

**Skirtboarder Net-a-Narratives:
A Socio-Cultural Analysis of a Women's Skateboarding Blog**

Stephanie MacKay

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In conformity with the requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Human Kinetics

School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Copyright ©Stephanie MacKay, Ottawa, Canada, 2012

Abstract

This dissertation examines: (a) the discourses of femininity circulating on a female skateboarding blog produced by the Skirtboarders (a group of women skateboarders based in Montréal, Canada); (b) the ways in which the Skirtboarders use Internet blogging (which I label “community media”) to contest (sexist) dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen deployed in mainstream and alternative media; and (c) the ways in which users read and make sense of the Skirtboarders’ blog. For this project, I collected 262 blog posts, including 1128 associated comments, conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Skirtboarders and four users of the blog and incorporated some observational notes. This information was then subjected to discourse analysis informed by the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault.

This research makes a significant contribution to a growing body of literature in the sociology of sport exploring media (re)presentations of bodies, especially women’s bodies, and lifestyle sports because it is one of the rare studies that goes beyond doing an analysis of media texts – it also uncovers the intentions of the producers of the texts and, in addition, examines the effects of the media discourses for audiences (herein referred to as users).

My findings reveal that the Skirtboarders offer something different than mainstream and alternative skateboarding media (re)presentations (i.e., I examined *what* narratives the Skirtboarders produce about themselves to understand how they appropriate, accommodate or resist gender discourses). The women who produced the blog consciously and purposely challenged dominant discursive fragments. Although users considered the blog inspirational for promoting female skateboarding, they had diverse readings of the Skirtboarders’ attempts

to reflexively start a “movement” and, in doing so, construct and circulate a collective identity.

I therefore suggest that the Skirtboarders’ blog is one of many political tools and strategies required to change the landscape of the global female skateboarding world. Ultimately, I argue that the Internet is a space where women can have access to predominantly masculine sport and create more fluid definitions of sporting femininity. It provides women with opportunities to control their own (re)presentations, which will challenge male dominated institutions such as mainstream and alternative media organizations.

Résumé

Cette dissertation étudie : a) les discours sur la féminité qui circulent sur le blogue des Skirtboarders (un groupe de femmes planchistes de Montréal, Canada); b) comment les Skirtboarders utilisent le blogue (que je nomme « média communautaire ») pour contester les discours dominants (sexistes) sur le corps sportif féminin déployés dans le mass média et les médias alternatifs; et c) comment les utilisatrices interprètent et accordent un sens au blogue des Skirtboarders. Pour ce projet : j'ai recueilli 262 articles de forum sur le blogue, incluant les 1128 commentaires; effectué des entrevues semi-dirigées avec huit Skirtboarders et quatre utilisatrices du blogue; incorporé des notes d'observation. Ces informations ont ensuite été soumises à une analyse du discours inspirée de la perspective théorique de Michel Foucault.

Cette recherche apporte une contribution importante à une littérature croissante en sociologie du sport explorant les (re)présentations du corps, spécialement les corps féminins, et les sports alternatifs; car il s'agit d'une des rares études qui s'aventure au-delà de l'analyse des textes médiatiques. Elle porte aussi sur les intentions des productrices des textes et examine en plus les effets des discours médiatiques sur l'auditoire (c'est-à-dire les utilisatrices).

Mes résultats révèlent que les Skirtboarders offrent un contenu qui diffère des (re)présentations du skateboarding dans le mass média et les médias alternatifs (par ex., j'ai examiné *quels* récits les Skirtboarders produisent à propos d'elles-mêmes pour comprendre comment elles s'approprient, s'accommodent ou résistent aux discours sur le genre). Les femmes qui produisent le blogue contestent consciemment et délibérément les fragments discursifs dominants. Quoique les utilisatrices considèrent le blogue inspirant pour la

promotion du skateboarding auprès des femmes, elles offrent diverses lectures de la tentative réflexive des Skirtboarders d'initier un «mouvement » et, en ce faisant, de construire et de propager une identité collective.

Je suggère donc que le blogue des Skirtboarders est un parmi plusieurs outils politiques et stratégiques requis pour changer le paysage de la scène mondiale des femmes planchistes. Ultimement, j'avance que l'Internet est un espace où les femmes peuvent avoir accès au sport dominé par les hommes et créer des définitions fluides de la féminité sportive. L'Internet offre des occasions aux femmes de contrôler leurs propres (re)présentations, lesquelles contesteront les institutions majoritairement masculines telles que les organisations de mass média et de média alternatifs.

Acknowledgements

Each of us is carving a stone, erecting a column, or cutting a piece of stained glass in the construction of something much bigger than ourselves.

Adrienne Clarkson

This piece of work is my attempt to carve a stone. I was once told that writing a PhD dissertation is an ego trip; that the journey and the work produced is all about me. However, I agree more with Adrienne Clarkson's suggestion that the carving of a stone is really only a small part of the construction of something much bigger than ourselves and that our work contributes to others' lives. I hope this project has done this. Furthermore, even though this is my stone, I could not have carved this stone (or more accurately written the words on these pages) without the support (in many different forms) from numerous people whose lives have intersected with mine over the past five years. It is my pleasure to thank the most important of these people.

My decision to complete my doctoral degree at the University of Ottawa had everything to do with the opportunity to work with Dr. Christine Dallaire. I came to know Christine first when she was a professor in one of my master's classes and the evaluator of my internship report. I learned a great deal from Christine during this time (as well as from other great professors in the master's program – in particular Benoit Séguin) and after getting my degree I set out into the world of sport management. I was working full-time in Victoria, BC, as a female hockey manager in a job that, on paper, looked like my dream job. The job entailed managing much of the provinces' female high performance hockey system and promoting the female game (among other things). I played hockey growing up at a time when girls and women were relatively scarce on the ice rinks and when it was only starting to become socially acceptable to be a girl playing hockey. That I was getting paid (pretty

good money!) to work towards improving the female game, including increasing opportunities for girls and women and challenging the reputation of female hockey in hockey and non-hockey spheres, was mind-boggling to me and others in my social circle. However, as a result of many experiences in that job, I realized that I needed to pursue a career that was critical of the Canadian sports system, the very system I was working in.

Christine and I shared interests in gender representation and discourse analysis and Christine's willingness to allow me to pursue my own interests made for a perfect match. My choice to leave the world of sport management for an academic career was the right one. Despite some days where I questioned whether choosing a life of critique and advocacy for change in sports systems (where I often find myself outside looking in) over working within the systems (as I was doing in Victoria), I knew I was in the right place. This questioning seemed to be commonplace for many people (some of my colleagues followed a similar path as I did – working in the field and then returning to academia) and over the past five years, Christine has helped me come to terms with my chosen path through her willingness to play the part of academic advisor, counsellor and friend. Christine: I want to express my deeply-felt gratitude to you. Your encouragement, thoughtful guidance, great efforts to explain things clearly and simply, ability to keep me on track and superior babysitting skills have helped make the difficult parts of the process bearable and the enjoyable parts tremendously rewarding.

Each member of my dissertation committee gave selflessly of their time and energy so I want to acknowledge their extensive contributions. Dr. Jean Harvey: You brought wonderful humour, sensitivity, and knowledge to the table all of which contributed to this being such a positive experience for me. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work

with you on the Sport4Development Gathering - although it did not directly relate to this piece of work, it introduced me to the sport for development field, gave me a paycheque during the summer months of 2009 and best of all, allowed me to work more closely with you. Dr. Geneviève Rail (grande-tante académique): You were infinitely supportive of my ideas and your inclusion of me in your group of young poststructuralist researchers (and your hospitality at your house in Montréal) was greatly appreciated. You helped me begin to understand “discourse” and were my go-to Foucauldian when Christine was not quite sure of something herself. I also want to thank Dr. Alexandre Dumas, the internal examiner of my defense committee, for providing both praise and critical thoughts from his area of expertise in the defense and over the course of the 4.5 years I worked on the this project. Alex: You offered me wonderful advice, friendship and support throughout this process and I am extremely grateful for it. Our chats in my office about theory and babies were always appreciated. Finally, I offer my immense gratitude to Dr. Belinda Wheaton for providing such rich insights as my external examiner. Belinda: I appreciate your carefully considered feedback and the way you presented it. I have admired your work on lifestyle sports since I began this journey and it was an absolute thrill to have you read and comment on my “skateboarding” thesis.

My sincere thanks also go out to the Skirtboarders and the other skateboarders who shared their experiences, time and insights. This dissertation depended on your willingness to work with me to understand female skateboarding in your respective locations and I cannot thank each of you enough for your contributions to the project. I wish you the best in your future endeavors – skateboarding and otherwise.

I would like to thank the many people who have taught or reminded me of the importance of having GOOD sport and physical activity in our lives (where inclusion and respect are the key ingredients): my high school physical education teacher Carol Rosenthal, my undergraduate teachers at Queen's, Drs. Mary-Louise Adams and Geoffrey Smith, and my master's degree teacher Dr. Parissa Safai (who is now a close friend and mentor for me as I pursue my academic career). I also thank Christina Parsons, my master's buddy and colleague in the pursuit of GOOD sport experiences and Shelley Coolidge for her unrivalled passion for women's sports and for her faith in me over the years.

My time at the University of Ottawa was made enjoyable in large part due to the many friends and groups that became a part of my life. It was a pleasure to share doctoral studies and life with wonderful people like (first and foremost) Becca Leopkey and Dana Ellis, my first office mates, and with Chiaki Inoue, Steven Adams, Véronique Boily and Laura Gibbs among others who are very close friends now. I am indebted to these people for providing a stimulating and fun environment in which to learn and grow. I am also grateful for the many social outings we shared together, including pints on the patio, field-trips to the beach and lessons on how to make sushi.

I thank the rest of the members of the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society including faculty, staff and students (in particular, Alexandre Dumas, Audrey Giles, Eileen O'Connor, Michael Robidoux, Courtney Mason, Marcel Fallu and Renée Lafleur). The group has been a source of friendships as well as good advice and collaboration.

I am also grateful for all of the people who worked with me on the 2007 and 2008 Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) Women's Ice Hockey Championships hosted at the University of Ottawa Sports Complex. Our team showed Ottawa residents that the women's

hockey community is passionate and that the skill level and appreciation of the women's game is improving at a phenomenal rate.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding sources that made my Ph.D. work possible. I was funded by the University of Ottawa's Faculties of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and Health Sciences, the Ontario Government (through an Ontario Graduate Scholarship), the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society and the Association of Part-Time Professors at the University of Ottawa. I am grateful for the funding each organization has provided to me and for their continued support of sociocultural research in general and of sport and physical activity research more specifically. I am also indebted to Dr. Christine Dallaire for her financial support which consisted of the occasional aid for conferences and most of all, too many hot chocolates to count!

I can't forget all of my friends outside of academia who helped keep me going over the last five years. To the "Bears", the women on my hockey team (especially Sarah Allen) – thanks for constantly reminding me that despite some problematic aspects, sport is amazing, especially when played amongst women. Anne Maffre, Mona Sladic, Laura Young, Layla Bloom, Mer Hockey, Jessie Deacon and Katie Verbeeten – the most accomplished group of women I know – thanks for your friendship over the last 25 years and for your support over the last five. Our annual Christmas dinners, regular BBQs and birthday phone calls and emails have been a source of comfort for me throughout the many life changes that have accompanied this process.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for all their love and encouragement. Thanks to my parents – they bore me, raised me, supported me, taught me, and loved me. In particular, I thank my mom, who raised me with a passion for social justice, a feminist

outlook and encouraged me in all my pursuits and my dad, who taught me that everything always works out in the end the way it is supposed to, even if it doesn't seem like it will during times of stress. To Blythe Sears, my incredible grandma who can't wait until I become a professor – your strength of character is admired by everyone who knows you, meets you or even hears about you. I also thank all of my aunts, uncles and cousins who may never have known exactly what I was up to but were behind me nonetheless and my best wishes go to David Sears because he is taking the same journey that I am just now completing. My brothers Geoff and Andrew have always brought a smile to my face, whether it was through their support of my political and philosophical views, their joking on or off the comedy stage or simply leaving a pizza slice upside-down on the couch after a raucous night on the town. Thanks for believing in me (despite my sometimes radical views) and for sharing so many laughs with me over the years. To my trusty K9s, Sitka and Canoe, who helped me enjoy life outside of this project by taking me for uncountable walks (and playing innumerable games of hide-and-seek) in the woods. My extended family — the Bournes' (including Mormor, Morfar, the Mosters, Uncles and cousins) — have been supportive of me over the past ten years in general and over the last 4.5 specifically as I completed my doctoral studies so thanks to you, as well. To little Linden, who grew inside of me throughout the writing process and who joined our family in the “outside world” before I defended this thesis: I know that you received much mental stimulation throughout the completion of this project and judging by your exponentially more animated kicking in the womb when I engaged in heavy theoretical thought and your loud cooing and razzing while sitting on my lap as I completed the revisions, I suspect you will either be a committed philosopher or you will want to live a pragmatic life without paying much attention to the

complexities of societies. This project has reminded me how much I hope that you commit yourself to a life in which you have a deep respect for all living creatures and things and the courage to identify as a feminist since there is still much work to be done! And most of all for my loving, supportive, encouraging, and patient partner Kyle whose faithful support during all of the stages of this Ph.D. is so appreciated. Thank you. Your support, laughter, and love saw me through this program in ways that you may never understand. To you I dedicate this thesis.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Résumé	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	xiii
List of Figures	xvii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
A Preamble	2
Who Cares About Media (Re)presentation, Anyways?	2
Asking Fresh Questions.....	5
Implications of the Project.....	7
Why the Skirtboarders?	10
Is Skateboarding a Sport? Are the Skirtboarders Sportswomen?.....	12
Caveats: On Being a Luddite.....	14
The Chapters.....	15
References	17
Chapter 2: Media (Re)presentations of Gendered Sporting and Skateboarding Bodies: A Review of Literature	24
Sport Media	25
Examinations of Gender in Sport Media	27
Why Focus on Identity and Subjectivity in Sport Media?	29
Feminist Sport Media Textual Analyses	29
Feminist Sport Media Production Research	31
Audience Reception Research	31
“Lifestyle” Sport and Skateboarding Research	37

Interrogations of New Media.....	41
Moving Beyond Content Analyses.....	46
References	49
Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations.....	67
Discourse, the Subject, Technologies of Power and Technologies of the Self.....	68
Discourse	68
The (Disciplined and Ethical) Subject.....	69
Technologies of Power	71
Technologies of the Self.....	72
Foucault and Feminism: Boon or Detriment?	75
My Understandings of Gender	77
Theoretical Paradigm and Poststructural Feminism.....	80
References	84
Chapter 4: Methodological Approach.....	89
Blog Posts, Interviews and Personal Observations:	92
Gathering Qualitative Materials	92
Blog Posts	92
Qualitative Interviews.....	95
Personal Observations.....	101
Analysis	103
Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.....	103
“Doing” Discourse Analysis.....	105
Ethical Considerations.....	107
My Position as “Researcher”	109
References	113

Chapter 5: Skirtboarder Net-a-Narratives: Young Women Creating their Own Skateboarding (Re)presentations.....	118
Contributions of Authors.....	119
Researching the Internet.....	124
Skirtboarder Gender Subjectivity as Performance	126
Skirtboarders.com.....	131
Research Protocol.....	133
Political Self (Re)presentations or “Just Skateboarders”	135
Polygendered, Gender-neutral or Stereotypically Feminine?	139
Reproduction of Dominant Discursive Constructions of Sportswomen	148
Mainstream and Alternative Media (Re)presentations on Skirtboarders.com	149
Conclusions	151
Acknowledgments	152
Funding.....	153
References	154
Chapter 6: Skirtboarders.com: Skateboarding Women and Self Formation as Ethical Subjects	168
Contributions of Authors.....	169
Abstract.....	170
Sport Media and Gender Research	171
Internet (Re)presentation and the Formation of Ethical Subjects.....	173
Research Approach.....	178
Setting the Context: The Skirtboarders Crew and their Blog.....	181
Skirtboarders as Ethical Subjects	185

Ethical Substance – Skirtboarder Gender Subjectivity	186
Mode of Subjection – Duty to Act as Role Models	191
Ethical Work – Reinventing the Self through Blog Writing	194
Telos – Aspiring to Be Engaged Female Skateboarders.....	200
Conclusion.....	203
Acknowledgements	206
References	207
Chapter 7: Skateboarding Women: Building Collective Identity in Cyberspace	214
Contributions of Authors.....	215
Abstract.....	216
(Collective) Identities and Internet (Re)presentation	221
Research Protocol.....	228
Skirtboarders’ Blog Commenters: Insiders and Outsider/Insiders	229
From Outsider/Insider to Insider: Roux Becomes a Skirtboarder	235
Skirtboarders’ Blog as Inclusive Collective Identity Building.....	236
Conclusion.....	242
References	244
Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts	251
So What Can We Learn From All of This?	252
Different Feminisms: Who Cares!.....	252
Political, Empirical, Methodological and Theoretical Contributions.....	255
Future Directions	261
Reflections on this Journey	262
References	266

Appendix A: Letter of Ethics Approval	269
Appendix B: Consent Forms	270
Appendix C: Interview Guides.....	274
Interview Guide – Skirtboarders (English Version).....	274
Interview Guide – Users of the Skirtboarders Blog	279
Appendix D: List of Interview Participants	283
Appendix E: List of Discursive Strategies and Discursive Constructions	285

List of Figures

Figure 1. Annie Guglia mid-flight	121
Figure 2. This video does not contain skirts!	135
Figure 3. Skirtboarders – Le Film	137
Figure 4. A Skirtboarder on the move.....	140
Figure 5. Margaux Walker digging in to her nachos	144
Figure 6. Mathilde Pigeon catching some air.....	145
Figure 7. Anne-Sophie Julien hosing Margaux Walker off	146
Figure 8. Anne-Sophie skates at a park in California	147
Figure 9. The Skirtboarders take a break	148

Chapter 1: Introduction

A Preamble

Before diving into the crux of the proposed study, I explain the title of this project – Skirtboarder Net-a-Narratives: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of a Women's Skateboarding Blog¹. The title uses the term net-a-narratives which is a play on words of the term metanarratives, developed (and criticized) by Jean-François Lyotard (1984) to describe an abstract idea that is thought to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. My feminist poststructuralist sensibilities encourage me to be a stark critic of metanarratives, and indeed, I am much more interested in focusing on specific local contexts as well as the diversity of sportswomen's² experiences (re)presented online, as I believe I have done in this project. I felt that it was appropriate, then, that I subvert the very idea of the metanarrative, which suggests that there is only one way to tell “the truth” about how sportswomen take up discursive constructions of gender, in my dissertation title.

Who Cares About Media (Re)presentation, Anyways?

Media (re)presentations³ contribute to the organization of social relations, the economy and political processes (Smith, 1993). It is important that we study the impacts that media (re)presentations (which are constituted by discourses) have on people's lives generally and more specifically for this project, women's lives. It is also important that we understand how

¹ Blogs allow bloggers (blog writers) to post regularly dated entries, often including opinions, journal entries or commentary. Although men tend to dominate the blogosphere (Ratliff, 2004), women are more likely than men to write more personal blogs as a means for personal reflection and communication (Jack, 2009).

² The term “sportswom(a/e)n” is used throughout this thesis to describe women who claim that their sporting pursuits make up an important part of their identity.

³ The term (re)presentation is used throughout this paper as a reference to Jean Baudrillard's (1983) postmodern age order of simulacra which suggests that when media present information, they are not representing “reality.” Instead, the representation *precedes* and *determines* the real. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum.

media (re)presentations contribute to the production of women's identities⁴, which poststructuralist feminist theory suggests can be understood as the continuous process by which discursively constructed subject positions are taken up, resisted or challenged (Butler, 1999a). This can be done by exploring how discourses⁵ located in social fields (macro-level) impact individuals' lives (micro-level) and suggesting ways in which language is involved in the construction and perpetuation of gendered sporting identities and subjectivities. Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory (1969, 1971) and the insights it provides into sports studies (see Cole, 1993; Markula & Pringle, 2006) and, more specifically into sports media analysis (see Pirinen, 1997; Wright & Clarke, 1999), I propose, like other scholars have before me, that the effects of media can confirm or nullify the legitimacy of women's sporting performance and can produce statements that may or may not ascribe femininity to sportswomen in a way that (hetero) sexualizes and trivializes their accomplishments. Indeed, the ways in which academics have examined and are currently examining mediated sport

⁴ In this thesis "identity" refers to the relational aspects that qualify subjects in terms of categories, such as gender, and thus in terms of acknowledged social relations and affiliations to groups. "Subjectivity" indexes the substantive acting, thinking and feeling being and evokes the set of processes by which a subject or self is constituted. Foucault sees subjectivity and identity as separate. In the *Subject and Power*, when talking about discursive power, he states:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. (Foucault, 1983, p. 212)

Therefore, Foucault suggests that identity categories are one of the effects of power. Foucault (1983) claims that identity is restrictive and limiting and it is formed through the regulatory apparatus that defines and subjects individuals. Subjectivity, then, creates identity. Subjectification is not something permanent or stable, but rather represents the precarious assertion of identity.

⁵ Foucault (1972a) argued that dominant discourses are constructed within our societies by "experts" (such as government departments, scientific bodies, etc.) The statements that make up these discourses underpin what is taken to be "common-sense knowledge" and it is through the circulation of these discourses that we are produced as subjects. Discourses are repeated over time and internalized.

suggests that sport remains “a select and powerful bastion of vestigial hypermasculinity” (Wenner, 2006, p. 52).

Scholars have been primarily attempting to understand how mediated (re)presentation of female and male athletes compare to the stereotypical feminine and hypermasculine ideals and the ways in which these (re)presentations contribute to the maintenance of masculine dominance both on and off the sporting field. However, as a feminist focused on the ways media (re)presentations of sport impact the experiences of girls and women, like Hardin (2011) I have become perturbed by:

“the underlying thesis of much of the Gramscian-oriented feminist work . . . in regard to sport: that power is “out of our hands” because we are at the bottom of a sport hierarchy and generally cannot create a more just, equitable situation for ourselves. . . . much of the literature produced . . . has taken on the effect of a cracked CD: it is a repetitive cacophony of powerlessness, frustration and alienation born from the best of intentions but lacking in any real hope for change.” (p. 48)

I argue that we have focused too heavily on the ways in which mediated sport makes us subjects to gender discourse and not enough on how we can become subject of gender discourse. In other words, we have put too much credence on “structure” and not enough on “agency”. It is necessary, then, that we (re)examine (re)presentations of athletes by challenging the typical construct of gender difference, as the “restrictive discourse on gender that insists on a binary of man and women as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a *regulatory* operation of power that neutralizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (Butler, 2004, p. 43). We must look at mediated sport texts through new lenses that allow for broader ideological possibilities.

Asking Fresh Questions

In addition to looking at sport media texts through new lenses that allow us to see gender in more complex and fluid forms, we must also ask fresh questions about how these texts impact people's lives rather than simply analyzing what we "see" as researchers. Mediated sport research is heavily dominated by textual analyses (see Kinkema & Harris, 1992; Rowe, 2004; Wenner, 1989). Reasons for this include: texts are readily available for analysis, troublesome aspects of texts are relatively easy to find and textual analysis is easier to complete than analyses of the production of mediated sport texts (such as those performed by Creedon, 1994, 1998; Lowes, 1999; Ordman & Zillman, 1994; Theberge & Cronk, 1986) and audience interaction analyses (such as those performed by Lemish, 1998; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008; Thorpe, 2008). For the most part, textual analyses essentialize gender, as few researchers who complete content analyses problematize gender and conversely, scholars who problematize gender are not likely to use content analyses, as they are epistemologically opposed to them (Sabo & Jansen, 1998). Donnelly, MacNeill and Knight (2008) argue that the time has come to begin asking fresh questions about how female and male athletes are (re)presented in mediated sport and how this effects gender relations in sport more broadly. I wholeheartedly agree and suggest that we do this by examining mediated sport texts at a deeper level – at a level where boundaries between femininities and masculinities are polluted and bodies are de-differentiated.

The first fresh question that we may ask to get to this deeper level of analysis is: how do renditions of sport appearing in emerging interactive technologies, such as the Internet, differ from renditions of sport on traditional mediums (i.e. radio, newspapers, magazines, television)? We must look at this issue if we want to understand the effects of sports media

texts in their current (and constantly evolving form). The second question we must address is: what gendered subject positions do individuals who interact with (produce or use) Internet mediated sport texts take up? In other words, how do (a) producers of texts and (b) audience members construct themselves through the sport media messages that we, as scholars, suggest emphasize stereotypical heterosexual femininity and hegemonic masculinity? Do producers of these Internet texts challenge the dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen⁶ we propose mainstream⁷ and alternative⁸ media texts circulate? How do audience members read these texts? We must look at these issues if we want to understand how cybernetic images and sounds affect people's gendered sporting realities (or become people's gendered sporting realities – see Rail, 1998).

⁶ Dominant discursive strategies that construct sportswomen focus on: gender marking (Koivula, 1999), establishing heterosexuality (Wright & Clarke, 1999), emphasizing female stereotypes (Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002), infantilizing women (Koivula, 1999), non-sports related aspects (Eastman & Billings, 2000), comparisons to men's performance (Donnelly, MacNeill & Knight, 2008) and ambivalence (Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

⁷ Mainstream media are produced by non-skateboarding journalists and producers for a mass audience with little knowledge of skateboarding. Like Downing (2001), I suggest that mainstream media are largely undemocratic, centred on profit making, have a hierarchical organisation (both in terms of the corporations and public companies who create and circulate media (re)presentations and the staff within those companies) and present voices that are largely exclusive due the routinisation and codification of the journalism profession.

⁸ Alternative media tend to be created by journalists, editors, photographers, and filmmakers who are, or were, active skateboarders. These media are not necessarily centered on profit making but are distributed to a relatively wide audience (compared to community media). Alternative media communicate skateboarding discourses and cultural knowledge, are the most instrumental to skateboarders' identity construction and are usually only available in special distribution locations such as skate shops or online. They are produced by noncommercial sources and aim to challenge existing power structures, to represent marginalized groups and/or to foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest (Downing, 2001). For a discussion of the different cultural connotations of mass and alternative media in club cultures, windsurfing and skateboarding cultures, and snowboarding culture, see Thornton (1996), Wheaton and Beal (2003), and Bruce, Falcous, and Thorpe (2007), respectively.

The Internet, which is in the evolutionary phase entitled Web 2.0⁹ (the definition of which is hotly contested in communications circles) can be thought of as a tool for deconstructing social boundaries because users have the ability to construct their own culture through the production and consumption of community media¹⁰. Audience members (who are at the same time producers/contributors of texts and who will be referred to throughout this project as “users”) have the potential to challenge dominant discursive constructions more readily than their mainstream or alternative media audience counterparts. As Wilson (2007) suggests “the more readily and easily any message sent through a technology-driven communication medium can be responded to via the same medium and to the same audience – the more likely it is that the technology will aid the facilitation of democratic change” (p. 465). If Internet users have a greater potential to challenge dominant discursive constructions (e.g., of sportswomen) via the Internet than through other means, the Internet also arguably provides people with a greater chance of engaging in what Foucault calls technologies of the self (which is what I argue in this dissertation).

Implications of the Project

Taking female skateboarders (i.e., the Skirtboarders and users of their blog) as a case study, I address the fresh questions in this project. I argue that the Skirtboarders are thinking, feeling subjects that reflect upon the discursive relations that constitute them and are capable

⁹ In short, the term is commonly associated with web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Although the term suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to an update to any technical specifications, but rather to cumulative changes in the ways software developers and end-users use the Web (O’Reilly, 2005).

¹⁰ My definition of community media is based on Yochim’s (2010) definition, which is media that are “designed by skateboarders using equipment and materials developed for personal use” (p. 183). These media are created to be not-for-profit, small in scale and distributed to and shared among community members rather than a mass audience.

of creating their own conceptions of gender. Through my Internet surfing prior to beginning this project, through an examination of women who self-identify as “fat” and take to YouTube to speak out about the discrimination they are subjected to (see MacKay & Dallaire, 2010) and through my examination of the Skirtboarders’ blog and my conversations with them and users of their blog for this project, I suggest that women who are responding to mainstream and alternative discursive constructions of gendered bodies are doing so with a heightened sense of awareness of those very discursive constructions. I felt that the use of a female skateboarding blog as a site for further examination of this proposal contributes to our understanding of youth consumer culture and the pleasure and politics of its consumption.

Ultimately, I argue that it is on the Internet that these women have a public space in which to voice alternative discursive constructions of gender by creating and posting their own stories that would otherwise be marginalized in mainstream and alternative media texts. Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) suggest that without such spaces, without such public expressions of fluid femininities, women (and men) have no access to alternative discourses and thus have to resort to discourses of heterosexism and dominant femininity. I have already proposed the Internet as a platform which provides women the opportunity for disrupting the current gender order – results from a pilot study I published with Dr. Christine Dallaire examining if and how women strategically challenge discourses of femininity and obesity using YouTube (the popular Internet video sharing website that allows users to upload, view and share video clips – see MacKay & Dallaire, 2010) suggest that women are, indeed, doing this.

This dissertation consists of a poststructural discourse analysis of Internet texts and interviews. Through these analyses, I (a) determined what discursive constructions of sportswomen a specific group of women are producing and using to constitute themselves, (b) examined the possibility that women are systematically (re)constructing and (re)creating themselves into subjects that challenge dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating in mainstream and alternative media via the Internet with the goal of determining whether these women approached what Foucault called “ethical subjects” (Foucault, 1988a), and (c) attempted to understand how women accessing the produced discursive constructions are negotiating them.

The primary goal of this research project was to use Foucault’s concepts to broaden our understanding of how new media (re)presentations can affect women’s sporting experiences and how the Internet can be used as a vehicle for both individual and collective transformation within a sports context. Throughout this dissertation, I take Pringle’s (2005) view that, although Foucault’s ideas have been criticized because they fail to lead large scale social transformation, his strategies do challenge social structures through their “more localized and less coordinated approaches focused on the connections between discourse and subjectivity” (p. 271). I also acknowledge that a Foucauldian perspective requires careful consideration of discursive constructs because a discourse/practice considered liberating in one context may be repressive in another context (and vice versa). Furthermore, although Foucauldian discourse analysis of the Skirtboarders blog posts and interviews transcripts was useful for this project, there is one major limitation to the method. It is impossible to know the extent to which the discourses identified were my own understandings (informed by scholarly research). Therefore, I do not imply that the methodological techniques used

allowed me to uncover discernable “truths.” After all, we can never truly know how others constitute themselves in discourse. Ultimately, then, I am conscious of and acknowledge the complexities and nuances that come about when using the concept of discourse in research projects.

However, I believe that Foucault still has much to offer scholars looking for ways in which women resist dominant constructions of gender thus in my most theoretically brave chapter (Chapter 6), I chose to play with Foucault’s concept of the technologies of the self in order to gain a deeper understanding of the techniques (writing, speech or bodily practices) that one uses to become an ethical subject. Through my play with these concepts, I hoped to determine whether these techniques, practiced via the Internet, might ultimately suggest new forms of ethical work not developed by Foucault.

My goal for this research project was to find out if one online community of women was successful at constructing individual and collective identities that can challenge dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating in mainstream and alternative media. I felt that if I determined this, it would be appropriate for me and other sport scholars to encourage women to produce their own (re)presentations of sporting and physical culture and to find ways of supporting those that do exist. Finally, I believe that the results from this research project will open up possibilities for future research on “what remains unchallenged and constant within sporting cultures” (Leonard, 2009, p. 12) with respect to sportswomen’s experiences of sport and its interconnections with new media texts.

Why the Skirtboarders?

The Skirtboarders blog was chosen for analysis because I found it the most interesting case among many blogs produced by and for female athletes on the Internet. I did

not plan on researching female skateboarders. I am not an insider in female skateboarding circles, nor am I an expert in research on lifestyle¹¹ sports. Instead, I started with the goal of furthering the suggestion that I put forward, along with my co-writer and supervisor Christine Dallaire (in MacKay & Dallaire, 2010), that traditional media platforms provide consumers with “knowledge” about what bodies are valued and what bodies are not valued. The Internet, by contrast, is an avenue where people can “talk back”; the technological and organic, inner and outer realms, simulation and reality, freedom and control are blurred and people are encouraged to see themselves in new (postmodern) terms and in disciplines that differ from those suggested by dominant discourses (Robins & Levidow, 1995). This analysis is ultimately the continuation of a larger effort to understand if and how women use digital media technologies in practicing technologies of the self with respect to their gendered and embodied selves (MacKay & Dallaire 2010).

In particular, I wanted to focus on sportswomen who self (re)present in blogs because I want to see if, given the opportunity to self (re)-present, sportswomen reproduce dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating in mainstream and alternative media or resist/challenge them and if they resist/challenge them, what strategies they use to

¹¹ I use Wheaton’s (2004a) term “lifestyle sport,” as it is clear from the blog and my interviews that the Skirtboarders are (re)presenting a “lifestyle that is [sic] distinctive and that gives [sic] them a particular and exclusive *social identity* (emphasis in original) (p. 4). Lifestyle sports (which have been referred to in both academic and popular discourse as extreme or alternative) consist of a range of primarily individualized activities such as surfing, skateboarding, parkour, wakeboarding, rock climbing, B.A.S.E. jumping and kite surfing (Wheaton, 2004a). The term lifestyle sport was adopted by researchers because they found that members of the cultures themselves defined what they do as “a lifestyle”, rather than as a sport practiced in a specific time and space. For example, in addition to the physical practice of skateboarding, “skaters” dress a certain way, act a certain way (based on philosophy or ethos) and spend much of their time off their skateboards with other skaters. Although there is no consensus in skateboarding communities whether or not skateboarding should be labeled a “sport,” (I address this debate again in Chapter 1) I consider the practice a “sport” throughout this dissertation.

accomplish this. I also want to find out if sportswomen are creating blog texts with a heightened sense of awareness of the dominant discursive constructions that scholars continue to suggest are in circulation and to attempt to understand how women who interact with these texts read them. It was only after many hours of searching sites that stemmed from the original search item (in multiple search engines) “women and sports and blog,” that I happened upon the Skirtboarders blog. What is interesting (and challenging) about qualitative Internet research is that while there are models and general rubrics to guide one’s choices, the practice is still novel enough to make the decisions about how to do a study difficult. At the same time, the absence of canonical texts indicates that Internet inquiry is still without many boundaries; this means that at this point in time, we have a great deal of potential for creativity in our research projects (Bayam & Markham, 2009). I took the liberty of choosing to do a discourse analysis of the Skirtboarders site based on Hine’s (2009) suggestion that Internet project boundaries are the outcome of the project, rather than their precursor; “indeed, it is by following a trail that led them to the places they could not have defined beforehand” (p. 4) that the limits of the research project are defined. In my case, I followed a trail from my initial search for “women and sport and blog” and arrived at the Skirtboarders blog.

Is Skateboarding a Sport? Are the Skirtboarders Sportswomen?

Once I decided to focus my analysis of Internet (re)presentations of sportswomen on the Skirtboarders, I asked myself the following questions: (a) is skateboarding a sport? and (b) who gets to decide if it is a sport or if it is something else? Yochim (2010) suggests that this issue is complex. In her study of young male skateboarders, some participants distanced

their practice from mainstream “sport”¹² by claiming that they find mainstream sport culture dissatisfying due to the disciplinary technologies (such as individuation of sport, embodied time, routinization of embodied exercise, correct training, presence of coaches, and knowing athletic bodies) described by Shogan (1999) and because it is practiced as a lifestyle rather than just in the confines of a sporting arena. Others saw skateboarding as a sport and practice it as they do other sports. She concluded that the male skateboarders in her study like their imagined outsider status in the sports world because it is important to their identity and is encouraged by mainstream and alternative media.

This is an important point because it has been suggested that the earliest participants (who were primarily male) in lifestyle sporting activities, including skateboarding, (in the 1960s and 1970s) originally sought out a lifestyle that was alternative to the mainstream and that gave them a particular social identity (Wheaton, 2004a). Donnelly (2008), however, notes that at that time, even though it was a marginal activity, skateboarding was taken up by commercial enterprises and there is little evidence to suggest that skateboarders were against the dominant sport culture. Despite these contradictions in historical accounts, since the 1960s and 1970s (and accelerated in the 1990s), some “lifestyle” practices such as snowboarding, skateboarding and surfing have become part of the mainstream, which ultimately increased access to these activities and solidified their categorization as a “sport” in some circles.

Participants used to consist mostly of “hard cores” (mostly young males) who put lots of effort, time and/or money into their practice and identified strongly with the lifestyle (and

¹² Reinhart, 2005, defines mainstream sport as those “that have been embraced by spectators and participants alike . . . are taught in the schools, that run through a patriarchal culture to such an extent that both terminology and attire deriving from those sports remain unremarkable to casual observers . . . ” (p. 234).

others who were as dedicated). However, participation rates of occasional participants who do the activities on weekends and who do not necessarily identify strongly with the lifestyle (and other participants) have been steadily increasingly since the 1990s. This shift is reflected in debates about the importance of “authenticity” in lifestyle sport subcultures (Beal & Wiedman, 2003; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Wheaton, 2003; Wheaton, 2004a).

Participants in these sports also now include teen-age boys and young men (who have always been the most involved participants and who are often the target market for companies) as well as older men and, increasingly, young women and girls (Wheaton, 2009). As a result of the shifting participant demographics, the ways in which people define skateboarding (i.e., as a sport or as something else) is becoming increasingly complex.

