

Jason Wollschleger , *Whitworth University*

Drawing on interviews with skaters on teams from all over the country in the women's flat track roller Derby association (wftda), this article argues that roller Derby can be viewed as a secular alternative to religion for its participants. Following Stolz et al.'s ((Un)Believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality, and Religious-Secular Competition, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2016) argument that social and cultural change has led to a change in the religious 'competition' regime which has resulted in changes to the nature of both intra-religious competition and religious-secular competition so that religious groups now find themselves competing with secular leisure activities. This article finds support for this theory: that roller Derby functions as a secular competitor to religion in the lives of these skaters in three key ways: (1) roller Derby participants make a significant investment of time, energy, money, and physical well-being into their sport; (2) roller Derby does, in fact, satisfy most if not all of the individual needs traditionally satisfied by religion as identified by Stolz et al (2016). ((Un)Believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality, and Religious-Secular Competition, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2016); and, (3) participation in roller Derby does conflict with individuals' formal religious involvement.

Catholicism has a large community to offer, and it is an international community, very much like Derby. When I got started in Derby, I did not really find the need to go to church so much anymore.

Religious-Secular Competition

Recently, in their book entitled *(Un)believing in Modern Society*, Stolz et al. (2016) put forward a theoretical perspective in which they argue that as a result of cultural and social shifts, including secularization at the institutional level, there has been a move toward what they call the me-society. In which, individuals have more ability to define themselves and choose what they want to participate in, and in which religion¹ has become a choice rather than a social necessity or obligation. Given these changes, they argue that in the me-society, religions and religious groups are no longer just competing with other religious groups for power within society, for the authority and legitimacy to interpret, and for individual demand. Rather they are competing with other religions and religious groups as well as secular alternatives (including leisure and other collective activities). There has been a sea change in the religious

competition regime: the nature of both intra-religious and religious–secular competition has changed. The traditional religious patterns are no longer holding, and established religions are now facing competition both outside of the traditional church as well as from secular sources. Recent scholarship on religion outside of congregations abounds, but very little has been done to explore the religious–secular competition².

Religion Outside of Congregations

Within the sociology of religion, there has been a recent move to the study of religion outside of the confines of the congregation (Ammerman 2014a), toward the study of religion at the edges (Bender, Cadge and Levitt 2012; Cadge and Levitt 2011). Scholars are no longer focusing exclusively on patterns of religious participation and attendance in houses of worship but on the lived and everyday religious experiences and practices of people (Ammerman 2014a, 2014b; McGuire 2008). This decentering of focus off of the institutional church and re-centering onto the lived experiences of people (Cadge et al. 2011) has included a look at the practice of religion in other institutions, such as medicine (Cadge 2013), airports (Cadge 2017), and among scientists (Ecklund and Scheitle 2007), as well as inside people’s homes and lives through the use of religious narratives – both visual through photo elicitation and oral narratives (Ammerman 2014b; Ammerman and Williams 2012; Williams 2010). Concurrently there has been a move to studying religious-like experiences outside of religion: this includes studies of non-religion (Stolz et al. 2016), spirituality in everyday lives (Kucinkas, Wright and Matthew Ray 2017), organized atheism (Garcia and Blankholm 2016; Smith 2013), and secular spiritualities, such as the Sunday Assembly (Frost 2019; Goldman and Pfaff 2017), and the spiritual lives of religious nuns (Drescher 2016).

Competition Over Individual Demands for Goods

This growing body of literature on religion outside of congregations lends support for Stolz et al.’s (2016) argument that the nature of intra-religious competition is changing, but very little if any scholarship has looked at the nature of secular–religious competition. Stolz et al. argue that there are three “highly desirable objects” (p. 25) that collective actors compete for in society: power at the level of the society as a whole; power, influence, and the authority to interpret in groups, organizations, and milieus; and, individual demands for goods (p. 25–27). It is the third of these that this article is focused on: the religious–secular competition over individual demands for goods. What they mean by this is that “religious and secular ‘suppliers compete with each other for the individual’s demand for goods, participation, and financial support” (Stolz et al.

2016, p. 26). Furthermore, this competition over individuals' goods, participation, and financial support arises because often the secular and religious are satisfying the same individual needs and because of macro-level social and cultural changes that have left individuals as their own authority who have the freedom to define themselves and choose how they invest their resources:

In the individualistic regime of the me-society, though, the most important religious–secular struggle is that which relates to individual demand. Religious practice is now no longer a social expectation; it is no longer something that belongs to the public person. Rather, it has been relegated to the domain of leisure time, where it faces stiff competition from other forms of 'leisure activity' and 'self-development' (Stolz et al. 2016, p. 5).

This competition is 'stiff' because secular competitors are sometimes able to satisfy the same needs that have traditionally been met by religion. In table 2.1, Stolz et al. (2016) lists these needs satisfied by religion which have secular competitors; they are: "help with problems; security, health, success; inner peace, and harmony; interpretation of the world, meaning; structuring of life; social identity, and social capital" (p. 27).

This article explores one such sport/leisure activity that serves as an alternative to religion for its participants: women's roller Derby. If Stolz et al. are correct and that leisure groups can function as a secular alternative to religion, then we can expect a couple of things. First, we would expect that roller Derby participants do, in fact, invest a lot of themselves, that is, the individuals' investment of goods, participation, and financial support into roller Derby – into the sport. Second, we would expect that roller Derby does satisfy most if not all of the individual needs listed above; needs that have been traditionally satisfied through religious involvement. Finally, we would expect that participation in roller Derby would conflict with individuals' formal religious involvement.

Roller Derby

The sport is innovative in part because it is a women's sport that is full contact. For those unfamiliar with the sport of roller Derby: a game – or bout as some call it – consists of two thirty-minute halves, which are broken up into periods of play called jams. Jams last no longer than two minutes, although they can be shorter, and they are separated by thirty-second breaks in action during which time teams can substitute players on the track or send out whole new lines. These lines consist of five skaters per team, four of which are blockers and comprise the pack, and the other is a jammer. The pack is playing both offense and defense simultaneously, trying to prevent the opposing jammer from getting through, while trying to create opportunities for their jammer to get through. The jammer starts each jam behind the pack and then tries to fight

her way through the pack. Once through her initial pass, the jammer skates around the full length of the track to try to lap the pack because each opposing skater she passes on her second and subsequent laps scores the team a point. Referees regulate hitting, blocking, and other aspects of game play and assess penalties in real-time – so that a penalized skater has to skate off the track and sit in the penalty box for a period of 30 seconds.

