

THE PRODUCTION OF WOMEN ONLYNESS: WOMEN'S FLAT TRACK ROLLER
DERBY AND WOMEN-ONLY HOME IMPROVEMENT WORKSHOPS

By MICHELE KATHRYN DONNELLY, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Michele Kathryn Donnelly, B.A. (McGill University), M.A. (Queen's University) SUPERVISOR: Dr. Michael Atkinson

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on four years of ethnographic research of contemporary women-only social formations. Two women-only leisure activities, women's flat track roller derby and women-only home improvement workshops, were selected as sites through which to explore the research problem: problematizing contemporary women onlyness. The research problem is developed in direct contrast to the dominant (naturalized, essentialized, assumed) approach to women onlyness in the literature. Specifically, taking a fresh look at women-only social formations by problematizing women onlyness, through exploring women's experiences of and meaning making about women onlyness, calls critical attention to women onlyness. The analysis, informed by a conceptual framework that draws on Connell's concept of 'gender regime' and a CCCS-inspired approach to cultural production, reveals the ways that women participants are active in the production of women onlyness gender regimes. Specifically, women's flat track roller derby skaters and women-only home improvement workshop participants consistently and constantly negotiate essentialized stereotypes of gender as they "win space" for themselves in traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined activities and settings, and make meaning of their involvement in these women-only leisure activities. Women participants produce women onlyness gender regimes in the ways they make time and space for and gender mark these activities, and in social interactions with each other, men, and other women. They work to produce women onlyness gender regimes that are experienced as welcoming, supportive, and comfortable, and encourage women to develop expertise and relationships with other participants. Emphasizing these processes of production reveals that these women onlyness gender regimes are not the natural result of a women-only group or the exclusion of men. These findings contradict the tendency in the existing literature to naturalize women onlyness, and contribute to our understanding of contemporary women-only social formations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the early 2000s, I began to be aware of a seemingly increasing number of women-only activities. For my Master's thesis, I studied media representations of women skateboarders and snowboarders. Watching television programs, reading magazines and websites, I learned about a number of relatively new programs for girls and women within these sports, and the broader realm of "extreme" or action sports. Often, these were "learn to ride" instructional programs organized for girls and women to learn to snowboard, skateboard, bmx, surf, etc. in a group composed of only women. Many programs also advertised that girls and women would learn from women instructors. One of the first women-only action sport programs to gain media attention, primarily in snowboard and ski subculture and industry media outlets, was the Wild Women's Snowboard Camps developed by professional snowboarders Greta Gaines and Mary Simmons. At the Wild Women Camps, an entire weekend was carefully planned to promote positive experiences for women. The weekend consisted not only of snowboarding and instruction, but also attempts to create an atmosphere modeled on Gaines' and Simmons' shared summer camp experiences. Wild Women Campers, and women instructors, ate, rode, socialized, and stayed together.

Other examples of women-only programs, such as Girls Learn to Ride and Girls Get on Board, were organized as annual series' of clinics, offering a number of action sport experiences, held across the United States (and occasionally in Canada). At these clinics, girls and women learned from the top, typically professional, women riders in their sports. Instructors were often current or former team riders, sponsored by the major

action sports retailers such as OP and Etnies who also sponsored and/or organized the programs. Women-only activities in the world of action sports were not limited to recreational or aspiring athletes, and a few events were organized for professional women's snowboarders. One example is Shannon Dunn's P!Jamma Party, organized by professional snowboarder, Shannon Dunn, as a non-competitive event intended to showcase elite level women's snowboarders and facilitate socializing and networking among them. For a weekend, women riders received all of the attention from the media Dunn invited, and they recorded not only the snowboarding but also the social opportunity modeled on a stereotypical girls' activity: the sleepover. The women-only trend in action sports piqued my sociological imagination: why women-only and why now?

Reading Stravers' (2004) article, "'In Session' – Are women who attend female-only camps getting a better sports education – or are they just getting schooled?" in *SG: Surf, Snow, Skate Girl* magazine, confirmed that others had also identified the women-only trend. Also, Stravers (2004) revealed that there was no consensus in the action sports world about the value of these women-only programs. She raised issues similar to those raised by sociologists with respect to segregation. For example, do women benefit from the women-only environment (and if so, how do they benefit), or do women risk their involvement being limited to, and by, women-only activities? Following my preliminary exposure to women-only action sport programs, I noticed examples of "women onlyness" in many other activities. In New York I found a poster for Chicks With Picks, women-only ice climbing clinics, advertising "Women climbing with Women, for Women". In

the *Globe & Mail*, I read articles about the Dirty Girls, a women-only mountain biking group, women-only ski vacations, and women's running groups. In the space of a couple of years, I learned about many other women-only activities and groups, including: Habitat for Humanity's women-only program, Women Build; women-only garages and auto repair clinics; women-only gyms; BlogHer, a blogger community for women; women-only home improvement workshops; and roller derby's flat track, women-only revival. It seemed that once I began to consider women onlyness, I found examples everywhere.

It can be argued that women onlyness in activities and groups is sometimes implied, such as groups for mothers, book clubs or reading groups, or activities that are traditionally associated with women such as knitting. In other words, groups and activities that are composed or inclusive of women only are not always described or advertised as women-only. I soon realized that the women onlyness that most interested me was explicit. These groups and activities were named and promoted in ways that made it clear they were intended for women, and only women. Their women onlyness was made obvious through gender marking. Many activities and groups were "women-only", "for women only", or used different terms to reference women, such as "chicks", "ladies", and "girls". Through the terms and imagery used, groups and activities were named and promoted in ways that marked them almost unambiguously for women. I was also most interested in women onlyness that was organized in groups, as opposed to more individual-focused women-only offerings such as hotels or taxi services. In addition to

being explicitly women-only and group based, I noticed other commonalities among these women-only activities and groups.

First, the majority of women-only activities and groups that attracted my attention, and are explicitly women-only are in the realm of leisure. Specifically, these are activities unrelated to (most) women's paid work outside the home or unpaid work, including family responsibilities and other elements of domestic and reproductive labour for which women continue to be disproportionately responsible. These are activities in which women would participate primarily for fun and/or recreation. In order to participate, women would need to make time in potentially busy schedules full of work, family, and other obligations. In their analysis of the Red Hat Society¹, Stalp, Radina, and Lynch (2008: 335) claim, "Doing something just for fun, solely for fun, and not to donate time or raise money for a worthy cause runs counter to our gendered expectations for women... Women's voluntary organizations typically include a social service element, therefore the existence of [an explicitly and unapologetically] non productive organization for midlife women seems unusual". It is within this context – of gendered expectations – that women would make time to participate in the emerging social phenomenon I identify as "women-only leisure activities".

Second, many women-only leisure activity groups use individual activities such as snowboarding or home improvement, and make them into group activities in the form

¹ According to Stalp et al. (2008: 326), the Red Hat Society is comprised of groups of women around the world: "RHS membership requires neither social service nor volunteer hours from its members, and chapter activities vary according to self-defined fun. Attending meetings is optional...but dressing in red hats and purple clothing [for members fifty years of age or older] is highly recommended".

of, for example, workshops, clinics, camps, trips, and teams. Additionally, it seems that many women-only leisure activity groups advertise not only the activity, but also the experience of the group. Because the group experience advertised is with a group of women, many women-only leisure activity groups advertise the benefits of being with other women. This suggests that underpinning many women-only leisure activity groups are assumptions about women's common experiences and interests, and also that women's experiences and interests differ from men's. Assumptions about gender differences are further emphasized in women-only leisure activities that are organized with an instructional element, such as workshops and clinics. These activities generally employ assumptions about women's and men's different learning styles, and most advance the idea (and practice) of women learning with and from women. As a result, women are often participants and instructors. With respect to participation, most women-only leisure activity groups I have found are promoted as inclusive of all women. They do not differentiate among women based on skill level, experience, age, race or ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or any other categories of social difference, only gender.

Finally, many of these women-only leisure activity groups are organized in the traditionally men's sphere. More specifically, they offer women opportunities to participate in traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined leisure time activities. Interestingly, the women-only groups are often not women's lone option to participate in these activities. In fact, almost all women-only leisure activity groups I have learned about have similar, if not nearly identical, gender-integrated antecedents or contemporaries. For example, there are gender-integrated snowboarding courses, home

improvement workshops, and roller derby's previous (and some present day) incarnations were coed. Women could participate in these not gender segregated versions of the activities, and some women do. During my research, I have not found any leisure activity groups that are explicitly organized and advertised as "men-only" (though, of course, many leisure activity groups are implicitly men-only).

Based on all of these common characteristics of women-only leisure activities, I would characterize their women onlyness as a form of temporary, voluntary segregation. In other words, women choose to become involved in these women-only leisure activities and groups, in part, at least, because of their women onlyness. However, these are not entirely "free" choices. As Messner (2009: 20) reminds us, "what people see as individual...choices are in fact *bounded* and *shaped* by institutional constraints, they are given *meaning* by stubbornly persistent cultural belief systems about gender...and they are given force by deep emotional commitments to gender difference". It is these "institutional constraints", "stubbornly persistent belief systems", and "deep emotional commitments" that women must negotiate as they participate in women-only leisure activities, and actively engage in the social processes of producing women onlyness.

Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this dissertation, women onlyness is conceived of as a *local gender regime*. An institution or organization's gender regime, according to Connell (2005: 4), is "the patterning of gender relations in that institution, and especially the continuing pattern, which provides the structural context of particular relationships and individual practices. The same definition applies to the gender regime of a particular site

within an institution”. The gender divisions of labour and power in an organization are a gender regime’s most revealing patterns. More broadly, Connell (1987: 119) identifies a gender regime as the “intermediate level of social organization between one-to-one relationships between people and the society as a whole”. All gender regimes are contextually (historically, culturally) specific, because “The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. It can be changed, deliberately or otherwise, but it is no less powerful in its effects...for that. It confronts...as a social fact, which they have to come to terms with somehow” (Kessler, Ashenden, Connell and Dowsett, 1985: 42). Analyzing women onlyness as a gender regime emphasizes the dynamic, changing nature of gender relations within particular institutions and organizations, and also within different locations of an institution or organization. At the same time, employing the concept of gender regime allows for the recognition of the influence of structure, i.e., the established, enduring patterns of gender relations in a gender regime and the larger gender order. In order to explore a gender regime in a specific time, place, and organization, it is necessary to employ qualitative methods, such as the ethnographic methods used in this study. As Messner and Bozada-Deas (2009: 52) explain, “The idea that a gender regime is characterized by a ‘state of play’ is a way to get beyond static measurements that result from a quick snapshot of an organizational pyramid and understanding instead that organizations are always being created by people’s actions and discourse”.

In this dissertation, I refer to women onlyness as a *local* gender regime (or regimes) because of the small size of the groups studied, and their location within a web

of increasingly larger social organizations and institutions, as well as the gender order. Employing the concept of a gender regime makes it possible to look at only one institution at a time (Walby, 2004), and one location within an institution, while simultaneously recognizing that individuals and groups consistently find themselves in contact with multiple, often overlapping, gender regimes. Sometimes these gender regimes are complementary and sometimes contradictory. For example, it is possible to speak about the gender regime of one big box home improvement store within the larger institution of the company that owns the store, and also within the institution of the home improvement industry/home improvement practice. Similarly, the gender regime of one women's flat track roller derby league can be investigated, but also the gender regime of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) governing body, women's flat track roller derby more generally, and the gender regime of "sport" as a social institution. As such, it is also possible to explore a particular gender regime in detail, without assuming that all similar groups will produce the same gender regimes. Women onlyness, as a local gender regime, is inextricably related to the multiple gender regimes with which women are in contact every day. Each gender regime is also "part of the wider patterns, which also endure over time...I call these wider patterns the gender order of a society. The gender regimes of institutions usually correspond to the overall gender order, but may depart from it. This is important for change" (Connell, 2002: 54). It is particularly important, then, to develop an accurate picture of a gender regime, such as women onlyness, to understand its connections – of correspondence or otherwise – to larger institutions and organizations, and to the gender order.

The various women-only social formations I have identified are exceptionally interesting because of the contemporary context of gender relations that characterize the gender order in which they are emerging. Specifically, these are women-only leisure activity groups organized in traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined activities. These leisure activities – and especially their persistent historical and cultural construction as “for men” – are one gender regime in the web of gender regimes within which women negotiate the production of women onlyness. Further, it would appear that in the past few decades, the trajectory of the gender order – the “sum of gender regimes” in a society (Walby, 2004) – has been toward ever increasing gender integration. Specifically, changes in the structure, or patterns of gender relations, of the gender order that emerged as a result of second wave feminism challenged existing gender logics in two main ways. First, liberal feminists sought reforms that would recognize and ensure women’s equal rights with men, and “to obtain equal opportunities through legal and institutional frameworks that enable women to participate freely and equally in the public sphere. Underlying the claim for equal rights and opportunities is a presumption of sameness” (Parker, Fournier and Reedy, 2007: 96). Radical feminists chose a different approach that emphasized difference from, rather than sameness with men: “radical feminism does not seek to gain women ‘equal’ access to the public sphere, at least as defined by men, but rather to revalue the experiences of women in the private sphere...women’s liberation from patriarchy tends to be associated with a separatist agenda that seeks to free women from male science...and institutions” (Parker et al., 2007: 97). Broadly construed, these two main approaches to gender equality are,

respectively, integrationist and separatist. According to Whittier (1995: 63), for radical feminists separatism was an ideological principle: “forming alternative institutions for women outside of the dominant culture [separate from men was] primarily a strategy for achieving social change, rather than as an end in itself”.

Influenced by second wave feminism, there has been an overwhelming trend toward gender integration, which by no means has been successfully realized. However, current policy approaches, such as “gender mainstreaming”, continue to work toward gender equality in an integrated, rather than separatist form (cf. Rees, 2003). A gender integrationist approach to gender equality is perhaps most apparent in women’s increasing participation in all levels of education, and in the labour force. In fact, our current economy has come to rely on women’s participation in the paid workforce at all levels. At a much slower pace, there has been some change in women’s and men’s responsibility for domestic labour, although women are still responsible for the majority of reproductive and domestic labour. These are responsibilities they must now attempt to balance with the responsibilities of paid work, in a “double shift” (Hochschild, 1989, Stier and Lewin-Epstein, 2000). Increases in women’s participation in education, the labour force, and other areas that were traditionally the “men’s sphere”, are primarily the result of removing, to varying degrees, social and structural barriers that once excluded women.

In some cases, removing barriers to women’s participation has still resulted in separate structures. For example, in sport, separate gender structures were already in place. As barriers to women’s sport participation were removed, such as through appeals

to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or Title IX in the United States, there remain institutionalized, naturalized, separate gender structures. However, with few exceptions, parallel, women-only structures created to meet women's needs, and most often framed in essentialist terms with respect to women's and men's different needs or women's needs that are not met in structures developed by men, have been largely dismissed in contemporary North America. This is likely a result of recognition that "separate but equal" has rarely meant equal at all, and particularly negative associations in the United States because of the history of racial policies using this approach. Sport remains one of the few exceptions. Messner (2009: 154) claims, "most advocates of gender equity in sports in the U.S. have explicitly argued for *separate but equitable* athletic funding, leagues, and facilities for girls and women". Arguably, separatism continues to be more persistent in cultural activities. Pelak, Taylor and Whittier (1999: 164) note, "At the cultural level, the feminist social movement community has challenged cultural values, beliefs, and norms around gender and the gender order through building alternative social and cultural institutions for women outside mainstream institutions". Among the most commonly cited social and cultural institutions for women that exist today are women's shelters, publishing houses, and music labels and festivals.

This discussion of the context of contemporary women-only social formations, and women onliness as a gender regime, is not to suggest that they are feminist, or part of a women's social movement. If anything, women-only leisure activities seem to more accurately reflect Tasker and Negra's (2007: 2) description of postfeminist culture: "Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of

feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer...[and] emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment". However, that is not the point I want to make here. Rather, my goal is to emphasize that women's current participation in more areas of public life, and increasing gender integration in most areas of people's lives, make the separation of women-only social formations, and the production of women onlyness as a gender regime, more obvious and sociologically interesting.

Both men-only and women-only social formations have long histories in their respective traditional spheres, and these gender-segregated social formations have rarely been queried. There are few exceptions, for example, Heath's (2003) study of the Promise Keepers, and Freedman's (1979) analysis of 19th century Women's Clubs. These researchers have commonly adopted a social movement approach that has not questioned the gender-segregated organization of these groups. Almost invariably, women onlyness has been normalized and naturalized to the point of being invisible. Now, the emergence, or possibly the re-emergence, of new gender-segregated social formations among women demands attention. As I started to think about women onlyness, and attempted to problematize it, I could not find research that had done so. For the most part, women-only social formations have been described, but rarely analyzed or interpreted such that the production and reproduction of particular forms of women onlyness is exposed.

The concept of gender regimes is ideally suited to a study of women onlyness because it highlights the relational elements of gender in all institutions and

organizations, even those that are gender-segregated. Specifically, the relational principles on which gender is organized and patterned persist, in influential and meaningful ways, in women-only and men-only social formations. Connell (2002: 54) explains, “Not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on one side and men on the other. The relations may be indirect—mediated... Relationships may be among men, or among women, but are still gender relations”. The consistent and constant negotiation of these gender relations is a central characteristic of women onlyness gender regimes. In fact, in many ways, this study demonstrates it is the intentional, institutionalized (to varying degrees) absence of men from these groups and activities that calls attention to gender, and results in the production of particular forms of women onlyness. For example, the unusual organization of gender in these particular activities and settings – in relation to their dominant gender regimes – and women’s awareness of this, makes gender a topic of conversation. The “total exclusion” of one gender from any setting, including academic theories, Connell (2002: 55) claims, is “a powerful gender effect”. Additionally, Connell (1996) indicates, the absence of men means that more work needs to be done to establish gender differences. The processes of gender marking are explored in Chapter 4.

In addition to “indirect” or “mediated” gender relations – the gender relations between women and men in a gender-segregated social formation – I argue that women onlyness is also influenced by, and must negotiate, “ideal type” or stereotypical regimes of women onlyness. From the data I have collected, I have identified two main “ideal

type” women onlyness gender regimes²: 1) Sisterhood, a gender regime in which the absence of men is represented as the solution to eliminating all negative interactions among women, resulting in a supportive, positive environment and experience for all women; and 2) Mean girls, a gender regime in which the absence of men is represented as promoting a focus on men, and results in negative, “clique-y”, and competitive interactions among women. These “ideal type” gender regimes are a product of the culture industries, more so than individual women’s life experiences, appearing regularly in movies, television, magazines, books, etc. for women. Although these “ideal type” gender regimes are at odds with one another, they are each included in the cultural resources on which women draw in their production of women onlyness. According to Connell (1996: 214), “Gender regimes need not be internally coherent, and they are certainly subject to change”. And Hall (1981: 233) reminds us that cultural forms are “not whole and coherent”, rather they “are deeply contradictory; they play on contradictions, especially when they function in the domain of the ‘popular’”.

A major contribution of this dissertation is an analysis of the social processes involved in the production of a women onlyness gender regime in specific women-only social formations. For this, I draw on a cultural studies approach to cultural production, and specifically, an approach inspired by the work of researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). For Willis (1981: 59), “Cultural Production

² These are the two most common “ideal type” gender regimes that were apparent and influential in the women-only social formations studied for this project. However, these “ideal type” gender regimes are not exclusive to these women-only leisure activity groups, nor do they represent all possible “ideal type” gender regimes; other “ideal type” gender regimes may be identified in different groups and settings.

designates, at least in part, the creative use of discourses, meanings, materials, practices, and group processes to explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions in sets of general material possibilities. For oppressed groups, this is likely to include oppositional forms and cultural penetrations at particular sites or regions”. Producing a gender regime, such as women onlyness, is a process of cultural production, where “Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted” (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, 1976: 11). This approach to cultural production is useful for two main reasons: the emphasis on multiple levels of interaction and interconnection among cultures, and the recognition of social agency, in a dialectic relationship with social structure, as a crucial element of cultural production.

Many CCCS researchers interpreted cultural production, particularly in the case of youth subcultures, as a “cultural response or ‘solution’ to the problems posed for them by their material and social class position and experience” (Clarke et al., 1976: 15). Although their focus was exclusively on social class, it is possible to interpret the cultural production of women onlyness in a similar way. That is, women onlyness is one collective response of a group of women to negotiate a changing gender order at a time of rapid change. However, that change, while apparently re-distributing power between women and men, and opening up all kinds of opportunities for women, actually appears to change very little in terms of the structural relations between women and men. This is what CCCS researchers would call the “problematic”: “that matrix of problems, structures, opportunities and experiences which confront that particular class stratum at a

particular historical moment” (Clarke et al., 1976: 29). A subculture – much like a gender regime – must always be understood through (at least) a double articulation; they “must first be related to the ‘parent cultures’ of which they are a sub-set. But, sub-cultures must also be analysed in terms of their relation to the dominant culture—the overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole” (Clarke et al., 1976: 13). Correspondingly, “A local gender regime is likely to share many features with the gender order of the wider society, but may depart from it in specific ways—and in some circumstances may even reverse widespread patterns ... Similarly, a particular site may depart from the broad patterns of the institution that contains it” (Connell, 2005: 5). Following this approach, cultural production is never complete; rather, it is always in process. The same is also true of gender regimes: “The pattern [gender relations] assume in any society is produced by its particular history and is always in a process of transformation. Even when change is slow to the point of being invisible, the principle should be kept in mind, because it directs attention to the ways in which the patterns of gender are constantly being produced in everyday life” (Kessler et al., 1985: 45).

The social processes involved in the production of a women onlyness gender regime are both enabled and constrained not only by the gender regimes of institutions and organizations with which they are directly linked (e.g., a store within a company), but also by gender regimes associated with the family, work, and other social institutions in which women are also engaged, and the material and structural conditions of women’s lives. This study demonstrates that women are active agents in the production of women onlyness. Willis (1981: 51) claims, the processes of cultural production “involve agency

and collective activity, including perhaps as their most specific activity not passive positioning in discrete kinds of Reproduction (i.e. class or gender), but profane combinations and inversions of resources taken from these things; not helpless inhabitation of contradictions but active work on them”. Women onliness is not the automatic result of a women-only social formation, but is instead, a collective, dynamic, ongoing cultural production. Women work together to make meaning using the materials and conditions available to them. For both the CCCS researchers and Connell, social agency exists in a dialectic relationship with social structure: “A structure of relations [enduring or extensive patterns among social relations] does not mechanically determine how people or groups act...But a structure of relations certainly defines possibilities and consequences” (Connell, 2002: 55). To borrow from Marx, women may make their own history, but they do so not in conditions of their own choosing.

Together, Connell’s concept of gender regimes and a CCCS-inspired approach to cultural production serve as the conceptual framework of this dissertation. Although CCCS-affiliated researchers often offered analyses with many common characteristics, such as an emphasis on social class and attention to resistance in the (sub-)cultural practices of the groups they studied, I have limited my borrowing from this approach to the attention paid to subcultures or social formations *producing culture*. As I read it, this approach to cultural production aligns well with Connell’s concept of gender regimes. Specifically, culture, like a gender regime, is the result of ongoing, dynamic social processes, in which human beings are active social agents. Human beings use their agency to produce culture/gender regimes in relation (and sometimes response) to the

structural conditions of their lives, including the gender relations that characterize various gender regimes and the gender order, as well as other cultures and subcultures with which they are in constant contact. Cultural production – of subcultures and gender regimes – is both enabled and constrained by the material and cultural conditions of people’s lives, and the resources available to them. In the analysis that follows, women onlyness gender regimes are understood as the result of dynamic social processes of cultural production in which women participants are active agents.

Research Problem

Once I had identified the contemporary social phenomenon of women-only leisure activities, I was particularly interested in learning about women’s experiences, and the meanings women make of their experiences, in these gender-segregated social formations. When I sought relevant research about women-only social formations – across a variety of literatures – I was consistently disappointed. More accurately, based on my reading of the existing literature, I was concerned about the trend of researchers appearing to have essentialized gendered behaviours and/or left gendered behaviours unattended in ways that contribute to their naturalization. That is, stereotypically gendered assumptions about women-only social formations underpin much of this literature such that women onlyness is often presented as a product of women being together because that is the “way women are”. For example, women-only social formations are consistently described as supportive, non-competitive, and offering spaces in which women feel safe, secure, and often, empowered.

My concerns about this trend are related to the fact that this approach did not seem very sociological. Rather than exploring the organization of gender relations in women-only social formations, or the social interactions among women participants, or the connection between women's experiences of women-only social formations and the conditions of their everyday lives with a critical lens turned on women onliness, this approach serves to further naturalize women onliness and leaves it unexamined. I realized that very few, if any, researchers had problematized or raised questions about women onliness as a mode of organizing women's leisure time activities. Finally, the dominant approach in the existing literature did not sit well with me because it did not fit with my own experiences of women-only groups in a number of different settings such as classrooms and sports teams. These concerns led me to wonder: In an apparent era of gender integration, why was this naturalizing, essentializing, reifying, and making assumptions about the "way women are" – and particularly the way women are in groups with other women – going on in the research?

The research problem I address in this dissertation is developed in direct contrast to the dominant (naturalized, essentialized, assumed) approach to women onliness in the literature. Specifically, taking a fresh look at women-only social formations by problematizing women onliness, through exploring women's experiences of and meaning making about women onliness, calls critical attention to women onliness. This broad approach raises a number of related questions. For example, why, in an era of gender integration, is there an emergence (or reemergence) of women-only social formations? And, how are contemporary women-only social formations organized and

experienced? The former question – why – is beyond the scope of this research project. However, given the apparent extrapolation of women-only social formations, it is timely to problematize gendered, naturalized, essentialized, stereotypical assumptions about the “way women are”. I work to achieve this by calling attention to, and attempting to avoid perpetuating, these assumptions while exploring women’s experiences of contemporary women-only leisure activity groups. In short, problematizing contemporary women onlyness is the research problem that guides the research and analysis in this dissertation.

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to specific activities and groups as “women-only”, and to the production of local gender regimes called “women onlyness”. Although women-only social formations are referred to in various ways, I have chosen this terminology because it is the language most commonly used in the social formations I have identified. My intention is to problematize and interrogate the notion of women onlyness, and expose the underlying assumptions and prevailing discourses that support these women-only social formations. This is an ideal time to study women onlyness, as I had the opportunity to study cases of women-only leisure activities that are emerging rather than institutionalized and established. This allows me access to the processes of their production, as well as the conditions necessary for their production, and the ways these are negotiated by women participants.

To best explore women’s experiences and meaning making of contemporary women-only social formations, and problematize women onlyness, I chose a qualitative approach, and specifically, ethnography. In order to learn more about women onlyness

more generally, I selected two case studies for a comparative approach: Anon City Roller Girls' (ACRG) women's flat track roller derby, and Big Box Home Renovation's (BBHR) women-only home improvement workshops. Both ACRG and the women's workshops are women-only leisure activity groups organized outside the traditional women's sphere. In addition to sharing many characteristics with the women-only activities and groups described above, they are also activities in which women can participate in gender-integrated groups. In other words, BBHR offers weekly workshops that are not gender-segregated, i.e., designated or intended for men only. And roller derby was gender-integrated (coed) in its previous incarnations. As such, it would seem ideal for reemergence as a gender-integrated sport, but instead women have redefined roller derby as a women-only activity. Further, although gender is the major organizing principle of sport, roller derby is different from the other forms of "women onliness" in sport. Specifically, women (re-)invented and run roller derby, and there are specific regulations in effect to ensure that women skaters maintain control of the sport and their participation. The men who are beginning to play do so by formal and informal rules developed by women, for women. As such, women's flat track roller derby offers a possibly unique form of women onliness. Conversely, the women-only home improvement workshops serve as an exemplar of the various other educational or training types of women-only leisure activities (e.g., snowboarding camps, surf schools, climbing clinics). In this study, I demonstrate the similarities and differences in the women onliness gender regimes produced in these two women-only leisure activity case studies. I also identified two exclusion criteria that would allow me to select case studies and

examine the specific phenomenon in which I am interested. They are: the women onlyness of the activities is not organized in order to be ethnically or religiously appropriate for women (e.g., women-only swim times), nor is it implicit by virtue of the activity involved, rather than explicitly women-only (e.g., beading or knitting groups). ACRG and the women's workshops met these criteria.

The body of data collected in nearly four years of field research, including hundreds of hours of participant observation, could never be encompassed in a 300-page dissertation. It is necessary to focus on a single thesis and what emerged from this data I feel is a significant understanding of these women-only social formations, and contributes to a gap in the existing literature that is currently filled with naturalized, essentialized, stereotypical assumptions about women onlyness. Specifically, I reveal women participants' active role in the production of a gender regime – women onlyness – that is welcoming, supportive, and comfortable (for most participants and with limitations and expectations), as well as relational, self-conscious, and constantly negotiating essentialized stereotypes of gender.

In the following chapters, I first (Chapter 2) review existing literatures relevant to a study of women onlyness: Women and leisure; Women and sport and physical activity; Women and outdoor education, recreation, adventure programming; and Gender-segregated education; as well as Women and home improvement/do-it-yourself, and Women's flat track roller derby. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methods employed for this research, including selecting Anon City Roller Girls and BBHR's women's workshops as the two women-only leisure activity case studies, and specific ethnographic research

experiences of each, such as gaining and maintaining access, finding a role, building rapport, and taking fieldnotes. I also describe the interviews conducted, issues related to ethics and confidentiality, and the analysis conducted.

Chapter 4, *Women Onlyness In Relation*, is the first of two findings chapters, and introduces two major themes of this dissertation: 1) women participants' consistent and constant negotiation of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference to produce, justify, and maintain women onlyness gender regimes, and 2) women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness. In this chapter, I address the conditions necessary for the production of women onlyness gender regimes: space and time designated as women-only, gender marking such that who can and cannot participate is made clear, and strategies of gendered boundary maintenance used to enforce the women onlyness of ACRG and the women's workshops. In each of these conditions there is evidence of women participants' active role in producing women onlyness gender regimes. Specifically, women participants self-consciously produce and reproduce women onlyness in relation to men and essentialized stereotypes of gender difference, as well as in relation and response to dominant gender regimes in BBHR, the home improvement industry, flat track roller derby, and sport.

In Chapter 5, *Producing Women Onlyness*, I explore a third theme: a discourse of expertise, which in the production of women onlyness gender regimes operates in tandem with the two major themes from the previous chapter. In this chapter, I elaborate on the ways that women participants actively produce particular kinds of women onlyness through their explanations and justifications of their women-only leisure activities, as

well as in the types of social interactions they deem appropriate and inappropriate. The focus of this chapter is the micro-level production of women onlyness gender regimes through women participants' interactions with each other, as well as with other women and men. In the final chapter, Conclusion and Discussion, I summarize the findings, emphasize the contribution of this research, and suggest areas for future research. In order for readers to understand the context and organization of the Anon City Roller Girls and Big Box Home Improvement's women's workshops, detailed information about each of the case studies with respect to activity, participation, organization, and location is included in Appendix A.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

In this chapter, I include research from a number of different literatures that are each relevant to the study of women onlyness and, particularly, to the study of women onlyness through research of women-only leisure activities such as flat track roller derby and women-only home improvement workshops. This demonstrates that there is not one women onlyness literature, and, in fact, this literature review is potentially massive, as the phenomenon of women onlyness is raised explicitly and implicitly in many diverse literatures that address women's experiences. A major contribution of this research is to make explicit the research and analysis of women onlyness, and problematize the notion of women onlyness through an examination of the social processes of production of women onlyness – a particular form of gender regime – in two examples of women-only leisure activities. To date, women onlyness, and in particular the perceived benefits and limitations of women onlyness, are most often assumed rather than examined. Because of space limitations, I have chosen to include only a small number of literatures that are directly relevant to the topic and case studies addressed, and have attempted to stay as close as possible to the main themes of this dissertation. In the following sections, the literatures addressed are: Women and leisure; Women and sport and physical activity; Women and outdoor education, recreation, adventure programming; and Gender-segregated education. Following this, I include case study-specific sections on Women and home improvement/do-it-yourself, and Women's flat track roller derby. Common themes from these literatures that are directly relevant to the study of women onlyness as a gender regime are summarized in the concluding section.

Women and leisure

The women and leisure literature problematizes definitions of leisure that do not take into account women's and men's different leisure opportunities and experiences, and highlights the relationship between leisure and gender expectations. For example, Clarke and Critcher (in Aitchison, 2003: 46) argue, "Some meanings are so entrenched that leisure cannot but give them expression. Gender we argued to be so powerful a meaning that leisure has come to be one of its principal forms of celebration. At those moments in leisure when people feel and appear most free of social roles, they are in actuality most bound to rigid expectations of gender behaviour". Much of this literature is from a critical cultural studies tradition. From this literature, I adopt an approach to studying leisure-time activities that is sensitive to women's experiences of leisure, while avoiding a framework of constraint (Dixey, 1987) and structural analyses that fail to take into account women's agency, including the various ways women negotiate leisure time and space for themselves. Women's and men's leisure (space, time, activity) is necessarily relational, and researchers have called attention to the ways women's leisure has been determined by men. McIntosh (1981: 103, 104) claims, "Women's work reproduces men at work; women's work allows for men's 'existence time' or reproduction, and women's work produces leisure for men"; "It is certainly true that women themselves are constructed as leisure by men". Simply making or taking time for leisure, separate from family and work obligations, is a challenge for many women: "As studies of women's leisure continue to show, time synchronisation and time fragmentation dominate most women's lives, which has led to them taking 'snatched' spaces for leisure and

enjoyment” (Green, 1998: 111). This literature is rife with assumptions and claims about women’s shared experiences and interests. Missing from this literature are detailed, qualitative accounts of the ways that women make space and time for women-only leisure activities, as well as the designation of particular spaces and times for women-only activities, and the processes of producing women onliness within those activities.

Of particular interest in this literature are the many studies that make reference to women enjoying time together (outside of or in the home), and the many ways that women’s leisure time (with other women) must be negotiated and justified. According to Deem (1986: 50),

Much of women’s leisure takes place in all-women contexts. Of course much male leisure also takes place in single-sex environments but conventional wisdom has often argued, particularly as an attack on feminism, that women do not like the company of other women, whereas men actively need and seek out the company of other men. However, the available evidence suggests that women also seek out the company of other women.

Women’s communal leisure, such as membership in voluntary organizations, has been justified by being gender appropriate, for example, associated with learning something useful, or with caring and traditionally/appropriately feminine activities (Stalp et al., 2008). At the same time, women have fun participating in a wide range of leisure activities (e.g., bingo, flower arranging, walking, travelling, going to movies, book clubs, staying in), and consistently describe their experiences of “having a laugh” with other women, while they remain “serious” about the task at hand (Deem, 1983; Miranda & Yerkes, 1983; Dixey, 1987; Talbot, 1988; O’Neill, 1993; Green, 1998; Long, 2003).

Women’s accounts of their leisure, i.e., explanations or justifications of leisure activities as, for example, “productive” or “serious” shed light on the ways women make meaning

of these activities, often in relation to stereotypes of essential gender differences.

Another consistent finding in this literature is the ways that men figure in women's descriptions of their women-only leisure activities and experiences. Women tend to be very conscious of the absence of men, and the effects this has on their experiences of participation, including their opportunities to participate, and the types of activities in which they participate (Miranda & Yerkes, 1983; Deem, 1986; O'Neill, 1993). This self-consciousness of women onlyness (in leisure activities) exists in spite of Deem's (1986: 50) claim that "Much of women's leisure takes place in all-women contexts". Women-only home improvement workshop participants and roller derby skaters also discuss men (and particularly the absence of men), as well as laughing a lot and maintaining serious commitments to the activities in which they participate (developing their skills, promoting and maintaining their activities, etc.). Green (1998: 119) argues that women's experiences of leisure with other women – in "the company of women" – can lead to "a recognition of female diversity and the empowering aspects of a shared leisure experience which also serves to 'unmask' enduring gender stereotypes". Rather than relying on unproblematized assumptions about essential gender difference (i.e., assuming that women onlyness is a product of women being together because they are women) to make claims about women onlyness, analysis of specific case studies of women-only leisure activities must explore the processes of production and reproduction of women onlyness, and the ways that women negotiate essentialisms in those processes.

Women and sport and physical activity

There exists an extensive literature on women and sport and physical activity,

although research relevant to the study of women onlyness comprises only a small portion. This is perhaps not surprising because gender is the key organizing principle of sport (women playing with women, men playing with men, and sometimes women and men playing differently); there is nothing unusual or remarkable about gender-segregated sport participation. “Sex segregation is such an ingrained part of athletics at every skill level that it rarely draws attention, much less protest” (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008: 8). According to McDonagh and Pappano (2008: 7), sport organization in the United States (and Canada as well) “is based on a principle of coercive sex segregation” that “does *not* reflect actual sex differences in athletic ability, but instead constructs and enforces a flawed premise that females are inherently athletically inferior to males”. Sociologists of sport have identified that notions of essential gender difference are produced and reproduced in sport (and physical activity), especially related to sport’s traditional role as a “school for masculinity”. In his study of youth sport, Messner (2009: 20) reveals, “Adults’ views of children commonly oscillate between two apparently contradictory beliefs—that girls and boys should have equal opportunities, and that girls and boys are naturally different. Soft essentialism, as an emergent ideology, negotiates the tensions between these two beliefs”. Due to sport’s historically gender-segregated organization, “ideas and strategies for equal opportunity for girls are being carved out within a ‘separate-but-equal,’ sex-segregated context” (Messner, 2009: 21). Messner (2009: 171) speculates, “As sex segregation breaks down or disappears in many areas of social life, perhaps the institutional homes of essentialism, because of the psychological security and pleasure it brings, tend to migrate to particular social sites, like youth sports, where

continued sex-segregation of bodily practices makes gender difference particularly salient”. Messner’s (2009) findings are some of the most recent that demonstrate the continued relevance of, and the extent to which the gender-segregated organization of sport has been naturalized.

For my purposes here, relevant literature is presented in two main categories: 1) research of the organization of sport (administration, management) as women only, and 2) research of participation in women-only sports and physical activities. Separating participation from organization is admittedly an artificial division; however, it is useful for organizing the existing findings, and demonstrates the ways that the production of women onliness has been addressed almost exclusively with respect to organization. In flat track roller derby, women onliness is relevant to both organization and participation. Flat track roller derby is gender-segregated, and the vast majority of leagues are women only. However, roller derby is a unique case study because it has no history of gender segregation; previous incarnations were consistently coed³. In addition, the redefinition of roller derby, beginning in the 2000s, involves not only the sport itself, but also its organization and management. In particular, most leagues adopt a commitment to “by the skaters, for the skaters”, such that women are the skaters (participation) and primary decision makers (organization).

Organization, administration, management

Gender difference is most obviously produced and reproduced through the organization of sport, specifically, organizing separate women’s and men’s sports, and

³ A more detailed history of roller derby’s history and current revival is included in the section, “*A very brief history of roller derby*” in Appendix A.

also the tradition – continued in some sports, such as hockey – of “girls’ rules for girls’ sports” (Theberge, 1998; Kidd, 1996). The existing women and sport and physical activity literature includes more research and analysis of the organization of women’s sport and issues relevant to women onliness, such as gender segregation and separatism (the formal production of women-only sport) than does the participation-focused literature (in which the production of women-only sport and physical activity is rarely addressed). With respect to the organization of women’s sport in North America, the historical context, particularly the periods following WWI through the 1920s in Canada and the 1960s through the 1980s in the United States, is well documented. Overall, the literature reveals a consistent lack of consensus about how women’s sport should be organized – in relation to the organization of men’s sport – and, often, different means were proposed to achieve similar ends *or* the same means were proposed to achieve different ends (Kidd, 1996: 124). Birrell (1984: 25, 26-27) identifies the dominant question about separatism (not exclusive to discussions of women and sport): “are women’s interests best served through separate or integrated structures?”, and introduces an important distinction between ideological separation and structural separation:

it is my contention that while liberal pluralism is an accepted element in American democracy, in reality liberal pluralism means that America will tolerate alternative structures but not alternative ideologies. . . In order for real change to occur, it is clear, structural separatism alone is never sufficient; ideological separatism, i.e., a distinctive ideology, must accompany it.

In the case of women’s sport, structural separatism refers to separate groups or associations in charge of organizing women’s physical activity and sport, often composed of women. These groups assume responsibility for the practical and material elements of

this organization, for example, deciding who should be involved and how. These groups may or may not be ideologically separate from men's sport organizations. Ideological separatism for women's sport organizations consistently refers to adopting an approach to sport that is intentionally different from, oppositional or alternative to the "male model of sport", and which seeks different outcomes for women's sport participation. Debates about the relative merits of structural and ideological separatism, and of separatism at all, are constant features of the history of women and sport in North America.

Hall (2002: 42) refers to the period post-WWI through the 1920s as the "golden age" of women's sport. In addition to increased participation and competition, women administrators and leaders took control of women's sport. Kidd's (1996) study of Canadian sport details this time period, with a focus on women's sport leaders and organizers. Both Kidd (1996) and Hall (2002) identify two main positions in the ongoing debate about separatism. The first is characterized as, "A girl for every team; a team for every girl", and promoted girls' and women's participation in recreational and instructional sport and physical activity, i.e., at play days to the exclusion of competition and other values associated with the "male model" of sport. The second position is characterized by a commitment to competition (at all levels), and the development of highly skilled women athletes. The former position, according to Kidd (1996: 123), demonstrates a "curious blend of protective and progressive impulses, held together by a desire for female advancement within women's-only institutions", and relied on assumptions about essential physical, as well as social and psychological gender differences. The protective impulse was arguably regressive, restricting women's

involvement in sport and physical activity, while the progressive impulse is how Kidd (1996: 124) views the “search for less dehumanizing, more inclusive alternatives” for girls and women, and the attempts to make the most effective use of very limited resources available for women’s sport in schools. It is important to recognize that organizers adhering to each of these positions contribute to the production of different versions of women-only sport. That is, particular women-only sport cultures are not the “natural” result of being all women, either run by women and/or women as participants.

During this time, the Women’s Amateur Athletic Federation (WAAF) developed and served as the national organizing body for women’s sport participation. Women from across Canada served the WAAF in various administrative capacities, often while actively competing as athletes in a variety of sports. All of the women Kidd (1996: 134) interviewed “stressed the double-sidedness of their relationships with the men, the desire for autonomy coexisting with the need for advice and support”. The WAAF’s activities often elicited strain, not only between women and men, but also among the women

as they brought different ideological perspectives, interests, and tactical considerations to bear. Was the project of ‘girls’ sport run by girls’ undermined by financial, technical, and administrative reliance on men? Or conversely, did too much autonomy jeopardize the necessary male support? If a women’s club was coached and sponsored by men, who should vote at association meetings? And what about ‘male advisers’? (Kidd, 1996: 134).

The WAAF and its member organizations debated these issues continuously throughout their existence without agreement. Then, during WWII, the WAAF collapsed, and everything the women had worked so hard to build ended. The efforts of the women involved in the WAAF were so effectively forgotten that Kidd (1996: 144) claims, “When second wave feminism began to make its voices heard in demands for better,

more numerous opportunities, young athletes... had to start the task of women's organizing all over again, as if WAAF's control of women's sports and the networks they created had never existed".

In the United States, unlike Canada, women were involved almost exclusively in school-based sport, and not also in community sport (Kidd, 1996: 144). Thus, debates about separatism are very similar, but in the U.S., they were limited to the education system, and particularly, the college system⁴. Women organized the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1971 "as an all-women organization which offered an alternative model of sport to women" (Birrell & Richter, 1987: 396), and promoted "A sport for every girl and every girl in a sport". For ten years, the AIAW was structurally and ideologically separate from the organizing body for men's collegiate sport, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Members of the AIAW were ideologically committed to developing student athletes, and avoiding the commercialization (and other perceived downfalls) of their male counterparts. The AIAW was a gender separate structure, in which "all resources material and human [are] expended on women, but women gain experiences in leadership often denied them in integrated structures. Moreover, it stands to reason that structures administered by women for women are more likely to be responsive to the needs of women" (Birrell, 1984: 26). However, as women's sport became more popular and more lucrative, the NCAA took over control of women's collegiate sport, and the AIAW folded in 1982.

⁴ Similar parallel women's and men's sport organizations also existed in the Canadian university system, for example, the Ontario Women's Interuniversity Athletic Association (OWIAA) and Ontario University Athletic Association (OUAA).

Birrell (1984: 25) explains, “As an accommodated class women located in integrated structures must continually legitimate our actions and our very presence to those who control those structures, and invariably those people are male”. When the NCAA assumed control of women’s sport, men replaced the vast majority of women administrators and coaches, and women’s control of women’s collegiate sport effectively ended (Acosta and Carpenter, 2006).

Though separated by nearly eight decades, there are many similarities between the experiences of Canadian women’s sport organizers in the ‘golden age’ and the organization of flat track roller derby in the 2000s. Specifically, a small number of women (relative to the number of participants) take on leadership roles at both local and (inter)national levels. With few exceptions, these women are both active skaters and team/league organizers. When Kidd (1996: 110) describes “the early female organizers” as “able, resourceful, and determined. They worked extremely hard, arranging schedules, hiring officials, arbitrating disputes, publicizing events in the little time they had after work and, in some cases, child-rearing and familial responsibilities”, he could have been writing about women involved in contemporary roller derby. The importance of friendships with other women emphasized by Kidd’s (1996) interviewees is also characteristic of roller derby; skaters often describe the social aspects of their involvement as invaluable. Flat track roller derby skaters, like earlier women’s sport organizers, demonstrate a commitment to inclusion; often describing roller derby as a sport where all women have a place, regardless of shape, size, ability, and experience. Finally, like the organizers Kidd (1996: 109) studied, women’s flat track roller derby

includes men in some roles (e.g., announcers, referees), but women continue to maintain control of the leagues and governing bodies⁵. Like the WFTDA, the WAAF and AIAW were involved in the process of formally producing women-only sport and physical activity. Revealed in the historical accounts of these women's sport organizations is the ways that women in these organizations variously accepted, rejected, and negotiated gender essentialisms in their production of particular forms of women-only sport and physical activity.

GetFit (a women-only gym franchise) is a case study of the formal (or organizational level) production of a women-only physical activity experience, specifically the 'feminization' of women's gym experiences in a women-only gym setting (Craig and Liberti, 2004, 2007). Craig and Liberti (2007: 696-697) argue that GetFit gyms are gendered through technology and labour, not through their women-only organization; and drawing on Britton (2000), they interrogate, rather than assume, processes of feminization. They claim, "As a single-gender organization that rested on the assumption that women's fitness needs were different from those of men, gender division was built into GetFit's organizational logic. However, the feminized culture of nonjudgmental and noncompetitive sociability did not arise merely from the absence of men" (Craig and Liberti, 2007: 682). Women-only gyms are the fastest growing segment of the fitness industry (Monson, 2006; Craig and Liberti, 2007), and these businesses often rely on essentialist explanations, such as assumptions about safety and support,

⁵ This is exemplified in the Women's Flat Track Roller Derby Association's (WFTDA) rules that skaters be majority owners and managers of teams or leagues, where skaters are defined as "female quad skaters" (www.wftda.com).

camaraderie and comfort in women-only settings, to justify their existence. Specifically, women's GetFit gym experiences are feminized because the company works to promote a sense of community among women. For Craig and Liberti (2007: 684), this is closely tied to a culture of sociability, in which working out is organized as a social activity through facilitating and encouraging socializing.

In addition to promoting feelings of community and essentialist ideas of femininity, GetFit gyms further promote dominant gender ideologies through the performances of employees that serve to level the difference between themselves and gym members. Employees fill a position of authority without training or expertise that would differentiate them from members (Craig and Liberti, 2004). Craig and Liberti (2004: 6) assert

the leveling of difference reproduces gender ideologies in which women are naturally non-threatening, non-athletic, non-expert, and non-competitive—but they are nice. In this construction a women's gymnasium is necessarily a space for the people who dislike exercise. It is a gym whose use requires no training and no special competence and whose equipment is so simple that women are encouraged to engage in conversation and childlike play while working out.

Craig and Liberti's study of GetFit draws attention to the processes of producing a feminized gym experience, beyond the organization of a women-only gym. That is, they emphasize that women-only gyms will not necessarily offer a feminized experience, and demonstrate the ways that technology and labour are mobilized at GetFit gyms to feminize the experience. Missing from Craig and Liberti's analysis is a sense of women participants' involvement in the production of a feminized gym experience, i.e., the ways in which women GetFit gym members contribute to or counteract the company's attempts to feminize their gym experiences.

Drawing on this, it is important to understand the ways in which women onlyness is produced – both formally (at the organizational level) and informally (among participants) – in flat track roller derby and women-only home improvement workshops. Craig and Liberti's (2004, 2007) study of GetFit does not address one important element relevant to roller derby: competition. In fact, women in the GetFit gyms are encouraged to *not* be competitive with one another, and though all of the women participate in one space, Craig and Liberti (2004, 2007) identify that this is a way of almost distracting women from their physical activity, rather than encouraging their skill, strength, and fitness development. Sisjord's (2007) study of a women-only snowboarding camp run by the Norwegian Snowboarding Association (NSA) offers an analysis of women onlyness in an elite, competitive sport setting. According to the NSA, there is a "common understanding that girls are in need of girl-specific initiatives" (in Sisjord, 2007: 3), and, in this case, women onlyness is employed as a strategy to promote the development of greater skills and confidence among female athletes. Skills and confidence developed at the female-only snowboarding camp are intended to benefit these athletes in competition situations, and to benefit the NSA through better performance in international competitions. The athletes in Sisjord's (2007) research reported favourably about their experiences, though her findings are limited by the fact that she was only able to observe one female-only snowboarding camp at which attendance was limited. In Sisjord's (2007) analysis, it is not clear how the snowboarders themselves contributed to the production of women onlyness, and their own positive experiences, at the snowboard camp. This is the norm in research of women's experiences of women-only individual and team sport

participation, and seems to demonstrate, again, the ways that gender segregated sport participation has been naturalized and normalized, and thus (assumptions about) women oneliness remains unexplored.

Participation

Kidd (1996: 144) claims, “‘Women’s sports run by women’ is so utopian an ideal that it cannot be imagined. As a result, girls and women struggle to develop identities of healthy womanhood in a cultural practice largely controlled by males and steeped in discourses of masculinity”. The suggestion is that the “male model of sport” is so naturalized and normalized that it is difficult for women to imagine and/or organize alternative models of sport. The implicit assumption is that women could, would, or should organize an alternative. Theberge (1998: 185) argues, “One of the most contentious issues in discussions of gender and sport is the question of gender integration”; a question with no easy answer because “Depending on the material and ideological context in which it occurs, segregation can be a vehicle for continued oppression or a strategy to enable resistance and transformation”. Consistently in their critical analyses of sport, and particularly of the commercialized, professionalized, militarized, “win at all costs”, “no pain no gain” male/masculine model of sport, it seems that sociologists of sport have made an implicit assumption: women’s sport (or a female model of sport) would offer something different, and, typically, something better. For example, case studies of women’s sport, such as Theberge’s (2000) long-term qualitative study of a women’s hockey team and Wood and Danylchuk’s (2010) qualitative study of women golfers, appear to be underpinned by an assumption of difference (whether

natural/essential or socialized).

In other examples, when Wheatley (1994) reveals that women rugby players sing the same lewd, sexually explicit rugby songs as the men (even with some elements of parody), and Young and White (1995) offer evidence that elite-level women athletes adopt similar attitudes about physical danger, injury, and aggression as men athletes, there is perhaps a tone of disappointment, or at least paradox. Young and White (1995: 56) explain that women's presence is undeniable, "On one hand, women are clearly participating in, even colonizing, traditionally male-exclusive spaces in sport". However, it seems the results of that presence are unanticipated: "On the other hand, many such spaces are being occupied by women who, rather than contributing to a deliberate or organized reconstruction in the meanings of sport, appear to be contributing to a male-defined sports process replete with violent, excessive, and health-compromising characteristics" (Young and White, 1995: 56). Why is there an expectation that women athletes, including those who are adamantly not feminist, will engage in reconstruction or transformation of sport? Women's involvement in sport, and particularly competitive and/or elite-level sport, challenges established gender norms, yet in spite of this, it is possible that an expectation exists that women's involvement will be stereotypically or essentially feminine. Giese (2000: 86), from outside the sociology of sport community, observes of professional and elite-level women's sport, "it's both demeaning and infantilizing to assign women's sports the chore of cleaning up the industry".

There are few examples of studies of women's sport participation that are directly relevant here. Birrell and Richter's (1987: 396) study of women's softball, and

specifically, “one community’s attempts to shape sport into a practice which has relevance within their lives as those lives are informed by feminism”. This study is an example for *Participation* because Birrell and Richter’s (1987) participants made decisions related to the operation of their own teams, and their conduct and social interactions with teammates and others (e.g., umpires), but they did not take charge of or affect the organization of the league. That is, unlike the examples of women organizing sport and physical activity for themselves (included above), these feminist softball players attempted to transform their experiences of an already existing sport opportunity. In fact, their approach to softball, identified by Birrell and Richter (1987) as attempts by some participants to develop a “feminist model of sport” was often the basis for conflict experienced with other teams and officials. Interviews and observation revealed that the feminist softball players were critical of the “male model of sport”, and “These criticisms serve as a blueprint for the changes they were putting into practice: a form of softball that is process oriented, collective, supportive, inclusive, and infused with an ethic of care. In the process of creating these oppositional meanings for sport, feminists claim as their own, territory long inhabited only by men” (Birrell and Richter, 1987: 408).

What Birrell and Richter (1987) contribute that is missing in much of the participation literature is a sense of how feminist softball players actively produce a form of feminist softball, even within a larger organization (the league) that is not feminist. Their attention to production is apparent in the claim: “We argue that this is a feminist alternative less because these solutions are unique to women than because women have laboured to produce them” (Birrell and Richter, 1987: 408). For most women,

participation in sport and physical activity is not feminist or explicitly political. However, that participation might still produce an ‘alternative’ model of sport. For example, Wood and Danylchuk (2010, n.p.) found that women golfers “created a group culture that was in direct opposition to a dominant way of playing golf”. As a result, similar attention to production, for example, of women onlyness in a variety of sports and physical activities – in place of assumptions and essentialisms – is warranted. It is important to note that women onlyness, such as that found in GetFit gyms or at women’s softball games, does not necessarily (or naturally) result in a supportive environment for women (as evidenced by Birrell and Richter’s (1987) participants’ pre-transformation experiences), or offer an alternative to men’s sport and physical activity.

Women and outdoor education, recreation, adventure programming

The field of outdoor education, recreation, and adventure programming is one of the few where women onlyness has been consistently raised, specifically through the promotion and, to a far lesser extent, the assessment of women-only programs (e.g., canoe, camping, hiking trips). Starting in the 1980s, practitioners and researchers turned their attention to women’s increasing participation in a variety of activities classified as ‘outdoor recreation’ (cf., Henderson, 1992). Miranda and Yerkes (1983: 19) claim, “one aspect of the increase in women’s participation has been the popularity of programs which are exclusively female...It is clear that they are meeting the needs of a large and increasing clientele”. In this literature, particularly among practitioners (e.g., program developers and operators, guides, instructors), women are typically treated as a “special population”, and women’s needs are described in essentialist terms (and assumed to be

qualitatively different than men's needs), but rarely explained.

Warren (1990: 411) identifies women-only outdoor programming as a “significant development in adventure education”, and claims, “Adventure leaders must recognize that a woman's experience in the wilderness is unique and that programming should correspond to this different perspective”. She argues that simply enrolling women in established programs and hiring women instructors is insufficient to meet women's special needs (Warren, 1990); although this seems to be the most common type of women-only program offering. In particular, women are perceived to learn differently than men, to experience nature differently than men, and to seek different outdoor experiences than men. Miranda and Yerkes (1983: 20) are alone in asking, “What...accounts for the demand for all-women outdoor adventure experiences when there is a widespread availability of programs run for coed groups?”, and recognize, “This is not a question that would be raised about an all-male outdoor adventure experience. The general culture assumes in the case of men that there is nothing to be explained”.

Though the literature contains discussion of program structures, and explanations of women-only outdoor programming, McDermott (2004: 298) points out “the lack of empirical research examining assertions made in the literature and by female-run outdoor travel programs regarding the empowering benefits of single-gender outdoor experiences”. McDermott (2004) contributes to the primarily quantitative, survey-based data with a qualitative research project exploring women's physicality and their experiences of women-only canoe trips. In place of research conducted about “the

reasons underlying women's decisions to do such experiences, what they get from them and how this relates to their physicalities" (McDermott, 2004: 288), the literature is composed primarily of assumptions and practitioners' personal experiences of women-only programs. Among the most common claims made about women-only programs are: they are non-competitive, and women support each other's learning as well as supporting each other as individuals; women work with, rather than against, nature; when participating in outdoor programs, women develop a sense of community; women are or feel secure and safe in women-only settings; and women are empowered by their women-only outdoor experiences. To an extent, findings from the existing survey research, and McDermott's (2004) qualitative research, support these claims, though there are important limitations that need to be considered.

Miranda and Yerkes (1983: 19) sent surveys to women who had participated in women-only outdoor programs, and received the majority of responses from privately run businesses. Their respondent demographics are similar to those of other studies, and so I present them in detail:

The participants in this study were predominantly single, educated, middle to upper-middle class women. Ninety-three percent were white and 81 percent came from urban settings. Their ages ranged from 19 to 66 years old... Seventy percent were employed professionals... Eighty-seven percent worked outside the home with 70 percent of these holding full-time positions. Their educational level was high and correlated with their employment status (Miranda and Yerkes, 1983: 20).

Hornibrook, Brinkert, Parry, Seimens, Mitten, and Priest (1997: 153) conducted survey research of women who had completed one-day to three-week long programs with Woodswomen, Inc., and found, "In accordance with earlier studies... the most important reasons for participating were the exclusivity of women to the program and the sense of

community that resulted”. In her qualitative study of women-only wilderness canoe trips, McDermott (2004: 289) identified three major themes in women’s stated reasons for choosing a women-only trip: “the opportunity to meet and be with other women; their perceived sense of ‘equality’ in a single-gender setting; and their preference for a female-only setting for learning and performing the physical skills encompassing canoeing”. Concerns about women-only programs attracting “angry radical feminists or lesbian women” were expressed by 22% of Hornibrook et al.’s (1997: 156) respondents, “but they changed and were generally pleasantly surprised how much they had in common with other participants”. And though “the concern is often expressed that women, by confining themselves to exclusively female groups, may narrow their experiences or fail to achieve as much as they might in mixed groups” (Miranda and Yerkes, 1983: 20), studies reveal that women often find that women-only programs allow them to overcome gender socialization that would make them more timid, less willing to try new things and learn new skills, less willing to take on leadership roles, and less able to take full advantage of their outdoor experiences in mixed gender groups (McDermott, 2004; Hornibrook et al., 1997; Loeffler, 1997; Warren, 1990; Miranda & Yerkes, 1983). Ultimately, Miranda and Yerkes (1983: 20) found that among their respondents “the preference for all-female outdoor adventures remained high regardless of age, level of experience, or amount of previous experience in mixed groups”.

McDermott (2004: 297) warns, “Simply having an all-female setting will not necessarily engender this sense of community and support ...the politics of gender *have* to be understood in order to create an environment that resists dominant gender

ideologies”. She claims the canoeists (who did not identify as feminists) “began this themselves through their recognition of gender differences (e.g., equality, division of labour, physical skill performance)”, but that the structure and delivery of the experience (by the women-run outfitters and trip guides) were crucial to the specific environment developed (McDermott, 2004: 297). In this sense, McDermott (2004) acknowledges the production of a particular kind of women onlyness on these women-only canoe trips (characterized by mutual support and a sense of community). However, she does not elaborate on the ways that the canoeists themselves were involved in this production, i.e., the ways that they accepted, promoted, or challenged the guides’ version of women onlyness.

In addition to the attention paid to women onlyness, the outdoor education, recreation, adventure programming literature is relevant to the study of flat track roller derby and women-only home improvement workshops because of the instructional/educational elements involved (learning through experience outdoors-related skills such as camping, canoeing, survival), and because the outdoors and related activities are traditionally perceived as men’s domain, and masculine pursuits (McDermott, 2004; Henderson, 1992; Warren, 1990). However, there are a number of limitations to this literature. First, in these activities, the notion of escape, and women taking or making time for themselves is often limited to middle and upper middle class women. Miranda and Yerkes (1983: 22) claim, “From the perspective of the women themselves, the need [for all-women adventure programs] is very real, but only the more affluent have the power to act upon it. Those in less advantageous circumstances will find

little available”. Hornibrook et al. (1997: 158) found, “those with high school education reported the most perceived benefits but were represented the least”⁶. It is possible that socioeconomic barriers to participation in outdoor programs (determining who can and who does participate) are relevant with respect to women’s experiences of, and the kinds of women onlyness produced in these activities. With respect to comparing women-only outdoor programs to other women-only leisure activities, a second limitation is the ‘nature’ of outdoor programs, which often last from a full day to a few weeks, and take place somewhere ‘away’, often at some distance, from a woman’s daily life. As a result, women must have a significant amount of time and likely other resources to devote to their participation. Though there is some suggestion that women bring important elements of their experiences back to their ‘regular’ lives – e.g., increased pride in women generally, increased willingness to try new things (Pohl, Borrie & Patterson, 2000; Yerkes & Miranda, 1983) – they have to be able to afford the experience in the first place. Flat track roller derby and women-only home improvement workshops do not afford women participants the same physical separation from their everyday lives that outdoor program participants experience, and they are more accessible to a more diverse group of women.

Gender-segregated education

As demonstrated in the outdoor education, recreation, adventure programming literature, many women-only leisure activities have an instructional or education

⁶ This finding, about who benefits most from gender-segregated outdoor experiences, is similar to Riordan’s (2007) that students who are “historically or traditionally disadvantaged” benefit most from gender-segregated education (included in the *Single-sex education* section).

component; they are organized with the intention of having women learn to do something (e.g., snowboard, do-it-yourself, canoe, etc.). In ACRG, women's flat track roller derby is not explicitly a "learn to" women-only activity. However, because of its short history (starting in the 2000s), nobody has roller derby experience, and therefore, all participants must learn the skills and rules (and the cultural norms, language, etc.) of this (re-)emerging sport. The existing research of single-sex education is almost exclusively concerned with formal education settings, from elementary school through college and university. In spite of this, research findings about single-sex education and, particularly, schools and classes that are organized for girls or women, are relevant to understanding the aspect of women-only leisure activities as instructional/education environments. Specifically, in this literature, it is apparent that instructional/education settings are sites in which gender differences are essentialized, often in the promotion of arguments for gender-segregated education, and particularly with respect to perceptions about girls' needs in school settings.

The existing literature comprises two main debates. The first is a primarily ideological debate (though sometimes couched in the language of pedagogy) about the appropriateness and legality of gender-segregated education. The second debate is about research findings and whether they demonstrate (or not) benefits (variously defined and measured) of gender-segregated education. With respect to the debate about benefits, findings remain inconclusive and there is no consensus in the literature. I will return to this debate after a brief discussion of the arguments both for and against gender-segregated education.

According to Streitmatter (1999: 25, 31), “The original consequence of single-sex schooling was that of isolation, social reproduction, and oppression of women”, and early forms of education in the United States included “curriculum content...designed to reinforce social, rather than academic, expectations for women”. Gender-segregated education for girls and women was not intended to develop academic interests and skills but rather, to prepare for gendered social roles as wives and mothers. Though gender-segregated education (classes and schools) is typically presented as a pedagogical decision, made to support the learning of the students involved, Mael (1998) and Riordan (2007) emphasize that coeducation in the United States developed as a result of economic, not educational, considerations. Gender-segregated education continues to be a contentious issue, particularly at publicly funded institutions.

On one side of this debate, proponents argue that gender-segregated education allows girls and women to learn in a more supportive, safer environment, and free from the biases that permeate education organized on a patriarchal model. Often these arguments are supported with claims about essential gender differences in ways of knowing and learning that can only be addressed by organizing separate education for girls and boys. On the other side of this debate, opponents argue that gender-segregated education cannot adequately prepare girls and boys for the real (coed) world, and for social interactions with the other gender. Others express concerns that gender-segregated education has the potential to perpetuate gendered stereotypes, as well as traditional inequalities and, specifically, that girls-only schools and classes risk receiving fewer resources. According to Connors (in Streitmatter, 1999: 21), “Isolation of females is a

dangerous action that further perpetuates a separate but unequal climate”. Underpinning arguments on both sides of this debate are assumptions about gender differences, sometimes based on socialization though often essentialized, and particularly that all-girl classes and schools will be different (for better or worse) than coeducational or all-boy classes and schools, simply due to the absence of boys. Missing from much of this literature is attention to the production of particular kinds of all-girl education (or girl onliness), and the roles of girl students themselves in that production.

Since Title IX was enacted in the United States in 1972, establishing gender-segregated schools and classes is federally prohibited. Though, as Mael (1998: 102) indicates, “Title IX was designed to compensate for sex discrimination and inequitable resource allotment found *within* coeducational institutions; negative policies toward [single-sex] schooling because of Title IX were only an afterthought”. However, Riordan (2007: 415) claims, in this environment, “Many people regard coeducation as a major milestone in the pursuit of gender equality. Single-sex education, by contrast appears regressive”, and Mael (1998: 102) states that gender-segregated education “is regarded by some as anachronistic or reactionary”. It is more rare for single-sex education to be recognized as an attempt at “affirmative action and reparation” (Streitmatter, 1999: 119).

In Canada, most gender-segregated schools have been, and continue to be, private schools. Sanford and Blair (2002) detail the long history of a small number of Canadian private girls’ schools, and the more recent introduction of private schools like Linden School in Toronto (established in the early 1990s, it is promoted as a “woman-centred school”). In Canada’s public school system, proponents developed a number of gender-

segregated classrooms and programs in the mid-1990s (most in Western Canada), often in response to studies demonstrating the failings of education for girls (e.g., boys receiving more attention and encouragement, taking up more time and space in classrooms, harassment of girls, etc.). Sanford and Blair (2002) studied three single-sex programs in Western Canadian public schools and concluded, “In terms of policy, we think that it is fair to say that these programs were developed and continue to operate, not on established policy, but rather on local working policies.” To date, in Canada, “single sex programs in public education have not been challenged at any level of jurisprudence” (Sanford and Blair, 2002). And if legal action were taken, it would have to draw on Canada’s human rights legislation, rather than a specific law such as Title IX.

