

Carving in and “Carving Out” Space: Gender in the Halifax Skateboarding Subculture

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Abstract

Skateboarding was made without rules, confinement, or regulation; it is a subculture (Beal, 1996) with an ideology that counters normative authority and, more specifically, standards of masculinity. Yet skateboarding continues to have persistent misogynistic perspectives and gender discrepancies in participation (Beal, 1996). Therefore, it is critical to understand the experiences of marginalized genders in the skateboarding subculture to discover *how ideas of authenticity are formed and upheld in the skate subculture and how these standards impact skateboarders of marginalized genders*. This study uses insights from Judith Butler, Erving Goffman, and Pierre Bourdieu to frame understandings of gender, subcultural identity, and power dynamics. It examines the unexplored skateboard subculture in Halifax, N.S. through an analysis of its symbolic membership and physical and social space. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this study identifies a disassociation from ‘typical’ masculinity and outwardly favourable attitudes towards gender diversity within the Halifax skateboard community; however, there are gender barriers within this still hyper-masculine setting disguised through support. Nevertheless, the historically resistant and rebellious attitudes that coincide with skateboarding may provide a space for fem and nonbinary skaters to counter the gender norms in the larger society and the skateboarding subculture.

Keywords: Skateboarding Subculture, Gender norms, Marginalized Genders, Authenticity, Entitlement to Space, “Strategic Entitlement”, Resistance.

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**Carving in and “Carving Out” Space:
Gender in the Halifax Skateboarding Subculture**

Skateboarding is perceived generally as the by-product of surfing, acting as a substitute during low tides (Woolley et al., 2011). Initially using large pipes, drained swimming pools, and residential streets (Dupont, 2014), skateboarders began to out-grow suburbia, turning to the city as their "concrete wave" (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018). However, unlike the ocean, the city is constructed with intended and often capitalist purposes (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018). Thus, conflict emerged between the design and governance of public space and its creative use by skateboarders (Glenney & Mull, 2018). This origin is part of the reason why skateboarding is an activity without rules (in the sense of a sport), confinement, or regulation, and is a subculture whose ideological principles counter normative authority and standards of masculinity (Beal, 1996). Yet skateboarding continues to have persistent misogynistic perspectives and gender discrepancies in participation (Beal, 1996). Therefore, it is critical to examine skateboarding through the sociology of gender, urban areas, and space to identify and understand the social and cultural perpetuations of gender discrimination in a subcultural context.

This study aims to uncover the gendered nature of skateboarding and, testing an assumption from extant research on skateboarding, whether authenticity remains a pivotal component in the embodiment of the subculture through the questions: *How is authenticity formed and upheld in the skate subculture, and how do these standards impact skateboarders and subcultural members of marginalized genders in their experiences?* This study uses the theoretical perspectives of Judith Butler, Erving Goffman, and Pierre Bourdieu as a lens for understanding gender and presentations of self in social settings. Building from these theoretical approaches and existing

literature, this study uses participant observation and semi-structured interviews to examine the skateboarding subculture through an analysis of its symbolic membership and physical and social space.

Gaining insight into the gendered nature of skateboarding—which, more than a sport or hobby, is a principle identity for many (Snyder, 2011)—is essential in understanding how binary gender constructs and systematic misogyny manifest in current subcultures. Research on skateboarding is essential to grasp how a subculture asserts anti-authoritative ideologies and antagonizes ‘typical’ masculinity yet preserves the same misogyny it claims to oppose. Understanding the experiences and roles of gender in a male-dominated subculture is necessary for uncovering if alternative masculinity is a façade, while listening to the experiences and locating patterns of gender discrepancies in skateboarding may aid in creating a more equitable subculture.

Literature Review: Anti-Authority or (not so) Hidden Hierarchy?

Admission, Authenticity and Identity in Symbolic Subcultural Membership

As with many subcultures, entrance to skateboarding is not an effortless undertaking. Despite its anti-authoritarian values, skateboarding has a hierarchal structure based on experience, skill, and perceived authenticity (Dupont, 2014). Other studies have used Bourdieu’s explanations of social and cultural capital to explain the establishment of ‘core’ skateboarders, or those perceived as authentic, as regulators of social mobility and producers of specific subcultural knowledge (Dupont, 2014). These ‘core’ skateboarders socialize, accept, or reject new members based on their discretion of whether an individual is authentic or holds the culture’s values (Dupont, 2014). Anyone seeking *admission* to the subculture must self-identify as skateboarders (Harris &

Dacin, 2019) and attempt to learn and adopt the norms they assume based on their existing knowledge (Palmas, 2013).

When considering how these aspects of admission link to gender, literature has found that fem¹ skateboarders start learning in private spaces until they feel their skills are developed and are frequently shown the entrance to the community by a male skateboarding contact (Kelly et al., 2006). Fem skateboarders face additional obstacles to admission due to the ‘core’ maintaining gender norms (Atencio et al., 2009); nevertheless, subcultures with male skateboarders who are mindful of and seek to oppose gender norms within communities create more inclusive and accepting spaces for fem skateboarders (Carr, 2017).

Admission hinges on being perceived as authentic, which entails meeting symbolically and socially constructed standards around the display of visible traits and skills, or manifestations of specific knowledge (Driver, 2011). In terms of skateboarding specifically, possessing cultural knowledge and anti-authoritarian values are decisive in judging authenticity and forming status (Dupont, 2014). The knowledge must be obtained and presented; initially, this may be through presumptions of the culture shaped by depictions and representations of skateboarding (Palmas, 2013). The ‘core’ actively opposes the neo-liberalization and commodification of skateboarding that has led to popularization and verifies other skaters to guard the authenticity of the subculture (Lombard, 2010).

¹ Fem: An abbreviation for female-identifying.

As skateboarders resist authority, conventional attitudes, and archetypal masculinity (Beal & Weidman, 2003), notions that the subculture rejects gender norms naturally emerge in the literature. MacKay and Dallaire (2012) discuss how some ‘girls’ use skateboarding as a tool for alternative gender expression yet continue to face difficulty feeling authenticated within the skate² community (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012). Male skateboarders often perceive their fem counterparts as unable to take risks or trying to join the culture for inauthentic reasons, namely to “find boyfriends” or an “alternative crowd” (Beal & Weidman, 2003).

Throughout this literature on skateboarding, discussions of authenticity inevitably connect to the concept of identity. Snyder (2011, pp. 314) suggests that skateboarding identity is more profound than owning a skateboard; it is a “physical and mental commitment” to the culture often substantiated through clothing, language, and videography as forms of “identity claims” (Dupont, 2019). This framing of identity corresponds with Goffman’s (1959) understanding of identity performance, which holds that individuals constantly search for cues to help them act and belong in social settings (Newman & O'Brien, 2008), adjusting their own ‘presentation of self’ to the guidelines and appearance they perceive from others to avoid scrutiny from those they are performing for (Goffman, 1959).

An interconnected aspect of identity performance is presenting and forming gender identity within the subculture. The social construction of gender sustains that there are two categories, male and female, that align with an individual’s ‘sex’ at birth (Butler, 1988). Butler considers how this binary conception of gender performance, erroneously assumed to be natural, penalizes

² Skate: In this study, a short form for skateboard or skateboarding explicitly.

those who present ‘incorrectly’ and is intertwined with heteronormativity³ (Hardy, 2014). Fem and nonbinary members have been found to use the skateboarding subculture to express themselves and challenge the heteronormative and cis⁴ understandings of femininity and gender (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012).

However, while masculinity is at the roots of skateboarding’s subcultural norms, including encouraged risk and rugged clothing (Kelly et al., 2006), fem skateboarders are also scrutinized if they do not display ‘enough’ femininity (Atencio et al., 2009). The rebellious identity of skateboarding that actively engages in risk and the opposition to authority rejects femininity, resulting in the further marginalization of fem skateboarders from accessing this aspect of identity (Atencio et al., 2009). Based on this literature, gaining admission, mastering authenticity, forming identity, and evidently, being a cis man remains critical in symbolic membership to this subculture.

