

**‘Ovary Motional’:
Constructing Gender and Identity in Roller Derby Names**

Major Research Paper

Master of Arts in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 What is roller derby?

The present work is concerned with roller derby, long considered a socially transgressive sport. It began with sports promoter Leo Seltzer's marathon on roller skates, which took place in Chicago, Illinois in 1935 (Gieseler, 2014). Seltzer sought ways to make his marathon less repetitive than the participants simply doing laps, and began to add elements of both show business and contact sport, which drew in large crowds. In a 1971 interview with the New York Times, Seltzer described the basic appeal of roller derby as 'noise, colour, body contact' (Harlan, 2019, p.1).

The marathon on wheels evolved over the following years, and was first labeled as 'roller derby' in 1937 (Joulwan, 2007). Televised roller derby grew popular in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s; however, mainstream attention waned over time and eventually the sport was no longer played. In 2001, roller derby experienced revival due to the founding of the Austin, Texas 'Women's Flat Track Roller Derby', a volunteer run organisation which codified rules to the game, and 450 roller derby leagues quickly sprang up in several different countries (Arendt, 2018).

Roller derby is not run for profit, which creates a contrast to traditional masculine sport, nor are there any professional derby players or leagues. In theory, this renders derby accessible to anyone who wishes to play, providing they can meet the requisite standard of skating, can make commitments in terms of time, and are able to afford the equipment needed.

One highly recognisable aspect of roller derby is that players skate under a pseudonym which is created by them and is unique to them. This name is typically registered in an online database through one of several websites. Players are known by this name and do not often use their legal name, with some considering their pseudonym to be representative of a roller derby alter ego or persona. These naming practices are the subject of the present

study.

As we shall see, through the use of both a large database which contains global data of every roller derby name registered on the two largest derby name registry websites (a total numbering approximately 70,000), along with a Google survey distributed to derby participants residing in England, roller derby naming follows certain patterns. These patterns include the use of puns and other word play, pop cultural references, and humour. Most players I surveyed considered being funny, clever and using puns to be key aspects of choosing a roller derby name, though some stated it was important to use legal names in order to legitimise roller derby as a sport.

Gender identity is also important to both roller derby as a sport, and in roller derby names, which involve the use of terms like ‘woman’ ‘lady’ and ‘Miss/Mrs’ far more often than male equivalent terms such as ‘man’ ‘gentleman’ and ‘Mr’. Derby names also feature word play on female given names such as *Daisy Dagger* whereas male given names tend to only be used as part of a pun on a celebrity name such as *Dick Slam Dyke*. Roller derby is used by players as an arena in which they can express their gender identity and parody tropes associated with mainstream heteronormative gender, in favour of alternative femininities and other less socially accepted genders. This is achieved through elements such as clothing and makeup as well as through roller derby names, all of which build upon the identity construct of the roller derby player.

Roller derby names typically feature the use of slurs, swear words and sexual references which are used both to reclaim and subvert hegemonic constructs of socially acceptable femininity. The photo below captures a moment in a bout in Toronto between Smoke City Bandits and Gore Gore Rollergirls.



Figure 1. Smoke City Bandits vs Gore Gore Rollergirls

(Photo credit: Jasmine Carbone/Helena 'Beat Em' Harder of Smoke City Bandits, Toronto 2019)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Roller Derby as a Feminist Subculture

Gieseler (2014) characterises derby as ‘a women’s sport functioning outside the phallogentric model of the mainstream sporting world’ (p. 762). The origins of roller derby as an amateur, non profit sport for women which was run by female volunteers means that it has evolved outside the context of masculine dominated professional sport. Derby, as Finley (2010) writes, is ‘not a women’s version of a traditional men’s sport’ (p. 367). The leagues are overwhelmingly trans inclusive, and in recent years there have been teams and leagues composed entirely of men; however, the sport is mainly played by women and femmes and as such my focus will be on such individuals¹. The feminist ethos associated with roller derby runs strongly through the sport, regardless of the gender identity of the players. Derby also has links with alternative subcultures such as punk, goth and the LGBTQAI+ movement (Finley, 2010).

In this regard, Channie-Hill, Waldren and Umsted (2012) formulated what they call a ‘3rd wave feminist model of sport’ which they define as ‘a mix of contradictory third-wave social justice and (post)feminist ideologies, including individualistic dynamics of gendered and sexual expression, gender maneuvering, inclusiveness, concern for social justice, commercialization, spectacle, and stealth feminism’ (p. 37). They apply this model to analysis of roller derby, by which they consider four discourses, namely: (1) stealth feminism through alternative sport, (2) social justice and inclusiveness, (3) rebelling and reflecting identity performances, and (4) violent action chicks (p. 38). These authors conclude that ‘although themes of women’s empowerment, sisterhood, and alternative-sport DIY philosophy are fairly common in league and team descriptions, promotional materials, and individual accounts, actual mentions of the word feminist are almost nonexistent’ (p. 40). They suggest that this may be due to the wide stigmatisation of the word ‘feminism’, the explicit use of which may alienate part of the sport’s fanbase or their sponsors (local businesses who

¹ Whilst Women’s Flat Track Derby Association leagues welcome men in supporting roles, the players are comprised of women and non-binary people. In this context, I am defining the term ‘femme’ as a queer gender identity in which a person identifies with the feminine end of the gender spectrum, but may not label themselves as a woman or female.

sometimes fund tournaments).

Inclusivity is, however, a major component of the 3rd wave feminist agenda, and Channie-Hill et al (2012) point out that current roller derby is explicitly inclusive of people regardless of gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity or body type. They also draw attention to the fact that the heteronormative 'girly girl' gender identity is not commonly accepted amongst players. Whether this is the case for roller derby in more conservative countries is beyond the scope of the present work, which focuses on international data on roller derby names, and opinions of roller derby names elicited from a small group of players in England.

2.2. Roller Derby as Gender Performance

Judith Butler's (1990) often cited theory of gender asserts that 'gender is "real" only to the extent that it is performed' (p.278). This suggests that gender is something which people *do*, which is socially reinforced. As roller derby is one vehicle through which gender identities are performed, parodied and subverted, it is an ideal case study for gender performativity. Wharton (2012) notes that to study gender is to take 'an interest in a moving target' (p.103), meaning that gender identities shift according to periods of time, places and cultures. As we shall see, gender identities within roller derby are subject to tension between the counter-cultural values which have been prevalent since the sport's revival, and the desire for derby to be seen as a strongly feminine sport.

Within the roller derby community, gender is performed through the use of makeup, costumes (known as 'boutfits', a portmanteau of bout and outfit) and player name choices, creating stylised parodies of gender tropes. Derby players assume and subvert aspects of both idealised and stigmatised femininities such as schoolgirls, pin-up girls, and 1950s housewives. Becker (2004) describes these boutfits as

‘a mix of sport, punk rock, burlesque or rockabilly fashion (...) Rollergirls often resemble cultural images of punk rockers and pin-up girls more so than popular, mainstreamed images of traditional female athletes.’ (p.108)

These outfits form an important identifying part of roller derby subculture and contribute to the overall construct of a roller derby player. Schippers (2002) suggests that ‘like most subcultures, clothing and style play an important role... and are part of the drawing of boundaries around the subculture.’ (p. 107).

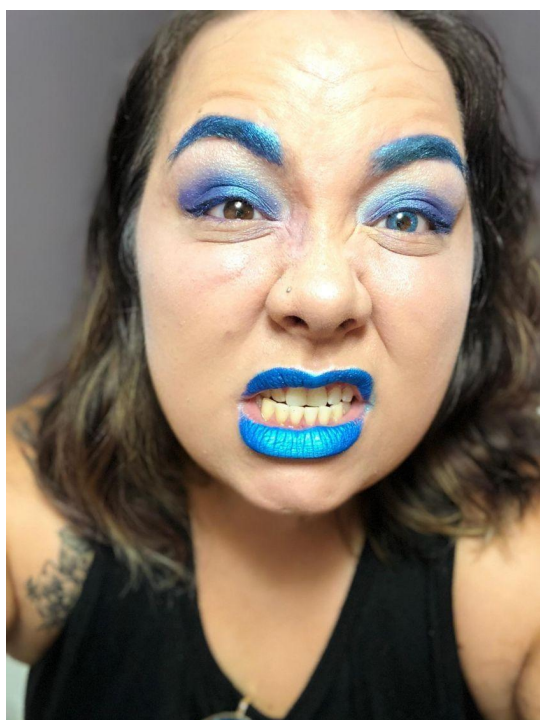


Figure 2. Bold makeup in team colours.



Figure 3. Helena ‘Beat Em’ Harder poses with CannaBish during a bout, wearing heavy makeup.

(Photo Credit 2 and 3: Jasmine Carbone/Helena ‘Beat Em’ Harder of Smoke City Bandits, Toronto 2019)

Players also draw upon pariah femininities which are eschewed by mainstream society, such as wicked witches, sex workers and butch lesbians. Schippers (2007) describes pariah femininities as those involving ‘practices and characteristics that are stigmatised and sanctioned if embodied by women (which) include having sexual desire for other women, being promiscuous, “frigid”, or

sexually inaccessible, and being aggressive,' (p. 95). The linguistic expression of such femininities in roller derby will be part of the present study.

The majority of roller derby leagues use the rules defined by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, on whose website the following statement is found in the section on 'Diversity and Inclusion':

The WFTDA recognizes that identifying as transgender, intersex, and/or gender expansive is not in any way related to an individual's eligibility for participating as a volunteer or employee. An individual who identifies as a trans woman, intersex woman, and/or gender expansive may skate with a WFTDA charter team if women's flat track roller derby is the version and composition of roller derby with which they most closely identify.

This suggests that roller derby leagues which operate under WFTDA rules are explicitly inclusive of anyone who feels that it is an appropriate place for an individual of their gender identity, and is not restricted solely to cis women. Tropes of various femininities are used as a form of social commentary within the sport, as feminist ideologies are evident amongst participants in roller derby (if not explicitly, then through the use of parodies of femininity, the portrayal of strength and female coded toughness). Finley (2010) suggests that in derby 'their alternative construction of femininity devalues particular elements of hegemonic femininity that are used to uphold male dominance' (p.379).

Schippers suggests that such personae stand not only in opposition to hegemonic masculinity but also serve as a direct threat to it, which can 'contaminate' the individual. By embracing these types of pariah femininities, roller derby is a space in which subversive expressions of femininity can be performed, displayed and explored. As Finley (2010)

states, 'when women move to subcultural settings that are intentionally resistive of established norms, cultural content (such as pariahs) can take on new meanings and utility' (p. 365), creating what Gieseler (2014) terms a 'drag performance' (p. 771) which subverts the realm of traditional masculine dominated sport. In doing so, Gieseler (2014) suggests that 'derby women take up the sexualities that men desire and the sexualities that terrify men' (p.765).

Finley (2010) also considers the construct of the derby girl as an 'alternative femininity' (p. 371) which affronts athletic tropes which focus on masculinised strength and prowess, noting that 'at a derby bout, skaters flaunt the hegemonic masculinity of sports unapologetically with a pride in toughness and aggression'. For their part, Becker (2018) writes that 'skate names, campy costumes, and dramatic antics' actually 'disrupt traditional images associated with femininity, cultural definitions of womanhood, attractiveness, and desirability, and create parodies of violence and sexuality' (p. 100).