Roller Derby as a sport started in the 1920s using a banked track. From its inception, it was a co-ed sport, with each team consisting of two squads – a men's and a women's. The game would alternate between genders by quarters. Over time, the sport morphed into sport entertainment (think pro-wrestling) suited for television, eventually disappearing altogether. The current iteration of roller Derby was started in 2001 by a group of women in Texas; flat-track roller Derby has quickly become one of the fastest spreading sports in the world. In fact, it was the innovation of playing on a flat-track rather than a banked-track that allowed it to spread so rapidly. Unlike a banked track that is large, built, and requires a permanent venue, anyone with access to a relatively flat, smooth surface could play flat-track roller Derby, including tennis courts, basketball courts, concrete warehouses, parking lots, as well as roller skating rinks. By 2004, the Women's Flat-Track Roller Derby Association (WFTDA), the governing body of the sport, was formed to regulate, coordinate, and promote roller Derby, which now has nearly 450 member leagues around the world. Local leagues are nonprofit organizations run by and for the skaters who participate. Roller Derby is much more than a sport; it is a thriving sub-culture complete with its own set of roles, norms, rituals, and gatherings, including the annual RollerCon held in Las Vegas. Since its inception, roller Derby has emphasized gender empowerment and has been strongly connected to the LGBTQ community.

Previous scholarship on roller Derby has included a look at the origins of modern roller Derby in the feminist, punk rock, riot grrrls movement (Pavlidis 2012), the do-it-yourself ethos of the sport (Beaver 2012), and the sport as feminist intervention (Pavlidis 2012; Pavlidis and O'Brien 2017). Some scholarship has focused on roller Derby and critical issues in sport and leisure research (Breeze 2013); such as the role of auto/ethnographic methods in feminist leisure research (Pavlidis 2013) and an analysis of the differences between participant observer and full observer in ethnography (Pavlidis and Olive 2014). However, most of the existing research on roller Derby has focused on issues of gender and sport (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Pavlidis and Connor 2016; Sheehan and Vadjunec 2016), portrayal of sexualities in the sport (Gieseler 2014; Sheehan and Vadjunec 2016; Strubell and Petrie 2016), and sexualization and objectification (Beaver 2016; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2015; Strubell and Petrie 2016). While gender, empowerment, personal identity, and the costs of

playing a full-contact sport are important to this article, the focus here is on how roller Derby functions as a secular alternative to religion in the daily lives of skaters.

Methods & Results

For a period of two and half years, I conducted interviews with twenty roller Derby skaters. I used a combination of convenience sampling and snow-ball sampling and built my sample around my academic conference travel and regional access to a top team who drew national competition to their venue. Whenever I traveled, I reached out to local representatives of leagues with a request to interview skaters, and often these league representatives would forward my request to the skaters. Interested skaters would then reach out to me. Once I had interviewed one local skater, I would ask for recommendations of other people who might be interested in being interviewed.

The sample of skaters included skaters from the East Coast, West Coast, and Southwest. They came from major urban areas such as Seattle, Phoenix, New York City, Atlanta, Boston, and Las Vegas, as well as smaller cities such as Spokane, WA; Rochester, NY; Coeur d'Alene, ID; and Olympia, WA. The sample was comprised of skaters from all levels of the sport, from skaters representing top ten teams as well as unranked teams; including new skaters in their first year all the way to nationally known figures, including one Team USA skater. I kept sampling until I reached saturation, and there were no significantly new responses to my questions.

The interviews explored the personal backgrounds and skating experiences of the women involved in roller Derby. They also explored how participation in roller Derby has affected their lives, work, and relationships, as well as connections between roller Derby and gender and sexual identities (full list of questions available upon request). This project was originally focused on gender empowerment and violent sports. It was only after the first round of open coding of the transcribed interviews that the way that roller Derby functioned as an alternative to religion began to emerge quite strongly and quite unexpectedly. I followed this round of open coding with a second round of coding, focusing on these themes of community, belonging, social support, empowerment, spirituality, religion, costs, commitment, conversion, and a new identity. It was only after this second, thematic round of coding that I made the connection from the data to Stolz et al.'s theory, and so I performed a third round of coding for this analysis. Thus, this analysis followed a grounded theory approach (Strauss 1987; Suddaby 2006) as it was an inductive process that began by listening to the data and moving up toward theory.

Individual Investment

Roller Derby skaters make significant personal sacrifices on behalf of their sport, not unlike sacrifices and commitments religious adherents make for their religion (Iannaccone 1992). The costs of participation in roller Derby are fairly high, and commitment takes multiple forms: time commitment for practice and exercise, physical costs through injury, relational sacrifices, financial investment, and volunteer work.

The amount of time commitment for practice varies across leagues and even within leagues. The larger leagues are organized with home teams (3–4) and an all-star team that is drawn from across the home teams. This all-star team is the travel team and the team that is ranked at a national level. For skaters in a small league, it may only be normal to practice two to three times per week, although sometimes these can be extremely long and grueling depending on the team’s access to their practice venue and the conditions for practice as this skater from Phoenix, AZ points out:

We practice Thursday nights for about an hour and fifteen minutes and then on Sunday, we have a four-hour practice and we have an un-air-conditioned warehouse; so you can imagine how that is in the summer” (Tammy, 37, urban professional who identifies as straight)³.

In larger leagues, it is not uncommon for skaters to have a minimum of 2–3 practices per week for their home team, an all-league practice, and then another two practices per week if they are on an all-star team:

You practice 7 days a week if you’re on a team, especially if you’re on the All-Star team, absolutely. Most girls don’t [skate on the All-Star team]. I would say on the average though the girls that skate . . . probably have a minimum of three to four practices a week (Belle, 27, urban professional who identifies as straight).

Additionally, competitive skaters workout regularly on top of their practice commitments. It is not unusual for skaters on a top team to spend 3 days a week doing power lifting or strength training and then another 2–3 days doing additional cardio conditioning:

I run at least 3 days a week, I work out in my basement primarily, and I used to work out at a gym, but just between being pregnant and having two kids I gotta be home . . . I get them started on homework, I go upstairs while they’re doing it, and I get a good 40 minute run on the treadmill. I lift weights, I do a lot of kettlebell workouts, and then I skate 3 days a week. . .3 hours on Tuesday we skate two and a half hours on Thursdays, and two and a half hours on Sundays (Tanya, 32, self-employed, mother who identifies as straight).

I’ll go to the gym usually five days a week, maybe six, and I’ll practice two to three times a week. I’ll do probably close to an hour of cardio and half an hour of stretching/yoga/weights.

