

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

Bridgette Norwood

Dalhousie University — Bridgette.norwood@dal.ca

ABSTRACT

Skateboarding is a subculture with an ideology that counters normative authority and standards of masculinity. Yet, it continues to uphold persistent misogynistic perspectives and gender discrepancies in participation (Beal 1996; McCarthy 2022). 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 qualitative study examines the unexplored skateboard subculture in Halifax, Nova Scotia through an analysis of its symbolic membership and physical and social space. This study identifies a disassociation from ‘typical’ masculinity and outwardly favourable attitudes towards gender diversity within the Halifax skateboard community; however, gender barriers remain 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 female and non-binary skaters to counter subcultural and societal gender norms.

Keywords: Skateboarding, gender, authenticity, entitlement

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

Authenticity, Identity, and Gender in Constructing 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). 'Core' skateboarders, or those perceived by skateboarders as authentic, are regulators of social mobility and producers of specific subcultural knowledge (Dupont 2014). Admission hinges on being perceived as authentic as anyone seeking acceptance must attempt to adopt the socially constructed skateboarding norms and present visible traits and skills or manifestations of cultural knowledge and anti-authoritarian values (Driver 2011; Dupont 2014; Harris and Dacin 2019; Palmas 2013). The 'core' skateboarders socialize, accept, or reject new members based on their discretion of whether an individual is authentic or upholds the culture's values (Dupont 2014; Lombard 2010; Palmas 2013). Individuals constantly search for cues on how to act and belong, adjusting their own 'presentation of self' to avoid scrutiny (Goffman 1959; Newman and O'Brien 2008). Thus, the authenticity of a skateboarder is directly tied to their identity through a "physical and mental commitment" to the culture. This is often substantiated through clothing, language, and videography as forms of "identity claims" (Snyder 2011, 314; Dupont 2019).

As skateboarders resist authority, conventional attitudes, and archetypal masculinity (Beal and Weidman 2003), notions that the subculture rejects gender norms naturally emerge in the literature. Some female, fem, and non-binary members use the skateboarding subculture to challenge the heteronormative and cis-gendered — an individual's gender identity aligns with their sex or gender assigned at birth (Bosson et al. 2021) — understandings of femininity and gender (MacKay and Dallaire 2012). While the term non-binary is an umbrella term for many forms of identity, for the purpose of this study, it refers to an individual whose gender identity falls

Skateboarding, today and over the course of its rebellious history, is often characterized as an activity without rules (in the sense of sport), confinement, or regulation (Beal 1996; Dupont 2014; Glenney and Mull 2018; Tsikalas and Jones 2018; Woolley et al. 2011). Moreover, it is understood as a subculture with standards of admission and authenticity (Dupont 2014) and with ideological principles that counter normative authority and standards of masculinity (Beal 1996). Yet, skateboarding also continues to perpetuate misogynistic perspectives and gender discrepancies in participation (Beal 1996; McCarthy 2022). In this paper, I present the findings of a 2022 study of gender and authenticity in the skateboarding subculture in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Overall, the findings of this study represent a step toward understanding how binary gender constructs and systematic misogyny manifest in current subcultures. Research on skateboarding is essential to grasp how a subculture asserts anti-ideologies and antagonizes 'typical' masculinity yet preserves the same misogyny it claims to oppose. Building from the theoretical approaches of Judith Butler, Erving Goffman, and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as existing research on skateboarding, this study used participant observation and semi-structured interviews to examine skateboarding subculture through an analysis of its symbolic membership and physical and social space. More specifically, it sought to gain insight into the gendered nature of skateboarding which, more than a sport or hobby, is a principal identity for many (Snyder 2011).

outside the gender binary, identifying as neither distinctly male nor female (Bosson et al. 2021). However, while hegemonic masculinity is at the root of skateboarding subcultural norms, skateboarders assigned female at birth (AFAB) are also scrutinized if they do not display enough normative femininity as the binary conception of gender performance penalizes those who present 'incorrectly' (Atencio et al. 2009; Butler 1988; Hardy 2014; Kelly et al. 2006).

Rooting in the work of Gramsci regarding the perpetuation of class position and hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity represents the "most honored way of being a man, it [requires] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically [legitimizes] the global subordination of women to men...achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, 832). While male skateboarders may distance themselves from their perception of "ideal types of masculinity", the reality is that they still engage or are complicit with hegemonic masculinity (Dupont 2014, 561). As skateboarding subculture reproduces and readapts such societal hegemonic masculinity and male-domination, additional obstacles to admission emerge for skateboarders of marginalized genders due to broader gender norms; male skateboarders often perceive their fem counterparts as unable to take risks or as skateboarding for 'inauthentic' reasons and are frequently shown entrance to the community by a male skateboarding contact (Atencio et al. 2009; Beal and Weidman 2003; Kelly et al. 2006). Based on this literature, gaining admission, mastering authenticity, forming identity, and evidently, practicing hegemonic gender remain critical in symbolic membership to this subculture.

