over media consumption due to its ability to reconfigure the often asymmetrical fan/celebrity relationship (Ferris & Harris 2011).

While attending roller derby bouts, I often observed the movement that Morgan and Pepâ la Pow! describe as spectators flocked to the suicide line from the stands. This focus on proximity and spectators’ enthusiastic movement towards the track, signal a desire to be involved in the contact, the event, and the cultural mores of the roller derby scene. It enables spectators to gain a more intimate and personalised experiential encounter with skaters: to touch and be touched. The descriptions of touching in both accounts can, therefore, be seen as part of fans’ desire for interaction and contact with skaters—as part of their ‘trophy seeking’ (Ferris & Harris 2011)—as well as with other spectators. In so doing, this tradition effectively
constructs skaters as objects of adoration and as local celebrities, while simultaneously reaffirming spectators as part of performing roller derby rather than as passive outsiders.

Even though the roller derby scene fosters some forms of social interaction between groups—a process epitomised by the post-bout high-five—this contact is brief. While there are no barriers dividing spectators and skaters during this collective practice, spectators are restricted to certain behaviours; as seen in Figures 7 and 8, spectators extend their arm while standing still, shoulder to shoulder, along the track line without pushing forward, or pursuing contact beyond the cursory touch of skaters as they move from spectator to spectator. The post-bout high-five enables a sense of intimacy often unattainable in other sports and at professional sporting events, yet interaction between skaters and others still remains restricted. This practice, therefore, is a unique cultural activity where the parameters of fan/celebrity contact are reconfigured but not removed.

If we recognise the centrality of spectators to fan/celebrity dynamics and to the constitution of the scene more broadly, we also need to consider their agency in the scene. Even though the post-bout high-five is primarily discussed as an avenue of social connectivity and a way to convey feelings of joy and appreciation, it can also be used by spectators to communicate disappointment and disapproval. When I attended ERRD in 2012, ‘The Steely Strumpets’ engaged in unsportsmanlike behaviour (heckling, intimidation, name calling and ‘dirty’ moves) when they played ‘The Amazons’.11

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11 Both teams have been renamed to maintain their anonymity.
The atmosphere in the venue has become tense. I cannot believe it, but The Steely Strumpets have been heckling the competition. While their skaters wait on the bench I can hear them calling The Amazons names and trying to intimidate them. The Steely Strumpets’ skaters are even becoming more aggressive as some are resort to illegal moves.

A Steely Strumpet skater just elbowed one of The Amazons in the face!

The supporters are getting angry and are becoming increasingly vocal. Sitting in suicide seating I can hear the spectators around me labelling the unsportsmanlike antics examples of ‘dirty derby’. When I asked Lady Deathstrike what dirty derby means, she told me it refers to forms of behaviour not usually tolerated in roller derby: illegal moves, being overly aggressive, dangerous, and rude to fellow members.

When the bout finally finishes, the crowd is steaming with disgust. As the losing team, The Amazons are the first to make their way around the track to give/receive high-fives. The spectators line the track, arms outstretched. As the skaters pass I can hear comments from those flanking me: ‘you guys did really well, considering’, ‘you played clean, that’s what matters’, while the skater next to me simply yells out ‘Fuck ém!’. As The Steely Strumpets start their victory lap, however, the spectators suddenly and en masse, turn their backs and leave. When I asked a fellow spectator what just happened, she replied ‘I don’t high five dirty skaters, that wasn’t derby!’ (JA fieldnotes, 29/9/12).

The after-bout high-five uses interaction and physical contact—albeit brief—to convey gratitude, thanks, and congratulations as it brings different groups of individuals in the scene together. The collective action described in the excerpt above demonstrates how the post-bout high-five can also function as a form of social protest. In this context, the lack of touching is symbolic and uses the conventions of this roller derby tradition to make a public and collective statement of disappointment, anger and displeasure. This incident draws attention to potential tensions surrounding roller derby’s ethos of equality, community and support, to which the spectator’s ‘that wasn’t derby’ comment refers. It also draws attention to competitive tensions within an increasingly athletically focused sporting scene that
are often obscured by the rhetoric of sisterhood, community, and collective agency. Importantly, however, it illuminates the active role of non-skaters in scene-making practices. In exercising collective agency, these supporters challenged skaters’ capacity to determine what roller derby is.

**Conclusion**

Using scene theory and drawing on Ferris’ (2010) concept of local celebrity, this chapter has offered a new avenue of enquiry in roller derby scholarship. A central aim of this chapter has been to outline and explain the features of roller derby’s local celebrity as a system of cultural value in the scene. I explored the social, cultural, and embodied dimensions of roller derby celebrity, and by analysing participant commentary and observation data, revealed that roller derby celebrity is characterised by a sense of being ‘real’ and ‘ordinary’, and above all, being accessible. By focusing on the micro-level processes of scenic activity, this analysis indicates that the DIY, amateur and localised structure of the Sydney roller derby scene encourages fan/celebrity interaction and provides a more intimate sporting experience. The specific socio-spatial dimensions of the live bout, therefore, distinguishes roller derby from other sport/sport stars as the Sydney roller derby scene facilitates unique forms of social interaction (such as the post-bout high-five) that a sense of accessibility.

Findings indicating that roller derby celebrities are ‘ordinary’ and ‘real’ prompted an analysis of celebrities’ own experiences of celebrity. This analysis identified a tendency to characterise fame and celebrity status as ‘weird’, ‘crazy’ and ‘bizarre’ that, I argued, was due to tensions between participants’ shift in social and cultural status in the scene. That is, the ‘weirdness’ of celebrity derives from members trying
to come to terms with their movement from ‘ordinary’ (for whom public attention and encounters are prohibited), and ‘extraordinary’ (for whom public interaction is largely considered socially acceptable). Furthermore, while some participants attributed celebrity to a small group of scene members (including Winnie Bruise and Haterade) analysis of interview and fieldnote data indicates that the skater collective is often valorised en masse, and numerous non-skaters such as Big Kahuna, Captain Shutterspeed, and Sintax have also gained renown in the Sydney roller derby scene. Recognising that the roller derby scene supports local, translocal, global, and virtual dimensions, I also identified the emphasis often placed on American skaters as the most famous and celebrated members of the scene.

Exploring fan and celebrity dynamics in the roller derby scene also revealed that scene members often moved between roles in the scene, as the boundaries between being a skater or spectator, a fan or a celebrity, often blurred or overlapped; therefore, roller derby celebrities can be, and frequently are, fans of someone else. This analysis demonstrated some of the issues inherent in role-based classifications in determining one’s role, form involvement, degree of investment, and belonging in the roller derby scene. These findings indicate a need to explore the ways scene members negotiate their involvement in roller derby. The following chapter further explores the fluidity identified in this chapter by investigating scene members’ elective belongings.
Chapter 5: ‘Being derby’: Negotiating belonging in the roller derby scene

It is a bitterly cold and blustery Thursday night and I am sitting in the bleachers at Penrith Valley Regional Sport Centre huddled around a flask of hot tea watching WSR train; the league is hosting a public bout on Saturday night and this is the last training session before the teams compete. In preparation, they have divided into their intraleague teams, each occupying a separate section of the venue. Directly in front of me are the Hellfire Honeys who, with their coach and team captain, are running slow defensive plays; as the wind and rain hammers the venue, I can barely hear the skaters as they attempt to coordinate the pack into position. Elsewhere in the venue, the Zombees, Circuit BreakHers and the Fearleaders are engaged in similar drills, focusing on strategy and coordination. Given the weather, it is a surprisingly large turnout for training but with the live bout looming, everyone appears focused and determined.

As I sip my tea, Princess Lay-into-Ya, an injured Hellfire Honeys skater I know, comes over and sits down next to me. ‘Hey, Dr Derby! Working hard?’ she asks, propping her moonboot on the chair in front of her. ‘Hey! I’m always working hard!’ I reply with a laugh, brandishing my notebook. ‘How’s the ankle?’ I ask. ‘Getting there. Hopefully I’ll be back on skates soon. It is killing me being off them’ she replies, frowning down at her ankle. ‘I am so pissed I can’t play on Saturday. I’ll be a Crip for a while longer’.

‘Hey, why aren’t you a skater?’ she suddenly asks, turning to me with a frown. ‘I reckon you’d make a good jammer’. I instantly feel awkward and nervous; it is a question I constantly get asked and I am always unsure how to respond. Attempting to hide my discomfort and maintain the light bantering mood, I reply ‘Oh, I am really uncoordinated. I would be a health hazard to those around me; you might have broken both ankles!’.

\[12\] To maintain this skater’s anonymity, I have used a pseudonym.

\[13\] ‘Crip’ is a colloquial term derived from ‘cripple’ that is used in the roller derby scene to refer to injured players. For example, S2D2 often refers to the group of injured members as Team Crip.
'You’ll get over that. We’ll turn you into a great skater’ she replies. ‘I have spare skates; I’ll bring them next time. You can have a go after training; I guarantee you’ll join that night’. Looking down at her team, she declares, ‘It’s just the best!’.

‘Thanks, it is really generous of you but it’s cool, I don’t actually have approval to skate, as my project is about being a spectator’ I explain. She looks at me quizzically, ‘But why would you want to be a spectator, when you can be a skater?’ (JA fieldnotes 21/6/12).

**Introduction**

As Dr Derby, a spectator researcher, I needed to negotiate roller derby’s social and cultural landscape where skaters, as the largest, most visible and active group are typically constructed as ‘the whole’ or ‘centre’ of the scene. I tended to overcome possible barriers in social situations by demonstrating my cultural competence through my knowledge of the scene (such as by discussing recent bouts or local celebrities). Yet, when conveying my desire and genuine pleasure in studying roller derby as a spectator, I was commonly—as in the excerpt above—met with surprise and bewilderment. On one notable occasion at ERRD, discussion of my role as a spectator and researcher was met with cynicism. A male referee claimed that researching roller derby as a spectator was ‘stupid’ and ‘pointless’, suggesting that I could ‘never know roller derby that way’, and that I was ‘just scared to give it a go’.

Central to scene theory is the knowledge that insider and outsider categories are arbitrary, and fail to recognise the messy reality of leisure involvement (Stahl 2004a). Similarly, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014b, p. 37) claim that in roller derby the insider/outside division is ‘an illusion, created through normalising processes’. The exchange above draws attention to these normalising social and cultural dynamics, as skaters are valued and positioned as ‘insiders’, and for many, as the ‘whole’ of roller derby.
In valorising skater practice, however, there can be an erasure and dismissal of other modes of scenic activity and relationships with roller derby. A further consequence is a failure—both in academia and roller derby’s scenic life—to recognise the potential continuities between groups of individuals (such as skaters and spectators) in their involvement practices and feelings of attachment and belonging to roller derby. Coming to this realisation stimulated my interest in exploring how belonging is experienced and negotiated and what it means to diverse individuals to feel that they are part of, or at times excluded from, the roller derby scene.

Scholars such as Savage et al. (2004), Longhurst (2007), Overell (2014), and Probyn (1995, 1996) have drawn attention to belonging as a social process rather than as a static or intrinsic dimension of one’s association with a community. According to Overell (2014, p. 11), in scenes the ‘experience of belonging depends on the individual’s shared experience with others in relation to a particular object, event or subject’. While Savage et al. (2004) argue that belonging is not confined to ‘community, with the implication of closed boundaries, but is more fluid, seeing places as sites for performing identities’. Belonging is something worked at and ‘lived’ as individuals ‘construct and perform positions and identities that make them feel at home through processes of reflection, but also imaginings about themselves and others’ (Longhurst 2007, p. 47).

While initially developed by Savage et al. (2004), in this chapter I draw on Longhurst’s (2007) development of the concept of elective belonging to explore participants’ involvement narratives and feelings of attachment to the roller derby scene. Elective belonging draws attention to the subjective processes of belonging, foregrounding agency and the activities people engage in as part of scenic
membership (Longhurst 2007). Elective belonging emphasises mutability and perceives scenic activity as involving a relationship between global processes and local, micro-level practices embedded in the flows of everyday life. Central to elective belonging is the importance of choice in a competitive leisurescape. This approach draws attention to leisure interests as ‘always present but most often experienced in fairly mundane or ordinary ways… [and which] take on ‘extraordinary’ meaning at certain times and in specific locations’ (Crawford 2009, p. 282). Longhurst (2007) argues, that elective belonging focuses on processes of ‘performance’ and ‘audiencing’, and the consumption of media, as modes through which individuals belong to scenes.

In relation to roller derby, elective belonging facilitates a focus on participants’ subjective, ongoing, and fluctuating processes of belonging with the aim of exploring what it means to ‘be derby’. Drawing on interview data and my own socio-spatial negotiations of the roller derby scene, I argue that ‘being derby’ involves affective experiences and embodied movement into, throughout, and—for some participants—away from the scene. This concept enables me to trace different involvement narratives and to explore possible tensions and continuities between groups of individuals in their experiences of scene life thus expanding the parameters of ‘who’ constitutes roller derby. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to illuminate participants’ elective roller derby membership, focusing on desires, processes of transformation, and internalised sense of identification with the scene, that I argue, is shared amongst scene members as, to use Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2014b) description, they ‘become’ derby.
Divided into three sections, this chapter is designed to trace participants’ involvement narratives with the aim of revealing shared feelings of ‘being derby’. In section one, I investigate participants’ movement into the scene, exploring the embodied micro-level processes of ‘getting involved’. I begin by identifying shared modes of initial contact with roller derby, including the film *Whip It* (2009) and attendance at live bouts and note that participants represent these activities as opportunities to belong. In this section, I argue that regardless of their role, scene members utilise a language of desire—for belonging, community, bodily challenges, and for ‘something different’ in their lives—to make sense of their attraction to roller derby and motivation for joining.

In section two, I provide a case study to trace shifts in a participants’ processual, highly fluid, and fluctuating elective belonging to the roller derby scene. In this section I foreground the experiences of a roller derby spectator turn NSO, Olivia, as she negotiates social, cultural, and embodied dimensions of scenic life. Many themes that recur throughout participant interviews are illustrated through Olivia’s unfolding narrative. Central amongst these is a pursuit for ‘more’ involvement; where ‘more’ signifies movement, transformation, and alterations to social, cultural, and sensory affordances that facilitate feelings of ‘being derby’.

During fieldwork, I became aware of some participants’ self-defined excessive and/or obsessive involvement in the roller derby scene. These participants often expressed a need to balance ‘derby’ and ‘non-derby’ commitments. In the third section of this chapter, I foreground some participants’ identified need to ‘pull back’ and ‘step away’ as they attempt to manage the strain of competing social networks,
relationships, and responsibilities. For some participants, their desire to be ‘in derby’, has become an obsession, adversely affecting other areas of their lives.

‘I just had to get involved’: Initial contact and participants’ desires to belong

Being interested in scene members’ involvement narratives, I began every interview by asking participants about their first encounter with roller derby, and what they think attracted them to the sport. This revealed numerous forms of initial contact; for most participants, their first encounter with roller derby was watching the film *Whip It* (2009), although several others attended live bouts (often with limited prior knowledge of roller derby as a sport and culture), or heard about roller derby from friends and family (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Initial contact with roller derby

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of initial contact with roller derby</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watched the film <em>Whip It</em> (2009)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a live roller derby bout</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed by a friend and/or family member</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw a roller derby pamphlet or advertisement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watched <em>This Is Roller Derby</em> (2011) documentary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed unspecified internet source</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Madame Dirty Boots and Olivia, watching *Whip It* (2009) was their first form of contact with roller derby and it produced an interest in the sport that lead to attendance at a live bout and/or joining a local league.

In all honestly, and as clichéd as it sounds, it would have to be the movie *Whip It*. I know, I know, it’s not the best. That’s probably your standard answer… I remember loving it but I know it isn’t the best. It isn’t what derby is really. We don’t carry on like that, I mean, Drew Barrymore tackles someone (laughs). But it got me thinking like ‘I could do that’ (Madame Dirty Boots, S2D2 skater).

It’s embarrassing to say so but I watched *Whip It* (laughs) don’t kill me! I didn’t know much about the content until I got the movie and watched it. I remember sitting on the sofa with my laptop Googling ‘roller derby + Sydney’ (laughs), and saw that there had been a league started not long prior—that would have been, probably 2010. We managed to get to one bout that year, and that was that, I was totally hooked! (Olivia, spectator).

*Whip It* (2009) depicts roller derby as an aggressive women’s, DIY, grassroots level sporting competition that supports an alternative and sexualised culture. The film, adapted from the book *Derby Girl* by Shauna Cross (2007), is a coming of age story, depicting roller derby as a space of women’s transformation and escapism from the drudgery of everyday life. In the film, roller derby is represented as existing on the social fringe. This is emphasised through character depictions; they have tattoos, alternative hairstyles, and are unapologetically non-conforming to social norms (Strong & Maddison 2013). This is reinforced by the positioning of roller derby as ‘on the outskirts’, as the venue and associated sociality is removed from the main character’s everyday life. Central to the plot is the rivalry between the main character, a young skater named Babe Ruthless (Ellen Page), and an older, experienced, and aggressive competitor called Iron Maven (Juliette Lewis). In ‘becoming’ Babe Ruthless—learning to skate, developing friendships, experiencing
a sense of belonging, and identifying as a member of roller derby—the main
coloracter discovers facets of herself previously obscured in the mundane, routine
patterns of her everyday life.

While identifying *Whip It* (2009) as an enjoyable first encounter with roller derby,
participants also often drew attention to the film’s inaccuracies, their tone suggested
it is a roller derby *faux pas* to be a fan. A common criticism of *Whip it* (2009) is that
it glorifies violence, misconstruing the reality of skaters’ sporting practice. The film
depicts skater rivalries and skater-on-skater brawling, both on and off the track. This
volatility portrays skaters as having limited regard for the rules of the game, or for
personal and mutual safety. It also suggests that skaters do not take roller derby
seriously. The use of uncontrolled violence is an aspect of roller derby often
associated with its theatrical, kitschy past and which Madame Dirty Boots claims
‘isn’t what derby is… we don’t carry on like that’. Michelle, a roller derby spectator,
also recognises the violent portrayal of skaters in *Whip It* (2009) as a distortion of
roller derby practice when she says, ‘I remember being confused watching a bout in
Sydney, I was like where are the punch-ups? (laughs). It wasn’t like the movie; I
really thought it would be more violent’. The creative license taken in the production
of *Whip It* (2009) is often, therefore, seen as overemphasising violence and failing to
accurately represent the roller derby scene as a site of serious sporting competition. I
return to these issues of seriousness and sporting legitimation in Chapter 6 where I
argue that the shift towards sporting seriousness has produced a focus on safe play,
as skaters negotiate toughness and aggression within the confines of the sport’s rules
and regulations. Regardless of its inaccuracies, watching *Whip It* (2009) prompts
Madame Dirty Boots to think ‘I could do this’. Similarly, while Olivia is
embarrassed by her admission of watching *Whip It* (2009), it nevertheless motivates her to investigate roller derby, and ultimately, attend a live bout.

*Scene* directs attention to the ways leisure activities are embedded within the flows of everyday life, including how a ‘range of media interact with other aspects of social and cultural life to produce ways of belonging that involve active choices’ (Longhurst 2007, p. 59). By Googling ‘roller derby + Sydney’ Olivia draws attention to the ways that digital technologies are embedded in everyday life and are integral to scene members’ involvement practices. Olivia later reiterates the importance of media to her involvement in the scene when she explains that she often streams roller derby bouts (including the 2011 Roller Derby World Cup) on her mobile phone while her daughter attends dance classes. Other participants engage in similar media practices as part of their roller derby involvement: Captain Shutterspeed (photographer) and Sintax (referee) stream roller derby bouts online; Morgan (spectator), Dita Von Bruiser (S2D2), and Dame Dead'na listen to the roller derby podcast ‘Viva la Derby’ (often while commuting on public transport); and Dita Von Bruiser (S2D2), Ellete Skelter (WSR) and Pepâ la Pow! (WSR) check roller derby websites for bout scores and recent articles in ‘non-derby’ spaces and places. All participants also regularly use social media sites such as Facebook as part of their roller derby involvement; members of S2D2 and WSR utilise it to manage league affairs (such as organising training sessions and fundraisers) and most participants use it to socialise with other scene members, particularly roller derby’s local celebrities.
The centrality of new media to roller derby has also been discussed by Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014c, p. 12) who argue that ‘roller derby communities have used virtual spaces to produce and circulate their own ‘version’ of sport—feminine, ‘tough’, and ‘real’’. As roller derby is not a singular formation, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014c) identify new media as sites where competing understandings of what roller derby ‘is’ play out. This can produce tensions and moments of bullying as different representations of roller derby are contested in what they describe as the ‘dark side’ of the roller derby community (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014c). Yet new media has also influenced sport and leisure consumption, as sport fans:

> do not need to attend the game or even congregate with other fans to share the [sporting] experience. With changes to media fans can tweet, text, blog, and Facebook, all while watching the game, providing a new and enriched fandom experience (Pegoraro & Pedersen 2013, p. 248).

While Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014c) foreground the role of new media in skaters’ process of constituting and maintaining roller derby as a DIY women’s sport, the proliferation of media use described in participant interviews suggests its broader significance in scene members’ processes of involvement, sociality, and belonging. Participants’ use of new media facilitates various forms of scenic activity, troubling the insider/outsider dualism as it demonstrates that different groups of individuals engage in shared involvement practices.
The live bout is also a common form of first contact with roller derby (see Table 4). Participants often claim that the bouts produced an interest in roller derby and desire for further involvement in the scene.

