

**“YOU’RE DOING IT WRONG”:
SKATEBOARDING, GENDER, AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY**

by

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ABSTRACT

My research focuses on skateboarding as a youthful and often gendered means of negotiating public and cultural space. Much of the academic literature sees the act of skateboarding as having transgressive potential in relation to public space. I use this body of work as a starting point from which to explore how class, race, sexuality and especially gender complicate the seemingly progressive relationship between skateboarding and public space. How do those publics who have struggled and continue to struggle for power, safety, and mobility in the public sphere (with a focus on women and non-binary people) engage with this struggle through their participation in skateboarding? And through what means are women and non-binary skaters creating space for themselves within the homogenous and sometimes exclusionary culture of skateboarding itself?

Framed through theories of public space (Lefebvre, 1991; Borden, 2001; Mitchell, 1995; Wilson, 1992; Day, 2007) and youth, gender, and resistance (Beal, 1995), my paper explores the contradictory ways that skateboarding both reproduces *and* provides a means to resist hegemonic discourses. Via an analysis of 10 interviews with skateboarders in Vancouver, BC, a number of media interviews of professional woman skateboarders accessed online, and field observations, I analyze how non-dominant identities find belonging in skateboarding and how skateboarding affects their interactions in and with public space. The women and non-binary skateboarders I spoke with and researched had all at some point overcome external and internalized narratives about women's limitations when it

comes to physical ability and risk, as well as about women's legitimacy as skateboarders. In conclusion I find that women and non-binary skateboarders negotiate belonging in public space through the use of a variety of gender presentations, the creation of female-only and female-run spaces, the seeking out of female role models, and through the creation and consumption of skateboarding media for and by women.

LAY SUMMARY

This thesis explores how woman and non-binary skateboarders use public space, and how they find a sense of belonging within a male-dominated and sometimes sexist culture. Women and non-binary people have often been at risk of violence and harassment when using public space. I explore how skateboarding can provide a way to use public space more safely, and how the presence of female and non-binary skateboarders can make these spaces more accessible. I find that female and non-binary skateboarders create a sense of belonging in a number of ways: through the creation of their own media, by skating with other women and non-binary people, by seeking out female role models, and by altering their gender presentation. My participants report feeling more comfortable using public spaces when other women are present, meaning that the more that women skateboard in public spaces, the more safe and accessible these spaces will become.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, K. Gray. The fieldwork reported in Chapter Three was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H16-00041.

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GLOSSARY

Definitions all taken directly from: <http://www.transstudent.org/definitions/>

Cis(gender): Adjective that means “identifies as their sex assigned at birth” derived from the Latin word meaning “on the same side.” A cisgender/cis person is not transgender. “Cisgender” does not indicate biology, gender expression, or sexuality/sexual orientation. In discussions regarding trans issues, one would differentiate between women who are trans and women who aren’t by saying trans women and cis women. Cis is not a “fake” word and is not a slur. Note that cisgender does not have an “ed” at the end.

Femme: An identity or presentation that leans towards femininity. Femme can be an adjective (he’s a femme boy), a verb (she feels better when she “femmes up”), or a noun (they’re a femme). Although commonly associated with feminine lesbian/queer women, it’s used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

Heteronormative / Heteronormativity: These terms refer to the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and society and furthers the marginalization of queer people.

Nonbinary (Also Non-Binary): Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is a nonbinary person). Not all nonbinary people identify as trans and not all trans people identify as nonbinary. Sometimes (and increasingly), nonbinary can be used to describe the aesthetic/presentation/expression of a cisgender or transgender person.

Queer: General term for gender and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. There is a lot of overlap between queer and trans identities, but not all queer people are trans and not all trans people are queer. The word queer is still sometimes used as a hateful slur, so although it has mostly been reclaimed, be careful with its use.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I began learning to skateboard one year into my masters program. At the time I was unsure of a thesis topic and struggling to find a balance with work, school, and the many other projects I'd taken on. When I started becoming more and more obsessed with skateboarding as both a physical and symbolic freedom from these things, I also started getting interested in the theoretical aspects. I had so many questions. Why were there so few women at the skate parks? Why had I never tried to learn before now, even though I'd always been interested? Why was I so intimidated at skate parks, and so embarrassed to be seen skateboarding at all, anywhere? I started looking up skateboarders online and feeling this unnameable joy whenever I'd see women skateboarding. Why did it so often make me cry? Why was I so moved by this?

The act of skateboarding also made me look at my city differently, at public spaces differently. I began noticing how smooth or rough a surface was, what kinds of interesting objects filled those spaces. I noticed that what had once seemed like a small incline would transform into an impossible obstacle once I was on my board. I noticed how dreamily smooth tennis courts can be. I also began noticing the sounds of skateboarders outside on my street, and I'd instinctively look out the window to watch every time. Skateboarding does in many ways shape the city spaces around us, and traces of skateboarders' presence are easy to spot, if you begin to pay attention. Marks and scrapes on walls, curbs, and benches; little metal pins every few feet along a public bench to keep skateboarders away; the sound of a skateboarder passing by your window, or the sound of skateboarders practicing tricks again and again: the slap of wood and wheels on concrete.

I got to know a small community of other women that I'd skate with now and then. We spent hours in parking lots, sometimes drinking beer or 5 dollar kombuchas, sometimes talking and sometimes not, and always trying things out on our boards again and again, or just floating around with stupid grins on our faces. We got to know each other in a way I'm not used to, with conversations kept casual, with slow friendships building naturally, with sometimes serious conversations cut short, a brief punctuation between the times we'd slip off again, riding in circles, enjoying the night breeze, the summer warmth.

I began to feel a sense of what it might have been like to be a teenage boy, and how perhaps that experience was different from my own, growing up. In high school, I can't remember spending much time with my friends that didn't involve consuming or watching or talking. As much as I value and appreciate the female friendships I had back then, the closeness and the honesty, I also feel that I did not explore the limitations and strengths of my body during that time, nor did I share a common physical passion with my friends. There are so many wonderful things that skateboarding offers that I feel are especially important for young women and non-binary youth--things that would have helped me cope better with the challenges of being young, being a woman, and navigating a world I didn't really understand in a body I didn't really understand either. These benefits, as I hope this thesis will show, can include a tight community of friends, a way to creatively and more comfortably access public space, and be *visible* there. They also include increased confidence, strength, and understanding of one's body's abilities. Skateboarding can be a comfort during difficult times, an outlet for complicated or difficult feelings, and even for grief, as one of my participants generously described for

me. Skateboarding, to me, feels like a particular kind of freedom. It is difficult, frustrating as hell, painful, repetitive and also surprising. Skateboarding is inextricable from community for me, and it seems to be so for all of the people I talked to or read about in the researching and writing of this project too. It is, most of all, fun in an utterly childish, silly, ridiculous, wonderful way. For all of these reasons, skateboarding matters, and symbolic and actual access to skateboarding should therefore be universal.

1.1 Statement of research question, goals of research

The work I have done aims to fill the gap in the research regarding women in skateboarding, especially in relation to the conflicting messages they receive from popular skateboarding culture in terms of gender presentation, legitimacy, and belonging. Despite the widely held belief that skateboarding is a culture that resists social norms, especially those relating to capitalism and consumer culture, I find through my research that skateboarding culture often also reproduces harmful norms. I focus especially on the norms it reproduces in relation to gender and sexuality. My findings have led me to see skateboarding as a mirror of patriarchal contemporary society, but also as a space of resistance that allows those who are marginalized to be heard, seen, and to support one another, as well as a platform from which to resist inequalities.

My research draws on interviews with female and gender non-binary skateboarders, casual conversations, videos, images, media interviews with professional skateboarders accessed online and in print, as well as observations and field notes taken in a number of locations in and near the city of Vancouver, BC. I examine the experiences of non-binary and woman skateboarders, and in analysing these experiences,

I ask whether all skateboarders can equally access, and therefore change, shape, and lay claim to public space. When asking this question, I filter my analysis through the ideas of David Harvey (2003) who, drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991), argues that the right to the city:

...is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire...the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights.
(p. 939)

But if this is so, then it is important to pay attention to *who* gets to remake the city, reimagine the city, and for *whose benefit*. As I will discuss in more depth in the review of the literature, many academic papers about skateboarding see the culture as subversive in that the act of skateboarding takes place in the public sphere without interacting with capitalist systems that these spaces were intended to function for and within. If a subculture that continues to be dominated by cis and hetero-normative masculinity gets to “reshape” or reimagine public city spaces, then *what* is actually being resisted? Can public space be redefined by skateboarding and skateboarders in ways that improve the safety and comfort of women and other subaltern groups, on and off skateboards, if white cis-heterosexual men hold most of the cultural and financial power? In his 2003 article about the right to the city, Harvey says that,

We are, all of us, architects, of a sort. We individually and collectively make the city through our daily actions and our political, intellectual and economic engagements. But, in return, the city makes us... The creation of a new urban commons, a public sphere of active democratic participation, requires that we roll

back that huge wave of privatization that has been the mantra of a destructive neoliberalism. We must imagine a more inclusive, even if continuously fractious, city based not only upon a different ordering of rights but upon different political-economic practices. If our urban world has been imagined and made then it can be re-imagined and re-made. (Harvey, 2003, pp. 939-941)

This emphasis on *political-economic practices* is key to my own understanding of skateboarding and its potential for social change: so much of skateboarding culture takes place at the level of leisure (Feixa, 2012) and does not, therefore, function to *change*, but rather to simply *opt out of*, certain economic and political practices. It's important to note that since many of the skateboarders who hold power in the culture are among the least directly affected by systems of cis-heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and racism, there is little impetus to change rather than merely opt out of oppressive systems. With this conceptual framework in mind, the research questions that structured my interviews and analysis were the following:

- 1) How are women, *femme*, and gender non-binary skaters engaging with public space *differently* from cis-male skateboarders?
- 2) What barriers keep women a minority in skateboarding, and how are women and non-binary people creating space for themselves in male-dominated spaces despite these barriers, both geographic and imagined?
- 3) Who feels comfortable using public skateboarding spaces, and how do they create or negotiate this sense of belonging?

- 4) How are female, femme, and non-binary skateboarders redefining, reshaping, challenging the spaces they use for skateboarding, in relation to Lefebvre and Harvey's ideas of the Right to the City?

Through interviews and observations in and around Vancouver, BC over the last 3 years, I tried to find some answers to these questions. Though my analysis can only provide tentative answers, in the process of writing this thesis, my conviction that these questions *matter* only became stronger. Access to public space matters. Increasing the safety of everyone who uses public space matters, not only because *people matter* but also because increased access to public space allows people to protest and change the systems that maintain the structures of inequality that make them unsafe in the first place. The inclusion, celebration, and empowerment of people of colour, women, non-binary, trans, lesbian, gay, queer, two-spirited people and all the many intersections of identity both *through* skateboarding, and *in* skateboarding culture, matters. Skateboarding may be a sport and culture that reproduces harmful norms and power structures, and it may not often engage directly or effectively with political structures, but skateboarding also provides a number of important resources to its members, resources that in modern capitalism can be difficult to access. These include, but are not limited to, a supportive community; safer access to public space; visibility in the public sphere; a means of building confidence, increased self-esteem, an expanded understanding and appreciation of one's body's capabilities; a coping mechanism during difficult times; and ultimately a freedom from many of the ways that contemporary society marginalizes people.

Skateboarding is a simple activity; beyond the power structures and symbolic hierarchies of the culture, at its heart it is the act of moving through space creatively, joyfully on four

wheels and a piece of wood. The symbolic and the actual freedom and mobility that skateboarding *as an act* provides has a great deal of potential for personal and social change.

1.2 Review of the Literature

This review of the literature situates my research within a body of work relating to skateboarding, belonging and public space. It gives context to my work and reveals the gaps in the literature that my research seeks to address as well as the theories that influenced my research questions and ideas. Using the ideas outlined below, I will show how subcultures such as skateboarding can provide a theoretical and physical space of belonging and a means of resisting both state-sanctioned and more informal forms of exclusion. I will also outline the ways skateboarding can and cannot shape public space.

As skateboarding is an activity that generally takes place in the urban public, my analysis is centered in particular on David Harvey's understanding of *the right to the city*. My research questions are influenced by the idea that citizens have differing access to not only the *use* of public space but also the creation of meaning *of* and *in* public space. Without, or with limited access to, public space, many people are thus limited in their ability to shape and change the urban public in ways that reflect their needs and experiences. Ideas about access to and use of public space form the conceptual understanding for my work. My work is also informed by concepts of belonging and exclusion, especially focusing of Flusty's (1997) idea of "fortressed space", a concept I use to frame the themes in my analysis of the data. These ideas allow me to explore and contextualize how skateboarding both includes and excludes simultaneously. I have thus

divided this review of the literature into the following two sections: 1) literature about public space, skateboarding and identity; and 2) literature about belonging and exclusion.

1.2.1 Public space, *the right to the city*, and skateboarding

Much has been written about how skateboarding can alter hegemonic definitions of public space. Iain Borden (2001) writes about the ways that skateboarding reimagines and alters public spaces into sites for creativity and exploration rather than for private interests. By using public space as an arena for an activity that contributes little to systems of labour and consumption, Borden argues, skateboarding critiques “the processes of exchange and consumption in the modern city, and, above all else, proposes a reassertion of *use* values as opposed to exchange values” (p. 237). In other words, skateboarders can create spaces that become valuable because of how they are used by the public rather than for their profitability within capitalism. Skateboarding takes place in public without being tied to systems of capitalism, at least on a surface level. Skateboarders can come into a space and act creatively within that space without any form of monetary exchange, whereas most uses of public space involve some kind of financial transaction (cafes, restaurants, cinemas, etc.) (Harvey, 2003).

Jeremy Nemeth’s 2006 work with skateboarders in Love Park, Philadelphia, also points to the ways that skateboarders can help to shape and change discourses around public space simply through their presence, especially in relation to capitalism. Nemeth argues that skateboarders helped turn the otherwise unremarkable Love Park into a vibrant place that is actively used, and that skateboarders’ eventual formal exclusion from the park by the city sparked important conversations in the broader community about the purpose of public space. Furthermore, skateboarders contribute a new understanding of

public space that is anti-consumerist, since skateboarders frequently use public spaces without adding financial value.

Ocean Howell (2005), however, thinks that skateboarders cannot exist outside of capitalist exchanges. Skateboarding is increasingly marketable as a hip ‘lifestyle’ and therefore contributes to gentrification while also feeding into a hugely profitable skateboarding industry. Howell, too, uses the example of Love Park in Philadelphia, but to different ends, pointing out that during the long struggle to lift the ban on skateboarders in Love Park, many skateboarders talked about the park as “empty,” even though it had been occupied by homeless people for years. He describes waves of gentrification that have taken place in Philadelphia since then, displacing both the homeless and skateboarders, and the influence that the presence of skateboarders had on this process:

...the youthful defiance of skateboarders has serendipitously reclaimed Love Park—generating revenue through media exposure and producing a marketable image for the city—all while deterring the presence of homeless. Now the skateboarders, in turn, are being phased out to make way for the next reclamation.
(p. 41)

Howell is showing how skateboarders can inadvertently contribute to capitalist ends and can even increase the desirability of a neighbourhood (leading to gentrification and the pushing out of poorer people), even though the act of skateboarding itself can be understood to be rejecting capitalism. This points to the contradiction that even while struggling to access and shape public space, skateboarders can also be displacing and erasing the presence of others in those spaces.

These articles speak to the way that public space is often defined from above and how these definitions can exclude groups that use spaces without consuming: (often intersecting) identity groups such as skateboarders, the homeless, and young people. The struggles for more inclusive definitions of public space are related to broader struggles for legitimacy and for belonging, concepts that I will discuss further in my analysis of the data. Mitchell (1995) speaks to two competing visions for the meaning of public space: “In the first of these visions, public space is taken and remade by political actors; it is politicized at its very core; and it tolerates the risks of disorder...as central to its functioning. In the second vision, public space is planned, orderly and safe” (p. 115). Much of the literature focuses on these two competing visions for public space, with skateboarders advocating for (and symbolizing) the former vision, and business and state interests advocating for the latter. There is a need for more literature that complicates this dichotomy by exploring minority identities in skateboarding and how female, queer, or trans skaters, for example, might see, experience, and participate in this struggle over public space differently.

Kristen Day (2007) does just that when she argues that public and private spaces are experienced differently depending on one’s racialized, classed, gendered, and sexual identities, and that public spaces have *never* been fully public to everyone:

Historically... most Western women have faced severe constraints on their use of public space. When we consider constraints on women, it becomes obvious that publicly owned spaces never were as “accessible” as implied, nor are they now...
(Day, 2007, p. 160)

While in no way denying that the increase in privatised public space is problematic for many social groups, Day shows that the most privatised, consumer-driven of public spaces can be the *most* accessible for some groups (in this case, women). It is thus important to examine critiques of abstract space with a critical eye. Her work shows that access to public space is complex and inextricable from an individual's intersecting identities:

The over-regulation of behaviour and design in privatized spaces, though real and sometimes offensive, may be of secondary importance to many women in the scope of their daily lives, when compared to the constraints that have an impact on their *use* of public space. (p. 165, emphasis author's)

The privatization of public spaces sometimes allows women to use public spaces more comfortably. For example, spaces where women can run errands while also experiencing some leisure time (such as malls) may be the most sought-after public spaces for women who are responsible for childcare and other household duties. This same argument was put forth by Elizabeth Wilson in her 1992 article "*The Invisible Flaneur*". Wilson says that in 19th century Western Europe, the era of the "flaneur", both public and private spheres were spaces created for men, and women--especially working class women--were often unsafe in both of these spheres, and rarely free to wander or be fully comfortable. Wilson argues that it was semi-public consumer spaces such as restaurants and department stores that began to provide the most freedom for women, spaces where she argues that a woman could experience the freedoms normally restricted to men; where, in other words, a woman could experience, briefly, what it was to be a *flaneur* (p. 101). Likewise, Day's research shows that, in current times as in the 19th century, these spaces

fulfill many women's desires to be in public while also allowing them to complete the daily tasks for which they are responsible, and they often provide a space where these women feel (and often *are*) less vulnerable to harassment (Day, 2007). Day considers how gender influences access to public space and the ways that women are differently constrained by certain public spaces than other identity groups. As she argues, women "frequently navigate public space as *objects* of observation, through sexual objectification or appraisal of their physical appearance" (p. 160, emphasis author's). This means that those who identify and/or present as women will frequently experience public space differently than men, and other intersecting identities such as race, class, age and sexuality will further complicate how people experience a space. Day indicates a need for more research that addresses the ways that different bodies experience public spaces differently. In relation to my thesis, her research also helps to show how the intersecting identities of "woman" and "skateboarder" may mean that certain female or non-binary skateboarders will understand the idea of "reclaiming public space" differently than their male counterparts. They may, for example, be more inclined to support privatized or semi-private spaces for skateboarding.