Who, then, gets to decide how skateboarding is labeled? Do girls and women define skateboarding as a sport? Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie (2005) found that skateboarding girls, like Yochim’s (2010) skateboarding boys, defined skateboarding in multiple ways – some gave the activity the label “sport” while others resisted giving it that label. Since the question of placing a label on skateboarding was not the focus of this dissertation, I follow Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie (2005) and Wheaton’s (2004a) lead and refer to skateboarding throughout this dissertation as a sport. The Skirtboarders are thus considered sportswomen.

Caveats: On Being a Luddite

I should elucidate that although I was optimistic before beginning this research project that new media platforms are providing women with the technological opportunity to resist/challenge dominant discursive constructions of femininity and continue to be after the completion of this project, I still struggle with Luddite tendencies. I have not yet signed up for Facebook, Linked-in or other large-scale, corporately run social networking sites, have a

limited presence on Twitter and in fact, I don't even have a cell phone (to check or produce updates on those sites or to text message family, friends or businesses). I resist these platforms because I am conscious of the ways in which the Internet is used to track, monitor and "know" individuals and to circulate discourses that subjugate people in a multitude of ways. I ultimately wish to continue being an "outsider" in some of these technological circles. I do, however, use the Internet extensively to connect with others with whom I share political and cultural philosophies and sports and other social interests. Therefore, despite my resistant tendencies towards some Internet technologies, I feel that this project has provided me with optimism about the potential for the Internet to connect women transnationally and enable them to form communities that would otherwise not be possible without such a technology. I therefore support Manovich's (2001) argument that whereas offline mainstream media "corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, which values conformity over individuality" (p. 41), new media follows the precepts of a postindustrial or globalized society in which a citizen can "construct her own custom lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices..." (p. 42).

The Chapters

In the following chapters, literature pertinent to the study of sport media, sport media and gender, sport media and identity, textual, production and audience reception analyses of sport media, lifestyle sport and skateboarding media and new media is briefly reviewed and a theoretical framework (based on concepts developed by Foucault), which served as the basis for this study, explained. My theoretical perspective is explicated and the methodological approach is then described. Following this, since I have chosen to use the "publishable papers" method the findings from this project are highlighted in three research

articles titled: (a) Skirtboarder net-a-narratives: Young women creating their own skateboarding (re)presentations; (b) Skirtboarders' blogging as technologies of the self and (c) Skateboarding women: Building collective identity in cyberspace. Each paper should be read as standing alone. While the papers are not meant to build on each other, as they might in the typical thesis format, they are related in that they all examine discourses of female skateboarding. In the first paper, more attention is given to the language of discourse used to (re)present female skateboarders in order to understand how what people say may enable or limit them. A Foucauldian approach was useful here since Foucault (1980) understood power as constraints on action that are both enabling and inhibiting (Fraser 1989; Shogan, 1999). In the second paper, more attention is given to the intentions of those producing the blog (and circulating gender discourse about female skateboarding) in order to understand if reflexivity was present during the creating and circulation of the online material. In the third and final paper, more attention is given to the negotiation of the discourses of female skateboarders by blog users, in order to understand the effects these discourses are having on skateboarding women.

I end this dissertation with a "kind of a conclusion." In my attempt to bring some closure to this dissertation, I write about my own understanding of this research, and my struggle to present any sort of definitive version of a work that will always be in progress as other readers and I learn new things about the rapidly evolving Internet and its effects on women's sporting bodies (and vice versa).

References

- Balsamo, A. (1996). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1983). *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Bayam, N.K. & Markham, A.N. (2009). Introduction: Making smart choices on shifting ground. In A.N. Markham & N.K. Bayam (Eds.), *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method* (pp. vii–xix). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Beal, B., & Wiedman, L. (2003). Authenticity in the skateboarding world. In R. Rinehart & S. Sydnor (Eds.), *To the extreme: Alternative sports, inside and out* (pp. 337–352). New York: SUNY Press.
- Beal, B. & Wilson, C. (2004). ‘Chicks dig scars’: commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders’ identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). New York: Routledge.
- Bruce, T., Falcous, M., & Thorpe, H. (2007). The mass media and sport. In C. Collins & S. Jackson (Eds.), *Sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand society* (2nd ed.; pp. 147–164). Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Thompson.
- Butler, J. (1999a). *Gender trouble*. Routledge: New York.
- Butler, J. (1999b). Bodily inscriptions, performative subversions. In J. Price & M. Shildrick (Eds.), *Feminist theory and the body* (pp. 416–422). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Cole, C.L. (1993). Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport and Technologies of the Body, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17(2), 77–97.

- Creedon, P.J. (Ed.) (1994). *Women, sport and media: Challenging gender values*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creedon, P.J. (1998). Women, sport and media institutions: Issues in sports journalism and marketing. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport* (pp. 88–99). London: Routledge.
- Currie, D., Kelly, D.M., & Pomerantz, S. (2009). *'Girl power': Girls reinventing girlhood*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Daniels, D. (2009). *Polygendered and ponytailed: The dilemma of femininity and the female athlete*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Donnelly, M. (2008). Alternative and mainstream: Revisiting the sociological analysis of skateboarding. In M. Atkinson and K. Young (Eds), *Tribal play: Subcultural journeys through sport* (pp. 197-216). Bingley, UK: JAI press.
- Donnelly, P., MacNeill, M., & Knight, G. (2008). *Enough, already! A comment on gender representation research*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Downing, J. (2001) *Radical Media: rebellious communication and social movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1969). *L'archéologie du savoir* [The archaeology of knowledge]. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1971). *L'ordre du discours* [The order of discourse]. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1972a). *The archeology of knowledge*, New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Prison talk. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews* (pp. 37–54). New York: Pantheon.

- Foucault, M. (1983). Afterword. The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd Ed, pp. 208–226). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fraser, N. (1989). Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions. In N. Fraser (Ed.), *Unruly practices: Power, discourse, and gender in contemporary social theory* (pp. 17–34). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gilchrist, P., & Wheaton, B. (2011). Lifestyle sport, public policy and youth engagement: examining the emergence of parkour. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 3(1), 109–131.
- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Jack, J. (2009). We have brains: Reciprocity and resistance in a feminist blog community. In K. Blair, R. Gadjjala & C. Tulley (Eds.), *Webbing cyberfeminist practice* (pp. 327–344). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Kinkema, K.M., & Harris, J.C. (1992). Sport and the mass media. *Exercise and sports science reviews*, 20(1), 127–159.
- Kinkema, K.M., & Harris, J.C. (1998). MediaSport studies: Key research and emerging issues. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 27–56). London: Routledge.
- Lauretis, T.D. (1987). *Technologies of gender*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press.
- Lemish, D. (1998). Girls can wrestle too: Gender differences in the consumption of a television wrestling series. *Sex Roles*, 38(9/10), 833–849.

- Leonard, D.J. (2009). New media and global sporting cultures: Moving beyond the clichés and binaries. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 1–16.
- Lowes, M. (1999). *Inside the sports pages: Work routines, professional ideologies, and the manufacture of sports news*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- MacKay, S., et Dallaire, C. (2010). La contestation des discours sur l'obésité : YouTube et la femme "grosse" parrhésiaste. *Recherches féministes*, 23(2), 7–24.
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport and exercise*. London: Routledge.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005). What is Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software. Retrieved from: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>. (2010, February 16).
- Ordman, V.L., & Zillmann, D. (1994). Women's sports reporters: Have they caught up? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 18(1), 66–75.
- Pirinen, R. (1997) 'Catching Up with Men? Finnish Newspaper Coverage of Women's Entry into Traditionally Male Sports', *International Review of the Sociology of Sport* 32(3): 239–49.
- Pringle, R. (2005). Masculinities, sport and power: A critical comparison of Gramscian and Foucauldian inspired theoretical tools. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29(3), 256–78.

- Rail, G. (1998). Seismography of the postmodern condition: Three thesis on the implosion of sport. In G. Rail (Ed.) *Sport and postmodern times* (pp. 144–161). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Ratliff, C. (2004, March 25). *Whose voice gets heard? Gender politics in the blogosphere*. Retrieved October 5, 2010 from <http://culturecat.net/node/303>.
- Reinhart, R. (2005). "Babes" & boards : Opportunities in new millennium sport? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29(3), 232–255.
- Robins, K., & Levidow, L. (1995). Soldier, Cyborg, Citizen. In J. Brook & I.A. Boal (Eds.) *Resisting the virtual life* (pp. 105–113). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Rowe, D. (2004). *Sport, culture and the media* (2nd ed.). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.
- Sabo, D., & Jansen, S.C. (1998). Prometheus unbound: Constructions of masculinity in sports media. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Sport media: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 170–185). London: Routledge.
- Shogan, D. (1999). *The making of high performance athletes: Discipline, diversity, and ethics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Sisjord, M.K., & Kristiansen, E. (2008). Serious athletes or media clowns? Female and male wrestlers' perceptions of media constructions, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(3), 350–368.
- Smith, D. (1993). *Femininity and discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Theberge, N., & Cronk, A. (1986). Work routines in newspaper sports departments and the coverage of women's sports. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3(3), 195–203.

- Thornton, S. (1996). *Club cultures: Music, media and subcultural capital*. London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of the self and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32 (2), 199–229.
- Wenner, L.A. (1989). Media, sports and society: The research agenda. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Media, sports and society* (pp. 13–48). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wenner, L.A. (2006). Sports, and media through the super glass mirror: Placing blame, breast-feeding and a gaze to the future. In A.A. Raney & J Bryant (Eds.), *Handbook of sport and media* (pp. 45–60). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wheaton, B. & Beal, B. (2003). “Keeping it real”: Sub-cultural media and discourses of authenticity in alternative sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38, 155–176.
- Wheaton, B. (2003). Windsurfing: A subculture of commitment. In R Rinehart & S. Sydnor (Eds.), *To the extreme: Alternative sports, inside and out* (pp. 75–104). New York: SUNY Press.
- Wheaton, B. (2004a). Introduction: mapping the lifestyle sport-scape. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 1–28). Thousand New York: Routlage.
- Wheaton, B. (2004b). ‘New Lads’? Competing masculinities in the windsurfing culture. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp 131–153). London: Routledge.

- Wilson, B. (2007). New media, social movements, and global sport studies: A revolutionary moment and the sociology of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24, 457–477.
- Wright, J. and Clarke, G. (1999) ‘Sport, the Media and the Construction of Compulsory Heterosexuality: A Case Study of Women’s Rugby Union’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34(3), 227–43.
- Yochim, E.C. (2010). *Skate life: Re-imagining white masculinity*. Michigan, USA; University of Michigan.

**Chapter 2: Media (Re)presentations of Gendered Sporting and
Skateboarding Bodies: A Review of Literature**

Sport Media

Academic examinations of mainstream and alternative media are a young phenomenon; they were largely off the disciplinary map in both media studies and sport studies as recently as 35 years ago (Wenner, 1998). It was the discovery and legitimization of cultural studies in the late 1980s that contributed to a “virtual explosion” of mediated sport research in both media studies and sport sociology, which continues today (Wenner, 1998). Cultural studies are an intersection of academic disciplines that combines numerous fields to study cultural phenomena (Giulianotti, 2004). The (inter)discipline emerged as an intellectual response to Marxist and neo-Marxist reductionism to explain the effects of language, culture, and power of capitalism on Western societies (Howell, Andrews & Jackson, 2002).

Early sport media examinations completed by sport sociologists were marked by Antonio Gramsci’s neo-Marxian concept of hegemony, which explains how a dominant group or class establishes political and cultural power over subordinate groups (see Hall, 1978; Murphy, Dunning & Williams, 1988; Whannel, 1979). Authors reflecting on sport media texts attempted to understand the role mainstream media played in producing, circulating and distributing hegemonic conceptions of sports and physical activity. However, scholars who took on the task of systematically studying sport media began to recognize what scholars in media studies had already determined: that the media go well beyond simple transmission of cultural information; they provide frameworks of meaning that both shape and create attitudes and values about culture, which includes sport (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Messner, 1988; Sabo & Jansen, 1998; Wenner, 1998). Consequentially, writers explored the complex relationship between sports, the media and society (e.g.,

Jhally, 1989; Maguire, 1993; Rowe, 2004; Wenner, 1998) in an attempt to further understand the influence of sports media.

Research projects examining the influence of sports media on society are typically categorized in three ways: analyses of the texts, examinations of the production processes of the texts and explorations of how audiences make sense of the texts. There is a rich history of analyses of sport media texts (e.g., Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, 1990, 1994; Bernstein, 2002; Bishop, 2003; Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004; Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002; Daniels, 2009; Davis, 1997; Duncan, 1990, Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Duncan & Messner, 2000; Duncan & Messner, 2005; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Farred, 2000; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Jones, Murrell & Jackson, 1999; Kane, 1988; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Kane & Lenskyj, 1998; Messner, Dunbar & Hunt, 2000; Messner, Duncan & Cooky, 2003; Messner & Cooky, 2010; Sabo & Jansen, 1998; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999; Vincent, 2004; Vincent & Crossman, 2008; Wann, Schrader, Allison & McGeorge, 1998), including studies looking at the discursive statements that are circulated in and through them (e.g., Duncan, 1994; MacKay & Dallaire, 2009; MacKay & Dallaire, in press; Markula, 1995). There are far fewer examinations looking at how sport media texts are produced (e.g., Bruce, 1998; Hardin, 2005; Knoppers & Elling, 1994; Lowes, 2004; Millington & Wilson, 2010; Theberge & Cronk, 1986; Thorpe, 2008) and studies looking at the ways in which discursive statements are taken up by sport media audiences are also relatively scarce (e.g. Bruce, 1998; Clavio & Kian, 2010; Lines, 2007; Millington & Wilson, 2010; Mitrano, 1999; Plymire, 2008; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008; Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton & Beal, 2003, Wilson &

Sparkes, 1996). Millington and Wilson (2010) suggest that the focus on textual analyses is problematic. They state that:

the implied and/or explicit conclusions about the potential impacts of media images on audiences that emerge from a field of inquiry based largely on textual analysis lacks important nuance—nuance that can be partially attained by attending to the activities and interpretations of audiences themselves [emphasis in original]. (p. 31)

Therefore, scholars like Millington and Wilson (2010), are now calling for more studies that look at both the production processes and the effects that sports media texts are having on audiences in order to have a deeper and more holistic understanding of the impacts of sports media.

Examinations of Gender in Sport Media

Issues pertaining to media (re)presentations of gendered sporting bodies have been touched on in the sport sociology and communications literature. These examinations surfaced when feminist scholars recognized that the mainstream sport media (re)presented women athletes in ways that undermined the promotion of women's sporting events and women as legitimate athletes (e.g., Fasting & Tangen, 1983; Hilliard, 1984; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Valgeirsson & Snyder, 1986). Scholars began using Connell's (1987, 1995, 2000) neo-Gramscian concept of hegemonic masculinity as well as critical (pro)feminist conceptions of patriarchy (see Thomson, 2002) and masculine dominance (see Burstyn, 1999) as an organizing principle of sport to systematically measure and catalogue both the (hetero)sexualization and trivialization (quality) and the underrepresentation and marginalization (quantity) of women's sports and female athletes in the sports media (Bernstein & Blain, 2003). Research examining gendered (re)presentations of athletes in the

sports media has continued now for over 25 years, focusing on mainstream media platforms (e.g., magazines, newspapers, television and certain Internet sites), alternative media texts (e.g., college sport media guides, college and high school newspapers and Internet applications such as blogs, wikis, and social networking functions) and various sports and sports events. Research examining mediated (re)presentations of male athletes using hegemonic masculinity as an organizing principle also emerged (e.g., Jansen & Sabo, 1994; Kane & Disch, 1993; Trujillo, 1995; White & Gillett, 1994) and continues today (e.g., Harris & Clayton, 2007).

It was understood by authors of early studies on sport media texts that “sport is dominantly male, that it is socially constructed, and that the hierarchies within dominant forms of North American sport are skewed toward reproducing and thus reifying a cultural myth of male physical superiority” (Reinhart, 2005, p. 236). For the most part, findings of studies examining the treatment of sportswomen by both the mainstream (majority of studies) and alternative sport media suggested that the (hetero)sexualization and trivialization and under(re)presentation and marginalization of female athletes is a primary means by which masculine dominance is reproduced in mediated sport. Scholars thus suggested that without proper coverage of female athletes, women would not be encouraged to participate in sports, nor would they be socially accepted if they did – this ultimately contributed to the perpetual gender inequity both inside and outside of sport. Studies examining ways in which male athletes are (re)presented in the media also confirmed, for the most part, that sport is a “religion of domination and aggression constructed around a male godhead” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 23).

Why Focus on Identity and Subjectivity in Sport Media?

Gender (re)presentation in media texts was not the only concern for researchers; studies exploring other aspects of identity were also deemed crucial in order to understand the diverse ways in which media and technologies are used in everyday life and their consequences both for individuals and social groups. Researchers in both communication and sport studies circles called for (and continue to promote) explorations of the ways in which people use the Internet for identity construction. For example, Buckingham (2008) states that “we need to consider how digital media provide young people with symbolic resources for constructing or expressing their own identities. . . .” Furthermore, Wheaton (2004a) suggests that the media (in all forms) provides many of the resources that help us understand ourselves and she thus calls for explorations of how people negotiate the complex association between lived experiences and media representations. Finally, Wilson (2007, 2008) implores sport scholars to consider how the Internet impacts sport cultures. Feminist media scholars are also calling for research that looks at the impacts women’s use of the Internet is having on their identities and subjectivities (e.g., Bury, 2005; Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002; Gajjala, 2004; Harcourt, 1999; Passonen, 2005). Work has been done on gendered media representations of lifestyle sports (mainstream and alternative media– see Beal & Wilson, 2004; Donnelly, 2008; Thorpe, 2008, Wheaton & Beal, 2003). However, thus far, this dissertation is the only work that has looked at gender, new media and lifestyle sport.

Feminist Sport Media Textual Analyses

Relying on Gramscian understandings of power and resistance to explain the complex issues involving (re)presentations of female athletes, scholars argued that dominant

descriptions of sportswomen (including skateboarding women – Beal & Wilson, 2004) focus on: gender marking¹³ (Koivula, 1999), establishing heterosexuality¹⁴ (Wright & Clarke, 1999), emphasizing female stereotypes¹⁵ (Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002), infantilizing women¹⁶ (Koivula, 1999), non-sports related aspects¹⁷ (Eastman & Billings, 2000), comparisons to men's performance¹⁸ (Donnelly, MacNeill & Knight, 2008) and ambivalence¹⁹ (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). These discursive constructs (or slight variations of them) have been used by sport media scholars to analyze media content for over a decade and continue to be used today, in most cases, to report that women are still relatively invisible in media texts (when compared with participation rates) and inaccurately (re)presented as women (heterosexual, sexualized) first and athletes second.

On a positive note, some recent studies examining (re)presentations of sportswomen in both mainstream and alternative sport media have documented counter discourses (e.g., Crossman, Vincent & Speed, 2007; Duncan & Messner, 2000, 2005; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008; Thorpe, 2008; Vincent, Imwold, Masemann & Johnson, 2002), however the majority have found that asymmetrical coverage of women's and men's sports sustain the

¹³ Identifying the gender of female athletes, teams and sports without indicating gender for male athletes, teams and sports.

¹⁴ Describing female (and male) athletes as objects of heterosexual attraction and referring to female athletes as 'girlfriends' of men.

¹⁵ Mentioning physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours stereotypically associated to femininity.

¹⁶ Describing female athletes as 'girls,' or using their first name rather than their last name or whole name without referring to similar-age male athletes as 'boys' or using their first name

¹⁷ Mentioning the athletes' family relationships and personal life

¹⁸ Comparing female athlete success or losses to male athlete success or losses

¹⁹ Juxtaposition of positive descriptions and images with others that undermine or trivialize women's efforts and successes

relations embedded in the gender order. Recent studies examining media portrayals of sportsmen have also found messages that contradict hegemonic masculinity discourses, which support the notion of fluid hegemony (e.g. Harris & Clayton, 2007; Miller, 1998; Whannel, 2002a, 2002b). However, scholarly work continues to conclude that both mainstream and alternative media culture continues to promote hypermasculinity (Baerg, 2007) which “ . . . inhibits the cultural, practical and political transformations necessary to achieve gender harmony” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 262).

Feminist Sport Media Production Research

Although there are studies looking at the production processes of gendered sports media texts (see Bruce, 1998; Hardin, 2005; Knoppers & Elling, 1994; Millington & Wilson, 2010; Theberge & Cronk, 1986; Thorpe, 2008) and studies looking at the production and control of online sports content without a gendered lens (see Boyle & Haynes, 2002; Lange, Nicholson & Hess, 2007; Lowes, 2004; Scherer & Jackson, 2007), there are no analyses that explicate issues of production and control of Internet (re)presentations of sportswomen.

Audience Reception Research

The ways in which audiences make sense of media (re)presentations have been examined in a variety of non-sports related academic disciplines for over 25 years. These examinations have been marked by a number of different paradigms, from classical “effects” research (e.g., Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963) and the “uses and gratifications” (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1983) model, which did not view audiences as active to the “cultural turn” (most notably advanced by scholars from the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)) and poststructuralist models (e.g., Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), which argued that audiences are, indeed, active in their media text

readings. The paradigm shift towards active audience models surfaced in the 1970's and argued (albeit using cultural studies rather than the poststructuralist terminology used here) that audiences do not unreflexively take up dominant discursive constructions circulated in and through media texts – rather they critically challenge these constructions either by choosing to take them up, resist them or create alternative discourses.

For example, in the early 1970's, scholars from the CCCS suggested that media texts conveyed messages of dominant ideology but that audiences could read these messages in various ways (Crawford, 2004). Another significant contribution that applied this way of thinking, (in what Alasuutari (1999) deems the “first generation” of audience studies) was Stuart Hall's (1980, originally published in 1973) structuralist “encoding-decoding” model. This model suggested that (a) meaning is not fixed; (b) meaning is not transparent (since language operates within a framework of power, institutions and politics/economics); and (c) audiences negotiate and often oppose meaning intended by the producer (“preferred” or “dominant” reading). Hall's (1980) study was among the first to focus on the construction of meaning through language systems (semiotics), to claim that texts are defined by precise moments of production (encoding) and consumption or audience reception (decoding) and to discuss notions of cultural identity.

Subsequently, (in what Alasuutari (1999) deems the “second generation” of audience studies) analyses that examined identity politics and that challenged the proposition of precise moments emerged. Janice Radway's (1984) seminal study of language employed in the Romance novel genre and how that language affected readers was one of many published by feminist scholars. These studies came about because scholars recognized that media (re)presentations had become pivotal to the definition, construction, contestation and

reconstitution of our multiple and (sometimes hybrid) cultural identities (Morley & Robins, 1995) and that there is a complex association between lived experience and the ways in which media (re)presentations (which are intertextual and consist of discursive constructs) are taken up by audiences (Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Like Hall, most scholars argued that audiences are active agents and that they actively construct their identities through their interactions with media (re)presentations.

The “third generation” of audience studies was characterized by further divergences from Hall’s original work, suggesting that recent changes in the contemporary world (such as globalization, in particular, the rapid expansion of new information communication technologies (ICTs) and the rise of neoliberal²⁰ philosophies in Western states) were fragmenting audiences. Scholars believed that these new, more fluid, conceptions of “audience” merited examination (Millington & Wilson, 2010) and argued that there were too many contradictions in the paradigm used in previous studies. Among these scholars were Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), who proposed the “spectacle/performance paradigm”. In this paradigm, there are three different types of audiences: simple, mass and diffused.²¹

²⁰ Foucauldian scholar Thomas Lemke (2001) writes that “neoliberalism encourages individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form. It responds to stronger “demand” for individual scope for self-determination and desired autonomy by “supplying” individuals and collectives with the possibility of actively participating in the solution of specific matters and problems which had hitherto been the domain of state agencies specifically empowered to undertake such tasks” (p. 202). Neoliberalism shifts responsibilities from the state (such as health, illness, poverty and unemployment – see Harvey, 2005; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999) to the individual; the core strategy of neoliberalism is self-responsibility. A neoliberal subject is thus a subject that is essentialized, universal and unhistorical, believes that s/he is creating her/himself and is blind to the constitutive effects of discourse.

²¹ The simple audience consists of face-to-face, direct communication, happens in public and is often highly ritualised (as in a live sporting audience); the mass audience consists of highly mediated, spatially – even globally – dispersed, often reads texts in private (as in the newspaper sports page readership or a football television audience) and the diffused audience is strongly dispersed and fragmented, yet at the same time

Abercrombie and Longhurst's focus on issues of performativity was deemed more useful than the neo-Marxian incorporation/resistance paradigm – which focused on the operations of power in society in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity and age.

Sports sociologists looking to understand the complexities of gender construction in the context of sport reading, listening, viewing and surfing have mostly analyzed the content of the texts. However, scholars have recently begun to use theoretical frameworks that focus on audience experience (e.g., Lemish, 1998; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008; Thorpe, 2008). Studies of this type are slow to come to fruition, partially due to the on-going debate which centers on the relative influence of audiences and texts in the construction of meaning. In this debate, some scholars argue that media texts are not ideologically deterministic (Fiske, 1989) while others believe that audiences are swayed towards preferred meanings, privileged by the ideological nature of the text (Condit, 1989). A key concept that is crucial for understanding the relationship between the individual audience member and the sport media text is that of the subject.

Subject positions are the products of discursive and power relations (Weedon, 1997). Gendered subject positions are constituted by locating ourselves in discourse (Weedon, 1997). We are subject to and subject of sport media discourses at the same time. When we interact with sport media texts, our gendered subjectivity is contradictory and precarious; we are constantly being (re)constituted in discourse. Duncan and Brummett (1993) supported this position, as they suggested that both preferred and subversive gendered subject positions are taken up by viewers; audiences are both constrained and empowered at the same time.

embedded in or fused with all aspects of daily life and is characterised by routine and casual inattention and yet always present (as in the 'always on' internet connection, multitasked with television, conversation and working from home).

However, Foucault (1990) warned that it is not a simple task to identify a specific discourse and explained that discourses are difficult to decipher, in part, because “a multiplicity of discursive elements . . . can come into play in various strategies” (Foucault, 1990, p. 100). Audiences confront numerous and even contradictory discourses and although the commercialized mass media undoubtedly influence the negotiation of femininities and masculinities in sport, these negotiations “do not produce a simple dominating discourse” (Pringle & Markula, 2005, p. 472).

Scholars argue that sportswomens’ bodies are constructed in multiple, ambiguous and conflictual ways and that women take up, negotiate, resist and challenge dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating through the media (Azzarito, 2010). The discourses that scholars once suggested are dominant in sport media and the subject positions audiences take up may not have effects that they were once thought to. Audiences may, instead, take up subject positions that contradict or challenge dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen and sportsmen and the institution of sport in general. Current research is only just beginning to respond to this issue (e.g., Bissell, 2010; Lemish, 1998; Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2008; Thomsen, Bower & Barnes, 2004; Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). For example, Thorpe (2008) found in her examination of how young women construct themselves through mass and niche snowboarding media that textual representations typically deemed sexist are not inherently oppressive – they do not necessarily confirm masculine dominance in sport. She determined that, instead, “the effect of these images depends on the discursive lens through which men and women read them” (Thorpe, 2008, p. 224). In this statement, she suggested that the women in her study are thinking, feeling subjects that reflect upon the discursive relations that constitute them and

are capable of finding their own conceptions of gender from sport media and niche snowboarding media texts.

Thorpe (2008) also suggested that if we want to come to a deeper understanding of sport media texts and the ways in which they affect people's constructions of gender, we must "question the extent to which discourses of femininity [and masculinity], and particularly discourses of sexism . . . really do have a 'discursive effect' on women's [and men's] . . . experiences" (p. 208). Therefore, we must attempt to understand to what point audience members are constructing their gendered selves through sport media discourses. Rail (1998) suggested that sport media texts are so pervasive in Western culture that they can become reality and she claimed that "nature is dying and culture is taking over: representation, not direct experience, comes to determine all meaning" (p. 151). It is possible, then, that sport media discourses of masculinity and femininity have an even more pronounced effect on how we construct our gendered selves than in previous times. Our mediated realities may, indeed be our real realities. This means that more effort is required on the part of sport sociologists to understand how individual audience members construct their gendered selves through sport media messages.

How can we continue to address this issue in the future? Scholars must engage in examinations of audience interactions with sport media texts by using de Lauretis' (1987) proposition: "that the construction of gender is the product and the process of both (re)presentation and self-(re)presentation" (p. 9). We must attempt to investigate the truthfulness of how we construct our gender subjectivities through sport media (re)presentations. However, in doing so, since we can never truly know how others constitute themselves in discourse, we must be prudent not to claim that our findings

represent the ‘truth.’ Through interviews and other ethnographic methods, we can begin to understand sport media audience members’ gender constructions and self-perceptions, albeit without an emphasis on metanarratives. Foucault’s conceptualization of subject to and subject of discourses can be useful for these examinations.

“Lifestyle” Sport and Skateboarding Research

Why look at the online practices of female skateboarders? How might these be different than the practices of other sportswomen? Even though I didn’t set out to study skateboarding women specifically, I ended up with skateboarding as the primary subject of my research. There is a large academic body of literature examining issues of identity in lifestyle sports (see Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton, 2004a, 2004b), and in particular, skateboarding (see Beal, 1996; Donnelly, 2006; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2008; Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly, 2004; Yochim, 2010). As suggested earlier, scholars argue that these activities present challenges to traditional ways of “seeing,” “doing,” understanding and (re)presenting sport (e.g., Midol & Broyer, 1995, Reinhart, 1998, Wheaton, 2000, Wheaton & Beal, 2003; Yochim, 2010). As previously stated, the earliest participants in lifestyle sporting activities were seeking an alternative lifestyle (and often times resistant) to the mainstream that created a distinct social identity (Wheaton, 2004a). Since I was looking for Internet sites where women resist dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen commonly circulated in mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations, it is no surprise that I ended up studying a group of women engaged in a lifestyle sport.

However, researchers also suggest that the increasing commercialization of these activities has changed the lifestyle sportscape. Beginning in the 1990’s, lifestyle sports were co-opted by multi-national corporations who arguably continue to control and dictate the

ways in which the sports are (re)presented (and thus diminish their resistive functions).

Yochim (2010) argues, though, that since its beginnings, skateboarding's subcultural roots were a discursive production of the mainstream (corporate) media. She also suggests that although skateboarding culture, which has historically been (and continues to be) steeped in consumption (and reliant on corporate America), it is also a space of citizenship in which youths produce a politic of identity through their consumption (Yochim, 2010). Therefore, skateboarders construct their conceptions of identity within and through the media.

That skateboarding is referred to by some scholars as a "subculture" raises some important issues. Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCC) suggested that youth subcultures resist dominant ideologies by appropriating mainstream signs and symbols for their own purposes. They proposed that these youth groups used commodities to resist structural change. Numerous sport scholars adopted the concept of subculture to examine sporting cultures, including lifestyle sports cultures. However, according to Wheaton (2007), early sport studies used the concept of subculture, as defined by Hall and his colleagues, in largely descriptive, atheoretical and ahistoric ways. Numerous critics (including Wheaton, 2007) of subcultural theory question "the political nature of subcultures, the strict binary between subculture and mainstream, the theorists' sole and limited focus on class relations to the exclusion of gender, race, nation and sexuality and their dependence on semiological methods to interpret subcultural style while ignoring subcultural practice (e.g., producing music or making zines)" (Yochim, 2010, p. 17).

These theorists, some of whom are also critical of the label "post-subculture," which accounts for mass culture and ideology but arguably fails to explain the relationships and

politics between mainstream culture and subculture, suggest that the concept of subculture needs to be revisited in order to account for “the flux dynamism and change experienced by self-identified participants but should also examine the stability and distinctiveness in the culture’s collective identity and forms of status” (Wheaton, 2007, p. 300). Yochim (2010) notes that we must understand subcultural discourses and practices together along with mainstream discourses and practices if we want to understand the ways in which practices, like skateboarding, both challenge and reproduce power relations.

Regardless of the theoretical approach taken, researchers note that lifestyle sport activities continue to present challenges to traditional sport practices, identities and cultures (Wheaton & Beal, 2003). In particular, identity politics in lifestyle sport culture has been examined to determine whether participants see their practice as a challenge to mainstream sport culture. For example, with respect to gender politics, Wheaton (2004a) reports that:

The central question lifestyle sport researchers have sought to answer is whether these newer non-traditional sports offer different and potentially more transformatory scripts for male and female physicality, than the hegemonic masculinities and femininities characteristic of traditional sport cultures and identities. (p. 16)

Reinhart (2005) further alleges that:

some proponents of alternative sports—in this case, extreme sports—claim that theirs is a different model, a paradigmatic shift, one in which mature females and mature males might see equal opportunities for participation, exposure, monies, respect, and individual and group growth within and through sports.” (p 238)

Spowart, Burrows and Shaw (2010) offer more support to the notion that lifestyle sports can act as sites for challenging dominant discursive constructions of gender in their

analysis of surfing mums. They argue that surfing mums occupy shifting positions of power and resistance, some of which potentially transform and re-work traditional constructs of motherhood (Spowart, Burrows and Shaw, 2010). In her analysis of the discourses of masculinity circulating in lifestyle sports magazines, Wheaton (2003) argues, with respect to lifestyle sport media that:

audiences actively interpret, draw on and create meanings that can vary and do differ from the preferred meaning offered by the texts. Although lifestyle sport magazines reinscribe traditional hegemonic codes about masculinity, they simultaneously offer at least the potential for changes in gender relations and identities. (p. 218)

Therefore, scholars are suggesting that lifestyle sport media may provide participants with opportunities to challenge dominant discursive constructions of gender. In their analysis of street skateboarding, Atencio, Beal & Wilson (2009) demonstrate that lifestyle sporting practices, such as skateboarding, are, indeed, providing girls and women with opportunities to challenge the gender relations and identities historically constructed in and through skateboarding culture. They further argue that “All-Girl” spaces might work alongside women-focused niche media forms in order to support resistant femininities and practices which might underpin more egalitarian gender relations in street skateboarding (Atencio, Beal & Wilson, 2009).

However, even though skateboarding can be a site in which participants can resist dominant modes of power,²² studies on gender identity in skateboarding (see Atencio, Beal & Wilson, 2009; Beal, 1996; Donnelly, 2006; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2008; Pomerantz,

²² Yochim (2010) argues that the polemic between grace and aggression required in skateboarding makes it a space in which dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity (since masculinity and femininity are mutually constitutive) have simultaneously been challenged and reproduced.

Currie & Kelly, 2004; Reinhart, 2005; Yochim, 2010) suggest that men and women, boys and girls never fully challenge the power of white, middle-class men, especially in relation to media systems.

For example, scholars note that in the skateboarding world, male skaters represent the standard in media (re)presentations while female skaters are sexualized, trivialized and marginalized (Beal & Wilson, 2004). They argue that mainstream media (re)present skateboarding women in the same way that they (re)present female athletes from traditional sports. Such forms of marginalization are even worse in alternative skateboarding media (Beal & Wilson, 2004). This confirms skateboarding women's doubly-marginalized status in the sports world and in the skateboarding world. Donnelly (2008) further suggests that even media (re)presentations focusing on female skateboarders rely on legitimization by men (considered the skateboarding experts) and focus on injury, which reinforces rather than challenges ideologies of gender difference.

Interrogations of New Media

Audiences construct their genders through sport media texts and it is critical that sports sociologists attempt to understand these gender constructions in the future. In order to do this comprehensively, we will have to continue to study traditional media such as radio, newspapers and television. We will also be required to consider new communication technologies (such as the Internet and other communication technologies), as computer mediated sport or "Cybersport" offers new challenges (Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Leonard, 2006, 2007; McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998; Wilson, 2007). This is in part because traditional forms of sport media are produced by organizations and with technologies that do not facilitate dialogue between the audience and the producer at the time of production.

Furthermore, these media have gatekeepers who filter ideas leaving audiences to construct meaning from texts after they are produced. Conversely, the Internet has a certain reversibility that allows audience members the ability to produce their own texts and interact with texts that others have produced, thus blurring the lines between encoder and decoder. By being both an encoder and a decoder at the same time, new subject positions are created. The Internet is the only form of media, currently, that allows for this new subject position creation.

Critics of the Internet claim that the lack of gatekeepers means that information is produced without the same rigor and systematic methods as traditional forms of media. However, this is arguably a blessing. If there are no official gatekeepers, discourses that are marginalized or trivialized by the traditional mainstream media have a space in which to operate. This gives marginalized groups the chance to contribute to the public discourse (Plymire & Foreman, 2000). Other critics have argued that cyberspace is a realm that is alternative to and separate from the real world; “in this paradigm, the Internet becomes understood as transformative spatiality where gender categories become reconfigured” (Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002, p. 2).

Researchers have been critical of the Internet, particularly the ways in which governments, armed forces and companies nefariously use the medium as a panoptic mechanism to classify and discipline populations (see Batra, 2008). Other scholars, including feminist scholars and sport sociology scholars, have suggested that although there may be disciplinary mechanisms at play, the Internet can be used as a tool for social change (Batra, 2008; Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002; Wilson, 2007). As a result, feminist scholars are

engaging heavily with the Internet (e.g., Bury, 2005; Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002; Harcourt, 1999).

For example, Sherry Turkle (1995) viewed both computers and information networks (such as the Internet) as identity-transforming, as they erode the boundaries of “real and virtual, human and machine” and enable constant reinvention of gender discourses (pp. 9-10). Other feminist academics have embraced Donna Haraway’s metaphorical cyborg (detailed in her manifesto), which she conceived of in 1985 prior to the proliferation of the Internet, and have used this figure to examine ways in which the Internet reconfigures the possibilities for bodies, technologies and gender (Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002). Haraway (2010) defines a “cyborg” as:

a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction [...] By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination.