Prior to getting married I lived a pretty boring lifestyle, there’s not a lot of stuff I actually like doing and me and my wife got in a little bit of a rut. I don’t drink, we don’t like going to clubs or that sort of scene, so we found that the only things we ever did was go to dinner and watch movies. So, I said, ‘Okay, I’ll find something’. I just wanted to find something else. I saw roller derby on a website or something, it was $10 for a Sydney Roller Derby League ticket, I got them, thinking it’s something different. So, I went and checked it out and I got obsessed with it from that point on. I emailed [a local league] and said, ‘Look, I want to be involved. Whatever you have for me, I’ll do it. If you want me to cut oranges at half time, I just want to have fun and be involved’ (Big Kahuna, media personality).

Similar to Big Kahuna, for other participants, the live bout satisfies an elusive desire of ‘something else’/‘something different’, and produces an addiction and overpowering craze to be involved in the roller derby scene.

We just wanted a different night out, to do something else instead of just going out to a bar. We saw a thing for a bout in Newtown and it just seemed a little different. I had already seen Whip It, so I had an idea what to expect but it was pretty new, we didn’t know the rules or the teams or anything, but it was great! After seeing it I was hooked. It was tough and the chicks were tough… I got pretty into it and we have been to quite a few bouts since then (Michelle, spectator).

After I had my kids I think I was feeling like I’d lost myself, and I didn’t know who I was any more… I needed to do something that was ‘out there’. Then I heard about roller derby. I went to a bout and I was like ‘Yes. It’s a bit different. This is what I need’. I got pretty addicted after that (Elleter Skelter, WSR skater).
According to Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014b), ‘women join [roller derby] to find ‘freedom’, ‘escape’, an alternative to the ‘mainstream’ and to the restrictions of everyday life’. These accounts reveal continuities between diverse scene members in their involvement narratives and desires to belong. For Big Kahuna, the search for ‘something else’ is primarily about a desire for social enlivening; his life was ‘boring’ and largely isolated as he and his wife were ‘in a rut’. In this context, roller derby represents opportunities to ‘have fun’ and ‘be involved’ in a collective endeavour, bringing a sense of excitement and energy into their lives. Michelle provides a similar narrative. In offering an alternative to ‘just going to a bar’, the roller derby bout is portrayed as an event that offers a contrast to a sense of the banality of everyday life. Big Kahuna and Michelle actively sought a new experience, a change to routinised ‘everyday’ social practices that roller derby satisfies.

Elleter Skelter was motivated by the possibility that roller derby would enable her to reclaim a sense of self outside of motherhood and this reflects the sense of ‘freedom’ identified amongst skaters in Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2014a) study. Other female skaters expressed similar feelings. For example, Theda Bastard, declared that she joined roller derby to have ‘something just for me where I’m not a mum, but can be me again’. Similar desires to ‘reclaim’ or ‘find’ one’s self through roller derby have been identified amongst female skaters in other research and has been largely understood as a reaction to the social pressures of women’s roles as mothers, partners/wives, and managers of domestic duties (Parrotta 2015; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b). Becoming mothers, while highly nuanced and subjectively constructed, often involves a sense of loss and/or redefinition of one’s self-identity (Donath 2015; Laney et al. 2015). In their study of how motherhood affects identity, Laney et al.
(2015, p. 131) found that this process tends to involve the ‘fracturing or compressing [of] women’s identities...[as they] incorporate a motherhood identity and their children into their sense of self’. For many female skaters, involvement in roller derby is motivated by their desire to negotiate shifts in their identity and to mark out a site where they can re-establish their individuality outside of interdependent relationships (as mothers, wives, partners, and home-makers).

These accounts are interlaced with desires for collectivity, belonging, and a sense of community and identity. For instance, when I asked Big Kahuna about his place in roller derby he claimed that he ‘is derby’. When I asked if he could elaborate, he said, ‘being derby means (pause), it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re a skater. It just means you’re in derby’ (Big Kahuna). This description emphasises intentionality and conveys a sense of togetherness where ‘derby’ is used in a collective noun. Such dimensions of participants’ elective belongings can be explained through Probyn’s (1995, 1996) work on belonging. For Probyn (1995; 1996), ‘belonging’ or (be)longing, is primarily about desire and longing. It is a ‘movement of desire’, where ‘wanting to belong, wanting to become... is fuelled by yearning’ (Probyn 1996, p. 19). Probyn (1995, p. 2) further claims that ‘while belonging may make one think of arriving, it also always carries the scent of departure—it marks the interstices of being and going’. ‘Being derby’, is to be actively engaged, to be part of and identify with the roller derby scene.

Drawing on Probyn’s (1995, 1996) insights, these participants’ can be seen as articulating desire for embodied action, movement, and agency; each participant sought roller derby—whether they knew what it was they were looking for or not—and ‘kept that desire moving’ through micro-level processes of involvement, embarking on a journey of ‘becoming’ derby. This is further demonstrated by the
language participants use to articulate their moment of desire to belong, as numerous
participants describe how ‘seeing’ roller derby, ‘getting to a bout’, or ‘watching the
girls’, led to ‘needing’, ‘wanting’, or ‘having’ to be involved. These accounts
reiterate the importance of the live bout as not just an enjoyable and collectively
produced leisure event as I argued in Chapters 3 and 4, but also as a site that
promotes new relationships, produces possibilities for changes to one’s social life
and identity and stimulates a desire to ‘be derby’. For some participants, therefore,
the live bout emerges as a place where ‘shapeless’ desires—for ‘difference’, for
‘something else’, for a space, place, and community to belong, and for a site to be
themselves—are satisfied.

In this section, I have explored participants’ elective belongings. Participants’
involvement narratives typically foreground their first live bout experience as the
moment that sparked their desire to belong to the roller derby scene. This analysis
reiterates the importance of the live bout in the unfolding social and cultural
dynamics of scenic activity introduced in Chapter 3, and demonstrates some of the
continuities between groups of individuals in their emotional reaction to roller derby
and in their yearning to be part of the scene. Primarily, however, the analysis in this
section indicates the limitations inherent in focusing exclusively on skater
experiences. Expanding the scope of analysis to include a diverse range of roller
derby members, revealed some of the shared, yet often elusive forms of belonging
that define participants’ roller derby belonging. Furthermore, illuminating non-
skaters’ fervour and all-encompassing roller derby obsession suggests that there is
more to ‘who’ constitutes roller derby than skaters as many emotional and
transformative dimensions of involvement are seen to operate within and across
groups in the scene. In the following section I expand my discussion of elective
belonging by tracing shifts in one participant’s processual, highly fluid, and fluctuating involvement narrative.

**Case Study: Olivia**

Olivia is a 44-year-old professional academic working at a Sydney University. She lives in Sydney’s Inner West with her family: her primary school aged daughter Jess, and teenage son Luke. She is an enthusiastic spectator, NSO for Sydney Roller Derby League and fan of roller derby. Olivia’s movement throughout the roller derby scene enables the exploration of themes that recur throughout participant interviews. Central amongst these is a desire to be more involved in roller derby, particularly in relation to embodied and sensory experiences at live bouts and inclusion in diverse social networks. Through this case study, I seek to illuminate how the scene is performed through the routine, micro-level practices of elective membership, arguing that belonging and feelings of ‘being derby’ are not confined to skater narratives. Instead, in exploring the ways Olivia negotiates spaces, places, social relationships, and forms of involvement my analysis demonstrates the centrality of non-skater contributions to the scene, and illuminates some of the ways involvement fluctuates as Olivia, like many other scene members in roller derby, move between roles as they pursue a sense of inclusion and belonging.

In the interview, Olivia provided rich, detailed accounts of her elective belonging that began with being a spectator in the roller derby scene. She focused on her sociality (particularly amongst friends and family) and practices through which she felt most involved in the cultural activity that unfolds at live bouts.
We generally go [to roller derby bouts] as a family—Jess, Luke and me—and sometimes with some friends, it is generally a good group. It is good because it is something everyone likes… It is hard finding something that both kids like given their gender differences and the age differences, they have very different interests. She’s very ‘girly-girl’ and he’s a typical 17 year old boy. But everyone gets really into roller derby, each for their own reasons (laughs). It is just great. If I said to Luke ‘There’s a derby match on’ he’d be like ‘Yep, I’m there’. Once it was clear that everybody liked it, it was like ‘Great! Well, we’ll be doing a lot more of this then!’.

We really only go to Sydney Roller Derby League games and our team is Team Unicorn, we’re big Team Unicorn fans. So, Jess knows a lot of the Team Unicorn players. I remember one time we had Jess’s friend with us and we went down to the track to try and get some photographs and things. Jess and her little friend both had Team Unicorn T-shirts on that evening, and they both had like a unicorn hat thing on. It was so cute! And they were both really excited! The best seating is around the track but we couldn’t sit in suicide seating because they are too young, but as soon as it was over they were running down to find their favourite skaters… Jess’s favourite is, of course, Winnie Bruise but she likes them all. She has their autographs on her wall at home. And it was all knew to her friend so Jess was all kind of like ‘Yeah, yeah, you know, it’s roller derby, it’s my thing, it’s what I do, it’s how I roll’ (laughs). And her friend, oh it was adorable, she was just in such awe, like ‘Wow, you’re so cool!’.

Olivia’s accounts emphasise some of the ways that the live bout fosters feelings of connectivity and sociality that are so central to scene members’ experiences of ‘being derby’. This is demonstrated in Olivia’s choice of language: ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’, ‘group’, ‘friends’, ‘family’, ‘everyone’, and ‘together’. The emphasis placed on the sociality of the live bout reflects other events in the sporting landscape as ‘most fans… [consume] sport in group settings and have used sporting fandom to build positive connections with other fans’ (Pegoraro & Pedersen 2013, p. 249). For Olivia, the emphasis often placed on sporting events as sites of sociality is extended to the specific role live bouts play in facilitating family bonding. In so doing, the live bout is represented as an important site of shared experience but one that is largely
defined by its ability to facilitate social relationships as it is the only leisure activity capable of bringing her family together.

Wearing or displaying team/league merchandise provides opportunities for spectators to ‘buy into’ a sense of community and ‘play out’ their roles as active participants’ (Crawford 2004, p. 159). As described in the second excerpt, Jess’s T-shirt and hat communicate her and her family’s emotional attachment to Sydney Roller Derby League’s ‘Team Unicorn’.14 These are normative fan practices that cultivate unity, enabling spectators to become a site/sight of performance (Crawford 2004; Derbaix & Decrop 2011). Such elective practices of involvement draw attention to the ways that Olivia and her family are actively connecting, specifically, with the ‘Team Unicorn’ collective, and with the roller derby scene more broadly.

While such ‘traditional’ forms of team support are common in roller derby, pre-organised bout ‘themes’ are a unique cultural practice in the scene that enable atypical fan displays and experiences of spectatorship.15 Bout themes range from focus on a specific event such as Halloween or Christmas, to pop culture references, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Lord of the Rings*, and Quentin Tarantino films. Bout themes are typically part of leagues’ entertainment package and are intended to distinguish roller derby events within a competitive sport and leisure landscape as they add theatrical flair to live bouts. Olivia, like other scene members in this study, expressed their pleasure in dressing up in theme for roller derby bouts.

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14 ‘Team Unicorn’, was a Sydney Roller Derby League (SRDL) team active throughout fieldwork. In 2014, SRDL changed their home teams, from Team Unicorn, The D’Viants, The creaming Assault Sirens, and the Beauty School Knockouts, to the Brawling Bar Belles, Team Lumberjack, and the Black Widows.

15 Bout ‘themes’ are more commonly used for intraleague competitions (bouts between teams of the same league). While they are sometimes used for ‘friendly’ interleague bouts, they are rarely used in interleague competitions such as 5x5, Eastern Region Roller Derby, Roller Derby Grand Slam, or International events such as the Roller Derby World Cup or Rollercon.
There were a series of bouts that were all themed on movies, and so we would come as things related to those movies. There was, for example, there were a couple of Quentin Tarantino ones, like Pulp Fiction. Luke and I both dressed up as—I can’t remember which way around we did it but one of us was the John Travolta character and one was the Samuel L. Jackson character in black suits and white T-shirts and ties and the whole nine yards, and he had his little pretend gun packed (laughs). Other times it might be a more general theme like Halloween, and there was actually an 80s one we dressed up for as well… Some people look at us funny, like ‘What’s with that?!’, but we don’t care, we really like dressing up—I’ve always been very theatrical—we’re just more into it, we get more involved in the whole thing. I love the themes and dressing up (laughs).

According to Crawford (2004, p. 85), ‘participation within the crowd can help cement [spectators’]… feelings of belonging and membership’. Being in theme is simultaneously an expression of subjective creativity and of shared identification and enthusiasm as scene members as, in this case, Olivia and her family support SRDL’s entertainment package; it is a process through which they ‘get more into it, [and are] more involved in the whole thing’. For Olivia, being in theme also distinguishes them from other, presumably less involved, spectators. In these excerpts, Olivia represents the live bout as a public site that offers opportunities for spectators to engage in roller derby performances through creative displays and interpersonal relationships in their expression of belonging.

While spectators are a crucial part of roller derby performances, their movement and involvement in the scene is often restricted. In roller derby, as in other sports, spectators are largely confined to specific spaces within the venue, and can only attend public events. Throughout the interviews, participants often framed their spectator experiences of live bouts in terms of proximity, emphasising their desire to be closer to competitive play. This was a reoccurring theme in Olivia’s interview.
One year we had Jess’s birthday at a Sydney bout. There were about ten of these little girls, all Jess’s friends… They were all super, super excited and we managed to get some seats right behind the penalty box that time because they were too young for suicide seating, but quite low down so they were still really nice and close. I’ve got this fantastic photo of them all hanging over the barrier; kind of looking, with all their little names on their backs, kind of looking, watching what was going on. And after it was over they went and took their programs and got them all signed and got photographs. It was great because only one of Jess’s friends had been before—we’d taken her a few times before that night—but for the rest it was all just crazy! We got them as close as we could and they loved it.

I definitely prefer sitting in suicide seating. You’re right on the track, it is the best place to see all the action! You just feel like you’re in it. It’s more intense and you can see and hear everything that’s going on like skaters talking on the track. But I am normally with the kids though, it is not somewhere I get to sit most of the time, which sucks! (laughs). But we pretty much always go up after. At least then you can see the skaters up close. Jess really loves that part, just to see them and talk to them afterwards.

Scholars have recognised that spectators are typically attracted to live sporting events due to desires to be part of the collective intensity and physical proximity of play (Crawford 2004; Weed 2013). Numerous participants emphasised the value of proximity in their spectator experiences, stating they wanted to be ‘close to the action’, ‘be nice and close’, to see and hear things more clearly, and overall, just be more involved in the live bout. For Olivia (as with most participants), suicide seating is highly valued as it can afford spectators a heightened sensory experience of roller derby. Sitting in suicide seating enhances Olivia’s feeling of immersion in the live bout; as she states, ‘you just feel like you’re in it’ (emphasis in original). The emphasis Olivia places on being ‘in it’ returns attention to the feeling of envelopment in the experience of, and contribution to, an affective atmosphere at live bouts discussed in Chapter 3. Olivia is drawing attention to the affective intensity of proximity that is, in part, due to the unique socio-spatial dynamics of the
roller derby scene; there is a lack of physical boundaries separating skaters and spectators.

Olivia’s accounts also demonstrate the role of proximity in processes of belonging. By feeling ‘in it’ and ‘more involved’, Olivia associates the subjective affective experiences of sitting in suicide seating with feelings of connectedness, inclusion, and immersion in the scene’s cultural activity, and consequently, foregrounds the located-ness of elective belonging. This draws attention to the significance of the shared communal experience of sporting spectatorship, that scholars indicate is a main reason for spectators’ attendance at live sporting events, and distinguishes such experiences from other consumption practices (such as via online streaming) (Bale 2003; Vertinsky & Bale 2004). By privileging suicide seating, Olivia also illuminates the ways elective belonging fluctuates, as she feels more involved in some places, and at some times, than she does in and at other times and places. This reveals the mutable nature of belonging, as it is prominent in individuals’ experiences at some points more than others (Longhurst 2007).

Proximity is, however, limited by the parameters of role-based identification and the experiences, movements, and social relationships they afford. Skaters, referees, and NSOs are comparatively more mobile in the scene and are often, as the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, socially and culturally valued. In her pursuit of more involvement in the roller derby scene, Olivia becomes an NSO for SRDL.
The more I went to bouts the more involved I wanted to be. I thought about it for ages and looked at being a skater or a referee. I’m not in the position to commit myself to a level of involvement that you would need to be able to skate or possibly to referee though. I still think ‘could I get to the point where I referee?’ But I just don’t (pause) I’ve got two kids, I’m very busy, I’m just not in a position to be able to give the amount of time that would be needed really. So, I became an NSO… I really enjoy NSOing because it means I can be more involved and see things more closely and just feel more involved in the whole thing. You get to be near the skaters a lot more. A lot of the time I monitor the penalty box, so you’re close, like really close to everything. I’d like to be a skater, but being an NSO is enough.

Due to their high visibility, extensive contributions to the organisation and management of roller derby leagues, and being the focus of roller derby performances, skaters are typically valorised and seen as constituting the ‘centre’ of roller derby. Yet, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, the roller derby scene is collaboratively produced and is constituted through an array of non-skater contributions, including those of NSOs. NSOs are volunteers who provide invaluable assistance in the organisation and management of leagues and roller derby performances, and have received minimal scholarly attention. Their contributions to the scene include recording penalties and team scores, timing bouts, assisting with ticket sales and collection, and setting up and dismantling the track.16

Olivia, like other participants, commonly used ‘more’ to indicate movement throughout the scene, to distinguish between roles and what they afford and to articulate her desire for greater social, cultural, and/or bodily involvement and belonging. This is also evident in the way Olivia categorises individuals in the scene as skaters, referees, and NSOs, and organises these groups in ascending order of involvement by identifying some roles as ‘more involved’ than others. While

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16 For flat track roller derby, this involves removing the tape used to mark out the track on the floor.
inexorably tied to the differences in forms of contribution—from contributing to the live bout spectacle, to aiding in the sporting competition on display—the ‘more-ness’ of NSO involvement defines a shift in the spaces Olivia occupies at roller derby events. It is not simply about seeing competitive play more clearly (although this is important) but rather, it is about the heightened sense of being ‘in derby’. As an NSO, Olivia therefore feels more engaged in scene making practices. This illuminates the corporeal located-ness of different roles in one’s experience of the live bout, and the centrality of this experience to ‘becoming’ derby and feeling ‘part of it’.

Being a NSO also enables Olivia to navigate spaces and places typically restricted to league members, providing some access to skaters’ social network.

Being an NSO and not being in the inner circle—because I’m not a skater—you both don’t hear things but you also hear things. You can almost be like wallpaper, like you hear more. People are discussing things in the penalty box so you can hear things that perhaps you wouldn’t otherwise. So occasionally things come up, which, if I were just a spectator I wouldn’t hear about at all. But I only get the very superficial level of it.

Olivia’s enthusiasm as a NSO is due to her extensive experience in the scene as a spectator where there is always distance and boundaries between herself and skaters, NSOs and referees. Being ‘just spectators’ positions this role as less involved in scene sociability. However, for Olivia, being a NSO is also limited, as she occupies a position between inclusion and exclusion in ‘inner’ social networks. This is apparent when Olivia describes the experience of being an NSO as being ‘like wallpaper’, implying that she is invisible and that, while crucial to the performance of the live bout, her position in derby is less important than skaters. Furthermore, Olivia later
returns to the issue of visibility when she explained that while, as a spectator, she would often exercise her creativity and dress up in theme, being an NSO she is required to ‘blend into the background… [so, you’re dressed] from head to foot in black’. According to Olivia, ‘this is very sad’ as it means ‘you can’t really stand out’. While both spectator and NSO roles are active in performing roller derby, for Olivia, each affords different embodied and sensory experiences, enables distinct and differing forms of involvement, and feelings of belonging and inclusion in the roller derby scene.

Scene theorists typically characterise consumer and producer groups as highly fluid social collectives with boundaries that often blur and overlap (Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004; Kahn-Harris 2007). Olivia’s account, however, highlights a tendency of participants observed in the roller derby scene to utilise hierarchical and essentialist categorisations of scenic activity in their commentary, regardless of their own involvement practices. As discussed in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 4, role-based identification oversimplifies the messy and often fluid mobility of scenic life, as members negotiate numerous forms of involvement, blurring boundaries between social groups. For instance, while Olivia is a NSO for SRDL, this does not preclude her from also being a spectator at other bouts. Similarly, skaters also often attend bouts as spectators, and as Breeze (2015) notes, may at other times (such as if you are injured) volunteer to perform non-skat er roles such as announcing or being a NSO. In tracing Olivia’s movement throughout the scene, this analysis also foregrounds the relationality of scene making processes and practices.
‘Fuck! My life is getting in the way of derby again!’: Managing roller derby involvement in the pursuit of balance.

In this section, I extend my analysis of elective belonging to explore some participants’ self-identified obsession with roller derby. For many participants, the desire to be involved in numerous facets of the roller derby scene—as skaters, spectators, media personalities, and members of various league committees—adversely affects other areas of their lives. In my analysis, I focus on some participants’ competing desires, as they often want to stay involved in roller derby, yet recognise a need to ‘pull back’ and ‘step away’ to manage the strain of competing social networks, relationships, and responsibilities.

As an elective leisure activity, roller derby is commonly described as a positive and enjoyable pursuit. During fieldwork, however, I found that for some scene members, participation in roller derby is a complicated, tiring and even distressing experience. Theda Bastard maintains a roller derby specific media website. Throughout the interview, she frequently returned to the issue of strain in managing the site, and emphasised a need to balance her competing responsibilities.