Utilization, Restriction/resistance, and Gender in Skateboarding’s Physical and Social Spaces

In the 1980s, skateboarding shifted from contained locations to streets (Chiu & Giamarino, 2018), resulting in the innovative and imaginative search for new spaces and tricks (Woolley et al., 2011). Skateboarders utilize street space and structures in ways that the designers did not intend (Chiu & Giamarino, 2018), breaking the societal norms of space, enacting the subculture’s

³ Heteronormativity: The presumption that heterosexuality is the standard and ideal ‘sexuality’ (Bosson et al., 2021).

⁴ Cisgender (cis): An individual’s gender identity aligns with their sex or gender assigned at birth (Bosson et al., 2021).

principled opposition to authoritative control (Glenney & Mull, 2018), and engendering conflict with the public (Snyder, 2011). This is not merely an unintended consequence or a reaction to a lack of other spaces. Although skateparks can be a place to form social capital and gender identity (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018), where members gather and perform their cultural knowledge and practice “ritual and initiation” (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018), many skateboarders view regulated skateparks as a method of control. Thus, public space and architecture are considered natural spaces to exercise their freedom (Glenney & Mull, 2018).

That said, commandeering a public street is not easy; the capitalistic construction of space (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018) objects to the utilization of public sites with no monetary purpose (Chiu, 2009). Cities attempt to hinder street skateboarding with legal measures and “defensive architecture” (Glover et al., 2019) such as metal attachments on benches or ledges known as ‘skate stop[s]’, or the use of gravel to prevent rolling (Glenney & Mull, 2018). Yet such measures serve as a symbol of established authority, which skateboarders transgress to perform the very freedom and rebellious nature encouraged in the subculture (Glenney & Mull, 2018).

For fem skateboarders attempting to participate in this male-dominated culture, there are different, additional barriers (Atencio et al., 2009). For one, they experience discouraging and intimidating behaviour from male skateboarders, such as testing their knowledge, questioning their authenticity, and persistent harassment (Atencio et al., 2009). Many fem skaters feel limited to private spaces and intrusive if using the male skate spaces (Kelly et al., 2006).

Entitlement is essential when considering the gender differences in access to and use of space (Backstrom & Nairn, 2018). The lack of ‘female’ entitlement to space is not exclusive to

skateboarding; urban spaces frequently display male domination by inducing fear such as patterned violence, verbal abuse, sexual assault, and the excess use of physical space by men (Beebeejaun, 2016). Backstrom and Nairn (2018) introduce the concept of *strategic entitlement* as assuming there is, and aspiring towards, an ideal of equality in entitlement to space rather than creating separate space for fem individuals. Fem skateboarders have regularly disclosed their comfortability with “women-only” skate events (Atencio et al., 2009). The notable gap in this approach is that it maintains heteronormative views of gender and creates inaccessibility to nonbinary or gender-diverse skateboarders.

Although many publications address gender discrepancies, most fail to connect the norms of authenticity in the subculture with gender, and they adhere to a binary view of gender, overlooking the experiences of nonbinary skateboarders. Furthermore, more recent studies are shifting focus to increasing popularity and gender diversity in the competition side of skateboarding, dismissing the evolving subculture. Finally, this study found no sources that considered the Halifax skateboard scene specifically. Therefore, it is pivotal to address gaps in the preceding literature by detecting initial patterns through an exploratory examination of gender, as a social construct that is more complex than a binary, in the Halifax skateboarding subculture.

Research Methods: Finding a Subculture Scattered in the City

The existing literature and pertinent theoretical perspectives establish skateboarding as a unique example of a subculture. It challenges societal norms through an anti-establishment foundation and the defiance of regulated space, yet the subculture also displays misogynistic structures and

principles. This study used participant observation and semi-structured interviews to explore this paradox.

Participant Observation

As skateboarding is primarily dependent on dry weather, participant observation was completed twice in October and once in November of 2021 to ensure adequate conditions. Street skateboarding was too unpredictable and geographically spread out to observe, so the Halifax Commons skatepark was the primary site for observation. This component of the research followed an observation guide (Appendix E) to document the layout of space, organization of people, gender presentation, and various noteworthy occurrences. Observation notes were later cross-referenced with descriptions gathered from the interviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

Participant interviews were conducted from January 21 until February 14, 2022, following approval by the Ethics Review Board at Dalhousie University (Appendix B). As skate culture extends past the activity, the study was not exclusive to skateboarders; it was open to any self-described member, aged 18 or older, of the Halifax skate community, except for one participant in Cape Breton. The objective was to gain exploratory information on experiences and understandings of gender in the skateboarding subculture, so there were no gender restrictions to participate.

As skateboarding does not have an official setting, social media has become a central method for members to share subcultural dedication (Dupont, 2019); accordingly, recruitment relied primarily on social media posts with some snowball sampling. After reaching out through direct

message and with the help of skate community members, various Nova Scotian accounts posted recruitment information, including a popular skateboard store, fem and nonbinary skate group, and queer⁵ skate group. All recruitment posts provided the lead researcher's contact information and other relevant details on the study (Appendix C).

The sample consisted of five cis fem, two cis male, and two nonbinary⁶ participants, all self-identifying their gender. The age of participants ranged from 21 to 34, with further details on participants in Appendix F. All nine participants reviewed and signed a consent form apprising them of their rights and guaranteeing their privacy (Appendix A). Two semi-structured interviews took place in person, and the rest on Zoom. These interviews followed a question guide (Appendix D) focused on subcultural experiences of acceptance, authenticity, identity, space, and gender.

The data was then analyzed similarly to Glover and colleagues (2019): all recorded interviews and notes were transcribed and coded in NVivo 12, while quotes and relevant patterns were placed into a separate document to “give shape to themes” (Glover et al., 2019, pp. 42-56). After identifying significant patterns, this study applied inductive reasoning to address the research questions, seeking to understand if experiences within the subculture differ depending on gender and if authenticity played a role in constructing gendered experiences within skateboarding spaces.

⁵ Queer: A reclaimed term referring to a “variety of sexual and gender identities” (Bosson et al., 2021, pp. 105).

⁶ Nonbinary (genderqueer): An umbrella term for many forms of identity; an individual’s identity falls outside the gender binary, identifying as neither distinctly male nor female (Bosson et al., 2021).

Limitations

This study assumes an exploratory disposition to apply the findings and methods of previous studies to this uncharted scene. Despite using non-academic social media platforms for recruitment, almost all participants indicated having post-secondary education or were particularly interested in sociology. This unanticipated limitation may result in the participants having further interest and supplementary knowledge in topics of gender and subcultures, perhaps increasing their tendency to reflect on the subject. Likewise, this honours thesis could not provide financial compensation for participation; if individuals work full time or have dependants, completing a voluntary uncompensated study may not be as practical. Future studies may mitigate this limitation by rephrasing the recruitment poster to ensure inclusivity and providing financial compensation to reimburse an individual for a missed hour of work. In addition, male participants were more hesitant to answer some questions that explicitly discussed gender. Similarly, during recruitment, many self-identified male skateboarders interested in the study declined to proceed to the interview stage, explicitly noting that they did not feel they could add to a discussion of gender as they are cis male. Therefore, future studies must approach discussions of gender in a way that male skateboarders feel comfortable and relevant in this dialogue.

This study did not explicitly ask participants to self-identify race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, participants noted the skateboard scene as overwhelmingly white, with two participants noting their own whiteness as a source of privilege within the scene. Additionally, participants frequently observed an increase in queer skaters, with four participants identifying as such; however, other participants noted the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia within

the skate community. Although this study was open to all gender and nonbinary identities, no participants identified as transgender⁷. This study does not consider these critical intersectional experiences but identifies them as potential patterns that require consideration in future studies. Further limitations are referred to throughout the analysis when applicable.

Analysis: A Repurposed or Rebranded Subculture?

