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# “By the Skaters, for the Skaters” The DIY Ethos of the Roller Derby Revival

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## Abstract

The growth of women’s roller derby has been driven by the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic. This means the majority of roller derby leagues are owned and operated by the participants. Drawing on an ethnographic study of three leagues, the author argues that the DIY ethos is not simply motivated by necessity; rollergirls consider it an important value of the revival. Doing it themselves ensures that skaters maintain control over their athletic activity, their organizations, and the sport as a whole. The author contends that roller derby’s DIY ethic is not about individualism. Instead, the revival is driven by rollergirls’ collective labor. The author also shows that the DIY ethic pushed women to create a sport that they control. Finally, the author discusses the barriers to participation that result from the DIY ethic.

## Keywords

alternative sports, DIY ethos, gender

“Tonya Harding,”<sup>1</sup> a 36-year-old mother of two teenage boys, had never participated in sports and had no experience running organizations prior to cofounding a roller derby league. When asked how she became involved with roller derby, Tonya replied, “In October of 2005 my husband and I went with a couple out to Seattle and we saw the Rat City Rollergirls’ championship game. Two weeks after we had gotten home from the trip [my friend and I] were handing out flyers to start our own league here.” Although unsure of whether there would be sufficient interest for roller derby in Fort Wayne, Indiana—a conservative Midwestern city—she decided that it was worth an attempt. After seeking advice about how to start a roller derby league through internet

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message boards and conversations with “rollergirls” in established leagues, Tonya and her friend began posting flyers around Fort Wayne.<sup>2</sup> Although only five women came to the first meeting, a story about the league in the local newspaper generated enough interest to lift it off the ground. According to Tonya, “From the article we received probably 40 skaters, 10 refs, and a bunch of medics, photographers, and other volunteers.” Three years later the league has gone from holding bouts in a roller skating rink to performing in front of 1,000 people in an exhibition room at Fort Wayne’s largest event center.

The rapid growth of women’s roller derby—from one league in 2001 to more than 300 today—is a result of grassroots efforts by women like Tonya who decided to create a league in their own city. Thus far, the all-women roller derby revival has been driven by the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic: The majority of leagues are owned and operated by the participants. Of course, this also means the majority of leagues are owned and operated by women. This is significant because sport organizations have historically been controlled by men. Even as female athletic participation rates have skyrocketed in the United States since the passage of Title IX, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions within sport organizations (Messner, 2002). As a sport created by and for women, roller derby is an interesting case because it provides an alternative to male-dominated sport. In this article, I argue that the DIY ethos served as a key tactic for producing this alternative. Drawing on ethnographic research on three roller derby leagues, I explore what DIY means to rollergirls. Is being “skater owned and operated” important to roller derby participants? Why or why not? What are the barriers to doing it yourself?

I begin this article with a review of research on sport’s gender regime, labor relationships within sport, and the DIY ethos. This is followed by an explanation of what the DIY ethos means in the context of roller derby and why this ethic became central to the current revival. I then argue that the DIY ethos is not simply motivated by necessity; rollergirls consider it an important value of the revival. Doing it themselves ensures that skaters maintain control over their athletic activity, their organizations, and the sport of roller derby as a whole. I contend that the “by the skater, for the skater” ethic is not about individualism. Instead, the revival is driven by the collective effort of rollergirls, which builds social bonds between skaters both locally and nationally. I go on to show that the DIY ethic pushed women to create a sport that they control. Finally, I discuss the barriers to participation that result from the DIY ethic.

## **Gender Relationships of Power in Sport**

R.W. Connell (2005) contends that gender should be analyzed as a structure of relations between men and women, and her work provides a framework for analyzing the structure of gender within institutions. Connell refers to the gender relations in any given institution as a “gender regime” and argues that the analysis of gender regimes should take into account power relations, production relations, and cathexis.

Examining the gender regime in sport is central to the work of sport feminists. Feminist intervention in the sociology of sport has drawn attention to male domination within the institution of sport, spotlighting the ways in which men maintain hegemony by denying women access to participation in sport and positions of power within sport organizations (Cahn, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990).

Yet, as Connell (1987) points out, gender regimes are not static. To highlight their dynamic, historical nature, Connell defines gender regimes as “the state of play in gender relations in a given institution” (p. 120). In sport, as in other social institutions, male hegemony is not fixed. The current gender regime is maintained through men’s collective efforts to retain dominance; however, the legitimacy of male domination in sport has not gone unchallenged.

Feminist scholars point to women’s struggles to gain access to power within sport’s gender regime. Liberal feminists, in particular, have focused their efforts on achieving gender equity in sport in terms of opportunities for participation, funding, and leadership positions within sport organizations (Cahn, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994). Although disparities between men and women still exist in terms of funding and access, liberal feminists have been successful in gaining increased funding for women’s sport and opening up opportunities for participation (Coakley, 2004). Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, there has been a dramatic increase in sport participation among women and girls (Messner, 2002). Although increased opportunities and participation rates represent progress toward gender equity in sport, it is necessary to note that these changes are not evenly distributed among all groups of women: Poor and working-class girls and women still face barriers to participation, particularly when budget cuts eliminate public funding for athletic programs (Coakley, 2004).

Furthermore, despite gains in participation rates, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions in sport organizations. Ironically, the passage of Title IX led to a decrease in women’s leadership and control over athletic programs, a result that was due, in part, to the incorporation of women’s athletic departments into men’s departments. A longitudinal study by Vivian Acosta and Linda Carpenter demonstrates this sharp decline in women’s leadership. In 1972, more than 90% of women’s intercollegiate athletic programs were headed by a female administrator; in 2008, only 21.3% of athletic directors were women. The percentage of coaching jobs held by women has also dramatically decreased since 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Although women’s sports advocates have been successful in expanding opportunities for athletic participation, the analysis of power and labor relations within the institution of sport reveals men’s continuing dominance in sport’s gender regime.

The figures cited above refer to high school and collegiate sports. Although these data provide a picture of the gender regime at the “core,” or “center,” of sport, it does not account for gender relations in “alternative” sporting spaces (Messner, 2002). In recent years, sport scholars have documented increasing participation rates in sports like skateboarding, surfing, and snowboarding, which are often labeled as “alternative,” “extreme,” or “lifestyle” sports (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004). Some scholars who study alternative sports have examined whether they challenge the

gender relations of power that characterize more traditional sports. Despite their potential as alternative sport spaces, research on skateboarding, windsurfing, snowboarding, surfing, and Ultimate Frisbee reveals that these sport subcultures fail to provide an alternative structure of gender relations: Like the traditional sports they are often defined against, these “alternative” sports are also male dominated (Anderson, 1999; Beal, 1995; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Booth, 2004; Heywood, 2008; Thornton, 2004; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998).