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense. (pp. 149-150)

Saleh (2010) contends that this metaphorical description can accurately describe any female who communicates through her computer in cyberspace because it “accounts for and welcomes so-called “contradictory standpoints” from women who are different in class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religious beliefs, political party and physical ability” (<http://mylifeinapyramid.com/about/cyberactivism-and-women-in-the-blogosphere/>). She further argues that although the Internet may provide women the potential to challenge discursive constructions of gender, most importantly, it gives women a space in which to enter a new phase of politics distinguished by the opportunity to share opinions and personal stories and the potential to advance their issues in the public arena. She specifically advocates for women’s use of the blogosphere and suggests that two features of this sphere – its self-publishing nature and an interactivity that is not available with other forms of media – are in line with salient features of third-wave feminist theory, notably the rejection of a universal female identity and the focus on discursive power and the distinctions among women. She notes, like others, that the Internet often replicates power relations – for example, if women turn to blogs, the structures that currently subjugate women (like the political sphere) are not challenged – and perpetuates gender norms.

Some sports sociologists have undertaken research on the Internet (e.g., Dart, 2009; Davis & Duncan, 2006; Ferriter, 2009; Hutchins, Rowe & Ruddock, 2009; Leonard, 2009; Plymire & Forman, 2000, Rowe, 2004; Wilson, 2002; 2007 Wilson & Hayhurst, 2009).

Some of these scholars have also engaged with the Internet as a platform for social commentary (blogs created by sport sociologists include – One Sport Voice, Pat Griffin’s LGBT Sports Blog, Sports Babel, Sports, Media & Society, and the Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport Blog). However, sport sociologists have been slow to engage with the Internet in their work on social resistance and social movements (Wilson, 2007). Although studies do exist that suggest that the actions of sports-related social movements are enhanced by their use of the Internet (e.g., Davis & Carlisle Duncan, 2006; Harvey, Horne & Safai, 2009; Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Lenskyj, 2002; Millington & Wilson, 2010; Plymire & Forman, 2000; Sage, 1999; Scherer & Jackson, 2008; Wilson, 2006, 2007), that describe ‘anti-jock’ cybergroups that critique hypermasculine sport cultures (e.g., Wilson, 2002), and that look at the production and control of online sports content without a gendered analysis (see Boyle & Haynes, 2002; Lange, Nicholson & Hess, 2007; Scherer & Jackson, 2007), no work has yet explored issues of production and control of gendered Internet (re)presentations of sportswomen (Wilson, 2007). This is disappointing given that female athletes are increasingly connecting with other women (and men) on platforms such as blogs, Facebook²³ and Twitter²⁴. Thus, if feminist sports scholars want to achieve the goals of our predecessors, who started empirically studying media

²³ Facebook is a social networking service and website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Facebook has more than 800 million active users worldwide. Users can create profiles with photos, lists of personal interests, contact information, and other personal information. Users can communicate with friends and other users through private or public messages and a chat feature. They can also create and join interest groups and "like pages", some of which are maintained by organizations as a means of advertising. The website is free for user and although users have the ability to set and view their own privacy settings, there have been controversies concerning the regulation of privacy in recent years.

²⁴ Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as "tweets". Twitter is privately owned and operated by Twitter Inc. Twitter currently has over 300 million users that generate over 300 million tweets per day.

(re)presentations in order to understand discourses of gender in sport media, it is critical that cyberspace²⁵ become part of the current academic conversation (Kian, Vincent & Mondello, 2008; Leonard, 2009).

Where should we start? First, Wilson (2007) suggested that we use integrated, historically located critical approaches to study cybersport. I suggest that we recognize that the construction of gender through cybersport texts is the product and the process of both (re)presentation and self-(re)presentation. Foucault's notion of technologies of the self is an appropriate tool for examining how women and men constitute themselves in cyberspace.

Moving Beyond Content Analyses

Unlike a number of previous studies, which focus solely on the analysis of media texts, I used a poststructuralist perspective (see Rail, 2002; Weedon, 1997) to go beyond this type of analysis and make the links between the political and the practical by looking not only at how sportswomen are (re)presented (analysis of media text) but also how and why they choose to self-(re)present (examination of the production of media texts) and what users think of these (re)presentations (examination of the audiences' uptake of media texts). Furthermore, following Leonard's (2009) call for examinations of new media and its impact on sport, I looked specifically at Internet texts, since research has not examined how sportswomen are (re)presented in this type of media.

In this dissertation, I examined what effects new media²⁶ (re)presentations of sporting bodies have on women's individual identities. My rationale for doing so comes down to two

²⁵ The word "cyberspace" was coined by the science fiction author William Gibson, when he sought a name to describe his vision of a global computer network, linking all people, machines and sources of information in the world, and through which one could move or "navigate" as through a virtual space.

points. First, I believe that since sport is such a pervasive element of our culture (Mangan, 2003), we must study it. Second, we must consider the discursive pressures enacted on the body within and through sport since the body is central to sporting performance. Finally, we must see the sporting body from a variety of perspectives including from a feminist perspective because women's participation and performance (including my own) in sport have always been negotiated within a set of hierarchical gender relations.

Furthermore, like Brian Wilson (2007), I propose that although the Internet is problematic in many ways (Batra, 2008), it also has "immense revolutionary potential in sport-related contexts" (p. 457). Indeed, sportswomen are still underrepresented and marginalized in mainstream and alternative media texts (Kane & Buysse, 2005). However, I argue that they are starting to turn to Internet driven forms of resistance/response to counter these messages. This is what I am interested in, mainly since I have, for the most part, stopped paying attention to mainstream and alternative media sports coverage because I feel that there have not been enough changes to the ways in which sportswomen are portrayed, written about, etc. (with the exception of some media texts such as the University of Ottawa's Fulcrum and La Rotonde – see MacKay & Dallaire, 2009). I rarely read *Sports Illustrated*, watch the local sports news on television or read the local or national newspaper sports sections. I rarely read relatively widely distributed magazines or watch videos produced by skateboarders, snowboarders, or surfers. However, I do consume community media such as blogs, I do participate in non-corporately-run social networking sites and I do

²⁶ Specifically the Internet, which encompasses electronic mail (email), the World Wide Web (WWW), Usenet newsgroups, bulletin boards, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Multi-User Domains (MUDs) and many other applications (Smith & Kollock, 1999)

watch videos produced by and for small communities online. Others, it seems, are doing this, too.

References

- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination*. London: Sage.
- Alasuutari, P. (1999). Introduction: Three phases in reception studies. In P. Alasuutari (Ed.), *Rethinking the media audience: The new agenda* (pp. 1–21). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. (1990). *Gender stereotyping in televised sports*. Los Angeles, CA: Amateur Athletic Foundation.
- Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. (1994). *Gender stereotyping in televised sports: A follow up to the 1989 Study*. Los Angeles, CA: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.
- Atencio, M., Beal, B., & Wilson, C. (2009). The distinction of risk: urban skateboarding, street habitus and the construction of hierarchical gender relations. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 1, 3–20.
- Azzarito, L. (2010). Future Girls, transcendent femininities and new pedagogies: toward girls' hybrid bodies? *Sport, Education and Society*, 15(3), 261–275.
- Baerg, A. (2007). Fight Night round 2: Mediating the body and digital boxing. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(3), 325–345.
- Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 575–582.
- Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1963). Vicarious reinforcement and imitative learning. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 601–607.
- Batra, N. D. (2008). *Digital freedom*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Beal, B. (1996). Alternative masculinity and its effects on gender relations in the subculture of skateboarding. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 19, 204–220.
- Beal, B., & Wilson, C. (2004). ‘Chicks dig scars’: commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders’ identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). Thousand New York: Routlage.
- Bernstein, A., & Blain, N. (2003). *Sport, media, culture: Global and local dimensions*. Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- Bernstein, A. (2002). Is it time for a victory lap? Changes in the media coverage of women in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37, 415–428.
- Birrell, S., & McDonald, M.G. (2000). *Reading sport: Critical essays on power and representation*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Bishop, R. (2003). Missing in action: Feature coverage of women’s sports in Sports Illustrated. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 27, 184–19.
- Bissell, K.L. (2010). Exploring the influence of mediated beauty. In H.L. Hundley & A.C. Billings (Eds.), *Examining identity in sports media* (pp. 37–63). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Boyle, R., & Haynes, R. (2002). *New media sport. Culture, Sport, Society*, 5, 95–114.
- Bruce, T. (1998). Audience frustration and pleasure: Women viewers confront televised women's basketball, *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 22(4), 373–397.
- Buckingham, D. (2008). Introducing identity. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1–24.

- Burstyn, V. (1999). *The rites of men: Manhood, politics and the culture of sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bury, R. (2005). *Cyberspaces of their own: Female fandoms online*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Buyse, J.M., & Embser-Herbert, M.S. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport: An analysis of intercollegiate media guide cover photographs. *Gender and Society*, 18(1), 66-81.
- Castells, M. (2003). *The Internet galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, business and society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Christopherson, N., Janning, M. and McConnell, E.D. (2002). Two kicks forward, one kick back: A content analysis of media discourses on the 1999 Women's World Cup Soccer Championship. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 19(2), 170–88.
- Clavio, G., & Kian, T.M. (2010). Uses and gratifications of a retired female athlete's twitter followers. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), 485–500.
- Condit, C.M. (1989). The rhetorical limits of polysemy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6(2), 103–22.
- Connell, R.W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Connell, R.W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. Cambridge, UK. Polity Press.
- Consalvo, M., & Paasonen, S (Eds.) (2002). *Women & everyday uses of the Internet: Agency & identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Couldry, N. (2005). The Extended Audience: Scanning the horizon, in G. Marie (Ed.), *Media Audiences*, Open University Press, Berkshire, pp. 184–220.
- Crawford, G. (2004). *Consuming sport: Fans, sport and culture*. New York: Routledge.

- Crossman, J., Vincent, J., & Speed, H. (2007). 'The times they are a-changin': Gender comparisons in three national newspapers of the 2004 Wimbledon Championships. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 42(1), 27–41.
- Daniels, E. A. (2009). Sex objects, athletes and sexy athletes: How media representations of women athletes can impact adolescent girls and college women. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 24, 399–423.
- Dart, J.J. (2009). Blogging the FIFA 2006 World Cup finals. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 107–126.
- Davis, L. (1997). *The swimsuit issue and sport: Hegemonic masculinity* in Sports Illustrated. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Davis, N., & Duncan, M.C. (2006). Sports knowledge is power: Reinforcing masculine privilege through fantasy sport league participation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 30(3), 244–264.
- Donnelly, P., MacNeill, M., & Knight, G. (2008). *Enough, already! A comment on gender representation research*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Donnelly, M. (2006). Studying Extreme Sports: Beyond the Core Participants. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 30(2), 219–224.
- Donnelly, M. (2008). "Take the slam and get back up": Hardcore Candy and the politics of representation in girls and women's skateboarding and snowboarding on television. In M.D. Giardina and M.K. Donnelly (Eds.), *Youth Culture and Sport* (pp. 127–146). New York: Routledge.
- Duncan, M.C. (1990). Sport photographs and sexual difference: Images of women and men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic games. *Sport Sociology Journal*, 7, 22–43.

- Duncan, M.C., & Hasbrook, C. (1988). *Denial of power in women's televised sports. Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 1–21.
- Duncan, M.C., & Brummett, B. (1993). Liberal and radical sources of female empowerment in sport media. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10(1), 57–72.
- Duncan, M. C., & Messner, M. A. (1998). The media image of sport and gender. In L. A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport* (pp. 170-185). Boston: Routledge Kegan Paul.
- Duncan, M.C., & Messner, M. (2000). *Gender in televised sports: 1989, 1993, 1999*. Los Angeles: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. www.aafla.org.
- Duncan, M.C., & Messner, M. (2005). *Gender in televised sports: News and highlights shows, 1989-2004*. Los Angeles: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. www.aafla.org.
- Eastman, S.T., & Billings, A.C. (1999). Gender parity in the Olympics: Hyping women athletes, favoring men athletes. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23, 140–170.
- Eastman, S.T. & Billings, A.C. (2000). Sportscasting and sports reporting: The power of gender bias. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24, 192–213.
- Farred, G. (2000). Cool as the other side of the pillow: How ESPN's SportsCenter has changed television sports talk. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24, 96–117.
- Fasting, K., & Tangen, J. (1983). Gender and sport in Norwegian mass media. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 18(1), 61–69.
- Ferriter, M.M. (2009). "Arguably the greatest": Sports fans and communities at work on Wikipedia. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 127–54.

- Fink, J. S., & Kensicki, L.J.. (2002). An imperceptible difference: Visual and textual constructions of femininity in *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*.” *Mass Communication & Society*, 5(3), 317–339.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Reading the popular*. Boston: Unwin Hyman. Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gajjala, R. (2009). Response to Shani Orgad. In A.N. Markham & K. Baym (Eds.), *Internet inquiry* (pp. 61–68). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Giulianotti, R. (2004). *Sport: A critical sociology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Greenberg, B.S. (1974). Gratifications of television viewing and their correlates for British children. In J. Blumer and E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratification research* (pp. 71–92). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1978). The treatment of “football hooliganism” in the press. In R. Ingham, S. Hall, J. Clarke, P. Marsh & J. Donovan (Eds.), *Football hooliganism: The wider context* (pp. 15–36). London: Inter-Action Inprint.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding and decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128–138). London: Hutchinson.
- Harcourt, W (Ed.) (1999). *Women@internet: Creating new cultures in cyberspace*. New York: Zed Books.
- Hardin, M. (2005). Stopped at the gate: Women's sports, “reader interest,” and decision making by editors, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(1), 62–77.

- Haraway, D. (2000). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late Twentieth Century. In D. Bell & B.M. Kennedy (Eds.), *The cybercultures reader* (pp. 291–324). London: Routledge.
- Harris, J., & Clayton, B. (2007). The first metrosexual rugby star: Rugby union, masculinity, and celebrity in contemporary Wales. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(2), 145–164.
- Harvey, D. (2005). A brief history of neoliberalism. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, J., Horne, J & Safai, P. (2009). Alterglobalization: Global social movements and the possibility of political transformation through sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(3), 383–403.
- Hilliard, D. (1984). Media images of male and female professional athletes: An interpretive analysis of magazine articles. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1(3), 251–262.
- Howell, J.W., Andrews, D.L., & Jackson, S.J. (2002). Cultural and sport studies: An interventionist practice. In J. Maguire & K. Young (Ed.), *Theory, sport & society* (pp. 151–177). San Diego, CA: Elsevier.
- Hutchins, B., Rowe, D., & Ruddock, A. (2009). “It’s Fantasy Football made real”: Networked media sport, the Internet, and the hybrid reality of MyFootballClub. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 89–106.
- Jansen S.C., & Sabo, D. (1994). The sport/war metaphor: Hegemonic masculinity, the Persian Gulf War and the new world, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11(1), 1–18.
- Jhally, S. (1989). Cultural studies and the sports/media complex. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Media, Sport and Society* (pp. 70–93). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Jones, R., Murrell, A.J., & Jackson, J. (1999). Pretty versus Powerful in the Sports Pages: Print Media Coverage of U.S. Women's Olympic Gold Medal Winning Teams.

Journal of Sport and Social Issues 23(2), 183–192

Kane, M.J. (1988). Media coverage of the female athlete before, during and after Title IX:

Sports Illustrated revisited. *Journal of Sport Management*, 2(2), 87–99.

Kane, M.J., & Disch, L.J. (1993). Sexual violence and the reproduction of male power in the locker room: The “Lisa Olsen Incident.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10(4), 331–352.

Kane, M.J. & Greendorfer, S.J. (1994) The media's role in accommodating and resisting stereotyped images of women in sport. In Pamela J. Creedon (Ed.), *Women, media and sport: Challenging gender values* (pp. 28–44). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kane, M. J., & Lenskyj, H. J. (1998). Media treatment of female athletes: Issues of gender and sexualities. In L. A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport* (pp. 186-201). Boston: Routledge.

Kane, M.J. & Buysse, J.A. (2005). Intercollegiate media guides as contested terrain: A longitudinal analysis, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 22(2), 214–38.

Kane, M.J., & Maxwell, H. D. (2011). Expanding the Boundaries of Sport Media Research: Using Critical Theory to Explore Consumer Responses to Representations of Women's Sports. *Journal of Sport Management*, 25, 202-216.

Kelly, D.M., Pomerantz, S., and Currie, D.H. (2008). “You can break so many more rules”: The identity work and play of becoming a Skater Girl. In M.D. Giardina & M.K. Donnelly (Eds.), *Youth Culture and Sport* (pp. 113–125). New York: Routledge.

Kian, E.M., Vincent, J., & Mondello, M. (2008). Masculine hegemonic hoops: An analysis of media coverage of March Madness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(2), 223–242.

- Kinkema, K.M., & Harris, J.C. (1992). Sport and the mass media. *Exercise and sports science reviews*, 20(1), 127–159.
- Knight, G., & Greenberg, J. (2002). Promotionalism and subpolitics: Nike and its labor critics *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(4), 541–570.
- Knoppers, A., & Elling, A. (2004). ‘We do not engage in promotional journalism’: Discursive strategies used by sport journalists to describe the selection process. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 39(1), 57–73.
- Koivula, N. (1999). Gender stereotyping in televised media sport coverage. *Sex Roles*, 41(7), 589–604.
- Lange, K., Nicholson, M., & Hess, R. (2007). A new breed apart? Work practices of Australian internet sport journalists. *Sport in Society*, 10(4), 662–679.
- Lauretis, T.D. (1987). *Technologies of gender*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press.
- Lemish, D. (1998). Girls can wrestle too: Gender differences in the consumption of a television wrestling series. *Sex Roles*, 38(9/10), 833–849.
- Lemke, T. (2001). “The birth of bio-politics”: Michel Foucault’s lecture at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and Society*, 30(2), 190–207.
- Lenskyj, H. (2002). *The best Olympics ever?: Social impacts of Sydney 2000*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Leonard, D.J. (2006). An untapped field: Exploring the world of virtual sports gaming. In A.A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Handbook of sports media* (pp. 393–407). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Leonard, D.J. (2007). Call for papers: Virtual sport as new media. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(4), 506.

- Leonard, D.J. (2009). New media and global sporting cultures: Moving beyond the clichés and binaries. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 1–16.
- Lines, G. (2007). The impact of media sport events on the active participation of young people and some implications for PE pedagogy. *Sport, education and society*, 12(4), 349–366.
- Lowes, M.D. (2004). *Inside the sports pages: Work routines, professional ideologies, and the manufacture of sports news*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (2009). Campus newspaper coverage of varsity sports: Getting closer to equitable and sports-related (re)presentations of female athletes? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 44(1), 25–40.
- MacKay, S and Dallaire, C. (in press). Skirtboarder Net-a-narratives: Young women creating their own skateboarding (re)presentations. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.
- Maguire, J. (1993). Globalization, sport development, and the media/sport production complex. *Sport Science Review*, 2(1), 29–47.
- Mangan, J.A. (2003). Series editor's foreword. In A. Bernstein & N. Blain (Eds.), *Sport, media, culture* (pp. vii–viii). London: Frank Cass.
- McDaniel, S.R. & Sullivan, C.B. (1998). Extending the sports experience: Mediations in cyberspace. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 266–281). London: Routledge.
- Messner, M. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5(3), 197–211.

- Messner, M. A., Dunbar, M., & Hunt, D. (2000). The televised sports manhood formula. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24, 380–394.
- Messner, M.A., Duncan, M.C., & Cooky, C. (2003). Silence, sports bras and wrestling porn: Women in televised sports news and highlight shows. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 27, 38–51
- Messner, M., & Cooky, C. (2010). *Gender in televised sports: News and highlights shows, 1989-2009*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Feminist Research, University of Southern California.
- Midol, N., and Broyer, G. (1995). Toward an anthropological analysis of new sport cultures: The case of whiz sports in France. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12(2), 204–212.
- Miller, T. (1998). Commodifying the male body, problematizing “hegemonic masculinity?” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 22(4), 431–447.
- Millington, B., & Wilson, B. (2010). Media consumption and the contexts of physical culture: Methodological reflections on a “Third Generation” study of media audiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(1), 30–53.
- Mitrano, J.R. (1999). The ‘sudden death’ of hockey in Hartford: Sports fans and franchise relocation. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 16, 134–154.
- Murphy, P., Dunning, E., & Williams, J. (1988). Soccer crowd disorder and the press: Processes of amplification and de-amplification in historical perspective. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 5, 645–673.
- Paasonen, S. (2005). *Figure of fantasy: Internet, women & cyberdiscourse*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Plymire, D.C., & Forman, P.J. (2000). Breaking the silence: Lesbian fans, the Internet, and the sexual politics of women's sport. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 5(2), 141–153.
- Plymire, D.C. (2008). The Wiki Defense: Contesting the Status of Knowledge in the Floyd Landis Doping Case. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(3), p. 307–319.
- Pomerantz, S., Currie, D. H. and Kelly, D. M. (2004) Sk8er girls: skateboards, girlhood, and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27, 547–557.
- Pringle, R., & Markula, P. (2005). No pain is sane after all: A Foucauldian analysis of masculinities and men's experiences in rugby. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(4), 472–498.
- Morley, D. & Robins, K. (1995) *Spaces of identity: global media, electronic landscapes, and cultural boundaries*. Routledge, London.
- Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press
- Rail, G. (1998). Seismography of the postmodern condition: Three thesis on the implosion of sport. In G. Rail (Ed.) *Sport and postmodern times* (pp. 144–161). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Rail, G. (2002). Postmodernism and Sport Studies. In J. Maguire & K. Young (eds.) *Perspectives in the Sociology of Sport*, pp. 179–207. London, England: Elsevier Press.
- Reinhart, R. (1998). Inside of the outside: Pecking orders within alternative sport at ESPN's 1995 “The eXtreme Games.” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 22(4), 398–415.

- Rinehart, R. (2005). "Babes" & boards: Opportunities in a new millennium sport? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29(3), 232–255.
- Rintala, J., & Birrell, S. (1984). Fair treatment for the active female: A content analysis of Young Athlete magazine. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1(3), 231–250.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowe, D. (2004). *Sport, culture and the media* (2nd ed.). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.
- Rubin, A.M. (1983). Television uses and gratifications: The interactions of viewing patterns and motivation. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 27, 37–51.
- Sabo, D., & Jansen, S.C. (1998). Prometheus unbound: Constructions of masculinity in sports media. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Sport media: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 170–185). London: Routledge.
- Sage, G. (1999). Justice do it! The Nike transnational advocacy network: Organization, collective actions, and outcomes. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 16(3), 206–235.
- Saleh, H. (2010). Cyberactivism and Women in the Blogosphere: The Role of a Virtual Wave in the Feminist Movement. Presentation given at the WRTC Graduate Symposium, Communication in the 21st Century: Obstacles and Opportunities series at the James Madison University, 16 April.
- Scherer, J., & Jackson, S. (2007). Sports advertising, cultural production and corporate nationalism at the global–local nexus: Branding the New Zealand All Blacks. *Sport in Society*, 10(2), 268–284.

- Scherer J. & Jackson, S.J. (2008). Producing Allblacks.com: Cultural intermediaries and policing of electronic spaces of sporting consumption. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25, 187–205.
- Sisjord, M.K., & Kristiansen, E. (2008). Serious athletes or media clowns? Female and male wrestlers' perceptions of media constructions, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(3), 350–368.
- Smith, M.A., & Kollock, P. (1999). *Communities in cyberspace*. New York: Routledge.
- Spowart, L., Burrows, L., & Shaw, S. (2010). 'I just eat, sleep and dream of surfing': when surfing meets motherhood. *Sport in Society*, 13 (7-8), 1186–1203.
- Theberge, N., & Cronk, A. (1986). Work routines in newspaper sports departments and the coverage of women's sports, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3(3), 195–203.
- Thompson, S. (2002). Sport, gender, feminism. In J. Maguire & K. Young (Ed.), *Theory, sport & society* (pp. 105–127). San Diego, CA: Elsevier.
- Thomsen, S. R., Bower, D. W. & Barnes, M. D. (2004). Photographic images in women's health, fitness, and sports magazines and the physical self-concept of a group of adolescent female volleyball players. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 28(3), 266–283.
- Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of the self and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32(2), 199–229.
- Trujillo, N. (1995). Machines, missiles and men: Images of the male body on ABC's Monday Night Football. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12(4), 403–423.

- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Urquhart, J., & Crossman, J. (1999). The Globe and Mail coverage of the winter Olympic Games: A cold place for women athletes. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23, 193–202.
- Valgeirsson, G., & Snyder, E. (1986). A cross-cultural comparison of newspaper sports sections. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 21(2/3), 131–140.
- Vincent, J., Imwold, C., Masemann, V., & Johnson J.T. (2002). A comparison of selected ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ British, Canadian, and United States newspaper coverage of female and male athletes competing in the Centennial Olympic games: Did female athletes receive equitable coverage in the ‘Games of the Women’? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37(3/4), 319–335.
- Vincent, J. (2004). Game, sex and match: The construction of gender in British newspaper coverage of the 2000 Wimbledon championship. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21, 435–456.
- Vincent, J., & Crossman, J. (2008). Champions, a celebrity crossover, and a capitulator: The construction of gender in broadsheet newspapers’ narratives about selected competitors at Wimbledon. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1, 78–102.
- Wann, D. L., Schrader, M.P., Allison, J.A., & McGeorge, K.K. (1998). The inequitable newspaper coverage of men’s and women’s athletics at small, medium, and large universities. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 22, 79-87.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

- Wenner, L.A. (1998). Playing the Sport media game. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Sport media: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 3–13). London: Routledge.
- Wensing, E., & Bruce, T. (2003). Bending the rules: Media representations of gender during an international sporting event. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(4), 387–396.
- Whannel, G. (1979). Football, crowd behaviour and the press. *Media, culture and society*, 1(4), 327–342.
- Whannel, G. (2002a). *Media sport stars: Masculinities and moralities*. London: Routledge.
- Whannel, G. (2002b). David Beckham, identity and masculinity. *Sociology Review*, 11(3), 2–4.
- Wheaton, B. (2000). “New lads”? Masculinities and the “new sport” participant. *Men and Masculinities*, 2(4), 434–456.
- Wheaton, B. (2003). Lifestyle sports magazines and the discourses of sporting masculinity. In B. Benwell (Ed.), *Masculinity and men's lifestyle magazines* (pp. 193–221.). Keale: Sociological Review, Blackwell.
- Wheaton, B. & Beal, B. (2003). “Keeping it real”: Sub-cultural media and discourses of authenticity in alternative sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38, 155–176.
- Wheaton, B. (2004a). Introduction: mapping the lifestyle sport-scape. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 1–28). Thousand New York: Routledge.

- Wheaton, B. (2004b). 'New Lads'? Competing masculinities in the windsurfing culture. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp 131–153). London: Routledge.
- Wheaton, B. (2007). After Sport Culture: Rethinking Sport and Post-Subcultural Theory. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 31(3), 283–307.
- White, P.G. & Gillet, J. (1994). Reading the muscular body: A critical decoding of advertisements in Flex magazine. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11(1), 18–39.
- Wright, J., & Clarke, G. (1999). Sport, the media and the construction of compulsory heterosexuality: A case study of women's Rugby Union. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34(3), 227–243.
- Wilson, B. (2002). The “anti-jock” movement: Reconsidering youth resistance, masculinity, and sport culture in the age of the internet. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 19, 207–234.
- Wilson, B. (2006). Ethnography, the Internet, and youth culture: Strategies for examining social resistance and “Online-Offline” relationships. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(1), 307–328.
- Wilson, B. (2007). New media, social movements, and global sport studies: A revolutionary moment and the sociology of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24, 457–477.
- Wilson, B. (2008). Believe the Hype?: The Impacts of the Internet on Sport-Related Subcultures. In M. Atkinson & K. Young (Eds.), *Tribal Play: Sport, Subcultures and Countercultures* (pp. 135–152). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier Science.
- Wilson, B., & Sparks, R. (1996). 'It's gotta be the shoes': Youth, race, and sneaker commercials. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 13(4), 398–427.

Wilson, B., & Hayhurst, L. (2009). *Digital activism: Neoliberalism, the Internet and sport for youth development*, 26(1), 126–155.

Yochim, E. C. (2010). *Skate life: Re-imagining white masculinity*. Michigan, USA; University of Michigan.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations

Discourse, the Subject, Technologies of Power and Technologies of the Self

In order to accomplish my dissertation goals of identifying the discourses that the Skirtboarders circulate on the Internet, understanding whether the women are reflexively engaged through their blog production and elucidating how others engaging with these texts understand the discourses circulated by the Skirtboarders, Foucault's concepts of discourse, the subject, technologies of power and technologies of the self were used. These concepts also allowed me to tackle my primary theoretical goal, which was to explore the technologies of the self in relation to an Internet text in order to determine what possibilities might exist for the individual skateboarding women (Skirtboarders' and their blog users) in my study and also if these possibilities could lead to larger scale social change. To situate these concepts in the context of sport studies, as mentioned earlier, numerous sports scholars have used Foucault's notions of power to explore discourses used to discipline women's bodies (e.g., Gill, 2007). Sport feminists have also used Foucault's technologies of power to analyze sport and sport media texts (e.g., Cole, 1993; Thorpe 2008). However, few scholars have turned to the technologies of the self to examine the possible links between sport media and social transformation (albeit there are increasingly more scholars doing this – e.g., Hardin, 2011). I take on this challenge in this dissertation. Additionally, since I use the concept of gender in relation to the media throughout this project, in this section, I explain how I understand gender and how I used the concept of gender in my work.

Discourse

Foucault (1994) claimed that we can only think about and talk about material objects and our experiences of the world through discourse. Foucault further (1972a) argued that dominant discourses are constructed when “experts” (such as government departments,

scientific bodies, etc.) establish “truths.” He argued that these are the discourses that are circulated en masse and these “truths” ultimately structure the possible field of action of others (Foucault, 1983). The statements that make up these discourses underpin what is taken to be “common-sense knowledge” and it is through the circulation, repetition and internalization over time of these discourses that we are produced as subjects. In this conception, power and knowledge are intertwined – it is “not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 52). The exercise of power, for Foucault (1983) is thus aimed at establishing truths influencing the actions and behaviours of others. In the Foucauldian sense, power is productive: It produces identities, practices, ideas and ways of being. In the context of this dissertation, it produces the female skateboarder.

The (Disciplined and Ethical) Subject

Foucault's work demonstrates how institutionalized discourse produces the resources by which we conceive the self. Discourse constructs the self's "obligations and responsibilities, its possibilities of action, its essential and peripheral elements, and its relationships to others and to the institutions in which it is embedded" (Frohmman, 1994, p.134). Therefore, it is the subject that is the product of discursive relations (Weedon, 1997). All participants in the power-knowledge process are ultimately “both victims and agents within systems of domination” (Sawicki, 1991, p. 10). Indeed, Foucault (1983) suggested that:

[discursive power] applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to

recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience and a self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (p. 212)

There are many types of subjects, two of which are: the disciplined subject, who takes up dominant discourses without reflection and the ethical subject, who engages in ethical work—that is, the work that “one performs on oneself” in an “attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behaviour”(Foucault, 1995). These subject positions are extremely complex because subjectivity is neither coherent nor fixed; rather it is partial, messy and incomplete. What is subjectivity? Subjectivity is what we are and it provides us with an understanding of our place in the world. It is discursively produced and we are constantly in the process of subjectification since we are subject to and subject of discourses at the same time. Since our subjectivities are always in motion and always under construction, it is impossible to try to fix or unify them.

Instead, in this project, subjectification is considered a fluid process and questions are asked about the tensions and instabilities in the skateboarding women’s subjectivities. The power relations the women are producing or reproducing and the points of resistance are explored with respect to gender. This is done because when we interact with sport media (re)presentations, our subjectivity is contradictory and precarious; we are constantly being (re)constituted in discourse. Duncan and Brummett (1993) suggest that we take up both preferred and subversive gendered subject positions when we interact with sport media; we are both constrained and empowered at the same time. Therefore, we have the potential to

be (self-authored/disciplined) subjects²⁷, constrained by technologies of power and/or (ethical) subjects²⁸ who engage in technologies of the self. But what are technologies of power and technologies of the self?

Technologies of Power

Foucault (1977) proposed that discipline is a mechanism of power that regulates people's thoughts and behaviours in a society. As previously suggested, the subject, according to Foucault, is the effect of the workings of discourse, which links the exercise of power to the acceptance of a "truth" concerning (in my case, female skateboarding) subjectivity (Markula & Pringle, 2006). It is through discourse that people are subject to disciplinary control; they are disciplined in some way – either through totalizing power or through individualizing power (Smith Maguire, 2002). Foucault (1988a) referred to these disciplinary processes as "technologies of power." Foucault (1977) further explained that disciplinary power:

defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determined. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. (pp. 137-138)

Although Foucault's conceptualization of technologies of power has been heavily used in research, it is only one aspect of his work. Smith Maguire (2002) complained that the sociology of sport "is only just beginning to take notice of his later work. . . [as a result] Foucault remains an incomplete figure to the field" (p. 294). Foucault (1993) himself

²⁷ Subjects who believe they are creating themselves but are blind to constitutive effects of discourse.

²⁸ Subjects who are able to turn a reflexive gaze on discourse – they have awareness.

clarified: “if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in western civilization, one must take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self” (p. 203).

Technologies of the Self

Discourse produces disciplined subjectivities and often the implicated subjects are unreflexive, or as Foucault suggested, docile bodies. In contrast to the unreflexive subjects, who spontaneously reproduce dominant discursive constructions constituted by “experts”, the ethical subject is a subject that is created in a strategic way – in this perspective a person practices ethics when she is aware of how a dominant discourse limits her, leading her to problematize the discourse and then choose what kind of person she wants to be. Foucault (1988b) stipulated: “ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (p. 28). Sportswomen who embark on the ethical subject path can use processes that Foucault (1988a) refers to as the technologies of the self to (re)create themselves. These technologies:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. (p. 146)

Foucault (1990) warned that it is not a simple task to identify a specific discourse and explained that discourses are difficult to decipher, in part, because “a multiplicity of discursive elements . . . can come into play in various strategies” (p. 100). Audiences confront numerous and even contradictory discursive truths and although the mainstream undoubtedly influence the negotiation of femininities and masculinities in sport, these

negotiations “do not produce a simple dominating discourse” (Pringle & Markula, 2005, p. 472). As Foucault (1972b) suggested, audience members (subjects) are not locked into taking up the discursive truths that circulate. Instead, through a series of four steps outlined by Foucault (1988c) which include: (a) identifying the aspect of the self that is morally problematic and that must be taken as the object of one’s ethical reflection and transformed into one’s ethical work²⁹; (b) determining the way in which the individual establishes her relation to the moral code, recognizes herself as bound to act according to it, and is entitled to view her acts as worthy of moral valorization³⁰; (c), asking oneself “What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?” (Foucault 1988c, p. 112)³¹; and (d) inquiring about what kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way³², they can change themselves and challenge these discursive truths so that they become “ethical subjects.”

An ethical subject is a person who acknowledges that while there are codes of conduct that are socially constructed and reinforced by power relations, she has certain choices within these codes to construct herself (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In addition to this acknowledgment, Markula (2003) suggests that ethical subjects must also have the ability to use strategies of critical self awareness (questioning what is seemingly “natural” and inevitable in one’s own identity) and aesthetic stylization (openness to changing oneself) to

²⁹ This is known as the ontological element as is called the ethical substance

³⁰ This is known as the deontological element and is called the mode of subjection

³¹ This is known as the ascetic element and is called ethical work

³² This is known as the teleological element and is called telos

engage in technologies of the self and (re)create themselves in order to resist dominant truths.

Technologies of the self consists of a number of steps, with the final step being the challenge to the individual to determine what type of person she wants to be. Foucault called this level the “telos” (Foucault, 1995, p. 37). In order to achieve her telos, the type of technologies of the self the sportswoman chooses is of vital importance. In particular, Foucault’s concept of parrhesia, which is a technique that can be used for ethical work whereby the subject fearlessly speaks the “truth,” and his concept of hupomnemata, which is another technique that can be used for technologies of the self whereby the subject writes the “truth,” are examined in the second paper. It should be noted that these techniques do not serve as mechanisms for autobiographical confessions or examinations of conscience but rather to establish a relationship between discourse and the lifestyle of the interlocutor (parrhesiastes or hupomnematist). For example, Foucault (1994) stated the hupomnemata did not intend:

to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self. (pp. 210-211)

Furthermore, Foucault’s notion of correspondence is also a technique for ethical work.

Foucault (1997) suggested that correspondence acts as a

way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to others...[making] the writer “present” to whom he addresses it...and present not simply through the information he gives concerning his life, his activities, his successes and failures, his good luck or misfortune; rather present with a kind of immediate, almost physical presence. (p. 216)

Therefore, the hupomnemata, parrhesia and correspondence are all ways in which the writer/speaker produces the self and it remains to be determined (which I attempt to do in Chapter 6) if subjects can employ a hybrid of all three types of ethical work.

Ultimately, the concept of ethical subject does not propose an essentialist post-feminist reading of the female subject which espouses that the breaking down and refashioning of the subjects' sense of identity is a rational process whereby the 'new' self is actually a more 'authentic' self that is preexistently latent (i.e., the ethical subject is not a "new" version of a rational, unified, subject liberated from liberal humanism). Rather, it proposes a reading of the female subject that suggests that sportswomen who resist/challenge dominant discursive constructions are aware of their messiness and the processes through which they are subjugated and disciplined.

Foucault and Feminism: Boon or Detriment?