Analysing the data with attention to the aforementioned, interrelated concepts of symbolic membership, physical and social space, subculture, and gender allowed four themes to emerge from the interview data: (1) skateboarding subculture and space must be unlocked, and obtaining the *key* at an older age is more difficult; (2) gatekeeping is subtle and protects the ‘core’; (3) authenticity *accommodates* masculinity which is upheld through perceptions of other skateboarders; (4) *constructing* skate identity and gender identity are interrelated, achieved through presentation, and solidified through identity claims; (5) public and skateboard spaces are restrictive, and dominated by those who are entitled to or *claim space*. Regarding gender identity, Jamie, Emily, Abby, Blaire, and Jay identify as fem, Sophie and Isaac identify as nonbinary, and Charlie and Max identify as male (Appendix F). All participants skateboard apart from Emily, a member of the skate community who does not partake in the physical activity itself. When relevant, if the quote or data includes or excludes Emily, it is noted.

⁷ Transgender: An individual’s gender identity does not align with their sex or gender assigned at birth (Bosson et al., 2021).

Square Key Round Lock

Every participant identified an individual or a group who introduced them to the skateboarding scene. Six described a male figure in their lives as making this introduction, aligning with the results of Kelly and colleagues (2006). Despite the wide range in age of initiation, starting at an older age was a recognized barrier to gaining access to the subculture. Participants explained that it was “challenging” or “awkward” learning at an older age, with heightened fears of falling, injury, and embarrassment. Notably, the average starting age was far later for fem participants who skateboarded than the other participants. Likewise, most participants recognized increased gender diversity within skateboarding during the last two or three years, or ‘around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic’.

While describing how they began, all fem and one nonbinary skater recalled having hesitation that prevented them from feeling comfortable joining or accessing skateboarding until recently. Jay reported learning at a skatepark, but the skatepark was intimidating for most. Jamie, Abby, and Sophie explicitly mentioned going to the skatepark at certain times to avoid other skateboarders being there. As Sophie explained,

I go to the skatepark really early in the morning generally, or there [were] a couple of times in September I went during a school day. I go when I hope that nobody is going to be there unless I'm going with other people.

The lack of comfort may explain the later starting ages of the fem skateboarders and why almost all fem skateboarders learned in more discrete settings until building “confidence” to go to the skatepark (Kelly et al., 2006). However, this does not account for the male and nonbinary participants who started in more private settings or that three of these skaters experienced intimidation when moving to a new skateboarding scene. Regardless of their gender, new

skateboarders are required to establish and present their authenticity and cultural skill and knowledge to gain access (Palmas, 2013). In turn, this may explain why these three skateboarders described the feelings of intimidation to subside once they established themselves and were introduced further to other members.

Digging deeper, some of the described intimidation appears to result from the presence of a group of skateboarders recognized as the ‘core’ (Dupont, 2014); participants specify this clique as experienced and devoted male skaters of varying ages who are consistently at the skatepark. Despite the common understanding that the ‘core’ skateboarders are outwardly supportive of the increasing gender diversity, most fem and nonbinary participants described experiences of feeling “intimidated”, “judged”, “excluded”, ‘patronized’, “treated differently”, or “questioned” by the (cis) male skateboarders. Nevertheless, those who described these experiences also believed they were accidental or “unintentional”, and the male skaters were “well-intentioned” and “supportive”. Some, like Blair, did not feel anything negative about initially meeting the ‘core’. As she described it:

Then skating the park and stuff, it was good. I don't think I ever really had any negative experiences. I felt really welcomed, and I often question whether my gender identity and the way that I present myself had to do with why I was warmly welcomed. I started quickly hearing that people were talking about the way I looked and stuff. Which I guess made me more comfortable to go...

Other participants who interacted with the ‘core’ had varying experiences. For instance, Isaac has mixed feelings about the group, as they explained:

I know a few of them. Some of them are welcoming; others are just very, “if you suck, don't come.” That's the type of vibe that they have; “if you're not good, if you suck, just don't show up. This is our park type of thing. If you're good, that's fine. Don't get in anybody's way.” I've definitely been questioned for wearing nail polish, that type of thing. But for the most part, it's been good.

In addition, some participants noted that older skateboarders obtain less encouragement or acceptance, especially if they are male. Since fem skaters receive ‘overly’ enthusiastic support compared to their male counterparts from ‘core’ skaters, three fem participants suggested this feels unearned or demeaning. Despite the foregoing variation in feelings of acceptance or intimidation and different paths in arriving at the skateboarding subculture, most participants described experiences of *gatekeeping* or barriers to accessing the community.

A Gated ‘Core’

As previously established, age and gender appear to be decisive conditions for feeling accepted. While the presence of the ‘core’ group may cause intimidation, it does not directly inhibit individuals from entering the general skateboard community. Nevertheless, participants frequently noted gatekeeping, especially when discussing the ‘core’. All the participants who started, or joined the community at a younger age, Emily, Charlie, Max, and Isaac, described interacting or associating with the ‘core’. Except for Charlie, who skates with the same friends he made while 12 years old, the other three participants suggested instances of gatekeeping that subsided once they began to prove social connections.

While Emily, Abby, and Blair understood themselves as intertwined with the ‘core’ skaters, they gained acceptance through or felt their acceptance was contingent on a romantic relationship with a member. Blair formed a romantic relationship following her entrance into this group. Despite initially receiving a warm welcome, the ‘core’ group no longer invited her around once her relationship ended. As Jay mentioned, she had previously “dated” male skaters and did not start skateboarding earlier as others may perceive her as the “tag-a-long girlfriend that is trying it

because [her] boyfriend was doing it...” These anecdotes allude to a gendered barrier of access carried out through perceived authenticity (Beal & Weidman, 2003), which hinders the ability of fem and nonbinary skaters to join at a younger age.

Likewise, a shared experience of gatekeeping, expressed by Jamie, Abby, Blair, Jay, and Sophie, was receiving unsolicited advice at the skatepark from male skateboarders. Four of them equated this to their gender identity or presentation and mentioned that it negatively affects them.

Moreover, as the following excerpt from Abby's interview shows, unsolicited advice is not just annoying; it creates a barrier to the scene for fem and nonbinary skateboarders.

Sometimes the way they [approach] situations makes you more uncomfortable without them realizing they are making you uncomfortable, so I encountered that a lot. I find even when I skate now, I have to put up major boundaries with people I know and don't know who want to give me advice or come and comment on everything I am doing. When men are in the skatepark, they don't seem to have the same reaction. I feel talked down to a lot, and I feel I get mansplained every time I go...

Furthermore, participants noted the ‘core’ group as exclusive of whom they invite to gatherings, parties, filming sessions, and street skateboarding locations. These accounts of gatekeeping were primarily related to gender and skill. As Blair stated:

I feel like you're more highly regarded and start to integrate more socially as you do get better, which is sh*tty. I'm like, 'I want to hang out with all the boys too.' I feel like if I was better, they would invite me around as their friend.

Atencio and colleagues (2009) show how male skateboarders act as “gatekeepers” in street skating spaces and found that access to this specific sphere for “women”, extending to all skateboarders of marginalized genders, is limited and only facilitated through invitation by male skaters. Male skateboarders are privy to these sub-culturally significant facets of skateboarding,

sustained through ‘dissuasion’ of other skaters (Atencio, 2009). The gatekeeping in skateboarding is subtle yet prevents skaters of marginalized genders from gaining access to a ‘deeper’ level of the culture, such as street skating and videography, and impedes entry to the inner or ‘core’ group.

These narratives align with Bourdieu’s cultural capital and how ‘core’ skateboarders control the admission of participants based on perceptions of authenticity (Dupont, 2014). The cultural values influence the authenticity necessary for acceptance (Dupont, 2014). The subculture is enthusiastic about the rise in fem skaters, yet gender norms discourage fem and nonbinary skateboarders from joining; this sustains a lack of representation (Atencio et al., 2009) and barriers the access to cultural knowledge (Atencio et al., 2009). Therefore, the gatekeeping within this subculture is not necessarily through direct means upon entrance but levelled prevention. As conveyed by participants, the male skaters display enthusiasm and support; however, these same skateboarders gatekeep access to the ‘core’, achieved incidentally through authenticity.

However, it is necessary to consider that those who decided to partake in the study may influence the difference in years of experience. A future study should alleviate this bias by defining ‘new’ versus ‘experienced’ and recruiting skateboarders by their level of experience, then comparing gender differences to their starting age. Nevertheless, based on the capabilities of this study, later starting age appears to be a relevant barrier in general. However, as all fem and one nonbinary skater started at older ages, it is essential to consider gender. Perhaps these skaters did not join earlier due to the deeply embedded societal gender norms and stereotypes of femininity that conflict with the standards of authenticity in the skateboarding subculture.