Last year that website was like a full-time job. My daughter would go to bed and sometimes I was up to four in the morning just doing stuff. I think I might have burnt myself out a little bit. So this year I’ve tried to be a little more organised and update it regularly but not every single night, every single time something comes up. I don’t need (pause) someone doesn’t need to post an event and it doesn’t have to be up two seconds later. I can let it (laughs) let it go. So I’m tryin’ to do that and also get a lot more help. [Doing everything] is just crazy and I, financially, can’t afford to do it. Last year was fantastic but I’m looking at this year and I think I need to put myself as a priority (Theda Bastard, media producer).
Attempting to ascertain Theda Bastard’s motivations, I asked her why she felt she had burnt out, to which she replied,

I just really loved it and it was because I was just so passionate about it, it pretty much dominated my whole life. I’ve worked out ways now to try and organise things better; it was a big learning curve but yeah, seriously, like every single night on it... I was going to bed at like four o’clock in the morning and my daughter gets up between 6.30-7 and I was like a grumpy zombie all day. And I thought, you know what? I’ve really got to change my life. I can’t live like this. And being grumpy, I don’t want to be like that in front of her. So it got to the point where I was like well, I need to step back for a little bit, organise it so I don’t have to update it every single night and try and withdraw from being on the computer every day (Theda Bastard, media producer).

As a DIY sport, the roller derby scene is maintained through the extensive unpaid labour of its members, and while this is typically valorised, this dimension of roller derby involvement can be a burden and have negative consequences. Theda Bastard’s accounts trouble the association between leisure and enjoyment that is often foregrounded in roller derby research (Beaver 2012; Donnelly 2012; Krausch 2009; Mabe 2007; Paul & Blank 2015). In describing the maintenance of the roller derby website as a ‘full-time job’, Theda Bastard draws attention to the pressures of roller derby involvement, representing it as an additional workload on top of her responsibilities as a single parent, her role as a student at TAFE, and her commitments as a part-time employee.

Theda Bastard’s tone as well as her ensuing remarks—having ‘burnt herself out’, indicating that it ‘dominated’ her whole life and made her into a ‘zombie’—emphasise the impact of her self-defined obsession with roller derby. The term ‘dominated’ also emphasises the impact of overlapping/merging social worlds as her work with the website affects all aspects of her life, as well as having power over
her. This account directs attention towards the difficulties of negotiating involvement. Unlike the positive descriptions earlier recounted, Theda Bastard’s involvement narrative foregrounds the negative effects of ‘being derby’, highlighting the impact of roller derby on other areas of her life, as well as on her health and personal wellbeing.

Theda Bastard describes a turbulent relationship with roller derby. While ‘last year was fantastic’, overall, there are limited references to pleasurable or happy feelings derived from her involvement in the scene. Indeed, Theda Bastard frequently (and without prompting) returns to the issue of strain and the need to manage involvement throughout the interview. When discussing the website, she states that it is ‘constant, constant, constant’, that ‘it’s crazy’, and that it has ‘taken over my life’. She also remarked that she ‘needs to pullback’, ‘let go’, as well as ‘get organised’, ‘get control’ and then also ‘loosen control’, ‘relax’, make herself a ‘priority’, ‘focus on herself’ and get ‘her real priorities straight’. These comments demonstrate the unresolved tensions, focusing on what she should do but has not achieved.

Negotiating involvement is something constantly worked at and unresolved. Unlike Olivia’s movement into and throughout the scene discussed in the previous section, Theda Bastard’s accounts foreground the work necessary to negotiate involvement in leisure amidst an array of competing commitments. This process is ongoing, and has been found to be most common amongst women as they are more likely to sacrifice personal leisure time and desires to meet demands of the home and workplace, amongst others (Bowers 2007; Foley 2005; Lapointe & Perreault 2013).
In my analysis of interview data, I found that the sentiment expressed by Theda Bastard—to ‘pull back’—was common, particularly amongst skaters. For some skaters, it was generated by tensions between ‘derby’/‘non-derby’ commitments and relationships.

[Roller derby’s] difficult to explain if you’re an outsider, like, my boyfriend doesn’t get it. He’s my derby widow I guess you wanna call it, we’ve been together eight years and derby’s been part of my life for two and a half years, and I drag him to every derby related thing under the sun! If I can get him to come. And he just doesn’t get it, he’s just like, “what is the hysteria around it?”’. My friends are just like, “it’s too much Naomi, you’re too obsessed, you need to step back”, and I did, I did have to step back because my obsession with the sport and an obsession with having to be involved with everything about it put strain on other parts of my life, and it sucks. My friends from High School and other activities I now call my ‘non-derby’ friends. It’s just like ‘wow, hold on, why do I have to label my friends? That’s shit. I don’t like doing that’. And I appreciate them so much more now because I spend so much time at derby. I love derby, don’t get me wrong, it’s never gonna change and I love my girlfriends and I love everything about it, but I just needed to balance it a bit better. That’s the tough part (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).

Intense involvement in leisure activities, particularly when one is obsessive in their pursuits, can have negative ramifications for activities outside of the leisure domain; for example, it may cause conflict in interpersonal relationships (Stenseng, Rise & Kraft 2011). While typically explored as positive, obsessive degrees of leisure involvement, or involvement in dangerous or risky pursuits (such as gambling) can have a negative impact on well-being. In relation to De-Nominator, tensions over involvement are largely due to a need to negotiate competing social worlds. A central tension relates to De-Nominator’s relationship with her boyfriend, whom she refers to as her ‘derby widow’. ‘Derby widow’ represents a loss of a partner to roller derby. While used affectionately, even ironically, by some, ‘derby widow’ is a trope within the scene, typically referencing tensions produced from ‘derby’/‘non-derby’
divisions, where ‘obsession’—in particular, ‘freshie’ fervour—results in the perceived alienation of one’s partner. Strain caused by involvement in roller derby has been raised in popular works on the sport (Barbee & Cohen 2010; Joulwan 2007) and was a common theme in my research on the scene.

The term ‘derby widow’ is the consequence of high levels of interest and involvement by the derby member but it also includes a countering dis-interest in roller derby by the partner. As De-Nominator states above, ‘I drag him to every derby related thing under the sun! If I can get him to come’ and ‘he just doesn’t get it’. Such dis-interest was also observed at the OMGWTFBBQ where some partners worked to distance themselves from roller derby. While I moved between social groups I encountered I spoke with two men who had been sitting by themselves and seemed reluctant to engage in social groups. Making small-talk, I asked them if they were ‘with roller derby?’. One replied ‘No, no, [my girlfriend]… makes me come to these things’, while the other exclaimed ‘God no! My wife does it’. While initially shocked at the emphasis on disassociating themselves from roller derby (and at a roller derby event), these comments indicate an active attempt to establish a division between being ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the roller derby scene. Being ‘forced’ or ‘dragged’ to roller derby events indicates distance between these partners and roller derby; they are not ‘in derby’, nor are they interested in being so.
The ubiquity of the term ‘derby widow’ in the scene speaks to widespread themes of obsession and managing involvement.

Initially it was really, really hard and I had to take a fairly big step away... I had Christmas and probably all of January to not really do any derby stuff. No Viva la Derby, no bouts, no nothing, and I really got to go back and hang out with friends and I went camping and did things with my boyfriend and I was like ‘okay, this is good, my life is sort of starting to come back to normal and it’s starting to find a balance’. Derby season has just kicked off, I really have to try and keep this balance because I’m already like ‘Fuck! My life is getting in the way of derby again! No, what am I going to do?! There’s all these bouts that I need to go to!’... There have been two bouts already this year that I haven’t gone to and I feel terrible. The balance is tough (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).

The challenge of attaining (and maintaining) balance was also raised by other skaters, including Elleter Skelter:

I think there have been times over the past couple of years where he has felt abandoned by me because of derby and I think initially I was overwhelmed and found it really difficult to distinguish how I could really strictly fit derby training and all the other stuff that comes with it into my life. Like I think I kind of shifted to fitting my life to my derby stuff. It’s been a process and I’m much more aware of what it – what are my true priorities which are my family first and foremost, but I think I need to make that look that way as well, not just say it. I think Dan really struggled with it over the years, but he has also said that he is so much happier with how I feel about myself and who I have become since I’ve started derby as well... Finding that balance I think is a constant battle (Elleter Skelter, WSR skater).

While involvement in roller derby can be excessive and even obsessive, these accounts foreground it as a passion that is not, in itself, the cause of negative feelings. Rather, as De-Nominator and Elleter Skelter indicate—as have participants referred to in the previous section—roller derby is often the source of pleasure; it is the management of ‘derby’ and ‘non-derby’ commitments that causes strain and tension. For example, while Elleter Skelter is ‘aware’ of what her ‘true priorities’
are, she still needs to ‘do’ balance by managing her involvement. For both skaters, the difficulty is attaining a sense of derby/‘life’ balance. These accounts demonstrate the need to situate analyses of roller derby (and sporting and leisure practices in general) within the broader network of social affiliations, responsibilities, and pleasures.

The aim of this section has been to extend discussion of involvement to explore the pressures of routine involvement as scene members negotiate scene boundaries. Central to analysis is the feeling of too much involvement—being ‘dominated’, ‘obsessed’, or ‘overwhelmed’—and needing to engage in ways to renegotiate their elective belonging in the roller derby scene.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on scene members’ involvement narratives—their pursuit of belonging, community, and sociality. A central aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate that while involvement practices differ between individuals and groups of individuals, there are, nevertheless, elements that transcend role-based identifications. Using Longhurst’s (2007) conceptualisation of elective belonging, I have argued that belonging is an ongoing, fluctuating process as participants constantly negotiate spaces, places, social relationships, and forms of contribution. Commonly, participants’ elective belongings are driven by desires to be ‘more involved’, as they pursue heightened embodied and sensory experiences, connectivity, and feelings of inclusion in social networks. My analysis indicates that the interplay between these subjective and intersubjective dimensions are central to participants’ involvement practices and it is this interplay that produces a sense of being ‘in derby’. By not privileging skater experiences in my analysis of
participants’ elective belongings, I have highlighted some of the ways that non-skaters (such as spectators, NSOs, announcers, and media producers) navigate the roller derby scene and actively pursue inclusion in the communal identity of being ‘in derby’. The following chapter expands on this analytic work into belonging, involvement, and embodiment to explore the social, cultural, and physical dimensions of ‘becoming’ skaters.
Chapter 6: The embodied, social, and cultural dimensions of ‘becoming’ skaters

Training has just ended for WSR and I am sitting with a group of skaters at the bottom of the bleachers as they start taking off their gear. As they chat idly about the training session, another skater comes over to join the group. Gingerly lowering herself to the floor, Marlene Did-a-Trick explains that she stacked it during training. ‘Better get a good bruise after that’ she declares, wincing as she reaches for her bag. Looking over, Julia Kill Hard says ‘I had a big one the other month. I was jamming and came around the turn heading for the back of the pack and —BAM! —I found myself on my ass’. There was a burst of laughter from the group, several of them nodding knowingly. ‘I got a killer bruise from that one! Seriously’, she said, her voice rising over the group’s mirth. Using her hands to indicate the size of a dinner plate she declared, ‘it was black and bloody massive’. Pointing at her, one of the skaters yelled ‘oh my god I remember that!’, while another, leaning to the side to pat her raised butt cheek, said, ‘Yeah, that’s ‘cos my ass stopped you in your tracks!’.

Julia Kill Hard exclaimed ‘Fuck off! It wasn’t that big!’ ‘It was!’ Julia Kill Hard yelled, ‘I put it on Facebook, go see for yourself! It was huge, and I couldn’t sit for ages! I thought I broke my ass for a sec’. As everyone continued laughing, Marlene Did-a-Trick playfully threw an elbow pad at Julia Kill Hard, ‘You’re so full of shit!’. ‘You’re just jealous!’ Julia Kill Hard replied, a huge grin on her face as she threw the pad back. ‘We’ll see who is laughing tomorrow when you’re all Butt Hurt!’ Just send us a pic of it!’. Sitting next to me, Lady Gut-Ya abruptly yelled ‘Yeah! Pics or it didn’t happen!’ (JA fieldnotes 7/3/12).

Introduction

Marlene Did-at-Trick and Julia Kill Hard’s banter generated an animated discussion. As the skaters took off their protective gear, they shared their stories, with many passing their phones around; as Lady Gut-Ya said, ‘pics or it didn’t happen!’. While most were bruises, some skaters, such as Lady Gut-Ya recounted more serious

17 ‘Butt Hurt’ is a term used in roller derby to refer to a tailbone or coccyx injuries.
injuries. The year before, Lady Gut-Ya fell during scrimmage practice and fractured her wrist. The other skaters commiserated with her over the wrist injury, with Kinky Hoot saying ‘Yeah, you were off skates for a while but, at least you’re back on them now?’. The other skaters nodded their agreement. Not to be outdone, however, Julia Kill Hard spoke up. ‘Pfft. Fractured wrist?! I got the winner right here’ she said, grinning as she held up her hand, ‘I stacked it on Tuesday and broke a motherfucking nail!’. I joined in as everyone exploded with laughter. But as I thought about the how the skaters talked about injuries and shared their images, I was struck by the ways they seemed to revel in their shared experiences of high-intensity physicality. There was a complexity and feeling of playfulness to the exchange, even when discussing serious injury, that I had not expected; I was intrigued by the way these skaters laughed off injuries, and appeared to value and take pleasure from some injuries more than others.

I was familiar with Peluso’s (2011) work on embodied gender resistance and her identification of injury as a form of subcultural capital. Developed by Sara Thornton (1995), subcultural capital means to recognise the ways individuals are ‘hip’ and ‘in the know’ in in distinct subcultural contexts. That is, subcultural capital was used to foreground ‘the mobility that characterises careers within subcultures as participants gain experience and attain a particular level of ‘cultural competence’’ (Driver 2016, p. 196, emphasis in original). For Peluso (2011), roller derby members developed a system of subcultural capital to distinguish themselves within the subcultural environment, and from ‘mainstream’ cultural understandings of femininity and women’s bodily capacities. Through the value attributed to injury (amongst other embodied aspects), Peluso (2011, p. 45) therefore surmised that in roller derby,
women are enabled and encouraged to challenge traditional femininity through their bodies, and this—in itself—constitutes a feminist act of resistance’.

As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, subculture is a problematic concept, and subcultural capital has inherited some of its limitations. Primary amongst these is that subcultural capital assumes a sense of uniformity in one’s involvement, role, practices, and performances, and a ‘singular community who will unproblematically recognise subcultural capital’ (Hills 2015, p. 101). Furthermore, while Peluso (2011) uses subcultural capital as a concept to articulate distinctions between skaters in roller derby, and between roller derby and mainstream society, her analysis obscures the differences between injuries in roller derby. Consequently, her use of subcultural capital homogenises injury as a singular aspect of cultural value, and assumes a pre-established, clear and collective understanding of injury as a form of capital.

While injuries can and do operate as forms of gender resistance (Peluso 2011), this does not exhaust the nature of injury as a system of value in the roller derby scene. Reflecting on the sense of playfulness observed at the WSR training session suggests that the function of injury—and in a broader sense, skaters’ embodied experiences—may instead incorporate a wider array of social, cultural, embodied, and mediated activity that cannot be adequately explained using subcultural capital. As scene theory directs attention to the centrality of social interaction in the constitution of cultural formations, roller derby capital offers a wider set of analytic possibilities. This has already been demonstrated in Chapter 4, where I argued that some scene members (such as Winnie Bruise, Haterade, and De-Nominator) have accumulated fame and, as is evident from my analysis of social relationships, have gained roller derby capital as local celebrities. In this chapter, I therefore argue that the roller
derby scene supports a complex system for establishing cultural value—particularly around the attainment and display of bruises—that ‘plays out’ in skaters’ experiences of physicality and social relationships, and circulates through roller derby media.

In section one, I investigate the place of injury in skaters’ experiences of roller derby. Central to this analysis is my exploration of the importance participants placed on attaining and displaying their first bruise. By focusing on the significance of the first bruise, I argue that injury—and bruises in particular—are part of both the system of cultural value in roller derby and skaters’ process of becoming intelligible as skaters. Recognising participants’ overwhelming preference for bruises (as opposed to broken bones), reveals that participants in this study value the symbolism and aesthetic quality of bruises rather than being injured. This analysis, I argue, firstly demonstrates that not all injuries are valued the same and secondly, indicates that the value of injury has limitations; rather than valuing the biggest or most painful injury, the celebration of bruises suggests an associated importance on controlled physicality and mutual safety.

The second section of this chapter analyses participants’ experience of ‘becoming’ roller derby skaters. Like Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2014b) findings, in this study some participants emphasised desires to be ‘hard’, ‘strong’ and ‘tough’. Yet, as indicated in the analysis of injury, participants tended to emphasise the need for control as a part of ‘becoming’ skaters. Attaining control is also, I argue, part of the system of roller derby capital. This analysis contributes to the existing research on skaters’ experiences of socialisation and bodily transformation by demonstrating that becoming skaters is not solely focused on the pursuit of harder, stronger, tougher bodies, but also involves mastering the body by developing control.
In section three, I situate my analysis of skaters’ embodied experiences and roller derby capital within the organisational structure and flows of the roller derby scene. Specifically, I introduce the idea of ‘safe play’ as an organising principle of the Sydney roller derby scene. Safe play refers to a set of social, cultural, and institutional aspects of the roller derby scene through which mutual safety and controlled violence is emphasised. Institutionally, safe play is reinforced through the development and maintenance of roller derby rules and regulations. My main interest in this section, however, is to explore the ways that scene members collaboratively reinforce safe play, particularly through micro-level processes, social interaction, and sporting performances. Central to this is participants’ focus on legal versus illegal forms of physicality. In this section, I draw together arguments made throughout this chapter to demonstrate that expressions of toughness and forms of physicality that stay within the boundaries of safe play (i.e. that are legal), are the most celebrated as they indicate a high level of proficiency, and thus operate as a form of roller derby capital. Consequently, I argue that by exploring safe play and skaters’ embodied experiences, this analysis reveals a complex system of cultural value that, again, cannot be adequately explained using subcultural capital.

*A beautiful rainbow of colours*: Injury, pleasure, and ‘becoming’ skaters.

Driven by my interest in exploring the ways injury operates as a form of capital, I asked participants how they felt about injuries sustained in roller derby. This rather simple but open-ended question revealed that participants frequently emphasised the importance of the ‘first’ bruise.
I must admit, my first bruise was on my ass and I put it on Facebook. I was so proud of it. It was like, “Check this out! My first bruise from derby! Check it out!” … I love it! I love showing my bruises off…I think it makes you feel a bit tough. And cause I'm so skinny, people don’t think I'd be tough (Meg 4 Mercy, WSR skater).

Morgan, who at the time of our interview had started training as skater with WSR, described a similar desire for her first bruise.

I’m disappointed because I haven’t actually had a roller derby injury, like I’m waiting to get that first big bruise. I’ve fallen quite a few times! Every day I’ll look. I had a pretty big fall where I fell on my side and then sort of skidded on my bum, so I kept on looking. I’ve got no bruise, but it was a hard fall, right like on my hip bone. I was like, “Yeah, I’ll get a bruise!” Nothing. I sort of had like this grey mark on my side and my bum where I had skidded. I was like it’s kind of an injury? When I was doing my freshmeat course, everyone was falling and getting bruises. But I wasn’t getting bruises, so I have no proud photo. With some of the girls it would take up half of their thigh. There would be this beautiful rainbow of colors, and I never got that. I haven’t had those proud derby injuries. Luckily, it’s only bruises that I need to come up with. I’ve never had broken bones or anything (Morgan, spectator).

A skater’s first bruise is a ‘moment of becoming’ (Fox & Allan 2014; Power & Bennett 2015), as it affirms a sense of ‘toughness’ (Barbee & Cohen 2010; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a, 2014b; Peluso 2011). In so doing, injuries signify transformation, and one’s movement into the scene through a physical ‘rite of passage’ (Burnett 1969; Young & Banwell 1993). This places pressure on new skaters to attain bruises; for example, Morgan’s inability to get a bruise while everyone else gets them is expressed as though she is being held back and not meeting a set of social standards. As she says, it is something ‘she has to come up with’. Her disappointment emerges from a perceived failure of her body to ‘act normally’ within the expectations and shared bodily experiences of the scene. Morgan moves between feelings of yearning, expectation, and disappointment over not yet attaining a bruise. Being ‘disappointed’
because she hasn’t ‘actually had a roller derby injury’ and looking for them ‘everyday’, exposes her desire to prove she belongs; she desires the status attributed to injury in roller derby. To quote Probyn (1996, p. 40, emphasis in original) again; while desire makes one ‘think of arriving, it also marks the… intersection of being and going, of longing, and of not arriving’. Morgan’s account, therefore, affirms her position between ‘being and going, of longing and not arriving’ (Probyn 1996, p. 40), situating her at the point ‘before’ transformation, or perhaps more accurately, before recognition.

The emphasis placed on the first bruise indicates that:

conforming to the presentational norms of a social group generally signif[ies] membership to that collectivity and acceptance of its values, allowing individuals to develop a subjectively experienced sense of self validated by the community (Shilling 2008, p. 64).

In sharing her first bruise on Facebook and being ‘so proud of it’, Meg 4 Mercy draws attention to the intersection of subjective and intersubjective dimensions of roller derby injuries as roller derby capital. Stating that she wants people to ‘check it out’, followed by the statement ‘I love it! I love showing my bruises off’, indicates that Meg 4 Mercy’s passion emerges from the sharing of injury images. Other participants also foregrounded the importance of sharing one’s first bruise. According to Dita Von Bruiser, ‘it’s good for new skaters… you celebrate your first bruise… it helps you conquer your fear’. While Zoe Da Belle explains that ‘bruises are cool, they are really cool… especially your first, you wear it loud and proud’. This reflects my observations of the WSR training session detailed at the beginning.
of this chapter as Julia Kill Hard claimed that she shared an image of her injury on Facebook, and Lady Gut-Ya’s emphasised the need for ‘pics or it didn’t happen’.