As suggested in Chapter 2, the majority of feminist scholars of sport examining media (re)presentations have used Gramscian notions about domination and hegemony in their analyses. However, a growing number have found Foucault useful for "ask[ing] new questions, [to] think differently and allow for the creation of new understandings and possibilities" (Pringle, 2005, p. 273). This was my motivation for using Foucault's concepts to study the phenomenon of the Skirtboarders' blog. Poststructuralist feminism, which Hardin (2011) argues is part of feminism's "third wave," resists universal explanations and a binary model (e.g., powerful/powerless) and instead looks at specific contexts. Negotiation and contradiction are part of this type of feminism's commentary and difference is used as a resource rather than as an obstacle.

In this project, the use of Foucault's concepts are a good fit because I am a poststructural feminist attempting to understand womens' experiences of an online blog, starting from the assumption that sportswomen are under(re)presented and sexualized in media (re)presentations, which makes them marginalized figures in the sports world. Because they are not part of the mediascape, they are not recognized as credible athletes – which ultimately affect their participation. The Skirtboarders participate in the discursive practices of repetition, which constitute a/many resistant identity (ies). Through repetition of resistant descriptions, the original repetitions that allowed the humanist, and sexed, “I” are disrupted. In other words, the Skirtboarders recognize the instability of gender identity and open up new possibilities for different, discontinuous, and previously subjugated subjectivities on their blog. As a poststructural feminist, my task was to look at this attempt at resistance and try to understand how the Skirtboarders were doing it and, ultimately, if it is working.

It is not surprising that there is a great deal of resistance by others, including feminist scholars of sport, to this model, whose harshest critique is that the “ethical relativism” in a poststructural approach to understanding sport “undermines critical reflection and political action” (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 331). However, Macleod (2006) points out that Foucauldian feminists recognize that women are threaded together by specific experiences that deny them equitable subject positions (even if they do not all share the same experiences) and they also recognize that men generally occupy dominant positions in institutions (which means they are also threaded together in an effort to maintain those positions). Thus, although poststructural feminists advocate micro-level solutions based on historical and social circumstances, their understanding and recognition of these threads

prevent them from slipping into the ethical relativism critics suggest. Large scale social change may not come from their analyses and suggestions but their work can have an impact on individual conditions.

My Understandings of Gender

In addition to Foucault's concepts of discourse, the subject, technologies of power and technologies of domination, I use the concept of gender in this dissertation. Like other subjects, the gendered subject is an effect of discourses that define and regulate how men and women are to act and think. Butler (1993) argues that one's gendered subjectivity is produced through the repetitive behaviors and practices we engage in that confirm our masculinity or femininity. She (1993) further explains that gender "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (p. 2). As masculine and feminine subjects governed by gender discourses, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity until these are experienced as if they were second nature. Where they are successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity.

Indeed, notions of essential femaleness or maleness are constructed to sex the individual in certain prescribed ways, punish the individual who acts in proscribed ways, and deploy their "truths" to the benefit of specific interests (Butler, 1999b, p. 420). Butler (1999a) suggests that by de-constructing the way we think about gender, we might move towards a new equality where people are not required to construct themselves as either masculine or feminine. To undertake Butler's task, feminist sport scholars must no longer simply engage with textual or media (re)presentations of gender, instead, we must challenge the ways that cultural practices (like skateboarding) make "the body gendered" (Balsamo,

1996, pp. 2-4). We must move beyond the liberal feminist agenda of examining mediated sport texts and promoting equivalent coverage of male and female athletes and the radical feminist emphasis on fixed difference and engage in genealogical and de-constructive examinations of how gender is (re)presented and (de)constructed through sport media texts.

Butler's task should be appropriated by sport sociologists in the future to study mediated sport. Perhaps even more useful, though, would be the use of Teresa De Lauretis' hybridization of postmodernism and feminism. Like Butler, de Lauretis (1987) also believes that gender must be disrupted. However, she suggests that we must retain an ambiguity towards gender, as we are both inside and outside of gender at the same time (de Lauretis, 1987). We can never completely desexualize it (cancel out the terms "male" and "female") because by doing so, we undercut feminism. Nor can we completely androgynize it (claim the same experience of material conditions for both genders in a given class, race, or culture) because by doing so, we end up trying to close the gap between poles controlled by a misogynist discourse³³.

As sport sociologists studying mediated sport from de Lauretis' perspective, we must cross back and forth between the boundaries and the limits of *différence* and gender neutrality (or androgyny) and develop a radical theory and practice of sociocultural transformation that accounts for human agency to further examine mediated sport texts. In order to accomplish this task, we must account for both the historical existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility, as per de Lauretis' suggestion. Daniels (2009)

³³ De Lauretis (1987) suggests that feminists are always both inside of and outside of the ideology of gender at all times and there is no way out of this state – we cannot claim to be able to escape this uncomfortable, messy position by suggesting that gender is constructed in discourse or by suggesting that there is no gender (i.e., androgynizing gender). We are always caught in the middle.

arguably does this when she calls for the recognition and celebration of the polygendered nature of individuals (especially girls and women). She claims that we are all, to some extent polygendered, meaning we embody “a mix of those characteristics, interests, behaviours and appearances that have been traditionally used to sort females and males into exclusive categories called feminine and masculine” (Daniels, 2009, p. 1-2). Daniels does not attempt to desexualize gender nor does she androgynize it. Instead, she encourages people to grant others (and ourselves) the ability to express themselves (and ourselves) and self-identify in whatever ways they (we) feel comfortable in terms of masculinity and femininity.

In relation to sports media, gender (de)stabilization calls into question the gender discourses that scholars once suggested are dominant in mainstream and alternative sport media and suggests that the subject positions audiences take up may not have the effects that they were once thought to. Audiences may, instead, take up subject positions that contradict or challenge dominant discursive constructions of femininities and masculinities. Current research is only just beginning to respond to this issue (e.g., Lemish, 1998; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008; Thorpe, 2008). In this project, I examined Internet texts by using de Lauretis’ (1987) proposition: “that the construction of gender is the product and the process of both (re)presentation and self-(re)presentation” (p. 9). However, in doing so, since we can never truly know how others constitute themselves in discourse, I was prudent not to claim that my materials represent the “truth.” Instead, I attempt to understand my conversational partners’ gender constructions and self-perceptions and present my understandings as that and only that – my understandings of my conversational partners’ “truths.” How did I

accomplish this task? I chose to execute a poststructural discourse analysis of Internet texts and interviews and explain these methods in further detail below.

Theoretical Paradigm and Poststructural Feminism

In order to determine what research methods best suit their proposed research, scholars first determine what their inquiry/research paradigm is (Wilson, 2001). A paradigm is a set of “basic belief system or worldview” that defines for researchers what it is that we are about ontologically and epistemologically and it guides our actions (Guba & Lincoln, 2003, p. 105). Each paradigm identifies a separate social-scientific reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Researchers adopt a particular ontological and epistemological stance based on their position with respect to four fundamental questions: (a) ontological – is reality real (external) or relative/nominal (internal) to each one of us; (b) epistemological – is knowledge separate from the operation of any consciousness (objective) or is it created/constructed by the mind (subjective); (c) axiological – is research value-free or is it value-laden; and (d) methodological – is it best to study our question as an outsider (nomothetic) or as an insider (ideographic) (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Creswell, 1994). Once we determine where we fit in relation to these questions, we can determine into which theoretical paradigm we fit.

This research aligns most closely with the anti-positivist paradigm because I view the world from a close-to-nominalist ontology, subjectivist epistemology and ideographic methodological place. It is frustrating that those of us who view the world from such a perspective must spend a great deal of time justifying our work rather than dealing with deeper theoretical questions. Over forty years ago, Douglas (1967) wrote that “throughout the Western world today there exists a general belief that one knows something only when it has been counted” (p. 163). Indeed, quantitative scientific research projects that attempt to

generalize results continue to be viewed as more legitimate than projects based on theoretical perspectives that seek to interrogate and challenge the foundations upon which much modern thought and theory rest. In this project, I will not spend any time justifying my anti-positivist stance. Instead, I will attach myself to this paradigm unapologetically.

In addition to anti-positivism, I also identify myself as a poststructural feminist³⁴. As a feminist, I believe that women are subjugated by the way in which society is organized (patriarchal) and as an interventionist, I am committed not only to describing dominant discursive constructions of gender, but also to challenging them. My poststructural sensibility comes from my belief that no one true reality exists, that the self (which is precarious and contradictory) is socially constructed and reconstructed through constantly changing relationships with others, that we come to know ourselves and our world through discourse and that normative and/or metanarratives which are supported by the use of numbers, tradition and firmly entrenched power structures subjugate people. As a feminist with a poststructural sensibility, I reject all versions of essential femininity (and masculinity) and believe that there is no one true reality to which women can have access. To take this stance is, as Jordan and Weedon (1995) suggested, to “create a space for political perspectives and interests that have hitherto been marginalized” (p. 205).

Unexpectedly, as I launched into this project aiming to utilize a Foucauldian, poststructuralist approach, I found myself constantly reconsidering my own feminist orientation. I set forth on my project because I believe that in order to accomplish feminist goals of political advocacy and social change we must continue to perform research projects

³⁴ It should be noted that feminism is not a paradigm - there are many feminisms and they find themselves as part of various paradigms.

that question (using poststructuralist theory) how we construct our genders through sports media. I agree that microlevel forms of resistance appear unlikely to support a significant change to the current discursive regime that dominates (re)presentations of sportswomen. However, it is important that sport scholars examine media texts – especially those created by and for sportswomen at the local level – to find out what kinds of discourses of femininity they reproduce and challenge when given the opportunity to self-(re)present their sporting lifestyles.

Throughout this research process, I discovered that the feminist lens from which I saw the Skirtboarders phenomenon was similar to some of the feminisms to which the Skirtboarders and their blog users claimed to attach themselves (these most resemble third-wave feminisms). This could have been because we seemed to come from similar social locations (female, white, middle-class urban dwellers). However, although I shared a common feminist orientation with some of my research participants, others did not share my orientation. This reminded me that women (and men) from similar social locations can have very different views and that I should, in future research projects, continue to engage in my own critical self-reflection within the researcher-research participant relationship by being critically self-reflexive of the feminist lens which I am using and resisting rather than imposing my brand of feminism on those who agree to share their experiences with me.

Finally, constructionism, a theoretical stance that suggests that people come to “know” reality and what it means to their lives through their own “mental constructions” (Henderson, 2006) that may be local and relative to a particular situation (Guba & Lincoln, 2004) also plays a role in making me who I am as a researcher. Crotty (1998) suggests that when a person is born, s/he inherits a system of meaningful symbols – ways of

understanding the world. As a result, the culture in which each person lives bestows meaning on certain things, but by the same token, leads them to ignore others. Indeed, in constructionism *“all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and the world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”* (Crotty, 1998, p. 42; his emphasis). Crotty (1998) further notes that constructionism drives home the idea that there is no such thing as a true or valid interpretation: *“‘Useful’, ‘liberating’, ‘rewarding’ interpretations, yes. ‘True or ‘valid’ interpretations, no”* (p. 48). Certainly, one skateboarding woman’s “truth” might be quite different from that of another skateboarding woman or mine as “the researcher” – a position that is clearly supported by the trilogy of this project’s proposed epistemology, theoretical framework, and methodology. As a constructionist, my goal is to deconstruct stories that dominate others, and through this process, encourage and support the emergence of alternate stories. The inclusion and emphasis on multiple realities and personal stories make these constructs relevant to my study. In practical terms, my research asked my conversational partners to reflect upon their own social context and their ensuing behaviour in an attempt to foster a new richness in understanding their skateboarding participation.

References

- Balsamo, A. (1996). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis*. London: Heinemann.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999a). *Gender trouble*. Routledge: New York
- Butler, J. (1999b). Bodily inscriptions, performative subversions. In J. Price & M. Shildrick (Eds.), *Feminist theory and the body* (pp. 416–422). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Cole, C.L. (1993) 'Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport and Technologies of the Body', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17(2): 77–97.
- Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Daniels, D. (2009). *Polygendered and ponytailed: The dilemma of femininity and the female athlete*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. (A. Bass, trans.). London & New York: Routledge.
- Donnelly, P., Cluer, S., Skelton, C., MacNeill, M., & Knight, G. (2004). *It's not rocket science: The last word on media marginalization and trivialization of women's sports*.

Public lecture given in the 'Gender, Sport and Mass Media' series at the University of Copenhagen, 25 March.

Douglas, J. (1967). *The social meaning of suicide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Duncan, M.C., & Brummett, B. (1993). Liberal and radical sources of female empowerment in sport media. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10(1), 57–72.

Edwards, L., and Jones, C. (2009). Postmodernism , queer theory and moral judgment in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 44(4), 331–344.

Foucault, M. (1972a). *The archeology of knowledge*, New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1980). Prison talk. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews*. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1983). Afterword. The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd Ed, pp. 208–226). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1988a). Technologies of the self. In Rabinow & Rose (Eds.) *The essential Foucault* (pp. 145–169). New York: The New York Press.

Foucault, M. (1988b). The ethics of the concern of the self. In Rabinow & Rose (Eds.) *The essential Foucault* (pp. 25–42). New York: The New York Press.

Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1993). About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self: Two lectures at Dartmouth. *Political Theory*, 21(2), 198–227.

- Foucault, M. (1994). Self Writing. In P. Rabinow (Ed.) *Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity and truth* (pp. 207–222). New York: New Press.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *The history of sexuality, Volume 2: The use of pleasure*. New York: Random House.
- Frohmann, B. (1994). Discourse analysis as a research method in library and information science. *Library & Information Science Research*, 16, 119–138.
- Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2004). Competing paradigms in qualitative research: Theories and Issues. In S.N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leacy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 17–38). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2003). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hardin, M. (2011). The power of a fragmented collective: Radical pluralist feminism and technologies of the self in the sports blogosphere. In A. Billings (Ed.), *Sports media: Transformation, integration, consumption* (pp. 40–60). New York and UK: Routledge.
- Henderson, K.A. (2006). *Dimensions of Choice: Qualitative approaches to recreation, tourism, sport and leisure research* (2nd Ed.), State College, Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Jordan, G., & Weedon, C. (1995). *Cultural politics: Class, gender, race and the postmodern world*. Oxford; Blackwell.
- Lauretis, T.D. (1987). *Technologies of gender*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press.

- Lemish, D. (1998). Girls can wrestle too: Gender differences in the consumption of a television wrestling series. *Sex Roles*, 38(9/10), 833–849.
- Macleod, C. (2006). Radical plural feminisms and emancipatory practice in post-apartheid South Africa. *Theory & Psychology*, 16(3), 367–389.
- Markula, P. (2003). The technologies of the self: Sport, feminism, and Foucault. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20(2), 87–107.
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport and exercise*. London: Routledge.
- Pfister, G. (2010). Women in sport – Gender relations and future perspectives. *Sport in Society*, 13(2), 234–248.
- Pringle, R., & Markula, P. (2005). No pain is sane after all: A Foucauldian analysis of masculinities and men's experiences in rugby. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(4), 472–498.
- Rail, G. (1998). Seismography of the postmodern condition: Three theses on the implosion of sport. In G. Rail (Ed.) *Sport and postmodern times* (pp. 144–161). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Sawicki, J. (1991). *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, power and the body*. New York: Routledge.
- Sisjord, M.K., & Kristiansen, E. (2008). Serious athletes or media clowns? Female and male wrestlers' perceptions of media constructions, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(3), 350–368.
- Smith Maguire, J. (2002). Michel Foucault: Sport, power, technologies and governmentality. In J. Maguire & K. Young (Ed.), *Theory, sport & society* (pp. 293–314). San Diego: Elsevier.

- Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of the self and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32 (2), 199–229.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 175–179.

Chapter 4: Methodological Approach

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that I adopted for this research project, the ways in which I went about collecting and analyzing the materials, some ethical considerations and a reflection on my positionality as “researcher”. As with any qualitative research project, I chose my approach in order to gather the richest source materials possible while also maintaining consistency with the overall objectives of the work and its theoretical influences. I began the project by conducting a Foucauldian discourse analysis of the Skirtboarders Internet blog entries to contextualize the case and to structure the interviews. In undertaking this project, I sought out to determine whether a group of skateboarding women are challenging or reproducing dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen in the Internet texts they create and engage with, how they are doing this and what impacts this has on other users. Importantly, this is one of the few studies that examines a series of texts and then tries to understand the producers’ and the users’ perspectives. Scholars (including Millington & Wilson, 2010) are calling for these kinds of studies in order to gain a comprehensive view of media (re)presentations.

To address these questions, focus was placed on what could be learned about the Skirtboarders and their blog users’ experiences producing and/or engaging with Internet texts. My observations of the blog and blog users were aided and affected by my own point of reference which derives from my experiences as a girl who always wanted to skateboard and who was (and still is) on the fringes of skate culture. The research was also influenced by Research Ethics Board requirements since it was conducted in compliance with the guidelines established by the University of Ottawa’s Health Science and Sciences Research Ethics Board. A copy of the HSSREB approval letter is attached as Appendix A.

In my investigations (although not expected in the beginning phases of this project) I adopted a case study approach. According to Gratton and Jones (2010), case studies are used to gain a holistic understanding of a set of issues and how they relate to a group (in my case, the Skirtboarders and their blog users). When proposing this research, I anticipated analyzing numerous Internet sites (produced by numerous groups of sportswomen) rather than just the Skirtboarders blog. However, I identify as a feminist scholar who seeks to move away from the detached, formal, and “unbiased” rhetoric of positivist writing and strives to get a sense of the “complete” experiences of the women I work with (and ensure their personal voices are heard through my research projects). When I noticed how unique and complex (in terms of the breadth of their blog, their popularity in Québec and their extensive following worldwide) the Skirtboarders situation was, I decided to focus on their case in depth rather than attempt to look at numerous cases at a more superficial level.

Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) suggest that a major characteristic of case study research is that it takes the perspective of those within the case rather than the researcher’s perspective. I attempted to do this in my in-depth study of the Skirtboarders’ blog. However, my history, my embodied experiences (as a woman who hung out with skateboarders as a teenager, who never learned to skate but who snowboards, surfs, plays hockey and numerous other sports) and my reflections on them undoubtedly factored in the creation of the interview guide, in the conducting of the interviews and the ways in which I took up the (re)presentations of the Skirtboarders on their blog. Arguably, my own participation in snowboarding gave me some credibility with the skateboarders, who were instrumental to this project. However, my lack of identification and connections in the skateboarding world most likely limited me in many

ways. Also, my personal history in which I have observed skateboarders behaving in sexist ways may have some relevance in my interpretation of blog posts and interview transcripts.

Blog Posts, Interviews and Personal Observations:

Gathering Qualitative Materials

I collected and analyzed three types of materials for this project: (a) Skirtboarders' blog posts (in their entirety including English and French text, photos, videos, links to other sites and comments from users); (b) transcripts from semi-structured interviews (herein referred to as *qualitative interviews*) and (c) personal observations from a Skirtboarders' demonstration event I attended at a skatepark in Ottawa.

Blog Posts

Through an in-depth poststructural discourse analysis of 262 posts (all posts on the Skirtboarders website from March 2007-May 2010), including photos, videos and comments, the Skirtboarders' construction of their gender subjectivities (through self (re)-presentation) and the ways in which blog users were reacting to the posts were examined. Each blog entry was studied once in an attempt to experience the unquestioning and status quo reading of the entry (like that of an ordinary, undiscerning reader). It should be noted that since the Skirtboarders are, for the most part, Francophones, and claim to have written the posts in French prior to translating them into English, the French texts were studied first and the English texts were compared to the French texts to determine whether there was consistency in the meaning of the two linguistically different texts. Many of the comments were in French, as well (these were not translated and were therefore analyzed in French). Next, each entry was examined a second time with a critical eye; this time written and visual texts were revisited at different levels, questions were raised about the statements about femininity that were present and a process imagining how the texts could have been

constructed differently was employed. The texts were compared to other texts about female athletes that I have studied in the past (attempting to establish what was included and what was excluded) and to the descriptions of female skateboarding media (re)presentations by Beal and Wilson (2004). The social context of the statements was also identified (e.g., who was saying them, in what circumstances) (see Rose, 2007). Subsequently, the discursive constructions were organized, with a particular emphasis on identifying whether the Skirtboarders reproduced dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen identified by numerous sport studies scholars and listed by MacKay and Dallaire (2009) or whether they offered alternatives to these discursive constructions. Comments were analyzed, as well. Of note – the photographs were the most noticeable aspects of the blog posts. For each post, there is at least one photograph (and often 5-10 photographs) accompanying the text.

It is important to note that Internet texts pose a unique analytical challenge because of their characteristics. For example, unlike most traditional media texts, Internet texts are inherently intertextual, they lack linearity, they are multimedia and polysemous, they have the potential to reach an international scope, they are impermanent and they have an altered sense of authorship (e.g., the reader often is the writer) (Mitra & Cohen, 1999). Therefore, traditional methods of analysis had to be rethought to ‘fit’ the specificity of the Internet. For example, in the context of this paper, the Skirtboarders changed the layout of their blog when I was collecting the blog posts, which meant that, although I saved a copy of each entry for analysis, some of the archived entries I saved looked different (e.g., different website banner) and connected with other sites differently than others. Furthermore, many of the links that appeared on the blog entries were broken by the time I carried out my analysis. These incidents served as a reminder to me that the impermanence of the Internet requires

that vigilant attention be paid to the collection and storage of materials used in analyses of Internet texts. Furthermore, ethical issues of doing research on the Internet are currently being debated in research communities. For example, although Internet users assume risk of privacy violation through the decision to communicate on the Internet, what is the researcher's responsibility towards those they are studying? How does a researcher ensure that she or he has not misinterpreted another's meaning or intention or used their story in a damaging way (Sharf, 1999)?

In my case, I am what Gajalla (2009) calls a "lurker." That is, someone who reads but does not post on the Internet site that she is studying. My collection methods, which consisted of saving all blog posts between March 2007 – May 2010 for future analysis (known in Internet research communities as harvesting) is ostensibly legal (all posts exist in the public domain), however, a number of researchers (myself included) do not feel that this practice is necessarily ethical on its own. As such, I followed Sharf's (1999) suggestions to: (a) deeply contemplate if my research is harmful or beneficial to the purposes of the group before proceeding with it (I deemed it to be beneficial for legitimizing the Skirtboarders goals); (b) clearly introduce myself to the Skirtboarders in terms of identity, purpose, role and intention before starting my discourse analysis (I introduced myself to the Skirtboarders via email to Mathilde Pigeon, the leader (and gatekeeper) of the crew, and to individual members as I contacted them for in-person interviews); and (c) strive to maintain and demonstrate a respectful sensitivity towards each member of the Skirtboarders crew (even though their posts are publicly accessible, I committed to being considerate of each members' vulnerabilities and privacy throughout the research process). The blog users I interviewed did not make any comments on the blog. Therefore, I did not have to negotiate

the online/offline nexus with these women. Having said this, I do not wish to imply that my techniques, including my focus on ethical conduct, allowed me to uncover discernable “truths.” We can never truly know how others constitute themselves in discourse. Instead, I attempted to understand the Skirtboarders’ gender constructions and present my understandings as that and only that – *my understandings of the Skirtboarders’ “truths.”*

Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews were completed in this project – after all, if we want to know how women understand their femininities, why not ask them? According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), the qualitative interview is a conversation in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. In qualitative interviewing, each conversation is unique – the researcher matches the questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share. Scholarly research interviews have changed considerably since they were seen as a “...neutral, face-to-face ‘conversation with a purpose’ between strangers that ostensibly produced facts of experience” and as a “...conduit for transporting experiential knowledge from a respondent to an interviewer” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 3). This modernist notion of the interview has given way to postmodern sensibilities that are common in contemporary qualitative interviewing practice.

Kvale (1996) describes one aspect of this postmodern sensibility in what she calls the “traveler metaphor.” In this metaphor, knowledge does not exist “out there,” rather it is created by both the “traveler” (researcher) and the conversational partner within and through conversation: “The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead subjects to tell their own stories of their lives world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as ‘wandering together with’” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4).

I am one of Kvale's "travelers," a feminist researcher who attempted to employ a postmodern sensibility (as defined by Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 52) in my interviews. I wanted to create nuanced descriptions with my conversational partners, the Skirtboarders and blog users, about their lives in order to attempt to make my way towards an understanding of their skateboarding experiences and how they make sense of gender. This provided insights into the discursive themes available to participants in this sporting practice. Through our conversations, I was able to gain an understanding of the ways in which this group of women thought about femininity (and the (re)presentation of femininity) and how these connected to their ideas about their own identities and their relationship to the broader socio-cultural context.

Participant Recruitment

I sought participants for my research by emailing the "leader" of the Skirtboarders' crew, Mathilde Pigeon. She was the only Skirtboarder whose contact information appeared on the blog and I quickly found out that she was the gatekeeper to the other members. I worked with Mathilde and Annie Guglia (another Skirtboarder who took over the gatekeeping role from Mathilde for a number of months) to contact all of the members of the Skirtboarder crew to invite them to participate in an interview. I also worked with the Skirtboarders to find users of their blog who they felt would be interested in doing an interview. I wanted to work with the Skirtboarders to find potential participants for the user interviews in order to honour Gall et al.'s (1996) suggestion that the research should take the perspective of those within the case rather than my own. I wanted the Skirtboarders to be able to have a say in who were included in the part of the study that attempts to understand users' readings of the blog.

Recruitment criteria specified that all participants be English or French-speaking, 18 years and older and either a member of the Skirtboarders' crew or a user of their blog. I also stipulated that they could reside anywhere, as I was open to doing telephone or Skype³⁵ interviews. Potential participants were informed that they would be asked to take part in one interview that would last between 45 and 90 minutes in either English or French (their choice) and would be recorded with a digital audio recorder. They were also advised that I might contact them for a follow-up interview. Within a few days of sending emails to all Skirtboarders and all blog users recommended to me by Annie, I had received 8 responses from Skirtboarders and 3 responses from users. I then sent a follow-up email to set up a date and time for the interviews, which included the Consent Form (see Appendix B).

I pursued the remaining Skirtboarders numerous times by email and phone (where possible), however, of the 17 crew members, only the original eight that responded to the email were interviewed. Some crew members chose not to participate in the interview (for a variety of reasons such as: responsibilities of motherhood, responsibilities at school and anti-academic inclinations) while others did not respond to (numerous) requests for an interview. I also pursued more users by requesting a second list of names from the Skirtboarders and by enlisting the assistance of a local skateboarder (living in Ottawa). The local skateboarder gave me the names of three more women she knew were users of the Skirtboarders blog. After contacting numerous users via email and/or phone, I was only able to secure interviews with four women (one from abroad and three from Ottawa).

³⁵ Skype is a voice over Internet Protocol service and software application that allows users to communicate with peers by voice, video, and instant messaging over the Internet. Calls to other users within the Skype service are free of charge. The service is owned by Microsoft.

As a result, interview materials with 12 women were included in the study³⁶. All of the Skirtboarders and the users self-identified as female. All of the Skirtboarders were white (as identified by the researcher) while three of the users were white. The other users were Vietnamese and Asian-Canadian (unverified). This reflects Brayton's (2005) assertion that while skateboarding may offer opportunities for challenging the normativity of whiteness, structural barriers still make entry more difficult for some than for others. Two of the Skirtboarders were currently pursuing their PhDs, three were undergraduate students, one was taking a massage therapy course and two were working (one as a chef and the other did not identify her occupation). Although I did not directly ask the women about their class backgrounds, the education levels and nature of employment of the participants, I argue, indicate that all women belong to the "professional middle class" (Fletcher, 2008). However, it should be noted that the wide range of ages complicates the specification of class since some of the 20 and 30-somethings may have grown up in middle class families but are now relying on their own working-class incomes. Ultimately, the perceived primarily white, middle class classification of the women interviewed is consistent with Wheaton's (2004) demographic profile of lifestyle sport participants and Yochim's (2010) suggestion that skateboarding is not a group organized primarily around class or racial identification but rather a group organized around gender identity.

The qualitative interviews took place between September 2010 and September 2011 at locations of the participants' choosing; most opted to meet at a local coffee shop (in Montréal for the Skirtboarders) or at their homes. One interview was done by telephone and one interview was done over Skype. Individual interviews were conducted with three

³⁶ See Appendix D for a full list of participants

Skirtboarders crew members and group interviews were conducted with five crew members (a group of two and a group of three). Prior to beginning each conversation, I reviewed the purpose of the study and provided a hard copy of the Participant Consent Form (electronic copy for the phone and Internet interviews). I reminded each participant that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw at any time. In compliance with the guidelines established by the HSSREB, two copies of the Consent Form were provided for signing. Each participant kept one copy (if they wished) and the other copy was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office, MNT 420B. Following completion of these administrative duties, the conversations began. The interviews varied in length between 47 minutes and 100 minutes, with the average being 65 minutes, and were recorded via digital recorder. I also took notes in the interviews reminding me to return to topics that were addressed but not spoken about in depth.

As Foucault suggests, and as outlined earlier in this dissertation, no one “truth” exists. Rather a multitude of perceptions and perspectives emerged out of my conversational partners’ lived experiences. While the interview guide included pointed questions, all interviews also attempted to construct a space that would enable the conversational partners to be “activated, stimulated and cultivated” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 17). The responding women were invited to reflect and elaborate further than they did in answering initial questions. They were challenged to talk about their own experiences in their own words rather than being restricted to the categories suggested in the questions (Gratton & Jones, 2008). This was meant to open up the possibilities to better understand which discursive fragments they spontaneously reproduced. Furthermore, the interviews were meant to be a space in which conversational partners could choose what they felt was

important for them to talk about. The women went on tangents at times, but these conversations were useful for understanding their worlds and for attempting to elucidate this understanding to others (through analysis and research writing).

The sharing of my own experiences within the interview setting was helpful. Although I had limited understanding of the physical practice of skateboarding, as a result of my teenaged friendships with skateboarders and participation in other lifestyle sports, I did have some understanding of the social identities associated with it. I shared my own ideas about board sports and other topics in the interview setting when asked to do so by the interviewees. Many of the participants commented that I made them very comfortable and that it was easy to speak to me especially because they expected an interview like the ones they have done for mainstream media producers or alternative skateboarding media producers. One participant who refuses interviews in any other circumstance, because she self-identifies as shy, spoke openly about her experiences in the interview and commented that she enjoyed the interaction.

There were numerous effects of the conversations, three of which included: (a) the Skirtboarders and blog users' worlds were made more explicit (i.e., they shared their thoughts on their skateboarding identities and on the ways in which they read or (re)present these identities on the blog); (b) the women demonstrated critical self-awareness throughout the interviews and actually stated that they better understood themselves after the interviews (i.e., the interview participants were reflexive about their identities); and (c) our conversations opened up the possibility for the Skirtboarders, blog users and interviewer to engage further and in different ways with the Internet.

Following the completion of each interview, the conversations were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist (who agreed to keep all information contained in the interviews confidential). I then sent each participant (who requested this on their consent form) a transcription of our conversation (in Microsoft Word format) for her review. Participants were asked to review the transcript to ensure that it adequately represented the actual conversation. This also provided an opportunity for participants to revise or delete any statements that they had made. Requested revisions (of which there were very few) were for purposes of clarity only (for example, a misunderstood word from recording to transcription or a misspelled name or word).

At the signing of the consent form (prior to the interview), I gave participants the opportunity to select whether they preferred to be referred to by their actual name or a non-identifying pseudonym of my choosing in the research project and subsequent publications. None of the Skirtboarders chose this option since they are already well known on the Internet and in the public sphere. All of the users asked me to choose a pseudonym for them. Hard copies of the transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office; electronic versions were saved on my password-protected office computer and on my supervisor's password-protected hard drive.

Personal Observations

Although the very small corpus of participant observation material was not used in the overall analysis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), it is important to note in this section because it did shape my views of both the Skirtboarders' interactions with male and female skateboarders and the Ottawa female skateboarding scene, which I asked interview participants about in our conversations. To obtain this material, I attended a Skirtboarders' skateboarding demo at

Legacy Skatepark (an outdoor skate park) in Ottawa which was a stop on their 2010 Crossing Borders Canada-Sweden tour (an exchange with a group of female Swedish skateboarders, No Limit!, who were part of the skateboarding contingent at Legacy). I offer my personal reflections of the day here.

The mid-summer day was very hot and humid; therefore it was not an ideal day for skateboarding. A number of the Skirtboarders and No Limit! crew members wore bikini tops and shorts, which grabbed the attention of the two dozen or so young boys and young men who were skateboarding at the park before the crew arrived on scene. However, this attire did not seem to objectify the women since they literally took over the skate park through their performances of high level skateboarding tricks and command of space. About eight young girls (some of whom stated that the Skirtboarders were their idols) sat on the sidelines watching the Skirtboarders and No Limit! boarders who performed while the rest of the crews sat under a tent relaxing and waiting for their turn to enter the park. The women took their turns in and out of the park, doing tricks in the pipe and on the rails. They offered numerous young boys instruction (no girls seems brave enough to go into the park, despite their role models encouraging them) and it was clear that the boys and young men in attendance were impressed by the women's skills even though they also seemed annoyed that they had taken over *their* park. One of the Skirtboarders had her two year old son with her and while she skated, her husband (also a skater) looked after the baby. When they both decided to skate at the same time, another Skirtboarder looked after the child. A sponsor, Top of the World (an Ottawa skate shop), was in attendance and provided the tents and some refreshments. The event was covered (a small write up and a colour photo located in the City section) in the most highly circulated Ottawa newspaper, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the next day.

What was most interesting to me about the experience was the power of the confidence exuded by both the Skirtboarders and No Limit! The women were in control of the space. They did not apologize for being women and proceeded to take the space they wanted to when they wanted to despite some of the boys' and mens' modest objections. Furthermore, the women seemed to act exactly as they (re)presented themselves online. I had already analyzed a great deal of the blog content when I attended the demo and was well versed in the "characters" presented by the Skirtboarders on their blog. The women seemed authentic when compared to their (re)presentations, which suggested that their (re)presentations were "realistic." The most noticeable aspects of the demo were that the women seemed to be having a lot fun (one of their primary goals as a crew) and were clearly there to actively promote female skateboarding.

Analysis

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

In this project, I asked: (a) how do renditions of sport appearing in emerging interactive technologies, such as the Internet, differ from renditions of sport on traditional mediums (i.e. radio, newspapers, magazines, television)?; (b) what gendered subject positions do individuals who interact with (produce or use) Internet mediated sport texts take up? The project was informed by Foucault's discourse theory (1969, 1971), his work on power, subjectivity and truth (1983) and his theory of technologies of the self (1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1994, 1995, and 2001) (as indicated in the Theory section). These theoretical concepts were useful for two reasons. First, this approach to analyzing the blog posts seemed reasonable given that we acquire knowledge of ourselves and our world through discourse. The self (which is precarious and contradictory) is socially constructed and reconstructed

through our interaction with discourse, and discourses provide access to certain ways of seeing the world and acting in it (Willig, 2001). Normative discourses and/or metanarratives (such as dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen) that are supported by firmly entrenched power structures can subjugate people (e.g., sportswomen). The use of Foucauldian discourse analysis allows the researcher to analyze how the social world represented in the text, expressed through language, is affected by various sources of power.

Second, Foucauldian discourse analysis is the most useful form of discourse analysis for sport sociologists who have feminist, poststructuralist and social constructionist sensibilities. It has been recently used by a number of others in the field with similar world views to my own, including: Bridel & Rail, 2007; Dallaire, 2003, 2004; Markula, 2004; Ravel & Rail, 2006, 2007 and Thorpe, 2008. The strengths of the approach are that the method can: (a) be applied to all kinds of materials, including Internet media texts such as online-magazines, websites, blogs and videos as well as interview transcripts (Rose, 2007); (b) allow the researcher to explore discourses in terms of their socio-historic context (as mentioned above); (c) be applied to studies examining the body since bodies are constructed through competing discourses (Powers, 2001); and (d) suggest that resistance to mainstream and alternative media messages is possible (Powers, 2001). The first strength which suggests that Foucauldian discourse analysis is useful for examinations of new media texts is important to highlight because although the Internet is a relatively new and under-researched medium, most methods for studying the Internet are a modest rejigging of old methods (e.g., see Hine's (2000) approach to "virtual ethnography"). Therefore, in this project, I drew on a well-documented Foucauldian discourse analysis approach (Willig's, 2001) to analyze two

types of texts: Internet texts as well as materials constructed through the qualitative interview process.

I recognize that at any point in time, there are a number of possible discursive frames for thinking, writing, and speaking about aspects of reality and not all discourses are afforded equal presence or equal authority (Cheek, 2004). The discursive construction that is afforded presence is a consequence of the effect of power relations. Discourses ultimately “represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status or power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 41). As such, throughout this project, I had to be cognizant of my own political interests and conduct my analyses with these in mind.

“Doing” Discourse Analysis

Although Foucault did not prescribe one way in which we must go about “doing” discourse analysis, he advocated that we must be explicit, precise and specific throughout our projects (see *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things*). Like Foucault (1972a), in this project, I am hoping that I have:

describe[d] statements, describe[d] the enunciative function of which they are the bearers, analyze[d] the conditions in which this function operates, covered the different domains that this function presupposes and the way in which those domains are articulated. (pp. 86-87)

I began transcribing the materials into a qualitative software program (Atlas.ti). As I began identifying discursive constructions, though, I realized it was not practical to use computer software because even the newest version of Atlas.ti did not have the capability to accept photos and videos as imbedded objects in excerpts from Internet sites. Instead, I organized, by hand, each and every blog post by creating tables in which the material was separated by segment (text, photo, video, comments section for the blog posts) and by theme

(in the interviews). To evaluate the material obtained, I used discourse analysis based on Foucault's discourse theory (1969, 1971) and the first three stages of Foucauldian discourse analysis described by Willig (2001). These include 1) identification of the how discursive objects are constructed in each text; 2) location of the discursive constructions within wider discourse; 3) closely examining contexts within which different constructions are being deployed. This method was useful for understanding how discourses located in social fields (macro-level) impact individual lives (micro-level) and for suggesting ways in which language is involved in the nexus of power-knowledge that attaches the Skirtboarder and blog users to her subjectivity.