Although alternative sports lack the formal structures to limit female participation, women are often marginalized within the status hierarchies created by male participants (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Booth, 2004; Thornton, 2004). Within these masculinist sport subcultures, women are constructed as the devalued “Other,” differences between men’s and women’s performances are naturalized by participants, and male participants bond over sexist jokes. Furthermore, men control the specialized media for these alternative sports. Women participants are, for the most part, symbolically excluded from alternative sports media, which serves to reinscribe the association between alternative sport and masculinity. When women are visible in alternative sport magazines, they are often reduced to sex objects in advertisements (Anderson, 1999; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Booth, 2004; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Although women resist their devaluation within these sports and some feel empowered by their participation, on the whole, gender relations within alternative sports mirror the gender regime that characterizes sport’s center.

## **Alienation and Commercialization in Sport**

In addition to analyzing gender relations, critical sport scholars are also concerned with labor relations within the institution of sport. Although much sport activity is recreational in nature and considered play by participants, sport has also become increasingly commercialized and dominated by corporate interests (Coakley, 2004). For this reason, some Marxist scholars argue that athletic performances in sport should be analyzed as a form of labor (Beamish, 2009; Cleaver, 2009; McDonald, 2009). Rob Beamish contends that Marx’s theory of alienation is particularly useful for understanding the labor of high-performance athletes. Marx argues that the capitalist mode of production, in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled, leads to four kinds of alienation for workers. First, workers are alienated from the products they produce because they do not own these products. Second, workers are alienated from the act of production because they have no control over the production process. The third form of alienation is a consequence of the first two: Workers are alienated from their “species being.” For Marx, the conscious production of objects is central to what distinguishes humans from animals. Under capitalism, production ceases to be a “life-activity” that leads to the realization of human potential; instead, production is reduced to a means to support the worker’s bare subsistence (Marx, 1978, p. 76). The alienation from one’s own “being” as a human, leads to the fourth form of alienation: estrangement from other human beings.

According to Beamish (2009), Marx's conception of alienation is a useful analytic framework for sport sociologists because "of all human practices, sport is continually raised as one that permits individuals and groups to explore their physical potential, to develop strong team and social bonds, and to aid in the fulfillment of their individual needs" (p. 95). Through the utilization of this framework, critical scholars "may assess the extent to which sport in contemporary society meets those high aspirations"; when sport fails to do so, the framework "allows one to focus upon those aspects of sport which must be changed if it is ever to deliver upon its implicit promise" (p. 95). This last point is an important one. Although the mode of production in high-performance sports may lead to the types of alienation outlined previously, Marx's theory of alienation implies the possibility of "a non-alienating, empowering culture of sport and physical activity" (McDonald, 2009, p. 41). Harry Cleaver (2009) suggests that reversing Marx's analysis of the four kinds of alienation provides a vision of what nonalienated sport would entail:

(1) athletes' control over their own activity in individual and collective self-expression, (2) activity that creates bonds among players, (3) activity whose "product," whether immediate satisfaction or spectacle, would be under the control of the players and (4) be organized as a creative realization of human species-being. (pp. xxxii-xxxiii)

Although roller girls are not professional athletes engaging in the types of high-performance sport that Beamish (2009) refers to, their engagement in the sport of roller derby is much more extensive than simply playing recreational pick-up games in a local park or skating rink. As I discuss in more detail later, in addition to their athletic labor, roller girls perform nearly all of the labor required to produce public bouts and maintain their leagues. For this reason, I feel that it is fruitful to extend a Marxist analysis beyond professional and Olympic sports to the sport of roller derby. Furthermore, as I will later demonstrate, roller girls' adherence to what I call the "do-it-ourselves ethic" is motivated in part by the desire to avoid the alienating aspects of sport that Beamish points to.

In fact, research on alternative sports shows that some participants were attracted to these sports precisely because they offered an alternative to the alienating aspects of traditional sports (Beal, 1995; Humphreys, 2003; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004). Many participants value individual control over their activity, aesthetic expression, and camaraderie as opposed to rationalized sets of rules, competition, and the win-at-all-cost attitude found in mainstream sport. However, the co-optation and commercialization of alternative sport by corporations looking to tap into a new youth market has pulled these sports closer to the dominant sport values that many participants oppose (Humphreys, 2003; Messner, 2002; Rinehart, 2003; Wheaton, 2004). For example, televised competitions like the X-Games resulted in the increasing rationalization of "extreme" sport along with a heightened focus on competition, which are both counter to the values expressed by many participants (Rinehart, 2003). The

increased media attention also attracted new participants who were more interested in competition and corporate sponsorship than “fun,” individual freedom, and self-expression (Rinehart, 2003). Of course, commercialization and corporate co-optation do not fully determine sport practice within alternative sport spaces; some participants continue to resist the institutionalization, rationalization, and commercialization of these sports (Beal, 1995; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Humphreys, 2003). Yet these studies demonstrate the ease with which alternatives can be incorporated into the mainstream and the impact that commercialization can have on the values and practices of “alternative” sport cultures.

## **The DIY Ethos**

Despite instances of corporate co-optation, some scholars maintain that subcultures are important for progressive politics because they provide spaces for alternative ways of thinking and being that challenge the dominant culture (Carrington & Wilson, 2004; Duncombe, 1997). According to Stephen Duncombe, one significant idea that arose from underground culture is the DIY ethic, which he succinctly defines as “make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you” (p. 2). Duncombe views the DIY ethos as a self-conscious political act: “Doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture. DIY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different” (p. 117).

The origin of the term “DIY,” as it is commonly used today, can be traced to the punk movement of the 1970s (Duncombe, 1997). Doing-it-yourself was often a necessity for punks, but the DIY ethos was, and is, about more than necessity. Underlying the philosophy is a rejection of “inauthentic” mass-produced consumer culture in favor of an “authentic” folk culture, a celebration of amateurism, and most important, the desire for individual control over cultural production (Duncombe, 1997; Schilt & Zobl, 2008). Those who subscribe to the DIY ethos are not primarily motivated by commercial success, particularly because attaining this success often requires giving up total control over the cultural objects they produce. Ultimately, the DIY ethic is about nonalienated self-activity (Duncombe, 1997).

Although girls and women have been largely absent in studies of subcultures, recent work shows that the DIY ethos has inspired girls and women to create their own alternative cultures (Duncombe, 1997; Schilt & Zobl, 2008). The Riot Grrrl movement in the early 1990s provides an example of this. Created through the merging of the punk DIY ethic and radical feminism, Riot Grrrl began as a response to women’s alienation and marginalization within the male-dominated punk scene (Schilt & Zobl, 2008). Instead of accepting their marginal status in the punk scene, Riot Grrrls formed their own community.