Atencio and Beal build a similar argument in their article *Beautiful Losers* (2011), which focuses on an art exhibit and a subsequent documentary film about the exhibit, both also entitled *Beautiful Losers*. The artists who curated the show, which took place in 2004 and exhibited internationally until 2009, described themselves and the exhibit as anti-establishment and DIY ("do-it-yourself"). Most of the artists who participated were skateboarders who did not have a formal education in art. The majority of the artists were also white and male. Atencio and Beal argue that the artists in this exhibition, like

skateboarders, were aligning themselves with the “street” and the identity of “outsider” in order to gain cultural and social capital, as theorized by Bourdieu. The authors argue that this particular counterculture identity was actually very much aligned with neoliberal ideas of “entrepreneurial individualism and consumer creativity” (p. 4), and served to center white masculinity, and indeed many of those who participated in the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition were not in fact outsiders or marginalized economically; many were white men working for large corporations (Aaron Rose, Christian Strike, Ed Templeton, Terry Richardson). In addition to having only two female artists, the exhibit also featured work by Terry Richardson that was criticized for its depiction and exploitation of women. One of the two female artists included in this exhibition, Clare Rojas, expressed her own discomfort with the narrative of “street art” in the show at the time, and argued that this particular understanding of the street is in fact a male-dominated space that reflects rather than rejects patriarchal culture (p. 9). Like Kristen Day (2007), who argues that unregulated public spaces are sometimes the least safe places for women, Atencio and Beal contend that the idea of anti-establishment art actually upholds already established dominance of white masculinity and creates a fortressed space (Flusty, 1997) for those who have less power, all the while disguising this power behind a rhetoric of equality and diversity:

At the heart of DIY is the belief that one does not need formal structures of advancement to achieve...Without governmental oversight, informal networks which are male dominated thrive, allowing for deep-seated biases and practices to be expressed and explained as part of the creative process...to make an argument that those who use formal systems of education or rely upon the “state” for social

advancement are illegitimate participants in a particular social field...reinforces the continued marginalization of women and people of color. (pp. 10-13).

What Atencio and Beal are articulating, much like in Day's study, is that the idea of unregulated spaces as spaces of freedom only holds true for those who already have power and cultural capital, and in fact often end up being spaces that are the most uncomfortable, unsafe, or exclusionary for those who do not. Atencio and Beal argue that the concept of DIY is used by the artists in *Beautiful Losers* in order to justify the lack of diversity in their art show. The particular myth of DIY in the arts being upheld in the *Beautiful Losers* art show is rooted in the neoliberal idea of meritocracy: that without structural interventions there would be an 'equal playing field', and therefore those who succeed are those with the most merit and talent, rather than those with the most pre-existing privilege and power.

Atencio and Beal (2011) and Sean Brayton (2005) argue that skateboarding culture's frequent identification with the space of the "street" is in fact a co-optation of marginalization as identity. In his article about white male backlash and skateboarding, Brayton discusses how skateboarding culture often appropriates black culture, such as graffiti and rap music that originated in the space of the street because of lived experiences of social, economic and structural marginalization. Skateboarding aligns itself with these street-centered black cultures in order to develop an "outsider" identity that constructs skateboarders as marginalized and therefore rebellious, despite the fact that many of those who hold cultural power in skateboarding are straight white cis-men. As Atencio and Beal (2011) argue, "The distinction of 'outsiderness' as found within alternative sports is not socially inclusive, as it primarily serves to position young white

men from middle-class backgrounds as ascendant within the field” (p. 4). Brayton compares the white rebellion against conservative middle-class white values in skateboarding to that of the Beat writers such as Kerouac. The narrative of the road in both Kerouac’s *On the Road* and in skateboarding road trip films is that of movement and mobility as a means to reject middle-class values and consumer culture:

Importantly, these narratives championing the road’s limitless possibilities and subversive potential all serve to displace counterevidence that such freedoms are unequally distributed along axes of differentiation related to gender, race, sexuality, and class. (p. 362)

Using Brayton’s argument to look more closely at *Beautiful Losers* and the narrative of DIY and street spaces in skateboarding culture, it is easier to see the way that skateboarding aligns with neoliberal ideas that maintain the power of white masculinity and prevent women, people of colour, and those from the LGBTQI+ community from holding cultural and financial capital in skateboarding.

Skateboarders are often constructed as a unified public, but skateboarding is made up of a diversity of individuals with intersecting identities that influence their experiences. There is an unequal distribution of power within skateboarding publics and therefore some identities do not have the same access to public space that would allow them to “make the city different” (Harvey, 2003) through skateboarding. Many of those with non-dominant identities in skateboarding may have different visions for the city than those who are most visible, and the culture of skateboarding often reinforces the exclusion, disempowerment, and immobility these individuals already experience in their lives, even while also providing access to other kinds of mobility. While skateboarding is

a powerful and imaginative way to enact one's "right to the city", the homogeneity of skateboarding may be resulting in cities being remade and reimagined in ways that merely reproduce existing structures of inequality and exclusion.

While the presence of skateboarders may indeed shift our understandings of public space, their presence can also reproduce and reinforce pre-existing exclusions within the very spaces it is "reclaiming". The dominance of a hegemonic, heteronormative masculinity in skateboarding is problematic, especially when skateboarding is so often lionized as a site of transgression and resistance. My thesis seeks to complicate this by critically examining whom this resistance serves. As Brayton (2005) argues, "Within skate texts...multiple images of white masculinity are produced at the expense of heterogeneous black subjectivities and via the exclusion of (white) female skaters" (p. 368). While skateboarding can offer a means of resisting consumer-capitalist definitions of (and restrictions on) public space (Borden, 2001), skateboarders are not a single homogenous group but rather a group made up of individuals with bodies that are read differently. Not all skateboarders have the same access (and histories of access) to public space. Though this is slowly changing, skateboarding media remains dominated by heterosexual cis-and able-bodied white men (Rinehart, 2005) for whom the public sphere has historically been most accessible and whose bodies continue to be less vulnerable to violence there. The multiple and intersecting identities of individual skateboarders means that theorists and researchers cannot easily generalize about skateboarders as a single entity, and therefore cannot generalize about skateboarders' relationship to the public sphere.

In her 2015 dissertation, Katherine White speaks to the differential access to

public space experienced by racialized communities. She examines how residents of the Bronx are using skateboarding as a way of resisting the racialized segregation of New York City. Her participants all identify as Black and Latino men. White argues that, “Black and Latino youth who skate in public spaces designed and policed to exclude them are asserting their power and right to exist” (p. 45). Through this assertion of their “right to the city” by using public spaces to skateboard that might otherwise exclude them literally or symbolically, these skateboarders of color are able to work towards changing the city in a way that reflects their own lives and experiences. The participants in White’s study report that they experience less surveillance and harassment from the police when they are skateboarding (mobile) than when they are simply hanging out (immobile), and that the social capital and mobility provided by skateboarding has changed their lives and their neighbourhood in positive ways (for example, the building of a skate park that becomes a safe space for youth to hang out, as well as the ability to enter other neighbourhoods more comfortably when on a skateboard). However, it is important to point out the absence of female skateboarders’ voices in this study. Skateboarding is being theorized here as a tool of empowerment and mobility, but the empowerment and mobility afforded by skateboarding is, in this case, only being accessed by skateboarders who are men.

Though White’s study includes only male participants, there is in fact a visible community of female skateboarders in the borough where her research takes place. A group of Latina skateboarders from the Bronx, the *Brujas*, have received a lot media attention in the last few years (with features in *Vogue magazine*, *Redbull.com*, *New York Times*, *Billboard*, and *GQ*, among others). This skate crew, made up of mainly women of

colour, drew their name from the cult video entitled “The Skate Witches” but also because, as Arianna Gil says in her interview with Vogue writer Patricia Garcia, they “are intersectional feminists who are interested in spirituality and the tradition of *brujería* [witchcraft] in [their] culture” (Garcia 2016, paragraph 5). *The Brujas* offer an intersectional analysis of the silencing that women of colour experience in both skateboarding culture and in public spaces. In an interview with *Browntourage Magazine* (2014, interviewer not identified), Arianna Maya Gil, a member of the *Brujas*, articulates that:

The commercial skateworld, and even the few outlets for girl skaters that exist tend to center white people and culture... *Brujas*... is about Latina Barrio girl pride. We put forward a vision of a world where women from the barrio, girls like us, are powerful and have agency and channels to express themselves in the streets... (*Browntourage Magazine*, 2014, paragraph 3)

This emphasis on the space of “the streets” is important. Skateboarding both represents and embodies mobility in and through the city, as well as an active and visible presence in the streets. As Don Mitchell (1995) argues: “...public spaces are...spaces for representation. That is, public space is a place within which a political movement can stake out the space that allows it to be seen.” He uses the example of homeless people, whose spatial marginalization means that, “they fail to be counted as legitimate members of the polity” (p. 115). The *Brujas*, like the men of colour in Katherine White’s study, recognize and address the fact that spatial marginalization is directly related to social and economic marginalization. The *Brujas* articulate that they see skateboarding as a means of being seen and heard, of acting with agency and power, and of changing notions of

who has a legitimate right to use public spaces comfortably (*BrownTourage Magazine* 2014). Skateboarding is a way to assert and practice their “right to the city” as defined by Harvey. By participating in this culture and this act, the *Brujas* are also increasing the visibility of women of color in the culture of skateboarding. The *Brujas* are using skateboarding as a platform from which to resist the patriarchy and white supremacy they see in both skateboarding culture *and* in the contemporary city. They are acknowledging skateboarding as a powerful tool of agency and resistance, while remaining critical of the culture itself. Via their refusal to be excluded or rendered invisible, they are shaping skateboarding, and in turn city space, into something more just and accessible.

The presence of these, and other women, in public space via the act of skateboarding is important on another level as well: that of political activism. While activism for social change takes place in many different spaces, including cyberspace, the physical space of the street remains essential in struggles for social justice. Access to public space is thus an important political issue. According to Mitchell (1995), being seen and recognized in public spaces is essential for groups seeking justice. Ongoing struggles for racial equality (such as the Black Lives Matter movement), for Indigenous rights and sovereignty (such as Idle No More), struggles against homophobia (such as Pride), for gender equality and against violence against women (Take Back the Night, March for Missing And Murdered Indigenous Women), and against transphobia and violence against trans people (Transgender Rights Movement) show that the public realm remains a key site for resistance. The public sphere, as the literature shows, is both a site of violence and injustice for many groups *and, simultaneously*, the most important and visible space in which to resist these very injustices (Mitchell, 1995; Nemeth, 2006;

White, 2015). Skateboarding is thus a unique lens through which to examine *exclusion* and *resistance to exclusion* in the public sphere because it is such a public activity and culture. Skateboarding can be a public act of resistance and a means of being seen and heard in public. However, skateboarding is also simultaneously a hugely popular and increasingly mainstream activity dominated by white cis-men that can reproduce harmful exclusions of those who already experience marginalization in the public sphere.

If one agrees with David Harvey when he says that, “We individually and collectively make the city through our daily actions and our political, intellectual and economic engagements” (2003, p. 939), then the marginalization or absence of women’s voices and bodies in many skateboarding spaces, as well as those of queer, trans and non-binary people, means that they are being excluded from one means of shaping the spaces in which they live, work and play. This exclusion will therefore have tangible effects on their lived experiences. I believe that expanding the opportunities for women in skateboarding will not only benefit individual women but can also have an effect on the access that women and other historically marginalized identities have to public space. By using the city in particular ways, by simply being visible, loud and active in public space, non-binary, trans and cis-woman skateboarders can change how other women, whether on skateboards or not, experience public space.

I draw here on Becky Beal in order to show how these differing experiences with public space manifest themselves in skateboarding. In her 1995 article, Beal explores some of the creative and collaborative ways that the (mostly white and male) skateboarders in her study resist dominant ideas about competition in sport, as well as the corporatization of skateboarding. Through their insistence on cooperation, support and

camaraderie, the skateboarders in her study continually resist the competition that is part of so many other sports. However, she finds that it is mainly only male skateboarders that benefit from this resistance (p. 265), and that while “the subculture of skateboarders resists many of the social relations associated with capitalism, in an apparent contradiction to what might be expected it generally does not resist those associated with sexism, racism, and homophobia” (p. 265). Nolan’s (2003) research on skateboarding in Australia reveals different ways that exclusion manifests itself in relation to skateboarding. She discusses how all skateboarders are excluded from certain public spaces, but also that skateboarders that identify as women and/or queer are often excluded even from spaces made specifically for skateboarders, and from the predominantly male and hetero-normative culture of skateboarding more broadly (p. 324).

Mackay and Dallaire (2014) show that even in spaces created specifically to address these exclusions in skateboarding, many people are still excluded. The *Skirtboarders* blog is a website created by a group of predominantly white cisgender woman skaters in Quebec who use their blog to promote female skateboarders. However, even the name of their blog promotes a very particular representation of women by using the skirt as a symbol of womanhood. There is also very little racialized diversity amongst the sponsored skaters making up their team. The authors explore how this blog both broadens the terms of inclusion in skateboarding, but while also including only a narrow understanding and diversity of women. As Beal (1995) puts it, “...skateboarding is not inherently counterhegemonic or hegemonic; instead, it may carry both sets of meanings, sometimes simultaneously” (p. 256). This is precisely what makes skateboarding such an

important object of study: it carries a great deal of potential for bottom-up social change, while simultaneously maintaining systems of patriarchy, homophobia and racial inequality, even while making efforts to be more inclusive.

In a very different portrayal of skateboarding culture, Joanna Hearne (2014) analyses Apache artist dustinn Craig's experimental film *4wheelwarpony*, and shows how skateboarding can become a means of strengthening community and sense of place for the Apache community. Hearne discusses the way that skateboarding functions as a kind of ceremony that connects young people to their Apache culture. The Apache Skateboard company even creates skateboards with Apache stories on their decks. She argues that both the skate park and these Apache-made deck graphics serve as "spatial anchors" (Basso, 1996) for moral behaviour where appropriate ways of being in the community are tied to particular places or objects. Skateboarding in this case (and in many others) can be read as a (public) performance: "The skate park's ramps and arena evoke both ceremonialism...and local, land-based activity, or reterritorialization" (Hearne, 2014, pp. 54-55). Likewise, "The poetics of attribution in street aesthetics—tagging, graphic signatures—here assert Indigenous authority over their own stories and storytelling" (p. 57). In other words the act of skateboarding as well as the art and places associated with it are redefined and claimed by the Apache in order to assert their identity and history as a community. Additionally, Hearne argues that skateboarding has served as an alternative to, and a space for healing from, drug-addiction, depression, violence and suicide in the Apache community.

Katherine White (2015), discussed previously, similarly argues that skateboarding provides a way out of, or to cope with, difficult circumstances. In interviews, many of

White's participants (skateboarders of color living in the Bronx) expressed that skateboarding provided an alternative to gang participation and illegal activities, and that they experienced far less negative and violent attention from the police when skateboarding than when simply "hanging out" in the streets. The act of skateboarding thus provides a mobile space of belonging for these young people, regardless of where it is practiced. Nemeth (2006) makes a similar claim, arguing that Love Park provides a social space for young people to act creatively and be with their peers while in the presence of a diversity of people, rather than relegated to more homogenous and separated spaces such as skate parks. Skating, according to Nemeth, provides young people with a means to escape the boundaries of adult-defined spaces where opportunities for creativity and interaction with different identity groups are limited. It is consistent throughout the literature that skateboarding can provide a safe space of belonging and inclusion for young people. All of this points to the basis for my research: that despite many problematic elements and contradictions, skateboarding has the potential to contribute a sense of belonging and community, as well as a means of dealing with difficult circumstances in the lives of young people. It is therefore important to further explore who is excluded from this subculture and how various subaltern groups are challenging these exclusions.

1.2.2 Belonging and exclusion

I contextualize my work within other literature that speaks to how belonging can be constructed or withheld. This helps me to understand how my participants and other women who skateboard navigate skateboarding spaces and cultures as a means to find belonging there. Sara Ahmed (2010), in her article about multiculturalism and "the

promise of happiness” explores how immigrants must negotiate belonging within the very limited discourse of integration. While the language of multiculturalism claims to be about embracing differences, immigrants are frequently asked to shape their identities around a hegemonic culture in order to be seen to belong:

And yet, many migrant individuals and families are under pressure to integrate, where integration is a key term for what we now call in the UK “good race relations”. Although integration is not defined as “leaving your culture behind” (at least not officially), it is unevenly distributed, as a demand that new or would be citizens “embrace” a common culture that is already given. (p. 131)

Ahmed shows here the contradictions that migrants must navigate in order to create a sense of place and belonging for themselves. Like the other authors discussed in this section, Ahmed shows how immigrants’ lives are shaped by conflicting discourses, structures and relationships that influence their ability to feel they belong. As Jo-Anne Dillabough and Jacqueline Kennelly (2010) argue, urban youth must constantly negotiate their experiences,

...on the one hand, through desires for belonging, for security, and for a twenty-first century idea of citizenship; and, on the other, through novel forms of youth class-conflict, changing gender relations, new national imaginaries, race relations and peer rivalry. (pp. 14-15)

Urban youth, in other words, have complex lives that are constrained by all sorts of conflicting discourses, racialized inequalities, and shifting economic and political structures. All of these things must be taken into consideration in order to truly understand how people make sense of their lives. My research will contribute to

understandings of how people negotiate these complexities by examining these concepts through the lens of skateboarding, a culture that is subject to all of these conflicting ideas of race, gender, class, nationalism and belonging, but that also offers a sanctuary of sorts from these restrictive and sometimes violent ideas of difference.

In her article about skateboarders in Hobart, Tasmania, Elaine Stratford (2002) uses Stephen Flusty's (1997) theorizations of space to show how both those in power *and* those who use the city in subversive ways can create spaces that feel unwelcoming for some publics. Flusty describes spatial types, of which "prickly space" is the most useful in relation to my findings. "Prickly space" is defined here as "space that cannot be comfortably occupied" (quoted in Stratford, p. 200). Stratford also outlines Flusty's concept of fortress strategies, which include privatization, surveillance, and defensive architecture which serve to selectively exclude some people, and to protect the consumer-citizen. This is a useful way to conceptualize how certain publics are selectively excluded from a space. Often skateboarders face this type of what I will hereby refer to as "fortressing" in the form of security, policing, surveillance, fences and walls, and aggression from non-skateboarders. "Fortressing" of space, ironically, frequently occurs *within* the skateboarding community. Nicholas Nolan (2003), during his observations at a skate park in Newcastle, Australia, notes that:

...when I observed a quite skilled young woman skating there, many of the males found it amusing, and their smirking and making comments to each other suggests that they thought of her as different, even though her skating ability appeared to be equal to, or better than, most of the others... (p. 324)

Others in Nolan's study observe that women are unable to blend in at the skate park, causing them to feel uncomfortable there or to avoid it altogether. It is not uncommon for women to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in skate parks, as Pomerantz, Currie, and Kelly (2004; see also Kelly et al., 2008) among others, show in their study of skateboarders in Vancouver, Canada. Some male skateboarders accused their female research participants of using the skate park only in order to get attention from boys. The girls' legitimacy as skateboarders was thus called into question every time they skated there, creating a "prickly" space for them. They were eventually able to construct themselves as legitimate users of this space, but only by first avoiding the skate park until they had improved their skills; something their male counterparts were not required to do in order to be seen as "real" skateboarders.

Fortressing and the creation of prickly space can also occur when one particular public is dominant in a space: for many skateboarders the atmosphere of hegemonic masculinity at some skate parks displaces them to sites that are geographically and temporally marginal. That some identities experience supposedly public spaces as fortressed and uncomfortable, of course, is not unique to skateboarding. Kristen Day (2007), as discussed above, argues that public and private spaces are experienced differently depending on one's racialized, classed, gendered, and sexual identities. She argues that public spaces have *never* been fully public to everyone, and historically women have never had full access to the urban public.

Julie Young's 2013 article about youth negotiating precarious legal status in Toronto contributes to my understanding of the ways that belonging and exclusion occur and are negotiated. While this article does not touch on ideas of skateboarding or public

space, the ideas about how inclusion and exclusion happen are relevant. Her study focuses on the emotional and social impact of precarious citizenship on a number of young people in the Toronto area, who are forced to keep their precarious immigration status secret. Young's focal questions are: "How do youth living with precarious status negotiate belonging? In what ways do people and contexts mediate their experiences?" (p. 103). These are key questions when talking about how people construct identities, and Young's analysis is important for my research project as it helps show how identity and belonging are constructed not only in response to culture and place but also in relation to immigration status and other forms of state recognition. As Young puts it, "An individual's attachment to and identification with a place cannot be separated from the context in which these feelings are negotiated and how that individual is positioned within that social context" (p. 100). Young's argument—that formal and informal recognition are a big part of how people make sense of their identities—is important to my research. According to Young, one's sense of place and belonging are very much tied up in the ways one is positioned in relation to the cultures and institutions from which one seeks recognition. As such, when skateboarding culture and media fail to recognize the contribution of women, queer and other non-dominant (and often intersecting) identities in skateboarding, many people are alienated and discouraged from participation, and so deprived of the benefits skateboarding can offer.