Try to focus on my upper body because that's what was hurt so. . . (Nadine, 28, self-employed who identifies as straight).

Beyond the physical toll and time commitment of practice, there are relational costs. Skaters speak about the reduction of meaningful relationships outside of roller Derby, including the detrimental effects of their skating on their friendships, families, and even leading to break-ups of romantic relationships, all of which are well-illustrated by the following quotes from skaters:

Oh. My friends have all left, I mean they haven't really, but I did get bad backlash from other friends who just don't get it. They feel like I've sold into a cult or something, you know, whatever. I don't see my kids as much as I would like to, I'm gone for practices two nights a week. I always have to check the Derby calendar before I make out-of-town commitments. Vacations, forget vacations. You know, we're going to Virginia next week to play Dominion, for some reason that's my idea of getting away even though it's going to be 12 hours in a van with a bunch of smelly girls there and on the ride home. There's going to be a game in the middle there somewhere and a short nap in a hotel room, but I went to Virginia Beach you know. Derby takes a lot of weekends, it takes a lot of time, and it's a commitment. It has to be number one, and it has to be okay that you have to go back to that Derby's not forever mentality to remember you take these opportunities when they're placed for you because they will not always be there. I don't have a life outside of Derby, none of us do. I mean, we do, but it's always second to Derby (Janice, 33, urban professional who identifies as queer).

Negatively, my ex really did not like me having that freedom, that thing that was just mine. Guys don't really do Derby so there wasn't really any room for him besides watching my kids. And that was his choice, you know, so he didn't like me being away for a couple hours every week for practice. So, you could say that may have hurt our relationship in whatever way, supportive, jealousy, I don't know. It's sad to say but worth it for me because it was really positive for me to have that outlet and I don't really need him (Dani, 28, service industry, single mother who identifies as straight).

So uhm, my friends that don't do Derby. . . don't understand it so they've kind of like, drifted apart because they don't understand why you'd want to commit so much of your time to something like this. Uhm, my family has a hard time to accept it. . . uhm, because I. . . I sacrifice a lot of weekends even holidays like Mother's Day uhm, where I'm pretty much always on the road for those kind of holidays. Uhm, so they resent that, but they also know at the same time like, if it makes me happy that. . . to support it. It hasn't negatively impacted. . . it's just changed. Changed drastically

(Tanya, 32, self-employed, mother who identifies as straight).

The two sets of quotes above, both on weekly training schedule and relational costs, also illustrate how roller Derby provides for one of the religious needs outlined by Stolz et al. (2016) – structuring of life. Competitive roller Derby creates a weekly and yearly structuring of time and life. It breaks the

year up into off-season, pre-season, and competition season. For the top leagues, this competition season is often broken up into an intra-league season and a national competition season. During the season, life is structured for skaters in that they often have 3–5 practices per week, 3 more days of off-skate workouts, regular meeting for their league responsibilities, and weekend travel for bouts. There are also a number of national events and tournaments, including national invite tournaments such as the ECDX, Big O, and Midwest Brewhaha; the series of regional playoffs leading up to nationals in the fall of each year; and the annual roller Derby extravaganza in Las Vegas – RollerCon. RollerCon is a mashup of seminars, workshops, pick-up bouts, sanctioned bouts by top teams, and one non-stop party. Many of the skaters I interviewed, even in smaller leagues, planned their travel money and took time off so that they could make their annual pilgrimage to RollerCon. This structuring of life can be all-encompassing, leading one skater to tell me that her family and friends thought she “had joined a cult,” and as indicated above, leading many skaters to experience relational strain as a result of their participation.

These roller Derby skaters have made significant relational sacrifices on behalf of their sport, but they also make physical sacrifices. Most skaters with even a little bit of experience have stories to tell about their injuries. Shoulder injuries from falling, knee injuries, leg breaks, and concussions are all fairly common as illustrated by these comments from skaters discussing their own injuries:

I separated my shoulder a couple times. I don't know how extensive it was because I never went to the doctor, but I know it was pretty extensive because that was like a year ago and I still have issues with it but it still works so I'm going with that

(Mary, 32, urban professional who identifies as straight).

I mean, there were a couple concussions and some falls that took a while to get up off the ground from in bouts, but all the broken legs and torn ligaments and things like that, all of that happened during practice

(Jessi, 29, full-time employee, mother who identifies as bisexual).

I have torn both PCLs in my knees. . . I have elbow injuries. . . separated both shoulders, uhm, busted fingers. . . (Nadine, 28, self-employed who identifies as straight).

This skater makes a direct connection between the physical cost of injuries and the near-religious commitment of the roller Derby skaters she knew:

Once it settles in, you just can't shake it. It really is an addiction, if you get into it. I mean, you've met . . . Is she having a great time not skating? No, she's fucking angry about it. She needs her Derby fix, that bitch is hooked. Or how about. . . how many times has that ankle

been fucking shattered? Broken? Sprained? Strained? How many surgeries is she going to have before she finally gives up the ghost on it? No, she never will. She will skate until her fucking leg falls off, and then she will get a prosthetic. So, in that regard, it is deeper than a religion, I don't know a single religion that would inspire that much physical determination and still have people coming back. Who the fuck would go to church, get punched in the face, and keep coming back? A Derby girl, that's fucking who

(Tammy, 37, urban professional who identifies as straight).

Thus, participation in roller Derby is a high-cost endeavor. Skaters must be prepared for enormous physical sacrifice in terms of exercise, practice as well as injury; and incredible time commitments, including practice and travel that lead to significant relational and familial sacrifice. Additionally, roller Derby is a DIY endeavor (Beaver 2012), and leagues are set up as nonprofit organizations. They rely on the energy and labor of their skaters for nearly all aspects of their formal organizations.

... there's still this huge commitment because it's skater run. Not only are you committing all this practice and bouting time but you're committing work time to running a league. There are a lot of friends that I just don't hang out with anymore because they're not in Derby; so I don't have time for them. It's horrible to say but it's totally true

(Jennifer, 28, service-industry, who identifies as queer).

Skaters I interviewed in this project served their leagues in a variety of ways, including: marketing and PR manager, executive board member, president of the board, vice president, accountant, bout set-up and tear down, event coordinator, coach, and conflict resolution committee member. Finally, there are no pro Derby skaters; skating is a financial investment. Skaters pay dues, pay for a mandatory skating insurance, pay their own transportation to away games, and invest in and upgrade their gear and skates.

