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Department of Sociology

Rolling with Pain

– A Sociological Investigation Into the Meaning-Making of Physical Pain

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Abstract

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In this thesis, I investigate the experience of physical pain. Through an analysis and assessment of the data in the form of qualitative interviews collected for this thesis, the aim has been to show that meaning-making is fundamental to our experience of (physical) pain. At its core, this thesis contends that physical pain can not be reduced to physiological stimuli and that an investigation must consider not what pain *is*, but how pain is experienced and also, what pain *does*. In order to tackle the dynamics of pain, this thesis focuses on the empirical case of skateboarding. The methodology of this thesis draws on insights from phenomenology, both in choices of point of departure in relation to collected data, and as a way of accessing the data. The theoretical threshold follows this phenomenological vein paving the way for theoretical insights of author and scholar Sara Ahmed, namely her conceptualization of *intensification*, *resurfacing* and *(re)orientation*. The research showcases how and why the respondents experience pain the way they do. It finds that when a painful experience is experienced it sets in motion a meaning-making process through which pain is assessed through a multitude of factors such as narration, past experiences, feeling states, and more, prompting a *(re)orientation* of the body. Through this process pain, firstly, comes to be experienced *as* pain, and, secondly, is ascribed value and meaningful or meaningless meaning. I conclude by arguing that the way physical pain is experienced depends on the meaning ascribed to it through this process of meaning making. In a final discussion I consider claims of societal algophobia. I argue that both the pain experienced by the respondents, as well as their utilization of this pain is radical, as it breaks with the *in-difference* of an algophobic society in the way it produces difference as it shapes and reshapes surfaces, bodies and borders, i.e. worlds.

Keywords: pain, physical-pain, meaning-making, phenomenology, Sara Ahmed

Popular Science Summary

In this thesis, I investigate the experience of physical pain. The aim of this thesis is to show how meaning-making is fundamental to our experience of (physical) pain. At its core, this thesis finds that physical pain can not be reduced to physiological stimuli, but that how pain is experienced – if it is even experienced as pain – depends on the meaning ascribed to it.

In order to tackle the dynamics of pain, this research focuses on the empirical data of people who have experience with skateboarding. It takes its offset in skateboarding because the practice is poised interestingly at the junction between professional sport and leisure activity.

The data stems from interviews of a dozen respondents who have experience with skateboarding and the data is treated through a phenomenological lens using feminist thinker Sara Ahmed's theories.

The research connects the painful sensation experienced within skateboarding with the way the respondents weave narratives about themselves and skateboarding. These narratives are centered on or underpinned by their experiences of pain. The paper finds that there is an interplay between narrative through which pain is understood and how pain is contextually experienced. From narratives, the paper then turns to the body and maps the concrete realities of being a skating body in pain using Ahmed's concepts of impression and surfaces to further illustrate the experience of pain. This section argues that the experience of pain and the way in which this experience mutates is central to the respondents' pain perception, self-conception and even broader worldviews.

In the final section, this thesis considers German philosopher Byung Chul Han and his claim that contemporary society suffers from societal algophobia (the fear of pain) and an obsession with the palliative (the numbing of pain). Via Han, this paper concludes that both the pain experienced by the respondents, as well as their utilization of this pain is radical. Radical in the sense that the experience of pain radically changes the way the respondents perceive themselves and their world-view thus breaking with the *in-difference* of an algophobic society.

Chapter 1

The Object of Inquiry

[W]e have out-Descarted Descartes [when] we perfected an idea of pain so blank and stripped down that [...] it acknowledges no meaning or social context at all. (Morris 1994, 5).

— David B. Morris
The Culture of Pain

Introduction

In his work *L'Homme* from 1664, René Descartes proposed a ‘classical’ description of pain in what he called the specificity theory. The theory proposed a simple mechanistic understanding of physical pain. What has since been referred to as the Cartesian causality of pain which is depicted in the following illustration *The Path of the Burning Pain* (1664):



(René Descartes, *The Path of Burning Pain*, 1664. Wellcome Library M0014440)

Descartes retained the assumption that the body, its doings and movements, were assisted by small organisms called “animal spirits”¹. These he understood as invisible or at the very least minute particles that rapidly and almost continuously flowed through the blood ‘like the

¹ The notion and theory of animal spirits was proposed by Hippocrates (460-371 BC), a physician from the island of Cos. Hippocrates believed that the animal spirits came from the outside air from where they were transferred into the brain, which was believed to be the head of the soul, “to induce the development of intelligence”. Aristotle (384-322 BC) expanded on this idea, explaining that the sensations of the body, both internal and external, were transmitted by the animal spirits as vibrations. The animal spirits moved through the blood and circulated from the heart to the muscles and brain. Up until Descartes, the idea of the animal spirits and their importance to the body and its sensations was further developed by a number of thinkers. (Barco-Río et. al. 2018)

wind' and resided in the brain. These animal spirits were believed to be the reason for the reaction and movement (away from) the pain. Looking at the illustration of the *The Path of Burning Pain*, we see what Descartes meant by this. The particles of the fire will disturb the filaments of the nerve of the foot; the disturbance will reach the brain by passing along the length of the nerve fiber, activating the animal spirits which will let the appropriate muscles 'know' that the foot should indeed be moved out of the fire (Morris 1994, 4). In this way pain and reaction to pain are like the pulling of a string with a bell at the end. The bell chimes when the string is pulled, notifying you that it is time to move out of harm's way.

Even though we have replaced the idea of 'animal spirits' with endorphins and nociception, Decartes' simple understanding of how pain works still seems to inform our perception of pain today. According to English Professor David B. Morris, Cartesian pain mechanics has served as the basis for much pain-research for centuries (Morris 1994, 4). We have, as Morris puts it, "out-Descarted Descartes". Our idea of "pain [is so] stripped down that [...] it acknowledges no meaning or social context at all" (Morris 1994, 5). Pain does not follow a straight path from foot to brain but is inextricably intertwined with a host of different forces (like context, gender, ethnicity, class and so on) that cause the 'animal spirits' to behave in different ways. Pain is wrapped up in a meaning-making process that itself reflects back on how we experience pain. The causality of pain is out of joint.

The central aim of this thesis is to show that meaning-making is fundamental to our experience of (physical) pain². The experience of pain is irreducible to its immediate physiological properties because the way pain 'hurts' is not simply based on sensory information. The 'raw' information is always already being interpreted within a given context and it is this act of interpretation that produces meaning and rebounds on the very understanding and experience of pain. The causal nexus between meaning-making and the experience of pain forges transformation as it has a radical effect on the way in which individuals see themselves, how communities are formed, and worlds are shaped. Ultimately, therefore, the experience of pain can be seen as a vehicle of change.

This thesis investigates the interplay between meaning-making and the experience of pain by considering how a (disparate) group of people who have experience with skateboarding understand and live with the pain they have experienced while skating. Skateboarding is an interesting case-study because it rests uneasily on the edge of

² When referring to pain in relation to the central aim of this thesis, I am always referring to *physical* pain. When physical is omitted, it is for the sake of the reading experience. Other types of pain, mental or otherwise, are always explicitly stated as such.

professional sport and, as the saying goes, a way of life. I will return to this question of *why skateboarding?* in more detail later on.

Research Questions and Outline

The main research question of this thesis is: How does the act of interpretation influence the subjective experience of pain, especially in the context of skateboarding? In order to answer this question, the following questions serve as guides:

- I. What research methods are effective for investigating the experience of physical pain?
- II. How do elements like narrativization, context, and other socio-cultural factors shape the experience of physical pain? And how does this orientate us?
- III. What can an examination of the experience of pain reveal about certain aspects of contemporary life?

Outline

The thesis is divided into two major sections. The first section provides methodological and theoretical grounding. Here, I explain why I chose to use qualitative data in the form of in-person, semi-structured interviews and unfold my theoretical position which is rooted in phenomenology.

The British-Australian scholar Sara Ahmed, especially her work on the political capacity of emotions, serves as the theoretical spearhead of this thesis. I draw heavily on her approach to understanding emotions and the *work* emotions do in the world. Following Ahmed, I approach feelings (and understandings) of pain as concrete realities; they are phenomena that have a tangible impact.

The final section is devoted to an analysis of the interview data. The analysis is divided into three subsections. I begin by considering the way the respondents talk about pain. I find that the respondents have similar ways of talking about/telling of their pain which I call the narrative of *the struggle*. The story of *the struggle* provides a backdrop to the understanding of how skaters make sense of their experience with pain. I conclude by arguing that the experience of pain is the structuring device in the narratives of the struggle.

In the second section of analysis, I look at the skaters' experience of pain with what Ahmed calls the *intensification process*. This is a process where meaning is ascribed to pain causally – the collision of the body with other objects – the assessment of this collision and the (re)orientation (of the body) based on this assessment. I argue that pain brings not only the skater's body into view but also other bodies, objects and contexts.

In the final section, I draw on German-Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han's work *The Palliative Society: On Pain* (2021) wherein he argues that contemporary society is increasingly focused on avoiding pain. I consider Han's work in order to illustrate the radical potential the experience of pain has.

You can boil it down to we're obsessed. It's an obsession. And you, through that obsession, you learn perseverance, you learn determination, you learn the value of repetition. And you learn to get back up and I don't want to get hurt, but I'm willing to (Hawk, 2023, 6:40).

— Tony Hawk
*Rolling Away: A Skateboarding
Documentary Starring Ryan Sheckler*

Delimitation - Why Skateboarding?

Like in many other sports, the experience of physical pain in skateboarding is inevitable. There is already a rich body of research on how pain works in sports in the field of Sociology of sport - competitive swimming (McNarry et al 2020; Throsby 2016), roller derby (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2015), contact sports like Rugby (Pringle & Makula 2005; Pringle 2009), certain forms of dancing such as ballet (Wainwright et al. 2005; Pickard 2012; Wellard et al. 2007) and competitive running (Lev 2019; Hanold 2010). I will return to this review of the literature in further detail in a later chapter.

There are several reasons why I choose to investigate skateboarding as opposed to the aforementioned fields of study, the most obvious being that there simply has been less research done on the subject of pain and skateboarding. My other reasons have to do with how skateboarding is more than athleticism and is something closer to a culture - in the broadest sense of the word.³ Exploring the many nuances of skate-culture is too broad for the scope of this paper, but there are aspects of it that are worth mentioning here because they do have, as we shall see later on, a bearing on what this culture means for the skaters' experience of pain.

One example of this is the sense of freedom that is described as unique to skateboarding (admittedly as described by the skaters themselves). That is, a freedom *from* the accountability and responsibility one might have to a team or a trainer (Interview, Simon, 2022, 00:53; Interview, Alex, 2023, 11:55). There is (usually) no coach or trainer pushing the

³ Of course, other sports can be said to have 'cultures' - fan culture, sports culture, modes of being - but these are somehow limited to the sport in and of itself whereas skateboarding is more 'messy' and seeps over its own boundaries as is described by the data.

skater to achieve. In this way, skateboarding is more individualistic, as one respondent explains: “if somebody weren't doing their best it would affect the whole team and... I think what really attracted me [to skateboarding] was that like... it's my board and me, you know, like, nobody is going to do it for me, I have to do everything by myself” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 30:24). Skaters can skate alone but it is certainly also a communal activity. Skaters look to other skaters to improve their techniques,⁴ and get support from the people they skate with (Interview, Sille, 2022 38:07; Interview, Emil, 2022, 01:09:51). A skate ‘session’ is usually not planned by anyone but happens, like friends hanging out.⁵

Skateboarding is not dependent on a designated space either, unlike most other sports that are constrained to a field or pitch or a specific set of rules. This is a freedom *to* skate. The streets, that bit of asphalt over there, the world is their oyster: “you had the freedom to just go down and skate. And you didn’t always skate with others. I would often spend hours at home skating around the street. [...] I mean, it was clearly a freedom in the sense that it was independent of anything else” (Interview, Alex, 2023, 10:52).

There are, of course, many more ways in which skateboarding is different from (and similar to) other sports. It *has* become more professionalized⁶ since the dawn of street skating in the 1980s.⁷ My interest in skateboarding is due to its mix of being both a sport and a culture, a professional activity and something to do with your friends. This has an effect on the way the experience of pain works in skateboarding as opposed to a more rigid professional setting where pain is something to endure, a by-product of trying to become the best at something, for the sake of the team or trainer.⁸

⁴ A big way in which skateboarding is consumed is by watching ‘skate’ videos. Videos that showcase a skater's ability, daring, and creativity. This has been integral to the skateboarding community and professional skateboarding. Many skateboarding brands were born out of skate videos and use these videos as a way to promote their brands.

⁵ Though skateboarding schools like the ones the respondents Sille and Victor run (Interview, Sille, 2022, 41:48; Interview, Victor, 2022, 03:53) do exist, none of the respondents have learned to skate through such schools.

⁶ In 2020, skateboarding became an Olympic event.

⁷ When exactly street skateboarding came about is disputable. Many would however, point to Rodney Mullen's flat ground ollie in 1982 as the dawn of street skateboarding because the trick not only made a myriad of other tricks possible (the famous kickflip for example), but also paved a way for skaters to use the streets as skateparks since they could now jump off of and on to things.

⁸ This can be seen among other places in the article “You Always Wanna Be Sore, Because Then You Are Seeing Results”: Exploring Positive Pain in Competitive Swimming (2020) by McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans. “[D]uring training,” the article notes, “swimmers’ bodies are regularly pushed to their physical limits in the pursuit of training adaptations. Discomfort and pain, and the toleration of these sensations in their various forms, constituted an integral part of the everyday routine of competitive swimming, where training constitutes ‘work’ that conditions the body and mind as swimmers learn to endure.” (McNarry et al. 2020, 304). Because the training in competitive swimming is planned, written and directed by the trainer(s) pain is seen as a ‘by-product’ (McNarry et al. 2020, 301).