For these participants, the value of injury resides in its symbolic quality; injuries affirm their personal sense of toughness, and convey to others that they are tough. The significance of injury, therefore, emerges from its relational function—the importance is derived from displaying it ‘loud and proud’—and the way that it operates as a marker of immersion in social and cultural relations of the skater collective, that are also always embodied.

While participants celebrated their first bruise, this does not completely explain the exchange between skaters described at the beginning of this chapter. This interest prompted me to ask participants what they think about the place of injury in roller derby, and whether they believe all injuries are treated the same or if they are differently.

It’s mainly just bruises just because anything else is probably going to get you time off skates so people don’t want to take it too far… so people love the bruises and the things they can show. So it is mainly pictures of bruises. Sometimes there will be a broken ankle or rink rash, but yeah mainly bruises (Dame Dead’Na, WSR skater).

I don’t know how I feel about this kind of stuff. It can make it look really bad and scare people off (laughs). It can be dangerous, and we all get bruises and things, but it isn’t all injuries. But yeah, there is definitely a focus on it but no one wants to actually get hurt! (SuziEphedrine, roller derby business owner).

A good friend of mine thought she'd done a bad injury. Thankfully it was just fluid and it passed, but when she got home her partner said to her you know, ‘What if you need a knee reconstruction?’ Like that's time off work, that's our mortgage, that's babysitters for kids, that's … Like there are repercussions, I think that maybe we don't always think about that (Zoe Da Belle, WSR skater).
Being an amateur, grassroots level sport puts pressure on skaters to avoid serious injury. As Zoe Da Belle explains, serious injuries have repercussions for work and family commitments. This was also identified by De-Nominator, who explained that ‘even given how much I love it, [roller derby] is one part of my life… [We] have to be aware of that’. While members pay insurance to their league—with some skaters also securing personal injury cover—serious injury can still impact one’s everyday life, income, and future wellbeing. By extension, being seriously injured also results in ‘time off skates’. This was a primary reason for participants’ valuing of bruises rather than other kinds of injuries; bruises rarely impact a skater’s ability to compete, nor would they disrupt commitments outside of roller derby. Here, it is the symbolic and aesthetic quality of bruises, rather than the experience of being injured that is valorised in the circulation of roller derby capital.

The value of bruises is largely based on aesthetics and skaters’ sensory pleasures as size, colour, and changes over time are emphasised. At the beginning of this section, Morgan described bruises as being a ‘beautiful rainbow of colours’. Zipee Sweet Feet (ex-skater) explained in her experiences of roller derby, ‘the bigger the bruise, the better’ as skaters are ‘always saying ‘look at the size, the colour, look at how it’s going, look how big it is’’. This focus on the aesthetics of injury as part of roller derby capital is reinforced through roller derby media, most notably in HAM through the reoccurring feature, ‘The Battle of the Breaks and Bruises’ (see Figure 9 below).
‘The Battle of the Breaks and Bruises’—and others features in HAM, such as ‘Glamour Stacks’—celebrate wounded and wounding bodies. By showcasing injuries and selecting a ‘winner’, these features simultaneously produce and reaffirm a system of differentially valued injuries. Such features also normalise risk and experiences of injury and pain as they demonstrate that ‘even if you are wearing protective gear, you are likely to get hurt doing derby’ (Barbee & Cohen 2010, p. 167).

The evidence discussed thus far, demonstrates that participants enjoy sharing their injuries. This is apparent in the playful banter between skaters at the WSR training session (p. 187), and across participant interviews where the aesthetic qualities of bruises are typically celebrated. Taking pleasure from injury—of wounding, being wounded, or depicting wounds (Hearn & Burr 2008)—has been researched across a
wide range of topics, including, sadomasochism (Ritchie 2008), self-harm (Hearn & Burr 2008; Ritchie 2008), body mutilation/art (Forsyth & Simpson 2008; Jeffreys 2008; Jorgensen 2008), sports such as rugby (Gard & Meyenn 2000) and rock climbing (Robinson 2008), as well as in film (Edwards 2008; McCosker 2008) and television (Burr 2008). In this research, pleasure derived from wounds and injury was situated within complex relations of power, gender, and identity. For instance, in Ritchie’s (2008) study of sadomasochists (SM) who also self-harm there were distinct differences in the pleasure derived from SM interactions when compared to those from self-harm Ritchie’s (2008) analysis revealed that ‘more attention [was] placed on the aesthetics and erotics of wounding’ in SM situations. Furthermore, instances of bruising were enjoyed—like Morgan’s ‘beautiful rainbow of colours’—because of ‘how they look’.

Drawing on Salecl (1998), Ritchie (2008, pp. 83-4) theorises that ‘SM play helps participants to bring bodily experience into the symbolic’ where ‘the very ‘real’ marking from these activities was used to support narratives of desirability and identity’. Ritchie’s (2008) discussion of SM and self-harm provides valuable insights, enabling recognition of individual pleasures and the symbolic qualities that can also support self-identity, and intelligibility as skaters within the scene. Furthermore, the celebration of bruises is culturally specific, relating to injuries sustained in roller derby from fellow skaters or on-track incidents, as opposed to throughout everyday routines. As such, the pleasures of bruises in roller derby reflect the distinctions observed in Ritchie’s (2008) study of SM and self-harm. Value and pleasure emerges from the distinct social, cultural, bodily, and power relations operating between scene members within scenic spaces and places. Furthermore, by
sharing and discussing injuries, participants situated themselves *amongst* the social relations of skater (and scene) sociality.

This section has focused on investigating the function of injury within the social and cultural relations of skater sociality but pain has not been discussed. ‘Playing through pain’ has been extensively documented within the fields of sports sociology, leisure studies and gender studies (Fenton & Pitter 2010; Gard & Meyenn 2000; Howe 2001; Nixon II 1992, 1996; Roderick, Waddington & Parker 2000). Commonly, ‘pain emerges as an understood currency which is traded in order to succeed at sport’ (Gard & Meyenn 2000, p. 9). In Pavlidis and Fullagar’s (2014a, 2014b) study of pleasure and pain amongst roller derby skaters, they determined that pain—rather than injuries or their display—was central to narratives of skater transformation and distancing from traditional notions of feminine frailty and the ‘girly’ image. Experiencing and ‘playing through’ pain is associated with skaters’ reinvention of themselves as ‘hard’, ‘strong’, ‘tough’ athletes. Also, according to Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014a, p. 489), the representation of wounded bodies in imagery indicates ‘pride and pleasure in representing pain to others… [which] shapes women’s own embodied relation to themselves as ‘tough’ *and* ‘feminine’’. A similar argument has been made by Wainwright, Williams and Turner (2005) in their study of ballet dancers, who recognise the significance of dancing through pain as simultaneously a demonstration of individual dedication and as a confirmation of their identity as dancers and as women.

Interestingly, in my study injury rather than pain was typically foregrounded by participants. When pain did emerge as a topic of conversation in the interviews or in social situation, it was typically represented in abstract terms, most often alluded to
as a potential consequence of injury. For instance, Meg 4 Mercy refers to becoming aware of more serious injuries as an ‘eye-opener’ to the possible dangers of playing a full contact sport. Some skaters simply allude to not wanting to ‘lose time on skates’, and the association between a serious injury and pain remained unspoken, but undoubtedly present. The relationship between pain and injury is also obscured through omission. In our interview, Dita von Bruiser reflected on the ways injury is typically celebrated by circulating images, and suggested that it helps new skaters ‘conquer’ their fears. In not elaborating on the source of fear—is it of falling, having an injury, or being hurt?—Dita von Bruiser obscures the association between injury and the experience of pain.

While there was a general silence surrounding pain in my interview data, this does not mean that it is not part of roller derby experience. While conducting participant observation, I was constantly surrounded by a rotating cohort of more seriously injured skaters known as the ‘crips’ or ‘Team Crip’, referencing ‘criple’. These skaters were typically recovering from broken ankles or wrists, resulting in skaters’ use of wheelchairs, crutches and slings. While pain was largely absent in participant interviews, the reality of roller derby as a dangerous full-contact sport is revealed through the presence of Team Crip. Furthermore, in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter, Marlene Did-a-Trick is in obvious pain from her stack, while Julia Kill Hard declares ‘We’ll see who is laughing tomorrow when you’re all Butt Hurt!’.

As a full-contact, competitive sport, while pain may sometimes be omitted from discussion it is still ‘felt, anticipated, enjoyed, suffered, shared and inflicted’ (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014a, p. 496), and through support of ‘Team Crip’, is embedded within the sociality of the roller derby scene. While participants
foregrounded the value of bruises in interviews, throughout the scene more broadly—particularly via specific roller derby injury websites and blogs—discussion tends to focus on recovery and rehabilitation for injured skaters. The ambiguity surrounding pain works to normalise the wounded body in the scene. However, this also reaffirms bodily traits pursued in ‘becoming’ skaters raised earlier in this chapter and also identified by Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014a, 2014b), as the silencing of pain encourages representations and cultural values of ‘toughness’ and can contribute to skaters’ roller derby capital by distancing skaters from notions of feminine frailty.

‘It is also about developing control’: Becoming tough and being in control

As participation in sporting environments can produce physical changes (such as increased muscularity), my interest in injury naturally led me to explore skaters’ processes of physical transformation and becoming intelligible as skaters. Throughout skater interviews, participants often described a process of bodily transformation; skaters explained that they started out as ‘soft’, ‘weak’, ‘not sporty’, and ‘awkward’, but that through roller derby they are able to ‘be strong’, ‘get tough’, ‘look tough’, ‘knock people over’, ‘hurt people’, ‘be harder’, and be ‘more comfortable’ in their bodies. For example, Meg 4 Mercy explained that she has ‘always been weak and small [because she is] so skinny’ but in roller derby ‘we’re tough and we get to feel strong and be proud’. Theda Bastard claims that she was ‘clumsy and just weak’ as she had ‘no strength and was pretty shy’ but that ‘roller derby changed all that. I’m a lot tougher now! (laughs)’. Spectators also recognise the transformative potential of involvement in roller derby. For Michelle, the idea of
becoming a skater is intriguing and she questions whether it ‘would make me tougher… The skaters, they’re not ‘girly’, they look strong and just tough. Seeing them on the track sometimes it’s like I wonder if I could do that, if I could be like that’. These accounts demonstrate that female skaters can gain a sense of ‘physical empowerment as a result of ‘discovering’ previously unrecognised bodily power and strength’ (Paul, Steinlage & Blank 2015, p. 429).

When members in a social field ‘bestow value directly on a specific bodily form, activity or performance, they are effectively creating a category of physical capital’ (Shilling 2003, p. 139). This is demonstrated in Wacquant’s (1995) influential study of becoming an amateur pugilist (boxer). Wacquant (1995) recognises that the social field and the practice of a specific bodily craft (i.e. boxing), results in boxers’ bodies being used as a form of capital. In this case, the boxing gym—as a structuring social setting—is where the body is converted from ‘abstract’ capital to ‘pugilistic’ capital (Wacquant 1995, p. 66). According to Wacquant (2004), this conversion from abstract bodily capital into pugilistic capital enhances one’s value and recognition in that social field and it is an ongoing process. Furthermore, the development of the physical body can be converted into other forms of capital, namely, cultural, economic, and/or social. While in Wacquant’s (2004) study, pugilists’ physical investment had the potential to provide economic gains, in roller derby the effort sunk into their bodies can produce subjective pleasure, feelings of accomplishment, and a sense of empowerment.

Capital is, therefore, part of the mastery of a specific field. For Bourdieu, this is a process of developing capacities, but he often focuses more on symbolic dimensions of capital. However, in the previous section I demonstrated that not all injuries are
equally valorised, and noted that participants often articulated a reluctance to be injured or in pain. Consequently, if we take the idea of capacity and mastery seriously, then we need to think of injury not simply as a form of distinction, but as part of a wider issue of capacity and mastery to be socially recognisable as a skater. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, one’s mastery of a specific field can also contribute to one’s social status, including gaining fame and celebrity. Central to this process is the need for control in demonstrating one’s competence.

The importance of control as part of skaters’ process of transformation is most apparent in accounts where participants felt that they had existing, yet unharnessed, strength.

I’m a big girl, bigger than most girls… and I’ve always been awkwardly, not, I wouldn’t call it strong, but just awkward in the sense that I just don’t know my own strength… I’ve always been nerdy but awkwardly aggressive and strong and I needed an outlet for that and derby’s perfect for that (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).

Throughout the interview, De-Nominator frequently described her experiences in roller derby in bodily ways, she was ‘awkward’, ‘big’, ‘unsure’, ‘not in control’, and ‘clumsy’, but roller derby helped her ‘get direction’, ‘focus’, ‘be tough’, and ‘be confident’. This movement from being ‘awkward’ to gaining confidence, ‘focus’, and ‘direction’ indicates the importance of control in sporting competence and becoming skaters. This is apparent when I asked De-Nominator if there was anything she felt was unacceptable in roller derby, to which she replied,

Being overly rough. When you take it to a point where you’re just so pumped up full of adrenaline that you’re being unsafe and stupid. It isn’t necessary, this is amateur sport (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).
The need for control also emerged when Theda Bastard discussed differences between her sporting performance/her league and the Texas Roller Girls.

While you need to be strong and tough it is also about developing control – Seeing Texas [Roller Girls] when they came to Australia, they were tough but they just have so much more control… the packs were so tight and just, it was just incredible to see how far we are from each other, and how far we have to go (Theda Bastard, media producer).

For De-Nominator, control is associated with performing roller derby in a manner intended to avoid serious injury and is central to the successful accomplishment of roller derby. Similarly, Theda Bastard represents control as an element of skater becoming. By separating The Texas Roller Girls from herself/her league, Theda Bastard differentiates between levels of expertise and development as skaters.

Stating ‘it was just incredible to see how far we are from each other’, recognises skaters’ dedication to the ongoing process of ‘becoming’ while foregrounding the scene as a social field that values particular bodily performances.

The centrality of control also emerged while conducting observation at the Eastern Region Roller Derby competition in 2012. While standing with several members of S2D2, conversation turned to the circumstances surrounding an S2D2 skater who had recently been injured. According to them, during a friendly bout between S2D2 and a newly formed Sydney team, one of the opposition’s ‘fresh’ skaters was moving off the track after the whistle blew, her skates kicking outwards as she moved. Passing an S2D2 skater, their skates accidently collided. The S2D2 skater fell and broke her leg. While conveying the incident to the group, those around me became irate. Some of them were angry, demanding to know whether it was intentional. Most, however, were exasperated as they recognised that the incident was due to inexperience and a lack of proficiency as a skater. As one skater
explained, ‘It was stupid, and totally avoidable. You learn to not flick your skates out. You shouldn’t be scrimmaging, let alone bouting till you’ve got that down’.

Becoming a skater is not just about physical transformation—getting harder, stronger, bigger—but also involves acquiring bodily coordination, changes in cognition and the mental effort required to complete a move or action, an ability to ‘read the game’, and acquire proficiency on skates. Becoming skaters involves more than being ‘tough’ and ‘hard’. To acquire roller derby capital and be recognised as skaters, they must also master their bodies by gaining control.

‘Was that legal?!’: Examining tensions between the ‘value’ of injury, ‘toughness’, and safe play.

During fieldwork, I discovered that while skaters revelled in physicality and celebrated injuries, they simultaneously emphasised the need for ‘safe play’, a cultural principle focused on mutual safety and controlled violence. Safe play discourages ‘dirty derby’ that, as discussed in Chapter 4, includes unsportsmanlike behaviour and overly aggressive or illegal forms of physicality. Safe play is reinforced through WFTDA, roller derby’s globally recognised organising body. As the roller derby institution, WFTDA maintains and manages the extensive rules and regulations in the roller derby scene, thus stipulating what is legal and illegal. The development of roller derby rules at the beginning of the revival in 2001 (Barbee & Cohen 2010; Joulwan 2007; Storms 2008)—and their ensuing review, alteration and circulation by WFTDA (Breeze 2015; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b)—ensures a focus on serious athleticism and sporting competition in the organisation and performance of roller derby. This focus distinguishes contemporary roller derby from previous versions. Whereas Roller Games in the 1960s encouraged uncontrolled violence on
the track and imposed few regulations on acceptable/unacceptable physicality (see Coppage 1999), the implementation of legal/illegal physicality, manoeuvres, and team strategies legitimises the roller derby revival by aligning it with mainstream sporting values and structure.

While the institutional dimensions of safe play are important, using scene, I am most interested in how such aspects ‘play out’ in participants’ lived experiences of roller derby. In interviews, safe play was frequently emphasised in skaters’ discussions concerning experiences of legal and illegal physicality.

M: I love knocking people over. It’s the best feeling… I knocked one of the girls over at training the other day and I said, “Was that legal??”, and she said ‘Yeah’. I went, ‘Aw, awesome! That felt so good!’.

J: Is it important to you that it is legal?

M: Yeah, of course! Even if you got away with it, you could still hurt someone. Plus, I’d know. Like keeping your elbows in for example, is just something that you have to learn. You have to learn to use the parts of the body you are allowed to hit with. You need to make sure you are playing it safe (Meg 4 Mercy, WSR skater).

I love being rough! I can hurt my best friend and be ok with it later. As long as it is legal than it’s great. I just want everyone to be safe… No matter how rough it looks, just like a footballer, we all have moves and things that we do on the track that we have to learn how to do properly to ensure that we’re safe and everybody is safe (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).

In both accounts, safe play emerges as a set of ongoing and routine practices in the scene. For Meg 4 Mercy, legal hits are something you just ‘have to learn’ (original emphasis), emphasising safe play as a primary aspect of skaters’ socialisation. Similarly, De-Nominator associates safe play with the accumulation of knowledge and skaters’ bodily transformation in ‘becoming’ skaters. A skater must learn what
parts of the body can be used, how to use them, and when such use is appropriate; it is not enough to be ‘hard’, ‘tough’, or strong, skaters must also develop physical control and proficiency on skates. Furthermore, the use of ‘you’, ‘I’, and ‘we’ in both accounts foreground safe play as an individual and shared responsibility, rather than being confined to league management and organisation. Throughout both accounts, socialisation involves the conversion of abstract physical capital into roller derby capital, while also acknowledging the associated accumulation of knowledge in becoming proficient skaters.

In the previous section, I demonstrated some of the ways that participants derive pleasure from their experience and display of injury. For many participants, however, pleasure was derived from how the injury was sustained. In this context, pleasure is derived from how skaters negotiate physicality within the parameters of safe play. This is evident in Meg 4 Mercy’s account. By celebrating the knowledge that it was a legal hit, declaring ‘Aw, awesome! That felt so good!’, Meg 4 Mercy reveals that pleasure from knocking someone over is inexorably linked to the legality of the hit. Likewise, De-Nominator declares, ‘I love being rough!... [but] I just want everyone to be safe’. This comment indicates a pleasure in, and desire for, potentially harmful physical contact that nevertheless stays within the rules of the game. Pleasure in this sense emerges from demonstrating one’s expertise or mastery of controlled violence rather than simply in demonstrating one’s strength or toughness.
The accounts above indicate that participants often enjoy and celebrate legal forms of physicality. These findings direct attention to the ways such activity is evaluated.

I love those moments when you see a massive, massive hit on the track and maybe that is probably one of the only times I do hear the audience. You see a really big hit happen. My referee brain is in the process of calculating target zones, blocking zones, trajectory, all of the other things I use to judge whether a penalty happens. And then my brain goes, ‘well, legal hit’, and the rest of me goes, “wow! Legal hit, yeah!” And then you hear the audience, like ‘wow! Yeah’ (Sintax, referee).

In evaluating a ‘massive, massive hit’, Sintax illuminates the routine activity of maintaining and enforcing safe play while reaffirming the pleasure often derived from legal physicality. While safe play manifests through skater action—being sportsmanlike, and accomplishing roller derby in accordance with legal/illegal regulations—as in other sports, roller derby referees operate as a conduit between incidents of battering bodies in competitive play and the implementation of sporting rules and regulations. In this context, Sintax’s ‘referee brain’ is the result of her accumulated roller derby knowledge and expertise; it is part of her roller derby capital.

Participants’ commentary demonstrates that structured or controlled violence is upheld as an expectation of roller derby skaters; they are socialised to place safety first, and this emphasis influences training techniques, the ways skaters use their bodies, how they engage with the sport on physical, social, and emotional levels, and how injuries and collisions are valued within roller derby’s system of cultural capital. Through target/blocking zones, and maintenance of safe play by conforming to legal/illegal parameters, skaters develop an appreciation of the sport’s emphasis on safety and (generally) work toward maintaining a full-contact sport that supports
moderate force and controlled violence. Furthermore, these accounts foreground the continuities between roller derby and normative sporting culture as emphasis is placed on excellence within the confines of acceptable competitive play.

While safe play is commonly upheld in participants’ representations of roller derby competition, it is not always maintained in media representations of roller derby. One example relates to the film *Whip It* (2009). In Chapter 5 I identified some participants’ criticisms of the film, as they argued that it misrepresented roller derby as a sport that fosters uncontrolled violence. To quote Madame Dirty Boots again, what the film represents ‘isn’t what derby is… we don’t carry on like that’. In criticising *Whip It*, Madame Dirty Boots also challenges the imaginary it constructs and circulates regarding what roller derby is.

Throughout the scene there are tensions concerning competing imaginaries. In this study, a central focus is the perceived overemphasis on violence and injury in visual imagery that many participants feel does not reflect roller derby’s emphasis on mutual safety.