In the first stage of the analysis (as described by Willig, 2001), in order to identify how discursive objects were constructed on the blog and in the interview conversations, I organized the material by using my research questions and the discursive strategies used to construct "truths" about sportswomen in mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations identified in relevant literature. These consist of the seven strategies described by MacKay & Dallaire (2009), which include gender marking, establishing heterosexuality, emphasizing female stereotypes, infantilizing women, non-sports related aspects, comparisons with men's performance and ambivalence, and Daniels (2009) descriptions of "polygenderism". I looked for the use of these discursive strategies on the Skirtboarders' blog because I had to determine if the women were reproducing "truths" about gender that are already in circulation (i.e., I had to locate the Skirtboarders' and their users' discursive constructions of gender within wider gender discourse. This corresponds with stage two of Willig's (2001) method).

In the second part of the first stage of the analysis, the identification of the use of these discursive strategies was followed by a categorization of emergent discursive constructions of gender (see Appendix E for a summary of the discursive strategies used to organize the materials and the discursive constructions that emerged). Therefore the discursive analysis moved beyond a simple categorization of the discursive constructions that either confirmed or challenged the a priori strategies (Boyatzis, 1998; King, 2004; Smith-Maguire, 2008). Ultimately, then, although I arrived at the material expecting that there would be discursive constructions that confirmed the “truths” about sportswomen circulating in mainstream and alternative media texts and others that challenged these “truths,” new discursive constructions emerged, which allowed me to better understand the Skirtboarders blog, the Skirtboarders themselves and their users (Smith-Maguire, 2008).

For the blog posts, a master list of discursive constructions was created and updated throughout the analysis process so that for each discursive construction, a list of the blog posts in which the discursive construction appeared was available. For the interviews, each transcription was read three times and the information pertaining to each question or topic was identified and organized. Particular attention was paid, throughout the entire process, to the multiple and variable subject positions of the conversational partners and how they tactically positioned themselves and others through discursive constructions. This allowed me to identify the contexts within which the different discursive constructions of sportswomen were deployed (Willig’s, 2001, third stage of Foucauldian discourse analysis).

Ethical Considerations

The Internet is having an impact and playing an important role as a place and a tool for research, and is increasingly being recognized for its scientific and methodological value.

However, researchers need to take special care when carrying out research via the Internet. Ethical standards for Internet research are not well developed yet. Eliciting informed consent, negotiating access agreements, assessing the boundaries between the public and the private, and ensuring the security of material transmissions are all problematic in Internet research (Kitchin, 2007).

For this project, I used the categories proposed by Kitchin (2007), which distinguish between web-based research—non-intrusive and engaged—and online research. My project consisted of non-intrusive web-based research which means that all materials were collected in the public domain and that there were no problems related to intellectual rights or copyright. Throughout the study, legal issues (copyright, intellectual property rights, etc.) were taken into account at all times.

Other ethical issues considered throughout this study included informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity concepts that lie at the heart of ethical research involving people. As stated above, I did not proceed with an interview unless my conversational partner gave me informed consent (via the signing of a consent form). Informed consent began with the initial contact and carried through to the end of my involvement with my conversational partners – it was an on-going process, not a single event that ended with a signature on a page. I ensured that prospective partners were given adequate opportunities to ask questions, discuss and contemplate their participation throughout the study.

Furthermore, privacy is a fundamental value, perceived by many as essential for the protection and promotion of human dignity. As such, the access, control and dissemination of personal information are crucial to research ethics. In order to maintain my conversational partner's privacy, I ensured that confidential information provided to me was protected.

Anonymity, however, was not guaranteed for the Skirtboarders since they are linkable to their Internet texts (or engagement with these texts). Participants were informed of this prior to the interview.

My Position as “Researcher”

Undoubtedly, there are those who would argue that my position as an “outsider³⁷” of the skateboarding world calls into question my ability to conduct research *with* skateboarding women that is of any significant use, value or merit. Although I have been keenly interested in the world of skateboarding since I was a teenager interested in a group of white teenage skateboarding boys who positioned themselves as different from “typical boys” through their music and sporting tastes, I never actually learned how to skate³⁸. I had always wanted to skateboard because of the resistant and anti-many-things nature of the lifestyle. Although I never ended up skateboarding, I hung out with these boys (along with three or four other girls) and watched while they skated idly around parking lots and other urban landscapes. My experiences reflect Yochim’s (2010) assertion that by the early 1990’s

³⁷ Although I agree that endeavors to be either one or the other reflect elements of the dualistic thinking that goes against poststructuralist constructionist perspectives, the insider/outsider binary in reality is a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space. No individual can consistently remain an insider (e.g., Skirtboarders come and leave the crew) and few ever remain complete outsiders (e.g., I could become an insider in skateboarding subculture if I learn to skate and become highly involved in the culture. In fact, I could even become a Skirtboarder). Yes, poststructuralism rejects binaries, but in my research, I came across discursively constructed binaries (e.g., Skirtboarders and female skateboarders who access the blog but are not official members of the crew). In order to explain the relationships between researcher and participants, I am merely recognizing that in these discourses, I am in the “outsider” subject position. However, in this recognition, I am quite aware of the messiness and the process through which this subject position is subjugated.

³⁸ I am still hoping to learn how to skate. I was planning to purchase and get going on a board this summer but once I found out that I was pregnant, I took up risk discourses about pain and injury sustained in skateboarding that circulate widely in media culture and medical circles. I plan to get on a board next summer, though!

(about the time I was beginning my teenage years), skateboarding had once again become an exclusively male pursuit – girls watched boys but did not skate.

Girls and women were not accepted in the sport during its first moment of popularity (late 1950's-mid 1960's) but were increasingly accepted in the 1970's when female skateboarders were taken more seriously (it is estimated that 10% of professional skateboarders were women) (Yochim, 2010). I would not identify myself as a "skate betty," though. Beal and Wilson (2004) claim that skate betties are groupies and Yochim (2010) suggests that girls who watched skateboarding boys helped to entrench the heterosexuality of skate culture. I do not feel that I was/did either of these things since I was not known as a "sidekick" to the boys; rather I was a budding feminist who was loud, commanded most of the attention and made it clear that the boys were friends but not objects of my admiration. Furthermore, I did not date boys and reflection on these experiences makes me realize that it is possible that others saw me as a lesbian, or at least not heterosexual, especially since I was reflexively challenging gender norms both inside and outside of skateboarding culture in other ways.

For example, I voraciously read skateboarding and surfing magazines (and occasionally watched videos), dressed daily in "skater style" with extremely baggy pants and t-shirts with anti-establishment messages and wore "authentic" skate shoes that were sold at the local "authentic" skateboarding shop (Top of the World, located in the Byward Market). I also videotaped the boys skateboarding (I was perhaps the only girl in my area doing this at the time) and worked on a film for a high school class that was called "West Side Story" which chronicled the party scene in Ottawa's Fisher Park and McKeller Park neighbourhoods (the film included lots of shots of the boys skateboarding). Outside of skate

culture but still within lifestyle sport culture, I took up snowboarding, which, at the time, was still a fringe sport for girls and women. Many of the skateboarding boys also snowboarded, and since I was the only girl in the group snowboarding, I had an extra connection to the “guys.” However, I did not date any of these boys nor did I really have much interest in impressing them. After all, by that time, a large part of my time was spent playing competitive ice hockey and soccer, the former of which was still not completely socially acceptable since it was considered to be a “butchy” sport full of lesbians. As much as I wanted to be an insider in the skateboarding scene at my school and in my community, I was both worried that the boys would laugh at me (because girls can’t skate, right?) and unable to step outside of the multifarious modes of gender discipline in school, outside of school and especially in sport, which was necessary to be part of that world. Thus, although I turned a reflexive gaze on some dominant neoliberal discourses (and challenged some discourses of femininity by playing hockey, snowboarding, dressing in baggy clothes rather than tight clothes, etc.), I was still a disciplined subject rather than an ethical one in skateboarding circles.

As a result of my reluctance to jump on a skateboard and learn how to skate but energetic efforts to look the part, I was most likely labeled a poseur or inauthentic by some of the boys in the skateboarding community (including those that worked at Top of the World). However, I believe that my “outsider” status in the skateboarding world is relative. I operated in the community as primarily an observer, and still do, but understand the inner workings of the culture to a certain degree. I am thus an insider watching from the outside, an outsider with a history of peering in. Ultimately, I feel that my experiences in skateboarding communities have enhanced my ability to understand the skateboarding

women in this study and, like Yochim (2010), “my position on the borders of this community – a borderland constructed primarily through my gender...” has been a privileged location for me because it has allowed me the ability to have an insider’s perspective (with knowledge of the communities’ norms) into a world that I knew and of which I always wanted to be a part and an outsider’s insight into the particularities of those norms.

Although skateboarding culture has interested me for over 15 years, it should be noted that this project did not come about because I wanted to research female skateboarders. Instead, like Brian Wilson (2007), I propose that although the Internet is problematic in many ways (Batra, 2008), it also has “immense revolutionary potential in sport-related contexts” (p. 457). Thus my interest in media culture, which began in high school thanks to a screen education program, continued throughout my undergraduate education at Queen’s University where I did a minor in Film Studies. and persists today, as well as my interest in the female athletic body, were the impetus for this project. As argued earlier, sportswomen are still underrepresented and marginalized in mainstream and alternative media texts, a “truth” that troubles me a great deal. However, sportswomen are starting to turn to Internet-driven forms of resistance/response (and creating their own community media sources) to counter these messages, which gives me some optimism.

References

- Batra, N. D. (2008). *Digital freedom*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Beal, B. & Wilson, C. (2004). 'Chicks dig scars': commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders' identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). New York: Routledge.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. London: Sage.
- Bridel, W., & Rail, G. (2007). Sport, sexuality, and the production of (resistant) bodies: De-/re-constructing the meanings of gay male marathon corporeality. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(2), 127–144.
- Cheek, J. (2004). At the margins? Discourse analysis and qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(8), 1140–1150.
- Dallaire, C. (2003). Sport's impact on the Francophoneness of the Alberta Francophone Games (AFG). *Language and Culture*, 25(2), 33–58.
- Dallaire, C. (2004). « Fier de qui on est... Nous sommes francophones! » L'identité des jeunes aux jeux franco-ontariens. *Francophonies d'Amerique* 18(1), 127–147.
- Daniels, D. (2009). *Polygendered and ponytailed: The dilemma of femininity and the female athlete*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Fletcher, R. (2008). Living on the edge: The appeal of risk sports for the professional middle class. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25, 310–330.
- Foucault, M. (1969). *L'archéologie du savoir* [The archaeology of knowledge]. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

- Foucault, M. (1971). *L'ordre du discours* [The order of discourse]. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1972a). *The archeology of knowledge*, New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1983). Afterword. The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd Ed, pp. 208–226). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1988a). Technologies of the self. In Rabinow & Rose (Eds.) *The essential Foucault* (pp. 145–169). New York: The New York Press.
- Foucault, M. (1988b). The ethics of the concern of the self. In Rabinow & Rose (Eds.) *The essential Foucault* (pp. 25–42). New York: The New York Press.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1994). Self Writing. In P. Rabinow (Ed.) *Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity and truth* (pp. 207–222). New York: New Press.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *The history of sexuality, Volume 2: The use of pleasure*. New York: Random House.
- Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless speech* (Pearson Ed.) California: Semiotext(e).
- Gall, M., Borg, W. & Gall, J. (1996). *Educational research: An introduction* (6th ed), White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Gajjala, R. (2009). Response to Shani Orgad. In A.N. Markham and K. Baym (Eds.), *Internet inquiry* (pp. 61–68). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gratton, C., & Jones, I. (2004). *Research methods for sport studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (2003). *Postmodern interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Holstein, J.F. & Gubrium, J.A. (1995). *The active interview*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In, C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 239–266). Oxford: Elsevier Science.
- Kitchin, H. A. (2007). *Research ethics and the Internet: Negotiating Canada's Tri-Council Policy Statement*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (2009). Campus newspaper coverage of varsity sports: Getting closer to equitable and sports-related (re)presentations of female athletes? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 44(1), 25–40.
- Markula, P. (2004). “Turning into one’s self”: Foucault’s technologies of the self and mindful fitness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21(3), 302–321.
- Millington, B., & Wilson, B. (2010). Media consumption and the contexts of physical culture: Methodological reflections on a “Third Generation” study of media audiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(1), 30–53.
- Mitra, A. & Cohen, E. (1999). Analyzing the web: Directions and challenges. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Doing internet research* (pp. 179-202). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Powers, P. (2001). *The methodology of discourse analysis*. Toronto, ON: Jones & Bartlett.
- Ravel, B., & Rail, G. (2006). The lightness of being 'Gaie': Discursive constructions of gender and sexuality in Quebec women's sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 41(3-4), 395–412.

- Ravel, B., & Rail, G. (2007). On the limits of “Gaie” spaces: Discursive constructions in women’s sport in Québec. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(4), 402–420.
- Rose, G. (2007). *Visual methodologies* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rubin, H.J., & Rubin, I.S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sharf, B.F. (1999). Beyond netiquette: The ethics of doing naturalistic discourse research on the Internet. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Doing internet research* (pp. 243–256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith-Maguire, J. (2008). Leisure and the obligation of self-work: An examination of the fitness field. *Leisure Studies*, 27(1), 59–75.
- Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of the self and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32 (2), 199–229.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 106–123). Buckingham Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Wilson, B. (2007). New media, social movements, and global sport studies: A revolutionary moment and the sociology of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24, 457–477.
- Wheaton, B. (2004). Introduction: mapping the lifestyle sport-scape. In B. Wheaton (Ed.) *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp 1–28). London: Routledge.

Yochim, E. C. (2010). *Skate life: Re-imagining white masculinity*. Michigan, USA;
University of Michigan.

Chapter 5: Skirtboarder Net-a-Narratives: Young Women Creating their Own Skateboarding (Re)presentations

This paper has been accepted for publication:

MacKay, S & Dallaire, C. (in press). Skirtboarder net-a-narratives: Young women creating their own skateboarding (re)presentations. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Published online before print January 9, 2012, doi: [10.1177/1012690211432661](https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690211432661)
<http://irs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1012690211432661v1>

Contributions of Authors

The work presented in this paper was conducted as part of Steph MacKay's (first author) doctoral dissertation, which received funding from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program and the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society. Steph MacKay initiated and designed the study, collected the blog posts, conducted the interviews, completed the analysis and wrote the manuscript of the article. Christine Dallaire participated in the conception and design of the project, contributed to the interpretation of the material and revised the manuscript critically for theoretical and empirical content. This article has been published in *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, a peer-reviewed journal (see link to online version of the paper on pg. 110).

Abstract

By creating and posting their own stories on the Internet, sportswomen are able to challenge the persistent, sexist, mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media (re)presentations of female athletes. A Foucauldian discourse analysis of 262 posts of the Skirtboarders' blog – a Montreal-based, Canadian female skateboarding crew's Internet project – explores the ways in which a group of sportswomen circulate alternative discourses of femininity. In these (re)presentations, the Skirtboarders embrace various femininities and, at the same time, reject binaries (male/female) without explicitly claiming a feminist agenda or attaching themselves to other oppositional discourses. This indicates a third-wave feminist sensibility. The Skirtboarders reproduce some normative discursive fragments commonly found in media (re)presentations. Furthermore, they post links to mainstream and alternative media coverage of their crew, which at times reflects the 'problems' of historical media coverage (sexualization, marginalization and trivialization). However, most of their online productions portray them as polygendered skaters (action shots, skating activities and lifestyle) and are thus radically different. The Skirtboarders' discursive portrayals of female skateboarders are therefore uniquely alternative to other media (re)presentations but at the same time, paradoxical.

Key words: femininity, alternative discourses, Internet, blog, skateboarding.



Figure 1. Annie Guglia mid-flight

This photograph shows a member of the Skirtboarders skateboarding (Guglia, 2009). Photo courtesy of Skirtboarders.com.

Media discourses are an important means of investigating gender subjectivity as they arguably contribute to how women understand themselves and their bodies – especially in relation to men’s bodies. Azzarito (2010) suggests ‘... through the media the feminine body is defined and circumscribed as a complement to and/or in opposition to the masculine body in specific, narrow and heteronormative ways’ (p. 264). Media discourses produce and circulate statements that may ascribe femininity to sportswomen³⁹ in a way that (hetero)sexualizes and trivializes their accomplishments (Kane and Maxwell, 2011; Messner and Cooky, 2010; Wensing and Bruce, 2003). This may impact the ways that girls and

³⁹ We use sportswom(a/e)n throughout this paper to describe women who report that sporting pursuits constitute an important part of their identity.

women constitute their subjectivity(ies) as sports participants and as feminine subjects.

Drawing on Foucault (1969, 1971), MacKay and Dallaire (2009) suggest that:

discourse links the exercise of power to the acceptance of certain truths about sportswomen (and sportsmen) as gendered bodies. The repetition of particular statements about female and male athletes establishes truths about who and what they are, in the same way that the absence of discursive recognition of women in sports makes them invisible. (p. 26)

The adaptation of Foucault's discourse theory in sports studies (see Chapman, 1997; Cole, 1993; Duncan, 1994; Markula, 1995; Markula and Pringle, 2006; Spowart, Burrows & Shaw, 2010), and more specifically in sports media analyses (see Pirinen, 1997; Wright and Clarke, 1999), shows that media texts normalize, discipline and classify women's bodies. Sports studies scholars argue that the discursive (hetero)sexualization and trivialization of sportswomen in media (re)presentations are the primary means by which masculine dominance is reproduced in sport (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). This unfair media coverage (substantially different in quantity and quality to men's media coverage) is alleged to diminish women's athletic accomplishments, discourage women from participating in sports, and suggest that women who participate in sport are socially acceptable only if they adopt and reproduce the dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulated in and through media texts (Bernstein, 2002). Despite the documented emergence of counter-discourses, the overall results of recent studies examining (re)presentations of sportswomen in both mainstream⁴⁰ and alternative⁴¹ media confirm the persisting asymmetrical coverage

⁴⁰ Downing (2001) suggests that the mainstream media are largely undemocratic, profit-centred, hierarchical in structure (both in terms of corporations and public companies that create and circulate media (re)presentations and the staff within those companies) and the vehicle of voices that are largely exclusive due the routinization

of women and men that ultimately contributes to gender inequity in sport (see Crossman, Vincent & Speed, 2007; Kane & Buysse, 2005; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008; King, 2007; Messner & Cooky, 2010; Thorpe, 2008).

Girls and women are exposed to dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating in and through sport media texts (including lifestyle sport media texts – see Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Discursive strategies used in the production of dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen (including skateboarding women – Beal & Wilson, 2004) focus on: gender marking (Koivula, 1999), establishing heterosexuality (Wright & Clarke, 1999), emphasizing female stereotypes (Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002), infantilizing women (Koivula, 1999), non-sports related aspects (Eastman & Billings, 2000), comparisons to men's performance (Donnelly, MacNeill & Knight, 2008) and ambivalence (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). However, these disciplinary mechanisms “do not produce a simple dominating discourse” (Pringle & Markula, 2005, p. 472). Michel Foucault (1978) warned us that discourses are deployed in ways that are difficult to decipher, partly because “a multiplicity of discursive elements . . . can come into play in various strategies” (p. 100). A disciplinary practice does not shape “all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures to the point of necessary and sufficient units” (Foucault (1977, p. 170). Therefore, women (and men) who interact with sport media texts do not necessarily embody the dominant discursive constructions that such media circulate. Instead, as Thorpe (2008) suggests in her

and codification of the journalism profession. In this analysis, mainstream media includes television, newspapers, widely circulated magazines and frequently used websites.

⁴¹ Alternative media often aim to challenge existing power structures, to represent marginalized groups and to foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest (Downing, 2001).

examination of how young women construct themselves through mass and niche snowboarding media, “the effect of these images depends on the discursive lens through which men and women read them” (p. 224).

Women may challenge these discursive constructions by creating their own sport and gender (re)presentations on the Internet. This paper examines a blog⁴² produced by the Skirtboarders – a female skateboard crew based in Montreal, Canada – to explore how these young women (re)present gender and sport performances compared to mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media texts. Computer mediated sport or “cybersport” offers a new source for constructing meaning about sporting identities (Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Leonard, 2007; McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998; Meân, 2010; Wheaton, 2007; Wilson, 2007). Part of the reason is that traditional forms of sports media are produced by organizations and with technologies that hinder dialogue between the users and the producers at the time of production. Furthermore, traditional media have gatekeepers who filter ideas, leaving users to construct meaning from texts after they are produced. Conversely, the Internet has a certain reversibility that allows users to produce their own texts and interact with texts produced by others, thus blurring the lines between user and producer and offering the promise of ruptures in subjectivity by challenging dominant discursive constructions circulated by other media platforms.

Researching the Internet

Sport sociologists are just beginning to examine the ways in which the Internet has been used for social resistance and social movement projects (Millington & Wilson, 2010;

⁴² Blogs allow bloggers (blog writers) to post regularly dated entries, often including opinions, journal entries or commentary. Although men tend to dominate the blogosphere (Ratliff, 2004), women are more likely than men to write personal blogs as a means of personal reflection and communication (Jack, 2009).

Plymire & Forman, 2000; Scherer & Jackson, 2008; Wilson, 2006, 2007). Although some authors describe “anti-jock” cybergroups that critique hypermasculine sport cultures (e.g., Wilson, 2002) and suggest that the action of sports-related social movements is enhanced by their use of the Internet (e.g., Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Lenskyj, 2002; Sage, 1999), no feminist work has yet examined gender constructions and social movements in cybersport (Wilson, 2007). Yet cyberdiscourses should not be neglected if we want to understand discourses of gender in sport media (Kian, Vincent & MondeLlo, 2008; Leonard, 2009). Other feminist researchers have heavily invested in this relatively new medium (e.g., Blair, Gajjala & Tulley, 2009; Bury, 2005; Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002; Paasonen, 2005). Cyberfeminists’ (feminists critically examining the Internet) early engagement is due in part to the ability of computer-mediated communication to circumvent and render irrelevant physical markers of race, gender, sexuality, ability and age (Baerg, 2008; Barlow, 1996). This “dream of disembodiment” produced debates about the potential of this transformation to allow women new forms of freedom. After decades of ambivalence towards technology, cyberfeminists claimed many women were now finding a wealth of new opportunities, spaces and lines of thought in the world of telecommunications. As Plant (2002) suggested, women were quickly realizing that “there is more to cyberspace than meets the male gaze” (p. 835).

While cyberfeminists were keen to point out the opportunities that the Internet afforded women, they also were careful to explain that social, economic and political power relations did not disappear online (Paasonen, 2005). Therefore, although cyberfeminists elucidated the contribution of women’s engagement with the Internet to individual empowerment in many Westernized and first-world locations, they argued that the

improvement in the material and political positions of women as a result of Internet practices is questionable (Gajjala, Zhang & Dako-Gyeke, 2010). However, the Internet does offer women the *possibility* of reconfiguring relations of power. Not all relations of power (especially those related to gender) are reflected electronically on the Internet. Nor is the Internet an alternative world, as some cyberfeminists suggest. The evidence of the continuity between online and offline life contradicts the idea that the Internet is separate from the “real” world (Wilson & Atkinson, 2005). Instead, the Internet is “a phenomenon *of* this world, [a set] of practices and narratives that have effects *in* this world...” [emphasis in original] (Paasonen, 2005, p. 5). The outcomes of Internet usage as a technology, as with any technology, are thus not predetermined.

Skirtboarder Gender Subjectivity as Performance

In this paper, the Skirtboarders’ gender subjectivity is regarded as a performance produced and framed in discourse. Discourse connects knowledge with the exercise of power.

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. (Foucault, 1983, p. 212)

Discourse then produces “truths” concerning identity, information and beliefs promoted and legitimized by institutions (including media organizations). Identity can thus be contested with the production of alternative forms of knowledge. Weedon (1997) referred to this as reverse discourse; although we prefer the term “alternative” discourse, defined as opposing

the status quo but not necessarily by using the same vocabulary as dominating discourses or producing the opposing social effects.

We draw on Foucault as well as Butler (1991, 1993) and Weedon (1997) to understand the fluidity, complexity and multiplicity of identities constructed through discourse to analyze how the Skirtboarders (re)present their gendered skateboarding performances on their blog. Butler (1991, 1993) explains that identities are performative and produced through regulatory practices. In this perspective, one comes to accept the “truth” about one’s identity through the repetitive practices defined by discourse. The various acts of gender thus create the idea of gender. The body becomes its gender through a series of gender acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time (Butler, 1990). One’s gender subjectivity, then, is not defined in language according to an essential identity. Rather, discourse pre-exists the subject. Discourse produces subjectivity since we learn modes of thinking about ourselves through language (Weedon, 1997). Yet, our subjectivity is not merely a matter of how we “recognize” the gender “truths” produced in discourse, but is also confirmed in how we “enact” or perform them. These gender-producing discourses circulate in numerous sites, including the media. As indicated above, media discourses about femininity play a powerful role in producing girls’ and women’s understandings of themselves and the construction of gender identities. The Skirtboarders’ blog is such a site where the discursive constructions of female skateboarders are reproduced and circulated by the media subjects themselves. This is unique in the skateboarding world, where male skaters represent the standard in media (re)presentations while female skaters are sexualized, trivialized and marginalized (Beal & Wilson, 2004).

Studies examining (re)presentation of female skaters in skateboarding media were pre-empted by research exploring issues of gender identity in lifestyle sports⁴³ more generally (see Thorpe, 2005; Wheaton, 2004b), and on gender identity in skateboarding in particular (see Beal, 1996; Donnelly, 2006; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2008; Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly, 2004). The earliest participants in lifestyle sporting activities (in the 1960s and 1970s) were originally seeking an alternative lifestyle (and often times resistant) to the mainstream that gave them a particular social identity (Wheaton, 2004a). Since then, some of these “lifestyle” practices (such as snowboarding, skateboarding and surfing) have been promoted by commercial enterprises and have become part of the mainstream, which ultimately increased access to these activities but arguably diluted their resistant functions. This shift is reflected in debates about the importance of “authenticity” in lifestyle sport subcultures (Beal & Wiedman, 2003; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Wheaton, 2003; Wheaton, 2004a).

Although each lifestyle sport has its own own history, identities and stages of evolution, some aspects of their ethos, philosophy and commoditization are similar. Lifestyle sports are an interesting phenomenon for feminist researchers because of the increasingly central role they play in the cultural identities of young women. This could partly confirm suggestions that some aspects of lifestyle sports make them friendlier to girls and women than traditional sport – for example, they are cooperative, anti-competitive, a means of self-expression and self-control and free of rules and hierarchal structure (Beal, 1992, Heino,

⁴³ Lifestyle sports (which have been referred to in both academic and popular discourse as extreme or alternative) consist of a range of primarily individualized activities such as surfing, skateboarding, parkour, wakeboarding, rock climbing, B.A.S.E. jumping and kite surfing (Wheaton, 2004a). Researches adopted the term lifestyle sport because they found that members of the cultures defined what they do as “a lifestyle,” rather than as a sport practiced in a specific time and space.

2005; Reinhart, 2005; Thorpe, 2005). Girls and women could also be taking an interest in these activities because the changing global economy and commodification of lifestyle sports has provided them with heavily marketed goods to consume. Haywood (2004) claims that although these global market shifts have opened up new possibilities for gender expression and identity construction, they have also limited the potential for sport to serve as a politically transformative space in relation to gender because participants become complicit with discourses of neoliberalism. Thorpe (2008) echoes this claim by stating that some female snowboarders are “aware of their commodity value and have no qualms about marketing their sexuality to boost their public profile and image and reap the financial benefits” (p. 211).

Other researchers suggest that lifestyle sports have been sexist since their inception and that women are still considered (albeit to a lesser extent than in the past) as “intruders” in masculine territories like skate parks, beaches and cliff jumping areas and in lifestyle sport culture more generally (Kelly et al., 2008; Laurendeau, 2004; Wheaton, 2004b). These contradictory positions reflect the complexity of girls’ and women’s participation in skateboarding, which is often based on a desire to resist dominant discursive constructions (e.g., of sportswomen), yet is still constrained by them (e.g., skateboarding is still a male preserve). In their analysis of skater girl discourse, Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie (2005) highlight this complexity when they argue that even though the skater girls they interviewed saw themselves as participating in an “alternative” girlhood through their skateboarding performances and identification as “skater girls,” becoming a “skater” often meant embracing the culture’s masculine norms. Therefore, they concluded that “skater girls” and

”skater women” are not necessarily engaging in and (re)presenting alternative discourses at all times in their skateboarding performances.

Mainstream media underrepresents, sexualizes and trivializes skateboarding women in the same way that it (re)presents female athletes from traditional sports. Such forms of marginalization are even worse in alternative skateboarding media (Beal & Wilson, 2004). This confirms skateboarding women’s doubly-marginalized status in the sports world and in the skateboarding world. Donnelly (2008) further suggests that even media (re)presentations focusing on female skateboarders rely on legitimation by men (considered the skateboarding experts) and focus on injury, which reinforces rather than challenges ideologies of gender difference. Therefore, the Skirtboarders interact with the discourses of masculinity and femininity circulated by mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media (re)presentations of female athletes, and this interaction shapes the women’s gender performances and ultimately their self-(re)presentation on their blog.

In light of the above discussion, this paper aims to understand the discursive constructions of gender the Skirtboarders deploy in producing their own sport coverage. The analysis consists of an investigation of a series of Internet (specifically Web 2.0) texts produced by the Skirtboarders in order to uncover the texts’ possibilities, the young women’s (re)construction of their bodies and resistance to the normative categories of femininity that sport scholars have identified. De Lauretis (1987) proposed: “that the construction of gender is the product and the process of both (re)presentation and self-(re)presentation” (p. 9). This study focuses on an analysis of blogged texts in an effort to put de Lauretis’ assertion to the test by looking at how a specific group of sportswomen self-

(re)present on their blog and how they are (re)presented by others in mainstream and alternative media texts (which the Skirtboarders reproduce or link to their blog).

Skirtboarders.com

The crew became an official entity in 2002 when a group of female skateboarders registered the Internet domain name “Skirtboarders.com.” Their website is a collaborative project by and for the Skirtboarders. The blog was added in 2007 and constitutes the main feature of this Internet endeavor. According to Mathilde, a founder of both the crew and the Internet site, “the Skirtboarders crew is a bunch of friends of all ages who skate together in Montréal and gather as often as possible” (The Side Project, 2008). The 17 primarily white⁴⁴ women (aged 18-32) profiled on the blog travel to skate, make videos (they produced the first Canadian all-female skateboarding film in 2007), socialize together, meet new people and share stories (including photos and videos) on their blog. The blog is produced in French and English, however, the Skirtboarders write most of their posts in French then translate them to reach a wider audience. Featured in the Canadian media several times since starting the blog, including television, newspapers, skateboarding websites and magazines, they have also attracted international media attention from Transworld Skateboarding magazine, Mexican and Swedish magazines and newspapers as well as numerous skateboarding websites, including women’s skateboarding websites.

⁴⁴ All but two of the 17 women appear to be white in blog photos. Brayton’s (2005) analysis of male skateboarding narratives promoting skateboarding or skating road trips reveals that skateboarding media imagery may offer opportunities for challenging the normativity of middle-class whiteness. While the 17 women featured in the Skirtboarders.com blog photos appear to be white, visual representations of their tours to Mexico, for instance, do trouble the predominant whiteness of their skateboarding media production and of the larger skateboarding culture. Nevertheless, while their web project strategically reproduces a variety of feminine identities opening up the potential for various gender skateboarding performances, it does nothing to challenge the whiteness of skateboarding. In this sense, it is similar to media portrayals of male skateboarders that reinforce the privileged position of white men (Yochim 2010).

The Skirtboarders produce both the written and visual (re)presentations displayed on the blog. Three members post the majority of the blog entries (elected by the group to perform this task on behalf of the group), although no administrator (gatekeeper) decides who can and cannot post. Therefore, all of the young women can post their material uncensored, or change what they have to say or how they visually (re)present themselves. This differentiates their web project from most media coverage. Anyone who visits the blog can comment on blog entries (without having to sign in). Most respondents are Skirtboarders commenting on posts by other crew members. However, a considerable number of respondents present themselves as young women who either skateboard or hope to skateboard in the future and consider the Skirtboarders as role models. The Skirtboarders also cross-post their stories and videos on numerous social networking sites (including Facebook and Twitter) and video sharing sites (including Vimeo and YouTube) where they have gained an extensive following (including almost 10,000 Facebook fans). Young women who engage with the Skirtboarders through the Internet come from Quebec and elsewhere in Canada or from other countries such as Sweden, Mexico, the USA, England and Vietnam.

What makes the Skirtboarders blog an interesting case for analysis? Through this blog (and their discursive self (re)presentation), these young women have been able to share their experiences as female skateboarders with a large (international) community, to meet other women who skateboard in Montreal or other locales (e.g., Sweden, Mexico, California) with whom they engage in exchanges (through trips or sharing information online) and to attract mainstream media attention that they arguably would not have received without the blog. Most of all, the site is interesting because the Skirtboarders have managed to self-produce and distribute (re)presentations of female skateboarders in their own way; that is, without

bending to mainstream media conventions (e.g., modeling their coverage after other female skateboard media coverage primarily intended to sell a product – see Beal and Wilson, 2004). This being the case, what discursive constructions of sportswomen do the Skirtboarders circulate on their blog?

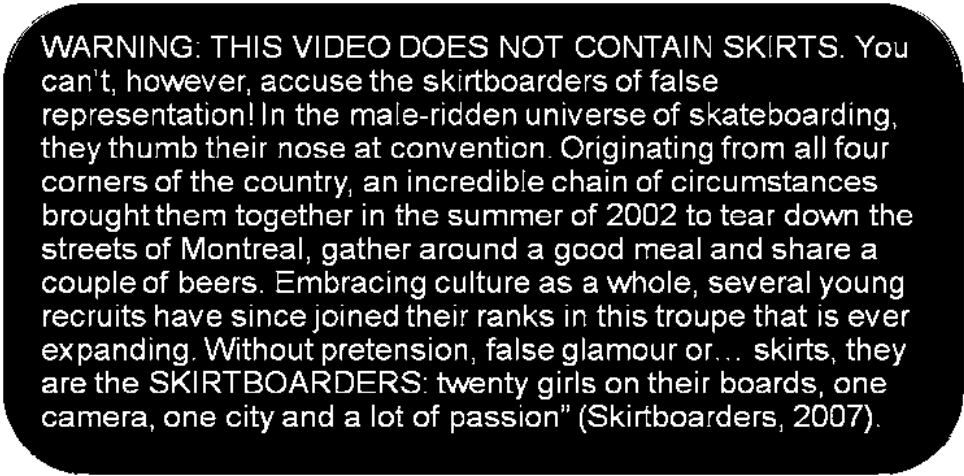
Research Protocol

All posts (262) on the Skirtboarders' website, including photos, videos and comments, from March 2007-May 2010 were included in this study to understand the Skirtboarders' constructions of their gender subjectivities. The six stages of discourse analysis described by Willig (2001) were employed to analyze the material drawing on Foucault's discourse theory (1969, 1971). These include (a) identifying how sportswomen (specifically skateboarding women) were constructed in each text; (b) locating the discursive constructions (of the Skirtboarders) within wider discourse; (c) closely examining the contexts within which the blog posts were being deployed; (d) determining which subject positions the blog posts offer; (e) examining the relationship between discourse and practice and (f) exploring the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. To achieve this, each blog entry was studied first of all simply to experience the unquestioning and status quo reading of the entry (that of an ordinary, undiscerning reader). Since most of the Skirtboarders are Francophones, the French texts were studied first and the English texts were compared to the French texts to establish whether the two linguistically different texts were consistent in meaning. Next, each entry was examined a second time with a critical eye; this time written and visual texts were revisited at different levels, questions were raised about statements producing femininity and possible alternate constructions of the texts were imagined. The photographs were the most noticeable aspects of the blog posts. For each post, at least one photograph (and often 5-10 photographs) accompanied the text.

The texts were compared to other texts about female athletes that we have studied in the past (to establish what was included and what was excluded) and to the descriptions of female skateboarding media (re)presentations by Beal and Wilson (2004). The social context of the statements was also considered (e.g., the source and the circumstances) (see Rose, 2007). The material was organized in two ways. First, we identified instances when the Skirtboarders replicated the discursive strategies used to construct “truths” about sportswomen (e.g., the seven discursive categories that emerge in mainstream media portrayals of female athletes identified earlier and Daniels’ (2009) descriptions of “polygenderism”). We looked for use of these discursive strategies on the Skirtboarders’ blog because we had to determine if the women were reproducing “truths” about gender that are already in circulation. The identification of the use of these discursive strategies was followed by an assessment of whether the Skirtboarders produced discursive constructions that challenged those constructed using these strategies. Particular emphasis focused on identifying whether the Skirtboarders reproduced dominant discursive constructions of femininity (for example, if they referenced their sexuality, body or appearance) or whether they offered alternatives to these constructions (for example, if they refrained from referencing female (hetero)sexuality, body or appearance and from using sex appeal to “sell” their blog).