Relevant Research

The topic of pain has been vastly investigated. A preliminary inspection of the field of pain research reveals a myriad of academic articles and papers in journals like PAIN, Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, Journal of Pain, Clinical Journal of Pain and European Journal of Pain (which are merely the highest ranking journals⁹). Just by glancing at these journals, it becomes clear that research and theory on pain is dominated by the fields of medicine, neuroscience and/or pharmacology. In other words, diagnosis and treatment has for years been the main focus of pain research. In the following I account for the field of pain research and how it has developed from the Cartesian understanding reflected in the introduction. This chapter maps out relevant research which oriented me toward the investigation of pain as a lived experience in the way it did. In this way, this chapter positions both the thesis and the object of this thesis within a broader field of pain studies.

The Field Changes

Scholars like Gillian A. Bendelow and Simon J. Williams have argued that to truly understand pain it is important to include socio-cultural thoughts and theories. They further note that a medical/diagnostic focus “reduces the experience of pain to an elaborate broadcasting system of signals, rather than seeing it as moulded and shaped by the individual and their particular socio-cultural context” (Bendelow & Williams 1995, 139).

Though medical studies still far surpass social, anthropological and cultural studies, the latter have made great strides since the 1990’s (Duncan 2017, 521, Morris 1994, 5). The studies of the 1990’s (Kleinman et al. 1992, 8; Duncan 2017, 520) were initially conducted in order to assist in the diagnosis and treatment of pain. Surprisingly, these studies found that acknowledging the ‘conflict’ between the medical definition and the meaning/experience of pain held by the patient was crucial to successful pain management. A study from 1992 investigating 136 patients living with chronic pain showed how the lived experiences of

⁹The rankings of journals can be seen here: <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=pain>

chronic pain “confound mind-body and subject-object dualism” (Duncan 2017, 520). Treatments became inefficient because they did not take into account the *experience* of pain. Thus they consistently kept producing and reproducing dichotomies. The problem was, it is argued, one of linguistics. In other words the difference between the meaning ascribed to pain by doctor and patient respectively influenced treatment and outcome (Duncan 2017, 520). This issue of misinterpreting pain still persists as another study shows where doctors fail to assess the level of pain their patients are in because of racial and gender biases (Moyer, March 2022).

The entry of research made from a social science, anthropological and cultural science perspective was prompted by the argued need to challenge scientific medical research on the mind-body division. Instead of, to borrow a phrase from Bendelow and Williams, “reducing the experience of pain to an elaborate broadcasting system of signals” (Bendelow & Williams 1995, 140), the importance of investigating pain as an experience and closing of the gap between mind and body was stressed. Bendelow and Williams' agenda was to investigate pain by looking at it, not only as a corporal phenomenon, but also as a phenomenon existing in and being informed by a socio-cultural tradition (Bendelow & Williams 1995; Duncan 2017). Such literature sought, and still seeks, to provide a framework that “transcend[s] the divide between mind and body and to develop a more adequate phenomenological approach to pain as a lived, embodied experience” (Bendelow & Williams 1995, 141; Bendelow 2006).

The Ambiguity of Pain

Since the mid-nineties many studies looking at pain from a social and cultural perspective have sought to further define and investigate the concept of pain. One prominent and frequently used study is Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain – The Making and Unmaking of the World* from 1985 wherein Scarry argues that pain resists and in some cases even destroys language (Scarry 1985, 4). This concept of pain as being something outside the realm of language and therefore also outside any universal or fixed definition has been a point of departure for numerous subsequent studies (Duncan 2017; Bueno-Gómez 2017; Bendelow & Williams 1995; Ahmed 2014, Aldrich & Eccleston 2000; Morris 1991; Arntz & Claassens 2004; Melzack & Wall 1988; Duncan Bueno-Gómez 2017; Fernandez 2010; Biro 2012). These argue that the experience of pain is not predetermined, but depending on the meaning ascribed to it. This emerging understanding of pain as not only existing within the confines of the body but also in the intersection between body, mind and culture, it is not surprising that a

plethora of research topics on and in relation to pain came to the fore. A few of the more notable topics are pain in relation to society, culture, ethnicity and religion (Morris 1991; Han 2021; Denny 2017; Miller et al. 2022, Jimenez et al. 2012; Jünger 2008, Williams & Thom 1989; Bates 1987; Moons et al. 2009; Morris 1994;), pain and its effects on human emotion and behavior (Ahmed 2004; Ahmed 2014; Singer et al. 2004; Moons et al. 2009; Bastian et al. 2014a), out of which pain in relation to rites and meaning is especially researched (Ehrhardt et al. 2022; Murer & Schwarze 2022; Fischer & Kruekaew 2020; Schlegel & Barry 2017; Glucklich 1998), pain and its political utilization (Scarry 1985; Harrod & Kincaid 2020; Osterholtz 2020) pain, the body and, especially, embodiment (Leder 1990; Procacci & Maresca 1985; Scarry 1985; Wacquant 2004), pain narration and narratives as well as the performance of pain (Spencer 2012; Vaittinen 2014; Barker 2017; Sparkes & Smith 2008; Morris 2001; Morris 2012; Manzenreiter 2013).

Other than establishing the many ways in which the subject of physical pain can be approached, larger bodies of work such as Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985), David Morris' *The Culture of Pain* (1991), Byung-Chul Han's *The Palliative Society: Pain Today* (2021), and the anthologies *Purposeful Pain: The Bioarchaeology of Intentional Suffering* (2020) edited by Susan Guise Sheridan and Lesley A. Gregoricka, *Dimensions of Pain: Humanities and Social Science Perspectives* (2012) edited by Lisa Käll Folkmarson and *Making Sense of Pain: Critical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2010) edited by Jane Fernandez and offering a fairly elaborate tour d'horizon of the field, establishes a keen interest in pain, not only from the perspective of its negative affect and consequences but also from its potentially positive affect. It should be noted here that there is ample literature which explores pain in conjunction with pleasure (Zeiler 2010; Roessler 2006; Smith 2019; Young 2004), other subjects of investigation in relation to pain and pleasure were body alterations like tattoo and piercing, and beautifying-procedures (Stone 2020) sex, sexuality and BD-SM more specifically (Dahan 2019; Abel-Hirsch 2006), pregnancy and childbirth (Gleisner 2012; Smith-Oka et al. 2020), drug addiction (Lende 2020), positive consequences of pain (Bastian et al. 2014b; Leknes & Bastian 2014; Sharpe et al. 2013; Leknes et al. 2013).

Pain Activity

There exists today a great amount of literature investigating the utilizable aspects of pain in relation to sports. Within the field of sport sociology and cultural studies there are studies of dance (Aalten 2007; Purser 2018; Singh 2011; Wainwright et al. 2005; Shilling 2017; Pickard

2012; Wellard et al. 2007), wrestling and Mixed Martial Arts (Downey 2007; Smith 2008; Smith 2016; Deri & Mendes 2012), running, especially competitive running (Lev 2019; Bridel 2010; Pringle 2016; Allen-Collinson 2003; Hockey & Allen-Collinson 2016; Hanold 2010), Rugby and other contact sports (Pringle & Makula 2005; Pringle 2009), competitive swimming (McNarry et al 2020; Throsby 2016), bodybuilding (Dean 2011; Monaghan 2001; Shilling & Bunsell 2009), skating, roller skating and roller derby (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2015; Young & Dallalre 2008), studies with a more general focus on pain and pleasure (in relation to sports) (Loland 2005; Murphy & Eaves 2016), on sport and pain investigation through risk, injury, coping and management (Howe 2014; Petrie 1993; Bazangor 1989; Miller et al. 2022; Bendelow 2006; Smith 2019; Allen-Collinson 2017; Brady 2019; Torres Colón & Smith 2020), on the general utilization of pain in sports (Pettersen et al. 2020; Murphy & Eaves 2016; Gard & Meyenn 2000).

With the amount of studies conducted and literature written on the subject of pain, on both its negative and positive effects as well as its effects on the lived experience of human beings there should be no doubt that the social and cultural sciences have indeed been established as a research field in its own right. That said, as noted by many before me (Bendelow & Williams 1995; Morris 1991; Duncan 2017; to name a few), the social and cultural perspective is still a fairly novel one which has not yet been studied extensively.

Even though the literature mentioned in this review have different angles, perspectives and objectives, they all strive to map out the meaning-making processes of the pain experience and how it affects our sense of being-in-the-world. As the experience of physical pain is one of the hallmarks of human existence, the study of its ramifications, its meaning, its impact on our day to day life – whether we are skaters or mere mortals biking to work everyday – is unwavering. Certainly we will probably never cease to ask ourselves and each other: “What does pain do?”

Methodology

Obtaining data in the form of detailed descriptions of the phenomena of physical pain as it is subjectively lived and experienced required a selection as well as a commitment to several techniques and methods from the social sciences. The methodological offset is a phenomenological one. By looking through a phenomenological lens and utilizing qualitative methods in the form of qualitative, in-person interviews with individuals, who have experience with skateboarding and who have experienced pain while skating, I have been able to gather a wealth of data describing lived experiences of pain. It is these experiences I will account for and analyze in this study (Allen-Collinson 2011).

Specifically I make use of an empirical phenomenological approach, inspired by the study on competitive swimmers by McNarry, Allen-Collins and Evans (2020), through the following directives:

- 1) collecting concrete descriptions from a subjective perspective of individuals, i.e. skaters, who regularly experience physical pain
- 2) acquiring the phenomenological attitude of epochē or bracketing¹⁰
- 3) initial readings of the assembled data to gain a feel for the overall data set
- 4) in-depth rereading of this data as part of a process of data immersion to identify key themes and sub-themes
- 5) the production of general statements and findings on the basis of the essential themes and
- 6) structure(s) retrieved from the data.

In the following I will give an account for the directive and the choices, considerations and reflections made in relation to them. I will do so while also describing the data-generating process, the data analysis strategy and the data evaluation.

¹⁰ Though epochē or bracketing will be referred to several times throughout this methodology, it will be accounted for in more detail in the theoretical chapter.

Data-generating Process

The data sampling in this thesis consists of 10 in-person interviews and one video call. The interviewees consisted of two women and nine men between the ages of 24 and 43. Though their skating experience varies as some have skated for years (one interviewee has skated for 30 years) and others only for a few years and one interviewee has only tried it once, all were familiar with the pain associated with skateboarding.

Finding Interviewees

The process of finding respondents began with contacting different skateboarding-profiles on Instagram and websites. Though the profiles on Instagram were more active in comparison to the websites I did not have any luck getting into contact with more than one person through this method.

Most respondents were found through *chain referral sampling*, or ‘snowball sampling’¹¹ (Noy 2008). I was, however, also able to get in contact with skaters through my own network, who would then refer me to other skaters, helping me achieve the necessary ‘in’ into the scene. The necessity of having such an ‘in’ was made clear to me through a conversation with one respondent who explained that I would most likely not get in contact with other skaters without an introduction from an insider. This respondent let me post, through his own profile, a notary on a skating forum on Facebook ‘advertising’ my study and search for more respondents. My experience was that because of the intimate culture of skateboarding there is a hesitance, almost resistance to letting strangers, or non-skaters, into the ‘scene’. However, once I had an ‘in’ it became much easier for me to get in contact with skaters and, even more so, to arrange meetings (time and place) for the interviews.

As noted by Hannerz and Tutengens (2022) there are some risks involved in using chain referral sampling that I have taken into account. These risks include overlooking relevant research participants by counting on the network of initial participants and the uncritical use of self-identification by which the initial participants might leave out certain people, whom they would not deem ‘right’ for this study (Hannerz & Tutengens 2022, 1272).

¹¹ I understand chain referral sampling or ‘snowball sampling’ as the selecting of a readily available subject who refers the researcher to other subjects (Hannerz & Tutengens 2022, 1270).

The object of my research, however, has not been to study an entire culture, but rather the phenomena of physical pain, and how physical pain is experienced within a group. For this reason, I did not see the need for a strict definition of who ‘qualified’ as a skater such as the one Hannerz and Tutengens refer to (2022, 1272). Moreover, though there are different norms that define the *legitimacy* of a skater (as defined by the data), my interest was directed towards the working of physical pain in relation to skateboarding. Because of this, I also did not exclude those participants who had only tried skateboarding once.

I do, however, acknowledge the pitfalls of chain referral sampling. I also accept that by selecting interviewees based solely on one criterion, that they have stepped onto a skateboard, I may have lost interesting insights as well as overlooked significant biases against some groups/types of skaters. This can be seen in the majority of the respondents being white, male, and between the age of 24 and 31. Through the academic literature on pain it is suggested that factors such as gender, socio-economics, ethnicity and culture play a part in how pain is experienced. However, as I have not been interested in findings that are specifically understood through such stratifications, my use of chain referral sampling will not have any bearing on the validity of my research. Had the investigation been a larger undertaking, such factors would undoubtedly have been relevant to include.

The Interview Guide

All in-person interviews were semi-structured¹² and deskriptive¹³. The semi-structuring kept the interview in line with my research questions, but also allowed for some digressions. Through this structuring, the interviewee had the freedom to go into the things that they found relevant, interesting and necessary for me to know (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 49). The loosely structured interviews often resulted in the emergence of stories based on their lived experience with pain in skateboarding, which I might not have learned about had the interview been more strictly structured. In other words, I was, as it is also suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann, able to retrieve insider information that I, as a skateboarding outsider, would not otherwise have been able to explore (2015, 51).

¹² Semi-structured is understood through Kvale and Brinkmann as a structure that “seeks to understand themes from the lived everyday experience of the subject’s own perspective” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 49; my translation).

¹³ Deskriptive is understood through Kvale and Brinkmann as encouraging the interviewees to describe as exact as possible what they experience and feel and why they act and react the way they do (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 51).

As suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) the preparation of the interview guide (see Appendix 1 for the full interview guide) is two-part. The first part is the identification of the study's thematic research questions or operational questions. These allowed me to stay close to, reflect on, and define the theoretical themes which I, based on prior readings on the topic of pain, found relevant. The second part deals with the definition of interview questions; how they may be translated from the theoretical into operational questions that take the interviewees (potential) lack of *theoretical* knowledge on the subject into consideration. Rephrasing or translating interview questions invites more personal responses. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 186-7).