Young discusses the role that schools play in these young people's lives as both sites of belonging and exclusion, and in turn what role these youth's legal status plays in their sense of belonging at school. Most relevant here is the way that Young shows how belonging is constantly being negotiated between the discursive and personal realms (p.

100). Many of the youth she works with do not disclose their precarious legal status and are in this way able to fit in with their peers. However, sometimes their legal status acts as a barrier to full participation in school activities, especially in situations in which legal identification or travel is involved, reminding them of the precariousness of their ability to belong (and remain) in Canada. Young contributes a better understanding of how notions of home for her participants can be composed of “multiple and complex connections to both where they were now and where they had been” (p. 114). Young’s ideas about how belonging and a sense of place are negotiated are key to my research.

Skateboarding can act as a space of belonging for many young people negotiating recognition in other aspects of their lives, but it can also alienate those who seek to belong. Young’s contribution to this literature review is a nuanced understanding of how belonging is negotiated through social, cultural and structural factors. Thea Abu El-Haj (2006), too, demonstrates how political forces shape people’s sense of belonging or exclusion. She writes about how Arab-American youth have had to negotiate the Islamophobia and stereotypes that have become prevalent in post 9/11 urban America. Using Charles Taylor and colleague’s (1992) ideas about the damage of mis- and non-recognition and the ways it “can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (Taylor et al., 1992, as cited in Abu El-Haj, 2006, p. 25), Abu El-Haj argues that there is a need for more welcoming educational environments, “in which students can consider complexity, nuance, and multiple perspectives in ways that deepen their knowledge and thinking rather than push them into dichotomous positions” (p. 26). Iris Marion Young, similarly, outlines the different “faces” that oppression can take, including cultural imperialism (or

“normativity”: see Young, 2006) where one’s culture is stereotyped as a homogenous “other” (Young, 1990). Abu El-Haj shows that many Muslim students have had to negotiate an increasingly stereotyped reflection of themselves since 9/11, not only in the media and from their peers, but also coming from teachers and school texts. Abu El-Haj’s article, like Young’s, asks us to consider the discursive, political and social barriers that stand in the way of a sense of belonging, and to consider what we as researchers might do about this. I argue here that skateboarding provides one such social space where belonging can be negotiated differently, and can become a refuge for those who are not recognized in other spaces. Additionally, as I discussed earlier in relation to the *Brujas*, skateboarding can give young people a means of being seen and asserting their presence in the public sphere (White, 2015). When skateboarding is understood this way, working towards making skateboarding culture more inclusive becomes all the more important.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The methodology that informed this research project is a critical feminist ethnography, as the data was generated over an extended period of time at various sites, and using a variety of methods. My ethnography is grounded in a feminist worldview, influenced by DeVault and Gross (2012), who define feminism as “as a set of practices and perspectives that affirms differences among women and promotes women’s interests, health, and safety, locally and abroad” (p. 207). As such I was continually thinking through what it means to conduct feminist research not only in content but also in form, keeping in mind the history and context in which particular methods have been used. Jaggar (2014) describes the relationship between methodology and methods when she says that “Methodology is critical and systematic reflection on methods. Methods are the means people use for accomplishing particular tasks. … Feminist methodology reflects on these methods from a feminist perspective and with particular reference to research intended to be feminist” (p. vii). In this chapter, I will discuss this conceptual framework and how it informed my work, my positionality and how it influences my data, as well as specific methods I chose in accordance with this framework to collect and analyse data. I will speak about the recruitment and data collection process, the questions and structures of my interviews, and my approach to analysis. I will end the chapter by discussing some of the ethical considerations and dilemmas I faced while doing this research, as well as the challenges, limitations, and lingering questions.

2.1 Methodology

Alison Jaggar (2014) says that

Feminist methodology ... considers the epistemological, ethical, and practical implications of various research methods, as these may have been used or misused in particular disciplines. It also considers the potential of new and possibly less-exploitative methods for developing more-trustworthy knowledge. (Jaggar, 2014, p. vii)

These considerations influenced my decision to use interviews as a primary source of data, as I felt that interviewing allowed me to work *with* my participants in making sense of their experiences, and thus allowed me to generate knowledge *with* rather than *about* the people with whom I work. I am most interested in how women and non-binary skateboarders conceive of and theorize their place within skateboarding culture. I recognize that interviews may only have given me a limited perspective on skateboarding culture in Vancouver and the experiences of women within it, both due to the limited number (10) of participants and also due to the gap between how participants might perceive of or describe their experiences to others, and what actually happens on the ground (Thomas, 2005). While I draw on observations and field notes in places where skateboarding takes place in order to address this gap, I focus more on the data obtained from my interviews and from various skateboarding-related media, because what is most important to my project is how my participants *construct* and *conceive of their identities and experiences* in relation to their participation in skating, especially in relation to ideas of belonging and exclusion. For this reason, I also use an extensive analysis of media to add a richness to my data. My research acknowledges the gap between experiences and

how we reconstruct those experiences for others and ourselves as a way of making sense of our past.

Both my methodological approach and conceptual framework are influenced by the work of Dillabough and Kennelly (2010), who make explicit connections between their methods and the concepts that underlie their research questions, and focus on their participants' use of space:

At the heart of our research is an attempt, animated by a desire to keep epistemology and method entwined, to uncover the deep meanings underlying young people's narrative accounts of the everyday, of the cultural ordinary, of anomie and even the sub-ordinary in comparative urban contexts. (p. 49)

Accordingly, Dillabough and Kennelly use a wide range of methods in their work in order to capture the complexity of their youth participants' everyday lives.

Interviewing

I used Warren (2012) as a guide for my interviewing practice, and her work has helped me to think about the interview process critically and thoughtfully from the planning stages all the way to data analysis. Warren (2012) says that, "For both interviewer and respondent, the situation of the interview--its time and place--is of relevance, as well as the selves mirrored within it" (p. 131). I recognize that there are any number of factors that can influence the data acquired from an interview. Since my research took place in a fairly small skateboarding community within a medium-sized city, many of my participants were acquaintances of mine, and one was a close friend, which certainly influenced what was said as well as the level of formality of the interview. Additionally, the location of my interviews varied, and this most likely

affected what the participants were able to say, their level of focus or distraction, and the length of the interviews. Warren (2012) goes on to say that “Interviewers and their questions set the background for the social interaction of the interview, as do the specific times and spaces within which the interview takes place. The respondent brings to table his own interests, agenda, and biography” (2012, pp. 132-133). Several of my interviews took place in cafes, one of which closed as my interview was nearing an end, cutting off any opportunity for last-minute stories or comments. Those interviews that took place in the homes of my participants often went on for longer than those that took place in public, and were sometimes harder to bring to an end. In the homes of my participants, the presence of partners, children and/or pets led to a number of distractions and the participants would sometimes lose their train of thought. The presence of others may also have influenced what my participants were willing or unwilling to share with me. In one case a partner even became inadvertently part of the interview, interjecting with his own perspectives and opinions on the questions I was asking the participant, and sometimes contradicting what she was saying. For example, at some point my participant argues with her boyfriend about being “snaked” at the skate park, a term that describes someone cutting ahead of you when you’ve been waiting to use a particular feature or section of the park:

A- I get snaked all the time because I'm a woman.

B- But snaking happens all the time...if you're trying something more sophisticated you need to maintain your focus...

A- It happens more to me and you don't know it.

This posed an ethical dilemma for me as the partner was not meant to be a participant in

the interview, but it also contributed rich data that provided a concrete example of the extent to which the barriers that women and non-binary people experience can be invisible to men.

Media Analysis

Media analysis is familiar to me, as someone with a background in Art History and Film Studies, and is often the first lens I look to when analysing any particular topic. The first questions I often ask myself when consuming media are: How is this being portrayed? By whom? For what audience? And to whose benefit? I believe these questions are essential when analysing any text relating to women in skateboarding, considering the histories of exclusion and sexism I discuss throughout this thesis.

I used a great deal of media as I went about researching for this project, some of which I use as a direct source of data. I analyse a variety of documents in Chapter Three that include documentary films, Instagram posts and their attached comments, various videos and photographs, an art exhibit, magazines, media interviews, and published articles. I chose the varied media I use in my data analysis because I found that it helped to both contextualize and to corroborate the themes I was encountering in my interviews, and because media about skateboarding both reflects and creates skateboarding “culture”. Many of my participants spoke of particular magazines, photographs or video clips that represented something significant to them. And indeed, it is almost impossible to talk about skateboarding without talking about media, especially photography and videos. Young skateboarders discover new tricks and new heroes through an almost obsessive consumption of skate videos, and this obsession is often a common ground and a way of relating to other skateboarders. New video parts will often be screened at local skate

shops, where large crowds will gather to loudly watch, and skateboarders will often talk in a language unrecognizable to others about impressive tricks seen in particular video parts. For all of these reasons I felt that including a media analysis alongside my interviews and field notes would add an important dimension and a richness to the first-hand accounts of my participants and my own experiences. The media analysis also allowed me to include a wider variety of perspectives and skateboarders: professional-level skateboarders, entire skate crews made up of women of colour, gay skateboarders, and even just the many male skateboarders across the world commenting on anything and everything online that relates to women in skateboarding.

Thematic Analysis

Within the methodological framework of ethnography, I used thematic analysis to analyse my data. Braun and Clarke (2006) show the flexibility of this method when they argue that:

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. (p. 81)

My work falls into the latter constructionist method. Since I am seeking to better understand both the experiences of my participants *and* the way that these experiences are informed by discourses and structures in society, the constructionist method of thematic analysis has been ideal for my purposes. I came to the research stage with the understanding that I would be co-constructing the data with my participants, rather than

necessarily seeing the data as an objective means of understanding the reality of their lives. Indeed, sometimes my participants would contradict themselves or change their mind about previously stated opinions as the interview progressed. How much of this self-editing and self-reflection took place because of the formality of the academic interview, and knowing they were being recorded? As Dingwall (1997), quoted in Warren (2012), says: “The products of an interview are the outcome of a socially situated activity where the responses are passed through the role-playing and impression management of both the interviewer and the respondent” (Warren, 2012, p. 56). Both interviewer and participant may be trying to come across positively to the other, or may simply not feel comfortable, and may therefore not be fully honest or forthcoming with each other. With this in mind, I continually asked myself how much we can actually know from what a participant chooses to tell us. Knowing that my interviews were influenced by the social context, I thus made sure to analyse not only the content of what was said in the interviews but also the context: the silences, the tone of voice, the use and quality of laughter, and body language and facial expressions. I also interpreted the sometimes contradictory nature of my participants’ statements not as making the data “untrue” but rather as rich sources of analysis for why and how and in what contexts we hold onto various beliefs and attitudes that are seemingly incongruous. These contradictions indeed provided me with some insight into the kinds of narratives people construct in order to seek full citizenship or belonging, or to make sense of complex and confusing experiences.

Positionality

I come to this research from the position of a woman in her early and now mid-thirties who began learning to skateboard at the age of 32. As a beginner, as an outsider with some access to the community, as a cis, able-bodied white woman, as an academic, and as someone with friendships within the skateboarding world of Vancouver BC, I come to my findings from a variety of positions and biases, and my positionality goes back and forth between outsider and an insider. I do not feel like a part of the Vancouver skate community necessarily, but I have shared skateboarding spaces, laughter, and friendship with some whose lives are completely embedded. I am not a skilled skateboarder, but I skateboard in spaces shared with those who are. Over the past 3 years I have had many conversations with skateboarders of various genders, both formal and informal, that have allowed me to see many different perspectives on what it means to be a skateboarder. I have also spent a good deal of time, either with friends or alone, skateboarding in public space, and though my research has always been on my mind while using these spaces, I was there primarily to skate. I therefore am able to draw on my own experiences, thoughts and emotions for my research, and can give my own perspective as an woman in her thirties learning to skateboard not merely for research purposes but for pleasure and fun.

2.2 Methods

The methods I used to collect, generate, and analyse data include semi-structured interviews, observations and corresponding field notes, an analysis of multiple media documents, as well as my own reflections. The findings I will be discussing in the body

of this thesis are based on 10 hour-long interviews with female and non-binary skateboarders, and a variety of media including published interviews, a documentary film, advertisements, public comments, and an Instagram post. I also draw on several years' worth of observations in skate parks in and around Vancouver BC as a kind of corroborative confirmation of what I was finding in my other data analyses rather than as a primary source of data.

Recruitment, consent and privacy

In order to participate in my study the participants needed to identify as female or non-binary, and as skateboarders, and needed to participate or have participated in some way in local and/or online skateboarding communities. In order to recruit participants I used posters, word-of-mouth, and then after having found several participants was able to use the snowball strategy to find the remaining participants. Roulston (2010) defines the snowball recruitment strategy as one in which “Participants are selected on the basis of successive referrals from participants recruited initially” (p. 82). Using this snowball method of recruitment, I was able to speak with skateboarders with some diversity of ages (between 20 and 40), sexualities, racialized and gender identities, and economic status. I found my participants initially through word of mouth, spending time at local skate parks, by recruiting from an online group for female skateboarders, at a monthly women’s night, and by speaking with those with prominence in the local skate community who referred me to female skaters they know (i.e., third-party recruiters). Most of my participants were recruited quickly via a single contact. This may have had an effect on my data as most participants were loosely part of the same scene of skateboarders in the same city and most know each other at least superficially. The

snowball method was an effective selection strategy since I was not looking to create a representative sample of the population, nor do I expect my research to represent a “universal experience” of being a female or non-binary skateboarder, as I do not believe that such a thing exists. The city in which my research takes place cannot be said to represent the full diversity of skateboarders on a global scale, and each skateboarder’s experience will vary depending on an endless number of variables including but not limited to their multiple intersecting identities, their personal histories, their current age as well as the age at which they started skateboarding, shifts in economic status and geography, and the presence or absence of a supportive community. I do believe that their experiences, while not necessarily representative, are nonetheless a reflection of an aspect of the North American skateboarding culture and also of what it means to exist as a woman or non-binary person within hetero-patriarchy.

I gave all participants a letter introducing myself and the project, and they were encouraged to share these documents with other potential participants. Once a sufficient number of skateboarders were recruited, I provided them with a detailed follow-up letter and consent form giving them more specific information about the project and the role of the participant and researcher. The form emphasized that they were able to opt out of the study at any point. All interviews and observations are confidential and secure, and the names of any organizations and skate parks where my research takes place have been changed. Additionally, I have obscured any identifying characteristics of these places in order to further protect my participants’ anonymity.

My research participants all identify as female or as non-binary and range in age from their mid-twenties to fifties. One participant identified themselves as non-binary,

while all others identified themselves as cis-female or did not state a preferred gender identity or pronoun. One participant was Indigenous and discussed her experience growing up on a reserve, while most other participants did not indicate their racialized identities but read as White. I interviewed a range of people, from those who had skated since childhood to those who took up skateboarding as adults. Many of my participants began skating in the 1990's or early 2000's, and I found that their reflections on experiences during their youth are quite different from the recounted experiences of those who began skateboarding more recently, both in terms of access to female role models and in terms of their experiences in skate parks, as I will describe in my data analysis.

I have attached my initial interview questions (see Appendix A) which I used as a guide, though often other questions and different themes emerged as the interviews were taking place. I also spent a good deal of time observing in skate parks around Vancouver over the course of several years, and I took many field notes. My observations were focused on gender ratios, interactions between and among skateboarders, perceived comfort or discomfort, and my own experiences, thoughts and emotions. I have outlined the details of how and what I was observing in the attached observation schedule (see Appendix B). I was also able to speak informally with two organizations that have implemented skateboarding programs for young people, and I collected and analysed many media documents, interviews, and articles about or by professional skateboarders of various genders and sexualities who live in North America, using these media sources as additional data for analysis that figures prominently in my overall analysis.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed before any deep analysis of the data took place. I transcribed each interview in full, and included meaningful pauses and silence, moments of laughter, body language and facial expression, as well as notes on other things I observed when I was conducting the interview such as perceived comfort or discomfort with certain topics. I began taking notes on themes and ideas that arose during the course of the transcription process.

In order to conduct my thematic analysis, I began by searching all of my interviews, field notes, and media sources for recurring and emerging themes that related to my research questions. Using the guidance of Guest et al. (2012) and Grbich (2007), I did so systematically, coding and analysing the data relating to each emerging theme and organizing these themes using a combination of the *block and file* approach and the *conceptual mapping* approach (as outlined in Grbich, 2007, p. 32). The block and file approach was useful to me because it allowed me to organize all of my interviews in detail according to particular themes. The conceptual mapping approach was useful because it allowed me to see a simple and easily digestible summary of each theme. I took note of any deviant (i.e., inconsistent with the norm) or negative (i.e., contradicting the norm) cases (Guest et al., 2012, p. 113 and environs) and analysed their significance, and often these became the most interesting and important themes as they provided a counterpoint to the arguments I was building and therefore forced me to think more deeply about why I was thinking about the data in a particular way. Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006), I searched for and described the patterns I found, and also used thematic analysis to theorize about the reasons for why these patterns might have

emerged. My themes were identified by looking at a combination of patterns: repeated words or phrases (for example, the term *tomboy*), repeated ideas, other research, my own research questions, significant and noticeable silences and absences, and any metaphors articulated by my participants (Kelly, 2016, personal correspondence). Once themes were identified and drawn out after many re-readings of my interview transcripts, I systematically searched my documents for particular words relating to each theme in order to verify that I hadn't overlooked any important data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it is essential to analyse all the questions being asked during a research project, from the broad theoretical research questions that inform the project, to the simpler questions being asked by the researcher during interviews with participants, to the questions being asked by the researcher during the coding of the themes. As Braun and Clarke argue

...the analytic process involves a progression from description, where the data have simply been organized to show patterns in semantic content, and summarized, to interpretation, where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications. (p. 84)

In essence, "thematic analysis involves the searching across a data set ... to find repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). As such, I immersed myself in the data before beginning to analyze emergent themes, meaning that I listened to, transcribed, and read - and then re-read, and re-read again- my entire corpus of data before I began to code for themes or create an organized data set. I was looking for themes even as I was gathering my data, noticing both the content and the tone of my interviews, continually observing my participants' "body language/gestures, intensity of expression, and tone of

voice” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 122). I remained curious throughout the 10 interviews and tried not to allow the patterns that were emerging to influence the questions I asked later participants. Themes were extracted during the transcription process, too: as I typed up my interviews, I was able to notice and record recurring themes, laughter, sighs, tone of voice and any other significant non-verbal expressions. This comprehensive treatment contributed to my ability to analyse the data.

Angrosino (2007) summarizes the two main forms of data analysis, descriptive and theoretical. The following summary, in its simplicity, gave me an accessible guide to begin to analyse my data:

Descriptive analysis is the process of taking the stream of data and breaking it down into its component parts; in other words, what patterns, regularities, or themes emerge from the data?...Theoretical analysis is the process of figuring out how those component parts fit together; in other words, how can we explain the existence of patterns in the data, or how do we account for the perceived regularities? (p. 2)

Using Angrosino’s definitions as a guide, as well as Braun and Clarke’s discussion described above, I looked back through my interviews, my pages of field notes, and the multiple media sources I was using in order to find patterns and to begin to think about why these patterns might be emerging, keeping in mind both the context of the interviews or field notes, as well as the literature that might help me contextualize these stories and notes within a broader political context (Riessman, 2012). As Riessman argues, it is important to consider how participants’ stories might be shaped by broader forces, even while analyzing them for the content on the page: “In interview studies, the analyst can

ask what the specific words participants select carry on their backs from prior uses. We can attend to meaningful silences—what *isn't* spoken—and offer possible readings of a personal narrative that go beyond what the narrator may have intended” (p. 369).