The emphasis on DIY was central to all aspects of the Riot Grrrl movement. Riot Grrrls produced zines, formed bands, started record labels, designed posters, and organized music festivals (Schilt & Zobl, 2008). Although it is often considered to be

simply a “musical moment,” Schilt and Zobl argue that Riot Grrrl was a political movement that “inspired young girls and young women both nationally and internationally to express resistance against restrictive expectations of girlhood, femininity, and traditional gender roles both in the punk scene . . . and in ‘mainstream society’” (p. 171). Yet, as Schilt and Zobl contend, the DIY ethos driving this movement was about more than individual empowerment. Rejecting the view that DIY is simply a form of liberal individualism, Schilt and Zobl argue that Riot Grrrls’ DIY ethos played a crucial role in furthering the politics of the movement because it encouraged cultural production that both spread feminist consciousness and linked together an international community of young feminists.

Unlike Riot Grrrl, the roller derby revival is not explicitly linked to feminist politics. However, like in the Riot Grrrl movement, roller derby’s DIY ethos played a crucial role in pushing women to carve out social spaces that they control while also creating bonds between the participants. Thus far, the DIY ethic’s role in producing alternative sport spaces has been largely understudied. After discussing my research methods, I explore what the DIY ethos means to women involved in the roller derby revival and, in doing so, I show how this ethic functions as a tactic for establishing a nonalienating model of sport.

## Method

The data in this study are based on ethnographic research on three roller derby leagues—two located Austin, Texas and one in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Roller derby has experienced a revival in cities in every region of the United States, but the roots of the revival are in Austin. TXRD (Lonestar Rollergirls), founded in 2001, was the first league in the all-women roller derby revival. TXRD is one of the few leagues that skates on a banked track. The league currently has 5 teams and approximately 80 members. The TXRD’s bouts—held at the Austin Convention Center—are popular and well attended, typically drawing about 2,000 spectators. In 2006, the league was featured on the A&E reality show *Rollergirls*, which generated an increased interest in the sport nationwide.

In addition to observing TXRD bouts and interviewing Lonestar Rollergirls, I also studied the Texas Rollergirls (TXRG). TXRG is a flat track league located in Austin. It was founded in 2003 by skaters who split from TXRD, which was called BGGW at the time, over management disputes. TXRG was one of the founding members of the Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), the national governing body for women’s flat track roller derby. The league has approximately 60 skaters and is comprised of 4 “home” teams and 1 all-star travel team that competes in WFTDA-sanctioned interleague bouts and national tournaments.<sup>3</sup> Monthly bouts held at a local skating rink regularly attract capacity crowds of 1,100.

The Fort Wayne Derby Girls (FWDG) are the third league included in this study. FWDG was the first flat track roller derby league in Indiana. The league was founded in October of 2005 and had its first full season in 2006. Like TXRG, FWDG is a

member of WFTDA. With approximately 50 skaters, FWDG is slightly smaller than the Austin leagues in my study. During my fieldwork in 2008, bouts were held at an indoor soccer complex. In 2009, the league moved the bouts to an exhibition room at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, Fort Wayne's largest event center. These bouts attract approximately 1,000 spectators.

My analysis is primarily focused on data collected through in-depth interviews with 21 rollergirls. The interviews were semistructured, which means I used an interview guide but did not follow a strict ordering of the questions. Participant responses to the open-ended questions shaped the direction of the interviews. I conducted 17 interviews, and the other 4 were completed by two colleagues. The duration of the interviews ranged from 1 to 2 hours. All of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis.

I interviewed women in all three leagues, including nine rollergirls from TXRD, seven from TXRG, and five from FWDG. At the time of the interviews, 20 of these women were involved in roller derby as participants who skated in bouts. One woman had recently retired after 6 years of skating but was involved in TXRG as a coach. Fifteen of the women are White, 3 are Latina, 2 identify as biracial—"Caucasian/Latina" and "Caucasian/African American"—and 1 is Asian American. The overrepresentation of White women was not by choice: The lack of racial and ethnic diversity is reflective of the demographics of the sport in general.<sup>4</sup> The ages of the women in my sample ranged from 24 to 40, with an average age of 31. The sample varied in terms of socioeconomic status but primarily included working-class and middle-class women. Not every rollergirl reported their income, but the annual income for those who did ranged from US\$7,000 to US\$60,000, with an average of approximately US\$37,000. In terms of education, four women had high school diplomas, six had associates degrees or some college education, nine had a bachelor's degree, and two had a master's degree. When asked about sexual orientation, 15 rollergirls identified as heterosexual, 5 identified as bisexual, and 1 identified as lesbian. None of the rollergirls I interviewed in Austin had children, but four out of the five women from FWDG did.<sup>5</sup>

In all three leagues, I interviewed at least one rollergirl from each team. The sample also included "veteran" and "rookie" skaters. The length of participation ranged from less than 1 year to 6 years. The average length of participation at the time of the interview was approximately 3 years. The selection of two leagues that were at the forefront of the revival gave me the opportunity to interview women who were involved in roller derby since the beginning of the revival. This was advantageous because these women had the best perspective on how the sport had changed over time and were personally involved in the founding of TXRG. In Fort Wayne, I had the opportunity to interview the cofounder of FWDG, which gave me insight into how leagues are currently being formed.

In addition to interviews, I also observed roller derby bouts, practices, tryouts, and pre- and after-bout parties. I wrote detailed field notes about each observation immediately after leaving the field or the following morning when events ended late at

night. Unfortunately, I was denied access to league meetings by both TXRG and TXRD, and a league meeting was not held while I was in Fort Wayne. For this reason, I focus on interview data to explain the meanings that roller girls attach to being “skater owned, skater operated” as opposed to focusing on how the organizations actually operate. The interviews and observations began in February of 2008 and ended in September of 2008.