The interview questions were written with multiple factors in mind. With a phenomenological approach, began this process with considering the process of epoche¹⁴. I realized that I came to this study of pain with numerous preconceptions (some of which are exemplified in a following section). In line with this phenomenological act of bracketing, I had to actively confront and set aside my preconceived ideas about pain and people who skate, in order to form an interview guide fashioned from questions which allowed the respondents to speak more clearly about their experiences; and thus the collection of concrete, in-depth data from the respondents subjective perspective (Allen-Collinson 2011; McNarry et al. 2019).

Relating to the interview guide, I began with questions relating more generally to the interviewees' personal experience with skateboarding ('when did they begin', 'how long have they skated', etc.), I gradually introduced them to questions directly relating to the research object: "Have you experienced pain when you have skated?", and following up by asking them to explain the *kinds* of pain they had experienced. Their responses gave me a general idea of the specific things, acts and situations that each of the respondents understood as painful. In this way, these initial questions functioned as a preliminary framework for us, the respondent and myself, to talk about the pain they experienced while skating. These questions were my initial entry into their thoughts on and experiences with physical pain as well as the language they used to describe. The relative simplicity of my first questions were also intended to make the interviewee at ease. 'Easing' into the conversation about their experience with physical pain in skateboarding would prove fruitful as some respondents were hesitant to talk about pain (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 95).

¹⁴ As Allen-Collinson (2011), I understand the notions epochē and bracketing as synonyms.

Lastly, the topic of pain is a deeply personal and intimate one. There was always the chance that it would have negative connotations or difficult memories connected to it, making it difficult to talk about – perhaps especially with a stranger and (skateboarding) outsider. For this reason I refrained from asking questions that might be viewed as ‘too personal and intimate’. Only if the interviewees volunteered personal information and stories did they become part of our conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 107-8).

In Preparation for the Interview

As part of the initial contact with the respondents, I informed them about the general object of my investigation. Though many of the respondents asked me to repeat the aim of my thesis when meeting in person, they had, generally, prepared themselves by thinking about the topic and their own experiences with pain.

In recognition of the potential effects of the material aspect of an interview, i.e. location and the human and non-human objects present in the interview room or space (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 144), I wanted to make sure that they took place in spaces with which the interviewees were familiar and comfortable. In almost all cases the interviewees were quick to suggest a place themselves. I interpreted the suggested places as being places where the interviewee did in fact feel comfortable. The in-person interviews therefore took place in a variety of different settings from the interviewees own home, work places, parks and cafés. This strategy of meeting the interviewees at their suggested locations showed itself as being highly productive. One interviewee invited me to a skating competition. Besides getting a feel of the culture, I was also able to do field observation and get in contact with and spontaneously interview other skaters.

I started all in-person interviews off with a briefing. In this briefing I re-informed the interviewee about me, my study, my general object of investigation and what I hoped to achieve with the interview. During the briefing I also defined the structure of the interview – the approximate duration of the interview and how they should let me know if they needed me to repeat, rephrase, or completely skip a question. As argued by Kvale and Brinkmann, I found that the pre-interview briefing was a productive way for both the interviewee and myself to get a sense of each other (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 183). Moreover, the briefing was also a way of offering enough information for the respondents to give their informed consent to the interview and my use of it (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 116). Following the briefing all respondents were, firstly, asked permission to record the interview, which all

respondents accepted, and, secondly, (in accordance with Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, 117)) I asked if they wanted to remain anonymous in the thesis, which all respondents declined.

Ethical Considerations, Preconceptions and Bracketing

While none of the respondents seemed particularly nervous before or during the interview as they were generally very eager to talk about their thoughts and feelings about skateboarding and pain in general, many of them became hesitant as soon as the conversation turned toward their own personal experience with pain. This resistance surprised me, as the culture of skateboarding shown in videos and magazines, is one that emphasizes physical pain. I watched these videos in the preliminary research process for this study and entered my investigation with the preconception that the respondents would find this topic easy and familiar to talk about. However, because the respondent's hesitancy could be interpreted as discomfort – or that the topic was actually more difficult to talk about than first presumed – I found it necessary to revise my initial bracketing of preconception and beliefs on the topic and people who skate. Following the first interview, I adapted a more conscious and caring approach in subsequent interviews.

All interviews were conducted in Danish except one which was conducted in English. Thus most interview quotes have been translated from Danish into English. Some meaning is inevitably lost in translation. In order to minimize this loss of meaning I have strived to only rephrase when necessary due to grammar and idiosyncrasies.

Data Analysis Strategy

Transcription

Each interview was transcribed following the meeting. I used the open source program *oTranscribe* in this process. The interviews were transcribed either fully or close to. I needed as much data, i.e. transcribed material, as possible in order not to miss or overlook important themes and statements. As recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann I decided to transcribe the interviews myself, so as to be as much in touch with the data as possible (2015, 239). Though I decided not to transcribe (all) pauses, emphases and emotional expressions such as laughter and sighs (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 240), I did include unfinished and disorientated sentences, assuming they might give me an indication of the instinctive or contradictory

thoughts and ideas the respondents had on the topic of physical pain. Though none of the respondents chose anonymity, I have, for ethical reasons, not included their full names in the transcriptions (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015, 246).

Coding

After all interviews were transcribed, I began the process of coding. This allowed me to define both dominant themes as well as minor, but still significant, themes (Saldaña 2016, 9).

In the first cycle of coding, I coded the data according to what Johnny Saldaña refers to as affective coding and narrative coding. Through this first cycle of coding I was able to categorize the data through color-coding and theme generation (Saldaña 2016, 141).

With affective coding I was able to “investigate the subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgements) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences. Affective methods include, among other things emotion coding, value coding and, to a lesser extent, evaluation coding. While the emotional coding gave me the tools to look for the inter- and intra-personal experiences with affects of the participant’s “distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and propensities to act” (Saldaña 2016, 125), value coding and evaluation coding enabled the coding of the “participant’s values, attributes, and beliefs” (Saldaña 2016, 131) as well as the participant’s “judgements about the merit, [and] worth” (Saldaña 2016, 141) of the phenomena of pain¹⁵. With narrative coding I was able to define narratives and stories in the data. “Stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute negatively or positively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes” (Polkinghorne 1995, 8; Saldaña 2016, 154).

A critique of both affective and narrative coding is that they are “lacking objectivity and rigor social science inquiry” (Saldaña 2016, 124), or that they are highly speculative (Saldaña 2016, 154). However, as Saldaña also argues, affects are “core motives for human action, reaction and interaction”. They should, therefore, *not* be discounted from investigations of the human condition. As pain must be considered a key aspect of the human condition, I believe my decision to lean on personal accounts is a meaningful approach.

¹⁵ Though evaluation coding is described as a method used for the coding of the evaluation of programmes, outcome of programs, policies and organization for particularly (Saldaña 2016, 142), I found that it could also, to some degree, be utilized as a way of coding the respondent’s thoughts on their experience with physical pain and the utilization of this pain.

Through the second cycle of coding, I re-coded and re-categorized the data using Saldaña's approach (2016, 11). Here categories or themes from the first cycle of coding were eliminated or reorganized if they proved to be ill sustained or outliers. During this second cycle of coding I reorganized the categories and themes from the first cycle into more substantial themes, based on the knowledge I had acquired from the process of the first coding. In this second cycle, I especially used focused coding allowing me to search for the more dominant, frequent and significant codes (Saldaña 2016, 240), and axial coding enabled me to "reassemble data that was 'split' or 'fractured'" (Saldaña 2016, 244) during the initial coding process.

Data Evaluation

Variations in the Data

Within the more dominant themes found in the collected data I found that there was a remarkable agreement. More specifically, understanding the pain experienced through narrativization and the narrative of struggling was one of these undisputed themes. That said, I also found some – though remarkably few – variation, discrepancies and contradictions in the data. Though I do not necessarily comment on or analyze these variations directly, they are included in the analysis as a way emphasizing how pain can be viewed and experienced differently. I did find that respondents contradicted themselves. However, these contradictions will not be commented on in the analysis as I did not find them significant to include (in this modest investigation)¹⁶.

Evaluation

Inevitably, the data generated from the interviews are to some degree influenced by the interview itself – the positioning of the interviewee *as* interviewee – and the interview questions. In other words, the respondents may not have discussed the themes that we spoke about with others outside the context of the interview – not even with other skaters. This means that, for example, the notion of narration presented in *Analysis Part 1* which is presented as a dominant theme, does not mean that most respondents directly mentioned

¹⁶ As noted, I found that it was not always easy for the respondents to talk about pain. That they were simply not used to vocalizing their views, thoughts and feelings about physical pain. By talking and thus insisting on this topic, I found that there was a progression in (the way they talked about it) their thoughts and feelings on the topic of physical pain potentially creating the contradictions.

either storytelling or narrativization. Only one respondent in fact, spoke directly of the struggle *as* narrative. It is important to note that there is an element of the data being produced that is swayed by the context of the interview which in turn has had an effect on my findings.

To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn towards things. (Ahmed 2010, 23).

— Sara Ahmed
The Promise of Happiness

Theoretical threshold

In the literary review we saw that there are a myriad different ways to approach the study of physical pain. The experience of pain is indeed a multifaceted subject that resists definitive categorization. There is always a subjective element at stake when we try to talk about what pain *is* leading us towards questions of *how* we experience pain. In the following, I will present the theoretical framework that guides this investigation of the experience of pain. Phenomenology is the driving force of this framework because it allows this research to position pain on an onto-epistemological plane rather than an ontological one. Even though I draw on phenomenology in this study it is Ahmed's work that helps fashion the phenomenological approach into a theoretical apparatus that ultimately guides this thesis. In other words, Ahmed provides a bridge between the subjective filtering of the world (the phenomenological) into the intersubjective space where, for her, emotions take shape as meaning is ascribed to it.

The Body in Pain – Epistemological stakes

Phenomenology is the study of appearances and how humans interact with *things* or phenomena in the world as we come in contact with them through our senses: touch, sense of smell and so on. Phenomenology investigates how these *things* appear to us through our senses. The phenomenological study of these interactions considers how we interact with things and also how we understand and reflect on phenomena: what meaning we ascribe to them and how they become meaningful to us.

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl broke with a well-rooted twentieth century European tradition of viewing *the body* and *the mind* as separate entities notably by scholars such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and René Descartes. According to Husserl the physical

body, the body-object, what he calls *Körper*, is not distinct from Kant and Descartes' view, but Husserl also argues that the living body, *Leib*, cannot be separated from the mind. Mind and body are thus interthreaded in Leib (Hockey & Allen-Collinson 2016, McNarry et al. 2020, 302). Husserl further argues that a person's body is "the zero point of orientation" (Husserl 1989, 162); "the means" Husserl argues "for all my perception" (Husserl 1989, 167). Husserl's theory, and phenomenology in general, has been criticized for being in danger of ending in relativism as "every possible phenomenon has to be considered as 'constituted' in the consciousness" (Halák 2018, 38). By arguing for a 'double state' of the body Husserl becomes a proponent for an ontology of the body as *also* being a materiality in and of itself. By so doing, Husserl implies a 'double state' of the body in which it simultaneous *is* and *is not* always connected to the mind¹⁷. Building and further developing on Husserl's argument, Merleau-Ponty sought to solve this paradox by arguing that these two 'states' should be understood as part of the same "original unity of a subject always already intentionally *related to* the world, but also *situated within it*." (Halák 2018, 39). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not a mere object among other objects, a materiality that can be understood as outside of my being-in-the-world, but rather as a 'vehicle' or 'agent' with which and through which the 'I' experiences the world; through which 'I am'. Merleau-Ponty thus suggests that the essence of subjectivity must be linked to my body and "to the way I rely on my body" (Halák 2018, 38). The two cannot then be separate.

A more sociologized version of phenomenology was implemented by Austrian philosopher and social phenomenologist, Alfred Schütz. Schütz emphasizes a concept, he called lifeworld, or *Lebenswelt*, which refers to the subjective world of everyday life in which we live and make sense of our lived experiences. It utilizes another of Husserl's arguments namely the importance of addressing the 'thing's themselves' (*das Sachen selbst*) "devoid (as far as possible) of presuppositions and preconceptions" (Schütz 1967; McNarry et al. 2020, 302). The concept of *Lebenswelt* underscores the necessity of examining and understanding social actors' lifeworlds from the point of view of the social actors themselves, giving credence to their subjective experiences and interpretations within a social structure and cultural milieu (Hockey & Allen-Collinson 2016; McNarry et al. 2020). To do this, the researcher adapts the phenomenological 'method' or 'act' of *epochē* or bracketing, employing the researcher to distance themselves from the everyday understandings of the world and thus

¹⁷ A paradox which was also problematized by Husserl himself as he argues for the body as a "remarkably imperfectly constituted thing" (Husserl 1989, 167) in that it both contributes to the way consciousness relates to object while being an object of consciousness itself (Halák 2018, 38).

the ‘thing’ or phenomenon they are investigating, i.e., being able to see that ‘thing’ with a “deeply questioning attitude” (McNarry et al. 2020, 302).

Because physical pain happens in, on or to the body, a fruitful scientific method for such an investigation is one that investigates how being-in-the-world and the interaction and effects phenomena have on the body. As I am interested in investigating the first hand lived experience of physical pain, how individuals act and react to this experience and what this looks like within a limited community, my scientific and methodological viewpoint is a phenomenological one. An adaptation of a more sociologized form of phenomenology which draws on the different phenomenological thinking just presented. Here, I understand pain as something without a fixed ontology. Pain ‘becomes’ in its connection with a context or as an experience. As a sociological researcher, with this phenomenological lens I am furthermore encouraged to be aware of the “structurally, [...] and ideologically-influenced, historically-specific, and socially situated nature of human embodiment and experience” (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2011: 332). My final argument for employing a sociologically influenced phenomenological lens on this investigation into physical pain and the experience of physical pain is that it allows an analytical deep-dive into the skaters experience with physical pain which considers the influence of different social and cultural structural forces.