Debates about the legality of gender-segregated education are focused almost exclusively on schools and programs that receive public funding⁷. As such, these debates are not directly relevant to the two case studies for this project. Neither Anon City Roller Girls nor BBHR’s women’s home improvement workshops receive public funding. Nonetheless, these debates are interesting because they tell us about the ideologies associated with gender segregation, and about dominant (government/legal) approaches to remedying gender inequality (in this case, gender inequality in education). With some limited exceptions, it seems that those responsible for the provision of public education in North America have adopted a gender-integrated, or gender mainstreaming approach, rather than a “separate but equal” approach to gender equity.

⁷ According to Title IX: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”.

The second major debate in the existing literature on gender-segregated education is about the benefits to students of gender-segregated education. Primarily quantitative research has been conducted to test for a variety of outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, self confidence, career path, etc.). Qualitative studies are more rare but, like Streitmatter (1999), usually find that girls, for the most part, enjoy and benefit from the experience of gender-segregated schools or gender-segregated classrooms in coeducational schools. Ultimately, there is no consensus about the benefits of gender-segregated education (though there is consensus that there are few, if any, negative consequences). One widely supported finding is Riordan's (2007) claim that benefits of gender-segregated education are typically limited to "historically or traditionally disadvantaged" students. With respect to gender, Riordan (2007: 419) contends,

During the 1970s and 1980s, female students benefited from single-sex schools regardless of their social class position because they were historically and traditionally disadvantaged in school. Sometime during the 1980s, and clearly by the 1990s, this historical disadvantage for females in schools had been remediated...As a result of this transformation, I now argue that only females of low socioeconomic status are likely to show significant gains (along with boys) in single-sex schools.

Gender-segregated education, Riordan's (2007: 420) findings indicate, has little influence on the academic achievement of affluent or advantaged students, girls or boys. Riordan's research is particularly important because it redresses a methodological limitation of much existing gender-segregated education research. Mael (1998: 106) explains, "Because of the virtual nonexistence of public SS [single-sex] schools and the paucity of public SS colleges, at least in the United States, SS schools used for comparison are most often private schools". Students at gender-segregated private schools tend to be from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds, and/or are more religiously homogeneous than

students at coed (public) schools, and these differences with respect to student body are often confounded in the findings about gender-segregated education. As women in traditionally male-dominated and masculine-defined activities, participants at BBHR's women-only home improvement workshops, and in ACRG (as skaters in a contact sport, and organizers and managers of a sports league), are "historically or traditionally disadvantaged". Perhaps this accounts, in some ways, for the women-only development, and/or women's positive experiences, of these activities. It is important to note that the ways that women onliness (or girl onliness) is produced, and the ways this results in positive outcomes and experiences for girls and women students, is not addressed in the education literature.

Deem's (1983) research of women and popular education offers analysis of instructional or educational activities more akin to women's flat track roller derby and women-only home improvement workshops, because they occur outside the realm of formal education. She explains, "This form, or rather forms, is not schooling, not compulsory, not organized primarily by the state, and is almost entirely conducted in single-sex groups. The education so provided can be considered 'popular' because women have organized it for themselves, albeit with some help from outside agencies" (Deem, 1983:107). Deem (1983: 107) identifies as "popular education" activities developed on the premise "that women share certain interests and hold a common position in society, particularly in the home, the family and community". Deem builds on her previous research of women and leisure when she lists reasons why women are attracted to forming and joining women's organizations and clubs. Specific to the

education component of the groups discussed, Deem (1983: 109) claims, “That men are more willing to allow women to attend educational or ‘caring’ or ‘home-making’ activities than alternative social activities such as dancing, mixed events or pubs”; “there are relatively few other places where women may meet socially with other women”; expected behaviours of women in public places “apply much less to educational contexts and women-only groups”; and “Women are self-interested in education”. The four groups included in this research are women-only, hold regularly scheduled meetings in public meeting places, “and all set out to transmit knowledges of various kinds to their members” (Deem, 1983: 110). Participants at women-only home improvement workshops are explicitly engaged in learning skills that will benefit others (most often, family members). As such, women at the workshops learn something ‘useful’, home-oriented, and, at the same time, account for their use of ‘men’s tools’ (by developing their expertise in a pseudo-formal educational setting). Women’s flat track roller derby does not meet many of the criteria Deem (1983) identifies, although ACRG’s (and many other leagues’) Community Service committee, and commitment to ‘giving back’ contributes to the roller derby experience a sense of ‘doing something useful’, and participating in appropriately feminine forms of caring, while having fun.

One of Deem’s (1983) findings that is particularly relevant to the study of contemporary women-only leisure activities is about the potentially oppositional or progressive character of women-only groups. She claims that such groups, “whilst avoiding some of the problems of male language domination, do not necessarily take on an oppositional character and do not always challenge the sexual division of labour,

either through activities or through their existence as groups of women, even though to set up those groups may have represented a successful struggle over male dominance of certain women” (Deem, 1983: 118). Watson (1997), in a small-scale study of why girls in New Zealand choose gender-segregated schools, also identifies limitations to girls-only schools’ potential to be oppositional or feminist. Specifically, she draws attention to ways in which dominant discourses of proper femininity are often adopted by and in girls-only schools, and “may serve to reproduce the gender inequalities they are perceived to be able to subvert” (Watson, 1997: 382). Mael (1998: 113) also cites “evidence that even some [single-sex] schools are not immune to catering to stereotypic female limitations in some subjects”. It is crucial, then, to understand how women make meaning of their participation in women-only leisure activities, rather than assuming that these activities (and the women-only spaces in which they take place) work to challenge gender norms. To this end, more attention to the production of girl/women onliness, for example, with respect to how girls and women negotiate stereotypes of essential gender differences, and engage (or not) feminist discourses, is warranted.

Even when gender-segregated education, formal or informal/popular, is not oppositional or feminist, the girls and women involved still tend to be acutely aware of the women onliness of these settings; the absence of boys/men, and the perceived results of their absence, are noticed and discussed. In each of the girls-only classrooms Streitmatter (1999: 122) studied, “regardless of the teacher’s intent, despite the lack of intentional feminist ideologies or pedagogies, the girls constructed places/cultures where they began to think about themselves as females within a male culture”. When

Streitmatter (1999) identifies the “construction of place/culture”, she reveals that girls (and teachers) are actively involved in the production of particular kinds of girl onlyness in these classes. She explains that this “construction” was accomplished because girls felt a sense of belonging, involvement, and mutual understanding in their interactions with other girls in the classroom. Streitmatter (1999: 126) consistently refers to the development of a girls’ culture, and argues, “Whether or not we choose to call the girls-only classes embodying aspects of a women’s culture, it appears that the young women believed that their girls-only classrooms were special places where they could take risks, be ‘in the front’, grow as math or science students, and in general have a respite from their struggle to be heard or valued”. Streitmatter (1999) is one of the few researchers whose findings shed light on the production of girl onlyness, i.e., as opposed to assuming that the environment of a girls-only classroom is the “natural” result of being all girls. However, it is likely that her reliance on interviews (with girls and teachers) does not allow Streitmatter (1999) to address the social processes of production, and specifically, the ways that girls negotiate gender essentialisms in the production of girl-only places/cultures. Without attending to these processes, it is more likely that the girl-only places/cultures produced appear to be a natural result of the all-girl environments in which they are developed.

Women and home improvement/do-it-yourself

In 2008, Kay Hymowitz proclaimed in a *Wall Street Journal* article that the “home improvement industry...is going designer pink” (W11). Citing the proliferation of pink tools, tool belts, construction boots, and related do-it-yourself equipment, as well as

books, videos, radio shows, and websites targeted at women, she is critical of claims about radical change associated with women's increased involvement in home improvement. The actors driving this trend, she argues, are

less interested in expanding career opportunities for women than in enlarging the traditional art of homemaking. Not so long ago, custom limited women's activities in that area to cleaning, sewing, cooking and perhaps a few crafts projects for those with extra time on their hands. Installing smoke alarms and reconfiguring a closet are simply an extension of the old domestic urge... It seems that you can take women out of the kitchen and nursery, but you can't take them out of the nest (Hymowitz, 2008: W11).

Though Hymowitz's (2008) skepticism might be well founded, even though it is grounded in essentialist notions of domestic, maternal femininity, her representation of the history of women's participation in home improvement is more simplistic than that presented by academics who have studied home improvement and do-it-yourself.

Do-it-yourself or DIY is a term used in the literature to refer to more than home improvement projects, yet this is the most popular usage of do-it-yourself. There is not one definition of do-it-yourself, and in his attempt, Edwards (2006: 11) demonstrates the complexity of defining do-it-yourself: DIY is "both a producing and a consuming culture. The 'raw materials' that are worked upon by amateurs are transformed and manipulated into an artefact which is then consumed by them and their family. It is also more than this. DIY represents the individual through self-expression and a sense of self-worth; it may be a pastime or a hobby; and it is good 'husbandry' or 'housewifery' as it is usually practical, thrifty and often self-sufficient". Though, at times, people (particularly working- and middle-class families) have relied on do-it-yourself as a necessary part of 'building' their home and a related sense of social status, this is not often the case today.

According to Atkinson (2006: 5), with the “economics of global-scale mass production”, “it is no surprise that DIY today is often not seen to be a necessity of any kind, and can only make sense if it is seen instead as a leisure pursuit or lifestyle choice”. It is on this definition of do-it-yourself home improvement as a leisure pursuit that I draw in identifying women-only home improvement workshops as leisure activities.

The literature on home improvement/do-it-yourself is sparse, and Melchionne (1999: 254) identifies reasons why DIY has been neglected in cultural theory: “do-it-yourselfing, at least in the incarnation of home improvement, is the purview of the most politically uninteresting group out there: largely white, middle-class, child-rearing, middle-aged homeowners and working-class people with middle-class ambitions”. Class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age – as well as gender – are all significant in the study of DIY home improvement. “Whether seen to be conspicuous consumption, emulation, self preservation or self-expression,” Atkinson (2006: 9) concludes, “DIY remains very clearly an intrinsic part of the material culture of everyday life”.

The relationship between do-it-yourself home improvement and dominant understandings of masculinity has developed throughout the history of DIY. According to the existing literature, there are two primary gendered constructions of do-it-yourself home improvement: first, do-it-yourself home improvement as a masculine practice, and a requirement for all husbands; and second, as a bonding activity for couples and families (Atkinson, 2006; Browne, 2000; Gelber, 1997). However, in the latter construction, a distinction has often been made between softer (feminine) do-it-yourself home improvement activities such as decorating, and harder (masculine) activities such as

building and using power tools; not all DIY home improvement pursuits are created equal. And Edwards (2006: 19) found that “there are many who still distinguish between soft (decorative) DIY and hard (structural) DIY with its gendered stereotypes”. According to Gelber (1997), following the separation of women and men into public and private spheres associated with industrialization, do-it-yourself allowed men to return to the home. He claims, “By taking over chores previously done by professionals, the do-it-yourselfer created a new place for himself inside the house. In theory it overlapped with a widening female household sphere, but in practice it was sufficiently distinct so that by the end of the 1950s the very term ‘do-it-yourself’ would become part of the definition of suburban husbanding” (Gelber, 1997: 67).

During the 1930s and 1940s opportunities for women to learn and participate in do-it-yourself increased. However, in spite of the “steady expansion throughout the twentieth century of the kinds of do-it-yourself tasks women were willing to take on”, according to Gelber (1997: 67-68), “in most cases, wives limited themselves to helping their handyman husbands and acting as an appreciative audience to their household triumphs”. During the Second World War, “Every woman her own handyman” was promoted in magazine articles featuring women using tools, and through “adult education classes for women...so that they could nurse their ailing homes and appliances for the duration” (Gelber, 1997: 91). However, like much of women’s non-traditional work (paid and unpaid) during the war, for many women, their involvement in do-it-yourself home improvement reverted after the war to more appropriately feminine pursuits.

Gelber (1997: 99) claims, “the changes in do-it-yourself during the 1950s

continued to enlarge the spheres of both men and women, but it was men who cemented their position as home handyman while at best, women expanded their role as assistant handyman. Women were now free to help with home improvements if they wanted to, but men were expected to”. Men’s do-it-yourself competence contributed to (or detracted from) their masculine identity, while women were able to choose to help their husbands. Due to the lack of available information, and the emphasis in DIY magazines and advertisements on heterosexual couples and nuclear families, Gelber (1997) and others do not mention single women or lesbian involvement in do-it-yourself home improvement. Browne (2000: 137-139) identifies differences in the representation of women and men in do-it-yourself magazines, “The female DIY consumer was seen to be active in the softer areas of painting, decorating, tiling and applying plastic coverings... Women were rarely shown DIYing, though, which suggests the product manufacturers behind the advertising saw women’s role as primarily designers and decision-makers”. DIY magazines and advertisements only tell part of the story, and Browne (2000: 133-135) suggests, “women in working-class/lower-middle-class households were more active than just being selectors of products within this particular field of domestic consumption and they were certainly not passive consumers”. The broad range of topics covered at BBHR’s women-only home improvement workshops, and Hymowitz’s (2008) claims about the “pinking” of do-it-yourself home improvement, seem to offer evidence that women in the twenty-first century participate in ever increasing ways in both the “softer” and “harder” areas of do-it-yourself home improvement.

Women's flat track roller derby

Roller derby has received very little academic attention. Before 2000, passing references to roller derby typically equate it with other spectacular or staged sports, such as professional wrestling, and highlight roller derby's aggression and violence, and appeal to "lower" class audiences (for example, Wilson, 2002). The few academic articles published to date about women's flat track roller derby consistently emphasize the participants' femininity, appearances, and the performance elements that are common in many, though not all, leagues. For example, using derby names, face make up, and sometimes "sexy" or revealing uniforms. Contemporary roller derby's women-only organization is always included in this literature; however, it is rarely interrogated or problematized. Beginning with Cohen (2008), researchers have used ethnographic research methods to study roller derby as a site for the performance of alternative femininities, or the development of an alternative sport. Following one season of skating and covert research with the Boston Derby Dames, Cohen (2008: 33) concludes, in roller derby "sex sells and the sporting-self is sacrificed". Apart from the methodological issues, Cohen's (2008) analysis is rather one-dimensional, and does not allow for necessary contradictions and complexities, relying instead on dichotomies such as "athletic" or "sexy", and "sport" or "entertainment". Similar themes, including the relationship between women's flat track roller derby and third wave feminism, and reinforcing and/or transgressing ("playing with") gender norms, have been explored in a number of unpublished conference papers.

Carlson (2010) offers a more nuanced analysis of the Nowhere Roller Girls, the

league with which she conducted participant observation research. According to Carlson (2010: 430), roller derby skaters critically engage emphasized femininity, and she uses the term “female signifiant” to “suggest that skaters engage in practices that do not necessarily abolish norms surrounding gender and athleticism so much as expose their contingency”. By revealing and reveling in “contradictions within femininity”, skaters challenge dominant gender norms. Finley (2010: 382) also emphasizes intragender relations between femininities as “ a source of interactional change in gender relations”, or “gender maneuvering”. She claims, “social relations between women create contexts where the resources and collaborations among women can support gender maneuvering” (Finley, 2010: 382). In these contexts, “Gender is preserved but redefined and altered” (Finley, 2010: 383). Though both Carlson (2010) and Finley (2010) conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews, both of their analyses seem to emphasize appearance and performance, over and above the social world of roller derby. Like that identified in the Women and sport and physical activity section above, there is a sense in the small roller derby literature that researchers have high expectations for women’s flat track roller derby: because it is organized and defined primarily by women, it must offer something different than other leisure pursuits (particularly sports) for women. When the differences are not complete (i.e., they are overlaid with contradictions and ambiguities), or not what the researcher hoped, the disappointment is apparent. It is also true that women’s flat track roller derby – as an emerging, rapidly growing sport – is changing more quickly than academics can keep up with, and what works for some leagues does not work for others. For example, Cohen’s (2008) concerns about revealing uniforms and

“sexy” rather than “athletic” photographs on bout posters are no longer relevant, as the Boston Derby Dames now skate in traditional sport jerseys and feature roller derby action shots on their posters. As such, it is important not to make broad generalizations about women’s flat track roller derby based on research of only one league. In this respect, attention to the social processes of the production of a women onlyness gender regime of ACRG – a snapshot of a dynamic “state of play” of gender relations – and comparison with the gender regime of the BBHR women’s workshops, is necessarily recognized as contextually (historically and culturally) specific.

Conclusion

Due to space constraints, this literature review is very focused. However, across the literatures included, there are a number of common themes that are specifically relevant to the study of women onlyness being undertaken. First, there is no consensus about the value of women onlyness. However, debates about organizing the social formations reviewed (leisure, sport and physical activity, outdoor programming, education) in gender-segregated ways – for women only – are consistent and constant in these literatures. Drawing on empirical evidence, personal experiences, and ‘common sense’ understandings, debates address women onlyness itself (as a product), the perceived benefits or limitations of women onlyness, as well as the degrees and types of women onlyness (e.g., structural or ideological). Generally in these literatures, researchers emphasize beneficial, positive experiences of women onlyness, and downplay or refute arguments opposing women onlyness.

Many researchers adopting a social capital approach do exactly the opposite when they highlight negative consequences of women onlyness in “bonding groups” or “voluntary associations”, and make only passing references to potential benefits. For example, Norris and Inglehart (2006: 94) do not elaborate on “positive spin-offs” in their claim, “gender-related bonding groups, where women talk to women and men talk to men, can have positive spin-offs for individuals, for groups, and for society. But at the same time, gender-based bonding groups can have negative externalities; for example, by isolating women from opportunities in the public sphere and reinforcing their role in the private sphere”. Popielarz (1999: 247) finds that “all female voluntary organizations” contribute to inequality and social isolation, but concludes, “For traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women, segregated environments guarantee at least some members positions of power within the group and the chance to be mentors and role models...Homogeneity in women’s groups also fosters dense and emotionally close enclaves within which women may reap the benefits of social support”. Within and beyond the literatures reviewed, the value of women onlyness is contested.

Underpinning all discussions of women onlyness are notions of gender difference, and as demonstrated above, these are often assumptions about essential gender differences used to explain or justify women onlyness. Some researchers, and the subjects of their research, explicitly or implicitly draw on stereotypes of gender difference in analyses and discussions of women onlyness; for example, that women and men are interested in different activities, and learn and interact in different ways. This acceptance

of stereotypes⁸ reveals that the organization and experiences of women onlyness are necessarily relational; they are organized in relation to men, and understood with respect to the absence of men, and perceptions of the ways that men's presence would change the activities and experiences. Further, the widespread adoption of essentialized, stereotypical, gendered assumptions reveals the ways that women onlyness is naturalized, and that naturalization is perpetuated in the research of women-only social formations. Also apparent across these literatures is girls' and women's self-consciousness of women onlyness. Missing from the literature is a sense of how women negotiate stereotypes of essential gender difference and the ways that women's self-consciousness of women onlyness is mobilized in the production of different kinds of women onlyness. Women onlyness, in these literatures, is most often presented as a result of an activity being women-only; little attention is paid to the active production of women onlyness by participants in the organization and experience of these activities. In fact, little attention (and especially critical attention) is paid to women onlyness at all.

Across these literatures, it is evident that women onlyness can take different forms, such as transforming women's experiences of sport to meet feminist goals, or reinforcing more traditional gender arrangements. Women onlyness, some researchers recognize, is not necessarily oppositional or progressive. However, more detailed exploration of the processes of producing women onlyness, in its various forms, and women's active role as social agents in those processes, is warranted. Employing

⁸ It is likely that the limited language available, that of stereotypes, which relies on forms of discourse that emphasize difference rather than similarity, almost obliges both researchers and research participants to also emphasize and exaggerate difference.

Connell's concept of a dynamic "gender regime" that is necessarily culturally and historically specific, as well as institutionally and locally specific, is instructive with respect to revealing the ways that gender relations are organized, and women onlyness produced, in ACRG at the BBHR women's workshops. Problematizing contemporary women onlyness by using Connell's concept of gender regimes is an approach that does not allow for the perpetuation of assumptions that particular gender relations are natural, essential, or universal. It is to that project I now turn, first with an examination of the methods employed.

Chapter 3: Methods

For this project, I chose an ethnographic approach that incorporates multiple methods, as well as multiple sources of data, and enables the triangulation, or cross-gridding (Willis, 1978) of evidence as a means of checking the collected data. The primary research method is participant observation, and I have spent hundreds of hours conducting field research. I have been a complete participant in two women-only leisure activities: skating and fulfilling all membership requirements of a women's flat track roller derby league, and attending and actively participating in weekly and monthly women-only home improvement workshops. In Junker's (in Gold, 1958: 219) typology of fieldwork roles, I was a "participant-as-observer", who interacts with those whom she observes "as naturally as possible in whatever areas of their living interest him [*sic*] and are accessible to him as situations in which he can play, or learn to play, requisite day-to-day roles successfully", and whose identity as a researcher is known. Though Gold (1958: 218) identifies a "complete participant" as one whose "true identity and purpose...are not known to those whom he observes", I use this terminology because I feel it most accurately reflects the role I played in the various field sites of this project.

In addition to participant observation, including informal interviews, I conducted more formal interviews, and analyzed relevant documents and Internet content (e.g., women's workshop posters, ACRG's website). During the nearly four years I spent in the field, I shared in women's experiences and in the production of women onlyness. It is only through participant observation that I have been able to identify the processes through which women actively produce women onlyness in these women-only leisure

activities. Like Messner and Bozada-Deas' (2009: 53) research of community youth sports, I also use qualitative methods to “see and understand the internal mechanisms—the face-to-face interactions as well as the meaning-making processes—that constitute the ‘state of play’ of the gender regime of” a particular institution or organization. In this research, I adopt Emerson, Fretz and Shaw's (1995: 12) view of “ethnography as committed to uncovering and depicting indigenous meanings. The object of participation is ultimately to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities *mean to them*”.

In the following sections, I explain how the research was conducted, and detail some of the “personal, ethical, practical, and strategic methodological choices” (Atkinson, 2007: 75) that I made during the research process. First, I discuss selecting the women-only leisure activity case studies. Then, I address in turn my specific research experiences of each activity with respect to gaining and maintaining access, finding a role, building rapport, and taking fieldnotes. Next, I describe the interviews, followed by a brief discussion of ethics and confidentiality. Finally, I describe the analysis conducted, and conclude the chapter.

Choosing case studies

I chose to include two case studies of women-only leisure activities in this project for comparative purposes. Purposively sampling two case studies that differ in a number of ways (e.g., how the activities are organized and who organizes them, the types of activities, what is involved in participation, etc.), while sharing important similarities⁹,

⁹ Details of these differences – and similarities – are included in Appendix A.

enables me to better explore and understand women onliness, and women's experiences of women-only leisure activities. When preparing this research project, I identified two main exclusion criteria that would allow me to select case studies and examine the specific phenomenon in which I was interested. They are: the women onliness of the activities is not organized in order to be ethnically or religiously appropriate for women (e.g., women-only swim times), nor is it implicit by virtue of the activity involved, rather than explicitly women-only (e.g., beading or knitting groups). Women's flat track roller derby is distinct from previous incarnations of roller derby because it is played on a flat track and is women only. However, women's flat track roller derby is also distinct from other women's sports with respect to its organization and management. Skaters have developed the sport, and adopted a commitment to "by the skaters, for the skaters". Roller derby is unique in its coed to women-only evolution, and very few, if any, sports are played, defined, organized, and managed almost exclusively by women. For these reasons, Anon City Roller Girls (ACRG), a women's flat track roller derby league is the first case study.

When I learned that Big Box Home Renovation (BBHR) offered women-only home improvement workshops at a store in my area, I selected them as the second case study. The women's workshops meet the criteria, and offer a non-sport case study through which to explore women onliness. Though they are organized in an activity and setting that is male-dominated and masculine defined, arguably, gender segregation is not as naturalized or institutionalized in home improvement as it is in sport (especially contact sport). Or, if it is, this naturalization or institutionalization is achieved in

different, often less formal ways. Women have always been involved in home improvement but in smaller numbers, less visibly, and often in different areas than men (Gelber, 1997). Initially, this project included a third case study: women-only snowboard camps. However, it became clear that pursuing this case would result in an imbalance among the case studies with respect to time spent, mainly due to cost, location, and availability. The two case studies selected for this project are, in a sense, a convenience sample: they were easily accessible, open to new participants and a researcher, and activities in which I could, and wanted to, participate. Further, the differences between the two case studies, particularly with respect to their organization, offered an important point of comparison with respect to women participants' experiences of women onlyness. Specifically, in spite of their many similarities, ACRG is organized "by the skaters, for the skaters" focus, while the women's workshops are BBHR organized and implemented. In the next section, I describe conducting research of ACRG.

Women's flat track roller derby – Anon City Roller Girls (ACRG)

The first roller derby bout I attended was ACRG's first bout in July 2006, which attracted over 700 fans to a hockey arena. I loved the game; it was fast and exciting, and, in some ways, unlike any other sport. I left feeling that I had found a sport I could study, and that I also wanted to play: I thought, "I want do that". I began field research with ACRG for a qualitative research methods course. In January 2007, I sent a message to ACRG's My Space account (a social networking site), and a skater replied with information about practice locations and times: Sunday evenings at a ball hockey venue. As I prepared to attend my first ACRG practice, I could not have anticipated the way that

roller derby would take over my life. Like many skaters, my involvement – both the extent of my involvement and the amount of time and resources I invested – increased rapidly.

When I contacted them, ACRG was not recruiting skaters and I was encouraged to attend practices and train to be an official. I attended and observed my first practice in mid-January. At the end of practice I met the league president (who was vice-president at the time). She spent “the next hour or so speaking with me about roller derby, answering some questions, and telling me about the different options for involvement with [ACRG]”. I was lucky to meet and begin developing a relationship with the main gatekeeper, and key informant for all ACRG-related information, at my first practice. The president approved my research of the league, encouraged my participation (recommending that I start skating), and shared details about the league’s history, the skaters, some of the group dynamics, and ACRG’s connections with the larger roller derby community. Due to her involvement in all aspects of the league (politics, organization, members), the president has continued to be a key informant throughout my research. In addition to the president’s generosity with her time, she offered to ask skaters for extra skates they could lend me, drove me home, and gave me her contact information to arrange to ride to and from future practices with her. I was surprised by this generosity, but soon learned it is common among league members; I was not the first (or last) person to need rides and equipment.

At our first meeting, the president “emphasized the importance of everybody, rookies included, understanding the work put in by the original fifteen girls in Anon City,

and that work still needs to be done (by everyone) to ensure the future growth of the league”. I left the meeting with a keen sense of the importance of league members’ commitment and reliability, and the president’s frustration with skaters who lack these traits. In addition to participating for research purposes, this conversation spurred my desire to find a role in which I could contribute to the league, and demonstrate my commitment. By my second practice, I was already concerned:

I have to find something to DO at practices (and fast). I really don’t like just sitting and watching (and certainly not past these two visits). I need to get some skates and learn the rules and figure out how to get involved. Hopefully [the president and My Space contact] can help with this, but I think I need to come to them with suggestions rather than simply asking them what they think (I feel like I need to demonstrate that I am making an effort).

At my third practice I volunteered to help during the scrimmage, and spent the next hour on the track as a “pilon”¹⁰ and penalty tracker: “I didn’t realize how scary/intimidating it would be to have a whole pack of roller derby girls...bearing down on me. Sometimes...I was actually part of the action...It was fun to be on the track and watching the action up close, and hearing the girls talking to each other during the jams”. After scrimmage, a few skaters thanked me. Once skaters began to notice me, starting at my second practice, they constantly asked about skating: “How come you’re not playing?”, “When are you getting skates?”. I interpreted that skaters assumed and expected that a woman interested in roller derby would skate if she could. Among ACRG skaters, the only perceived barriers to a woman skating are physical or financial. Skating ability is not a factor in determining if a woman “could” skate.

At my third practice, a skater asked my shoe size and suggested that I try on her

¹⁰ “Pilons” stand on the inside edge of the track to indicate the track boundary.

skates “which I thought was very, very nice of her (I did not expect this)”. Over time, I learned that sharing equipment is common among roller derby skaters. Skates are an investment (typically \$150 to \$400), and it is helpful to try on skates before ordering. On February 1st, for the first time in 18 or 19 years, I rollerskated at a roller rink. After skating, “I feel tired and sweaty, my feet hurt (my right foot especially), my muscles are sore...and I realize that I had a lot of fun... Tonight was a bit of a test to see if continuing the roller derby project...is feasible, because, in order to continue, I am going to have to skate”. Skaters’ encouragement, and a desire to be more involved in the research setting, led to my observation that I needed to skate.

Early in February, a skater lent me a pair of rollerskates, I purchased the rest of my protective equipment, and I skated at my first league practice in the middle of February. I was the only new skater, and I tried my best to keep up in laps, drills, and a full contact scrimmage:

Probably my favourite thing about the whole night was when the girls checked in with me to see how I was doing. [One skater] especially seems to have taken on the responsibility of training/teaching me. Throughout the practice, she would skate with me (when we were doing laps, or when I was skating during the breaks between things) and ask how I was doing, and give me pointers about what I should be doing.

Encouragement and support – from league members (skaters, officials, the president) – are recurring themes throughout my roller derby fieldnotes. In order to get “up to speed” I asked questions and took advantage of every skating opportunity. My commitment to improving as a skater was a result of wanting to demonstrate that I was listening and learning, my own desire to be better, and also concerns about the effects of complete participation for my research. After my first skating practice, I reflected: “From the time I

started to skate...I am not certain that I actually collected any useful information ...During the practice, I was so focused on me...I felt quite oblivious to a lot of what was going on around me. I think this has to do with taking on a whole new level of participation for this practice...and, to be honest, I think my participation took precedence over my observation”. Gans (1968) argues that the inherent primacy of the “researcher” role challenges the researcher’s total participation in a research situation. For Gans (1968: 303), the “total participant” is a researcher “who is completely involved emotionally in a social situation and who only after it is over becomes a researcher again and writes down what has happened”, but qualifies, “emotionally, the participant-observer is a researcher 24 hours a day”. While others in the situation are completely focused on participation, a researcher is – or should always be – researcher *and* participant. Though I believed, “I was still somewhat aware of what I *should* be doing”, I hoped “that this ‘problem’ is a result of taking on a new (much more active and participatory) role in this setting, and that with more experience, I will get better at achieving a balance between my researcher and participant roles”. Feeling more comfortable on skates and familiarity with ACRG’s routines improved my ability to maintain my research focus and be a complete participant.

Further increasing my involvement, in February I was invited to join the ACRG online discussion group, skate at a home teams’ practices, and attend a league meeting. Each new site of involvement allowed me to maintain access and develop rapport; demonstrating commitment, interacting with more skaters, and learning about the production of women onliness in the organization and operation of the league. The

online discussion group includes information about league history, skaters' contact information, photographs, and archives online communications, for example, skaters' posts about practices and events, asking for rides, information from other derby sources, celebrating birthdays, and explaining absences. Attending league meetings, and later, team and committee meetings as well, has been a valuable source of data for this project; at meetings, ACRG members conduct the business of the league, and skaters interact in different ways than on the track. More often than when skating, meetings can be sites of conflict among skaters, particularly with respect to league organization and management. Typically, skaters discuss and vote on issues, and negotiate the direction of the league, for example, with respect to growth, practice schedules, membership requirements, possible sponsorships, and promotional activity. At my first league meeting, the league founder and president resigned, and this led to discussion of the league as a volunteer-run, self-organized entity, and the importance of all skaters contributing to league work. From the very beginning of my involvement, commitment – of time and energy – was flagged as a key issue for the organization and experiences of the league.

Although both ACRG home teams had enough skaters to be considered “full”, a few skaters on one home team believed they needed more skaters for the upcoming season. This was due to low attendance at practices throughout January. Following poor attendance (five skaters) at their first team practice, the captain invited me to their next practice in mid-February. She assured me, “the team is totally cool with you coming next time”. Prior to this invitation, after a skater at the roller rink warned me: “you better get good, I’m trying to steal you for my team”, I had started to think about what it would

mean for my research if I joined one of the home teams:

Even though I probably set out with the goal of being on a team...I don't think I considered what this would mean for doing research in this setting, i.e., having a team affiliation has the potential to distance me from some of the girls (though, at the same time, it seems that it might make some of the girls more comfortable, because they will be better able to 'place' me, and understand what I am doing at practices, etc.). There really isn't a way to remain 'neutral' in this setting unless I choose not to play and, instead, act as referee or scorekeeper. My sense, however, is that some of the girls would find it strange if I chose to remain in one of these roles if there was an opportunity to play, and, it would have implications for my own research because being an official...means that I would spend more time with the guys than with the girls. And though I am interested in the role the guys play in the league...they are not the focus of my interest.

After skating at practices during which skaters repeatedly asked: "Are you joining our team?" and "Which team are you on?", I was convinced that, if asked, I should join a team "because...it will allow the girls to better place me...I will be a derby girl (with a team affiliation) and not be in an odd (less easy to understand) position of playing, but not really playing". In mid-March, I joined an ACRG home team. At the beginning of a league practice, three skaters from the home team I had been practicing with asked: "Would you want to be a [team member]?", and I said I would. Another skater decided, "I like you, I think you should be a [team member]". They asked the president: "Can we have her?", and were told: "Sure, it's your job to get her ready for minimum skills". The skaters cheered, and told the rest of the team. I was excited and overwhelmed.

My entry into the league was unusual for ACRG at the time; skaters were either original, i.e., skated in the first game in 2006, or part of a "fresh meat" group that completed a semi-formal training program before being placed on home teams. After me, other skaters joined the league in similar, less formal ways. I skated with my original

home team for two seasons. Since joining ACRG, and for various reasons (e.g., league restructuring), I have skated for all three home teams, and the travel team. Based on my experiences, joining a team was the right choice for this project. Skating with all ACRG teams, I have skated with most skaters, and interacted with them as a teammate at practices (as well as pre- and post-practice), and at the few exclusive team events held each year. In addition to skating at practices, I have been an active member of the league by paying membership dues, doing league work, i.e., serving on committees, and attending fundraising, community service, and promotional events, as well as team and league meetings.

Beyond the formal membership requirements of ACRG, I have attended parties, after-parties, and celebrations of skaters' birthdays and other special events. Spending social time with my leaguemates is not only expected – though not mandated – it helps me to build rapport, and appreciate the many ways that league membership extends beyond playing roller derby. I also read the online discussion groups for ACRG, my home team, the WFTDA, and Canadian and international groups, and news and blogs on roller derby websites. I look at photographs, and watch live and archived “boutcasts” online. Following the larger roller derby community allows me to understand ACRG in relation to other women's flat track roller derby leagues, and the ways that debates, incidents, and innovations in the larger roller derby community affect ACRG.

Throughout my research, I have also collected the “stuff” of roller derby such as bout programs and posters, and merchandise from various teams, leagues, and events. These reveal the ways that roller derby leagues, including ACRG, represent themselves to the

‘public’, and to others within roller derby. Media coverage (e.g., newspaper articles) and official ACRG documents (e.g., code of conduct, liability waiver) offer further insight into league organization, and representation to and in various media outlets.

My extensive involvement in ACRG means that I can spend up to twenty hours a week practicing, promoting and preparing for a bout, and spending time with my leaguemates. In my first two years with ACRG, I attended almost every practice, bout, party, event, and traveled to away events. Travel events are typically a full weekend of derby including travel, skating, spectating, partying, and more travel. I have traveled to most away games, as well as bootcamps, other league’s bouts, and WFTDA annual meetings (at least twelve road trips and flights in Canada and the U.S.). Traveling with the league has allowed me to learn more about the women involved, and further develop relationships with them, and also meet skaters from other leagues. It is an opportunity to observe skaters from different leagues meeting and competing against each other. Much of the production of women onliness in the larger roller derby community happens in online settings, such as discussion groups, social networking sites, and roller derby websites. Online and in person, it is valuable to experience the hospitality extended to visiting leagues, observe the relationships that are formed, and participate in and learn the information that is shared, related to training, organization, and often commiserating about shared challenges with respect to recruitment, space, and the work of running a women’s flat track roller derby league.

From the beginning, members of the league were aware that I am a researcher. Initially, this meant receiving permission from the league president. I also told skaters

that I was interested in roller derby both personally and for school/research. During my time with ACRG, I continued to tell skaters and others who joined after me, as well as skaters from other leagues. When I have discussed my academic interest in roller derby, skaters have responded positively. Many mention how “cool” it is that I can play and study roller derby. Throughout my involvement, I reminded skaters, referees, and others about my dual role: researcher and skater. I spoke with skaters about writing course and conference papers, and chose a derby name that reflects my student status (Eduskating Rita). As an observer at my first two practices, I took extensive handwritten notes and typed them later, including all I could remember about the setting, participants, interactions, and activities I observed. At my second practice, one of the referees “sees me taking notes and says: ‘Notes, eh? You’re serious about this’. I kind of smile and nod—I’m not sure what to say”. By the third practice, I decided not to take notes, with the exception of jotting down a few words when I had a chance. My early note taking was noticed, and provided an opportunity to explain my dual role. After the first time I helped with scrimmage, “[a skater] asked what I had been writing. I said that I was recording who got penalties during the scrimmage... [Another skater] asked if that’s what I had been doing last time as well. I answered that it wasn’t, that I am also studying roller derby and that I was taking notes about how practices run, and that sort of thing”. At the time I observed, that “[the two skaters] seemed satisfied [with my response] (at least, they didn’t ask any questions)”. As I became more involved and started to skate, taking notes was not possible.

For the first few months of my time with ACRG, I recorded formal, lengthy

fieldnotes, written soon after I arrived home from practices and events. These notes include what I saw and heard, as well as how I felt about the research and skating. This is in line with Emerson et al.'s (1995: 11) claim that “*what* the ethnographer finds out is inherently connected to *how* she finds it out...It thus becomes critical for the ethnographer to document her own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses as these factors shape the process of observing and recording others’ lives”. In time, I modified my approach, and recorded more informal fieldnotes with less consistency. These include new league happenings and changes, interactions among skaters, comments or incidents directly relevant to the research (i.e., related to women onlyness), and my reactions and feelings. In addition to fieldnotes, I recorded notes at meetings I attended (league, team, committee, WFTDA). These notes include information about league organization and management, and skater interactions about league work. On occasion I shared some of their content with the league by providing meeting minutes or confirming attendance.

Based on my experiences with ACRG, and my understanding of the informal (and some more formal) ‘rules’ and expectations of participation, I continue to skate. Due to the nature of my involvement, the commitment I have made, and the relationships I have developed within ACRG, I do not feel that it would be appropriate to leave the field because my data collection is complete. Like other skaters, I will wait until there is a “good” reason, i.e., moving away, or taking on responsibilities that conflict with my participation. I will try to end my involvement when there is a logical break in the league’s activities (e.g., an end of season break).

Women-only home improvement workshops – Big Box Home Renovation (BBHR) stores

When I contacted the BBHR stores in my area, I learned that only store One held regular weekly women's workshops. I attended my first BBHR weekly women's workshop at store One in September 2007. At the workshop, I found out that all of the women participants had attended past women's workshops:

Two of the women arrive after me—they are friends...One of these...introduced herself to me (because, unlike the other women, she did not recognize me as having been at a previous [women's workshop])...she encouraged me to 'Do it while you're young'. I asked her if the other women are all regulars, and she said yes (the woman sitting in front of me confirmed that they have all attended previous women's workshops).

During my first workshop, I learned that this was the second workshop in a new workshop cycle (a series of workshops with a somewhat fixed beginning and end). At the first workshop, women participants learned to use manual (non-power tools), and the second workshop was learning to use power tools. Women were encouraged to develop familiarity and comfort with tools at the beginning of the workshop cycle, so they could use the tools when learning about specific home improvement projects at subsequent workshops. My sense of the workshop "cycles" was confirmed a few weeks later when the women's workshop organizer introduced a woman to the group who was a participant in "last year's women's workshops".

I was pleased to learn that some women attend the workshops regularly, as this meant my plan to attend as many of the weekly workshops as possible constituted normal behaviour. It soon became clear that many participants at store One's women's workshops planned to attend regularly; they typically referred to the following week's workshop when saying goodbye (e.g., "See you next week"). When women were unable

to attend workshops, they often told the group why and for how long they would be gone, and promised to return. Also at my first weekly workshop, one of the women explained that I needed to sign up for future workshops, and went with me to the service desk to request the sign up binder. I was pleased and relieved that the women were nice, encouraging, and shared information with me.

From September 2007, I attended almost every weekly women's workshop at store One. I also continued to contact other BBHR stores in the area for updates about their women's workshop offerings. In December 2007, stores One and Two began to offer a new women's workshop program: monthly workshops that were promoted in the stores with posters advertising prizes and refreshments. Because I already attended the weekly women's workshop at store One, and the weekly workshop was continuing, I chose to attend the monthly women's workshops at store Two. This allowed me to observe similarities and differences in the women's workshops offered at each store. Like the weekly workshops, it was clear at the inaugural workshop that the BBHR associates in charge of the monthly women's workshops expected that women would attend more than one, if not most of the workshops offered. At the end of each workshop, the organizer reminded the group of the next workshop date and say, "See you next time", and in April 2008, store Two's women's workshop organizer gave a binder to each of the participants to keep each month's handouts together.

After the monthly workshops started, I attended two women's workshops in the first week of every month – the monthly and weekly workshops – and the weekly workshop in the other weeks. Women's workshops were scheduled on the same

weeknight each week or month (on different nights from each other), usually from 6 to 8p.m. As a result of decisions made at BBHR head office, after April 2009 store Two stopped offering the monthly women's workshops, and instead offered weekly one-hour workshops on the same night as the weekly workshops at store One. Starting in May 2009, I attended weekly and monthly women's workshops, as well as some women's workshop special events, only at store One. In 2010, store One offered fewer monthly workshops, but continued to organize, and I continued to attend, two hour-weekly workshops.

Attending workshops at two different BBHR stores has allowed me to better understand the effect of the women's workshop organizer on women's experiences of the workshops, as well as the ways that store managers and associates can have an impact on the women's workshops. Including two sites reveals different ways that the women-only workshops are organized, e.g., a commitment to women instructors at store Two, but not at store One¹¹. It also reveals differences in the groups of women attending workshops, e.g., consistent attendance at store One's weekly workshops, but not at store Two, and regular attendance at both store's monthly workshops. Attending the women's workshops over an extended time period exposed changes in their organization, a result of BBHR corporate initiatives and changing priorities, i.e., from weekly women's workshops offered in some stores and not others, to a monthly women's workshop program piloted in a few stores, to corporately-mandated weekly women's workshops offered at all Canadian stores. Data collected from observing and experiencing these transitions in

¹¹ Details of the differences and similarities between stores One and Two, and about BBHR's women's workshops in general, are included in Appendix A.

BBHR's workshop offerings is invaluable. All BBHR workshops, including the women's workshops, are open to the public (customers): there are no participation requirements, no membership, and women are able to drop in and out of the workshops. This open participation, combined with repeat attendance as a normal form of participation, facilitated my involvement at the weekly and monthly women's workshops. My role was the same as other participants.

As a participant observer at the women's workshops, I participated fully in all of the activities, including listening and taking notes during the lecture-style portions of workshops (when the women's workshop instructor or organizer presents information), asking questions when I have them (e.g., for clarification or about specific projects), taking my turn with hands-on activities (e.g., trying a nail gun, grouting ceramic tile), and working on building projects (e.g., planter box, deck chair). As was the case for all women attending the women's workshops, my full participation was expected and encouraged by the other women. When appropriate, and following the lead of other women participants, I shared my limited personal experiences with tools and home improvement projects, and occasionally information learned at previous women's workshops. Before and after women's workshops, and during food and drink breaks at the monthly workshops, I socialized with other workshop participants. These were ideal opportunities to ask about their experiences of the workshops, how they learned about them, and what they thought of them. With time, I learned many of the women's names and information about their lives. As such, I could ask about their children, their jobs, vacations they had taken, etc. Again, this is in line with the norms of behaviour and

interaction among the workshop participants, and many of the women also asked questions about my life.

At store One, since early 2008, a few different women have generously offered me rides home from the store (and sometimes to the store as well), especially when the group is working on a building project with materials to transport, when the weather is bad, or if a workshop runs late. This has provided me with additional time to develop relationships and speak to women about the workshops and their lives. When invited, I attended events or gatherings organized outside of the workshop time, such as holiday dinners and drinks at restaurants near the store, a presentation by the women's workshop organizer and 'team' from store One at the local home show, and, on a couple of occasions, visited women's houses with other workshop participants to assist with home improvement projects. In addition, I have corresponded by e-mail with a few women participants from store One's weekly workshops, consisting mainly of forwarded messages (e.g., jokes, cartoons), and acknowledgements of birthdays or special events. Some e-mail correspondence is workshop specific, such as enquiring about an upcoming workshop topic or arranging to travel to workshops together. At store One, there was consistently at least one woman in the group who would initiate collecting contact information for all of the regular participants, and share the list with the entire group. I always included my contact information when asked.

When I spoke about my women's workshop participation to other women participants, and to the women's workshop organizers and instructors, I always explained that my interest was both personal and academic, part of a larger research project. In the

summer of 2008, I scheduled meetings to speak about my research to the women's workshop organizers and store managers at BBHR stores One and Two. After receiving their approval, I made brief, informal presentations to the women participants of the weekly and monthly workshops at both stores. Though they acted as gatekeepers for these presentations of my research, the women's workshop organizers and store managers did not otherwise influence my access to the weekly and monthly women's workshops or the workshop participants. At both stores, and weekly and monthly workshops, the women participants acted as key informants, particularly those women who attended regularly: "the regulars". During the women's workshops, it was most often participants who initiated discussions about the workshops, their reasons for attending, and their experiences of them. Sometimes this was in response to comments from women who were new to the group (e.g., "I had no idea this was even happening"), but more commonly these were spontaneous discussions in response to something we were learning, or started for no obvious reason. Early on at the weekly and monthly women's workshops, the regulars (women who attended most if not all the workshops) recognized and acknowledged each other: smiling at each other, saying hello, introducing themselves, starting discussions about previous workshops or the topic for that evening's workshop. Other regulars frequently acknowledged me in these ways. Like me, many new women seemed to feel comfortable in the group almost immediately, because they were welcomed, and there was a lot of joking and laughing among the women. This facilitated my interactions with women in the group, including responding to women's questions of me, and discussing my research interests.

As a participant observer at both weekly and monthly women's workshops at stores One and Two, I recorded my experiences in fieldnotes. Taking notes during the women's workshops was easy because taking notes is a normalized and encouraged behaviour. At store Two's monthly workshops, women participants regularly received a photocopied information package about the workshop topic, and BBHR pens were available to use during the workshop and take home. I was relieved that this was the case: "A number of women are taking notes (pew) on the packages that were distributed". At store One's monthly workshops blank sheets of paper with "[Women's workshop] Notes" printed at the top were distributed to all women participants. At my first weekly women's workshop at store One, other women participants took notes: "There are two other women taking notes, though their notes seem to be more selective than mine. One is writing things down on a small piece of paper. [One woman] seems to have typed up a list of products and instructions from last week's workshop. She makes some notes on that".

I chose to make notes about the material being presented (information that other women would also record), in addition to notes about women's responses to the presentation, side conversations, interactions between the women and the workshop instructors, reactions of people (customers and BBHR employees) passing by the workshop area, etc. "During the workshop, I made extensive notes on the information that [the instructor] was providing... Writing everything down allowed me to also make notes about interesting things that people said and did... These were written in the inside margins of my page(s) in a smaller print so that these notes would not be obvious to

anybody looking at my workshop notes”. I always recorded the number of women present at the workshop and whether or not I recognized them from previous workshops, and with time, I could include many of the women’s names. When I typed up my notes, soon after leaving the field, I included only the marginal notes, though some women suggested that I should type up the workshop content notes they saw me taking: “I am taking notes (as usual), and [one woman] asks, ‘Are you going to be a builder?’. I laugh, and tell her I don’t remember anything unless I write it down. [Her] friend says, ‘You should be typing those up and selling them to us’. I say, ‘Do you know how long it would take me to do that?’ (because I know exactly how long it would take!)”.

Women participants often commented on my note taking, and sometimes asked, “Are you writing all this down?” or “Are you writing a book?”. Many have said it is a good idea to record everything, that it will be useful to me, or others, in the future: “A woman asked how she would know what saw blade she would need for a specific project, and the instructor told her to ask in the store, and one of the woman said, ‘Or ask Michele, she’s writing it all down’”. Among the regulars, my note taking became so normalized that they occasionally explained it for me. After the transition at store One to a new women’s workshop organizer, a new group of women from the monthly workshops started to attend the weekly workshops: “A woman asked me, ‘What are you writing down?’, and one of the original weekly workshop participants replied, ‘She’s a student!’. I explained, ‘If I don’t write it down, I will forget’”. At lecture-style workshops, I was able to take more extensive notes, though I was also able to record notes while standing and watching demonstrations, and during field trips outside the

workshop room.

In addition to fieldnotes, I have consistently checked the BBHR website for information about the women's workshops (though little about the description of the women's workshops has changed since 2007). I also collected handouts and information packages from the women's workshops I attended, and posters advertising the women's workshops. When that was not possible, I recorded their content. When women participants, the women's workshop organizer, or a vendor sales representative shared photographs of women's workshop activities and events, I kept them for my records. I have also collected "stuff" from the workshops: the BBHR shirt given to all participants at store Two's monthly workshops, various promotional products from BBHR vendors, a handmade invitation to a women's workshop holiday celebration, prizes I have won, and projects I have built. I also photographed a large poster board thank you card made for the women's workshop organizer and signed by the participants at store One's monthly workshops.

As with ACRG, I continue to attend the women's workshops whenever possible and correspond by e-mail with a few regulars. Unlike ACRG, attendance at the women's workshops is not mandatory. Nevertheless, the group of regulars (to which I 'belong'), most of whom I have known for more than two years, and who have been very generous to me, contributes to my sense that I should continue participating. A significant benefit of my ongoing participation is the opportunity to discuss ideas with the women's workshop participants (and ACRG skaters) during the writing process. I will continue to attend workshops until I am no longer able.

Interviews

I conducted eleven qualitative, in-depth interviews lasting between 40 minutes and two hours. All interviewees provided consent prior to the interview (Appendix B), and granted permission for recording. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participant; each participant chose the time, location, and medium for their interview. Interviews were semi-structured, including a series of open-ended questions about the interviewee's experiences of participating and/or being involved in a women-only leisure activity (Appendix C). I asked probing and follow-up questions. Due to my existing relationships with most of the interview participants, interviews were relatively informal and conversational. Nine of eleven interviews were conducted with people associated with the weekly and monthly women's workshops: one BBHR executive in charge of workshops, two store managers, two women's workshop organizers, two weekly workshop participants from store One, and two monthly workshop participants from store Two. The BBHR executive and one store manager are men, and all other women's workshop interviewees are women. Two roller derby interviews were conducted: one with ACRG's president, and one with a former TXRG skater and WFTDA board member who has been involved with roller derby since 2001. Both roller derby interviewees are women. Attempts to interview the league founder were ultimately unsuccessful; she is very busy and quite removed from ACRG with the exception of occasionally attending bouts or events.

The purpose of interviews with BBHR women's workshop participants was to explore their experiences and the meanings they attribute to their involvement in this

women-only leisure activity. All four interviews were conducted with participants who were regulars, but had since stopped attending the women's workshops. Following the presentations I made about my research at each store, each had expressed an interest in being interviewed. Interviews were conducted in a woman's home, at a coffee shop, and by telephone. Interviews with the BBHR executive and store managers were conducted to learn about the company's history of, and reasons for, offering a women-only workshop, and to understand the corporate perspective of the (changing) organization of the workshops, and perceptions of the workshops' success. I also asked about feedback they receive from women's workshop participants, other BBHR customers, and BBHR employees. I spoke with the BBHR executive by telephone, interviewed one store manager in his office, and had lunch with the other store manager at a restaurant near her store. I interviewed women's workshop organizers in order to understand their experiences of the women's workshops, the information they receive from BBHR to guide their organization of the workshops, as well as their perspectives of the women onlyness of the workshops, and feedback they receive about the workshops. I interviewed the women's workshop organizers in their respective stores. I was able to interview everybody I contacted about the women's workshops.

The purpose of interviewing ACRG's president was to learn about the league's history, especially with respect to the decision to organize a women-only roller derby league. In addition, the president was able to speak about her experiences of this women-only leisure activity, and discuss her observations of other women's experiences. ACRG's president has been involved in organizing and running the league since it was

established. Because I was unable to secure an interview with the league founder, interviewing the president provided information that would have been difficult or impossible to procure from any other source. I interviewed ACRG's president at the bar where she works. Based on my interview with ACRG's president, and my inability to find information about why the most recent incarnation of roller derby is organized as women-only, I contacted a former TXRG skater and WFTDA board member. This woman has been involved in women's flat track roller derby since 2001 (widely acknowledged as "the beginning"), and was able to shed some light on how this roller derby revival came to be women only. In addition, we spoke about her experiences of roller derby as a skater and organizer (not only of her own league, but also of the sport's governing body). TXRG is recognized for having pioneered the model of a women's flat track roller derby league adopted by leagues around the world; it was invaluable to learn about that league's origins, and how and why decisions were made about its organization. The interview was conducted by telephone.

At the beginning of this research project, I had planned to conduct a larger number of formal interviews with participants involved in both ACRG and the women's workshops. This did not happen for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the significant amount of time spent in both field sites, over such an extended period of time, and in settings not limited to the specific spaces of roller derby and the women-only home improvement workshops (e.g., in cars, at restaurants), meant that I had ample opportunity for informal interviews. This was even more true of my experience with ACRG than the women's workshops due to attending multiple practices and roller derby

events almost weekly since early 2007. This is why I ultimately chose to limit my formal roller derby interviews to ACRG's president and the former TXRG skater. In addition, as an ACRG league member, I had access to, and involvement in, the organization and operation of the league, including decisions about the organization and operation of the league. Similar access was not available at the BBHR women's workshops because BBHR executives, managers, and employees – and not the women's workshop participants – made decisions about the organization and operation of the workshops. Conducting interviews with the decision makers was the only way to learn information about those processes. Through conducting the formal interviews detailed in this section I learned valuable information that nicely supplements the extensive participant observation data that is the primary data source for this research.

Ethics and confidentiality

Before beginning data collection, I applied for and received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (Appendix D). At an early stage of this research, I made the decision to keep confidential the identity of my field sites, groups under study, and individual participants, even though potential risks associated with participation are minimal. I have made my best efforts to honour this commitment, including using pseudonyms for the store, program, and roller derby league. Though being identified is unlikely to cause harm or pose psychological or social risks for participants, there is no reason to identify participants, and I want to maintain some privacy for all participants. The social and emotional intimacy that has developed among participants in the groups under study, reflected in sharing personal information and developing friendships,

confirms for me that maintaining confidentiality is the appropriate approach for this research. The only research participants who asked specifically about confidentiality – how the research results would be disseminated and what identifying information would be included – were the BBHR store One manager and executive. When I explained that their participation would be confidential, and I would not name the store or participants, they were both satisfied.

Conclusion

Data analysis and interpretation were ongoing throughout the research process, and the result is an emergent analysis. Through the project of exploring and problematizing women onliness using ethnographic research methods, I identified women's active engagement in the production of women onliness – as a contextually-specific, local gender regime – in these women-only leisure activities. I also avoided some of the naturalized assumptions about women onliness that appear to have been made in some other studies. For example, I included above my early experiences with ACRG in such detail because they demonstrate one way in which skaters are active in defining and shaping the league, and experiences of the league, including who is involved and how. In spite of an 'official' freeze on recruiting when I joined the league, when I started to skate at practices, skaters defined my involvement as skater and (potential) teammate. The imperative for women to skate is so strong and naturalized that until reading back through my fieldnotes, I forgot that I was initially encouraged to train as an official. Through their involvement in these women-only leisure activity groups, their interactions with each other, with women outside of the activity, and with men, and also

through the organization and management of these activities, women participants produce particular kinds of women onlyness.

The social processes involved in the cultural production of women onlyness, and the idea of women onlyness as a cultural production, are missing from the existing research of women-only social formations. This is possibly due, in part, to the methods used in much of the existing literature: most commonly interviews and surveys. Ethnography, and particularly participant observation, is the only way to reveal the social processes of producing women onlyness. As demonstrated in the proceeding chapters, women onlyness is naturalized, and experiences of women onlyness are very difficult to discuss and explain (likely because of the limited language, discourse of difference, and cultural repertoires available to do so). Using interviews and surveys, I would likely have learned, as others have, about types of women onlyness (Stalp, 2007; Long, 2003; Theberge, 2000), but not about their production. It is only through observing and experiencing women's active production of particular kinds of women onlyness, especially in responses to contradictions and challenges to that women onlyness, that we can understand that women onlyness is produced, and explore the processes of that production.

By reading and re-reading my fieldnotes and interview transcripts, I developed a familiarity with the data, and identified themes. Themes were both emergent, and already developed (based on the existing literature). Numerous themes emerged from such an intense, prolonged period of ethnographic involvement and the vast amount of data collected. Further, some themes were identified, in part, because of the ways that ACRG

skaters and women's workshop participants drew attention to particular issues and elements of their experiences. Most relevant for this dissertation are the broad theme of the production of women onlyness, and the supporting themes: women participants' consistent and constant use of essentialized stereotypes of gender, women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness, and a discourse of (in)expertise. As in all qualitative research, what I offer in this dissertation is only one understanding or interpretation of the data, and of women onlyness as a social phenomenon. However, this analysis is grounded in data collected using multiple methods, including my own experiences of these women-only leisure activity groups.

Both ACRG and BBHR's women's workshops offered relatively easy access for me as a researcher, and, specifically, a researcher who is a woman and who was willing and able to be a complete participant in both activities. The ease with which I accessed the activities and groups is indicative of the opportunities available to most women in these settings, though my commitment and perseverance in both activities is related to my researcher role. Particularly with ACRG, my decision to join alone, i.e., without knowing anybody in the group beforehand, was not typical. When I joined in 2007, most new skaters had known at least one person involved in ACRG before joining. Recently, a former skater said that I was "very brave" to have showed up at practices without knowing anybody (personal communication). In the time since I joined, more women (and a few men) have become involved with ACRG without knowing any ACRG league members or volunteers in advance. My ability to become involved in both activities reveals that these groups are composed of strangers, and some friends, and women from

different backgrounds and life situations. Both activities occur in semi-public places and are advertised as open to all women, i.e., no experience or skills needed. In these research settings, then, unlike for example Theberge's (2005) study of an elite-level women's hockey team, I believe that participation was expected. That is, the only reason to not participate, to select an approach, like Theberge's (2005: 89), to be "with the team [/group] but not of it", would have been my researcher status. To not participate would have potentially strained my relationships with ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants for a number of reasons: I was physically able to participate (even as a novice in both activities); I was present when other women were trying these activities for the first time; sharing experiences is an important element of interaction among women in these activities and settings (both doing the activities together and speaking about them); and to not participate would have entailed developing some "other" form of involvement that did not already exist. Though Theberge (2005: 90) successfully negotiated a role that allowed her "to be helpful in ways that did not compromise [her] role as independent observer", that approach did not make sense in my field sites for this research project.

As Emerson et al. (1995: 2) point out, "The ethnographer seeks a deep *immersion* in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important". In ACRG and at the women's workshops, achieving this immersion meant total participation, which "enables the fieldworker to directly and forcibly experience for herself both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives, and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject (Emerson et al., 1995: 2).

My experiences of gaining and maintaining access to the women-only leisure activity groups included in this project (and then observing this process for other women), revealed an openness to new participants that facilitated my involvement. This is demonstrated by being welcoming, encouraging the participation of new women, and in more formal recruiting techniques. Early on in this research project, I recognized that the ease with which I was able to gain access to these women-only leisure activities and groups was not necessarily the norm for qualitative research. This is not to say that I did not feel anxious about entering these field sites, or continue to feel anxious as I developed relationships with the women participants, and further developed the research project.

Throughout this research, I was astounded by how generous and encouraging the women involved in these activities and groups were; with their time, information, instruction, and also with material things. Women participants in roller derby and at the women's workshops lent me roller skates, drove me places (to and from practices, workshops, events), remembered important events, asked how I was and what was going on in my life, etc. This generosity and sharing among ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants is unlike anything I have experienced in a group of relative strangers. It was amazing to me how quickly these groups of women went from being strangers to me and to each other, to being people I thought about almost every day and cared about, and who cared about each other and me. One month into my involvement with ACRG I was already aware of the characteristics that made this a "good" site for research: "I definitely feel good about the relationships I am developing with the girls, and it is really great that everybody is generally very welcoming and concerned that I am being

included, and enjoying my involvement. I know that not every research site would be like this”.

In May 2008, I realized the extent to which my relationships with the other regular women’s workshop participants had grown:

[One of the regulars] said to me earlier that if she had my telephone number she would have called and picked me up...because the weather is so bad. When she said this, I realized that we do actually think about each other outside of the two hours we spend together each week. I suppose that this is somewhat unavoidable when you spend time with people over such an extended period...and you learn about them and their lives beyond basic, everyday kinds of things...I know that I would miss ‘the ladies’ if the women’s workshops stopped being held.

I have also developed close relationships and friendships with members of ACRG. I spend a significant amount of time with my team- and leaguemates, and though we spend a lot of our time discussing roller derby (a consistent feature of any conversation among derby girls), we also discuss family, work, school, and everything else that is discussed among groups of friends. According to Emerson et al. (1995: 3), “Rather than detracting from what the fieldworker can learn, fist-hand relations with those studied may provide clues to understanding the more subtle, implicit underlying assumptions that are often not readily accessible through observation or interview methods alone”. For this research, the ways that women-only leisure activity participants have developed social and personal relationships that I have observed and experienced highlight the active production of a particular kind of women onliness.

Although there has been a decline in fieldwork studies for a variety of political, ethical, and temporal reasons, ethnography was the most appropriate method to employ in an attempt to better understand and problematize women onliness. Without the intensive,

prolonged field research conducted, none of the insights about women onlyness would have been achieved. My immersion in these women-only leisure activity groups, and the resultant data collected and relationships developed, were necessary to explore the ways that the prevailing assumptions – stereotypically gendered assumptions – about women-only social formations in the existing literature are or are not relevant to contemporary women's experiences. By sharing in women's workshop participants' and ACRG skaters' experiences of their activities and groups, I was able to collect data that not only allowed for, but also demanded a more nuanced analysis of the gendered, and at times seemingly stereotypically gendered, production of women onlyness gender regimes. That is, rather than relying on the assumptions about women-only social formations, and the "way women are", that underpin much of the existing literature, I was able to explore the ways that women participants organize, experience, and make meaning of their experiences of women onlyness. Ethnographic research methods encouraged attention not only to the product of women onlyness, but also to the processes of its production. That these micro-level processes are rife with contradictions as women participants negotiate their own and others' ideas about essentialized gender differences and gender stereotypes was made exceedingly apparent throughout the research. Analyzing these constant negotiations as part of ongoing, dynamic processes of cultural production recognizes the agency of women participants in these processes.

Pursuing this more traditional approach to ethnography, and adopting the role of a complete participant (both researcher and participant at all times), meant that the social processes of cultural production – of women onlyness gender regimes – were more

evident as I both observed and participated in them. In addition, the style of ethnography employed allowed me to focus on the elements of these women-only leisure activity groups, and of the women participants' experiences, that were both sociologically interesting, and which the participants themselves identified as important (in conversations with each other and with me). This allowed me to attempt to offer an analysis that was not only academically rigorous and sociologically important, but also one in which ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants would recognize their own experiences. In the following two findings chapters, I use empirical evidence¹² to demonstrate the production of a local gender regime – women onlyness – in ACRG and at the women's workshops.

¹² Examples provided in the following chapters are selected because they are characteristic. Due to space limitations, only one example of supporting evidence is often provided, chosen because it is typical of the data collected.

Chapter 4: Women onlyness in relation

“We’re women, we do read instructions” (weekly women’s workshop regular, store One).

“When a woman reports that she had installed a new backsplash, [the women’s workshop organizer] asks if she is going to bring in photos...Another woman asks if she did it herself, and she says yes. Her husband tried to help but was no help at all. She tells us that he liked cutting the tile, and mis-cut about thirty tiles (because he just wanted to cut them and didn’t take the time to measure them)—when she asked if what he had cut would fit, he would say, ‘it should’. She finally told him to get out of her way. [The women’s workshop organizer] responded...with a few ‘such a guy’ comments, and a few of the women agreed, ‘Men just want to do the fun stuff’, ‘I’m sure he thought he was being a big help, men always do’” (fieldnotes).

“[I don’t want men here] because this is ours” (weekly women’s workshop regular, store One).

Derby drama – “That’s what happens when you have so many girls together” (ACRG skater).

This is the first of two major findings chapters. In this chapter, I begin by introducing the requirements for women onlyness; specifically, a women onlyness gender regime can only be produced if there is both space and time that are designated as women-only. Establishing women-only space and time is part of the process of developing and maintaining a local gender regime, such as women onlyness. In the subsequent sections, I address the many relational aspects of women onlyness, and the ways that these are apparent in BBHR women’s home improvement workshop participants’ and ACRG skaters’ production and maintenance of women onlyness gender regimes. Women onlyness can only ever be relational; in order to produce women onlyness, women participants must make reference to men, and define their activities and their involvement in relation to men (and men’s absence). As noted, “Not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on one side and men on the other. The

relations may be indirect—mediated... Relationships may be among men, or among women, but are still gender relations” (Connell, 2002: 54). In women-only leisure activities, women participants produce and reproduce women onliness in relation to their perceptions of men and men’s activities, and also in relation to men’s involvement in these activities. ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants develop formal, as well as informal, rules and expectations to limit and manage men’s involvement. Even when men are not present at ACRG activities or the women’s workshops, women participants discuss men: the ways that men are (or are not) involved in these activities, and men in general, such as what men are like, and how the activities might be different if (more) men were involved.

ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants consistently and constantly make reference to men, and also to women, in essentialist terms. Specifically, when women participants employ essentialized stereotypes of men, they imply that women are different, and of course, the reverse is also true. In the quotes above, when women’s workshop participants claim that a woman’s husband is “such a guy” for “helping” in an unhelpful way, they not only generalize about all men, but also imply that women are different: women would take time, measure carefully, and be helpful. Similarly, when ACRG skaters claim that “derby drama” results from having many girls together, they essentialize to all women dramatic or catty behaviours, and imply that in groups of men, interpersonal conflicts would not happen for the same reasons, or in the same ways. These examples reveal the influence of two main “ideal type” gender regimes that are the result of culture industry representations of women onliness: I call them Sisterhood and

Mean Girls. The former is the “positive” women onlyness gender regime, in which the absence of men results in a supportive, encouraging, enjoyable experience for all women. The latter is the “negative” women onlyness gender regime where women’s interactions are nasty, competitive, and exclusive, typically in their pursuit of men’s attention. Along with the primarily “indirect” or “mediated” gender relations with men in women-only leisure activities, these “ideal type” gender regimes form some of the dominant context of gender regimes with which ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants must negotiate in their production of women onlyness gender regimes.

Following the discussion of space and time, I explore the ways that ACRG roller derby and the women’s workshops are gender marked. Next, I explain the ways men are involved in these women-only leisure activities, and why men are involved. I also present the distinction women participants make to define some men as “exceptional” and others as “problem” men. In the next sections, I discuss strategies of boundary maintenance employed by ACRG founders and women’s workshop organizers and instructors, and also ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants. The primary focus of the subsequent section is women’s negotiations of roller derby (and sport organization and administration) and home improvement as traditionally masculine cultural practices, with corresponding gender regimes, including ways that women demonstrate their awareness of these activities as traditionally masculine (the men’s sphere), limited processes of feminization, and women’s accounts of their involvement in, and the women onlyness, of these activities. Two main themes run throughout this chapter. The first theme is women participants’ consistent and constant use of (and reference to) essentialized stereotypes of

gender difference to produce, reproduce, justify, and maintain women onlyness. The second theme is women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness. I return to these themes in the chapter conclusion.

Making space and time for women onlyness

The focus of this chapter is the directly and indirectly relational aspects of women onlyness as produced at BBHR's women's workshops and in ACRG. First, I address the basic requirements of women onlyness for these two women-only leisure activities. In order to create, develop, and maintain a women-only leisure activity, space and time for that activity must be designated as women only, and the women onlyness of the spaces and times must be somehow protected. Also, women must be able to access the women-only designated spaces, and make time for themselves during the women-only designated times. These are implicitly relational aspects of women onlyness; women's workshop participants make space for their activities in the men's sphere, specifically the traditionally masculine cultural practice of home improvement. ACRG skaters make space for women's flat track roller derby in traditionally male-dominated spaces such as hockey arenas. And participants in both women-only leisure activity groups make time in schedules organized around family, work, and other responsibilities.

As demonstrated in the review of literature, researchers have made a number of assumptions about women-only groups and activities, and particularly task-oriented activities that involve learning new skills. Each of these assumptions is predicated on the belief that women-only spaces are qualitatively different than mixed-gender or men-only spaces, with respect to interactions among participants, and participants' experiences of

the activities and spaces. Assumptions about women-only activities include: they are safe and offer women a sense of (physical, emotional) security, they are comfortable for women, women are supportive of rather than competitive with one another in these spaces, they are conducive to women's learning because women learn better with and from other women and in the absence of men, they offer women a (temporary) escape from other obligations and imposed gender roles, and they encourage a sense of community built on women's shared life experiences and interests. In developing and perpetuating these assumptions, women and men consistently draw on essentialist notions of gender differences, and reinforce beliefs that women are non-competitive, caring, nurturing, etc. Once women-only groups, and especially women-only leisure activity groups organized in traditionally male-dominated and masculine cultural practices (e.g., contact sport and sport administration, home improvement) are organized, it is necessary to continue to justify, defend, and reproduce women onlyness. Re/production is accomplished primarily through appeals to and negotiation of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference; stereotypes of gender difference provide the materials from which women participants draw in their production of women onlyness gender regimes.

In the following sections, I discuss struggles for women onlyness with respect to space and time, as well as assumptions about, and their connection to experiences of, women onlyness that are apparent throughout these struggles. Also included is the organization of women's workshops and ACRG activities with attention to women's schedules. Though introduced here, space and time issues pervade many aspects of this chapter, and are interpreted in the appropriate sections.

Space for women onliness

ACRG's activities (practices, meetings, bouts, events) and BBHR's women's workshops are organized in semi-public locations¹³. In the case of ACRG's bouts and events, the locations and activities are public, and (paying) spectators are invited to attend. There are also activities that are intended for league members only, such as practices and meetings. As a result of the semi-public spaces in which these activities occur – in the BBHR workshop room or store, and hockey arenas, sports venues, local bars and restaurants – women and men not involved with the groups can watch and interact with the women involved, for example by asking questions or making comments. The ways that women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters, as well as others involved in these women-only leisure activities, work to establish and maintain the women onliness of their activities is discussed in detail in later sections. In this section, I address issues related to physical space, premised on the idea that winning space for women-only activities is crucial to their existence; without space that can be at least temporarily designated "for women only", there is no possibility for women-only leisure activities. The idea of "winning space" is borrowed from CCCS research of youth subcultures, and extends beyond attention to physical space. Subcultures, Clarke et al. (1976: 45) claimed, "win space for the young: cultural space in the neighbourhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street or street-corner". With respect to "actual room", the extent of women onliness in spaces for

¹³ Details about the locations of ACRG activities and BBHR women's workshops are included in the "*Where are the Anon City Roller Girls? – Location*" and "*Where are the women's workshops? – Location*" sections of Appendix A.

ACRG and the women's workshops is limited. However, women make the most of what is available to them. ACRG and the women's workshops' temporarily women-only spaces are only ever women-only when they are filled with (only) women: the women onliness of these multiple-use, semi-public spaces exists when women-only groups use them for women-only activities. When women take up space in a BBHR workshop room, or a hockey arena, they temporarily claim that space for women. This can lead to women feeling more comfortable in spaces that continue to be less accessible to women (than men), or that are accessible in limited ways, i.e., women are often in arenas as "moms", "wives/girlfriends", rather than "athletes", and in BBHR stores as customers, rather than women actively involved in home improvement projects.

As skaters and women's workshop participants, women engage in more active ways with the space, using it for functional purposes rather than performing more traditionally feminine roles by providing support to men and children athletes (Thompson, 1999), or being shoppers/ consumers (Melchionne, 1999). Laying down a track, and spending up to three nights each week in a hockey arena contributes to a sense of familiarity, if not comfort (knowing where everything is and how everything works), and ownership ("our space"). Spending two hours each week (or month) in a BBHR store also fosters a sense of familiarity, comfort, and ownership in that space, and as women accumulate knowledge of home improvement skills and products, they use it when they leave the workshop room to shop in the store. "Field trips", led by instructors and organizers to specific departments relevant to the evening's topic, are key to encouraging women's workshop participants to feel more comfortable in the store. For example, at

flooring workshops, the women's workshop instructor typically leads the group to the flooring section to see and feel different types of flooring, and look at prices, styles, and colours. During field trips, women ask questions, point out products they have used, and admire new products (new to the store or new to them). Often the women's workshop instructor uses the time in the aisles to test the participants' knowledge by asking questions about the workshop content (e.g., what type of grout to use with what tiles, differences between wall and floor tiles). At times, the majority of a workshop takes place in the aisles, such as a store Two workshop on colour theory spent looking at paint chips in the paint department, or a store One workshop on window-coverings conducted in the blinds section.

BBHR sales associates' (and occasionally customers') comments when the women's workshop participants arrive in their department demonstrate that a group of women in a BBHR store is an uncommon sight. These reactions reveal the gender regime of the BBHR store, and more generally, BBHR as a company and the home improvement industry. Men sales associates consistently welcome the "ladies" to "my department", and observe, "I don't think I've ever had this many ladies in my department" or ask, "Is it ladies' night?". By calling attention to women's presence in these ways, men "mark" women's incursions into the store. Specifically, they highlight the presence of a group of women in the store, and emphasize that it is unusual. Although individual women do not always report positive experiences in BBHR and other home improvement stores, their presence (as a woman) is not commented on explicitly. Women's workshop instructors and organizers often use a sales associate's presence to exhibit participants' knowledge;

this is an opportunity to elicit responses from an “expert”, for example, having the women answer a question in front of them, or asking for a particular product so the women’s workshop participants can explain its features.

Because the aisles are not designed as a learning environment or to accommodate large groups, women’s workshop participants have to find space to stand, see the products, and hear the instructor. Sometimes this means that women block the entire aisle, and other customers (and BBHR employees) must navigate around them. This results in different scenarios. During one of my first women’s workshop field trips (to the plumbing aisle), I observed the reactions of three men BBHR employees:

At one point, 3 young male [BBHR] employees stand at the end of the aisle and watch all the women for a minute. They seem to be laughing and making comments. We are quite a sight, I imagine—this is a very busy aisle, we are a large group moving slowly down the aisle to look at various products, while people bustle around us in search of products that they *need*. There are both men and women in the aisle (as customers), but the only employees are men.

During other field trips, customers stopped to listen to the women’s workshop instructor or watch the group. Typically, customers move politely around or through the group if they need to reach a product, but occasionally a man would, “rudely” in the women’s estimation, move through the middle of the group, or make comments that indicated displeasure with a group of women being in his way. When incidents like this occur, women’s workshop participants are reminded of the challenges of sharing space in the BBHR stores, and some men’s disapproval of their presence in what can be considered the men’s sphere. In these direct interactions with men, and with the gender regime of the store/company/home improvement industry, the challenges posed by the production of a women onlyness gender regime in this setting are emphasized.

In the case of ACRG skaters, it is more common for people to see a team of women playing a sport; however, roller derby equipment (particularly the quad rollerskates) attracts attention as a novelty. This is true in the league's practice spaces, where men's and boy's ball hockey teams (and parents) might hang around to watch an ACRG practice. When the arena door is open in the summer, passersby often stop to watch, ask questions, and make comments, and when ACRG skaters skate in groups outside, for example along waterfront trails, they also experience taking up (public) space. When not on skates, ACRG skaters are often out in groups in Anon City. During my first season, teammates and I went to the market before a bout to buy fruit and snacks for our locker room. Five or six of us, in uniform, walked through the market and the mall. For the most part, people moved around us, looking and trying to figure out who we were in our matching outfits with names and numbers on the backs of our shirts. I said to my teammates that I felt like we were a "girl gang", and they laughed and agreed. I have heard a few skaters make reference to a "girl gang" feeling when they are out with a group of derby girls.

Being a "girl gang" suggests a feeling of power or control of a situation, a force to be reckoned with rather than passive actors or reactors in a situation. According to Store One's women's workshop organizer, many women's workshop participants feel a sense of power and control because it is only women in the workshop space, "Even when guys walk by, [the women are] not afraid to scream 'cause this is their territory now". That women draw attention to this feeling of power associated with taking up space, suggests it is not something they are used to, and they are very aware of reactions from others

(discussed below). For many women, this experience is associated with their involvement in a women-only leisure activity. In their research of the Red Hat Society (a women-only leisure time group), Stalp et al. (2008) also found that the group aspect contributed to women's enjoyment and sense of comfort in public spaces. It is possible, then, that the women onlyness gender regimes that are commonly produced only in specific times and spaces, can be experienced in similar conditions (such as being in a group with women who all have experience of that women onlyness) beyond those times and spaces.

In spite of sometimes feeling a sense of control as a group of women in space together, women-only leisure activity participants have no part in the permanent planning, organization, or decoration of these spaces. During the relatively short amount of time each week they spend in these spaces, the groups often organize and decorate temporarily. For example, at women's workshops, participants move furniture in the workshop space to make room to build, watch a product demonstration, or facilitate socializing. However, the space is always "fixed" (tools and materials put away, mess cleaned up, furniture returned to its original location) before all of the participants leave. At hockey arenas, skaters remove and return the hockey nets before and after practice, and store equipment such as cones and pinnies. Women participants bring materials, equipment, and personal belongings into the spaces they use. During ACRG practices, the locker room is full of derby bags, street clothes and shoes, and women bring purses, jackets, and sometimes plans, tools, and safety equipment to women's workshops. When women-only leisure activities are happening in these various spaces, there are always more women than men (and sometimes only women), and this is the primary way that the

spaces are temporarily marked as women-only. There are few other indicators of women onlyness.

Marking the space (temporarily) makes incursion by others, and particularly men, more noticeable. Women in the groups often call attention to men who are not involved in the activity and/or not related to any of the women involved in the activity, such as customers who enter the workshop room to ask questions of the women's workshop instructor or look at the women's building projects or tools, or men who watch ACRG practices. Sometimes, especially at the women's workshops, it is possible to watch a man look around the group and realize he is the only man in the workshop room, and quickly leave, or to see and hear customers outside the workshop room pointing out to each other that the workshop attendees are all women. As a result of self-policing by men, and boundary maintenance by women participants (discussed below), the physical space of these women-only leisure activities serves as a temporary clubhouse for women – a space for the “in group”, where they feel comfortable, and sometimes even dominant, powerful, or in control.

Due to their reliance on the presence of women participants, women-only spaces for ACRG roller derby and BBHR's women's workshops are only ever ephemeral. Women spend as few as two hours each month in these spaces, and never more than ten hours in a week (divided among practices on three different days). With very few exceptions, such as the addition of soap and a mirror to a locker room, all evidence of the spaces' use by a women-only leisure activity group is removed when the women are not in the spaces. At times, a poster advertising the women's workshops or an ACRG bout is

added to the space, and stays in place when the women are not present. In general, the lack of indicators (when the women-only groups are not present) of the spaces' sometimes use as women-only space, can make it more challenging for women to find, enter, and feel comfortable in these spaces. First time attendees at the women's workshops often hover outside the workshop room, and wait until somebody speaks to them (e.g., asks if they are there for the women's workshop, and/or invites them to come in), and aspiring ACRG skaters often wait outside until a league member shows them to the locker room, and explains the ways the skaters use the space. Even during a designated women's workshop, if a group of women is not present, the space is often not women-only, e.g., at a weekly women's workshop at store Two, another woman and I were the only two women participants. Three men attended the workshop, asked questions, and took turns in the hands-on learning. It seems that two women was insufficient to mark the space even temporarily for women only. In these traditionally male-dominated spaces, the "dominant" gender regimes – characterized by men as active and knowledgeable participants and women as passive spectators or consumers – is consistently reinforced by the presence of more men than women. As such ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants must consistently respond to and negotiate that, and other, gender regimes in the production of a women onliness gender regime. In the next section, I discuss the second basic requirement of women-only leisure activities: time.

Time for women onliness

Intimately related to winning space for women-only leisure activities, and with its own challenges, is making or negotiating time for flat track roller derby or the women's

workshops. Sociologists and cultural studies' researchers who study women's leisure have called attention to problems caused when definitions of leisure developed based on men's experiences are applied to women's experiences. For McIntosh (1981: 101), problems arise with respect to defining space and time for women's leisure: women's work often does not fit into work/non-work dichotomies, and for women, "All time is potential working-time", because in addition to paid workplaces outside the home, for many women, "the home is workplace and living place". This is the case for many women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters; they have part-time and full-time jobs, as well as primary responsibility for their households, including all aspects of domestic labour (e.g., cleaning, cooking, childcare). This is especially true for women with young and adult children. As a result, making time to attend the women's workshops or participate in ACRG is challenging for many women. Green (1998: 111) claims, "studies of women's leisure continue to show, time synchronisation and time fragmentation dominate most women's lives, which has led to them taking 'snatched' spaces for leisure and enjoyment, rather than planned activities".

In many cases, this means women's leisure activities are undertaken individually. For women in Bialeschki and Henderson's (1994: 23) study of physical recreation, this was "because individual activities were easier to schedule". In addition, "the ways that women chose to negotiate their physical recreation opportunities consciously and unconsciously around significant others in their lives was an important theme that emerged" (Bialeschki and Henderson, 1994: 25). To attend the women's workshops or become involved in ACRG, women must be able to make time for these activities, in

relation to potential constraints posed by their responsibilities for others, and other demands on their time. Women's struggles to make time for women-only leisure activities also reveal the consistent contact that women participants have with multiple gender regimes, including work and family. These overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, gender regimes contribute to the conditions and materials of production of women onlyness gender regimes. With respect to women-only leisure activities, I address two main components of time. The first is the timing of, and time for, the group's activities from an organizational perspective.

Scheduling the women's workshops – day and time, frequency and content – is handled at the level of BBHR head office. Currently BBHR plans the women's workshops on the same evening (day and time), with the same content in all Canadian stores. The women participants have no direct control or influence in this decision making process, and the women's workshop organizers are almost equally powerless. According to a BBHR executive, there are "key contact people" in stores through whom they solicit feedback about the women's workshops. Store One is an exception to the consistency of the women's workshops, because the women's workshop organizer has the store manager's support to offer *more* than the BBHR-mandated workshops so long as she also offers the mandated workshops. BBHR claims to take into account women's life situations when scheduling workshops. Store One's manager explains, the women's workshops have always been offered in the evenings, "trying to cater to the working mom as well as the stay-at-home mom that the evenings were usually a time that was her time, and I'm not trying to drive into the stereotypes or anything like that, but the six

o'clock hour was always a good hour to, you know, after dinner or whatever, to have time for *yourself*'. A BBHR executive speculated that the weekday evening time had been chosen (before his time with the company) because

[that] evening is sort of a quieter time in our stores so that it gave associates an opportunity to maybe spend a little bit more time with customers in an environment that didn't have maybe a thousand things happening at once, so hopefully a little bit more palatable for the customer to come in, not to an environment that was a little crazy, and [BBHR] as a store can be pretty intimidating to a customer who hasn't been in before, it's a pretty big, loud environment so I mean, I can only assume, but it was finding a time where maybe the store as a whole was a little subtler, to try and drive as much interest as possible and to create an environment that was required to get customers into the store.

During the past three years, BBHR stores One and Two have each offered weekly and monthly women's workshops. When the company makes decisions for all stores, they can have different effects at individual stores.

When BBHR mandated weekly women's workshops for all stores, store Two began to offer weekly workshops in place of monthly workshops¹⁴. At store One, both the weekly and monthly workshops have been reasonably successful (with respect to numbers of women attending). At store Two, monthly women's workshops were successful, and weekly workshops were not. Store Two's weekly workshops have attracted very few women, and often no women at all. The decline in attendance is likely related, in part, to the workshop schedule. When BBHR introduced the Canada-wide weekly women's workshop program, they reduced the length of the women's workshops from two hours to one hour. The time provided for the workshops by the store affects the workshop content, and specifically, the amount of hands-on learning. Women's

¹⁴ As explained in Appendix A, store One continued to offer monthly women's workshops.

workshop organizers, instructors, and participants all agree that hands-on opportunities are the “best part” of the women’s workshops. According to store Two’s manager,

We had a little bit more time [than other workshops] because we had the two hours so we kept an hour for the hands-on and, I mean, to me the hands-on is the most important because it gives them a chance...anybody can watch a lecture and write notes, but it doesn’t give you the real, ‘okay, how does it work’... when you get the chance with the hands on, you’re down and dirty and you actually know how that hammer’s gonna hit, you’re not surprised.

The length of time affects not only the women’s workshop content, but also the opportunity to learn skills that women can use for their own home improvement projects.

A regular at store Two’s monthly women’s workshops explained why she had not attended the weekly workshops,

I also didn’t like the idea that they dropped it down to an hour because I felt like by the time I got home from work and got there, an hour passes, I found the two hours passed by so quickly, quite often I’d be like, ‘that’s it, it’s over already? I’m not ready to go home, I want to stay another hour’, and there were a lot of subjects that could have continued another hour so, for me, for an hour, it wasn’t worth my time.

She pointed out that for women with young children at home (not the case for her), it could take longer to get the children settled with a babysitter or husband than they would actually spend at the workshops.

The frequency of the women’s workshops, weekly or monthly, is also an issue decided at BBHR head office, and one about which women’s workshop participants’ opinions differ. A regular at store One’s weekly women’s workshops claimed, “that’s when I kind of lost interest when they went to once a month, I liked the weekly thing, because it was more hands-on, plus you were into a weekly routine you know, like...I never planned anything on [that] night”, and the friend she attended with agreed, “you can get more done” when workshops are every week. They concluded, weekly workshops

“hold a person’s interest longer, it’s a commitment”. Alternatively, few, if any, women participants from store Two’s monthly women’s workshops attended that store’s weekly workshops. Store Two’s monthly workshops ended abruptly, with little warning, and this likely contributed to many women being unaware of the weekly workshops. At both stores, I found that most women were committed to the frequency of women’s workshop that they started with, either weekly or monthly, and were less interested in attempting, or felt less able to accommodate, the other. This suggests that once women had made a commitment to a particular time and frequency of workshops – and thus made time in their schedules – changes to that commitment were challenging, often because of the myriad other work, family, and leisure-related commitments and responsibilities the women have.

When organizing ACRG’s practice schedule, the league (specifically, members of the Board and Training Committee) attempts to accommodate as many different skater schedules as possible. These include work schedules, especially for shift workers, recognition that some skaters are parents, and that all skaters have work, family, social, leisure, or other commitments. The league considers both days of the week and times of day when scheduling practices. ACRG has tried to rotate early and late practices, and practice and scrimmage nights, so that all skaters can participate at least sometimes, in spite of other commitments. To ensure that the largest number of skaters can attend practices (and thus meet their attendance requirements), league members vote on proposed practice schedules. For example, skaters are asked to vote for three nights they would most like to have practice, or one night that they can never be at practice, and

results are used to plan the practice schedule. It is in the best interests of the league to have as many skaters as possible able to attend any one practice, and all skaters pay the same amount in membership dues; skaters are often happiest when there are few conflicts between their personal schedules and roller derby. In spite of ACRG's best efforts, made at least twice each season as the league moves between practice spaces, it is impossible to accommodate everybody. As with finding space, ACRG is limited to the time available at practice spaces, and by cost.

In addition to the practice schedule, ACRG makes decisions about fundraising and other events, year-end parties, and bouts. Like practice space, the league must consider both time and cost when making these decisions. Throughout the year, ACRG skaters must attend at least one practice each week (with a few exceptions, such as time in December), and the league tries to accommodate practice requirements when planning other events. There are constant reminders that the league depends on skaters (and volunteers) to conduct the work of the league, and that demands on people's time must be as reasonable as possible. Reasonable means taking into consideration that for all ACRG skaters, roller derby is a recreational activity, skaters pay to play, and everybody involved has commitments outside of roller derby. Though many skaters would like to skate in more bouts during ACRG's home season, the league has chosen to hold only four public bouts (events for paying spectators) each season. Preparing to host a public bout includes promotion (writing press releases, newspaper advertisements, bout posters, website and social media updates, distributing flyers around Anon City), organizing bout day volunteers, buying materials (e.g., track tape, kids' table, beer), and then there is bout

day, which starts by mid-afternoon and, for many skaters, does not end until they return home from the after party. Skaters who experienced the third season, when ACRG hosted at least six bouts and traveled to a similar number of away bouts, often remind each other about how “burned out” the league was from “too much roller derby”. They share these stories with newer skaters and volunteers, often in response to questions about why the league does not host more bouts. Time and cost limit the league’s bout schedule: the cost of bout production is sometimes greater than the revenue earned. ACRG contributes to the production of a particular kind of women onlyness when it takes into account women’s other commitments, particularly family and work, when scheduling practices and events. Knowing that the league attempts to facilitate their involvement, and not penalize them for having other responsibilities, makes many skaters feel included and supported.

The second main component related to time with respect to women-only leisure activities is women being able to make or find time to participate. Women make time in schedules often dominated by family, work, or other obligations. At a store One monthly women’s workshop, “A woman told the group she had left leftovers for her husband and kids for dinner and told them she was going out. They were surprised that she was not cooking for them, and wanted to know where she was going—they were not used to her going out without them”. A participant at store Two’s monthly women’s workshop said she almost missed that night’s workshop because she did not realize it was a workshop night until she looked at the calendar while cooking dinner: “I yelled to my husband, ‘come and finish cooking this if you want dinner’, and ran out the door”. A regular at

store Two's monthly women's workshops told me she is responsible for "running the place" at home, and this included leaving dinner for her husband on workshop nights. Another regular described her situation: "The boys [adult son and husband] contribute, but the household responsibilities are mine". A number of women with young children have to arrange childcare with family and friends in order to attend the women's workshops or ACRG practices or events. Depending on the practice time and the age of the children, some skaters bring their children to practice. If this is not possible, skaters, like women's workshop participants, try to arrange for family members (often parents, husbands/partners) or friends to babysit. For a time, two ACRG skaters alternated practice nights and childcare so they each had the opportunity to be at some practices.

In addition to family obligations, women participants must make time in relation to work and other commitments. Some women have to rearrange their work schedules to attend the women's workshops or ACRG activities. This can cause problems when, for example, ACRG's practice schedule changes. One skater was consistently frustrated that it seemed, "Once I get my work schedule changed so I can make it to practices, the schedule changes again. I can't keep asking my boss for changes all the time." Some women participants have no control over their work schedules and are forced to miss women's workshops or ACRG activities. A regular at store One's weekly women's workshops was absent at least once a year because the school where she teaches organized events on the same nights, and some ACRG skaters regularly miss practices because of their job's shift schedules. Each of these struggles sheds light on the overlapping gender regimes in which women are enmeshed, and the conditions that both

enable and constrain the production of women onlyness gender regimes.

Women onlyness and struggles for space and time

In addition to women interested in learning about and participating in flat track roller derby and home improvement in women-only groups, the most basic requirements for women onlyness are space and time that is designated as women only. As discussed in the preceding sections, space and time for women-only leisure activities is negotiated in relation to other users of these spaces (predominantly men), owners and managers (also predominantly men), and in relation to women's other responsibilities and commitments (to family, work, etc.). Space is one of the major differences between the two case studies. Specifically, as founders, organizers, and managers of the league, ACRG skaters must find and procure space for roller derby activities (skating and otherwise)¹⁵. By contrast, the women's workshops are organized by BBHR, and occur in space provided in BBHR stores. Similarities in the spaces of these two case studies are first, both the women's workshops and ACRG's activities take place in traditionally male dominated and masculine defined spaces. Second, both are dependent on others for space in which to meet and participate in women-only leisure activity groups; most often it is men in the decision-making positions to approve, or not, women's use of these spaces. Participants are aware of this dynamic, and women's workshop participants, and to a greater extent, ACRG skaters express desires to have "our own space".

¹⁵ In this regard, ACRG is very like many other women's flat track roller derby leagues in North America and around the world in that space poses a significant challenge to their organization and development. Live and virtual discussions among skaters suggest that many women's flat track roller derby leagues are almost constantly searching for permanent, affordable space for practices, bouts, and events.

Since the league was founded, ACRG skaters have consistently pursued their perceived need for “our own space”: skaters search real estate listings, call telephone numbers posted on potentially suitable buildings, ask friends and family, and ACRG home bout programs include an advertisement that “ACRG is looking for a home”. Many ACRG skaters believe that having a designated space (owned by or rented exclusively to the league) would solve many scheduling problems the league deals with year round, such as the lengthy process of requesting time and space for bouts and practices, waiting for decisions, and having little flexibility once the schedule is determined. An ACRG space would be the location for practices and bouts, fundraisers and meetings, and would allow skaters to know practice and bout schedules well in advance. This would benefit all ACRG skaters, particularly shift workers, parents, and others with less flexible schedules. Some of store One’s weekly women’s workshop regulars have discussed the possibility of an alternative workshop away from the BBHR store, at somebody’s house or workshop. This would end the women’s workshop participants’ dependence on BBHR, and women would have control of the topics offered, and more opportunities for hands-on learning in a broader range of workshop topics. At BBHR’s women’s workshops, workshop topics are limited to reflect the range of products sold in stores, and hands-on learning opportunities are restricted by concerns about insurance and liability. For the women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters, the biggest drawback to “our own space” is cost. It would likely be necessary for women to pay for privately run workshops (whereas the BBHR women’s workshops are free), and skaters would have to pay not

only rental or purchase costs, but also utilities for an ACRG space¹⁶. It is possible to interpret planning for “our own space” as part of the production of women onliness, as ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants imagine the possibilities of being more women-only and less dependent on men.

ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants are also dependent on others with respect to time. BBHR and ACRG’s practice, bout, and event venues often determine the time during which women participants can use the space. Further, women participants are sometimes dependent on others for childcare, or to manage other responsibilities. Women commonly need support from family members to participate, or to facilitate their participation. For example, a regular at store One’s weekly women’s workshops can only attend the workshops in non-winter months because her husband uses the car to go to curling on the same night; his curling takes historical precedence over her attendance at the women’s workshops. A number of ACRG skaters also share cars with husbands or partners and must find rides when they do not have the car. Women participants who have young children need help with childcare to attend practices, events, and workshops. When husbands/fathers bring children to ACRG bouts to watch their moms play roller derby, there is a temporary reversal of the traditional scenario of women and children spectating while dad plays (Thompson, 1999). For many participants in these women-only leisure activities, making time is the greatest challenge

¹⁶ For many women’s workshop participants, the lack of financial commitment to attend the workshops is appealing: “I can’t believe they’re free”, “It’s so nice to be able to try it and not have to pay anything”. There are a few ACRG skaters who have difficulty paying their dues each month (approximately \$40 to \$70 each month), and skaters would have to pay for any increased league costs.

to their involvement. Many ACRG skaters describe conflict with family (including partners, children, parents) and non-derby friends related to the amount of time required for league membership, and the additional social time that many skaters spend with leaguemates. ACRG skaters occasionally point out that there are only two original league skaters whose long-term romantic relationships, started before their involvement in roller derby, have “survived roller derby”. These surviving relationships are in the minority, and some have suggested, “They should get a prize”. When these discussions occur, long-term skaters often count the many relationships they perceive to have been “doomed by roller derby”, most often because of the time a skater spent at roller derby, and sometimes related to changes in the skater herself, e.g., increased self-confidence. For most participants in these women-only leisure activities, it is a constant struggle to make time.

Time is the main reason women discontinue their involvement in these women-only leisure activity groups. Of the women who spent a period of time as active participants in ACRG or at the women’s workshops and then ended their involvement, not having time (in relation to life, relationships, work schedules) is the primary explanation. During busy times, if conflicts arise, and after attempting to negotiate some kind of resolution (e.g., reorganizing their time, spending less time), some women participants opt out of these activities temporarily, and some permanently. Family and work are the primary responsibilities that take precedence over roller derby or the women’s workshops. At times, women’s limited time “for me” makes it impossible for a woman to continue participating. For example, a regular at store One’s weekly women’s workshops explained that she was no longer able to attend the workshops because she

was going to attend a fitness bootcamp class instead; it was not possible to spend two weekday evenings away from home and leave her husband with their children. A regular at store Two's monthly women's workshops claimed, due to work, vacations, and "family stuff", she found it very hard to attend workshops during the summer months. Based on the recurring decline in attendance from about June to September, this seemed to be true for many women's workshop participants. ACRG skaters complain constantly that the home season is in the summer and interferes with family time (when children are out of school), and generally, "summer" (e.g., going to cottages, sitting on patios). Other skaters remind them, "If we find our own space, we can make our season whenever we want". Ultimately, space and time are both basic requirements, and structural limitations, that affect the organization and maintenance of women-only leisure activities.

Space, and particularly time, also consistently limit women's opportunities to participate, and they must negotiate time for ACRG or the women's workshops in relation to other responsibilities. In doing so, women contribute to the initial production of women onlyness, a production that I have demonstrated is necessarily relational. Once designated women-only spaces and times have been procured (or identified, in the case of the women's workshops), women participants work to produce and reproduce particular kinds of women onlyness gender regimes within them.

Marking women onlyness

In the spaces and times designated as women-only for ACRG's women's flat track roller derby and BBHR's women's home improvement workshops, women participants find ways to maintain them as women-only, and to produce a women

onlyness gender regime. This is achieved, in part, through gender marking the activities to indicate and advertise their women onlyness. Gender marking is necessary, in part, to mark difference. Connell (1996: 215) observes, “In some ways, coeducational settings make it easier to mark difference, that is, to establish symbolic oppositions between boys and girls”. In a single-gender setting, such as women-only leisure activities, gender marking establishes and reinforces the importance of gender, and particularly of gender difference. It can be argued that the activities are gender marked because it is all (or predominantly) women in the times and spaces designated for these activities, i.e., at a BBHR women’s workshop and at an ACRG practice. However, as described above, this is not sufficient to ensure women onlyness in these settings, and women use other means to mark women onlyness. Through their interactions with each other, as well as with other women, and men, women participants produce women onlyness, and maintain or “police” it in particular ways. These are described in more detail below.

With respect to more conventional understandings of gender marking, the women onlyness of these leisure activity groups is marked in their names: BBHR’s *women’s* workshop and Anon City Roller *Girls*. BBHR’s weekly and monthly women’s workshops had different names (the weekly workshop program has had two names since 2007), though both made explicit, through the gendered terms used, that the workshops were intended for women. Although BBHR named the women’s workshops, some women participants demonstrated that they identified with them when they adopted a term from the monthly women’s workshop name to make reference to women in the group (i.e., if the women’s workshops had been called “Jane Doe-it-herself”, they referred to women in

the group, including themselves, as “Janes”). When women’s workshop organizers announced that BBHR did not own the monthly women’s workshop name, they invited participants to submit names for a contest. During a store Two monthly workshop, women suggested “Wenches with wrenches”, “Hammers’n’heels”, “No boys allowed”, and “Screw it”, and the names and ensuing discussions elicited much laughter and joking among the women.

In addition to being the Anon City Roller *Girls*, ACRG’s home teams each have names with exclusively feminine associations. This is common across women’s flat track roller derby leagues; the most typical league and team names include “girls”, “dames”, “dolls”. According to ACRG’s president, skaters chose the names: “Fifteen people showed up at the [first] meeting that night, they picked a name...they decided their colour...somebody had a brother-in-law who’s a graphic designer so was gonna do up a logo, and it happened”. When more women wanted to play, the founders chose a league name (ACRG), incorporated the league, and “everybody else who joined up [after the first fifteen], we allowed them to pick their own name, their own colours, and have at ’er”. When they chose the team names, the aspiring skaters had never skated together, and some had never skated at all. When choosing league and team names, ACRG skaters followed the lead of already established women’s flat track roller derby leagues (e.g., TXRG), for whom gender marking distinguishes contemporary roller derby from previous coed versions and also makes clear that skaters are women. In addition, placing roller derby’s “all-girl” revival in historical context – the first leagues were established and started to play in the early 2000s – it is likely that “girl” draws on some of the same

connotations as riot grrrls, and/or “girl power” (such as that popularized by the Spice Girls), and also a sense of “bad girls” contravening gendered expectations.

Uniforms are another way that flat track roller derby is gender marked. At ACRG’s first bout, most skaters wore skirts and t-shirts or tank tops; I noted only two skaters not in skirts. The following season, one home team wore skirts, and the other wore one-piece coveralls altered to be form fitting, with shorts and short (or no) sleeves (a few skaters opted for a skirt instead). In subsequent seasons, fewer skaters wore skirts to play, and a majority of ACRG skaters now skate in shorts (mostly “booty shorts”, but some longer shorts as well), or leggings with underwear (or specially made Derby Skinz) over top. In ACRG, uniform tops are t-shirts, and are the only part of the skaters’ uniforms that are “uniform”, i.e., the same for all skaters (skaters choose their own bottoms). Even so, skaters often remove the sleeves, and sometimes modify them in other ways, such as cutting in a scoop or v-neck. Some skaters choose to wear fishnet tights under their skirts or shorts, and knee-high socks are common. These various uniform choices tend to signify that this is a women’s sport, and one that is “alternative” to more established sports because of the “girly”, “sexy”, and customized/individual appearances of many skaters.

At BBHR’s women’s workshops there are no uniforms, though store Two distributed black polo t-shirts with the BBHR logo embroidered on the chest, and the women’s workshops program name on the sleeve, to monthly workshop participants. Women were encouraged to wear the shirts right away, and when attending future women’s workshops. Some women did wear them, but most did not. As part of gender

marking, store One used the colour pink on signs and tools; from the first monthly workshop, members of the women's workshop "team"¹⁷ replaced their BBHR uniforms with pink half-aprons. At a later special event at store One, women's workshop participants each received a pink half-apron. A few women were really excited: "I've always wanted one of these!", and brought them to workshops after the event. Others wore them only for the day.

Because pink is culturally associated with femininity, Koller (2008: 410) argues, "the first and most basic function of the colour is to denote something as feminine... Interestingly... the less traditionally feminine a product is perceived to be, the more pronounced the usage of pink becomes, both quantitatively (for example, more space on the page or the screen being coloured pink) and qualitatively (for example, central elements like slogans appearing in pink)". Within BBHR stores, pink (on women's workshop signs, staff, and participants) stands out; it is not used anywhere else. For some women's workshop participants, pink does or should designate that a product is for women. During a field trip to the power tools department at store One's weekly women's workshop, the women's workshop organizer pointed out a very small cordless drill in response to a woman's question: "Isn't it cute? That would be perfect". Another woman commented, "That drill is so small, a guy would be like, 'What's the point?'. They should have made it pink 'cause only women will buy it". Other women take exception to the association of pink with activities and products for women: "[A regular participant] was talking about seeing tool parties a few years ago (with a line of women's

¹⁷ The women's workshop team was comprised of women BBHR employees who helped the women's workshop organizer organize and deliver some of the monthly women's workshops.

tool that were only available in the U.S.). She thought the idea was good—getting together with some girlfriends, hammering some things, working out some pent up energy but she was not impressed that the tools are pink. ‘I don’t even like the colour pink’”.

Although there are roller derby teams that wear pink, the majority of teams choose other colours to match a variety of themes. Some teams’ themes¹⁸ draw on hyper feminine or iconic feminine figures, but often play with them, i.e., by adding dangerous, negative, or masculine associations, such as “punk rock cheerleaders”, “homicidal housewives”, “banished girl scouts”, and “psycho ex-girlfriends”. Teams also feminize themes traditionally associated with masculinity, and/or positions of power and authority, such as “princess militia”, “naughty executives”, “lady cops”, and “armed female forces”. There are also many team names and themes not described in feminized ways, or that do not have a theme. At the women’s workshops and in ACRG, it is apparent that women participants must constantly negotiate gender stereotypes, and do so in various ways; sometimes accepting or rejecting them, and other times, engaging the stereotypes in more nuanced, complex ways.

In addition to naming the groups, the physical appearance of participants, and use of the colour pink, women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters typically reinforce the group’s exclusive gender composition by referring to other participants as “ladies”,

¹⁸ This information is from the International Rollergirls’ Master Roster (twoevils.org). Most women’s flat track roller derby teams and skaters “register” their names on the master roster, which is maintained and hosted by an American skater. To the extent possible (with the rapidly increasing numbers of skaters and teams), names are unique. On the master roster, teams and leagues include their name and information about the basic theme and colours of their uniform.

“girls” (sometimes “girlies”), “bitches” (sometimes “sexy bitches”), as well as by team names (e.g., TXRG’s Hot Rod Honeys would be “Honeys”), and program names (e.g., “Janes” mentioned above). ACRG skaters use “bitches” and sometimes other derogatory terms for women (e.g., “sluts”, “whores”) in affectionate, reclaiming-type ways. A number of skaters’ derby names are feminized, though skaters typically refer to each other using shortened versions of their derby name (e.g., to many of my leaguemates, I am “Eduskate” or “Rita”). Women’s workshop participants do not use these terms (i.e., “bitch”), but are more consistent (almost constant) in their use of “ladies” and “girls”, and, as women get to know each other, they call each other by their first names. Skaters and women’s workshop participants take their lead (with respect to addressing each other) from veteran skaters, women’s workshop organizers, and regulars. In ACRG, skaters tend to refer to each other by the (derby or real) name a skater uses to introduce herself, and sometimes “fresh meat” skaters refer to themselves and each other as “fresh meat”: “I asked a new skater if she had thought of a derby name yet. ‘No, I’m just fresh meat’”. In my experience, women’s workshop organizers consistently refer to women’s workshop participants as “ladies” and “girls”, sometimes adding the possessive, i.e., “my ladies”. “Ladies” is the term most frequently used when promoting the women’s workshops, e.g., on all in-store signs and the website. ACRG refers to “derby girls” on its website: “think you’ve got what it takes to be a derby girl?”, and advertises its membership in the *Women’s Flat Track Derby Association*.

It is common for women-only leisure activity groups, particularly those that fit the criteria adopted for this research, to be gender marked. For example, Chicks Climbing

offers women-only ice and rock climbing clinics called “Chicks with Picks” and “Chicks Rock”, and a group of women mountain bikers in British Columbia are the “Dirty Girls”. Most often, there is no equivalent activity or group designated for men-only; I have not found any examples of men’s learn to ice climb or mountain bike programs or groups, such that men’s exclusive involvement is explicitly stated as an organizing principle of the group or a membership condition. In these cases, it is important to consider why gender marking is happening and who is responsible for initiating and maintaining it. Typically, gender marking is interpreted in negative ways, emphasizing the exclusion and/or trivialization of women in certain activities. Kearney (1997: 211) claims that in some music genres (e.g., rock), gender marking is used to demonstrate that an activity “has been constructed as a naturally masculine sphere in which women, because of their sex and gender, can never be fully incorporated”, serves as a constant reminder that it is women participating, and “implies the contingency and incompleteness of [women participants], as well as their inauthenticity in comparison with men”. Sport researchers have documented consistently asymmetrical gender marking of women’s and men’s sports, for example in team names and media coverage. Eitzen and Zinn (1989: 362) claim that gender-marked team names for women’s U.S. collegiate sports teams, such as using the prefix “Lady” or the suffix “-ettes”, “contribut[e] to the maintenance of male dominance within college athletics by defining women athletes and women’s athletic programs as second class and trivial”. In their analysis of television coverage of the 1989 women’s and men’s American collegiate basketball tournaments, Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993: 127) found that only the women’s games and tournament were gender

marked, “As a result, the men’s games and tournament were presented as the norm, the universal, whereas the women’s were continually marked as the other, derivative, and, by implication, inferior to the men’s”. In these examples, colleges, collegiate athletic associations, and television broadcasters and commentators make decisions about what to name women’s teams, and how to refer to women’s games, tournaments, and women athletes.

The women’s workshops are in a similar situation because BBHR named the programs, and chose to gender mark the women’s workshop program. Gender marking distinguishes it from other BBHR workshops, and highlights women’s incursion into a traditionally masculine cultural practice. It could be interpreted that women’s participation is belittled because the only other limited participation, marked workshop BBHR offers is a children’s workshop. Perhaps BBHR’s decisions are informed by the “women as special population” approach advocated by Warren (1990: 411) for outdoor programming: “Adventure leaders must recognize that a woman’s experience in the wilderness is unique and that programming should correspond to this different perspective”. On one hand, it is possible that gender marking the women’s workshops serves to trivialize and/or “other” women’s participation in home improvement. On the other hand, the selected workshop names are not trivializing. In fact, the workshop names suggested by women’s workshop participants (included above) are much “worse” with respect to drawing on conventional gender stereotypes. However, in addition to gender marking the workshops, BBHR also invested more resources in the women’s workshops, and particularly the monthly workshops by offering (at least initially) food, beverages,

prizes, and having a women's workshop team. The women's workshops offer more opportunities for hands-on learning, and only store One's women's workshop participants have the chance to build and take home projects. BBHR advertises workshops in the store, in promotional flyers (not including the monthly women's workshops because they were "only a trial"), and on the website.

As a result of these investments by BBHR, the majority of women's workshop participants learned about the women's workshops by seeing a sign in a BBHR store, and were attracted by the women onlyness of the program, i.e., that the workshop name and advertising clearly indicated this was a workshop for women only attracted their attention in a way that BBHR's other workshops had not. They saw themselves in the invitations to participate, interpreted the workshops as being offered "just for me (and people like me)" (i.e., women), and made assumptions about women-only workshops offering a safe and comfortable setting in which to learn. One women's workshop participant "told me that it was definitely the women-only workshop that appealed—she explained that she had spent a lot of time around tradespeople ... She said that men treat women really poorly in these settings, treating them like they are stupid and don't know anything, and she believed that the women's workshops would offer an opportunity to ask any questions, and not feel stupid doing so". In this way, many women have positive associations with the idea of a women's workshop; facilitated by the process of gender marking, which makes it clear that the women's workshops are intended for women.

In ACRG, skaters themselves choose team, league, and their own skater names, as well as make decisions about uniforms (themes and clothing items). Of course,

sometimes skaters make controversial decisions, and as discussed, commonly rely on conventional gender stereotypes when making these decisions. Finley (2010: 377) claims, “a skater name...mocks violence, sexuality and convention while simultaneously claiming them. Names often blur the boundaries between masculine and feminine or reclaim pariah labels used to control women who are contaminating the gender order— ‘Wicked Wonder’ or ‘Bitch Barbie’. As in much of the culture developed around women’s flat track roller derby, this is usually done with a sense of parody and an eye to performance. Also, it is important to note that women’s flat track roller derby leagues and teams, including ACRG, are not, like many other women’s sports teams, named in relation to (and/or by making reference to) existing men’s teams. At the beginning of roller derby’s current women-only, flat track revival, there were no men’s teams. In fact, the growing number of men’s teams often trace their origins to one or more established women’s teams. This is discussed below.

In ACRG and at the women’s workshops, women participants are intimately involved in processes of gender marking, and their intentions in gender marking these activities and groups are somewhat different than the usual aims to trivialize and “other” women’s activities and women participants. Specifically, gender marking serves as a barrier or boundary marker. By marking the activities as exclusively for women, they identify to everyone (women and men) who is able to participate and who is not. Women consistently demonstrate the usefulness of gender marking for these ends when they exclude men from playing roller derby by identifying it as a “women’s sport”, and when they use the marking of the women’s workshops to signal to encroaching men that they

are not welcome at the “women’s workshops”. For example, at a store One weekly workshop, “As we were starting, a regular participant raised her hand to ask [the women’s workshop organizer], ‘This is the *women’s* workshop, right?’ while looking pointedly at a man sitting at the back of the workshop space”. More examples and discussion of women’s active involvement in maintaining the gendered boundaries of these activities are included below.

At times, gender marking can have unanticipated consequences. When ACRG skaters tell people that only women skate in this version of roller derby, this often elicits responses that indicate assumptions about women’s lack of aggression or desire to play contact sports, e.g., “You don’t hit each other, do you?”, or refer to earlier incarnations of roller derby to “explain away” women’s involvement. Upon being told it is full contact, some respond, “But it’s all staged, right? Nobody gets hurt.” At the women’s workshops, some women inferred from the existence of a designated workshop for women that the store’s other workshop offerings were for men, sometimes asking, “Can we attend the other workshops?”. At a monthly workshop at store Two, a couple of women demonstrated the ways they might “play with” this assumption, and encourage their husbands to do projects: “Women were reading the workshop offerings advertised on the wall [in the workshop room]. ‘Ooh, vinyl windows. When is that?’. Another participant replied, ‘I think those are the men’s [workshops]’, to which the first woman replied, ‘Good, I want my husband to install some vinyl windows for me’”. Overall, ACRG and BBHR’s women’s workshops demonstrate that gender marking is not always negative, and that, for these women, it is part of the struggle for women onlyness. Gender marking

is often interpreted (by the women involved in these activities) as positive because it tells them these leisure activity groups are for them, and men are not included. The ways that women draw on stereotypes of essential gender differences, such as using pink and feminized forms of address, are very apparent in the process of gender marking, and this is a clear example of ways that women negotiate these stereotypes in the processes of producing a women onlyness gender regime. Throughout this chapter, additional examples of women's investment in constructing and marking these groups for women only, as part of the process of producing women onlyness, are included.

Men in ACRG and at the women's workshops

In spite of time and space designated as women only, and gender marking that indicates who can (and cannot) participate, men *are* involved in various roles in both ACRG and at the BBHR women's workshops. Since the beginning of ACRG¹⁹, men have volunteered as officials (e.g., referees, penalty trackers, time keepers), announcers (though ACRG's most regular announcer is a woman), and photographers. Two men have coached the travel team at different times, and another man served as skating coach for the league during parts of two seasons. And men are increasingly becoming involved in flat track roller derby as skaters (starting their own teams, often with connections to established women's leagues), but this has not yet been the case in Anon City. ACRG volunteers (including referees and coaches) do not have attendance and participation requirements or pay dues, and though many attend league meetings and events when they can, they are not expected to (as skaters are). By contributing to the league in each of

¹⁹ Details about the men involved in ACRG are included in the subsection "Men" in the "Who is Anon City Roller Girls? – Participation" section of Appendix A.

these volunteer, non-skater roles, men help to make possible women's flat track roller derby in Anon City. Without referees and volunteers in other positions, ACRG would be quite different especially with respect to bouts.

Based on the WFTDA rule set that ACRG uses, at least three referees are required for any bout, and seven is the maximum and ideal. In ACRG, referees are encouraged to attend league practices, and often help run drills, as well as officiate scrimmages. Some referees, like skaters, organize much of their leisure time around roller derby, for example, when they take opportunities to referee away from Anon City, either at ACRG away bouts, or for other leagues. Having a league photographer – a skater's friend who attended the first bout and was "hooked", and now attends most ACRG bouts and events, and travels to non-ACRG roller derby events such as RollerCon and WFTDA tournaments – allows ACRG access to professional-quality photographs (at no cost to the league). With respect to coaches, both men who coached the travel team started their involvement as referees, and both were dating skaters during the time they coached. The league skating coach was related to a skater's boyfriend, and had coached hockey and power skating for years. In ACRG, the role of "coach" is different than other sports teams I have experienced. Specifically, the "coach" does not have unquestioned or uncontested authority to make decisions, and works closely with team captains and members of the Training Committee; all skaters and all women. Typically, the travel team coach works with the team captains to plan practices, recruit new skaters, organize bouts, and decide lineups for games.

At the BBHR weekly and monthly women's workshops, men are involved

primarily as instructors, and are BBHR employees or vendor representatives. Store One's weekly and monthly women's workshops very often had men instructors, though the women's workshop organizer was almost always in attendance. At store Two, only one monthly women's workshop was instructed entirely by a man, though on a couple of occasions a man employee taught part of a workshop²⁰. In the majority of cases, men are asked to instruct the women's workshops in order to share their expertise with the women's workshop participants (issues related to expertise are discussed in detail in the next chapter). In the role of women's workshop instructor, men are in a position of authority as the "expert". However, as discussed in more detail in the following chapter, they are often not the only person in the group who claims expertise, and the workshops are typically organized such that women can direct much of their own learning by asking questions. Most men instructors demonstrate they are willing to learn from the women's workshop participants, for example, when a woman had used a product with which they were unfamiliar, or had a trick or suggestion for a particular project they had not heard before.

Typically, men instructors seem to have a sense that they are providing a service to the women's workshop participants, such as during a workshop instructed by a man power tool vendor representative. A woman "asks about a table saw (or about a job that would require a table saw), and [the instructor] says to ask him back (to the store for another workshop), it would take an hour, and 'that's a tool you need to respect'". At the

²⁰ Store One and store Two's different approaches to choosing instructors is discussed in more detail in the "*Workshop instructors and organizers*" subsection of the "*Who is at the women's workshop? – Participation*" section of Appendix A.

end of the workshop, the instructor “says that from here, we can move on to big things (I think he is referring to bigger power tools). He reminds us that we just need to let the [BBHR] people know that we want to invite him back”. Also, women participants are often asked to provide feedback about the women’s workshops, and this includes some evaluation of instructors. The only other men involved in the women’s workshops are BBHR store managers or executives, and in general they have little direct contact with the women’s workshops, only occasionally dropping by the workshops to observe. Though some men enjoy their time at the women’s workshops, and indicate their willingness (to the women’s workshop organizer, and sometimes the participants) to instruct the women’s workshops, unlike men who volunteer for ACRG in various roles, the men involved in the women’s workshops are paid employees, and instructing the women’s workshops is part of their job, i.e., they are scheduled and paid for their time. While men at the women’s workshops are working, men’s involvement with ACRG is different from (most) women’s with respect to the roles they play, but also similar in that all are involved during their leisure (non-paid work) time.

Further, men are actively involved in ACRG; however, because they are not skaters, their active involvement is different than the skaters. This is particularly true with respect to the extent of their involvement (i.e., more flexibility in time spent, less financial investment), and role in decision making processes. As referees and volunteers, men (and some women) are in support roles in ACRG because they facilitate skaters’ opportunities to play roller derby without playing themselves. Finley (2010: 375) also found that “The men who are involved with the skaters or with the league scramble

gender relations too. The partners and boyfriends of the skaters frequently engage in supportive volunteer roles: setting up the rink, refereeing, cheering, tending to wounds, and attending the bouts”. These men’s roles are more active than those typically played by women in support of men’s sport involvement: Thompson’s (1999) research demonstrates the dependence of men’s sport on women’s domestic labour such as cooking, laundry, and childcare. The occasional reversal of these roles for women-only leisure activities was discussed above. Most importantly, in ACRG unlike at the women’s workshops, women define men’s involvement in their activity. From ACRG’s start as a league, skaters have determined what positions men can hold, what roles they can play, and the extent of their involvement in league activities. In this respect, ACRG’s organization, and commitment to “by the skaters, for the skaters”, moves toward reversing more traditional sport-based gendered relationships by creating a situation in which women are the active subjects (athletes and decision makers) and men are their supporters; men’s participation is both determined by women and dependent on women’s approval. Defining men’s involvement, and limiting that involvement to particular roles, is a key element of women onlyness gender regimes.

Among ACRG skaters, men’s involvement in the league is rarely talked about explicitly (i.e., men involved in a “women’s sport”). Conversations about men in the league are usually about issues with a specific man. Men’s involvement is typically considered necessary to accomplish the league’s goals, such as improving skaters’ rules knowledge or having public bouts (discussed below). In this regard, ACRG is similar to many women’s flat track roller derby leagues. There are also parallels with earlier

attempts to organize sport for women. For example, in interviews with Kidd (1996: 134), Canadian women sport leaders of the 1920s and 1930s “stressed the double-sidedness of their relationships with the men, the desire for autonomy coexisting with the need for advice and support”. At that time, most women lacked time, financial means, and women role models in leadership positions in sport and other social institutions. A shortage of women leaders dictated a reliance on men for expertise and experience. In ACRG, in spite of few role models in sport leadership (with the exception of other roller derby leagues), women are established as leaders (and owners, operators, and skaters) and that women will hold these positions is institutionalized, yet there are aspects of the activity, most commonly refereeing, they have tended to “farm out” to men.

Why men?

There is nothing inherently gendered about being a roller derby skater or a referee, non-skating official, or other ACRG volunteer position. When I asked ACRG’s president, “Why is it only women who skate?”, she replied, “I don’t know. It just is, it’s just how it evolved, I couldn’t tell you *why*. It’s just, I don’t know if it’s part of the fact that skaters are in control of their own destinies, when it comes to how we operate, but I don’t know”. As a founding member and leader, it is interesting that the president finds this question so difficult. Her answer is typical of many ACRG skaters’ perspectives. This highlights the almost entirely unexamined, unquestioned adoption of the TXRG model of women’s flat track roller derby, and also draws attention to the perceived naturalness of organizing roller derby as a single-gender sport. The president ultimately identifies ACRG’s commitment to “by the skaters, for the skaters” as an explanation of

derby's women onlyness. There is a perception that organizing roller derby for women only is the most effective way to ensure that women are, and stay, in control of roller derby. Men's involvement seems at odds with this commitment; however, because men are not allowed to skate (in ACRG's code of conduct, the first membership requirement listed is "Female"), and they are encouraged to take on roles in the league that few women want to take on because the women prefer to skate, their involvement is not a major challenge to women's control.

As discussed in the Methods chapter, not only do most women prefer skating, there is an expectation among ACRG skaters that if a woman can skate, she will. This is apparent in my experience of joining the league. Also, most of ACRG's men referees, unlike many skaters, have some experience of organized sport, though usually as players, not officials or coaches. As a volunteer-run organization, ACRG is dependent on women and men who are willing to volunteer time and energy. If an aspiring referee is prepared to learn the rules, attend practices, and be at bouts, it does not matter if they are a woman or a man, their involvement is welcomed. Finally, as mentioned, ACRG has typically recruited volunteers from among skaters' boyfriends, husbands, friends, and family. On occasion, men recruit other men (friends) to ACRG. Much of the recruiting of men, especially early on, was out of necessity, i.e., the league needed referees, all of the women wanted to skate, and so they asked their partners to try refereeing. Because of the significant time commitment demanded of skaters, volunteering offers men a way to be involved, and spend time with their wives, girlfriends, and/or friends doing something they both enjoy. As with any other ACRG volunteer, including skaters, if men did not

enjoy their experiences with the league, it is unlikely that they would continue their involvement.

At the women's workshops, men's involvement as instructors is primarily a result of limitations associated with who is employed in the stores and at vendor companies, which is revealing with respect to the gender regimes of these organizations. Store Two's women's workshop team made a commitment to "women teaching women", and this sometimes meant the women's workshop organizer learned all she could about the workshop topic in advance so she could teach it, or she would learn with the women's workshop participants by going through a prepared handout. Store One's women's workshop organizer emphasized the importance of learning from the most knowledgeable person available. She claims to choose BBHR associates to instruct the women's workshops because they are "an expert in their field. It doesn't have to be a woman 'cause I'd rather you guys learn than just have it all about women you know. 'Cause there's not, well, [pause] let's leave it at that. [MD: Were you going to say there's not that many women in the store?] [Making a noise to drown me out] I wasn't going to say *that*". In what she leaves unsaid, store One's women's workshop organizer seems to suggest that she would prefer to have women instruct the women's workshop. However, there is a limited number of (qualified) women associates available to her. In addition, most men enjoy instructing the women's workshops: "Oh, the guys love talking to you girls! They *love* it. Like, I can ask them and I can say, 'It's for the women's workshop', [immediately], 'Okay'. They'd rather do this than the weekend ones... I think it's because, well, everyone's kind of familiar with you all, even if there's new people there's

a general enthusiasm”, compared to other workshops where people are “just waiting for information”. Many men instructors perceive the women’s workshops to offer a different, and more positive experience, i.e., they appreciate interactions with the women participants that are generally more social than at the weekend (mixed gender but attended predominantly by men) workshops. The women’s workshop organizer describes this as “magic”: “I don’t know what the magic is, but there’s magic”.

Exceptional men

Men are involved in these women-only leisure activities for a number of reasons: as a matter of necessity, because they enjoy being involved, and because of the limited number of women who are able to or want to fill particular roles. In general, women participants in ACRG and at the women’s workshops make a distinction between the men who are involved and other men. Other men are often characterized as “problem” men, while the majority of men involved in ACRG and the women’s workshops are characterized by contrast as “exceptional”. When women make often negative and essentialized generalizations about men, they exempt the men with whom they have had positive interactions, and who contribute to their enjoyment of the women’s workshops or roller derby, and the existence of these leisure activity groups. In this way, women make use of both direct and indirect relationships and experiences with men to inform the organization of gender relations of women onlyness gender regimes. Though they occur in both groups, discussions about men are most common at the women’s workshops. The men who are most involved, and present most regularly at ACRG practices, bouts, and events are referees. It is likely that this role, not often a popular figure among athletes,

contributes to occasionally antagonistic relationships between some women and the men involved in ACRG (especially during bouts and scrimmages). In fact, skaters tend to be most critical of ACRG referees when they perceive them to be engaged in feminized behaviours such as gossiping, contributing to derby drama (discussed in the next chapter), or being “too sensitive” to skaters’ comments, e.g., “Refs shouldn’t be talking about skaters, spreading rumours isn’t cool”, “There’s enough drama in the league without refs getting in on it”, “Why does he have to be such a baby? They’ve gotta know what I say during the game isn’t serious”. For the most part, skaters distinguish between ACRG’s referees and other men, even other league’s referees. One skater believes referees are “different” because they are attracted to roller derby, which she described as an “alternative sport”: “they’re not like the macho jocks that would be attracted to other sports”.

Women’s workshop participants tend to be more candid about the problem men; the men who “speak to women in a condescending tone, that’s why men bother me”, and the men who “do it for you” when they are supposed to be teaching you to do it yourself. In some cases, women’s assessment of problem men is based on their own experiences, such as the woman earlier who referred to men who “treat women really poorly in these settings, treating them like they are stupid and don’t know anything”. It is not only home improvement novices who have these experiences with men. A regular at store Two’s monthly women’s workshops works in home improvement and described feeling frustrated after attending a weekend BBHR workshop: “I felt the men talked down to the women...they talked to the women like you were an idiot”. Store One’s women’s

workshop organizer told a story about being in a BBHR store (before she worked for the company) with her husband. After explaining in detail her problem to a man sales associate, he tried to tell her husband how to fix it. Her husband had to say, “I don’t know why you’re talking to me, she asked you the questions. I’ve got no idea”. In general, problem men are those men who assume that women lack expertise, treat women badly, and inhibit women’s opportunities to develop home improvement expertise (more on this in the next chapter).

ACRG and women’s workshop participants draw attention to the admired characteristics of exceptional men when they discuss men instructors and volunteers. Discussions frequently include implied and sometimes overt comparisons with problem men. In ACRG, exceptional men are those who appreciate the importance and scale of what the women (in ACRG and the larger roller derby community) have created, do not try to take over, treat women with respect, demonstrate their investment by going beyond their volunteer duties (e.g., helping with practices and events), and understand and accept that they play a less central, but critical, role in women’s flat track roller derby. ACRG’s president claims, “They’re ultimately our biggest supporters. They wouldn’t do it if they didn’t love us, and they love the sport, and so without them, how do you have a game?”. When men exhibit the characteristics of exceptional men, skaters include them in social functions, develop friendships with them, and consider them league members. In these ways, the characteristics are effectively reinforced, and all men involved in ACRG are encouraged to behave in these ways. When conflict arises with a man, it becomes clear that these characteristics of exceptional men are expected of all men involved in ACRG

(this is discussed below).

As with the characteristics of problem men, women's workshop participants are more candid than ACRG skaters about the characteristics of exceptional men. Similarly to ACRG, exceptional men at the women's workshops treat women with respect, and demonstrate an investment in women's learning by encouraging women's active participation in the workshops: inviting and answering questions without judgement, and providing hands-on learning opportunities. Participants tell the women's workshop organizer if they think a man is a good instructor: "he explains everything really clearly", and tell each other: "All of the women who have dealt with [man BBHR associate] before...tell all the other women how fabulous he is—how nice and helpful". Women appreciate when men instructors are knowledgeable, reassuring, and patient: "[He] is good because he knows so much and is patient, he waited a long time before he took over hammering from [one of the regulars]". It is important to some women participants that men involved in the women's workshops want to be there, or at least give the impression they do. When discussing that evening's weekly workshop with another store One regular, "She said she really liked how [the man instructor] ran the workshops—that it seemed he was enjoying it and that he was very encouraging (so even when she was having difficulty installing a plank, he was saying 'that's it', 'good job', 'you got it'), and she appreciated that. He is good at sharing all of the information he has". This often means being able to joke and laugh with men instructors. Jokes regularly make reference to essentialized gender differences: "After he helped her to screw in to a particularly hard piece of wood, "[A regular] was telling all the women that [the man instructor] is good at

something, that testosterone sometimes does come in handy”. At times, women use sexual humour with men instructors; sexual innuendo is hard to avoid in a setting where women are “screwing”, “nailing”, needing to “do it harder”, etc. During some workshop topics, women participants avoided making eye contact to prevent giggling. In Dixey’s (1987: 206) study of bingo, she found, “This largely female environment enables women to relax, and also enables them to be in control of any sexual innuendo, such as jokes directed at the male caller”. At the women’s workshops, sexual innuendo is common even when no men are present, such as a regular saying quite leeringly, “*We like to screw*”, or an exchange during a field trip to the power tools department: “A new woman said, ‘I need to take a class to learn how to screw properly’, and the whole group laughed. [One regular] pointed to [another regular] and said, ‘[She] can teach you’, and everybody laughed again”. Like Dixey’s (1987) bingo players, women participants initiate and control the sexual innuendo at the women’s workshops.

Women’s workshop participants are consistently appreciative of exceptional men, and demonstrate their appreciation by thanking them at the end of workshops, and telling the women’s workshops organizer and participants who missed the workshop how good it was and, as indicated in the examples above, why it was good. In my experience, the most popular men instructors are those who adopt the same essentialized assumptions about women and men that the women’s workshop participants themselves often use. In many cases, these are stereotypes that paint women in a positive light, and men less positively. For example, a man representative of a tool vendor instructed the first weekly women’s workshop I attended. During the workshop, “One woman asks a question—she

prefaces by saying that it might be a stupid question. [The man instructor] says that no question is stupid, and reminds us ‘I work with men’”. At the time I speculated, “This comparison of the men’s and women’s workshops (relying on stereotypes) seems to be a big part of [his] shtick”. I have since attended many workshops instructed by this man, and he does rely on gendered stereotypes of women and men (e.g., women read instructions and follow directions, men do not), and he meets all of the characteristics of exceptional men identified by women’s workshop participants. He is one of the most popular instructors at store One’s women’s workshops (in part because women participants get to use power tools when he instructs), and women’s interactions with him, such as asking questions (about workshop-related things as well as more personal topics), making jokes, and requesting workshops with him, indicate that women feel comfortable, learn from, and enjoy the workshops he instructs.

Another popular man instructor also uses stereotypes of essential differences between women and men, for instance when explaining hardwood flooring installation: “There is some manual labour involved—you can enlist your husband for that but I recommend you learn how to do it because he might not be around when you need him”, a woman added, “or he might not know what he is doing”. It is perhaps relevant to note that women’s stories about problem men typically relate women’s encounters with men in a BBHR store (or similar setting) when they were alone or with a man (usually a husband). Conversely, women’s positive experiences with exceptional men are usually at the women’s workshops, a setting in which a group of women interacts with, in most cases, one man instructor. There are two points here. First, women’s workshop

organizers, as much as possible, choose men instructors carefully (based on experience, and feedback from women participants). Second, the dynamic between women and men in the store is likely altered when a man instructs the women's workshop. When women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters describe the men involved in these activities and groups as exceptional (unlike other, problem men), they simultaneously identify the characteristics of exceptional men, reinforce their expectations and appreciation of exceptional men, and affirm stereotypical assumptions about problem men. Ultimately, they account for the involvement of specific, exceptional men in their women-only leisure activities, and reveal that a women onlyness gender regime is not rigid or static, but dynamic and open to change.