## **Roller Derby and the DIY Ethic**

*By the Skaters . . .*

The majority of the leagues in the all-women roller derby revival were formed by women who, after seeing or hearing about roller derby, decided they should start a league in their own city (Joulwan, 2007; Mabe, 2007). Instead of waiting for someone else to start the league for them, wannabe roller girls followed the ethic that lies at the core of the current revival: Do it yourself. Many, though not all, of these women had been part of the punk rock scene, where DIY is a central subcultural value. Ivanna S. Pankin, from Sin City Rollergirls, acknowledges the link between punk and roller derby in her story about how the Las Vegas league came about:

I’d played in a few bands, written a few fanzines, and raised myself in the punk-rock scene, where it’s a short jump from wishing you can do something to deciding you’re going to just do it. So it wasn’t long before I found myself on a local music message board posting, ‘Who wants to join my roller derby team?’ I didn’t know much about derby and I couldn’t even find a copy of the rules, but I knew I could figure it out. So just like starting a band, I recruited girls and we met over pitchers of beer to strategize our derby venture. Three months later we played our first bout.” (Mabe, 2007, p. 10)

Although Ivanna fails to acknowledge the structural constraints that limit the possibility of “just doing it,” this quote illustrates two principal facets of the DIY ethic. First, you should create your own culture as opposed to consuming that which is manufactured and sold to you. Second, anyone can become a cultural producer even if they lack professional experience or expertise. When Ivanna founded Sin City Rollergirls, there were few resources on how to start a roller derby league. Today, internet message boards and roller girls in established leagues provide helpful information to nascent leagues. Although advice may aid in the process of forming a league, many league founders, like Tonya Harding of FWDG, had no prior organizing experience. Yet, true to the DIY spirit, lack of experience did not deter them from trying.

The DIY ethic extends beyond the founding of leagues. League members also perform nearly all the work required to keep the leagues running and produce bouts. Although volunteers often serve as security, referees, and announcers, roller girls design and post flyers to advertise the bouts; set up the track and seating at the bouts;

coordinate volunteers; design, manage, and sell league merchandise; sell and take tickets; secure league sponsors; handle public relations; train new skaters; manage disputes among skaters; book bands and half-time entertainment; find charities to donate to; and in some cases even serve as league accountants. This list is not exhaustive but merely demonstrates the extensive labor involved in operating leagues and producing public bouts. Because league maintenance and bout production necessitate a tremendous amount of work, all three of the leagues I studied require skaters to serve on committees charged with executing these tasks.

### *. . . For the Skaters*

In addition to being operated by the skaters, the leagues that I studied—like the majority of leagues in the revival (Mabe, 2007)—are also collectively “owned” and democratically controlled by the members.<sup>6</sup> The three leagues have different organizational structures, but they all have a board of directors that puts forth recommendations regarding financial and operational decisions. Although the board makes the recommendations, most of the major financial and organizational decisions are put to a league vote. This means that all skaters potentially have a voice in the decision-making process as opposed to decisions being handed down by an owner or executive board.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the members of the board of directors are selected through a democratic process: They are nominated and elected by the members of the league.<sup>8</sup>

Texas Rollergirls explains what it means to be “skater owned and operated” on their website:

Every skater in the league has a vote on everything from financial decisions to charities we support, from where we play to when we practice. Texas Rollergirls is a direct democracy—majority rules and every voice is heard. That means that what Texas Rollergirls is now and what it becomes in the future is decided by the skaters. (TXRG, 2008)

This statement was corroborated by members of TXRG in my interviews. For example, Tart of Darkness told me:

So we have the advisory board, which is basically like you pick the people who you really respect their opinions and you think they’re doing a good job. And you put them in that position to steer but then we also have business meetings, which are really helpful, and everybody gets a chance to speak and everybody has a chance to express their opinion and then you vote. Like I really like that—I think that’s a great model.

Skaters in TXRD and FWDG also reported that they have the opportunity to vote on major issues. Babe Ruthless, from TXRD, said,

Everyone has a voice and input into the business and how it's run. And at any point, even if the board members decide one thing, you know, it can go back to the league for a vote. So it's a good balance of getting business done and everyone having a voice. So I really think it's a perfect way to run a business of our kind.

Because voting takes time, league members do not vote on every single decision. However, like Tart of Darkness and Babe Ruthless, the skaters I interviewed told me that they were happy with their league's decision-making process and felt that they had a voice in the process. Voting on major decisions, in addition to skater control over the board of directors and other league committees, ensures that roller derby leagues are run "for the skaters."

### **The Origins of "By the Skaters, for the Skaters"**

Although the majority of leagues in the all-women revival are controlled and operated by the skaters, the revival did not begin with a "by the skaters, for the skaters" ethic (Joulwan, 2007). Moreover, although the roller derby revival has been driven by women's grassroots efforts, a man named Daniel Eduardo Policarpo, also known as Devil Dan, came up with the initial idea to revive the sport in Austin, Texas, in 2000 (Brick, 2008). After Devil Dan recruited a group of women by posting flyers around town, he set up four teams and appointed one woman as the captain of each team. He had recruited enough women to start the league and even held a fund-raiser, but before the league skated in their first bout Devil Dan unexpectedly skipped town.

Undeterred, the four league captains forged ahead, forming an organization called Bad Girl Good Woman Productions (BGGW). After creating a set of rules, devising the dimensions for a flat track, and holding practice scrimmages, BGGW held its first bout for friends and family in 2002. The founders of BGGW, who called themselves "SheEOs," quit skating halfway through the first season, but they continued running the league as the "owners." Members of the original league contend that the SheEOs saw roller derby as a profit-making venture and that they gave skaters little say in league decisions, regardless of the work skaters did for the league. Melissa Joulwan (2007) recounts her experience in the league, "We were admonished to keep our opinions about league business to ourselves. [The SheEOs] informed us that they owned our names, our images, our uniforms" (pp. 57-58). After months of disputes over management, the majority of the skaters split with BGGW in the spring of 2003 and formed their own league, Texas Rollergirls (TXRG).<sup>9</sup>

Due to their dissatisfaction with BGGW's organizational model, which left skaters with no control over league decisions, the disgruntled rollergirls determined that their new league would be owned and operated by the skaters. As the second league formed in the revival, the decision to make TXRG 100% skater owned and operated had a significant impact on the future direction of the sport, particularly because the

organization served as a model for flat track derby leagues that were starting up in other cities (Joulwan, 2007). When these leagues joined together in 2004 to create a national governing body for flat track roller derby, the DIY ethic was explicitly stated in the WFTDA mission statement: “The governing philosophy is ‘by the skaters, for the skaters’. Women skaters are primary owners, managers, and operators of each member league and of the association” (WFTDA, 2008). This philosophy has also been formalized in WFTDA’s bylaws. In order to qualify for full WFTDA membership, at least 51% of the league owners must be skaters, unless the league is a nonprofit, and skaters must comprise at least 67% of the league management. The governing body itself symbolizes roller derby’s DIY ethos. Not only was WFTDA formed by rollergirls, it is also controlled by skaters from member leagues. WFTDA’s major decisions, such as rule changes, are voted on by these league representatives.

On the one hand, WFTDA and the local leagues are “skater owned and operated” out of necessity. The majority of leagues do not generate enough profit to pay professionals to do the work currently done by the skaters. Most of the money leagues make is used to pay for operating expenses, including the rental of practice and bout spaces, bout production costs, travel expenses, and insurance. Rollergirls point out that there is not enough profit, at least at this point in time, to be made in roller derby to entice entrepreneurs to purchase leagues. Yet, regardless of the necessity, when leagues proudly proclaim that they are “skater owned and operated,” they are not simply turning a necessity into a virtue. As I explain in the next section, doing the work themselves also ensures that they retain control over their organizations, labor, athletic activity, and the future of the sport of roller derby.