Ahmed On Pain

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014) Sara Ahmed explores what emotions *do*. She argues that emotions “work by working through signs and on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds” (Ahmed 2014, 191). These surfaces and boundaries are part of the lived world and help constitute a political space. Emotions produce difference. Among the emotions that Ahmed investigates is the experience of pain.

When defining pain, Ahmed takes her departure in definitions adopted by *The International Association for the Study of Pain* in 1986. Pain is a) subjective, b) more complex than an elementary sensory event, and the experience of pain as involving c) associations between elements of sensory experiences and aversive feelings, and d) the meaning attributed to the unpleasant sensory event. (Ahmed 2014, 23). Pain is not limited to a feeling that corresponds with bodily damage as the recognition and experience “of pain as *pain*” (Ahmed 2014, 23) depends on the meaning ascribed to feeling and experience. This in turn involves the association between the sensation and other ‘feeling-states’ (Ahmed 2014,

23). Put differently, based on the differences in experience associated with a particular sensation, what one person experiences as pain may not be the same for another because of the different association with the sensation.

Public and Private Pain

The individual nature of pain is why, Ahmed writes, pain is often described as a private experience (Ahmed 2014, 20). The pain one person feels is their experience alone (Ahmed 2014, 20). No matter how eagerly the person in pain might try to share their experience or how much somebody might *want to* understand the pain of another, this can never happen (Ahmed 2014, 20). The unsharability of the experience of the pain has to do with language.

Pain evades language itself. The person feeling pain will never be able to successfully describe the pain they feel. Though the feeling of pain may be experienced as more present, self-evident, and self-explanatory, than anything else, “throbbing in its thereness” (Ahmed 2014, 22), to describe this pain to another through the vocabularies available to us (medical and metaphoric) will never truly be successful. To say that pain refuses representation in language or, as Ahmed argues through Elaine Scarry “pain is not only a bodily trauma, it also resists or even ‘shatters’ language and communication” (Scarry 1985, 5; Ahmed 2014, 22), is not to say that it is unrepresentable. It rather points to a schism between an internal feeling and its external representation. Therefore, since we cannot truly feel the pain *of* others nor adequately describe pain *to* others, the experience of pain can be, as Ahmed notes, a lonely one (Ahmed 2014, 20).

While a potentially lonely feeling, to say it is a private one is not strictly true. Ahmed unfolds the workings of a public language of pain. She uses a letter written by Christian Aid in 2003 as an example. The letter orientates the reader to a kind of experience of pain by narrating the pain of the others. The feeling of pain in the reader ‘mimics’ the pain of the other described in the letter, but it is not the same pain. The pain of the reader is, in this instance, a ‘ploy’ to action, intentionally created by the Christian Aid. While the feeling of pain existing ‘in’ one body cannot be directly shared it can be utilized publically.

Pain Surfaces

The ‘pain ploy’ of the Christian Aid letter is an example of how Ahmed sees emotions in action. In this way Ahmed provides an answer to the question what does the feeling of pain do rather than how pain feels (Ahmed 2014, 24). When considering what pain *does*, Ahmed

turns to Freud. For Freud, the ego is bound up with ‘bodily surface’ and the process of establishing this ‘surface’ depends on sensual experiences (such as pain). When we experience pain we get a sense of *our* surface; of what is internal and external, inside and outside, of what is and is not ours (Ahmed 2014, 24). Ahmed stresses that this is not an ontology of pain. Her claim is not that the surface is *caused* by pain, but that we are made aware, or rather, *become conscious* of our bodily surface through sensations such as pain (Ahmed 2014, 24). Part of *becoming conscious* of our surface, is also to become conscious of the surface as that which separates us from other surfaces From other individuals and objects (Ahmed 2014, 23-24).

The encounter between one body and other objects leaves, as Ahmed writes, an impression. One object can impress itself onto another body causing a sensation that could, of course, be painful. If I bang my elbow on the table I, my elbow, or rather, my surface will impress onto the surface of the table and vice versa causing a sensation in my elbow. How this sensation is felt, is not simply a matter of proximity, but of the way in which I will read and recognize the sensation. Ahmed describes this with what she refers to as *intensification*.

Part of intensification is how I *read* the sensation I experience. *How* we read the sensation, Ahmed ascribes to a process of over-determination of sense perception, emotion and judgment (Ahmed 2014, 25). When I bang my elbow on the table it sets in motion a process wherein I will 1) seek to understand the sensation that I feel in my elbow by 2) mediating it through an understanding of the context – what I see, how this makes me feel, past experiences with the ‘event’ or the sensation – all of which will enable me to *judge* the sensation and even act upon it: ‘this hurts, let me move away’ – and maybe even – ‘I will try not to do this thing again or at least not intentionally do this thing again’: or on the other hand, ‘this does not hurt a lot, I know that it does not pose any immediate danger to me’. *Intensification* can thus be understood as the meaning making process within which a person will read and attribute the cause of the sensation with the sensation itself, leading to the ‘reorientation’ of their body or bodily surface to(wards or away from) the ‘thing’ that they attribute as causing the sensation (Ahmed 2014, 24). This means, in short, that the “*impressions of a surface is an effect of such intensifications of feeling.*” (Ahmed 2014, 24). How we experience an impression has to do with the meaning-making that happens during this intensification process.

The intensification of pain sensations is where we are made aware of our own and other surfaces and, as Ahmed notes, it is “through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and worlds *materialise* and take shape or that the effects and boundaries, surfaces and

fixity is produced” (Ahmed 2014, 24; my italics). The creation of surfaces is never about a single surface. As the (unveiling and) production of one surface happens in the collision with other surfaces, the production of one surface will always entail the production of multiple surfaces: and thus a forming of worlds.

While pain might not be *about* anything because it does not have an inherent meaning or orientation in itself, pain is always *because* of something (Bending 2000, 86; Ahmed 2014, 25). The attribution of meaning, explanation and narration to the pain and the cause of the pain all function as, or constitute the object of pain and the very words we use to describe our pain, contributes to the *reshaping of our bodies* as well as the creation of *new impressions* (Ahmed 2014, 25). As Roselyne Rey explains, it is “[t]hrough his [sic] skin – the boundary between the self and the world . . . every human being is subject to a multitude of impressions” (Rey 1995, 333; Ahmed 2014, 25). Through sensations such as pain we not only become aware of ourselves, the world and the ways in which we embody the world; we are also faced with new, unseen and unexplored impressions of our surface and the world.

Ahmed on Leder

Ahmed does not argue that we do not have any sense of self, our body, surface, or embodiment prior to the experience of a sensation like pain. Rather, she argues, it is through the collision with other objects and bodies that one's body *comes into view*. This is an idea that Ahmed borrows from Drew Leder and his work *The Absent Body* (1990). Leder suggests that the body is ‘absent’ to our perception of it on a day to day basis. When we are not in pain our body ‘disappears’ (from our consciousness). It is when we experience pain, when the body *dysfunctions* as Leder puts it (Leder 1990, 85), that our body comes into view. When our body *dysfunctions* we are ‘able’ to recognize our bodily boundaries – what it can and cannot do – as it *seizes our attention* and “recalls us to our bodily surface” (Ahmed 2014, 26). In this way, pain calls us *back into our body*. Leder suggests that the body ‘turns in on itself’ when in pain, and tends to open up to other bodies when experiencing pleasure (Ahmed 2014, 26). When the body turns in on itself, or rather, turns its attention *onto* itself, what happens, Ahmed argues, is not a *forming*, but a *reforming* of the body. This reforming not only happens when we move away from what causes the pain but because we *move into* (acknowledge, turn attention to) our own body *and* seek to move away from the pain (Ahmed 2014, 26).

Where Leder uses notions such as ‘absent’ versus ‘present’, Ahmed describes this through her concept of *intensification*. How we experience our body (as absent or present, in or out of view) depends on the range and intensities of bodily experiences (Ahmed 2014, 26). Ahmed then attributes our awareness of our bodily surface and what she refers to as *the dynamic nature of surfacing itself* (turning in or away, moving toward or away) – a push/pull or constant movement based on our reading and assessment of the the sensation – to these intensities of pain sensations (Ahmed 2014, 26).

Chapter 2

The Analysis

[T]he merest schoolgirl, when falling in love, has Shakespeare and Keats to speak for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry. (Woolf 1926, 34).

— Virginia Woolf
On Being Ill

Analysis Part 1: Talking About Pain

Some respondents admit that they rarely talk openly about pain, least of all with each other (Interview, Sille, 2022, 25:21, Interview, Mathias, 2022, 1:17:05). Instead, they talk about the events leading up to and the time after a crash. In *The Body in Pain* (1985) Elaine Scarry argues that “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (Scarry 1985, 4). She writes, pain is impossible to translate because the exact feeling of *your* pain, its concrete bodily reality, always eludes us the moment we try to convey it through language. While the exact phenomena of pain may escape language, it does shape the stories skaters tell about themselves and each other. A dominating narrative theme that emerges is one I will define as *the struggle*.

Unlike other sports, which may be subject to mythmaking, *Tour de France* as a Homeric epic for example,¹⁸ skateboarding and skaters are actively involved in the creation of their own myths and narratives. This is not to say that skateboarding is not mythologized from the ‘outside’, but rather that narrativization is a component part of the practice itself.

Skateboarding films serve as an interesting example of this. While the films ostensibly are a showcase of the prowess of various skaters, and by extension the brand sponsoring their clothes, shoes and boards,¹⁹ these films are just as much documentaries about the skaters themselves. They are tales of friendship, their trials and errors when trying out new tricks, battles with police and various authority figures. Pain and frustration – scenes of skaters falling, snapping their boards in half – are a natural part of a fully fledged skate

¹⁸ Here I’m thinking of the famous literary critic Roland Barthes’ collection of essays *Mythologies* (1957) where he discusses the mythmaking surrounding the *Tour de France*.

¹⁹ Professional skaters often skate for a brand and thus the films are also produced in connection with the brand.

film. It is as if without this counterpoint of pain, the films would hold little interest. It is as if pain is the structuring device underpinning the rest of the story.

The Struggle

This counterpoint of pain is what I will refer to as the struggle. The respondents, though, use other similar terms like the *fight*, *the battle*, and even, on several occasions, the war. According to Ahmed, these terms reflect the “connection between the over-representation of pain and its unrepresentability.” (Ahmed 2014, 22). Pain is everywhere in these stories, and yet difficult to pinpoint exactly.

The struggle delineates a narrative arc of trial and error, where the skater’s main adversary is ultimately themselves. It is about their dogged determination to get back on the board again after having fallen.

The process of learning a new trick clearly illustrates the inner workings of *the struggle*. Learning a new trick inevitably involves physical pain since you are bound to fall several times in the process (Interview, Villads, 2022, 45:31, 57:53; Interview, Sille, 2022, 03:08; Interview, Lasse, 2022, 15:06; Interview, Emil, 2022, 21:47). Falling, as well as the actual experience of physical pain, while a key component in the respondents struggle there are many other aspects related to learning new tricks. Emil explains:

“skateboarding is also really about getting back up again, right. And just being able to get through all these steps and fail again and again and again until finally you get the satisfaction you were aiming for. That's the core of skating. In my opinion anyway. Then it's obvious that the pain also has something to do with making that fight or whatever you call it... more powerful. You want it even more because you have sacrificed so much [...] where you're in this mode where it's like... yeah it's almost war, right.” – Interview, Emil, 2022, 21:47

Skateboarding is, as Emil puts it, “about getting up again”. For him, the core of skateboarding lies precisely in the struggle he must go through in order to land a trick. It is about falling and failing again and again, in spite of the pain; it’s about never *giving up* but *getting up*. In fact, the pain of the struggle is, as Emil says, the very reason this struggle or fight becomes more powerful.

Other respondents have similar ideas about the importance of the struggle. Sille too, finds value in the repetition of falling and getting back up. After having broken her ankle,

Sille was back on the board as soon as her ankle had healed. One friend of hers only took a few weeks off after having broken a finger (Interview, Sille, 2022, 25:52) and another friend, who broke an arm while skating, yelled out of the back of an ambulance: “see you in two weeks, let's do the trick, eh?” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 16:57).

Falling and physical pain are, as Sille explains, simply unavoidable when you skate: “You’re gonna fall and you’re gonna fall a *lot* of times. Because if you don’t, you’re not gonna learn anything. It’s just a part of the game” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 03:08). Because this pain is inevitable, Villads finds himself simply accepting the physical pain that he experiences (Interview, Villads, 2022, 57:53). Victor too sees falling and getting back up as an important part of skating as the struggle is precisely the thing that makes you believe that you will eventually succeed: “if you constantly keep trying” (Interview, Villads, 2022, 53:56). However, for him the struggle also speaks to “the philosophy”, “that it is okay to fail”. Failing is half the battle.

There are then several elements at play within the narrative of *the struggle*. In order for the skater to be able to get up, they must of course first fall. The narrative reinforces itself through repetition. The more the skater falls, the more adversity they must overcome, the more they are ‘given’ the opportunity to get up again and potentially prevail. This narrative also compels the skater forward. It is a self-perpetuating force and the very reason they get back up. Emil notes that the experience of pain enhances both his sense of struggling and heightens his feeling of achievement (Interview, Emil, 2022, 21:47). The harder the skater has had to struggle to land a trick, the more hits and bruises they gain along the way, the more important, satisfying or meaningful the achievement of the trick becomes. The fact that he has already “sacrificed so much” during his attempt to land a trick, Emil explains, only makes him want to keep going and succeed even more.

Landing a trick is, as Simon explains, “like winning something, like winning a football tournament [...] but this trick is something you have fought for for several hours, sometimes even multiple days” (Interview, Simon, 2022, 09:12). One trick, Simon explains, took him half a year to land, and when he finally landed it “then it’s like you can take on the whole world” (Interview, Simon, 2022, 09:12).

The Shared Struggle

So far we’ve considered *the struggle* as it relates to the individual skater. How it drives the skater through an ordeal with the promises of success. But the narrative of the struggle, like

any good myth, threads a link between members of the skateboarding community. The struggle is, *as a* narrative, prolific. It makes, as Emil explains, for good stories. He can easily imagine using the narrative of the struggle as a way of telling other skaters about his pain, what he went through. Because of this, it is almost “cooler if I had struggled more than if it succeeded on the third try [...]. There is more reason to talk about it than if I just do it. That’s more of a story. Again that cock-and-bull story is also better.” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 1:11:45). The more hardship, the better the story.