Useful to the understanding of this aspect of roller derby identity is the concept of indexicality (Irvine and Gal 2000, Silverstein 1976) which can be used to understand how skaters can draw upon a projection of toughness, athletic strength and the embracing of taboos to index the identity of a roller derby player. The concept of indexicality refers to a sign indexing an object within the context it occurs in. This can apply to both linguistic and non linguistic signs - for example, a bright pink spiked haircut may index the identity of a punk, and certain features of their accent may index the fact that they are working class. Together signs, both linguistic and non linguistic, can signify different social identities in context. To summarise, contemporary general theorising of gender as performative and as roller derby itself as performative inform the present work.

2.3 Roller Derby Names

While not the object of previous systematic linguistic analyses, player names are recognised as an important component of roller derby identity construction, and are displayed prominently on the jerseys of players, and are used during announcements, in promotional materials and on scoreboards. As noted above, it is common for participants in roller derby to be known solely by their chosen pseudonym within derby circles; for most players, their derby name is an integral part of their identity. The process of choosing and registering a derby name is considered critical to involvement in the sport:

‘Though there seemed to be variations across the various leagues, the consensus was that you do not simply get to choose a name on the first day you show up. Rather, getting a derby name is a rite of passage’ (Arendt, 2018 p.68).

In order to exemplify what types of names are chosen as roller derby names, **Table 1** presents 100 randomly selected names taken from the database of 70,359 roller derby names:

Table 1: 100 Randomly Selected Roller Derby Names from the Online Database

1	Abby WHAMblock	35	Gypsy	68	Peter ParkHer
2	Alice Loop-her	36	Hannahphylaxis	69	Poison Oy Vey
3	Amy Toxin	37	Heathy Metal	70	Porn Scar
4	Annasty Hit	38	High 5	71	Princess Layher Out
5	B.A. Chica	39	Hits-it Van Gogh	72	Racer Xtasy
6	Ballance of Power	40	Impala Girl	73	RAIDHO!
7	Bambi Deerdevil	41	Inya Endo	74	Rockin rampage
8	Bella DuBois	42	Jemanda Maulograms	75	Roller Toast'er
9	Bitch Tits	43	Joey NotSoPuto	76	Rosy Reckabilly
10	Blackheart	44	Johnny Smash	77	Samnesia
11	Blitz Craig	45	Joy D'Vicious	78	Scandi Crush
12	Boom Boom Martini	46	Jumbo Jet	79	Sebastian Block
13	Broken Beaver	47	Justice Beaver	80	Shay'kn Not Scurred
14	Butter Buns	48	Kiss my Lunt	81	Shut Jazzup
15	Carl-imari	49	Kitty KaPow	82	Sin'n Juice
16	Cat-Asstrofic	50	Lacey Overalls	83	SkateGoat
17	CBlast	51	Land Shark	84	Skinny Monteiro
18	Charly Truck-It	52	Lay'em Lola	85	Skylla
19	CompliKate	53	Lextacy	86	Slammy Faye Baker
20	D-Tek	54	Lieutenant Dan	87	Smack em'Black
21	D'manda Hit	55	Lizzie L Getcha	88	Smash Effect
22	Dee Dee O.S. Attack	56	Lola Leadfoot	89	Soporific
23	Deenasaurus Rex	57	Mandrin Trouble	90	Sparkling Otter
24	Demolition Deedee	58	Mary Tyler Score	91	Spider-Slam
25	Dis-Turbia	59	Misfit Jax	92	Stealth SoulJAH
26	Dr. Smackwell	60	Miso Knotty	93	Stroke of Luck
27	Evil Monkee	61	Miss C-Bomb	94	Sweet Enemy
28	Final Smasher	62	Molly Mongoose	95	Tamagotchu
29	Fire & BrimStoner	63	Moral Hazard	96	Tebo Smackaho
30	Frida Runamok	64	Motorboatin' Momma	97	Trixie Delight
31	Funksta	65	Mt. Mel	98	TutanKarnage
32	Gore May Cupcake	66	Nancy Spinatra	99	Wednesday At'emz
33	Guinofear	67	Obi-Wan Kiome	100	XAQSHNR
34	Gunner Hands Off		-		-

Becker (2018) identifies themes found in player names thusly: ‘Names usually play on words that create double entendres with satirical, faux violent or sexual puns, and plays on pop culture.’(p. 102). Skaters aren’t afraid to use slurs, swearing and other taboos within their chosen name, such as *Molotov Cocktease*, *Dumblewhore*, *Big Dyke Energy* and *Slut Her Throat*. An important aspect of the present research is the deliberate use of slurs and taboo within the community and how naming practices link with reclamation both inside and outside the world of roller derby.

I therefore draw upon research such as Lui’s (2020) theory of slurs whereby ‘slurs are derogatory words because they are illocutionary force indicators (...) of the illocutionary acts of derogation against their target.’(p. 1053). An illocutionary force indicator is a linguistic act which indicates the meaning with which an utterance should be taken. In the case of slurs, the act of using a slur against a person or group of people indicates that you wish to denigrate them, unless the usage is part of an act of reclaiming the slur.

My research is also informed by McConnell-Ginet’s (2020) analyses of slurs presented in her monograph *Words Matter: Meaning and Power*, in which the term is defined as ‘any insulting or demeaning language that targets either a group or an individual’ (p.137) and the more specific category of S-word is used to mean ‘a special category of slurring language, enforcing and maintaining socially structured subordination.’ (p.137). Using this framework, I will consider how the slurs used within roller derby names play on subordination. I will also explore the extent to which the use of slurs or S-words within roller derby names may involve reclamation.

Finley (2010) also states that ‘when women move to subcultural settings that are intentionally resistive of established norms, cultural content (such as pariahs) can take on new meanings

and utility but leave the label intact' (p. 365), which suggests that what names 'mean' can vary widely. For some players, their derby name represents an alter ego or persona which allows them the freedom to act in ways which might otherwise be unusual for them, and/or as a resemblance through which they can draw strength or emotional resilience. My research examines both the range of names found in the world wide registry mentioned above, as well as attitudes of current and former roller derby players and referees toward naming through an online Google survey. In particular, I will look at the use of slurs and sexual references in roller derby names and consider the concept of reclamation and what makes a slur acceptable or unacceptable within this community.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the structure of my database of roller derby names. It will describe the details involved in the creation, distribution and analytic methods of a Google survey investigating player attitudes toward naming.

3.1 Constructing the Name Registry Database

At the point when a player has gone through the initial stages of training and trials associated with joining a roller derby league, they are permitted to select a roller derby name. Similarly, referees and NSOs also select a name for themselves in order to officiate for a roller derby league. As noted above, many players consider the selection of their name to be a sort of rite of passage, signifying the end of the training period and the start of their time as a player.

Since having a unique name is important for player identification and for the expression of individuality, there are websites through which a person can register their roller derby name. As the websites *rollerderbyroster.com* and *derbyrollcall.com* are the two best known and most widely used for this purpose, my research combines the data from both. Having created an account on these websites, a person can register their name, number (players also choose a number associated with their name), league, and, in the case of the *derbyrollcall* website, players also include the country in which they play. This allows participants to ensure that they are not choosing a name which has already been chosen by someone else². The league information attached to the names allows people to ensure that they aren't likely to play someone with the same, or a similar, roller derby name, as this can cause confusion or sometimes conflict between players.

² Though one of the sites (*derbyrollcall*) does allow similar or duplicate names due to the number of people who now play roller derby, duplicate names are discouraged.

Using the data from these two websites, I created an Excel spreadsheet of 70,359 roller derby names (without the number or league attached) in use in January 2023. In order to research the data efficiently, I then created a tab which would allow me to search the data for certain keywords. This returns results for the number of names containing the keyword in the combined data, as well as creates a simple method to calculate the proportion of names which contained a particular keyword. I was thus able to determine how often certain words occur in the data.

The three tables below present the results of keyword searches for gendered words (Table 2), words associated with pariah femininities (Table 3) and slurs and swear words (Table 4). The data shown below represents the number of roller derby names which contain the keyword listed as part of the name.