Restriction, Resistance, and Gender in Physical and Social Skateboard Spaces

Skateparks are used to form social capital and gender identity wherein members gather and perform their cultural knowledge and practice "ritual and initiation" (Tsikalas and Jones 2018); however, some skateboarders view regulated skateparks as a method of control embodied by public space and architecture (Glenney and Mull 2018). Skateboarders utilize streets and

structures in ways that the capitalistic construction of space does not intend (Chiu and Giamarino 2018; Tsikalas and Jones 2018), breaking societal and monetary norms of space and engendering conflict with the public (Chiu 2009; Snyder 2011). For instance, skateboarding on sidewalks is to take up "pedestrian space;" however, if sidewalks are used by retailers, it is excused due to their economic purpose (Chiu 2009). Cities attempt to hinder street skateboarding with legal measures and "defensive architecture" such as metal attachments on benches, ledges known as 'skate stop[s],' or the use of gravel to prevent rolling (Glenney & Mull 2018; Glover et al. 2019).

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). Consequently, many fem skaters feel intrusive when using male-dominated skate spaces and thus feel limited to private spaces (Kelly et al. 2006). Thus, it is critical to consider how gender impacts comfortability or feelings of entitlement in such spaces.

Gendered Entitlement to Space

Entitlement is essential when considering the gender differences in access to and use of space (Backstrom and 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 (Beebejaun 2016). Backstrom and Nairn (2018) define the concept of *strategic entitlement* as assuming there is, and aspiring towards, an ideal of equality in entitlement to space as opposed to creating separate spaces for fem individuals. While 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 hetero-normative and cis-normative views of gender and creates unequal access for non-binary or gender-diverse skateboarders.

Filling in the Gaps

Although many publications address gender discrepancies regarding participation in skateboarding, most fail to connect the norms of authenticity in the subculture with gender and they adhere to a binary view of gender (Atencio et al. 2009; Backstrom and Nairn 2018; Kelly et al. 2006). Recent studies are shifting focus to increasing popularity and gender diversity in the competition side of skateboarding, dismissing the evolving subculture (D’Orazio 2020; McCarthy 2021). Finally, this study found no sources that considered the Halifax skateboard scene specifically.

Research Methods: Finding a Subculture Scattered in the City

This study relied on two instances of participant observation at the Halifax Commons Skatepark and nine semi-structured interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes with participants in the skateboarding subculture. Participant observation documented 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. The interviews were conducted from January 21 until February 14, 2022, following approval by the Ethics Review Board at Dalhousie University. As skate culture extends past sole participation in 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, and one participant in Cape Breton. The objective was to obtain information on experiences and understandings of gender in the skateboarding subculture, so individuals of all gender identities were welcome to contribute. Recruitment relied primarily on social media posts with some snowball sampling.

The sample consisted of five cis female, two cis male, and two non-binary participants, all self-identifying their gender. Regarding gender identity, Jamie, Emily, Abby, Blaire, and Jay identify as fem or female, Sophie and Isaac identify as non-binary, and Charlie and Max identify as male (Table 1). 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. The age of participants ranged from 21 to 34, with further details on participants in Table 1. Once interviews were transcribed, the names of participants were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms and the data was analyzed similarly to Glover and colleagues (2019): all were coded in NVivo 12, while quotes and relevant patterns were placed into a separate document to “give shape to themes” (Glover et al. 2019, 42-56).

When identifying applicable patterns, this study noted the recurrent experiences of participants regarding the skateboarding culture, norms, and hierarchy while cross-examining these patterns with the participant’s gender. In addition, the study asked direct questions concerning gender within skateboarding, identifying any overlapping sentiments and experiences. 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 the perception of authenticity played a role in constructing gendered experiences within skateboarding spaces.

Limitations

Despite using non-academic social media platforms for recruitment, almost all participants indicated having post-secondary education or an interest in sociology. This unanticipated limitation may result in the participants having supplementary knowledge of topics of gender and subcultures, perhaps increasing their self-reflexivity. Likewise, I could not provide financial compensation for participation, which might have benefitted and appealed to those who work full-time or have dependants. 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. Those who did participate were more hesitant to answer some questions that explicitly discussed gender.

I 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 non-binary identities, no participants distinctly self-identified as transgender, or an individual whose gender identity does not align with their sex or gender assigned at birth (Bosson et al. 2021). While the terms “transgender” and “non-binary” are umbrella terms, neither are all-encompassing nor mutually exclusive. The two terms attempt to describe identities that cannot necessarily be categorized or explicitly defined. So, while the two participants in this study did not explicitly identify themselves as transgender, the definitions of non-binary and transgender intersect and are fluid with individual identities. In addition, these identities are not stagnant; thus, while the two participants in this study identified as non-binary, this does not indicate that they still identify with this particular classification today. 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 this analysis when applicable.