I disagree with some of the logos, particularly the ones that involve injuries on part of the body where you should have been wearing safety gear. There's one in Sydney, where there is a big cut on the elbow with a band aid over it. No! Where are your elbow guards? I disagree with logos that show derby players not wearing safety gear. Because I think that it's an important part of what we do. I disagree with skate-outs without helmets. I disagree with publicity shoots that involve people wearing only skates, jumping over each other and things. But injuries, real injuries, I like that we glorify them (Sintax, referee).
The depiction of ‘unreal’ injuries in stylised representations—particularly in contexts where such injuries would be avoided if using protective gear—encourages misconceptions regarding roller derby practices and scene values. For Sintax, injury is not the issue, but rather the tendency to dramatise injury, and in so doing, to misrepresent roller derby physicality and contribute to an imaginary that conflicts with the scene members’ emphasis on safe play. This tension is aptly demonstrated by Inner West Roller Derby League’s (IWRDL) initial logo (see Figure 10 below).\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{inner-west-roller-derby-league-logo.jpg}
\caption{Initial Inner West Roller Derby League logo}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} Inner West Roller Derby League, founded in 2012, produced this league logo at their onset. After wide-spread contention in the scene, the logo was changed to one focused more on sporting competition and athleticism.
The IWRDL logo was released during the time that I was conducting participant observation. At social events the logo was frequently criticised by scene members (including skaters, NSOs, referees and volunteers) for its perceived celebration of violence and failure to represent roller derby as a serious and competitive sport. During interviews, I used visual aids and showed participants a series of roller derby logos, including S2D2’s league logo, WSR’s ‘Hellfire Honeys’ logo, and IWRDL’s league logo (Figure 10). Upon seeing Figure 10, Michelle (spectator) exclaimed, ‘is this real?!’, before stating, ‘I don’t know how I feel about the skate to the face. That would definitely be illegal in the actual game’. Similarly, Madame Dirty Boots stated that she hated the skate to the woman’s head as ‘it isn’t even what we use!’. Dame Dead’Na explained that Figure 10 ‘sends a different message—we play sport’. One skater, Scarlett O’Harmer, also recognised the image as a problematic representation of violence against women, explaining that ‘it’s distasteful… [especially] when so many women are victims of physical abuse, this to me doesn’t depict a woman owning a derby injury, it is a woman with limited agency’.

Central to participants’ criticisms of Figure 10, is the lack of protective gear depicted. Skaters and referees (including Sintax, Scarlett O’Harmer, and Pepâ la Pow!) questioned the logo, asking ‘where is her helmet?’. This lack of protective gear led some participants to wonder if the represented participant in Figure 10, is meant to be a spectator. Morgan claimed that it was offensive because ‘it looks like a spectator, which is just bad form’, while this idea made Catherine feel less welcome in roller derby, stating ‘it is confronting because she looks like a spectator. Why would you do that? The spectators support your league. I don’t get that and I don’t like it’. This interpretation of Figure 10 challenges the inclusive ethos often
emphasised in the roller derby scene, and further, undermines spectators’ feelings of belonging and of ‘being derby’.

While IWRDL have since replaced their logo with a simple black roller derby skate, Figure 10 remains relevant for the ways it highlights tensions between the valorisation of injury and aggressive competition, and the scene’s emphasis on sporting seriousness, safe play and women’s empowerment. This logo is, therefore, problematic because it associates roller derby with lawlessness and ‘distasteful’ forms of violence against women. In doing so, this image was seen to misrepresent what roller derby ‘is’ to the public. For many, their anxieties over the logo centred on the nature of roller derby as a revival which strongly differs from previous, highly theatrical versions.

This section has expanded the analysis of ‘becoming’ skaters by situating discussion of bodily experiences and competitive play in respect to roller derby’s organising principle of mutual safety. In foregrounding the routine accomplishment of safe play through individual and shared maintenance of legal/illegal distinctions and accountability, this analysis exposes the limits imposed on expressions of bodily toughness in avoiding injury in an amateur sporting context. Maintenance of safe play discourse situates skaters’ bodily experiences within broader sporting values as the scene reinforces emphasis on sporting seriousness in the maintenance of safe play through individual and collective practices.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored and analysed the subjective and intersubjective elements of injury and physicality in respect to skater sociability, belonging, and becoming intelligible as skaters, and I have situated this analysis within a broader conceptualisation of roller derby as a scene. Throughout my analysis I have argued that the roller derby scene supports a complex system for establishing cultural value—particularly around the attainment and display of bruises—that ‘plays out’ in skaters’ experiences of physicality and social relationships, and circulates through roller derby media; I refer to this as roller derby capital.

Beginning with a focus on injury, my analysis reveals that skaters place specific importance on the first bruise, making it akin to a ‘rite of passage’ in participants’ process of ‘becoming’ skaters. Central to this process is the circulation of injury via social networks and media, typically Facebook. This indicates that it is the sharing of imagery and injury stories rather than experiences of injury that are typically valued. This extends to the silencing of pain I noted in section one. While Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014a) identified pain as a common dimension of skater experience, my data offered few instances where pain was discussed. This difference may be due to my method in studying roller derby. As a spectator, I can access public sites (such as live bouts) and observe training sessions with WSR and S2D2. Yet, there is, of course, a social network amongst skaters—that Olivia also identifies (Chapter 5)—that, unlike Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014a), I had less access to, and within which pain may be more frequently discussed. My analysis, however, revealed that throughout the data, bruises were the most valued, primarily for their symbolic and aesthetic qualities.
In my analysis of injury and its place in ‘becoming’ skaters, my findings support Pavlidis and Fullagar’s work on roller derby as participants in this study also often desired to develop hard, tough, strong bodies. My analysis, however, extends the field of roller derby research by identifying a simultaneous focus on gaining mastery of their bodies. This, I argued, was a central dimension of becoming skaters as it was primarily about participants demonstrating their competence and capacity as skaters. These embodied experiences are also intricately linked to the DIY, grassroots, amateur nature of roller derby. This aspect of roller derby informs the kinds of injuries valued as roller derby capital, as skaters are aware of the potential consequences of being seriously injured. By situating my analysis of skater experiences in respect to the broader organising principle of safe play, my analysis provides greater nuance to roller derby scholarship by illuminating the complexity of injury and other embodied experiences in roller derby. This chapter also identified the importance of roller derby media to the social and cultural formation of the scene. Specifically, analysis of Figure 10 revealed a disjuncture between the lived experience of roller derby and some forms of visual representation. By using scene theory and focusing on social interaction, relationships and the role of media in the circulation of culture, this analysis reveals some ways roller derby culture is collaboratively constituted and experienced.

In the following chapter I extend my analysis of roller derby media by analysing dominant trends in roller derby league/team logos and promotional material that focus primarily on depictions of women’s bodies. The aim of this analysis is to explore roller derby’s cultural imaginary in relation to common understandings of what roller derby ‘is’.
Chapter 7: Representing roller derby

To fill the time between bouts at Eastern Region Roller Derby (ERRD), I moved between the stalls in the entrance of Penrith Valley Region Sports Centre. As I turn away from a stall advertising custom helmet designs, I come across a table covered in pamphlets for ‘This is Roller Derby’, a documentary about the sport and culture. In the centre of the pamphlet is a stylised representation of a female skater. Pictured with her back to the reader, her helmet is held under her arm and her skate is propped on a skull. My eyes are instantly drawn to the centre of the image where the skaters’ mini skirt reveals red underwear decorated with the words ‘Back off’ written in capital letters. She is looking over her shoulder, and while black ‘war paint’ decorates her cheeks, her hair is neatly arranged in a rockabilly style with a Betty Page fringe, and her lips are painted red. She is smirking and her raised eyebrow seems to convey an unspoken challenge. Printed along the bottom of the pamphlet is the tagline: ‘If you can’t play nice, play roller derby!’.

Picking up a pamphlet I head back to the group of S2D2 and WSR skaters I had been sitting with throughout the competition. Joining them, Femme Furious sees the pamphlet. ‘Thinking of watching it? You aren’t really missing much’ she says. ‘What do you mean?’ I ask. ‘I guess it’s okay if you haven’t heard of derby before, you know, tells you how it works and all that. But it over does the flair and tutus and ‘be your own super hero’ crap. Some people like that stuff, but it isn’t all derby is. You would already know way more about derby than it tells you’. A few of the other skaters agree as some nod their heads and laugh. Next to me, One Jam Wonder explains that the film was good enough and fun and was ‘getting derby out there’, but that it isn’t very accurate and ‘no one takes it seriously’ (JA fieldnotes, 29/9/12).

Introduction

My first experience of roller derby in December 2011 revealed some incongruities between ‘real’ skaters and scholarly works that tended to emphasise an alternative, punk, and pin-up aesthetic organised around expressions and experiences of raunchy
alternative femininity (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Storms 2008). This experience stimulated an interest in the heterogeneity of roller derby performances and of the potential multiple imaginaries operating in the scene and produced by different leagues. The exchange described above indicates that there is a dissonance between participants’ subjective understandings and some visual representations of roller derby. This exchange, coupled with my own questioning of roller derby representations, seemed to suggest competing imaginaries.

A benefit of *scene* is its anti-essentialist framework as it does not reduce the complexity of cultural formations and social life to a singular, static representation. Instead, *scene* accounts for heterogeneity and also recognises their changeability over time (Drysdale 2015; Silver & Clark 2015). This is because a scene:

mobilizes local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions—onward, to later reiterations of itself; outwards, to more formal sorts of social or entrepreneurial activity; upwards, to the broader coalescing of cultural energies within which collective identities take shape (Straw 2005, p. 412).

In relation to roller derby, Straws’ (2005) work is useful in that it foregrounds the possibility of the roller derby scene developing new dimensions as it expands and alters over time. I have already demonstrated some ways the roller derby scene supports variation and how it is undergoing a series of changes. In Chapter 5, I discussed the shift towards recognising non-skaters as ‘being derby’. This demonstrates a shift in the representation of skaters as ‘the whole’ of roller derby and troubles descriptions of roller derby as a women’s sport. While beyond the scope of
this thesis, the rise of men’s roller derby is another example of the scene’s onward motion. Straw’s (2005) work on scenes is significant because it directs attention to possible avenues of development and change in the nature and formation of scenes, as a crucial aspect of local scenes is the way they engage with, or relate to, globalising processes.

Throughout this thesis, my focus has largely been on the ‘locatedness’ of the Sydney roller derby scene. The analysis provided in earlier chapters explored and analysed local manifestations of scenic activity, exploring clusters of roller derby’s sociability and performance in the urban landscape. Scenes can and do, support translocal, global and virtual dimensions, operating through globalising processes (Longhurst 2007). Longhurst (2007, p. 115) calls for recognition of the role of media in ‘sustain[ing] the scenic constitution of social life’. In Chapter 6, I identified one way that roller derby media fulfils this function, as my analysis identified HAM as an avenue through which injury is sustained as a form of roller derby capital. Even though sites of co-present activity (such as live bouts and training sessions) are crucial to the constitution of the roller derby scene and individuals’ experiences, there is a need to explore the ways a range of media interact with various kinds of social activity and cultural sensibilities in extending the roller derby scene beyond the bounded space of local sites. Exploring the ways roller derby is represented through visual communication provides an inroad to an analysis of roller derby’s heterogeneous cultural representations that sustain a scenic imaginary. In this chapter, I explore roller derby imagery and interview data, and argue that the roller derby scene supports an array of representations that exist simultaneously and cannot be ‘resolved’ as a singular imaginary.
In section one, I focus analysis on the ubiquity of women’s bodies in league/team logos. In my analysis, I draw on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) ‘grammar of visual design’ to deconstruct the assorted logos. While league logos offer an opportunity to exercise erotic capital and convey a sense of empowerment, my visual analysis reveals that logos commonly provide ambiguous depictions of women’s sexual agency. Furthermore, imagery rarely incorporates women of colour. This reflects the widely recognised dominance of Caucasian participants in roller derby (Breeze 2014; Donnelly 2012; Liu, Bradley & Burk 2016; Parry 2016; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2012). In this section, I add to the field of roller derby research by incorporating a visual analysis of the only as yet identified logo in the Sydney roller derby scene that features a woman of colour. Through my analysis of each roller derby logo and a comparative discussion, I argue that they tend to reproduce gender and racial stereotypes and provide ambiguous depictions of women’s sexual empowerment.

As recent scholars have indicated, there is a shift in roller derby towards sporting legitimisation as many members want roller derby to be taken seriously as a sport. In section two, I explore S2D2’s (re)imagining of roller derby as they work to distance themselves from the sexualised imagery and pin-up aesthetic that dominates roller derby culture to instead imagine roller derby as a serious sport. In this section, I argue that the roller derby scene supports an array of representations, enabling leagues to mobilise different and potentially conflicting scenic imaginaries.

In section three, I expand analysis beyond the common descriptions of roller derby as alternative or serious, to explore S2D2’s appropriation of Star Wars in promotional material. I draw on Breeze’s (2015) concept of ‘non-/seriousness’, to
argue that S2D2’s incorporation of *Star Wars* as ‘gimmicky’ and playful operates alongside, rather than negates, their emphasis on sporting seriousness. Furthermore, I argue that it functions as a ‘new’ cultural imaginary, demonstrating the ability of the roller derby scene to support a myriad of representations, practices, and forms of sociality.

‘They’re always riding something’: Visual representations of women in roller derby

As I was interested in the forms of roller derby’s visual representation and how participants felt about such imagery, I asked them what images or styles they believed were most commonly associated with roller derby. Participants tended to foreground pin-up as a dominant influence in roller derby imagery.

All the logos with females in them generally are quite empowering, like pin-ups flexing muscles, or they’ve got a black eye or something. It is still sexualised. Even though it’s like some hot girl with massive cleavage, it’s still got some element of derby and toughness to it (Dita von Bruiser, S2D2 skater).

Alternatively, Cameron, a gender ambiguous self-identified lesbian emphasised the erotic quality of roller derby logos and their use of pin-up designs, foregrounding the pleasure they derive from such images.

They really like the old school pin-up look; there’s a lot of big hair—the rolls and fringes—and make-up and underwear and they’re always like riding something, a wheel or doing some kind of sexy pose (laughs). It’s pretty hot but I don’t know, I think it is kind of powerful. But yeah, mainly there are heaps of chicks, like sexy women and that makes sense because it’s derby (Cameron, spectator).
A pin-up is a sexual yet typically ‘soft core’ image of a single individual (generally a young, conventionally attractive woman, although there are also male pin-ups) in lingerie or other revealing clothing that is displayed for private or public consumption (Rosewarne 2007). While pin-up traces back to the late 19th century when early female burlesque dancers self-advertised through the use of small photographic images or cards, the 1940s and 1950s represent the golden age of pin-up style (Buszek 2006; Kakoudaki 2004). The classic pin-up is commonly associated with sexually self-aware and aggressively feminine stars such as Rita Hayworth, Betty Grable, and Ava Gardner in the 1940s, and Betty Page, Jayne Mansfield, and Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s.

Yet, the era (and the genre of pin-up more broadly), is epitomised by *Esquire* magazine’s ‘Varga Girl’ paintings by Alberto Varga (Buszek 2006). Varga’s paintings popularised female sexuality and are commonly regarded as ‘cheesecake’ art, as they were ‘publicly acceptable, mass-produced images of semi-nude women’ (Meyerowitz 1996, p. 10). The classic pin-up, therefore, tended to incorporate a sense of innocence, of ‘the girl next door’, with a layer of sexual connotation that was ‘both visible and dismissible, making it possible for the same image to be acceptable in a variety of publications and to evoke numerous levels of pornographic identification’ (Kakoudaki 2004, p. 339).

Contemporary pin-up style is largely a throwback to this golden age, and is commonly regarded as a source of women’s sexual empowerment (Buszek 1999; Regehr 2012). The association between pin-up and sexual freedom has made it a dominant influence in roller derby’s cultural aesthetic (Finley 2010; Gieseler 2014; Owen 2014). By describing skaters as ‘riding something’ or doing a ‘sexy pose’,
Cameron suggests that the ‘power’ of roller derby’s pin-up inspired imagery derives from a sense of sexual agency and, potentially, from representations of sexual dominance. Dita von Bruiser recognises a similar style where the classic pin-up—the soft core, semi-nude and often subtly sexualised woman—is infused with a sense of ‘derby’ and ‘toughness’ through visible musculature and the display of injury. Both participants emphasise pin-up as a ubiquitous style as it features prominently in roller derby imagery, and this largely supports my own observations of the roller derby scene (see Figures 11 and 12 below).

Figure 11: Adelaide Roller Derby League logo.
Both Figures 11 and 12 are reminiscent of the pin-up genre through the posed and sexualised skater depictions. The skater in Figure 11 dominates the image through her size, positioning, and overlapping of boundaries; she ‘comes out’ of the image. She is the ‘centre’, the other elements are the ‘margins’ (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). While the diagonal and elongated pose and semi-nude design is common to pin-up art and is intended to be alluring, the image is not easily readable as empowering or objectifying. The pose, for instance, accentuates the skaters’ slim, non-muscular frame and feminine curves, yet her demurely arranged legs convey a more restrained message.
According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), when a represented participant is depicted with a tilted head, particularly if directed away from the viewer, it conveys a submissive message. In Figure 11 the women’s sense of authority or power is undermined by the slight tilt and angle of her face. This also means that the direction or focus of her gaze is unclear, resulting in a non-transactional reaction process as no connection is being established (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). Doing so positions the represented participant as an object for the viewer’s scrutiny. In contrast to the sense of passivity the gaze suggests, the devil theme—providing a ‘femme fatale’ connotation—coupled with the skaters’ sneer, indicates disdain or disinterest in being objectified. Collectively, these forms of composition and style of visual design draw heavily on pin-up art and represent an ambiguous depiction that resists a straightforward interpretation as sexually dominant, submissive, athletic, or theatrical.

Figure 12 contains similar ambiguities. The use of orange—as a derivative of red—is a highly salient colour and draws attention to the female skater’s body. This results in the skater’s pale facial features being washed out, while the contrast between orange, black, and white (and the central positioning) pronounce the skater’s exposed, and enhanced, cleavage. Unlike Figure 11, Figure 12 depicts a non-transactional action process that is formed through direct eye-contact (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). In pin-up, the represented participant (i.e. the woman pictured) usually ‘has a direct eye-line connection to the implied viewer, and this imagined mutual recognition between viewer and model gives the pin-up its characteristic allure and sexual content’ (Kakoudaki 2004, p. 339). This direct gaze contributes to the sense of sexual awareness and agency pin-up art typically conveys. Like Figure 11, the tilt of the woman’s head and oblique angle of her gaze—originating from the
corner of her eye—indicate undermine the attitude and presence of the represented participant. However, her facial expression—with slightly parted lips, and raised eyebrows—is questioning and unsure, as opposed to the sense of surety and disdain conveyed in Figure 11.

Where Figure 11 drew on the cultural understanding of the femme fatale, Figure 12 instead draws on the history of pin-up in World War II (WWII). Esquire produced pro-war imagery and in 1939, made an agreement with the US military to create and circulate a free ‘military edition’ once a month (Kakoudaki 2004). Being widely circulated amongst overseas servicemen, Esquire’s Varga Girl art inspired the creation of the bomber girls: pin-up paintings that decorated American WWII military planes, including B-17, B-25, and B-52 bombers (Morgan & Powers 2001). As the skater in Figure 12 is depicted straddling the large, and distinctly phallic rocket, provides a heteronormative representation of female sexuality that Cameron (p. 218) claims is ‘pretty hot’ and ‘powerful’. Figure 12, therefore, appropriates the cultural understanding of the bomber girls to convey a similar representation of weaponised of femininity.

Figures 11 and 12 are also reminiscent of women in video games, which, ‘in their design [and] representative features… are influenced by and directly linked to sex, sexuality, pornography, romance, and desire’ (Lauteria & Wysocki 2015, p. 1). This is achieved through the focus on sexual body parts including breasts, buttocks, and groin, as well as—like pin-up—by being posed in sexually suggestive ways while wearing revealing clothing (Burgess, Stermer & Burgess 2007; Lynch et al. 2016). Parry (2016), as well as Dita von Bruiser and Cameron (p. 218), suggest that skaters are empowered through the combination of sexual elements and designs that accentuate strength, power, and/or toughness; for example, through the depiction of
sexual dominance, muscularity or injury. It is this combination of feminine sexuality and ‘masculine’ display that also forms the basis of many scholars’ claims about roller derby as a gender resistive and empowering sport culture (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Hern 2010; Parry 2016; Peluso 2011). However, this is not supported by the analysis of Figures 11 and 12.

In both images, the represented participant is depicted as a slim, non-muscular, conventionally beautiful woman. While the central composition focuses attention on the skater in both images, their function as ‘object’ or ‘subject’ is ambiguous. In Figure 11, for example, even though her expression is dismissive and the theme of the logo suggests a powerful and dangerous woman, the pose, tilt of her head, and gaze undermine her projected sense of agency and sexual empowerment. This is strengthened through the use of long shots; an impersonal technique that indicates social distance between the viewer and the represented participant, encouraging objectification (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). Yet, there is a sense of playfulness in both images, particularly in relation to the femme fatale/devil and bomber girl themes.

The logos fail to communicate the kind of overt forms of gender subversion such as through depictions of strength or aggression or through utilising visual tools to convey dominance and power, as Dita von Bruiser suggests (p. 218). For instance, the dynamics of both images, would have been greatly altered if both skaters were depicted from a frontal angle and stared directly at the viewer. This would influence the meaning of the image, the relationship between represented participant and the viewer, and would convey a stronger sense of sexual agency. However, while neither logo provides a clear gender resistive message, by drawing on pin-up culture they
can convey multiple meanings simultaneously, offering varying interpretations of their sexual content.