Religious Needs

The results of the selective coding along religious themes revealed interesting trends in the responses. Not unlike the martial artists in Jennings and Brown (2010), skaters overwhelmingly talked about the types of benefits they get from participating in roller Derby, benefits that are similar to those derived from religious participation. They include a sense of belonging to a community that provides tangible emotional and social support, a sense of empowerment that they carry with them into other social settings, and real religious and spiritual benefits that even include a sense of healing. Additionally, the lived experiences of these skaters and their relationship to roller Derby is similar to that of religious people in relation to their religious group. This is true for both the sacrifices and commitments skaters make on behalf of their sport as well as for their 'conversion' into roller Derby.

Help with Problems. Skaters, much like religious participants, gain help with their problems through participation in roller Derby through two primary ways – belonging to a supportive community and the feeling of empowerment that comes through participation. A sense of belonging to a community and the social supports that come with this belonging are hallmarks of religious involvement. All the skaters in this sample universally described the sense of belonging to a tight-knit community through roller Derby. This sense of belonging is important not only for its impact on their empowerment but on the social and emotional well-being of participants. Belonging to this group is especially important for individuals who need emotional and social support. I interviewed a number of skaters who talked about their ability to come out as lesbians only after they had the support of the skating community:

And then I told her and a couple of my friends, and it worked out telling everyone else and it was way easier than I thought it was going to be and I think because I had this really strong community of people who were gay or ambiguous or straight and just didn't care because I had them to back me up, I knew I could. Even if someone did treat me poorly, I could go back to my Derby home and everything would be fine. These people love me for who I am no matter who I choose to kiss. I would say yes, is your involvement in Derby connected to your sexual identity, it's not connected to my actual sexual identity, but it is connected to how I was able to become ok with who I am and allow myself to walk down the street in Rochester holding my girlfriend's hand. Just something I never thought I was able to do until I reached 45 (Denise, 35, urban professional who identifies as queer).

Some skaters were just socially isolated and in need of a home and friends, which they found through skating:

I mean I didn't really have a lot of friends, ah, before Derby, so there were no friends to leave me or anything. So that was...if anything I gained friendships and I gained like, a whole another family (Mary, 27, service-industry who identifies as straight).

So yeah, what Derby means to you is home. You know, no home is perfect, there's no such thing. There's always going to be rough times, there's going to be people who go through rough situations, there's going to be people you bump heads with but there's so many other people to fall back on. To hold your hand, to help you through things (Jacqui, 29, service-industry who identifies as bisexual).

A couple of skaters spoke about the importance of roller Derby in creating a new community after relocating to a new city:

I mean there's lot of things I like about it but the community is what drew me into it especially knowing that I was going to be moving around a lot. It was nice when I moved to Las Vegas and just, all I had to do was one email and then I had 75 friends immediately (Tammy, 37, urban professional who identifies as straight).

Others spoke about the social and even financial support the community has provided in times of need:

My dog was hit by a car the night before a bout. The night before a bout, got nailed by a car. Lived, broke his leg, needed surgery, major expensive surgery to fix the dog . . . without me knowing, my teammates took a bucket to the bout the next day and collected money and got 7 or 800 dollars. Just an amazing amount of money to help me with the vet bills, and it was just a huge; Derby gives just as much back to you as you give to it in the most surprising ways sometimes (Tanya, 32, self-employed, mother who identifies as straight).

To these skaters, the roller Derby community is home to which they belong, friends with whom they can have fun, an important source of meaning and identity, and a resource in times of need.

Security, Health, Success. Durkheim (1995 [1912]) identified empowerment for living life as one of the primary functions religious rituals served in the lives of individuals. This focus on empowerment as a result of religious involvement has been continued and renewed through the theoretical work of Collins (2004, 2010), and the subsequent application of his interaction ritual theory to religious involvement (Wollschleger 2012; Wollschleger 2017; Baker 2010; Draper 2014; Corcoran 2015; Inbody 2015; Wellman and Corcoran 2014). A sense of empowerment was another pervasive theme throughout the interviews. This is not just a physical sense of empowerment as a result of learning to hit people while on skates but a sense of empowerment which carried forward into other areas of life, including social interactions, work, facing intimate partner violence, and for closeted LGBTQ skaters to come out.

This skater speaks about her mentorship and coaching of the new skaters and how it directly leads to a sense of empowerment, including one skater's ability to leave an abusive relationship:

But outside of practice, you know, before we even really started practicing 100%, I live like I said right by this big park that's got this huge trail that goes all the way around this kind of inner city lake pond thing. And, I would meet up with all the girls and help them skate around the lake with me. It's got big hills and big cracks in the sidewalk, and when I first met the girls I'm skating with now, most of them were just terrified of it. And, so to be able to kind of help them overcome those fears because I went through that and going through it again, it's been a really cool experience. And, it really has been cool to watch them gaining their sense of empowerment. I have one girl that's about ready to punch her husband in the face, just sick of him. She's been sick of him and has never really wanted to get up and go because she's been too scared, and now she's like I'm done, I'm over it. Just finding that strength and that courage to do what she needs to do

(Karen, 45, full-time employee, who identifies as straight).

This experience is echoed by other skaters who voiced how participating in roller Derby empowered skaters to end straight relationships and come out and to fight victimization in other ways:

And there have been a couple other skaters too who ended straight relationships to go into a gay relationship. So, I think it's probably the same for them. It's that level of empowerment and acceptance that allows them to come out or (unclear) or whatever

(Dani, 28, service industry, single mother who identifies as straight).

So, let's see, empowerment, I feel like as women, we're victims in a lot of ways. I mean we see it on the news all the time, and my parents are always afraid for me going certain places or like alone or at night and stuff like that. I just feel like that's not fair. That's just not fair for the world to be that way. People talk about women like we have our rights, like "Yay we get to vote" or we can have abortions or whatever, and like we have our rights. And I feel like we don't have rights until we feel safe enough to walk out to our car alone at night cause it's just not fair that we have to be afraid. I feel like roller Derby is kind of a way to show that, you know, we're strong, and that we don't have to be afraid of those kinds of things. I mean there will always be danger, but anything that we can do that can kind of bring us up to the level that men are at or that have been given to them or however it happened, is good. So, I think that roller Derby can definitely play a role in that. . .

(Mary, 27, service-industry who identifies as straight).