Analysis: A Repurposed or Rebranded Subculture?

Analyzing the data with attention to the aforementioned, interrelated concepts of symbolic subcultural membership, physical and social space, and gender entitlement 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 a ‘core’ group of skateboarders; (3) skate authenticity *accommodates* hegemonic 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 *claim space*. Through my research, I found that there are gendered barriers that remain disguised as outward gestures of support for fem and gender-diverse skateboarders displayed through verbal affirmation and inordinate, unsolicited instruction or advice. These barriers further perpetuate the male-dominated construction of the skateboarding subculture. Understanding the experiences and roles of gender in a male-dominated subculture is necessary for understanding whether ‘alternative’ masculinity is a façade (Beal, 1996), while listening to the experiences and locating patterns of gender discrepancies in skateboarding may aid in creating a more equitable subculture.

Square Key Round Lock

Every participant identified an individual or a group who introduced them to the skateboarding scene; many 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 social acceptance within the subculture. Participants explained that it was “challenging” or “awkward” learning at an older age with heightened levels of fear of falling, injury, and embarrassment. Notably, the average starting age was far later for fem participants who skateboarded than the other participants.

While describing how they began, all fem skaters and one non-binary skater recalled feeling hesitant or uncomfortable 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 mentioned, “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 non-binary participants who started in more private settings or the fact that three of these skaters experienced intimidation when moving to a new skateboarding scene. Regardless of gender, new skateboarders must establish and present their authenticity through skill and cultural knowledge to gain access (Palmas 2013). In turn, this may explain why these three skateboarders described their feelings of intimidation as subsiding once they established themselves within the community.

Digging deeper, some of the reported 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 non-binary 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 "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, "...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." 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.' 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 at the age of 12, the other three participants reported instances of gatekeeping that subsided once they began to prove their social connections.

While Emily, Abby, and Blair understood themselves as intertwined with the 'core' skaters, they felt their acceptance was contingent on a romantic relationship with a member. Blair formed a romantic relationship following her entrance into this group, but 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 and Weidman 2003). This

barrier hinders the ability of fem and non-binary skaters to join at a younger age.

Likewise, a shared experience of gatekeeping, expressed by Jamie, Abby, Blair, Jay, and Sophie, consisted of receiving unsolicited advice at the skatepark from male skateboarders. Four of them equated this 'advice' to their marginalized gender identities and mentioned that it negatively affects them. Moreover, as the following excerpt from Abby's interview demonstrates, unsolicited advice is not just annoying, but it creates a barrier to the scene for fem and non-binary 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 comprised of who they invite to gatherings, parties, filming sessions, and street skateboarding locations. Their accounts of gatekeeping were primarily related to gender and skill. As Blair detailed, "I feel like you're more highly regarded and start to integrate more socially as you do get better, which is shitty. 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) display 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 subculturally significant facets of skateboarding, sustained through the 'dissuasion' of other skaters (Atencio et al. 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 'core' group.

These narratives align with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital and how 'core' skateboarders control the admission of participants based on perceptions of authenticity (Dupont 2014). Bourdieu (1984) asserted that 'authenticity' is cultivated and sustained by those with structural power through the socialization of those with less power; in this case, the 'elite' or the 'core' skateboarders socialize new skateboarders, establishing what is necessary for authentic participation in the subculture and governing their acceptance or rejection (Dupont 2014). Thus, the subcultural values of skateboarding influence the perception of authenticity necessary for acceptance (Dupont 2014). The subculture is enthusiastic about the rise in fem skaters, yet gender norms discourage fem and gender-diverse skateboarders from joining; this sustains a lack of representation and creates barriers to accessing cultural knowledge (Atencio et al. 2009). Therefore, the gatekeeping within this subculture is not necessarily through direct means upon entrance but through 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, as further expanded upon in the following section.

However, it is necessary to consider that those who decided to partake in the study may influence the patterns of age observed in the study. For instance, there were no male participants who began skateboarding recently, perhaps due to the lack of entitlement they may feel to possessing skateboarding identity yet or those beginning may be too young to participate in the study. Further studies could 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, a later starting age appears to be a relevant barrier to being perceived as authentic. However, as all fem and one non-binary 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 they 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 the 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, "... 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" and "perseverance." As Charlie explained, "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, stating, "...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."

Shifting from physical displays of authenticity, all participants indirectly and directly discussed cultural dedication through commonly shared beliefs, norms, and 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."