Table 2: Gendered Words Found in the Roller Derby Database

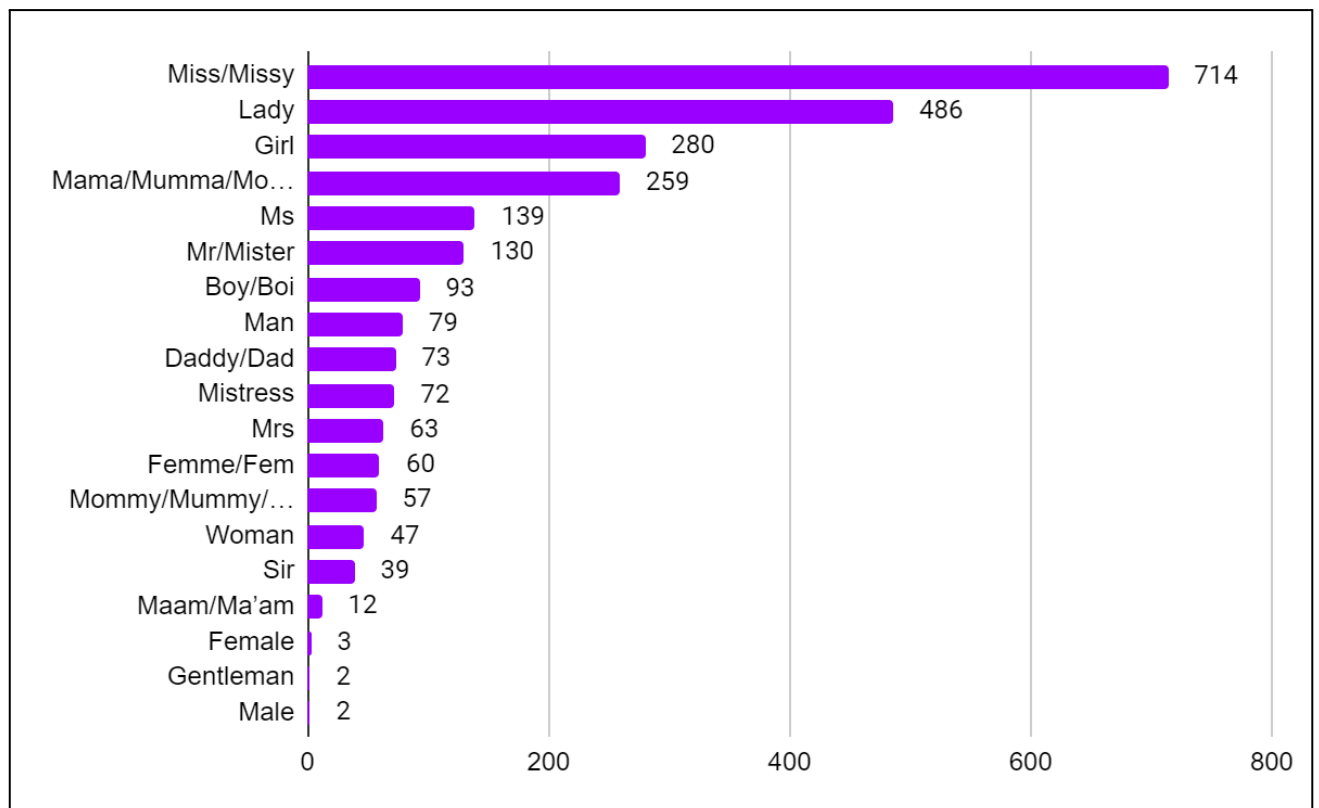


Table 3: Pariah Femininities Found in the Roller Derby Database

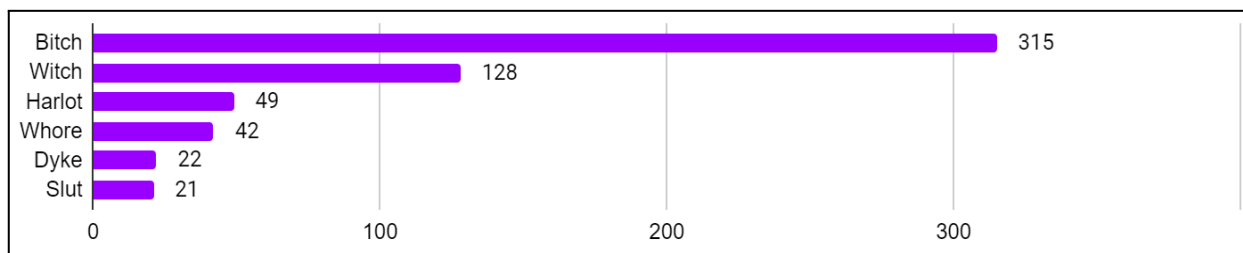
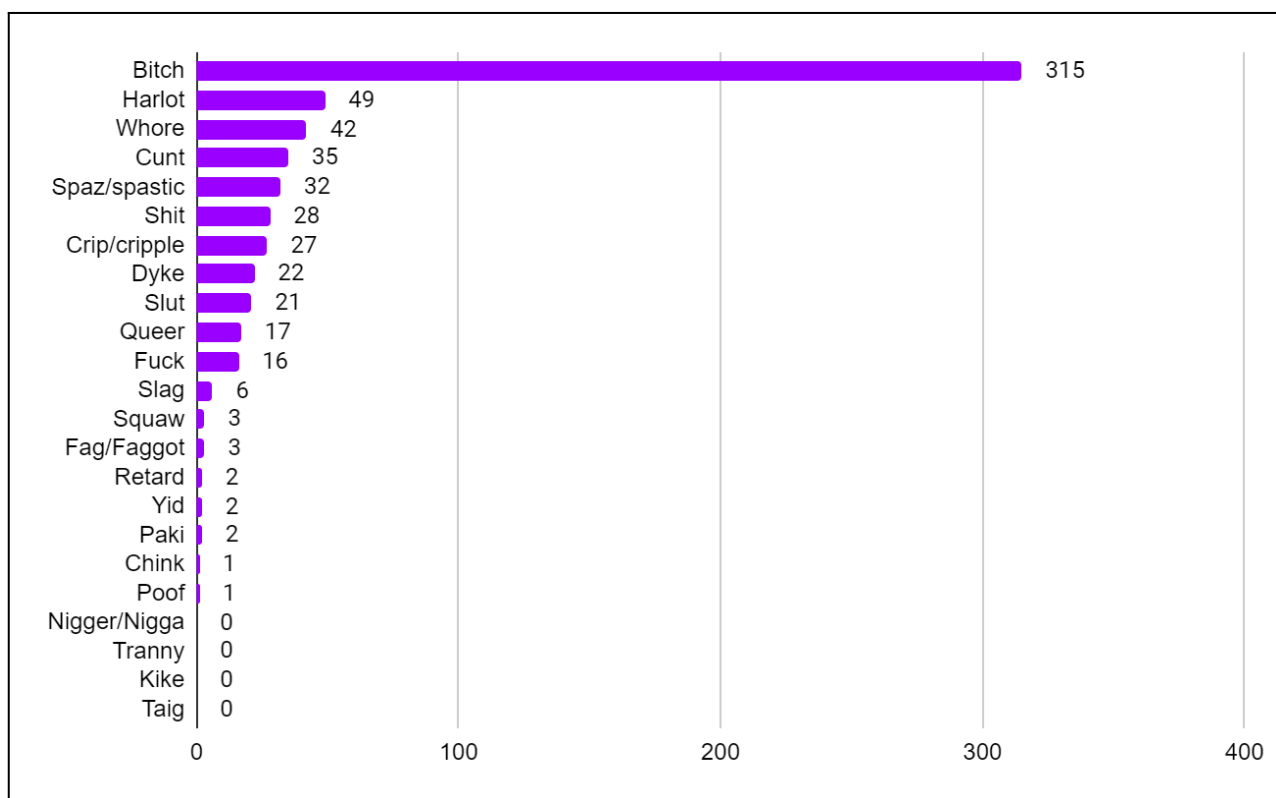


Table 4: Slurs and Swear Words Found in the Roller Derby Database



These keyword searches are intended to inform the theoretical backdrop for analysing individual player attitudes as they relate to different tropes of femininity within roller derby. We return to these results below.

3.2 Construction of the Google Survey

In order to gain insight into the perception of roller derby names within the community, I constructed and circulated a Google survey to 125 current and former roller derby players and referees who reside

in England³. England was chosen specifically as it is my home country, which means that I have the cultural background necessary to interpret anything in the data which requires local knowledge. This choice also allowed me to utilise my own social networks in order to disseminate my survey. The survey data provide context to my broader data set containing the names taken from *rollerderbyroster.com* and *derbyrollcall.com*.

The survey contained eight questions in total, with an introductory paragraph explaining who I am and how the data will be used. I collected data on age, gender and the roller derby names of participants and I also included a confirmation question to check that participants resided in England. I then asked questions regarding perceptions as to what participants think made a good roller derby name, and how they chose their own name. Following common practice, I also gave respondents the opportunity to add their own comments.

I created the survey using Google Forms, which provided me with different templates for collecting data in the questions such as checkboxes and short or longer open text fields. These templates were useful for both offering multiple-choice options and for collecting data which allowed participants to provide detailed comments. Google forms automatically collates the answers from participants in a spreadsheet, and provides simple charts where applicable, which also helps with data analysis. The full text of the document can be found in **Appendix 2**.

To distribute my survey, I used my personal connections with friends whom I knew played roller derby. Initially, I shared the survey on my personal Facebook page, and I also asked people to distribute it within their networks using Facebook, Twitter or instant messaging. I also asked friends within LGBTQAI+ communities and other alternative subcultures (namely goths, boardgamers and roleplayers) who I knew were likely to have friends who played roller derby to obtain data for a range of gender identities. These friends passed my survey to people in their own networks, and I was told

³ Though I initially received 130 total responses, five had to be excluded as the person answered 'no' to the 'Do you live in England?' question.

that my survey had been shared on the Facebook pages of several roller derby leagues from England. This referral method of distribution was effective in obtaining responses but did potentially create certain biases in the data, which will be discussed below.

3.3 Breakdown of Google Survey Questions

Firstly, survey respondents were asked to provide their own roller derby name (Question 1), as it would allow for insight into how the rest of their opinions on roller derby naming aligned with the actual choice that they made regarding their own name. I also gathered basic demographic data on age (Question 2) and gender (Question 3), in order to contextualise responses. I then used a simple yes/no question to confirm whether participants lived in England (Question 4).

The first derby-specific question was Question 5, which stated ‘Using three adjectives, describe what characteristics make a (good) roller derby name’. This question encouraged players to consider what traits they thought made a name effective. This allowed me to summarise which adjectives occurred most frequently and consider what respondents did and did not include. Question 6 was ‘When choosing your own roller derby name, what was most important to you?’ I decided to give participants a set of tick boxes with pre-written responses, as well as a blank space in which they could write their own response. These options were not mutually exclusive, and a participant could choose to tick a response as well as provide their own reply.

- that it is funny
- that it reflects my political views or my ideologies
- that it is clever
- that it makes me feel strong or powerful
- that it is a persona or character that I take on when I play derby
- other _____

The pre-written suggestions were informed by prior research, including Finley (2010; p. 337), who interviewed many skaters and found that ‘for some the name and character they use to skate becomes an alternate identity they can take off and put on with their skater garb.’ This insight led me to consider roller derby names as part of a persona construction. Eckert (2012) defines a persona simply as a socially constructed ‘self’ (p. 306), and expands on the concept thusly:

A person’s style is not static -- it emerges in social practice, and involves an ongoing history of stylistic moves. The first time a girl puts on eyeliner, the first time a boy adds some flair to his basketball toss may be momentous moves for them. Each time they repeat these moves, they become increasingly part of their style, part of a claimed persona. And a given individual may develop alternative styles, presenting different personae in different communities of practice. (p.306)

In the context of a roller derby player, their style (hair, outfit, make up, customised skates), speech, manner of playing, and their roller derby name are also aspects of this ‘self’ which contribute to an overall persona as illustrated in **Figures 4 and 5**.



Figure 4: A player named *Rainbow Dash* (taken from the My Little Pony character of the same name) poses in themed makeup, with the Rainbow Dash logo on her helmet.



Figure 5: Rainbow Dash wears matching skates in Rainbow Dash signature colours with rainbows and matching blue wings similar to the character.

(Photo Credit 4 and 5: Ruth Jepson aka Rainbow Dash of Halifax Bruising Banditas, Halifax, England 2017).

Some players may consider their persona a source of inner strength or power, which is why I added ‘it makes me feel strong or powerful’. There may also be some who do not perceive a separate persona, but who derive strength from the speed and aggression which are integral parts of how roller derby is played. One player commented on the factors which helped them choose their name with ‘it was a persona I had already adopted’. The roller derby names I had uncovered in my larger data set informed my choice of potential conditioning factors for player naming. In particular, I noticed the occurrence of puns and other wordplay which can be seen as clever or funny, such as *Fairy Quad Mother*, *Preying Man Tease* and *Ovary Motional*. The subversive and counter cultural themes common throughout roller derby led me to consider that some players might rate political views or ideologies as important factors in choosing their roller derby name.

Question 7 was worded as follows ‘Please tick which three of the following made-up names you think would make the best roller derby names:’ I provided a list of fictional potential derby names, which I hypothesised may conform to, or contravene, certain patterns in roller derby naming found in the large database. The patterns I included involved puns, names which included two or more words, references to pop culture/celebrities (e.g. *NailHer Swift*) and word play involving food (e.g. *Bitch Tea Biscuit*). I also included distractors which I suspected did not conform to patterns seen in roller derby naming. For example, *Alex Smith* was chosen as these are both commonly used names (Smith being the most common surname in England) and do not involve any obvious word play. The full list of names was as follows:

- Dyke Hard
- Carbon Monoxide
- Scissor Me Timbers
- The Wreckorcist
- Bitch Tea Biscuit
- Raspberry Cripple
- Alex Smith

- NailHer Swift
- Nice To See You
- Dog

The list purposely also included three different names which involved a pun and included the slurs bitch, dyke and cripple, which were *Dyke Hard*, *Bitch Tea Biscuit* and *Raspberry Cripple*. Both *Bitch Tea Biscuit* and *Raspberry Cripple* were also local references as they were puns on sweet foods which would be known to English people (namely rich tea biscuits and raspberry ripple ice cream). I had observed that roller derby names often include regionally specific in-jokes, and I had wondered if participants in my survey would pick up on this.