Throughout my research I attempted to analyse not only what was said but also what was left out of my discussions; I also made every attempt to consider the various meanings of these silences and spaces between. As I listened to, transcribed and then read through my data, I noticed a number of themes emerging. At first I had over a dozen themes listed, but as I repeatedly analysed the data I realized that many of these were connected to each other, and I finally came up with only the following five broad themes into which many of the smaller ones could be organized:

- 1) ideas of *identity, belonging and legitimacy*
- 2) the importance of seeing oneself represented
- 3) conforming and/or refusing to conform to gender presentations as a means of seeking belonging
- 4) gendered ideas about ability, risk, and women
- 5) the policing of gender and sexuality

As I worked through analysing my data using these themes as guidance, I also used the overarching idea of “*fortressing*” as conceptualized by Flusty (1997) to understand how and why the people I interviewed acted and presented in particular ways, and why certain themes arose again and again in my data, all of which I will discuss in much more detail further on. An important part of my analysis occurred not only in the analysis stage but also the writing stage, which Richardson and Adams St Pierre (2005) argue can be understood as both a method of data collection and a means of analysing the data. Indeed,

important themes arising in my interviews and new understandings of the data only occurred once the writing process was underway.

2.3 Ethical Considerations and Dilemmas, Challenges, and Limitations

One of the major ethical tensions I grappled with as I analysed my data was that I wanted to respect my participants' willingness to share vulnerable information, but I also wanted to be able to maintain a critical distance from what they were saying in order to see the data clearly. As Warren says in her 2012 article on interviewing as social interaction, "The respondent may indeed say one thing toward the beginning of the interview and other toward the end, and the parameters of this difference need to be explored" (p. 137). My participants would sometimes go back and forth with themselves out loud, taking up one position and then qualifying it or contradicting it with another. Though all of my participants expressed solidarity with feminist causes, I sometimes detected undertones of internalized sexism on the part of my participants when they would distance themselves from, or be deeply critical of, other female skaters, or would attempt to justify sexist behaviours on the part of others. I grappled continuously with how to best approach these moments with a respectful openness but also a critical eye. The fact that my participants were themselves struggling with these contradictions led me to believe that the most respectful means of addressing this was to highlight rather than exclude these moments of contradiction from my analysis. I examine these moments not as ethical flaws or hypocrisies, but as evidence of how complex my participants' experiences have been. They put themselves in a vulnerable position by speaking openly with me about their lives, and I hope that my analysis shows careful respect to all participants without dampening the critique I wish to make of the world that they

navigate.

How *do* people reconcile their own marginalization with the fact that they have loving and respectful relationships with people who cannot understand their experiences, or who in some cases inadvertently contribute to that marginalization? I do my best throughout this thesis to address these contradictions as they arise, and to point to how they reflect the inherent contradictions of living under systems and worldviews that can both oppress *and* provide many privileges at once. I understand these contradictions as *structural* rather than *personal*: rather than blaming my participants for holding multiple contradicting worldviews and experiences (as we all do), I look to the structures and systems that keep power imbalances in place as the source of these contradictions.

I hope to use my research findings as a means to influence policy and to support any visions these skateboarders might have for long-term change in and for the skateboarding community, especially relating to gender and exclusion. I will do so by reaching out to public organizations to provide the results of my research. At the end of each interview, therefore, I asked my participants what changes they would like to see in the skateboarding communities and how they might like to see my research used, and their responses were varied, thoughtful and sometimes surprising. I discuss these responses in more detail in the conclusion, and hope that I can continue to work towards implementing some of these ideas after my thesis is published.

I also want to ensure that my work is available and accessible to the people who contributed their time, their thoughts, and their energy to this paper. I hope that by finding spaces to publish my work in non-academic spaces that I can ‘translate’ my work into something that is accessible to everyone. Using the ideas of O’Donoghue (2006) as a

guide, I made every attempt to give my participants opportunities to theorize and analyse their own experiences and words. O'Donoghue trained three young people from the community-based youth organizations she was researching to do qualitative data analysis, thus giving these young people a role in the meaning-making process and not just positioning them as passive subjects (p. 232). Similarly, Loutzenheiser (2007) argues that "...listening to students or young people requires an additional step of acknowledging that they have something to say and are able to build theories about their lives" (p. 112). These words were present in my mind throughout the research and writing processes, and I hope that the analysis that follows is relevant, useful, and reflective of the respect I have for the people with whom I worked. I especially hope that it does justice to their expectations, as all of the people I spoke with throughout the interview process were excited about my research topic, supportive of my work, and generous with their time because they, like me, believe that this work matters. I am incredibly grateful for the enthusiasm of my participants and their willingness to share vulnerable, joyful and difficult moments in their lives, as well as an infectious love for skateboarding.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.1 Introduction and Themes

In this chapter, I will describe the data I collected over the course of my research, and will analyse my findings in relation to my research questions. I examine how Flusty's (1997) ideas of prickly space and fortressing can help to think through and better understand some my research findings. I find that there are a variety of ways that women are excluded from skateboarding and cultural capital in skateboarding, and that women and non-binary skateboarders are finding creative ways to make a space for themselves nonetheless.

As I laid out in Chapter 2, the themes I use in my data analysis are the following:

- 1) ideas of *identity, belonging and legitimacy*
- 2) the importance of seeing oneself represented
- 3) gendered ideas about ability, risk, and women
- 4) conforming and/or refusing to conform to gender presentations as a means of seeking belonging
- 5) the policing of gender and sexuality

I discuss these themes through the lens of Flusty's (1997) concept of *fortressing*, as discussed in more detail in the review of the literature (see: page 27). Throughout the research I ask myself how these themes relate to the ways in which women, among others, have been historically and systematically excluded from skateboarding culture and skateboarding spaces, and also from public space in general? How do ideas of gender, representation, and belonging act to establish and maintain the male-dominance of

skateboarding culture? In the following analysis of my interviews and field notes, I will discuss the ways that women and non-binary people are excluded or discouraged from pursuing skateboarding, using Flusty's concept of "fortressing" as my analytical lens.

Before I begin analysing the mechanisms that act as "fortresses" for women in skateboarding, I want to explore a question that I have heard articulated on a number of occasions and that forms the basis for my entire project: *why does it matter if there are female skateboarders or not?* To begin to answer this question, I look at a history of women's participation in subcultures as a means of contextualizing the ongoing exclusion of women from cultures such as skateboarding. As McRobbie and Garber (1976) discuss in their work on girls' subcultures, the early days of youth subcultural theory focused almost exclusively on men and male subcultures, with women appearing merely as sidekicks, girlfriends, or fan-girls. Often girls' cultures revolve more around the private sphere and passive activities that take place in the private sphere. McRobbie and Garber, writing in 1976, ask why there is such an absence of women in the subcultures that were being researched and written about by subcultural theorists of the Birmingham School. "When they *do* appear", McRobbie and Garber argue, "it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women with which we are now so familiar... or they are fleetingly and marginally presented" (p. 177). The authors explore the factors and structures that inform girls' abilities and desires to participate in most subcultures of the era (1970's), and they ask how girls organize their cultural lives if and when subcultural options are not presented to them. Even when women are not excluded from a subculture, they are still often limited to particular stereotypes: for example, as either the "Earth mother", or the "fragile pre-raphaelite lady" in the case of the hippies (p.

186). McRobbie and Garber talk about the phenomenon of “Teeny Bopper” as one of the few female-dominated subcultures of the 1960’s and 1970’s, and argue that although Teeny Bopper culture was wholly manufactured and sold to young girls, it nonetheless provided a private and insulated culture within which girls could explore their identities. The authors argue that the girls used this subculture as a “defensive solidarity” against figures of authority and institutions in which they are not included such as other male-dominated subcultures (p. 187). However, while I agree with McRobbie and Garber that there is always space for agency and meaning-making within any subculture, no matter how manufactured, the Teeny Bopper culture that they discuss is still, at its heart, a culture that involves women watching and cheering on mainly male artists, rather than acting as subjects themselves. Even today, over 40 years after McRobbie and Garber’s text was published, most cultures and leisure activities that are targeted at young women continue to revolve around consumerism and/or the consumption of male-dominated activities such as music, films, and sports (i.e., cheerleaders, groupies, etc.). Skateboarding is no exception, with men still making up a large majority of professional skateboarders, media figures, and skateboard companies, and women still earning far less money at competitions and from sponsors.

One of my participants, speaking regretfully about her failure to take up skateboarding in her youth, says: “like, instead of just sitting around chatting, like being on the phone for hours or whatever, could have been at the park, like, it’s just crazy to think of that now” (RE). This quote speaks to the ways in which young women’s culture is often relegated to passive and/or private spheres: talking on the phone about boys; watching young boys play sports, video games, guitar, etc.; shopping at a shopping mall.

Often cultures that are associated with young women do not involve an active but rather a passive subjectivity that revolves around appearances, consumption, and gaining the attention of the hetero male gaze, and as such they rarely involve activities that build confidence or skill. RE here addresses her frustration that as a young woman she did not see skateboarding as something necessarily for or available to her, and was never encouraged to take it up. The fact that many young women simply do not even think of skateboarding as an option for them results from a number of factors that I will explore as I analyse my interviews and field notes.

In one interview, a participant talks about her own research about women skateboarders. She, too, feels discouraged and frustrated by the lack of women in subcultural theory:

I'd been reading about subcultures and subcultural theory and it's often from the perspective of male participants. And then any kind of acknowledgement of women, they would always be the girlfriends, the sidekicks; they would never be the cultural producers and sort of doing things for themselves.

Just as McRobbie and Garber (1976) analysed in their subcultural theory text decades ago, young women continue to be associated with cultures that exist mainly within the private sphere. While McRobbie and Garber argue that women are able to explore and create identities within the private sphere and even within subcultures that are created and sold to girls by capitalist mechanisms, the subcultures normally relegated to women leave them with far less freedom or skill-building than subcultures that take place in the public sphere, such as skateboarding. Beyond providing some of the freedoms normally associated with white masculinity, skateboarding gives young women a sense of

community: a space for watching and learning from other women, and for building a supportive and close community with them, rather than seeing other women as competition. Skateboarding is one of many cultures that provide a space for women to build their confidence and trust in themselves and see their worth beyond being objects of the male gaze. In her article *On Pandering*, Vaye Watkins (2015) speaks of her revelation as an adult that she had spent much of her youth watching and looking up exclusively to boys:

I've watched boys play the drums, guitar, sing, watched them play football, baseball, soccer, pool, Dungeons and Dragons and Magic: The Gathering. I've watched them golf. Just the other day I watched them play a kind of sweaty, book-nerd version of basketball. I've watched them work on their trucks and work on their master's theses. I've watched boys build things: half-pipes, bookshelves, screenplays, careers. I've watched boys skateboard, snowboard, act, bike, box, paint, fight, and drink. I could probably write my own series of six virtuosic autobiographical novels based solely on the years I spent watching boys play Resident Evil and Tony Hawk's ProSkater. I watched boys in my leisure time, I watched boys in my love life, and I watched boys in my education. (Watkins 2015, paragraph 24)

As a heterosexual cis-woman, this essay certainly resonated with my own experiences when I was younger. Many of my role models--including the bands, authors, artists and filmmakers I believed to be interesting and important--were male. Later, even in university and beyond into my late twenties I continued to internalize societal assumptions about my physical and intellectual limitations as a woman, even while

believing that *other* women did not have these limitations. While I do not deny that I had agency to think beyond these limitations, I do believe that this upbringing and this socialization is a big factor in why I did not take up skateboarding until I was in my thirties: I simply did not, for whatever reason, see myself as someone who was capable of the risk and skill and visibility involved in skateboarding.

Fortressed Space

Flusty's concept of fortressing, discussed in more detail in the above literature section, helps me to conceptualize the themes that arose during the analysis of the data, which all relate to the various barriers that women face in skateboarding. Skateboarding culture is built on a narrative of resistance, of skateboarder as “outsider”, and on embracing and celebrating diversity, but in reality only some kinds of diversity are seen as legitimate. Skateboarding is implicated in maintaining and reinforcing structures of power that benefit heterosexual, cis-males at the expense of other identities. The subtle and not-so-subtle ways that this culture sometimes excludes, objectifies, and dismisses women, queer, trans and non-binary people perpetuates attitudes and behaviors that have real consequences on their lived experiences.

3.2 Gender expression, gender norms and fortressing

Many of my participants talked about identifying as, or being identified as, “tomboys” when they were younger. Other participants talked about their negotiations of gender presentation in relation to skateboarding without necessarily using the term *tomboy*. One participant, E, talks about growing up and learning to skateboard with a

group of male skaters. She discusses her early explorations of gender presentation in the following manner:

I wanted to be identified and affiliated only with skateboarding. So I guess just wearing men's clothing and whatnot was off-putting to certain females, and males as well, I got called a lot of derogatory not nice things. Like skater shit, and he-she, and she-male... I didn't really have any... females that I could relate to. Yeah, males were my, just, my circle, the people who accepted me. Females, it was more difficult with them, maybe they couldn't relate to why I did that. (E)

What is interesting in E's story to me are the two following points: 1) the fact that at this time in her life and in this era, she identified skateboarding and skateboarding style as *necessarily* masculine, and shaped her own style accordingly; and 2) that her early explorations of a masculine presentation (short hair and baggy clothes, in her words) resulted in a sense of belonging and legitimacy among other (male) skaters while simultaneously decreasing her sense of belonging elsewhere, especially, in her words, among other women. Many of my participants use the term "tomboy" to describe their identity and/or physical presentation when they were younger and/or beginning to skateboard, and most also describe shifting their presentation later in life towards a more femme one as they became more comfortable with their identity as both "woman" and "skateboarder". Since a significant number of participants describe this shift in gender presentation in relation to skateboarding and belonging, I argue that while some young women who skateboard may present as masculine for reasons of gender identification, others may present as masculine-of-centre as a means of seeking belonging and membership to a culture that they identify as male.

I've listed excerpts from a number of different participants who use the term tomboy to describe themselves in our interviews:

Well I definitely chose more comfortable, and kind of a tomboy presentation. Possibly having brothers or just wanting to be athletic and sporty and active, um, so it kind of equated with, yeah, the tomboy look. But um, and I think I was harassed in other ways, um, I'll just put this out there [laughs] but yeah, being flat chested, and being athletic, and being threatening to the boys at my school because I was a faster runner than them meant that every single day I would be yelled at by these guys, so it created this sort of resentment. And um, also insecurity, because I really did think I was ugly and not feminine. And so I dressed myself appropriately. But then I think as you get older and a bit more confident in your identity, then you are perfectly entitled to negotiate how you look and how you present yourself... (N)

I was obviously like a “tomboy” or whatever but, it just sort of drew attention to that fact, and I'd get made fun of for looking like a boy and trying to be, I don't know, just stupid comments about not fitting into a gender. (BE)

All my friends in high school they were skateboarders and I've always been fascinated by skateboarding but I wasn't doing it then, I was just hanging out, there was no girls. Not that I NEEDED girls, but it's like, 'cause I've always been more like a tomboy, like kind of all my friends were guys, and I was the only girl with all the guys, so I've never been intimidated, or feeling like suppressed or like discouraged by guys. (M)

Growing up I really was like, you even referred to yourself as a tomboy and when you tell people “oh yeah I was skateboarding at twelve,” they’d be like “oh yeah, so you were like a tomboy growing up, you were doing boy sports.” And yeah, I didn’t really think of it like that growing up, but people would say it so much you kind of starting thinking like, “Oh yeah I guess I was a tomboy growing up”, like I wore my dad’s Levi pants [laughs], and t-shirts down to my knees, but I still wore makeup, and you know like, I still kinda, I didn’t go to prom because I wanted to go skateboard. (RO)

It’s funny when you say “to dress more boy” because I have really liked that aspect of it at times where I really, like I could just, you know jeans and a t-shirt, and roll out, though there is a part of me that over the years, I think it has to do with maturity and coming into yourself a bit more, where I realize that I can be feminine as well. But I have felt at times where I have wanted to hide a little bit. (AS)

But I’ve functioned so androgynously that I feel like, I don’t ask to be treated differently and I don’t expect to be treated differently than they would treat another dude. (RE)

These quotes show a variety of experiences in relation to both gender presentation as well as treatment in *relation* to gender presentation. It would appear from this data that a rejection of femininity could be part of constructing an identity of “skateboarder” for young women who skate. It can act as a non-identification: a way of rejecting a certain gender presentation that represents for them outsider status, harassment in public space,

and an inability to blend in and use public space comfortably. In other words, a masculine presentation can act as a kind of invisibility cloak or a shield from the difficulty of navigating public space as a woman. In one example, it seemed that the participant associated her “tomboyishness” as a symbol of her comfort in male-dominated spheres, in opposition to women who may have different experiences. In the following excerpt she describes an incident when she was younger that shows the ways in which her attitudes have shifted.

when we all used to have meetings and stuff about women in sports and skateboarding and stuff, [another female skateboarder] felt really intimidated, and really oppressed in the sport of skateboarding, and I almost despised her for that, at the time. I was kind of a judgemental cow. Cause I was always such a tomboy so for me it was nothing, I had like uncles teaching me gymnastics and my brother teaching me martial arts and other sports so for me I was always used to that world, being comfortable there, but [she] felt really intimidated to the point where she really just wanted to make a change and shift people’s perspective and help women to feel more open to it. And when I look back now I’m like ahhh, yeah, that’s called the full spectrum of our experience. And just ‘cause mine was over here, I needed to be more empathetic at the time because I had come a long way in the sport because of the support I had. She didn’t feel she had any [support] and she was really struggling, and instead of me saying “let me help you and let me understand and see it through your eyes” I was like “ug, quit complaining, just go skate, you’ll find your groove.” (C)

In this case, the participant uses the term “tomboy” as a term encompassing not only her physical self but also her identity as someone who feels comfortable with men and male-dominated spaces.

This association of masculine presentations with skateboarding speaks to an underlying culture of exclusion in skateboarding that I would like to unpack further. As outlined above, the decision to present in a masculine way may be in some cases a subconscious or conscious means of rejecting femininity (and sometimes other women) in order to develop a sense of “insider” identity in a male-dominated culture, as in the case of Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie’s 2005 study. Their research with “skater girls” shows how young people shape their identities in relation to *and* in opposition to other identities as a means of resisting ideological discourses. The ways they do so are often complex and contradictory. In Kelly et al.’s article, the participants make sense of their position as women in a patriarchal society in part through participation in the male-dominated world of skateboarding. The female research participants consistently defined their participation in this culture in opposition to “emphasized femininity”, a term coined by Raewyn Connell (1987) referring to feminine presentations of self meant to appeal to the heterosexual male gaze (Kelly et al., 2005, p. 145). In this context, these young women resisted patriarchal constraints on their lives by rejecting ideological ideas of femininity, but in doing so they also criticized and rejected other women and femme identity (the girls in the study, for example, defined themselves in opposition to a group of girls at their school who dressed in feminine ways and hung out at the skate park to watch boys), thus reproducing the very structures they sought to resist. In this context, then, these young girls are constructing their identities as skater girls through both the

(positive) act of skateboarding and also through the (negative) rejection of certain kinds of femininity. As such, they are simultaneously resisting and reproducing sexist norms in order to create a sense of belonging in this subculture and in their communities.