Watching others engage in a struggle Sille explains that she experiences a sense of connectedness to the people she skates with. She recognizes the adversities they go through. Sille explains:

“I don’t necessarily think that has to do with pain, but more to do with the process of skateboarding which includes pain, but that we have all gone through it. So it’s like the whole process that you have gone through together [...] because you spend everyday together and.. and see eachother cry and get frustrated or be in pain, but your like, ‘get up again’” – Interview, Sille, 2022, 41:48

Interestingly, Sille notes that her feeling of being connected might not have anything to do with pain and yet *pain is nonetheless* a part of it. The process of skateboarding simply includes pain and that is something that is shared. About her friends who are not skaters themselves Sille remarks, they “don’t get it” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 43:59). Skating with her friends is something of an “adventure” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 44:45), she notes. Sille understands and relates to the process the other is going through. She knows it intimately because she has felt it on her own body. While the process and struggle is not necessarily unique to skateboarding, as Sille also notes, she argues that there is a difference, that the skateboarding struggle is its own thing (Interview, Sille, 2022, 42:52).

Perhaps this difference is due to its nature as adventure. There is something at stake. That something is certainly a danger of getting hurt. Another respondent, Alex, also talks about an intimacy fashioned through skating. He explains that he felt a kind of understanding between himself and his fellow skaters that he does not experience with those outside of skating:

“I think that the intimacy that comes from skating through pain is [...] non-linguistic. But it creates some kind of closeness because you have been there together after all. I can’t help but [...] think about warrior-like situations even though I’ve never experienced it. But

there is something in it where [...] we have put ourselves in this absurd situation and now we are, as it were, connected. It's like this strange pact, right. [...] And it is not linguistic. After all, it is more symbolic and ritualistic” – Interview, Alex, 2023, 1:03:01

This intimacy is forged by something non-linguistic, corporal, ritualistic and, sometimes, absurd. This absurdness that Alex finds is akin to what Sille (Interview, Sille, 2022, 42:52) describes as adventurous and what Emil calls dangerous (Interview, Emil, 2022, 1:13:04). All adjectives attempting to describe a certain richness in their collective experiences.

The warrior-like situation of the struggle and the experience of physical pain created intimate bonds for Alex. The pain, the fear, the struggle was a common and relatable dominator (Interview, Alex, 2023, 31:45). For example, when Alex describes the first time he and his friends tried to drop from a ramp he emphasized the strangeness of doing this together. By doing it together, by sharing something, a moment, the experience of physical pain and the fear of the pain, they created not just a community, but what Alex refers to as a pain community (Interview, Alex, 2023, 32:55). Contrary to Ahmed's conceptualization of the lonely qualities of pain and the experience of this pain, the data also presents something else; that is, the sense of community and understanding with one another on the basis of pain.

Sally alludes to a ‘pain community’ as well. Once, during a skate competition where she was part of the audience she experienced how everybody in the audience gained a sense of community or connectedness with the people skating because: “these people [the skaters] showed that they were [...] vulnerable and the showed that they were able to fall and sometimes they fell in from of these [...] hundreds of people.” (Interview, Sally, 2023, 48:06). What Sally found was that there was something ‘really cool’ about witnessing the skaters fall or, put differently, fail in front of so many people. The audience did not judge them for their failures but “loved them even more” for it. There was something special about the skaters being on different levels and that they sometimes “fucked it up” (Interview, Sally, 2023, 48:40), Sally says. This is something she believes many could relate to (Interview, Sally, 2023, 48:44). By seeing the skaters falling, failing and ‘fucking up’ the audience were put in a position where they could be compassionate about the skating participant, connecting to them on the bases of their experiences with physical pain and struggle (Interview, Sally, 2023, 48:06). Contrary to Ahmed's conceptualization of the lonely qualities of pain and the experience of this pain, the data thus also presents something else; that is, the sense of community and understanding with one another on the basis of, or, because of pain. Even if pain does shatter language, as is suggested by Scarry and Ahmed, through the public

mediation of pain (through, for example the narrative and, as we will see later on, through physical marking, scar, wounds, etc.) the data also show how painful experiences and the struggle is recognizable and relatable for respondents.

If you take the pain out of skateboarding, it becomes something else. For example, when Emil discusses the the professional skater Nyjah Imani Huston:

“[T]here is someone called Nyjah Huston, for example, who is probably the world's best skater, but people hate him a little bit because he is like a robot to watch. He never falls, can just land every time. [...] so it doesn't seem like there is a struggle in it.” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 1:13:04)

Huston is such an excellent skater, he rarely falls or makes any mistakes. Instead of this being something Emil, and, Emil argues, other skaters find inspiring, Huston's excellence seems to make him less popular. This, for Emil, has to do with the struggle, or rather, how Huston *does not* seem to struggle. Huston has left the plane of the struggle and is no longer easily relatable as Emil argues. Huston never falls and does then, by extension not experience. At least, as far as the viewer can tell.

Similarly, Mathias, while talking about skateboarding as part of the Olympic Games, mentioned that he, and the people he skates with, have their reservations about skateboarding becoming an olympic sport. Olympic skateboarding, he thinks, is too polished and choreographed. By giving points for the tricks and the way the tricks are done it removes an important element of skating: freedom as well as pain. He refers to freedom as the freedom to express yourself and freedom to choose which trick you want to do in the moment i.e spontaneity (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 55:37). Freedom is, in this context, the antithesis to choreography. The choreography hides the struggle though it is certainly there in all the hours it took to perfect the routine. Freedom involves the risk of failing and falling.

Skateboarding films do not show choreographed versions of skating but strive to document skateboarding and recognize it as a practice that includes failure as Mathias notes: “especially [when they] fall [that] is something you recognize.” (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 53:46). Mathias continues:

“[T]he fight itself is also really worthy of recognition among skaters. That you have persisted and that you have taken a hit and then succeeded. Or to occasionally take a hit without succeeding. Just the fact that you fall over and beat yourself up. This video just came out where you see a guy fall and hit himself quite brutally and never land that trick.

But the fact that the person gets injured is like wow he's cool. [...] a very big part of being a good skater is also just being able to take it sometimes, to be able to take those blows.”

– Interview, Mathias, 2022, 53:46

For Mathias, being able to take the hits and blows that come with skateboarding is a necessity. If these hits and blows are as inevitable as has been described by other respondents, this argument seems indisputable. With the fight comes a recognition.

This is further exemplified when Sille argues that “it’s cool” to include the part showing the struggle and the fall into one's skate video because it shows the “energy” and the “power” you have put into landing that trick (Interview, Sille, 2022, 14:54). And when Emil states that “it was cool to have bruises up and down your arm” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 26:58), that skating and trying to land a trick “wouldn’t be cool if it didn’t hurt” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 37:34) and that “if it [skating/landing a trick] goes wrong then it would be really dangerous if he did it [the trick] and that makes it even more cool” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 1:13:04).

While Victor also talks about the ‘coolness’ of showing off the blows and injuries, especially during the filming of a skate video (Interview, Victor, 2022, 15:48), he also brackets this discourse as archaic (and oftentimes correlated with the belief) that a ‘real skater’ would never shy away from the falls, hits and blows (Interview, Victor, 2022, 15:15).

According to Villads, what is especially worthy of recognition is not so much having gone through something painful, but to have kept going on *in spite* of the pain. “I see now”, Villads notes “how the pain is embedded in [skateboarding] in that you are not good [at skateboarding] from day one, but that it takes time and that you’ll get some bumps along the way” (Interview, Villads, 2022, 45:31). For Villads, recognition and relatedness goes hand in hand. Recognition is ‘given’ by someone who relates to their struggle. Villads goes on: “you have been through the same ritual [...] you go through these trials which can include pain which it would for most (Interview, Villads, 2022, 45:31). In line with Villads, Sally also speaks to the recognition of the struggle and beatings. However, she also points to a discrepancy. On the one hand, she says, you can get ‘credit’ or recognition by getting hurt. However, what she thinks of as cool has to do with the fact that the skaters, despite experiencing pain, *dared* to do what they did (Interview, Sally, 2023, 29:08).

It would seem that *the struggle* maps onto different emotions. It is not only about pain as noted by Sally. It also has to do with daring or the sense of adventure. Yet, fundamental to *the struggle* is an experience of physical pain that undergirds these emotions and narratives.

As Ahmed writes on pain “[t]he very words we then use to tell the story of our pain also work to reshape our bodies, create new impressions” (Ahmed 2014, 25). Pain then works in a twofold manner. There are the literal new impressions in the sense that something presses upon something else and changes its shape, like a scraped knee. But there is also the narrative *of* pain that, just like the scraped knee, works on the surface, creating new impressions.

This can be more clearly understood in how the narratives create boundaries or new surfaces. In some of the interviews, respondents mention the difference between the experience of pain in different sports. Emil notes that he would find it strange to talk with football players about pain. They have to fake it a lot of the times Emil notes, he continues “I would think, ‘you don’t know what pain is’ or ‘you have to cry because...’, or you’re that kind of person that has to say *how* much it hurts. And that’s not cool.” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 53:17). Emil acknowledges that footballers do get hurt sometimes but he still finds that the experience of pain in skating and football are not comparable:

“Yeah, it just really isn’t the same. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that in skateboarding, you kind of do it to yourself, you’re the one responsible for how bad it gets. And in football it’s usually a tackle or something done by someone else, right? So a person does something to you. Plus, this [skateboarding] is something I’ve challenged myself to the degree that I get injured by it. I just think that’s cooler. Yeah, it has to do with a type [of person]. That you are willing to go so far to achieve something that you get hurt in the process. I think, yeah, I think that’s pretty cool and of course it sucks when it [pain] is caused by others, of course footballers get hurt. But the pain is different in that way.” – Interview, Emil, 2022, 55:06

The quote illustrates the legitimization of some kinds of pain and the delegitimization of others. The key difference for Emil is whether pain is something that *happens to you* or something you actively *choose* to be exposed to. Emil’s rhetoric is in line with the struggle. Pain makes sense and means more because it is part of a challenge he has given himself. It is the price he has to pay in order to achieve something.

The difference between pains lies at the level of how pain is structured. That is, in the narrative of pain. From Emil’s perspective, the perspective of the struggle, pain only means something or is only worth something in relation to the very act of struggling. The footballer might have a different understanding. It is in this sense that pain ‘put into words’ makes an impression as it forms Emil’s view of the world. Pain *as* narrative exerts itself as delineation and judgment creating new surfaces along the way: A difference between us and them,

between skaters and footballers.

Pain as experience is an intensive pressure that shapes the skaters' narratives of themselves and how they view the world. It is therefore a creative force that opens up new spaces for connection and understanding. Pain in itself is like a vanishing point in the narrative of *the struggle*. Like the narrative drives the skater on to greater heights, so too does pain urge the narrative forward as it generates more tales of daring, bruises, and new impressions.

Analysis Part 2: The Body in Pain

In the previous chapter I looked at how pain shapes language and storytelling. Ahmed states that pain is given meaning through a meaning-making process. Ahmed conceptualizes this meaning-making through her concept of *intensification* through which she argues that the intensity with which pain is experienced – or simply, how pain is experienced – has to do with the meaning given to it. The meaning-making process of intensification consists of the impression or impact of objects, the assessment of this collision and (re)orientation (of the body).

In this chapter I will focus, not only on this process of intensification, but on how within this process, pain can be said to shape the body. Here I will explore the different types of physical pain described by the respondents. Using Ahmed's notion of impressions I consider how the experience of pain is affected by the meaning it holds for the respondents. As we shall see, the value attached to pain, its importance, determines the experience. Lastly, I move from impressions to orientation and examine how the respondents act on their experiences of pain.

Painful Impressions

According to Ahmed (through Leder), it is through the collision with other objects and bodies that the body comes into view. When a body *dysfunctions* or when we experience (uncommon) sensations such as pain, we become aware of the surfaces and boundaries of our bodies. It seizes our attention and “recalls us to our bodily surface” (Ahmed 2014, 26). In the following I will give examples of such collisions by going through the actual experiences the respondents have had with pain.

The first thing respondents talk about when asked about pain are their skateboarding injuries. Some of the injuries mentioned were sprained ankles and wrists,²⁰ knee, foot and

²⁰ (Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:10; Interview, Simon, 2022, 07:30; Interview, Victor, 2022, 07:58),

back injuries and chronic pain²¹, torn ligaments²², broken ankles²³, arms²⁴, legs, feet ²⁵, wrists and fingers²⁶, and osteoarthritis²⁷.

Only when asked directly about their common experiences with physical pain when skateboarding did they elaborate. These included the following: cuts, bumps, bruises and skin scrapings²⁸, shiners i.e. the board hitting the shins²⁹, the general pain felt when falling over³⁰, elbow bumps³¹, rolling their ankles³², small or benign hits to the head³³ and a general soreness during and especially after skating sessions³⁴.

These are examples of collisions. Bodies colliding with other objects. When the respondents collide with their boards, the ground, the rail, etc., they become aware of their bodily surfaces. Their skin, muscles, ligaments, and bones come into view through the collision as they are now felt and experienced, in ways they would have otherwise not been. They become aware of their own borders in relation to the borders of the objects they collide with and learn what ensues when these borders are crossed. Their skin is now something that can be scraped off and bruised, their ligaments can be torn, their bones are breakable, and suddenly the body can bleed and swell. They learn how collisions make their bodies feel. Through collisions they get, as it were, a corporal sense of self. This is what Ahmed refers to as the appearance (and what Leder refers to as a *dys-appearing*) of bodily surfaces.

Using Ahmed's notion of *impressions* of collisions, pain can be understood as something that shapes or rather reshapes the bodies of the respondents. In the same way as a pen leaves a dent in your finger when you write, skateboarding leaves marks on the skater's bodies. No matter the type of pain, whether smaller bruises or broken bones, an impression will be left on the body.