## **Participant Control Over Athletic Activity**

Although doing it yourself may be a necessity, it is also a value that has become ingrained in roller derby culture. For many skaters, underlying this ethic is a desire to control their athletic activity and the labor that goes into producing their “product,” which includes roller derby bouts and their leagues in general. Bubble, one of the skaters who left BGGW to form TXRG, said that her experience with BGGW confirmed the importance of maintaining skater control over the leagues. When asked whether she thought being skater owned and operated was important, she replied, “Oh absolutely! Yeah, because of where we were with BGGW—they said they owned us and we’re like, ‘What?!? Are you crazy?!? Hell no! No way!’” Bubble’s strong reaction stems from her personal experience playing in a league that denied skaters a voice, but even rookie rollergirls in leagues that are skater owned and operated said that participant control over roller derby is important. Faye Tallity said, “I probably wouldn’t have it be any other way than to be ‘for the skaters, by the skaters’ cause I wouldn’t want anybody telling me you know about the way I skate or the way I play or how we perform or any of that kind of business.” Of course, rollergirls do not have complete autonomy because roller derby is a team sport. Team captains and coaches do instruct

rollergirls on how to skate and perform in bouts, but for Faye Tallity this is different than a league owner determining the way the sport should be played.

Even when team captains and coaches exercise some control over lineups and team strategy, their authority is not absolute. Several rollergirls said that their teams, like their league as a whole, are run democratically. For example, when I asked Lockjaw who makes team lineup and strategy decisions, she replied, “We do that as a team, the team decides. We get together as a team and we work on a lineup and we work to see who’s going to be playing what positions. We work on strategy as a team—it’s really a team effort.” Similarly, Babe Ruthless said, “The line-ups and the recruitment of new girls on the team is really a collective thing. For the most part, me and the [co-captain], we’re in charge of getting [line-ups] done but we’ll get input from everyone on the team. And we really try to keep it a collective decision.”

Not all rollergirls told me that their teams were democratically controlled to this extent: Sometimes coaches or captains make lineup and strategy decisions without team input. However, some rollergirls assert that democratic control over team decisions distinguishes roller derby from other sports. For example, when I asked Bubble how roller derby compared to her prior sports experiences, she replied,

Yeah, well okay so when you’re younger and you’re in team sports in school you have those “Yes ma’am’s,” “No ma’am’s”—you do what the coach says and there’s no talking back and “This is how it is,” you know? And [roller derby] is a completely different story. I mean it’s that to a degree, you know you listen to your captain, your coach if you have one, but you also, in the way we set it up, we had a say in what was happening. Like, “What if we do it this way?” You kind of got to take ownership of it—in Texas Rollergirls we got to do that.

Babe Ruthless also recounted her difficulty dealing with authority in other sports: “I was never really good with authority so I tried to do volleyball. I played volleyball in the summertime, beach volleyball. And I tried to do team volleyball and got kicked out cuz I hated coaches and authority. I was one of those girls.”

In these two cases, Bubble and Babe Ruthless did not dislike sport itself; what they disliked was the way team sports were organized and controlled. The alienation that resulted from lack of control over their athletic activity is implicit in these narratives. In contrast to other team sports, roller derby allows them to take “ownership” over their athletic performance and the spectacle they produce. Instead of being forced to follow the orders of authoritarian coaches, rollergirls exercise some control over how they play roller derby.

Rollergirls also cited other reasons why roller derby should be governed by the participants. Some argue that skaters know what is best for the sport because they have first-hand experience playing it. For example, Jodie FASTER believes changes to the sport, such as altering the rules, should be driven by the skaters:

Promoters and outsiders don't skate so how do they know what's happening on the track? If you don't experience it yourself, it's not tangible, it's not something you can really describe or explain without experiencing it. So while this rule may sound good in writing, it's really stupid for this reason. I mean we've even learned from that. . . . We're very in-touch with the issues, so we're the best ones to take care of it.

In addition to knowing what is best for the sport, rollergirls assert that they put their personal safety at risk on the track and, therefore, they should exercise some control over the sport, especially since they are not paid athletes. Although rollergirls are trained to avoid injuries, roller derby is a full-contact sport and injuries do occur. Beatrix Slaughter said, "It's really important that skaters have a role in making decisions because ultimately it's their health, it's their bodies on the line."

Beatrix Slaughter's statement points to a central aspect of the revival: Rollergirls perform most of the work necessary to produce bouts and run the leagues, from the risky athletic labor on the track, to the time-consuming labor off the track. For that reason, rollergirls argue that not only should they have control over their labor but they should also reap the rewards of this labor. Discussing the importance of skater control over her league, Tart of Darkness said,

I feel like if you put somebody in charge of something like this there would be a real temptation to be exploitative. And then there are a lot of people doing a lot of work, and there's a lot to be gained from the work that other people are putting in because they're excited about this. So I like it that everybody has the chance to gain and grow.

Likewise, when asked whether it would matter if her league had an owner, Cleo Splatra replied,

Yes, it would matter very much because I don't wanna be owned. I want this investment that I've dedicated six years of my life to be something that I have control over—or at least a say in. I don't want to be told what to do and nobody's going to monopolize off of everything that I'm doing.

These quotes demonstrate rollergirls' desire to avoid the alienation that occurs when the means of production are privately owned and controlled. They do not want to be "owned," controlled, or exploited, which they fear would happen if their leagues had an owner and operated with a hierarchical, nondemocratic organizational structure. As Tart of Darkness points out, in leagues that are "skater owned, skater operated," all the skaters benefit from the labor that goes into producing roller derby bouts. On the other hand, if leagues were not collectively controlled, league owners would reap the rewards of the skaters' collective labor. By maintaining skater-owned and skater-operated leagues, rollergirls retain control over the production process, the bouts

that they produce, and the rewards of their labor. Through the organizational structures they created, rollergirls hope to prevent the conditions that lead to alienation.

## **Doing It Ourselves: Collective Labor and Community Bonds**

Although Cleo Splatra's response to my question about league ownership focuses on her individual investment in the sport, Tart of Darkness's response points to collective investment. Rollergirls do talk about the importance of having individual control over their athletic activity and self-expression in the sport, but they also recognize that running a league requires a collective effort. When asked about the responsibilities of league members, Babe Ruthless replied, "You help with the operation of the business, which is anything from selling merch, to working the door, to building the track, special events. It's a co-op kind of business. We are a social business and with that it really takes the whole society to run it." In other words, operating a roller derby league is not about just doing it *yourself*. It involves a cooperative effort from everyone involved.