Dealing with (problem) men

As discussed, ACRG skaters (women) define men's involvement. Conversely, at the women's workshops, participants have little control over men's involvement, though women's workshop organizers make attempts to ensure only exceptional men are asked to instruct. Due to hiring, scheduling, and other processes beyond their control, this is not always possible. In the case of negative experiences with men, i.e., problem men involved in the groups, ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants and organizers have varying degrees of control and means of influencing the men's future involvement. In this section, I address men who become involved as volunteers (ACRG) or instructors (women's workshops). In a later section, I address issues related to men's involvement as participants. At the women's workshops, instructors have rarely been problem men. The two examples I include here are men instructors with whom women

participants were frustrated because they did not demonstrate the expected or desired investment in the women's workshops.

Specifically, one man BBHR associate instructed a framing workshop at store One: “[The man instructor] has never done framing and is working through it with us—guessing at the parts he is not sure about. This leaves us in the awkward position (and a little frustrating) of having to do a few steps more than once to accommodate errors in guesses”. Women participants (including me) were willing to repeat steps to ensure accuracy, but in this case, frustration was increased because each woman had purchased her own framing materials, and every error and inaccurate guess wasted wood and money. When I asked two store One weekly workshop regulars about an atypical workshop experience, they identified this workshop: “The picture frames...It was not a good night”, one woman said. The other agreed, “I don't think I would have known that had I not taken a picture framing course”. Based on their experiences, she was grateful not to have invested more, “God, if we'd gone and bought that [proper picture framing] material that costs \$90”. At a store Two monthly women's workshop on ceramic tile,

[The women's workshop organizer] says she has something to show us and tells us that she asked one of the guys in flooring to tile a board for her...It is very poorly done and the women point out the problems—he used the wrong sized trowel, the grout lines are too big, the tiles are crooked, etc., etc. One woman asks, ‘Did you fire him?’. Another says, ‘He should be here for this’. Another suggests that he probably did it on purpose so [the women's workshop organizer] wouldn't ask him to do anything again. A number of women agree. [The women's workshop organizer] says, ‘My husband does that’, and the woman says, ‘So does mine, that's why I'm here’, and a number of women agree.

Later in the workshop, “the guy from flooring makes the mistake of coming by and the women tell him directly about all of the errors he made. He laughs, says he is impressed

with everything we have learned, looks suitably embarrassed, and admits to having produced the ‘how not to lay ceramic tile’ example”. Many women expressed surprise that he had done such a bad job, and indicated they enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate their newly acquired expertise, i.e., telling him what he did wrong. This experience was clearly significant for a number of women as they raised it in conversation at subsequent workshops, including telling the story to women who had not attended the tiling workshop.

In these two examples – of men instructors who did not know better (picture framing) and did not do better (tiling) – there is evidence of an expectation of men’s expertise, in part because they are men, but primarily because they are identified as “experts”. Women assume that a man BBHR associate asked to instruct a picture framing workshop knows about framing, and a man BBHR associate who works in flooring is able to create a reasonable tiling example. Women’s trust in men’s expertise, likely a result of socialization as well as men’s “expert” roles in these situations, is called into question when the men do not know or do better. In the picture framing example, women’s experiences of men in all parts of their lives assuming expertise even when they do not have it are reinforced. This is apparent when the regular says she would not have known how bad it was if she did not have relevant experience. In the tiling example, some women recognized their own relationships with husbands and other men in their lives. For many women, these examples emphasized their need to know how to do projects themselves, because you cannot rely on others (even “experts”) to do them properly.

In these situations, women's workshop participants are able to express their displeasure to the women's workshop organizer, and to each other. Usually, the man is not asked to instruct or do anything for the group again. The picture framing instructor did instruct the weekly women's workshops on two other occasions, but limited to topics that are in his area of expertise. The public shaming of the man who did the poor tiling job likely did not predispose him to helping with future women's workshops, though he was good natured about the critique. Among women's workshop participants, sharing information about men BBHR associates – warning each other about certain men and promoting others – is another way to deal with, usually by avoiding, problem men. For example, after the tiling workshop, store Two's monthly women's workshop participants reminded each other to be careful who they spoke to in the flooring department. During a monthly women's workshop at store Two on deck building, a regular recommended a man BBHR sales associate in a related department: "He is really great to work with, he's not derogatory at all, you know how some of the men can be". In these ways also, women participants simultaneously reinforce their expectations and appreciation of exceptional men, and affirm stereotypical assumptions about problem men; assumptions that, as demonstrated, are often based at least in part on the women's negative experiences with men.

In ACRG, dealing with problem men is complicated because, as mentioned, most of the men began their involvement as a result of pre-existing relationships with skaters, as boyfriends/ husbands, friends, or acquaintances. During parts of two seasons, ACRG had a man, a relative of a skater's boyfriend, volunteer to be the league's skating coach.

In this capacity, he attended league practices, and used his extensive background as a skating coach to plan and run league practices. He also attended bouts, sometimes acting as a bench coach, and during one season, he planned and ran “fresh meat” practices. Because so many ACRG skaters started their roller derby careers with minimal or no skating skills (this “no expertise necessary” approach is addressed in the next chapter), skaters were excited about the opportunity to work with a skating coach. When the skater who knew him told others that he was interested in helping out, she was encouraged to invite him to practices. For the most part, ACRG skaters appreciated the expertise of the skating coach, and benefited from his expertise by further developing their skating skills.

The arrangement between the league and the skating coach, which was always informal, became problematic during the second season for a few reasons. However, many skaters’ primary concern was that the skating coach did not listen to them, and did not demonstrate respect for what the skaters were doing or what they had accomplished. He wanted the league to commit to his training plan without question, and without having the opportunity to contribute to its development. As mentioned previously, this is not the way that coaching relationships have been established in ACRG. Further, many skaters felt that the skating coach’s exclusive focus on skating skills took away from learning roller derby: “How can we be expected to play in a bout when we don’t ever practice roller derby?”, “It’s great to be better skaters, but we play roller derby”. When they expressed their concerns to the skating coach, his responses, e.g., “What can you learn from just skating around in circles like that?”, “If you can’t skate, you’ll never be good”, were interpreted as trivializing all that ACRG had accomplished before his involvement.

Eventually, skaters began to resent the skating coach's presumption that he knew more than they did about women's flat track roller derby, and tried to make time during practices for roller derby-specific training. During this time, practices were characterized by a power struggle, with some skaters trying to negotiate a middle ground: continuing to include the skating coach and his skating training at practices, while also including roller derby training. In the end, it seemed impossible to achieve a balance that was acceptable to both parties, and due to this and other issues, his involvement with the league ended.

This situation was particularly awkward because of the skating coach's pre-existing personal relationship with one of the skaters, and this is often the case with problem men in roller derby. Typically, if a man volunteer is a problem for the league, skaters are able to stop notifying them of opportunities to volunteer. However, when a problem man is related to a skater this is much more difficult. The few problem men situations in ACRG have encouraged the development of better, sometimes more formal, processes for future volunteers.

Although problem men are typically abstract and/or men that women participants encounter outside of roller derby or the women's workshops, these examples demonstrate the ways that women react to problem men in the limited ways available to them, and work to avoid the potentially negative effects of problem men on the women onliness they produce in these groups.

Boundary maintenance: Reproducing women onliness

Establishing and maintaining boundaries in ACRG and at the women's workshops

With respect to participation in these women-only leisure activities and groups, as

ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants, it is primarily the women participants who take on responsibility for boundary maintenance. That is, women participants make clear to men what they can and cannot do in relation to these leisure activity groups, and thus maintain the groups as women only (with the exceptions already mentioned). Maintaining boundaries to exclude men's participation is accomplished differently in ACRG and at the women's workshops. In ACRG, there is a general perception that boundary maintenance is not a serious issue for the league; people understand that ACRG's version of roller derby is *women's* flat track roller derby, and men are not allowed to skate. Specifically, boundary maintenance is less necessary when existing boundaries are unchallenged.

ACRG is formally established as a women's flat track roller derby league: being "female" is included in the league's membership requirements. Since it was founded, ACRG has chosen to adhere to the WFTDA's membership requirements: member leagues are skater owned (at least 51%), and skater operated (at least 67%), and skater is defined as a "woman" skating on "quad skates" (www.wftda.com). As a result, ACRG has explicit rules about men's involvement, i.e., men cannot skate (except as officials), and are limited with respect to leadership/ administrative positions. People rarely ask why men do not skate, and the common explanation (such as that of the president included above) is that men do not skate in this version of roller derby. To an increasing extent, skaters explain that men can start their own teams if they want to skate, just like the women did, and that a growing number of men are doing so. Since the main concerns for the first women skaters in TXRG were about men in owner and manager positions: the

“cigar chomping managers” who, in earlier versions of roller derby, exploited women’s participation for profit, it is interesting that they decided to exclude men from skating as well as owning and managing their newly developed roller derby. It is likely that men skaters were just as exploited as women in previous versions of roller derby, though it is true that the vast majority of the exploiters were men. Excluding men allows women to control all aspects of this version of roller derby, from the way the sport is played to the way it is organized and promoted.

Instead of choosing women-only roller derby for any explicitly political or feminist reasons, it seems that ACRG unquestioningly adopted TXRG’s model of “for the skaters, by the skaters” women’s flat track roller derby. As the president said, there is an appeal of skaters “being in control of their own destinies”. However ACRG’s decision is probably more closely related to the perceived naturalness of the dominant, gender-segregated model of sport organization. McDonagh and Pappano (2008: 8, 10) claim, “Sex segregation is such an ingrained part of athletics at every skill level that it rarely draws attention, much less protest”, and gender segregation in sport is taken for granted “to the point of being invisible”. This model of sport organization is so prevalent that many women’s flat track roller derby skaters are unfamiliar with roller derby’s history(ies). Many skaters do not know that previous versions of roller derby were coed, including both women and men as skaters on each team. In fact, if many contemporary roller derby skaters know only one thing about earlier versions of roller derby, it is that they were “staged”; choreographed with pre-determined outcomes. Women’s flat track roller derby’s emphasis on being a “real” sport, with “real” athletes is neatly summarized

in the motto of its primary governing body, the WFTDA, “Real. Strong. Revolutionary. Athletic.”. This focus is, in part, an attempt to distance women’s flat track roller derby from the various incarnations of roller derby that preceded it, and possibly supports the notion that “real” sport is gender-segregated.

As a result of the overt, formal boundaries established by ACRG (and the larger roller derby community), and the perceived naturalness of gender-segregated sport organization (sport’s dominant gender regime), the league rarely has to enforce or even explain its women onlyness. Within the larger roller derby community there is ongoing discussion – in online discussion groups, roller derby news sites, at RollerCon and the annual WFTDA meetings – of men’s involvement. These discussions include speculating about the reasons for, and potential consequences of, the increasing number of men’s flat track roller derby teams, and how women’s flat track derby should respond. Most skaters are supportive of men playing flat track roller derby, though the occasional comment indicates that some women recognize that men’s involvement could eclipse women’s roller derby in the eyes of the general public and mainstream media, and/or speed up some of the goals for which women skaters have worked so hard, e.g., “I will be so pissed off if roller derby becomes ‘legitimate’ just because men play now”. Men’s roller derby is not an issue in ACRG. A couple of ACRG men referees have participated in “ref jams” (referees playing roller derby) at women’s flat track roller derby events, and some have contemplated skating “if somebody started a men’s team in the area”. Coed roller derby, played mostly in challenge bouts and non-WFTDA leagues, has also not been an issue in ACRG. According to ACRG’s president, “there’s some women that don’t care

and they'll play with whoever wants to play, and then there are some women that it's one thing to get beat up by a girl but it's another thing to get beat up by a guy—that keeps it women-only I guess”.

Within the larger roller derby community, another topic relevant to women-only boundaries is if and how to include trans skaters (male to female transgendered skaters). The WFTDA recently developed a gender policy that defines “woman” for the purposes of interleague competition. It might be argued that more so than men, some ACRG skaters perceive trans skaters as a “threat” to women onliness. ACRG has not knowingly dealt with this issue in its membership; however, ACRG teams have competed against skaters who are self-identified transwomen, and others ACRG skaters believed they could identify as trans, or more unfortunately, as a “man” or “dude”. In these situations, I have had discussions, sometimes heated, with my leaguemates about gender and trans issues. A few skaters have offered pseudo-scientific explanations for the exclusion of trans skaters, e.g., women born as men are innately stronger and more skilled than biological women based on muscle mass, hormones, or centre of gravity. During one discussion, a skater claimed, “If I wanted to play a coed sport, I would join volleyball or something”. When I suggested it is impossible to know that somebody is trans unless they tell you, a lesbian skater told me, “*I can tell when someone's a dude*”. I raise the issue of trans skaters here to highlight that although most ACRG skaters are uncritical of the women-only organization of the league, and sometimes make comments that suggest ACRG's women onliness is not important to them (discussed below), skaters' reactions to the idea of transgendered skaters reveal their (albeit ambivalent) investments in women onliness.

Also, with respect to the issue of trans skaters, ACRG skaters reveal enduring commitments to beliefs about essential biological and physiological gender differences; beliefs that are directly contradicted by other aspects of their involvement in roller derby.

At the women's workshops, no formal boundaries exclude men as participants. In fact, the commercial imperative of BBHR limits women's ability to engage in boundary maintenance. BBHR relies solely on gender marking to maintain the women onlyness of the women's workshops. That is, the only boundaries established by BBHR are those that result from gender marked naming and promotion of the women's workshops. Women's workshop participants, and to a much lesser extent the women's workshop organizers, take on all other boundary maintenance activities. "Comfortable" is the most common word used by BBHR employees to describe both the need for and result of the women's workshops. According to a BBHR executive, the women's workshops "had started out really with 'let's do topics that women wanna know about', and it has evolved into 'let's just create an environment where they're comfortable doing anything'". Creating the "comfortable environment" of the women's workshops is intended to ensure that women "feel comfortable enough to ask questions and get involved, and get hands on, and not really be worried about their overall ability...or what someone might think". "Someone" in this scenario is a man, and it appears that BBHR makes the same stereotypical assumptions about men that many women's workshop participants do: these are the problem men who make women feel uncomfortable, treat them like they are stupid, and inhibit their ability to develop expertise. The ways that women contribute to the production of a comfortable, supportive environment for developing expertise is the focus

of the next chapter. In contradiction of their claims about offering a comfortable and safe women-only environment at the women's workshops, there are no established rules for men's involvement. A BBHR executive claimed, "We try and keep it as women-only just to keep that level of comfort and that exclusivity, and sort of 'privilege' situation in place, where they feel that it's designed specifically for them, and that it's their time". However, according to the BBHR employees with whom I spoke, the company provides no guidance or training for the women's workshop organizers and instructors about what to do if a man customer attends or wants to attend a women's workshop.

Without training or guidance, it is unclear how women's workshop instructors and organizers are expected to "try and keep it women-only", and it is evident that at the store level, BBHR employees did not feel they could say "no" to men customers. Store Two's women's workshop organizer said, "There are men that show up. We can't say 'No, go home' [laughing]. 'Sorry, this isn't for you'". All BBHR employees I spoke with admitted that men could attend the women's workshops. Store One's manager was the most blunt, "A man could join if he wanted to...if he wanted to learn what was being taught at a specific workshop", then qualified his answer, "If a man wanted to learn with a group of people different from him then he could". Store one's women's workshop organizer explained, "I really don't have any issues with [a man sitting in]. I know a lot of the women do, and it's *so* funny when they see a guy walk in, [angry whisper] 'What's he doing here?'. That does not bother me at all because it's all about learning, bottom line". At times, though, men's presence is a problem that women's workshop organizers need to address, such as when a man monopolized a landscape designer's time at a

monthly women's workshop: "[One of the regulars] came and told me and I just shoed him away 'cause I mean, you're more than welcome to listen and stand there, but this is their time with the experts. That's touch and go. I mean, if he had a question that would help everybody that's another story, but if he's asking just about his personal yard, no".

Without guidance from BBHR, women's workshop organizers and instructors developed two main strategies to deal with men's attempts to attend the women's workshops. The first is a "common sense" strategy that works from the assumption that if a man understood this is a group for women; he (or any man) would not want to join. Even though the women's workshops are promoted for novices ("no expertise necessary"), teach basic skills and knowledge, and offer hands-on learning opportunities from which women and men could benefit, employees tend to be incredulous that a man would want to part of something "for women/ladies", and assume that men would be embarrassed to be in a workshop for women. Store Two's manager claims, men who have very basic questions will always ask another man, not a "lady", "because they're embarrassed and, I mean, they shouldn't be 'cause there's a lot of men out there that really don't know that kind of stuff, but that's just the way things are run in the world". Using this strategy, women's workshop instructors and organizers tell men, "This is the women's workshop", or if the man asks a question they might say, "I'll answer that if it's okay with the ladies, this is their workshop". In the situation at the gardening workshop described above, "He was upset, kind of abrupt, and I just said, 'This is the *women's* group, did you notice you're the only guy here?'. But you know, what can you say?". The common sense strategy is akin to most ACRG skaters' belief that it only makes sense to

organize roller derby in a gender-segregated way.

Using humour is the second strategy women's workshop organizers and instructors employ for boundary maintenance. According to the manager and women's workshop organizer, the women's workshop team at store Two planned in advance a humorous response to men who might want to join the group. They decided to tell men they could join the workshop if they "put on a skirt and make up", and they did (it is recorded in my fieldnotes on a number of occasions). Store Two's manager explains, and demonstrates the overlap between common sense and humorous strategies,

We basically said that [men] would be welcome to come in, but our biggest joke was that they'd have to put a skirt on. So, I mean, you get the odd one here and then that tried to come in but you could see where, when they would come in how uncomfortable they were and if you flip that around, and take it say it was all males and that woman coming in, that's what you're trying to eliminate is that uncomfortable feeling. So I mean, yes, we allowed them in and we did it as a joke just so that they could, you know feel a little bit more, break the ice, no problem, but in most cases they would just leave. [MD: Why do you think they were uncomfortable?] The fact that they were sittin' there with a bunch of women. And thinkin' that maybe they looked a little on the stupid side.

Part of the humour in this demand made of men is the characterization of gender expectations, i.e., that being a woman at the women's workshops means wearing a skirt. It is at odds with the version of womanhood performed by most women at the workshops. I can remember seeing a woman wearing a skirt at the weekly and monthly women's workshops at both stores fewer than five times in nearly three years. It is also funny (and likely inaccurate) to think, particularly relative to concerns about gender in ACRG detailed above, that women's workshop participants' definitions of women onlyness would be satisfied by a man in a skirt. This made the comments funny, and the intentional joking demonstrates the ways that humour can be used as Green (1998: 121) suggests;

she identifies humour as a social process that “promotes bonding through the sharing, often in an ironic way, of common concerns, differences and problems, whilst downplaying their importance. Shared laughter and humour generate positive sentiments among ‘insiders’, which serve to bond the group, often at the expense of excluded ‘outsiders’”.

Women’s joking reveals concerns about preserving women onlyness while maintaining a good-humoured atmosphere, and avoiding confrontation with men. It also effectively contributes to a feeling of bonding among the women’s workshop participants and with the women’s workshop organizer against, and at the expense of, men. In the larger roller derby community humour is also used for boundary maintenance, and ACRG skaters adopt some of these jokes. A popular roller derby saying, printed on t-shirts and stickers, uses double meaning to indicate that men do not play roller derby, and that roller derby is unlike other sports: “There are no balls in roller derby”. In addition, when men do play flat track roller derby, it is gender marked in such a way that it can be read as the “little brother” of “proper” roller derby. Most often, men’s roller derby is referred to as “merby”. Because roller derby is gender marked only when men play, i.e., men’s roller derby/merby versus simply, roller derby, this sends the message that women’s games and women skaters are the norm, the universal, whereas the men’s games and men skaters are continually marked as the other, derivative, and, by implication, inferior to the women’s (modified from Messner et al., 1993: 127).

Gender marking men’s roller derby also emphasizes that women are primarily responsible for developing this version of roller derby, and current men skaters play using

formal and informal rules created by women. Typically, women are incorporated into men's sports using "girls' rules". After a period of resistance to girls' involvement, many sports, such as hockey and basketball, and sometimes women's sport organizations themselves, introduce adapted rules for girls (Theberge, 1998; Kidd, 1996). Flat track roller derby is the only sport I know in which the "girls' rules" – written by women, for women – are *the* rules, and men also use them. A more pejorative, but also humorous term for men's roller derby is "dangle derby", which emphasizes physical differences between women and men. Occasionally, roller skaters also "play with" notions of physical differences, for example naming a men's all-star team, Team SeXY.

In ACRG and at the women's workshops, gender boundaries are established in formal and informal ways. Establishing and maintaining boundaries demonstrates investments in women onlyness, and reveals the ways that women onlyness is produced and, in the case of ACRG, institutionalized at the organizational level of these activities.

Participants

Women participants are actively involved in boundary maintenance, and it is a primary way in which women onlyness gender regimes are produced. In ACRG, skaters are responsible for developing and maintaining the formal boundaries related to league membership, for example, writing and enforcing the code of conduct. At BBHR's women's workshops, the participants are primarily responsible for boundary maintenance because they cannot rely on the women's workshop instructors and organizers to limit men's participation in the group. Women's workshop participants use the same strategies – common sense and humour – as the women's workshop instructors and organizers. I

consistently heard women participants use language and phrases introduced by the women's workshop organizers. During a monthly women's workshop at store Two, a man customer asked the women's workshop organizer, "What is this". She told him, "It's the women's workshop", and he replied, "I feel left out". While she assured him, "There are other workshops, just this one is for women", a participant told him, "If you wear a skirt, we'll let you join".

Women's workshop participants also use more overt boundary maintenance strategies than instructors and organizers. As customers in the store, they are able to be more direct in their defense of women onlyness than BBHR employees who are expected, it seems, to maintain their customer service commitment above all else. At the women's workshops, women appear to be more attentive to the perceived benefits of women onlyness. According to a monthly women's workshop participant at store Two, "it's nice that the workshops are for women only, then men don't look at you and make you feel stupid", and a participant at store One's monthly women's workshop said how much she enjoyed being able to try skills and tools in a group of all women, it is much more difficult in other settings, "especially if a guy is watching". Store One's women's workshop organizer told me that women have issues with men at the women's workshops, "Cause this is their time. This is their almost sanctuary, where they can come and learn and feel totally calm and free, and they just don't want it, you know. It's not all women, it's just some women it really bothers".

A sense of ownership and investment is apparent in many responses about women's commitment to the women onlyness of "their" workshops. When asked, "Why

don't you want men at the workshops?", a regular at store One's weekly and monthly workshops said simply, "Because this is ours". And store One's manager also identified a sense of ownership as integral to women's enjoyment of the workshops: "They like that it's theirs". In order to maintain the women onlyness of the women's workshops, participants use a variety of strategies that can be broadly categorized as indirect, direct, and physical. Indirect strategies typically involve one or more women's workshop participants calling attention to the presence of a man or men at the workshop or in the workshop space, e.g., "A woman asked 'What's with all the men?' upon arriving at the workshop area to find a number of men customers standing around". It is my interpretation that when using this type of indirect strategy, women hope to enlist each other's assistance, they hope somebody else will say something to the man, or the man will overhear and realize he is at the women's workshop. Indirect strategies commonly engage the women's workshop instructor or organizer as an "authority" figure in the group to help discourage men's participation. This is apparent in the previously cited example of a woman raising her hand and asking the women's workshop organizer, "This is the *women's* workshop, right?". When women's workshop participants use these indirect strategies of boundary maintenance, they hope that the man will "get it" and leave. When they do not, which is often the case at least initially, their perceived obliviousness, "Didn't he realize it was all women?" provides evidence to support stereotyped views of men's lacking social intelligence relative to women. To be fair, most customers in the BBHR stores, women and men, are unaware that the women's workshops exist; men are not alone in their ignorance. The majority of men eventually

leave the workshop space, often after realizing there are no other men in the group. Men's reactions to this realization are a source of entertainment for some women's workshop participants: "He couldn't get out of here fast enough!"

Some women's workshop participants attract the attention of the women's workshop organizer: "They tell me... 'There's a man right there', oh yeah, they'll like point, and there's those two sisters who will get up and tell them, 'This is for women only, get outta here', it's hilarious". The sisters are an example of women's more direct strategies of boundary maintenance, when women participants tell men: This is our time and space and you need to leave. At an ACRG practice, "During the drills, there are a number of obnoxious men spectators/ ball hockey players standing by the arena door. They make loud comments [about skaters and roller derby], and laugh (they seem to be drunk). At one point, [a skater] yells 'Fuck off!' very loudly in their direction... The guys seemed a little surprised. They left not long after that". Engaging men directly in the defense of women onlyness can be confrontational, as in this ACRG example, though often, especially at the women's workshops, direct strategies use humour to "soften" the confrontation, while still sending the message: "You are not welcome here". Examples of this include women's "You can join us if you put on a skirt" comments, and welcoming men to the women's workshops by emphasizing the contradictions, e.g., "Would you like to join our *women's* workshop, *sir*?" A regular at store One's weekly women's workshops often called attention to men watching the women's workshops, and engaged them in joking ways that usually encouraged them to leave. At a workshop on power tools,

While we are trying the tools, a few men stop to watch. On a couple of occasions, [a regular] notices, and says something to the spectators. For example, when we are trying the circular saw, she says to a male spectator, ‘Would you like us to give you a haircut, sir?’. The man does not respond, but looks a little sheepish and drifts away soon after. At one point (I think it was when we were trying the palm nailer [a loud hammer-like tool]), a [BBHR] worker came over from the painting counter to tell us that it sounds like a dentist’s office. [She] offers, ‘We can do some work for you’. He laughs, and heads back to the painting counter.

During these interactions with men, other women’s workshop participants usually laughed, and sometimes commented, “He didn’t stick around for long”, or teased, “You scared them away”.

Sometimes women’s workshop participants employed physical strategies of boundary maintenance, strategies that emphasized boundaries by physically performing them in the space of the workshops. During a field trip to the flooring department at store Two’s monthly workshop, “A young couple is trying to shop in the aisle where we are all standing and some of the women welcome the young woman to ‘come on down’ and they move out of her way. The man ends up going down the next aisle and coming up at the other end from where we are standing”. Although the women participants would likely have moved for the man as well (this was usually the case), they only addressed the woman directly, and it seems he interpreted this as encouragement to find another way through. At a monthly women’s workshop at store One, bleachers in the workshop room facilitated participants’ view of the electrical demonstration. A man sat at the top right-hand side of the bleachers and as women participants arrived, they sat as far away as possible, filling only the bottom benches and left-hand side of the bleachers. Throughout the workshop, he was physically secluded/excluded on the bleachers, and I watched a number of women watch him at various times. At the end of the workshop, women asked

the women's workshop organizer about him, and were told he is a BBHR executive who came to observe the women's workshop because they are the most successful in the country. Upon hearing this, women participants' concerns shifted from his presence to what he had said about the workshops.

On many occasions, women's workshop participants do nothing to maintain women onlyness. At a flooring workshop, a couple entered the workshop room and asked the man instructor questions about their floors. When they left (after he answered them), the instructor asked the women's workshop participants, "Why were they in your workshop?", [one woman responded] 'You [indicating the man customer] go, she can stay', [another claimed] 'I was going to say, welcome to our women's workshop', [a different woman concluded] 'We were nice tonight. Next week, maybe not'. Most women's workshop participants feel it is unnecessary to engage a man who just listens: "I don't care about them" a store One weekly women's workshop regular said. According to store Two's women's workshop organizer, "It really depends on the man, because if he's a guy that can take it and joke around, then he's in, but if he's Mr. Serious who's over there in the corner, the women are going to feel quite uncomfortable and feel as though they're being judged, so it depends on the man". Some women are simply not comfortable confronting anybody, especially men, "I could never do that". When women participants use indirect, direct, and physical strategies of boundary maintenance, they demonstrate an active engagement in producing women onlyness, in part, by defending or enforcing women onlyness. Additionally, whenever possible, women use these strategies in ways that maintain a friendly and comfortable atmosphere for all participants.

Even when women participants do not engage in strategies of boundary maintenance, many demonstrate a keen awareness of men spectators' at their activities. Spectators are men who are present at the women's workshops or ACRG events, but usually do not interact with the women participants. Within the women-only groups, and related to boundary maintenance, women draw attention to men, and offer accounts of men's reactions. This reinforces women onliness, distinctions between exceptional and problem men, and reveals women's awareness of the lack of "real" boundaries of their women-only leisure activities. At times, ACRG volunteers and women's workshop organizers contribute to women's awareness of men in "their space". Men's presence can be frustrating, entertaining (as mentioned, women laugh at men's reactions to realizing they are in a group of women), odd or inexplicable ("What is he *doing* here?"). However, as indicated in the above reference to "Mr. Serious", interpreted by workshop participants as passing judgement, women respond most strongly when they feel judged. When men seem supportive, their presence is less remarked upon, if at all.

At a workshop on ceramic tile, "a man stops at the back of the workshop room and asks what is going on. A woman tells him that it is the women's workshop and he says that it would be a great way to meet women. His wife (the woman with him) seems to be pushing him to move on but he stays and watches for a moment. (He seems encouraging)". Though women's workshop participants smiled and laughed at his comment, they said nothing about his presence. As in this case, men's (and other women's) presence as spectators is a result of the semi-public spaces in which these activities take place. At almost every women's workshop, customers stand around the

workshop room, and less frequently enter the workshop room to watch or ask questions. Early in my involvement at the workshops, I observed: “Most customers look into the workshop room as they walk by (both women and men, though there seem to be significantly more men than women in the store). Some stop a few feet away and watch what [the instructor] is doing. A few spend time looking at all of the women”. Women’s workshop participants demonstrate their awareness of spectators when they draw attention to them. Usually, women spectators are invited to join the group (this recruiting is discussed in the next chapter), and men are talked about, and occasionally spoken to as explained above. During a store Two monthly workshop, “A woman behind me says, ‘I love the looks on men’s faces when they walk by. We should have pictures of them’”. At a store One weekly women’s workshop, “Workshop participants are consistently noticing attention from men customers as they go by—they stop to look. [A regular] says... ‘All the men are looking in, every single man that walks by’”.

It seems the attention men pay to the women’s workshops is most obvious or interesting to newer participants. It was often women attending one of their first women’s workshops who commented about the men. Perhaps women’s workshop regulars become accustomed to men’s presence, and while they continue to notice the men (which is obvious in some situations), they rarely draw attention to men’s presence. New participants more overtly negotiate the group’s women onlyness in relation to men. Women’s workshop organizers also commented more on men’s presence and reactions early on. For example, at the fourth store Two monthly workshop, a woman BBHR associate instructed and the women’s workshop organizer stood at the back of the room.

During the workshop she said, “Every man who walks by makes a comment”, such as “It’s all women” and “Want me to show you how to do it?”. She replied, “Tell me how to do it, to show me they know how”, and none would. After this, some women participants spent more time looking at the men who went by, and especially men who stopped to spectate.

Outside the store, e.g., women’s workshop presentation at a local Home Show, building event outside store One, women’s workshop participants demonstrated awareness of men, and responses were not limited to newer participants. At times, regulars seemed almost defensive (of “their” women’s workshops) when they described their perceptions of men’s reactions. At the Home Show,

It is interesting to hear how aware the women are (and how concerned they are) with men’s reactions to the presentation and to the workshops in general, especially reactions that are perceived to be negative—based on physical and verbal reactions to the presentation. The participants...tell [the women’s workshop organizer] that the older man sitting in front of them was shaking his head while [the woman presenting] was saying that it would take her two minutes to install the faucet. The women were pleased when she was successful... another man in the crowd was quite disparaging about the women-only workshops, though someone said they thought this was because his wife expressed an interest in attending.

The women’s workshop organizer was invested in ensuring the women’s workshop presentation was well received; it would be good publicity for the store and the program. Women’s workshop participants’ responses, as they reported to the women’s workshop organizer, revealed that they also felt invested in the women’s workshops being well received. I had the sense they felt the women’s workshop presentation also reflected on them, and they took personally the reactions of (particularly) men in the audience. When a man informed the weekly women’s workshop group at store One that the deck chairs

we were building “won’t be as comfortable as the ones I made, mine have curved backs”, the women (including me) were unsure how to react, assuring him, “They are very comfortable”, and “We’re happy with them”. When he left, we looked at each other, laughed, and made “What the hell?” comments. When one woman asked, “Why did he need to tell us that?”, another replied, “Some men don’t think women should do this kind of thing”, and another elaborated, “He felt threatened by our deck chairs. Good for us”.

Women’s responses to men’s presence and reactions are shared with the entire group. When women tell these stories, their interpretations of men’s reactions are clear: men are uncomfortable with women’s involvement or feel threatened by women being capable in traditionally masculine activities, such as home improvement. Some women suggest that men see the women’s workshops and women learning home improvement skills and knowledge and “feel like they’re being replaced”, “They’re worried we won’t need them anymore”. Women also interpret men’s reactions as disapproval of their involvement, such as men making disparaging comments about the women’s workshops, or when a man ran over part of a group’s shed at a store One building event. At this event women’s workshop participants built sheds outside in an area of the parking lot cordoned off by tents, bleachers, and trucks. In spite of this, a man rolled a shopping cart over one group’s roof while it lay on the ground. The women who saw were astounded, “I cannot believe he did that”, “Why couldn’t he just go around?”, “Who would do that?”, angry, “What a jerk”, “Asshole”, and told the other women in the group. All had similar reactions. When a woman asked, “Did you say anything to him?”, another replied, “It’s not worth it, he’s one of those guys who doesn’t think women belong here”. Another

agreed, “Us just being here made him angry, imagine if we’d said something?”. Women’s responses to, and explanations of, men’s reactions to the women’s workshops demonstrate their awareness of men, perceptions that men have opinions about the women’s workshops, and recognition that home improvement is a traditionally masculine cultural practice (and men’s reactions to them are linked to this association). When they talk about these men, women reinforce women onlyness and the meanings of women onlyness, for each other and themselves, and emphasize (essential) gender differences. Further, in these situations women demonstrate an implicit awareness that they are challenging some gender stereotypes or gender norms within the gender regime of home improvement; however, they explain this as the men’s problem. That is, men feel threatened by women, rather than women’s participation in these activities is threatening to men. In the following section, I include additional ways in which women recognize and are reminded about their involvement in a traditionally masculine cultural practice.

Women onlyness: Traditionally masculine cultural practices

Maintaining boundaries to exclude men as participants at the women’s workshops and in ACRG is an ongoing process, accomplished only temporarily using strategies described in the previous section. The need to constantly defend and “work for” – produce and reproduce – women onlyness demonstrates some of the challenges associated with women onlyness gender regimes, particularly as a result of the broader relationships of these activities to men. It also reveals the active production of particular kinds of women onlyness. Specifically, women onlyness for these groups is established in relation to (and within) activities that can be understood as traditionally masculine

cultural practices, such as organizing and managing a sports league, playing a full contact sport, and doing-it-yourself home improvement. The dominant gender regimes of these activities (and the organizations and institutions with which they are typically associated) are strongly patriarchal, privileging men over women in divisions of labour and power, as well as status and prestige. Britton (2000: 424) is critical of what she calls the “nominal approach” to applying the concept of gendering: referring to occupations (her focus) as gendered (feminized/masculinized) when in fact they are dominated by women or men. In her view, this approach “commits the error of conflating sex with gender”, and “may obscure the historical process through which definitions of gender-appropriate work are shaped” (Britton, 2000: 424). A preferable approach, Britton (2000: 424) claims, draws on Roos and McDaniel’s distinction between sex composition (“the representation of men and women in particular occupations and should properly be expressed as the extent to which they are female or male dominated”), and gender typing (“the process through which occupations come to be seen as appropriate for workers with masculine or feminine characteristics, that is, occupations could be said to be feminized, masculinized, or, more generically, gendered”). Though this is an important distinction, and can affect some of the ways that women engage with these activities and the settings in which they take place, the sex composition and gender typing of both roller derby (and particularly those aspects of developing a sport, owning and managing teams) and home improvement correspond. That is, each of these activities is, to a certain extent, traditionally dominated by men, and also masculinized.

Women's participation in contact sports, such as rugby, hockey²¹, and even boxing is considered increasingly acceptable. In spite of this, women participate in smaller numbers than men, and women continue to be vastly outnumbered in coaching and administrative positions in almost all sport organizations, including women's sport at amateur, collegiate, and professional levels (Acosta and Carpenter, 2006). In the Review of Literature, I addressed the ways that home improvement has been defined as men's work. Women's involvement, especially in the more structural or 'harder' forms of home improvement has often been framed as a matter of necessity, i.e., no men available to do it for them. Gelber (1997: 91) describes predecessors of the women's workshops: "A variety of organizations established adult education classes for women during the war so that they could nurse their ailing homes and appliances for the duration...[they] held classes to teach women to change fuses, splice wires, trouble-shoot appliances, paint, plumb, and do simple wood repairs". The impression that women do home improvement work only out of necessity continues in spite of women's growing interest in home improvement, the home improvement industry's growing interest in women as a market for tools, materials, and projects (Hymowitz, 2008), and recognition that women wield decision making power with respect to home improvement projects. Every BBHR employee I spoke with made reference to "research has shown" or "it's been proven" that women control spending on home improvement, and all claimed that women comprise at least fifty percent of the do-it-yourself customers in their stores.

²¹ It should be noted that women's hockey, including elite-level competition is played by a different rule set than men's hockey, and body checking is not part of the women's game (Theberge, 1998).

Women-only leisure activity group participants, and particularly the women's workshop participants, demonstrate that they are very aware that the activities in which they participate are traditionally male dominated and culturally defined as masculine. The ways that women make known their awareness of, and negotiate their place within, male dominated and masculine cultural practices is revealing with respect to the production of women onlyness. In addition, others (including some women participants) are involved in the process of reminding and reinforcing the traditionally masculine associations of these activities, however unintentional this might be. At the women's workshops, participants consistently reinforce the idea of home improvement as a masculine activity by indicating they think home improvement is men's work, most commonly by making reference to men as the traditional, usual, or expected actors. Men are assumed to have home improvement expertise or it is assumed that men *should* have expertise; many women claim to attend the women's workshops – they *need* to attend the women's workshops – because their husbands cannot, do not, or will not do home improvement work in their homes.

Women's workshop participants have described husbands who "cannot": "My husband is a catastrophe, if anything can go wrong it does – that's why I'm doing this", and one woman told store Two's monthly women's workshop group her husband lacks confidence, but assumes he should be able to DIY because he is the man. A women's workshop participant claimed, "Every man knows how to do it until he's your husband and you ask him to do it", to which another woman replied, "That's my husband, he doesn't know how". Husbands who "do not" and "will not" are often those who never

“get around to it”: a regular at store Two’s monthly women’s workshops said she attends “Because you get tired of waiting for somebody else to do it”, and admitted, “somebody else” is her husband. Another woman said, “I’m doing this because if I don’t do it, it won’t get done”. Additionally, some widowed women expressed a desire to learn to do work their husbands had done, and use “his tools”. Typically, conversations about power tools indicated they belong to men: “[A regular] says that a lot of the women have tools already—‘If you have a man around, you usually have one of everything’. Another woman adds, ‘When men are involved, you probably have two’”. Women without husbands sometimes adopt similar language: “one of the women says, ‘As women, we always want something to be done [around the house]. If I had a husband, I would work him to death’”. A sense that home improvement is part of the men’s sphere exists even when women are willing to do the work. One woman described doing work *for* her husband: “Now she is at home (working only one day each week...), and enjoying learning about looking after the house. She...was happy to learn about drywall, because if her husband didn’t want to do it, she could do it. She suggested that she had done a couple of things recently as a surprise for him while he was out at work”.

Gelber (1997: 99) argues that post-1950s, “Women were now free to help with home improvements if they wanted to, but men were expected to. Most frequently women were depicted as helpers or partners for their husbands...In an adult version of the tomboy pattern, the wife who did a man’s work around the house was admired for her competence, but the husband who did not was less than a man”. However, the women’s workshop participants’ experiences suggest there are few, if any, consequences for a

husband who does not do-it-himself. In fact, women's workshop participants reinforce home improvement's association as "man's work" in the ways that they speak about it. At the same time, by attending the women's workshops, they demonstrate willingness, and in some cases perceived necessity, to take on this work. During a break at a store

Two monthly women's workshop, "participants discussed their husbands' nervous reactions to all the new project ideas they come home with after each workshop. The consensus was that many husbands have adopted a 'go to it' attitude about the work, and thus encourage their wives to take on ever increasing responsibilities for the housework".

In addition to the women's workshop participants, women's workshop organizers, instructors, and others contribute to the process of declaring and reinforcing home improvement as a masculine cultural practice, and a man's responsibility. In most cases, I believe this is largely unintentional because it occurs simultaneously with encouraging and promoting women's active involvement in home improvement. For example, at a store

Two weekly women's workshop on plumbing, the man instructor affirmed many women's experiences of "unhelpful" or "unhandy" husbands, "[He] tells us that sometimes when women come into the store and ask him questions, he will explain that something could be DIY, 'if your husband is handy'. He claims that many women end up 'rolling on the floor' laughing in response. One of the women asks [him], 'Why do you think we're here?'" Even though he is instructing a women's workshop, and dealing with women customers in the store, this instructor continues to assume that women's husbands, and not the women themselves, do the projects they ask about.

Some women instructors at the women's workshops consistently make reference

to men as the home improvement practitioners in women's homes. At store Two's monthly women's workshops, one woman instructor always referred to home improvement projects as something participants might have seen their husband/boyfriend/father/brother/uncle/son do. Despite her own extensive experience, she never referred to a woman doing the project. Away from BBHR stores, women encounter men and women making similar assumptions. A store One weekly women's workshop participant told the group, "I went to buy my electric drill at [department store], and the guy said 'your husband will like this' and I had to say, 'but it's for me, he won't be using it'". Some women believe their husbands would not have supported their involvement in the women's workshops: "One of the older women in the group...says, 'If my husband saw me here, he'd be rolling in his grave', [he would ask] 'What the hell are you doing?'". I heard her say this a few times when she and a friend were regulars, even though her family was very supportive: "My girls [adult daughters] were excited. They were excited that I was going, and they couldn't believe what I was learning... 'What are you gonna do next mom?'". Sometimes other women were dismissive of the women's workshops, such as during a store One weekly women's workshop: "two women customers passed by the workshop room and stopped to watch. After asking the women what they were doing (replacing a screen), they chided the [women's workshop participants], 'Come on ladies, don't let him off the hook, make your husbands do it'". Women's workshop participants' responded: "He was never *on* the hook", "Some of us don't have husbands", which suggest they agree that men *should* do this work, and "We want to be able to do it ourselves", which works to redefine assumptions about who can and should do the work

of home improvement. Some women's workshop participants consider women's involvement in home improvement optional: when a regular at store One's weekly workshops learned I am not married, she told me, "Whoever gets you is going to be lucky". Unlike a man's expected home improvement expertise, some workshop participants perceive my newly acquired skills and knowledge as a bonus, not a requirement.

In all of these interactions, women's workshop participants and others reinforce home improvement's cultural association as masculine, and demonstrate the power of the dominant gender regime of BBHR and the home improvement industry. They also, in limited ways, make space for women's involvement by explaining their involvement in relation to the masculine association of home improvement. When a man cannot fulfill the expectation that he is responsible for home improvement (based on expertise, time, or something else), or if there is no man in a woman's life to do home improvement, it is necessary for her to do-it-herself. These explanations address the reality of many women's workshop participants' lives (though definitely not all). They also shed light on the ways that women draw on a range of sometimes contradictory gender stereotypes in their production of a women onlyness gender regime.

The situation in women's flat track roller derby, and ACRG, is quite different. Similar processes are in place to signal that women playing a contact sport, and owning and managing sports teams are engaged in traditionally masculine cultural practices. However, the women who founded the first leagues, and initiated the resurrection and redefinition of roller derby (the "mothers" and "grandmothers" of women's flat track

roller derby) did so in ways that established distance from these associations, and to an extent, offered alternatives to their characterization as masculine. Instead of making use of an activity already provided, as the women’s workshop participants have done, or “going along” with Devil Dan’s plans for a roller derby revival, the women who founded TXRG, and leagues that followed their lead, created something of their own. In their creation, they denied, and at the same time made implicit, reference to the male dominated and traditionally masculine cultural practice of roller derby²².

At a WFTDA annual meeting, a Board member addressed representatives of member leagues, and discussed the growth of the organization, emphasizing its success with respect to staying in control of the sport and message (avoiding both “cigar chomping managers” and succumbing to “how the media saw us”), while developing a community. The WFTDA (sometimes referred to as “WeFTDA” to highlight the role all WFTDA members play in the work of the organization), she claimed, has created something “meaningful and lasting for women”, and needs to move “forward with the same optimism and enthusiasm that has gotten us through the past five years”, while preserving “the values of the mothers who started this”, including: control of the sport and the message, community, democratic ideals, and fun; elements that make flat track roller derby “the best sport ever”. It can be argued these values are an implicit response to the organization and promotion of earlier versions of roller derby, as well as the values – and gender regime – of male-dominated, and masculine-defined sports organizations, i.e., authoritarian, commercialized, militarized, etc.

²² The main characteristics of earlier versions of roller derby are included in the “*A very brief history of roller derby*” section of Appendix A.

As a response, these values establish distance from other versions of roller derby and sport, and simultaneously demonstrate that women's flat track roller derby is unavoidably connected to these other forms. In order to create something new and separate²³, women's flat track roller derby is forced to identify what it is separate from. These processes are more apparent at the level of the WFTDA than in ACRG because it is at that level that women work to develop and sustain women's flat track roller derby and the WFTDA in the face of challenges from, for example, national roller sports federations and men's roller derby. As discussed above, at the league level in ACRG, the women onlyness of contemporary roller derby is naturalized and unquestioned. Women founded the league, and have done the league work for the entirety of its brief history. ACRG skaters are in control, and feel able to limit men's involvement, as well as limiting the influence of masculine-defined sport organization and values. The league's commitment to "by the skaters, for the skaters", and women onlyness gender regime, is more formally established and institutionalized in ACRG.

In ACRG and at the women's workshops, women participants' both reinforce and challenge the traditionally masculine associations of their activities. In so doing, they reveal that women onlyness is always produced in relation to and negotiation with men and essentialized stereotypes of gender difference.

²³ In other sports, women's leagues and teams are often part of larger sport organizations or associations that are usually run predominantly by men. In women's flat track roller derby, the emphasis is not only on women as skaters (athletes) but also as team and league owners and operators, and through the WFTDA, as defining and determining the present and future of the sport of roller derby.

Women onliness and feminization

As Britton (2000) warns, it is inaccurate to claim that an occupation or an activity is feminized simply because increasing numbers of women participate in it. Doing so confuses women's participation with the ways in which women (and some men) contribute to the feminization of home improvement and roller derby. Women-only leisure activities are not feminized by women's participation, but through processes of introducing elements that make them seem more appropriate for women (participants "with feminine characteristics"). I prefer to emphasize the production of women onliness gender regimes versus feminization; however, this latter process is revealing with respect to the ways that women onliness is produced in relation to essentialized stereotypes of gender difference. There are limited examples of the feminization of home improvement and roller derby: domestic- or women-related analogies and cooperation at the women's workshops, and community service and concerns about appearance in ACRG. For the most part, women's activities are identical to the same activities for men. Women's workshop instructors use the same content guides for the women's and other workshops, and flat track roller derby rules for women and men *are* the "girls' rules". The limited strategies of feminization discussed in this section serve as continuous reinforcement of (essential) gender difference, and further demonstrate the ways that women participants are constantly negotiating among various gender stereotypes. I identify these elements as "feminized" because the women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters highlight them as essentialized differences between women and men. For example, at the women's workshops participants, instructors, organizers, managers, and executives claim

consistently: women need women-only workshops to feel comfortable asking questions. No such consideration of men's questions, or the need to create a conducive learning environment for men, is mentioned. In this context, like some others, such as asking for directions, seeking help has feminized connotations. This is elaborated on in the following chapter.

Women's workshop participants', organizers', and instructors' use of domestic- or women-related analogies is the first way that home improvement is feminized at the women's workshops. In three years, I have heard the following examples: a woman participant asked if you could apply putty to a window frame "like icing, by using a Ziploc, or right out of the package?"; repairing a screen is "just like darning socks"; applying venetian plaster is like "icing a cake"; and "there are fashions in flooring just like anything else, like stilettos versus block heels versus pointed toes"; when a woman participant suggested that mixing mortar for installing ceramic tile is "like cooking with flour", the man instructor agreed, "Yes, it is like flour", and told us that the consistency should be like muffin mix"; and a man tool vendor representative explained that his collection of router bits is like a jewelry collection. When women and men invoke these traditional understandings of "women's work", such as cooking and sewing, it is possible they are trying to make home improvement more accessible to women. They might make skills and products more relevant to women by drawing attention to similarities with activities many women have experienced (though it seemed that only the woman using the analogy had actually darned a sock). At the same time, these comparisons emphasize difference. Home improvement is positioned as outside women's traditional areas of

expertise (connected to the domestic sphere), which implies that it falls traditionally within the men's sphere. Also, on a number of occasions women's workshop participants discussed house and garden issues related only tangentially (if at all) to the evening's topic. These have included sharing home recipes for cleaning solutions, as well as tips for getting rid of garden pests, repelling bugs, treating insect bites and stings, cooking, and reporting back about using tips learned from other women, e.g., "I used your onion water, and no streaks!", "I tried that recipe and it was delicious". These discussions are useful, allow women to share expertise with one another (this is included in the next chapter), and tend to reinforce the association of domestic labour as women's work. Though it is possible that men would share tips with one another in a similar setting, it is unlikely they would be the same ones.

Some women's workshop participants identify cooperation among participants as a feminine characteristic. A regular at store Two's monthly women's workshop said there was a lot of cooperation among the women: "If you couldn't do it, somebody else would help you with it, I think we're more apt to pitch in and help each other". In her estimation, men are unlikely to cooperate in similar ways. According to another regular, "I find women look after women and they become each other's advocate and you build on these relationships which is what was happening at the [workshops] is even though we were kind of a loosely fit group and none of us knew each other, you did build on the relationships over a period of time and that's important when you're learning". Women, many women's workshop participants suggest, are more inclined to cooperate, support each other, and develop relationships. Like cooperation, sharing is identified as a

feminine trait: “One of the women...said how well we had all shared the limited tools, etc. last week and that men would never have been capable of doing that”. Sharing at the women’s workshops was sometimes frustrating for women (including me). In response to the previous comment I recorded, “Interestingly, I had been really frustrated about having to share and wait for everything and I sensed the same thing from other women”. A regular at store One’s weekly women’s workshops said, “I thought most of the women in the workshop were very cordial, you know other than when it was getting to 9 o’clock and we wouldn’t let them have the nailer [laughing]. But I think everybody helped everybody else out. I think everybody was there to learn and they all cooperated with everybody”. For some women, there were limits to their willingness to share and cooperate; however, these limits also reveal that sharing and cooperation were the norm for most women’s workshop participants.

Sharing and cooperation are also features of women’s flat track roller derby, and are often associated by participants with the sport’s women onlyness. Many women’s flat track roller derby leagues, including ACRG, rely on the generosity of more established leagues:

For the most part, everybody has had the same experiences at one point or another. Going to RollerCon for 3 years in a row, it just kind of makes you realize, as you sit through the workshops, and everybody’s trying to figure out how to sell merch...and how to skate, and what’s your track made out of...and do you even have a place to skate and practice all year round or, like, *everybody* that has a roller derby league has the exact same problems...going to those things, we got to short cut a lot of those things.

Learning from other leagues in face-to-face meetings, such as at RollerCon or bouts, or through online communication, allowed ACRG to avoid potentially time consuming and

costly trials and errors. Even though leagues compete on the track, they typically share information about training plans, business structures, and everything else involved in running a women's flat track roller derby league. Occasionally skaters make comments that suggest this is related to women's desire to help each other, and to see all women succeed: "The support and generosity from this amazing community of women is overwhelming", and sometimes attribute to the larger roller derby community a sense of "sisterhood". It can also be argued that sharing and support among leagues is not a feminized element, but rather it serves the interests of everybody involved in women's flat track roller derby to have growing numbers of successful leagues.

A common feature of women's flat track roller derby that does seem to be interpreted as feminizing is a commitment to community service. ACRG's Community Service Committee is one of the league's original committees, and focuses on supporting organizations that provide services for women and children. According to ACRG's president, the community service commitment started with the founder. She felt, "This is important and if we have this many people involved then we should be able to do something to make a difference". Although this explanation credits one individual, almost all women's flat track roller derby leagues have a Community Service or equivalent committee. ACRG's president suggests, "It plays into, from a business perspective, plays into accounting...cross-marketing. There is benefits to it, but that wasn't the intent of how it started. It just seems to be a part of derby because I think women just generally care, and I mean, if we can do it, why not?". ACRG has donated money and time to a number of organizations and causes. Although there are parallel "giving back to the

community” initiatives affiliated with professional sports teams, e.g., Maple Leaf Sports+ Entertainment’s “Team Up Foundation”, the community service component of ACRG and many women’s flat track roller derby leagues is not a feature of many amateur, grassroots sports organizations. Similarly organized men’s recreational hockey leagues do not usually include a commitment to community service in mission statements or descriptions (as ACRG does). Stalp et al. (2008) claim, unlike men’s voluntary organizations, “Women’s voluntary organizations typically include a social service element”. As the president indicates, this establishes an association of ACRG’s skaters as caring, nurturing – feminine – women, in spite of (and possibly related to) their full contact, distinctly not traditionally feminine actions on the track.

In a different vein, roller derby in ACRG is feminized through some skaters’ concerns about appearance. Specifically, attention to applying make up before games, choosing the “right” outfit, and complaining about uniforms based on their appearance rather than function (“We need something nicer than t-shirts”, “I’m so sick of wearing this ugly uniform”) are examples of some skaters’ preoccupation with how they look while playing. Occasionally, ACRG skaters remind each other that there are more important things than appearance: “Maybe we should worry about how we play more than how we look”, “Let’s figure out if we even have a team before we pick new uniforms”. However, part of roller derby’s appeal for many skaters is the opportunity to be part of a team *and* be creative, individual, and sometimes outrageous in the way they choose to look.

In each of the cases described, fairly limited processes of feminization serve as

continual reminders of gender difference: women engaged in traditionally masculine activities constantly remind themselves and each other that “we are women”, and in so doing negotiate essentialized, stereotypical notions of what it means to be a woman (a domestic labourer, nurturer, object).

Accounting for women onliness in traditionally masculine cultural practices

Among ACRG skaters, as mentioned, there are few attempts and opportunities to account for women onliness. Flat track roller derby has been effectively established and defined as a women’s sport, with a corresponding women onliness gender regime, thus women-only rather than coed participation is naturalized for most skaters. ACRG’s president exemplifies this position: “There’s lots of different versions of roller derby but I mean, this is just the one we play, and this is the way we operate, but I mean everybody operates differently”. Like the president, for many ACRG skaters, flat track roller derby “just is” women only. Conversely, women’s workshop participants regularly offer accounts of women onliness. Though many women claim to be attracted to the women onliness of the workshops, they struggle to explain why, and often offer explanations that make more sense for other women. It is notoriously difficult for anybody to articulate motivations, and I do not include these accounts as evidence of women’s specific motivations, rather because of what the accounts reveal about women’s difficulties explaining the need for and appeal of women-only home improvement workshops.

Many women’s workshop participants frame their accounts and explain their workshop attendance in relation to a common theme: necessity. A store One weekly women’s workshop regular stated, “Why would you get into it if your husband’s going to

do it—there's gotta be a need". These accounts sometimes reflect a person's particular circumstances, and often overlap. In addition to describing women's workshop participation as a matter of necessity related to incapable, unwilling, or absent men, or lack of money, women's accounts demonstrate their commitment to developing independence. According to a regular at store Two's monthly women's workshops,

I would guess [women's workshops are offered] because there are so many women who are on their own that are probably intimidated by trying anything. The base of the population, everybody's separated, divorced, single mums—can't afford to hire somebody if it's a simple thing that you could do then why not try it, kind of thing...and there seem to be a lot of older ladies who're probably on their own as well. So you've got a good cross-section in that group actually.

I was intrigued that the woman who offered this account is married (to the father of her adult children), runs a business, and owns a house. Her explanation of the women's workshops did not include an account of her own experience. Similarly, during a conversation at store One's weekly women's workshops, a participant said, "She thought that the appeal of the workshops seemed obvious in some ways: she identified more independent women, living alone, who need to be able to do things for themselves. [Her] analysis was particularly interesting because she is a married woman with a husband who seems to have (at least in the past) done most of the work around their house(s)". Two regulars at store One's weekly women's workshops consistently encouraged me to "do it while you're young"; when it is important to be independent. Both are widows in their late 60s who attended the women's workshops regularly for over a year. During that time, "[One] said to me that I must really be learning a lot from the workshops. I said that I am, and she said that it is really good because I am still young, and will actually use the information and skills. She said that, for her, it was interesting to know this stuff, but that

most of the time she knows that she will not use what we are learning”. I laughingly pointed out that she and her friend had both done more work in their homes than me. They claimed all of my newly acquired home improvement expertise makes me “a good catch” for somebody (a husband). They attributed their involvement to their husbands, who had done all of the home improvement when they were alive, being gone: “I don’t have the money to pay somebody, so I have to do it myself”.

These are two of a small number of women who offered explanations that included their involvement in their own home improvement, in spite of the fact that many women already did home improvement work with their husbands and/or other men (e.g., dads, brothers, friends), and some women participants are the primary do-it-yourselfer in their house. Another exception is a woman who claimed to attend the women’s workshops, in part, to develop expertise that would stop her husband taking over her projects. It appears that many women’s workshop participants have an impression of for whom the women’s workshops are *necessary*, e.g., young women and single/divorced women, even though most are not part of these groups. Overall, there is a sense that women should develop home improvement expertise; however, it seems easier to see, or at least articulate, others’ positions, i.e., why other women might take advantage of the opportunities provided by the women’s workshops, versus why they attend. It seems that to account for their incursions into the men’s sphere, women choose to offer “necessity” as their best explanation. Even for women who currently have husbands, or men who help them with home improvement, there is the spectre of a future time without them. One participant warned, “You never know when you will need it, and women don’t have

the information from their families or school or other places”. That many women’s workshop participants offer accounts of the women’s workshops that are at odds with their own lived experiences highlights the challenges women face when explaining women onliness, and particularly women onliness in a traditionally masculine cultural practice.

Conclusion – Relational, self-conscious, and essentialized women onliness

In this chapter, I addressed the relational aspects of women onliness gender regimes, beginning with the necessity of designated women-only space and time, and various ways that women participants (and others) gender mark these activities. When men are involved in women-only leisure activities, women participants define their involvement, and distinguish exceptional men, who contribute to their positive experiences of these leisure activity groups, from problem men, who are often cited in justifications of women-only leisure activities. Specifically, in ACRG and at the women’s workshops, women participants have a sense of what the activity or the group would be like if men were (more) involved, or if particular types of men (problem men) were involved. These assumptions are often, though not always, based on women’s negative experiences with men in similar settings and activities. In their production of women onliness gender regimes, women participants and organizers (attempt to) ensure that problem men are excluded, and women are able to experience roller derby and home improvement, and develop their expertise free from that negative influence. To varying degrees, women participants define men’s involvement by making clear the roles they are able to fill (typically support roles and roles that women do not want to or cannot fill),

and excluding men from participation. Men's participation is limited by women's workshop participants' and ACRG skaters' strategies of boundary maintenance, ranging from formal and explicit to informal and indirect. Through these processes, women onlyness is framed as necessary because of essential differences between women and men. Once women onlyness is established on the premise of essential gender differences, and produced in relation to notions of essential gender differences, difference, even in contradictory forms, must continue to be reinforced in order to maintain and reproduce women onlyness.

Women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters produce women onlyness gender regimes by adopting, rejecting, and negotiating stereotypical assumptions of essential differences between women and men, in spite of these differences being contradicted on a regular basis by women's (and men's) words and actions. This is the first major theme that runs through this chapter. In the production of women onlyness gender regimes, gender stereotypes serve as the basic materials on which women draw. A primary way that women participants essentialize difference is when they account for their involvement in traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined activities and spaces. As described above, ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants demonstrate awareness that they are involved in traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined activities (and are reminded of this by others). Women participants also identify and engage in somewhat limited processes of feminization of home improvement and roller derby. With women's responses to men, and various strategies of boundary maintenance, women participants' sense of a broader relationship to men and

masculine cultural practices through their women-only activities indicates that many women are self-conscious of or about women onlyness.

Self-consciousness of women onlyness is the second major theme of this chapter. Though women onlyness is naturalized in many ways (particularly with respect to roller derby and the dominant model of gender-segregated sport), women participants consistently demonstrate that they are aware of, feel strongly about, and generally, are self-conscious of the women onlyness of the women's workshops and ACRG. For some women participants, self-consciousness is particularly apparent with respect to a sense of encroaching on traditionally masculine cultural activities, and in traditionally male-dominated spaces, and their varying levels of comfort with this. Other researchers have also revealed women's self-consciousness of women onlyness in women-only settings. For example, a woman quoted in O'Neill's (1993: 150) study of Greenham Peace Camp: "By the time I first stayed at Greenham there were no men around at all. But there were still arguments and discussions about whether men should be there and whether they should visit and, if they did, whether we should talk to them. [laughing] Even though they weren't there they were still taking up our time!"

Women participants' self-consciousness of women onlyness, evidenced when they draw attention to, explain, and sometimes celebrate the absence of men, reveals both positive and negative beliefs about or perceptions of women onlyness. For most women, ACRG or the women's workshops is the only women-only group in which they participate. Women's positive, negative, and sometimes ambivalent feelings about women onlyness are often related to their experiences of the women's workshops and

ACRG. Many women's workshop participants, and some ACRG skaters, positively evaluate the women onlyness of these activities. They believe the presence of only women, and the absence of (problem) men in their leisure activity groups results in a supportive, encouraging environment in which they are able to feel comfortable, and develop social and personal relationships, as well as home improvement or roller derby expertise. This perspective, a positive assessment of women onlyness, is apparent in a regular's pronouncement, made at the end of a building event, "I'm so proud of our gender", and when a WFTDA Board member encouraged a roomful of women league representatives to reflect on and take pride in everything that the "mothers of roller derby" and "we" have accomplished. Miranda and Yerkes (1983: 21) identify similar experiences: when they asked women in their study, "What were the most important personal consequences of participating in a women's outdoor adventure program", "70 percent of the women indicated that, 'it increased my pride in women generally'". Among women who view their women-only experiences positively, there are still instances of feeling frustrated with other women participants when they identify certain behaviours or social interactions as inappropriate. This is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

At times, and more common among ACRG skaters, women-only leisure activity participants employ negative stereotypes of women together in groups, such as when ACRG skaters suggest that conflict among skaters in the league is inevitable, and explain, "That's what happens when you have so many girls together". This negative sense of women onlyness is perpetrated in a variety of popular culture sources that emphasize

conflict and “drama” in women-only settings such as among sorority sisters and housewives; this is the Mean Girls ideal type” gender regime. And although I very rarely heard a women’s workshop participant, organizer, or ACRG skater mention feminism, on those few occasions, the woman expressed negative sentiments about feminism and distanced themselves from anything feminist, e.g., “I’m not into that feminist, man-hating, ridiculous bullshit” or “Because despite the fact that women go ‘It’s the new millennium’ and ‘I am woman hear me roar’ crap, they still don’t want to get their hands dirty”. Occasionally, I had the impression that some women’s negative, or at least ambivalent, feelings about women onlyness were related in part to their unwillingness to identify with activities that might be perceived as feminist. Never once during my time at the women’s workshops or as a member of ACRG have I heard a woman participant identify the women’s workshops or flat track roller derby as feminist, in spite of using some language that is reminiscent of women’s movements or feminism (e.g., empowerment, independence) and organizing in ways associated with strategies employed by both liberal and radical feminists (e.g., in consciousness-raising groups and separate women’s cultural and social institutions).

Ambivalence about women onlyness is relatively common among women-only leisure activity participants, sometimes expressed as an “I like this...but I also like men” sentiment (perhaps denying potential lesbian connotations of being involved in women-only leisure activities), but also in concerns about segregation more generally. Examples of women-only leisure activity participants’ ambivalent feelings about women onlyness include a regular at store Two’s monthly women’s workshop saying she likes the women-

only workshops, and “thinks that women-only and men-only things are necessary, but does not believe that one gender should be excluded from doing any activity”. And when ACRG skaters volunteered at Anon City’s Take Back the Night March, one skater questioned and opposed men’s exclusion from the march: “I don’t think I like that, segregation is bad”. Ambivalence about women onlyness among some ACRG skaters can lead to resistance to thinking about or naming flat track roller derby as women-only. ACRG’s president claimed, “Because our refs are considered part of our league, I don’t really think of us as women-only, ’cause they’re around so much”, and emphasized, “I never really think of [the league] necessarily as an all-women activity”. Some women-only leisure activity participants are not comfortable with potential connotations or perceptions of women onlyness. It is interesting to note that ACRG skaters seem to feel more ambivalent about women onlyness, and more often employ negative stereotypes of women in groups; however, they also maintain stricter and more formal boundaries with respect to men’s participation. There appears to be a relationship between boundaries and expressed commitments to women onlyness: for ACRG skaters, stricter, more firmly established, and easier to enforce boundaries (maintained through formal rules, as well as common sense perceptions of gender-segregated sport as the dominant model of sport organization) seems to allow for less conviction about women onlyness, though arguably not less commitment to or investment in women onlyness (because the rules continue to be enforced, and boundaries maintained).