As discussed in Chapter 6, roller derby is often represented as a sporting environment where women can feel confident in their bodies, and experiment with physicality, desirability, and sexuality in ways rarely encouraged in other sporting spaces. When discussing the dominance of pin-up style imagery in our interview, SuziEphedrine, however, identified a dissonance between roller derby representations of the ‘hot derby girl’ and the ‘reality’ of roller derby diversity, stating ‘we probably all might want to look like pin-ups, but… (laughs)… [we’re actually] more normal looking’. Similarly, Dita von Bruiser stated that ‘there is a common idea of roller derby as hot chicks in skimpy shorts’ but skaters are ‘more varied in size’. When I asked Meg 4 Mercy if there is a roller derby ‘look’ or ‘style’ she replied, ‘I did think that—with the pin-ups and tattoos and stuff—but I was quite shocked at how many girls were just normal, average. It appeals to the normal chicks too’. Dissonance between roller derby representations and ‘real’ skaters was also conveyed by scene members in the excerpt at the beginning of this section. The image and focus of the documentary ‘This is Roller Derby’ were perceived as overly theatrical and aggrandising elements of roller derby, which may be important to some members, but do not define the scene. The film was perceived as misrepresenting roller derby as a sport and culture, and the bodily diversity throughout. In interviews and during participant observation distinctions emerged between some of the idealised representations presented in roller derby imagery, and the lived reality of roller derby where bodily diversity is part of, and promoted throughout, the scene.
The description of ‘real’ skaters as ‘normal’ is problematic. It suggests a dualism of normal/abnormal yet what constitutes a ‘normal’ body remains unspecified. One interpretation is dependent on Western beauty ideals, where ‘normal’ women’s bodies are slim but firm, able-bodied, fertile, and white, with conventionally attractive ‘full-breasted figures’ (Grogan 2016). A second interpretation is that both skaters’ sense of ‘normal’, is shaped by the knowledge that roller derby is an environment that supports bodily diversity.

In Figures 11 and 12, skaters are represented as conventionally beautiful; they are white, able-bodied women with lithe bodies, and feminine characteristics such as having long hair and wearing lipstick. According to Parry (2016), analyses of erotic capital and the mobilisation of women’s sexuality as a social resource needs to recognise the implications of intersecting social identities, such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and (dis)ability, as well as gender. As I researched forms of visual representation in roller derby, The Brawling Bar Belles logo was one of the few identified that does not conform to a heteronormative representation of women’s bodies, and it is the only logo found in the Sydney roller derby scene that depicts a woman of colour (see Figure 13).
Figure 13: ‘The Brawling Bar Belles’, Sydney Roller Derby League intraleague team logo.

The composition of Figure 13 draws attention to the skater’s physical features. This is achieved through the ‘clutter’ of the top half of the image that works to emphasise the skater’s body resulting in the face being drowned out. The skaters’ abdomen, groin, and thighs are also accentuated as they occupy the centre of the image and of the ‘burst’ design in the background. Such design techniques are like those used in Figures 11 and 12 are intended to emphasise and sexualise the represented participant’s body. However, the skater in Figure 13 differs in two ways; firstly, she is depicted with a fuller—that is rounded rather than muscular—body shape, and
secondly, she is a woman of colour. Furthermore, unlike many other logos (including Figures 11 and 12), Figure 13 is designed using a palette of brown shades with minimal degree of contrast. This colour scheme undermines the distinction between skater, other visual elements, and the background of the image (that can be seen in Figures 11 and 12); instead, she blends in rather stands out.

Analyses of video games provides useful insights into common forms of visual representation and their implications, particularly in relation to the intersection of race and gender. In video game advertisements, Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) found that:

[w]hite female characters were the most sexualized and highly attractive characters in the video game advertisements. The near absence of female Black, Native American, and Latina characters and their propensity to be less sexualized and less attractive than their White counterparts suggest a particular type of beauty standard is being communicated in video game advertisements. The idealized White female body is the object of desire, to the exclusion of women of other races and ethnicities (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro 2009, pp. 14-5).

The contrast between Figures 11, 12, and 13 discussed above indicates that roller derby imagery reflects such intersecting forms of racialisation and sexualisation that operate throughout video game culture. This is also apparent in the exoticisation of Figure 13, that is reminiscent of Orientalist depictions of Eastern cultures as barbaric, backward, and irrational (Hasan 2005; Varisco 2012). Unlike Figures 11
and 12, Figure 13, incorporates ‘ethnic’ markers such as ‘henna’ body art, while the shape of her body and emphasis on her abdomen suggest that she is intended to be ‘read’ as a belly dancer.

Henna body art is part of religious and cultural practices throughout the Arab Peninsula, India, and Asia. Given the specific cultural emphasis on women and modesty in Middle Eastern, Indian, and diverse Asian cultures, henna is traditionally displayed on hands and feet. The function of henna in this respect ‘draws attention to the female as an erotic being and claims space for the celebration of femininity, while not deviating from norms of propriety’ (Rogers 2013, p. 122). However, given the dominance of Caucasian skaters identified in this study and in roller derby scholarship (Breeze 2015; Donnelly 2012; Liu, Bradley & Burk 2016; Parry 2016), the use of henna and revealing clothing in this logo is reminiscent of essentialised Orientalist intentions to ‘empower’ and ‘free’ women from gender oppression in Eastern cultures. This process has also often involved ‘unveiling’ and thus hyper-sexualising Muslim women (Hasan 2005). Depicting henna art on the skaters’ thighs and abdomen in Figure 13, therefore, does not appreciate the ‘cultural differences and historical specificities inherent in the East’s material culture and in eastern women’s experiences’ (Hasan 2005, p. 29).

The exoticisation evident in Figure 13 as well as the lack of racial/ethnic diversity amongst skaters and therefore those involved in designing logos, is cultural appropriation and signals a troubling representation of women of colour as ‘Other’. Restricting bodily diversity to Figure 13 does not challenge heteronormative constructions of beauty, gender, and women’s bodies, but rather perpetuates racialised stereotypes in visual communication that continue to ‘Other’ women of
colour. Instead, a more gender subversive approach to visual representations would be to incorporate greater bodily diversity in logo designs, regardless of ‘race’/ethnicity of the skaters being depicted. Furthermore, imagery that includes women of colour should include a variety of themes rather than drawing on and perpetuating racial stereotypes. Hence, women of colour can also be ‘bombers’, femme fatales, pirates, lumberjacks, and pin-up style sex-symbols.

I do not suggest that women of colour and/or large bodies are undesirable and cannot be used as erotic capital, as avenues for empowerment or for social/cultural change. I am also not suggesting that roller derby logos cannot, or should not, exercise erotic capital in logos or other roller derby imagery. Rather, this analysis questions, firstly, the ambiguity inherent in these logos that undermine their ability to visually communicate sexual agency; secondly, the correlation between larger bodies and women of colour; and thirdly, the socio-historical implications of a white dominated space and culture that both appropriates non-Western culture and sexualises women of colour.

‘I hate roller derby being tied up with pin-up culture’: Imagining seriousness

While analysis of Figures 11, 12, and 13 demonstrate the use of sexualised representations of women in roller derby imagery, and their potential as an avenue of social empowerment (Owen 2014; Parry 2016), some participants contest their use, instead preferring representations that emphasise athleticism and sporting seriousness.

There’s so much sameness and there’s so much (pause), I get sick of it, I hate roller derby being tied up with pin-up culture. I don’t know
how to describe it because that’s certainly not what it’s about for me, and I don’t think it’s what it’s about for most of the people in our league. We’re not about wearing tiny shorts and having our boobs out at the games, you know? (Killabee, S2D2 skater).

Killabee’s commentary foregrounds the pervasive and homogenising effect of sexualised representations of women in roller derby imagery, claiming that they often misrepresent skaters’ motivations and their embodied experiences of performing roller derby. This is encapsulated by Killabee’s focus on the perceived conflict between representations of skaters as wearing ‘tiny shorts’ and having their ‘boobs out at the games’ and the ‘reality’ of roller derby as being about ‘something else’. While Killabee does not specifically state what playing roller derby is about for most skaters in her league, she implies that it involves a shared focus on athleticism and being taken seriously. Zoe Da Belle (WSR, skater) also raises this issue, explaining that ‘there are a lot of girls who wanted to be a ‘derby girl’ but weren’t actually particularly interested in sweating on the track or taking the hits or formulating plays’. Later she described new skaters as caught up in ‘what they think roller derby is about’, remarking that while her league enables diversity and individual expression, ‘there are a few times where I’ll say, ‘Don’t they know it’s not about the tutu?’”.

Killabee and Zoe Da Belle foreground the implications of using sexualised cultural representations of roller derby. For these skaters, such representations operate in contention with the reality of many skaters’ performances and motivations for being ‘in derby’. Doing so establishes distinctions between competing imaginaries that convey how roller derby should be performed, and how bodies should be used. In fact, the turn to sporting seriousness may be a significant factor in the spread of roller derby in more conservative cultures. In 2016, Roller Derby Beirut was
founded. While the league is in its early stages, league members are performing roller derby is hijabs and sports gear—rather than the hyper-sexualised performances—and engaging in physical displays not often supported in Lebanon, or, indeed, in Western societies. The formation of a sport focused imaginary provides space not only to feel empowered ‘as women’, but to negotiate other forms of difference. As one founding member explained, ‘We didn’t know what people’s reactions would be… We’re from different backgrounds, and they loved the diversity’ (Huck HQ 2016a).

Sporting seriousness is also emerging in the logo designs of some more recently established leagues, such as S2D2 (see Figure 14 below).

Figure 14: South Side Derby Dolls League logo
Figure 14 diverges from dominant visual trends—such as in Figures 11, 12, and 14—that emphasise sexual body parts such as breasts, buttocks, and legs through colour, positioning, and pin-up style poses. Instead, Figure 14 uses a close-up design that reduces social distance and encourages a more intimate appraisal of the represented participant. Figure 14 also contains a non-transactional reaction process as the skater is depicted in profile and the focus of her gaze unclear. This produces an ‘offer’ image (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, p. 119), and as in Figure 11, results in the represented participant becoming object rather than subject. Her face is almost blank, but her lowered brow conveys a sense of seriousness or intent contemplation. Furthermore, the represented participant is a Jammer. This is signalled by the star on the helmet. Due to the contrast between fluoro blue and purple, the star is the most salient element of Figure 14. This emphasises S2D2’s focus on competitive play, being not just a symbol of roller derby, but of the accumulation of points; it signifies winning.

Throughout interviews and while conducting participant observation I understood that the S2D2 logo was often seen as representing roller derby’s movement towards sporting seriousness.

We don’t want to be a league that are all show and pin-ups. We all knew that we wanted to take a step away from the theatrical side of things. We want to be a league which is athletic. We want to be taken seriously. We want to skate. We want to win. We want to be competitive, rather than spend time just donning costumes (Scarlett O’Harmer, S2D2 skater).
We didn’t want to sexualise the league by having, you know, some kind of pin-up girl. We wanted it to look serious and sporty and we had this massive brain-storming session about what we wanted from it. And we definitely wanted to move away from the misconceptions of roller derby and the sexualisation. We wanted the kind of sportiness of it, we wanted something a bit more serious (Dita von Bruiser, S2D2 skater).

In wanting to ‘take a step away’ and ‘move away’ from ‘pin-ups’ and sexualised imagery, both skaters foreground the intention to design an alternative to dominant forms of representation. This desire to be ‘taken seriously’ is also a shared sentiment, this is evident from the ubiquity of ‘we’ in both skaters’ commentary: ‘we’ brainstormed logo ideas, ‘we all knew what we wanted’, ‘we wanted to be competitive’, ‘we want to be taken seriously’. S2D2’s logo is, therefore, perceived as an avenue for mobilising ‘new’ ways of representing, and ‘doing’ roller derby. However, while they wanted their logo ‘to look serious and sporty’ and dispel ‘misconceptions of roller derby’, the inclusion of ‘war paint’ is an ambiguous marker of sporting seriousness.

‘War paint’ is contentious due to its historical association with Native American cultures and as such resists a singular meaning as signifying either ‘sport’ or a culturally insensitive ‘spectacle’. Furthermore, the use of bright colours throughout, and a two-dimensional design produce a low modality image. Ironically, Figures 11 and 12 in this respect are more ‘real’, while Figure 14 is an ‘unnatural’ representation. This indicates that Figure 14 does not visually communicate a more ‘realistic’ depiction of roller derby. The primary distinction between Figure 14 and most other roller derby logos, therefore, is not an emphasis on athleticism—which is actually ambiguously represented—but rather is due to the lack of sexualised
imagery; representing ‘seriousness’ is therefore less about ‘realism’, and more about movement away from the use of sexuality as a social resource.

While scenes enable a sense of coherence across various sites and moments of social activity, they are not stable, static, or homogenous formations (Quader & Redden 2015; Straw 2015; Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015). This is demonstrated through the diverse forms of representation and the trends in ways of ‘doing’ roller derby illuminated in this analysis of roller derby imagery. Instead, roller derby is formulated through the collective, but not necessary harmonious, activity of diverse scene members. As members move the scene in new and interesting directions, maintaining some cultural elements, remaking others, they collectively produce a fluctuating, multifaceted cultural formation. The ‘conflicting’ representations discussed throughout this section indicate points of tension between different roller derby imaginaries that exist simultaneously as the scene supports a myriad of representations, practices, and forms of sociality. In the next section I expand analysis beyond the common descriptions of roller derby as ‘punk’ and ‘alternative’, to explore S2D2’s creative negotiation of ‘seriousness’ as they diverge from the norm and instead incorporate Star Wars in the promotion and articulation of a league identity.
‘We’re all nerds. That’s it. That’s what it pans down to’: ’Non-seriousness’ and S2D2’s reimagining of roller derby

While punk, rockabilly and pin-up styles dominate the roller derby scene, S2D2 is distinguished from other leagues through its appropriation of Star Wars. By incorporating Star Wars, S2D2 produce new forms of representation that do not rely on erotic capital. In this section I draw on Breeze’s concept of ‘non-seriousness’ to argue that S2D2’s use of Star Wars defies a straightforward interpretation of theatricality or ‘serious’ sport, and instead represents S2D2’s negotiation of competing modes of doing roller derby. S2D2 often utilise Star Wars elements in promotional posters (see Figures 15 and 16).
Figure 15: ‘Are you the Droid we’re looking for?’, South Side Derby Dolls’ NSO and referee recruitment poster.
Figure 16: ‘Join the Darkside’, South Side Derby Dolls’ skater recruitment poster.
Both Figures 15 and 16 appropriate *Star Wars* as a promotional tool, ‘selling’ roller derby to potential scene members through a ‘fun’ but not sexualised form of visual communication. Figures 15 and 16 are composite images, involving a relationship between image and text (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). That is, both images integrate image and text to signify elements of importance and convey meaning. Meaning in composite images can be derived from analysis of information value, salience, and framing (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). Information value refers to the positioning of elements in an image, and the meanings often associated with such placement. In Figure 15, information is divided between ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ parts of the image. Elements placed in an upper, or top, position are presented as ‘ideal’, while elements placed at the bottom are described as ‘real’. ‘Ideal’ refers to more general information, and as such is typically most salient, providing meaning, context, and/or an introduction to the other elements in the image (Kress & Leeuwen 2006). In Figure 15, the text—‘are you the droid we’re looking for?’—is ‘ideal’. The ‘ideal’ text defines the function of the image. In Figure 15, the function of the image and focus of the ideal is to recruit non-skating members (i.e. ‘droids’).

Integrating photographic imagery—as opposed to stylised representations that dominate league logos (see Figures 11, 12, 13 and 14 in the previous section)—provides a credible and high modality representation of ‘droids’ as individuals engaged in productive, scene-making activity. Furthermore, the contrast between the high modality represented participants, and the low modality background and text in Figure 15, works to accentuate a distinction between practice and representation. That is, league members take the sport of roller derby seriously—both league members are actively engaged in ‘doing’ roller derby in Figure 15—while the other elements of the poster signal a fun and creative sporting space. Depicting ‘droids’ as
males also masculinises this description, and operates in contrast to the feminised association between roller derby skaters and women implied by ‘dolls’ in the league name and as represented in the S2D2 logo.

Unlike Figure 15, the overall modality of Figure 16 represents it as a creative imagining; it is not ‘real’ but rather accentuates elements of fantasy. The colour scheme and stencil art design provide limited visual detail and contribute to its low modality. The colours in this image are unmodulated; it includes purple and cream, with no differentiated shades to assist with depth perception and detail. The represented participant is also decontextualised through the lack of a background or setting.

Figure 16 is dominated by a representation of a *Star Wars* Stormtrooper, whose gaze—implied by the darker patches on the stencilled helmet—forms a vector, producing a non-transactional reaction process, although the direction of gaze is ambiguous due to the lack of identifiable eye-line. However, Figure 16 is still able to visually communicate a feeling of force, and superiority. This is primarily achieved through the incorporation of a statement rather than question—‘join the dark side’ as opposed to ‘are you the droids we’re looking for?’ in Figure 16—and the symbolism of the gun (blaster) held by the Stormtrooper.

As recruitment posters, both images are designed to ‘draw in’ potential members, utilising *Star Wars* in a similar fashion to Sydney Roller Derby League’s appropriation of *Pulp Fiction* for their bout theme (see Chapter 3). However, S2D2’s promotion of a nerdy roller derby aesthetic enables engagement with sport and spectacle while moving away from sexualised depictions of women’s bodies and the use of erotic capital as a social resource and form of empowerment.
I love that ours is so different to anyone else’s because it’s gimmicky enough that it’s catchy and people think it’s cute and it’s really easy to work into advertising and stuff and we can still be sporty. It’s an alternative to the normal pin-up girl on skates thing. It’s not just another pin-up girl on skates. Which is really crap, I hate that (Killabee, S2D2 skater).

J: While other leagues might have a particular character and draw on things, such as violence or punk, or rockabilly styles, yours is the only one I’ve found that-

D: -that it’s sci-fi (laughs).

J: -That it draws on yeah, on Star Wars basically.

D: We just, we just decided to take on that mentality because it was fun and it was different, we thought, why not? We were considered the ‘Dark Side’ for a while. We can get creative with it (De-nominator, S2D2 skater).

Killabee and De-Nominator foreground the function of S2D2’s Star Wars ‘theme’ as a point of difference from other leagues. The Star Wars iconography used by S2D2—as in Figures 15 and 16 above—function as ‘selling points’, distinguishing S2D2 amidst the perceived ‘sameness’ of roller derby culture. Star Wars is utilised as a social resource to attract potential league members and spectators while maintaining distance between S2D2 and other leagues which (re)produce sexualised imagery in roller derby representations. While Star Wars is an innovative alternative, it nevertheless resists association with a straightforward meaning of ‘seriousness’.

Breeze (2015, p. 118) identified similar ambiguities in her study of roller derby, and developed the concept of ‘non-/seriousness’ as ‘a way to designate ambivalence and plurality without recourse to the binary implications of unseriousness, or not-serious’. She found that while emphasising a desire ‘to be taken seriously’, roller derby members often employed elements of fiction and fantasy in order to ‘pursue serious recognition without entirely sacrificing their ideas of roller derby as special or different’ (Breeze 2015, p. 144). Non-/seriousness ‘facilitates, and is a
manifestation of, participants’ continued ambivalence in relation to their changing identities, practices, representations, and organization’ (Breeze 2015, p. 153), and is used to recognise members’ negotiation of seriousness, sport, spectacle, and fun.

Regarding S2D2, this captures their simultaneous emphasis on seriousness as an ideal of sporting practice (of playing competitive, strategic, safe sport) while incorporating elements of ‘make believe’ and fantasy as creative and light-hearted pleasure. For many skaters and leagues, the display of female bodies and use of sexuality as an avenue for bolstering crowds and interest in roller derby, and as a choice, is a form of physical empowerment (Owen 2014; Parry 2016; Paul, Steinlage & Blank 2015). However, for S2D2, being ‘taken seriously’ is to abstain from utilising women’s sexuality as a form of capital and social resource in maintaining the financial viability of roller derby. This is not to suggest that S2D2 is superior or ‘more’ serious than other leagues. Rather, this analysis indicates that the roller derby scene supports a variety of cultural interpretations, forms of representation, and associated subjective and intersubjective identities.

I asked participants about S2D2’s incorporation of Star Wars to ascertain its reception in the roller derby scene, and to investigate the motivation for this theme. Skaters from WSR commonly described it as ‘cool’, ‘fun’, and ‘a bit different’. While supportive of S2D2’s ‘gimmicky’ theme, they could only offer limited elaboration on where this distinctiveness comes from or how it ‘fits’ in the scene. S2D2 members, however, typically associated its use with a shared identification as ‘nerds’.
We’re all nerds. That’s it. That’s what it pans down to, what it is. Ahh, there are a few uneducated S2D2-ans that have not seen Star Wars, which I am in the process of rectifying (laughs) and they will all be watching Star Wars as homework (De-Nominator, S2D2 skater).

J: From an outsider’s perspective your league is rather distinctive.
D: (laughs)
J: But seriously (laughs), why Star Wars?
D: We’re all nerds (laughs). I think that’s the simple way to put it: We’re all nerds. And I think first we got S2D2 because it matched and it sounded better than SSDD. Like South Side Derby Dolls. S2D2, again cos we’re nerds, and then I think it’s just that, yeah that sense of stupid playfulness, so we can say to people ‘Come to the Dark Side’ and stuff like that. I can’t really explain the theme. It’s probably because a couple of us are massively big nerds and then some of us are massively big Star Wars nerds and movie nerds, that it’s just like combining both of our loves (Dita Von Bruiser, S2D2 skater).