Subsequently, the categorization of emergent discursive constructions of gender was completed, therefore the discursive analysis moved beyond a simple categorization of the use of and/or challenges to a priori strategies (Boyatzis, 1998; King, 2004; Smith-Maguire, 2008a). Therefore, although we arrived at the material knowing some of what we would be looking for, discursive constructions that neither confirmed not challenged the discursive

strategies emerged from the materials and new discursive constructions emerged, which allowed us to better understand the Skirtboarders blog, the Skirtboarders themselves and their users (Smith-Maguire, 2008a).



WARNING: THIS VIDEO DOES NOT CONTAIN SKIRTS. You can't, however, accuse the skirtboarders of false representation! In the male-ridden universe of skateboarding, they thumb their nose at convention. Originating from all four corners of the country, an incredible chain of circumstances brought them together in the summer of 2002 to tear down the streets of Montreal, gather around a good meal and share a couple of beers. Embracing culture as a whole, several young recruits have since joined their ranks in this troupe that is ever expanding. Without pretension, false glamour or... skirts, they are the SKIRTBOARDERS: twenty girls on their boards, one camera, one city and a lot of passion" (Skirtboarders, 2007).

Figure 2. This video does not contain skirts!

This photograph shows a section of the back of the film jacket for the Skirtboarders skateboarding film (Skirtboarders, 2007a). Film jacket by Érika Dubé.

Political Self (Re)presentations or “Just Skateboarders”

McRobbie (1999) suggests that scholars might try looking for resistance in “the more mundane, micrological level of everyday practices and choices about how to live. . .” (p. 72). In this analysis of the Skirtboarders’ blog, the daily experiences of the bloggers were studied to understand whether they are producing alternative discourses on femininity via the Internet. Interestingly, although the Skirtboarders explicitly state on the jacket of their film that they want to challenge certain aspects of skateboarding culture and (re)presentation (see Figure 2), they do not identify themselves as feminists nor state any specific political goal of promoting certain forms of femininity on their blog.

On the film jacket, the Skirtboarders juxtapose the text (see Figure 2) with a picture of a skateboarder in a skirt (see Figure 3), which contradicts the text. However, when they state that there are no skirts in this film, they mean it, and no skirts are paired with a skateboard on their blog either. Therefore, although it may initially appear from the film jacket that the Skirtboarders consciously and explicitly created their film in order to challenge mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations of sportswomen, specifically young women who skateboard, an analysis of the blog reveals something else. The findings suggest that the Skirtboarders self (re)present on their blog, much of the time, as “just skateboarders” rather than as female skateboarders on a mission to promote and express gender politics. For example, Mathilde, the leader of the crew, remarked in a television interview that the Skirtboarders started taking photos and making videos of themselves skateboarding, and posting them on the Internet, because they perceived that women skateboarders were absent from mainstream and alternative media texts. However, she was quick to say that the crew started this web project because they wanted to (re)present themselves skateboarding and have fun doing it (Pigeon, 2009c). Her comments do not suggest that they turned to the Internet because they wanted to “talk back” to anyone.

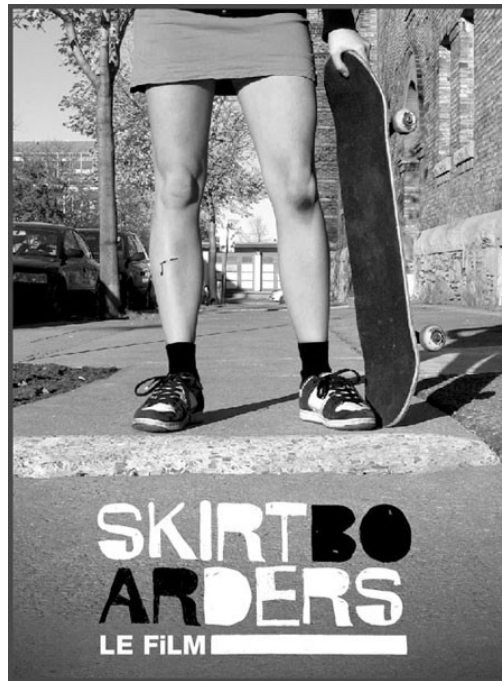


Figure 3. Skirtboarders – Le Film

This photograph shows the cover of film jacket for the Skirtboarders skateboarding film (Skirtboarders, 2007a). Film jacket by Érika Dubé.

Regardless of the Skirtboarders' affirmed group goals, they engage in gender politics in multiple ways. First, they mention in interviews with mainstream media sources that the majority of crew members began skateboarding with boys (brothers, neighbours, etc.) and self-identified, at least at one time, as "tomboys" (see Pigeon, 2009c). Daniels (2009) states:

No matter how skilled the tomboy may be at the culturally normative male activities in which she engages and for which she has been accepted by her male and female playing cohort in the past, she learns that she is an intruder in the games and sports and that there are negative consequences to her trespassing on this masculine territory. (p. 39)

Second, the Skirtboarders mention in media interviews (Pigeon, 2008; Pigeon 2009c) that the crew formed because they found that as more women joined the group, they had more fun skateboarding. They suggest that the Skirtboarders's primary strength is power in numbers, which can be read as an indication that they counteract feelings of trespassing the male skateboarding world by physically "taking over" skate parks. Third, the fact that the blog was created and is continually produced by women for women, and features only female sport performances (the male partners of crew members have rarely appeared, and never as "skaters," but always as "partners" throughout the three-year period studied), says something about the Skirtboarders' gender politics. Finally, the group's name is a comment on femininity as it relates to skateboarding.

Despite this apparent feminist agenda, the ways in which the Skirtboarders (re)present themselves in their blog posts seem to lack a feminist consciousness and may even be labeled by some as postfeminist.⁴⁵ However, Pomerantz et al. (2004) argue that such a classification might stop us from "hear[ing] all the ways in which girls are quietly but powerfully changing the face of girlhood through localized and specific gender struggles" (p. 549). Indeed, scholars suggest that younger women have developed new feminisms that complicate the contradiction between persistent sexism and increased opportunities (particularly economical) for women. For example, Heywood and Drake (1997) describe third-wave feminism as "a movement that contains elements of the second-wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse and power structures" while also recognizing "the pleasure,

⁴⁵ Postfeminism refers to an anti-political political position taken up by younger generations who choose to avoid the label of feminism because they characterize the movement as negative (i.e. man-hating, angry-at-the world, etc.). They are criticized by second-wave feminists for enjoying all the freedoms won for them by the women's movement but (wrongfully) dismissing work that remains to be accomplished, which ultimately depoliticizes second-wave feminism (Stacey, 1990).

danger and defining power of those structures” (p. 3). Third-wave feminists have grown up having had opportunities (e.g., in sport) and tend not to experience gender in the same way as older generations. Unlike women involved with second-wave struggles, they do not necessarily take up discourses as either/or but rather “embrace contradiction, hybridity, and multiple identities” (Thorpe, 2008, p. 212) and are “passionately engaged in social change agendas, but that these occur in marginal, virtual or underground places” (Harris, 2001, p. 139). Heywood (2008) further argues that young sportswomen are working on advancing key feminist issues and goals using “third wave” perspectives in less conspicuous spaces, without attaching themselves to the word *feminist*. She calls this “stealth feminism.” It is possible that the Skirtboarders are “stealth feminist” bloggers who are looking to (re)present gender in a different way altogether, where maleness and femaleness are not discernable and fluidity marks their bodies as “polygendered.”

Polygendered, Gender-neutral or Stereotypically Feminine?

Butler (1993) argues that the performative dimension of identity refers to the “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (p. 2). She contends that gender identity should be seen as non-essentialist and fluid, and explains that gender “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, p. 2). As individuals taking up subject positions in gender discourses, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity until these are experienced as if they were second nature. Where they are successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity. By de-constructing the way we think about gender, we might move closer to a new equality where individuals are not required to construct themselves as either masculine

or feminine (Butler, 1990). In discussing the discursive production of the category “women,” Butler (1990) explains that:

... the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (p. 140)



Figure 4. A Skirtboarder on the move

This photograph shows Éloïse Théorêt skateboarding through a tunnel (Pigeon, 2010).

Photo courtesy of Roux Centena.

Through the reproduction of the actions discursively associated to the category “women”, a woman’s femaleness is “established, instituted, circulated and confirmed” (Butler, 1991, p. 18). Also, because identity involves repeated performance, it is unstable, open to challenge and resistance.

Although not a poststructuralist, Daniels (2009) challenges the notion of a feminine essence that all women must embody or that some women have more than others. She claims

that the concept of gender is created socially and culturally and calls for recognition and a celebration of the polygendered nature of individuals (especially girls and women). She claims that we are all, to some extent polygendered, meaning that we embody “a mix of those characteristics, interests, behaviours and appearances that have been traditionally used to sort females and males into exclusive categories called feminine and masculine” (Daniels, 2009, p. 1-2). She encourages people to grant others (and ourselves) the ability to express themselves (and ourselves) and self-identify in whatever ways they (we) feel comfortable in terms of masculinity and femininity. Polygenderedness is thus about challenging the binary discursive constructions that limit how males and females should act out their gender.

The concept of polygender is useful for this analysis because it can be used to explain a different kind of gender subject position. Polygendered subjectivity is a site of disunity and conflict produced through a whole range of embodied masculinities and femininities and is therefore never fixed or coherent. The Skirtboarders exemplify “polygenderedness” regularly in photos, videos and the ways in which they write about themselves on their blog. For instance, in Figure 4, the image of the skateboarder could be a woman or a man. There is no accompanying caption specifying that the skateboarder is, indeed, a woman. What is certain, though, is that the person is a skateboarder. Reading and analyzing this photo is complex and depends on the viewer’s perspective. For example some viewers might see the skateboarder in the photo as a man, while others might see a woman. Still others might not read any gender in this photograph (a gender-neutral athlete) but assume that the subject is a man since skateboarding culture is still controlled by men (Beal & Wilson, 2004). The complex reading of the Skirtboarders’ photos reflects Fiske’s (1989) argument that all media texts are polysemic (“producerly”) – they contain both dominant messages and “opportunities to

speak against them” (p. 23). The Skirtboarders’ photos are polysemic, but since the Skirtboarders rarely post photos of men, viewers must ultimately accept that the skateboarder shown in Figure 4 is a woman. Arguably, though, the complexity in reaching a conclusion about whether the skateboarder in this photo is male or female suggests that this photo (re)presents a polygendered (or gender neutral) skateboarder. However, the Skirtboarders do not post photos like this one (or Figure 1, which is comparable) because they want to *be* men. They do not judge themselves against male skateboarders at any point on their blog. They rarely write about men’s skateboarding and do not post any pictures or videos of men skateboarding. In one regard, however, the Skirtboarders seem to reproduce dominant discursive constructions confirming men as the more skilled athletes. In a post about a skateboarding competition in Sweden, Julie states that the best 30 skaters in Sweden are men (Levesque, 2009). For the most part, though, they do not even acknowledge that men skateboard and they certainly do not compare themselves to men in any way, shape or form.

In addition to the general sense that the Skirtboarders do not explicitly identify crew members’ genders in their blog, they rarely establish heterosexuality either. This challenges Jennifer Hargreaves’ (1994) suggestion that the potential of alternative (re)presentations that differ from those created by and circulated through mainstream media is limited by “a powerful heterosexual code” (p. 165-166). Occasional textual or photographic references are made to one of the crew members’ husbands or boyfriends, especially in posts about Skirtboarder social events (e.g., Christmas dinner) attended by family. However, for the most part, they do not write about or advertise (in photos or videos) their romantic relationships with men or women. Discursive constructions of heterosexuality occur when

they write about or show crew members with their babies. For example, in one post, the following was written by Mathilde: “La vita è bella in the Poulin-Filion family! Rébecca, her boyfriend Fred and her daughter Maëlle have been living in Sardinia (Italy) for a few months now” (Pigeon, 2007a). Interestingly, this type of description usually appeared when the husbands or boyfriends accompanied the Skirtboarders on skateboarding trips to care for their baby (also occasionally (re)presented). Therefore, the men stood on the sidelines, so to speak. In some cases, a Skirtboarder was (re)presented with her baby and no mention was made of her partner. In these instances, the lack of a clear link between motherhood and heterosexuality raises the possibility that the Skirtboarder’s baby has only one parent or two mothers (who may or may not be another Skirtboarder). For the most part, they do not talk about or show images of romantic relationships with men or women, which suggests that they rarely establish heterosexuality.

The Skirtboarders also rarely emphasize female stereotypes, compare themselves with men’s performances or post ambivalent materials, all techniques found in mainstream media (re)presentations of sportswomen. In fact, they often challenge female stereotypes in the blog. For example, in videos they spit (Pigeon, 2007b) and fart (Julien, 2009) while taking a break from skateboarding. Blog users and other Skirtboarders have commented on these videos sarcastically, such as “very elegant anne-so” (Yannick, 2007, regarding Anne-Sophie’s spitting) or in astonishment, such as “An-So it’s not possible that such a stench can come out of something as girly as you [our translation]” (Frederique, 2009, regarding Anne-Sophie’s farting). In addition to challenging female stereotypes in videos, they frequently flaunt their opposition to characteristics and behaviours stereotypically associated with femininity (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Margaux Walker digging in to her nachos

This photograph shows a Skirtboarder mowing a plate of nachos while on a skateboarding trip (Skirtboarders, 2007c). Photo courtesy of Skirtboarders.com.

In some (albeit fewer) photographs, the Skirtboarders are shown with long hair, long painted nails, jewelry (earrings) and tight jeans, which can be read as an emphasis on femininity. In fact, Mathilde is rarely seen in photos without dangling earrings (see Figure 6). However, in this same photo, Mathilde is wearing a loose t-shirt, has no bra straps showing and is on a skateboard. These latter visual cues may lead some users of the blog to think that Mathilde is a male skateboarder with dreadlocks rather than a woman with long hair. This contradiction suggests that sportswomen can both resist dominant discursive constructions and reproduce them at the same time. Several sport scholars (see Chapman, 1997; Guthrie & Castelnovo, 2001; Johns & Johns, 2000; Markula, 2003, 2004; Shogan, 1999; Spowart, Burrows & Shaw, 2010) have come to similar conclusions about sportswomen's interactions with dominant discursive constructions. However, in the

Skirtboarders' case, the circulation of paradoxical discursive constructions in which young women embrace various femininities (including sexualized versions), and at the same time reject binaries (male/female), reflects a third-wave feminist sensibility. Indeed, Thorpe (2008) notes that whereas second-wave feminist researchers have argued that the sexualisation of female athletes reduces women to docile bodies for the consumption of the male gaze, young women today often applaud sports media (re)presentations of feminine physical attractiveness and do not view “feminine” and “sporting” as mutually exclusive identities, but rather as inextricably intertwined.



Figure 6. Mathilde Pigeon catching some air

This photograph shows a Skirtboarder skateboarding at a skatepark (Skirtboarders, 2007b).

Photo courtesy of Yann Richer and Babas.

Additionally, some photos depict the Skirtboarders wearing bikinis and striking poses that could be read as (harmfully) stereotypically feminine. However, the “reading” of these

photographs can vary. Some users might read the photo of Margaux and Anne-Sophie posing in bikinis with a hose (see Figure 7) as a mockery of stereotypical feminine soft-pornography photos where women hose themselves off to appeal to the male gaze (see for instance <http://www.thedirtysnatch.com/tag/wenatchee/page/10/>). Users' readings of the Skirtboarders as "mocking" typical (re)presentations of femininity rather than unreflectively reproducing them might derive from the context in which the photos appear. They form part of blog posts in which the Skirtboarders challenge stereotypes of sportswomen in other ways (for example, skateboarding, eating large amounts of food with their hands and making faces while eating, etc.).



Figure 7. Anne-Sophie Julien hosing Margaux Walker off

This photograph shows Anne-Sophie and Margaux taking a break from skateboarding in their bikini/skate session in preparation for their skateboarding trip to Mexico (Skirtboarders, 2008). Photo courtesy of Skirtboarders.com.

The discursive constructions that frame these images can be difficult to interpret and may be read in numerous ways depending on the reader's frame. The varied "reading" of the photographs suggests that the Skirtboarders self-representations have a certain "polygenderedness" (or gender neutrality in some cases) about them and whether these images challenge or reproduce dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen is debatable. Furthermore, Foucault (1969) suggests that some statements belong to more than one discourse. This could be the case here. However, we would stress that the majority of the blog photos are action shots of the Skirtboarders



Figure 8. Anne-Sophie skates at a park in California

This photograph is an action shot of Anne-Sophie skateboarding on her trip to California (Julien, 2009). Photo courtesy of Skirtboarders.com.



Figure 9. The Skirtboarders take a break

This photograph shows seven members of the Skirtboarders crew taking a break from skateboarding in their bikini/skate session in preparation for their skateboarding trip to Mexico (Skirtboarders, 2008). Photo courtesy of Skirtboarders.com.

skateboarding (see Figure 8) rather than pictures of the women off the field of play, which is atypical of mainstream media and alternative coverage of sportswomen and confirms that these women (re)present themselves as skateboarders.

Reproduction of Dominant Discursive Constructions of Sportswomen

While the Skirtboarders offer alternatives to part(s) of dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen, they do repeat “truths” about femininity that are prevalent in media (re)presentation of sportswomen. This discursive contradiction points to the inconsistent positions confronting sportswomen (especially “stealth feminists”). When they reflexively try to construct themselves on the Internet, some of the discursive strategies they adopt can be paradoxical; this confirms how difficult it is for the Skirtboarders to fully resist

dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen that (hetero)sexualize and trivialize sportswomen's accomplishments. This is especially true since these skateboarding women do not claim to be producing a blog to "talk back" to existing sport media in the way other women post YouTube videos to "state the truth" and contest dominant discursive constructions of obesity (MacKay & Dallaire, 2010).

The Skirtboarders rarely juxtapose their own descriptions or images with others that undermine or trivialize their crew members' success. Some photos (see Figure 9) show some members of the crew in bikinis while others are wearing pants and a t-shirt. This photo can be read as ambivalent – the women are trying to appear like athletes with their skateboards but, at the same time, expose their bodies for other skateboarders and/or blog users to see. However, the photo can also be read as resisting female stereotypes, since the bikini-clad women are wearing skateboarding shoes and fashion sunglasses and hats characteristic of skateboarding culture, and are posing at the top of a skateboarding ramp. Furthermore, these "ambivalent" photos (such as Figure 7) were taken at their final skateboarding session in Montreal before leaving on a trip to Mexico. Therefore, these photos are arguably action shots or depictions of skateboarding lifestyle activities leading up to travel to hot climates where it might make sense to skateboard in a bikini.

Mainstream and Alternative Media (Re)presentations on Skirtboarders.com

Although the Skirtboarders rarely (re)present themselves in ambivalent ways on their blog, they have been (re)presented frequently in the mainstream and alternative media (including skateboarding media) as a result of their blog. The Skirtboarders include all mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations of themselves on their blog, and these (re)presentations convey significant ambivalence. For example, in a Crux magazine article,

Margaux Walker is photographed in skateboarding shoes and with a skateboard, but is heavily made-up, bejeweled and definitely not in skateboarding action (see <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/crux-magazine-margaux-walker/>). Most of the story talks about Margaux's skateboarding and the Skirtboarders, but includes not one photo of her actually skateboarding. This is not surprising given the findings of previous research. However, it is interesting because the Skirtboarders do not (re)present themselves in such ways at any point on their blog. It is also remarkable that the Skirtboarders rarely comment on these (re)presentations on the blog (e.g., they rarely express their approval or disapproval of how they are (re)presented by others).

Admittedly, discursive techniques commonly used in sports media coverage to establish gender as the dominant frame for differentiating between athletes did emerge in the blog posts. For example, the Skirtboarders wrote about or showed (in photos and videos) non-sports related aspects of their lives. Posts about partying were noted, along with posts about travelling (although always associated with skateboarding). However, the posts were all related to the Skirtboarders skateboarding *lifestyle*. Therefore, one could argue that these posts were not, in fact, reproducing discursive constructions of sportswomen in mainstream media that attempt to trivialize sportswomen's performances, but rather elements that cannot be separated from the sport itself. Wheaton (2004a) suggests that participants in "lifestyle sports" such as skateboarding describe their activity as a way of life that extends beyond sport participation only. "Participants [seek] out a lifestyle that [is] distinctive, and that [gives] them a particular and exclusive social identity" (Wheaton, 2004a, p. 4). Posts that were not explicitly about skateboarding as an activity arguably had something to do with this skateboarding lifestyle "identity."

Conclusions

Although the microlevel forms of resistance that appeared in the Skirtboarders' blog are unlikely to support a significant change in the current discursive regime that dominates (re)presentations of sportswomen (and skateboarding women) in mainstream media, the Skirtboarders' new (and less sexist) (re)presentation may give reason for some optimism, despite the paradoxical character of the blog. Even though the Skirtboarders generally resist the dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating in mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations through their different (and potentially "polygendered" (or gender neutral)) self (re)presentations, the analysis revealed ambivalence in some of their photos (for example, the bikini photos) and in their links to mainstream media (re)presentations of themselves. This is not abnormal – the ensemble of discursive statements is not always coherent because there is ambiguity between polygendered or gender neutral and sexualized images. Skirtboarders do not explicitly claim to have a political agenda on the blog, yet they nonetheless make a political statement through the discursive constructions they circulate. Therefore, without professing to be feminists, the Skirtboarders produce, circulate and use feminist materials to expand girls' and women's space in the Internet skateboarding landscape. Hardin, Lynn and Walsdorf (2005) suggest that the emergence of female-only sports media texts "signals an emergent discourse about women and sport that has the potential to make 'gender trouble' in ways that will chip away at male hegemony" (p. 115).

Perhaps some of the distinctive features of lifestyle sports, including skateboarding, allow the Skirtboarders to (re)present themselves through a "polygendered" lens. Wheaton (2004a) interrogates whether lifestyle sports offer more egalitarian and empowering gender identities than other sports, and Beal (1992) draws an important comparison between

skateboarding techniques and traditionally feminine behaviour. Furthermore, Beal and Wilson (2004) suggest that skateboarders in general display an ambivalent attitude towards the commercialization and (re)presentation of their lifestyle in the mainstream media, and often attempt to distinguish themselves from the mainstream in order to preserve authenticity in their communities.

This project has generated a deeper understanding of the new ways in which women are acting out their gender identities through new media texts. The Skirtboarders illustrate how young women can transform their own experiences and actively engage in the technological decision-making processes that affect the construction of their subjectivities. Although the Skirtboarders' (re)presentations appear as "potential beginnings of an altered subjectivity, an altered identity" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998, p. 18), the women did not explicitly attach political meaning to these altered identities in their blog. This analysis supports Kelly et al.'s (2006) findings on what girls are learning online about femininity; while challenging dominant discursive constructions of femininity at the collective level, young women are not necessarily attaching themselves to feminist and other oppositional discourses. Therefore, the Skirtboarders might be enacting a third-wave feminist politic that suggests an awareness of gender inequity in mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media and a desire to (re)present themselves differently without claiming to be feminists.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions and constructive feedback. We are also grateful to Eileen O'Connor and participants in a Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society workshop featuring an earlier version of this article for their helpful comments.

Funding

This research received a small grant from the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society, University of Ottawa.

References

- Abercrombie, N. and Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination*. London: Sage.
- Abulhawa, D. (2008). Female skateboarding: Re-writing gender. *Platform Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, 3(1), 56-72.
- Azzarito, L. (2010). Future Girls, transcendent femininities and new pedagogies: toward girls' hybrid bodies? *Sport, Education and Society*, 15(3), 261–275.
- Baerg, A. (2007). Fight night round 2: Mediating the body and digital boxing. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(3), 325-345.
- Barlow, J.P. (1996). A declaration of the independence of cyberspace.<https://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>, accessed September 28, 2010.
- Beal, B. (1992). Sex segregation. The subculture of skateboarding: Beyond social resistance. Cambridge, UK: University Press.
- Beal, B. (1996). Alternative masculinity and its effects on gender relations in the subculture of skateboarding. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 19, 204–220.
- Beal, B., and Wiedman, L. (2003). Authenticity in the skateboarding world. In R Rinehart and S. Sydnor (Eds.), *To the extreme: Alternative sports, inside and out* (pp. 337–352). New York: SUNY Press.
- Beal, B. and Wilson, C. (2004). 'Chicks dig scars': commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders' identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). New York: Routledge.

- Bernstein, A. (2002). Is it time for a victory lap? Changes in the media coverage of women in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37(3/4), 415–428.
- Bissell, K.L. (2010). Exploring the influence of mediated beauty. In H.L. Hundley & A.C. Billings (Eds.), *Examining identity in sports media* (pp. 37–63). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Blair, K, Gadjjala, R. and Tulley, C. (2009). Introduction: The webs we weave. In K. Blair, R. Gadjjala and C. Tulley (Eds.), *Webbing cyberfeminist practice* (pp. 1–22). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Booth, D. (2004). Surfing: from one (cultural) extreme to another. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 94–109). London and New York: Routledge.
- Brayton, S. (2005). “Black-Lash”: Revisiting the “white negro” through skateboarding. *Sociology of Sport* 22(2), 356–372.
- Bury, R. (2005). *Cyberspaces of their own: Female fandoms online*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1991). Imitation and Gender Insubordination. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/out: lesbian theories, gay theories* (pp. 13–31). New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”*. London: Routledge.
- Chapman, G.E. (1997). Making weight: Lightweight rowing, technologies of power, and technologies of the self. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 14, 205–223.

- Christopherson, N., Janning, M. and McConnell, E.D. (2002). Two kicks forward, one kick back: A content analysis of media discourses on the 1999 Women's World Cup Soccer Championship. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 19(2), 170–88.
- Cole, C.L. (1993). Resisting the canon: Feminist cultural studies, sport and technologies of the body. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 17(2), 77–97.
- Consalvo, M. and Paasonen, S (Eds.) (2002). *Women & everyday uses of the Internet: Agency & identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Crossman, J., Vincent, J. and Speed, H. (2007). 'The times they are a-changin': Gender comparisons in three national newspapers of the 2004 Wimbledon Championships. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 42(1), 27–41.
- Daniels, D. (2009). *Polygendered and ponytailed: The dilemma of femininity and the femaleathlete*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Donnelly, M. (2006). Studying Extreme Sports: Beyond the Core Participants. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 30(2), 219–224.
- Donnelly, M. (2008). "Take the slam and get back up": Hardcore Candy and the politics of representation in girls and women's skateboarding and snowboarding on television. In M.D. Giardina and M.K. Donnelly (Eds.), *Youth Culture and Sport* (pp. 127–146). New York: Routledge.
- Donnelly, P., MacNeill, M. and Knight, G. (2008). *Enough, already! A comment on gender representation research*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Downing, J. (2001) *Radical Media: rebellious communication and social movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Duncan, M.C. (1994). The politics of women's body images and practices: Foucault, the panopticon, and shape magazine. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 18(1), 48–65.
- Eastman, S.T. and Billings, A.C. (2000). Sportscasting and sports reporting: The power of gender bias. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24, 192-213.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Unwin Hyman
- Foucault, M. (1969). *L'archéologie du savoir* [The archaeology of knowledge]. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1971). *L'ordre du discours* [The order of discourse]. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish* (A. M. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction*. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1983). Afterword. The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd Ed, pp. 208-226). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Frederique. (2009, July 14). Anne-So's Brazilian day! [Web log comment] Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/anne-sos-brazilian-day/#>. (2010, May 26).
- Gajjala, R., Zhang, Y. and Dako-Gyeke, P. (2010). Lexicons of Women's Empowerment Online, *Feminist Media Studies*, 10(1), 69–86.
- Guglia, A. (2009, June 6). Annie vs Paris – Part 2 [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/annie-vs-paris-part-2/#>. (2010, June 2).

- Guthrie, S.R. and Castelnovo, S. (2001). Disability management among women with physical impairments: The contribution of physical activity. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 18(1), 5-20.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding and decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson.
- Hardin, M., Lynn, S. and Walsdorf, K. (2005). Challenge and conformity on “contested terrain”: Images of women in four women’s sport/fitness magazines, *Sex Roles*, 53(1/2), 105-117.
- Hargreaves, J. (1994). *Sporting females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women’s sports*. London: Routledge.
- Harris, A. (2001). Revisiting bedroom culture: New spaces for young women’s politics. *Hectate*, 27(1), 128–139.
- Heino, R. (2000). New sport: What is so punk about snowboarding? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24(1), 176–191.
- Heywood, L. and Drake, J. (Eds.) (1997). *Third wave agenda: Being feminist, doing feminism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Heywood, L. (2008). Third-wave feminism, the global economy, and women’s surfing: Sport as stealth feminism in girls’ surf culture. In A. Harris (Ed.), *Next wave cultures: Feminism, subcultures, activism* (pp. 63-82). New York, NY: Routledge
- Holland, D. C., Lachicotte, W., Jr., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Jack, J. (2009). We have brains: Reciprocity and resistance in a feminist blog community. In K. Blair, R. Gadjjala and C. Tulley (Eds.), *Webbing cyberfeminist practice* (pp. 327–344). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Johns, D.P. and Johns, J.S. (2000). Surveillance, subjectivism and technologies of power: An analysis of the discursive practice of high-performance sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(2), 219-234.
- Julien, A-S. (2009, July 14). Anne-So's Brazilian day! [Video file] Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/anne-sos-brazilian-day/#>. (2010, May 26).
- Kane, M.J. and Buysse J.A. (2005). Intercollegiate media guides as contested terrain: A longitudinal analysis. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(2), 214–238.
- Kane, M. J. and Maxwell, H.D. (2011). Expanding the boundaries of sport media research: Using critical theory to explore consumer responses to representations of women's sports. *Journal of Sport Management*, 25(3), 202-206.
- Kelly, D.M., Pomerantz, S. and Currie, D. (2005). Skater girlhood and emphasized femininity: "You can't land an iollie properly in heels." *Gender and Education*, 17(3), 229–248.
- Kelly, D.M., Pomerantz, S. and Currie, D. (2006). "No Boundaries"? Girls' Interactive, OnlineLearning About Femininities. *Youth & Society*, 38(3), 3–28.
- Kelly, D.M., Pomerantz, S. and Currie, D.H. (2008). "You can break so many more rules": The identity work and play of becoming a Skater Girl. In M.D. Giardina and M.K. Donnelly (Eds.), *Youth Culture and Sport* (pp. 113–125). New York: Routledge.

- Kian, E.M., Vincent, J. and Mondello, M. (2008). Masculine hegemonic hoops: An analysis of media coverage of March Madness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(2), 223–242.
- King, C. (2007). Media portrayals of male and female athletes: A text and picture analysis of British national newspaper coverage of the Olympic Games since 1948. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 42(2), 187–199.
- Kinkema, K.M. and Harris, J.C. (1998). MediaSport studies: Key research and emerging issues. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 27–56). London: Routledge.
- Knight, G. and Greenberg, J. (2002) Promotionalism and subpolitics: Nike and its labor critics. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(4), 541–570.
- Koivula, N. (1999). Gender stereotyping in televised media sport coverage. *Sex Roles*, 41(7), 589–604.
- Laurendeau, J. (2004). The “crack choir” and the “cock chorus”: The intersection of gender and sexuality in skydiving texts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21(4), 397–417.
- Lauretis, T.D. (1987). *Technologies of gender*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press.
- Lemish, D. (1998). Girls can wrestle too: Gender differences in the consumption of a television wrestling series. *Sex Roles*, 38(9/10), 833–849.
- Lemke, T. (2001). “The birth of bio-politics”: Michel Foucault’s lecture at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and Society*, 30(2), 190–207.
- Lenskyj, H. (2002). *The best Olympics ever?: Social impacts of Sydney 2000*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Leonard, D.J. (2007). Call for papers: Virtual sport as new media. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(4), 506.

- Leonard, D.J. (2009). New media and global sporting cultures: Moving beyond the clichés and binaries. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 1–16.
- Levesque, J. (2009, June 11). Julie in Sweden – Contest in Malmö [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/contest-a-malmo/>. (2010, June 3).
- MacKay, S. and Dallaire, C. (2009). Campus newspaper coverage of varsity sports: Getting closer to equitable and sports-related (re)presentations of female athletes? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 44(1), 25–40.
- MacKay, S. and Dallaire, C. (2010). La contestation des discours sur l’obésité : YouTube et la femme “grosse” parrhésiaste. *Recherches féministes*, 23(2), 7–24.
- Markula, P. (1995). Firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin: The postmodern aerobicizing female bodies. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 424–453.
- Markula, P. (2003). The technologies of the self: Sport, feminism, and Foucault. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20(2), 87–107.
- Markula, P. (2004). “Turning into one’s self”: Foucault’s technologies of the self and mindful fitness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21(3), 302–321.
- Markula, P. and Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. London: Routledge.
- McDaniel, S.R. and Sullivan, C.B. (1998). Extending the sports experience: Mediations in cyberspace. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 266–281). London: Routledge.

McRobbie, A. (1999). Shut up and dance: Youth culture and changing modes of femininity.

In Morag Shiach (Ed.), *Feminism and cultural studies* (pp. 65–88). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meân, L.J. (2010). Making masculinity and framing femininity: FIFA, soccer and World

Cup websites in H.L. Hundley and A.C. Billings (Eds.), *Examining identity in sports media* (pp. 65–87). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Messner, M., and Cooky, C. (2010). *Gender in televised sports: News and highlights shows, 1989-2009*. Los Angeles: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.

www.aafla.org.

Millington, B. and Wilson, B. (2010). Media consumption and the contexts of physical

culture: Methodological reflections on a “Third Generation” study of media audiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(1), 30–53.

Paasonen, S. (2005). *Figure of fantasy: Internet, women & cyberdiscourse*. New York: Peter Lang.

Pigeon, M. (2007a, June 27). Rébecca Filion & GSD [Web log post]. Retrieved from

Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/rebecca-fillion-gsd/>. (2010, May 5).

Pigeon, M. (2007b, August 23). Anne-Sophie & Margaux @ préfontaine [Video file].

Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/anne-sophie-margaux-prefontaine/>. (2010, May 5).

Pigeon, M. (2008, January 28). Compte à rebours [Web log post]. Retrieved from

Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/compte-a-rebours/>. (2010, May 5).

- Pigeon, M. (2009a, March 31). Fred in Pala. [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/fred-in-pala/>. (2010, June 10).
- Pigeon, M. (2009b, June 9). Crux Magazine & Margaux Walker [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/crux-magazine-margaux-walker/>. (2010, June 2).
- Pigeon, M. (2009c, July 4). Marie par +30 [Video file]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/marie-par-30/>. (2010, June 2).
- Pigeon, M. (2010, March 17). *Spring is here!* [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/spring-is-here/>. (2010, May 26).
- Pirinen, R. (1997). Catching up with Men? Finnish newspaper coverage of women's entry into traditionally male sports. *International Review of the Sociology of Sport*, 32(3), 239–249.
- Plant, S. (2002). On the matrix: Cyberfeminist simulations. In P. Marris and S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media studies: A reader* (pp. 835-849). New York: New York University Press.
- Plymire, D.C. and Forman, P.J. (2000). Breaking the silence: Lesbian fans, the Internet, and the sexual politics of women's sport. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 5(2), 141–153.
- Pomerantz, S., Currie, D. H. and Kelly, D. M. (2004) Sk8er girls: skateboards, girlhood, and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27, 547-557.
- Pringle, R. and Markula, P. (2005). No pain is sane after all: A Foucauldian analysis of masculinities and men's experiences in rugby. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(4), 472–498.

Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*.

Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Ratliff, C. (2004, March 25). *Whose voice gets heard? Gender politics in the blogosphere*.

Retrieved October 5, 2010 from <http://culturecat.net/node/303>.

Rinehart, R. (2005). "Babes" & boards: Opportunities in a new millennium sport? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29(3), 232–255.

Rose, G. (2007). *Visual Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sage, G. (1999). Justice do it! The Nike transnational advocacy network: Organization, collective actions, and outcomes. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 16(3), 206–235.

Scherer J. and Jackson, S.J. (2008). Producing Allblacks.com: Cultural intermediaries and policing of electronic spaces of sporting consumption. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25, 187–205.

Shogan, D. (1999). *The making of high performance athletes: Discipline, diversity, and ethics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Sisjord, M.K. and Kristiansen, E. (2008). Serious athletes or media clowns? Female and male wrestlers' perceptions of media constructions, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(3), 350–368.

Skirtboarders (Producers and directors) (2007a). *Skirtboarders – Le Film* [Motion Picture]. Canada: Platnum Distribution.

Skirtboarders. (2007b). Le Crew [Web log post]. Retrieved from Web site:

<http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/crew/mathilde-pigeon/>. (2010, May 26).

Skirtboarders. (2007c). Lewiston [Photo Gallery]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site:

<http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/les-photos/roadtrip-2007-lewiston/>. (2010, May 5).

Skirtboarders. (2008). Pre-Mexico Session [Photo Gallery] Retrieved from Web site:

<http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/les-photos/pre-mexico-sess/>. (2010, May 26).

Smith-Maguire, J. (2008). Leisure and the obligation of self-work: An examination of the fitness field. *Leisure Studies*, 27(1), 59–75.

Spowart, L., Burrows, L., & Shaw, S. (2010). ‘I just eat, sleep and dream of surfing’: when surfing meets motherhood. *Sport in Society*, 13 (7-8), 1186–1203.

Stacey, J. (1990). Sexism by a subtler name? Poststructural conditions and postfeminist consciousness in Silicon Valley. In K. V. Hansen, and I. J. Philipson (Eds.), *Women, class, and the feminist imagination: A socialist feminist reader* (pp. 338–356). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

The Side Project. (2008, June). *Skirtboarders*. Retrieved from Web site:

http://thesideproject.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=185%3Askirtboarders&catid=43%3Amovers-and-shakers&Itemid=62. (2010, October 1).