Others spoke about how it carried over into their work place, their ability to interact socially with strangers, and for motivation to overcome life challenges. For instance:

I also find myself using Derby for motivation. Like, if I'm trying to do something, and I'm just not doing it well or it's not working out or it's going to be hard, I just kind of think about roller Derby and how it's super hard, like get out there and you're like "I don't know what to do!" I still feel like that, but just have to do it, and you have to do it as hard as you can. So, I kind of try to use that in life, in my mind sometimes. I'm kind of like, "Ok, this is like roller Derby." It's really hard and I have to do it, but I have to do it as hard as I can. It's kind of like that

(Stephanie, 25, professional, who identifies as straight).

Every skater I spoke to either felt empowered in ways that they had not before as a result of participating, or they had directly witnessed this empowerment of other skaters. They characterized it as a key outcome from participation in roller Derby, especially in connection to gender and sexual identity.

In terms of health, some skaters described what they have seen in terms of participation in roller Derby's impacts on the emotional and mental health of skaters. One skater describes 'Derby as therapy' and another states "I mean, I really think...I've seen some people walk in broken and come away fixed and...and I think that's great." Another skater talks about her own healing in this moving and completely unexpected response, I received from a rising star in the Derby community:

I don't know, I mean, its super personal but I don't mind talking about it but like, when people say that roller Derby saved their souls like, it really saved mine. Like, I was in and out of mental institutions, I was on suicide watch, it was...I was on so many medications...it was ridiculous. Like, it was a really, really dark time in my life and roller Derby just like, swooped right in and gave me goals, it gave me something to look forward to, it gave me like, friends to talk to...and it just really like...after doing it for a couple years, I went off the medications and I just was...like it really did pull me out of the gutter. And that's why I feel like I'm so connected to it...and I like really...like, if I didn't have Derby, I don't know where I would be
(Belle, 27, urban professional who identifies as straight).

Inner Peace and Harmony. While no skater spoke specifically about a sense of inner peace and harmony, there is a sense of spirituality that emerges throughout the interviews. No one ever explicitly calls it this, but it is similar to what has been called mind–body spirituality elsewhere (Oh and Sarkisian 2012). Skaters describe this element of self-improvement and challenge related to the physical nature of the sport along with a sense of connectedness to others:

I love the sport, I love the competitive aspect of it, I love the challenge, and I love the camaraderie of the girls on your team, the connectedness, the singular goal, the height of the mind aspect of just bringing everyone together for a common goal, and pushing each other to get better and reach it (Sarah, 29, full-time employee, single-mother who identifies as straight).

It means something more than a sport... There's some sort of other commitment there too. It's exercise and it's like, not socialization, but interaction with... It's to getting to better myself at something that I'm already good at... Pushing yourself out there to see what you can do or finding boundaries and limits, so I think it's helped me get better at just pushing myself at something when something gets hard. I see improvement, and I want to keep pushing it even though it's difficult sometimes...

(Jennifer, 28, service-industry, who identifies as queer).

In addition to this sense of self-improvement connected to the physicality of roller Derby, many of the skaters interviewed spoke about a sense of transcendence they got from “putting on their skates.” None of them explicitly used the term transcendence or inner peace, but many of them spoke about how they felt differently once they were skating. Some of them described this feeling like being high (not unlike the way religious involvement has been described, see Wellman and Corcoran 2020); some skaters equated the feeling to being divine, to being greater than ordinary, or being “untouchable.” Others noted how everything else from their life just “fell away”, and they were able to focus on themselves and their own development. Regardless of the exact description, each of these skaters is describing a sense of transcending their ordinary lives that happens when they practice roller Derby, this transcendence leads to a sense of peace, empowerment, and sometimes just the feeling of having their

“day reset.” All of which resonates with the concept of mind–body spirituality (Oh and Sarkisian 2012).

Social Identity, Social Capital. I was surprised by the number of interviewees who, when they related their stories of how they got involved with roller Derby, told me that they were not looking to join roller Derby. For many of them, it was something that happened as a result of social ties. The importance of social ties is evident in two ways; first, many of these skaters had had a recent severing of their social network – either through a divorce or bad break-up, or through relocation for work or school: “I moved up to Washington I had no . . . friends and nobody. We moved there sight unseen for my husband’s school, and I knew that Derby was a good way to get to know people and make quick friends and also giving me something to do while my husband was trudging through law school.” Second, a lot of them were invited to go to a practice or watch a bout and then try practice by a friend as illustrated by this skater:

Uhm, well I was coming out of like a really dark period and I had very very few friends. I had like two that I would ever talk to, and it was. . .and just randomly one day we were hanging out, and she was like ‘oh my gosh have you heard of this roller Derby? I really want to do it!’ And I’m like. . .but she’s like I’m really scared so come with me, and I was like no. I never skated before; I don’t want to do it, I don’t want to meet new people. I was really like, really shy and just closed off at the time and I’m like I’m not doing that. She’s like ‘please, I don’t want to do it do it unless you’re there.’ So, I was like fine. So, I’ll go and I’ll watch you and I’ll just be there to be your friend and support you

(Mary, 27, service-industry who identifies as straight).

In this way ‘conversion’ to roller Derby skater happens in a manner similar to conversion to religion. Lofland and Stark (1965) emphasize the importance of social ties in conversion to a deviant religious identifying – both the disruption of ties to outsiders and the formation of ties to members of the group.

Additionally, skaters take on a new identity as part of their transition into roller Derby. They take on both a new name and a number. These names are often characterized by double entendres, multiple meanings, a tongue-in-cheek humor, or an indication of toughness. But they also mark an important claiming of a new identity. Skaters will often pick names and numbers that have deep personal significance to them. Such as one skater I interviewed whose number was her children’s birthdates. Not all skaters chose their own names; some were named by the team, and they adopted it. These skaters spoke to me about the importance of feeling claimed by the group and how having another name that was meaningful within that context created a powerful sense of belonging. One skater shared with me that getting a name in roller Derby was like

“finding your place.” This new identity can lead some skaters to feel like they are new people, different from their past selves or other selves, even if it is only when they are skating:

I feel so good when I'm wearing my skates. Like, I feel confident, I feel awesome, I'm like no one's fucking going to touch me! I get like...so like...I mean because I still have...I'm really shy I get social anxiety a lot around like, groups of people that I don't know like, I'm terrible at parties...if I don't know people, I'll just shut down but like once I put on skates, I'm like I know what I'm doing, you know? And it just...it just feels so good to feel good about yourself. And that's what roller Derby does for me. You know? And that's why I'm really addicted to that feeling. Not drugs, but Derby is my drug for sure. So...but a good one
(Jennifer, 28, service-industry, who identifies as queer).