De-Nominator and Dita Von Bruiser convey an individual and collective nerd identification. In stating ‘we’re all nerds’, both skaters situate themselves within a network of shared identities as nerds. This signifies freedom to adopt a nerd identity in the scene, while also emphasising the prevalence of nerd as a form of identification. The term ‘nerd’ has historically been represented in popular culture as deficient, uncool, dishevelled, as a misfit (Huynh & Woo 2014; Walker & Sturgis 2008), and often as an identification (young) people employ strategies to avoid (Milner 2004). According to Quail (2011, p. 461), ‘the nerd is culturally placed in contrast with a more athletic, socially skilled, sexually aware individual—the cool kid or jock, who demonstrates a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity’. The nerd stereotype embodies a particular aesthetic, bodily capacity, and set of social interests (Kinney 1993; Quail 2011; Walker & Sturgis 2008). As a full-contact sport, skaters’
self-identification as nerds demonstrates the problematic assumption that nerds are not interested in or cannot play sport, and are anti-sport. Rather, this indicates that one does not preclude the other.

Nerd and geek are often gendered, and used interchangeably (Campbell 2014; Innes 2007; Jowett 2007). The nerd stereotype has typically been used to demonstrate the value of hegemonic masculinity through its negative representations of non-hegemonic expressions and it tends to limit appreciation of the female nerd. Consequently, girls:

are taught that they cannot be real “nerds”. Although many females rebel against this sexist stereotype, they must struggle against a culture that doubts their intellectual acumen (Innes 2007, p. 4).

While, for Westman (2007, pp. 25-6), the term geek ‘still suggests, first and foremost, a reclusive and socially awkward male immersed in the minutia of computing rather than an intellectual and beautiful woman’. However, being a nerd or a geek is becoming an increasingly socially acceptable and chosen identity for boys and girls, men and women (Bucholtz 1999; Cross 2005; Huynh & Woo 2014; Kendall 2011; Sele 2012; Tocci 2007; Woo 2015). While negative connotations still exist (particularly in youth related contexts), the rise of computer technology in the 1990s, and reinterpretations of nerd identity in popular culture such as though film, TV and the expansion of gamer culture means that the sociocultural discourses of the nerd stereotype have undergone change (Quail 2011; Tocci 2007; Walker & Sturgis 2008).
The increasing association between nerds and economic success has led to its greater mainstream acceptance, resulting in it being elevated to cult status. This has also led to nerd related trends and identities, such as ‘geek chic’, ‘sexy nerd’, and ‘technosexuals’ (Quail 2011; Walker & Sturgis 2008), and has contributed to increased self-identification or ‘geek pride’ amongst adults in particular (Tocci 2007). For girls and women, being a nerd offers an ‘alternative to the pressures of hegemonic femininity—an ideological construct that is at best incompatible with, and at worst hostile to, female intellectual ability’ (Bucholtz 1999, p. 213). For S2D2 members wanting to distance themselves, their sporting practice, and their league from the hyper-sexualised representations and historical connotations of previous incarnations of roller derby, *Star Wars* and nerd culture provides a new avenue of expression.

Nerd identity is also performed, and can be explored through material culture and how participants ‘do’ nerd sartorially (Tocci 2007). Reflecting on the observational notes of an S2D2 training session cited in Chapter 2 (pp. 65-6), enables exploration of nerd performativity.

Everywhere I look skaters and NSOs have elements of nerd culture on their clothing, or as stickers on their helmets. *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* ‘thumb’, ‘42’ and ‘DON’T PANIC’ written on the back of a helmet; *Star Wars*’ rebel alliance emblem and Yoda stickers; leggings printed with characters from *Adventure Time* and *Star Wars*, and one referee with a Pac-Man tattoo. By the end of training it seems like half the league has approached me to compliment me on my ‘cool shirt’ and to chat about derby. I think I’m in! (JA fieldnotes 29/3/12).
Tocci (2007) examines how individuals identify themselves as nerds and fans through a focus on fashion and style, an area not typically explored within the field. The rise of ‘geek chic’, and the growing acceptability of adult nerd identification, has produced a new market in nerd style and accessorising to accommodate varying degrees of nerd association. This is apparent in the field notes above. Some scene members actively engaged in performing nerdism through the display of nerd culture. Nerd clothing and accessories was a frequent topic of discussion in social situations, with scene members often exchanging suggestions for good quality clothing websites which cater for nerdy women, such as Black Milk Clothing. Black Milk Clothing provides leggings—which are particularly popular in roller derby—dresses, active wear, tops and accessories. Their clothing is popular amongst scene members, particularly from S2D2, as they incorporate patterns influenced by various forms of nerd culture, such as Star Wars, Adventure Time, Harry Potter, DC Comics, The Lord of the Rings, and Dr Who.

Furthermore, ‘the relatively new-found respectability lent to some traditionally geeky media makes it easier to claim an interest without conjuring stereotypes of juvenility: one can now be a geek without being a freak’ (Tocci 2007, p. 26). This is achieved through the different markets for nerd consumption, which can range from overt to subtle references to nerd icons. Some nerdy displays may be overt—depicting iconic figures, such as Yoda or Pac-Man—while others are more intuitive, requiring more nerdy knowledge to ‘read’. This is demonstrated through my experience at the training session described above and discussed in Chapter 2. To make sense of ‘42’ on a skater’s helmet
required knowing about ‘the Ultimate question’ in *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*.

Throughout this section I have argued that production of S2D2’s nerd theme is an example of Breeze’s ‘non-/seriousness’ and is a way for league members to mobilise energies in ‘new’ and creative ways. *Star Wars* is a way for S2D2 to put ‘un-athletic behaviour, not taking themselves seriously, side by side with identification as ‘athletes’—a claim for serious recognition’ (Breeze 2015, pp. 107-8). It provides an opportunity to formulate a ‘new’ cultural imaginary that does not rely on hyper-sexualised depictions of women, while contributing to the scene’s heterogeneity in its movement away from pin-up and punk aesthetics.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the multiplicity of co-existing—although not necessarily harmonious—representations of roller derby. The analysis in this chapter has identified imagery as a point of tension as scene members define and redefine what roller derby ‘is’. Rather than attempting to ‘resolve’ such tensions by aligning roller derby with sporting seriousness or sexualised theatricality, I instead recognise the scene’s social and cultural activity as unstable, diverse, co-existing, and fluctuating. Such tensions are productive, indicating continued social interest, movement, and energy amongst scene members, demonstrating their ongoing investment in the future of roller derby.
In supporting a multiplicity of representations, this chapter—following the work by Breeze (2015) and Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2013, 2014b) in particular—continues the analytical work of this thesis in moving beyond dualisms. Exploring roller derby as loosely bound clusters of activity enables recognition of plurality as scene members draw on, (re)produce, and develop new cultural imaginaries that exist simultaneously, operate at subjective and intersubjective levels, and may conflict with each other in practice, and with other forms of representation, social activity, and cultural imaginaries. Throughout this thesis I have endeavoured to resituate diverse critical perspectives of roller derby in the research, including skaters, various non-skaters, referees, and spectators. In the following and final chapter, I redirect analysis to the question ‘who is roller derby?’ and conclude the thesis with an exploration of issues of ownership, belonging, and community.
Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I described my experience attending my first roller derby bout in December 2011, when Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby’s (WIRD) ‘The Vixens’ played ‘The Vipers’. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the WIRD bout would prove to be the most profound moment of my research. In revealing a complex social and cultural environment that I felt was, in some ways, at odds with the ‘dazzling carnival on wheels’ (Joulwan 2007, p. ix) that I had envisioned, it led me to question early roller derby scholarship and my own assumptions about roller derby as an alternative sport on the outskirts of sporting culture.

This experience stimulated an interest in investigating the ‘making’ of roller derby as a scene and reaffirmed what I saw as a need to add to the scholarship by conducting an ethnographic study of roller derby from the perspective of a spectator. Using scene directs attention towards the socio-spatial dimensions of cultural formations and locates them within the urban landscape. As most scholars focus on skaters (often from a single league) and how traditional gender norms are reconfigured in roller derby, focusing on the socio-spatial dimensions of roller derby draws attention to the cultural activities and social relations unfolding between individuals and groups of individuals in the scene.

Scene also enables an analysis of culture and involvement as a fluid, mutable, and heterogeneous formation of loosely bound clusters of activity (Stahl 2004b; Straw 1991). It offers analytic possibilities often foreclosed in analyses that utilise other,
potentially more rigid, conceptual frameworks (such as subculture) as it is not encumbered by dualisms such as gender resistance/conformity, alternative/mainstream and in/out that have underpinned much roller derby scholarship. My attraction to scene theory as a conceptual tool in this investigation roller derby largely derives from its ability to assist in articulating widely different forms and degrees of involvement (such as exists between spectators and skaters) and through a focus on interaction, brings into focus the ways roller derby is shaped through shared practices. Its anti-essentialist foundation emphasises the need to explore the messy, ambiguous, and often conflicting aspects of social and cultural formations. Consequently, scene theory draws attention to individuals’ mobility within cultural formations such as exists in the roller derby scene as members move between roles; spectators become skaters, skaters are celebrities, and all participants are fans.

Informed by scene, this thesis aimed to answer four questions about roller derby.

- How does a focus on socio-spatial dynamics and forms of social interaction expand the scope of roller derby analysis, and what does it reveal about the constitution of roller derby culture?
- What does the study of diverse perspectives reveal about involvement in roller derby and contemporary leisure pursuits in general?
- How do participants in the Sydney roller derby scene negotiate contemporary discourses around the sporting body, sexuality and gendered subjectivities?
‘Who’ is roller derby and how does the inclusion of diverse critical perspectives effect understandings of ownership, belonging and the representation of roller derby as a women’s sport?

Using a mixed methods approach that incorporated participant observation as a spectator, semi-structured interviews with diverse scene members, and analysis of visual and textual forms of roller derby media, this study provides an investigation of roller derby as a collaboratively produced social and cultural formation. The methodology and conceptual framework used in this thesis provide data that offers new insights into roller derby that contribute to, and often compliment, existing scholarship. In this conclusion, I discuss the implications of my research findings, and suggest potential avenues for future research.

This thesis began with an investigation and analysis of the socio-spatial dynamics of the live bout (Chapters 3 and 4). According to Edensor (2015, p. 82), the sporting venue ‘possesses architectonic qualities that promote and contain levels of noise, and organise the distance between fans, and the closeness of fans to the pitch and players’ and in so doing, influences the ways the event and associated atmosphere are shaped and experienced. As Justin (spectator) stated, some venues just have the ‘wow factor’ (p. 97). In Chapter 3, by investigating some ways venues ‘act on’ the live bout experience—whether they are small/large, in/near complexes designed to facilitate sociability, or have cultural status as either internationally recognised entertainment venues or sporting complexes—my analysis demonstrated that the venue is a primary and to date, unacknowledged factor in the heterogeneity of roller derby’s cultural formation.
My analysis of interview and observational data revealed a debate over whether roller derby leagues should use additional forms of entertainment, such as skate-outs. This issue is representative of broader tensions in the scene concerning the representation of roller derby as ‘sport’ or ‘spectacle’. Yet, as ‘a little glitz goes a long way’ (Hell Pixie, S2D2 skater), I found that regardless of such tensions, participants in this study overwhelmingly supported the use of additional entertainment at live bouts as a way to gain and maintain spectator interest in what is still a relatively ‘new’ sport. Crucially, while participants were conscious of such tensions, their accounts indicate that the inclusion of additional entertainment does not detract from roller derby as serious competition, but rather, helps infuse the live bout with a sense of excitement, and ‘silly’ fun. The ‘ideal’ live bout experience was, therefore, regarded as one that provided a fusion of ‘sport’ and ‘spectacle’. By focusing on the unfolding social and cultural dynamics within the venue, this analysis supports Breeze’s (2015) work on roller derby and ‘non-/seriousness’, and challenges assumptions that sporting seriousness is not spectacle.

Informed by scene theory, a central aim of this thesis has been to investigate the ways roller derby is situated within Sydney’s broader sport and leisure landscape. By investigating the forms of additional entertainment used in roller derby (such as skate-outs), my analysis drew parallels across different roller derby events and leagues, as well as between roller derby’s entertainment package and traditional sporting events. In so doing, my analysis expanded the field of roller derby research by illuminating common trends in roller derby’s entertainment package, and by demonstrating some of the ways roller derby has appropriated forms of
entertainment used throughout the sport and leisure landscape. While these findings contribute to roller derby scholarship, they also support Crawford’s (2004) claim that forms of entertainment comingle as the sport and leisure landscape becomes increasingly competitive and focused on providing a complete entertainment package.

Using scene and focusing on the socio-spatiality of roller derby led me to explore live bouts as sites of shared scene-making and affective intensities. At live bouts, spectators were vocal and were engaged in subjective and intersubjective bodily displays of sporting passion, fan practices (wearing league merchandise or dressing up in theme), and they engaged in interactive roller derby rituals (such as the post-bout high-five). Spectators’ bodies and their associated affective experiences are central to the sites/sights of roller derby performance. Through their shared performances and the circulation of affect across bodies, all scene members are enveloped in and actively contribute to the performance of the scene. Scene members’ affective experiences of the live bout are bound up in implicit understandings of what a live bout is, and how it should and does affect people. This analysis drew attention to the connections between roller derby and many traditional and professional sporting events, thus illuminating some of the ways roller derby is similar to more traditional sporting events.

By researching roller derby as a spectator, I too experienced the affective intensity of live bouts and contributed to the performance of roller derby. Yet, such experiences largely defy our ability to convey them through language. While conducting research and writing this thesis, I have attempted to overcome this issue through the ways that I wrote my ethnographic accounts. To recreate these largely mundane and everyday
moments I provided short, first person narratives—‘slices’ of my embodied experiences of roller derby—and used evocative language to help ‘emplace’ the reader in my accounts of scenic life. This required ongoing attention to the multisensory dimensions of spectatorship. I, therefore, often found myself at live bouts watching, listening, and feeling the crowd rather than watching the bout. Such active ‘sensory work’, while not perfect, was necessary to help identify and attempt to record the ‘slippery’ and elusive emotions and affects that distinguish live sporting events from other sights/sites of sporting consumption. While other methods—such as filming or recording soundscapes—may provide a more accurate visual and auditory account of roller derby, I found that journaling my ethnographic study was a more effective way to convey not simply the scene (to reveal ‘who’ and ‘what’ contribute to the formation of roller derby), but my interpretation of the scene. Furthermore, through the series of short narratives throughout the thesis, I hoped to bring to life the broader research ‘story’ that captures the shifts in my own perception of roller derby.

While scene members contribute to roller derby in different ways, there are similarities between individuals and groups in their understandings of what it means to ‘be derby’. While numerous scholars have investigated skaters’ transformative experiences of roller derby, the focus on skaters is limiting for two reasons. Firstly, in relation to skaters’ experiences, it suggests a static category, limiting recognition of the ways scene members move between roles and forms and degrees of involvement. That is, skaters are also often spectators as well as NSOs. Secondly, the focus on skaters obscures the forms of commitment, sense of belonging, and diverse forms of social and cultural activity that are part of non-skaters’ experiences of roller derby. In so doing, it also fails to recognise non-skaters’ contributions to the
constitution of roller derby. A central and innovative dimension of this analysis, therefore, was the use of a case study that traced a non-skater’s movement from spectator to NSO.

Tracing Olivia’s involvement narrative simultaneously illuminated the ubiquity of role based identifications (being a ‘skater’ or a ‘spectator’ or ‘NSO), and their inadequacy in capturing the messy and negotiated reality of scenic life as the boundaries between roles often blur and overlap. That is, as discussed in Chapter 2, scene members often occupy numerous roles in the scene simultaneously or shift between positions as they move between leagues, events, relationships, spaces, and places. By tracing her movement from spectator to NSO, Olivia’s narrative brings the spaces between being ‘in’ and ‘out’ of roller derby into focus. Yet, while this analysis establishes the fluidity inherent in members’ elective belonging to the scene, Olivia also identifies the boundaries of non-skater involvement as, she states, that even as an NSO who is more involved in the live bout and SRDL dynamics, she sometimes feels ‘like wallpaper’ (Olivia). Consequently, while this analysis draws attention to the elasticity of social roles and the fluidity through which many members negotiate their involvement in the scene, it also indicates possible limits for non-skaters in gaining access to SRDL’s inner social network.

While there are shared affective, emotional, and social experiences amongst different individuals and groups of individuals in the roller derby scene skaters are central to roller derby. It is unsurprising that scholars have focused almost exclusive attention on skaters as their experiences remain unique within the scene; they are often the most involved individuals, and are very publicly engaged in distinctive social, cultural, and embodied scene making practices. In this thesis, analysis of skater
experiences focused on roller derby’s fan/celebrity interactional dynamics (Chapter 4) and the social, cultural, and embodied processes through which skaters are socialised and become intelligible as skaters within the skater collective (Chapter 6).

Using *scene* and investigating roller derby as a spectator led me to recognise that some members of the scene—skaters most commonly—had gained fame and were often attributed celebrity status (Chapter 4). In Chapter 4, I drew on Ferris’ (2010) concept of ‘local celebrity’—a localised form of celebrity characterised by increased accessibility and limited reliance on media—to examine how members negotiate shifts in status, between being ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’. By focusing on social interaction, this analysis revealed that roller derby’s local celebrities are typically defined by their combination of ‘extraordinary’ talent, visibility in, and commitment to, the roller derby scene and the perception that they are, nevertheless, still distinctly ‘ordinary’. As Dita Von Bruiser states, ‘they are not on a pedestal’. That is, while skaters such as Haterade and Winnie Bruise (Chapter 4) were overwhelmingly foregrounded as ‘amazing’ skaters, unlike profession sport stars, they nevertheless remain ‘real’, accessible and tangible. By incorporating an analysis of the construction of roller derby’s local celebrity and fan/celebrity interactional dynamics at live bouts, this analysis provided a unique contribution to the field of roller derby research.

In Chapter 6, I negotiated a space amongst the growing works focused on skaters’ embodied and transformative experiences to explore the multi-dimensional, relational, and ongoing processes of, what Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, 2014b) describe as ‘becoming’ skaters. Where previous scholars have foregrounded gender-based analyses to articulate the subversive potential of roller derby for female
athletes (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Peluso 2011), an aim of this thesis was to explore skaters’ experiences in relation to the organising principles and cultural systems of value operating in the roller derby scene. Building on existing understandings of roller derby as a transformative space (Paul & Blank 2015; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014b; Peluso 2011), my analysis of interview and media data indicates that skaters negotiate a desire to be ‘tough’, ‘hard’ and ‘strong’ but that this process involves gaining control over their body and learning how to be competitive within the parameters of safe play.

Central to my analysis was the exploration of the place of injury in roller derby beyond its function to distance skaters from feminine frailty. This involved distinguishing between Peluso’s (2011) work on injury that draws on Sarah Thornton’s concept of subcultural capital and my own focus on the cultural sensibilities and system of cultural value in the scene that includes, but is not restricted to, some forms of injury. To summarise, where Peluso’s (2011) discussion of injury emphasises a resistive quality, I felt that this foreclosed an analysis of a broader system of cultural value that operates in the scene, manifests through sociality between diverse scene members and circulates through roller derby media. Navigating this conceptual landscape, I opted to re-envision the system of cultural value that Peluso (2011) associated with injury, to argue that the roller derby scene supports a broader formation of status, taste, and value that I refer to as roller derby capital.

Exploring injury and what it means to ‘become’ derby, my analysis revealed a hierarchical structure in the representation and experience of injuries as not all are celebrated, or valued the same. Having bruises to display was the overwhelming
preference for skaters. This was primarily because bruises would not typically hinder skating ability and because of their aesthetic quality. Furthermore, a skaters’ first bruise was coveted and often widely circulated via social media and in social situations. This indicated that the first bruise was seen to function as a ‘rite of passage’; it established one’s achievement and social recognition as a skater.

Yet, the analysis indicated that the process of becoming a skater also involves supporting a set of socially and culturally enforced limits on physicality and forms of play. Specifically, as a DIY, grassroots sport, the roller derby scene supports an organising principle of ‘safe play’. In Chapter 6 I demonstrated that safe play involves conforming to the scene’s organising principles of mutual safety, bodily control and regulated competition. The focus on safe play and its enforcement in official and unofficial forms of communication indicates the shift in contemporary roller derby towards sporting seriousness as it reflects the focus on regulation that distinguishes institutionalised sport from the fake, kitschy, and theatrical sports such as the WWF. Furthermore, participants’ fear of serious injury illuminates the reality of participants’ movements between ‘derby’ and ‘non-derby’ worlds. In maintaining safe play and celebrating bruises rather than ‘being injured’, skaters draw attention to the ways roller derby is one dimension of their lives within a broader tapestry of commitments, responsibilities, and identities. Scene theory is well suited to this analysis, as unlike subculture or neo-tribe, it brings participants’ movements between different social worlds into focus.

Tracing the involvement narratives of diverse scene members provided new insights on issues of belonging and ownership that are typically lost in debates over roller derby’s gendered constitution. The analysis extends the field of roller derby
scholarship as it provides evidence of shared desires to belong and to claims of ownership that are not easily reducible to a dualistic gendered formation of women/included and men/excluded, but rather indicate a more complex and negotiated formation. Ownership and belonging are *practices* and require ongoing negotiation of relationships, spaces and places, and forms of contribution.

A final aim of this thesis was to explore the diverse and prevailing forms of roller derby representations. In Chapter 7 I took an innovative approach to explore cultural representations by engaging in a visual and textual analysis of roller derby imagery. This analysis focused on the ubiquity of women’s bodies in league/team logos and found that there is a propensity for sexualised depictions and a tendency to represent skater bodies as slim, non-muscular, and white. Participants often described the women depicted in roller derby imagery as less ‘real’ on the grounds that skaters are more ‘normal’ looking. This commentary indicates that some imagery does not reflect participants’ understandings of ‘who’ and ‘what’ roller derby is. One exception was SRDL’s Brawling Bar Belles, as it represented greater bodily and racial diversity. My analysis of different team/league logos demonstrated that some roller derby imagery reproduces racialised and stereotypical designs of women of colour. In doing so, the Brawling Bar Belles logo Others women of colour and reinforces roller derby as a ‘white scene’.