Carbon Monoxide was, on the other hand, included as it is the name of a chemical element with no obvious humour attached. *Nice To See You* was included as a commonly used pleasantry which is not subversive, a pun or violent in nature. Finally, I included *Dog* because I had noticed that most names included more than one word, and I wanted to gauge reaction to a single-word name with no obvious joke. Retrospectively, however, I realised that the term ‘dog’ can be used as an insult with different connotations depending on the gender of the person it is applied to. When applied to women, the term typically describes someone whom the speaker finds physically unappealing. As such, the use of this word as a roller derby name may actually involve reclamation or subversion.

I also decided to explicitly include a reference to a queer sex act in order to gauge response to such names. Names like *Scissor Me Timbers* are important to my research as such terms may in fact be used to reclaim or subvert certain slurs and sexual references. As Gieseler (2014) argues:

Derby skaters not only recuperate pariah femininities but further rescue and embrace tabooed sexualities through performative parodies. The sexually androgynous “trannie,” sexually active “slut,” lesbian “dyke,” and dominant

“bitch” bear these labels because they enact something sexually threatening to the hegemonic order. Yet in roller derby, these are exactly the types of labels taken up and celebrated on jerseys, in bios, in action. With their derby monikers, skaters “Trans Em”, “Slut HerThroat,” “Dyke Tyson,” and “Anita Bopabitch” exemplify the rescue of once punitive language and identities; derby skaters exhibit identification and pride in expression these tabooed desires and sexualities. (p. 766)

3.4 Google Survey Distribution

As noted above, to distribute my data, initially I shared the google survey on my personal Facebook page, and I also asked people I knew to distribute the survey within their networks using Facebook, Twitter or by instant messaging. This method of distribution was effective in gaining responses, but did possibly create bias in the data as I, myself and the roller derby players I knew are in our mid 30s, which may have influenced the age range of participants in the survey. I suspect that these participants are more likely to have social networks composed of people within the 30-40 age bracket, unlike people in their 20s, who likely also make up a large proportion of roller derby players. The initial use of Facebook for distribution is also likely to have a similar effect, as younger people are much less likely to use Facebook than other types of social media.

In fact, my reasoning for choosing Facebook as my main method of distribution was due to both its event creation function, and its allowing individuals to make pages for local organisations. These features make Facebook convenient for roller derby teams to solicit members, keep members informed of practices, and also to advertise bouts within the local community to people who may wish to purchase tickets. As local teams and leagues tend to maintain Facebook pages for these reasons, this meant that making an easily shareable link to my survey on Facebook was a good way to encourage distribution. It was also likely to be easier to target teams in England than on a medium

such as Twitter which makes it less easy to separate people by geographic area.

Finally, I must report that as a result of the inclusion of slurs and sexual references, I encountered some problems with distribution, and received a few complaints from people who felt uncomfortable sharing the survey amongst their networks. In particular, people reacted negatively to the term ‘cripple’. Some were reassured when I explained that I had only chosen to use slurs which denigrate minority groups which I myself am part of, as in-group usage of slurs seems to be an important factor in these communities. However, the sharing of a survey containing this type of material (without content warnings) created mistrust for some roller derby participants, and possibly restricted the number of people who were willing to respond. That said, 124 completed surveys were retained for analysis.

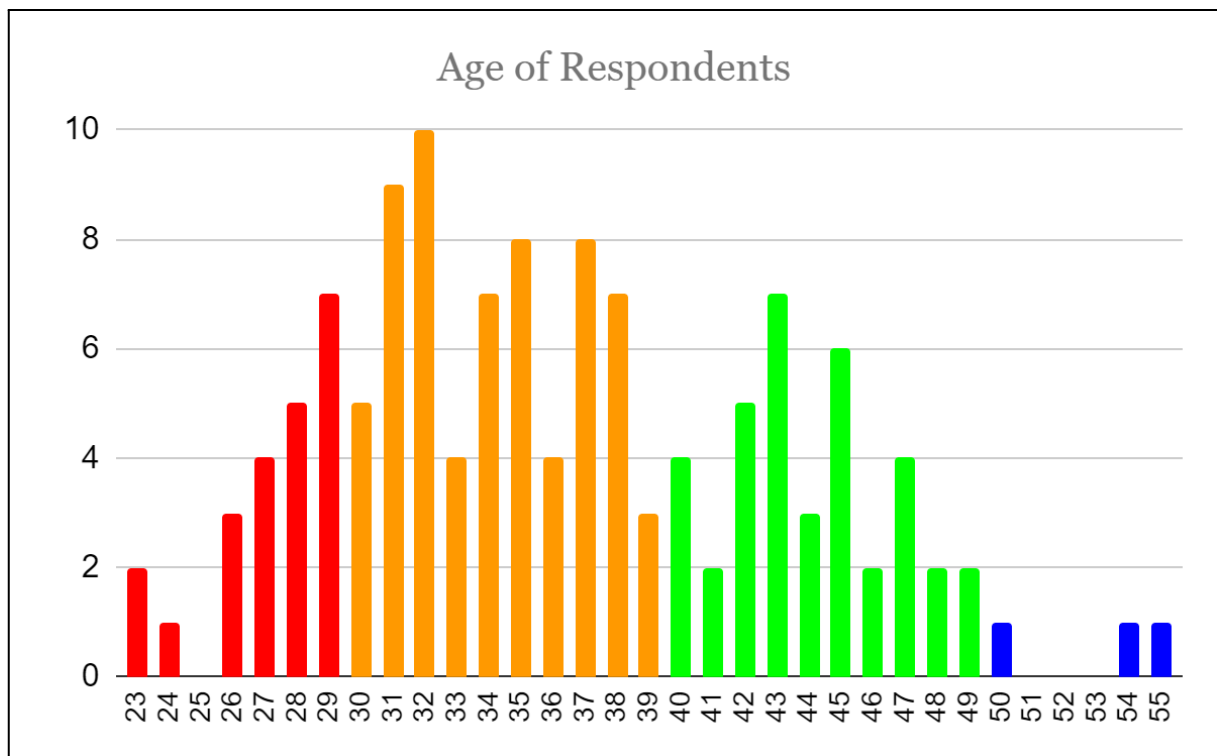
Chapter 4: Results

1.1 Google Survey Demographics

Age

The age range of respondents to the survey was between 23-55, with the majority being in their 30s. Of the 124 people surveyed, 18 of them were aged either 31 or 32. The ages of all respondents are illustrated in **Figure 6** below:

Figure 6: Age of Google Survey Respondents (Colour Coded by Decade)



Perhaps due to roller derby being a high risk impact sport, it makes sense that the majority of players are in the 20-45 age range, as this demographic are more likely to have the physical ability to play.

The survey also includes respondents who have retired from playing and Non Skating Officials (NSOs), which may partially explain why there are a few in the 45-55 range.

Gender

Participants were asked to state their gender via a text field so that they could write the gender

identity which best described them. The responses were categorised into four sections, which fell into four broad categories: male, female, genderqueer or non binary. For the purposes of classification, I simplified the responses in order to create these four broad categories, however the actual responses were more nuanced. The table below gives the full range of responses recorded:

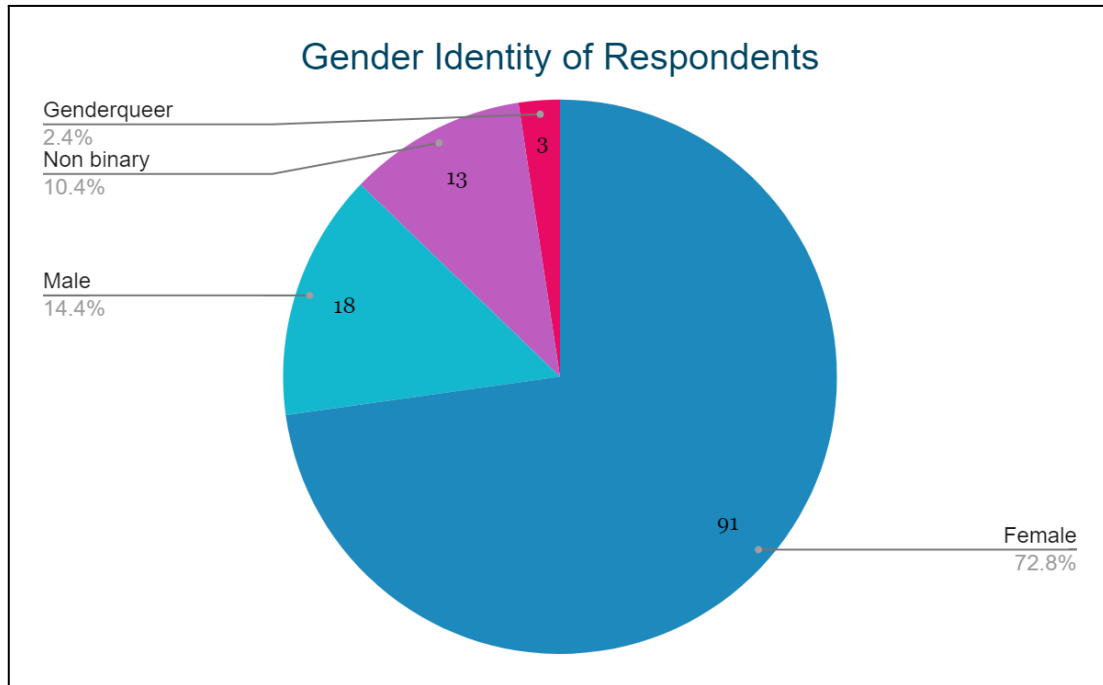
Figure 7: Gender Identity of Survey Respondents

Self Identified Gender	Simplified Classification	Number
Female	Female	79
Woman	Female	5
Cis Woman	Female	2
Cisgender female	Female	1
Cisgender woman	Female	1
F	Female	1
Female (she/her)	Female	1
I identify as a woman	Female	1
Female/ gender questioning	Female	1
Woman (trans)	Female	1
<hr/>		
Non binary	Non Binary	7
Nonbinary	Non Binary	2
Fem / Non-b	Non Binary	1
Non-binary demigirl	Non Binary	1
Non-binary woman (demigirl)	Non Binary	1
Non binary (they/them), play MRDA	Non Binary	1
<hr/>		
Genderqueer	Genderqueer	2
Queer	Genderqueer	1
<hr/>		
Male	Male	16

The majority of respondents identified as female (72.8%), with a fairly high proportion identifying as

either genderqueer or non binary (12.8%). The graph below presents the individual responses for gender identity in broader categories.