Thomsen, S. R., Bower, D. W. and Barnes, M. D. (2004). Photographic images in women’s health, fitness, and sports magazines and the physical self-concept of a group of adolescent female volleyball players. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 28(3), 266–283.

Thorpe, H. (2005). Jibbing the gender order: Females in the snowboarding culture. *Sport in Society*, 8(1), 76–100.

Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of self, and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32, 199–229.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

- Wensing, E. and T. Bruce (2003). Bending the rules: Media representations of gender during an international sporting event. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(4), 387–396.
- Wheaton, B. (2003). Windsurfing: A subculture of commitment. In R Rinehart and S. Sydnor (Eds.), *To the extreme: Alternative sports, inside and out* (pp. 75–104). New York: SUNY Press.
- Wheaton, B. and Beal, B. (2003). “Keeping it real”: Sub-cultural media and discourses of authenticity in alternative sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38, 155–176.
- Wheaton, B. (2004a). Introduction: mapping the lifestyle sport-scape. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 1–28). London and New York: Routledge.
- Wheaton, B. (2004b). ‘New Lads’? Competing masculinities in the windsurfing culture. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp 131–153). London: Routledge.
- Wheaton, B. (2007). After Sport Culture: Rethinking Sport and Post-Subcultural Theory. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 31(3), 283–307.
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 106–123). Buckingham Philadelphia: Open University Press
- Wilson, B. (2002). The “Anti-Jock” movement: Reconsidering youth resistance, masculinity, and sport culture in the age of the Internet. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 19(2), 206–233.

- Wilson, B. and Atkinson, M. (2005). Rave and Straightedge, the virtual and the real: Exploring online and offline experiences in Canadian youth subculture. *Youth & Society*, 36, 276–311.
- Wilson, B. (2006). Ethnography, the Internet, and youth culture: Strategies for examining social resistance and “Online-Offline” relationships. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(1), 307–328.
- Wilson, B. (2007). New media, social movements, and global sport studies. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(4), 457–477.
- Wright, J. and Clarke, G. (1999). Sport, the media and the construction of compulsory heterosexuality: A case study of women’s Rugby Union. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34(3), 227–243.
- Yannick. (2007, August 23). Anne-Sophie & Margaux @ préfontaine [Web log comment]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/annesophie-margaux-prefontaine/>. (2010. May 5).

Chapter 6: Skirtboarders.com: Skateboarding Women and Self Formation as Ethical Subjects

This paper was submitted for publication (October 2011) and was accepted with revisions:
MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (accepted, January 2012). Skirtboarders.com: Skateboarding
Women and Self Formation as Ethical Subjects. *Sociology of Sport Journal*.

Contributions of Authors

The work presented in this paper was conducted as part Steph MacKay's (first author) doctoral dissertation, which received funding from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program and the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society. Steph MacKay initiated and designed the study, collected the blog posts, conducted the interviews, completed the analysis and wrote the manuscript of the article. Christine Dallaire participated in the conception and design of the project and contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the material. She also revised the manuscript critically for theoretical and empirical content. This article has been accepted for publication (with revisions) in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, a peer-reviewed journal. This is the revised version resubmitted to *Sociology of Sport Journal* (February 2012).

Abstract

The Skirtboarders, a Montreal-based crew of female skateboarders, purposely challenge discourses of femininity through an Internet skateboarding blog. Interviews with crew members reveal the similarity between their sporting and Internet practices and processes that Foucault (1986) referred to as “self formation as an ‘ethical subject’” (p. 28). We draw on the four aspects that Foucault outlined by which an individual constitutes herself as an ethical subject – ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work and telos – to analyze the Skirtboarders’ reflexivity and critical engagement both in their skateboarding and their blogging experiences. The results illustrate how sportswomen-driven forms of social media can become a means of individualized and collective ethical transformation.

Key words: femininity, ethical subject, Internet, blog, skateboarding.

Sport Media and Gender Research

Issues pertaining to media (re)presentations⁴⁶ of gendered sporting bodies have been explored in sport sociology literature since the early 1980s when feminist scholars recognized that sport media (re)presented sportswomen⁴⁷ in ways that undermined the promotion of women's sporting events and women as legitimate athletes (e.g., Fasting & Tangen, 1983; Hilliard, 1984; Rintala & Birrell, 1984). Such research was deemed critical since the media not only reflect society, they circulate frameworks of meaning (discourses) that both shape and create attitudes and values about culture, including sport (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Messner, 1988; Wenner, 1998). Research examining media (re)presentations of sportswomen has continued for over 25 years, focused mainly on scholarly readings of sports media (re)presentations of female bodies (Plymire, 2005). While some studies have examined the processes involved in producing gendered sports media texts (Hardin, 2005; Knoppers & Elling, 1994; Theberge & Cronk, 1986), only Hardin (2011) has explored the production of gendered Internet (re)presentations by and for sportswomen in her analysis of interviews with Internet bloggers linked to the Women Talk Sports blog.

As Hardin (2011) argues, Internet text creators do not always (re)produce (re)presentations limited solely to the dominant discursive fragments of femininity – some

⁴⁶ The term (re)presentation is used throughout this article as a reference to Jean Baudrillard's (1983) postmodern age order of simulacra which suggests that when media present information, they are not representing "reality." Instead, the representation *precedes* and *determines* the real. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum.

⁴⁷ The term "sportswom(a/e)n" is used throughout this paper to describe women who claim that their sporting pursuits comprise an important part of their identity.

women circulate reverse⁴⁸ discursive fragments (Foucault, 1983, 1990) and use new media platforms as a vehicle for producing these alternative femininities (see MacKay & Dallaire, in press, 2010). The ways in which subjects (including sportswomen) are (re)presented change over time and space. The recent widespread use of the Internet has contributed to these transformations. For example, Manovich (2001) argues that whereas mainstream media “corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, which values conformity over individuality” (p. 41), the new media follow the precepts of a postindustrial or globalized society in which a citizen can “construct her own custom lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices...” (p. 42).

While sport scholars have been slow to examine issues related to the production of gendered (re)presentations on the Internet, cyberfeminists (feminists critically examining the Internet) have heavily invested in such projects (e.g., Blair, Gajjala & Tulley, 2009; Bury, 2005; Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002; Paasonen, 2005). Foucault (1990) reminds us that discursive power presumes a free subject who can take up or challenge the truths put forth in discourses. The Internet provides a space where women can contest discursive constructions of identity. Indeed, unlike any medium before it, the Internet and its sport counterpart, computer mediated sport or “cybersport,” offer a new source for interpreting sporting identities (Leonard, 2009; McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998; Meân, 2010; Wilson, 2007), partly because traditional forms of sports media, such as radio, television, newspaper sports sections and magazines, are created by organizations and with technologies that do not foster dialogue between users and creators at the production stage. Furthermore, the traditional

⁴⁸ Foucault (1990) describes “reverse discourse” as alternative forms of knowledge that may or may not use the same vocabulary as institutional discourses and may or may not produce the opposing social effects.

media enlist gatekeepers that filter ideas, leaving users to construe the meaning of a text after its production. The Internet, in contrast, affords a certain reversibility that allows users to produce their own texts and interact with texts produced by other, thus blurring the line between user and producer. In fact, we suggest that the Internet offers the *possibility* of self-formation through the problematization of discursive constructions of gender.

We address this specific question in this exploration of how the Skirtboarders—a crew of female skateboarders based in Montreal, Canada, who (re)produce and circulate alternative gender discourses online—carry out Foucault’s (1986) processes of self-formation as “ethical subjects.” We begin by outlining the connections between Internet (re)representation and Foucault’s concept of the ethical subject (1986), and we then detail our research method with particular emphasis on how we used this concept to understand the Skirtboarders’ Internet and sport engagement. Next, we contextualize the Skirtboarders’ crew and blog and move on to a discussion of our results and a conclusion about the Internet as a means for ethical self-transformation.

Internet (Re)presentation and the Formation of Ethical Subjects

Foucault’s discourse theory has been adapted and used for sport media studies before (see Duncan 1994; Pirinen, 1997; Wright & Clarke, 1999). As yet, however, only Thorpe (2008) has applied this concept to a sport media analysis exploring how female snowboarders take up and challenge the discourses of femininity circulated in snowboarding magazines. Not all audiences comprise docile subjects who constitute aspects of their subjectivities through uncritical media consumption. In fact, Thorpe (2008) shows how snowboarding women challenge the discursive constructions of femininity transmitted by mainstream media by subverting the messages to create their own reverse discourses. Indeed,

discourses, including those about masculinities and femininities that act as “dividing practices” (Foucault, 1977), are not necessarily accepted without critique. Markula and Pringle (2005) suggest that “discourses of femininity help to produce very real sets of lived differences and inequitable sets of power relations within and between the sexes” (p. 477) because “bodies can be regarded as invested, marked, pleased and tortured by discourses in a manner that helps constitute a body’s postures, thoughts, performances and subjectivities as typically male or female” (p. 477). Discourses of masculinity and femininity can and do have material and cultural effects – as shown by various sport media analyses of (re)presentations of sportswomen (e.g., see Wensing & Bruce, 2003) – but they can be challenged and reverse discourses can be created. Duncan and Brummett (1993) suggest that we adopt both preferred and subversive gendered subject positions when we interact with sport media; we are constrained and empowered by them at the same time. However, we can be either unreflexive disciplined subjects or ethical subjects, who consciously choose one discipline over another. In contrast to the docile subject who spontaneously reproduces discourses constructed by “experts,” the ethical subject is created in a strategic manner. Foucault (1988b) stipulated: “ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (p. 28).

Yet, as Foucault (1990) observed, identities are constructed in relation to the workings of power, therefore not all individuals have equal opportunity (i.e., life circumstances or the availability of discursive resources) to create an understanding of the self of their choice. Therefore, an ethical subject is a person who acknowledges socially constructed codes of

conduct reinforced by power relations, but knows that she⁴⁹ has some flexibility within these codes to construct herself (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In addition to this acknowledgment, Markula (2003) suggested that ethical subjects must also use critical self-awareness strategies (questioning what appears “natural” and inevitable in one’s own subjectivity) and aesthetic stylization (openness to personal change) to (re)create themselves. As Foucault (1988b) suggested, though:

the problem is not to try to dissolve them [relations of power] in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one’s self the rules of law, the techniques, the management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination. (p. 40)

How does one engage in the modes of ethical self-constitution? Foucault (1986) made a fundamental distinction between morality and ethics. He suggested that morality has three aspects: (a) a moral code , which is the set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies, such as the family, the church, and arguably the media; (b) the actual behaviour of those that are ‘subject to’ this code; and (c) the way individuals constitute themselves according to this code – that is the way they bring themselves to obey the code. It is in relation to this third aspect that Foucault used the term ‘ethics.’ As noted by O’Leary (2002), “for Foucault,

⁴⁹ Although we use feminine pronouns and argue that a group of sportswomen are ethical subjects in this paper, Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (and his other works) makes few references to women or to the issue of gender. In fact, his constructions of otherness, sexuality and ethical subjects focus on men, paying no attention to gender-specific disciplinary practices. In spite of his androcentrism, feminists have successfully used his treatment of the relations between power, the body and sexuality to examine feminine disciplinary practices (McLaren, 2002). We adopt this approach in this project.

ethics is not a field of rules, principles of precepts, it is the field of our self-constitution as subjects. . . . ethics consists of the set of attitudes, practices and goals by which we guide our moral self-fashioning” (p. 11). Therefore ethics has to do with the relation of oneself to oneself. In his later work, Foucault (1983) proposed that “maybe the task nowadays is not to discover who we are but to refuse what we are” (p. 216). He thus claimed that our task is to reject forms of subjectivity and the modes of subjection that are imposed on us.

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1986) examined the ethical conduct of sexuality and proposed four facets that determine how an individual constitutes himself as an ethical subject: the ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work and telos. He also illustrated how these facets vary by culture and historical period, from the Ancient Greeks to early Christianity, on to the 16th century and modern society. In brief, if we adapt his framework to understand how sportswomen engage in ethical work, the *ethical substance* is concerned with an individual determining what aspect or part of herself or her behavior falls within the realm of moral conduct (subject to ethical judgment) – i.e., what part of herself requires work. The *mode of subjection* is concerned with the sportswoman determining how she must establish her relationship to the ethical rule or moral code in question and determine why she should engage in a certain ethical task. Through critical reflection of the mode of subjection, the individual can determine what means or techniques she can use to transform herself and engage in what Foucault (1986) considers “*ethical work*.” A wide variety of physical and mental techniques can be used to perform ethical work, such as writing (e.g., hupomnemata and correspondence), speaking (e.g., parrhesia) and physical training (e.g., sexual abstinence and other rituals of purification and expressions of identity (see Butler, 1999) through bodily comportment). These techniques are related to the *telos*, which is the existential aspiration

she hopes to achieve through moral behavior (personal transformation goal).

Foucault (1986) claimed that through ethical practice, by reflecting on one's relationship to oneself and training as a significant self-forming activity, an individual's life could become aesthetic, a work of art. He did not, however, explicitly extend his own fourfold ethical framework (ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work and telos) beyond the field of sexual conduct (homosexuality). Yet this should not prevent us from exploring its applicability to other types of practice and lifestyle, including sport (in our case, skateboarding). For example, in urging high-performance athletes to transform themselves into ethical subjects, Shogan (1999) acknowledged that while pushing the limits of identity in sport may be less ambitious than Foucault's limit experiences with sexual conduct, it might allow athletes to play with conventional gendered (and other) identities. In yet another attempt to demonstrate that some athletes can and do transform themselves into ethical subjects, Pringle and Hickey (2010) found that male volleyball, football, softball and rugby union athletes negotiated sporting tensions which ultimately shaped their (masculine) selves. In their analysis, they argued that some of these athletes rejected the values or moral codes of hypermasculinity in attempts to create ethical masculinities. They suggested that reflexive resistance to hypermasculine forms of subjection could be one form of ethical response to issues surrounding masculinities and sport, and could allow athletes to move within existing power relations and in relation to moral codes (rather than be restrained by them).

This paper presents a case study of the Skirtboarders' blog production to build on the work of sport scholars exploring Foucault's ethical framework and to apply this theory as a means of shedding light on a sportswomen's new media project. We illustrate how these

skateboarding women engage in modes of ethical constitution as they negotiate and reinvent discourses of femininities in fluid and conflicting ways both as producers and as users of Internet text.

Research Approach

In order to accomplish this task, in-depth individual and group qualitative interviews with eight of the Skirtboarders “core” members were conducted between August 2010 and January 2011. Scholarly research interviews have changed considerably from a modernist approach presuming that “conversation[s] with a purpose” provide the interviewer with facts about the respondent’s lived experience to a postmodern approach common in contemporary qualitative interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 3). Kvale (1996) described one aspect of this postmodern sensibility in what she calls the “traveler metaphor” explaining that knowledge does not exist “out there,” but is rather created by both the “traveler” (researcher) and the conversational partner within and through conversation. The first author who conducted all interviews construed herself as one of Kvale’s “travelers,” a feminist researcher guided by postmodern sensibilities (as defined by Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). She attempted to create nuanced descriptions with her conversational partners about their lives in order to make her way towards an understanding of their skateboarding and Internet practices. The recruitment process specified that participants would converse with a doctoral student completing a research project on sportswomen’s approach to femininity and sport. The Skirtboarders were thus presumably taking on subject positions in gender discourses as they responded to the invitation to take part in this study (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). They were also seemingly willing to share their thoughts with a university research “expert” in training.

One crew member was interviewed by telephone in English. All other conversations were conducted in Montreal in French, including individual and group interviews (a group of two and a group of three). The audio-taped interviews, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes provided a balanced combination of structure and flexibility as well as the opportunity to put conversational materials into context (i.e., making connections between the Skirtboarders' online and offline lived experiences) (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2004). The content of the blog—the gender and sport discursive fragments that Skirtboarders reproduce through their Internet project—was analyzed prior to conducting the interviews and subsequently published in MacKay and Dallaire (in press). This paper focuses on the blog production process rather than its content and relies on the information gathered through conversations with the sportswomen to understand why they created this blog and how they make sense of its content. A variety of questions were addressed regarding their skateboarding activities and the development and goals of the crew. The Skirtboarders were also invited to discuss the creation, purpose and impact of their blog. Additional conversation topics included their mainstream and alternative media consumption as well as their assessment of media (re)presentations of women.

Foucault's (1986) theorizing of ethical practices guided our analysis of the Skirtboarders' responses. Throughout the entire process, we paid particular attention to these sportswomen's multiple and variable subject positions. The discursive constructions related to gender present in each transcript were interpreted based on the four questions that Foucault (1988c) suggested frame the task of ethics, which he defines as the relationship to oneself.

The question he identified for the first aspect of ethics, the ethical substance is: “Which is the part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct?” (Foucault, 1988c, p. 111). The aspect of the self that the Skirtboarders identify as morally problematic and that must be taken as the object of their ethical reflection and transformed into ethical work for is gender subjectivity. The Skirtboarders morally object to the dominant discursive gender “truths” circulating through mainstream and alternative media that perpetuate inequities for sportswomen (see Messner and Cooky, 2010, for a summary of some of the “truths” that construct sportswomen). They abide by a moral code that promotes gender equity and thus reject the discursive “truths” that marginalize sportswomen as gendered subjects. They individually and collectively work on the aspects of themselves that relate to gender inequity in skateboarding more generally and in skateboarding media more specifically by producing a blog that contests the current skateboarding gender order.

The second aspect of ethics, the mode of subjectivation, refers to “the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligation” (Foucault, 1988c, p. 111). In other words, how does the subject establish his relationship with the moral rule, recognize his obligation to uphold it and view his acts as worthy of moral valorization (Foucault, 1986)? In our analysis of the Skirtboarders, this question was formulated as: Why did the Skirtboarders engage in ethical work on their gender subjectivity through the blog? The Skirtboarders’ gender subjectivity and ethical work is larger than just the blog – their work includes skating, traveling, supporting other women. . . etc. However, they use the blog as one means to contest dominant discursive gender “truths” about sportswomen and create alternative discursive constructions.

To uncover the ethical work, the third aspect of ethics, Foucault (1988c, p. 112) asked: “What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?” We explored this ethical dimension in our analysis of the Skirtboarders by focusing on the techniques or practices they adopted to transform their gendered selves, to create purposeful representations of their skateboarding practices and to behave in certain ways towards other young skateboarding women through their blog production.

Finally, Foucault (1988c, p. 112) explained that, telos, “[t]he fourth aspect is: “Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in in a moral way?” In our analysis, this question became: “What kind of gendered subjects do the Skirtboarders want to be ?”⁵⁰ We explored this aspect in order to explore how they manifest their desire to be engaged female skateboarders, as in being skateboarding women and as in serving as role models towards other young women.

Setting the Context: The Skirtboarders Crew and their Blog

The crew became an official entity in 2002 when a group of female skateboarders created Skirtboarders.com, an Internet collaborative project by and for crew members. In May 2007 they added the blog that currently comprises the main feature of their website. A founder of both the Internet blog and the crew explains that “the Skirtboarders crew is a bunch of friends of all ages who skate together in Montreal and gather as often as possible” (The Side Project, 2008). Sometimes they compete, but usually they skateboard for pleasure. Although some of the women have official sponsorships (e.g., Sitka, Volcom, Spy Optics

⁵⁰ See O’Leary (2002, p. 12-13) also for a summary of the questions that a Foucauldian approach of ethics poses and specifically the second part of O’Leary’s analysis (2002, p. 107-174) for an interpretation of a how this fourfold division of ethical practices could be used to reflect on “the question of the well-lived life” (p. 107).

and Hurley) that help fund their skateboarding trips and provide them with clothing and equipment, most finance their sporting activities and travel themselves. The 17 women profiled on the blog travel to skate, make videos (they produced the first Canadian all-female skateboarding film in 2007), socialize together, meet new people and share stories (including photos and videos) on their blog. They have been featured in the Canadian media several times since the blog started, and have also attracted international media attention.

The Skirtboarders produce both the written and visual (re)presentations contained in the blog. Three members post the majority of the blog entries (elected by the group to perform this task on behalf of the group), although no administrator (gatekeeper) decides who can and cannot post. Therefore, all of the women can post their material uncensored, or change what they have to say or how they visually (re)present themselves without concern for organizational or group policy, since none exists. This differentiates their web project from most mainstream media coverage. Most postings are initiated by crew members, yet a considerable number of respondents present themselves as young women who see the Skirtboarders as role models. The Skirtboarders also cross-post their stories and videos on numerous social networking sites (including Facebook and Twitter) and video sharing sites (including Vimeo and YouTube) where they have gained an extensive following (including almost 10,000 Facebook fans). Young women who engage with the Skirtboarders through the Internet come from Quebec and elsewhere in Canada or from other countries such as Sweden, Mexico, the USA, England and Vietnam.

The Skirtboarders interviewed ranged in age from 19 to 31 years, filled a variety of roles within the crew and made different contributions to the blog. For example, Mathilde⁵¹, age 30 and a co-founder of both the blog and the crew, wrote most of the blog posts, filmed and edited most of the videos and took many of the photographs between May 2007 and September 2011. She directed *Skirtboarders, Le Film*, released in 2007, the Skirtboarders all-female skateboarding video and the first of its kind in Canada and among the first worldwide. She also managed all of the Skirtboarders' media requests and emails and acted as the Skirtboarders' "gatekeeper" (media outlets and others who wanted to connect with the Skirtboarders outside of the blog had to contact Mathilde) until late 2010 when she handed the reins over to Annie. She dedicated herself to promoting female skateboarders and the Skirtboarders in particular, often focusing more on producing blog material than her own skateboarding (Mathilde, personal communication, February 19, 2011).

Louise, age 30 and a co-founder of the crew, took many of the photographs, filmed some of the videos for the blog posts and occasionally commented on posts written by others. She competed in skateboarding competitions internationally in her early 20s but now skateboards for pleasure (Louise, personal communication, September 8, 2010).

Amy, age 30, and a co-founder of the blog and the crew, occasionally wrote blog posts and commented on posts by others. While she lived in Montreal at the time that the crew was formed, she has since returned to her native British Columbia where she remains

⁵¹ The Skirtboarders have used their names and/or posted photos or other identifying personal information on the Internet and were advised at the outset of this research project that their anonymity could not be guaranteed since readers of texts arising from this research might be able to identify individuals from their interview responses. The Skirtboarders interviewed all agreed to be named in the research.

actively involved in the skateboarding lifestyle (Amy, personal communication, August 31, 2010).

Julie, age 31 and co-founder of the crew, wrote blog posts (a special series of posts over the year she lived in Sweden) and commented occasionally on posts by others. She competes internationally and is sponsored by a major Canadian skateboarding company (that provides clothing and some cash for skateboarding trips) (Julie, personal communication, September 16, 2010).

Anne-Sophie, age 23 and a co-founder of the crew, occasionally wrote posts and commented regularly on posts by others. In the past, she competed internationally (and is still sponsored by Volcom, Globe and a number of other major skateboarding companies), but currently skateboards for her personal enjoyment (Anne-Sophie, personal communication, September 8, 2010). She is one of the better-known Skirtboarders as a prominent figure in Quebec skateboarding media and on the Quebec skateboarding and snowboarding scene since 2005. She was TV host for X-Skatera (a Canadian French-language television program on skateboarding), currently hosts for VRAK TV (a youth-oriented Canadian French-language cable television specialty channel) and models for Glaceau Vitamin Water (a privately owned subsidiary of Coca-Cola Company that manufactures and distributes various lines of enhanced water).

Eloise, age 21 and a newer member, rarely wrote blog posts or took photographs, but occasionally commented on the site. She is often featured in videos and photographs but does not compete; she skateboards purely for pleasure. Other Skirtboarders describe her as one of the most talented skateboarders in the crew. She resists competition because of her aversion to the spotlight (Eloise, personal communication, September 8, 2010).

Annie, age 19 and the youngest member, is now the primary blog poster (she also records and edits videos and takes photos) and the crew's new "gatekeeper." She has heightened the Skirtboarders' profile on Facebook and Twitter since taking over the reins in late 2010. She rarely competes but is still known as one of the most talented skateboarders in the crew (Annie, personal communication, September 8, 2010).

Roux, age 21 and the newest member, rarely wrote blog posts, but commented often and was regularly featured in the posts. She became a Skirtboarder after seeing the blog and mustering the confidence to introduce herself to the other women offline. She claims that the blog changed her life; she was not part of the skateboarding scene before finding the blog, and skateboarding is now a large part of her identity (Roux, personal communication, September 8, 2010).

Skirtboarders as Ethical Subjects

Our analysis of the Skirtboarders' blog production focuses on their engagement in the ethics of the self. Of course, other practices contribute to their reflective production of the "Skirtboarder" as an ethical subject concerned with sport and gender, such as skateboarding together, choosing their clothing and shoes, travelling to skate (e.g., across Canada, California, Mexico and Sweden), making videos, socializing and celebrating birthdays, meeting female skateboarders and promoting female skateboarding in mainstream media sources. Although these activities also contribute to their self-formation as "Skirtboarders," their collective Web project best illustrates their reflexivity on their skateboarding experiences and how they view their role as female skateboarders. Indeed, their blogging suggests that they are keenly aware of how their skateboarding and their blog affect their gender identities and those of other young women.

Ethical Substance – Skirtboarder Gender Subjectivity

The ethical substance that these sportswomen address, the part of the self that the Skirtboarders' problematize on the blog, is the "Skirtboarder" gender subjectivity. The specific subjectivity they work on draws on a mix of reverse and dominant gender and sport discourses. Not only does their blog circulate reverse discursive fragments about femininities and sport compared to those broadly disseminated in mainstream media texts (see MacKay & Dallaire, in press), the interviews confirmed that these differences are deliberate. The Skirtboarders consciously and strategically work on their gender subjectivity to create themselves as an alternative form of skateboarding women. This critical awareness of gender norms is not uncommon among female skateboarders, known for challenging forms of femininity they disagree with (Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly, 2004; Young, 2004). The Skirtboarders produce a "polygendered" blog where their (re)presentations of skateboarding women embody "a mix of those characteristics, interests, behaviours and appearances that have been traditionally used to sort females and males into exclusive categories called feminine and masculine" (Daniels, 2009, p. 1-2). These contrast with mainstream (re)presentations of female skateboarders, and sportswomen in general, in that they rarely, if ever, emphasize female stereotypes, compare their performance to the performance of men, post ambivalent materials, gender mark themselves, (re)present themselves in stereotypically feminine ways or establish heterosexuality. Indeed, the Skirtboarders' blog strategically (re)presents and circulates complex and fluid femininities. Mathilde explained that:

The crew, it's girls because there are none. Because we want to demonstrate that girls exist. We want to demonstrate the femininity of each one through a sport that has long been just for guys. I think it is possible to be feminine and skateboard at the same time,

each person in their own way. Some are less [feminine], others more [feminine] and it's really not a problem but we are all women and we skate and I think it's a good example for lots of other girls in many other domains [our translation].

Annie furthered this sentiment:

It is also to incite the next female generation, show that it's not only guys that are able to skate. As much as it's kitsch, but there are surely young girls who want a skateboard, that their parents are like, "No, skateboarding is not for girls." But, you know, if you have a group of girls who look like Anne-Sophie [identified by the Skirtboarders as being very feminine off a skateboard but less so on a skateboard] and that skate, maybe the dad will say "Oh, OK, it is possible." There are compromises, you know. It's true, like a young boy who wants to become a ballet dancer... There are prejudices, when you pass a certain limit. We try to break that [our translation].

Both Mathilde and Annie stressed that a central goal of the Skirtboarders (and their blog) is to (re)present skateboarding women as a diverse group of sportswomen who express a variety of femininities both on and off a skateboard. In fact, all eight of the Skirtboarders suggest that they are not coherent, stable, rational selves but rather an embodiment of what Bury (2005) calls "interdiscursive collision" (p. 10). Over time, they claimed that their feminine identities have changed both on and off the skateboard. Possible reasons include aging (i.e., gaining the self-confidence to take up or challenge dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen and femininity in general), strength in numbers (i.e., meeting and skating with other female skaters in skate parks, which gave them the confidence to use such locations without feeling self-conscious or compelled to act like boys/men to gain acceptance) and the awareness that they can shape their identities as they please. Julie

summed up the Skirtboarders' general sentiments when asked whether her behavior is feminine off a skateboard:

I used to be more masculine when I was skating. I told myself that I did not have the right to wear a camisole when I was going to the skate park because I'm a girl or I told myself that I just wasn't really feminine because I was doing a masculine sport. And I was more likely to dress like a boy. But, slowly, together, I would say that it happened together, the girls at one point we just understood and we went: "Man, we are girls! We are beautiful. And what really is stopping us from being beautiful, like in life? Nothing!" And we had kind of a boom. And I, since then, I have expressed my femininity in my life in general and in sport [our translation].

These women recognized that they do not have to take up the dominant discourse of gendered heterosexuality – they transformed the skateboarding lifestyle into a site (for women, at least) where femininity, masculinity and poly-genderedness are acceptable on and off a skateboard, although they recognized that young women are "not socialized or encouraged to participate in [skateboarding] because it [is] thought to be too dangerous and [goes] against the conventional beliefs of femininity" (Young, 2004, p. 80). In short, the Skirtboarders use their Internet blog as a vehicle to consciously (re)present themselves as "skateboarders – that's all" (Julie, our translation), rather than as gendered skateboarders.

In addition to the fluid femininities promoted on their blog, the Skirtboarders explained how their blog deviates from mainstream media (re)presentations: they do not (re)present female athletes as hypercompetitive and achievement-oriented, they do not sensationalize or sexualize themselves and they refuse website sponsorships. They therefore strive to portray a more accurate image of women skateboarders, or at least, of the

Skirtboarders. They echo the mixed feelings that Beal and Wilson (2004) reported among skateboarders regarding mainstream media (re)presentations of their sport, which some believe have been “distorting skateboarding’s core values by highlighting records and formal competitions” (p. 36). Julie clarifies that the Skirtboarders focus on their enjoyment and passion for skateboarding; they emphasize their varying levels of sporting talent and how their blog illustrates these differences: “It’s not just skating competence that is important. It is as much about the love that you put into it” (Julie, our translation). She also felt that mainstream media (re)presentations distort the “skateboarder identity,” which Beal (1995) suggested is centered on skateboarding as an avenue of expression (and, in the Skirtboarders’ case, community) rather than a means to advance within a competitive structure for monetary gain. Unlike mainstream media (re)presentations of female skateboarders, their blog, they argued, reflects a genuine image of what and who they are, and that this authenticity persuades other women to take up skateboarding. Indeed, Louise clarifies that “it is a more credible representation of who we are, of what we do. At least it encourages [other women because it is] real. It does not encourage stereotypes and extremes” (Louise, our translation). Conversely, she claims that mainstream media (re)presentations of the Skirtboarders “always deform reality a little.” While their blog posts convey what these sportswomen consider to be “real” images, they see photos of themselves or other sportswomen in mainstream media as “hypersexualized” or altered. In their view, editing their sport performances to make them appear more impressive renders the (re)presentation inauthentic. The Skirtboarders confirm Beal and Wilson’s (2004) conclusion that, “identity construction is underpinned by issues of power” (p. 37). On their blog, the

Skirtboarders provide more 'realistic' representations of themselves and thus insist on controlling the production and circulation of their Internet texts.

They postulate that their blog differs from mainstream media texts because the Skirtboarders, not someone unfamiliar with them and intent on selling a product, control what they write about their experiences and how they (re)present themselves. Anne-Sophie echoed this claim: "We speak. We describe ourselves. In the Skirtboarders, at the moment Annie has taken over the blog, it cannot be more authentic than it is now. Yes, the blog speaks of us because we speak of ourselves" [our translation]. Louise clearly states that the Skirtboarders' blog stands apart from mainstream media because, "We have nothing to sell – that means that we do not sensationalize or deform reality. (...) We don't have to try to (...) sell our body, you know what I mean, to be seen. Because there [on their blog] it's just you who can put who you are" (Louise, our translation). The Skirtboarders' frequent allusions to economics in describing how their blog differs from mainstream media texts are particularly interesting. They were adamant that their purpose in starting the blog was not to make money. They even refused a proposal to be managed by an outsider in order to preserve the authenticity of their image. Yet some Skirtboarders have sponsorships (from skateboarding clothing and equipment companies) and some appear in advertisements for products not associated with skateboarding. This paradox suggests that while the Skirtboarders do not share a uniform position on all issues, as a group, they accept that some members will make different decisions for personal reasons. This accommodation of difference discursively occurs not only in relation to sponsorships, but also femininities.

Not one woman interviewed mentioned that she could not identify with the blog or that it (re)presented other Skirtboarders but not her. Although each Skirtboarder expresses her

own gender subjectivity in relation to skateboarding, femininity and sponsorship, all postings (re)present their writer and the others in ways that reflect their close friendship and respect for individual subjectivity. This paradox makes the analysis of their blog production all the more complex since the Skirtboarder gender subjectivity is heavily contingent on the relationships among Skirtboarders (and not simply with others). The innovative aspect of this study, and its challenge, is to understand how these sportswomen engage in ethical work through blogging using a concept that Foucault proposed to analyze individual practices when such a large component of the Skirtboarders subjectification and “truth”- making is a communal undertaking, both online and offline.

Mode of Subjection – Duty to Act as Role Models

The question that frames the Skirtboarders’ mode of subjection asks why the women engage in the task of forming themselves as a specific type of skateboarding woman. The interviews indicated that a collective and individual responsibility to serve as leaders for other skateboarding women in order to counter the marginalization and their infrequent (re)presentation in media texts, sustained their blog production and their self-transformation as Skirtboarders. They unanimously agreed that media coverage of skateboarding women is insufficient. As illustrated by the above quotes from Mathilde and Annie, these sportswomen hope to set an example for young women who might be interested in their sport. The blog:

is not just an inspiration and a motivation for skateboarding. It can prove how, with a certain number of girls, we can do anything and it will be fun and people will love it, read it and see it. It is really related to more than skateboarding. It is really related to a friendship and a family of fun (Roux, our translation).

The Skirtboarders are bothered that skateboarding women are rarely (re)presented in mainstream or other skateboarding media texts. Accordingly their blog “fills a gap left by the media” (Louise, our translation) by delving deeper than the mere observation that women skate too. It legitimizes female skateboarders and focuses attention on the skateboarding lifestyle and the personalities of the young women in the crew.

The Skirtboarders would prefer that their blog, and other sport media, portray women excelling at what they do rather than being judged or seen as a sideshow (to men’s skateboarding). Despite the claim that sex sells in women’s sports, Louise advanced that televised (re)presentations of female athletes should not be sexualized in lifestyle media texts. Such observations confirm Kane and Maxwell’s (2011) findings that sexualized pictures of athletes may sell magazines but do not increase the popularity of women’s sports. On the contrary, such portrayals repel female fans (like Louise). Furthermore, the Skirtboarders’ contention that the media sexualizes sportswomen echoes Beal and Wilson’s (2004) suggestion that female skateboarders perceive a masculine bias in mainstream skateboarding media texts with the sexualization of female skateboarders. Therefore, through their critical awareness of dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen, the Skirtboarders offer girls and women (and boys and men) an alternative to sexualized lifestyle sport (re)presentations. However, while the Skirtboarder’s blog is one way that women can resist dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen, Thorpe (2005, 2008) argued that the increase in “for women, by women” endeavors has relieved mainstream media organizations of the obligation to adequately (in terms of quantity and quality) (re)present women. Indeed, Amy suggests that the fact sportswomen can and do post their own texts on the Internet may contribute to the lack of mainstream coverage:

I don't know if it's going to happen in print so much, but I know through websites that the girls skateboarding is going to have... I mean a lot of people are checking out our blog and it's becoming a bit more popular all the time. As long as we have that outlet for ourselves, I don't know if too much is going to change in the magazines. (...) I feel like we've always kind of had to do things ourselves so why would it change now? (...) [S]o I think as long as we can keep expanding on our own outlets, I think that that's enough (Amy).

The Skirtboarders' emphasis on their responsibility to increase the media visibility of female skateboarders, but also to control the actual coverage to ensure an "authentic" (re)presentation, is thus reminiscent of Beal and Wilson (2004), who suggested that skateboarding women may be better off outside the mainstream media spotlight where they can avoid the market/capitalist trap of men's lifestyle sports. The Skirtboarders are certainly aware that given the lack of media coverage of female skateboarders, they have managed to create their own space in the sports mediascape by documenting their experiences online. However, more than simply a means to constitute their own Skirtboarder identities, the blog also pursues a social cause: to promote participation by girls and women in skateboarding. Their sense of duty to increase the media visibility of skateboarding women by publicizing their own skateboarding activities comes in response to the lack of media coverage but also to the frequent feedback they have received from young women since their web project started (as illustrated by blog comments, some 10,000 Facebook friends and emails). Mathilde describes the impact of the blog to date, with a reference to Roux, a current Skirtboarder who began skateboarding after she found the crew on the Internet:

When there are people like Roux that can tell me her story before and after the Skirtboarders; her story before, when she saw the group as an outsider. And that I, I would have never guessed. Yes, it has an influence. Just the fact that in Québec and even in Ontario, there are a lot of little girls that write to us: “Hey, I skateboard because I saw you on television” or because they saw our website, because they find it cool, because their cousin showed them our site (Mathilde, our translation).

In short, the Skirtboarders’ mode of subjection consists of their sense of duty to act in light of the limited and problematic media coverage of skateboarding women because it restricts the range of identities (feminine and sporting) available to girls and women. They recognize that these feminine codes may limit their resistance to the normalizing effects of disciplinary power, and their blog is an effort to change this.