As such, it is possible that their participation in roller Derby is providing them with an opportunity to experiment with a new or different identity, roles, and expectations. This is similar to what Palmer (1993) found in her research on women in new religious movements; that for many of them participation in an NRM served as an opportunity to experiment with new gender and sexual identities. Thus, not only do some skaters find roller Derby like some people find religion but also when they become full members in the group, they adopt a new name and feel as if they have been given a new identity along with new stocks of social capital.

Conflicts with Religious Involvement

As part of the interview, I asked a number of questions about the skaters' background and family life, including one about their religious involvement while growing up. This question was originally intended simply for background information, but the responses it yielded were some of the strongest indicators that roller Derby was a secular substitute for religion in these skaters' lives. In response to the question “were you religious growing up?” skaters replied with comments such as the following:

No not at all. Still not. No not at all. Unless you count going to practice on Sunday church then I do. Well, some of the skaters that I have spoken to feel that way about Derby. Yeah. That's the closest I think to religion I've ever gotten (Karen, 45, full-time employee, who identifies as straight).

Catholicism has a large community to offer, and it's an international community, very much like Derby. When I got started in Derby, I didn't really find the need to go to church so much anymore (Tammy, 37, urban professional who identifies as straight).

Or this conversation between a couple of skaters who chose to be interviewed together:

Belle: "I . . . my mom had a stint where she brought all her kids to get faith . . . and that didn't last . . . it lasted like a month. And then . . . I was never really brought up religious. My husband, however, is like a pastor's son, and his mother is a pastor's daughter; he used to live at a church. And so like, he was extremely religious. Even though . . . even though I'm like, agnostic he doesn't force anything on me, and so it's kind of just like he has his own little religion and I have my own whatever it is."

Mary: "You have Derby."

Belle: "I have Derby. Yeah, Derby . . . I . . . I have the . . . all-star gods that I worship"

(Belle, 27 and Mary, 32, both urban professionals who identify as straight).

Clearly these skaters see their own involvement in roller Derby as a substitute for religion. It is especially informative given that this was not at all what was being asked in the question, nor the intention of asking the question. For these skaters, roller Derby is a direct competitor with religion for their time and resources. Relatedly, there was only one skater in the sample who identified as a regularly practicing religious adherent, and she stated that she often felt a conflict between her religion and her sport and that as a result, she did not participate at the same level as other skaters nor did she feel like a full member in the roller Derby community, but she also felt like she was unable to fully participate in her religious involvement as a result of roller Derby.

Discussion

There were three things I expected to find if in fact roller Derby was functioning as a secular competitor to religion in the lives of these skaters. First, it was expected that roller Derby participants do, in fact, invest a lot of themselves into the sport. Second, it was expected that roller Derby does satisfy most if not all of the individual needs traditionally satisfied by religion as identified by Stolz et al. (2016). Finally, it was expected that participation in roller Derby would conflict with individuals' formal religious involvement. There's overwhelming support for the first expectation. Skaters invest a significant amount of their time, energy, finance, and other resources into their participation in the sport, and this competes directly for their participation in formal religion. As noted above, only a single skater in the sample was actively religious, and roller Derby provided a point of conflict with her religious participation.

There's a good amount of support for the second expectation – that roller Derby meets individual needs previously met by religion. In fact, there's good evidence for five of the six categories of needs outlined by Stolz et al. (2016) help with problems; security, health, success; inner peace and harmony; structuring of life; and social identity and social capital. What was not in the data was any noticeable indication that roller Derby provides skaters with an

interpretation of the world and/or meaning. Clearly, skaters get meaning out of their participation; this should be evident throughout the quotes, but it is not obvious that there is any larger meaning or new way to interpret the world. In other words, roller Derby does not seem to offer any certainty about the world or one's place in it. This is actually an important finding for our understanding of religion in society and its future given the recent research (Frost 2019) that indicates people have much more tolerance for uncertainty than has been previously theorized. When taken together, these two findings – that people have differing preferences and tolerances for uncertainty (Frost 2019), and that a sport such as roller Derby can meet almost every other need previously met by religion – strongly support Stolz et al.'s (2016) argument that the religious landscape has changed significantly and that religious organizations now face competition not only from other religious organizations but any secular organization that can provide a similar set of benefits, regardless of whether or not they can provide transcendental meaning or certainty.

That said, there may be another more fruitful way of looking at the impact of the skater's participation in roller Derby and their interpretation of the world and/or meaning. Following the study by Taves and Asprem (2018), it may be more useful to consider worldviews and ways of understanding the world from the ground-up perspective, to focus on lived worldviews rather than articulated, systematized worldviews. Drawing from the literature on worldview formation, event cognition and narrative identity, Taves et al. (2018) make the case that people develop world models without reflecting on the fact that they are doing so, and that worldviews are best understood in an evolutionary perspective and from the bottom-up “as explicitly articulated and elaborated on a need-to-know basis...lived worldviews may be more fragmentary, episodic, and situation-dependent than formal systematized worldviews would lead us to expect” (p. 212). From this perspective, it could be argued that roller Derby, in fact, does shape the worldviews of the skaters because as they practice and compete, they are reformulating models of themselves as well as their understandings of the world and their place in it. As evidenced by statements from the skaters in this article, participation in roller Derby has had a direct impact on empowerment; skating has changed their conception of themselves and their relation to and agency in the world. Skaters interviewed for this project describe empowerment to overcome social anxiety, to come out as queer, to break out of harmful and unsupportive romantic relationships, to push through challenges at work, and to overcome crippling fears of gender-based violence. If this empowerment comes, in part, through a reformulation of how they see the world and their place in it as a result of roller Derby, then it can be argued that it does, in fact, shape their worldview as Stolz et al. (2016) would predict.

It is worth noting that there may be a selection effect in this sample of skaters. Since I was reliant on the leagues to ask skaters to participate, it could be the case that only skaters who have a near religious level of commitment to the sport responded. Thus, I am not claiming that this is representative of all skaters. I am also, for clarification, not attempting to claim that roller Derby is a religion, nor necessarily that it can provide all the things that religions and religious groups can provide to their adherents. I am claiming that after listening to the voices of the skaters in this sample that roller Derby functions as a secular alternative to religion. Some of the skaters even stated this connection explicitly. For these skaters, participation in roller Derby means an opportunity to belong to a community that gives them a sense of identity (even a new identity) and belonging, along with a social support system. It serves as a resource for empowerment to overcome the challenges of life. For some it is admittedly their source of spirituality and even a sense of healing and wholeness. Like committed religious adherents, skaters are willing to accept tremendous costs and sacrifices on behalf of their sport.