Figure 8: Gender Identity of Respondents (Broadly Defined)

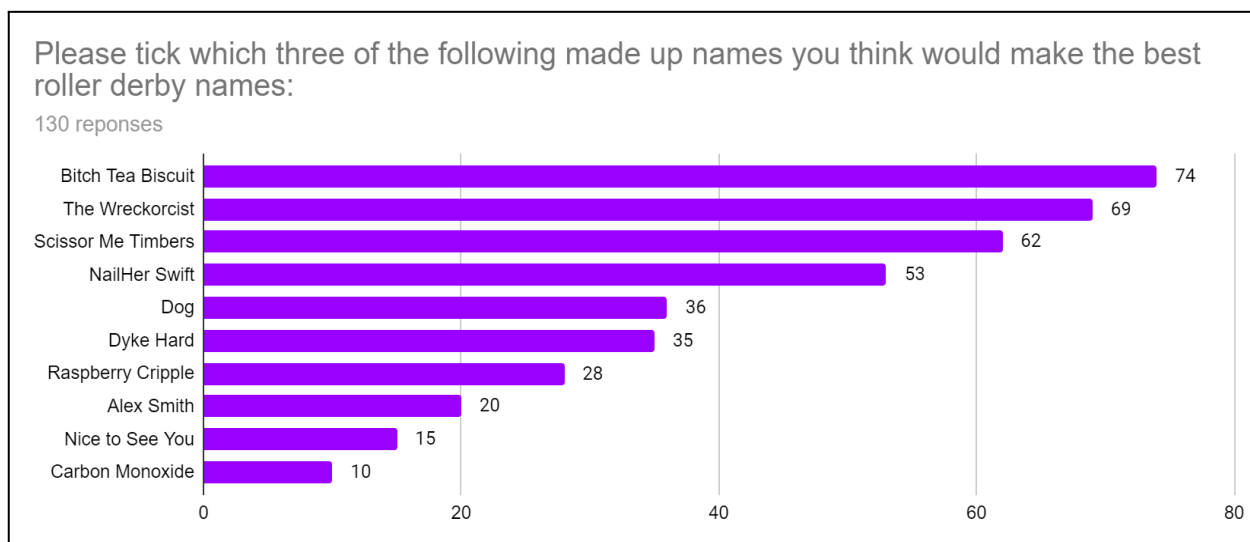


While 18 of the respondents identified as male, it is unclear if they participate as skaters or in a capacity as referees or NSOs (two of the men who responded explicitly identified themselves as referees). Since referees and NSOs are also given roller derby names they are included in my research. In retrospect, it would have been wise to include a question which asked participants' status e.g. whether they were players, referees, NSOs or retired. This information could be used in conjunction with information on gender identity to give additional context to the data, as there was a much higher proportion of male respondents than I had expected.

2.2 Responses To Questions About Roller Derby Names

Figure 9 gives responses to what makes the best roller derby name, chosen from a list of ten names from which participants were asked to select three. The results were as follows:

Figure 9: Roller Derby Name Rankings



The following three names were chosen by most participants: *Bitch Tea Biscuit* (74), *The Wreckorcist* (69) and *Scissor Me Timbers* (62). Notably, all three involve a pun. One involves a misogynistic slur and the name of a sweet food (*Bitch Tea Biscuit*), one involves a reference to violence and a pop cultural reference to the movie *The Exorcist* (*The Wreckorcist*) and one involves a reference to scissoring, which is a sex act associated with queer women and a pun on a phrase associated with pirates in popular culture (*Scissor Me Timbers*).

As noted above, I had expected that players would not rate the name *Dog* very highly because the majority of roller derby names in my data contained more than one word (11564 out of 70366 names, which is 16.4%). There was also no obvious word play attached. However, in the responses, two people told me that there is a player named *Dog* who is known to respondents of the survey as they happen to be a player in England. This may partly explain why this name was rated relatively highly (36).

The three names which were chosen by fewest participants were *Alex Smith* (20), *Nice To See You* (15) and *Carbon Monoxide* (10). These were all distractors which I expected did not conform to patterns in derby naming, as noted above. *Alex Smith* is a common name in England and does not contain a pun but likely performed relatively well in the survey because there is divided opinion in

roller derby about players using their legal names. I had been unaware of this debate until I read some of the comments provided by respondents in the survey which mentioned this. *Nice To See You* was chosen as a pleasantry associated with small talk which seemed to oppose the convention of using words linked to aggression which is evidenced further by the results below. *Carbon Monoxide* was chosen because it is the name of a commonly known chemical element, and did not contain any of the humour or pop cultural references typical of roller derby names.

Though they contained puns and references to sweet food or pop culture, both *Dyke Hard* and *Raspberry Cripple* were rated lower than other similar options at 35 and 28 respectively. This may be due to the inclusion of the slurs dyke and cripple, which may be seen as more controversial and will be discussed in more detail below. The next question asked participants to describe what characteristics make a (good) roller derby name, using three adjectives⁴. Of the adjectives listed, the most frequent are listed below:

Figure 10: Most Frequently Occurring Adjectives in the Survey Data

Adjective	Number of Occurrences in the data
Fun	62
Pun	52
Funny	37
Personal	32
Clever	29
Punny	21
Memorable	11
Witty	9

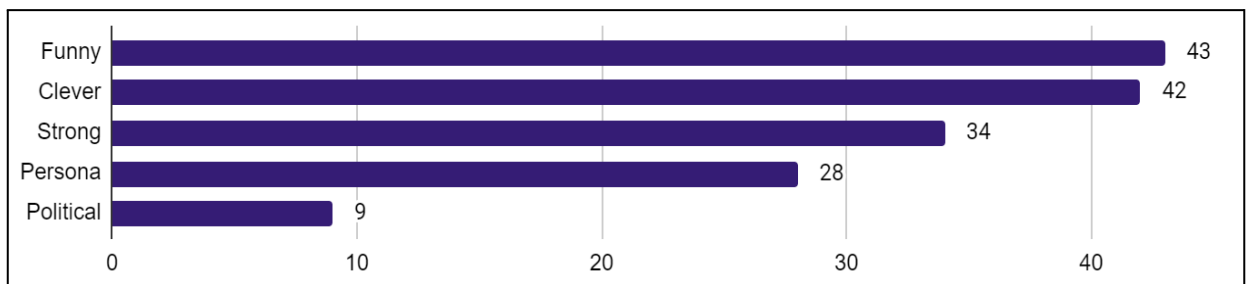
The most frequently occurring adjectives were ‘fun’, ‘pun’ and ‘funny’ which support the idea that roller derby players rate these characteristics very highly. The term ‘punny’ was also used by 21

⁴ For a complete list of all responses to this question, please see **Appendix 2**.

When examining these adjectives in particular, it is notable that though the terms ‘aggressive’, ‘intimidating’ and ‘violent’ are used, there are also terms like ‘badass’, ‘feisty’ and ‘kickass’, which have very different connotations. Terms like ‘savage’ and ‘fierce’ have also experienced semantic shifts in recent years due to the rising popularity of TV shows like ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’ which have popularised the language of gay men and drag queens. As Mercer and Sarson (2020) suggest, ‘RuPaul and the most successful queens of Rupaul’s Drag Race are now assimilated into the patterns and discourses of mainstream celebrity culture.’(p.491).

The results for Question 5 ‘When choosing your own roller derby name, what was most important to you?’ seemed broadly in line with the list of adjectives provided, as the two highest rated options were ‘that it is funny’ (34.6% of responses) and ‘that it is clever’ (32.3% of responses). Of the suggested prompts to this question, participants answered thusly:

Figure 7: Factors Rated as Most Important in Choosing a Roller Derby Name



Despite the counter-cultural aspects of roller derby which are prominently associated with the sport, participants rated the political aspect of a name as being of least importance. The reasoning for this is likely twofold; in line with the other results to the google survey, it seems that participants rate humour and playfulness highly which suggests that hard hitting political messages will be uncommon unless they are expressed in this sort of manner. Additionally, although the responses suggest that identity politics do seem important to participants (such as trans rights - one respondent commented ‘It relates to my trans identity and my disability’) there may be a distinction drawn between rights

and actual party politics. This distinction may lead some respondents not to classify their names as political because they don't consider issues such as trans rights and gender equality (which are frequent themes in roller derby names) to be directly political.

The 'factors in choosing a derby name' question also contained a section in which the respondent could write their own response if they felt that they wanted to add anything further. **Appendix 3** contains a full list of responses. A number of the responses to this question included some practical considerations about playing roller derby such as the length of the name, the ability to be shortened or how easy the name would be for announcers to say over a crowd during a bout. Some examples of responses in this category are: 'that it shortened nicely when yelled in a hurry', 'Efficient - easy to say/shout', 'could be read by announcers', 'that it is not too long - either to say in game, or to write on a shirt'.

In addition, some players considered it important that their name be related to their own identity, interests or political ideologies. It seems that these respondents assigned importance to a roller derby name which reflected their individuality and was personal to them. Examples of responses which reflect this perspective in choosing a derby name are: 'that it was something with personal relevance to me' and 'that it reflects me/my interests/hobbies/other aspects of my life/ in a way that's unique to me whilst also sounding good.'.

Other responses emphasised the desire to incorporate their own name or elements of it. Some respondents seemed to want to use their real name, or a play on it, because they would respond to it e.g. 'It's a pun on my own name so it's easy to hear shouted during a game'. Others stated that the use of real names was important to roller derby being taken seriously as a sport. 'With the increased professionalisation of the sport I believe using your real name makes the sport appear more serious and legitimate in the eyes of outsiders'. One player remarked that she felt that using her 'maiden name' as part of her derby name would allow that name to 'carry on as part of my life' and one said

simply 'I just wanted to use my name'.

Notably, where players did use part of their real name, they sometimes did so as part of a pun.

Examples included *Weston-super-Clare* (a pun on the name of the town 'Weston-Super-Mare' which is located in Somerset) and *Rii Arrange Your Face* (likely puns on the person's legal name, yet this did not seem to delegitimise the use of this name for these players).

Finally, sixty participants provided a response to the final question which was 'Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Is there anything else you would like to add?'. These responses are listed in full in **Appendix 4**. This open ended question provided a range of interesting data.

Some players used the space to expand further on their own choice of name, or characteristics of a good name such as in these comments, echoing in some cases prior responses:

1. 'A good roller derby name is not too complicated, and can be easily shortened. The shortened form is what everyone ends up being called by.'
2. 'being easy for announcers to pronounce, and shortening nicely to something that's unique within your team(s), are good bonuses! our team has three "Bam"s and two "Hells"s. Oops.'

The topic of using legal names as derby names was also addressed by a few commenters, who felt strongly that the use of 'real names' was integral to roller derby being taken seriously as a sport:

3. 'A lot of my league use their own names as they want the sport to be taken more seriously.'
4. 'Roller derby has evolved from its performative origins to being a legitimate sport. Derby names are a legacy of this and, although fun, I can see them becoming less common in the coming years as players wish to be seen as serious athletes.'
5. 'As derby has evolved over the years more people are using their birth names to seem more athletic. Myself went from being Donna K Baps to Donna (my birth name) as I wanted people

to be proud of who they are and that they don't need a derby name to be powerful great people.'

However, there were also comments from players who felt that the increasing use of legal names as roller derby names was detracting from the more lighthearted elements of the sport:

6. 'A lot of skaters started using their own names which I think is a shame - I love the puns and silliness (although I didn't use one!!). Ps. I'm retired from roller derby!'
7. "'professionalism" is killing fun in roller derby. There's room for both - having your family name as your derby name doesn't make you any better than someone who has a silly name!'

There were also players who addressed the concept of their own shifting identity or persona making it necessary to change their name:

8. ' My current derby name is a shortened version of my original derby name. I transitioned while active in roller derby, and my original [derby] name (Emmeline Pancakehurst) while clever, was now inappropriately gendered. It was also too long to use (...) and had already been shortened to Pancake in common usage. It became less clever, but more appropriate to my needs.'
9. '(...) I definitely developed an on track persona with my original name, and it gave me the opportunity to be this other awesome person. I'm in a different place in life now, with different thoughts and feelings and reasons for playing. (...) I'm not the same person I was back then, so it would be weird having the same Derby name.'