(Un)accommodating authenticity

Establishing, upholding, and developing authenticity or legitimacy is a pivotal facet of subcultures (Beal, 1996). Participants answered questions that aimed to uncover how the skate community, other skaters, and themselves recognize authenticity. Their responses display a general understanding of authenticity as determined by the perceptions and standards of others. Hence, when asked if they considered *themselves* authentic skateboarders, most participants were more hesitant to answer than when referring to others; as Charlie emphasized, “... That's for other people to answer.”

Reflecting on what authenticity looks like, participants tended to point to risk, dedication, skill, and norms. Participants establish risk as a necessary form of authenticity; this aligns with nearly all existing literature on skateboarding subculture, including Beal and Weidman (2003). One measure of risk frequently and implicitly introduced by participants was the use of helmets in skateboarding. Nearly all participants recognized that wearing a helmet is seen as “taboo” or “not cool”. Furthermore, as Jay explained, wearing a helmet is seen as childish:

... there's not too many people that are wearing helmets besides the kids because their parents are [nagging them to].

Apart from risk, participants often referred to dedication in terms of bodily exertion when considering authenticity, illustrated through words such as “determination”, continuous “tries”, and “perseverance”. For example, Charlie explained his determination as something related to skateboarding:

I'll be exhausted and sweaty and bloody, and I'm like, 'yeah, probably should have called it an hour ago.'

Likewise, all participants mentioned dedication in terms of time. Participants frequently recognized the ‘core’ group of skateboarders as devoted to skateboarding. Whereas Sophie understood their ‘lack’ of time-commitment as an obstacle to self-identifying as authentic:

...at the beginning, I always felt that I was not a real skater because I’m not that good, and I don’t skate every day... I consider myself a part-time, well-intentioned skateboarder who would like to skate more than I do, but I just really like the space more than anything. So, that is what kind of keeps me drawn to it even when I feel like I’m not making enough time for this.

Shifting from physical displays of authenticity, all participants indirectly and directly discussed cultural dedication through commonly shared beliefs, norms, attitudes, such as being “rebellious”, “tough”, “carefree”, “anti-capitalist”, “anti-establishment”, “anti-authority”, “anti-police”, “willing to risk their life”, “not a Trump supporter”, and ‘supportive of other skaters’. Correspondingly, many participants, especially those describing the ‘core’, identified substance use as a frequent and occasionally problematic reality for this group and the skateboard scene; however, it is changing with the “diverse” new members.

Furthermore, this ‘core’ group was explained through many accounts as fully immersed in skateboarding culture and as engaging in substance use and partying, another historically relevant aspect that speaks to the defiant disposition of the subculture (Atencio et al., 2009). Seeing that it is the dominant group controlling approval, ‘core’ members of any subculture may create intimidation (Atencio et al., 2009); however, this skate group has the added layer of gender. The male-dominated nature produces further unease for the participants of marginalized genders who were historically denied from these spaces, therefore, having additional barriers proving the same level of authenticity. Participants who interacted with this group discussed the challenges of access, or as previously touched on, fears of being thought of as ‘just joining

because of their male partner,’ which Blair noted would be “incredibly inauthentic.” In Beal and Weidman’s (2003) findings, this common gendered perception prevents fem skateboarders from being regarded as authentic.

While participants commented on “the best” or “really good” skaters in terms of the risk, skill, and dedication discussed above, overwhelmingly, this was in direct reference to a male or the ‘core’ skaters. While describing her “guy” friends, Abby said:

Pretty much all my guy friends are into street and park, and a few are super shreddy in the bowl, and they can do both and are just Gods and so good at everything.

Despite all participants describing the subculture as predominantly male and referring to male skaters as the most authentic, only six participants stated that there are gender norms in skateboarding. In contrast, two male-identified participants mentioned that they could not think of any, and Jay stated none existed. Although some participants did not identify gender norms or stereotypes, many implied them. Including Max, who narrated the following about skate culture, misogyny, and homophobia:

I just think about the old sexist skateboard ads that you would see with skimpy-clad women all the time and all the misogynistic jokes that I remember seeing in magazines when I was growing up when I was reading the skate stuff...I don't see much argument against women skating anymore, and that's good. I still see a lot of pushback from people with homophobic stuff, which I can't stand.

As per the results of this study and the existing literature, gender norms in skateboarding require deliberating in two overlapping ways, the perceptions that coincide with versus those that counter gendered perceptions in broader society. When directly asked, the gender norms that six

participants specified surround the male-domination and participation of the activity and skate community, masculine aesthetics, and descriptions that depict hyper-masculinity. For those who did not identify gender norms when explicitly asked, all three participants described gendered depictions throughout their interviews, such as how the subculture consists of primarily male members. Perhaps a valuable consideration is that the understanding of the word gender may be generally distanced from cis men, resulting in the male skaters dissociating with the subject deeming it inapplicable to them in discussion. Likewise, many skateboarders who displayed interest during recruitment and identified as male did not proceed to the interview stage as they presumed being cis male made them ineligible.

When considering gender norms relative to the subcultural standards of authenticity, the primary principles of authenticity often conflict with the societal guidelines for marginalized genders.

More specifically, the binary gender norms in society typically label women and girls as having less risk-taking capabilities (Beal & Weidman, 2003), yet taking risks is a primary trait of the subcultural authenticity that remains firmly in the perceptions of the participants. Access and encouragement of sports from a young age become gendered and designates aggression, risk, and physical capability to masculinity (Schailleé et al., 2021), which in the gender binary is only acceptable for cis men. The gender norms and discouragement surrounding risk may explain why fem or nonbinary participants who had an interest in skateboarding decided not to join.

In addition, most fem and one nonbinary skater implicitly alluded to these gender norms while discussing topics of not wanting to be perceived as ‘bad’ or hiding in these spaces until they learn. The overlap between gender norms and fear of inadequacy may imply a ‘stereotype threat’ where “members of negatively stereotyped groups often feel anxiety around the possibility of

confirming negative group stereotypes. This anxiety, in turn, can undermine performance in high-stakes testing situations” (Bosson et al., 2021, pp. 133). This phenomenon likely stands as a barrier to skill development, as it may prevent someone from skating where they would progress or ‘test’ their skills, such as the skatepark or events.

In addition, the frequently mentioned rise in fem (and to a lesser degree, queer and nonbinary) skateboarders in their 20s or 30s may come with the continual progression and trends of opposing gender norms and emboldened feminism. Kelly and colleagues (2011) allude to an overall direction of a “redefined” feminism where fem skateboarders alter perceptions of gender norms through skating. Participants recognized this increase during the last two or three years or around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The start of the pandemic was a noticeably “active” time for social movements (Pleyers, 2020) and a politically reactive time through the presidency of Donald Trump and the re-election period in the United States. Kolod (2017) marks this as a perceived disruption to the accretion of feminist movements and progress where a reactive rise in feminism occurred. Perhaps the neighbouring politics and increased attention to political movements extend to further encouragement of breaking gender norms and increased representation of fem and nonbinary skaters; this may explain the increase during this specific time.

Additional barriers crop up once fem and nonbinary folks join the skate scene. Helmets are not often worn and are generally frowned upon; thus, fem and nonbinary skateboarders must choose between looking authentic and being safe, which is a challenging dilemma for beginners.

Additionally, the perception of confirming or displaying gender stereotypes appears to be a

common concern among fem and nonbinary participants; not only must they prove themselves through subcultural entry but gendered conceptions. Skaters express authenticity in terms of skateboarding and gender through self-identity and performance.

Constructing Identity

As the earlier literature clarifies, forming and enacting identity is a primary tenet of subcultures. Drawing from Goffman, individuals construct subcultural identity and identity performance by perceiving the self in relation to the acceptance and authenticity of others (Newman & O'Brien, 2008). As previously determined, a subculture's 'core' group produces and upholds these standards through which an individual forms identity. This skateboarding identity is influenced by and simultaneously impacts gender identity. In skateboarding subcultures, gender identity and presentation are obstacles for some yet a channel of expression for others. This study observes and examines the intersections of skateboarding identity and gender identity while considering criteria, “claims”, and presentation of identity.