Importantly for the sociological study of religion, it is worth noting that these costs, which include time, money, and energy lead to a reduction in skaters' ability to participate in competing activities, not unlike a part of Iannaccone's (1992) explanation for the value of religious sacrifice and stigma to the group, while at the same time, providing a place for community, self-betterment, and a form of mind-body spirituality. The same could probably be said for other sorts of leisure activities and sports such as CrossFit (see Dawson 2017 for an analysis of CrossFit as a 'reinvention institution'), yoga, and martial arts (see Jennings et al. 2010).

As illustrated by the opening quote – "...When I got started in Derby, I didn't really find the need to go to church so much anymore" – the findings from this inductive analysis of roller Derby interviews lend support for this theoretical perspective. Again, this indicates support for Stolz et al.'s argument that religions must now compete both in the religious marketplace and in the leisure marketplace, and has important implications for institutional religion and the study of religion. Relatedly, it is worth noting that due to its DIY ethos (Beaver 2012), roller Derby requires skaters to serve the organization in multiple forms of leadership. Leagues often mandate that skaters serve the organization in some way, and many of these positions carry titles such as VP of Marketing, Chair of the Finance Committee, and Director of Conflict Resolution. Which means all of the leaders in these organizations are women. This potentially gives roller Derby a competitive advantage to mainstream religion which often excludes or at least impedes leadership by women. Additionally, there is a significant presence and noted empowering effect of roller Derby on sexual minorities who are also often intentionally excluded from or

marginalized within mainstream religion. Thus, while I am not claiming that roller Derby is a religion, I do think it works in place of religion for these skaters, and its growth indicates a potential source of competition for established religion (see Stolz et al. 2016).

Conclusion

Originally, this project was supposed to explore the intersection of gender empowerment and participation in a violent sport through skaters' roller Derby narratives. However, through inductive analysis and a deep engagement with the skaters' narratives, new patterns emerged that indicated that roller Derby functioned as a secular alternative to religion in the lives of these skaters. For them, roller Derby is a high commitment and costly endeavor to which they converted and in which they found a new identity. Participation leads to a sense of belonging, location in a community, empowerment, and a type of spirituality. For some of these skaters, roller Derby is – “the closest . . . to religion I've ever gotten.”

ENDNOTES

*Please direct correspondence to Jason Wollschleger, Department of Sociology, Whitworth University, 300 W. Hawthorne Rd, Spokane, WA 99251, USA; e-mail: jason.etc@gmail.com

The author would like to thank Marion Goldman, Mark Killian, Stacy Keogh George, Jacquie van Wormer, Danielle Cossey and the members of the Fall 2018 research practicum class for their comments, as well as a special thank you to Amy Sackett for her research assistance. However, all errors of fact and omission are those of the author.

¹For purpose of consistency, I am using Stolz et al.'s (2016) definitions of religion, religious groups, and religiosity, and I am including them here:

Religion is a totality of cultural symbol systems that respond to problems of meaning and contingency by pointing to a transcendental reality. This transcendental reality influences daily life in accordance with these symbol systems, but cannot be brought completely under control. Religious symbol systems include mythical, ethical, and ritual elements, as well as notions of salvation goods. The use of a transcendental level (with gods, spirits, etc.) allows us, nevertheless, to understand the inexplicable, and to process the uncontrollable, in a symbolic manner. Examples of such religions are Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Raelianism.

Religious groups and organizations are collective actors which have a central reference to a religion – for example, they represent a religious ideology, offer religious goods, or perform religious collective activities. Examples are churches, religious centers, temple communities, and prayer groups.

Religiosity is an individual experience or action, insofar as it relates to one or more religions. Religiosity has different dimensions (action, experience, knowledge, belief, etc.) Attending a religious service or meditation course, praying, going on a pilgrimage, and believing in angels are all examples of an individual religiosity as defined here.

By using these definitions, we can distinguish between the religious and non-religious. All cultural, social, and individual phenomena which are not religious are, therefore, for us secular (Stolz et al. 2016, p. 23–24).

²Of course, a clear delineation between the religious and the secular has been problematized by scholars in the social sciences for decades. Notably, Asad (2003) who argues that this distinction is largely a Eurocentric approach and that the secular should not be understood as just the absence of religion. This approach is a growing trend in the sociological study of religion as evidenced by the emergence of journals, such as *secularism and nonreligion* in 2012 and *secular studies* in 2019. That said, the line between religious and secular has been a major topic of exploration and contention in the sociology of religion. Much ink has been spilled in arguing over the process and forces of secularization. In fact, Peter Berger (1999) claimed that the “interplay of secularizing and counter-secularizing forces is . . . one of the most important topics for a sociology of contemporary religion” (p. 7). And, it is in this intellectual context that Stolz et al.’s (2016) work is set, and it is, in effect, central to their argument that this distinction between religious and secular is becoming less and less salient. I would add that this claim is supported by the findings of this current article as well.

³To protect skater’s identities, their names have been changed and the ages listed are approximate.