Several commenters wanted to address the use of slurs/swear words within the set list of potential names I had provided in my survey, and also within roller derby as a whole. There were people who felt that the use of slurs and swear words was inappropriate. In particular, the term 'cripple' drew

attention, though the terms 'dyke' and 'bitch' were also used in my data and did not draw as much attention. Some players commented that these terms would be banned in their own leagues, whilst others seemed to find them personally objectionable:

10. 'I'm not a fan of derby names that include words sometimes used as slurs e.g. Raspberry Cripple'
11. 'I'm not a personal fan of derby names that are clear sexual innuendos, or contain words commonly used as slurs, as I think its a barrier to getting a wider audience to the sport'
12. 'Is there a reason you've chosen some potentially rather offensive 'derby names'? It generally isn't the case any more.'
13. 'Derby is a welcoming, progressive space. Some older derby names were deliberately provocative and would no longer be acceptable in the sport. See "Raspberry Cripple" in your list above. Our league never allow someone to use this. This would also apply to a lesser extent to names using derogatory terms like "bitch"'

On the other hand, there were also some players who seemed to enjoy the names from the survey which contained puns based on slurs or more adult themes:

14. 'Scissor Me Timbers is hilarious!'
15. 'I am sad I never thought of bitch tea biscuit for myself 😂'

The range of contrasting perspectives given in this section seves as an illustration of how players approach roller derby names, and that some issues within roller derby naming are divisive.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1: Femininity and Slurs in Roller Derby Names

Overall, my research on roller derby names aimed to explore the manner in which they contribute to the construction of alternative femininities within the sport, and how this sits within the wider social order of mainstream gender identity. In addition, my research considered the extent to which the use of slurs and swearwords in roller derby names contributes to these gender constructs. My Google survey was used to discern which characteristics a group of 124 roller derby participants in England consider a good roller derby name. This survey data helped to contextualise the patterns I observed in my broader dataset of 70,359 roller derby names.

Firstly, the dataset of 70,359 supports my theory that roller derby names lean towards feminine gender identities. As we saw in **Table 2: Gendered Words Found in the Roller Derby Database**, terms such as girl, which is part of 280 derby names, are found in higher numbers than the equivalent masculine terms such as boy/boi, which was found as part of 93 derby names. Another prominent example is Mama/Mummy/Mom (and other variant spellings) which is found as part of 316 names, whereas Daddy/Dad is found as part of 73 names. Similarly, I have observed that female first names e.g. *Bad News Betty*, *Ice Kate*, *Jenacide* form part of roller derby names in greater numbers than male first names, which tend to occur only as part of a celebrity reference e.g. *James Hatefield* (a play on Metallica frontman James Hetfield). Though female first names do occur as part of celebrity name wordplay in the dataset, they are also often found to be used outside of these puns.

This inclination towards female coded names and identities is also applied to the slurs used in the dataset. As illustrated in **Table 4: Slurs and Swear Words Found in the Roller Derby Database** terms related to female identities, gynotypical body parts and sexuality are those which are found in the highest numbers compared to other types of slur or swear word. The most prevalent term is bitch which is found as part of 315 names, followed by harlot (49 names), whore (42 names), and cunt (35

names) all of which carry obvious female connotations. Comparing these to male equivalents was difficult to do as many slurs are misogynistic in nature⁶. However in the case of dyke (22 names) vs a comparable male equivalent fag/faggot (3 names) or poof (1 name), there is a clear difference. While the only female-coded slur in the dataset which was rarely used was squaw (3 names), it should be noted that this is also a racial slur as it follows the same pattern as other racial slurs in the dataset, which are found in low numbers (if they occur at all). Examples of these racial slurs are paki (2 names), chink (1 name) and nigger/nigga (0 names). Another notable absence from this dataset is a commonly used slur mainly targeted against trans or gender non-conforming people, which is the term tranny. This illustrates how, despite subversion being a strong theme in roller derby, there are clear social rules which govern the selection of roller derby names.

I argue that these patterns are due to the process of reclamation; a process by which a slur is reclaimed by a minority group through using the same slur which has been weaponised against them to label themselves. An example is the term queer, which was highly offensive in the 1950s and 60s but is now the preferred self-identifying term for many younger homosexual, pansexual, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people (as it can be used as an umbrella term to cover a wide range of identities). This particular process is termed 'pride reclamation' by Jeshion (2020) in which a group aims to distance their own use of a slur from the way in which bigoted people use it by echoing their derogatory use of the term.

I suggest that the use of ableist slurs in the database is one example of how reclamation affects roller derby names. The term crip/cripple is found in 27 names whereas the term retard is found in only 2 names. The term cripple has seen some reclamation due to the online rise of a movement known as 'cripple punk' which encourages embracing one's own disabilities whilst still projecting an air of self confidence. However such reclamation is not widespread and still causes offense, as shown in the

⁶McConnell-Ginet (2020) notes that 'long histories of sexism and misogyny have given English speakers a wealth of resources for demeaning women as women: slut, bitch, hag, harriidan, hussy, and many, many more'. (p. 158).

feedback from participants in my survey who made comments such as ‘I’m not a fan of derby names that include words sometimes used as slurs e.g. Raspberry Cripple’. Unlike *crip/cripple*, the term *retard* has not been subject to reclamation and is still considered taboo which is perhaps why it is only found as a part of two names. That said, the ableist slur *spaz/spastic* is also found in the data (32 names) and has arguably also not been subject to wide reclamation. The use of this term could be part of regional variation, as it is generally considered less offensive in North America than it is in the UK, although this does not account for it being the most prevalent ableist slur in the dataset. For the most part, the slurs found in the data are misogynistic, with male-coded homophobic slurs, ableist, racial and religious slurs being comparatively rare, e.g. *kike* (0 names), *yid* (2 names).

Lui’s (2021) speech act theory of slurs is useful here. They suggest that the offensiveness (being offensive) and the derogatory force (the property of being derogatory) of slurs can be separated. Though slurs can be both offensive and derogate a target simultaneously, these properties are not interchangeable. According to Lui, slurs have offensive autonomy, which means that a slur can offend a person even if the speaker does not intend for this to be the effect. An example would be a speaker using the term ‘*dyke*’ in reported speech such as the utterance ‘Michael said that Betty is a *dyke*’. In this case, the speaker is not aligning themselves with the homophobic views which someone may possess when they use a term such as *dyke*, yet the use of the slur itself may cause offense to somebody who has had the term used negatively against them. In this manner, the act of derogation is not intended by the speaker, but the offensiveness of the slur may remain intact.

Conversely, slurs can also be offensive without being derogatory, such as when a term is used as a slur in a particular dialect that is not widely understood. Lui uses the example of the term ‘*Monday*⁷’ which can be used in Bostonian slang as a secret racial slur against black people. Since this usage is not widely understood by most people, it would not cause offense to someone overhearing it.

⁷Lui counts such contexts as the use of a slur as the origin of many slurs is through colloquial terms in a language, which gain notoriety as more speakers use them. Other speakers begin to understand that the term is intended negatively against a group of people to infer bigoted stereotypes about them, therefore there is no defined point at which something becomes a slur.

However, the use of the term is still intended to derogate a group of people. Slurs can also be used by in-group people to express solidarity and respect. An example is in-group usage of the term nigger/nigga, which as McGonnell-Ginet (2020) observes is ‘frequently used among members of black communities, the targets of the N-word, often in address, for something like bonding. In these uses, it is much like bro or dude.’ (p. 146).

I suggest that while the slurs used in roller derby names can be considered offensive by some individuals, such usage is likely not intended to denigrate these minority groups as inclusivity is a core value of roller derby. The WFTDA explicitly includes statements on inclusivity within the codified rules of the game. These values can also be seen to be held by players. One respondent to my survey said that they ‘noticed some slightly offensive/non-pc names in the above list - I'm hopeful that as a community we're moving away from these as they don't reflect the inclusivity roller derby represents!’.

In the context of a roller derby name, a slur is likely intended as ‘pride reclamation’ or as subversion of a social identity or norm. The slurs used tend to occur as part of word play conveying humour or wit such as *Whore Moanal*, *Weird Gal Yankobitch* and *Tara Bitch Down*. These terms also conform to other patterns found in derby naming such as pop cultural references, celebrity puns, and references to toughness or violence. In this context, they do not fit the category which McConnell-Ginet (2020) terms ‘S-Words’ which function as ‘enforcing and maintaining socially structured subordination’ (p. 137) as the intent is likely to challenge or subvert this type of social structure. Though most slurs analysed here have their origins in misogyny⁸, the data collected here underline the importance of social context.

⁸ It is worth recalling here McConnell-Ginet’s (1989) important discussion of the genesis of misogynistic slurs in small-group social interaction. She considers the case of English ‘hussy’, originally a term for housewife, which took on negative sexual connotations over time. She suggests that an individual’s initial derogatory use of the term would have had to have been taken up and shared by like-minded members of the community, and spread in interaction.

6.2 Constructing Alternative Femininities in Roller Derby

Why, then, is it that in a sport which is mostly played by women and femmes that such misogynistic slurs are found? I argue that this is due to another type of reclamation namely the reclamation of pariah femininities (Schippers, 2007), and the creation of alternative femininities in roller derby.

Schippers (2002) describes a process called ‘gender maneuvering’ which is described as:

‘Individual action or patterns of action developed by a group that manipulate the relationship between masculinity and femininity in ways that impact the larger process of gender structuration.... a process of negotiation in which the meanings and rules for gender get pushed, pulled, transformed and reestablished.’ (p.37).

Within roller derby, the meaning of pariah femininities is (re)negotiated in part through their use in names which project strength, toughness and the abject embracement of female sexuality. Terms like slut are openly used despite their being, Schippers (2002) describes, ‘within the boundaries of femininity but marginalised as a less legitimate/inferior form of femininity’ (p.117). Sexualised tropes related to femininity are common, and conform to broader patterns found in other derby names such as witty forms of wordplay e.g. *Venus Guy Trap*, *The Golden Snatch*, and *Titty Titty Bang Bang*. There are also references to gynotypical body parts and items associated with female identities which involve similar wordplay such as *Dark Side of the Womb*, *Ovarian Fyst*, and *Texas Chainsaw Mascara*.

Pariah femininities within the dataset also follow these patterns, and are conveyed as an unapologetic affront to hegemonic female ideals. The terms bitch (315 names), witch (128 names), harlot (49 names) and slut (21 names) are found, and similar clever and funny patterns are found in their usage e.g. *Grand Thigh Witch*⁹, *Pizza Slut*, and *Ambitchious*.

Using these terms, which have been weaponised against women and femmes, to label

⁹This is a reference to the Grand High Witch from the book ‘The Witches’ by Roald Dahl.

oneself in a manner that is clever, strong or funny is a distinctive aspect of roller derby names. In this manner, the terms are either reclaimed or perhaps used abjectly in the same manner as sexual references in derby names e.g. *Cock Blocker*¹⁰, *Liquor Hard*, and *Smokin' Revulva*.