When regarding criteria of skateboarding identity, commitment to the culture is critical (Snyder, 2011). Participants described their cultural commitment through the number of friends or relationships and their social depth with other skateboarders. Every participant acknowledged having friendships that formed because of skateboarding, and many identified having some friendships with skateboarders prior to skateboarding or being a part of the community themselves. Eight out of nine participants said more than half of their friendships were within the skate community, while four fem participants noted romantic relationships with skaters.

Additionally, most participants related their identity to skateboarding and skateboarding subcultural values, which are critical before being accepted or rejected by others (Harris & Dacin, 2019). Eight participants also described their identities in terms of personality characteristics, and three included political and social values in their identity description. For instance, Max described his identity as follows:

I try my best to be an ally to the community, the LGBTQ, and the female community... I'd probably say honestly, a white, socialist skateboarder are the three things that I would say describe myself, and I use skateboarder as the description for pretty much the 'authentic' as well with the 'rebellion attitude' that skateboarding comes with.

When considering the expression and performance of skate identity, participants described specific knowledge, attitudes, and skate and clothing styles. All participants displayed direct and indirect skateboard-specific cultural and technical knowledge, including where to shop, norms, values, terminology, popular bars, events, etiquette, videos, and numerous other standards. Regarding skate etiquette⁸, seven of nine participants commonly used words and phrases such as “respect”, “waiting your turn”, “looking where you’re going”, and “support”. Charlie and Max both directly utilized the term skate etiquette as something they learned through observing or being instructed by other skateboarders. In addition, participants mentioned ‘inside jokes’ that create a sense of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ and other presentations of identity claims (Dupont, 2019). Abby expanded this through her understanding of identity claims:

⁸ Skate etiquette: An informally constructed yet widely understood and socially upheld rules of conduct primarily centred around respecting other skateboarders, the skatepark, and skate spots.

I also feel like skateboarders’ flex on people or each other with their lingo, like they are talking about tricks in a way that is almost exclusive if you don’t know them; or, they will make references to old skate videos that are obscure.

As previously referenced, offering unsolicited advice, possessing or enforcing skate etiquette, and making specific cultural references may serve as a means for members to present their knowledge. These exhibitions may aid in proving authenticity and status to gain social capital within the boundaries of the skatepark (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018). Furthermore, these identity claims, perhaps incidentally, maintain an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ (Atencio et al., 2009) on multiple levels of the subculture.

Shifting to identity presentation, participants recognized a typical, outwardly presented attitude as carefree, with seven participants using words and phrases such as “go with the flow”, “chill”, and “relaxed”. The attitude of ‘trying too hard’ is discussed by Beal and Weidman (2003) regarding new skateboarders; however, participants recognize this to extend past just new skaters and to the subculture as a whole. Goffman’s (1959) impression management is applicable as participants frequently implied this attitude as performative; skateboarders must try hard without appearing so. Although participants distanced themselves from this attitude, it was overtly present in almost all interviews.

Seven of the eight skateboarders recognize tricks and different styles of skateboarding as an essential piece of forming and presenting skateboarding identity. For instance, a person can

skateboard “surf style”⁹ or “gangster style”¹⁰; as Isaac explained, “there’s definitely different styles of skateboarding and a lot of people have created identities from their style.” Clothing style also arose in eight interviews, with participants describing the attire as “baggy” and “comfortable,” with many tying the style to the practicality of the activity and masculinity.

When considering the impact of gender, all participants implied that their gender shaped their skateboarding identities, five of whom mentioned their gender identity as having a discernible impact on their skateboarding experiences. While many related to the previously discussed skate identities, three fem participants dissociated with risk, negligence of life, and substance use; as Lombard (2010) discussed, some ‘feminine’ skateboarders may not want to associate with this perceived deviance in skateboarding.

In terms of performance, six participants reflected upon their gender expression through skateboarding. Abby and Blair felt pressure to present themselves as more masculine to fit into the skate scene. However, both participants also stated that it is “powerful” or “fun” to express femininity in a masculine space providing an example of when they actively chose to wear particularly ‘feminine’ clothing to the skatepark. In contrast, Sophie felt pressure to present as more feminine in certain skate scenes. For instance, when describing their experiences in the local skate shop, Sophie stated:

I feel like I have to be a girl skater in those spaces and my inclination is to be more fem to appeal to the very masculine skate bros who are in there. I feel very at odds with it and I don't really feel myself.

⁹ Surf style: A skateboarder with loose and flowy movements resembling a surfer (Blair).

¹⁰ Gangster style: A skateboarder who may appear ‘edgier’, ‘looks cool’, and does not appear to care while landing tricks (Blair).

Blair, Jamie, and Isaac saw their gender or ‘queer’ presentations as possibly an inadvertent advantage. Isaac explained that they are male-presenting, and other skaters may not know they identify as nonbinary, insinuating this shields them. Blair and Jamie discussed how their ‘straight-passing’ or ‘cis fem’ presentations were possible reasons they experienced an “easier” or more “welcoming” entrance to the space. While reflecting on their presentation in the skate scene, Jamie said:

I guess the [fact] that I'm femme and straight presenting, and also white just basically makes for an easier journey to exist in that space, where it's more difficult for someone else.

As Butler (1988) articulates, an individual must present their assumed gender ‘correctly’ according to society's binary norms; this may account for participants who felt they could not present as ‘too’ feminine or ‘too’ masculine. Likewise, the heteronormativity in the skate scene may explain the perceived advantage of passing as straight. However, as four participants indicated, skateboarding spaces may allow these members to counter cis-gendered and heteronormative norms (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012). Some fem and nonbinary skaters utilize the ‘alternative’ subculture to “reject an appearance-based femininity” (Currie et al., 2011, pp. 303), while others employ femininity to reimagine skateboarding.

Furthermore, those who present their gender ‘wrong’ are often penalized (Butler, 1988), as portrayed by Isaac’s description of being questioned and criticized at the skatepark for wearing nail polish as a male-presenting person. Thus, participants depicted that managing gender presentation is required to receive approval (Butler, 1988). Skateboarders must present

themselves as authentic through their skate identity, but if their gender does not align with the required cis masculinity, they encounter further obstacles in their identity presentation.

Claiming Space

As the existing literature confirms, claiming space is fundamental to skate culture and is a sustained gendered barrier. This section explores how people of different gender identities use space while examining entitlement and resistance in skateboarding and public spaces.

Skateboarding extends to several settings as an activity and a subculture. Street skateboarding predominantly occurs on ‘public’, yet regulated, properties and utilizes the architecture to find creative ways to skateboard and perform various tricks (Woolley et al., 2011). Eight participants referenced skateboarding as rejected in public spaces, including negative public perceptions, ‘defensive architecture’, forced ejection, and altercations with the public or authority. These descriptions illustrate the social exclusion of groups that use space in ‘inappropriate’ ways (Glenney & Mull, 2018). The subsequent conflict allows skaters to exercise the subculture’s rebellious ideologies, as noted by five participants; however, it is necessary to consider *who* is most comfortable or able to enact these anti-authoritarian ideologies dependent on the threat that resisting may pose.

Participants characterized street skating as distinctly male-dominated. Historically, social norms “restrict” marginalized genders from using public space (Beebejuan, 2017) and frame femininity as intrinsically subdued and unobtrusive. As street skating occupies substantial physical and auditory public space, it is conceivably gendered. Consequently, fewer participants partook in street skating than anticipated; therefore, the discussions primarily considered

skateparks. However, the difference in participation in street skating may also depend on the number of years participants have skated and the different skills or styles they retain.

Unlike street skateboarding, the skatepark is a designated space with various features to aid in progressing and displaying skills (Glenney & Mull, 2018). Skateparks also serve as a physical space for members to converge and perform cultural knowledge (Tsikalas & Jones, 2018), possibly explaining why participants primarily depict experiences of acceptance, authenticity, and identity performance at the skatepark. Eight of the nine participants have gone or consistently go to Halifax Commons skatepark. Six participants illustrated a ‘new side’ of the skatepark, which has smoother ground, more features and a large ledge that faces the city, while the ‘old side’ has worse pavement and fewer features.