This means that even though teams compete against each other on the track during the bouts, they must act cooperatively off the track. For this reason, leagues actively work to foster a sense of unity and community among all the players in the league. Rollergirls in all three leagues said that their league operates according to the motto "league first, team second." Bo Dacious, from TXRD, explained why this motto is important: "We are a league, we are in it together—without a league you don't have a team you know. So we're all in it to keep the league prosperous and moving forward and keep the games going. It doesn't matter what your team's doing you know, it's all about the league." Babe Ruthless, who is in the same league, learned the importance of the "league first" motto from first-hand experience: "It was very different when I tried out [in 2003], there was a lot of separatism between the teams. I knew my team members but I didn't know a soul on other teams. I had no relationship with them and it wasn't a very good feeling. It was always this feeling of us versus them." As a result of this experience, she said that she always reminds skaters, "We're a league first. You can't have a team if there's not a league." This quote demonstrates how doing it themselves requires rollergirls' avoidance of the win-at-all-cost attitude that creates divisions between athletes and teams in other sports.

In addition to discourse that stresses the necessity of cooperation, TXRD works to create bonds between skaters across team lines through social events involving the entire league. Bo Dacious said, "We hang out as a league a lot. Like we have monthly league meetings where the whole league is together and we talk business. Then we go out and we have an after-party. Once a year we have a league retreat and we all go camping. So we're all very close—it's family for sure."

FWDG recently took more drastic action to promote league unity. In order to eliminate a rift between teams, the members voted to restructure the league. Instead of the original structure—two teams that compete against each other within the league—they

created an “A” team and a “B” team to compete against other leagues in interleague bouts. Veruca Assault explained why the league did away with intraleague competitive bouts: “We wanna get rid of that separation. We wanna get rid of that ‘us against them’ mentality so that we all work together.” Hannibelle Lecter also felt that intraleague competition was detrimental to the league: It “intentionally creates a division in the league and it’s prevented the league from growing.”

Although roller girls contend that cooperation is necessary for league survival, the collective nature of the revival is more than instrumental. Nearly every roller girl that I interviewed talked about the importance of “community” within the sport. In fact, many roller girls enjoy being a part of the roller derby community as much as, if not more than, playing the sport itself. Molly Hatchet, when asked what she liked most about roller derby, responded:

It’s an instant community—like we have an amazing community of people. And it’s people that I would have never in a million years ordinarily been introduced to. . . . But because you’re in derby, with every type of person you can imagine, and you have to work together with them, it makes you give them a chance where you might not otherwise, and you make like 6,000 instant friends. It’s really an amazing experience.

Whereas Molly Hatchet talks about bonds she formed with women different than herself, Tonya Harding said that roller derby connected her with other women who were just like her—“outsiders” and “misfits”—for the first time in her life. Tonya became choked up as she discussed the roller derby “sisterhood”:

It sounds so cliché to say that this is a sisterhood, but it is an amazing sisterhood because you’re taking . . . a certain type of girl and you’re connecting her with others that are like her and for the first time. I get really, really emotional about this, but for the first time you actually feel like you’re a part of something that will touch you for the rest of your life and that you have made ties in your community and with people that are just like you. It is an awesome feeling.

For both Molly and Tonya, and nearly all of the roller girls I interviewed, roller derby illustrates sport’s potential to create strong social bonds between participants. As these two roller girls point out, roller derby forged connections between women that did not exist prior to the revival and would not exist without the community that has been built through women’s grassroots efforts.

This sense of community in roller derby extends beyond individual leagues. Although Molly Hatchet is surely exaggerating when she says she made “6,000 instant friends,” roller girls across the country are connected through interleague bouts and national tournaments, internet message boards, and an annual roller derby convention called Rollercon. Cleo Splatra talked about the national roller derby community: “You can go to other cities and go to their practices. You can go to other cities and sleep on

their floors or their couches or their beds. You can go to other cities and have rides from the airport, you know? It's amazing." Other skaters also told me about friendships they had developed with women in leagues in other cities.

Although these friendships are important to rollergirls, the relationship between leagues involves more than personal friendships. Roller derby leagues are competitors on the track in interleague bouts, but members of these leagues work together off the track to sustain and develop the sport. In addition to collectively controlling and operating WFTDA, established leagues share information with start-ups on numerous topics: training drills; insurance information; legal issues, such as how to form limited liability companies or obtain nonprofit status; and league policies. For example, Tonya Harding said FWDG received "a lot of help" from other leagues; thus, they recognize the importance of sharing what they have learned: "We're fostering relationships all over with other leagues and showing girls how to run a practice, how to run drills. 'Hey, you wanna see our attendance policy?' 'Hey, do you want this from us?' We share everything possible."

As the quotes in this section demonstrate, the success of leagues at the local level and the growth of sport at the national level depends on, and is the result of, women's collective labor and cooperation. Calling the driving ethic behind the revival the "DIY ethos" is somewhat misleading because it implies individualism. It is more accurate to say that rollergirls subscribe to a "do-it-ourselves ethos." Individual women inspired by the DIY philosophy may take the initiative to start a league, but the work required to sustain the league and produce roller derby bouts is performed by all the members of the league. Through their collective labor, rollergirls create, and actively work to maintain, social bonds among skaters in local leagues and at the national level.

Beyond the necessity of cooperation and the social bonds it creates, women's collective labor in roller derby also serves an important symbolic purpose: It challenges stereotypes about women's "cattiness" and inability to work together. Several rollergirls actually talked about this stereotype as if it was a truism. For example, one of Bo Dacious's responsibilities is handling skater disputes. When I asked her what kinds of arguments occur, she replied, "Oh you name it. I mean there's over a hundred women involved in roller derby and imagine what comes up. We're women, we fight, it happens." Bubble said, "I think there's always going to be drama in all the leagues—I mean when you get 70 women together (laughs) playing a high impact, you know mostly contact sport, yeah there's gonna be a lot of drama (laughs)." Molly Hatchet also said that "girls are very emotional" and "can be kind of catty."

Babe Ruthless acknowledges that fights do occur in roller derby and she worries that disputes within and between leagues could bolster negative stereotypes about women. She said,

I think my main my complaint about the evolution of all-girl roller derby is that there's some ugly shit that has come up that is the exact opposite of what this is all about. I mean, to me, I think we're defying the stereotype of what women are. You know, "Oh, women are petty. They can't work together, they're just gonna

cat fight, blah, blah.” We’re not. We’re a solid group of women that are running a really good business, having a lot of fun, and creating a family at the same time. And it really disgusts me that there are these leagues coming up that are not embracing that and they’re letting all of the stereotypes come true. I think that’s gonna be the fall of the roller derby, is that kind of attitude.