The use of these slurs, sexual references and other taboos are one part of different identity constructions or alternative femininity to these players. Burnett's (2020) distinction between the construct of a 'dyke' (a masculinised sapphic femme who is politically radical and countercultural) vs the socially accepted 'mainstream lesbian' who is typically feminine and therefore seen as more palatable, is also relevant here. Whilst the construct of a dyke may be seen as a source of strength and rebellion for those who call themselves thusly. I would add that doing so through their roller derby name is an important way to embrace this label, and the associated identity or persona construct that the label conveys. Similarly, the use of terms like whore and harlot would be part of the same process.

6.3 Conclusion

In summary, my research on slurs in roller derby names is contextualised by the research on of how slurs / S-words function by McConnell-Ginet (2020) and Lui (2021), as well as by the concept of pariah femininities proposed by Schippers (2007). These theories allowed me to understand the seemingly contradictory manner in which an outwardly feminist and inclusive sport can prominently use many elements of misogynistic language and other taboos. The concept of alternative femininities (Schippers, 2002) lent to my understanding of how gender identity is expressed within roller derby and other subcultures. More generally, the work points to the importance of considering the construction of meaning in its social context.

¹⁰The term 'blocker' is also a position played in roller derby.

There were some drawbacks to my survey design, such as the fact that I hadn't realised there was a strong debate in roller derby between the use of legal names and roller derby names. I received feedback from my survey such as 'As derby has evolved over the years more people are using their birth names to seem more athletic. Myself went from being Donna K Baps to Donna (my birth name) as I wanted people to be proud of who they are.' The nuances of such debate may serve as a potential for further research.

The use of numbers for roller derby players is an element of derby naming which I have not included in my research. These numbers are chosen by players and often relate to their derby name such as *Cannabish #420*¹¹ or *Gen-X Her #1974*. The numbers in question are listed on both name registry websites and may provide further context for, or information about naming practices in roller derby. I also had not considered the phonological aspects of roller derby names, as players are often called by a shortened version of their name during bouts. This may affect the choice of their name as respondents to my survey stated that a name being easy to shorten, say or hear announced was an important consideration for them. Further research building on my own could consider in detail how numbers are used in conjunction with roller derby names.

¹¹ 420 is a commonly used reference to marijuana.

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Appendix 1: Full Text of Google Survey

My name is Sophie Hambleton and I'm a Masters Degree student in Linguistics at York University, Toronto. I'm asking roller derby players to fill out this survey, which is designed to help discern patterns in roller derby naming to help me with research for my Major Research Project. Though I have requested that you provide your roller derby name, the responses given in this survey will remain anonymous in my project, and will be seen only by myself and my supervisor Dr Ruth King. Thank you for participating!

1. Roller Derby Name:
2. Gender
3. Age
4. Do you live in England?
 - Yes
 - No
5. Using three adjectives, describe what characteristics make a (good) roller derby name:
6. When choosing your own roller derby name, what was most important to you?
 - that it is funny
 - that it reflects my political views or my ideologies
 - that it is clever
 - that it makes me feel strong or powerful
 - that it is a persona or character that I take on when I play derby
 - other _____
7. Please tick which three of the following made up names you think would make the best roller derby names:
 - Dyke Hard
 - Carbon Monoxide
 - Scissor Me Timbers
 - The Wreckorcist
 - Bitch Tea Biscuit
 - Raspberry Cripple
 - Alex Smith
 - NailHer Swift
 - Nice To See You
 - Dog
8. Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2: List of Adjectives Submitted by Google Survey Participants

Punny, original, personal	Funny, short, rude
Pun, fierce, personal	punny, succinct, unique
personal, witty, rhythmical	Punny, personal,
Witty, identifiable, personal	Bold, memorable, unique
fun, strong, snappy	Punny, funny, snappy
Funny, meaningful, empowering	Succinct, Fun/Punny, Fitting
Short, punchy, aggressive	Punny, themed, clever
Personality, fun, easy to use	Simple, authentic, punchey
Attitude, shoutable, fun	Witty, fun, fierce
Puns, identity, enthusiasm	Funny, punny, recognisable
funny, timeless, simple	Catchy, punchy, clever
Pun, funny, descriptive	Clever, funny, meaningful
memorable, evocative, entertaining	Good short version, punny, means something to you
Your real name	Funny, clever, empowering
Fun, Puns, descriptive	Pun, amusing, snappy
Fun, individual, personal	Punny, clever, strong
Puns, personal, eye-catching	Personal, widely appealing, inoffensive
Personal, strong, tough	Short, memorable, catchy
Personal, unique and easy-to-announce	Punchy, personal, puntastic
Witty, fun, cool	Pun-ful, abbreviate-able, individual
Funny, using a pun, a local or personal connection	Short, clever, punny
Fun, punny, clever	Funny, clever, personal
Witty, violent, funny	Catchy, apt, representative
Short, memorable, silly	Fun, geeky, personal
Personal inventive fun	Clever funny representative
Funny, clever, mildly threatening	Pun, short, strong
Puns, personal, different to someone else on your team!	Funny, meaning, related
Funny, witty, succinct	Punny, memorable, flows
Pun, Aggressive, idiosyncratic	Person, fun, snappy
Puns, use of own name, something that makes you feel strong	Funny, meaningful, innuendo
Funny, clever, thought-provoking	Puns, thematic and individual
Fun, clever, punny	Pun-tastic, silly, unique
Clever funny punfull	Funny, clever, ?hard
Clever, unique, personal	Pun, funny, easy to shorten

Pun, funny or descriptive	Pmakes you think, funny, personal
Punny, awkward to pronounce, relevant to the person	Funny, clever, clean
accessible, aggressive, funny	Funny, strong, pun
Fun, lighthearted, personal	Punning, fierce, clever
Catchy, pun, funny	Memorable, clever, suitable
Funny, Goth, Pun	funny, savage, relevant
Fun, empowering, relatable	Fun, aggressive, topical
clever, amusing, shoutable	Catchy, easy to remember or pronounce, play on words
Easy to say, kickass and personal to you.	Unique, memorable, interesting
Witty, fitting, clever	Funny, sharp, easy to shout
Fun, snappy, ability to be shortened on track	Funny, clever, badass
Playful fun happy	Pronounceable, Individual, Identifiable
Pun, powerful, short	Fierce, fun, fabulous
Fun, pun, personal	punny, clever, personal
Personal, fun, cheeky	Original, witty, punny
Memorable, not complicated, individual	Strong, witty, fun
Not a pun	Succinct, punny, personal
Personal, fun, fiesty	Reflects personality, threat, humour
Clever, personal, fun	Clever, funny, strong
Personal, Rhyming, funny.	Personal, funny, memorable
Funny Inoffensive puns	Meaning, easy, memorable
Punchy, memorable and strong	Aggression, Skating Ability, Mental Toughness
personal, derby-related, funny	Fun shoutable unique
Intimidating, funny, personal	
clever, descriptive, fierce	
Puns, clever, meaningful	
Funny, clever, tough	
Defiant, Applicable, Rock	
Unique, empowering, humorous	
Punny, clever, apt	
Punny, fierce, clever	
Punny, violent, fits the person	
Punny, applicable, appropriate	

**Appendix 3: List of Responses to Question Five -
'When choosing your own roller derby name, what was most important to you?'**

1. 'that it contained a reference to something with meaning for me, and that it could be shortened to a good nickname'
2. 'that it reflects an interest or hobby of mine'
3. 'With the increased professionalisation of the sport I believe using your real name makes the sport appear more serious and legitimate in the eyes of outsiders'
4. 'That it fits you and feels right, my name does not mean I am a punchy Alpaca but it's the person that I am and I feel like a different person when I am called Alpaca'
5. 'That it reflects me/my interests/hobbies/other aspects of my life/ in a way that's unique to me whilst also sounding good.'
6. 'That its nerdy'
7. 'that it shortened nicely when yelled in a hurry ("blue", "turing")'
8. 'That it makes me smile'
9. 'That it reflected things about me but didn't take itself too seriously'
10. 'It made sense to me, this is my 2nd roller derby name. Kirk is my maiden name, and I love that it carries in somehow in my life '
11. 'It's entirely down to the person, define people are happier with their actual names'
12. 'I actually just went with my middle name because it's kind of iconic anyway and I know I'm too fickle to have been able to stick with a proper derby name for long!'
13. 'That it felt authentic to me'
14. 'I think mine reflects more my interests (dinosaurs) & my talent for crashing! 😊 I did consider ones that reflect my politics but this one was a play on my name too!'
15. 'I spent weeks coming up wity my initial derby name and as soon as i committed it to uniform i knew ot was wrong and didnt reflect who i am as a player or as a person. I chose my original derby name based on my fabourite cocktail but found the interpretation of the language left my name open to an incorrect persona being reflected.'
16. 'I would respond on track to the shortened version'
17. 'My initials are TPK so I needed a clever play on those'
18. 'It reflected something that I loved'
19. 'Self-deprecating, punny'
20. 'The first nick name i had that wasnt deogatory given to me by my wife 7 years before i started derby'
21. 'That it made people happy when they saw it'
22. 'Reflects my love of Terry Pratchett books'
23. 'The ref name was because there were two Liz's, one of them being my wife, so one was Liz wife and the other was Liz not wife and Tom Husband just stuck.'
24. 'That it's obviously ott'
25. 'Efficient - easy to say/shout.'
26. 'That it was something with personal relevance to me'
27. 'Incorporates actual name'
28. 'It relates to my trans identity and my disability '
29. 'People actually use it. My first Derby name was Wuthering Fights and no one ever called me that. So I went with Hedders, which is a family nick name.'
30. 'A combination of funny, clever, personal and something i would be happy being reffered to as.'

31. 'Makes me feel myself'
32. 'I love a good pun or play on words!'
33. 'It represents who I am'
34. 'Nicknames never really stuck'
35. 'It's a pun on my own name so it's easy to hear shouted during a game'
36. 'It's a trans in joke'
37. 'That it reflects who i am as a person'
38. 'I just wanted to use my name'
39. 'Including daughter's name '
40. 'My kids suggested it'
41. 'That it wasn't already taken by someone else! (In the days when that still mattered)'
42. 'It reflected some things I was involved in at the time'
43. 'That it is not too long - either to say in game, or to write on a shirt'
44. 'that it says something about me'
45. 'It fits with my team city and its history'
46. 'Pun, worked with people who got me into derby as part of a theme, could be read by announcers.'
47. 'I chose it based on my nickname from school (Fonz) although it does reflect my skating style too (I'm fast). To be honest my list of potential derby names was huge. '
48. 'Reflects me'
49. 'That it represents a facet of my personality or history'
50. 'That is has meaning to me, cultural ref to female rap artist'
51. 'Something fun / cool'
52. 'It's tied to a place that's special to me.'
53. 'It was a persona I had already adopted - and I joined back when names had to be unique (and registered on Two Evils)'
54. 'Nickname'

Appendix 4: List of Responses to Question 8

**‘Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.
Is there anything else you would like to add?’**

Nope

No

I'd rather names were funny than overtly sexualised or aggressive.

Good luck with the thesis!

Noticed some slightly offensive/non-pc names in the above list - I'm hopeful that as a community we're moving away from these as they don't reflect the inclusivity roller derby represents!

"Dog" literally played for Tyne & Fear at #MEC this weekend - he's been a key player in the team for years, and I'm sure I've officiated with a Wreckorcist.

Making a play on your own name is great for other people to remember it too

I think derby names used to be more sexual/suggestive but since much more attention has been paid to creating an inclusive environment, this has lessened in some places.