While the rejection of emphasized femininity may signify a resistance to or reproduction of patriarchy, it can also serve other more practical purposes. One participant in my study describes her decision to present in a masculine way as a strategy to avoid harassment in public space:

Through my teen years I only ever wore boys' clothes, I think the first time I dressed like a young lady in a skirt I was like 14 or 15 or so, [and] I was called horrible names when I was waiting at the bus stop by some young men in a car passing by, and so, like that type of experience made me want to blend in and just look more male...there were several years where I wished I was a man...and rejected a lot of the feminine stuff, like I stopped wearing a bra and stopped shaving my legs in my late teenage years when I figured out that I COULD, that I was allowed to, that I had the power to reject these expectations...when I was living in N____ I started wearing dresses for the first time in my adult life and it felt good, to be able to allow myself to wear a dress and see that it was not all that bad. But yeah, you get treated differently, noticeably differently from the way that you dress and present yourself. (AN)

The experiences of my participants reveal the extent to which women make certain choices in order to avoid harassment, danger, or attention. The women and non-binary people in my study not only navigate the geographies of public space, by avoiding certain skateboarding spaces late at night, for example, but also through the way they present

themselves physically. They dress in particular ways as a direct reaction to the ways they are treated in public. The participant quoted above also says that:

Yeah, some people are really annoying when they notice that you're not a dude, they give you a lot of unwanted attention. So that, I could see that deterring women from getting into it. Because you're treated like "a chick who skates" and not a skateboarder, you're othered pretty fast. But at the same time, there, I've also received a lot of attention and positivity and encouragement *because* of the fact that I'm a woman and trying something that is painful and you get hurt at. (A) Whether the attention women experience from male skateboarders is positive or negative, it still comes from a place of being constructed as different. Praising women for trying something painful and risky is still a way of maintaining normative narratives about gender and ability, something akin to saying "you're not like other girls" as though this were something to strive for.

Some participants noticed a shift in their treatment from others in the skateboarding community when they changed towards a more femme presentation. Later in our interview, E, quoted at the beginning of this section, talks about shifting from a more masculine presentation to a more femme one, and the way that she was treated differently as a result:

... I decided to grow out my hair, I didn't cut it short anymore, at times I'd prefer to wear more feminine clothing, floral prints, clothes that fit my body a bit more... getting sexual comments, about body parts, or just some judgement that if you were just sitting with your skateboard some men would think you were just there to pick up guys...I just wanted to skateboard. But when I started getting that type of

attention from other skateboarders, the sexual stuff and the comments about body, bum and ass and stuff that was uh... made it a lot more uncomfortable. (E, p. 4, lines 192-208)

E's discomfort in this public space and in this subculture shows how gender presentation is often linked to the ways that public spaces are fortressed for women. The discomfort that E experienced when she took on a more femme gender presentation results in the exclusion of women from the culture and the (public) spaces of skateboarding.



Illustration 1: Leticia Bufoni
photograph by Autumn Sonnichsen



Illustration 2: Lacey Baker
Photograph by Sam Nixon

This contradiction in relation to women's style choices is evident, too, in the public perception of two top female skaters, Lacey Baker and Leticia Bufoni. Though the two are on fairly equal footing in terms of skateboarding skill (both ranking in the top three at the X Games of 2017 and 2018), their respective acceptance by the skateboarding community differs greatly. Leticia Bufoni presents in a manner Raewynn Connell (1987), as discussed previously, would call emphasized femininity. Bufoni dresses in sporty and often tight-fitting clothing, makeup, and wears her hair long. She has posed nude for a sports magazine, a choice that has led to much public criticism and attention. In comments online, Bufoni is often sexualized and objectified. Lacey Baker, on the other hand, began her career with long blonde hair and a generally femme presentation but has

since shifted to a much more androgynous and sometimes masculine presentation. In the *Facets* documentary about Baker, mentioned previously (Okumura, 2016), Lacey says:

Everybody was like obsessed, oh Lacey Baker, like long blonde hair, whatever, and I'm like yeah...it's my hair. I dunno, I hated it. The skate industry is obviously, it's just a bunch of dudes. So there's just like male gaze when it comes to girls skating and everybody's like, wants you to look girly. My mom would pressure me and she'd be like, you should wear girlier clothes, so I started wearing tighter pants. I was more feminine because this is what people thought I should be... Eventually I was like... I don't really like this at all... I like this shirt, I don't care if I look like a boy if I wear it, when before I'd be like, oh someone's going to think I look kind of like a boy if I wear this, but now I'm just like ok, I'm trying to look like a boy because that's just how I want to look.

Interestingly, this quote shows Baker's path as being in some ways the opposite from what many of my participants experienced: while a number of them felt the need to present as masculine in order to be accepted, and then later presented as femme when they felt more comfortable doing so, Baker began her career presenting as feminine because of pressure from others, but later was able to present in a way that felt more in line with her own identity. Her previous feminine presentation was put on in order to make her sponsors and the general public happy and to therefore carve out a space of belonging and acceptance in her chosen field. In these cases, women felt pressured to present themselves in a certain way in order to belong and be accepted, whether or not the gender expression they took on aligned with their own sense of personal identity. As Baker puts it, "I was more feminine, because this is what people thought I should be"

(Okumura, 2016). Baker's experience shows the contradiction faced by women skateboarders: to be a female skateboarder means to constantly negotiate the line between a culture that expects women to "fit in with the boys" (thus normalizing the "maleness" of the sport), and a broader culture that wants women to be feminine, fragile, and sexualized for the heterosexual male gaze, especially women who are in the public eye. In skateboarding as elsewhere, women are scrutinized, judged, and criticized for their appearance no matter how they choose to present themselves.

Baker's path to professional skating has arguably been much more respected by the general skating community than that of Letícia Bufoni, with much criticism of the latter's use of sexuality to rise to fame. As in so many other fields, women are given few opportunities for income and success in skateboarding, and then when they choose to use their sexuality as a means to make a living in their field, they are criticized and denounced for selling out or "giving women a bad name". The degree to which misogyny and shaming of women occurs is disturbing, and this shaming rarely takes into account how limited women's options truly are.

Lacey Baker, while generally more respected by the skateboarding community, does not get off much easier than Bufoni when it comes to comments and judgements on her appearance. Reading through YouTube comments of a video of Lacey Baker, there were frequent comments on her gender presentation, especially in relation to her skating abilities, with some commenters claiming she was a good skater because she was "really a man" while other comments dehumanized and de-sexualized her. Baker is subject to frequent comments about her androgynous presentation and her refusal to cater to the cis-male-heterosexual gaze. For example, a video of a Lacey Baker part was published on

Thrasher Magazine's website in January of 2017, and the comment section included several comments about Lacey's appearance. While some are intended to be "compliments" they serve to reinforce the idea that women's appearance is just as, if not more, important than their ability to skateboard:

I like her better then leticia bufoni the difference with her is that she's hot but don't got that style like Lacey tho [sic]

I've NEVER seen a female skate with style like that! Was she born female though?

She rips. I like that she's not all up in the supermodel media hype, but just puts it down properly.

While most other comments were fully supportive and did not comment on either Baker's gender or appearance, it is rare to see any videos of women skateboarding online that don't have at least a few comments such as these. Commenters often compare women to male skateboarders, and whether the comparison is favourable or not, these comments function to maintain the centrality of men in skateboarding, who are constructed as the standard to which all other skateboarders should be judged.

The contradictions here leave little space for women to manoeuvre: to present as "too femme" is to sell out or be seen as illegitimate as a skateboarder, but is also the surest way to find success with the broader public and thus sponsorship and an income from skateboarding. On the other hand, to present as masculine or androgynous is to belong more easily to some communities of skateboarding, while simultaneously being

seen as a threat to hegemonic gender roles. No matter how a woman presents herself, there will always be comments on her appearance; it is nothing new that women must navigate this constant scrutiny any time they're in the public eye. What is interesting about skateboarding is that it gives women and non-binary people a subject position in the public sphere, wherein they *act* in addition to being *looked at*. By moving through space on a skateboard, people who normally experience harassment or comments based on their appearance are able to take on a more empowered role in public space that may in some cases make them less vulnerable to harassment or discomfort.

3.3 Homophobia and fortressing

It is important to contextualize the policing of gender identities and appearance within systems of homophobia and transphobia in addition to patriarchy, since it does not only affect women and non-binary skateboarders. Arguably the policing of male gender expressions and sexuality have been more intense than that of the policing of female gender expression and sexuality. There are still far more openly queer women than men in skateboarding, and women's skateboarding has expanded in terms of acceptable style and gender presentations far more than men's skateboarding has in recent years. It is safer for cisgender women to explore a variety of gender presentations, since female queerness and gender fluidity is seen as more "safe" than that of male queerness in the context of skateboarding. If comment sections online are any indication, it is male rather than female skateboarders who are by far the most protective of hegemonic norms in skateboarding and most fearful of difference, whether in the form of homosexuality, femininity, or gender non-conformity.

In his article online for *Kingpin Skateboarding Magazine* (2017) about bigotry in skateboarding, Anthony Pappalardo points out that popular skateboarding culture's dominant narrative "mostly ignores the tremendous roles women have had since skateboarding's inception, and completely refuses to acknowledge that anyone from the LGBTQ community has taken part in skateboarding's history" (paragraph 1). Indeed, there are still very few openly gay people in skateboarding, and almost no openly gay men. In 2016 Vice Sports put out a documentary called *Brian Anderson on Being a Gay Professional Skateboarder* in which the well-known skateboarder Brian Anderson comes out publicly as gay, which was surprising to his fans after having followed his successful professional career for decades. He was, and remains, the only openly gay skater of his calibre and fame. This film has a number of contradicting narratives that I will discuss here in order to show how gender and sexuality are policed in skateboarding, as well as the inextricable link between gender normativity and homophobia.

The narrative throughout the Brian Anderson Vice Sports video, as Ben Stephenson explains in *King Magazine* (2017), is that it's okay to be gay *as long as you're really good at skateboarding*, and as long as you act and present in a normatively masculine, and therefore "not-gay" way. The interviewees in the Brian Anderson video (mostly friends of Anderson and/or prominent figures in the skateboarding community) describe Anderson's normative masculinity again and again as a way of constructing him as "safe" to the skateboarding world. One interviewee describes Anderson as "Burly like a monster...[the] most manliest figure I've ever seen." He is also described as "aggressive" (but also as "different" as though assuring everyone that homosexuality is detectable and therefore "safe"). Anderson emphasises that he's not attracted to

skateboarders, which is then corroborated later in the video by a friend. The implication here is that Anderson would *not* be acceptable to the skateboarding community if he were less masculine or if his sexuality was ever directed towards other skateboarders, and therefore visible. This also ties into the homophobic fear of the “predatory gay”. The video ensures that Anderson’s sexuality does not come across as a threat to the heteronormativity of skateboarding, since he essentially promises to never overlap the two aspects of his identity or to “act gay” in the sphere of skateboarding. Anderson also says, “I consider myself a skateboarder first and gay second.”

The fact that Anderson feels it necessary to rank these two identities is troubling, regardless of whether he truly feels this way. It is troubling because it implies that the reason he hid his sexuality for most of his career was because his sexuality was simply *not important*, rather than due to his fear of homophobic violence or rejection. This releases the skateboarding community from any accountability and from any need to address homophobia as a problem. This same narrative is reinforced in the comments section on *YouTube* where the video was posted. For example, one commenter says “it’s the fact that he’s a sick skater that we don’t see him as a straight or gay.” Another says, “who even cares about being gay. Like at all. Especially when it’s about skateboarding. Being gay and skating have nothing to do with each other. People need to stop making everything about being gay or not.” These comments express support for Anderson as an individual while simultaneously silencing any discussion about his queer identity or the homophobia he’s faced. Over and over comments appear that say things like: “Fuck you Vice. No one cares what BA’s sexual preference is. Brian is a monster” and “Despite his sexual orientation he’s always been badass and his skating has never ever been gay.”

Comments such as these mask and often reproduce homophobia by constructing queerness as irrelevant, non-existent, or as a defect to be tolerated (or not). In an extreme example, one commenter says, “They’re acting like he was raised in 1950’s America or the Middle East. ‘The world is homophobic’ what kind of statement is that! A couple kids calling each other faggot doesn’t make the world homophobic.” By denying that homophobia exists (though ironically using an example of homophobia to support this claim), this commenter is thus shutting down any discussion about social change or necessary paradigm shifts within skateboarding culture. While not all of the comments in this vein deny that homophobia exists, they do all express a willingness to support queer *individuals* (conditional on their skill), but not *queerness*. The prevalence of this narrative is disturbing, since it excludes those whose queerness is not rendered “safe” by a certain skill level or normative gender presentation, and does not allow even “acceptable” gay people such as Anderson to talk about the discrimination they’ve experienced.

I have listed below many more examples of this type of comment (unedited) to show the scope of this narrative:

gay straight who cares he rips and its about skateboarding but i find it funny he's on Girl [a skateboard brand].

how does his sexual preference effect what he does on a board in any way, shape, or form?

dont care who you want to fuck. only care about skating.

Dude shreds who cares who he's bangin. Got my support 100%!

Us skaters really support our favorite pros no matter what! No matter what we back Brian 100%

BA we support you no matter what brother!!

So what if he is gay.... i just like his skateboarding.

its 2016. why is this still a deal? all that matters is what he does on a skateboard.

He's a skater, pretty sure no one cared that he was gay.

Why do we have to know this?

Why do we need to talk about Brian being gay. I[t] doesn't matter. He's a fucking sick skater.

he's always gonna be Rad! and gay is okay he's a great skater and still hella manly.

This is why I love the skating world. It doesn't matter if you're white, black, gay, straight, male or female.

This how a gay men should be, a MAN!!!

Who cares if he's gay, and I dont mean that like in a whoo hoo he is gay, lets walk in a parade type of way. I mean really who cares. The guy is core and skates insane. I like what he said though "I consider myself a skateboarder first and gay second." Thats whats up. I still would give him crazy amounts of sh&t for being gay though just because he is one of the boys.

To reiterate my point, these commenters see Anderson's sexuality as a *flaw* that is acceptable *only because* he's a good skateboarder, and only if he doesn't talk about it or "act" or "look gay." *Brian Anderson* can be embraced by the skateboarding community, but *homosexuality* cannot. These comments also function to deny and render invisible the ever-present spectre of violent homophobia in skateboarding.

Anderson had good reason to fear for his career and his safety: in the 1980's and 1990's both Jay Adams and Josh Swindell, prominent skateboarders of the era, were charged in the murder of gay men in separate hate-related incidents. In the Swindell case, another well-known skateboarder, Danny Way, was involved in the assault but never charged. Max Dubler (2016), writing for *Jenkem Magazine*, points out that Jay Adams continues to be revered in the skateboarding community even today, with homage murals all over Venice, California. He was also prominently featured, and arguably portrayed as

a tragic hero, in the popular documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys* as well as the fictionalized *Lords of Dogtown*, with little to no discussion of his fatal hate-crime, for which he served only six months in prison. Skateboarding mainstream culture maintained homophobic language and advertisements throughout the 1990's, the era in which Brian Anderson's career was taking off. Dubler (2016), who identifies as a gay skateboarder, describes the climate for queer skaters during this era with the following examples:

In 1998, Birdhouse am Tim Von Werne had his *Skateboarder* magazine interview pulled by his sponsors when they learned he planned to openly discuss being gay in it. Big Brother gave a gay skateboarder, Jarret Berry, the cover of the magazine, but the photo was him skating a handrail in chaps with his ass hanging out. Several times, Big Brother editor-in-chief Dave Carnie has asked people if they “ever, you know, gayed off with the Bones Brigade.” And … it’s undeniable that skateboarding harassed rollerblading out of existence with a relentless campaign of homophobic bullying, exemplified by the joke immortalized in a *Big Brother* rainbow rollerblade sticker: “What’s the hardest part of rollerblading? Telling your parents you’re gay.” (paragraph 11)

In this context, it is no surprise that Anderson hid his sexuality. It was even more unsafe at this time to be gay than it is today, and certainly would have devastated his career. It is very possible that it was only by hiding his sexuality that Anderson was able to reach the level of success that he did.

Arguably, Anderson protected himself by performing a kind of extreme or emphasised masculinity. As is discussed in the Vice Sports video, people could not believe Anderson was gay because he was such a “monster”: he dresses in a very

masculine style, with baseball caps, plaid shirts and baggy jeans, and his skateboarding style is aggressive, fast, and risky, with big moves and jumps. Like many of my female participants, it is possible that Anderson took on a particular gender presentation in order to mask aspects of his identity that he feared would subject him to violence, prejudice, and exclusion from skateboarding spaces. This is not to say that Anderson's gender presentation is not genuine or that he didn't have agency, but rather that it's just as possible, or *also true*, that he used it as a means of performing a normative gender and sexual identity in order to protect his career and his safety. Like my female and non-binary participants, Anderson took on a particular gender expression as a way of navigating belonging in skateboarding spaces, both physical and cultural.

This careful navigation is even more intense for transgender people, who continue to experience a high risk of violence in public space. In an interview in *Vice Magazine*, Chris Nieratko (2011) recounts the experiences of Hillary Thompson, a trans skater who must navigate her gender presentation carefully in order to feel safe and comfortable in public spaces:

... she said that before her transition when she was prepared to give up skating in order to adhere to the gender norms of femininity. Before she transitioned, she felt intense social pressure to conform as much as possible to female norms, so as not to be "out" as a transgender person. She felt that if people saw her skateboarding, they would question her gender because, in the communities where she grew up, there are very few, if any, visible skateboarding women. (paragraph 4)

Thompson's experience shows how complicated gender presentations can be for those who are not allowed full membership in the skateboarding community, or in public spaces in general. In Thompson's case, she had to navigate this especially carefully in order to be correctly gendered by others, because of the long history of skateboarding being associated with men. The language and tone of Nieratko's article construct Hillary Thompson as "other" immediately: the author refers to Hillary as skateboarding's "Loch Ness Monster or Easter Bunny". While the purpose of the article is purportedly to celebrate difference in skateboarding, it ends up reinforcing cis-hetero masculinity as the norm by constructing Thompson as exotic and different. The author at one point writes that he "both loved and pitied the girl I met down there," positioning Hillary as someone to be defined and emoted on from the outside rather than an agentic person with the ability to theorize about her own experiences.

As I have shown with the above examples, the requirement to prove oneself to compensate for one's "otherness" is something experienced not only by women and non-binary skaters, but by anyone who embodies difference as constructed by the skateboarding community. Those whose identities are perceived as different have to prove themselves again and again to gain insider status in skateboarding--with cis-hetero-masculinity, and for many years and still to some extent whiteness--as the norm in relation to which difference is constructed. Acceptance is conditional: if you are very skilled, then your differences are accepted (though not up for discussion), otherwise you're just a "betty" or a "poser" (derogatory terms meaning people who pretend to skate in order to flirt with skateboarders or look cool), or any other number of terms meant to other and exclude, or you're simply unsafe or unwelcome. This is implicit in the

experiences my participants recounted, receiving frequent remarks at skate parks such as “you’re good for a girl”, “are you a skate mom?” or “hey, can you do a kickflip?” that serve to delegitimize them as skateboarders, point out their otherness as women, and ask them to prove their skill in order to be accepted. As long as you are talented, you are allowed to be something other than a cis-hetero man, but you should never talk about these differences or accuse skateboarding culture of being intolerant. For example, one of my participants tells this story:

Yeah I got in an argument with my [male] friend... about that, Lacey [Baker] naming certain things, like she gets some free shit from Vans, but they won't sponsor her because of the way she looks, and he was like “you know, like why would she say all that stuff, she's totally alienating herself.” It's like, she's ALREADY alienated, why not just fucking be honest and call bullshit on it?!