The narratives were almost synonymous in terms of the spatial organization of people; the ‘new side’ is predominantly claimed by skaters who were “male”, “good”, or ‘core’, while the ‘old side’ consists of “scooter kids”, “beginners”, and “queer” or “fem” skaters. Descriptions frequently illustrated ‘the ledge’ as a hangout, for many ‘core’ male skateboarders and their bags, characteristic of a locker room. The common sentiment of this group was that they were “not actually” judgmental of others but rather an overbearing or intimidating presence. The participant descriptions of the physical and social organization of the Halifax skatepark in the Commons correspond to the observations made by this study.

Eight participants depicted physical and social skateboard spaces as male occupied and dominated, while five mentioned it is overwhelmingly white, cis, and heteronormative. Many fem and nonbinary participants described themselves or others as feeling designated to the ‘old

side’. Some skaters of marginalized genders may use the skatepark to develop a sense of belonging and visibility (Anecio et al., 2009); Abby and Blair suggested actively ‘taking up’ space within the male-dominated areas by skating on the ‘new side’. However, others depicted feeling isolated under a spotlight attributable to gender rather than authenticity or skill. The attention generated from being fem-presenting or not cis-male may induce feelings of being an outsider, resulting in an undesired sense of visibility with no alternative but seeking further invisibility (Atencio et al., 2009).

All participants considered that the scene is favourably “changing” with increased gender diversity. Whether directly or indirectly, most participants supposed this was due to the increased cultural representation of ‘fem’ skateboarders. Seven participants referenced distinct fem, gender-inclusive, or queer skate groups and events, or fem and nonbinary skaters as “taking” or “carving” distinct spaces within the skate scene.

Reflecting a specific event dedicated to fem and gender-diverse skateboarders, Blair and Abby had nearly indistinguishable accounts of the space being challenging to claim. Although many ‘fem’ skaters showed up, a “surprising” number of “guys” showed up. Ostensibly, they were there to show their support, but they took up the space instead. Blair recounted how “it ended up being essentially what felt like us watching all the guys all night.”

Abby explained this further:

Even in those events, [the guys] still dominated the space, which wasn’t intentional; their intention was to come and support us and show their support by just being there, but then they’re hitting ramps, flying around, jumping over sh*t and doing kickflips off this and that. We’re just trying to have a girl’s day and take the space [and] they are here to support us; can’t they just sit on the sideline for this? ...God love them, they mean well; I guess because they never walked in our shoes, they don’t understand.

Emily made a point in her interview that helps to contextualize this event and suggests it reflects something larger:

That is typical, carving space and not waiting for men to give the space. They are like, “Okay, we are going to carve our own space and going to have our own events and were going to make it okay so that women, or gender diverse people, can feel okay to start doing this.” I think it is a really positive thing, but unfortunately, women or gender-diverse people have to take the responsibility to do that themselves. I think it is just reflective of our society in general.

The historical and social designation of and entitlement to space extends to the skatepark and explains the composition of the ‘new’ and ‘better’ side as dominated by male and ‘core’ skaters.

Conclusion: Deceptive ‘Equality’

The skateboarding scene is still a subculture in Halifax; it maintains conditions of acceptance, authenticity, and identity distinct from dominant society; however, it is evolving. With the increase in fem, nonbinary, and queer skaters, more independent groups are forming and utilizing the subcultural space to serve a different meaning. Perhaps the historically resistant and rebellious attitudes that coincide in skateboarding provide a space for fem and nonbinary skaters to counter the gender norms in the larger society and the skateboarding subculture. But this potential is stymied by hollow support and assumptions of equal space.

This unique subculture disassociates from ‘typical’ masculinity and seemingly supports gender diversity. Advice may be a perceived display of this support; however, when this advice is unsolicited, as experienced by all fem and one nonbinary skater, it serves as a reminder of inferiority. These ‘supportive’ gestures may allow male skaters to solidify their authenticity by asserting cultural capital over others. Despite describing male skaters as well-intentioned, much

of the praise and support was seen as rather tokenistic and patronizing as the bar was set far lower than their male counterparts.

While the idyllic subcultural transformation dissolves gender norms once the space is declared equal, it is a misconception that ignores the historical barriers of gender. Although the skate community is outwardly in favour of fem and nonbinary skateboarders, it does not automatically convert this into an accepting space. This issue is where both understandings of equity and “strategic entitlement” are pertinent; the assumption that there is an achievable ideal of equal entitlement rather than creating separate space (Backstrom & Nairn, 2018). Atencio and colleagues (2009) found that fem skateboarders have expressed comfort in designated spaces. Evidently, the only fem participant who did not recognize gender norms or experience intimidation in skateboarding attended separate nights for fem skateboarders at their local indoor skatepark in Cape Breton, a controlled setting notably absent in Halifax. Furthermore, participants illustrated much value in the designated event intended to allow fem and nonbinary skaters to ‘take up’ the ordinarily male-dominated space; however, it was disheartening when the male skaters imposed on the space instead.

Although skateboard spaces that actively acknowledge and work to mitigate misogynistic and heteronormative customs can successfully reduce the challenges ‘fem’ skateboarders endure (Carr, 2017), this is not (yet) the case in the Halifax skate community. It may not be intentional or even conscious marginalization by male skaters; nonetheless, there are gender barriers within this hyper-masculine setting disguised through support. While many fem, nonbinary, and queer skaters found identity in distinct groups outside the ‘core’, they still felt relegated to the ‘old side’ of the skatepark, and kept out of the way, less ‘in sight’. It is evident that the skateboard

community has collective importance for all participants; it is an encouraging and often safe space for many skaters. Yet, the skate event and the Halifax Commons skatepark depict gendered exclusion and entitlement to space maintained through the façade of support. Exploring these gender barriers further is essential as those trying to skate their way into the ‘new side’, the better side, the authentic side, are responsible for “carving out” their own space.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Breaking Ankles to Break Norms? Gender in street skateboarding subculture in Halifax

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Bridgette Norwood, an undergraduate student in Sociology, as part of my honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to explore authenticity and gender in street skateboarding. The research will focus on the questions *What are the experiences of female-identified skateboarders in street skateboarding subculture? How are ideas of authenticity formed and upheld in street skateboarding culture and how do these standards of legitimacy impact the experiences of female-identified skateboarders?* Semi-structured interviews will be conducted on individuals who identify as street skateboarders in Halifax.

As a participant in the research you will be asked to answer a series of questions during a semi-structured interview, engaging in a discussion about your experiences in and with skateboarding subculture and your perspective on gender in skateboarding. The interview should take about an hour to an hour and a half and will be conducted in a quiet location of your choice or, if you prefer, online via Zoom. I will audio-record the interview.

If we conduct the interview by Zoom, I will record the interview using the platform's internal recording feature. This recording will be saved directly to my computer, not the cloud, and the video portion will be deleted. During the live Zoom meeting, audio and video content is routed through the United States, and therefore may be subject to monitoring without notice, under the provisions of the US Patriot Act, while the meeting is in progress. The risk associated with using Zoom recording for this research is no greater than using Zoom recording for any other purpose. After the meeting is complete, meeting recordings are securely stored in Canada and are inaccessible to US authorities.

If I quote any part of your interview in my honours thesis. I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you from the quote.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so up to two weeks after the date of your interview. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have integrated it into my analysis.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only I will have access to the

unprocessed information you offer, and the honours supervisor may see de-identified transcripts. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and in my honours thesis. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. The anonymized data will be securely stored for potential future use in research.

The risks associated with this study are minimal, but include potential discomfort in discussing topics of identity and gender or gender-based discrimination. A list of resources that could help deal with experiences and incidents relating to gender will be provided at the end of the interview by email to all participants. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, please feel free to take a break, skip any questions that you prefer not to answer, or stop the interview at any time.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on the understandings of gender and authenticity in skateboarding subculture. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my honours thesis after April 30.