²¹ Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:10; Interview, Erik, 2022, 35:07; Interview, Alex, 2023, 14:26

²² Interview, Simon, 2022, 05:47; Interview, Erik, 2022, 04:07; Interview, Villads, 2022, 07:19

²³ Interview, Sille, 2022, 04:14; Interview, Simon, 2022, 07:30; Interview, Lasse, 2022, 02:13; Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:10

²⁴ Interview, Simon, 2022, 05:35; Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:10

²⁵ Interview, Simon, 2022, 05:04

²⁶ Interview, Simon, 2022, 05:04

²⁷ Interview, Erik, 2022, 07:56

²⁸ Interview, Victor, 2022, 07:58, 16:31; Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:10, 12:25; Interview, Erik, 2022, 04:07; Interview, Villads, 2022, 07:19

²⁹ Interview, Sille, 2022, 04:04; Interview, Simon, 2022, 07:49; Interview, Victor, 2022, 27:13; Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:52; Interview, Villads, 2022, 06:56; Interview, Mathias, 2022, 03:33; Interview, Erik, 2022, 54:46; Interview, Alex, 2023, 15:51

³⁰ Interview, Mathias, 2022, 03:33; Interview, Alex, 2023, 14:26

³¹ Interview, Victor, 2022, 07:58

³² Interview, Emil, 2022, 10:52; Interview, Simon, 2022, 06:32; Interview, Erik, 2022, 04:07

³³ Interview, Simon, 2022, 06:13; Interview, Nicholas, 2023, 03:14

³⁴ Interview, Victor, 2022, 16:31; Interview, Mathias, 2022, 03:33; Interview, Erik, 2022, 01:01:32

Creating Bodies

According to Ahmed, the collision and the impression of the object on the body does not in itself lead to the experience of these collisions *as* painful: “it [pain] is affected by objects of perception that gather as one’s past bodily experience.” (Ahmed 2014, 25). What is determined as pain, Ahmed argues, is not limited to a feeling that corresponds with bodily damage (Ahmed 2014, 23). Rather, it depends on the meaning ascribed to the feeling and experience, which in turn involves the association between the sensation and other ‘feeling-states’ (Ahmed 2014, 23). Likewise, Morris argues that pain ‘gains’ meaning through our determination of it and that our determination and experience of pain exists on a continuum where the determination of pain oscillates between *meaningful* and *meaningless* (Morris 1991, 34-35). The meaning (or meaninglessness) we attribute to the sensory experience determines how we experience it.

In order to determine how the respondents attribute meaning to their experience of pain, I will look closer at how they understand the ‘collision of bodies’. Here I will exemplify how pain is described and determined by the respondents themselves as painful and either important or unimportant. This will, consequently, show how different (skating) bodies are created as, among other things, a body in pain.

When asked how much the thought of pain matters to him when skating, Erik initially argues that it does not matter at all (Interview, Erik, 2022, 07:31). Skating related pain is something he feels “just needs to be ignored” (Interview, Erik, 2022, 36:17). Physical pain while skating does not matter to him, he says, as he is in pain (because of a knee injury) most of the time anyway (Interview, Erik, 2022, 07:39). Similarly, Sille too states that though the pain while skating was something she thought about when she first started out, she longer thinks about it (Interview, Sille, 2022, 03:08). Sally does not feel like pain matters much to her either. She is not afraid of the pain itself while skateboarding – she does not remember having thought “oh no this is going to hurt” (Interview, Sally, 2023, 06:53). For Mathias, how much pain matters when he skates differs vastly from one practice to another. He finds that there is a difference between how he thinks of pain now compared to when he was a teenager. Mathias used to consider the sensation he got from shiners and other typical skating injuries as painful, yet now he does not ‘connect’ these sensations with physical pain (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 08:17).

Despite either experiencing collisions as painful, now or in the past, the respondents also argue that common painful experiences simply do not matter much to them anymore.

These minor collisions have become “so much a part of it”, Victor explains, “that you have become used to it” (Interview, Victor, 2022, 23:35). The respondents have experienced these collisions so many times that they do not fear them. Ahmed understands this through the event where a person experiencing pain will judge the sensation they feel based on, among other things, prior experiences: “if one has a pain one might search one’s memories for whether one has had it before, differentiating the strange from the familiar. [...] Only later will I realize that the hurt ‘hurts’ *because* of this or that.” (Ahmed 2014, 25). What Ahmed is driving at is not only about prior experiences, but how these prior experiences were interpreted at the time and then reinterpreted presently. When respondents experience these pains again and again having found out along the way that they are in fact not dangerous, they can now not only interpret them as benign but at times even as insignificant. For Nicholas, however, pain never became insignificant. The one time he tried skating, Nicholas, immediately after stepping up on the board, fell and hit his head. “I thought it was gonna be cool and I thought it was gonna be fun” (Nicholas 02:59), Nicholas explains, “I hadn’t really grasped the concept. I didn’t know [...] that balance was something you might have to use, or I didn’t realize how much skill and patience or [...] endurance was expected so I just thought it was gonna be a smooth ride into a future full of skateboarding but it turned out to be the opposite” (Interview, Nicholas, 2023, 03:14). Because he had no prior experience with skateboarding, he had no idea of what to expect, no understanding of the pain factor. Nicholas explains that the fall shocked him enough to never really feel like getting up on a skateboard again after that initial incident. He did not “appreciate the idea of [...] investing pain into an activity.” (Interview, Nicholas, 2023, 07:23). The respondents who have skated for years experience pain as a sacrifice, a necessary and meaningful investment in themselves as skaters, as I have discussed in the narrative of *the struggle*. Nicholas though, was never able to ascribe the experienced pain such insignificance. He had no real prior experience with either pain or skateboarding and so for him, the experience of pain became meaningless.

Thus the same types of pain can be either meaningful or meaningless as Morris argues. The oscillation between meaningfulness and meaninglessness explains how and why many respondents feel differently about even the most benign experiences of pain outside of a skateboarding context. Sille notes that when she hits her foot or rolls her ankle walking on the street “it hurts more and you’ll get annoyed and angry. [...] you never get annoyed or angry if you get hurt when skating; you’re just like ‘it is what it is’.” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 16:57). Outside skating the feeling of pain, Sille explains, merely seems ‘silly’ and ‘stupid’ and ‘ridiculous’. When she experiences these kinds of pains outside of a skating context they

do not have meaning because she is not able to put them into a narrative such as *the struggle*. This is echoed by Victor (Interview, 2022, 22:23), Erik (Interview, 2022, 36:17), Simon (Interview, 2022, 1:02:55), and Mathias (Interview, 2022, 12:59). Villads explains further that the reason why he experiences pain within and outside of skating differently has to do with the ‘investment’ he puts into skating. Skating-pain becomes “part of a process to become better. So you accept it completely differently”, Villads explains (Interview, 2022, 57:53).

Examining the respondents' experiences with pain in relation to these two contexts, inside and outside of skating, shows the non-static nature of the pain experience. Here we see how, even when the types of pain experienced are physically similar, their judgment of that pain can oscillate between meaningfulness and meaninglessness depending on the context: leading to the pain being *experienced* differently.

This oscillation between the meaning ascribed to pain happens again within the skating context where commonly experienced pains and the pains that lead to chronic injuries are understood differently. Where the commonly experienced pains can be seen merely as part of skating, the pains leading to more malicious injuries gain a contextual surplus meaning for skaters. This type of pain creates, or rather, *forces* the creation of the bodies of respondents not only as *skating bodies in pain* but as bodies that are at once skating bodies *as well as* working bodies, family bodies and simply non-skating bodies. In other words, the forming of the skating body in pain is also a body that is forced to acknowledge and reconcile with elements existing outside of a skating context.

Sally, who previously commented that common pains did not matter much to her, is, however, afraid of painful experiences when she understands these as leading to, or being followed by, serious injury. She mentions being very afraid of ‘fucking up’, of becoming paralyzed and unable to bike – which is her main form of transportation – or dance at the parties she goes to (Interview, Sally, 2023, 06:53). This sentiment is also echoed by several other respondents. For Simon, the fear of injury is about a fear of missing out and not being able to skate thus losing a sense of community and how all his friends would become much better than him (Interview, Simon, 2022, 21:58).

Where Sally and Simon's fears are examples of potential consequences, Erik recounts how an actual injury stopped him from skating. Prior to his injury, Erik skated every single day, and skateboarding was a big part of his identity and personality (Interview, 2022, 48:05). Erik remembers asking himself “who am I now” (Interview, 2022, 47:15) after the injury. “It took me a few years before I could even start thinking about skating. And then I just got out of practice. Yes, those were some tough years. I numbed it with hash and shit like that. And

just got further and further away from being in shape and being able to do the things I used to. [...] So I felt like I lost some of my identity, for sure. Because I also checked out of everything. I couldn't bear to sit and watch others skate. I thought it was too hard.” (Interview, Erik, 2022, 48:05).

Emil, Mathias, Sille, Lasse and Villads, on the other hand, are examples of how they, with age, came to understand and even fear the pain in relation to potential injuries because they saw how an injury could have very serious consequences for their lives and responsibilities outside of skateboarding. “[W]ith age I’ve become pretty risk analyzing of the situation and considering, you probably didn’t do that as much as a child, but I think you have become pretty good at realizing the outcome of one’s actions” (Interview, 2022, 04:43), Mathias says. Emil explains that he does not often try new things and, “probably because I fear the pain” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 17:27) he argues, sticks to what he knows. The reason for ‘fearing the pain’, or maybe rather, the potential physical consequence of skating, has, as mentioned, to do with the responsibilities the respondents have outside of skateboarding. Emil explains:

“[A]lso now that I've started working full-time. I'm self-employed, so if I break an arm I'm fucked or something like that, then I can't do my job. [...] I remember when I was little it was like cool, some skater also said it [...] where you wrote ‘fuck the pain’ on your board and stuff like that, right. It was a thing that didn't matter. And it’s not like that anymore. I mean, now I'm actually thinking about the fact that it has consequences, also for the life I have outside of skateboarding.” – Interview, Emil, 2022, 17:27

Emil describes a kind of carelessness in relation to pain and injuries when he was younger. ‘Back then’ it was ‘cool’ to at least seem indifferent to the pain. However, “fuck the pain” is a young skaters anthem. With age, Emil, Mathias, Sille, Lasse and Villads have felt it necessary to recognize pain and injury in relation to the responsibilities of work and family. When Villads skates, he explains, he also always takes care to not try to do anything too ‘dangerous’ or complex. For him an injury could mean that he could not take his child to daycare (Interview, Villads, 2022, 23:27). This is echoed in the quote above where Emil notes that when he skates he always considers that if he gets injured he might not be able to work. Similarly, Mathias also chooses “not to throw myself into the same things as when I was younger because I also know that I have a job that needs taking care of” (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 06:02). Sille says that for her as well “it [pain] matters a lot. because you know that if

something happens then I can't work, I won't get any income [...] it would have a big impact on my economy" (Interview, Sille, 2022, 06:57). The same goes for Lasse who also worries about not being able to pay the bills if he gets injured (Interview, Lasse, 2022, 03:45).

The oscillating meaning shows how and why pain is a dynamic phenomena. The painful experience forces our awareness of our bodily surfaces. When the respondent speaks of the change they have undergone from not being to being risk analyzing we see an example of what Ahmed refers to as the dynamic nature of surfacing (Ahmed 2014, 26). The meaning ascribed to pain is not fixed. It is a constant and dynamic movement based on our reading and assessment of the sensation we feel, in relation to the context within which we feel it. However, what we also see through the respondents' statements is that the dynamic movement of our assessment of pain does not only, or rather, *always* take place in relation to one context, to the context within which the pain was (first) experienced. It blurs contextual boundaries and pulls in other contexts that too will or could be affected by the pain and injuries. Depending on the types of pain and their ascribed meaning, it confronts the respondents with external factors through which they are forced to acknowledge the physical consequences of skating. This results in, at least for the respondents just accounted for, a risk analysis and subsequent management of the way they skate, how responsible or irresponsible they skate and the concrete tricks they try to do. This production of meaning leads to reorientation (which I will return to later on in this chapter) and reshaping of their bodies as they orientate *away* from the injuries. Through this reshaping they take form, not only as skating bodies, bodies in pain or injured bodies, but also as citizens, parents, employees, etc.

Signs That Matter

The marks on the respondents bodies, their bumps and bruises, scrapes, wounds and scars, also play a part in the meaning ascribed to their experiences with pain. They are signs that matter. They mean something to the skaters.

"[S]urely", Lasse argues, "there is a kind of pleasure in getting a giant skin scraping when landing your trick" (Interview, 2022, 14: 37). "It's worth it" Erik (Interview, 2022, 55:17) and Sille (Interview, 2022, 13:23) note, Sille is proud of all her scars because they are signs of perseverance; that she kept skating in spite of her injuries. For her these scars symbolize how "you can always overcome situations and that you come out stronger on the other side" (Interview, Sille, 2022, 51:25). Likewise, when he was younger, Emil thought it was cool to have wounds up and down his arm as they represented the trials he had been

through. For him they signaled he had “not just stayed down” (Interview, Emil, 2022, 26:58). Sille describes how the pain experienced while landing a trick and subsequent markings on her body became “like an addiction, so like, almost a pleasure at times”, where she would come home and show off her wounds to her roomies: “be[ing] like, you need to see [...] [the] big black mark that I got on my butt” (Interview, Sille, 2022, 12:32). Villads used to see the markings, in particular the wounds that are common for skaters to get on their lower back and elbows as a kind of emblem that made him recognizable to other skaters. His wounds also became a means to measure his courage and his struggle against other skaters’ performance. If he had “tried hard enough compared to the others and with it, if I had exposed myself enough to potential pain in the same way as the others [...] measur[e/ing] myself according to what they had dared to do and how much they had dared to get hurt.” (Interview, Villads, 2022, 1:00:31). Even though his injuries (signs of his struggle) could be painful, Villads says, he would also think of them as, “a star on the shoulder [...] a medal you get” (Interview, Villads, 2022, 1:01:03).