The major themes of this chapter – women participants’ consistent and constant negotiation of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference to produce, justify, and

maintain women onlyness gender regimes, and women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness – continue in the next chapter; including attention to the ways women onlyness is produced in relation to a discourse of expertise. For example, when store One's manager explained that a man would not join the women's workshops because "he would want to learn with people who are on the same learning curve as him", he assumed that women and men are on different "learning curves". This likely refers to two main expertise-related assumptions: women and men possess different amounts or types of expertise, and women and men learn differently. However, his assumption is both reinforced and contradicted by his claim, "You'd be surprised at the skills of some of the people in the women's workshops, and also the children's workshops". In one statement, the manager reinforces the idea that most women lack home improvement expertise, and the comparison to children further emphasizes women's assumed "beginner" status. Simultaneously, the manager admits that some women's workshop participants do have home improvement skills. These contradictory claims offer an example of the ways that a discourse of expertise is employed in the production of women onlyness gender regimes.

BBHR's women's workshops and ACRG roller derby are both organized and promoted as "no expertise necessary" activities that all women can and are encouraged to attend or join. In this chapter I demonstrated various ways that these activities are understood to be traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined, with corresponding dominant gender regimes. When women participants are involved in these activities, they generate expertise that formerly existed primarily with men. Further, in

the case of roller derby, women's flat track roller derby skaters have transformed and redefined roller derby; women took what had formerly been coed and run by men and made it women-only with selective women-defined roles for men, and thus developed roller derby expertise on and off the track. In a sense, the women's workshops are a more traditional women's activity because the major decision makers are men and the women's workshops are part of BBHR's marketing. According to a BBHR executive, "I try and make all our advertising come alive in the store, and workshops is a piece of that". However, in both ACRG and at the women's workshops, women are encouraged to develop non-traditional expertise, specifically formerly "men's expertise".

In the next chapter, I elaborate on the production of women onlyness gender regimes that are relational, self-conscious, and negotiate stereotypes of essential gender differences, and explore the ways that a discourse of expertise informs initial social interactions among women participants. Women participants negotiate a discourse of expertise – gendered assumptions about expertise – with various other gender stereotypes, as they define appropriate and inappropriate social interactions in these women-only leisure activity groups. This micro-level production of women onlyness gender regimes in women participants' interactions is the focus of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Producing women onlyness: A discourse of expertise

“I was out at [BBHR], and I’ve always wanted to go to something like that just to learn the little tricks for little things around the house, and they had the sign out for the women’s workshops and I thought ‘I wanna check this out’. I called about it, they said it was free, it was, you know, one night a week. I thought ‘perfect’, so that’s how I got involved. I mean, because I live on my own, and there’s some little jobs around the house you want to do yourself” (weekly women’s workshop regular, store One).

“We had found the Women’s Flat Track Derby website, and they had the rules on it and how to play, so we downloaded those and we read them, and then we started trying to figure it out, and we lined everybody up on the track and then said ‘go’, and then the way it was working didn’t seem to make sense from a sport aspect, like ‘that can’t possibly be how you play the game’ and so we’d blow the whistle and then we’d start all over again until we actually figured it out” (ACRG league president).

“Do you remember that one woman, I think she was 50-something, it was the first time she’d had a jigsaw or whatever the power tool was and she put it down and she screamed, and I thought she’d hurt herself, but she was so excited because she’d never, ever used a power tool before” (women’s workshop organizer, store One).

“As practice was starting, I joined the girls skating warm up laps around the track. I was trying to, as quickly as possible, get the feel of my skates and equipment...After a few laps, most of the girls move to the middle of the track to stretch...I tried to watch what the other girls were doing, and copied a few of them...The first drill I participate in is suicide lines, which is really difficult because I haven’t yet learned how to fall and there are three different kinds of falls expected in each turn...I go for it. As it turns out, I’m not very good at falling, but at least I was trying...The past few weeks, I have been watching the girls to see how they do this...Later on...I asked [a skater] for some pointers about how to fall to my knees...I really appreciated her help” (fieldnotes).

This is the second of two major findings chapters. In the previous chapter, I addressed the relational aspects of women onlyness in ACRG and at the women’s workshops, and the material and structural conditions in (and with) which women onlyness gender regimes are produced, including space and time, various gender regimes, and gender stereotypes. Two major themes pervade the discussion in the first chapter: women participants’ consistent and constant negotiation of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference to produce, justify, and maintain women onlyness gender regimes, and

women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness. In this chapter, I continue to demonstrate that the production of women onlyness gender regimes is very much a process of negotiating (accepting, rejecting, contesting) gender stereotypes. Discourses and stereotypes about expertise – who has expertise, who has the opportunity to develop expertise – are both explicitly and implicitly gendered. BBHR women's workshop organizers and participants and ACRG skaters employ a discourse of expertise (or perhaps more accurately, a discourse of inexpertise) formally and informally in their production of women onlyness. The focus of this chapter is the micro-level processes of production of women onlyness gender regimes. Specifically, the interactions among women participants that simultaneously define and enforce the patterns of gender relations that characterize women onlyness gender regimes in ACRG and at the women's workshops.

When women participants employ a discourse of (in)expertise, they typically do so in ways that emphasize essentialized gender differences and are self-conscious, and thus, the two major themes from the previous chapter are both also relevant here. In this chapter, I provide evidence to support the existence of gendered stereotypes about expertise, and offer context for understanding a discourse of expertise both as a reason for and explanation of women onlyness in these two women-only leisure activities; a discourse of expertise is used not only to justify women onlyness, but also to explain and negotiate some of the consequences of women onlyness. For my purposes, expertise is an umbrella term used to refer to skills, knowledge, and experience: the skills necessary to play roller derby or do home improvement projects, the knowledge of roller derby (rules,

strategy, business) and home improvement, and experience playing roller derby and doing home improvement projects. Women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters attend the women's workshops and join ACRG at least in part to develop roller derby and home improvement expertise. In this way, both ACRG and the women's workshops are task- or learning-oriented leisure activity groups, as are many contemporary women-only leisure activity groups. Throughout this chapter, expertise refers most often to women's workshop participants' and ACRG skaters' expertise that is partial, specific, and developing, and not more common definitions of practiced and proficient skills, knowledge, and experience often associated with a professional.

Both ACRG roller derby and the women's workshops are underpinned by an assumption or expectation that women have no relevant expertise. "Novice", "beginner", or "inexpert" are terms used to signal woman, and vice versa; being a woman is equated with being inexpert. Specifically, in these activities women are beginners or inexperts willing to self-identify as such. For example, when women cite their not "handy" husbands, or not having a husband, as a reason to attend the women's workshops (discussed in the previous chapter), they simultaneously emphasize that men *should* have home improvement expertise, and that there is no such expectation of them (as women), and it is thus easier for them to admit and address their inexpertise. The assumption that women lack expertise, and need activities organized for novices is both implicit and explicit in ACRG and at the women's workshops. These women-only leisure activity groups rely on the equation of women with inexpertise, even when this is not the reality for many women (and when it is the reality for many men). Therefore, a discourse of

expertise is one way that gender difference is essentialized in these groups, by assuming that men have particular kinds of expertise and women do not. It is also a way that gender stereotypes are constantly negotiated, through the consistent contradictions that arise when women do have expertise and men do not. A regular at store Two's monthly women's workshop explained that she chose to attend the women's workshops because she believed, "Pretty much that it would be women all in the same boat, nobody's gonna probably have a lot of technical expertise. Guys would be comparing, you know, 'I know how to do this', 'I know how to do that', kind of thing. But I think it was a good way to do it...less intimidating". Through various formal and more informal means, by participants and organizers, women onliness is framed as an assumption of inexpertise, and, to a more limited extent, an aspiration to expertise. Becoming involved in ACRG and at the women's workshops, women make a commitment to developing expertise.

Both organizers and participants negotiate a discourse of expertise, sometimes adopting and promoting, and other times challenging gender stereotypes about expertise. Ideas and assumptions about expertise are instrumental in the production of women onliness in ACRG and at the women's workshops. Though developing expertise is an element of many leisure activities, in these women-only leisure activities, a discourse of expertise, in tandem with other (complementary and contradictory) gender stereotypes, is used to emphasize differences between women and men, as well as produce, justify, and explain women onliness. In the following sections, I first address the ways that a discourse of expertise is included in the reasons for and explanations of women onliness in ACRG and at the women's workshops, and the relevance for ACRG skaters and

women's workshop participants of assumptions about women's inexpertise. Next, I discuss social interactions among women in these groups that employ a discourse of expertise, specifically, in women's initial interactions. Then, I focus on the social interactions that women participants determine to be both appropriate and inappropriate in these settings, and the ways that these reveal women's active role as social agents in the production of women onlyness gender regimes. These social interactions draw on gendered assumptions about expertise, as well as various other stereotypes of essentialized gender difference. Finally, I discuss the ways that leadership and authority are contested through the negotiation of a discourse of expertise and gender stereotypes. Throughout these sections, I include the ways that women negotiate gender stereotypes about expertise in their experiences of ACRG and the women's workshops, and in their production of women onlyness gender regimes in these women-only leisure activity groups, as well as the ways that women employ other essentialized stereotypes of gender difference, and demonstrate self-consciousness of or about women onlyness.

“No Expertise Necessary”: Reason for and explanation of women onlyness

The women-only leisure activities that are the focus of this research are made to seem more accessible to women, and likely are more accessible to many women, because elements of each are promoted and organized as “no expertise necessary”. Specifically, accessibility is enhanced because the activities occur in semi-public places, and are advertised as open to all women with emphasis on the fact that no expertise (experience, knowledge, or skills) is needed. The promotion of these activities as “no expertise necessary” and women-only contributes to their accessibility in spite of their location in

traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined spaces and cultural practices. This is the more formal and explicit use of a discourse of expertise. On the BBHR website, all “ladies” are invited to attend the women’s workshops. Similarly, ACRG asks, “Think you got what it takes to be a roller girl?”, and invites anyone “18+ interested in playing roller derby or just getting out on skates” to attend introductory courses. Most women’s flat track roller derby leagues emphasize that no (roller derby or skating) skills are necessary for women to join. Appealing to all women, without distinctions based on expertise, makes it easier for many adult women to take on the activities in these groups. This discourse encourages women to see themselves in the invitations to participate, to imagine themselves as learners and women capable of developing roller derby or home improvement expertise. This aspect of ACRG’s and the women’s workshops’ organization and promotion is in contrast to many other activities for adults, and in particular, women. Women’s organized sports teams in more “mainstream” sports such as basketball or soccer often require, or at least give the impression they require women to have some expertise. For example, in order to join a women’s basketball league in Anon City, women must have some experience, and skills and knowledge specific to the sport; the league is not organized to teach them. Many women perceive organized sports leagues for women as places for formerly elite or competitive athletes, not places to begin one’s athletic career.

Many women do begin athletic careers when they join ACRG. Because flat track roller derby is so new (in its first decade), nobody has roller derby experience when they start skating with ACRG (transfer skaters are the exception). This is exceedingly apparent

in the league president's quote at the beginning of this chapter. That nobody has playing experience makes women's flat track roller derby distinctive as a sport for adults, and makes it acceptable for women to join with no experience, skills, or knowledge. Women joining ACRG are not even expected to be able to skate; the league promises, "we will teach you how to skate", and most ACRG skaters do not know the rules when they begin their involvement with the league (the league takes responsibility for teaching them)²⁴. In ACRG, all aspiring skaters start from the same place: they have to learn the skills and rules specific to flat track roller derby. As roller derby beginners, aspiring skaters start with different skill sets. Some women begin by learning to roller skate, while others are able to skate and start by learning blocking, and other derby skills²⁵. Good skaters, experienced athletes, and women with directly relevant sport experience, such as hockey, figure skating, and roller skating, do not necessarily excel in roller derby. Aspiring skaters must learn roller derby's rapidly evolving rules and strategies, and develop the skills to play a full contact sport. Even women who play hockey often do not have much experience with body checking (Theberge, 1998). Among ACRG's skaters and aspiring skaters, and in the larger roller derby community, the idea that skaters with no sport experience or athletic background can do well is emphasized. Specific ACRG skaters (and skaters from other leagues) for whom this is the case are identified and held up as role models. More broadly, skaters' athletic backgrounds (or lack thereof) are often

²⁴ In this regard, ACRG is like many smaller and/or newer roller derby leagues that depend on recruiting to have enough skaters for teams, and to do league work. Increasingly, larger and more established leagues are able to set higher expectations for new members, and test skating and roller derby skills at formal tryouts.

²⁵ More detail about ACRG skaters' athletic (and non-athletic) backgrounds is provided in the "Who is Anon City Roller Girls? – Participation" section of Appendix A.

highlighted in roller derby websites, news stories, and online discussion groups (e.g., a monthly “Featured Skater” segment on the WFTDA website).

Not including the original fifteen ACRG skaters, most women discovered ACRG and decided they wanted to skate after learning about women’s flat track roller derby and searching for a league in Anon City, learning that a friend or acquaintance was skating, seeing an ACRG poster or news story, or attending an ACRG bout. Many women in the league, including me, describe seeing flat track roller derby and having the same reaction: “I want to do that”. Roller derby looks “fun” and “cool”, and more than anything else, women perceive roller derby to offer “something different”. For most, this is “something different” from their perceptions of other organized sports, and particularly high school sports: “I wasn’t into, or good at, sports in high school, but this is different. I didn’t like jocks, or the kids who were into sports and competitive. This is different”. A lot of women feel that their interest in roller derby, and desire to skate, is at odds with their established ideas about organized sports. This results in a consistent emphasis that roller derby offers “something different”. The difference is highlighted when aspiring skaters express concerns about the physical requirements of roller derby, such as fitness level and skating ability, worry that they might need to have previous sport experience, or that they do not have the right body type. Veteran skaters consistently remind aspiring skaters and each other that no expertise is necessary; that women with all body shapes and sizes, and various sport or non-sport backgrounds are welcome in roller derby and have the potential to succeed; there is not one ideal roller derby body or background.

A few ACRG skaters make reference to the league’s commitment to “by the

skaters, for the skaters” as part of roller derby’s appeal. They like that participants are responsible for the activity and the league. For some women, the appeal of participant control is combined with roller derby’s “something different” (compared to other opportunities for physical activity). This is apparent in the president’s explanation of the motivations for founding the league:

There’s nothing for our age genre, and for the most part it started with a bunch of girls in the music community who don’t play sports, or who don’t, you know, have a lot of girl friends outside of the like-minded people that we can tolerate going out drinking with, or something like that. Nobody really did anything, so it was like to go to the Y and join a volleyball league was just, ‘why would I do that?’, ‘Why would I go do something with a bunch of strangers?’. So part of it, I guess, was an extra day that we get to hang out with our friends and nobody’s gonna bother us, and you know, we’re gonna get exercise out of the deal, and you know, just some fun.

Aspiring skaters with sport backgrounds are often less concerned about the need to develop roller derby expertise, though many are also seeking “something different”, a change from the sports and organized sport cultures in which they have previously been involved. On occasion, aspiring skaters perceive the “something different” offered by roller derby as a potential barrier to their participation. For example, one ACRG skater and former competitive athlete said she almost did not try skating because she did not want to wear a short skirt to play. “Something different” is often the sense that individual expression is valued in contemporary roller derby. This is true; however, in spite of media reports to the contrary, fishnets and tattoos are *not* required. Due at least in part to the reality that “no expertise [is] necessary” and roller derby’s “something different”, women’s flat track roller derby is growing rapidly across Canada and the world.

By contrast, BBHR’s women’s workshops offer a more traditional activity for women, because they are often run by men, and exist as part of BBHR’s advertising

program, and thus target women as consumers. Women's workshop participants have little organizational control of the activity. According to store One's manager, BBHR has offered the women's workshops for almost ten years, "Really focusing on a growing interest as well as a growing population of women who are doing it themselves".

Melchionne (1999) believes that, more than ever, stores such as BBHR are organized in ways that make them attractive to women customers. This includes the provision of home improvement workshops: "On evenings and weekends, the store holds workshops on how to use its merchandise...For some consumers, especially women, this atmosphere may make the difference between undertaking a project or putting it off until a professional can be paid" (Melchionne, 1999: 251). In this way, BBHR frames women's interest in home improvement as a recent phenomenon, and women as a new and growing population of "do-it-yourselfers" they can benefit from "cultivating".

Specifically, BBHR employees use a discourse of expertise, and gendered assumptions about women's lack of expertise, to explain the women-only workshops. Women's workshop organizers spoke about women "who don't even know how to hold a hammer", and a store manager made reference to women's and men's different "learning curves". Additionally, as cited in the previous chapter, a BBHR executive suggested that the women's workshops are scheduled on the same weekday evening because "[That] evening is sort of a quieter time in our stores...[BBHR] as a store can be pretty intimidating to a customer who hasn't been in before. This account of the women's workshops as a place for "a customer who hasn't been in before" contradicts women's experiences, and also BBHR's own market data. The executive suggests women

attending the women's workshops are new BBHR customers, and need to be accommodated as such. However, almost every woman I met at the women's workshops learned about them by accident: they saw a sign in the store rather than seeking them out, even the few women who claimed to have "always wanted to do something like this". This means that women are already in BBHR stores, and this is supported by claims, made by all of the BBHR employees, that women comprise at least fifty percent of the do-it-yourself customers in their stores²⁶. They also claimed women are the primary decision makers when buying products and planning projects for the home. As such, it seems that BBHR's women's workshops are intended to provide women with knowledge to make buying decisions.

Although this indicates that women are involved to some extent in home improvement, two store Two BBHR employees explained that women's involvement is limited to decision making and purchasing. In their experiences, many women shop with lists provided by their husbands, and the women buy the products, but have limited knowledge of what they are buying, and little or nothing to do with the projects. Other BBHR employees claimed that women are interested in developing their home improvement expertise, and their "appetites" for learning exceed the décor and "fluffy type projects" that the company initially planned to attract women customers. I was surprised that employees at stores One and Two offered such significantly different assessments of the extent of women's involvement in home improvement projects. The former emphasized women's active involvement: "[women] no longer wanted to just

²⁶ All were careful to make a distinction between the do-it-yourself customers and the contractors (professionals) who shop in the stores, the overwhelming majority of whom are men.

build a wine rack but to get into some very progressive, educational settings, meaning you know, ‘how do I wire?’, rather than just out in front of the wall but behind the wall—insulation, stud framing, that type of thing”. The latter suggested that women are less interested in doing home improvement projects themselves. In each case, the employees also discussed women who better fit the other perspective. For example, the store Two employees told stories about women bringing in photographs to show them “the flooring they had done, the molding, you know, the painting, all that kind of stuff. I mean it gives them a sense of pride, because ‘I did this without the other half’ and that’s where it makes a difference”. And store One’s women’s workshop organizer highlighted some women’s “customer” focus: “I mean you look at the stores, they’re no longer the old hardware store that a man used to go in, buy exactly what he needed, and leave. They’re set up for women, they’re set up for *shopping*...[women] come in and browse, they look, they impulse buy, so I think the seminars are set up for them to learn and then be able to buy as well”. Though most of the explanations provided for the women’s workshops assume and emphasize women’s inexperience in home improvement (and, in relation, imply men’s expertise), no one explanation is able to account for all women participants.

Participants at the women’s workshops gave many reasons for attending. Most wanted to do projects at home, usually described as “small” or “simple” projects, without needing someone else. Some wanted to be able to do-it-themselves because they live alone (many of the women who live alone are widowed or divorced), and some had “inherited” tools they wanted to learn to use. One woman’s sentiments were echoed by many of the women who are widowed: “my husband did it when he was alive and now I

don't know how". Other women were frustrated about waiting for someone (usually their husband), and wanted to "get things done". A regular at store Two's monthly women's workshops attended, "Because you get tired of waiting for someone else to do it, kind of thing, not because it really interested me or I was really curious, you know you get to the point where you think, 'I'm sure I could do this, or get it started'". Some women already tried to do projects at home: a store One regular "said that when she starts a project at home, [her husband] likes to jump in and try to take over (she said she thinks men are worried that women won't need them anymore)". Having better knowledge and skills would allow her to challenge his taking over.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a number of women claimed they attend the women's workshops because their husbands are not able to do home improvement because they are not "handy": one woman described her husband as a "catastrophe", "if something can go wrong, it does. That's why I'm doing this". Another woman consistently told stories about her husband's lack of home improvement expertise, and lamented the duct tape he had used to "fix" tiles in a bathtub (as well as other problem areas): "he's handy with his duct tape". For some women, attending the women's workshops allowed them to bridge the gap between customer and "do-it-yourselfer". Other women said they would not "do-it-yourself" because a particular project was too hard, too heavy, too much, or not something they were interested in doing (e.g., crown molding, building a deck). A few women had brothers, sons, or other relations who work in trades, and wondered, "Why would I do it, when that's what he does [professionally]?" Women's workshop instructors and organizers sometimes claimed,

with the information learned at the women's workshop, "if you get a contractor, he's not going to pull the wool over your eyes". Women were told that they are now "better educated and better prepared" to deal with contractors (always referred to as men, which emphasizes the association of home improvement as men's expertise and reinforces the dominant gender regime of the home improvement industry) because the women know what to ask, the language to use (i.e., proper terminology), and what to look for while the work is being done.

Not all of the women's workshop participants' reasons for attending were related to the content. In addition to attending workshops to develop home improvement expertise, many women described the women's workshops as an opportunity to "get out of the house", "meet new people", and share time with women of all ages, with similar interests, on a "night out". According to store Two's women's workshop organizer, the monthly workshops "offered more to the consumer to make it seem more like a night out—we had food and beverages, prizes, which I think created a lot of excitement". Built into the organization was a greater emphasis on social interaction among the women participants. Since the monthly women's workshops ended, store Two has been unable to develop the same feeling in its weekly workshops. Store One has consistently had a group of regulars attend the weekly women's workshops, and some regulars at the weekly women's workshops also attended the monthly workshops. Occasionally the regulars bring in food to share with one another (e.g., cake, fudge, cookies), or take drinks orders from the group to nearby coffee shops. In these and other ways (discussed below), the women produce a social atmosphere.

Similarly, many ACRG skaters appreciate the opportunity to spend time with other women, develop friendships, and expand their social networks. Perhaps this is connected to one of the original motivations for starting the league (stated above): “an extra day that we get to hang out with our friends”. When the league started to grow, it was necessary to incorporate “strangers” into the group, and this continues to be the case as more women who have no previous relationship with league members join ACRG. In many respects, there is a social imperative to ensure that all skaters feel included and invested in ACRG. Like some women’s workshops participants, for some skaters, making new friends and spending time with other women are part of their motivation for joining ACRG. For example, one skater said she really liked roller derby “because there aren’t many girls’ sports where you get to be around people who are creative”. She emphasized that there was such a broad range of girls, from different backgrounds, and the diversity contributed to her enjoyment of ACRG.

Both ACRG and the women’s workshops are accessible to a relatively diverse group of women (particularly with respect to age, and other aspects of women’s social backgrounds such as education, work experiences, family life, etc.) because women are able to “try them out”. That is, women are encouraged to participate in these women-only leisure activities, in part, because they are organized to accommodate beginners; women with no expertise. At the women’s workshops, there is no cost to attend, and women can arrive late or leave early, participate as much or as little as they want, attend regularly or not, without formal consequences. Informal expectations of behaviour developed by women participants are discussed below. Even when women sign up for the women’s

workshops, there are no penalties for women who do not attend. This flexibility with respect to participation, and the lack of monetary investment, can make it easier for women to attend the workshops. In 2009, the ACRG Training Committee developed an introductory roller derby course for aspiring skaters: the course runs for eight weeks, and all aspiring skaters must complete it before joining ACRG. The course was developed for a few reasons, but primary among them is to offer aspiring skaters a “taste” of roller derby before making a full investment and commitment. Roller derby equipment is expensive so for the introductory course, aspiring skaters can use what they have (e.g., bicycle helmets, inline skates). The course is quite reasonably priced, and payment is intended only to cover the league’s costs. To help them decide if roller derby is “for me”, aspiring skaters even have the option to attend and pay for only insurance and the first week of the introductory course. If they decide to continue, they pay for the remainder of the course. In these ways, a discourse of expertise informs the groups’ attention to “beginners”, and contributes to making the activities more accessible to more women.

Although it may contribute to some positive outcomes, a discourse of expertise is not able to account for the many women who attend the women’s workshops and join ACRG who do possess related expertise. This is more relevant with respect to the women’s workshops, where participants span the entire range of complete novice to experienced professional; however, it is increasingly relevant at roller derby where ACRG skaters include first time skaters, fresh meat (less than one year), to founding members of the league (five years). As discussed, roller derby presents a distinctive situation in that all women who skate with ACRG learned to play roller derby with

ACRG. This means all had time in the league during which they were fresh meat, even if they could skate or had other skills that facilitated their development of roller derby-specific skills and knowledge. At the women's workshops, it is more challenging to explain the involvement of women who have home improvement expertise, and, specifically, the continued involvement/repeat attendance of women who have done the specific projects presented at the workshops. For example, at a "how to build a deck" monthly women's workshop at store Two, it became clear early in the evening that at least five women in a group of just over twenty had participated in building at least one deck. These women used their own experiences to share information, and were able to answer questions, for example about cost or particular materials, that the women's workshop organizer was not. Women sharing experiences and knowledge of home improvement is a common feature of the women's workshops, and is the primary way that participants reveal their expertise. Also, at the beginning of many workshops the women's workshop instructors ask who has experience with a specific tool or project. Invariably, there is at least one woman, and usually more, who raises their hand. Most women have worked with their husbands or other men (e.g., fathers, uncles, sons), typically as "the assisting person" who holds a board, a ladder, or directs. A few women are the primary do-it-yourselfers in their household, and sometimes call on their husbands to assist. One regular at store Two's monthly women's workshops is a Women in Skilled Trades program graduate, and runs her own home improvement business. She attended the women's workshops to learn about products, understand what women want from contractors, and enjoyed the "camaraderie" that developed in the group.

Even though women participants have a wide range of expertise (or lack of expertise), there is an implicit assumption that more “expert” women will be nice to the novice participants. That is, not only will they share their knowledge and experience, they will allow the inexpert women to ask as many questions as they need without complaining, belittling, or making them feel uncomfortable or “stupid”. This belief is supported by women BBHR employees’ experiences at the weekend workshops, which are not gender segregated. According to store Two’s manager, fewer women attend the “regular” workshops, “because they do feel intimidated by that guy sitting beside them, ’cause that handyman that has no trades but actually figures he can do everything will actually put them down, you know like they would give them that feeling of being stupid”. When I asked if novice men are treated in the same way, she said “it’s strictly women”, and this is one example of a “bias in the whole trade itself” because construction and home improvement have “always been male-dominated, and they don’t like the females coming into that”. In her experience, even “expert” women at the “regular” workshops will “pull you aside, they’ll ask the questions but to be in front of a group with men, absolutely not”. Store Two’s women’s workshop organizer claimed, unlike men, “women aren’t ‘Oh, I can do that’, you know, a woman would sit back out of the crowd to allow a sister to learn how to do something, even if she already knew so she wouldn’t make a sister feel uncomfortable”. Store One’s women’s workshop organizer said,

A lot of women—and I’ve heard this from day one—they’re just uncomfortable on the weekends, they don’t wanna ask a question with all these guys, because as soon as they open their mouth the guys look at them like they’re nuts, like ‘I’m sorry, you should be a guest here and just listen to what we have to say’, and I’ve seen it happen,

it's not pretty. So, by having their own [workshop] they kind of bond together, they ask questions, they don't feel stupid because everybody wants to know anyway.

Gendered stereotypes about expertise are apparent in these quotes: it is assumed that most women are inexpert, and need an opportunity and safe space to develop their expertise. Forming a group of beginners, which is done implicitly by organizing a women-only workshop, provides that opportunity and space. This is all premised on the belief that women will support each other's learning without picking on or singling out the inexperts. In addition, this allows all women, including "expert" women and women's workshop organizers and instructors, to admit their lack of expertise about certain topics without worrying about negative reactions from women in the group.

The process of "expert" women sharing their expertise with novice and inexpert skaters is more formalized in ACRG. The league has a Training Committee whose members, all skaters, develop a training plan for the season with respect to fitness, skills, and strategies. Members of the Training Committee also plan and run practices. Because it can be difficult to run and participate in a practice at the same time, men referees sometimes run a practice planned by a skater. As a result, skaters maintain control of the content of practices. Also in a formal "teaching" (or sharing expertise) capacity, skaters serve as instructors for ACRG's introductory roller derby course, and thus take on the responsibility of teaching aspiring skaters. In addition to the more formal processes, a significant amount of informal mentoring happens among ACRG skaters.

When I first joined, a few skaters took an interest in me and helped me learn the minimum skills I needed to pass my first assessment and be eligible to skate with a team. I continued to look to these skaters for guidance for the rest of the time we skated

together. During my time with the league, I have witnessed similar relationships develop every season, and more recently I have been on the mentor side of the relationship. At times, new skaters seek advice from veteran skaters, for example, posting a request on a team's online discussion group for strategies to deal with self-doubt and feeling "lost" on the track, or pointers about developing a specific skill (e.g., jumping, blocking). Not all skaters actively engage in mentoring newer skaters, but most offer assistance when asked, and mention when they notice a newer skater improving and/or being able to do something they could not do previously. These formal and informal processes reflect interactions among skaters and leagues in the larger roller derby community. For example, ACRG has benefited from hosting and traveling to play teams from more established American leagues. As well as learning from competing against these teams on the track, leagues often share ideas for training, and some leagues deliver bootcamp-style training to leagues they visit. Leagues also share expertise related to league organization, committees, and dealing with intra- and interleague conflicts. Sharing expertise and supporting the development of women's flat track roller derby is modeled by more established leagues and adopted by ACRG skaters.

Men's roles in ACRG and at the women's workshops, as well as women participants' perceptions of men in instructor, coach, and other roles in these women-only leisure activities, are addressed in detail in the previous chapter. However, it is important to mention here that a discourse of expertise as a marker of essentialized gender difference is often accompanied by assumptions that women and men have different learning styles (i.e., women and men develop expertise in essentially different ways), and

different teaching styles. These assumptions are more explicit in the organization of the women's workshops, and interactions among women's workshop participants. Currently in ACRG, it is predominantly women (ACRG skaters and skaters from other leagues) who teach other women to play roller derby. This is because only women have developed flat track roller derby expertise by actually playing. Earlier in the league's history, men were occasionally enlisted to teach specific skills that women did not have, such as recruiting boyfriends or referees with hockey experience to teach "hockey hits", or as "coaches". Men have not been asked to teach specific skills since the league stopped using the skating coach in 2008. As discussed in the previous chapter, ACRG coaches do not have unquestioned or uncontested authority to make decisions for the team that is typical of coaches in most sports, and they work closely with team captains, and the Training Committee. This is discussed below in relation to leadership and authority.

At the women's workshops, participants make more regular reference to women and men's different learning styles: a regular at store Two's monthly women's workshops said, "I think women think in a more detailed fashion, men talk from a perspective where they forget all of the little details that are important, and as women we are more detail-oriented". Women's workshop participants also assume that women read instructions, and contrast this with men who do not (this is discussed in more detail below). While some women assume that women and men learn differently, others believe differences are also a result of different starting points. For example, the women's workshop participant who assumes that men have more "technical expertise" than women, and would compare their expertise with others in a workshop. In her view, and experience of

the women's workshops, many women lack "technical expertise" and do not compare what they know. In fact, she referred to women doing the opposite: sharing stories about "what they did wrong". For many women's workshop participants, it seems to be common sense that women and men learn differently, and women benefit from learning from a woman.

Among BBHR employees, there is a basic assumption that a woman should be in charge of the women's workshops. For Store One's manager, women learning from women is only "common sense": "The women's workshop runs best when a woman leads them—that only makes sense. Why would it be any different?". In spite of this, women's workshop organizers at stores One and Two have different perspectives about who should teach the women's workshops²⁷. At store Two, the emphasis is on learning from women, because only a woman can understand how women learn: "[A woman BBHR associate] specifically does the women's workshops because a woman needs to do the women's workshops...just to make the women feel more comfortable, more at ease. Men and women learn differently, women are more tactile, you know a woman's gotta feel everything where a man could really care less what it feels like, 'how much power does it have?'" Store One's women's workshop organizer emphasizes learning from the most knowledgeable person, and, in the quote included in the previous chapter, seems to suggest that men often instruct the women's workshops because there are fewer available, qualified women BBHR associates and vendor representatives. It is interesting to note that when she put together a team for the monthly workshops, "I put up a notice

²⁷ These are described in detail in the "*Workshop instructors and organizers*" subsection of the "*Who is at the women's workshop? – Participation*" section of Appendix A.

upstairs [in the employee area] to get a team together and it obviously had to be all women”.

According to store Two’s women’s workshop organizer, compared to the women’s workshops, the weekend workshops have “a different feel, different criteria, different questioning”:

Men are more detail-orientated...say with the women’s workshops compare it to a regular Saturday afternoon workshop on how to install drywall—same topic, two different groups. The women could care less if they ever learned how to install drywall, they enjoyed learning about the tools, and the mud, and where to find stuff...so you have to cater it differently, you have to present the program differently. Where men are more fact-orientated, they wanna know what thickness, what type of trowel, it’s just more, ‘Okay, let’s get down to business here’. They weren’t here for fun, they were here to learn how to install drywall. So, totally different presentation between the two workshops.

In spite of this perspective that there are vast, essential differences between women and men at BBHR workshops, BBHR does not offer guidelines or training specific to the women’s workshops. According to a BBHR executive, “The appetite is very similar from men to women in our workshop situation, and I don’t know if it’s as necessary, may even be doing them a disservice to suggest how different they are when in reality they want to learn the same things, to be treated in the same way...Generally, it’s women that are running the workshops, so understanding some of the differences is, pretty obvious”. Although he suggests the content is and should be the same at the women’s workshops, the executive ultimately implies that women’s workshop participants *are* different in ways that only women employees are able to understand.

I have often heard women’s workshop participants express this perspective, when they say they prefer having a woman instructor because they feel more comfortable, and

see “her” as a role model. A regular at store Two’s monthly women’s workshops said she “definitely” liked having a woman instructor: “I think women would probably be more apt to let you make mistakes, or help you avoid them. They probably would be more patronizing if they were guys, ’cause they feel like they need to lead the instruction”. As McDermott (2004: 298) indicates, in the academic literature, “the idea of gender-specific learning styles—either intellectually or physically—is open to debate”. However, many women’s workshop participants, and some ACRG skaters, express beliefs that women and men learn differently, and women learn better or more easily or more comfortably from women instructors. These beliefs, like much of the data included in this section, are inextricably tied to assumptions about essential gender differences, expressed in this case in relation to a discourse of expertise.

A discourse of expertise – comprised of multiple complementary and contradictory gendered stereotypes about expertise – simultaneously reinforces and challenges the gender regimes of the larger institutions and organizations in which ACRG and the women’s workshops are organized. It also reveals assumptions about gender, which are also both complementary and contradictory, that inform women participants’ production of women onlyness gender regimes in ACRG and at the women’s workshops. Specifically, assumptions about men’s expertise and women’s expertise (or lack of expertise), and the relationship between gender and expertise, are apparent in a number of ways. Women’s assumed lack expertise is employed when leisure activities for women-only are organized and promoted as “no expertise necessary”, and opportunities to try activities with little commitment support the notion that women do not typically do them.

Assumptions about women's and men's different teaching and learning styles influence decision making about who should teach the women's workshops and be responsible for training in ACRG, and are thus reinforced. Each of these gendered assumptions about expertise is consistently negotiated (i.e., not completely accepted or rejected, though sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected) in the production of women onlyness gender regimes. That negotiation is necessary, in part, because of the ways that these assumptions are contested and contradicted by the actual experiences and backgrounds of ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants.

Some women participants do have home improvement and roller derby-related expertise (and many of the men in their lives, especially in the case of the women's workshop participants, do not). In these cases, women participants reveal gendered assumptions about how "expert" women will interact with non-expert women; women, they believe, will encourage other women to develop expertise by allowing them to ask questions, as well as sharing their own expertise. This is in direct contrast to their beliefs about how "expert" men (or, perhaps more accurately, all men) would interact with non-expert women (or all women). In these ways, it is apparent that a discourse of expertise serves as material on which ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants draw in their production of women onlyness gender regimes. When they make decisions about how women should interact with one another – around issues related to expertise – in these women-only leisure activity groups, women participants reveal the social processes of producing women onlyness, i.e., determining the gender arrangements of these leisure activity groups. They also highlight the possibilities of producing a gender regime that

differs in significant ways from the larger institution or organization within which it exists. As Connell (2005: 5) claims, the gender regime of “a particular site may depart from the broad patterns of the institution that contains it”. In the following section, I continue to demonstrate the role of gendered stereotypes about expertise in interactions among women participants; further evidence of the micro-level production of women onlyness gender regimes.

Initial interactions: Declaring and assessing expertise

Both ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants employ a discourse of expertise in their interactions with each other, almost from the very beginning. Among these women, it is common to declare one’s own lack of expertise, and assume that everyone else is more expert. Initial interactions between new women’s workshop participants and regulars, and aspiring and veteran skaters, as well as among new participants and aspiring skaters, often include at least one of the following statements (or a variation thereof): “I’m new”, “I just started skating”, “This is my first time coming”, “I haven’t skated in X number of years”, “I’ve never done this before”. It seems these statements serve to simultaneously call attention to and explain the woman’s lack of expertise, before anybody has an opportunity to realize or question it. I participated in this myself when I state in my fieldnotes (included in the Methods chapter), “On the 1st of February, I went to the local roller rink and rollerskated for the first time in 18 or 19 years”. For me, this exposes my novice status when I joined ACRG, and is a source of pride now that I look back and realize my improvement over time.

Stating one’s own lack of expertise and assuming other women have more

expertise is typically accompanied by attempts to assess others' level of expertise. For example, during a break at store Two's monthly women's workshop, "A woman [who attended infrequently] asked [another regular and me] if we have been building for long. We both looked at her. She said, 'you seem to know everything, I'm just starting, I'm a school teacher'. We explained that no, we have done some stuff—mostly because of attending the workshops—but are here to learn". Women perceived to be more "expert" are consistently asked, "You must do this a lot" and "How long have you been skating?", and identified to other women participants, often in ways that explain their expertise as exceptional, such as "That's just [her], she's good at everything" and "We all wish we could be that good". Learning about the various levels of expertise of women in these groups allows participants to understand their own (in)expertise in relation to the existing expertise. Further, just as women offer an account for their own lack of expertise, they want to know why and how other women have developed relevant expertise. Among ACRG skaters this knowledge is used to plan for one's own development. Veteran skaters consistently warn aspiring skaters that it will likely take at least one year to know what they should be doing on the track *and* be able to do it. Evidence of this learning curve is provided by veteran skaters' own experiences. Often, more "expert" women use their own initial lack of expertise to encourage newer or less expert participants, for example, assuring a new women's workshop participant, "I had never used a power tool when I started coming", or telling an aspiring skater, "If you had told me two years ago that I would be able to do this, I would have thought you were crazy". ACRG's league president is fond of telling new skaters, "I remember when we first started and 3 out of 30

could actually stand on their skates and not fall down”.

Assessing other women’s expertise is done mostly with admiration, and often indicates a woman’s aspiration to develop her own expertise. It can also make women participants feel more comfortable because it offers assurance that there is a place for them in the group, i.e., there are other “beginners”, and even the “expert” women were once inexpert themselves, or are not “expert” about everything. Aspiring and veteran skaters alike look to role models in the league and larger roller derby community and profess, “I want to skate like Bonnie Thunders/Carmen Getsome/Joy Collision”, or “I want to block like Beyonslay/Dolly Rocket/Sassy”. At the women’s workshops, some women have specific projects they want to learn, or tools they want to use. Many claim, “I just want to be able to do Y”, and some request special topics not included on the schedule. In ACRG, skaters’ expertise, especially women who were good skaters when they joined the league, is often attributed to their previous athletic involvement or general athleticism. Some skaters assure themselves and others, “She played hockey for years” or “She’s good at every sport”. In these ways, women draw on a discourse of expertise to negotiate a place for themselves: they simultaneously appreciate and admire the expertise of others in the group, aspire to develop their own expertise, and assure themselves that it is okay to have limited or no expertise.

I do not want to suggest that this particular negotiation of expertise is naturally or essentially feminine; however, it does feel a little gendered, and particularly, “girly”. That is, in interactions with other women in these groups, women seem to enact a somewhat feminized orientation to expertise that raises the spectre of essential gender difference. It

seems akin to prefacing a question by saying, “This is probably a stupid question”, or “I don’t really know, but I think...”²⁸, and seems to demonstrate a general discomfort with expertise, both having and not having expertise. On one hand, these strategies allow women to declare and explain their lack of expertise, and to assure themselves they are not the only inexpert to be part of the group now, or ever (“there is a place for ‘me’ in this group”). It offers confirmation that “I don’t need to know yet, that’s why I joined the group”, and that inexpertise is considered to be more a criteria for, rather than a barrier to, membership. On the other hand, there is a degree of democratization of expertise, and reluctance to claim expertise.

“Expert” women (participants and instructors) often claim that all women can develop the skills and knowledge they possess, and that being involved in ACRG or attending the women’s workshops is one way to do this. In doing so, they deny or at least mask the years of experience that contributed to their expertise. Women instructors (and “expert” participants), particularly at the women’s workshops, contribute to this sense that women are uncomfortable with expertise when they qualify, disclaim, or downplay their own expertise. Similarly, at GetFit, a women-only gym, Craig and Liberti (2007: 690) identified “a feminized interactional style of nonjudgmental and noncompetitive sociability that included speech norms, modeled by employees, in which they praised other members, [and] downplayed their own achievements”. Many of the women instructors at the women’s workshops were asked to instruct because they are experts on a specific topic. Expertise is demonstrated by their abilities to answer questions, perform

²⁸ Some women also do this, i.e., qualify their questions by suggesting that it “must be a dumb question”, or that “I am probably the only one who doesn’t know this” (this is discussed below).

relevant skills, and make suggestions for participants' own projects. Many of these women have years of personal and/or professional experience, often mentioned when they are introduced to the group.

“Expert” women typically reveal their expertise in ways that frame them as role models: “If we can do it, you can do it”, and yet their expertise is often qualified by admissions of worries, failures, and limitations. For example, during a monthly women’s workshop on basic electrical projects, the woman instructor admitted, “All of those wires are scary, I know I was scared the first time I did it”. When learning about crown molding, the woman associate leading the workshop was introduced as having a lot of experience doing this kind of work, but later said, “hopefully I have done it right, I have been practicing all day”. A regular participant at store One’s women’s workshops is often identified by other participants as “expert”: “She’ll know how to do it, she’s good at everything”, or “You should give her a [uniform], she’s a mini-[women’s workshop organizer]”. Her responses, such as “I don’t really know, I’m just impatient” or “I just try it until it looks right”, deny her expertise (based on experience of and research about home improvement). Occasionally, an ACRG practice manager will ask a skater to demonstrate a specific skill they do well. Skaters often reply, “I’ll try”, or “Of course, now I won’t be able to do it”, or “You want *me* to do it?”. Perhaps these admissions of “limited” expertise and/or denials of expertise help new and regular women participants feel more comfortable, knowing that even the “experts” sometimes feel worried, uncertain, or do not feel like they know what they are doing. According to Warren (1990: 415), downplaying expertise allows “expert” women to avoid being perceived as

“superwomen”: “Women, especially beginners in the outdoor field, may feel great admiration for the superwoman but are intimidated by this woman who, in addition to her superlative technical skills, may display no apparent fears or doubts”. When “expert” women share fears and doubts, as they do at the women’s workshops and in ACRG, they downplay their own expertise in such a way that it encourages other women to develop home improvement and roller derby expertise. It is important to note that men do not use these strategies when instructing the women’s workshops or coaching at ACRG practices.

Sometimes the woman instructing a women’s workshop is clearly not an “expert” on the topic (i.e., she has never done or learned about it). In these situations, the instructor usually claims she is “learning along with the women”. This was most often the case at store Two’s monthly women’s workshops, and is likely a result of the commitment to have a woman lead all women’s workshops. For example, at one workshop, the women’s workshop organizer admitted she read up on the topic and spoke to “expert” associates all day in preparation. Other times, she relied more heavily on a handout to guide the workshop instead of a planned presentation, or modified the workshop content to share expertise she does have. As mentioned, the women’s workshop organizers are typically present even when somebody else instructs the workshops. Sometimes, they participate with the group while a BBHR associate or vendor representative instructs, e.g., asking questions, joining in hands-on learning opportunities. In some cases, this participation seemed to be a strategy employed by the women’s workshop organizers to elicit more information from the “expert” instructor (woman or man), and in other cases, is genuine. At ACRG practices, the practice

manager will often admit to trying a skill for the first time at practice, and learning at the same time as teaching.

“Expert” women’s expertise is simultaneously revealed and qualified. In tandem with women’s declarations and assessments of (in)expertise, this works to encourage women’s adoption of a discourse of expertise, inextricably related to assumptions about essential gender differences. From women’s initial interactions in these women-only leisure activity groups, a discourse of expertise is fundamental to the production of women onlyness gender regimes. This is likely, in part, a result of the production of an “alternate” gender regime within male-dominated and masculine defined cultural practices. That is, women negotiate gendered stereotypes about expertise in order to “win space” in activities where men are assumed to have expertise and to belong “naturally”. Through their negotiations, ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants and organizers develop different orientations to expertise and belonging; these are central elements of their women onlyness gender regimes.

Producing women onlyness: appropriate social interactions

In addition to the declaration of inexpertise and assessment of others’ expertise that characterize women’s early interactions within these women-only leisure activity groups, social interactions among women participants and between participants and other women commonly draw on a discourse of expertise, and particularly the notion of “no expertise needed” to participate. Also relevant in these interactions are stereotypes about essential gender differences beyond those related to expertise, and negotiations of the patterns of gender relations that characterize other gender regimes, such as the gender

regimes of the home improvement industry and sport, as well as “ideal type” gender regimes such as Sisterhood and Mean Girls. These more informal group interactions also demonstrate the ways that women work to define what is and is not appropriate²⁹ behaviour for women in these groups. That is, women’s active involvement in the social processes of producing women onlyness gender regimes. In the previous chapter, I addressed the ways women, through their interactions with and assumptions about men, distinguish between problem men and exceptional men, and promote the characteristics and involvement of exceptional men. Among women participants, there are three broad categories of behaviours (types of social interactions) that are considered appropriate: 1) recruiting women to the leisure activity group, 2) promoting participation and/in a supportive environment, and 3) encouraging repeat attendance/membership. Each type of interaction, the ways they draw on gender stereotypes, their relevance for new and returning women, and their contribution to the production of women onlyness gender regimes in these groups are addressed in turn.

Recruiting women to the leisure activity group

BBHR’s women’s workshops and ACRG are always open to new participants and new members (with some limitations, e.g., aspiring skaters must now complete ACRG’s introductory course before skating with the league). Among participants in both activities, behaviours are promoted that encourage the involvement of new women. Specifically, women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters actively recruit new

²⁹ For my purposes here, the terms “appropriate” and “inappropriate” are context-specific. That is, I am not imposing any value on them; my use of these terms is based on the norms developed among women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters.

women, and work to create an environment that is welcoming for both new and returning women. Recruiting is an element of every roller derby event. “Want to join the league?” information is included on ACRG’s website, in bout programs, and promotional flyers. In my experience, when skaters are out and about, and can be identified as roller derby skaters (e.g., handing out flyers, wearing team shirts or rollerskates), conversations with non-members almost invariably include encouragement of non-members to become involved with ACRG. Women are invited to skate (“You should come out!”) and/or to volunteer, and men are told, “We are always looking for referees and volunteers”. Skaters direct non-members to the ACRG website for more information, and sometimes give out their own e-mail addresses, social networking site information, or telephone numbers (especially if the potential recruit is an acquaintance). As did the founder³⁰ and founding skaters, many skaters recruit from their own social networks, including family, friends, and co-workers. Recruiting “pitches” from skaters and in league-produced materials always emphasize that no expertise is needed: “We’ll teach you how to skate”, “You don’t need to know the rules”. Also emphasized is skaters’ enjoyment of the sport and community: “It’s so much fun!”, “The girls are awesome”, “You will love it!”.

At the women’s workshops, women who plan to attend or have attended workshops also recruit women from their own social networks. A regular at store One’s weekly workshops explained jokingly (in front of the friend she talked about), “I got this phone call from my friend...and she said, ‘Guess what we’re doing on [day]?’”, and I said ‘What?’. She goes, ‘We’re going to the workshops at [BBHR]’. I said, ‘Oh no we’re not’.

³⁰ This process is detailed in the “*Who is Anon City Roller Girls? – Participation*” section of Appendix A.

‘Oh yes we are’. And that was it, that’s how I got involved”. Like ACRG skaters, once involved, women’s workshop participants tell other women about their involvement and encourage them to participate. A regular at store Two’s monthly workshops claimed, “I was hooked from the first one I went to, I just thought it was a great idea, and then I started talking to all my neighbours and other ladies to say, ‘this is something that’s offered, is it something that would interest you?’. So I became like an advocate for them because I had seen the benefit to it”.

In addition to recruiting from their own social networks, women’s workshop participants also recruited women customers in the store during workshops. During a hardwood flooring workshop, participants took turns installing boards with the nailer. “A woman stopped to watch and asked, ‘Does everyone get a turn?’. [One of the regulars] told her, ‘Join our women’s group!’”. The woman was immediately invited in, took a turn with the nailer, and the group waited while she asked questions and the instructor reviewed some information so that she caught up with the group. When a couple (woman and man together) stops to watch the women’s workshops, which happens regularly, some participants address the woman specifically, and invite her to attend: “You should join us”, “Come be part of our women’s group”. Usually they ignore the man or tell him, “Sorry, it’s a workshop for women/women’s group”.

From the beginning, when a woman joins ACRG or attends the women’s workshops, women participants foster a sense of belonging by saying hello, welcoming them, introducing themselves, moving to make space for women as they arrive, asking questions of each other, and remembering details at subsequent practices or workshops.

At the women's workshops, this is done in part by the organizers who might start a workshop by saying, "there are a lot of new faces", and the new women are "welcome". This indicates to new participants both that their attendance is appreciated and that there are returning participants in the group (I return to this below). Returning participants often identify new women before a workshop begins. As women arrive at the workshop space, and it is clear that a woman is there for the workshop, the regulars introduce themselves and others. Before one weekly women's workshop, a few regulars and I sat chatting in the workshop space, and a woman asked us what we were doing. We answered, "We're the women's workshop" and told her the evening's topic. "She asked if she could stay, and we told her 'yes'. She went to sit at another table, and we invited her to sit with us. She said she didn't want to interrupt, but we told her not to worry, 'no, no, sit with us'".

At ACRG practices and events, women also make space for new skaters (e.g., in the locker room), and explain how things work: where to leave bags, practice routines, whom to pay, etc. New skaters are welcomed, and there is typically a sense of excitement about them. This is especially true now that aspiring skaters must complete an introductory course before skating at league practices; being invited to skate with the league is an accomplishment. League practice is when new skaters play roller derby for the first time (the introductory course is skills-focused), and veteran skaters often tell new skaters, "This is what you've been working so hard for!" and "This is the best part". Similarly at the women's workshops, other women (usually the regulars) validate women's decision to attend. For example, at a weekly women's workshop, a new

attendee “told [a regular] that her husband died...and he had a full workshop that has just been sitting in her house because she doesn’t know how to use anything. She is attending the workshops so she can use his tools. [The regular] shared...that she has really enjoyed the workshops because they give her more confidence to try things and do things around the house”. Through these interactions, women contribute to the production of a welcoming environment for new and returning women, and for women with various levels of expertise.

Promoting participation and/in a supportive environment

Many women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters “check in” with newer participants about their experiences, for example, asking “Did you enjoy it?”, “Are you having fun?”, “Did you learn a lot?”. This demonstrates to newer participants that their experiences are important, and other women in the group are concerned that their experiences are positive, i.e., they are having a good time. When women skate with ACRG or attend the women’s workshops, other women in these groups promote their participation. Specifically, women encourage each other to be active participants in the group’s activities. At the women’s workshops, at least one woman will typically (informally) keep track of who has taken a turn at a hands-on learning opportunity. For example, at a power tools workshop, one or two women did not take a turn with the mitre saw. After her turn, a regular asked each woman if she wanted to try the saw, and with other participants, encouraged the women to try all of the tools: “You should definitely try this”, “Make sure you take a turn”. The “encouragers” also addressed the women’s objections, such as having used the tool before (“But not this one”, “It’s worth a try”) or

feeling nervous (“This is the best place to try”, “We’ll show you exactly how to do it”). With the latter objections, the women usually shared their feelings about the tool, e.g., they felt uncomfortable or uncertain at first, the noise of the saw scared them. On a few occasions, I sympathized with new participants about the mitre saw: “You just have to be careful, follow the instructions, and it is a lot of fun to use!”. Similar scenarios occurred during hands-on learning opportunities at many workshops. When presenting a hands-on learning opportunity, the women’s workshop instructors typically encourage all women to participate. However, this is a general invitation to the entire group, and it is often the women themselves who make sure each woman takes a turn. The expectation that all women participate is apparent in a woman’s “of course, of course” response to an instructor’s request, “I would like you all to take a turn”. For many, hands-on learning is the “best” part of the women’s workshops, and many women take responsibility (at different times) for ensuring all women benefit from these opportunities.

At ACRG practices, and other non-bout skating opportunities, such as at the roller rink or outdoors, skaters encourage each other to participate and keep participating. If a skater sits out of a drill, other skaters want to know: “Are you okay?”, “Why aren’t you doing this one?”, “What’s wrong?” , and if the skater is not injured or having equipment troubles (“acceptable” responses), they are urged to keep skating. If the reason for sitting out is not knowing or feeling comfortable with the skill(s) involved, a veteran skater will often take time to explain and/or demonstrate. There is general agreement that the best way to develop skills is to try them, i.e., skaters learn best from “just doing it”. Also, skaters are encouraged to ask questions and the Training Committee seeks input about

skills and strategies that skaters want to learn and improve. Women's questions are also an essential component of the women's workshops. Asking questions is strongly encouraged by women's workshop instructors and participants, and explained as, "If you have a question, you're likely not the only one and everybody will want to know the answer". Women's workshop instructors typically invite women to ask questions throughout a workshop, and most women do, though this can sometimes be a problem (discussed below). Women's questions range from general (definitions and guidelines), to very specific questions about issues in their houses, to personal questions about each other's and the instructor's home improvement and life experiences. Women's workshop participants often ask each other questions, e.g., if they did not hear or understand something. If the women they ask cannot answer the question, women often encourage each other to ask the instructor. As mentioned, sometimes women's workshop organizers also ask the instructor questions to prompt them for additional information, clarify an explanation, or remind them to make time and opportunities for hands-on learning.

At the women's workshops, participants have a sense that a major (essential) difference between women and men is that women are willing to admit inexpertise and seek help, and men are not. Women and men workshop instructors often reinforce this essentialized belief. In the previous chapter I discussed that seeking help has somewhat feminized connotations. This association is promoted at the women's workshops most apparently in comments made about asking questions, reading and following instructions, and specifically, that women do these things and men do not. According to store Two's women's workshop organizer, "men are more fact-orientated", and they want information

delivered quickly and concisely. In contrast, women want to have fun while learning, and the opportunity to ask as many questions as they might have without feeling rushed, uncomfortable, or “stupid”. Women’s workshop instructors and organizers perceive women to be a more enthusiastic and positive audience, willing to learn from the instructor instead of acting like they “know better”. Store One’s women’s workshop organizer claims, “I think these women were here ’cause they wanted to learn, they wanted to know, they weren’t just wasting time, and it’s a whole different atmosphere, like it’s a pleasure to teach somebody who wants to learn”.

In addition to asking questions, reading and following instructions are consistently cited as methods of developing expertise employed by women and not men. During a workshop on power tools, “One woman asked if all of the information...is included in the drill’s manual. [The man instructor] says that it is, and that you should/can always read the manual for information. The woman says, ‘unless you’re a guy’, and [he] agrees, ‘men don’t read manuals’”. An instructor at store One’s weekly women’s workshop “said about installing new light fixtures that ‘guys don’t read instructions but it is all there, step for step’”. During a plumbing workshop, “[The women’s workshop organizer] demonstrates how to assemble a part, but is having some difficulty. One of the women chides, ‘come on, don’t be like the men’, and recommends that [she] read the instructions”. At store One’s weekly women’s workshop, a woman proudly claimed, “We’re women, we read instructions”. By contrast, men are sometimes presented as claiming expertise they do not have, for example, when a women’s workshop participant said, “Every man knows how to do it until he is your husband and

you ask him to do it”, or “that handyman that has no trades but actually figures he can do everything” in store Two’s manager’s quote included above. During a crown molding workshop, “[The woman instructor] claimed, ‘I asked 5 men in the store to do this, and none of them would touch it’. A man [BBHR] employee standing at the back of the workshop room admitted to being one of them. One of the participants told him, ‘At least you admit you don’t know’, and a number of the women in the group agree”. These comments reinforce that women and men are different, and have different orientations to expertise, particularly the ways they seek help and develop expertise, thus reinforcing stereotypical connections between gender and expertise.

Among ACRG skaters and BBHR women’s workshop participants, there is acceptance of, and, in fact, encouragement to claim one’s lack of expertise. Through interactions among women participants, as well as between participants and instructors, it is made clear to all participants that there is no expectation that women have experience, knowledge, or skills related to flat track roller derby or home improvement. Women do not need to know anything, and are encouraged to say what they do not know. Acceptance and encouragement contribute to a supportive environment for all women, and particularly inexperienced women: aspiring skaters, fresh meat, and “never done anything before” do-it-yourselfers. Women participants claim that they experience these environments as supportive; they feel able to and comfortable participating because they know their inexperience is not a barrier to participation. If a woman struggles with a skill or tool, or has difficulty understanding a strategy or technique, they are with women who will help them (demonstrate and (re-)explain what to do and how to do it), and support

them (offer encouraging words, share stories about their own issues with the same thing, recognize that more time and attention might be needed for a woman to “get it”). The most common overt expressions of the supportive environment created in these women-only leisure activity groups are clapping, cheering, and high fives when a woman achieves something, such as completing a first practice, landing a solid hip check, using a power drill for the first time, or laying a section of laminate flooring. Women frequently respond to each other with positive reinforcement: “Yay!”, “Way to go!”, “Nice one!”, “Good”, and “I knew you could do it”.

Sometimes, women use their own (existing or newly acquired) expertise to translate between an instructor and a woman having difficulty understanding. For example, during a store One weekly women’s workshop on interior doors, a few women helped each other understand the man instructor’s explanation about choosing the right door: they asked questions so the instructor would re-explain the confusing parts, used different words and analogies to explain it themselves, and shared their own tips and tricks (based on experience or learned from others). At ACRG practices, skaters often use similar strategies to (re-)explain a skill or drill, i.e., they use different words and share tips such as, “This is what I think about/focus on when doing it...” or “I find it helps when I do this...”. In addition to sharing help and expertise, women often share “stuff”: material goods and services that facilitate each other’s participation in roller derby or at the women’s workshops. For example, I started skating when a veteran lent me her old skates, and the same is true for many other women who started with borrowed skates and/or equipment. At the women’s workshops, women share tools, including tools they

bring from home. Finally, women's willingness to drive me (and other non-drivers) to and from practices, events, and workshops has facilitated my participation in ACRG and at the women's workshops. When women participants share expertise and equipment, and help each other attend practices and workshops, they promote each other's participation. By indicating they want other women to be at these activities and develop expertise, they create a supportive, encouraging environment for women with various levels of expertise.

The supportive environment created by women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters is not limited to developing roller derby or home improvement expertise. In fact, a significant element of these women-only leisure activity groups is the social and personal relationships that develop among participants. Women see each other at the women's workshop every week or month, and ACRG skaters spend time together each week and sometimes multiple times in a week at practices, meetings, and events. During time together, women learn about each other's lives, for example, families, jobs, pets, hobbies, personalities, aspirations, etc., and use this knowledge to inform their interactions, such as asking about a woman's husband who has been ill or a new job, or teasing a woman for her perfectionist tendencies or forgetfulness, as well as inquiring about ongoing home improvement projects or roller-derby related skill development. These interactions begin at a woman's first workshop or the first ACRG practice or event when women meet and welcome each other to the group. As they get to know each other, women in these groups often notice and comment on new or nice items of clothing or accessories ("I love your purse"), new equipment ("Nice skates, do you love them?"), a

haircut or new tattoo (“You finally got it!”).

In both groups, women participants share information about important events and accomplishments, and women participants acknowledge and celebrate each other’s happy events, such as a birthday or new baby, and commiserate with each other about sad or difficult events, such as a divorce or death in the family. The relationships women develop in these groups are such that they are often excited to share non-derby or non-home improvement experiences with the group. A regular at store One’s weekly women’s workshop

was so excited to tell everyone about her recent dragon boating success. She paddles in a ...boat that just started this year, and they have participated in a few events. She has really been enjoying it and has told us about a few trips... This story was about their participation in a [major] racing event... She explained the course of the day, the number of races paddled, and their results. It turns out that her boat ended up in the final and they won it. With this revelation, she pulled out her necklace on which she has attached the ‘medal’... She was so excited and proud, and the women (including me) all responded with how happy we are for her, how proud she must feel, etc., etc. It was a really nice moment.

Many ACRG skaters and some women’s workshop participants spend social time together away from roller derby and the BBHR store, and develop close friendships. During my time with the league and the women’s workshops, I have established friendships I will maintain beyond my involvement in both activities. This sense of closeness among ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants, and relationships that are about “more than” roller derby or home improvement – that results from work done by the women participants themselves, rather than the “leaders” or the organization of the activities or groups – contribute to the supportive environment of these groups, and are dependent on women’s consistent contact over time.

Encouraging repeat attendance/membership

As well as recruiting new women and promoting women's participation, ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants encourage and, to an extent, make assumptions about each other's membership and repeat attendance. Women who regularly attend group activities anticipate that other women will also continue to attend (week after week, month after month, practice after practice), and, in the case of ACRG, will join the league by meeting the formal membership requirements³¹. The expectation of continued attendance and participation is particularly interesting at the women's workshops because, for the most part, each workshop could be a one-time activity, i.e., if a woman wanted to learn to install drywall, she could attend that workshop and not attend again until there was another relevant topic, or not at all. Based on what I have heard from BBHR employees and customers about the weekend workshops, this seems to be the case. Instead, at the women's workshops, women know immediately that they are welcomed, encouraged, and possibly expected to attend subsequent workshops.

From the first workshops I attended (as discussed in the Methods chapter), it was obvious that many women planned to attend the workshops regularly. During each workshop, they discussed the next workshop topic, and when they left said, "See you next [time]". The women's workshop organizers contributed to this sense by explaining that the workshops "will build up" (skills and knowledge learned at one workshop will be further developed at later workshops), and by telling the group, "See you in [month]", or at store Two (where participants received women's workshop t-shirts and binders),

³¹ These are detailed in the "*Who is Anon City Roller Girls? – Participation*" section of Appendix A.

“Wear your t-shirt/Bring your binder next time”. Regular attendance is often tied to a discourse of expertise such that women attend and are encouraged to attend the women’s workshops to develop home improvement expertise, only some of which they plan to use in their own homes. This rests on an assumption that (most) women lack any home improvement expertise and thus benefit from a broad range of workshop topics. At stores One and Two, most regular women’s workshop participants were women who attended from the very beginning, i.e., they were at one of the first weekly workshop in a “series” or the store’s first monthly workshop. These are the women who collectively developed, following the lead of the women’s workshop organizers, the norms of regular attendance. This was done by attending as many of the women’s workshops as they could, and encouraging other women to do the same. At both stores a few women started to attend the women’s workshops after the initial group of regulars was already established, and also became regulars.

Regular participants set an example for newer participants and each other by saying, “See you next week/month”; this introduces the idea that some women attend all or many of the women’s workshops. Women’s regular attendance is also apparent to many new attendees when they witness interactions among the regulars, specifically, making reference to previous workshops and speaking about their personal lives. The example of repeat attendance is reinforced when the regulars who encouraged a new woman to return are also present at the following women’s workshop. In this way, regulars role model repeat attendance behaviour, and newer participants know that they can, and possibly should, attend the women’s workshops regularly. Women also ask each

other, especially new participants, if they plan to attend again (“Do you think you’ll come again?”), or assume they will (“So we’ll see you next time?”). This promotes a relationship in which many women feel responsible for telling the group when and why they will miss a women’s workshop(s), and their commitment to return: “See you in two weeks” or “I’ll be here when I get back from Florida”. At the end of her first workshop, a woman at store One’s weekly women’s workshop explained to the regulars, “I want you to know that I have to go away for a couple of weeks. This has been really interesting, very cool, and I didn’t want you to think I didn’t like it”. This comment was addressed to the women participants (not the women’s workshop instructor or organizer), which indicates that, for many women, interactions among participants foster feelings of inclusion and commitment, even when there is no formal requirement or expectation of regular attendance. A regular at store Two’s monthly women’s workshops suggested that regular attendance should be acknowledged by the store: “During the break [a regular] had said that [BBHR] should do something to mark the one-year anniversary—she suggested they should take photos of all the women who have been around since the beginning”, which suggests that women participants themselves were aware of who were the “original” attendees.

For a number of women’s workshop participants, regular attendance involves attending all workshops, including those on topics they have experience with, or in which they have no interest. This suggests that women’s involvement takes on a social dimension beyond the actual activity; this is something “more than” the actual activity, identified by participants as a “social element”. According to store Two’s women’s

workshop organizer: “The only reason I can think of why a person would attend a workshop they don’t need to attend is because they’re having a great time and they don’t want to miss it. Right, they’re having a few laughs and that’s it”. Women’s “great time” is often a result of the relationships they develop with other regulars through sustained contact over a period of time (typically at least one year for most regulars).