(BE)

This reaction on the part of my participant’s male friend is very much like that of the commenters on the Brian Anderson documentary: in order to be accepted it is imperative that you not talk about your experiences of discrimination. There is a narrative here that those who are constructed as different should be grateful to be accepted, no matter how conditionally, and should therefore not complain. I have noticed, too, that many skateboarders are very hesitant to criticize any aspect of skateboarding, even the uglier aspects, possibly because skateboarders’ lives are often deeply embedded in the culture, many of them having started very young, and with many of their friends and social activities revolving around skateboarding.

This silencing and conditional acceptance can be understood, therefore, as another form of fortressing in skateboarding. As discussed previously, fortressing is a means of symbolically excluding certain identities from a space or culture. For decades skateboarding has made it clear that homosexuality was not accepted, thus preventing gay people from taking up skateboarding in the first place, or forcing gay skateboarders to hide their sexuality. Anderson, despite skateboarding professionally for years, was never able to come out as gay to his community, thus he was comfortable in skateboarding spaces only insofar as he pretended to be straight. Popular skateboarding culture continues to uphold and reproduce patriarchal notions of masculinity, gender, and sexual identity. It does so not only by rejecting those whose identities threaten these norms, but also by refusing to discuss how the difference--embodied and lived even by the skateboarders they admire--affects their experiences. The rhetoric of “we don’t care who you are, we just care about skateboarding” does not offer acceptance but merely serves to silence and reject identities outside of the norms skateboarding culture has typically upheld. It also denies and therefore refuses to take responsibility for the homophobia, sexism, and cis-normativity that are prominent in the culture.

None of this is to say that it is not important that Brian Anderson is now talking openly about his sexuality: not only is it fantastic that he finally felt safe enough to do so, but he also now serves as a role model for queer skateboarders who may have feared coming out or participating in skateboarding. As has been made clear by my analysis, representation is extremely important in terms of encouraging marginalized people to get involved with skateboarding. One of my participants expressed excitement about the documentary, and I’m sure this was a common reaction:

Have you seen the documentary about Brian Anderson? Coming out?... Yeah, that was really exciting for me because, yeah, I remember in the day with [the skateboarding company] *Toy Machine* very masculine, like he was just kind of the dude. Everyone would assume he was heterosexual. And I really admired that, that was SUPER cool to me that he came out, and just explained what he was going through. (N)

Opening up about his sexuality must have been extremely difficult in the context of his experiences, and the fact that he did so has started a much-needed discussion of homophobia in skateboarding. There is now far more discussion and openness around difference in skateboarding. However, in the same way that my participants often felt they needed to present as masculine in order to be accepted by local communities, and feminine in order to be accepted by sponsors, the Anderson documentary shows that many still feel they need to necessarily present as normatively masculine in order to be a male skater, *especially* if they are gay. This is relevant to my analysis of women's experiences in skateboarding since the policing of gender presentation, and the pressure to conform to particular gender norms, are inextricably linked to homophobia.

3.4 Legitimacy and fortressing

Another form of fortressing manifests itself through the careful construction of legitimacy: the construction of who is legitimate in skateboarding, and also who gets to *decide* who is a legitimate skateboarder. One of my participants describes a memory of this kind of fortressing: “I remember my one friend … the boys at the skate park grabbed

her board and threw it in the garbage can, and were like yelling at her to take off..." (B, p. 6, lines 257-259). Another participant describes the following similar experience:

But I remember like getting up the nerve one time to drop in, and then I totally bailed and cut some guy off and he totally just lost it at me and was like "what the fuck are you even doing here?" You know, there's stuff like that [laughs], where... I feel like that does happen to other guys too, but, that's just kind of part of it, that you have to deal with. But for somebody's that's already more insecure about it, being female or queer, that you're going to be more sensitive to that kind of thing, I guess, on average. (B)

These are examples of how space is fortressed or made "prickly": the experience described by BX is rooted in a common narrative that if women and non-binary people are to use a skateboarding space, they and other marginalized identities are expected to remain out of the way or to prove their skills in some way to earn their legitimacy and right to use skateboarding spaces. The comment "what the fuck are you even doing here?" can be interpreted in a number of ways: is the "you" referring to those who are not cis-men? Is it referring simply to those whose skills are not as advanced as the commenter? To both? Regardless of intention, this comment functioned to de-legitimize B's presence at the skate park, and their right to use the space, despite their many years of skateboarding experience. The comment serves to construct for B and for others a symbolically fortressed space, and a "prickly" space where they do not feel comfortable. Another participant recounts a different but similar story to B's in which a skateboarding space is fortressed by male gatekeepers who feel entitled to decide who is a legitimate user of certain skateboarding spaces:

Like, I would have to say in Winnipeg I got, a few times I was spoken to in a really negative manner. Like, you know, “what are you doing here?” kind of thing. I had my board kicked once in a parking lot, just like “get out of here”... Yeah, by a skateboarder! ...I feel very protected by the skateboarding community, guys and girls, now. But it was, it happened in the past. (K)

In these examples women and non-binary people are treated as though they are not legitimate skateboarders and are therefore not welcome in skateboarding spaces. These are the kinds of incidents that make women generally feel less welcome or comfortable in skateboarding spaces than men, since this kind of fortressing allows some skateboarders to use the space without incident while others can only do so uncomfortably, unsafely, and/or conditional on their skill level. Regardless of whether this kind of incident happens frequently or infrequently, the fact that women know they *may* experience these types of scary or uncomfortable interactions may prevent many women from wanting to skateboard at all.

That women need to “earn” their place in skateboarding spaces is a common narrative that is, interestingly, reinforced by some of my female participants. One participant, when asked whether she saw a lot of support for women’s skateboarding coming from men, replies in the following way:

But in the scene here, like, all the guys are super supportive and ... some, like you may think, “Oh, I’m kind of intimidated by them and stuff,” but the thing is, you know, I think some of them may think, “Oh, this girl is just coming here” and they don’t know if they’ll ever see her again, ‘cause sometimes it’s just like a short thing, but if you always see them, then they’re like, “Okay, you’re pretty serious

about skateboarding,” and I don’t think you need to earn their respect in a certain way, but you know, are you in the community of skateboarders or like, are you doing it for one day? Well, I don’t know where I’m getting at with that. But I was just thinking, everyone’s so nice and so supportive, and regardless if you’re there for one day and never see them again, everyone is excited to see that somebody’s trying. (M)

This narrative, while on the one hand describing how welcoming the community is of women, also simultaneously positions men as the gatekeepers for who is a “real” or a “serious” skateboarder. This is something that I noticed several times in my data. There is a very strong underlying narrative in skateboarding culture that men are the standard to which all others should be compared, and so it is not surprising that many skateboarders of all genders have internalized this idea. However, my participant seems to change what she’s saying mid-way through the above quote, when she goes on to say that “everyone is excited to see that somebody’s trying”. In a sense, I think that both of the narratives being explored by my participant are true to her experiences. I experienced a great deal of support and enthusiasm from men when I started learning to skateboard. Many men I encountered did not care about my skill level but were simply excited to see me trying. On the other hand, I also experienced many skate parks as “prickly spaces” (Flusty, 1997) where my skill level and gender *did* appear to matter, and made me feel out of place. Often the men I’d see at skateparks interacted far more with my male friends than with me, and I often felt that I had not “earned” the right to belong there, whether due to my skill level or my visible difference. Arguably, this is part of my socialization as a woman: to feel the need to earn my place in all the things I do and to feel I do not have a

legitimate claim to any identity until I am extremely skilled in that area, whereas many men I know have been socialized to simply feel that they belong anywhere that they desire to belong.

Even something as innocuous-seeming as constant demands to show what tricks you can do is a subtle way of asking you to prove that you belong, in a way that male skaters are rarely asked to do. Women are frequently asked to prove their skills in public space, which is another subtle way women are asked to prove themselves in order to be seen as legitimate, something that occurs in many areas of life for women. For women, simply having and riding a skateboard and loving the activity is not enough for automatic membership to a culture that is, at its heart, simply about owning and riding a board. Quite a number of my participants told me that they are frequently asked to “do a kickflip” when they’re at the park or just riding around in public:

...and you have the little kids, they always wanted to see a girl kickflip and I don’t know where that came from, and even now like strangers, you know, I used to get mad when I’d be skating down the street and a guy would be like “kickflip!” and I’d be like “fuck you, you kickflip!”, but now I’m like yeah “okay sure, there you go buddy, have a good day.” (R, p.14, 695-700)

The resignation R expresses here is interesting: after decades of feeling angered by being asked to prove her membership to a culture she’s been participating in since childhood, R now simply laughs it off. I have also experienced the questioning of my legitimacy first-hand, in both subtle and unsubtle ways. I recorded one such troubling encounter with a stranger in my field notes, recorded the day of the incident, when my friend (a highly

experienced skateboarder) and I were approached by a middle-aged man while walking down the street with our boards.

Man: "Ohhh, hey, Lady Skaters!! Want me to teach you some tricks?!"

Friend: "You want to try my board? Sure!"

I stand silently, scowling, uncomfortable.

Man, standing on board: "You ladies have a lot to learn! First of all, these trucks are much too tight!"

My discomfort grows.

Friend: "Uhhh...that's how I like them?"

Man, pointing at me: "Let me check the trucks on yours."

Me: "No thank you."

Man, shouting at us angrily as we walk away: "I guess it's because you weigh more than me that you need your trucks so tight!"

Incidents like these, in which a man condescends to women, and will undermine or insult them if they do not respond positively to the man's advice and/or attention are familiar to any woman who's ever been in public, but there is something about skateboarding that seems to give permission to men to question women's legitimacy regularly, and to ask women to prove themselves as "real" skateboarders" on a regular basis.

Rather than waiting for acceptance from men into the world created by and for male skateboarders, a common theme throughout my interviews was women creating their own scenes and supporting each other, often as a direct response to the ways women are often treated in public. In a short documentary called *Facets* (Okumura, 2016), pro-level skater Lacey Baker says, "If we do actually want any kind of equality or space, *we're* the ones

who are going to have to create that space.” She goes on to say, “Everyone’s realizing that they’re just not going to do anything with female skaters, so we want to create our own industry” (Okumura, 2016). Indeed, after decades of women being given significantly less prize money, little coverage in skateboarding media, and few to no professional sponsorships, (Calderon, 2017; Cariker, 2018) many women are looking to create their own scene and their own spaces, rather than continue to struggle to be recognized by men in power who have been overlooking women’s contributions for decades. The fact that many women who skateboard are looking to create a separate scene and culture is likely the result of many years of being marginalized and undervalued by men in the industry. One participant, N, describes being contacted by a reporter to comment on a situation in which:

The local MALE [emphasis hers] skateboarders were angry because a group of girls had asked for a girls’ night only at their local skateboard park...these boys thought the girls would never be accepted by the guys if they demanded their own night. As if we wanted to be welcomed by them. And I had to explain like, that is a decades old mentality! We have our own scene, and it’s because we’ve had to do it ourselves because chumps like these kids think that we want to be accepted by them, when all we want to do is skate. (N)

N goes on to point out that “at least girls can comfort themselves with everything that’s online and accessible”. Indeed, the Internet has provided an incredible platform for women to gain exposure in skateboarding, and it has aided in the formation of many groups and media platforms that centre identities other than white, cis and male. There are a good deal of people out there now who are building a separate skateboarding world

that includes space for people of all genders, queerness, people of colour, and any spectrum of femme to masculine presentations. For example, in the past year a new skateboarding magazine was created called *Skateism* that focuses exclusively on those who have been historically less visible/invisible in skateboarding. The first issue's (January 2018) cover featured Lacey Baker, a queer woman skater mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, and the second (May 2018) featured Gabriel Ramirez and Jeffrey Cheung, a queer couple who founded *Unity*, a queer skateboarding collective based in Oakland, California. *Mahfia TV* is a media outlet that serves as a popular platform for women in extreme sports such as skateboarding. There is another such space, created, run and attended by women in skateboarding and based in Vancouver. The organization mainly revolves around a Facebook group on which its 510 members (as of June 2018) can post to meet up with other women to skate, or to share any media that centers women in skateboarding. This group also organizes a monthly meet-up for women to skate together and teach each other what they know:

We ended up starting these ladies' nights... and sort of trying to teach people how to use the ramp there, now it's like a huge success, people are freaking out about it, like, when's the next one?! And a lot of those girls ended up becoming friends with each other. (K, p. 4, lines 223-226)

When I attended the first of these events, I was moved by the sense of community that was created there. Many women with experience were helping to teach those who were new, and there was lots of cheering and encouragement for those trying to learn new tricks. We stood in a circle and introduced ourselves at the beginning of the meet-up, which immediately set a tone of community and support rather than competition. The end

goal of projects such as these are to increase visibility of people normally not centred in skateboarding culture, rather than seeking acceptance in spaces dominated by men.

However, the mentality that women (and any other non-dominant identity in skateboarding) are necessarily seeking validation from men in the field is still prevalent. Ironically, the work women have done to create their own separate scene in skateboarding has led to women in skateboarding being seen as edgy, trendy, and rebellious, and therefore the popular media is now increasingly willing to feature them in mainstream publications. This has led to women gaining more cultural capital in mainstream skateboarding spaces and media, but it has also led to an increase in hostility online, as I discuss below.

An example of the kind of hostility facing women in skateboarding is shown in the following example: In December of 2017 a relatively well-known and highly skilled female skateboarder re-posted the cartoon in figure 1:

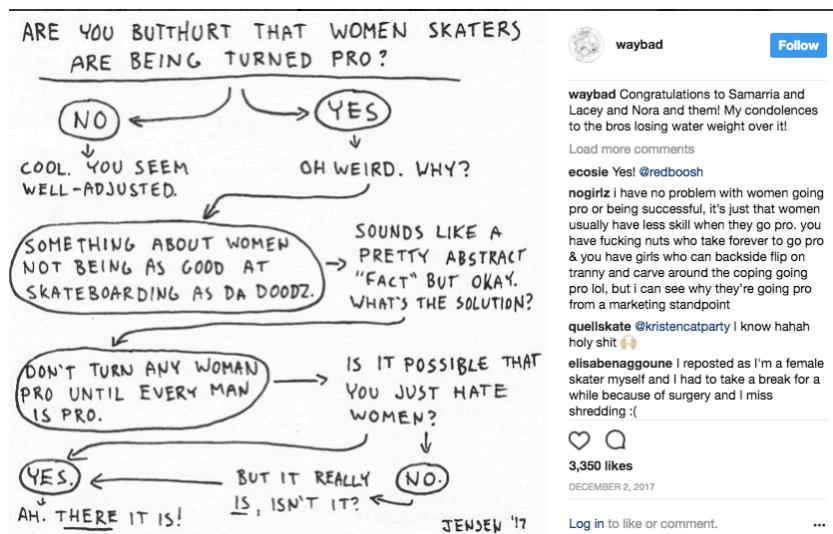


figure 1: “Are you butthurt that women skaters are being turned pro?”

Originally drawn and posted on the social media site Instagram by a skateboarder named Ben Jensen, the drawing refers to the negative response some people had when Samarria Brevard, a talented female skateboarder, “went pro” (meaning that a skateboarding company made a board with her name on it and sponsored her). Many (male) comments on her sponsor *Enjoi*’s Instagram expressed outraged that she received her pro-model board before a popular male skateboarder who also rides for the company. Una Farrar, a semi-professional female skateboarder from Canada, reposted the illustration in December of 2017 on her personal Instagram account and captioned it with the following text: “too important not to post, bummed on the amount of misogynistic reactions. There is ONE reason these women are going pro, and it’s because they deserve it.” Though many responses to her re-post were supportive and positive, there were also quite a few comments from a small number of men who felt that granting these women pro-status was “unfair.” While there were far more supportive comments than negative ones, the negative ones appear virtually everywhere online where female skateboarders are featured. I have listed some of the publicly posted comments from Farrar’s post below:

OSCARALDAMASHAW: my problem is women going pro while I know some guys who I personally think are more talented skateboarders and work very hard although the standards for male professional skateboarders is much much higher and I think everyones standard should be the same, and to assume that I probably hate women is wrong because all I want is equality not giving “minortys” an easier chance....

ALBRIGHTLUCAS: I’m only butt hurt towards the girls who are total

fucking posers and are worse at skating than I am, but are famous because their [sic] some hot broad cunt that can ride up and down ramps. Go skate in some heavy traffic instead.

...Just because men were more interested in skating, and put more time and hard work into skating, doesn't mean that women couldn't put an equal amount of time and hard work into skating. Of course there was zero money in women's skating. That's what happens when you don't put in the same amount of effort into becoming the best skaters in the world. It's not men's fault ... that the women that skated didn't train and practice as hard as the guys, to become as good as the guys.

JESUS_FRIED_CHRIST: Men don't have the privilege of affirmative action. We don't get stuff just because we have a penis. Women do. That's the privilege of not having to work as hard, and that's the bigotry of low expectations too. Affirmative action implies that "of course women are inferior to men, that's why we have to give them the upper hand, because they'd never be able to compete on a level playing field. ...

JOSHNILSON15: I don't hate women and I'm all for "equality for all" and stuff, but why do women get to be pro while hundreds of male skaters who are better than them aren't? That's not equality.

DAMO.FURY: @joshnilson15 "why do all of these female basketball players

get to be pro when there are so many guys better at basketball” [eye-roll emoji]

JOSHNILSON15 @damo.fury THANK YOU! All these pussies and feminists are assuming I hate women, I’m just stating facts.

DAMO.FURY: @joshnilson15 you are so dumb [4 likes]

MADD_GABB_ The only reason a guy would be bothered by this, is cause he enjoys watching swetty dudes all day. Straight up!

[use of homophobia to support women in this case.]

JOSHNILSON15: ...if women competed again men they’d get destroyed.

CHASEHAMILTON_ @joshnilson15 shut up pussy

[use of misogynistic language to defend women in skating...]

Sean Brayton’s 2005 analysis of “male white-backlash” in sports is relevant here.

Brayton argues that solitary, alternative sports such as skateboarding are often seen as spaces where white masculinity can remain dominant as the dominance of white masculinity is increasingly threatened by the number of people of colour in team sports, such as basketball. He says that, “alternative sports might symbolize a ‘re-territorialization’ of white athleticism through an expression of cultural diversity and misguided claims of marginality” (p. 359). The contradiction of skateboarding’s claims to marginality are what is interesting in these Instagram comments: they all put forward the idea that men are being unfairly withheld opportunity due to the success of a few women

in skateboarding, in much the same way that white men reacted to the rise of athletes of colour in many sports, as outlined by Brayton (2005):

From the time of the civil rights movements to the present, shifting gender and race relations have, in small increments, disrupted the unmentioned privileges of white males. This has resulted in a vociferous group of angry white males appropriating a marginal status in hopes of rescuing their own social advantage from the ravages of such purported assaults on white people as affirmative action, increased illegal immigration, and multiculturalism. (pp. 356-357)

Interestingly, the argument in the example that Brayton describes (white male backlash against people of colour in sports) was that men of colour had an unfair physical advantage in some sports and that therefore white men should be given more opportunities. However, the argument from the backlash against *women* in skateboarding is ironically that women are biologically inferior and therefore they should *not* be given the same recognition or merits as men. All of these comments point to the fact that for many, women are seen as a threat to men's hegemony in skateboarding.