There is a Dog in the UK. Most of the names listed I would not feel comfortable with as an announcer, they could easily be considered offensive so I would recommend to the skater to change it

Most the made up names I found potentially offensive which made them impossible to pick

I actually know a skater by the name nail'er swift

It was important to me that my name could be about how I am to others but also could apply to me, ie I might cause others to trip and I might trip myself. Having just broken my leg last week paying roller Derby I'm feeling really glad I didn't pick a really threatening name like "the destroyer" or something, as I'd have felt even more silly. Good luck with the research!

I just don't like puns. But I don't mind weird nicknames. Dog is quite cool.

Hello

Scissor Me Timbers is hilarious!

being easy for announcers to pronounce, and shortening nicely to something that's unique within your team(s), are good bonuses! our team has three "Bam"s and two "Hells"s. Oops.

Beware naming yourself after a celebrity. I've known people spend a fortune in derby shirts with their derby name on and then have to buy new ones because the celeb they based their name on turned out to be a creep. That said, I don't doubt for a moment that Taylor Swift is lovely 😊.

When we invite new skaters to find their name puns tend to be what people go for, but I make sure to let people know that their isn't a pressure to pick one, and your name should feel right when you say it and when people use it to refer to you. If that means your name doesn't fit a typical 'derby' style name then so be it. The question above about what names I felt were best for Derby I think is hard as a name is personal in my mind. So a Derby name like Dog or even someones normal name can just as well be a derby name if thats what they want to be called.

I am sad I never thought of bitch tea biscuit for myself 😂

No thank you, good luck with your masters!

I'm not a fan of derby names that include words sometimes used as slurs e.g. Raspberry Cripple

I am a former roller derby player (2010-2013)

I started as a ref and think this name works better for that

Duke Hard is also great

As derby has evolved over the years more people are using their birth names to seem more athletic. Myself went from being Donna K Baps to Donna (my birth name) as I wanted people to be proud of who they are and that they don't need a derby name to be powerful great people

Most skaters will have a shortened form of their skate name that teammates will be able to shout on track so this is also something to factor in when choosing

I'm not a personal fan of derby names that are clear sexual innuendos, or contain words commonly used as slurs, as I think its a barrier to getting a wider audience to the sport, but other people's mileage may vary, and I respect that.

Roller derby is rad and everyone should give it a go

I only chose my name because I was told I couldn't have anything with swearing in it. So I chose a swear that's not a swear word 🙅 also I've had it 10 years and I've still. Ot met another flip the bird

Roller derby is fun if you know WHY you're doing it. Don't let anyone else tell you that your chosen name isn't good enough.

A good Roller Derby name is not too complicated, and can be easily shortened. The shortened form is what everyone ends up being called by. In my case, the shortened form happens to be my actual name, so my full Derby name is generally only used by announcers during a game.

Is there a reason you've chosen some potentially rather offensive 'derby names'? It generally isn't the case any more.

I wanted a different skate name but got 'bullied' into having my nickname as my skate name. (Lightly bullied by friends)

My skate name reflects the fact I work on the railway and there are often Points Failures causing delay. It took on an extra level of punnery when I began reffing. My number is also related: 1075 is the size of a standard set of points. Oddly I only use the skate name for printing on shirts or programmes; I ask others to call me by my first name when skating.

There is the potential for a question that allows people to state their Derby name relates to a name, nickname or other life aspect (profession, preferred hair colour) they currently have. Eg. I already was known as Nixxie so Nix worked to coincide with this

I used to live in England, and played roller derby there, but moved to BC 5 years ago. My derby name is the one I used while playing there.

Derby names are such a personal subject. I deliberately picked mine as it contains my surname so it wouldn't be so difficult to start responding to it and people would remember it.

Derby names used to be a bigger thing but as the sport has grown and become more serious, real names have become more popular.

Derby is about making a safe space for everyone and I think acknowledgement of people's chosen names is a big first step of that.

My current derby name is a shortened version of my original derby name. I transitioned while active in roller derby, and my original name (Emmeline Pancakehurst) while clever, was now inappropriately gendered. It

was also too long to use - both in game and in conversation - and had already been shortened to Pancake in common usage. It became less clever, but more appropriate to my needs.

Roller derby names are a personal thing - what is funny/clever/relevant for one person won't be relevant for someone else. I don't mind names that have grown from in jokes (I might not "get it"), but names shouldn't involve slurs or offensive language. Derby is an inclusive and fun environment - it shouldn't make (especially marginalised) people feel uncomfortable, offended, or unwelcome.

I also don't think derby names shouldn't include swears - our league hosts games open to spectators of all ages, it's a family league.

I think I added my feelings in my previous comment. I enjoy seeing people's punny names or double meanings but I realised I didn't feel proud, strong or confident with my original name. Now that i use my surname I automatically feel more authentic, strong and proud. I was trying to create a persona that didn't match my true self and I'm glad I've now changed my derby name in time for our final game of the season A lot of my league use their own names as they want the sport to be taken more seriously

Raspberry cripple only works as a derby name if the player considers themselves to be "crippled" or disabled, it shouldn't be used as a way to suggest you will be 'crippled' or 'cripple' someone else during gameplay.

Whilst I do like a good pun, meaningful names and nicknames are also good.

Roller Derby has evolved from its performative origins to being a legitimate sport. Derby names are a legacy of this and, although fun, I can see them becoming less common in the coming years as players wish to be seen as serious athletes.

Derby is a welcoming, progressive space. Some older derby names were deliberately provocative and would no longer be acceptable in the sport. See "Raspberry Cripple" in your list above. Our league never allow someone to use this. This would also apply to a lesser extent to names using derogatory terms like "bitch"

"professionalism" is killing fun in roller derby. There's room for both - having your family name as your derby name doesn't make you any better than someone who has a silly name!

To expand on my descriptors - for me, widely appealing is something that either is simple, or recognisable as a play on words/a name, even if the observer doesn't know the source.

Inoffensive - anything playing on something regarded as widely offensive should be avoided, however appreciate there is an aspect of reclaiming some terms to be taken into consideration

I think more people should do this kind of research!

In finding the right pun there is always a risk of being (inadvertently) offensive, which is why I've seen people change names in recent years, with rising awareness of issues as not being appropriate to be joked about, however there is still work to be done

It's Banshee because I scream a lot when playing and love my folklore, and weave because that's my manner of playing - but also because I sew a lot.

Be interesting to look at how/when players change their derby name, why they do it and how hard it is to get people to use your new one (both guilty and victim).

This is my original roller Derby name from when I started about a decade ago! I've actually come back from a long break and decided to use my real surname now. Reasons being I definitely developed an on track persona with my original name, and it gave me the opportunity to be this other awesome person. I'm in a different place in life now, with different thoughts and feelings and reasons for playing. I feel like I am totally happy just being me now and I'm not the same person I was back then, so it would be weird having the same Derby name. I've made up a clever, personal number instead this time! (K999 if you're interested, as I'm a firefighter with a dog walking business. Yes I did think I might be a genius when I figured that number out 😏)

I wonder if roller derby trust to professionalise people start to use their own names more so we look more like a 'proper sport'

A lot of skaters started using their own names which I think is a shame - I love the puns and silliness (although I didn't use one!!). Ps. I'm retired from roller derby!

Sometimes numbers interact with the names which is fun. Eg mine is 150 which is the number of points you get for catching the golden snitch

I would be interested to read your study (please feel free to email me Izzy.John.150@gmail.com) and to see if it explores what derby names are deemed not ok in any contexts. Eg, when champs was aired on ESPN and some of the players had to play under different names. A player on crime city was "dykestalker" which also causes some controversy.

If I was still skating, I wouldn't use my derby name. I did love it at the time, but feel that roller derby names are slowly being phased out.

I also think that some derby names become nicknames & others don't. Most skaters used my given name & I never really had my derby name used other than in games by announcers.

This is a cool project! Please share findings back with Manchester Roller Derby, UK!
Cool research topic!

Thank you for looking into this, it seems like really fun & interesting research!

I like all the names above. My league (SWAT) has a family friendly names policy so anything with swears or an adult theme is a no go.

Appendix 5: List of Roller Derby Names of Google Survey Respondents

1. Derby Barbie	2. Points Fail Ya
3. Them Fatale	4. Why-Gon Jinn
5. Fitz 'n' Giggles	6. Art Hole
7. Beans	8. armitage shanks
9. Trypsy Danger	10. Half Hinch
11. Just Dan	12. Zelda
13. Valhalla	14. starrymoose
15. Jinx	16. Crashida Rex
17. Storm Cooper	18. Nix Fury
19. F.I.L. (Falling is learning)	20. Wood (Previously Dirty Martini)
21. Fairy Quake	22. Barbelle
23. Mabel in a China Shop	24. Hannibal lect-her
25. Electric Fight Orchestrator	26. Barbarrayck
27. Bona	28. Scary Biscuit
29. Chevy Impaler	30. Wildkat
31. Alpaca Punch	32. Victor E Dance
33. Banshee Weave	34. Thembo Party Killer
35. vomwitch	36. The Golden Snatch
37. Stormageddon	38. BookHer DeWitt
39. Doppler Blue (bouting) / Turing Tested (referee)	40. Scaramouche
41. <i>Haven't got one yet!</i>	42. Orla Skew
43. Cassie Roll	44. Josie Doe
45. Juke Special	46. Asterisk
47. Parma Violence	48. Kellraiser
49. Comic Slams	50. Gizmo
51. EmRAH	52. Rainbow Dash
53. Freudian Trip	54. Esme weatherwacks
55. Weston-super-Clare	56. Abbottoir
57. Scotch Wroth	58. Ravi Rolly
59. Assault n Peppa	60. What's Luck Got To Do With It?
61. Kirk	62. Insannabell / Roodi Mental
63. KP	64. Pipkin
65. James Smackavoy (player) Tom Husband (Ref)	66. Deplaurable
67. Rii Arrange Your Face	68. Maimed'oiselle
69. <i>Never got one</i>	70. Hedders
71. Rocky Bashova	72. Rhythm & Bruise

73. Kay Od	74. Curse-T
75. Riva Styx	76. King Crazy
77. Donna	78. Dando unchained
79. Hurt Nouveau	80. Nyte Owl
81. Mortal Wombat	82. Pancake
83. Kammakazi	84. Destroying Angle
85. Nixon	86. Ebor Whack'em
87. Leahviathan	88. Catface (Catface Killher)
89. Purpletrator	90. Flip the Bird
91. Sin de Bloch	92. She-RARR
93. Dr Crusha	94. Luna Trick
95. The Girl Anachronism	96. Yvel Saint Laurent
97. Jayne	98. Sweetness & Fight
99. Grrrrrrrrrr	100. Swearwolf
101. Brody Hellz	102. Speedy Fonzaes
103. Purd is the Word	104. War Cub
105. Ref Or End Em	106. MishMash
107. The Morigana	108. Spinderella
109. DiströJa	110. Mia Malice
111. Eleanor Hell Strop	112. Kit Kruger
113. Reaper Cushions	114. MsMoll
115. Speedy Gone Charlie	116. Stonecold
117. Rex Everything	118. Over the Painbow
119. Township Rebel	
120. Giant Tess	
121. Rainbow Smite	
122. Scornflake Grrrl	
123. Rose Misconduct	
124. Nutcracker (Nuts)	
125. Cazmanian Devil	