At roller derby, I anticipated and experienced similar expectations that women who expressed an interest in ACRG and attended a practice or event would return, and they would skate. The primary way for women to be involved in the league is to play roller derby, which requires regular attendance at practices and other events. When I started research of ACRG, in spite of the situation, skaters assumed I would skate (“Of course you will skate”)³². My experience is one example that demonstrates that once a woman expresses interest, the nature of her involvement can be molded to be suitable to the majority of league skaters, in spite of “official” positions that might differ. Unlike at the women’s workshops, in ACRG, when women commit to being league members, they must meet formal membership requirements, and skaters are expected to expand their participation by taking on league work. This is an element of participation that is unique to roller derby; women’s workshop participants are only ever responsible for attending the workshops. BBHR employees do all of the women’s workshop organization, planning, and implementation. Sometimes employees seek input from the women’s workshop participants, such as asking for topic suggestions, but that is the extent of participants’ involvement in the “work” of the workshops. Conversely, ACRG skaters are

³² This situation, and ACRG skaters’ definition of my involvement, is detailed in the Methods chapter.

responsible for all league work, and it is necessary that as many skaters as possible take on some of that work. In many cases, veteran skaters role model appropriate behaviours in this regard.

Through their regular involvement, many ACRG skaters develop expertise beyond that needed for roller derby on the track (e.g., skating, blocking, strategy); specifically, expertise related to league work such as promotion and insurance. In this respect, ACRG (and women's flat track roller derby more generally) is distinct not only from the women's workshops, but from most other women's sports in which athletes are rarely responsible for much more than their participation as athletes. Skaters' commitment and contributions to the league are a constant topic of discussion at meetings, and among skaters. Newer skaters (and veteran skaters not already doing so) are encouraged to take on league responsibilities, such as serving on a committee or organizing an event. This expectation is framed in two ways. First, it is only "fair" that all skaters contribute to league work because all skaters benefit from that work. Second, expertise associated with league work must be shared with newer skaters, and among as many skaters as possible, so it is not lost when veteran skaters retire, burn out, or leave the league for any reason. For many ACRG skaters, attendance requirements and expectations about league work, can often seem like "too much" and more than they expected when they became involved. Roller derby is a recreational sport; however, the fact that skaters are also required to do league work dramatically increases the amount of time spent on roller derby, and time spent with other skaters as well. Within the larger roller derby community, and adopted by ACRG skaters, there is a joke (funny because it

is true for some skaters) that “roller derby ruined/took over my life”. Conflict that arises when women do not actively participate, in ACRG and at the women’s workshops, is discussed below.

Summary: Social and functional roles of appropriate social interactions

The four types of interactions detailed above – declaring and assessing expertise, recruiting women, promoting participation and/in a supportive environment, and encouraging repeat attendance/membership – reveal women participants’ active role in the production of women onlyness gender regimes in ACRG and at the women’s workshops. Each of these interactions also serves both social and functional roles in the processes of producing women onlyness. With respect to a social role, women use these norms of interaction to share with other women their own positive experiences of these women-only leisure activity groups. When they recruit new women to the group, they do so by sharing what they enjoy about, and how they benefit from, participating in ACRG or at the women’s workshops. Also when recruiting new women, and when they discuss the activities among themselves, women participants emphasize the supportive environment of the groups, and social and personal relationships they have developed with other participants. When they return after time away from the group, women express that they missed the activity and the group. In women’s first interactions with one another, opportunities for social interaction arise from declaring one’s own and assessing others’ (in)expertise. This is apparent in the example above: in the process of explaining why she was a home improvement inexpert, a woman shared that she was a teacher. Sharing information that is not specific to the activity can provide the basis for

developing social and personal relationships among the women. That is, when women learn more about each other than “need to know” information, it promotes a sense of social bonding among them. Often these are relationships among women who did not know each other before being involved in ACRG or the women’s workshops, and who are unlikely to have met in many other settings, based on differences in age, education, neighbourhood, or family situation.

Some women identify forming relationships with other women in a setting where women develop expertise as what they enjoy most about these groups. This is particularly true when they see women’s growing expertise translated into self-confidence and independence. ACRG’s president claims,

I’ve gotten to see a lot of people grow whether it be with their social skills, or their self-confidence, or their independence, and that’s what I like out of it is you know watching that wallflower who sits in the corner and is afraid to say ‘boo’, and then watch that person come out and say like, ‘I can do this and I’m gonna do it on my own terms and I don’t care what you think because I have every right to do this’, and like, watching those people grow.

With respect to social interactions, a number of ACRG skaters claim they have more girl friends than they ever have before, often saying they have always had more guy friends than girl friends. Many skaters believe that through roller derby they have met friends they never would have met otherwise, and occasionally marvel at the relationships they have developed with women they never could have imagined being friends with.

Sometimes the extent of the social relationships developed among skaters is a cause of concern in ACRG and the larger roller derby community. Specifically, skaters make jokes about forgetting what it was like to have non-derby friends, because there is no time to fit non-derby people and activities into their schedules. For example, when a newer

ACRG skater declined an invitation to go out with teammates because she had plans with “non-derby friends”, they responded: “What are those?” and “It won’t be long until you don’t have any non-derby friends”. For a lot of ACRG skaters, the types of interaction discussed above contribute to the development of social relationships with other skaters, and these take on a prominent role in skaters’ social networks. They also contribute to skaters’ commitment to, and their positive experiences in the league.

At the women’s workshops, participants sometimes mention, “It’s nice that this is all women”, and often attribute their positive experiences of the workshops to the opportunity to learn from and with women. The social component of the women’s workshops is also important to many women, particularly the regulars, and is facilitated by the interactions described above. Regulars often attend the women’s workshops even if they are not interested in the evening’s topic or do not plan to build the project. During that workshop, they sometimes sit and socialize or, if needed, help other women with their projects. For many, the women’s workshop has become “a night out”, an opportunity to socialize with a group of women they have gotten to know and like, and a chance to learn interesting or useful information about home improvement.

The women’s workshop organizers at both stores suggested that there is something unique about women (in an implicit comparison with men) that results in the social aspects of the workshops. According to store Two’s women’s workshop organizer, women are more inclined to develop social relationships in this type of group, and feel that the relationships enhance their experience: “Women develop friendships quite easily, if you’re in a group on [a week] night and we’re on a social level, and we’re talking about

our kids, and your kid's got a temperature this week, next week [women] want to know how your kid's doing...and that's the way women are, so creating the social aspect of that whole thing [the women's workshops] was the A+ in the experience". For Store One's women's workshop organizer, the "unique" relationships women develop with each other contribute to their enjoyment and commitment to continue attending the workshops:

In my opinion, [women keep coming back] because they're learning valid things...they're learning, they have fun with each other, I think a number of the girls have become friends, so I think it goes beyond. Women have a very unique way of, I guess, forming friendships and keeping them and, I don't know, you have things in common and it's something that you just can't throw away. Like, the class is over but you can't.

During workshops, women's workshop participants often discussed their experiences, saying that they found the workshops fun and interesting, and enjoyed meeting new people and the opportunity to learn new things. Often, women make reference to the ways that participants "help each other out" during the workshops, and that they appreciate the cooperation that typically characterizes interactions among the participants. Many women mention that what they refer to as "camaraderie" and/or the "social component" contributed greatly to their enjoyment of the women's workshops. The types of interactions discussed in this section facilitate the development of the "social component" of the women's workshops, and thus to women's positive experiences. The "social component", this analysis demonstrates, is not an automatic result of organizing a group as women-only. Rather, ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants actively contribute to a "social component" in their production of women onlyness gender regimes, by engaging in and promoting the types of interactions

discussed in this section. It can be argued that this element of women onlyness gender regimes, particularly for the women's workshops, is, in part, a response to women's perceptions of men's interactions (among themselves and with women), i.e., that men do not or would not interact in these ways.

In addition to their social role, declaring and assessing expertise, recruiting women, promoting participation and a supportive environment, and encouraging repeat attendance are also functional for ACRG and the women's workshops. Above all, they contribute to sustaining the groups by bringing in new women and retaining women by promoting positive experiences. These women-only leisure activity groups are voluntary associations that rely on participants' happiness and commitment for their existence. In this way, the social element of these groups is also functional. According to Long (2003: 87), "many [reading] groups are pleasurable for participants and they make the efforts to ensure that all members are satisfied. Otherwise, being voluntary associations, they would dissolve". ACRG is only possible when the majority of skaters enjoy roller derby and the time they spend with other skaters in the league, feel a sense of obligation to attend events and practices, and a commitment to league work. If there are not new skaters or not enough skaters, then ACRG cannot happen because there is nobody to do the work.

For league members who are actively involved in league work, this recognition of the precariousness of ACRG contributes to a sense of insecurity. If they do not do the work of the league (and convince other skaters to help), ACRG will cease to exist. When the league is able to recruit new skaters, this increases the number of women able to take

on league work (or at least maintains the number when skaters leave). Sharing league work with new skaters can also help preserve the commitment of veteran skaters who might otherwise burn out. With the exception of a few skaters who left the league because of injury, or because they moved away, the majority of skaters leave because of the demands of membership, and especially the time commitment. In ACRG, there is excitement about new skaters not only because they take on league work, but because they are new and enthusiastic, which makes them excellent league promoters, and sometimes means new ideas for organization or training. To feel comfortable joining ACRG, new skaters must be assured that there is a place for them regardless of their roller derby inexperience, and defining their “place” is accomplished through the four types of interactions discussed. New skaters can also contribute to renewed commitment to skill development among veteran skaters. In discussions with my veteran teammates, it is clear that nobody wants to be “shown up” or replaced by a newer skater, and many veteran skaters (myself included) focus on “stepping up their game” to defend their team positions. In this way, the addition of new skaters can promote the development of roller derby expertise (on and off the track) for all league members.

Among regulars at the women’s workshops, there is a perception that if there are not new participants or not enough participants, “they” will take the workshops away, i.e., BBHR will stop offering the women’s workshops. When women are recruited to the workshops, their attendance demonstrates to BBHR a demand for the women’s workshops, and their viability. Less than a month after I started attending store One’s weekly women’s workshops, signs posted in the store advertised the new monthly

women's workshop program, and the weekly women's workshop organizer told the group her concerns that the store planned to replace the weekly workshops. At the end of a workshop she asked the manager to meet with the women participants to address these concerns. The meeting was tense and awkward, but clearly demonstrated the women's commitment to continue attending if there were weekly women's workshops to attend, and their investment in the women's workshops and developing their own expertise: "[A regular] concludes that she is happy 'as long as this is going to continue, and I learn all my things...I have my list'".

From that time, I have been aware of the precariousness of the women's workshops, and it is apparent in women's comments and interactions that particularly the regulars also recognize their precariousness. This is due in part to changes made relatively continuously over three years, often unannounced. For example, when the monthly women's workshops started in late 2007, stores invested in food, beverages, and prizes for participants, and each store had a team of women associates who organized, instructed, and contributed in other ways. Over time, it was obvious to the participants that there was less investment in the women's workshops; there were fewer staff (and, ultimately, only the women's workshop organizer), prizes, and less or no food. Further, at later monthly workshops, the women's workshop organizers often apologized for their lack of preparation, and told participants they had little or no time (in their work schedule) for workshop preparation (e.g., "I'm very sorry, I was only scheduled for 5 hours this week. I don't want you girls to suffer"). As store Two's monthly women's workshops were winding down – for a few months women left the workshop not

knowing if there would be a workshop the following month – participants expressed an interest in having a “proper” final workshop that would celebrate their commitments to the women’s workshops, something they had enjoyed and been invested in, and be a chance to see everybody “one last time”. From these sentiments, it was apparent that most women did not plan to attend the weekly one-hour women’s workshops that replaced the monthly workshops. Also, the women demonstrated a sense of being part of a group comprised of women (participants and the women’s workshop organizer) who had bonded through their participation in the workshops. Ultimately, the monthly women’s workshops at store Two ended without notice: women left the April 2009 workshop knowing that “this might be the last one”, and it was.

Store One has consistently offered a women’s workshop for longer than store Two, and has continued to offer women’s workshop options beyond those mandated by BBHR. As a result, participants have been less affected by BBHR-level changes to the women’s workshop program. However, women have been aware of these changes and expressed concerns about how their participation might be affected. Store One’s expanded offerings are attributable, in part, to support from that store’s management, and to attracting more women than any other Canadian store. Also important in this equation are the women who continued to attend the women’s workshops with the belief that “if we keep coming, they have to keep offering them”. From the end of 2007 to mid-2008, the group of regulars at store One’s weekly women’s workshops was quite small (five women including me). When two regulars went on vacation, the rest of us felt duty-bound to continue attending. One regular expressed a “sense of obligation to continue

attending—even on nights when she really doesn't feel like it so there is something there when the ladies come back...and so the manager can't do away with the weekly workshops...There is a sense that the store would like to do away with [the weekly workshops] but can't because of us". Similarly, store One's women's workshop organizer was away in December and January 2009/2010, and many regulars attended the workshops offered by "substitute" instructors. A few women explained that they attended the first workshop in January because they did not want the woman instructor to "feel bad" if nobody attended. When the women's workshop organizer returned, women participants provided feedback about the workshops, and in discussions among the regulars, some claimed they attended them all to demonstrate (to BBHR, the store, the store manager) that they are committed to the workshops as an opportunity to develop home improvement expertise and not "just" a social group, or for the women's workshop organizer. In these specific ways, as well as their adoption of the types of interactions discussed in this section, women participants demonstrate awareness of the precarious position of the women's workshops in the larger BBHR enterprise, and commitment to and investment in the continuation of the women's workshops.

Finally, new participants are socialized into these norms of behaviour. In my experience, this has resulted in interactions among women in these groups remaining relatively stable over time, as new women begin and others end their involvement. When reading my fieldnotes, and remembering my early experiences in ACRG and at women's workshops, I am consistently reminded that the ways I interact with regulars and ACRG skaters, and especially new women's workshop attendees and aspiring skaters, are

learned behaviours. They are shaped by the ways that veteran skaters and women's workshop participants behaved with me, and particularly interactions that made me feel welcome, encouraged my active involvement, and helped me feel more comfortable with the other women and develop my home improvement and roller derby expertise. In the years I have been involved in both of these women-only leisure activities, I have observed new women's workshop participants benefit from the guidance and support of regulars and the women's workshop organizer. And now, using the expertise and confidence they have developed, they guide and support participants newer than them. And in ACRG I have observed aspiring skaters use the encouragement, teaching, and support of veteran skaters to learn to play, and develop into veteran skaters who instruct and encourage the newest fresh meat.

These socialization processes are not unique to women-only leisure activities.

Downey, Zerbib and Martin (2011: 112) observe,

Research suggests that acquiring expertise in a leisure activity occurs via socialization wherein collective values are learned and internalized, and those processes are generally driven by more advanced participants...Consequently, for understanding socialization processes, distinctions across levels of participation become particularly important in terms of status and emulation, as more advanced participants generally enforce norms and values upon novices. In other words, the status of veterans within an activity is universalized to values that extend beyond activity-specific expertise.

When established women participants engage with newer participants in these ways, they serve as role models for the appropriate behaviours in these women-only leisure activity groups. In many ways, they also reinforce, and sometimes challenge, assumptions of essentialized gender differences, and demonstrate self-consciousness of women onliness. For example, when women attend workshops to support the women's workshop program

and “prove” they are interested in developing home improvement expertise, they challenge assumptions that women attend the women’s workshops primarily as a social group. Also, women demonstrate self-consciousness of women onliness through their awareness of this assumption and of the precariousness of the women’s workshops. This is not to suggest that there is never conflict or disagreement among ACRG skaters or women’s workshop participants. In fact, identifying and analyzing the behaviours that cause conflict and are subject to formal and informal sanctions by participants, makes it possible to better understand the appropriate social interactions and the ways they are established. Inappropriate behaviours are the focus of the following section.

Challenging inexpertise by performing expertise

Before addressing social interactions that women participants identify as inappropriate, I want to expand on the idea that women are socialized into the appropriate types of interactions described above. These socialization processes are important for the production, and particularly the reproduction, of women onliness gender regimes. For both veteran skaters and women’s workshop regulars, developing expertise (skills, knowledge, and experience) in women-only settings produced by participants as welcoming, supportive, and which promote women’s active participation, leads to another positive outcome beyond the development of expertise and relationships with other women. As women maintain their involvement in these groups, they are able to perform expertise in a setting almost guaranteed to elicit a positive reaction; most often women’s demonstrations of roller derby and home improvement expertise are appreciated and admired by other participants (within the bounds considered acceptable by the group,

discussed below), and set the standards of what newer and less expert women aspire to achieve. This is true for women participants who developed their expertise in the group, and also women who had established home improvement or roller derby (skating) expertise prior to joining the group.

A regular at store One's monthly workshops was so excited about what and how the women were learning, especially about power tools, she proposed, "taking [the workshops] on the road". She envisioned the monthly women's workshop regulars driving an RV (bearing a new program name: "Women of power") across Canada to share their expertise with women at BBHR stores. A cross-country, women-driven, workshop-delivering RV is an exaggerated version of what is actually happening at the women's workshops and in ACRG when women serve as mentors and role models for other women, for example, when a veteran skater instructs ACRG's introductory course, or a regular women's workshop participant teaches a new participant to use the mitre saw. When women demonstrate expertise developed through their involvement (or otherwise), they are removed, to an extent, from the inexpert (novice) role, and reveal to themselves and other women some of the potential benefits of participation. They also explicitly contest gendered stereotypes about women's lack of expertise in these activities. Store Two's women's workshop organizer consistently started or ended each workshop by asking the participants, "What are you working on?". This was an opportunity for women to share information about planned or completed projects, and she would follow up with women about projects they had mentioned: "I was brushing my teeth and I wondered, 'Is that bathroom finished yet?'". Discussions about women's

projects are common at the women's workshops. Participants often ask each other about ongoing or planned projects, and take pride in each other's achievements, such as when a regular at store One's weekly workshops told a new participant: "you can definitely install your own toilet. Ask [another regular], she installed two new toilets at her house". In these situations, women challenge the notion that women onliness implies a lack expertise, and instead, women are rewarded for having home improvement or roller derby expertise, and encouraged to share their expertise with other women.

The women's workshops offer participants an opportunity to demonstrate their expertise, and this is also true for women BBHR associates involved in the women's workshops. Store Two's manager claimed, "[The women's workshop team] enjoyed it. It gives them a chance to show off [laughing]". In addition to a chance to "show off" at the women's workshops (as mentioned earlier, "showing off" expertise is often qualified), women associates benefited in other ways, whether they helped to instruct, organized food, or cleaned up. According to Store One's women's workshop organizer, "[the monthly workshops] actually gave the girls that worked here something as well. It wasn't just a job, like they enjoyed doing this, they loved doing it...It was being creative. It was having fun...and it's a whole different atmosphere...they all wanted to be part of it because it was just this wonderful entity". Like most women participants, and particularly the regulars, being involved in the women's workshop is a positive experience for the organizers and instructors, and part of that positive experience is having the opportunity to develop and share expertise. Interestingly, women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters also regularly counteract the assumed inexpert role when they share expertise not

directly related to roller derby or home improvement.

At the women's workshops, this sharing is often in the form of tips and tricks for various domestic labour activities, such as cleaning, or eliminating bugs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, sharing domestic labour-related expertise serves a somewhat feminizing purpose in the context of a home improvement workshop. In ACRG, sharing non-roller derby expertise is most common when skaters take on league work through which they can demonstrate "expert" skills in a relevant area. When a skater does work for the league directly related to her training/education or job, for example a skater who works as a publicist taking responsibility for the league's Public Relations Committee, she is an "expert" in that area (or, at least, the most "expert" woman in the league). Because ACRG skaters not only skate, but also do the work necessary for the league's existence, women involved in ACRG often develop skills they never anticipated, especially non-roller derby expertise necessary for the running of the league. ACRG's president claims, "It's definitely been a growing experience—I've learned a lot. I mean I was forced to learn about insurance because everybody needs to be kept safe, and I was forced to learn some accounting skills because money had to be kept track of, and I've learned some mediation skills because not everybody gets along all the time". Through their involvement in these women-only leisure activity groups, women develop not only activity-specific expertise. Though much of the way these activities are organized, and the types of interactions encouraged among participants, rely on a discourse of expertise, specifically assumptions that women lack expertise, women find ways to demonstrate (various kinds of) expertise, challenge expectations and assumptions that they are

inexpert, and thus consistently negotiate a discourse of expertise.

Producing women onlyness: inappropriate social interactions

The types of social interactions among group members and between members of the group and other women discussed in the previous section are those considered appropriate by women participants. Their appropriateness is apparent in the ways that women adopt and promote them, and in doing so contribute to the socialization of new participants and skaters to these same behaviours. In this section, I focus on the types of behaviours that cause conflict among, and/or are deemed to be inappropriate by women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters. This approach is premised on the idea that, knowing what is wrong (inappropriate) means also knowing what is right (appropriate), and including analysis of these interactions contributes to a fuller picture of the social interactions among women in these groups (Donnelly and Young, 1988), and the dynamic process of producing women onlyness gender regimes. Further, highlighting women participants' responses to inappropriate behaviours sheds light on their active production of particular women onlyness gender regimes: welcoming, encouraging, supportive women onlyness that is produced through the appropriate types of social interaction. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the inappropriate behaviours discussed in this section are almost the exact opposites of the appropriate behaviours described above. As a reminder, "appropriate" and "inappropriate" are used based on norms established among ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants, and do not represent value judgements on my part.

I identified social interactions that are considered inappropriate by the ways

women respond to them with formal and, most often, informal sanctions, or by making comments that express their frustration, upset, and sometimes anger. This is facilitated by the fact that, for the most part, women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters tend to recognize and acknowledge interpersonal and group social dynamics, and bring them to the attention of the group or specific women within the group. Identifying inappropriate social interactions further elaborates the ways that a discourse of expertise and other gender stereotypes are negotiated in women's interactions, and in the production of women onlyness gender regimes in ACRG and at the women's workshops. In particular, when women identify and react to inappropriate social interactions, they demonstrate that there *are* limits to women's possible appeals to a discourse of (in)expertise, and also to the participant-created supportive environment. There are four broad categories of behaviours (types of social interactions) that are considered inappropriate: 1) "acting like men", 2) divisive or "clique-y" behaviour, 3) demanding "too much" personal and emotional support from the group, and 4) not actively participating. In the following sections I discuss each type of inappropriate social interaction in turn, as well as its relationship to a discourse of expertise, stereotypes of essential gender difference, and the types of appropriate social interactions, and its role in the production of women onlyness in these groups.

"Acting like men" – Behaviours that are essentialized as men's behaviours

In the preceding chapter, I addressed men's roles at the women's workshops and in ACRG, and skaters' and women's workshop participants' perceptions of men in these roles (usually exceptional men), as well their perceptions of other (usually problem) men.

For this section, it is sufficient to say that women participants identify as inappropriate the behaviours of other women when they are perceived to be acting in ways stereotypically associated with men, specifically, the previously introduced problem men. Importantly, women participants do not explicitly identify the behaviours as such, i.e., as men's or masculine behaviours. This is a connection I have made between how women speak about problem men, and these particular interactions that are identified as inappropriate. Women participants explain these inappropriate behaviours in other ways, and do not make the connection to concerns about, and experiences of, negative interactions with men. The relevant essentialized assumptions about men are that men would dominate the group: men would take over these groups, and make the women feel stupid (because of assumptions about women's lack of expertise, and perceptions that men tend to claim expertise, real or not). In other words, many women believe that men's participation in these groups would introduce elements of pressure to perform/to be an "expert", and competition not promoted by the appropriate types of interactions described above. In her study of a women-only guided canoe trip, McDermott (2004) found that women canoeists also believed men would introduce "performance pressure" to the experience by expecting women and other men (in a mixed gender group) to "prove" themselves, especially their physical skills. This essentialized stereotype of men is particularly apparent in discussions among women's workshop participants, and the women's workshops contribute the majority of examples in this section.

In women's flat track roller derby, concerns about and experiences of men taking

over are part of the sport's nascent origin myth. As previously introduced³³, much of contemporary roller derby – the flat track, women-only and “by the skaters, for the skaters” commitment – is modeled on roller derby as reimagined and recreated by the Texas Rollergirls (TXRG) in the early 2000s. At the very beginning of TXRG, negative experiences with men, particularly Devil Dan, encouraged the skaters to take control and keep control of “their” roller derby. Though TXRG adopted Devil Dan's women-only skaters version of roller derby, they eschewed the sideshow, objectifying, and exclusive (limited to women who fit his idea of a “derby girl”) elements of his version. ACRG has largely unquestioningly adopted TXRG's model of women's flat track roller derby. In fact, a number of ACRG skaters know nothing of roller derby's earlier coed incarnations, and associate “skater” with “woman” because this is their only exposure to or experience of roller derby.

ACRG's president explains that the women-only model was decided with little, if any, discussion, “the thought of it being just for fun, for a group of girls that were gonna start it, it never really crossed our minds to have a coed league or to let men play, and then once the rule set came out, we were playing by a rule set that was women-only, it was the only rule set that was ever written down anywhere, and then it just kind of stayed that way”. It is interesting to note that ACRG's president frames men's involvement in terms of if *we* “let *them* play”, which seems to indicate a greater commitment to women's control of the activity than is suggested in the rest of her comment. In addition to the notion that ACRG is a women-only league (i.e., only women skate) because a group of

³³ This is in the “*A very brief history of roller derby*” section of Appendix A.

women started roller derby in Anon City, and women's flat track was the model of roller derby they chose, the league's organization also relies on the norm of gender-segregated sport. This is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. For many skaters, it "makes sense" that ACRG is gender segregated, because it fits with other sports they have played and watched, and is the dominant model of sport organization with which all skaters are familiar. Rather than taking issue with stereotypical behaviours associated with men (and particularly men athletes), some ACRG skaters adopt characteristics of masculine defined sport, such as celebrating toughness, injury, and win-at-all-costs competition. This is not absolute, and other, less masculine elements are integrated into the culture of ACRG, such as inclusiveness (of all skill levels, body types). For the purpose of this section, it is important to note that ACRG skaters do not identify as inappropriate stereotypical behaviours associated with men in the same ways as women's workshop participants.

At the women's workshops, a small number of women behave in ways that many women commonly identify and essentialize as behaviours they believe men would perform if they were involved as workshop participants. These behaviours are "not okay" because they detract from the mutually constituted welcoming, supportive environment that promotes women developing expertise, and is experienced as enjoyable by most women. Specifically, there are women who "take over" the women's workshops, often by monopolizing the activity, group, or instructor. Women's workshop participants typically express frustration when a woman monopolizes workshop time in ways that are not useful to other women in the group, for example, when a participant asked many very

specific questions about her own garden at a monthly women's workshop on landscaping. At store Two's monthly women's workshops, the women's workshop organizer sometimes asked that participants write down their questions and hold them until the end of the workshop to ensure the instructor would have time to cover all of the planned material (this was in response to the first couple of monthly workshops running over time). When one regular consistently ignored this request, at multiple workshops, it was apparent that the behaviour was frustrating for the other women's workshop participants: "One woman continued to ask questions even though we had all been asked not to, and even though we were running out of time. When she did it again, women in the group (including me) looked at each other, smiled, shrugged their shoulders, and rolled their eyes. I interpreted these reactions as expressions of our mutual frustration about the lack of attention to the directions". In addition to these expressions of frustration, women started side conversations, sometimes about the workshop topic but not always.

At the women's workshops, interactions between women participants (BBHR customers) and women's workshop instructors and organizers (BBHR employees) are influenced by their relative roles. In each of the following sections, it will become clear that, like the maintenance of gendered boundaries discussed in the previous chapter, women's workshop participants are primarily responsible for identifying and responding to behaviours deemed inappropriate. Women's workshop instructors and organizers typically adopt the customer service-oriented position that "the customer is always right", and tend to rely on participants to discourage inappropriate behaviours. For example, instructors rarely stop a woman from asking questions, even if they have requested that

women hold their questions until the end of the workshop. In situations when one participant “takes over” with questions, asking questions – discussed above as an essential component of the women’s workshops – can exceed the limits of appropriate social interaction among women’s workshop participants. In part, this is because the woman engaged in this type of questioning demonstrates a lack of regard for other women participants, and particularly their opportunities to develop expertise (especially when excessive questions make it impossible for other women to ask questions and/or lead to running out of time for hands-on learning opportunities). In some cases, a woman might acknowledge that she is taking over a workshop, for example, if she is particularly interested in the topic or planning to do the project: “I’m sorry, I’m taking up all the time with my questions” or “I have so many questions, I hope you all don’t mind”. Almost invariably, when a woman acknowledges her “taking over” and apologizes, the participants approve the behaviour by assuring her that she should ask all of her questions: “Go right ahead”, “You obviously need the information”, and occasionally other women admit learning something from hearing the answers.

Sometimes a woman’s dominating behaviour is so frustrating for other participants that it affects their enjoyment of the women’s workshops. Many participants adopt the appropriate types of social interaction detailed above in an attempt to ensure the continuation of the women’s workshops, and share their own positive experiences. However, they are not upset that some women do not attend regularly: “[a regular] mentioned how strange it was that none of the other women (who started [attending the workshops] with us) have come back. She is glad the one woman ‘who kept buying gifts

for her husband' didn't come back 'because she talked the whole time'". Among some of the store One women's workshop regulars, expressing frustration about one particularly dominating woman (also a regular) served to break the ice at a December holiday get together held at a restaurant (after a workshop):

There was some discussion about the woman...who is quite annoying (everything is about her, she knows everything, and she will talk over the 'experts' when they are presenting). All of the women knew who was being talked about and each had stories (including me)—there was a consensus that she is very annoying and completely oblivious to people's reactions to her—this was kind of a bonding thing (discussed right at the beginning [of the evening]).

Appropriate behaviours for women participants are reinforced when inappropriate behaviours are explicitly identified and discussed among them. When they express annoyance or dislike of women who behave in inappropriate ways, women's workshop participants encourage each other not to behave in these ways. It both calls attention to the inappropriate behaviours, and clearly demonstrates women's negative reactions to them.

In addition, in this manner, women reinforce that most participants are engaged in appropriate social interactions. For example, while building deck chairs during a weekly women's workshop, one of the regulars stated consistently, "Somebody didn't watch Sesame Street",

which was code for the fact that some of the women did not really understand that everyone needed to be sharing the saw by taking turns cutting their wood. [One woman] in particular ...consistently tried to make all of her cuts at the same time, even when that meant holding up the other women...(even though [the women's workshop organizer] made it quite clear that we should be measuring our wood in advance (as much as possible) so that when it was our turn to use the saw, we could make a few cuts and then turn it over to somebody else).

By drawing attention to one woman's inappropriate behaviour (not sharing), this regular

emphasized that sharing is an appropriate and desirable social interaction, and offered implicit recognition of the women participants who were sharing and behaving appropriately (the women to whom she made the comments). A few participants also directly addressed the women who was not sharing, reminding her there was only one saw for everybody, the women's workshop organizer had explained the need to share, and pointing out the ways that other women in the group were making efforts to work together.

At times, a woman "takes over" the women's workshop by being a know-it-all. "Know-it-all" dominating behaviour can make other women in the group feel stupid because they do not have all the answers, or because the "know-it-all" corrects or belittles their contributions. In all, this type of behaviour calls negative attention to some women's lack of expertise in ways that are at odds with the women's workshops' inclusiveness, and challenge the constantly promoted idea that "no expertise is necessary". When they identify as problematic "know-it-all" behaviours, it is apparent that women's workshop participants distinguish between sharing expertise with other women in the group (e.g., talking about personal experiences or how to use tools) in ways that promote all participants' development of home improvement expertise, and doing so in ways that demonstrate one's own expertise without consideration of others' expertise or feelings about their own (in)expertise. Though it was common for participants to answer each other's questions, during store One's weekly women's workshop, "women were asking questions to [the women's workshop organizer], and [a regular] consistently interrupted the questioner or [the women's workshop organizer] to answer them. Eventually,

[another regular] said to her: ‘[The women’s workshop organizer] should give you the [staff uniform]’. She replied, ‘I can help explain too’’. This demonstrates that women’s workshop participants are open to learning from other women in the group (not only the instructors); however, there are some limitations to this openness. Specifically, the tone (and content) of the response is important.

Most women participants, as well as women’s workshop organizers and instructors, answer in ways that encourage women to ask questions, assure them there are no stupid questions and that questions help the entire group, and answer follow up questions or clarification when necessary. When answers are hurried, impatient, or forceful, as they were in this situation, many women feel less comfortable asking questions, and stop asking questions altogether or wait until the end to ask the women’s workshop organizer directly. This is what store Two’s manager claimed women tend to do at the weekend workshops, rather than asking questions in a group of men. By making a comment, one of the regulars tried to intervene, and demonstrated to other participants that the “know-it-all” behaviour was frustrating and unwelcome. At a weekly women’s workshop, “when another participant tried to take a piece of wood from me to ‘show’ me how to cut it (actually, cut it for me), I was almost too surprised to respond. I did not let her take it from me, assured her I would try it myself, and moved away from her. [Two regulars] approached me to tell me they had seen this interaction: ‘Oh my god!’, ‘I can’t believe she tried to take it out of your hand!’”. The reactions of the regulars, and the fact that they said something to me, reinforced my feeling that this action was not okay. That this type of behaviour is associated with men was highlighted when a One weekly

women's workshop regular explained the appeal of a women-only workshop, "cause you know when guys are around they kinda take over, you know like they get your hand and show you how to do it".

When women's workshop participants behave in ways that many participants associate with men, especially when they "take over" the workshop by monopolizing the workshop time or instructor, not sharing with other participants, and acting like a "know-it-all", other participants respond in ways that demonstrate their assessment of these behaviours as inappropriate. Some women avoid the dominating participant(s) and/or ignore the behaviour and the woman (e.g., turn away from her, start separate conversations). Some express frustration to other participants through body language (e.g., rolling eyes, shrugging shoulders) and comments. And a few women make comments, often said in a joking way, to the woman who has "taken over" to demonstrate that their behaviour is a problem for women in the group, or very occasionally say explicitly that specific behaviour is inappropriate. These are the informal means women participants use to control social interactions among women in the group, and to produce and reinforce the women onlyness gender regime. No formal means of controlling a woman's participation in the women's workshops are available because of the semi-public, retail space of the groups and their organization as a corporate, consumer-focused initiative.

In my experience, when a participant behaves in an inappropriate way that women's workshop participants commonly identify and essentialize as being associated with men, participants do not make a connection between the woman's behaviour and the

assumptions they regularly make about men, i.e., that men would dominate, assume women lack expertise, and make women feel stupid. As mentioned above, a woman might be admonished to read instructions so she is “not like a man”, however a woman who “takes over” a workshop is not told to “stop acting like a man”. Instead, women’s workshop participants offer different accounts of these women’s behaviours. For example, women’s inappropriate behaviours are explained as a result of a woman being socially awkward (“I don’t think she gets it”, “It’s like she doesn’t know better”) or “needy”, and explanations are more nuanced than essentialized explanations of men’s behaviours: “That’s just how men are”. In the latter case (“She’s needy”), participants suggest that a woman behaving in these ways is using the group for her own purposes, hoping to receive praise, appreciation, or recognition from other women participants. Sometimes they speculate that a woman would solicit these reactions at the women’s workshops because she has low self-esteem or does not receive these things at home (from husband, children, etc.). Even though women’s responses indicate that they find these behaviours very frustrating, they offer accounts that are quite generous or kind (instead of suggesting that a woman is simply annoying or a bad person).

When they explain “women acting like men”, women’s workshop participants sustain an essentialized caricature of men that produces and reinforces explanations and justifications of women onlyness. Also, accounts offered for “women acting like men” are based on beliefs about essential women’s experiences (e.g., assumptions about women’s self esteem and personal relationships), and assume that women understand other women’s behaviours, which results in the explanations being more nuanced than

explanations of men's behaviours. Ultimately, they are a stereotyped set of explanations that reinforce differences between women and men. This demonstrates, in part, the complex negotiations of gender stereotypes occurring in women's production of women onlyness gender regimes.

Divisive/"Clique-y" behaviour

At times, a woman or women in ACRG or at the women's workshops initiates social interactions with other participants that are divisive or "clique-y". Specifically, they behave in ways that are at odds with the norms of recruiting and welcoming all women established in these groups. Also, this can be perceived as an attempt to limit some women's participation and their opportunities to develop expertise and relationships in a supportive setting. As such, "clique-y" behaviours further contradict the appropriate types of social interactions of ACRG and the women's workshops. Specifically, if a woman attempts to create a group within the group by intentionally including some women and excluding others, or uses existing divisions (such as team affiliation or "regular" status) to determine how to act toward particular women, most ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants deem these social interactions inappropriate and respond in ways that indicate their disapproval.

For example, over a few months at store One's weekly workshops, one woman attempted to create an exclusive group (within the women's workshop group) composed only of selected participants. For the most part, the selected women were regulars at the monthly workshops, and then started to attend weekly as well. The initiator spoke only to certain women during workshops, and actively excluded others by turning her back to

them, or not including them in conversations. One evening,

While she was painting, she was talking to the other [monthly women's workshop] regulars —she said she wanted to have them over for dinner, they should have a Christmas dinner... [The women's workshop organizer] asked if she wanted to have a potluck dinner in the store. The woman didn't really seem to like that idea... At one point, the woman... looked over to where [another regular] and I were working, and seemed to realize we could both hear her. It seemed that this was not her intention— this was a directed vs. a general invitation.

Although the women's workshop organizer attempted to encourage organizing a dinner in which all women's workshop participants could be included, the woman declined. At a later workshop, she made a show of giving pads of paper and pens from a vendor, distributed at the previous week's workshop, to certain women – regulars she knew were missing from the workshop – but not everybody. I was surprised to receive a pad and pen from her. It seemed to be an indication that she had decided to include me in “her” group. At least one other woman and I gave the pad and pen to other women participants who admired them.

Giving away the selectively distributed items demonstrated, in part, that we did not support this woman's attempts to exclude some women's workshop participants. In discussions among the regulars, it became clear that a growing number of women recognized what was happening, and they also responded by actively working against this woman's attempts to exclude certain women, e.g., going out of their way to speak to and include all of the women's workshop participants (in conversations, hands-on learning opportunities). Employing the appropriate types of social interaction described previously, women's workshop participants were able to counteract this woman's attempts to divide the group, and develop her own “clique” within it. Eventually, the

“problem” woman stopped attending, and some women suggested she no longer attended “because she couldn’t have her own way” and she was “too bossy and controlling for this kind of group”. A few disparaged her behaviour as “so high school”, indicating that women should have moved beyond forming and controlling cliques, and drawing on, by denying, the Mean Girls’ “ideal type” women onlyness gender regime. Many women’s workshop participants, including those who were excluded by this woman, expressed relief that she was gone, and that they had been aware of what she was trying to do. For example, a few months after the woman stopped attending the women’s workshops, one of the women who had been excluded (with her friend) made reference to “we were the ones who didn’t fit, weren’t included”. After the “problem” woman left the group, women’s workshop participants told stories about seeing her places, and laughed that she would not acknowledge them. A few regulars made it clear that the woman had no reason to be angry or upset with them, she was the one who had “behaved badly”.

That this woman’s behaviours had been inappropriate in the context of the women’s workshops was reinforced at a later weekly workshop. A regular brought gifts from her holiday for the other regulars, but did not have enough for everyone at the workshop because there were new participants. Rather than distributing the gifts, she chose to wait, and when there were still more women than gifts the following week, she gave regulars the gifts as discretely as possible, and asked that they put them away so the others would not see. At the women’s workshops, regulars might constitute a group within the group because they have developed personal relationships through time and shared experiences. In response to a question about who could join the women’s

workshops, store One's manager emphasized, "It depends on what you mean by 'join'— it is not a club that requires membership. Anybody can go to the service desk and sign up". In my experience, most of the women's workshop regulars do not perceive the workshops as an exclusive group, and any woman who attends regularly, interacts socially, and participates actively is able to "join" this group.

Since it was founded in 2006, ACRG has been a league comprised of two (and, for one season, three) home teams³⁴. By virtue of its organization, ACRG consistently divides skaters into smaller groups (teams) within the larger group (the league). Sometimes, the league has tried to keep women together (on the same team) who knew each other before joining, or developed friendships during their early involvement; but this is not always possible. Throughout my time in the league, skaters have developed or maintained cross-team friendships, and skaters typically attend all league events (including events hosted by other teams). Having separate teams then is not necessarily divisive or clique-forming. However, there are situations in which team affiliations contributed to "clique-y" behaviour. For example, during the 2008 season, one team had more skaters than the other, and when skaters voted for the travel team roster and year-end awards, team affiliations were mobilized in exclusive ways that were perceived by some skaters to be unfair, and not in the league's best interests. A skater on the larger team told a skater on the other team, "I think you should win rookie of the year, but I'm going to vote for [a teammate] instead because I have to support my team".

Starting in the 2010 season, ACRG scheduled only league practices and

³⁴ League and team organization is described in greater detail in the "*Anon City Roller Girls – The Activity*" section of Appendix A.

eliminated voting for the travel team roster. These measures seem to have diminished some of the divisions that could be attributed to having different teams within the league. According to one ACRG skater (who joined in 2009), her joining ACRG was facilitated and inhibited by the close relationships among skaters: “I e-mailed the president directly about getting involved—I could do that because [the league] is so small. But also because it’s small, it’s cliquy and it can be difficult to get involved and feel included, and girls tend to be more cliquy than boys”. Among ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants, it is commonly acknowledged that some women will get along better, have more in common, or develop closer relationships. In fact, as discussed above, the types of appropriate social interactions women adopt in these groups promote the development of personal and social relationships with other women-only leisure activity participants. When participants behave in ways that deny other women the opportunity to develop these relationships as well as their expertise (by excluding them), or behave in ways that indicate a clique mentality (interacting as “opponents” rather than “leaguemates” or ignoring new participants in favour of regulars), many participants identify these behaviours as inappropriate. Most ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants work collectively to create a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment.

In a sense, it seems that these women-only leisure activity participants reject one “ideal type” women onlyness gender regime: the Mean Girl stereotype, which assumes that women cannot get along with each other in groups because they are prone to compete with one another (often for attention from men), “catty” social interactions, and use arbitrary criteria to exclude some women from their cliques. This is demonstrated in

some women's references to behaviour as "so high school", suggesting the behaviours are considered immature and inappropriate, and women distance themselves from them. However, it appears that many women's workshop participants and skaters reject this "ideal type" in favour of more positively valued, but also stereotypical and essentialized assumptions about women's behaviour. Specifically, they employ the "ideal type" women onlyness gender regime, Sisterhood, emphasizing that these groups exclude men in favour of including *all* women. A Sisterhood approach to explaining women together in groups is evidenced when women adopt types of social interactions that promote the involvement of all women, and rely on assumptions about women's common experiences that allow women to understand other women (i.e., offering more nuanced and thoughtful explanations of women's behaviour). Much like the sororities Handler (1995) studied, women in ACRG and at the women's workshops negotiate contradictory stereotypes of women. For sorority members, "Their membership is an extension of a relational view of women: women need each other, particularly for support in dealing with gendered problems and gender relations; but many sorority members harbor stereotyped views of women: women cannot be trusted, particularly in dealing with gendered problems and gender relations" (Handler, 1995: 238). In my experience, ACRG skaters' negotiation of these stereotypes is more explicit, and more consistent. This is likely due to a number of factors, including spending a significant amount of time together (more than women's workshop participants, and based on the premise that more time spent together means more chances for conflict), the nature of the activity (a full contact sport played competitively), selection processes for teams, and dependence on skater contributions to

league work (as a volunteer-run organization).

At times, as introduced in the preceding chapter, skaters justify conflicts between skaters by invoking the idea that women together in groups cannot get along. During one of my first league practices, skaters disagreed about how to run the scrimmage, and argued on the track. A skater next to me observed, “That’s what happens when you get so many girls together”. Over time, I have heard a few skaters make similar comments, claiming that within a group of women, conflict is inevitable, “What can you expect?”. Sometimes the term “derby drama” – typically used by ACRG skaters and in the larger roller derby community to refer to any and all types of conflict between skaters, between skaters and others involved in roller derby (e.g., officials, announcers), and within and between teams – stands in for overtly gendered comments. For example, when an issue causes controversy within ACRG, skaters identify it as “Ah, derby drama”, typically with a smile or shrug. This suggests that many skaters accept “derby drama” (conflict, gossip, complaints) as an unavoidable characteristic of women’s flat track roller derby. When used this way, “derby drama” is implicitly gendered, making reference to “drama queen”, and the “drama” that permeates popular cultural forms directed at women, e.g., soap operas. Comments suggesting that women cannot get along are not uncontested, and occasionally another skater will challenge this assumption: “That’s bullshit”, “It has nothing to do with being girls”. In this way, some skaters deny the relevance of the Mean Girls’ stereotype.

In ACRG’s promotional materials, and when skaters promote the league and use the appropriate types of social interactions detailed above, the Sisterhood stereotype is

commonly employed. At times this is used to downplay divisions among league skaters. For example, at a league meeting ACRG's head referee proposed coaching the "all star team". In the ensuing discussion, "it was...emphasized that we are not talking about an all star team but a travel team ([one skater] said 'we're all stars'—which somebody else commented was 'a very girly thing to say')". Among skaters there is also a tendency to selectively mobilize biological explanations of conflict among women. Specifically, about once each month skaters discuss that spending so much time together causes many skaters to be on the "same [menstrual] cycle", and this causes "one week of hell" every month as those skaters experience period-related symptoms at the same time. One skater has suggested, not entirely jokingly, adopting "an early warning system" so that skaters in a bad mood (for whatever reason) would wear a pink t-shirt to practice. When the travel team received pink t-shirts from a host league, she was excited: "We can do it now everyone has a pink t-shirt". Some skaters use the suggestion to explain their own or other's behaviours: "I'm not wearing pink because of *that*", "Maybe *you* should have worn pink".

Each of these examples demonstrate various ways that ACRG skaters employ and negotiate both complementary and contradictory stereotypes about women, and particularly groups of women. These stereotypes include characterizations of women and groups of women that are both positively and negatively valued. These processes of negotiation are crucial in the production of women onliness gender regimes, and revealing of the various direct and indirect ways that women onliness gender regimes are produced in relation to other "real" and "ideal type" gender regimes, and gender

stereotypes.

Demanding “too much” personal and emotional support from the group

As described, in ACRG and at the BBHR women’s workshops, women participants work together to create an environment that is encouraging and supportive of all women regardless of expertise, and one in which women are able to develop personal and social relationships that are about “more than” home improvement or roller derby so that support among participants extends beyond the activities. In some cases, women participants use the language of family to describe their relationships, e.g., “We’re the women’s workshop family!”, “derby wives”, “sisterhood”. Additionally, in ACRG and the larger roller derby community, some skaters refer to roller derby as a “healthy” outlet for aggression, and an alternative to more passive versions of talk therapy, e.g., a league sticker that reads, “Have issues? Try roller derby”, a Facebook group called “I don’t need therapy, I have roller derby!!!”, and “Where else do you get to knock girls down and not get in trouble for it?” as a common explanation for playing. At times, women’s workshop participants make comments about using tools to let out aggression “in a healthy way”, e.g., “It just feels good to whack it!”, “I’m taking my day out on this piece of wood”, and occasionally use word plays to reference “therapeutic” outcomes, e.g., when using a coping saw: “Next time your husband says you can’t cope, pull out your coping saw”.

In spite of references to family and therapy, some women’s behaviours reveal limitations to the support available among ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants. For many women participants, it is a problem when another woman consistently compels the group to focus on “me”. Long’s (2003: 72) study of women’s

reading groups revealed similar concerns: “groups often perceive members who become too preoccupied with their own personal problems as difficult or disruptive to the real purpose of the meetings”. In ACRG and at the women’s workshops, a focus on “me” can mean monopolizing workshop or practice/bout/meeting time to share personal stories or troubles. It typically includes eliciting sympathy and support *all* the time, such as “too much” need for affirmation about a job well done, and constant assurances that “You do *not* suck”, “You *are* getting better”, “Yours *does* look as nice as everyone else’s”, etc. Each of these behaviours is acceptable from all women, but only some of the time. When women seek personal support from the group on occasion, or when something particularly good or bad has happened (such as the dragon boater’s success story included above), most women participants regularly offer support, praise, or sympathy.

Although there is general recognition that newer participants require more support and assurance from established members of the group, all participants must meet certain criteria to “earn” their support from the group. For example, when a new skater on my team constantly sought reassurance that she was improving, that she could “do this”, that the team was happy to have her, etc., many skaters cooperated for a while. When the team began to feel the new skater wanted support without offering it in return (“The only reason she compliments anybody is so you say something nice about her”), and did not demonstrate commitment to developing roller derby expertise (“How’s she going to get better if she’s not at practice?”, “You can’t learn if you don’t skate”), they were less willing to offer the same amount of support, or in the case of some skaters, continued to offer support, but also commiserated with other teammates about their frustrations. Some

skaters expressed a preference for offering unsolicited praise, and referred to their own experiences of receiving praise to show that they perceived it as more meaningful than feeling obligated to offer praise because a skater is “so needy”. Similarly, when a regular at store One’s weekly workshops spent an entire two-hour workshop listening to another regular describe a stressful situation at work and family issues, other regulars acknowledged and congratulated her patience and kindness. They also indicated they were unwilling to do the same: “You’re a better person than I am”, “I couldn’t have done it”. They also warned, “She’d never do it for you”, and speculated, “I don’t think she has anybody else to talk to”. When women dominate the group in these strikingly different ways from the “acting like a man” ways, there are often comparable outcomes. Focusing all of the attention on one woman can detract from a welcoming, supportive environment in which all women can focus on developing expertise, and social and personal relationships, and have an enjoyable experience.

It is possible that some women assume that women onlyness in these leisure activity groups promises an opportunity for caring, maybe even therapeutic, interactions with other women. It is hard to imagine them joining mixed-gender groups and demanding similar forms of personal and emotional support. Women’s responses to these dominating behaviours demonstrate willingness to engage in support work and emotional labour with other participants, but in ways that are limited and require reciprocation (all women as givers and receivers). Limits allow the activity and group to be fun and supportive for all women, disallow any one woman the opportunity to emotionally monopolize the group or use it for her own ends, and emphasize the activity of the group

(these are task-oriented groups). In ACRG and at the women's workshops, women produce a version of women onliness that is not therapy. Here again, it can be argued that women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters rely on accounts of women's inappropriate behaviours that are based on essentialized beliefs about women's experiences, specifically, assumptions about women's self esteem, self-confidence, and the roles they play in their personal (family and work) relationships.

Not doing what you are supposed to do – Not actively participating

When an ACRG skater or women's workshop participant consistently does not actively participate in the group's activities, the behaviour is considered inappropriate and can cause conflict among women-only leisure activity participants. ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants learn the expectations of participation both through the promotion of women's active participation (described above as an appropriate type of social interaction), and negative responses to women who do not actively participate. In addition, ACRG has formal attendance and participation requirements of skaters, set out in the league's code of conduct. All skaters must sign the code of conduct to indicate they have read and will abide by the requirements. In addition to expectations about the number of practices and meetings a skater attends, the code of conduct reflects ACRG's ongoing issues with some skaters' lack of commitment by further explaining that skaters must skate at all practices (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to), and take on league work (rather than simply claiming committee affiliations). To enforce these requirements, ACRG continuously develops and refines attendance and participation tracking strategies (often consulting other leagues for examples). Reading and signing the

code of conduct is one of the first tasks for new ACRG members, and they are consistently reminded that joining the league is a “big commitment”. ACRG constantly recruits new members, and claims that it is in the best interests of the league for members to skate for as long as possible (less turnover means more skilled skaters, better roller derby, and continuity in league work), therefore the league takes the approach that new skaters must understand “what they are getting into”. That way, fewer women join the league and then realize they are unable to meet the membership requirements. When a skater is unable to meet one or more requirements (especially attendance and dues payment), she can no longer be a league member. For some skaters, this is temporary (e.g., until they find a job, recover from injury, find childcare), and others stop skating for good. There are no formal attendance or participation requirements at the women’s workshops, though regular attendance is encouraged. In the remainder of this section, I discuss the informal means by which “not doing what you are supposed to do”, particularly with respect to active participation, is defined as inappropriate by these women-only leisure activity participants.

Most commonly, women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters express frustration about women who are unwilling to do work for themselves and expect others to do it for them. In ACRG, this refers primarily to the work of the league, and at the women’s workshops to the work necessary to build a project. It is customary for women’s workshop participants to help each other, either by working together to each build a project, or as previously mentioned, women not building a project for themselves often attend and help the women who are. Some women’s workshop participants who

have (physical) limitations tell other participants, and they offer assistance accordingly, e.g., at least two regulars at store One's weekly women's workshops have told the group that they have issues with their hands and wrists and cannot use tools, such as a router, that are heavy. When a project requires such a tool, it is common practice for another participant to offer to do that step for them.

There are limitations to the help women's workshop participants are prepared to offer each other. For example, a woman who attended a few store One weekly women's workshops developed a (bad) reputation for expecting other participants to do projects for her. At each building workshop she attended, she asked another woman in the group to "help her", and then left that woman to do the project while she sat down, spoke to other women, and did nothing to help (or watch and learn). Women's frustrations were evident when they told each other, "She didn't want my help, she wanted me to do it for her", "How will she learn if she walks away while I do it for her?", "She doesn't even want to learn, she just wants something to take home". In addition to expecting other women's workshop participants to do work for her without demonstrating a commitment to developing her own expertise, this woman did not reciprocate the help she requested: "She never helps anybody, why should I keep helping her?", "She doesn't do anything!". Performing helplessness in a group of women committed to developing their expertise and independence, and exploiting the generosity of other women's workshop participants are clearly behaviours deemed inappropriate at the women's workshops. In my experience, women's workshop participants are able to elicit as much help as they need, whether the need is a result of physical limitations, lack of expertise, or limited time, as

long as they have demonstrated both a commitment to developing expertise (they want to learn) and willingness to help other women in the group (when and in whatever ways they can). In addition, women's workshop participants regularly reinforce the appropriateness of helping when they express their appreciation of assistance provided to them: "Thank you so much for all your help", "I couldn't have done it without you", "It looks great because you helped me".

In ACRG, a relatively small number of skaters consistently do the work of the league for all skaters³⁵. As mentioned, some skaters are unaware of the amount of work done on their behalf, and this is common in many voluntary associations, including sports teams and leagues (Donnelly and Harvey, 2011). The situation is frustrating for skaters who do the work, and can cause conflict between skaters when some neglect their league work responsibilities. In addition, if too few skaters do league work, the future of ACRG is jeopardized. One of the league's biggest challenges is convincing new skaters of this. At our first meeting, "[ACRG's president] emphasized the importance of everybody, rookies included, understanding the work put in by the original fifteen girls in [Anon City], and that work still needs to be done (by everyone) to ensure the future and growth

³⁵ In this section I focus exclusively on issues related to league work, however, within ACRG there is sometimes conflict related to roller derby expertise (skills needed to play roller derby). At times, skaters express frustration with a skater who does not improve in a "reasonable" amount of time, especially when that skater's commitment is questionable. Like women's workshop participants, ACRG skaters are prepared to help each other develop expertise. However, that help is not unconditional: skaters must demonstrate a commitment to developing their own expertise (by attending practices, skating as much as possible, seeking help), and show (even minimal) improvement over time. Carlson (2010: 436) found similar issues in the league she studied: "Even though women can join the league without much athletic background, their integration into the League depends on the learning curve of their skating abilities. Skaters who join but do not attend enough practices to become recognized as 'athletes' are condescendingly referred to [as] being in derby 'just for the party,' in one skater's words. Real skaters are athletes; bodies matter" (Carlson, 2010: 437).

of the league”. At the time I speculated,

commitment and reliability on the part of league members... seem to be a pretty constant source of difficulty/annoyance [for the president] as people move into and out of the league. I have a feeling that this emphasis has a lot to do with the fact that [she] is so committed (to the league and the sport), and so she has difficulty understanding other people’s more flippant attitudes about their own responsibilities to the league and the other players.

During my time with ACRG, I have learned that others, including me, are also frustrated and annoyed by some skaters’ lack of commitment to the league. Of the small number of skaters who do the bulk of league work, the majority are founding or longstanding members who, in most cases, have held leadership positions or contributed in whatever capacity the league needed, almost since the beginning. Many of these skaters feel obligated to do league work (e.g., serving as a captain or committee chair, planning a bout or fundraiser) because they understand that if the work is not done, there will be no ACRG, and all the time and work they have invested will be lost.

While some of these skaters admit they are happiest when they take a hands-on approach to league organization and operation, they and others are consistently frustrated when they have to do the same jobs (and most of the jobs), because new or non-contributing skaters do not do them. In some cases, these skaters do league work because it is easier to “just do it” than to recruit and train somebody else to do it, or because they have tried to delegate responsibilities and “been burned” by a skater not doing what she committed to. For any skater to contribute league work, they must make time in schedules already full of roller derby commitments, such as practices, bouts, and events, on top of paid work, family responsibilities, and other commitments (issues related to time are discussed in more detail in the previous chapter).

League meetings are key sites where conflicts arise related to some skaters' lack of contribution to the league. During league meetings, skaters discuss ongoing business and plan for the future, and the league's commitment to democratic principles (i.e., all skaters can participate in decision making by speaking and voting) is most obvious at these times. Discussions about commitment and contribution typically begin when skaters attending a league meeting express frustration about low attendance numbers at meetings. Attending skaters often complain that some skaters rarely make time to be at league meetings, but "they always have an opinion". Further, part of almost every league meeting I have attended has been devoted to discussing the need to have more skaters play active roles in league work, and encouraging them to "step up". Most often, the "encouragers" are members of the ACRG Board and other skaters who spend a lot of time and effort on league work, and they remind skaters that "everybody is busy", "it's not fair that some people do all the work and others do nothing", and "it won't get done if nobody does it". The "encouragers" also remind newer and less active skaters that "no expertise is necessary" for league work. As discussed earlier, though skaters sometimes bring expertise from their non-derby life to their league work, this is not necessary: "Nobody knew what they were doing at the beginning", "I had no idea how to do this when I started", "Anybody can do this". In these ways, ACRG's most actively contributing skaters demonstrate they are not happy doing all of the work, and they aspire to a more equitable division of labour.

Among both ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants, some women's expectations that others do work for them reveal limitations of how much help, as well as

time and effort, many participants are willing to give. In the case of the women's workshops this is most clearly demonstrated when women decline helping another participant: "Why don't you try it yourself", "I need to finish my own project", and when they speak to each other about frustrations with women who do not do work for themselves. In ACRG, for any skater to play roller derby, league work must be done. Skaters remind each other that being "by the skaters, for the skaters" means there is nobody else to do the work. When skaters make suggestions, usually prefaced with "The league should", "Why don't we", or "Other leagues", they are encouraged to take on the task themselves: "That is a good idea, you should do that", "Are you volunteering?". In these ways, ACRG skaters signal that all skaters need to make time and effort to contribute league work.

Summary: Limitations of appropriate social interactions

ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants deem to be inappropriate behaviours that are opposite to the appropriate behaviours identified in the previous section in the sense that they work against the group's ability to create a welcoming, supportive environment in which all women can develop their roller derby and home improvement expertise, and also develop social and personal relationships. When women participants "do not do what they are supposed to do", and especially when they expect other women to do work for them, they directly contradict the behavioural norms of active participation and/in a supportive environment established within the groups. In many ways, the types of social interactions participants identify as inappropriate effectively demonstrate the limitations of the appropriate types of social interaction.

Some women participants' behaviours illuminate the bounds of those social interactions, and reveal that when women exceed those bounds consistently or constantly, other participants identify and respond to their behaviours as inappropriate.

Helping other women in ACRG or at the women's workshops by sharing experiences and knowledge, showing women how to do things, and developing one's own expertise by asking questions are all acceptable, encouraged behaviours in these women-only leisure activity groups. That is, until they are done in the "wrong" ways, specifically "acting like men" as evidenced in the examples above. Similarly, ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants are encouraged to develop mutually supportive relationships and friendships within these groups. However, developing relationships with other participants in ways that are exclusive of some participants are not acceptable to most women. Finally, women participants work together to create an environment and develop relationships that are mutually supportive in ways not limited to roller derby or home improvement. Nonetheless, it is possible, as demonstrated above, for women to demand "too much" personal or emotional support from the group, by compelling group members to constantly focus on "me".

In these voluntary association groups, dependent for their existence on women's enjoyment of, and commitment to, the activities and the group itself, it is important that women participants be willing to respond to inappropriate behaviours, and attempt to curb them, and also that the ways they respond are not considered problematic themselves. All of these interactions are evidence of women participants' active role in the micro-level production of women onlyness gender regimes. Women's workshop

participants and ACRG skaters use a variety of strategies to identify for each other appropriate and inappropriate types of social interactions. As mentioned, women most often ignore or distance themselves from inappropriate behaviours, make jokes that indicate their feelings in a “nice” way, and express their frustrations to other women in the group. I would argue that women typically choose less direct means of enforcing the group’s behavioural norms for a few reasons. Addressing frustrating or potentially conflict-producing situations in these ways allows women participants to identify behaviours as inappropriate to the woman engaged in them, and perhaps even more importantly to other women in the group. Further, in these ways, women participants implicitly acknowledge that most women are behaving appropriately.

By adopting less direct means of identifying inappropriate behaviours, women can also more effectively maintain the welcoming and supportive environment of these groups (i.e., women are able to express their opposition to specific behaviours without creating an uncomfortable situation for other women). It is likely that many women respond in these ways because they are socialized through other gender regimes with which they have contact to avoid conflict, and prefer to respond in “nice” ways and hope their message is clear. The ways that women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters respond to some women’s inappropriate behaviours in these groups are similar to the strategies of boundary maintenance used to maintain the groups’ women onlyness (discussed in the previous chapter). Finally, also like boundary maintenance, when women identify and respond to inappropriate behaviours, they demonstrate their active engagement in the process of producing women onlyness gender regimes. Welcoming

and supportive environments in ACRG and at the women's workshops are not the result of their being women-only. Rather, they are the result of women's production – through social interactions, meaning making, negotiating gender stereotypes – and reproduction of women onlyness gender regimes with these particular characteristics.

Leadership, a discourse of expertise, and women onlyness

Another common characteristic of the women onlyness gender regimes produced in ACRG and at the BBHR women's workshops is the way they contest the authoritarian leadership model typically associated with sport and many educational settings. In sport, coaches (and sometimes managers) usually make decisions on behalf of athletes and teams, and dictate and control what athletes do with respect to training and playing. In many educational settings, students look to a teacher for information, the teacher determines the content of classes, and how information will be delivered. In both cases, leadership is closely connected to expertise. In the women-only leisure activity groups studied, coaches and Training Committee members, and workshop instructors (and women's workshop organizers) are in a situation made difficult, likely unintentionally so, by the ways that women onlyness is produced. Specifically, the ways that women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters negotiate a discourse of (in)expertise creates a situation in which it can be difficult for anybody to “step up” and be the leader, or the “expert”.

In these groups, women encourage each other to share their experiences, answer each other's questions, and contribute ideas and suggestions related to the activity (e.g., workshop topics, roller derby drills), and the group (e.g., completing evaluation forms at

monthly women's workshops, voting on league organization). In ACRG, this approach can cause problems when somebody needs to be "in charge", such as a skater running a practice, or a Board member chairing a league meeting. Constant discussion and suggestions about everything can make it difficult to accomplish anything. For example, at practices, some ACRG skaters talk through explanations of drills or consistently suggest changes to a drill before and during the drill, thus challenging the "expert" and related "leader" role of the skater running the practice. At the women's workshops, the challenge to an authoritarian leadership model, which seems unlikely in a group composed of participants assumed to be inexperienced and an expert women's workshop organizer or instructor, is most apparent when women share their own expertise with each other. When women's workshop participants claim home improvement and other forms of expertise, however qualified, the expert instructor becomes only one of many experts in the group. For example, when women describe their experiences with a specific product, especially when the instructor has no experience with the product, they become the expert to whom other women in the group direct questions. Also, the authoritarian leadership model is challenged when the designated expert admits to be learning with the women participants, and demonstrates that sometimes, on some topics, even the experts are inexperienced. As mentioned, this was common when the women's workshop organizer instructed monthly workshops at store Two.

By instructing workshops on topics about which she did not consider herself "expert", it is likely that store Two's women's workshop organizer made developing home improvement expertise seem more accessible to some women participants (as does

revealing the limits of the experts' expertise), and she also facilitated opportunities for women with relevant expertise to share it with the group. Sometimes when a participant asked a question she could not answer, she directed it to the group, thus explicitly sharing around the expert role. In ACRG, skaters regularly coach and learn skills at the same time, for example, when they introduce a new skill or drill at practice, and try it themselves for the first time: "It will help if I can actually do this", "Let's see how this goes". When they direct attention to other skaters, e.g., "Look at [her], she's got it", they also share the expert role. On occasion, women's workshop instructors struggle to share their expertise with participants. When women translate information between the instructor and other women participants, such as in the example of choosing a door described earlier, or when, during a lighting workshop, a woman found a photograph in an instructional book to assist the man instructor with his instructions, they demonstrate the limitations of expertise, and sometimes claim expertise in the process. Though, again, this expertise is often qualified, e.g., by claiming, "I also find it so confusing" or "I'm never quite sure, but I think".

Like some instructors, expert women are sometimes cast (or cast themselves) as learners, i.e., they possess expertise but they hope to further develop that expertise, and emphasize learning at the women's workshops. A regular at store Two's monthly workshops who works in home improvement claimed, "I learn something new at every workshop". It is perhaps unsurprising that women who already have home improvement expertise justify their attendance by highlighting a desire to further develop their expertise. In this way, there is space for them in a setting organized primarily with

inexperts in mind. Women's workshop participants also regularly share newly acquired expertise (from previous women's workshops) with each other and instructors. At one workshop,

A woman sitting next to me points out that [the instructor] is not holding the nails the 'proper way' that [a different instructor] taught them. The woman across the table reminds her that [he] 'warned us about that' (i.e., that many men, even the 'experts', would not hammer properly). Because I missed that workshop, I ask what is the proper way to hold a nail and the two women demonstrate, and explain that it protects your (finger) nails because you are holding pads up. They then suggest the instructor try it.