Signs that matter are another way in which pain brings bodies to the surfaces because they are markings that make bodies recognizable in one form or the other. These markings are part of what Ahmed calls an ‘affective economy’ – that is, some form of organizing principle that Ahmed uses to exemplify how emotions are also ‘public’. As Ahmed writes “affective economies are social and material, as well as psychic” (Ahmed 2014, 46). For the respondents, their battle wounds are signs of bodies that can *take* and *handle* pain: the skating body. This is a way in which collective bodies come to the fore, how skaters could recognize other skaters as skaters.

No Pain, No Gain

It is important to note however, that several respondents do make it clear that they do not skate *because* of the physical pain, but *in spite of it*. Others however do appreciate, utilize, and even take pleasure in the pain. Mathias explains how he believes that the physical pain he experiences while skating is “healthy” (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 50:38) because it makes you feel alive. In his mind, he says, to “feel that your body has been used in that way, I think those are the days I’m the happiest” (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 50:38). Mathias might be feeling the happiest when skating because he fears being “stuck in an office chair and not pushing myself physically” (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 50:38). It is interesting to note the

contrast between the active and the passive, which in Mathias' understanding represents the dichotomy between pain and numbness. According to Morris, the opposite of pain is not pleasure but *numbness* (Morris 1991, 115): And as Mathias previously explained, feeling pain is to be preferred over feeling nothing (by being stuck in an office chair). Being physically active, using his body, pushing boundaries and enduring pain is the *antithesis* to numbness. Moreover, Mathias argues (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 50:38), pain and soreness is to be preferred over mental pains such as anxiety and emotional agony. Likewise, both Sille and Emil talk about how on several occasions the physicality of skateboarding and familiarity with the commonly experienced physical pains, helped to ease worries and emotional pain. For Sille, "Skateboarding is a form of therapy I feel [...] because if you, like, have problems or a lot on your mind, or a lot of anxiety, because I have a lot of anxiety and I don't feel any anxiety when I skate. [...] and especially if you're having a really sad day [...] you can, like, let go of it by feeling that pain more physical than mental" (Interview, Sille, 2022, 1:08:00). Emil mentions that when he broke up with his girlfriend, he experienced the physical pain when skating as pleasurable exactly because that type of pain, the physical, numbed the emotional pain he was feeling because of the break-up (Emil, personal communication, August 23, 2022). For Mathias, Emil and Sille the physicality of skateboarding, the feeling of pain and soreness, provided them with a space where their mental struggles were, at least for a time, ignored as they were wrapped up with a more tangible physical struggle.

As long as it is not an invalidating pain, Mathias finds pleasure in the benign bumps, bruises, and soreness. They help him feel (alive in) his body. The physical signs *on* his body tell him "hey, I have really done something today" (Interview, Mathias, 2022,58:18). Erik also views his sore muscles as familiar, as nice (Interview, Erik, 2022, 22:13) as he knows exactly what caused them. For Erik, this soreness too, is a symbol, or rather a materialization, of his physical activeness, of the fact that he has indeed pushed himself (Interview, Erik, 2022, 22:33).

Mathias describes how he experiences the sensation of smaller pains as "pleasurable" (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 1:00:14). When Mathias experiences the pain as positive, it is because it can give him something. It creates different feeling states. This is different from 'signs that matter', which are concrete markings that produce recognition. Mathias explains:

"[I]t's a kind of liberation from everyday life [...]. I mean, there's an incredible freedom associated with skateboarding. Where you put everything else away and just exist in that space. And you can play and be free and you can fall over, which in many other contexts

would be seen as clumsy. [...] so there is a freedom to doing things every day that there would not otherwise be room for in one's everyday life. ” – Interview, Mathias, 2022, 1:03:13

Because Mathias speaks about the feeling states of liberation and freedom while skating where he is in a way ‘allowed’ to play and fall over, I ask him if he then also experiences it as a freedom to get hurt and feel pain (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 1:04:05). Mathias answers:

“[Y]es, yes absolutely [...] it doesn't really exist in, at least in the life I live, it's not really part of my everyday life [...] and it's definitely just the context where it's okay to fall and get hurt. It's okay to lie down and hurt a little. [...] and through that there is a freedom to... [...], and this has probably come with age, [...] I mean, for me, it's playful. That you can play with the body or with your friends. And when you play, you get hurt, just as children do, and, fortunately, as some adults do too.” – Interview, Mathias, 2022, 1:04:08

Pain is inextricably intertwined with playfulness. This is why Mathias is able to experience small physical pains as positive. When Mathias gets hurt, he feels his body; and when he feels his body, he is able to connect with his physical being. His body finally comes into view. Turning to Leder, we could say that this ‘coming into view’ when experiencing pain, is what he calls *dysfunction* (Leder 1990, 85). It would be wrong however, to call this coming into view as a *dysfunction*. It is in fact the opposite for several of the respondents, and most clearly for Mathias. The body actually *functions* through these commonly experienced physical pains. The skating body *functions* through the *physical* experiences with benign pain. This functionality is also at play in the collective meaning making of the narratives, as we have seen. The narratives could also be said to *function* through a meaning-making of pain. In this case, the function of the body ‘in’ pain creates new feeling states: the sense of freedom or healthiness that Mathias talks about.

Reorientation

When a person experiences a sensation such as pain, before acknowledging the pain *as* pain it will undergo what Ahmed refers to as a meaning-making process of *intensification*. The person experiencing the sensation will *read* (i.e. interpret) the sensation and ascribe meaning to it through an over-determination of sense perception, emotion and judgment (Ahmed 2014, 25) and attribute the cause of the sensation with the sensation itself. This will, depending on

the ‘verdict’ prompt the person experiencing the pain to *reorient* their body or bodily surface to(wards or away from) the ‘thing’ that they attribute as causing the sensation (Ahmed 2014, 24). As has been accounted for, the verdict, the interpretation of a painful sensation, looks differently for the respondents. It is constantly changing according to context and feeling state. Depending on the verdict – whether the sensation is seen as meaningful or meaningless, as harmless or harmful, or as useless or productive – the respondents reorientate their bodies.

As previously accounted for, for several of the respondents like Mathias, the sensation of the common pains, among other things, orientates him towards skateboarding as these pains, the soreness and feeling that he has been active, also connects them to their bodies. They get to be *in touch* with their bodies. It is also emphasized that this is not the case in the more invalidating pain. In contrast to the benign pains, these malicious or invalidating pains are feared by several of the respondents because of the meaning ascribed to them: they are seen in relation to the negative physical consequences skateboarding can have on their lives both inside and outside of skateboarding.

A Paradoxical Reorientation

Ahmed describes the reorientation of the body in line with a chain of causality where a sensation is experienced, then assessed and judged which prompts a reaction and reorientation either toward or away from the sensation depending on the or the assessment and meaning ascribed to the sensation. However, for the respondents this orientation is more complex than this.

To skate is to be in constant risk of getting injured. You are always at risk of breaking something, hitting your heads, tearing ligaments, etc. The respondents that (keep) skate(ing) display different modes of orientation. In a way, they orientate themselves *to* the commonly experienced and benign pains because, as discussed, these are part of a meaning-making process at several levels. They are inevitable *and* utilizable. Simultaneously, the skaters orientate themselves *away* from the ‘accidents’ by coming up with and utilizing physical and mental tactics and methods. I will account for these tactics and methods in the following.

Tactics and Methods

Simon (Interview, 2022, 08:01), Emil (Interview, 2022, 10:52) and Mathias (Interview, 2022, 04:43) connect learning and being aware of the falling techniques to the attempt to minimize the potential pain and injuries. More concretely, Victor describes these techniques and

methods as “tighten the neck”, “tuck and roll, protect the face” (Interview, Victor, 2022, 33:28). Mathias elaborates on this explaining that, though this is not something he has ever talks about with others and therefore has not been taught by others, it seems to him that many skaters learn how to consider the possible consequences and outcome of the trick they are about to do (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 04:43). For Mathias this includes learning how to fall.

Sille explains how she, instead of thinking about the pain she is potentially about to experience, she thinks about the technical aspect of doing that trick and in particular, how to fall in relation to the specific trick she is about to do (Interview, Sille, 2022, 10:08). Not thinking about pain is not the same as not acknowledging the physical pain and the potential of experiencing physical pain. Rather, not thinking about pain is a tactic. The moment she becomes too aware of the pain she is potentially exposing herself to – for example after watching someone get injured – the thought and fear of that pain can get into her head, forcing her to stop skating for the day (Interview, Sille, 2022, 06:57, 07:41). Trying to get the thoughts about the pain out of one's head, or not letting it in in the first place, is also echoed by Simon (Interview, 2022, 28:20) and Victor (Interview, 2022, 13:20).

“Dealing with the pain”, as Victor calls it, is different for the respondents. However, several of the respondents also mention having picked up different more long term and sustainable tactics of pain prevention or, at least, minimization over the years. Mathias, as an example, has come to see physical pain and especially chronic injury as something he can prevent by training his body outside of skateboarding. Here, Mathias mentions doing yoga and working out, specifically targeting his back, enabling him to have more control over his falls, and training his ankles so not to roll on them. Mathias continues:

“[I]t’s probably a kind of prevention against pain, to know that there is a strength in your joints [...] that can handle [skating/the pressure put on it]. But it probably comes back to a prevention of injuries but also... I also think there are many who do it because they know, ‘then I can handle it better when I fall’ or something like that. That you’re better equipped for it [the physical pain and injuries].

[...] [pain] is probably hard to avoid, it's a big part of it. It is, after all, learning to fall and get hurt. I mean, you want to avoid getting hurt. I think most skaters will agree to that, that the thing that makes you better is also to learn to fall *the right way*. But I think the pain will always be a part of it, it's inevitable” – Interview, Mathias 2022, 36:03 - 37:12

The experience of physical pain, Mathias argues, is something most skaters want to avoid. For this reason, as a skater you need to *learn to fall and hurt yourself* exactly because the

constant potential of pain is such a big part of skating. As Mathias explains in the quote, when you experience physical pain, you not only learn to ‘take the pain’, you learn to prevent the pain.

Adapting a Sports Mentality

Training the body outside of the skate park speaks to what Victor calls the *sports mentality* (Interview, Victor, 2022, 12:09) which is also mentioned by several other respondents. The respondents who train their bodies, their backs and ankles for example, stretch before sessions, do yoga and massages, and maybe even skate less often, do so, Victor explains, in order to prevent bigger injuries. It is, in other words, a way of making sure that they can keep skating for as long as possible (Interview, Victor, 2022, 11:41, 14:57). Besides the physical tactics, Victor also mentions mental training, and breathing exercise to help him clear his mind; and to help prevent fear of pain from entering his mind (Interview, Victor, 2022, 14:57), or as he puts it, to “distract yourself from the fear of thing actually going wrong” (Interview, Victor, 2022, 14:35).

Victor mentions that this sporting mentality is a fairly recent element in the skating culture (Interview, Victor, 2022, 14:47). He argues that the skating mentality has changed the last 5 years from being one that primarily celebrated pain, the falls and the injuries and where the idea of ‘the real skater’ was one who was never afraid of the pain, falls and injuries, to one where the prevention of the pain, falls and injuries the tactics mentioned by Victor is celebrated, or at the very least accepted (Interview, Victor, 2022, 15:15). As an example Victor mentions how when filming skating videos it was important to have parts dedicated to painful incidents, falls and injuries. Even though this is still the case, Victor explains, the difference is, that now “you just don’t want them [the painful incidents, falls and injuries] to happen” (Interview, Victor, 2022, 15:48). A big part of skateboarding is “probably also to know how to fall which has taken me many years to learn, and how to bend. People’s endurance to the pain is connected with that” (Interview, Mathias, 2022, 05:38), Mathias explains.

The data thus shows that for the respondents, reorientation is twofold. In the first movement, the respondents keep skating in spite of but also to some extent because of the pain. Here, the respondents are oriented towards the benign pains and their utilization while also orientating *away from* serious injuries in a second tier orientation which leads to methods and tactics of pain prevention.

The intensification of impressions is a lens through which we can begin to grasp at the complexities of the interplay between the respondent's meaning-making processes and their experiences of pain. Surfaces are constantly being formed through the collision of bodies and objects. These surfaces, as we have seen, can range from conceptions of personal surfaces creating personal boundaries, to the formation of worlds: the skaters *as* a skating body, skaters *as* skaters or bodies that are otherwise wrapped up in different socio-economic contexts. This accumulation of surfaces in many ways mimics the way (street)³⁵ skaters are in the world: as an ever changing landscape of surfaces to be skated as we saw in the first part of this analysis. Where most would see a set of stairs with a rail to guide one up or down, a skater would view it as a potential – the potential to land a trick there, a potential to incorporate that set of stairs in a narrative (the struggle to land that trick), potential pain and different ways to mitigate this pain or embrace it or to just ride it and simply not think about it.

³⁵ This is a distinction I have not pursued in this thesis, but there are of course different types of skateboarders. Those that mostly skate vertical, ramps and the like (think Tony Hawk), those that pursue street skating (doing tricks in public spaces), and freestyle skateboarders (those that push the boundaries of what consists of a trick). This list is far from exhaustive and many skate a mixture of the aforementioned. The respondents that I have spoken with are a mix of these types.

Tell me your relation to pain, and I will tell you who you are.

— Ernest Jünger
On Pain

Discussing Radical Pain

In the previous chapters I have seen how meaning-making is fundamental to the way in which pain is experienced, presented in the stories that the skaters tell of themselves and in the production of new surfaces, as Ahmed would have it. In this sense, pain is a productive force. Its very ontological negativity – the fact that pain is irreducible to its positive properties – is paradoxically precisely why it can be a productive force. Because it has no meaning in itself it must be *ascribed* meaning. This is what both creates and drives the narratives we have considered, what shapes the surfaces and bodies.

For both Ahmed and Leder, the sensations that become connected with the phenomenon of pain is the very thing that makes our bodies (re)surface as well as other bodies. What then, does the lack of pain lead to? In the following I will consider this question through a close reading of German philosopher Byung-Chul Han's book *The Palliative Society: Pain Today* (2020). Through a comparison between experienced pain and avoided pain, I will show that pain is not only a productive force but also a radical force.