If you have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is bridgette.norwood@dal.ca. You can contact the honours class supervisor, Dr Martha Radice, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6747, or email martha.radice@dal.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email ethics@dal.ca.

Participant’s consent:

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Researcher’s signature:

Date:

Appendix B: Research Ethics Board Approval

Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board
Letter of Approval

December 16, 2021
Bridgette Norwood
Arts & Social Sciences\Sociology and Social Anthropology

Dear Bridgette,

REB #: 2021-5903
Project Title: Breaking Ankles to Break Norms? Gender in street skateboarding subculture in Halifax

Effective Date: December 15, 2021
Expiry Date: December 16, 2022

The Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application for research involving humans and found the proposed research to be in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. This approval will be in effect for 12 months as indicated above. This approval is subject to the conditions listed below which constitute your on-going responsibilities with respect to the ethical conduct of this research.

Effective March 16, 2020: Notwithstanding this approval, any research conducted during the COVID-19 public health emergency must comply with federal and provincial public health advice as well as directives from Dalhousie University (and/or other facilities or jurisdictions where the research will occur) regarding preventing the spread of COVID-19.

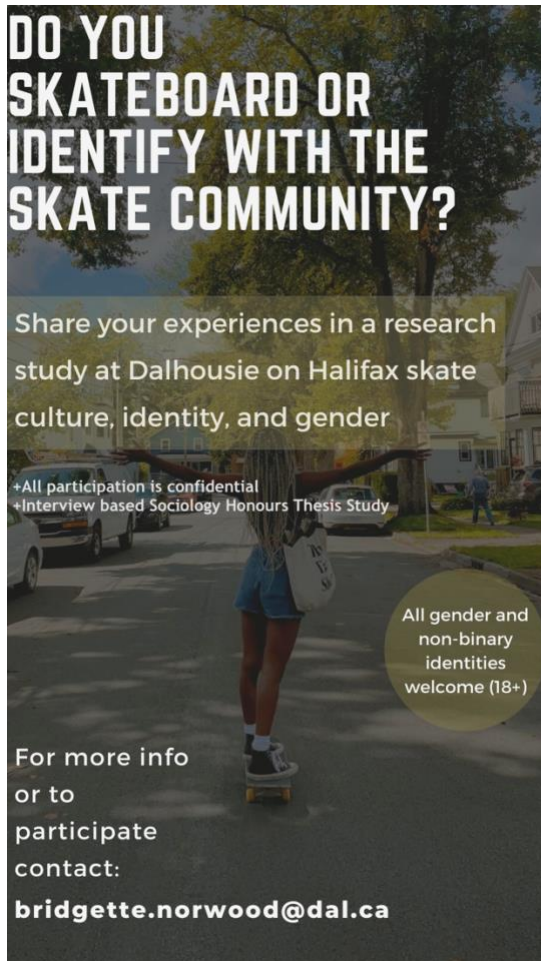
Sincerely,



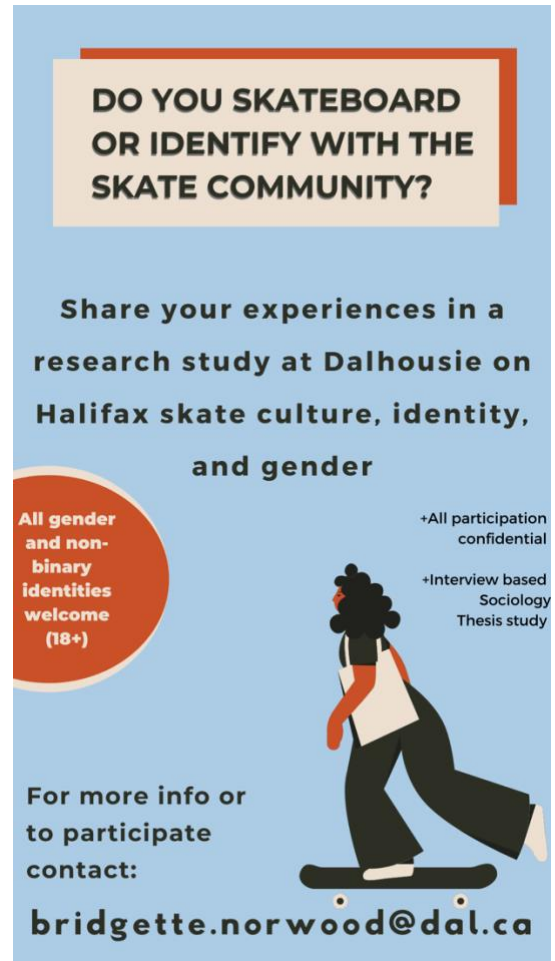
Dr. Karen Foster, Chair

Appendix C: Social Media Recruitment Advertisements

A.



B.



Appendix D: Interview Guide

A) Introductory Statements to Participants

Just before we start the interview, I want to tell you a bit about what we will discuss today. As mentioned in the poster/Instagram post and consent form, I am conducting research to try to find out information on the subcultural experiences of street skateboarders and understandings and perspectives on/from fem and non-binary members. To clarify, I am looking at skateboarding as more than the activity itself but rather all the customs, experiences, norms, and information

around being an authentic member of the skate culture and how these experiences may be impacted by or impact gender? Do you have any questions for me before we begin? Just a reminder that you may take breaks, skip questions, or stop the interview at any time. Your participation is completely voluntary and there is no issue if you would like us to end the interview.

B) Questions

1. What are your preferred pronouns or gender identity?
2. How old are you?
3. Could you tell me how you began skateboarding and what this experience was like?
 - a. Did anyone introduce you to skateboarding?
4. Did you begin skateboarding by yourself or did you skateboard with others?
5. Did you have any barriers or difficulties when trying to begin skateboarding?
6. What location did you start skateboarding at? (skatepark, street, outside your house etc.)
7. What were your experiences like in these spaces?
 - a. Did you enjoy learning in a specific space?
 - b. Did you experience any resistance from other people in these spaces?
8. What stage (level) of skateboarding do you consider yourself now? (beginner, intermediate advanced, professional and why?)
9. Where do you skateboard now?
10. Do you find that you skateboard now by yourself or with others, or both?
 - a. What do you prefer?
 - b. How is skateboarding solo or with other people different?
 - c. What skateboarding settings (school, skatepark, street, buildings) do you like best and why?
 - d. What skateboarding settings do you like the least and why?
11. Do you have relationships such as friendships that have formed as a result of skateboarding?
12. How are your experiences with other members of the skateboard community?
13. Do you attend events or social gatherings that focus on skateboarding or have a lot of skateboarders in attendance?
 - a. How are your experiences with these gatherings?
 - b. Are there any particular spaces that have these events are held?
14. Are there alternative spaces to express skateboarding such as social media or online?
 - a. How are these spaces shared among members of the community?

15. If you could describe what a skateboarder looks like how would they act, dress, or present themselves?
 - a. How would they speak?
 - b. What would they do in their free time?
 - c. Would they own specific skateboard related items?
16. What do you associate with skateboarders?
17. Are there particular locations or items important to be a skateboarder?
 - a. Is there crucial skateboard gear to own?
 - b. Are there particular brands a skateboarder should or should not buy from?
 - c. Are there social places for skateboarders to socialize when not skateboarding?
18. Do you find that skateboarding has particular clothing styles or items that are associated with it?
 - a. Are these styles or items universal across genders?
 - b. Do you or others wear protective gear while skateboarding? Why or why not?
19. Are tricks and styles of skateboarding important to developing an identity as a member of skateboarder? If so how?
 - a. Do you share or express different tricks to other members? If so, how do members share tricks with each other (online, in person, competition, magazines etc.)?
20. Do you find that there are many fem or non-binary members in the skateboarding community?
21. How do you think things are different (if they are) for fem or non—binary skateboarders as they learn to skateboard and participate in the activity in general?
22. How would you describe gender norms in skateboarding? Are they different from gender norms in broader society?
23. Do you find your gender identity impacts your experiences in skateboarding, if so how?
24. What do you find makes a skateboarder authentic within the community?
25. What makes a skateboarder inauthentic or a ‘poser’?
26. Do you consider yourself an authentic skateboarder?
 - a. Why or why not?
27. How many years have you been skateboarding?
28. How do you spend your time?
 - a. Do you have an occupation? If so, what is your occupation?
29. How do you identify yourself as a person? Do you find this identity impacts your experiences skateboarding, if so, how?
 - a. Do you have a religious identity?
 - b. Do you have an ethnic identity?
 - c. What is your sexual orientation?
30. If you could describe your experience in skateboarding in one word, what word would you choose?
31. Is there anything else you would like to share before we wrap up our interview?