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 of skateboarding 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, creating additional barriers to 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 perceived 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 male or to 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 that none

existed. Although some participants did not identify gender norms or stereotypes, many implied them. Max, for example, 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. These include an analysis of the perceptions that coincide with the gender norms of broader society versus those that counter such hegemonic expectations of gender. 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 primarily of 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.

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, binary gender norms in society typically label women and girls as having less risk-taking capabilities (Beal and Weidman 2003). Yet, risk 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). Within the gender binary,

this is only acceptable for cis men. The gender norms and discouragement surrounding risk may explain why fem or non-binary participants who had an interest in skateboarding decided not to join.

In addition, most fem and one non-binary skater interviewed 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, 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 non-binary) skateboarders in their 20s or 30s may come with the continual progression and trends of opposing gender norms and emboldened feminism. Currie 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 non-binary skaters during this time.

Additional barriers crop up once fem and non-binary folks join the skate scene. Helmets are not often worn and generally frowned

upon; thus, fem and non-binary 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 non-binary participants; not only must they prove themselves through subcultural entry but gendered conceptions.

Constructing Identity

As the earlier literature clarifies, forming and enacting identity is a primary tenet of subcultures. Drawing from Goffman (1959), individuals construct subcultural identity and identity performance by perceiving the self in relation to the acceptance and authenticity of others (Newman and O'Brien 2008). As previously determined, a subculture's 'core' group produces and upholds these standards through which an individual forms their 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, most of whom described over half of their friendships as being within the skate community, while four fem participants noted romantic relationships with skaters.

Additionally, most participants related their identity to skateboarding and its subcultural values, which are critical criteria to consider before being accepted or rejected by others (Harris and Dacin 2019). Participants also included personality characteristics as well as political and social values as markers of skateboarder identity. For instance, Max described his identity as "an ally to the community, the LGBTQ, and the female community" and "a white, socialist skateboarder." He continued, "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. 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 stating, "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 performances may aid in proving authenticity and status to gain social capital within the boundaries of the skatepark (Tsikalas and 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 posited this attitude as performative; skateboarders must try hard without appearing to do 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 component of forming and presenting skateboarding identity. For instance, a person can have “surf style,” or as Blair described, a skateboarder with loose and flowy movements resembling a surfer; as Isaac elaborated, “there’s definitely different styles of skateboarding, and a lot of people have created identities from their style.” Discussions of 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 displays of ‘alternative masculinity’. As discussed by Hellman and Odenbring (2020), skateboarders find ways to display and redefine “white, middle-class [“subversive”] masculinity through bodily performances” (47) including by appropriating hip-hop clothing style to adopt the persona of “being bad” or “aggressive” (Hellman and Odenbring 2020, 47-48), thus engaging in acts of alternative masculinity (Beal 1996).

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, and they provided examples of when they consciously 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.”

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 non-binary, 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. Butler (1988) emphasizes that gender is a public performance by which there is a script that can be interpreted in different ways, yet stray too far, and there are social consequences. Skateboarders may distance themselves from normative masculinity; however, their gender presentations must still fit within the gender binary. Likewise, the predominance of 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 and Dallaire 2012). Some fem and non-binary skaters utilize the ‘alternative’ subculture to “reject an appearance-based femininity” (Currie et al. 2011, 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 explained 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 a marginal activity 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 (Glenny and 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). As well, these norms 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 (Glenny

and Mull 2018). Skateparks also serve as a physical space for members to converge and perform cultural knowledge (Tsikalas and Jones 2018). This could explain 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 participants' 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 non-binary participants described themselves or others as feeling designated to the 'old side.' That said, some skaters of marginalized genders may use the skatepark to develop a sense of belonging and visibility (Atencio et al. 2009). Abby and Blair suggested actively 'taking up' space within the male-dominated areas by skating on the 'new side.' However, for others, the attention generated from being fem-presenting or not cis-male induced feelings of being an outsider, resulting in an undesired sense of visibility with no alternative but to seek further invisibility (Atencio et al. 2009).

All participants considered the scene as "changing" in favourable ways 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 non-binary 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 as challenging to claim. Although many 'fem' skaters attended, 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 shit 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, non-binary, 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 with skateboarding provide a space for fem and non-binary 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 dissociates 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 non-binary 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 non-binary 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 and 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 non-binary 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 acknowledge and work to mitigate misogynistic and heteronormative customs can reduce the challenges 'fem' skateboarders endure (Carr 2017), this is not (yet) the case in Halifax. It may not be conscious marginalization by male skaters; nonetheless, there are gender barriers within this hyper-masculine setting disguised as support. While many fem, non-binary, 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.

Name	Gender Identity / Pronouns (at time of interview)	Age	Skateboarder or non-skateboarder	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'
Max	Male (he/him)	20-25	Skateboarder	11-12 yrs.	Halifax	Non-specified/ interacts with 'core'

Table 1: Detailed Participant Characteristics & Group Affiliation

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