Of course, disputes occur within every organization. Yet, as Babe Ruthless points out, fights between women in organizations serve as “proof” of women’s inability to work together. Ruthless believes that women in roller derby leagues have the potential to counter this stereotype. She feels that her league accomplishes this by demonstrating that women can work together as a “solid group.” I would argue that the longevity of the other leagues I studied—TXRG is in its sixth year and FWDG its third—in addition to the continual growth of the roller derby revival as a whole, also serves to undermine the stereotype about women’s inability to work collectively.

## Women Owned, Women Operated

Women working together to build roller derby leagues does more than challenge a single stereotype—it subverts the gender regime that characterizes sport on the whole. Because most leagues are “skater owned, skater operated,” they are also “*women* owned, *women* operated.” Although some leagues, such as TXRD and FWDG, do allow men to sit on the board of directors, women still control a majority of the board. And because women comprise the majority of these leagues’ membership as well, they outnumber men in terms of voting power. Beyond the local organizations, women also manage and control the national governing body, which means they have power over the future direction of flat track roller derby.

That women’s control over roller derby makes the sport unique is not lost on rollergirls. The majority of skaters were reluctant to label roller derby as “feminist,” but those who did point to women’s power within the sport.<sup>10</sup> Beatrix Slaughter said,

I think it is [feminist]. I think for once women have a sport that they—the modern conception of roller derby, like the last 10 years or whatever—they have a sport that they really fashioned and so they can take the ownership over this and I think that’s really feminist. The fact that if it’s largely skater owned and operated, its women owned and operated typically.

Like Beatrix, other skaters talk about the importance of roller derby being a sport specifically for women. Although Cleo Splatra does not label roller derby as “feminist,” she does consider the sport to be “empowering.” When I asked why it was empowering, she replied,

The way it makes me feel is why it’s empowering. It makes me feel really strong and it gives me something that is my own and this is a sport that is for *women*.

We're not gonna be compared to anybody. We're not gonna be WNBA, you know? We are roller derby, we are women and that's who plays roller derby.

Cleo Splatra “loves” the fact that the current revival is for women only, as opposed to the coed teams in “old-school” roller derby, because it allows them to participate in a sport without being compared to or overshadowed by men. She went on to say that in other sports, like basketball, women’s leagues and team names signify their difference and that the women are considered second-class athletes.

Celia Fate’s personal experiences with male domination and being treated as second class in coed sports led her to join a women-only sport. She recounted her experience on a coed rowing team: “It felt like the men were valued more than the women. And that might be why I’m involved in a women’s only sport, now, having dealt with that. And it’s also really nice, I’ve never had a man tell me what to do on this league. And, um, I’m so awful at taking any sort of direction or authority from men. So it’s been good for me. I don’t have to deal with that issue.”

Unlike Riot Grrrl, which was a direct reaction to women’s marginalization within the male-dominated punk scene (Duncombe, 1997; Schilt & Zobl, 2008), the roller derby revival was not initially motivated by women’s marginalization within sport. Yet, regardless of the intent, the DIY ethic that has guided the revival pushed women to create a sport that they “own” and control. As a result, roller derby leagues provide a sport space where women can largely avoid the male domination and marginalization they experience in other sports.

Although leadership positions within the institution of sport are overwhelmingly filled by men, the “by the skaters, for the skaters” ethic in roller derby has allowed women access to positions of power within the sport organizations they created. Many of these women have never been involved in running organizations before, and through their participation they develop skills and confidence. This aspect of the revival is highlighted by Tonya Harding, cofounder of FWDG:

I’ve had many, many life lessons in the three seasons that I’ve been in it. I think that it’s been my college—I never went to college, I have a high school education and instantly had kids a year after I got out of high school so I never went back to school. I’m a hands-on type of person so the way that I think about roller derby is that it’s been my college.

When asked to describe what she learned, Tonya replied,

I have learned how to work with attorneys and accountants and basically build a non-profit organization. I’ve learned what it’s like to work with charities and watch where that money actually goes to—that’s amazing in itself. . . . I’ve learned how committees and organizations are run. I’ve learned how to create a business in the first year that had revenues of \$56,000. . . . So creating a business like that in the first year, that’s pretty huge I thought.

Angela McRobbie (1993) argues that young women's involvement in subculture can be an empowering experience, particularly because of the DIY ethic, which encourages participants to become cultural producers. Women's involvement in roller derby provides further support of McRobbie's argument while demonstrating that participation in DIY movements is also empowering for *adult* women. In the roller derby revival, it is the emphasis on doing it yourself that gives women opportunities to learn new skills and gain the confidence that comes from creating and sustaining organizations. Like in other DIY movements, participants do not need to be professionals or experts in order to produce culture. Tonya illustrates how this particular aspect of the DIY ethic encourages working-class women to become cultural producers, which in turn leads to skills that are applicable beyond roller derby.

### **Barriers to Doing It Yourself**

Despite all the benefits of being "skater owned and operated," following the DIY ethos is not without its challenges. The most frequently mentioned challenge, and rollergirls' biggest complaint about roller derby, is the enormous time commitment it requires. Like all athletes, rollergirls spend time practicing and competing, but on top of that they also do all the work required to run the leagues and produce the bouts. Although roller derby leagues rely on collective labor, not all the work is shared equally. Several rollergirls told me that it feels like "10 percent of the people do 90 percent of the work." Some rollergirls reported that they spend 20 to 30 hours per week on roller derby. Of course this work is in addition to their full-time "day jobs." Lockjaw even said participating in roller derby caused her to cut down on the number of paying jobs held: "I went from three jobs when I joined the roller derby to two jobs and then down to one job. Basically because you don't realize how much time it takes—it just really it's completely consuming. Yeah, it is a part-time job that you don't get paid for [laughs]." Obviously not all women have the option of cutting down on paid labor in order to devote more time to unpaid labor.

In addition to the time commitment, the cost of playing roller derby is a burden for some rollergirls. Two of the leagues that I studied charge monthly dues: Skaters in TXRD pay US\$25 per month and members of FWDG pay US\$40. Although members of TXRG are not required to pay monthly dues as long as they work 4 hours per month, they still spend a significant amount on their equipment. Beatrix Slaughter said roller derby is an "expensive pastime." When I asked her what she spends money on, she replied, "My uniform, all my equipment, which actually wears out on a fairly regular basis—mouth guards, helmets. I spend an inordinate amount of money on Band-Aids (laughs). I tape my feet before every practice—tape gets expensive, just stupid things you don't think about." Bounce Her also talked about the cost of equipment:

We have to pay for our own skates, we have to pay for our pads that we wear—we have to wear elbow and kneepads, mouth-guards, helmets, wristguards—we have to wear all that stuff and we have to pay for that. So a lot of people don't

understand that if your kneepad breaks you have to get a new one—you can't wear a broken one or not wear one. A lot of people don't understand how much they're going to be constantly putting into their skates or their equipment, period. Like I broke my plate on my skate and I had to get a new one and instantly that's you know the cheapest plate is about \$80. And for that to just be like "wham" out of nowhere . . . you know that's not something that you budget.