3.5 Representation and fortressing

Another theme that came up consistently throughout all of my interviews was the topic of *representation*. Almost all participants talked about how the lack of female representation in skateboarding acted as a barrier when they were starting out, and how exciting it was when they *did* find women in skateboarding media. Participants repeatedly brought up the importance of meeting other female skateboarders and/or seeing professional female skaters in skate magazines and media. Many also mentioned the

frustration they felt with the lack of representation in most skateboarding media, especially those who began skating in the 1990's and 2000's as teenagers, when it was extremely rare to see women in skateboarding magazines or at skate parks. The number of women who have appeared on the cover of *Thrasher*, one of the oldest and most popular skateboarding magazines, can be counted on one hand. Women are increasingly represented in magazines and media such as *Thrasher*, but often still in disempowered, inactive, and sexualized roles. This demonstrates, again, the extent to which skateboarding culture is not only a reflection of patriarchy, but also a site of its reproduction.

Thrasher Magazine in particular has a long history of depicting women in less than empowering roles and has rarely published any content relating to female skating. Even today the magazine still publishes content focusing almost exclusively on male skateboarders. When I looked through an issue published in 2015, I found only one image of a female skateboarder in the entire magazine. The photograph was tiny and depicted Leticia Bufoni, a highly skilled professional skateboarder, *carrying* rather than *riding* a skateboard in order to strategically cover her naked body. One of my participants likewise recounts a particularly troubling experience with *Thrasher Magazine*'s content:

I think I've shied away from things like *Thrasher Magazine*, because they have these really degrading misogynistic ads. One piece of art, this cartoon of a woman's body wearing highheels with a skateboard rammed up her ass and her head cut off. That upset me so much that I wrote to *Thrasher Magazine* and informed them that they were embracing misogyny...Reduce her to a piece of ass...that's what role you get as a skateboarder. The fact that this is still common

in 2016 is really disappointing...They wrote back to me and basically called me a wuss and told me that I was being oversensitive. (A)

Beyond overtly misogynist advertisements like the one described by my participant, the decision by magazines such as *Thrasher* to ignore the contribution of women in skateboarding sends a message that speaks just as clearly about attitudes towards women as explicitly sexist comments, some examples of which I will discuss later on. This exclusion is pointed out by many of my research participants, and many of them spoke about the impact this had on them when they were younger. For example, one participant says: “It can be kind of excluding, a lot of the media, like skateboard magazines, like all the ads and stuff [are] pretty macho. And...not a lot of visibility of women in the sport” (A, p. 3, lines 145-147). Another participant says: “But seeing women be represented, and seeing now like, women on the covers of magazines, and especially in advertisements, and stuff like that, that makes me super excited” (RD, p. 7, lines 387-390).

The exclusion and erasure of women except in passive non-skateboarding, and often sexualized roles, leaves little space for women who simply want to have access to the same opportunities for exposure, income and sponsorship as men. Women are not, for the most part, fighting to be included into the boy’s club that skateboarding has been for decades; they are simply fighting to be recognized as different but equal, with access to equal opportunities.



Illustration 3: Lizzie Armanto on the cover of *Transworld*, November 2016

The magazine *Transworld*, published since 1983, recently released their first issue to focus on women in skateboarding, and it featured a woman on the cover for the first time in their 35 years in existence. The magazine was celebrated for this issue, with very little public critique (as far as I could find) of the fact that they were centering women in skateboarding *only* once women in skateboarding had already become more visible and popular, and therefore profitable. It is only now, after decades of work and activism on the part of those on the margins of skateboarding, that women's skateboarding is beginning to get some attention from the public, and, as a result, women are now being recognized and sponsored by major corporations and skateboard companies. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram have allowed women to build up a community and a

following without going through traditional male-dominated media outlets that have historically ignored or objectified women, and acted as gatekeepers for white hetero masculinity in skateboarding. While it is easy to be cynical about popular media only embracing women's skateboarding now that it's profitable, it also has positive repercussions, including an increase in visibility and role models for young women, as well as increased access to income via sponsorship and competitions. One participant says, in response to *Transworld*'s special "women's issue":

I have yet to buy a magazine, but I'd say the one that just came out that features all women, the *Transworld* one, would kind of be the first one that I ever wanted to buy. Oh I bought a *skate witches* zine. I have one of those... I've definitely looked through skate mags here and there because they would be in the bathrooms of my friends' place, but I've never felt the urge to take one home. The culture seemed pretty... just too... male saturated. It was almost sort of alienating. (R)

Another participant, taking a different stance on the *Transworld* "special issue", says, "I think it was last month everyone was excited because the one girl skater was on the cover of *Transworld*, and that was a first? I couldn't believe it... *Transworld* never had any female skaters. That's pathetic! [laughs]" (N, p. 7, lines 299-304). The fact that many companies are now profiting from the increasing popularity of women's skateboarding leaves my participants with understandably mixed feelings and a spectrum of reactions. On the one hand, any increase in visibility increases women's chances of sponsorship and better prize money, thus allowing more women to make an income and sometimes a living from skateboarding. However, there is an understandable mistrust of corporations, magazines and companies that have ignored, excluded, sexualized and belittled women in

skateboarding culture for decades, and who have only begun supporting women's skateboarding now that they have already become a profitable market via their own labour and activism. It is not these magazines and corporations, after all, who put in the hard work to increase women's visibility, but they are certainly profiting from the shift that has come about.

To contextualize the troublesome relationship between skateboarding companies and women, one particular, though extreme, example is helpful. The skateboarding company *Enjoi* put forward a series of advertisement in 2013 that were unapologetically misogynistic, with taglines such as "*Enjoi, where no means yes*" and "*dirty laundry keeps women busy*." Some argued that these advertisements were meant to be tongue-in-cheek, but this does not change the fact that they reproduce harmful and even violent narratives about women's place in society. Another in this series of advertisements depicts a man looking at two women on a couch, with a caption reading: "*you chicks wanna taste what it's like to skate all day?*" positioning women as sexual objects, and normalizing their position as necessarily non-skateboarders. The advertisement that caused the most backlash from the public featured an illustration of a woman with her arm in a sling, crying and captioned with the words: "*he really does love his skateboard more than me*." When confronted about the implications of domestic violence, *Enjoi* representatives denied that the woman had been physically abused. *The Guardian* (Carroll 2013) quoted *Enjoi*'s response to the backlash, with *Enjoi*'s Instagram post reading: "Some people don't seem like one of our shirts and they are petitioning against it. Uuh ... OK. Dunno what the fuss is all about, she got injured shopping at the mall, not by her man." *Enjoi* removed the post shortly after it was published (Carroll 2013). *Enjoi*'s

response to the criticism, which was likely just a public relations cover, still reinforces the narrative of woman as passive consumer/victim rather than active subject, and it functions to reinforce stereotypes and ideas about the essential hetero-maleness of skateboarding.

Regardless of intention, *Enjoi*'s ads not only downplay and belittle the sexual harassment, violence and oppression that women experience daily, but also create a narrative that normalizes the identity of skateboarders as being necessarily and exclusively heterosexual cis-male. It also normalizes the idea that (in skateboarding and in general) women function to either provide male pleasure (as sexual objects, as domestic labor) or as obstacles to male pleasure (as "nags", "ball and chains", or as distractions from the "brotherhood" of skateboarding). Nowhere in this narrative is there space for female subjectivity, female friendship, female pleasure, or female agency. Men in this narrative *act* and *do*, while women function only in relation to men, as girlfriends, groupies, or objects of their desire. These narratives are not always as explicit as the *Enjoi* example in skateboarding culture and media, but are nonetheless present. For example, a close male friend of mine who grew up immersed in a highly male skateboarding scene once said to me, after we had been skating at a park for hours with a very talented young male skateboarder, that this boy could make it big if he "doesn't get distracted by girls." The idea that women could be this boy's peers or role models in skateboarding or that this young man may not be heterosexual did not cross my friend's mind, since his own experience with skateboarding has been so completely male and hetero-normative.



Illustration 4: *Enjoi* advertisement: “where no means yes”



Illustration 5: *Enjoi* advertisement “dirty laundry keeps women busy”

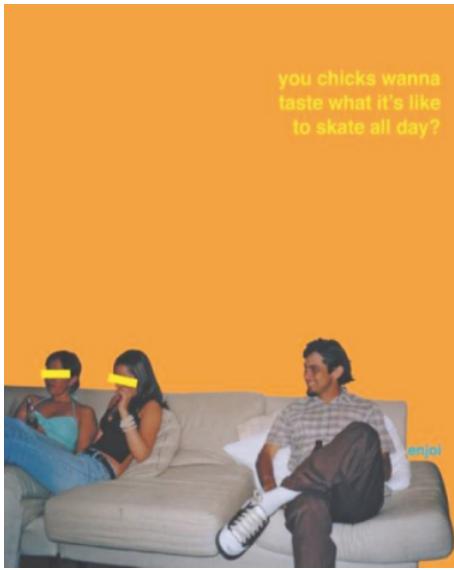


Illustration 6: *Enjoi* advertisement: “you chicks wanna taste what it’s like to skate all day?”

While *Enjoi* may be an extreme example, this type of narrative is common throughout popular skateboarding culture and media. Though there is always some pushback from subaltern groups with the culture, skateboarding culture and media have been putting forth the message, both subtly and unsubtly, for decades that women are not legitimate members of the skateboarding community.

Some participants emphasized the importance of female role models as a means of understanding what they were capable of themselves, whether the role model was a professional like Kara-Beth Burnside or Elissa Steamer (mentioned frequently), or simply a friend or a female skateboarder they saw at a skate park. For example, one participant says:

It was such a huge thing to seek out, and see someone like yourself--to feel less alone and for motivation. And yeah, it was pretty important. And also yeah just to kind of figure out what I could possibly pursue, or was capable of. Like oh, so-and-so’s doing this down a handrail or something... just a standard to pursue. (N)

It was interesting to hear a number of participants say things along this line: it would appear from my interviews that many women in skateboarding do not look to what men are doing in order to learn new tricks, and instead set their aspirations in relation to what they see other women doing. If this is the case, then it is all the more important for professional woman skateboarders to have visibility and financial support in order to remain in the profession. Another participant says:

I only spotted one female skateboarder in many years of skateboarding in H_____...she was a lot younger and she could do so much more than me, and that really opened my eyes to what was possible for me when she did like a thigh high ollie right in front of me, or a kickflip just standing there, boom! I was like holy crap...even though the guys were so much more capable, yeah, it was just exciting to finally see another young woman do it...(A)

It is evident from these experiences that seeing women in public skateboarding spaces was important both for allowing women to push themselves as skaters and to even see skateboarding as a possibility in the first place. This is a very important point, and shows that a lack of visibility for women in skateboarding can act as a significant barrier to participation: without role models in skateboarding, many women do not see themselves as capable of certain tricks or moves, or they simply do not take up the sport in the first place. The lack of role models is a self-perpetuating cycle, with women choosing not to skateboard because they don't see it as a friendly or open space for women, which in turn leads to fewer role models that might encourage other women to take it up. As mentioned above, many of my participants measured what they were capable of by what other women were doing rather than other men. Representation was, in these cases, of utmost

importance: these female role models led my participants to set standards for themselves and to expand their understanding of what their bodies could do. Few of my participants talked about men as their role models in skateboarding, though some mentioned one or two professionals they admired.

In 2018 Crystal Moselle put out a film entitled *Skate Kitchen*, a fictionalized look at a real life women's skateboard crew in New York City, after whom the film is named. In Jake Howell's (2018) review of the film in the *Globe & Mail*, Howell speaks to the importance of women and representation. He notes that:

In one key sequence, Skate Kitchen members tear up a sidewalk, causing a little girl passing by to turn her head in awe. The scene isn't showy – in fact, none of the film is, despite painting New York as the coolest place on Earth. "I didn't want to nail it on the head. You don't have to be like: 'Girls can skateboard, everybody!'" Moselle says. "You just have to see them do it and want to be like them". (January 2018)

What Howell is pointing out here is the need for young women to *see* women doing things in order to perceive things as possible. As a young woman growing up in the 1990's, for example, I rarely saw women skateboard. I took it for granted that skateboarding was for men, and it was not until I was in my thirties that I finally saw myself as capable of being a participant in this culture. Another of my participants, like Howell, discusses the importance she places on young girls having role models:

...like, if I'm at a park and I'm just hanging out and a little girl is walking by or something I'll almost always jump on my board and skate in a place where she can see me, so she can go "Oh! Oh, girls can skate? Oh!" Or like maybe she

doesn't even have that question, but it's now in her head that it's a reality, that that's something she can do and she'll never question whether or not that's normal. Because hopefully it's going to balance out if she's only seen dudes on boards. So. Yeah. And I've seen that happen too where a little girl comes to a park with a board and there'll be a few of us girls and we're just sitting and then we all just know, "get on our boards!" And once she sees us doing it, she'll feel more comfortable and almost always that's what gives her the encouragement. (R)

What is being pointed out is that it is not enough to merely tell girls that they can skate, but rather they need to see role models out in the world, in public spaces, who can *show* them that girls can and do skateboard, that they are legitimate members of the skateboarding community, and to show them the extent to which women are capable of complex and challenging movements and tricks. The presence of other women in skateboarding spaces is also important in order for other girls to feel safe and comfortable. This is supported by my own experience as well as the experiences and anecdotes of my participants, many of whom emphasized the excitement and relief of seeing other women skateboarding:

It is really, really awesome to just be skating with a smaller group of women, it really depends on personal preference, what people like to skate... But it is really, really uplifting to go with women...[Some friends] and I went to Seattle and went to the Wheels of Fortune competition...Yeah it was really, really uplifting and encouraging to have some girlfriends who skate and who are more around my level. So I got to learn from them because they're more within my range of technique, whereas the guys are mostly a lot better. (AN)

Um somehow on TV there were like female role models that I was looking up to, I think for me that was a big thing to show that snowboarding was possible. Cara-Beth Burnside, she's a professional skateboarder, but when I saw her she was snowboarding in the Olympics... (M)

Usually I'm like "we're all the same, let's all hang out!" and it's fine, but with skating in a group of women it's been the number one thing for my growth. It's like the most critical aspect of my growth has been having that support. (RE)

Skating and feeling like I have support and encouragement and someone who understands, that mostly comes from women... From my experience it's probably not just from skating with women, it's from skating with other women who are also just starting out. We all try different things, and then when I see them doing something I think oh, okay, I think I can do that if you can do that. We encourage each other in a different way. We just in general talk about our feelings more. There's a quality of it that's a lot different than when I'm just hanging out with men that's more, that just has a softer approach to the whole experience. We congratulate each other way more for tiny things than I would typically get from men, which isn't a necessity, but it feels really nice. We're all just like happy to be able to do anything, and I feel like our standards are lower and our cheering each other on is higher. (RE)

I was so excited, like when I first met one of my closest girlfriends when I was in Calgary skating the [inaudible] skatepark. She was one of the first women that I'd skateboarded with and I was so excited to have another lady to skate with... and then like I said over the years, skating in Vancouver, and seeing women in the community here and there, but I've never had the experience of skating with women until these last two years. And I like a mix, to be honest, if that... but at the same time, now that I've experienced what it's like to go out with a crew of women, I would take that. I'd take that any day, right? So, yeah, it just, I was just so excited. I'm sure you can tell. Like it kind of felt like, "Oh wow! This is..." Like, I'd been waiting for that, but I didn't know it, you know? (AS)

I did remember, I think it was ... I don't know if it was *Skateboard Canada* or *Concrete Skateboard* magazine, there was a local BC woman skateboarder that was, had, and this was maybe late 90's, I'm totally forgetting her name right now, um, but there was this amazing shot of her in that magazine and I remember, like, I still have it, from the late 90's, like I've cut it out and had it up on my fridge for like [laughs] a decade or more, and I still have it tucked away somewhere. I couldn't get rid of it. (AS)

The latter quote especially is a good example of the impact that seeing oneself represented can have on one's life, with this participant saving this photograph for 20 years because of how important (and rare) it was to her to see a woman in a skateboarding magazine. All of these excerpts show the extent to which, for women and

non-binary people who skateboard, representation matters. For the women I spoke to, the presence of highly skilled female skateboarders in the media was very important in terms of feeling encouraged and inspired, feeling like part of the skateboarding community, and in terms of pushing themselves physically beyond their current skill level.

3.6 Biological determinism and fortressing

Reading an article about sexism and sexual harassment in comedy, I came across the following quote by Lindy West (2017):

One of comedy's defining pathologies, alongside literal pathologies like narcissism and self-loathing, is its swaggering certainty that it is part of the political vanguard, while upholding one of the most rigidly patriarchal hierarchies of any art form. Straight male comedians, bookers and club owners have always been the gatekeepers of upward mobility in stand-up, an industry where "women aren't funny" was considered conventional wisdom until just a few years ago.

(paragraph 12)

The longstanding notion in comedy that women were simply biologically unable to be funny is very much like skateboarding, where women have been systematically excluded due to biological determinist arguments about how "women can't skate" or that women are naturally risk averse. Upward mobility in skateboarding, as in comedy, art, music, and any other male-dominated culture, has been a highly patrolled boys-club with almost all of the cultural and financial power controlled by heterosexual white cis-men, with much of the justification for this exclusion coming from arguments about biology that are based in the idea that women are simply not "naturally good" at these things. These arguments

serve to hide the underlying histories of inequality and privilege that have allowed certain men (namely white, hetero and cis men) to dominate many professions and fields *because* they are the gatekeepers and the ones with financial and cultural capital and power, because of years of structural inequality. This focus on “natural ability” also naturalizes an idea that success in skateboarding is objective and is only based on the kinds of tricks you can do and how high you can jump, rather than any kind of institutionalized bias or privileging of certain communities and bodies. As discussed in the literature section, Atencio and Beal (2011) get to the heart of this idea when they compare skateboarding culture’s DIY ethic with neoliberal ideas of meritocracy and deregulation. They argue that skateboarding culture’s failure to examine pre-existing power structures means that there is a deeply held belief that success in skateboarding is all about individual style and skill, which in turn leads to a belief that if women have not succeeded or participated in skateboarding for the last several decades, then it must be because women simply can’t skate, are not interested in skateboarding, or simply find it “too gnarly” (as quoted below).

The perception that women have biologically determined physical limitations that prevent them from being good skateboarders is the third form of fortressing that became evident from my observations and interviews. This perception comes not only from men in the skateboarding world but is often also internalized by women who skateboard, myself included. I analyse the experiences of my participants and my observations here using the ideas of Iris Marion Young. She argues in her 2005 article *Throwing like a girl*, “For many women as they move in sport, a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted space”

(Young, 2005, p. 33). Indeed, many of my participants were only able to expand their belief in their physical capabilities after seeing another *woman* doing impressive or difficult tricks, meaning that many women, apparently, do not feel that their bodies are capable of the same things as men's bodies. Young argues that much of women's perceived physical limitations are culturally imposed:

The girl learns actively to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity that increases with age. In assuming herself to be a girl, she takes herself to be fragile.