Women's workshop participants consistently take advantage of opportunities to demonstrate the expertise they are developing, and in a brief role reversal are sometimes able to teach the instructor something new. At the few women's workshops during which the instructor struggled with a project, such as trying to hang a door (for over an hour in a jam that he eventually decided was warped), women participants reacted in different ways:

The woman next to me (who earlier had suggested I write down the telephone number for installation services) says, 'I'm definitely calling someone'. The door installation is just too fidgety, and she doesn't have time for it. One of the women says that she feels sorry for the [workshop] instructors because they have to deal with a room full of women saying 'you did that wrong honey'. Some of the women continue to make suggestions (e.g., about where [he] needs to place or remove shims). Others are more tuned out (e.g., having conversations, reading the new schedule). One woman says, 'Ladies, when you try to do it on your own and it doesn't work, you know why'. Another woman says, 'I'm glad it's not working', it is good experience to see how difficult it is, and how you deal with issues that arise.

The final reaction, that women appreciated being able to see problems and how to solve them, was the most common response among women's workshop participants to instructor's struggles. One woman said, if she had not seen the instructor struggle, identify the problem, and find a solution, "I'd be at home not knowing why it doesn't

work”. By responding in this way, participants demonstrate their commitment to developing expertise they can actually use, and also attribute a positive value to the instructor’s (expert) struggles, thus diminishing any potential loss of face in the estimation of the women’s workshop participants.

ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants consistently negotiate leadership and expertise, and particularly the connections between them, as well as the ways that leadership and expertise are related to authority or influence, and also to gender. Long (2003: 96) also found that leadership was contested or ambiguous in the women’s reading groups she studied: “There are few rewards for assuming leadership, aside from the intrinsic pleasure of seeing the group flourish. Whatever modicum of control leaders can exact because of their authority is undercut by the voluntary nature of these groups. If people are not happy, they can leave”. In addition, ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants are often ambivalent about expertise and leadership. For a special building event at store One, women’s workshop participants were divided into teams, and the women’s workshop organizer asked a member of each team to be the “leader”. She chose regulars who typically helped other participants and made suggestions at weekly workshops. Each woman tried to refuse the position until the women’s workshop organizer assured them, “You don’t really have to be in charge” and “You don’t have to tell anybody what to do”. ACRG skaters’ conflicting feelings about leadership, and particularly who should be “in charge” are evident in various league activities. At the beginning of a travel team practice, team skaters encouraged the coach (a man) to “be more of a coach”, by providing feedback to skaters about their

performance and making decisions during bouts. One skater said, “It only makes sense if you’re the coach”. Later in the practice, the coach made a decision for the team, and the same skater questioned, “Oh, so now you’re the final say on everything?”. In ACRG and at the BBHR women’s workshops, participants create a setting in which they and the designated leaders or experts (e.g., instructors, coaches) all contribute to developing expertise. There is, to an extent, in the women onlyness gender regimes produced by women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters, a democratization of expertise. By extension, within these women onlyness gender regimes, the authoritarian model of leadership is challenged because expertise is not limited to the apparent experts, and the presumed connection between expertise and leadership (i.e., expert equals leader and vice versa) is also contested. Further, as discussed previously, assumptions about gender and expertise, and also assumptions about gender and leadership, are also negotiated, and women participants define divisions of labour and power that encourage all women to develop expertise, and to assume leadership roles.

At the same time that expertise is democratized and leadership contested, there is some evidence of a hierarchy associated with expertise within these women-only leisure activity groups. As in any activity there is status associated with expertise, and sometimes women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters defer to women with greater perceived expertise. At the women’s workshops, this is evident when participants listen to the ideas of other women in the group, but ultimately seek advice from a more expert woman (e.g., the women’s workshop organizer). In ACRG, league skaters almost always rely on more veteran skaters to make decisions about practices (if nothing is planned in

advance), and occasionally express a desire to make exceptions for more expert skaters, such as ensuring they are eligible to bout by changing or reinterpreting attendance requirements. When ACRG skaters or women's workshop participants identify another woman in the group as somebody whose (level of or type of) expertise they aspire to, they use their assessment of other's expertise as motivation.

Finally, it is important to recognize that leadership or authority in the group is not associated only with expertise. In the women's reading groups she studied, Long (2003: 95) found, "Some members carry more authority within the group than do others. The founder(s) or original core members have the authority that flows from their initiative in forming the group. Consequently, they often display a feeling that the group 'belongs' more to them than to latecomers". That this is particularly true of ACRG is made clear when the president makes reference to the "importance of everybody... understanding the work put in by the original fifteen girls in [Anon City]". At least five of the "original fifteen girls" still skate, and others continue to be actively involved in other capacities. At league meetings, and when important league decisions are being made, it is common for skaters to look to these skaters for guidance. At the women's workshops, even though participants are not involved in organizing (or founding) the workshops, the regulars are accorded an authority associated with their ongoing commitment/attendance. As such, and not surprisingly given the production of women onlyness described in the previous sections, in both ACRG and at the women's workshops, status is often associated with length of time in, and perceived commitment to, the group.

In addition to gendered stereotypes about expertise and authority or leadership,

women participants negotiate various other stereotypes of essential gender difference in their production of women onlyness gender regimes. This is apparent in the preceding sections, throughout which I have demonstrated the social processes of producing women onlyness at the micro-level of face-to-face interactions among women participants, between women participants and others involved in ACRG and at the women's workshops, and occasionally with other women and men.

Conclusion – Production of women onlyness and a discourse of expertise 'sans homme'³⁶

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the ways that women onlyness is produced relationally, that is, with and without, and in relation to men. I also introduced two themes – women participants' consistent and constant use of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference to produce, justify, and maintain women onlyness gender regimes, and women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness. In this chapter, I explored a third theme that emerged from the data: a discourse of expertise, and the ways in which it articulates with the two themes from the previous chapter. Specifically, I addressed ways in which women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters are active in producing particular kinds of women onlyness gender regimes that are necessarily relational, self-conscious, and negotiate a gendered discourse of expertise, as well as other essentialized stereotypes of gender difference. Women participants, as well as women's workshop organizers and instructors, BBHR executives, and ACRG founders, employ a discourse of expertise in ways that are implicitly relational. Assumptions about

³⁶ According to Hargreaves (1994: 119), "The Pinnacle Club's use of the expression 'sans homme' symbolizes the way in which women have understood the advantages of all-female contexts and have been prepared to fight to take power for themselves".

women's (lack of) expertise are inextricably related to assumptions about men's expertise, particularly that men possess expertise (and/or claim to possess expertise). In addition, because both home improvement and roller derby (especially organizing and managing the league) are traditionally defined as masculine cultural activities, with corresponding gender regimes, when women join ACRG and attend the women's workshops, they are encouraged to develop "men's expertise", and their involvement requires the production of an alternate gender regime. By associating women onliness and inexpertise, and particularly inexpertise in these non-traditional activities, participants and organizers offer one account of the need for women-only activities.

In this chapter, I discussed the ways that a discourse of expertise informs the organization of these women-only leisure activity groups, and explanations of women onliness. The promotion of ACRG and the women's workshops as "no expertise necessary" makes them more accessible to women, and encourages women's involvement. In addition, women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters produce women onliness through social interactions that negotiate gendered assumptions about expertise, as well as other gender stereotypes, and define as appropriate social interactions that positively influence women's abilities to develop expertise in these groups, i.e., by contributing to the development of a welcoming, supportive environment, and personal and social relationships with other women. Similarly, Wood and Danylchuk (2010, n.p.) found, "that when some women participate in sport in a social group setting, they may be more likely to overcome the difficulty associated with skill acquisition and ultimately continue participating".

When women declare and assess expertise, recruit new women to the activity, promote participation and/in a supportive environment, encourage repeat attendance/membership, and perform expertise (including non-roller derby or home improvement expertise), they negotiate assumptions about their inexpertise and about other gender differences (such as how women interact in groups), support the development of expertise, and actively work to produce women onlyness gender regimes with these particular characteristics. Further, women participants deem inappropriate social interactions that impede or limit women's opportunities to develop home improvement or roller derby expertise, social and personal relationships, and which affect women's enjoyment of these leisure activity groups. ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants respond in ways that indicate to other participants that consistently or constantly "acting like men", engaging in divisive or "clique-y" behaviour, demanding "too much" personal and emotional support from the group, and not actively participating are not appropriate behaviours. When explaining some women participants' inappropriate behaviours, women participants typically offer more nuanced and thoughtful accounts (than for men's "problem" behaviours). Where men are simply "acting like men", some women assume they are able to understand other women, even when they disapprove of or are frustrated by those women's behaviours.

It is important to understand those social interactions that are defined by women participants as inappropriate because they demonstrate limitations to the appropriate social interactions to which participants are socialized. Specifically, though these women-only leisure activity groups consistently recruit, and promote the regular attendance and

active participation of *all* women, not all women's behaviours are acceptable. This is similar to women participants' distinction between problem men and exceptional men, such that exceptional men are those who contribute to women's opportunities to develop expertise and to enjoy their roller derby and home improvement experiences. Women's informal social control of inappropriate behaviours reveals that the particular characteristics of women onlyness gender regimes in ACRG and at the women's workshops are produced by women participants, and are not naturally occurring as a result of women's participation. The forms of women onlyness produced by both ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants also contest the authoritarian leadership model often associated with sport and educational activities. In doing so, they extend the notion that expertise, in these activities, is "in development" and available to all participants, not only to "experts", while still making room in these activities for women with widely varying expertise.

As established in the previous chapter, and further developed in this chapter, it is apparent that many women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters (and more so skaters in the larger roller derby community, particularly original skaters and league founders) assume that a setting or group without men is necessary for them to best develop expertise in traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined activities. That women-only groups promote women's opportunities to develop expertise is a belief with a lengthy history. For example, Hargreaves (1994: 119) cites The Pinnacle Club, formed in 1921 to promote women-only mountaineering. A founding member of The Pinnacle Club claimed this was, "prompted by feelings we many of us shared that a rock-climbing

club for women would give us a better chance of climbing independently of men, both as to leadership and general mountaineering” (Pillely in Hargreaves, 1994: 119). Similarly, Warren (1990: 413) point out, “since all the available roles on women’s [outdoor] courses, including the traditionally male-held roles, must be filled by women, equality is promoted”. And McDermott (2004: 290) found that women perceived a sense of “equality” on a “single-gender canoe experience”, “This sense of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ to which women spoke was specifically related to the division of labour, as they all believed they more likely would have taken a ‘back seat’ with men present”. Women in her study believed taking a “back seat” to men would mean observing but not participating, or “that they would have to assume more responsibility for activities arguably female gendered, such as ‘cooking’, ‘bowing’, or carrying ‘paddles and life jackets’” (McDermott, 2004: 291). Women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters express similar concerns about men “taking over”, and “losing control” of their activities. However, the data presented in this chapter demonstrate that simply removing or excluding men from these activities is not sufficient to produce the forms of women onliness that the women participants achieve. In fact, within these groups, women onliness gender regimes are actively produced through social interactions among women participants (as well as with instructors/organizers, volunteers, other women, and men); social interactions that negotiate essentialized assumptions about gender difference, a discourse of expertise, and about which many women participants seem to be keenly self-conscious. In the final chapter, I emphasize the contribution made by this research: recognizing the dynamic social processes that are involved in women participants’ active

production of women onliness gender regimes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, I sought to problematize contemporary women onlyness. For this research, I focused on the realm of leisure, in which there are many examples of women-only activities. Among these many examples, most women-only leisure activity groups have gender-integrated antecedents and contemporaries. For example, women-only learn to ride snowboard camps are a relatively recent addition at many ski resorts, and are one offering in instructional programs composed primarily of gender-integrated options. In other words, the only learning opportunities designated for a specific gender “only” are for women, I have never seen a resort advertise a snowboard camp “for men only”. Therefore, in many leisure activities women onlyness is not the only option for women’s participation, and women choose to participate in women-only leisure activity groups. Messner (2009: 20) qualifies this idea of choice: “what people see as individual ...choices are in fact *bounded* and *shaped* by institutional constraints, they are given *meaning* by stubbornly persistent cultural belief systems about gender...and they are given *force* by deep emotional commitments to gender difference”. “Persistent cultural belief systems about gender” that emphasize and perpetuate difference have contributed to the naturalization of women onlyness. I argue that women onlyness is naturalized to such an extent that it is rarely questioned. As a result, the re-emergence of women-only social formations, women’s decisions to participate in women-only rather than gender-integrated social formations, and women’s experiences of women-only social formations are rarely interrogated or problematized.

For comparative purposes, I included two case studies in this dissertation: Anon City Roller Girls' women's flat track roller derby league and Big Box Home Renovation's women-only home improvement workshops. I selected these case studies because their women onlyness is not organized in order to be ethnically or religiously appropriate for women, nor is it implicit by virtue of the activity involved. ACRG and the women's workshops are explicitly women-only, and have gender-integrated antecedents and contemporaries. Additionally, these women-only leisure activity groups were easily accessible, open to new participants, and activities in which I wanted to participate. Using ethnographic research methods, including hundreds of hours of participant observation, informal and formal interviews, and analysis of relevant documents such as website content and promotional posters, I focused on and problematized women onlyness in ACRG and at the women's workshops. What emerged most prominently in this analysis from the extensive ethnographic data, collected in nearly four years of field research, were themes that highlighted the production of particular kinds of women onlyness in these women-only leisure activity groups. The social processes of production include explanations and justifications of women onlyness offered by women participants and others (e.g., BBHR executives, managers, and employees). Women participants' active production of women onlyness is not addressed in existing studies of women-only social formations, which offer largely descriptive accounts of women onlyness, and little interpretation or analysis of women onlyness. Even among researchers, it seems that women onlyness is naturalized.

To facilitate this analysis, women onliness has been conceived of as a local gender regime; a specific pattern of gender relations in these two leisure activity group case studies, produced in particular sites of the institutions or organizations within which they are located. Women onliness, then, is a local gender regime produced within, and in response to, larger gender regimes in, for example, BBHR, flat track roller derby, the home improvement industry, and sport. Further, women onliness gender regimes are produced by women participants who are in consistent contact with multiple, overlapping gender regimes, including families and workplaces. Each gender regime is characterized by different patterns of gender relations, including divisions of labour and power, and women experience these multiple – sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory – gender regimes in their daily lives. A women onliness gender regime, I have argued, is the result of processes of cultural production. Where previous research has assumed that women onliness is the “natural” result of women-only groups, and/or the result of leaders in women-only groups, this approach emphasizes the role of women participants as active social agents in producing women onliness gender regimes. For this cultural production, women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters draw on the material and structural conditions of their lives, including a wide range of gender stereotypes, such as gendered assumptions about expertise. Negotiating gender stereotypes – sometimes accepting or rejecting, but consistently contesting them – is one the primary social processes involved in producing women onliness gender regimes.

Focusing on the cultural production of women onliness gender regimes also draws attention to the social processes at work in this production, as well as the

interconnections between women onlyness gender regimes and other gender regimes, as well as the contemporary gender order. Women participants' social agency exists in a dialectic relationship with social structures. That is, women participants' produce women onlyness gender regimes in ways that are enabled and constrained by other gender regimes, and also by the material and structural conditions of women's lives. Women produce their own women onlyness, but not in conditions of their own choosing. Finally, both gender regimes and cultural production contribute a conceptual framework that recognizes the ongoing, dynamic nature of these processes, and of women onlyness gender regimes.

In Chapter 4, *Women Onlyness in Relation*, I introduced two major themes of this dissertation: 1) women participants' negotiation of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference to produce, justify, and maintain women onlyness gender regimes, and 2) women participants' self-consciousness of or about women onlyness. The focus of the chapter is the ways that women participants (and others involved in ACRG and at the women's workshops) produce women onlyness in relation to men, or perhaps more accurately, the absence of men, and in relation to the traditionally masculine cultural associations, and corresponding gender regimes, of home improvement and roller derby. To begin I addressed the conditions necessary for the production of women onlyness gender regimes, specifically space and time designated as women only, and gender marking. In the literature on women's leisure, space and time are consistently identified as constraints for women's leisure (Aitchison, 2003; Henderson, Hodges and Kivel, 2002; Green 1998; Bialeschki and Henderson, 1994). Therefore, it is important to understand

the ways that women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters negotiate space and time – and thus “win space” (Clarke et al., 1976) – for their activities. The activities of ACRG and the women's workshops are held in semi-public spaces only ever temporarily designated “for women only”, and this designation itself is often limited. ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants win space in these settings as groups of women. Being in a group of women can contribute to women participants developing a sense of familiarity, comfort, and even ownership in these spaces (Stalp et al., 2007). Women's use of these spaces, such as hockey arenas and BBHR stores, is not uncontested, and men, for example BBHR associates, sometimes call attention to women participants and thus highlight their incursions into traditionally male-dominated spaces, and reinforce the dominant gender regimes in these settings. When women participants plan for “our own space”, they imagine the possibilities of being more in control of their activities, in part, by being less dependent on men.

In addition to space, time also presents challenges for women-only leisure activities and participants. Women's workshop participants have little control in the process of scheduling workshops, and the day, time, and length of the workshops are important factors for their participation. Gendered stereotypes of women's lives are evident in managers' and executives' explanations of the women's workshop schedules. For example, a BBHR executive assumed that women's workshop participants are new customers, and suggested that the company selected a quieter evening in the store to be “less intimidating” for women. There was no consensus among women's workshop participants about a preference for weekly or monthly workshops; however, all

appreciated a consistent schedule, and expressed that they wanted the time to be “worth their while”. For most workshop participants this meant having opportunities for hands-on learning, and developing useful expertise, in addition to the social component of the workshops. In ACRG, attempts are made to accommodate as many skaters as possible when scheduling practices and events, but like the women’s workshops, the league is ultimately dependent on the venues. ACRG also attempts to not overburden skaters who, because of the league’s commitment to “by the skaters, for the skaters”, are required to skate and contribute to league work. As well as the organizational aspect of time, women participants must make time for ACRG and the women’s workshops in schedules often full of family, work, and other responsibilities. Like the women in Bialeschki and Henderson’s (1994) study of women’s physical recreation, women participants negotiate time for roller derby and the women’s workshops in relation to significant others, and rely on support from family members and friends to facilitate their participation. This highlights the multiple, sometimes contradictory, gender regimes with which women have consistent contact, and in relation to which women win space for their participation in women-only leisure activities. Ultimately, issues related to time, and typically not having (or being able to make) enough time, are the main reasons that women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters discontinue their involvement in these women-only leisure activities.

Gender marking is necessary to indicate and advertise women onliness, and time and space designated for women-only leisure activity groups, and, as such, is integral to processes of producing women onliness gender regimes. ACRG and the women’s

workshops are gender marked in names, appearance, and the forms of address used by ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants and organizers. Gender marking has commonly been interpreted as a means of trivializing and othering women's participation in male-dominated and masculine-defined activities such as sport and rock music (Kearney, 1997; Messner et al., 1993; Eitzen and Zinn, 1989). However, the primary purpose of gender marking in ACRG and at the women's workshops is to advertise and promote gendered boundaries by marking the activities as exclusively for women. For many women, particularly among the women's workshop participants, the women onlyness of the activity, which was evident in the language and colours used in advertisements of the women's workshops, attracted their attention and interest in ways that gender-integrated versions of the activity, such as the weekend workshops, had not.

Struggles related to space and time, and the processes of gender marking demonstrate that fulfilling the basic requirements for the production of women onlyness gender regimes contributes to the production of particular forms of women onlyness; women onlyness that is necessarily relational, and constantly negotiates, by adopting and challenging, essentialized stereotypes of gender difference in seemingly self-conscious ways. In spite of these efforts to construct and mark women-only leisure activities, men are involved in various roles in ACRG and at the women's workshops, typically as officials in ACRG, and instructors at the women's workshops. Unlike the women's workshops where men's involvement is determined by the women's workshop organizers within constraints imposed by BBHR (e.g., hiring, scheduling), ACRG skaters define and must approve of men's involvement. Men most often play supporting roles that facilitate

skaters' opportunities to play roller derby, and to a limited extent, these temporarily reverse traditional gendered roles in sport (Thompson, 1999; Finley, 2010). In general, men fill roles that ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants do not want to or cannot do. Women participants tend to distinguish between the men involved in their activities and other men as exceptional and problem men respectively. Women participants assume, based on personal experiences and gender stereotypes, that men would take over, treat them badly, inhibit their opportunity to develop expertise, and that home improvement workshops and flat track roller derby would be less enjoyable if men were involved as participants. In this way, women-only leisure activity participants simultaneously cast all men as a problem, and justify the need for women onlyness. The relatively small number of men who contribute to women participants' positive experiences of the activities and facilitate the activities themselves, are perceived as exceptional, and women call attention to the ways that their behaviours differ from those of problem men. When women participants identify and express appreciation for some men's exceptional characteristics, they reinforce stereotypical assumptions about all (problem) men, and account for the involvement of some men in their women-only leisure activity groups.

With respect to men's participation, informal and formal gendered boundaries are established and maintained at the organizational level of ACRG and the women's workshops. According to ACRG's formal membership requirements, skaters must be "female". For many skaters, the dominant model of gender-segregated sport (and sport's dominant gender regime) "makes sense", and is naturalized to the point of being

unquestioned. ACRG skaters are not alone in this; McDonagh and Pappano (2008: 8, 10) claim, “Sex segregation is such an ingrained part of athletics at every skill level that it rarely draws attention”, it is taken for granted “to the point of being invisible”. Further, this formal gendered boundary demands little attention because it has not (knowingly) been challenged, and many ACRG skaters are unaware of roller derby’s coed history. Conversely, BBHR’s commercial imperative limits the ways that women’s workshop instructors and organizers can enforce women onlyness. As a result, they employ informal strategies such as common sense and humour to discourage men’s involvement, and simultaneously reinforce essentialized notions of gender difference. It is primarily women participants who take on the responsibility of making clear to men what they can and cannot do in ACRG and at the women’s workshops. Women participants also make use of common sense and humour in various indirect, direct, and physical strategies of gendered boundary maintenance in ways that express a sense of ownership and investment in women onlyness gender regimes. Also, women participants use gendered boundary maintenance strategies in ways that avoid confrontation, and maintain a friendly and comfortable atmosphere for all women participants.

In many women-only social formations, for example education or sport, women onlyness is institutionalized: formally established gendered boundaries seem unchallenged, i.e., with very few exceptions, boys and men do not try to participate (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008; Theberge, 2000; Streitmatter, 1999). Perhaps due to the often institutionalized nature of women onlyness, researchers might address ideological challenges to women-only social formations; however, there is little information about

the ways women work to produce, maintain, and reproduce women onlyness gender regimes. Women's use of various gendered boundary maintenance strategies and keen awareness of men spectators, demonstrated when they call attention to men and discuss perceptions of men's reactions to the group (e.g., men are threatened by or disapprove of their involvement), indicate women's self-consciousness of women onlyness, and further demonstrate women's negotiation of essentialized stereotypes of gender difference in its production.

ACRG's flat track roller derby and BBHR's women's workshops are established in relation to, and within traditionally masculine cultural practices, with corresponding gender regimes that typically privilege men as active participants and cast women as passive spectators or consumers. Women participants reinforce for themselves and each other the masculine cultural associations of home improvement and roller derby, while at the same time negotiating a place for themselves in these activities. For example, women's workshop participants consistently reinforce the association of home improvement with "men's work", and commonly account for their involvement as a matter of necessity. They must develop home improvement expertise because there is not a man willing or able to do the work for them. At the same time, women's workshop participants emphasize that learning about home improvement is enjoyable and makes them more independent, which they perceive as positive. Women's flat track roller derby skaters have redefined roller derby by both denying and making implicit reference to previous versions of male-dominated roller derby. For example, when skaters identify control of the sport, community, democratic ideals, and fun as values of women's flat

track roller derby, they establish distance from, and also implicitly in relation to, previous versions of roller derby that had different core values.

By employing gendered stereotypes of women, such as using domestic labour-related analogies, or offering gendered accounts of cooperation and community service among and by women participants, women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters contribute in limited ways to feminizing home improvement and roller derby. Britton (2000) argues that feminization does not automatically result from women's involvement in an activity, and Craig and Liberti (2007) demonstrate processes of feminization in GetFit, a women-only gym. Craig and Liberti (2007: 682) emphasize GetFit's organizational culture "of nonjudgmental and noncompetitive sociability and that the foundation of that culture was the organization's use of technology and labor". McDermott (2004: 297) also focuses on the organizational culture of the women-only canoe trips she studied: "how the female-run outfitters structured the women's experiences and how the trip guides enacted this". In this study, I reveal that women onlyness gender regimes, which like processes of feminization are constantly engaged with essentialized notions of gender difference, are produced not only at the level of the organization (ACRG or BBHR), but women participants themselves are active social agents in the production and reproduction of women onlyness gender regimes. Women onlyness gender regimes, as produced by ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants, are (necessarily) relational, self-conscious, and constantly negotiate and contest essentialized stereotypes of gender difference.

In Chapter 5, *Producing Women Onlyness: A Discourse of Expertise*, I introduced a third theme of this dissertation: the ways that women participants negotiate assumptions about and claims of expertise and inexpertise in their production of women onlyness gender regimes. For the purpose of this research, expertise is an umbrella term used to refer to skills, knowledge, and experience. Underpinning ACRG and the women's workshops are assumptions that women lack expertise. Women's assumed lack of expertise is presented as both a reason for and an explanation of women onlyness. ACRG and the women's workshops are promoted as "no expertise necessary"; women are invited to participate irrespective of skills, knowledge, or experience (or lack thereof). In tandem with the inclusive claim that there is not one ideal background or body for roller derby, ACRG's commitment to "by the skaters, for the skaters" contributes to many skaters' belief that roller derby offers "something different", in contrast to their perceptions of organized sport. At the women's workshops, assumptions about women's lack of expertise are associated with framing women's interest in home improvement as a recent phenomenon, and women as a new customer base for the do-it-yourself industry. Many women's workshop participants express beliefs that women do not have the same opportunities as men to develop home improvement expertise, such as in school or working with family members. In ACRG and at the women's workshops, the majority of women participants are self-identified novices, interested in developing their roller derby and home improvement expertise. There is also a social element (a night out, time with friends) of these women-only leisure activity groups.

Associating women onlyness with inexpertise implies that men possess expertise, and constantly reinforces gender differences. As a result of being promoted for beginners, ACRG's roller derby and the women's workshops' home improvement (traditionally masculine cultural practices in male-dominated spaces) are more accessible to more women. A few women participants are not beginners, and though their participation is not accounted for in the equation of women onlyness with inexpertise, they often describe themselves in similar terms. For example, women "experts" at the women's workshops typically downplay their expertise, and explain that they are still learning. Assumptions made by organizers and participants that "expert" women, unlike men, will encourage and share expertise with novice participants, and that women and men have different learning styles simultaneously reinforce and challenge assumptions about gender differences. Formal and informal teaching and mentoring among women participants, and some women's claims that they learn more easily or comfortably from other women seem to be congruent with these assumptions, though this congruence is not naturally occurring. Through their social interactions with each other, women participants work to produce these results.

Initial interactions among ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants typically include declaring one's own lack of expertise and assessing others' expertise. New participants regularly assume that others are more expert, and declaring and assessing expertise allows women participants to explain their lack of expertise, seek assurance there is place for them in the group, and identify role models. These interactions seem to indicate a democratization of expertise, and reluctance among

women participants (and some women's workshop instructors and organizers) to claim expertise. When women claim expertise, they commonly downplay or qualify their expertise, but also serve as role models for the group, and encourage other women to develop expertise. The seemingly contradictory ways that women participants negotiate a discourse of expertise, and particularly gendered assumptions about expertise, is revealing with respect to the exceedingly complex negotiations of gender stereotypes that are a consistent and constant feature of women's production of women onlyness gender regimes.

In addition to declaring and assessing expertise, Chapter 5 elaborates on the micro-level production of women onlyness gender regimes through women participants' interactions with each other. The types of social interactions that women participants deem appropriate, and to which they socialize new participants are: recruiting women, promoting participation and/ in a supportive environment, and encouraging repeat attendance. In each of these types of social interactions, women participants draw on a discourse of expertise, especially "no expertise needed" to participate, and negotiate other essentialized stereotypes of gender difference. Through these interactions, women's workshop participants and ACRG skaters produce a women onlyness gender regime that is experienced as welcoming, supportive, and comfortable, and which facilitates women's opportunities to develop expertise and social and personal relationships, and have an enjoyable, positive experience. These characteristics of women onlyness gender regimes in ACRG and at the women's workshops seem to support assumptions made in the existing literature about women's experiences of women-only social formations. That is,

women participants do tend to produce women onlyness gender regimes that correspond with dominant beliefs about how “women are”; however, this research exposes two important qualifications to this analysis. First, there are clear limitations to the ways that women participants are prepared to be welcoming and supportive, and this includes expectations of reciprocity in the appropriate types of social interactions among participants. Second, women participants produce women onlyness gender regimes in self-conscious and nuanced ways; these gender regimes are not simply a “natural” result of women-only social formations.

Revealing women’s active involvement in producing these forms of women onlyness is a significant contribution. Previous studies of women-only social formations have assumed or described support and comfort as naturally occurring characteristics of women-only groups. This is largely due to their studying only the product of women onlyness, and not the processes of producing women onlyness. Most research seems to anticipate and look for difference in women’s groups (e.g., classes, sports teams, canoe trips) compared to similar men’s groups. The findings presented here demonstrate that women organizers *and* participants work to produce those patterns of gender relations, and do so in relation and response to their perceptions of men’s and gender-integrated groups.

Women participants’ active production of welcoming, supportive, comfortable women onlyness gender regimes that promote women’s development of expertise and relationships is particularly apparent in the types of social interactions deemed inappropriate. Analyzing inappropriate social interactions exposes the ways that ACRG

skaters and women's workshop participants respond to challenges, from other women participants, to the types of women onliness they are producing. It also emphasizes that these types of women onliness – the patterns of gender relations, and divisions of labour and power that characterize these women onliness gender regimes – are not natural, not a result of the “way women are”, or the exclusion of men, but instead, something that women participants constantly work to produce. In addition, recognition of which behaviours are deemed inappropriate serves to highlight which behaviours women participants endorse. In general, in these women-only leisure activity groups, the types of social interactions deemed inappropriate are those that directly contradict the appropriate types of social interactions.

When women participants “act like men”, engage in divisive or “clique-y” behaviour, demand “too much” personal and emotional support from the group, and do not actively participate, other women participants respond with formal, and most often, informal sanctions that express their frustrations, upset, and sometimes anger. These sanctions expose the limits of the appropriate types of social interactions described. Women participants discourage each other from behaving in ways that impede enjoyment of their experience, feelings of comfort and support, and development of expertise and relationships with other participants. In ACRG and at the women's workshops, the women onliness produced challenges the authoritarian leadership model, and the association of leadership and expertise that is typical of other sport and education settings. For example, when women participants share expertise with one another and the designated “experts”, expertise is democratized and leadership contested. In determining

which types of social interactions are appropriate and inappropriate, and challenging the authoritarian leadership model, women participants engage with essentialized notions of gender difference, including a discourse of expertise, at times accepting, challenging, or refuting stereotypes about women in their active production of women onlyness gender regimes.

For this dissertation, I studied two women-only leisure activities in order to problematize and interrogate women onlyness; a separatist form of organizing women's leisure time activities that seems to contradict dominant trends toward gender integration in the gender order. Perhaps the major contribution of this research is the exposure of women's workshop participants' and ACRG skaters' active production of particular kinds of women onlyness gender regimes. Though there are differences between the two case studies, there exists significant overlap in the ways that women participants produce women onlyness, and the forms of women onlyness produced, especially with respect to negotiating the essentialization of gender differences. Women participants produce women onlyness gender regimes in the ways they make time and space for and gender mark these activities, and in social interactions with each other, men, and other women. The forms of women onlyness gender regimes produced are reinforced when women explain their involvement in and justify the existence of ACRG and the women's workshops as women-only social formations. Women participants produce forms of women onlyness that are experienced as welcoming, supportive, and comfortable, and encourage women to develop expertise and relationships with other participants.

Research of various women-only social formations has regularly identified these as characteristics of women onliness.

McDermott (2004) found that women-only canoe trip participants anticipated common interests, a ‘level playing field’, and support to develop and perform physical skills in a women-only group; expectations developed in relation to women’s beliefs that they would have qualitatively different experiences in a group with men. Like women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters, women canoeists believed that men would take over, inhibit women’s opportunities to develop expertise, and women would be relegated to traditionally “women’s roles”. Women’s experiences reinforced these beliefs, and McDermott (2004) attributes this to the organization and leaders of the trip. Similarly, Craig and Liberti (2007) explain that women’s experiences of a women-only gym are a result of its organizational culture. Missing from these analyses is the role of women participants themselves, and challenges to the forms of women onliness produced.

Birrell and Richter’s (1987) study of feminist softball offers the only account I have found of women participants’ production of a particular, in this case feminist, form of women onliness. They describe “how women who define themselves as feminists consciously construct and maintain alternatives to what has been called the ‘male preserve’ of sport” (Birrell and Richter, 1987: 395). Feminist softball players constructed (or produced) women onliness by transforming, through practice, the “elements [of sport that were] offensive to their feminist sensibilities”, such as the over-emphasis on winning and hierarchy of authority (Birrell and Richter, 1987: 408). In Birrell and Richter’s (1987) analysis, appropriate behaviours (to use my terminology) are the feminist

transformative behaviours of feminist-identified softball players, and other women softball players and men coaches and umpires engage in inappropriate, non-feminist behaviours associated with traditional forms of sport. Birrell and Richter (1987) do not include examples of challenges by other feminist-identified softball players to the form of feminist women onlyness produced. For a fuller understanding of the processes involved in producing women onlyness, it is important to explore conflicts and challenges within the group of women producing women onlyness, and women's responses to those challenges. By including examples of some women participants' inappropriate behaviours in this analysis, I reveal that welcoming, supportive, comfortable forms of women onlyness are not the natural result of a women-only group or the exclusion of men. Further, through examples of women's responses to these behaviours, I demonstrate the ways that women work to produce these forms of women onlyness, and that the work of production occurs not only in relation to men and other women, but to all women participants as well. These findings contradict the tendency in the existing literature to naturalize women onlyness, and contribute to our understanding of contemporary women-only social formations by highlighting the ways in which women participants actively produce women onlyness.

Women participants produce women onlyness gender regimes in necessarily relational, self-conscious ways, and constantly negotiate assumptions about essential gender differences, including assumptions about expertise. Women onlyness can only ever be relational. Women participants produce women onlyness in relation to perceptions of men and men's activities; in other words, women-only leisure activities

are perceived to offer “something different” than men’s and gender-integrated activities. Although women onlyness is naturalized, women participants consistently demonstrate that they are aware of, feel strongly about, and generally, are self-conscious of the women onlyness of the women’s workshops and ACRG. Even in their absence, men are a topic of conversation. This is related, in part, to women’s awareness of roller derby and home improvement as traditionally masculine cultural practices, and their negotiation of a place in these activities and spaces, and in response to their dominant gender regimes. Finally, women-only leisure activity groups are built on, and in relation to essentialized stereotypes of gender difference because this is the vocabulary and the cultural resources that women participants have to work with. In a sense, these are women’s “discursive repertoires”. Frankenberg (1993: 16) used this term to describe the ways that women spoke about race: it “captures, for me, something of the way in which strategies for thinking through race were learned, drawn upon, and enacted, repetitively but not automatically or by rote, chosen but by no means freely so”. The language of stereotypes relies on forms of discourse that emphasize difference rather than similarity, and almost requires women participants to emphasize and exaggerate difference. In their organization and practice, women-only leisure activities, like many explicitly women-only social formations, are based on a sense of (gender) difference, and must therefore produce and reproduce difference. In turn, women’s perceptions of gender differences are meaningful, and they help to shape, and are shaped by, women’s experiences of these women-only leisure activities. The essentialization and naturalization of difference is a continuing theme throughout the analysis. Women onlyness gender regimes, as produced

in ACRG and at the women's workshops, require constant work. Women participants cannot, and do not, rely on others (e.g., organizers, BBHR) to do that work; women participants themselves produce and reproduce women onlyness, in the face of various challenges (from men and women). It is possible that what I have discovered with regard to the production of these gender-segregated social formations could be relevant to other voluntarily segregated social formations. For example, perhaps segregated social formations based on age, sexuality, race, or ethnicity also produce, through discourse and practice, forms of "onlyness" that justify segregation through assumptions about natural or essential differences.

An essentialized sense of gender difference is pervasive among ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants. However, when women participate in roller derby and home improvement in these women-only leisure activity groups, the activities themselves are barely differentiated, if at all, from the activities as men would do them. In other words, women participants constantly engage with and invoke essentialized stereotypes of gender difference, in practices that are explained and justified using a discourse of essentialized gender difference. At the same time, they make place, or "win space", for themselves in traditionally masculine cultural practices. In his research of youth sports, Messner (2009) found similar, seemingly contradictory accounts of girls' sport involvement. He identifies a discourse of "Equity-with-Difference" employed by coaches: "This thread, a narrative attempt to negotiate the tensions between feminist beliefs in social equality and essentialist beliefs in natural difference, posits girls and boys as separate and different but favors equal opportunities for all kids" (Messner, 2009:

141). This discourse, Messner (2009: 158) argues, exemplifies an emergent ideology: soft essentialism, and exposes “asymmetry in thinking about boys and girls...girls are able to move across a broad social field, whereas boys are rigidly focused to a particular path”. Messner (2009: 169, 170) claims, “This contemporary essentialism is harder when it comes to boys, and softer, more flexible when it comes to girls”, and “It is an emergent, ‘soft’ essentialism that accommodates the reality of girls’ and women’s presence in sports, and in public life more generally”.

Although “soft essentialism” is not relevant for all women-only social formations, it is a compelling concept with respect to women’s involvement in traditionally masculine cultural practices (such as home improvement and roller derby) in women-only ways. Specifically, Messner (2009: 21) suggests, “Youth sports is an ideal place for the construction of soft essentialism; unlike in most other institutions, ideas and strategies for equal opportunity for girls are being carved out within a kind of ‘separate-but-equal’, sex-segregated context”. It seems that “soft essentialism”, which attempts to reconcile the tensions between believing in equal opportunities for girls and boys and believing in natural differences between girls and boys might also be constructed in ACRG and at the women’s workshops. An emergent ideology of “soft essentialism” suggests perhaps that women’s integration (or incursion) into the traditionally men’s sphere, especially leisure or recreational activities, is more easily accommodated when it happens in women-only ways.

Among women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters, unlike adults involved in youth sports, there was no prominent discourse of equal opportunity. Women

participants did not typically use the language of equal opportunity (e.g., women should be able to do what men do), though this was implied in their involvement. Instead, they offered different accounts of their involvement, such as “necessity”. As discussed, women onlyness gender regimes, as they are produced in ACRG and at the women’s workshops, are dependent on essentializing gender difference. Essential gender difference is a reason for, explanation of, and integral to the production of women onlyness. And because women onlyness is built and justified on assumptions about essential gender differences, in order to maintain women onlyness those assumptions must be perpetuated, even while they are continuously contradicted and contested. Although I find Messner’s (2009) explanation of this ascendant ideology of “soft essentialism” compelling, I contest its designation as “soft”.

Based on my own and other women’s experiences of ACRG and the women’s workshops, there is little that is “soft” about their engagement with essentialism. Almost everything that women’s workshop participants and ACRG skaters do is framed in relation to essentialized stereotypes of gender difference. Women’s participation in traditionally masculine cultural practices might be interpreted as evidence of a more flexible, softer essentialism. However, women’s overwhelmingly consistent and constant negotiation of their participation in relation to essentialized stereotypes of gender difference, and essentialism’s role as the base on which these women-only leisure activities are constructed, makes it feel anything but soft. Even when essentialized stereotypes of gender difference are directly contradicted by women’s and men’s behaviours, these apparent contradictions are explained using gendered stereotypes. For

example, when a woman “takes over” at the women’s workshop, she is needy, lacks self-esteem and/or support from home. When a man is encouraging and respectful of skaters and does support work in ACRG, he is “exceptional”, unlike typical men who are a “problem”. These stereotyped explanations effectively reinforce differences between women and men. It might be more appropriate, in the case of ACRG and the women’s workshops to refer to an emergent ideology of “negotiated” or “flexible” essentialism; terms that might better reflect the evidence presented here that gender essentialism is pervasive, but not entirely uncontested among these women-only leisure activity participants. Ultimately, Messner (2009) offers one possible explanation of a separate but equal approach to gender equality in the contemporary moment, characterized most often by gender integrationist approaches.

The major contribution of this research – revealing women participants’ active involvement in the production and reproduction of particular women onlyness gender regimes in relational, self-conscious, and essentializing ways – is the result of extensive ethnographic research conducted over nearly four years, and, based on the research problem presented, offers an attempt to problematize contemporary women onlyness. My long-term participation in ACRG and at the women’s workshops, and a conscious effort to avoid the essentialized, stereotypical, gendered assumptions that are common in much of the existing literature, made possible this emergent analysis. As I have tried to show in Chapters 4 and 5, women onlyness is so naturalized that awareness of the production of women onlyness would not have emerged using other methods. In other words, ethnography revealed far more about the processes involved in the production of women

onlyness gender regimes than would have been evident from interviews alone, or from other methods such as surveys. As Connell (2005: 7) states, “The empirical task, in studying any gender regime, is to collect information that allows a characterization of the state of play, i.e., the current relations and practices”. Ethnographic research, conducted in two sites for multiple years, enabled me to see beyond the product of the women’s workshops and ACRG as women-only leisure activities, to the processes of production involved in establishing women onlyness gender regimes.

In addition to revealing the production of women onlyness by ACRG skaters and women’s workshop participants, the conceptualization of women onlyness as a local gender regime is a major contribution of this dissertation. Specifically, I have demonstrated the ways that people – in this case, women participants – are active agents in the ongoing production of particular gender regimes. This reinforces Connell’s claims that gender regimes are the “state of play” of gender relations in an organization or institution, and are consistently being worked on (to maintain or change them) by the people involved in them. Perhaps most interestingly, this research offers an analysis of gender regimes in gender-segregated groups. Although Connell (2002) is clear that gender regimes exist, through “indirect” or “mediated” gender relations, in women-only and men-only groups, few researchers have employed this concept to study such groups. The emphasis on and constant negotiation of essentialized notions of gender difference among women’s workshop participants, ACRG skaters, and others involved with these women-only leisure activities offers evidence of the ways that gender relations are still prevalent, and in fact, possibly more so in the production of women onlyness gender

regimes. Because men are (mostly) absent from these groups, women participants have to invest additional work to “mark (gender) difference” and “establish symbolic differences” between women and men (Connell, 1996: 215). This work often takes the form of appeals to gendered stereotypes (including stereotypes about expertise), sometimes promoting and sometimes challenging them.

Further, in their production of women onlyness gender regimes, I argued, women participants take into account not only their perceptions of and experiences with men, but also their experiences of and ideas about women in groups. These ideas are informed, in part, by “ideal type” gender regimes, such as Sisterhood and Mean Girls that are promoted in various cultural resources targeted at women. “Ideal type” gender regimes are one form of mediated gender relations that constitute some of the cultural repertoire on which women draw, and to which they respond, when producing women onlyness gender regimes. This research offers an example of studying specific gender regimes – the women onlyness gender regimes produced in ACRG and at the women’s workshops – in detail, without assuming that all similar groups will produce the same gender regimes. Women participants produce these particular gender regimes as alternatives to the dominant gender regimes in the traditionally male-dominated and masculine defined activities in which they are organized. However, it is important to recognize that the women onlyness gender regimes produced are not entirely oppositional in their understandings of (or investments) in gender. The tremendous complexity of gender relations, and women’s negotiations of gender relations, is laid bare by this analysis.

Looking ahead, there is value in exploring why, in an era of gender integration, there is an emergence (or reemergence) of women-only social formations. Answering this question, which is intended to explore contemporary motivations for women onlyness in the context of gender relations and integrationist trends, is a large and complex project. Answers that would address the larger social structural trends that might influence the contemporary emergence of women-only social formations did not surface from these two case studies. Women participants did give accounts of their own women-only leisure activities. These explanations typically included their perceptions, as well as experiences, that men would treat them badly, make them feel stupid, and take over the activity and the group which would limit their opportunities to develop expertise, and stop them from enjoying their experiences. Among the ACRG skaters, there was also a perception that women-only sport simply “made sense”, and they did not question it. When asked why they participated in these women-only leisure activities, women’s workshop participants most often cited “necessity”, and ACRG skaters, “fun”. In these ways, women participants did not directly address their motives, but they do account for their involvement in women-only leisure activities. Women’s accounts are important and revealing; however, they do not (and cannot) explain the larger phenomenon of (re-)emerging women-only social formations. Clearly, “why” is a question in the realm of theoretical interpretation, and it is not possible for women participants to answer (just as it is exceedingly difficult for almost anybody to articulate their motivations, especially motivations for social formations whose organization is as naturalized as women

onlyness has been). As a result, it is only possible at this point to speculate why there has been a (re-)emergence of women-only social formations.

Possible avenues to explore in an attempt to explain the (re-)emergence of women-only social formations might include commercial or nostalgic reasons for women onlyness. For example, the workshop program, including the women's workshops, is part of BBHR's marketing. According to a BBHR executive, "I try and make all our advertising come alive in the store, and workshops is a piece of that". Melchionne (1999: 251) claims, "In this economic environment, [hardware and building supply] manufacturers and retailers have been obliged to make the do-it-yourselfer a prime design and marketing target". Women are targeted specifically, "cultivated" as consumers based on the perception that women constitute "a growing population" of do-it-yourselfers, and claims that women are the primary decision makers when buying products and planning projects for the home. Similarly, I interpreted women-only snowboarding camps as "implicated in a process of commodifying women's participation and experiences" (Donnelly, 2004). Women-only snowboard camps not only sell women's experiences on the hill, but "Camp participants become a captive audience for the snowboarding related companies that sponsor the camps and their participation in...the camp becomes tied to specific brands, not only through opportunities to try or win products, but also through coaches' and camp organizers' modeling of fashions and equipment" (Donnelly, 2004). Clearly, some commercial entities develop women-only programs, often with an instructional element, based on market research or conjecture that identifies women as a potentially lucrative, untapped market. However, this explanation of the (re-)emergence

does not account for all women-only social formations, including women's flat track roller derby.

It is possible that contemporary women-only social formations emerge, or in this analysis, definitely *reemerge*, for nostalgic reasons. In the context of women's increasing integration into the public sphere (paid work outside the home, education, etc.), and a concomitant decline in traditional women-only social formations, such as women's clubs, church groups, knitting/ sewing/quilting collectives, and time to devote to women-only leisure activities, perhaps women have a sense of missing something. Some women might "look back" in an attempt to model contemporary women-only social formations on their historical counterparts. Earlier women-only social formations were organized most often in the private or domestic sphere. However, contemporary women-only social formations are clearly not limited to traditionally women's activities; women's involvement in the traditionally men's sphere reflects contemporary, more integrated gender regimes. A genealogy of women-only social formations would shed light on their historical manifestations and changes over time, including types of women-only activities, their prevalence at different times, and the ways that they engaged with relevant gender ideologies. Where relevant data exists, it would also be interesting to analyze the processes of production, and types of women onliness of earlier women-only social formations.

A limitation of this research is the use of only two case studies. Although two case studies are better than one, and the case studies included offer both interesting points of comparison and significant overlap with respect to the production of women onliness,

adding more case studies would elaborate on the processes of producing and reproducing women onlyness in different settings, activities, and among different groups of women. Based on my own and existing research of women-only social formations, I suspect that women participants are active in the production of women onlyness in many, if not all, women-only settings, including sororities, classrooms, rugby teams, and business networking groups. Future research of additional cases of women-only social formations, including women-only social formations in the traditionally woman's sphere (female-dominated, feminine defined activities), would be revealing with respect to different types of and social processes of producing women onlyness, and the ways essentialized stereotypes of gender difference are negotiated.

Women participants in ACRG and at the women's workshops were, with few exceptions, white, and though there were some class differences, it is not possible to draw conclusions about race or class and women onlyness from the data collected. Additional cases would contribute more data, and future research might take an intersectional approach and/or try to incorporate case studies of women-only social formations that include women from different social backgrounds than ACRG skaters and women's workshop participants. Data gathered for this research, and supplemented with additional cases, would lend themselves to study as subcultures, and contribute to contemporary debates about subcultures and ongoing debates about women's subcultures (cf. McRobbie and Garber, 1997). There is also potential in analyzing contemporary women-only social formations, particularly those organized outside the traditional women's sphere, in the context of the long history of women's collective action. For this, it might

be useful to draw on Pelak et al.'s (1999) social movements-inspired concept, "gender movements" and emphasis on gender transformation.

There are also avenues for future research based on not fully analyzed areas of the data presented. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, these topics warrant further analysis. Preliminary data suggest, for example, that physicality is an important component of both the women's workshops and ACRG. With respect to expertise, women's workshop organizers and ACRG skaters emphasized women's lack of physical skills, e.g., "Some women don't even know how to hold a hammer", and "Nobody could skate at the beginning". And women participants consistently express their enjoyment of the physical element of these activities. For women's workshop participants, hands-on learning, especially power tools, was the "best part", and ACRG skaters sometimes complained, "I just want to skate" when spending time on league work. This analysis would build on McDermott's (2004: 283) attention to "women's lived-body experiences of their physicalities", and might focus on women's development of new skills and ways of using their bodies that could constitute "gender resisting physicality". Inferring from Messner (2009: 171), it is possible that women onlyness might be more likely in activities that are physical: "As sex segregation breaks down or disappears in many areas of social life, perhaps the institutional homes of essentialism, because of the psychological security and pleasure it brings, tend to migrate to particular social sites, like youth sports, where continued sex-segregation of bodily practices makes gender difference particularly salient". Pursuing this analysis could potentially involve exploring the ways that women's assumptions about gender differences, and their perpetuation of

these differences in the production of women onlyness, contribute to their desire to learn and perform physical skills together with other women.

Collective physicality, in addition to the elements of women onlyness presented, seems to contribute to a sense of community among women participants. McDermott (2004: 296) emphasizes “the importance to all the canoeists of having a shared *physical* experience which engendered a sense of support and community”. Bialeschki and Henderson (1994: 6) found that “Most women undertook their physical recreation on an individual basis but several reflected the idea of the need for group support, especially for their individual activities”. These women sought out other women to participate with, even in individual activities, and Bialeschki and Henderson (1994: 11) describe this practice of women’s physical recreation participation as “alone in groups”.

Community is a second avenue to further develop the analysis. A sense of community is hinted at throughout the data presented here, particularly when, over time, women participants develop social and personal relationships that are about “more than” home improvement or roller derby. Also, women participants produce women onlyness that is supportive, comfortable, and enjoyable for women from different backgrounds and social locations. Further, women participants demonstrate their investments in the group when they engage in gendered boundary maintenance, model appropriate behaviours, and respond to inappropriate behaviours. When ACRG skaters refer to “derby love” and having “16 best friends”, and women’s workshop participants celebrate birthdays, exchange gifts, and miss the group when they are absent, they seem to demonstrate a sense of community. Theberge (1995: 390) claims, women hockey players’ shared

identity as hockey players and constant “hockey talk” contributed to defining the team as a community. Although this is likely the case for many ACRG skaters, women’s workshop participants’ construction of a sense of community requires more attention. In many ways, the women’s workshops seem to exemplify some elements of Bauman’s (2001) description of community in the contemporary moment, which he calls liquid modernity. This version of community makes few, if any, demands of participants, and offers bonds that last only “until further notice” or “until satisfaction lasts.” However, the ways that women’s workshop participants develop women onlyness, and also develop long-term commitments and expectations for participation, are solidifying. An analysis of community in ACRG and at the women’s workshops might also be able to contribute an explanation of why there is a contemporary (re)emergence of women-only social formations.

Each of these avenues for future research would further contribute to problematizing and de-naturalizing women onlyness. In addition, future research would advance understandings of types of women onlyness in women-only social formations, processes of production of women onlyness, and participants’ (and others’) involvement in the production of women onlyness.

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Appendix A: Context

This project is an investigation of contemporary women-only leisure activities, and comprises two case studies: Anon City Roller Girls' (ACRG) women's flat track roller derby; and Big Box Home Renovation's (BBHR) women-only home improvement workshops. BBHR is a large North American chain of hardware and building supply stores. Women in each of these activities participate not only as skaters, and aspiring do-it-yourselfers, but also as organizers, administrators, 'experts', referees, coaches, and instructors. The women-only character of contemporary roller derby is distinct from the sport's coed history starting in the 1930s and continuing through the 1980s. Hardware, building, and home improvement-oriented businesses and activities are traditionally perceived as part of the men's sphere. The two case studies selected share a number of other characteristics, most importantly their women onliness, and are also different in some important ways. Both the similarities and differences are relevant for other women-only leisure activities. In the following sections, I describe for each case study: activity, participation, organization, and location. As much as possible, the following sections include changes observed over nearly four years of data collection.

Women's flat track roller derby – Anon City Roller Girls (ACRG)

A very brief history of roller derby

Roller derby has a long and colourful history. The earliest references to roller derby are from the early 1900s; however, roller derby's most recognizable origin is Leo Seltzer's Transcontinental Roller Derby. Invented in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, roller derby competed for spectators with multi-day cycling and dancing endurance events. At the time, roller derby skaters were men and women. They skated laps of an oval banked track in a race to finish a distance equivalent to that between, for example, New York City and Los Angeles. Roller derby was reorganized as a full contact sport when Seltzer and sportswriter, Damon Runyon, realized that spectators enjoyed physical contact between, and teamwork among, the skaters. For example, when skaters from one team worked together to block a skater from the other team. Since the 1930s, many versions of roller derby have been played, and the sport has experienced waves of popularity interspersed with times of near extinction.

There are four main characteristics of previous incarnations of roller derby that distinguish them from roller derby's dominant contemporary form: women's flat track roller derby. First, roller derby was played on a banked track. Second, roller derby was coed. Both women and men played on each team. Games were typically organized so that women played against women, and men played against men; a line of women from each team were on the track at one time, followed by a line of men from each team. Third, roller derby was professional. Skaters were paid, and promoters, managers, owners, and others earned money from their involvement. Fourth, roller derby was spectacularized. Almost exclusively, the outcomes of roller derby matches were determined in advance, and staged fights and other altercations were regular features for 'entertainment'. Teams of skaters traveled from city to city, and often played under different team names to capitalize on local interests and rivalries. Skaters who adopted larger than life

personalities were heavily promoted and are most remembered, such as Gwen “Skinny Minnie” Miller and Ann “Banana-Nose” Calvello. From early on, roller derby was televised, and some later revivals were television-only and had no live audience. By the 1990s, roller derby was once again experiencing a slump. The only exceptions were occasional, one-off matches organized in the United States using paid veteran skaters, both women and men.

Starting in the early 2000s, roller derby’s newly redefined form attracted the attention of women across the U.S., and increasingly, the world. The most popular form of contemporary roller derby – based on number of skaters competing – is women’s flat track roller derby. This is roller derby played on a flat track by women who are unpaid. It is grassroots, organized in cities around the world, and many teams and leagues are committed to a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic. Men participate as referees, coaches, announcers, and have started to develop their own “merby” teams, often associated with existing women’s leagues. Roller derby, relative to other sports and its own history, has no major sponsors and receives little media attention. Media coverage tends to be in the “lifestyle” and “entertainment” vein, though roller derby increasingly receives attention as a sport. Many women’s flat track roller derby leagues have worked hard to attract attention to roller derby as a “sport” and to emphasize the athleticism required of participants.

In spite of the many differences between contemporary roller derby and its previous incarnations, today’s roller derby was developed only in part in response to what came before. That is, its founders did not set out to remake roller derby. Contemporary roller derby was developed as a “new” sport, and many current skaters are unfamiliar with the long history of roller derby. Perhaps one of the primary reasons for contemporary roller derby’s distinct identity (relative to previous versions of roller derby) is one of the “origin myths” associated with the Texas Rollergirls (TXRG). TXRG is widely recognized as the founders of flat track roller derby. According to one of TXRG’s founding skaters, their league developed as women-only because of negative experiences with men early on. Specifically, women’s unpleasant experiences with “Devil Dan”, who is identified as the person who first planned to organize roller derby in Texas in the early 2000s, made the women decide to take on roller derby themselves. Devil Dan, whose moniker is not ironic, perceived women’s roller derby as a sideshow, and recruited only women who fit his image of a “roller derby girl”. When the skaters proceeded without Devil Dan, they committed to putting the skaters first, by committing to, “by the skaters, for the skaters”. They knew this would help them maintain control of what was going on, and be happy with the outcomes. They also understood that doing everything would mean that roller derby might not happen very quickly, and it might not be as flashy or fancy as it could be, but it would happen, it would be theirs, and they would be happy with it. Interestingly, TXRG maintained Devil Dan’s idea to have only women skaters in this new version of roller derby and, therefore, “by the skaters, for the skaters” meant “by women, for women”.

TXRG provided the model for other roller derby leagues starting in the U.S., and eventually around the world. In the beginning, skaters from TXRG invited interested women to come to Austin, and visited aspiring and newly established leagues across the

U.S. This mentoring contributed to the perpetuation of the TXRG model, and that is likely why the dominant form of contemporary roller derby is women's flat track roller derby, organized with a strong commitment to "by the skaters for the skaters". Contemporary roller derby maintains some continuity with roller derby's earlier versions: it is played on roller skates (also referred to as quad skates to distinguish them from inline skates or rollerblades), the track is oval, the rule set has been adapted from banked track roller derby, and though the emphasis is on "real" versus staged action, contemporary roller derby maintains elements of roller derby's spectacular past. One example of this is derby names; names used by skaters for roller derby. These are the names listed in programs, on websites, and printed on the back of jerseys. Skaters often use word play to develop a derby name, and often play with ideas about violence, sexuality, or make allusions to popular culture, occupations, hobbies, or even racial/ethnic background (e.g., Carrie A. HackSAW, Betty Bonecrusher, Amanda Jamitinya, Sista Fista, Skate Winslet, Noam Stompsky, Ex Libris, the Prosecutor, Punk Roxy, Purl Slam, Shutter Speed, Kamikaze Kim, Rice Rocket, Death by Chocolate). In addition to derby names, which are used by most but not all skaters, skaters in many leagues have flexibility to wear customized uniforms, such as fishnet tights, booty shorts, or cutting off sleeves, widening neck holes. As a result, roller derby teams often do not appear as "uniform" as more mainstream sports teams.

As the number of teams and leagues continues to increase rapidly throughout the world, some people have identified "waves" in the growth of women's flat track roller derby. By 2004, there were enough leagues in various stages of development around the U.S. that some joined together to facilitate inter-league competition. Prior to this, many leagues used different versions of flat track derby rules. In 2005, representatives of thirty leagues attended the first meeting of the United Leagues Coalition (ULC). Representatives voted to change the organization's name to the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), and opened the organization to new members. Early in 2006, the first Canadian teams started skating; there are at least four leagues in major Canadian cities that started around the same time. 2006 is often identified as the second wave of women's flat track roller derby, and many cite the popularity of A&E's *Rollergirls*, a reality television series about the Lonestar Rollergirls (a banked track league in Austin, Texas) as one reason for the jump in numbers at this time. Another wave of growth occurred following the release of Drew Barrymore's film, *Whip It!* in 2009. The film seems to have encouraged the creation of more junior derby leagues, for skaters under 18. By 2010, there are over 400 leagues around the world, including North America, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, Germany, and France. Membership in the WFTDA has increased to 89 leagues, with 52 leagues in the organization's newly developed Apprentice Program (www.wftda.com). According to posts on public discussion groups and roller derby websites, new roller derby teams and leagues are started every week.

Anon City Roller Girls – The Activity

Anon City Roller Girls (ACRG) was established in January 2006 in a medium-sized Ontario city with an industrial history and a university. Anon City's founder is a member of a local punk rock band, and has many connections to the city's music scene.

When she decided to start a team, it was “a much more recreational, fun thing to do on Sundays for exercise and just to hang out with the girls”, and since then, “it’s just kind of evolved and snowballed into a much bigger project” (ACRG president). The first meeting held to discuss roller derby was at a local bar. This was a venue for live music, and a couple of the soon-to-be derby girls worked there. Sixteen women attended, and a handful more were unable to attend but had expressed an interest in being involved. At the first meeting, attendees chose a team name, colour, and one woman volunteered her graphic designer brother-in-law to design a logo. Within weeks, the aspiring derby team was featured in the local independent newspaper, and more women wanted to join. The numbers doubled, a second team was formed, and it was decided that the teams would be part of a league. Anon City Roller Girls was then incorporated as a business. League members worked to find practice space, learn about insurance and the rules of roller derby, and they started to skate. For many, this was their first time skating. ACRG skaters learned to play roller derby by reading the rule set they downloaded from the WFTDA website, and trying through trial and error to play in a way that made sense. That is, they tried the rules on the track until they thought it looked “right”, and made sense as a sport. In the DIY spirit of contemporary roller derby, and the punk/rock music scene it was closely connected to in Anon City, ACRG held its first bout (roller derby game) only seven months after starting, and before almost any of the skaters had seen anybody else play roller derby. ACRG’s efforts were rewarded when 700 spectators attended the first game, and the league has continued to grow (and sometimes shrink) and evolve ever since.

Following the first game, ACRG worked to develop connections within the broader roller derby community by traveling to see games in the U.S. (most often, more established leagues and/or WFTDA members), attending RollerCon (an annual roller derby convention hosted in Las Vegas), and communicating with skaters and leagues across Canada and the United States using online discussion groups and social networking sites. As a result of these connections, and the original desire to have fun and spend time with friends, ACRG is modeled on TXRG and the many leagues that adopted the TXRG model of women’s flat track roller derby. Specifically, ACRG is committed to “by the skaters, for the skaters”. Skaters in ACRG are women over 18 years old. Starting in 2007, ACRG has organized a home season of derby bouts every year, each with a minimum of four games. Also in 2007, ACRG started a travel team, and that team has traveled to dozens of games in Canada and the U.S. In 2009, ACRG succeeded in its goal to become a member league of the WFTDA, and as such is now eligible for ranking among the WFTDA leagues, has greater opportunities for game play at a competitive level, and votes on issues determining the future of women’s flat track roller derby, such as rules.

Currently, ACRG is a league encompassing two home teams and a travel team. For one season in 2008, ACRG had three home teams. Women’s flat track roller derby uses the language of teams and leagues differently than many other sports. Most cities have a roller derby “league” that includes as few as one or as many as nine teams. And some cities are home to more than one league. “Teams” can be home teams, travel teams, fresh meat teams, recreational teams, or junior teams. Home teams compete in intra-

league games against their league's other home teams, and sometimes compete against other league's teams. Travel teams are usually comprised of the best skaters in the league, and compete most often in inter-league games. Some leagues have A- and B-level travel teams. Fresh meat teams are made up of a league's newest skaters, commonly referred to as "fresh meat". During a season, ACRG's home teams usually play each other once or twice, and also play home teams from other leagues. These games are most often held during the league's home season, which runs from April to September. The travel team is composed of skaters from both home teams, has competed year round, and travels most often to the U.S. to play other league's travel teams. In Anon City, as in most roller derby leagues, roller derby is not only about the sport, and the time spent on skates and on the track. In addition to the time skaters spend practicing and playing, leaguemates often spend time together off the track. This includes time spent together after practices, at after parties, going to roller derby events, and hanging out.

Roller derby, as played by ACRG (using the most recent official WFTDA rules), is a full contact sport played on a standard-size flat track. The oval track is approximately 28 meters long and 16 meters wide around the outside. Skaters are required to wear helmets, mouthguards, elbow pads, wrist guards, knee pads, and quad roller skates. Five skaters from each team skate on the track at one time: four blockers from each team line up on the straightaway, and one jammer for each team (wearing a helmet cover with a star on either side of it) lines up approximately eleven meters behind them. When the jam timer blows the whistle, the blockers start to skate; they are the pack. At the second whistle, the jammers start to skate. Jammers are the point-scoring skaters. The jammers have to skate through the pack and then race around the track to enter the pack again. They are now on a scoring pass and score a point for each opposing skater they pass legally. Skaters are allowed to block each other using only legal blocking zones: from a skater's shoulder to her knees, and they receive penalties for elbowing, tripping, pushing, and many more prohibited acts. Four to seven on-skates referees watch the action from the inside and outside of the track, keep track of scoring, and call penalties. Score keepers, penalty trackers, and other non-skating officials record the details of the game, and facilitate communication among the referees. Roller derby is a fast-paced game, with a lot of action. Blockers simultaneously play offense and defense (by working to help their jammer and stop the other jammer at the same time), and jammers skate as fast as they can to score as many points as possible, while avoiding hits and blocks from the opposing team's skaters. In order to be prepared to play roller derby, ACRG skaters practice regularly. Practices include endurance drills, drills to learn and practice specific skills (e.g., stopping, lateral movement), and strategy (e.g., what to do when one team's jammer is in the penalty box).

ACRG's games and practices, and even recreational skates, are often loud events. There is a lot of talking, laughing, and sometimes yelling. At practices, skaters have conversations in the locker room when they arrive and get ready for practice, and these continue while skaters do warm up laps. Some skaters continue to chat during practice even while instructions are being given, when they are waiting for their turn in a drill, at water breaks, and while stretching. Occasionally, somebody shushes skaters who are speaking at inappropriate times, or the group is reminded that they need to listen.

Laughing is consistent as skaters joke with each other about the outcomes of upcoming competitions (either games or drills and scrimmages at practices), groan and complain about endurance drills, and make fun of themselves for messing up a drill or specific skill. There is a lot of teasing, sarcasm, and self-deprecating humour used among the skaters, and between the skaters and referees. Yelling is also common at practices, and during games. It is a mode of communication (to get people's attention, let teammates know what is happening, where they should be, and direct play), and also a means of demonstrating frustration or anger. Often this is directed at referees, but can also be directed at members of a skater's own team and/or the opposing team. Communication among opposing team skaters during games is usually friendly, and skaters sometimes chat with members of the other team when they line up on the track. At a tournament in Wisconsin in 2010, announcers drew attention to this common practice, and suggested that the competing team's jammers were sharing recipes on the starting line. When there is a timeout or delay in game play (not including for injury), skaters lined up on the track often start a "dance party", dancing on their skates to the music until the game is started again. Skating itself is often a loud activity due to the sound of wheels on the skating surface. When skaters stop, they move their wheels across the floor in ways that tend to produce a loud screeching noise. There is also noise from skaters falling (hard plastic knee, elbow, and wrist pads hitting the floor), and hitting each other. Music and announcers (using microphones) are common features of roller derby bouts, and fans cheer for favourite skaters and teams, and some boo the opposition. Big hits, avoiding big hits, and scoring also elicit cheers from the crowd.