As Bounce Her points out, women on a tight budget cannot afford to replace broken equipment. Although working-class women do participate in roller derby, both the time and financial commitments involved are significant barriers to their participation. Ironically, it is the DIY ethic that provides opportunities for working-class women to run roller derby leagues without the formal education or experience required to occupy positions of power in other sport organizations; however, this same ethic produces constraints that potentially limit their participation in the sport.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Despite the aforementioned challenges, the roller derby leagues I studied and leagues around the country continue to be owned and operated by the participants. For most of these leagues, this is a necessity. Yet, as in other subcultural movements like punk and Riot Grrrl, doing it yourself is also a value that guides the revival. This is not to suggest a complete lack of ambivalence about following the DIY ethic. Due to the time commitment, the financial expenses, and frustration with the slow, democratic, decision-making process, rollergirls admit there are times when they wish a league owner paid them to skate. However, they also recognize that working for someone else would result in the loss of control over their athletic activity and the bouts they produce. By establishing leagues that operate according to a "by the skater, for the skater" ethic, rollergirls have created a model of nonalienated sport for women: They control their athletic activity, the labor that goes into running the leagues, and the roller derby bouts that are the product of this labor (Clever, 2009).

Women's control over the sport of roller derby is significant, considering men's hegemony within the institution of sport as a whole. Yet it is equally significant that rollergirls have built organizational forms that do not simply reproduce the hierarchical structures found in other sports. As scholars have pointed out, the examination of women's struggles for access to sport opportunities and leadership positions within sport organizations requires asking questions such as "Access to what?" and "Access for whom?" (Hargreaves, 1994; Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008). Although liberal feminist efforts to gain equality in sports have dramatically increased women's athletic opportunities, they have failed at achieving equity for women in terms of leadership positions. But even if women are able to achieve parity with men within existing sport organizations, the hierarchical structures that limit participant control over their athletic activity will remain intact. Moreover, critics of the liberal feminist approach argue that these struggles for equality tend to promote the interests of middle-class

women (Hargreaves, 1994). In contrast, the do-it-ourselves ethos in women's roller derby opens up access to positions of power within the sport's organizations for working-class women who may lack the professional credentials or experience required to run existing sport organizations. At the same time, the "by the skater, for the skater" ethic offers all of the participants a potential say in how their sport is organized. Feminist efforts to increase women's leadership positions within existing sport organizations should continue, but thinking about and discovering alternative ways of organizing sports is equally important (Birrell & Richter, 1994). As this case study demonstrates, the DIY ethic can serve as a tactic for producing nonalienated forms of sport by and for women.

It could be argued that I did not pay enough attention to the conflicts that arise from running leagues according to the DIY ethic. Although some of the quotes point to conflict that stems from being "skater owned, skater operated," I chose not to make this the focus of my analysis. This was not out of naïveté or because I think this conflict is entirely unimportant. Instead, I wanted to illuminate the fact that, despite the challenges involved in building a participant-controlled sport, women have established self-sustaining leagues and a national governing body through their collective, grass-roots efforts. Obviously, conflict occurs in every organization. Furthermore, a great deal of cultural discourse already focuses on conflict between women and thereby allegedly demonstrates women's "cattiness" and inability to work together. Within this cultural context, women's cooperative efforts to create and sustain a new sport provide a symbolic challenge to sexist stereotypes. In addition, the success of roller derby leagues demonstrates women's ability to work collectively to produce forms of sport that meet their needs (Birrell & Richter, 1994). That being said, additional research that focuses on the day-to-day operations of DIY sport organizations, including the types of conflict that occur within them, would be fruitful. What participants say about the DIY ethic is important, but what they do also requires examination. This research could help to further highlight the ways in which the DIY ethos does and does not live up to its radical potential.

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### **Notes**

1. In roller derby, skaters do not identify by their legal names; instead they invent creative pseudonyms that are used to identify them on the track. Although roller derby names are already pseudonyms, they serve as identifiers because they are listed on team websites and, in many cases, are linked to a photo. In order to capture the creative spirit of the

sport, I decided to use roller derby names, though not the participant's real one, throughout the paper as pseudonyms. I allowed the interviewee to choose a pseudonym for the report. In cases where participants declined to do so, I picked a pseudonym for them from the national registry of roller derby names.

2. Roller derby participants self-identify as "rollergirls."
3. Although "home" teams also compete in interleague bouts, only the all-star team bouts count toward leagues' official WFTDA (Women's Flat Track Derby Association) rankings.
4. Like other alternative sports (Wheaton, 2004), the overwhelming majority of roller derby participants are White. In interviews and informal conversations, both Black and White rollergirls attributed the lack of racial diversity to roller derby's connection to the punk scene.
5. I was told in several of the Fort Wayne interviews that the majority of skaters in FWDG (Fort Wayne Derby Girls) have children. At the bout I attended, I saw several children wearing t-shirts with their mother's roller derby name printed on the back.
6. Some leagues are limited liability companies that are owned by all the members. The founder of FWDG is the legal "owner" of the league, but a board of directors makes recommendations on financial and other major league decisions, which are then put to a league vote. Others, like TXRG (Texas Rollergirls), have nonprofit status, which means that league members are considered "volunteers" and not "owners."
7. Although skaters in all three leagues reported that major decisions are voted on by league members, they also said votes are not held for every single league decision. In the interest of streamlining the decision-making process, some decisions are left up to committee members. For example, the marketing committee chooses flyer designs without putting every design up for a league vote.
8. In Texas Rollergirls, only skaters are allowed to be league members, which means only skaters can be elected to positions on the board. Lonestar Rollergirls (TXRD) allows non-skaters, such as the men and women who help with bout production, to become league members and serve on the board of directors. The bylaws of FWDG stipulate that three members of their seven-member board of directors must be non-skaters. These three positions must include a local business owner, an attorney, and an accountant.
9. BGGW (Bad Girl Good Woman Productions) eventually changed the league name to TXRD, in addition to changing their organizational structure. Like TXRG, TXRD is now skater owned and operated.
10. As Jennifer Hargreaves (1994, p. 36) points out, "Sportswomen as a whole have not been enthusiastic feminists."

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## Bio

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