REFERENCES

- Ammerman, Nancy T. 2014a. “Finding Religion in Everyday Life.” *Sociology of Religion* 75 (2):189–207.
- Ammerman, Nancy T. 2014b. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ammerman, Nancy T. and Roman R. Williams. 2012. “Speaking of Methods: Eliciting Religious Narratives through Interviews, Photos, and Oral Diaries.” Pp. 117–134 in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, Volume 3: New Methods in the Sociology of Religion*. edited by Luigi Berzano and Ole Preben Riis. Boston: Brill.
- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formulations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. CA: Stanford University Press.
- Baker, Joseph O. 2010. “Social Sources of the Spirit: Connecting Rational Choice and Interactive Ritual Theories in the Study of Religion.” *Sociology of Religion* 71(4):432–56.
- Beaver, Travis D. 2012. “‘By the Skaters, for the Skaters’ The DIY Ethos of the Roller Derby Revival.” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 36(1):25–49.
- Beaver, Travis D. 2016. “Roller Derby Uniforms: The Pleasures and Dilemmas of Sexualized Attire.” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 51(6):639–57.
- Bender, Courtney, Wendy Cadge, Peggy Levitt and David Smilde. 2012. *Religion on the Edge: De-Centering and Re-Centering the Sociology of Religion*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Berger, Peter L. 1999. “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview.” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, edited by Peter L. Berger. Grand rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Breeze, Maddie. 2013. “Analysing ‘Seriousness’ in Roller Derby: Speaking Critically with the Serious Leisure Perspective.” *Sociological Research Online* 18(4):1–13.
- Cadge, Wendy. 2013. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Cadge, Wendy. 2017. "God on the Fly? The Professional Mandate of Airport Chaplains." *Sociology of Religion* 78(4):437–55.
- Cadge, Wendy, Peggy Levitt and David Smilde. 2011. "De-Centering and Re-Centering: Rethinking Concepts and Methods in the Sociological Study of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(3):437–49.
- Carlson, Jennifer. 2010. "The Female Significant in All-Women's Amateur Roller Derby." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 27:428–40.
- Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Collins, Randall. 2010. "The Micro-Sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual." Association of Religion Data Archive "Guiding Paper" series. <http://www.thearda.com/rh/papers/guidingpapers/Collins.asp>.
- Corcoran, Katie E. 2015. "Thinkers and Feelers: Emotion and Giving." *Social Science Research* 52:686–700.
- Dawson, Marcelle C. 2017. "CrossFit: Fitness cult or reinventive institution?" *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 52(3):361–79.
- Draper, Scott. 2014. "Effervescence and Solidarity in Religious Organizations." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2:229–48.
- Drescher, Elizabeth. 2016. *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of American Nones*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1995 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. NY: Free Press.
- Ecklund, Elaine Howard and Christopher P. Scheitle. 2007. "Religion among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics." *Social Problems* 54(2):289–307.
- Finley, Nancy J. 2010. "Skating Femininity: Gender Maneuvering in Women's Roller Derby." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39(4):359–87.
- Frost, Jacqui. 2019. "Certainty, Uncertainty, or Indifference? Examining Variation in the Identity Narratives of Nonreligious Americans." *American Sociological Review* 84(5):828–50.
- García, Alfredo and Joseph Blankholm. 2016. "The Social Context of Organized Nonbelief: County-Level Predictors of Nonbeliever Organizations in the United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55(1):70–90.
- Gieseler, Carly. 2014. "Derby drag: Parodying sexualities in the sport of roller derby." *Sexualities* 17(5/6):758–76.
- Goldman, Marion and Steven Pfaff. 2017. *The Spiritual Virtuoso: Personal Faith and Social Transformation*. NY: Bloomsbury.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1992. "Sacrifice and stigma: Reducing free-riding in cults, communes, and other collectives." *Journal of Political Economy* 100(2):271–91.
- Inbody, Joel. 2015. "Sensing God: Bodily Manifestations and Their Interpretation in Pentecostal Rituals and Everyday Life." *Sociology of Religion* 76(3):337–55.
- Jennings, George, David Brown and Andrew C. Sparkes. 2010. "'It can be a religion if you want': Wing Chun Kung Fu as a Secular Religion." *Ethnography* 11(4):533–57.
- Kucinkas, Jaime, Bradley R. E. Wright, D. Matthew Ray and John Ortberg. 2017. "States of Spiritual Awareness by Time, Activity, and Social Interaction." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56(2):418–37.
- Lofland, John and Rodney Stark. 1965. "On Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 30:862–75.
- McQuire, Meredith B. 2008. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Oh, Seil and Natalia Sarkisian. 2012. "Spiritual Individualism or Engaged Spirituality? Social Implications of Holistic Spirituality among Mind–Body–Spirit Practitioners." *Sociology of Religion* 73(3):299–322.

- Palmer, Susan J. 1993. "Women's 'Cocoon Work' in New Religious Movements: Sexual Experimentation and Feminine Rites of Passage." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32:343–55.
- Pavlidis, Adele. 2012. "From Riot Grrrls to Roller Derby? Exploring the Relations Between Gender, Music and Sport." *Leisure Studies* 31(2):165–76.
- Pavlidis, Adele. 2013. "Writing Resistance in Roller Derby: Making the Case for Auto/Ethnographic Writing in Feminist Leisure Research." *Journal of Leisure Research* 45(5):661–76.
- Pavlidis, Adele and James Connor. 2016. "Men in a 'Women Only' Sport? Contesting Gender Relations and Sex Integration in Roller Derby." *Sport in Society* 19(8–9):1349–62.
- Pavlidis, Adele and Simone Fullagar. 2015. "The Pain and Pleasure of Roller Derby: Thinking Through Affect and Subjectification." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18(5):483–99.
- Pavlidis, Adele and Wendy O'Brien. 2017. "Sport and Feminism in China: On the Possibilities of Conceiving Roller Derby as a Feminist Intervention." *Journal of Sociology* 53(3):704–19.
- Pavlidis, Adele and Rebecca Olive. 2014. "On the Track/in the Bleachers: Authenticity and Feminist Ethnographic Research in Sport and Physical Cultural Studies." *Sport in Society* 17(2):218–32.
- Sheehan, Rebecca and Jacqueline M. Vadjunec. 2016. "Roller Derby's Publicness: Toward Greater Recognition of Diverse Genders and Sexualities in the Bible Belt." *Gender, Place and Culture* 23(4):537–55.
- Smith, Jessie M. 2013. "Creating a Godless Community: The Collective Identity Work of Contemporary American Atheists." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52(1):80–99.
- Stolz, Jorg, Judith Konemann, Malorie Schneuwly Purdie, Thomas Englberger and Michael Kruggeler. 2016. *(Un)Believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality, and Religious-Secular Competition*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing.
- Strauss, Anselm. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Strübell, Jessica and Trent A. Petrie. 2016. "'Bout Time! Renegotiating the Body in Roller Derby." *Sex Roles* 74:347–60.
- Suddaby, Roy. 2006. "From the Editors: What Grounded Theory is Not." *Academy of Management Journal* 49(4):633–42.
- Taves, Ann, Egil Asprem and Elliot Ihm. 2018. "Psychology, Meaning Making, and the Study of Worldviews: Beyond Religion and Non-Religion." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 10(3):2017–217.
- Wellman Jr, James K., Katie E. Corcoran and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk. 2014. "'God is like a Drug...': Explaining Interaction Rituals in American Megachurches." *Sociological Forum* 29(3):650–72.
- Wellman Jr, James K., Katie E. Corcoran and Kate Stockly. 2020. *High on God: How Megachurches Won the Heart of America*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Roman R. 2010. "Space for God: Lived Religion at Work, Home, and Play." *Sociology of Religion* 71(3):257–79.
- Wollschleger, Jason. 2012. "Interaction Ritual Chains and Religious Participation." *Sociological Forum* 27(4):896–912.
- Wollschleger, Jason. 2017. "The Rite Way: Integrating Emotion and Rationality in Religious Participation." *Rationality and Society* 29(2):179–202.