(p. 43)

Young's ideas here are not merely theoretical: these gendered ideas about our bodies have an impact on what we believe ourselves to be capable of, and what we fear, as well as what others perceive women to be capable of. There is a widespread belief in skateboarding that continues to be expressed today, that women are fragile and simply not capable of skateboarding as well as men. In fact, a famous male skateboarder Nyjah Huston was interviewed in one of the most widely circulated skateboarding magazines, *Thrasher* (July 2013) and is quoted as saying that: "Some girls can skate but I personally believe that skateboarding is not for girls at all. Not one bit." After the backlash from many who were angered by this comment, Huston went on to apologize on *Twitter*, but his apology continued to reinforce the same ideas he put forward in the first interview: that women are fragile, physically limited, and in need of protection from men:

I want to apologize for the remarks I made in *Thrasher* about female skateboarders. What I meant was that skateboarding is a gnarly sport, in general,

and as someone who knows the wrath of the concrete all too well, I don't like the thought of girls (like my little sister) getting hurt. My words were an inaccurate reflection of who I am; more importantly, they were disrespectful and I genuinely regret them. (Huston, 2013)

Though there was a considerable pushback against Huston after his original comments were published, this young man (who has been deeply embedded in skateboarding culture from a young age) was arguably just articulating a message that is already present in much of popular skateboarding media: that women are not capable of succeeding as skateboarders because they are *fragile* and *physically limited*, and therefore that women are not equal to men. These beliefs are perpetuated by many, including those who hold cultural capital and power in skateboarding. The fact that *Thrasher* magazine printed Nyjah Huston's harmful words in the first place speaks to the underlying attitude of popular skateboarding media towards women. Mimi Knoop, a prominent figure in women's skateboarding and founder of Mahfia Media, mentioned above, articulates why comments such as Huston's are so harmful:

It doesn't bother me personally. I mean, if that kind of comment bothered me, I would have stopped skateboarding 15 years ago. What bothers me most about it is that there are younger girls out there who maybe don't have the same perspective I have. I know Alana Smith [a teenage pro-level skateboarder] really looks up to Nyjah and I know it probably broke her heart to read that. (Bane, 2013)

Huston's comments, too, were likely read by many of his other young fans. As someone in a position of power in skateboarding, it is likely that some of Huston's fans took his words seriously and agreed with them. And reinforcing Nyjah Huston's words was the

magazine in which they were published, with each page dedicated almost entirely to men in skateboarding. The narrative of women not belonging in skateboarding is reinforced in so many subtle and unsubtle ways, and Huston's words were just one blatant manifestation.

In the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition discussed in detail in the literature section, for example, a similar argument about the lack of women was put forth. During a talk by some of the artists at the *Beautiful Losers* opening, many in the audience questioned the lack of diversity, especially since the artists had built up an identity around marginalization and anti-establishment. In response, the artist Aaron Rose said that, "the street requires physically demanding acts where people get hurt, so girls don't want to be involved in street culture as much" (quoted in Atencio & Beal 2011, p. 8). According to Rose's narrative, much like Huston's, the lack of women is due to women's biological aversion to risk rather than structural barriers preventing them from accessing not only "the street" but also prickly and fortressed spaces such as the male-dominated cultures of skateboarding and DIY art scenes. This art exhibit was internationally recognized, with many of the male artists holding a great deal of cultural capital and influence in both DIY art and skateboarding culture.

The idea articulated by Nyjah Huston and Aaron Rose is a widely held idea: that women's bodies are fragile and generally less capable than men's at learning and mastering difficult physical acts, and that women are naturally more risk-averse. The socialization that women experience about their bodies from a young age acts as a barrier for women to try out skateboarding in the first place and to push themselves within the sport. Likewise, the socialization of men and boys to see women as less capable acts as a

barrier that results in the belittling, invisibility and ignoring of women's accomplishments by men who hold significant cultural power and capital in skateboarding. Marion Young (2005) says that:

Women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy. Typically, we lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry us to our aims...We often experience our bodies as a fragile encumbrance, rather than the medium for the enactment of our aims. We feel as though we must have our attention directed upon our bodies to make sure they are doing what we wish them to do, rather than paying attention to what we want to do *through* our bodies... Typically, the feminine body underuses its real capacity, both as the potentiality of its physical size and strength and as the real skills and coordination that are available to it. Feminine bodily existence is an *inhibited intentionality*, which simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an "I can" and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed "I cannot."

(Young 2005, pp. 34-36)

What Young is saying here is that it is often women's *socialization* that keeps us from participating in or pushing ourselves further in sports such as skateboarding, rather than any kind of innate aversion to risk or lack of ability. This is corroborated by some of my participants. For example, one participant says:

...so it became this thing, where it's like "that's what guys can do, what can girls do though?" I really didn't even understand if it would even be possible for a woman's body... I would watch men skate and I would be like, "how would my body do that?" I don't even know. And then my buddy mentioned, I'm blanking

on her name now... And he mentioned her, and he was like you should watch some of her videos, and it totally blew my mind because she just ripped as hard as any dude did. There was no difference in what she would do, she was totally fearless and amazing. Elissa Steamer! ...Anyways yeah, watching that, and I was like okay, I see now, I have no excuse. Cause I did sort of feel like oh maybe it's just not as possible for me, which is kind of funny because in my life in general I've been like "I can do whatever you can do". That's not going to stop me. And then for some reason in this sport, I was like, "oh I'm just a girl, I don't want to hurt myself [uses high pitch voice]", and I just started realizing oh wait, that's not a valid excuse anymore. (RE)

My participant here shows how limited women can feel in and by their bodies, especially in a sport like skateboarding where there are so few visible role models. Many women see their bodies as a barrier rather than a tool for movement and skill, and believe, consciously or not, that men's bodies are simply better at challenging tricks. Young argues that women are indeed socialized to feel this way from a young age, and my conversations with women who skateboard corroborated this finding. It is no wonder that skateboarding, a sport that requires a great deal of risk, pain, and trust in one's body in order to gain a high level of skill, is so dominated by boys, since girls are so often socialized to feel that their bodies are simply not capable of these things. One participant articulates this difference: "I think it's different for little boys, I just do think we're quite different in how we approach things, especially scary physical things" (RE p. 17). This does seem to be the case for many of my participants. Young's argument about the perceived bodily limitations of women demonstrates why it is then so important for

women to have role models in sports such as skateboarding, so that women are able to see and believe female bodies are capable of the things required of them in skateboarding.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Over the course of this study, I collected data in the form of observations, interviews, and various media sources in order to answer the questions that informed my inquiry. I arrived at some tentative answers that support and complicate the existing literature on the intersections of skateboarding, gender and public space. I address my research questions individually below:

Who feels comfortable using public skateboarding spaces, and how do they create or negotiate this sense of belonging? How are women, femme, and gender non-binary skaters engaging with public space differently from cis-male skateboarders?

My participants sometimes navigated space differently than men might, choosing to use public spaces that were not necessarily made for skateboarding, such as parking lots or side-streets, when they were first learning. Some also sought out more hidden places or skateboarded only at hours when few others would be around to witness them. Some participants claimed that this was how they first learned to skateboard, and then later, after building some confidence in their skills, they moved on to places like skate parks where they would be far more visible and open to the scrutiny of other skateboarders. This trend may be due to my participants feeling that they needed to be skilled and comfortable on a board before they could feel like legitimate users of the skate park, or at the very least comfortable there. The women and non-binary skateboarders I spoke to, as well as the female professional skateboarders whose experiences I researched, had all been participating in skateboarding culture for at least a year, and often closer to a decade. Over the course of this time they had all found some sense of belonging in skateboarding culture and spaces, despite the numerous barriers.

They did so by finding communities of women with whom they could skate and therefore feel safe and supported in public, and by seeking out female role models, as well as alternative skateboarding media that centres the experiences of those not normally as visible in skateboarding. Some of my participants also regularly sought out women-only spaces or events, and most expressed their appreciation of these spaces even if they didn't frequent them. Many participants were excited about the monthly women's night organized by a local group, and reported that spaces that were women-only felt less intimidating. My personal experience as a skateboarder corroborates these findings, as I experienced these women's nights as spaces where I did not need to navigate the sometimes uncomfortably competitive attitude I found to be present at many skate parks. I also found the women-only night to be warm and supportive, as opposed to at skate parks where I often felt self-conscious as a woman, suspected I was being judged for my lack of skills, and/or felt I was getting in the way of "real" skateboarders. Many participants also reported that they enjoyed and sought out women to skate with, as a means of feeling more comfortable.

What barriers keep women a minority in skateboarding, and how are women and non-binary people creating space for themselves in male-dominated spaces despite these barriers, both geographic and imagined?

There are quite a number of barriers to women and non-binary people participating fully in skateboarding, and that therefore maintain the male dominance of skateboarding. My research indicate that these include a lack of representation in popular media, or the representation of women solely as sexual objects and/or passive observers of skateboarding. There is also an unequal distribution of prize money and income for

women, as in many other major sports, and therefore more limitations on women's ability to make a living from the sport. Internalized and externally reinforced ideas about women's physical abilities and relationship to risk can also keep women from becoming skateboarders. The male dominance of skateboarding spaces, especially skate parks, can sometimes be uncomfortable for women, and my participants were often asked to prove themselves in order to be seen as legitimate users of these spaces. The policing of gender expressions and women's appearance also functioned to exclude many of my participants and other well-known female skateboarders from skateboarding.

How are female and non-binary skateboarders redefining, reshaping, challenging the spaces they use for skateboarding, in relation to Lefebvre and Harvey's ideas of the Right to the City?

This is the most theoretical of my research questions, and for me the most interesting one. While my data shows that skateboarding media remains male-dominated and often sexist, many of my participants observed that women were becoming more and more visible both locally at skate parks and in public spaces, as well as online. This increase in the number of visible women skateboarding is a result of years of work on the part of female and non-binary skaters who demand to be seen and who are fighting for equal access to opportunity and resources, and creating new platforms that provide a space for women to be seen by other women. One of the major ways I saw the people in my study challenge skateboarding spaces was by taking on a gender identity that felt right for them, whether it was deciding to dress feminine while skateboarding even when their community was all men, or realizing that they didn't have to dress feminine in order to be seen as acceptable by mainstream skateboarding media. The surge of skateboarding

media and space created by women and non-binary people has begun to change the landscape of skateboarding: women are beginning to be recognized by major companies and magazines, and a few are now being sponsored by companies like *Nike* (Lacey Baker) and *Adidas* (Nora Vasconcellos). Thanks to the Internet, for young people taking up skateboarding today there are at least online communities that provide space for folks who haven't always been able to find a place for themselves in skateboarding. As my field notes, interviews, and media analysis show, women are showing up to the skate park and in the media wearing a variety of styles along the masculine-feminine spectrum, meaning that young women who join skateboarding may not feel the same pressure to present in any specific way in order to belong as they may have a decade earlier. Many of my participants talk about having played around with style in skateboarding, and the media coverage of female skate crews such as *The Skate Kitchen* and *The Brujas* shows that both feminine and masculine styles in skateboarding are becoming increasingly accepted, at least for women.

Recommendations, strengths and limitations, future applications

The presence of women in skateboarding is important because skateboarding builds confidence and allows women to push past their perceived limitations of self, take risks, and begin to see their bodies as tools rather than as barriers to free movement. It also allows them to explore the urban public landscape as *subjects* rather than passive consumers, observers, fan-girls, or as objects for the male gaze. It gives them access to the many freedoms that (hetero white cis-) men may take for granted. Skateboarding takes place in the public sphere, and therefore provides a means for women to act in

public, to claim public space for themselves, and to use public space in an empowered way.

Many white heterosexual cis-men who skateboard in the past several decades have been able to take for granted that they belonged, that their hard work and talent and skill could potentially be recognized and rewarded with cash prizes and/or an income, that their legitimacy would not be questioned at skateparks, and that they would see people like themselves represented in skateboarding magazines and other sites of cultural production. Through the work that they've done, those who have been systematically excluded from skateboarding have begun to shift the culture so that *everyone* might one day take these things for granted, and so that there is more (though by no means equal) access to opportunities and income for those who are marginalized.

Marginalized skateboarders are creating their own spaces and changing the ones that exist, rather than trying to assimilate into a culture that does not always welcome or accept them unconditionally. This helps me to articulate why my research matters: As much as I believe that skateboarding can help women and non-binary people in myriad ways, women and non-binary skateboarders, with the help of the Internet's easy accessibility, are also helping skateboarding to become something different - more interesting, more open, more uplifting - than what it once was. By refusing to opt out, by demanding to be part of the culture but on their own terms, skateboarders who are queer women, queer men, straight women, cis women, trans women, trans men, non-binary people, people of colour, and all intersections thereof, are creating space for more than just a change in skateboarding, but a change in society. And *through* skateboarding, these people are positioning themselves as subjects who *act* in the public sphere in a loud and

visible way, therefore declaring that they are a legitimate and important part of the cityscape and the public, and have as much right to shape and change the city as those who have held the most cultural and financial power in skateboarding.

My research shows the importance of a female/non-binary/non-cis presence in skateboarding, and also demonstrates the important role that skateboarding can play in the lives of young people. As I discussed in my review of the literature, women, non-binary, queer and trans people have historically been unsafe or uncomfortable in many public spaces. Skateboarding provides a means for them to use public spaces as active subjects whose *actions* rather than *appearance or identity* can become the focus. Skateboarding also gives them power to contribute to shaping the meanings and uses of public space, which can only have positive repercussions for other marginalized identities that use these spaces.

At the end of almost all of my interviews, I asked my participants how they'd like to see this research used. All of my participants expressed a strong conviction that writing about women and skateboarding was important. I've included some of their suggestions and ideas about what changes they'd like to see in skateboarding in the hopes that I can eventually use this work to help implement some of these changes in the near future:

There needs to be more [women's] events. Like all kinds of events, like movie premieres, and like picking a spot and sessioning this one spot, and documenting it, doing a little video edit of it and share it online. (M, p. 15 lines 642-652)

Just to, to bring awareness and a voice for women in the community... everybody I've talked to about your thesis is super excited about it... maybe something locally, like a non-profit women's collective for skateboarding... (A, p. 9, 468-474)

I feel like, just connecting more queer and female youth with skateboarding is a huge thing. Having more, as far as spaces where people can skate and feel comfortable, having more safe space skate nights and stuff like that. Cause that's where shit's really gonna change is if you ... make it more inclusive and accessible for younger kids that would otherwise be deterred by the mainstream of it. (B p.12 lines 635-640)

... you're going to come up with some interesting data and be able to synthesize some overall findings I think that could really, if they were published or just made publicly available, could help and empower females... like me and my friend growing up and other females I've talked to at certain times. Just to support them and encourage them to get out there and skate and not let... those "hey do a kickflip!" comments, not let that take skateboarding away from us...I think that maybe skateboarding could be used in therapeutic ways too that haven't been explored, like for counselling, or for trauma, or just to help people who are going through tough times. (E, p.18-19, lines 967-1013)

So I feel like the very fact that you are doing this, the domino effect of what you're doing is going to create ripples beyond you even knowing. So the fact that you're doing it without necessarily even knowing why or what the conclusion's going to be will already create change. And ... once it's complete then however it's presented and where that goes will continue to create change. (RD, p. 16, lines 855-858)

I guess just valuing women more... I'd like women to be respected and valued as people more, and treated less by their gender and also for it to be more common for language to change, for you know, put downs not to be gendered... Maybe more understanding from men about their treatment of women and ... what they choose to include in their magazines, especially with Thrasher. (A. pp. 9-10, lines 501-509)

It would be amazing if it could be used to inspire more parks, or more facilities. or even just more awareness, implementing into schools, or summer camps funded by the city. If we could use this data to connect these dots in the mind of people who don't have a clear picture to how much you grow and change and evolve because of it. That's what so cool. (C, p. 11, lines 604-608)

Just this whole thing about, sometimes you need the permission to try something. And that it's okay to fail and get hurt, and even go through adversity...yeah, take a risk and try something because you're gonna meet people, you're gonna have cool

experiences and yeah, hopefully young girls will see this as an opportunity...I think you could use your research and sort of [introduce] new outlets, opportunities. (N. p. 15, lines 668-676)

As is clear from these quotes, all of my participants feel strongly about the benefits that skateboarding has had in their own lives, and they are eager to see this research used to help make skateboarding more accessible to other women.

Areas for further research

Further research should be done to compare the experiences of those women and non-binary people who began skating in the 80's to 2000's with that of those who began skating after 2010. Since skateboarding is such a mediated culture, and because the Internet has created so much more space for women to be visible in skateboarding, more research could be done focusing on how this has changed women's experiences. This functions on two levels: the local and the more international level. On the local level, sites such as Facebook and Instagram have created a platform for women to find other women and non-binary people to skateboard with, allowing them to both build a community and to also feel more comfortable skating in public. On the more international level, the increasing visibility of women skateboarders online has led to media attention (such as the *Vogue* and *Teen Vogue* stories about the *Brujas* and *The Skate Kitchen*) which may in turn be responsible for increasing the number of professional women skateboarders sponsored by large corporations and skate companies. It would be both useful and interesting to see more research about this phenomenon. Further research on the recent decision to include skateboarding in the 2020 Olympics should also be done, as

this could have a huge effect on the visibility and status of women, as well as their ability to make a livelihood from skating.

More work should be done that focuses specifically on the experiences on non-binary and trans skateboarders, as well as the experiences of queer skateboarders. While I tried to address how these intersecting identities informed skateboarder's experiences, the majority of my focus was on the experiences of cis-women, due to lack of extensive data from non-binary skaters. Another limitation of this study is the limited diversity in terms of racialization, which would certainly have an effect on the experiences recounted. Further research should be done that focuses more in-depth on the experiences of those who are not cis-bodied, on people of colour, on the experiences of queer women and men, as our multiple identities inform our experiences in different ways. It would also be interesting to see a more extensive media analysis of skateboarding texts, and of how skateboarding media such as magazines and videos create and in many ways *mediate* what skateboarding is and can be.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduce self and research project.

Inform participants of their right to opt out of the study at any time. Obtain informed consent.

Before we start, do you have any questions about the research project or me?

Do you think of yourself as a skater? How long have you been in Vancouver? How old are you? Do you have a story about how you got your current or first board?

Why or how did you start skateboarding? Who or what influenced your decision?

What do you love most about skateboarding? What do you like least about it?

Where are some places you most like to skate? Where do you not like to skate and why?

At what times of day do you prefer to skate? What is it about those times that make them preferable?

Would you say that skateboarding has changed how you see or use the city? Can you tell me a story about a time that skateboarding caused you to think about or experience the city in a new way?

How has skateboarding affected your life?

(Leave this open, OR elaborate with:)

-Can you speak about community in relationship to skateboarding?

-Who do you skate with?

-Has it changed your idea of community?

-Does it influence who you spend time with? If so, how?

Do you read or buy any skateboarding magazines? Do you watch skate videos online?

Can you give me some examples? (websites, specific magazines or zines).

-Do you feel like this media represents many different kinds of people? Do you relate to the people you see in this media? Who do you feel like this website/magazine is made for?

-How do you feel about this media? Why do you like/dislike it?

-What are your favourite media sources, and why?

- What do you like/dislike about it?

Who is your favourite skateboarder? Professional or otherwise? Who embodies what you like most about skateboarding?

Do you feel welcome in skate-focused spaces?

- In skateparks? Which ones?
- In skate shops? Which ones?
- Competitions or demonstrations or larger events?

Do you have any other stories about skateboarding that you want to share? Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Do you have any ideas about how you would like to see this research used? Is there anything in skateboarding culture or in the Vancouver skateboarding community that you'd like to see changed?

Is there anything you want to ask me?

Appendix B: Observation Schedule

Research title: “You’re doing it wrong: Skateboarding, gender and the *right to the city*

Observation Protocol:

Location for observations: Observation for this study will take place at various skate parks in and around Vancouver, British Columbia.

Focus of observation: The focus of the observations will be on the interactions that occur between skateboarders at various skate parks around the Vancouver area. I will be observing conversations as well as gestures and body language as forms of communication.

Number and duration of observation: Up to five observations will take place in each site during the months of August 2015 to August 2016. The duration of the observation will be between one to two hours. Observations will be recorded in the form of hand-written field notes that will then be transcribed onto the computer.

Guiding questions for observations:

- Who is present at the skate park during the period of observation (age, gender presentation, type of activity being enacted, length of stay, style, groupings)?
- How do female and gender non-binary skateboarders present themselves in terms of dress, style, etc?
- How do male skateboarders present themselves?
- How are users of the skate park interacting with each other?
- Who is interacting with whom?
- Who takes the initiative during the interaction, and what kind of response do they receive?
- What is the general atmosphere at the park? Is it welcoming or intimidating? For whom?
- Do I feel comfortable or uncomfortable? Why or why not?

All observations will be carried out by the co-investigator of the study.