Nevertheless, this analysis also illuminated the inherent playfulness of roller derby and what Breeze (2014) would describe as an exercise in non-/seriousness. Adopting Breeze’s (2014) concept, I explored the ways that S2D2, as a newly formed league that emphasises its focus on sporting seriousness, chooses to represent itself within the roller derby scene. By appropriating *Star Wars*, S2D2’s defies a straightforward
(and overly simplistic) interpretation as roller derby being focused on ‘sport’ or ‘spectacle’. Instead, S2D2 reimagines playfulness and fun while not compromising their emphasis on being a family-oriented, sporting focused league. The use of sexualised imagery, particularly the pin-ups that dominate the roller derby scene, is here positioned as both a distraction from sporting seriousness and as a mode of visual communication that does not represent S2D2’s league values.

The analysis of S2D2 promotional material reveals that the scene supports competing imaginaries. Each imaginary it seems, aims to convey how roller derby should be performed, and how bodies should be used. Yet, the concept of scene enables a sense of coherence across various sites and moments of social activity, while maintaining that such formations are not stable, static, or homogenous (Quader & Redden 2015; Straw 2015; Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015). Consequently, rather than attempting to ‘resolve’ such tensions or identify a ‘truth’ amongst perceived conflicting representations, I argue that they demonstrate ‘onward’ development into a more dynamic scene that supports the co-existence of different scenic imaginaries as interpretations of what roller derby ‘is’, while remaining open to change. What emerges from this analysis is a scene that supports constant tensions and conflicting ideas of ‘what’ roller derby is, and ‘who’ can lay claim to it.

While this thesis contributes to roller derby research through extending existing works and by offering new avenues of enquiry, it also contributes to scene theory. As noted in the thesis introduction, the concept of scene was developed by scholars of popular music—including jazz, rock, punk, and metal—and it has largely been confined to this field. Longhurst (2007) argues that scene, as an anti-essentialist concept that focuses on interaction, space, and place, may enrich studies of sport and
leisure activities. A secondary aim of this thesis, therefore, has been to ‘test’ the viability of scene as a conceptual tool to ‘open up’ new avenues of research into diverse leisure-focused activities. In so doing, this thesis has successfully demonstrated the potential of scene theory beyond its application to music to instead include a wider array of social and cultural pursuits.

Scene theory has, however, been criticised—most notably by Hesmondhalgh (2005)—as a ‘muddled’ concept. Hesmondhalgh (2005, p. 23) claims that scene ‘suggests a bounded place but has also been used to refer to more complex spatial flows of musical affiliation; the two major ways in which the term is used are incompatible with each other’. For Hesmondhalgh (2005), while scene may offer a less rigid conceptual framework (compared to subculture), he is not convinced that scene is capable of simultaneously capturing macro level flows of cultural sensibilities and the forms of sociability and cultural activity that operate at the micro level. Longhurst (2007) responds to these criticisms by suggesting further theorisation of scene. Longhurst (2007) claims that perceiving scenic events as sights of ‘elective belonging’ bridges the ‘gap’ between micro-level processes and broader scenic tastes and styles. Longhurst’s (2007) conceptualisation, however, was largely theoretical. Adopting elective belonging in my analysis, I found that it provided the language to more accurately articulate the ‘messy’ nature of members’ affiliation with the roller derby scene. Consequently, my analysis of roller derby provided a site to test the usefulness of elective belonging as a way to enhance scene theory.

In more recent work on scene, Driver and Bennett (2015), and Glass (2012), have called for greater focus on the embodied dimensions of scenic life as scholarly attention has most commonly centred on the flows of musical style and taste. For
some scholars (see Peterson & Bennett 2004; Straw 1991, 2005), such flows operate between local, translocal, global and virtual scenes. I tend to agree with Longhurst (2007), however, who instead claims that scenes may have local, translocal, global, and virtual dimensions, across which cultural sensibilities may flow (particularly through media and other forms of communication) rather than indicating separate scenes.

In this study, I have responded to the work of Driver and Bennett (2015), Glass (2012), and Longhurst (2007) by foregrounding the significance of local scenic activity to members’ involvement in the roller derby scene, and by tracing common trends in members’ accounts (such as injury, celebrity, and notions of women’s sexual empowerment) through roller derby media and promotional material. As discussed above, I made methodological decisions—such as being a spectator and conducting emplaced sensory ethnography—to situate embodiment at the fore of my investigation into roller derby. This approach opened up new areas of critical enquiry, most notably in relation to the collective production of affective atmospheres and the centrality of haptic communication to fan and celebrity interactional dynamics. These avenues of analysis enrich this thesis by providing an original contribution to the field of roller derby scholarship, but perhaps more importantly, reveal new and exciting trajectories for research into scenes.

Although this research is by no means exhaustive, it provides a glimpse into the lives of a range of roller derby participants and into the socio-spatial dynamics of roller derby as a transitive scene in the urban landscape. There is still, however, much to be learnt about roller derby. Reflecting on this project, there are aspects of roller derby I would, in hindsight, have liked to incorporate in this research project. First, this
study—like others in the field—offers limited insights into the intersections of race/ethnicity and class in roller derby. This is largely due to the dominance of Caucasian participants in the research. It is also, however, due to scope of the data as I only recognised ‘race’ as a possible topic when nearing the end of my research. While visual analysis in Chapter 7 engages with some aspects of race/ethnicity in roller derby, this analysis revealed that roller derby imagery largely celebrates normative representations of Western beauty ideals (being dominated by slim, conventionally attractive, white women), providing a racialised and Othering representation of a woman of colour in one logo. This analysis prompted the question, is the Sydney roller derby scene a ‘white scene’? While requiring further study, from the research conducted as part of this study of the Sydney roller derby scene, there appears to be an overwhelming whiteness to the scene. Such an interest can, and should, also be extended to future analyses of roller derby’s non-skaters as it remains unclear whether they reflect the race/ethnicity or class demographics of the sports competitors.

Second, at the beginning of this research project in late 2011, roller derby was still in its infancy in Australia; yet, as I complete this thesis in 2017, the scene has expanded to include men’s, mixed, and junior teams/leagues, and associations. Pavlidis and Connor (2015, 2016) argue that roller derby offers a site to challenge the restrictive and often arbitrary divisions between men’s and women’s sporting competitions by providing mixed teams. Having utilised scene in this thesis, an interesting direction for future research would be to explore how such developments ‘fit’ in the roller derby scene. It is unclear, for instance, if men’s roller derby is part of the Sydney roller derby scene, or if it represents what Straw (2005, p. 412) describes as the ‘onward’ development of scenes ‘to later reiterations of itself’. That is, is men’s
roller derby understood by scene members (both men and women), as part of the same culture as women’s roller derby? Or is it thought of and experienced as a distinctly different cultural formation?

Given the continued growth of roller derby, broadening the scope of roller derby research to explore the possible differences as well as continuities between men’s, mixed, and junior, and women’s teams/leagues, potentially offers new directions in the study of the organisation, representation and management of the roller derby scene. Using a scenic perspective offers analytic possibilities in exploring this potential new direction in roller derby and the associated implications for issues of ownership, belonging, agency and inclusion/exclusion in the roller derby scene.

In December 2012, I attended my last S2D2 event: a league Christmas picnic. Having spent over a year attending training sessions, live bouts, social events, and interviewing league members, I was warmly welcomed as I joined the massive group of S2D2 members and their families in a Western Sydney park surrounded by the distinctive Australian bush. There were tables set up loaded with food and a barbeque fired up to the side of a giant, decorated Christmas tree. Moving towards the tables, I was welcomed by Dita Von Bruiser and as she asked how I was, I saw Big Kahuna over her shoulder spot me from the barbeque. He waved, and mimed drinking, grinning broadly he pointed to an esky (ice cooler) under the table. Smiling and waving my thanks, I wasted no time and helped myself to a beer and a plate of food and started moving between the small groups of people scattered around the haphazard assortment of tables and chairs.
A few hours later, after everyone had eaten, the committee members herded everyone to the big Christmas tree. With the children in front and the rest of the league and their families and friends arrayed behind, it was time for speeches, awards, and presents. Dita Von Bruiser, as the league president talked about the growth of S2D2 over their inaugural year, and thanked everyone—from skaters, referees and NSOs to the volunteers and supportive families and friends—for their hard work and dedication. The future of S2D2 was bright.

Next were awards. Made from make-shift materials, random ‘knick-knacks’, spray paint and glitter, the gifts were fun and silly and everything derby. I stood near the tables, when suddenly I hear Dita Von Bruiser call out ‘Dr Derby!’ and wave me forward.

Surprised, I made my way to the front, where Dita Von Bruiser and Killabee handed me a little present. Wrapped in cellophane and tied with a ribbon was a hand-decorated purple Christmas bauble with ‘Dr Derby’ written in big, glittery letters. Attached was a note: ‘To Dr Derby, you are part of the S2D2 family now!’

Genuinely touched, I hugged them both. As I moved back to my place by the table I looked around and I thought about the last year.

My research on the roller derby scene and my journey becoming Dr Derby had been one of the most interesting, fun, stressful, yet invigorating periods in my life. Seeing everyone around me just enjoying the afternoon and each other’s company, I realised that these skaters, NSOs, referees, spectators, business owners, photographers, family, and friends were the scene; they were the ‘who’ making roller derby possible. What struck me, however, as I looked down at the little bauble was that, like them, I was roller derby too.
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Glossary

Blocker
Three skaters on each team play Blockers during every Jam. Blockers hinder, or ‘block’, the opposing team’s Jammer while assisting their own wherever possible.

Bout
Roller derby term for ‘game’.

Interleague
Often referred to as ‘all-stars’, these are teams within leagues who compete against other roller derby leagues. For example, The Sydney Roller Derby League’s ‘Assassins’ playing South Side Derby Dolls’ ‘The Force’.

Intraleague
‘Home’ league bouts; teams and competitions held between teams within a league. For example, Western Sydney Rollers’ ‘The B-52 Bombshells’ competing against ‘The Blackheart Brawlers’. These bouts are often held in the local, ‘home’ venue.

Jam
Game play in roller derby is broken up into two-minute ‘jams’.

Jammer
Point scorer in roller derby. Each team has one Jammer in each Jam. They are recognized on the track by the star on their helmet.

Merby
Colloquial, and contested, name for Men’s Roller Derby, including teams, leagues, and competitions.

Pivot
A skater who manages their team and strategy in The Pack, and sets the pace. Each team has one Pivot on the track per Jam. They are recognised by a stripe on their helmet.

Skate out
Skate outs are performances by skaters as they enter onto the track at a roller derby bout. They frequently involve a dance routine or display of skaters’ skills to music for spectators’ enjoyment.

The pack
Blockers from both teams, together with the Pivots, form The Pack. Jammers work their way through The Pack to score points.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Group A (skaters) Interview Question Guide

1. To begin, could you please tell me a bit about yourself and what your involvement with roller derby is?
2. How did you first learn about roller derby?
3. What was it about roller derby that interested you?
4. What was your first experience with roller derby like?
5. Thinking back on the bouts you have been to, have you found that they generally feel the same, or do they feel different? What makes them different/the same?
6. When you are at a bout, where do you prefer to sit and why?
7. What things do you think make roller derby entertaining to watch, and to be a part of?
8. Sometimes there is extra entertainment at bouts, normally before the competition or at half time. What kinds of additional entertainment have you seen and what do you think about leagues’ choice to include them?
9. What is your favourite part about a live bout?
10. How do you feel about the physicality of roller derby?
11. How would you describe roller derby culture?
12. A common description of roller derby is that it is a ‘women’s’ sport. What do you think about this, and do you think this is a good description?
13. How do you feel about the tendency for skaters, referees, and NSOs to use a ‘derby name’?
14. Do you think there is a roller derby ‘look’ or ‘style’? If so, how would you describe it?
15. SRDL PULP FRICTION POSTER: Looking at this promotional poster, and considering some of the aspects of roller derby we have been discussing, do you think this image is a good representation of roller derby style?
16. When you are watching a bout, how does it feel seeing a skater get knocked off the track or take a hard hit?
17. Particularly in roller derby magazines such as Hit & Miss and on the internet, roller derby injuries are displayed by skaters in ways which suggest a sense of pride. What do you think about this observation?
18. According to your league’s website, SRDL/WSR operates with a ‘by the skaters, for the skaters’ philosophy. Could you please tell me what this means to you,
and, if you know, what it means in terms of the management and ownership of the league?

19. In roller derby, do you think there are any forms of expression that are considered unacceptable or undesirable? (prompt: Such as behaviours, clothing, or relationships)

20. What do you think about the diversity of roller derby members?
   - Diversity in relation to sex and gender?
   - Diversity in relation to sexuality?
   - Diversity in relation to race/ethnicity?

21. How do you think roller derby has impacted on your life?
22. Thinking back on this interview, is there anything else about roller derby, or your experiences with it, that you think is important that we haven’t talked about?
Appendix 2: Group B (non-skater) Standard Interview Question
guide

1. To begin, could you please tell me a bit about yourself and what your involvement with roller derby is?
2. How did you first learn about roller derby?
3. What first attracted you to roller derby?
4. What was your first experience with roller derby like?
5. Thinking back on the bouts you have been to, have you found that they generally feel the same, or do they feel different? What makes them different/the same?
6. When you are at a bout, where do you prefer to sit and why?
7. What things do you think make roller derby entertaining to watch, and to be a part of?
8. Sometimes there is extra entertainment at bouts, normally before the competition or at half time. What kinds of additional entertainment have you seen and what do you think about leagues’ choice to include them?
9. What is your favourite part about live bouts?
10. How would you describe roller derby culture?
11. What do you think about descriptions of roller derby as a ‘women’s sport’?
12. How do you feel about the tendency for skaters, referees, and NSOs to use a ‘derby name’?
13. Do you think there is a roller derby ‘look’ or ‘style’? If so, how would you describe it?
14. **SRDL PULP FRICTION POSTER:** Looking at this promotional poster, and considering some of the aspects of roller derby we have been discussing, do you think this image is a good representation of roller derby style?
15. When you are watching a bout, how does it feel seeing a skater get knocked off the track or take a hard hit?
16. Particularly in roller derby magazines such as *Hit & Miss* and on the internet, roller derby injuries are displayed by skaters in ways which suggest a sense of pride. What do you think about this observation?
17. According to your league’s website, SRDL/WSR operates with a ‘by the skaters, for the skaters’ philosophy. Could you please tell me what this means to you, and, if you know, what it means in terms of the management and ownership of the league?
Appendix 3: Group B Tailored Questions: Referee

18. What was it about roller derby that made you want to become a referee, can you tell me about how you came to be one?

19. I’ve noticed that in roller derby, referees, like skaters, typically develop a derby name and persona or alter-ego. Could you tell me about your derby name and persona, and how you came to choose/construct it?

20. Could you tell me about your first experience refereeing at a live bout?

21. As a referee you are also in the spot light at roller derby bouts. What is it like refereeing in front of sometimes very large crowds?

22. How would you describe your relationship, as a referee, with skaters?

23. Referees in roller derby work as part of a team, could you describe what this experience is like?

24. I’ve noticed, particularly in America and via online communities, that there are some referee communities/networks which are considered unaffiliated in that they are not linked to any particular league so as to provide unbiased, trained and dedicated referees. What do you think about these networks? Is this similar to the kind of referee network you are part of?

25. If not, what do you think about having specific league affiliated referees? What kind of benefits and/or issues have you found are associated with this?

26. Do you see roller derby as part of your everyday life, or as a break from your everyday life?

27. Thinking back on this interview, is there anything else about roller derby, or your experiences with it, that you think are important but that we haven’t talked about?
Appendix 4: Group B Tailored Questions: Roller derby photographer

17. Could you please tell me a bit about your history as a photographer? How long have you been a photographer, and what kinds of pictures do you normally take e.g. portraits, live sports?

18. How did you get involved as a roller derby photographer?

19. When you are taking pictures at roller derby bouts, are you looking for anything in particular as a ‘good shot’?

20. What kinds of challenges are there taking pictures at roller derby bouts, and how, if at all, are you able to overcome these issues?

21. Could you describe what it feels like capturing people’s experiences of roller derby on camera?

22. At every roller derby bout there are generally a collection of photographers. Could you describe the relationships which exist between you? [possible prompt: development of a shared network or sense of community]

23. Do you feel affected by the atmosphere or vibe being generated at bouts? If so, could you possibly elaborate on this by describing what it feels like?

24. Do you take photographs at roller derby with the intent to distribute them in some way?

25. Do the magazines or other media you send your images to request certain kinds of images?

26. To your knowledge, do roller derby images get photo-shopped before publication or posting? If so, what kinds of things are included, altered, erased or enhanced?

27. What are your relationships like with other roller derby members?

28. Some people have suggested that there is a roller derby community developing in Australia. Do you feel like you are part of it?

29. Do you see roller derby as part of your everyday life, or as a break from your everyday life?

30. How do you think roller derby has impacted on your life?

31. Thinking back on this interview, is there anything else about roller derby, or your experiences with it, that you think are important but that we haven’t talked about?
Appendix 5: Group C (spectators) Interview Question Guide

1. To begin, could you please tell me a bit about yourself, what do you do for work, if you study, where you live – just some background information?
2. How would you describe your involvement in roller derby?
3. How did you first find out about roller derby, and could you describe your first experience with it?
4. What was it about roller derby that interested you?
5. Do you think the experience is affected by who you go with?
6. When you are at a roller derby bout, is there anywhere in particular that you like to sit?
7. Do you enjoy going to watch roller derby? What is it that you enjoy?
8. Thinking back on the bouts you have been to, do any stand out as more interesting than others? If so, what was it that made it so memorable?
9. What do you think is similar, and what is different, between bouts you have been to?
10. Do you consider yourself a roller derby fan? If so, could you describe what being a roller derby fan means to you? (possibly)
11. Some people really enjoy sitting track side in the Suicide Seating, have you ever sat there, and if so do you think it enhanced your experience? Why, why not?
12. Have you been to any bouts where they have had some supporting entertainment – so either before the bout, at half time, or possibly between bouts? If so, could you tell me what they were and what you thought about them? Did you enjoy them?
13. What do you think about the contact between skaters and spectators in roller derby, compared to other sports?
14. After the bouts, skaters usually skate past and high five the spectators, what do you think about this? Is it something you enjoy? Why do you enjoy it?
15. Do you think there is a roller derby ‘look’ or ‘style’? If so, how would you describe it and what do you think contributes to it?
16. Do you have any favourites skaters or referees? If so, what are they and why do you like those in particular?
17. Are there any you don’t like? Or do you think skaters using derby names in general is something you don’t agree with?
18. Roller derby is often thought of as ‘different’ to other sports. What does this idea mean to you?
19. Have you ever thought about joining yourself? If so, what have you thought about doing and what has held you back? If not, would you mind telling me why being part of roller derby in more ways than as a spectator does not appeal to you?
20. A common description of roller derby is that it is a ‘women’s’ sport. What do you think about this, and do you think this is a good description?
21. **IMAGES:** I have a couple of images I am going to show you, and I just want you to tell me what you think of them, whether you like them as either logos or promotional posters, and what you think it tells you about the sport. Do you think they represent particular aspects of roller derby culture?

- Inner West Roller Derby logo.
- S2D2 logo
- SRDL logo
- WSR Hellfire Honeys

22. What is the thing that you like the most about roller derby?

23. Is there anything you that you don’t like about roller derby?

24. How—if at all—has roller derby impacted on your life?

25. Thinking back on this interview, is there anything else about roller derby, or your experiences with it, that you think are important but that we haven’t talked about?
Appendix 6: Tables

Table 1: Group A – Skaters’ demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>League</th>
<th>Secondary role/s</th>
<th>Skating Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pepâ la Pow!</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Media – writer for RDAU.</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BatNataZ</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elleter Skelter</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe Da Belle</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Captain – Hellfire Honeys</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meg 4 Mercy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dame Dead’na</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killabee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Happiness Commissioner</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-Nominator</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Media – Presenter on Viva la Derby podcast</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dita Von Bruiser</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>League President</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Dirty Boots</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hell Pixie</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Committee member - Media</td>
<td>Inactive - Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlett O’Harmer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Inactive - Injury</td>
</tr>
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Table 2: Group B – Non-skaters’ demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>League Association</th>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Secondary Role/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SuziEphedrine</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Blue Mountains Roller Derby League (BMRDL)</td>
<td>Roller derby Business owner – Sydney Derby Skates</td>
<td>Skater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikemare</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>BMRDL</td>
<td>Referee</td>
<td>Roller Derby business owner – Sydney Derby Skates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Shutter Speed</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Kahuna</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Media – Via la Derby founder and presenter</td>
<td>S2D2 Vice President; bout commentator; fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theda Bastard</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Media – Roller derby website founded</td>
<td>WSR Skater (Injured)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sintax</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Wollongong Roller Derby League (WIRD), and S2D2</td>
<td>Referee</td>
<td>Fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zipee Sweetfeet</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Ex-Skater</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
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Table 3: Group C – Spectator demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Spectator of:</th>
<th>Secondary role/Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>S2D2</td>
<td>Husband of S2D2 Skater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>Mother of WSR Skater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>Skater with Sydney University Roller Derby League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>Non-skating official for SRDL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SRDL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>WSR</td>
<td>WSR Fresh Meat Skater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Initial contact with roller derby

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of initial contact with roller derby</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watched the film <em>Whip It</em> (2009)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a live roller derby bout</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed by a friend and/or family member</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw a roller derby pamphlet or advertisement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watched <em>This Is Roller Derby</em> (2011) documentary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed unspecified internet source</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>