Who is Anon City Roller Girls? – Participation

In ACRG, there are two main types of involvement with the league: 1) Skaters who play roller derby and do league work, such as organizing and implementing training, recruiting, marketing; and 2) Volunteers who help to make roller derby happen by serving as referees and non-skating officials, announcers, coaches, and filling necessary positions on bout days and at events. As a result, ACRG is open to anybody: women who want to skate or volunteer, and men who want to volunteer. Like most other women's flat track roller derby leagues, ACRG skaters are women, on quad roller skates, and they are over eighteen years old (for insurance purposes). Though these are the only explicit criteria for skater participation, ACRG skaters must also be able to pay for their equipment (roller skates and safety equipment), insurance (annual liability insurance and travel insurance), and monthly membership dues. In addition, skaters must be able to devote time to skating (at practices, bouts, and events), and league work (e.g., committee involvement, set up on bout day). Women who can do all of these things, and abide by ACRG's membership requirements can participate. Formal membership requirements are detailed in the league's code of conduct document. In order to participate in contact drills and scrimmages during practices, and in bouts, skaters must pass a minimum skills test of physical skills and rules. Unlike many other sports for adult women, skaters do not have to be able to skate or have any sport background when they join the league. Also contributing to roller derby's distinctness is its inclusion of all women, and specifically, claims that there is a place for every woman in flat track roller derby regardless of age, body shape or size, experience or athleticism.

During its four-year history, ACRG has had as many as fifty skaters (approximately fifteen skaters on each of three home teams) and as few as sixteen skaters (at the beginning). With the recent development of a new training system, there might be also be five to twenty-five new (“freshmeat”) skaters enrolled in ACRG’s introductory roller derby course. This course is one day per week for four to eight weeks. Because of the risks associated with playing a full contact sport on roller skates, ACRG’s president believes, “it takes a special kind of person to be willing to get hurt to have a little fun”. However, there is no such thing as a typical “derby girls”. ACRG skaters have different backgrounds, ages, sport experiences, and reasons for skating. As mentioned, all ACRG skaters identify as women, and they are committed to learning to skate and/or play roller derby. In addition to skaters, ACRG has had two women referees, a woman announcer, and a number of women who volunteer at games as non-skating officials and in other capacities, such as selling merchandise or beer. Often, women volunteers are aspiring or retired skaters, or women who enjoy roller derby but are unable to play. Some cannot play for physical reasons, because of the time commitment, or conflicting family, work, or leisure commitments.

Currently, ACRG’s skaters range in age from nineteen to forty-five, and the average age is around late-twenties to early-thirties. Since January 2007, almost all ACRG skaters appeared to be white. There have only been one or two exceptions, including one skater who claimed a Philippina background, and another a Laotian background. Both skaters were raised in Canada. ACRG has also had a few skaters who identify as First Nations. The majority of ACRG skaters identify as straight, and many are in heterosexual relationships (dating, long-term relationships, and married). These relationships have served as the primary source of volunteers for ACRG. Since 2007, the league has had at least four skaters who identify as lesbian, a number of skaters who dated both women and men, and some skaters who are identified by others as “six-pack lesbians”. These are women who are perceived to be interested in other women when they have been drinking alcohol. There are two couples in the league composed of skaters who had previously been in long-term heterosexual relationships, and had little or no history of dating women. Most ACRG skaters do not have children; however, up to one third of skaters at any one time have had children. These children range in age from babies to adults, and approximately half of the skaters are single moms who share some custody of their children with their fathers. Most have primary responsibility for their children.

Skaters are employed, underemployed, unemployed, and students. They work as bartenders, event planners, educational assistants, corrections officers, in retail, the film industry, energy, health care, etc. All skaters have graduated high school, many have some college or university education, if not diplomas or degrees, and a small number have or are working toward post-graduate degrees. Some ACRG skaters own a house, most rent apartments, and some live at home with their parents. Just over half of the skaters at any one time own cars, and they often take on the responsibility of driving the many skaters who do not have cars and/or driver’s licenses, and the skaters who share vehicles with their partners or other family members and do not have constant access. ACRG skaters have widely differing sport backgrounds, from nothing at all (no

experience of organized sport) to high-level competition (in sports such as water polo, figure skating, soccer, ringette, tennis). A very small number of skaters have a lot of roller skating experience. These are women who started roller skating when they were young and continued to roller skate as adults. Most skaters had tried roller skating at some point, and a few were avid recreational roller bladers/inline skaters, but often this experience was a long time ago (ten to fifteen years or more). Many of the skaters with no sport background had ambivalent, if not negative, feelings about organized sport in high school, and did not consider themselves to be the sporty (jock) type. One benefit of flat track roller derby's newness is that nobody has roller derby experience when they start skating with ACRG. The exception is transfer skaters from other leagues. As such, everybody – even good skaters and experienced athletes – starts from the same place: they have to learn skills and rules that are specific to roller derby. For some, this means learning how to roller skate, while others are able to move right into learning roller derby-specific skills such as blocking and assists. ACRG skaters are usually considered “veteran” when they are no longer “fresh meat”. The league's newest veterans have completed one season of bouting, and the most seasoned veterans have skated since 2006. Currently active ACRG skaters have skated for an average of two or three seasons (of five ACRG seasons).

The league's founder recruited the original ACRG skaters. She invited friends and acquaintances she thought would be interested in roller derby in person and by e-mail. Acquaintances included women she had met at parties, seen at bars and shows, and women who played in bands. Of the sixteen women who attended ACRG's first meeting, six still skate for ACRG. Within a few weeks of the first meeting and practice, a local independent newspaper article and word of mouth advertising resulted in an influx of potential skaters. Some of the new recruits (referred to casually as “the strangers” because many were not directly connected to the original group) showed up at the local bar where the original meeting had been held in order to carpool with the group to the nearest roller skating rink. For a while, that bar was used as a kind of clubhouse and meeting place. A few ACRG skaters can be identified as responsible for recruiting many other skaters. For example, one skater who worked locally in retail had worked or been friends with at least five women who also joined the league. This informal recruitment method, using individual's social networks, has continued to be ACRG's primary recruiting strategy. More formal strategies, such as advertising in bout programs, on the league's website, and in media coverage, have also been used. Very few ACRG skaters did not know anybody when they started, but the few who did not saw a bout poster, heard from a friend of a friend, saw a roller derby television program, film, or news story and sought out the local league, or otherwise learned about the existence of roller derby in their area, and decided that they needed to get involved. Sometimes these women convinced a friend to come out with them.

Like their backgrounds and life situations, there is no typical “derby girl” with respect to appearance. ACRG's skaters have many different body types, and are all shapes and sizes. A number of skaters would likely not be identified as “athletes” because of their body shape or size; however, many are effective roller derby players. Skaters are encouraged to take advantage of the benefits associated with their particular shape and

size, and consistently reminded that not everyone plays in the same ways, but everyone can play roller derby. For example, not all skaters are “big hitters”, and being difficult to move is ideal for holding the inside line. In spite of media reports to the contrary, not all “derby girls” are tattooed, pierced, and fishnet-clad. Based on a number of factors, but particularly individual taste and comfort, skaters at practices and games wear a variety of clothing. Most common among their choices are t-shirts or tank tops often with logos from other derby leagues or bands, and the colour black. Some wear fishnet tights under skirts or underwear/booty shorts/derby skinz™, and some wear these bottoms over leggings or bare legs. Other skaters wear longer shorts or leggings. Knee-high socks are common, and usually decorated with stripes, polka dots, stars, and other designs in different colours (at times matching the team or league colours). Many skaters have visible tattoos, and at least nine ACRG skaters have had one or more of half sleeves, chest pieces, and large back or leg tattoos. During their time with ACRG, some have added derby-related tattoos, and skaters have their derby names, “ACRG”, roller skates, and derby girl tattoos. Many skaters have piercings and stretchings, most commonly in ears, lips, noses, and cheeks. Skaters are not required to remove jewelry when playing (unless they could pose a danger to another skater), and almost all ACRG skaters play with studs, hoops, and plugs in. Others skate wearing necklaces and rings. Some skaters look very “sporty” when they skate, and there is a trend in the larger derby community to more standard, sport-like uniforms (matching tops and bottoms made of synthetic materials). Currently, all ACRG teams skate in matching t-shirts (screen printed with the team logo on the front, and the skater’s name and number on the back) and bottoms that each skater chooses. A few skaters alter their t-shirts by removing the sleeves or cutting a v-neckline. ACRG uniforms are less “uniform” than in many other sports, and skaters’ appearances are one way that roller derby offers something different than other, more established or “mainstream” sports.

Men

A small number of men have been involved in ACRG since close to the beginning. The league’s original referees were the long-term partners of skaters. Recruiting volunteers from among skaters’ boyfriends, husbands, and friends continues to be a trend in ACRG. As a result, most men are involved because a skater has encouraged their involvement, often out of necessity. If the league is not able to find enough referees to work at a bout, the bout cannot happen. In addition to volunteering as referees, men have been non-skating officials, coaches or managers, announcers, and photographers. ACRG has consistently had three to six active referees. Referees are active to varying degrees: some skate regularly at league practices, and others tend to limit their involvement to refereeing at scrimmages and bouts. ACRG’s referees also travel to work at other league’s bouts, and with the travel team to work at away bouts. When men stay involved for a while (usually a few months), they sometimes recruit other men from their social networks. For ACRG, the end of a romantic relationship between a skater and volunteer has consistently signaled the end of the man’s involvement, and the skater has remained in the league. Referees, for the most part, are as diverse as the skaters. They are predominantly white, have an average age in the late twenties to late thirties, and work at a variety of jobs. Though there are many volunteers at every bout (at least twenty people

to fill all positions), I have included here only information about volunteers whose involvement has been long term (i.e., consistent, lasting through multiple bouts, and often more than one season).

What is Anon City Roller Girls? – Organization

ACRG follows the lead of many already established women's flat track roller derby leagues by adopting a commitment to "by the skaters, for the skaters" in the ownership and management of the league. In part, this is due to ACRG's desire to be a member of the governing body of women's flat track roller derby, the WFTDA. To meet the WFTDA's membership requirements, ACRG must have only women competitors (skating only on quad skates), have league skaters (i.e., women) as majority owners (at least 51%), have leagues skaters manage at least 67% of the league business, and use democratic practices to make league decisions (<http://wftda.com/join>). In ACRG, skaters and volunteers, who are most often injured or retired skaters, do the business of the league. All positions on ACRG's Board (e.g., president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary) are elected, and other positions (e.g., committee chairs, committee members) are filled by whoever is willing and able to do them. ACRG has many committees including public relations, training, community service, and mediation. No league work happens unless ACRG skaters do it, including finding and booking practice space, scheduling games, advertising and promotion, fundraising, event planning, buying insurance, etc. League work is often a contentious issue within ACRG; some skaters work as many as twenty to thirty hours a week at different times of year to do their league jobs, while others contribute very little. League work is often done at skaters' "real jobs", for example, checking and sending e-mail messages, printing and photocopying flyers, and organizing appointments. Some skaters are reluctant, or less able, to take on league work. It is derby lore that as volunteer-run organizations, twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work. According to ACRG's code of conduct, all skaters must contribute to league work, and tracking and making skaters accountable for that work is an ongoing struggle for the league.

League members are defined as skaters who have paid monthly dues and met attendance and participation requirements. These active skaters vote on league business, including choosing a practice space or reorganizing the league. Voting is conducted at league meetings, which are organized almost every month. At league meetings, committees report about ongoing activities and solicit new members, seek ideas or feedback. League meetings also include socializing among league members. Referees sometimes help with league work, and attend league meetings, but are mostly involved in referee-related work such as organizing referees and non-skating officials for bouts. Many skaters are surprised about the amount of work required to run the league. Often, they are not aware of league work until they become more involved, or until they take on some of the work themselves. Unlike many other sport organizations, there is not an office staff to do the work, nor is there history and precedent for making many decisions. As much as possible, ACRG seeks assistance from other roller derby leagues when making decisions or developing new policies. Borrowing from their experiences allows ACRG to avoid "reinventing the wheel".

Time and Cost

ACRG skaters practice from one to three times, for two to ten hours, each week. More practice time is available during the home season, and fewer practices during the off season. Almost all practices are held in the evenings between 6 and 10p.m. Sometimes ACRG has scheduled Sunday afternoon practices. Since the introduction of the travel team, those skaters have not had an off season because they play games year round. Practice arrangements have changed over the league's four full seasons, but always include some combination of league, home team, and travel team practices. During the most recent season, ACRG has organized only league and travel team practices (four hours and two hours per week respectively), and home teams were able to organize their own, additional practices. All skaters are required to attend 50% of practices. Until the 2009 season, the attendance requirement was 75%, and was revised in response to a growing number of skaters not meeting the requirement, and because of frustrations related to what "counted" as an excuse for missing practice (e.g., work, illness). With the 50% attendance requirement, no excuses are considered. Travel team skaters are required to attend 50% of league and travel team practices. These are considered minimum attendance requirements, and attendance records are often used, in part, to determine skaters' relative playing time during bouts. According to ACRG's code of conduct, skaters who do not meet the membership requirements for two consecutive months lose their league membership, and return to the pool of "fresh meat" skaters to start again.

In addition to skating time (practices and additional individual skating), league members are expected to attend league meetings, and team and committee meetings usually organized as needed. Skaters on the ACRG Board also attend regular Board meetings. Although committee participation through which skaters do the work of the league is required of all skaters, this has consistently been more difficult to enforce than attendance, and some skaters "get away" with doing little committee work. Encouraging skaters to take on league jobs is a consistent topic of conversation at league meetings, and a significant frustration for those skaters who actively work for league committees. As mentioned previously, this is a serious issue for ACRG because of the commitment to being skater organized. In other words, skaters must do the business of the league because if they do not do, ACRG will no longer exist. ACRG is not alone in its concerns about skater involvement, and women's flat track roller derby leagues organize elaborate models to promote and enforce committee participation and league work (e.g., points systems, quarterly reporting). For ACRG, the home season tends to be so busy that skaters have difficulty making time to participate in all of the games and events, and committee work tends to be overlooked. Then, during the off season, skaters look forward to a "break" from roller derby and it can be difficult to organize meetings, set and achieve goals for league work.

During the summer, skaters have very few non-derby weekends. In general, ACRG organizes four home games, one each in May, June, July, and August. These are the only months during which Anon City arenas are available to ACRG, because the ice has been taken out for the summer. ACRG has hosted as many as seven games in one home season, although the majority of skaters agreed after the fact that this was "too much" (to organize, not to play). Relative to other sports, there is an imbalance between

the amount of time spent practicing and the amount of time spent playing. In part, this is because bout production is time consuming, and requires input by many different skaters and volunteers. They must lay the track; set up tables and chairs for merchandise, spectators, penalty boxes, announcers, etc; stock and set up the beer room; purchase and put water, sports drinks, and ice in coolers for all of the locker rooms; procure licenses and insurance; organize and assign jobs to volunteers; set up the sound system; greet media personnel and accommodate requests for interviews and photographs; sell and check tickets at the door; etc. In the weeks prior to a bout, posters and handbills are designed, printed, and distributed around the city; advertisements are placed in local newspapers and on the league website; the league tries to raise its local profile by attending events such as concerts, sports games, and festivals; referees, non-skating officials, and volunteers are recruited; rosters and line-ups are determined; etc. All of this work associated with putting on a public bout contributes to summer being the busiest time for ACRG. The number of bouts is also limited for financial reasons. ACRG's home teams can organize away games, but they have to cover their own costs. As a result, home teams travel significantly less and less far than the travel team. Even the travel team is often responsible for travel expenses, such as transportation, accommodation, and food when traveling to bouts, and this can make travel prohibitive for some skaters.

Throughout the year, all skaters are responsible for ACRG public relations. This includes league events, for example, fundraisers, participation in charity events such as bowl-a-thons, and at other local events such as street festivals, pride parades, Take Back the Night marches, concerts, fashion shows, and conventions. Skaters are expected to attend as many events as they are able to. If they cannot attend, skaters are expected to contribute in other ways, such as purchasing items for a prize pack or picking up a rental karaoke or bingo machine. At public events, skaters typically wear league t-shirts, and act as ambassadors for ACRG and roller derby in general. ACRG hopes to benefit in numerous ways from its public presence, including recruiting new skaters and volunteers, and attracting new spectators, fans, and potential sponsors. Sponsorship is important to many flat track roller derby leagues, because it can help to defray costs otherwise incurred by the skaters themselves. ACRG has had a few sponsors over its four seasons of play; however, many have offered in-kind sponsorships (e.g., printing programs, screening t-shirts, beer). Skaters, then, not only commit to skating time and volunteer time, but also pay to play roller derby. Depending on the practice space and number of available practice hours, monthly membership dues cost between \$35 and \$85. ACRG uses most money collected from dues to cover the cost of renting practice spaces, and a small amount goes to paying other league expenses. In addition to membership dues, skaters pay for uniforms, roller skates, and safety equipment. In all, being involved in roller derby requires an extensive commitment of time and money, and beyond ACRG's membership requirements, many skaters spend social time together at house parties, going to bars, and hanging out. It is perhaps not surprising that roller derby is often accused of taking over women's lives.

Where are the Anon City Roller Girls? – Location

For ACRG, locations include spaces for roller derby (skating) and spaces for roller derby-related activities (everything else). I address the former first. Flat track roller

derby is significantly more accessible than banked track roller derby (because leagues do not have to buy and store the track materials); however, space is a major challenge for ACRG and many other flat track roller derby leagues. ACRG's primary roller derby space is local ice hockey arenas during the summer. From May to August, many local arenas remove their ice and rent the concrete surfaces to lacrosse, ball hockey, and now roller derby teams. ACRG uses arenas for both practices and games, and ACRG struggled to gain access to space owned and organized by the City. Many cities rent their arenas on the basis of history, so that teams and leagues that have rented space in the past have priority when renting space in the future. Because ACRG is so new, and roller derby is still an unknown entity to many people, the league has had some difficulty trying to rent arena space. This process has become easier with time. ACRG has developed a history with the City; however, the league is dependent on the City with respect to scheduling practices and games. ACRG submits a request for practice times and location preference, and bout dates, and then waits months for the City to determine the schedule. In general, ACRG has been granted its requested days and times but the City's timing – not making its decisions until April – has limited ACRG's opportunities to invite other leagues to play in Anon City (i.e., most flat track roller derby leagues book and organize their bout schedule one year in advance). In four seasons, ACRG has practiced in five different City arenas, and held bouts at three different arenas. When the ice is in the City arenas (September to April), ACRG is forced to find other practice space.

In order to hold a roller derby practice, ACRG needs a space that is large enough to accommodate a regulation-size oval track with sufficient space around the outside to be safe. Also, the space must accommodate at least ten skaters, and up to thirty or more skaters (plus referees). ACRG spent almost three years renting off season practice time at a small ball hockey venue in a neighbouring city, approximately twenty minutes driving distance from Anon City. This space was too small for a regulation size track, but offered other benefits: supportive owners who did not raise the rental cost for the three years, a bar and restaurant where skaters could socialize before and after practices, and party rooms the league was able to use for meetings. At the end of 2009, ACRG moved to an old arena in a suburb of Anon City, approximately thirty minutes driving distance, that is now owned by the local fairground, and is no longer iced in the winter. This space is ideal in terms of size, but in order to keep the rental cost low, and because it is not used for other activities during the winter, the arena is not heated. ACRG skaters learned to skate with long johns, toques, mittens, and as many layers of clothing as they could fit under and over their gear. ACRG skaters skate outside of formal practices as well, and to do so they use the nearest roller rink, which is about thirty minutes driving distance from Anon City, and outdoor spaces (weather permitting), especially paved trails along the waterfront. In addition to local spaces, ACRG skaters have traveled to at least five other Canadian cities to skate and train with other leagues, and at least ten American cities to compete. At away bouts, ACRG teams have skated in convention centres, auditoriums, roller rinks, professional inline hockey venues, sports complexes, and hockey arenas.

The most typical venue for ACRG is local hockey arenas with no ice. Skaters skate on the polished concrete floor, and have access to the arena floor, lockers rooms, and bathrooms. ACRG has no private space in the arena or the locker rooms, which

means there is no space to leave anything between practices. Some arena workers have found space for the league to store practice equipment (e.g., pinnies, pylons, hitting bag), but this is not guaranteed. When it is cold outside, the arenas are cold, and when it is hot outside, the arenas are hot. The league has to negotiate with arena employees to be able to lay down a track in any kind of semi-permanent way, such as using tape rather than taking the time to draw the track outline in chalk at each practice. Except for during a practice or a bout, there is no evidence that a roller derby league uses the arena. The exception is an oval track taped in the middle of the arena floor. There are no posters, signs, or other indicators of roller derby in the arena, unlike the hockey teams that use these spaces; some arenas have “home of” a hockey or lacrosse team signs painted in them, most have banners and retired jerseys hanging over the arena floor, and all have advertising on the boards, scoreboard, and walls of the arena which sometimes reference hockey or lacrosse teams that play there.

On practice nights, skaters (and sometimes referees) arrive at the arena up to thirty minutes in advance of practice time to have time to put on all of their safety equipment and their skates. During that time, most skaters “gear up” in the locker room, and leave their bags and street clothes and shoes in the room during practice. In the arena, skaters use the floor, and sometimes the team benches and penalty boxes. When the arena is open for practice, the front doors are unlocked, and in the summer the zamboni door is opened to encourage air flow. During practices, anybody can enter the building. At a few of ACRG’s practice arenas, people involved in other activities, such as registering their children for hockey, kids and parents of kids playing ball hockey in the time slot before derby practices, have stayed to watch ACRG practice. At the ball hockey venue, ACRG attracted the attention of ball hockey (all men) and beach volleyball (coed) players who were also using the venue, as well as people there to drink and eat, and the staff. Sometimes skaters’ partners, friends, parents, or other family members watch practices. If their children are old enough to entertain themselves during practice, some skaters bring their children. At every arena ACRG has used, the arena employee working during roller derby bouts and practices has been a man, with the exception of concession stand staff during bouts. Since it was founded, ACRG has searched for its own space where skaters would be able to practice at any time, throw parties and fundraisers, and hold bouts on dates chosen by the league. ACRG includes an advertisement in its program that “ACRG is looking for a home”, and asks fans to share information they have about spaces that meet ACRG’s space requirements.

During bouts, the arena space is more clearly marked as a space for roller derby. ACRG puts up banners in the arena – one for each of the home teams, the league, the referees, and the WFTDA – and uses old bout posters to decorate the beer and concession areas. Signs are posted throughout the arena directing spectators to the merchandise table, beer room, and “suicide seats” or trackside seating. Competing teams use separate locker rooms, and referees have their own locker room. On the arena floor, the track is set up in the middle with a three-metre wide referee lane around the outside, a penalty box (table with six chairs) at the outside of one turn, and two large white boards in the middle (one for each team) that list all participating skaters by number, and are used to track penalties. Around the outside of the ref lane, there is room for “suicide seating”, and behind this are

chairs set up for spectators who want to be trackside, but not so close to the action. Also on the arena floor, but further away from the track, are a “merch” table, a kids’ area (with balloons, materials for colouring, etc.), sound equipment, and an announcer’s table. The City staffs the concession stand, and ACRG organizes a beer room, i.e., they apply for a liquor license, purchase the alcohol, move it into the arena, and find qualified volunteers to sell it during the game. Alcohol is not allowed outside the beer room, and ACRG has been lucky that the licensed space in two arenas allows spectators to drink and watch the game (the rooms are separated by glass windows from the rest of the arena). During a bout, spectators can sit in the arena seating, or on the arena floor either directly on the floor or on the chairs provided. As mentioned, skaters and league volunteers are responsible for all of the set up and tear down on bout day, and skaters spend approximately seven hours in the arena for a one-hour bout. By 10p.m. or so on bout day, all evidence of roller derby is once again cleared away.

Roller derby-related events happen in many different places. For example, after parties, after-after parties, and year-end parties happen at bars, restaurants, people’s homes, and in hotels. Meetings – league, team, and Board meetings, annual WFTDA meetings – are held in bars, restaurants, people’s homes, hotels, and at the arena. In an attempt to limit the amount of time spent on roller derby, ACRG tries to schedule meetings before or after practices at the practice space. For example, if Monday evening is a practice night, adding a meeting on Monday is easier than organizing it for another day of the week. Community service events happen all around the city at bowling alleys, doing garbage pick up in neighbourhoods, parks, and the waterfront, or joining organized events such as the Pride parade or Take Back the Night march. Fundraising events are organized at bars and halls (party-style events), and sometimes at gas stations or parking lots (car washes), or people’s houses (garage sales). Skaters also spend time at roller derby events organized by other leagues, especially tournaments and games. During these events, and ACRG’s own travel games, hotels become an important site for socializing and partying. In April 2009, an ACRG skater and her husband bought a bar. At least three current and former league members work at the bar, and it has become the go-to location for meetings and events. One skater affectionately referred to the bar as “our clubhouse” when organizing to meet there before heading out to a group event. Previous to this bar, there was a local bar/restaurant that served a similar purpose for ACRG, especially for events (fundraisers, after parties, and end of year parties). A number of skaters worked there during the time that it served as a base for roller derby parties. Fortunately, the skater-owned bar was ready to take over as “clubhouse” when the original bar closed. ACRG tends to rely on one or two locations for roller derby party events, because some locations are more roller derby-friendly than others with respect to the types of behaviours allowed (e.g., wrestling, dancing, drinking, nudity, etc.).

Women-only home improvement workshops – Big Box Home Renovation (BBHR) stores

A very brief history of home improvement/do-it-yourself

The gendered history of home improvement/do-it-yourself is included in the “Women and home improvement/do-it-yourself” section of the Review of Literature.

Women-only home improvement workshops – The Activity

Big Box Home Renovation (BBHR) stores offer weekly home improvement workshops for customers. These are educational workshops, offered throughout the week and on weekends, about a specific home improvement project such as installing crown molding, changing a faucet, laying ceramic tile, building a deck, or planning a basement. Only two of BBHR's workshop offerings have limited participation: the women's workshops and the children's workshops. Starting as early as ten years ago, (some) BBHR stores have offered one workshop per week (or month) for women only. In fact, BBHR is the only major chain of home improvement stores that advertises an in-store workshop for women only, though other chains do offer in-store workshops for all customers. Currently, BBHR mandates that all stores hold a women-only workshop one weekday evening every week from 7 to 8p.m. (workshops are scheduled for the same day each week), and the schedule of workshop topics is provided by head office. Not all stores have the same customer response to the women's workshops, i.e., some have consistent participation, while others often have no women attend their women's workshop. There is also little consistency with respect to how the women-only workshops are run with respect to instructors, promotion, and opportunities for hands-on participation. This research deals with the women's workshops offered at two BBHR stores in Ontario (store One and store Two). These stores are located in middle/upper middle class suburban areas, and both are in large plazas comprising many other retail and restaurant businesses. They are also accessible by public transportation, but the vast majority of women travel to the stores by car. In general, the women's workshops place a greater emphasis on hands-on learning than the other workshops offered by BBHR. At most workshops, there is an attempt to move beyond simply talking about the project to include an opportunity for women to try the project being covered, or at least some small part of it (i.e., laying laminate flooring or patching dry wall). At the least, tools and materials are passed around for the women to see and hold ("show and tell"). Women consistently identify the hands-on part of workshops as their favourite part, and also the most effective way for them to learn. Depending on the workshop leader and the topic being discussed, some projects are very clear and seem accessible and doable, while others seem less so. For example, following tiling workshops, a number of women's workshop participants have undertaken tiling projects (e.g., a kitchen backsplash). However, few women have attempted to hang crown molding – a project that seems very complicated, involving the calculation of angles and precision cutting, in spite of instructor's claims that it is a do-it-yourself/herself project.

BBHR's women-only workshops are scheduled to last for one or two hours, and have always been scheduled between 6 and 9p.m. (i.e., 6 to 8p.m., 7 to 9p.m., or 7 to 8p.m.). Sometimes workshops end early if there is not much information about the topic, and/or not many questions, and/or no opportunity for hands-on learning. And sometimes workshops run late, often if there is a lot of information, a lot of questions, opportunities for all participants to try something, or if the women are working on a building project. The women's workshops are organized in two main formats: 1) Learning a specific skill or about a particular product; and 2) Building something. The former mode of workshop is the most common, i.e., happens consistently at all stores, following the workshop

curriculum provided by BBHR. Sometimes these workshops include both a lecture portion and a demonstration by the instructor, but often the instructor attempts to involve the women participants in the demonstration. For example, the instructor will hand around the tools and products being discussed, and/or participants are invited to try a tool or a technique. A major feature of these workshops is the opportunity women have to ask questions throughout the workshop, often stopping the instructor to request clarification of what is being presented, or for a definition of a term the instructor has used. Many women ask specific questions about their own houses or projects they are planning, and it is common for women to share information they already know (based on their own experiences), or to “check” information they think they know (e.g., “I heard X about this product, is that true?”). There is often a lot of laughing during workshops, particularly with respect to anything that sounds sexual (e.g., drilling, screwing, studs, etc.), and always when women use power tools for the first time (or even not the first time). Sometimes the laughter is self-deprecating, for example, when a woman is having difficulty understanding the instructor’s explanations, is nervous or uncertain about trying a new tool or skill, or is not successful in their hands-on attempts.

The second workshop mode – building – is much less common, and might actually be specific to BBHR store One in this study. During these workshops, women have the opportunity to build a project from start to finish (e.g., a storage bench, birdhouse, frame, deck chair), and are often involved in planning the project as well. Building workshops regularly run overtime, or are continued for more than one week. Women have to find and purchase the materials before starting (though sometimes the workshop leader is able to do this in advance of the workshop), and while working, all the women have to share a limited number of tools (e.g., one miter saw, three electric drills). Building workshops feel more hectic – because of increased excitement and frustration and activity – as women move around in the workshop space using various tools and materials. These workshops are also noisier because there are often multiple women using tools at one time, as well as speaking over the noise of the tools. During building workshops there is an emphasis on safety; women learn the proper ways to use power tools, and are consistently reminded about them. It is often participants in the group who remind each other to wear safety glasses, keep their hands safely away from saw blades, and generally to avoid injury and/or attract negative attention to the women’s workshops. At the end of a building workshop, there is usually a mess in the workshop space (especially sawdust from cutting and routing wood), and tables and chairs need to be replaced. Participants often help the workshop instructor return the workshop space to its usual state by sweeping, moving furniture, and putting tools away. Regardless of the type of workshop, there is often a small group of “regulars” who spend time chatting and catching up at the beginning of each workshop (and sometimes during workshops), and who also introduce themselves and others to new participants. Further, it is most often the “regulars” who stay at the end of workshops to help tidy up, as well as to socialize, sometimes discussing home improvement-related issues, but often not. Prizes, raffles, and “gifts” are a common feature of many women’s workshops as well. Women’s workshop organizers and instructors regularly try to have something that participants can take home, and if there is only one or a small number of giveaway items, names are drawn to

select winners. In the case of a raffle, women are asked if they want to participate to ensure that only those who are interested in winning the prize are entered in the draw. Giveaways include promotional items from vendors whose products are sold in BBHR stores such as baseball hats from a paint company, pens and carpenter's pencils from a tool company, or products that have been "written off" in order to be used in the workshop demonstration (e.g., an open bag of cement or package of tiles). In the case of larger building projects such as an arbour or a potting bench, one woman wins the item that the group has spent the workshop building.

Who is at the women's workshop? – Participation

Since September 2007, the two BBHR stores that are the focus of this research (store One and store Two) have hosted weekly and monthly workshops. At any one workshop, there have been between one and eighty-plus participants, and the average number of participants at a workshop is between six and ten women. In both stores, there have developed groups of workshop "regulars". These are women who attend most, if not all, workshops regardless of the topic and whether or not it is relevant to their own needs (i.e., planned or possible projects). In addition to the "regulars", there are women who attend multiple workshops, but limit their attendance to topics that are of specific interest to them, and/or who attend workshops when they are able, but who do not make them a top priority in their schedule. Workshop participants are all women, and range in age from their mid-twenties to seventies. The average age of workshop participants is likely between forty-five and fifty-five years old. The majority of participants appear to be white, and all speak English though, for a very small number, English is their second language. Beyond their self-identification as women (by choosing to participate in a clearly gender-marked women's workshop), the workshop participants come from many different life situations. Most are married, divorced or widowed, and all of these women are in or were in relationships with men. At BBHR women's workshops, there is a presumption of heterosexuality – single women are asked about men they are dating (or would like to be dating), and told that they will be "a great catch" for a man, because of all of the home improvement knowledge they have acquired at the workshops. Many of the workshop participants are mothers, and their children range in age from young school-aged children (e.g., four and five years-old and up) to adult children. Almost all of the women own their own homes, though there are a few women in the group who rent apartments or houses. Most women arrive at the workshops alone, and the vast majority drives their own vehicle to the store. Many do not know any other workshop participants when they begin attending the workshops. Exceptions to this are women who organize their participation to attend with a friend (friends arriving together often carpool to the store), or a neighbour, and some mothers and daughters and sisters attend together.

Most workshop participants arrive at the BBHR store from home, that is, they have the opportunity to go home between work or other daytime activities, and the start of the workshop. Others arrive directly from work, particularly for workshops that begin at 6p.m. This might account for some of the variety in women's attire at workshops. Some women wear business casual style clothes (these are often the women arriving straight from work, or who have little time between the end of work and the start of the workshop), but most women attend in more casual, 'leisure time' clothes such as jeans, t-

shirts, sweats (tops and pants). There are a few women who dress in preparation for the workshop activity, i.e., wearing old clothes for painting, or close-toed shoes for building project, but many do not (or sometimes intend to and then forget). Often, women's attire is only remarked upon if they are particularly satisfied with it (e.g., "I'm glad I wore a shirt I don't care about"), or if they regret their choice (e.g., lamenting having a lot of wood chips down the front of a low-cut shirt after using a router). Sometimes, women will admire each other's clothes, shoes, or bags. In a women's workshop group at any one time there are women who are complete novices with respect to home improvement, but many have at least some experience. This often comes from having worked with their dad, husband, or family members, or doing a project because they needed to (i.e., there is/was nobody else to do it or somebody else – usually a husband – will not or cannot do it). There are also some women who have proficient and advanced home improvement skills. Most of these "expert" women have developed their skills by taking on multiple and varied projects at home, and a couple of women work in home improvement, either as a side business or their primary occupation. "Expert" women are exceptional at the workshops, rather than the norm; however, given the BBHR emphasis on women's lack of home improvement expertise and confidence (as the rationale for offering women-only workshops), there are more workshop participants who have some experience of home improvement projects than those who do not. Women's home improvement experience becomes apparent during workshops because there is much sharing of stories (positive and negative), experiences with specific products and tools, and often support or encouragement as well (e.g., "If I can do it, anyone can do it."). One other difference among the women who attend the BBHR women's workshops is this: many attend the workshops in order to learn how to do home improvement projects themselves (or with their partners or other informal "help"); others want to learn what they should know when hiring somebody to do the work for them (i.e., to learn the correct language, what to ask about, what to look for when the work is being done, etc.). Sometimes women with the latter perspective change their mind and decide that they could undertake the project themselves, and occasionally the reverse is true – women who planned to do-it-herself decide that the project is actually too complicated or involved. At some workshops, there are women who have attended for purely social reasons. That is, they have no interest in the topic or building project for that week or month, but attend anyway to visit with the other women, and sometimes to help others with their projects.

Workshop instructors and organizers

At BBHR store One, instructors (or leaders) for the women's workshops are any store associates (employees) who are considered "expert" on the topic and/or who is available for the day and time of the workshop. Since September 2007, there have been two main organizers of the women's workshop. Both are women, and they held this position at different times. The first organized the women's workshops from 2006 until mid-way through 2008. She was a store associate who did some home improvement work herself outside of BBHR, but whose knowledge was more limited to the particular department within the store in which she worked. The second organizer was assigned responsibility for a new women's workshop initiative in December 2007, and continues to organize the store's women's workshops today. She has more personal experience with

home improvement projects and, for various reasons, has existing relationships with BBHR vendors (companies whose tools and products are sold in BBHR stores) that she is able to mobilize to offer new opportunities to the workshops – in the form of topic, product, and building knowledge and skills. In addition, she is recognized in the area as a result of appearing, for BBHR, on a local morning television program, and unlike the first organizer, her name is attached to the women’s workshops at store One (e.g., advertised on the monthly calendar and posters advertising the workshops). With few exceptions, the sales representatives from BBHR vendors who serve as occasional instructors for the women’s workshops are men. Again with few exceptions, the in-store “experts” (sales associates from relevant departments in the store such as flooring or plumbing) who instruct the women’s workshops are men. This means that men instructors deliver the content of the majority of the women’s workshops offered by store One. It is rare for the woman organizer of the women’s workshops to leave the workshop room during the women’s workshops, and she often reminds the men instructors to explain certain things, shares her own experiences and tips, and strongly encourages them to make time and opportunities for the participants to try the tools, products, and skills discussed. For example, she might ask the workshop instructor to explain a term, or provide more background for understanding the steps of a project. Many of the workshops – especially the building workshops – are instructed/led by the women’s workshop organizer herself. The only time she is absent from the women’s workshops is when she is not in the store (due to illness or vacation), and when she is required to work in her department during the workshop time (i.e., a problem with scheduling). Sometimes during a women’s workshop she leaves the workshop area to collect tools, products, or information for the workshop.

At BBHR store Two, the initial decisions about workshop instruction were very different than store One. Workshop leaders were all women, and they had a team of women store associates supporting them (this “team” eventually dwindled to one store associate who was often scheduled to work in her department during the workshop time). This meant that sometimes the woman leading the workshop was not an “expert” on the topic being addressed, and she would be learning along with the participants (though she had often spent time in the week or day before the workshop learning the necessary information from BBHR resources, and from other store associates). Starting in December 2007 (until March 2009), one BBHR woman associate organized monthly women’s workshops, and she also instructed most of them. Occasionally, a sales representative from a BBHR vendor was invited in to instruct a workshop (e.g., about power tools), or another store associate was asked to instruct all or a portion of a workshop in order to share their topic-specific expertise and experience. In most cases, these ‘other’ instructors were men. This is one of the major differences between the women’s workshops organized at BBHR store One and store Two: the workshop organizers at store Two interpreted the workshop intention to be “women learning from women”, as well as women learning home improvement knowledge and skills “with” other women. At store One, the commitment has remained to offering the workshops – as a space and time for women to learn about home improvement with other women – but learning from whoever is considered “expert”, or, most often, from whoever is available.

What are the women's workshops? – Organization

Women's workshops offered between 2007 and 2010 at the two BBHR stores that are the focus of this study fall into two main categories. The first are women's workshops mandated by BBHR head office which are held at all BBHR stores across Canada at the same time, on the same day. These workshops are advertised on the company website and in the promotional flyers, as well as on the weekly and monthly calendars of workshop offerings displayed and distributed in the store. Guidelines for these workshops (a type of curriculum) are provided to the workshop leader and follow the same model as all workshops offered in the store. Throughout 2007 to 2010, weekly workshops should have been available at all stores (with the exception of the time when monthly workshops were being organized). However, store One did offer weekly women's workshops (even while they were offering the monthly workshops), and store Two did not. When I first inquired at store Two, I was told that the weekly women's workshops were not being run due to a lack of interest. Starting around mid-2009, both stores One and Two offered weekly women's workshops, and the workshops were consistent across the stores, e.g., the same topic, on the same evening, at the same time as dictated by BBHR head office, and reflecting a renewed commitment to weekly women's workshops initiated by BBHR head office. Since September 2007, the weekly workshops at store One have changed – from workshops decided on in-store by the women's workshop organizer, sometimes in consultation with the women participants, to a combination of head office-mandated and store-based workshops. That is, when BBHR re-committed to the weekly women's workshops and rolled out the plan to stores, they mandated only one hour for women's workshops. Previously, the women's workshops, weekly and monthly, had been scheduled for two hours each. Store One continues to offer some two-hour workshops, often with a building and take home component. Sometimes this means that the workshop instructor (the women's workshop organizer) presents two separate things during one two-hour workshop: 1) the building project, which is a project often requested by the participants themselves; and 2) the head office-mandated workshop that is advertised on the website, in the flyers, and on the calendars. At store One, then, the women's workshop organizer (with the tacit approval of the in-store management) is negotiating between somewhat autonomous and partially participant-directed offerings, and the requirement of all BBHR stores to offer the advertised women's workshop program.

The second category of women's workshops offered between 2007 and 2010 is monthly workshops organized by the women's workshop organizer and/or in consultation with representatives from a few BBHR stores in the area. These workshops – which stopped being offered at store Two in March 2009, and which continue to be offered but with less consistency at store One – were initially organized as special events, distinct from the store's other workshop offerings, and included food and beverages, door prizes, and sometimes special guests or vendor involvement. Stores provided the money for food and beverages, and offered the door prizes. At times, prizes came from vendors as well, especially if a sales representative for a particular vendor was involved in presenting the workshop. During the workshop, the instructor would take breaks to pull names for smaller prizes (e.g., "how to" books), and there was usually a larger prize (grand prize) as the final one of the night. At store Two's first monthly workshop, the grand prize was a

tool box full of tools including a hammer, saw, screwdrivers, electric drill, and other items such as safety glasses, hooks, and a measuring tape (the prize was worth as much as \$200). Other grand prizes were smaller, but still impressive, such as a ceiling fan or cans of deck wash and stain. Stores also scheduled associates to work at the workshops, instead of working in their usual position within the store, i.e., in a specific department or at the customer service desk. For the first few months, monthly women's workshops at both stores One and Two involved a team of women associates who would perform various tasks during the workshop. These included: setting up the workshop room; making sure that participants signed in, and their names were entered in the prize draws; distributing information packages and other trinkets to participants (e.g., BBHR pens); assisting with demonstrations; reminding the workshop instructor to stop for prize draws and for food; laying out the food and drinks; taking photographs; and helping to answer questions. Sometimes, a member of the team would take over the workshop instruction for topics about which she was especially knowledgeable or experienced. As the monthly workshops began to wind down at store Two, the decreased resources devoted to them were apparent to participants because only the women's workshop organizer was present during the workshops, food and beverage offerings diminished and then disappeared entirely, and there were fewer or no prizes. Further, the women's workshop organizer revealed that there was no longer time in her schedule to plan and organize the workshops, so it was more difficult for her to present them. Though store One continues to offer some monthly workshops, there has been a similar dwindling of resources devoted to them with respect to the number of associates, food, beverage, and prize offerings, and organization.

Women's dual roles as BBHR customers and women's workshop participants are often emphasized during workshops. For example, store flyers (advertising sales and new products) are included with information packages, or distributed to participants at the beginning of workshops. Sometimes workshop instructors direct participants to particularly good in-store sales, or make them aware of upcoming sales and promotions, especially when these are relevant to the topics, tools, or products being discussed. Many women admit that if there is something they need (e.g., lightbulbs, paint, screws), they will wait until the workshop evening to make their purchase at BBHR instead of going to another store right away. Women might arrive early at the store, or stay late after a workshop, to shop. On the flip side of encouraging women's workshop participants to also be BBHR customers, participants share information with each other about sales at other home improvement stores, and sometimes encourage other participants to go elsewhere because an item is "much cheaper". Occasionally women's workshop instructors will even tell participants that they should try a BBHR competitor because they have better prices or better selection. Often this is said quietly, and sometimes with a caveat that "I will deny it if you tell anyone." This perceived honesty on the part of the instructors, and having the participant/customer's best interests at heart, works – along with the women's workshops – to engender a feeling of loyalty to BBHR among some workshop participants, and a qualified commitment to "shop here when I can". In general, the women's workshops are dependent on having an invested organizer, supportive store management, and a commitment from BBHR head office. When there

are changes to any of these components, the effects on the women's workshops are very real (and obvious) for the workshop participants. The dependence of the women's workshop on in-store factors (organizer and managers) means that in spite of some consistency across BBHR stores, the women's workshops can look and feel very different from one store to another. Also, changes made at head office with respect to organization and workshop offerings are intended for all stores, and thus do not take into account the specifics of any one store (e.g., the success of the monthly workshops versus a lack of success with weekly workshops at store One). As one women's workshop organizer said, head office decisions are based on "flavour of the month" trends, and as a result, the lifespan of something like the women's workshops, in any one format, is limited.

Time and Cost

Weekly women's workshops at BBHR stores are held one evening each week for one or two hours. This has been the case since at least 2007, though at that time, some stores had stopped offering the workshops due to lack of interest. As of 2010, BBHR renewed the weekly women's workshops and every store is expected to offer the same workshop content at the same time and day each week. At store One, weekly workshops have always been offered, and monthly women's workshops were introduced – in addition to the weekly workshops – in December 2007, and these continued to be held regularly until late 2009 when they started to be offered more sporadically. The monthly workshop was held on a different weekday evening, but in the same timeslot (6 to 8p.m.). The monthly workshops also started at store Two in December 2007, and ended in March 2009. At that point, store Two began to offer the head office-mandated weekly women's workshops, scheduled for 7 to 8p.m. According to a BBHR store Two manager, the weekly workshops do not have the same attendance as the monthly workshops did, and often no women attend. With the exception of some special event women's workshops organized at store One (scheduled for a full day on a weekend), all weekly and monthly women's workshops have been, and continue to be organized on weekday evenings. The most regular participants in the women's workshops – women who attend almost every week or month – spend two to three hours each week or month at the workshops. Women whose attendance is more intermittent spend significantly less time at the workshops. Some women, in preparation for, or in the aftermath of, a building project will spend additional time outside of the workshop. For example, women might go to BBHR store One on a non-workshop day to purchase materials, especially wood, needed for the project, and they might even have their wood cut in the store, or cut it at home, so they are prepared to start assembling their project at the workshop. This might be done to avoid some of the waiting time associated with having a number of women share one electric saw. After a workshop, some women finish their projects at home, for example, painting a frame or deck chairs, cleaning grout from a tiled box lid, or finishing the assembly of a project. This requires women to have some tools available to them at home, and many of the workshop participants are able to do this. It is a running joke among women's workshop regulars to inquire about each other's incomplete projects (e.g., "Did you ever finish that birdhouse?", "How's that thing you made for your kitchen?"). Some women even make claims that they cannot start any more projects until

they have finished some of their unfinished ones, or they complain that there is no more space in their garages for new, incomplete projects. This seems to suggest that many women do not find the time outside of the workshops to complete projects they have started there.

Women's home improvement workshops at BBHR stores are organized in such a way that there is no expectation that women attend. In fact, even when stores One and Two encouraged women to sign up for the workshops in advance (in a women's workshop binder stored at the customer service desk), there was no penalty or consequence to women for signing up and then not attending a workshop. And women who had not signed up could always attend and participate in the workshop. This allows women walking by the workshop space to stop and decide to stay at the workshop, and for women who need or want to leave early to leave a workshop whenever they choose. For the first six months or so of the monthly women's workshops at store Two, a customer service associate working during the day would call all of the women who had signed up to remind them of that evening's workshop. A number of women expressed their appreciation for this, as it helped them to remember the workshops and, for others, it confirmed that the workshop was going to happen so they did not have to drive to the store for no reason. Other women would only "remember" the women's workshop when they happened to stop at BBHR for other reasons but during the workshop time. Seeing a group of women in the workshop space would remind them that this was a workshop night. All in all, there is no commitment required for participation in the women's workshops. A woman could attend once and never again, or, as many women do, she could decide to attend every week or month. The level of commitment is completely self-determined. It is interesting to note though that once women have attended a few workshops, the other regulars tend to expect them. That is, they will enquire about absences when a woman returns to the workshops, and/or have conversations every now and again about women who did attend regularly and now do not. If a regular participant has seen them (i.e., run into them somewhere else, or in the store at a different time than the women's workshop), they update the rest of the group about that woman, and often pass along her regrets about not being able to attend due to other commitments and obligations. Some of the women's workshop regulars develop relationships with each other that then extend beyond the workshops. Most often, this takes the form of staying in the workshop space to socialize after the workshop has ended, or sometimes if a workshop is cancelled. For two consecutive years, the regulars at store One have gone to a nearby restaurant for drinks and food with the women's workshop organizer in mid-December as a celebration of the holidays, and of the women's workshop (there was little overlap between the two groups of women who attended both years). Three women from store One joined a fitness class together, and others have met outside of the workshops to assist each other with home improvement projects (e.g., building a shed).

All workshops, including weekly and monthly women's workshops, are offered at no cost to the participants. The only exception is when the group works on individual building projects such as deck chairs. In these instances, women must buy their own wood and hardware in order to make their own project, which they then take home with them at the end of the night. Women are able to use tools (and standard nails and screws)

provided by the store free of charge. When purchasing materials for a project, women are sometimes able to choose between different qualities of the material in order to control their spending on the project. For example, a woman might choose to use cheaper wood to build something if her primary purpose for building it is to have the experience of using the tools, and going through the process. Others might use more expensive wood that is closer to furniture-quality, if they intend to use the project in their home or give it away as a gift. Occasionally, such as for a workshop about using a router, the women's workshop organizer is able to provide a piece of wood for each woman so that they can participate, in this case by routing edges and a groove to make their own cutting boards. In general, then, the commitment of time and money needed to participate in the women's home improvement workshops is relatively low, and each woman is able to determine the extent of her involvement.

Where are the women's workshops? – Location

At both BBHR stores One and Two, the women's workshops are most often held in the store's designated workshop room. The workshop room is the site of all workshops run in the store, not only the women's workshops, and is a space located along the front wall of the store. Enclosed on three sides, and open to the store on the fourth, the workshop room is lined on two or three sides with magazines and books. As a result of its layout, customers and store associates walking by the workshop room can look into the room and see and hear what is going on. Also, because of the books and magazines in the workshop room, customers – both women and men – often enter the space during workshops to look for magazines, and sometimes they sit and look through magazines during the workshops. Inside the workshop room there are tables and chairs, usually two or three tables with four chairs at each table. During the women's workshops, these tables are sometimes moved out to accommodate more participants, and more chairs or benches are added. The workshop room can comfortably fit up to about thirty or forty women, depending on how it is organized, and mainly for a more lecture and demonstration style workshop. When women have the opportunity for hands-on participation or when they are building a project, the workshop room can accommodate significantly fewer participants (approximately eight to twelve women). This number depends on the kinds and number of tools being used, and the size of the actual project. In store One, because of the building workshops that are offered, some materials and tools for the women's workshops are stored in the workshop room. A miter saw and band saw sit on top of tables pushed against a wall, and drills, hammers, pliers, screws, nails, etc. are stored in locked cupboards. Using the workshop room for storage is a contentious issue at store One, and the women's workshop organizer consistently negotiates this arrangement with the store management. When building projects continue for more than one week, participants are required to pack everything up (the incomplete project and as yet unused materials), take it all home at the end of the night, and bring it all back the following week. This places practical limitations on the size of project the women can build in the workshops.

In the workshop room, the store's sound system is audible, and music, announcements, reminders about safety, and calling associates to specific departments often interrupts the workshop instructor. Also, there is noise from machines used to move

large items through the store (which emit a persistent warning signal), and from customers and store associates speaking to each other outside the workshop room. Occasionally the noise from the women's workshops can be disruptive to the store. Especially when women are using power tools during workshops (e.g., a nail gun with a compressor) there is good natured joking and complaining about the noise from the workshop room that can be heard in the store, and especially at the neighbouring customer service desk. Staff members at the customer service desk also have to deal with some of the sawdust created when the women use saws and routers in the workshop room. Sometimes store associates or managers enter the workshop room to comment about the noise made by the women, especially the laughing, though there is a lot of talking, and at times clapping, as well. These comments are often directed at the women's workshop organizer, with a suggestion that she should do some "real work". At times, this type of comment is used by another store associated – usually a woman – to warn that a manager is in the area, and maybe it should be a bit quieter or, at least, not so raucous.

A large calendar of the week is posted in the workshop room, listing all of the days of the week and the title and time of the workshop(s) held each day. Sometimes, additional signs are added to advertise a special event such as a basement renovation event running all weekend that includes workshops and discounts. Also available in the workshop room are monthly calendar handouts that include the title and time of every workshop for the month. In both BBHR stores, letter paper-size posters have been made to advertise the monthly women's workshops. These are hung in the workshop room, on the door of the women's bathroom, and inside the women's bathroom. With the exception of the occasional sign advertising this month's women's workshop, there is nothing in the workshop room that designates it as the space of the women's workshops. It is the space where all workshops are held, and when there is not a workshop, it is the space where customers can sit down to wait for somebody, or to look through the large selection of books and magazines. In store One, a large pink sign painted with the women's workshop name and the store logo is hung at the front of the workshop room. The sign was painted by one of the store's associates and has been used at some of the larger women's workshop events, such as presenting at the local home show, and for workshops held outside the workshop room (in other parts of the store and outside the store). When hung in the workshop room, the sign is up very high, and is out of anybody's sight line. It faces into the workshop room, so that you have to be inside the room and looking up to see it. It is unclear if the sign in this location is intended to advertise the women's workshops, or simply to store the sign.

When relevant or necessary, workshops are held outside of the workshop room, such as in the garden centre, seasonal section (adjacent to the store's main entrance), or outside the store (immediately in front of the store or in the parking lot). The women's workshop is moved for a number of reasons. Most often, it is to more easily accommodate a large number of participants (for both spectating and building). Other times, it is to better advertise and draw attention to a special guest workshop presenter, for example, a carpenter from a home improvement television program. On very limited occasions, the women's workshop is moved to allow the participants to build a large

project such as a shed, deck, or deck chair. Outside the workshop room, the women's workshop is even more likely to attract attention, and have customers walk by and stop to watch for a while. It is very common for customers, both women and men, to do this even when the women's workshop is held in the workshop room. The workshop room allows customers to stand outside. Sometimes customers, both women and men, walk into the workshop room during the women's workshop to ask questions about the topic or the workshop itself, or to look at the tools and products being discussed and used. When the women's workshop is held in the workshop room, the workshop instructor and sometimes workshop participants regularly initiate "field trips" into the store to visit relevant departments and aisles. "Field trips" entail the entire group of women leaving the workshop room to walk through the store, and often stand in the aisles to learn more about specific projects and products. Depending on the size of the group, the women's workshop participants sometimes block the aisle, and it can be difficult for customers and store associates to move through the group. Outside of the workshops, some women's workshop participants have arranged to meet at the local home show, have a meal and drinks at restaurants near the store, to attend fitness classes together, and assist each other with home improvement projects at their respective houses. These are often the regulars who see each other every week or month, and develop personal and social relationships with each other.

Appendix B: Consent Form

January 2009

Letter of Information and Consent Form: “Women’s Experiences of Women Only Leisure Activities”**Principal Investigator**

Michele Donnelly
 Department of Sociology
 McMaster University
 Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
 donnemk@mcmaster.ca

Supervisor

Dr. Michael Atkinson
 Department of Sociology
 McMaster University
 Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
m.f.atkinson@lboro.ac.uk

Purpose of the study

In this study, I hope to learn more about women’s experiences of women only leisure activities (for example, women’s flat track roller derby, women only learn to ride snowboard camps, women only do-it-yourself workshops). Through interviews with women who have participated in such activities, as well as with those who have organized, instructed, and otherwise been involved in the development and running of women only leisure activities, I hope to learn about the reasons women choose to be involved, and the various ways their involvement is experienced. The data collected in this research will contribute to my PhD dissertation in sociology.

Procedures involved in the research

You are being asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to one hour. As an interview participant, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your experiences of participating and/or being involved in a women only leisure activity. For example, I will ask how you learned about the women only leisure activity in which you are involved, the reasons you decided to become involved, reactions to your involvement from family and friends, and what you like and dislike about your involvement. The interview will take place at any time, in any setting you prefer, or via the medium of your choice (telephone, e-mail). I will pay for, or reimburse you for, all long distance telephone calls, postage, local transportation and parking costs. With your consent, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed.

Potential harms, risks or discomforts

McMaster University requires that participants in university supported research be informed of the possible risks involved. The possible risks involved in this study are minimal, and it is very unlikely that you will find any of the interview questions upsetting. It is possible, however, that some of the questions may lead to you thinking about experiences that you found frustrating or annoying. If any questions make you uncomfortable or you prefer not to answer, you may choose not to answer, or to discontinue the interview. You may also worry about how others might react to what you say. I describe below the measures I will take to ensure the confidentiality of your participation.

Potential benefits

Though this research will not benefit you directly, I hope that what I learn will help me to understand more about why women in Canada in the 2000s choose to participate in women only leisure activities. This could benefit municipal policy makers, as well as other administrators, to develop programs that are relevant to and beneficial for women. It also contributes to an understanding of contemporary gender relations.

Confidentiality

Unless you indicate otherwise, your name will not be used in the written and oral reports of the findings of this research, and I will make all attempts to keep your identity confidential by using pseudonyms, and not making reference to specific details that would allow you to be identified. However, you should be aware that because of the relatively small size of the group and the interesting nature of the activity in which you are involved, some people reading about the study might be able to identify you. Please keep this in mind through the interview.

The information obtained by me will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office, and will be available only to me and my supervisor. All data will be kept securely for no fewer than five years.

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can change your mind about participating at any time. I will be the only one who knows whether you participated or not. If at any point during the interview you decide that you do not wish to continue, you may withdraw from the study without consequences by simply telling me that you would like to stop. If you decide to withdraw, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise.

Information about the study results

If you are interested in receiving a summary of the findings of this study, please indicate your interest below. If you decide later that you would like to receive a summary of findings, please send me an e-mail message. This research project is the first stage in ongoing research that I hope to continue after I complete my PhD dissertation (by August 2010), and the data collected for this study may be used again in future research regarding women only leisure activities. The information collected for this research may be used for conference and other presentations, and publications.

Rights of research participants

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact Michele Donnelly (donnelmk@mcmaster.ca OR 905 528 5600).

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by PhD student, Michele Donnelly of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time or choose not to answer specific questions, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

I agree that the interview will be recorded.
(check here)

Signature of participant

I would like to receive a summary of the findings. (check here) Please contact me by mail or e-mail at this address:

Appendix C: Interview Guides**Women's workshop organizers and executives**

- Can you tell me about the workshops offered in [BBHR] stores?
 - Why are they offered?
 - How are they organized? (e.g., how are topics decided, etc.)

- Can you tell me about the history of the women's workshops offered in [BBHR] stores?
 - When were they introduced?
 - How were they introduced?
 - Where? By who?
 - Pilot projects / autonomous in store offerings
 - Different versions of workshops for women

- How were/are decisions made about offering a women-only workshop option?
 - Who is involved in the decision making?

- Why has the [BBHR] decided to offer a women-only workshop option?
 - Meeting a demand / creating a demand

- Have you been involved with organizing/implementing other women-only programs or activities? (At [BBHR] or elsewhere)
 - Does the company have a history of organizing/implementing women-only programs or activities? (e.g., for customers, staff, etc.)

- Can you speak about the [BBHR]'s experience of offering the women's workshops?
 - What guidelines are in place for the women's workshops? (e.g., are workshop leaders told what to do if a man wants to join the group?, do workshop leaders receive training? Is any training specific to the women-only workshops?)

- How successful are the women's workshops?
 - How is success measured/determined?
 - Is this the same with all [BBHR] workshops?

- What kind of feedback do you receive from participants?
 - Do they refer specifically to the women *onlyness* of the workshops?
 - How is feedback provided? (e.g., in person, telephone, etc.)

- What kind of feedback do you receive from instructors/employees and/or from store managers?
 - Do they refer specifically to the women *onlyness* of the workshops?

- What kind of feedback does [BBHR] receive, if any, from non-participants in the women's workshops? (e.g., men customers)

-- Is there anything you would like to add about the do-it-herself workshops?

Thank you -- Would it be okay if I contacted you to follow up (if I have more questions)?

Women's flat track roller derby – Organizers

-- Can you tell me about how you got involved in roller derby?

-- How did you hear about it?

-- Where?

-- Who was involved? (friends, family, etc.)

-- Why roller derby?

-- Were you around during the TXRD-TXRG split?

-- What did you know about earlier versions of roller derby when you were getting involved?

-- Can you talk about the women-only organization of this version of roller derby?

-- How did it happen?

-- Who decided?

-- How did decisions get made?

-- How was it discussed (e.g., what explanations of justifications, if any, were given for including only women as skaters)?

-- Support or objection from people involved?

-- What do you think?

-- Positives/negatives?

-- Have you been involved with organizing other (leisure) activities?

-- Women-only?

-- Participation in women-only activities?

-- In your experiences, how are men involved in roller derby?

-- Positives/negatives?

-- What do you think would be different if this version of roller derby was co-ed?

-- How do you think men's leagues/roller derby are different from women's leagues/roller derby?

-- In general, what kinds of feedback have you received from skaters and others involved in roller derby?

-- Does anybody refer specifically to the women onlyness of derby? Who?

-- Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to add/share?

Thank you -- Would it be okay if I contacted you to follow up (if I have more questions)?

Women's workshop participants

A. Getting involved

- How did you get involved in the women's workshops?
- How long have you been involved?
- Why were you interested in the workshops?/getting involved in the workshops?
 - What did you know about the women's workshops when you started?
 - What attracted you to the women's workshops?
 - Is this still the case? (Are you still attracted by the same things that attracted you originally?)
- What was the process of getting involved?
 - How did you learn about the women's workshops?
 - Do you know anyone (e.g., friends, family members, others) who participate in or have participated in the women's workshops or something similar?
- Have you ever done anything like this before?/Have you previously (or concurrently) participated in similar activities?
 - What types of activities?
 - How are they similar?
 - What are the differences?
 - Does/did anybody in your family participate in anything like the women's workshops?
 - Does/did anybody among your friends (social group/acquaintances) participate in anything like the women's workshops?
 - Is there anybody in particular whose experiences have influenced your own participation in the women's workshops? [Would you have done it alone?]
- How, if at all, have your previous experiences prepared you for participating in the women's workshops? For example, experiences of family, school, work, recreation, etc.
- Before becoming involved, did you ever imagine yourself being interested in this type of activity (diy home improvement)? Why or why not?

B. Experiences of involvement

- Please describe what you think might be your typical experience of the women's workshops.
 - How much time do you spend at the workshops? How much time do you spend on activities related to the workshops (e.g., work around your house)?
 - How do you feel before going to the women's workshops?
 - How do you feel afterwards?
 - Please describe some experiences that were not typical.
- What role, if any, does your experience of the women's workshops play in your everyday life?

- How has your behaviour (daily activities, recreational activities) changed since you started participating in the women's workshops?
- How do you balance your involvement in the women's workshops with your other responsibilities at home and work (leisure/recreation and work)?
- What kinds of things do you think differently about since you started participating in the women's workshops? (How has your thinking changed?)
- Do you think/feel differently about yourself since you started participating in the women's workshops? Why do you think this?
- What is the importance of the women's workshops in your everyday life?

- What do you enjoy about the women's workshops?
 - What is your favourite part?

- Is there anything you don't like about the women's workshops?
 - What would you change if you could?

- Who have you discussed your involvement in the women's workshops with?
 - Have family/friends shown an interest?
 - What kinds of reactions to your involvement do you get from other people? (positive, negative – both, neither)
 - Family? (parents, siblings, children, etc.)
 - Friends?
 - What about co-workers or other acquaintances?
 - How do they express their feelings about the workshops?
 - Have you received different reactions from women versus men?
 - Is there anybody you don't want to know about your participation in the women's workshops? Why?
 - Is there anybody you couldn't wait to tell about your participation?

- How do you make time for the women's workshops?
 - Do you work?
 - Paid work outside the home?
 - Other kinds of work?
 - What kinds of household responsibilities do you have?
 - Do you share these responsibilities with anyone?
 - How do the women's workshops fit into your daily/weekly schedule?

C. Women only-ness

- What drew you to participate in a women-only workshop?
 - What has been your experience of the workshops as women-only activities? Please explain.
 - Please describe what it is like learning from other women?
 - Please explain. Can you give any examples?
 - Please describe what it is like learning with other women?
 - Please explain. Can you give any examples?
- When you talk to people about the workshops, do you say that they are women-only?

- What do you say?
- How do you explain why they are women-only? (Does this come up?)
- What kinds of reactions/responses have you received? (from women, men)
- What do you feel are the main benefits of being involved in a women-only program?
- Is there a social element to your involvement in the women's workshops?
- Is there an opportunity to socialize with other women during (related to) the workshops?
 - If so, how does the social element affect your experience?
 - If not, ... ?
- How, if at all, are men involved in the women's workshops?
 - What do you think about men's involvement in the women's workshops?
 - Please provide examples.
 - Would you like men to be more/less involved? In what ways?
- How do you think men's involvement influences your experiences of the women's workshops?
- Do you have experience with other women-only activities or programs?
 - If yes, can you tell me about those experiences?
 - How is this experience similar/different?
 - If you stopped participating in a women-only activity or program, can you please talk about the reasons why you stopped?
 - If no, is there a reason you have not participated in other women-only activities or programs?
 - Would you seek out other women-only activities/programs in the future? Why/why not?
 - Are there particular activities you would choose to do/learn in a women-only setting? Why?

D. Demographics

(If not sufficiently covered during the interview – “Just to wrap this up...”)

- Sense of age, social class background (e.g., participant's job/occupation; if relevant (or appropriate), husband/partner's job/occupation), school/education (e.g., Did you do any of this in school?, How far did you go in school?)

E. Other

- Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you [Would it be okay if I call you again to follow up (if I have more questions)?]

Appendix D: McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) Certificate of Approval

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB) <small>c/o Office of Research Services, MREB Secretariat, GH-305/H, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</small> CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH			
Application Status: New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Project Number 2008 056			
TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Women's Experiences of Women Only Leisure Activities			
Faculty Investigator (s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
M. Atkinson	Sociology	44-0-1509-22-	m.f.atkinson@lboro.ac.uk
Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
M. Donnelly	Sociology	905-528-5600	donnelmk@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB: <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:			
COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing approval is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and approved before any alterations are made to the research.			
Reporting Frequency:		Annual:	Other:
Date: May 11, 2008		Dr. D. Maurer, Chair/ Dr. D. Pawluch, Vice-chair: <i>Almann</i>	