In *The Palliative Society* Han argues that neoliberalism suffers from a fear of pain. "Today", Han writes, "a universal *algophobia* rules" (Han 2021, 1). According to Han, our algophobia makes us seek out permanent palliation. We see examples of this, Han argues, in phenomena such as the opioid epidemic in the USA³⁶ and what he refers to as the *dispositif* of happiness.³⁷ Han's arguments rest on the Foucauldian theory that seeks to unveil how power

³⁶ Here I'm referring to the opioid epidemic in the United States of America which, according to the C.D.C, has claimed over half a million lives since 1999 (<https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/epidemic.html>).

³⁷ Han is referring to the way in which discourses, norms and values, blindly focus on happiness as an ideal. Or how happiness has become an imperative wherein the unhappy subject could almost be considered an abject subject. There are many contemporary studies on the imperative of happiness. Some notable references are *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) by Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), to name a few.

shifted from a *disciplinary power*³⁸ to a *smart power* (a disciplinary power that hides its subjugating violence). As explained by Foucault:

“the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them” (Chomsky & Foucault 2011, 49).

Pain used to be explicit in Foucault’s disciplinary power. The pain Power caused was explicit. However, as Han argues, power has changed to smart power because it now proposes to cause no pain. In fact, smart power makes its subject believe that, if they feel pain, then they are themselves to blame. Smart power teaches us to fear pain. Through this fear of pain “[w]e have completely lost the *art of suffering*” (Han 2021, 19) and the ability to narrate it. By not confronting pain we can no longer make sense of it or ascribe meaning to it – in other words it becomes *meaningless*. The ultimate consequence of this, Han argues, is that we become unable to judge pain because we become unable to put it into context – historical and otherwise. Pain becomes *thing-like*, a *terrible object* that evades narration. “When the pain suddenly invades, it does not illuminate the past: it only illuminates the present areas of the body”. (Han 2021, 21). For Han, meaningful pain requires narration so as to situate life “within a meaningful horizon” (Han 2021, 22). When we turn away from it, pain not only loses its meaning, so too do our lives.

Han’s theory of the palliative, while a sweeping makro analysis of contemporary Western society, overlaps with the way Ahmed and the respondents view and understand the (experience of) pain. As I have argued, pain becomes meaningful for the respondents through a meaning-making process. These processes entail a narrative of suffering (*the struggle*) and the way in which the body and its borders are resurfaced. Pain produces *difference* in other words and “[w]ithout pain”, Han writes, “there can be no distinction, and so no appreciation. A world without pain is a hell of the same [Hölle des Gleichen], where in-difference [Gleich-Gültigkeit] rules” (Han 2021, 32). Here, pain can be understood, if we take Han’s theory at face value, as a *radical force* because it produces difference. The respondents are

³⁸ Foucault elaborates on this power dynamic in many of his works and perhaps most notably in *Discipline and Punishment* (1975) where he famously describes the evolution of power through an example of the evolution of the penal system. Foucault uses the panopticon as a way of describing how control and power operate – a mechanism of control where subjects largely police themselves.

outliers as they present a departure from the palliative. They experience, assess, ascribe meaningful and meaningless meaning to pain. They react to it enabling the differentiation between surfaces and meaning.

It is critical, for Han, to understand the experience of pain through past experiences (*Erfahrung*). If pain is *not* contextualized with past sufferings, we lose the ability to recognize and more importantly, judge and assess pain experiences in the present. Pain loses its temporality and thus it loses its radical charge. The ability to produce difference. “Without pain,” Han writes, “the body, as well as the world, sinks into in-difference” (Han 2021, 31). In other words, pain is a differentiating force; what Ahmed would call the instantiation of surfaces.

Contrary to Hans theory, the respondents actively choose to follow a path of suffering. The respondents do not merely experience pain. Pain does not merely *happen* to them. They cause the pain, choose it because it is an investment in the thing they want to do (land a trick or just skate) and are therefore *in control* of the pain. In this way they are, in Han’s understanding, *radical*. By choosing (to do a thing that causes them) pain, it is not due to a masochistic impulse but a way to engage in a space that rejects the palliative. If they fall and get injured it is because *they* are to blame. If they complete the rite of *the struggle* then whatever reward they find is theirs to reap. Because of skateboarding being a space within which pain is inevitably a part, both physically and narratively in the culture, skateboarding becomes an activity through which agency can be regained. It could even be seen as a conscious objection to the palliative.

Conclusion

The central aim of this thesis was to investigate how meaning-making effects the experience of (physical) pain. The preliminary research conducted revealed that the experience of pain cannot be reduced to mere sensory input. With this point of departure, a dozen respondents with skateboarding experience were chosen as a case study because pain is intrinsic to this ‘sport’, to, in fact, the entire culture of skateboarding.

The main findings of this investigation are as follows: 1) Pain is experienced based on the meaning ascribed to it. 2) The meaning ascribed to the painful experience is dependent on the context within which it occurs. 3) When bodies collide with objects (animate or inanimate) it causes a sensation which beckons a meaning-making process. 4) The meaning-making process consists of an assessment and judgment of the sensation through which it can be understood *as* pain, and, if painful, meaningless or meaningful. 5) On the basis of the assessment/judgment of the pain sensation as well as the consequences of a possibly serious injury, the persons experiencing pain (re)orient themselves towards or away from the pains. 6) The experience and utilization of pain is a *radical* force as it creates surfaces, borders and worlds, i.e. the experience of pain leads to the production of *difference* – that I am this and not that.

Phenomenology provided me with a theoretical lens through which I could study the experience of pain in a way that was not stuck in the mind/body division. Qualitative methods in the form of qualitative, in-person interviews gave me access to a wealth of subjective and descriptive data on lived experiences of pain.

How pain is assessed, judged and experienced is influenced by myriad factors. The analysis showed the value and importance of the narrative of *the struggle*. Narration of pain is a key element in the meaning-making process. For the skaters, their tales of struggle and war is one way to understand how the experience of pain operates within the context of skateboarding. There is a simple logic at play here. The narrative gives pain shape. Narration thus plays a part in, not only the stories respondents understand themselves in relation to skateboarding, but especially in relation to the pain they experience. Interestingly, the

narratives had a reflexive quality that seemed to lessen the pain experienced.

The data also revealed a purposeful utilization of pain and painful moments. Here we see the interpretation of the painful sensations and its physical manifestations (scars, torn ligaments, ect.) as a means through which the respondents are resurfaced and (re)created, not only as skating bodies withstanding pain, but also as bodies outside of skateboarding, parent, employees, etc. Furthermore, the data also showed how the direct experience of painful sensations enabled a unique space of intimacy based on the communal experience of pain, as well as a playful space through which respondents were free to play around, fall and get hurt. A lesser, however still notable finding, was that respondents found themselves able to let go of or lessen mental pains as the physical pains took over when skating.

How pain is assessed, judged and experienced also affects the way in which the respondents (re)orient themselves in relation to pain. This (re)orientation happens at several levels. For instance when pain is utilizable, as with minor and commonly experienced pains, there was a (re)orientation toward these pains, as they were seen as an investment, for example in mastering a new trick. However, severe pain in connection with serious injuries called for a reorientation away from pain, as serious injuries may adversely impact a skater's life off the board, i.e. at work or at home. Risking serious injuries here becomes a matter of risk management and choice: Do I want to take on the challenges of this trick, if it could have serious consequences? In relation to these pains, the data shows a double reorientation both away from these pains, and toward the pain prevention methods and tactics of body strengthening, stretching and doing yoga as they, ultimately, want to keep skating (and are oriented towards skating).

The pain experienced in collision with other objects and bodies shapes the bodily surface and boundaries. Here, as other objects come into view, *difference* is unveiled to the individual as they can now see and feel the boundaries between themselves and other objects and bodies: I am this and not that. This distinction cannot be learned or understood if pain is concealed or palliated. If the experience of 'collisions' are numbed, we lose understanding of our lived experiences past and present, as it is our ability to assess our pain through (past) experience (*Erfahrung*) that enables the production of change/difference. In this way, algophobia leads to in-difference because it hinders the possibility of painful experiences (since one would avoid collisions at all cost). Pain, then, can be understood as is a radical force. The respondents consciously gravitate towards and away from pain, using it to create meaningful experiences, new bodies and differences. Without this movement, the respondents would fashion worlds that are hells of the same, where in-difference rules.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

*Interviews conducted with Danish-speaking interviewees

Interview #

Date

Location of interview

First name and age of respondent

THEMES ³⁹	Research questions or ideas	Interview questions
INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS/SKATING IN GENERAL	(Questions about the respondents' experience with skating in general.)	<p><i>(Introductory: I'd like to talk to you a little about skating and some of the experiences you've had with it. I am, as I told you, interested in what physical pain means to skating and to those who skate. But first of all, I actually just want to hear a little about you and skating in general.)</i></p> <p><u>Skating now</u> How long have you skated?</p> <p>How old were you when you started, and how long have you been skating?</p> <p>Why did you start, and why do you skate now?</p> <p><u>If not skating now:</u> How long did you skate?</p> <p>How old were you when you started, and how long have you been skating?</p> <p>Why did you start,</p> <p>Why do you stop?</p>

³⁹ The Thesis Guide is translated from Danish.

THEMES ³⁹	Research questions or ideas	Interview questions
<p>PAIN EXPERIENCE</p> <p><i>How is pain experienced within a certain culture?</i></p> <p><i>How is pain experienced by skaters (...)</i></p>	<p><i>How is pain experienced within a particular culture?</i></p> <p>How has pain been experienced while skating? How much is pain in skating?</p> <p>What meaning is given to pain?</p> <p>Dominating discourses</p>	<p><i>* only regarding the interviewee's experience of pain</i></p> <p>Have you experienced physical pain while skating? Tell me about it. How did it feel? What were your thoughts on it? What do you think of it now? Was it frightening? Motivating?</p> <p>What goes through your mind, for instance, when you're at the top of a ramp and might be about to attempt a new trick, knowing it could potentially cause you pain? What goes through your mind afterward?</p> <p>How significant is pain to you in skating?</p> <p>How do you perceive or think about pain in the context of skating? Is it a good or bad thing? Exciting or frightening?</p> <p>Is there a difference in how you perceive and think about pain outside of a skateboarding context (school, work, etc.)?</p> <p>What have you learned about your own pain thresholds since you started skating? Has it shifted, for example?</p> <p>Can you feel it in other contexts?</p> <p>Do you and those you skate with talk about the physical pain you experience, which often accompanies skating? Is the physical pain something to fear or not - a motivation or not? Is it something you should dare to endure? Is it about courage?</p> <p>What do you do when someone gets hurt, i.e., experiences physical pain?</p> <p>Would you say there's a form of recognition in experiencing physical pain, like in getting hurt?</p>

THEMES ³⁹	Research questions or ideas	Interview questions
	Recognition and pain	
<p>GROUP (IDENTITY)</p> <p>*SKETCHING OUT THE SOCIAL WORLD OF SKATING (IN ORDER TO TALK ABOUT HOW THE SKATERS EMBODY IT)</p> <p>(...) and how can the formation and shaping of identity be understood in relation to this?</p>	<p>Could identity and the shaping of same have anything to do with the way pain is experienced and understood within skating culture/by skaters?</p> <p>*other ways of formulating identity: (through the building up of) togetherness, relationships, friendships, culture, community, solidarity, empathy, learns to know one's own limits and acknowledge the same, understanding oneself, general world-formation</p> <p>Culture and community within skating as well as relationships/friendship</p>	<p>Can you briefly tell me about the relationships you've formed through skating? Are they different from those you've made outside of skating?</p> <p>Does the physical pain you/you all experience while skating play a role in how you've formed and continue to form relationships within the skateboarding community?</p> <p>Do you think the absence of physical pain has any significance in how you form friendships outside the skateboarding community?</p>
<p>IDENTITY & UNDERSTANDING OF SELF</p>	<p>Selvforståelse inden- og uden for skating</p>	<p><i>(Introductory: I'm interested in hearing whether skating and the physical pain have had an effect on your self-understanding - that is, how you see yourself and want to describe yourself. That is what I want to inquire about now.)</i></p> <p>I'm curious to hear about how the way you view and describe yourself has changed since you began skating. How?</p> <p>Do you view yourself in the same way when you're in a skateboarding context as when you're in another context, like school or work, with other friends, or family? If there's a difference, how would you describe yourself outside of skating?</p>

THEMES ³⁹	Research questions or ideas	Interview questions
	<p>Smerte ift. selvforståelse inden- og uden for skating</p> <p>Egne smerte-grænser</p>	<p>Do you think, or would you say, that the physical pain you experience while skating has affected your self-understanding?</p> <p>If yes, can you feel it in the way you handle work, school, communities, friendships? How has the physical pain affected it?</p> <p>What have you learned about your pain thresholds since you started skating? - have they, for example, moved?</p> <p>Can you feel it in contexts other than skating?</p>
	<p>Thinking about Norbert Elias, civilization process, we are trained/raised/civilized to avoid pain or potentially dangerous situations, therefore:</p> <p>Why skate, when skating almost inevitably leads to the experience of pain?</p>	<p><i>(Introductory: I've been thinking a lot about how in a way we're brought up or perhaps even trained to avoid things and situations that can cause pain. We learn to be careful and avoid the hot oven, stove, and fire. We're taught not to climb too high in a tree because we could fall and get hurt. Some things are taught, while others, of course, we learn through experience. But with skating, you can't avoid the physical pain - it's a part of skating. Therefore, one could argue that to skate is to actively put oneself in a position of physical pain.</i></p> <p>So my question is: Why skate when it puts you in a position where physical pain is inevitable?</p>
<p>PRODUCTIVE, POSITIVE, UTILIZABLE PAIN</p>	<p>Can the experience of physical pain be understood as positive?</p>	<p>We've talked about some things you learn from pain, but I'm also interested in hearing: Do you gain something from the pain itself? Does it or is there also a kind of pleasure in experiencing physical pain? Can you feel that it's also nice to experience physical pain when it's not something done in many other contexts?</p>