Appendix E: Observation Guide

1. What is the numeral flow of people using the skatepark?
 - a. Here I will try to grasp an understanding of if, and when the skatepark becomes busy, how many people are utilizing the skatepark at one moment, and if specific areas within the skatepark are more popular than others.
2. How many people are skateboarding in the skatepark compared to other uses such as roller-skating, BMX biking, scootering, or additional activities?
 - a. Are there other uses of the park?
3. How many people are at the skatepark but not participating in an activity?
4. What are the perceived demographics of the skatepark users?
 - a. I will observe apparent characteristics of the skateboarders to gather information on whether there are demographic trends including gender presentation, ethnicity, age
5. How are skateboarders interacting with other skateboarders?
 - a. I will observe apparent friendships or norms of using the park. I will observe whether there are any tensions or expectations between users.
6. How are skateboarders interacting with non-skateboarder users of the skatepark?
 - a. I will observe how skateboarders interact other users of the skatepark such as BMX bikers, roller-skaters, and people on scooters.
7. What kinds of social interactions are occurring?
8. How do the interactions and perceived demographics differ (if they do) from regular use of the skatepark compared to the Halloween event?
9. Are there any observable patterns of hierarchy, norms, clothing, or additional subcultural trends?

Appendix F: Detailed Participant Characteristics & Group Affiliation

Name	Gender Identity & Pronouns (at time of interview)	Age	Skateboarder vs. non-skateboarder *(all members of skate-community)	Number of Years “Really” Skating or in Skate Community	Frequently Referred to Location	Mentioned Skate Group Affiliation or Interactions
Jamie	Fem (she/her)	20-25	Skateboarder	Initial: 15 yrs. ‘Really’: 2-3 yrs.	Halifax	Queer skate group
Emily	Fem (she/her)	30-35	Non-skateboarder	Initial: 20 yrs. (est. “a kid”) ‘Really’: 4 yrs.	Halifax	‘Core’ group
Abby	Fem (she/her)	30-35	Skateboarder	Initial: 9 yrs. (est. in com.) ‘Really’: 3 yrs.	Halifax	‘Core’ group/ fem skate
Blair	Fem (she/her)	20-25	Skateboarder	2 yrs.	Halifax	Queer skate group/ ‘core’ group
Jay	Fem (she/her)	20-25	Skateboarder	Initial: 3-4 yrs. (est. in com.) ‘Really’: 1 yr.	Cape Breton	All fem skate group
Sophie	Non-binary (they/them)	20-25	Skateboarder	Initial: 2-3 (est. in com) ‘Really’: 1-2 yrs.	Halifax	Queer skate group
Isaac	Non-binary (they/them)	20-25	Skateboarder	7-8 yrs.	Halifax	Non-specified
Charlie	Male (he/him)	20-25	Skateboarder	14-15 yrs.	Halifax	Tied to ‘core’/outer ‘core’

Appendix G: Research Ethics Board Final Report



ANNUAL/FINAL REPORT

Annual report to the Research Ethics Board for the continuing ethical review of research involving humans / Final report to conclude REB oversight

A. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

This report is (*select one*):

An annual report

A final report

REB file number:	#2021-5903			
Study title:	Breaking Ankles to Break Norms? Gender in street skateboarding subculture in Halifax			
Lead researcher (named on REB submission)	Name	Bridgette Norwood		
	Email	br779936@dal.ca	Phone	250-886-6926
Current status of lead researcher (at Dalhousie University): <input type="checkbox"/> Employee/Academic Appointment <input type="checkbox"/> Former student <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current student <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):				
Supervisor (if lead researcher is/was a student/resident/postdoc)	Name	Dr. Karen Foster		
	Email	karen.foster@dal.ca		
Contact person for this report (if not lead researcher)	Name			
	Email		Phone	

B. RECRUITMENT & DATA COLLECTION STATUS

Instructions: Complete **ALL** sections relevant to this study

Study involves/involved recruiting participants: Yes No
If yes, complete section B1.

Study involves/involved secondary use of data: Yes No
If yes, complete section B2.

Study involves/involved use of human biological materials: Yes No
If yes, complete section B2.

B1. Recruitment of participants	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
B1.1 How many participants did the researcher intend to recruit? (provide number approved in the most recent REB application/amendment)	8-10
B1.2 How many participants have been recruited? (if applicable, identify by participant group/method e.g. interviews: 10, focus groups: 25)	
a) In total, since the beginning of the study: 9	
b) Since the last annual report: 9	
B1.3 Recruitment for this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going	

<p>B1.4 Data collection from participants for this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going</p>

B2. Use of secondary data and/or biological materials	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
<p>B2.1 How many individual records/biological materials did the researcher intend to access? <i>(provide number approved in the most recent REB application/amendment)</i></p>	
<p>B2.2 How many individual participant records/biological materials have been accessed?</p> <p>a) In total, since the beginning of the study:</p> <p>b) Since the last annual report:</p>	

C. PROJECT HISTORY

<i>Since your last annual report (or since initial submission if this is your first annual report):</i>	
<p>C1. Have there been any variations to the original research project that have NOT been approved with an amendment request? This includes changes to the research methods, recruitment material, consent documents, study instruments or research team.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, list the variation here: <i>(You will be notified if a formal amendment is required)</i></p>	
<p>C2. Have you experienced any challenges or delays recruiting or retaining participants or accessing records or biological materials?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, please explain:</p>	
<p>C3. Have you experienced any problems in carrying out this project?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, please explain:</p>	
<p>C4. Have any participants experienced any harm as a result of their participation in this study?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, please explain:</p>	
<p>C5. Has any study participant expressed complaints, or experienced any difficulties in relation to their participation in the study?</p>	

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:
C6. Since the original approval, have there been any new reports in the literature that would suggest a change in the nature or likelihood of risks or benefits resulting from participation in this study? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:

D. APPLYING FOR STUDY CLOSURE

Complete this section only if this is a FINAL report as indicated in section A

D1. For studies involving recruitment of participants, a closure may be submitted when: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> all research-related interventions or interactions with participants have been completed <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (this study did not involve recruitment of participants)
D2. For studies involving secondary use of data and/or human biological materials, a closure may be submitted when: <input type="checkbox"/> all data acquisition is complete, there will be no further access to participant records or collection of biological materials <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A (this study did not involve secondary use of data and/or human biological materials)
D3. Closure Request <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I am applying for study closure

E. ATTESTATION (both boxes *must* be checked for the report to be accepted by the REB)

I agree that the information provided in this report accurately portrays the status of this project and describes to the Research Ethics Board any new developments related to the study since initial approval or the latest report.

I attest this project was, or will continue to be, completed in accordance with the approved REB application (or most recent approved amendment) and in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2).

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SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Submit this completed form to Research Ethics, Dalhousie University, by email at ethics@dal.ca at least 21 days prior to the expiry date of your current Research Ethics Board approval.
2. Enter subject line: REB# (8-digit number), last name, annual (or final) report.

3. Student researchers (including postdoctoral fellows and medical residents) must copy their supervisor(s) in the cc. line of the annual/final report email.

RESPONSE FROM THE REB

Your report will be reviewed, and any follow-up inquiries will be directed to you. You must respond to inquiries as part of the continuing review process.

Annual reports will be reviewed and may be approved for up to an additional 12 months; you will receive an annual renewal letter of approval from the Board that will include your new expiry date.

Final reports will be reviewed and study closure acknowledged in writing.

CONTACT RESEARCH ETHICS

- Phone: 902-494-3423
- Email: ethics@dal.ca
- In person: Henry Hicks Academic Administration Building, 6299 South Street, Suite 231
- By mail: PO Box 15000, Halifax, NS B3H 4R2