Ethical Work – Reinventing the Self through Blog Writing

Ethical work refers to the work “that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one’s conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behaviour” (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). To engage in ethical work, the Skirtboarders cultivate an aesthetic stylization of the self, a self that Markula (2004) claimed “is open to change and the constant re-creation of changing conditions in society” (p. 307). This aesthetic stylization of the self requires ongoing creativity and the ability to (re)invent the self as a work of art, where the self is constructed “as a task, as something which needs to be continuously worked on” (O’Leary, 2002, p. 14). The blog plays a significant role in their process of ceaseless self-transformation. What techniques do these sportswomen deploy through their Internet project to constitute themselves as

Skirtboarders? The means they use are similar (yet distinct) to other forms of ethical work described by Foucault (2001): the hupomnemata and parrhesia.

The blog resembles the hupomnemata (also referred to as hypomnemata), a form of self writing used by the Ancient Greeks who recorded thoughts, experiences, and/or curiosities in a notebook or journal for later synthesis and reflection (Foucault, 2001). In the Greeks' version of the technique, a person would note down quotations by wise community members, discussions overheard or their own inner dialogue. However, unlike the intimate, confessional journals later found in Christian literature, the hupomnemata did not intend:

to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self. (Foucault, 1997, p. 210-211)

By writing a hupomnemata, the writer engaged in active self-creation by transcribing personal reflections and experiences onto paper, thus gaining self-knowledge, gathering and recording information and creating a permanent record of his life.

The Skirtboarders' blog writing resembles the hupomnemata in that it essentially initiated the Skirtboarders' practice of self. Foucault (1997) stated:

The role of writing is to constitute, along with all that reading [e.g., other media (re)presentations of skateboarding women] has constituted, a "body." And this body should be understood not as a body of doctrine, but, rather – following an often evoked metaphor of digestion – as the very body of the one, who by transcribing his readings, had appropriated them and made their truth his own: writing transforms the things seen

or heard “into tissue and blood” (in vires et in sanguine). It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself. (p. 213)

Their active Web presence launched these sportswomen on a process of constituting themselves as Skirtboarders. Starting as a group of 10 skateboarding young women who would meet in Montreal, they began filming themselves and came up with the name “Skirtboarders” as they searched for a website domain name (to share their videos and photos). Prior to 2002, they occasionally met to skateboard but did not consider themselves a “crew.” The original website was minimal and mainly described who the Skirtboarders were (e.g. listing their names). With the addition of a blog consistently updated by contributions from various members relating their activities and posting photos and videos of themselves, and with additional comments about the posts from other members, these young women were able to work on their collective and individual sense of self and to identify themselves as “Skirtboarders” in public and private spaces. Foucault (1997) noted that the *hupomnemata* is one way that we “form part of ourselves” (p. 210). The blog has become a space where they define, describe and portray themselves as skateboarding women, and where they interact. The blog “is the basis of it all... I think we would not be there if it was not for the blog” (Eloise, our translation).

The second similarity between their blog writing and the *hupomnemata* is the continuous documenting and sharing among Skirtboarders of what and who they are. Through frequent writing about their skateboarding practices and responses to the comments, photos and videos that other Skirtboarders post on the blog, they continuously transform themselves collectively and individually. The communal self-(re)presentation Internet project became the Skirtboarders’ technique for shaping the self and seeing their

lives as works of art.

However, the Skirtboarders' blog writing also differs from the *hupomnemata*. Unlike the Greek journal writing, the Skirtboarders' blog not only has a transformative effect on the writers (the Skirtboarders), it also promotes a social cause: to show other girls and women that skateboarding women are out there and to encourage others to join the movement. Amy described the blog as an opportunity for the Skirtboarders to be creative, to write for themselves and others using the Internet and to "push it further" by showing others that local, grassroots skateboarding women's crews exist. The *hupomnemata*, on the other hand, is a personal tool used by an individual in care of the self and is only, in rare circumstances, shared with others as a gift.

The Skirtboarders' desire to promote skateboarding among other young women may more closely resemble Foucault's *parrhesia*, a type of ethical work where the subject fearlessly speaks the "truth" and where devotion to the "truth" catalyzes a process of self-transformation (Foucault, 2001). Whereas the *hupomnemata* is a tool for the writer's self-care (introspective), *parrhesia* is a communal tool that enables members of a community to help one another take care of the self (the *parrhesiast* provides advice and encouragement to others). Importantly, the *parrhesiast* takes a risk, knowing that what she is saying clashes with the beliefs of the majority. She also sees "truth"-telling as a duty for the common good, intended to improve or help others (and herself) and willingly accepts the danger inherent in fulfilling her duty (Foucault, 2001).

Unquestionably, the Skirtboarders' blog is a shared tool for delivering advice and encouragement to other women who skateboard (or want to) and for receiving feedback. As Mathilde explains:

The number of requests that I get from all kinds of girls that say... Just last night, I received an email: "I'm from Vermont. I'm coming to Montreal. Can you recommend some skate parks? Are you having a Skirtboarder event this weekend?" From everywhere in the world. "What do I do to become a Skirtboarder? How did you go about forming your crew?" Anything, all the time, all the time... Now I'm taking a break because I've been working almost 10 years non-stop on the Skirtboarder image, the website and everything. I went like OK, wow, I need to take a break because it has become too big to manage all that, just the emails from everyone. It's a lot... And girls from Brazil: "Hey, we're hosting an event. Can you talk about it on your site?" Other girls from New Zealand who want to do a tour and that want to invite us and other girls from Seattle who know us and are: "Do you have any projects this summer? What could we do?" Non-stop, all the time, all the time... (Mathilde, our translation).

The Skirtboarders are known on the international female skateboarding scene as leaders in promoting sportswomen. Their blog is the site of alternative discourses of femininity and encourages others attempting to follow suit. In this sense, they are like parrhesiastes.

Furthermore, the Skirtboarders face some risk in their blog activities because they promote women's skateboarding, which is a doubly marginalized phenomenon.

Skateboarding is still associated with heterosexual masculinity (Beal & Wilson, 2004) and is not considered a sport in many circles (including the Canadian federal government). Annie describes some of the feedback to videos posted on the blog and cross-posted to YouTube: "But of course we receive negative comments. We do receive negative comments. On Youtube there are always smart a**s. 'Are you girls lesbians?' You know, like it's the first thing. It's like "Come on! [exasperation]" (our translation). Anne-Sophie adds: "Or like

[comments posted to videos of] girls that do cape flips that are not very high: ‘They skate poorly,’” (Anne-Sophie, our translation). However, while the Skirtboarders concede that all videos attract good and bad comments, the positive feedback far exceeds the negative. Julie echoes this view: “But yes, they are mainly positive comments: ‘Keep going girls. What you’re doing is great. It’s good. It’s cool. We did not know you could skate as well as boys,’” (Julie, our translation).

Although the Skirtboarders may feel that their duty is to help women gain confidence and to promote female skateboarding (and alternative discourses of femininity) through a continuously updated blog, their assessment of the type and amount of negative comments they attract suggests that they sense minimal danger. Compared to the negative social risk confronted by the parrhesiastic women in MacKay & Dallaire’s (2010) study of self-identified obese women, the Skirtboarders did not report enough disparaging comments about their skateboarding or their gender identities to make them feel threatened, despite the fact that they expose themselves on the Internet and produce alternative discursive constructions of femininity. Accordingly, their online speech does not reflect all of the qualities required to qualify as parrhesia. The risk they take concerns their presentation out of a sense of duty of discourses (their “truth”) that differ from mainstream media portrayals. However, unlike the parrhesiast, their “truth” may be generally accepted among their audience.

Moreover, unlike the parrhesia that Foucault describes, the Skirtboarders blog is a narrative of the women’s’ lives, and not necessarily an examination of how they live (Foucault, 2001). Additionally, they do not write about what they read, hear or think (like in Foucault’s *hupomnemata*), but about what they do (skateboarding) and have done. Thus,

their blog contains some of the elements of Foucault's *hupomnemata* and *parrhesia*, with an added collective dimension. While Foucault suggested that a subject may engage in ethical work "with the help of others" (Foucault, 1988a, p. 146), he never suggested that the *hupomnemata* and *parrhesia* could be performed by groups, like the Skirtboarders, who arguably become ethical subjects at the same time. We propose that this is possible, although each woman is at once an individual and a part of the group, and follows a slightly different trajectory in the process. Arguably, other blogs that pursue political convictions or aim to transform the producers' life into a work of art may bear similarities to the Skirtboarders' blog. This could make a case for a new (contemporary) kind of ethical work based on self-depiction (writing, speech and portrayal) that includes individual and collective dimensions and effects.

Telos – Aspiring to Be Engaged Female Skateboarders

Foucault (1986) suggested that the *telos* is the mode of being or way of life that constitutes the broader goal of the ethical work. Interviews suggest that the Skirtboarders aspire to become engaged female skateboarders and set an example for other young women. Their ethical blog writing work attempts to get them closer to this mode of being. Some Skirtboarders (Anne-Sophie, Mathilde) spoke of themselves as pioneers in the female skateboarding "movement" in Montreal that revolutionized skateboarding for girls and women. However, not all members of the crew shared the same definition of what it means to be an "engaged female skateboarder." Therefore, the Skirtboarders define "engaged" in a variety of ways. For some, it means actively promoting involvement by girls and women in the skateboarding world through blogging, and for others, it means *doing* (i.e., skateboarding), maintaining a public profile and meeting other skateboarding women. They also differ in the ways they contribute to the blog. Some spend hours every week taking

photos, recording and editing videos, posting stories and reading posts by others. Some prefer to comment on posts or appear in photos or videos, but decline to write their own posts. Incidentally, the women interviewed for this analysis are the most active on the blog. Other Skirtboarders might have different ways of “engaging” with the blog and/or their skateboarding lifestyle. Therefore, when proposing that groups (like the Skirtboarders) engage in modes of ethical practice, it is crucial to acknowledge that each group member will apply the various techniques in a distinct way (and some not at all), but that such differences are accepted and accommodated within the group.

Although some of the women claimed to be part of a “movement” to increase the number of skateboarding girls and women and although all approved that more women are skating now than before, their responses when asked whether they considered themselves feminists were nuanced. Some think of themselves as feminists in that they created a women’s crew and are devoted to the cause of female skateboarders and equality within the skateboarding world. On the other hand, they “would not militate or buy a Simone de Beauvoir t-shirt” (Annie) and they reject what they consider extreme feminist positions. For the Skirtboarders, being an engaged female skateboarder is not being anti-men; their boyfriends, partners and male friends may be outside the crew and are never featured on the blog, but they support and sustain them. Their goal is to get more girls and women skateboarding *and* to challenge the gender order. Their values correspond to some liberal feminists (e.g., their efforts to get more girls and women on boards by featuring women on their blog and acting as role models in their physical and virtual communities) and some radical feminists (e.g., building an alternative model to gender (re)presentation on their blog and encouraging participation based on feminist sporting principles such as recreation, fun

and friendship), but they do not all claim to be feminists. This is reminiscent of Harris' (2001) finding in her study on bedroom culture in the new millennium suggesting that girls have developed new forms of political expression in new spaces (e.g., gurl webpages, alternative music spheres and underground zines) and often express their politics when it seems they are expressing nothing at all political. Harris (2001) demonstrated that young women are passionately engaged in social change agendas and while they may be advancing feminism, they may not call themselves feminists, much like the Skirtboarders.

The Skirtboarders utilize mainstream media to get press for their blog and, ultimately, their "movement" to promote female skateboarding. Beal and Wilson (2004) suggested that female skateboarders have historically been absent from specialized skateboarding media but have succeeded in garnering mainstream media coverage. The problem lies in the fact that although such coverage increases their visibility, their presence in these non-authentic media texts further marginalizes women's skateboarding within the skateboarding community and fails to challenge masculine hegemony in this sporting world. This is arguably the opposite of what is occurring on the Skirtboarders' blog. Although the Skirtboarders have a large following and international success, they attribute very little of it to mainstream media. They contend that their blog (women-driven, specialized skateboarding media) is responsible for their popularity in mainstream media circles, which may spark some interest in users to seek out the blog, thus expanding their audience. Relying on modern technology, they have created a space in which they challenge oppressive, male-dominated skateboarding institutions (like skateboarding media) *and attract* mainstream media to *ask them about it* (rather than to facilitate it).

The Internet can have a huge impact on women's lives – the Skirtboarders' goal of

becoming engaged female skateboarders began with their use of the Internet to circulate their hupomnematic/parrhesiastic texts. However, most important to their goal of becoming engaged female skateboarders was *doing it* – their skateboarding. They report consuming little mainstream media sports texts (such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines or websites). They generally pay attention to lifestyle sport coverage (such as skateboarding magazines like *Expose* and *Thrasher*, television such as the X-Games and the Olympics and Internet sites) and, as Montrealers, some are naturally hockey fans. Their responses suggest that the Skirtboarders are engaged female skateboarders who construct their identities through skateboarding, travelling to skateboard and documenting their sporting experiences on their blog, rather than through passive consumption of media (re)presentations. Their engagement is therefore rooted in active participation in their own female skateboarding lifestyles.

Conclusion

Our study expands on the current body of work on gendered sport media (re)presentations in two ways. First, it explores why women self-represent their sporting practices with the use of new media and technology. Our focus on a project of Web self-(re)presentation addresses the lack of research on Internet (re)presentations of sportswomen and the need for more studies of women who interact with Internet discourses as active agents. Despite what some might suggest (e.g., Plant, 2002), the inequitable sets of power relations and dividing practices that Foucault (1977) and Markula and Pringle (2005) mention do not disappear online (Gajjala, 2002; Kibby, 1997; Paasonen, 2005). Internet discourses are worthy of critical analysis given their increasingly global impact on cultural

life, including the production and consumption of sport by young women as evidenced by the international reach of the Skirtboarders' blog.

The second contribution of this analysis to current sport media research is the fact that it moves beyond the media text analysis to uncover how the Skirtboarders engage in modes of ethical practices through their participation in sport and production of their Skirtboarders.com blog. This case study illustrates how Foucault's notion of the ethical subject offers a useful concept for understanding how young sportswomen constitute themselves individually and collectively through contemporary practices such as producing Internet coverage of their own sport performances. Although we recognize that each has a nuanced Skirtboarder lifestyle and subjectivity, and we understand the danger in trying to delimit representative examples of the ways in which the Skirtboarders engage in ethical self-constitution, we nonetheless have attempted to demonstrate how the Skirtboarders practice self-work as they create and post various Internet texts. In their self-constitution, we suggest that these young women are carrying out the task Foucault (1983) described, which is to reject forms of subjectivity and the modes of subjection that are imposed on us (in this case dominant discursive constructions about sportswomen that sustain gender inequities in skateboarding and in sport more generally). In fact, through the acting out of their gender subjectivity in their blog project, the Skirtboarders may be creating a new moral code for the female "gendered" and "sport" subject.

We are also aware that not all (if any) of the Skirtboarders joined the group and contribute to the blog to engage in ethical work. Indeed, a number of the Skirtboarders suggested that they formed a crew and began their blog in order to skateboard together and to show others (online) what they were up to, not to act or showcase themselves as reflexive

subjects. Although the Skirtboarders vary in their level of self-awareness and desire to be reflexive about their skateboarding experiences, those we interviewed appear to engage in ethical practices through the production of their collective internet skateboarding project.

By applying Foucault's tenets of ethical conduct to the Skirtboarders' blog production, we suggest new forms of ethical work not developed by Foucault, such as combined features of *hupomnemata* and *parrhesia*. Foucault (1983) advocated that we promote new forms of subjectivity while refusing the modes of subjectivation imposed on us by the "simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures" (p. 216). He suggested that "maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse who we are" (Foucault, 1983, p. 216). These new forms of Internet ethical work may be currently practiced by other lifestyle sport blogs or social media producers, and should be explored further. Indeed, the Internet has long been used by countercultures and is having a growing impact on the "alternative sportscape" (see Reinhart, 2000). Other counterculture sport Internet sites may be venues where girls and women, boys and men engage in modes of ethical self-constitution. More analyses like this one are thus relevant.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the constructive feedback provided by the anonymous reviewers and the editor. Their comments were most useful in helping us shape a clearer and stronger argument.

References

- Birrell, S., & McDonald, M.G. (2000). *Reading sport: Critical essays on power and representation*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Beal, B. (1995). Disqualifying the official: an exploration of social resistance through the subculture of skateboarding. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12(3), 252-267.
- Beal, B., & Wilson, C. (2004). 'Chicks dig scars': Commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders' identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). Thousand New York: Routledge.
- Blair, K, Gajjala, R. & Tulley, C. (2009). Introduction: The webs we weave. In K. Blair, R. Gajjala and C. Tulley (Eds.), *Webbing cyberfeminist practice* (pp. 1–22). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Bury, R. (2005). *Cyberspaces of their own: Female fandoms online*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Consalvo, M. and Paasonen, S (Eds.) (2002). *Women & everyday uses of the Internet: Agency & identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Daniels, D. (2009). *Polygendered and ponytailed: The dilemma of femininity and the female athlete*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Duncan, M.C., & Brummett, B. (1993). Liberal and radical sources of female empowerment in sport media. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10(1), 57-72.
- Duncan, M. C. (1994). The politics of women's body images and practices: Foucault, the panopticon and Shape magazine. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 18, 48-65.

- Fasting, K., & Tangen, J. (1983). Gender and sport in Norwegian mass media. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 18(1), 61-69.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1983). Afterword. The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd Ed, pp. 208–226). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1986). *The history of sexuality. Volume 2: The use of pleasure*. New York: First Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988a). Technologies of the self. In L.H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P.H. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the Self* (pp. 16-49). United States of America: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault, M. (1988b). The ethics of the concern of the self. In P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds.), *The essential Foucault* (pp. 25-42). New York: The New York Press.
- Foucault, M. (1988c). On the genealogy of ethics. In P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds.), *The essential Foucault* (pp. 102-125). New York: The New York Press.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1997). Self-writing. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Ethics, subjectivity and truth* (pp. 207-221). New York: New York Press.
- Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless speech*. LA, California: Semiotext(e).
- Gajjala, R. (2002). Introduction/editorial: but really is it transgressive?', *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, no. 4, [Online] Available at:
<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue4/intro.html> (1 Dec. 2009).

- Gratton, C., & Jones, I. (2004). *Research methods for sport studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Gubrium, J.F. & Holstein, J.A. (2002). From the individual interview to the interview society. In J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein (Eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research* (pp. 3-32). Thousand Oaks, California : Sage Publications.
- Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (2003). *Postmodern interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hardin, M. (2005). Stopped at the gate: Women's sports, "reader interest," and decision making by editors, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(1), 62-77.
- Hardin, M. (2011). The power of a fragmented collective: Radical pluralist feminism and technologies of the self in the sports blogosphere. In A. Billings (Ed.), *Sports media: Transformation, integration, consumption* (pp. 40–60). New York and UK: Routlage.
- Harris, Anita (2001). Revisiting bedroom culture: New spaces for young women's politics. *Hectate*, 27(1), 128– 139.
- Hilliard, D. (1984). Media images of male and female professional athletes: An interpretive analysis of magazine articles. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1(3), 251-262.
- Holstein, J.A., & Gubrium, J.F. (1995). *The active interview*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Kane, M.J., & Maxwell, H. D. (2011). Expanding the Boundaries of Sport Media Research: Using Critical Theory to Explore Consumer Responses to Representations of Women's Sports. *Journal of Sport Management*, 25(3), 202-216.
- Kibby, Marj. (1997). *Babes on the web: Sex identity and the homepage*.
<http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/anteriores/n9/babe.html>, Retrieved Sept. 28, 2010.

Knoppers, A., & Elling, A. (2004). 'We do not engage in promotional journalism':

Discursive strategies used by sport journalists to describe the selection process.

International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 39(1), 57-73.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2004). In-depth interviews. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 138-169). London: Sage.

Leonard, D.J. (2009). New media and global sporting cultures: Moving beyond the clichés and binaries. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(1), 1-16.

MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (2009). Campus newspaper coverage of varsity sports: Getting closer to equitable and sports-related (re)presentations of female athletes?

International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 44(1), 25-40.

MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (2010). La contestation des discours sur l'obésité : YouTube et la femme "grosse" parrhésiaste. *Recherches féministes*, 23(2), 7-24.

MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (in press). Skirtboarder net-a-narratives: Young women creating their own skateboarding (re)presentations. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Markula, P. (2003). The technologies of the self: Sport, feminism, and Foucault. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20(2), 87-107.

Markula, P. (2004). "Turning into one's self": Foucault's technologies of the self and mindful fitness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21(3), 302-321.

- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2005). No Pain is sane after all: A Foucauldian analysis of masculinities and men's experiences in rugby. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(4), Dec 2005, 472-497.
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport and exercise*. London: Routledge.
- McDaniel, S.R. & Sullivan, C.B. (1998). Extending the sports experience: Mediations in cyberspace. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *MediaSport: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 266-281). London: Routledge.
- McLaren, M.A. (2002). *Feminism, Foucault, and embodied subjectivity*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Meân, L.J. (2010). Making masculinity and framing femininity: FIFA, soccer and World Cupwebsites in H.L. Hundley and A.C. Billings (Eds.), *Examining identity in sports media* (pp. 65-87). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Messner, M. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5(3), 197-211.
- Messner, M., & Cooky, C. (2010). *Gender in televised sports: News and highlights shows, 1989-2009*. Los Angeles: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.
www.aafla.org.
- O'Leary, T. (2002). *Foucault and the art of ethics*. London and New York: Continuum
- Paasonen, S. (2005). *Figure of fantasy: Internet, women & cyberdiscourse*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Pirinen, R. (1997). Catching up with Men? Finnish newspaper coverage of women's entry into traditionally male sports. *International Review of the Sociology of Sport*, 32(3), 239-249.

- Plant, S. (2002). On the matrix: Cyberfeminist simulations. In P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media studies: A reader* (pp. 835-849). New York: New York University Press.
- Plymire, D. (2005). Qualitative methods in sports media studies. In D. Andrews, D. Mason, & M. Silk (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in sports studies* (pp. 139-164). New York: Berg.
- Pomerantz, S., Currie, D., & Kelly, D. (2004). Sk8er girls: Skateboarders, girlhood and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(5/6), 547–557.
- Pringle, R. G. & Hickey, C. (2010). Negotiating masculinities via the moral problematization of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(2), 115–138.
- Reinhart, R. (2000). Emerging arriving sport: Alternatives to formal sport. In J. Coakley & E. Dunning (Eds.), *Handbook of sport studies* (pp 504–520). London: Sage.
- Rintala, J., & Birrell, S. (1984). Fair treatment for the active female: A content analysis of Young Athlete magazine. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1(3), 231-250.
- Shogan, D. (1999). *The making of high performance athletes: Discipline, diversity, and ethics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Skirtboarders. (2007). Mathilde Pigeon. Retrieved from:
<http://www.skirtboarders.com/blog/crew/mathilde-pigeon/>
- The Side Project. (2008). Skirtboarders. Retrieved from:
http://thesideproject.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=185%3Askirtboarders&catid=43%3Amovers-and-shakers&Itemid=62
- Theberge, N., & Cronk, A. (1986). Work routines in newspaper sports departments and the coverage of women's sports, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3(3), 195-203.

- Thorpe, H. (2005). Jibbing the Gender Order: Females in the Snowboarding Culture. *Sport in Society*, 8(1), 76 — 100.
- Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of the self and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32(2), 199-229.
- Wenner, L.A. (1998). Playing the Sport media game. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Sport media: Cultural sensibilities and sport in the media age* (pp. 3-13). London: Routledge.
- Wensing, E., & Bruce, T. (2003). Bending the rules: Media representations of gender during an international sporting event. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(4), 387– 396.
- Wilson, B. (2007). New media, social movements, and global sport studies. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(4), 457-477.
- Wright, J., & Clarke, G. (1999). Sport, the media and the construction of compulsory heterosexuality: A case study of women's Rugby Union. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34(3), 227–243.
- Young, A. (2004). Being the 'alternative' in an alternative subculture: Gender differences in the experiences of young women and men in skateboarding and snowboarding. *Avante*, 10(3), 69 – 81.

Chapter 7: Skateboarding Women: Building Collective Identity in Cyberspace

This paper was submitted to a special issue of the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, New

Media Literacy and Sporting Cultures:

MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (submitted, February 2012). Skateboarding Women: Building
Collective Identity in Cyberspace. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*.

Contributions of Authors

The work presented in this paper was conducted as part Steph MacKay's (first author) doctoral dissertation, which received funding from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program and the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society. Steph MacKay initiated and designed the study, collected the blog posts, conducted the interviews, completed the analysis and wrote the manuscript of the article. Christine Dallaire participated in the conception and design of the project, contributed to the interpretation of the material and revised the manuscript critically for theoretical and empirical content. This article has been submitted to the New Media Literacy and Sporting Cultures special issue of the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, a peer-reviewed journal.

Of special note: According to the call for papers, "this special issue works to highlight the dynamic nature of sporting cultures and the transformative possibilities resulting from new media technologies. It attempts to build upon the existing literature all while engaging ongoing debates and discussions. It seeks to foster critical new media literacy in a sporting context, all while elucidating the social, cultural and political significance resulting from the changing sports landscape...Essays should be roughly 4,000-5,000 words." Therefore, Chapter 7 was designed with these limits in mind (the chapter is 5121 words without the abstract, notes and references).

Abstract

This paper reconsiders the Skirtboarders' blog, produced by a crew of female skateboarders, as a space where crew members attempt to reflexively start a movement and, in doing so, construct and circulate a wider collective identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Through Foucauldian discourse analysis of blog comments and user interviews, we attempt to understand how young women who visit the blog interpret (re)presentations of female skateboarders and whether they become engaged in the movement to promote skateboarding among women. Do they adopt this collective subjectivity? While the analysis suggests that they do feel part of the movement, it raises the issue of blog user access to the more specific "Skirtboarder" identity.

.

Key words: collective identity, blog users, Internet, skateboarding, gender

The Skirtboarders crew became an official entity in 2002 when a group of female skateboarding friends registered the Internet domain name “Skirtboarders.com.” The blog was added to the Internet site in 2007 and now constitutes the main feature of this collective Web endeavor. Crew members are bound not only by their passion for skateboarding but also by a close friendship that exceeds the boundaries of sport engagement: They socialize together, celebrating birthdays, organizing potlucks and other events that do not include sporting practice. One section of the Internet site offers details about the crew: its formation, purpose and activities; its members (names, biographies and photos). The 14 primarily white⁵² women (aged 21-36) identified as Skirtboarders on the Internet site and profiled on the blog travel to skate, make videos (they produced the first Canadian all-female skateboarding film in 2007), meet other girls and women through skateboarding and share stories (including photos and videos) on the blog. They engage in different skateboarding practices in various locales: from exclusive gatherings of crew members to larger events organized through their blog where they invite any and all girls and women to join them (in Montreal, or other cities in Canada or on tour). Sometimes they compete, but usually they skateboard for pleasure. Although some of the women have official sponsorships (e.g., Sitka, Volcom, Spy Optics and Hurley) that help fund their skateboarding trips and provide them

⁵² Brayton’s (2005) analysis of male skateboarding narratives promoting skateboarding or skating road trips reveals that skateboarding media imagery may offer opportunities for challenging the normativity of middle-class whiteness. While the 14 women featured in the Skirtboarders.com blog photos appear to be white, visual representations of their tours to Mexico, for instance, do trouble the predominant whiteness of their skateboarding media production and of the larger skateboarding culture. Nevertheless, while their web project strategically reproduces a variety of feminine identities opening up the potential for various gender skateboarding performances, it does nothing to challenge the whiteness of skateboarding. In this sense, it is similar to media portrayals of male skateboarders that reinforce the privileged position of white men (Yochim 2010).

with clothing and equipment, most finance their sporting activities and travel themselves. Featured in the Canadian media several times since starting the blog (including television, newspapers, skateboarding websites and magazines), they have also attracted international media attention from Transworld Skateboarding magazine, Mexican and Swedish magazines and newspapers as well as numerous skateboarding websites, including other women's skateboarding websites.

Our analysis of the website's content has shown that the Skirtboarders contest dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen⁵³ through their blog production (MacKay & Dallaire, in press). In fact, the Skirtboarders generally resist the dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulating in mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations through their different (and potentially "polygendered" (or gender neutral)) self (re)presentations, yet the blog reveals some forms of ambivalence in some photos and in their links to mainstream media (re)presentations of themselves. Without professing to be feminists, the Skirtboarders produce, circulate and use feminist materials to expand girls' and women's space in the Internet skateboarding landscape. Moreover, interviews with crew members reveal that they do so purposefully (MacKay & Dallaire, accepted), constructing a reflexive subjectivity illustrative of the four dimensions of the ethics of the self outlined by Foucault (1985): ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work and telos. Their Internet practices contribute to their deliberate production of the "Skirtboarder" as an ethical subject

⁵³ These constructions are created using strategies that focus on: gender marking⁵³ (Koivula, 1999), establishing heterosexuality⁵³ (Wright & Clarke, 1999), emphasizing female stereotypes⁵³ (Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002), infantilizing women⁵³ (Koivula, 1999), non-sports related aspects⁵³ (Eastman & Billings, 2000), comparisons to men's performance⁵³ (Donnelly, MacNeill & Knight, 2008) and ambivalence⁵³ (Wensing & Bruce, 2003)

concerned with sport and gender, illustrating their reflexivity on their skateboarding experiences, their transformation as “Skirtboarders” and how they view their role as female skateboarding leaders. Indeed, their blogging suggests that they are keenly aware of how their skateboarding and their blog affect their gender identities and those of other young women⁵⁴. Skirtboarders.com thus illustrates how women-driven forms of social media can provide a foundation for individualized transformation—in this crew’s case, the constitution of the “Skirtboarder subjectivity” created through the production of alternative discursive constructions of sportswomen.

Our research of Skirtboarders.com heeds Wilson’s (2007, 2008) invitation for sports scholars to explore how interactive media platforms, such as the Internet, affect sport cultures and sport identities. Like Wilson (2007, 2008), feminist media scholars (e.g., Bury, 2005; Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002; Gajjala, 2004; Harcourt, 1999; Paasonen, 2005) are also appealing for research that specifically explores the impact of the Internet on *women’s* identities. Feminist sport scholars are beginning to examine how sportswomen negotiate individual gender identity constructions (such as dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen) circulated in cyberspace (see Hardin, 2011; Jones, 2006; Plymire & Foreman,

⁵⁴ The purpose of our larger study of Skirtboarders.com focused on the reproduction of femininities in skateboarding and how female participants themselves self-(re)present their gendered skateboarding practices through Internet. Yet, there was room in the interviews with Skirtboarders and with users to introduce race or class issues and how they contribute to shaping the Skirtboarder identity/web representation or the larger female skateboarding movement. Nevertheless, it became clear that Skirtboarders are keenly aware of the effect of gender discourses and they focus on destabilizing and opening up ideas of femininity through their skateboarding practices and representations (Authors, accepted). Blog users also manifest an awareness of the effects of gender power relations. In short, these young women are reflective about their subject positions in gender discourses, but they do not appear to engage with discourses about race or class. This of course does not mean that class and race do not intersect with gender in complicating the reproduction of a variety of femininities among the Skirtboarders and the young women engaging with their blog and the larger movement to promote skateboarding among girls and women.

2000). However, no studies have examined how the Internet can be used to create a “movement” promoting participation by women in sports and, in doing so, construct a collective identity.

Although work has centred on gendered media (re)presentations of skateboarding (see Beal & Wilson, 2004; Donnelly, 2008; Wheaton & Beal, 2003; Yochim, 2010), scholars have yet to explore how Internet skateboarding media produced by and for young women (categorized as community media⁵⁵) influence skateboarding women’s identities. So far, textual analyses of media (re)presentations claim that mainstream⁵⁶ and alternative⁵⁷ skateboarding media underrepresent, sexualize and trivialize skateboarding women in similar ways that they mis(re)present female athletes in traditional sports, thus positioning women as *outsiders* in skateboarding culture and discouraging them from skateboarding (Donnelly, 2008). Yet the contradictory and increasing prevalence of skateboarding as a viable activity for young women (see Wheaton, 2009), their continued under-(re)presentation and purported mis(re)presentation in the mainstream and alternative media and the proliferation of the

⁵⁵ Our definition of community media is based on Yochim’s (2010) definition, which is media that are “designed by skateboarders using equipment and materials developed for personal use” (p. 183). These media are created to be not-for-profit, small in scale and distributed to and shared among community members rather than a mass audience.

⁵⁶ Mainstream media are produced by non-skateboarding journalists and producers for a mass audience with little knowledge of skateboarding. Like Downing (2001), we suggest that mainstream media are largely undemocratic, centred on profit-making, have a hierarchical organisation and present voices that are largely exclusive due the routinisation and codification of the journalism profession.

⁵⁷ Alternative media tend to be created by journalists, editors, photographers, and filmmakers who are, or were, active skateboarders. These media are not necessarily centered on profit making but are distributed to a relatively wide audience (compared to community media). Alternative media that communicate skateboarding discourses and cultural knowledge are the most instrumental to skateboarders’ identity construction and are usually only available in special distribution locations such as skate shops or online. They are produced by non-commercial sources and aim to challenge existing power structures, to represent marginalized groups and/or to foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest (Downing, 2001).

Internet in contemporary society are reasons to study how female skateboarding, community-produced Internet media (re)presentations may be affecting young skateboarding women. The Skirtboarders.com blog users are ripe for such an analysis. In this paper, we respond to Millington and Wilson's (2010) call for sport scholars to reach beyond textual media analysis and perform audience reception analyses to understand how sport media (re)presentations contribute to consumer identity construction.

(Collective) Identities and Internet (Re)presentation

Poststructuralist feminist theory suggests that identity⁵⁸ can be understood as a continuous process by which discursively constructed subject positions are taken up, resisted or challenged (Butler, 1999). The concept of collective identity, which Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue is "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences and solidarity" (p. 105), can be integrated within a discursive subjectivity framework. Collective identity has been used in the social movement literature by scholars attempting to understand how social injustice translates into social action

⁵⁸ In this article "identity" refers to the relational aspects that qualify subjects in terms of categories, such as gender, and thus in terms of acknowledged social relations and affiliations to groups. "Subjectivity" indexes the substantive acting, thinking and feeling being and evokes the set of processes by which a subject or self is constituted. Foucault sees subjectivity and identity as separate. In the *Subject and Power*, when talking about discursive power, he states:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. (Foucault, 1983, p. 212)

Therefore, Foucault suggests that identity categories are one of the effects of power. Foucault (1983) claims that identity is restrictive and limiting and it is formed through the regulatory apparatus that defines and subjects individuals. Subjectivity, then, creates identity. Subjectification is not something permanent or stable, but rather represents the precarious assertion of identity.

(Fominaya, 2010). Snow (2001) suggests that a constructionist perspective, which places more attention on the construction and maintenance of identities, is an analytically useful view for explaining the character and content of collective identities. He argues that “collective identities are invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together rather than being biologically preordained or structurally or culturally determined” (p. 5). This feature aligns with the poststructuralist perspective that subjectivities are always in motion and always under construction.

In sociocultural sports studies, the notion of collective identities, as conceptualised by Taylor and Whitter (1992), has rarely been used (see Pelak, 2002, Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Spaaij, 2008). Many sport scholars have studied enclaves, subcommunities and sporting collectivities using other theoretical conceptualizations, however. These include concepts of subculture (see, for example, Beal 1996; Donnelly & Young, 1988), subworld (see Crosset, & Beal, 1997), postsubcultural formations (see Heywood & Montgomery, 2002) and neotribes (see Giulianotti, 1999; Hughson, 1999, 2002 and Kiewa, 2002).

A major criticism of subcultural theory, the Gramscian-semiotic approach of the CCCS, is that it focuses on class relations to the exclusion of gender. Additionally, in subcultural theory, the media appear only ‘after’ the event of subculture (e.g. in the role of commercialising a subcultural form). Furthermore, the CCCS notion of a youth ‘subculture’ implies the existence of a coherent sub-unit of society with some ‘fixed’ identity homologically reflected (Wheaton, 2007; Young & Atkinson, 2002). Since gender is the primary aspect of this study, the media is the event⁵⁹ and the Skirtboarders and their users do

⁵⁹ Thornton (1996) uses the same argument in her study of club cultures

not seem to have a “fixed” identity, this theory did not offer the adequate tools for our purposes.

In her article outlining a revised agenda for the study of subcultures in sport, Wheaton (2007) critiques subcultural theory and claims that there is room in sport studies for new methodological and theoretical tools and notes that the introduction of poststructural theorizing may be useful for future research projects. She states (2007, pp. 292-293):

Poststructural debates, and particularly the work of Judith Butler, have been influential in developing an antiessentialist approach to subcultural theory, emphasizing the fragmented and contradictory practices and nature of identities. Butler’s concern with subverting the apparent stability and naturalness of gender and sexual identities has been adapted to explore performativity in the ongoing construction of subcultural identities (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003b). Such an account is appealing for examining how masculinity and femininity is produced in popular culture because it acknowledges the reflexive process involved in producing gender in such contexts and the ambiguous, contradictory, and fractured process involved (Benwell, 2003).

We agree and are attempting to do this here.

Subcultural theory was not the most useful theoretical tool for our analysis of the Skirtboarders’ web project, nor was postsubculture theory. Postsubculturalists suggest that youth cultural practice takes place within less permanent, more fleeting and more fluid cultural formations (than subcultures) with a mixed class base (Muggleton, 2000), which fits well with our use of a poststructural feminist conception of identity. However, as Yochim (2010) suggests:

Post-subcultural theorists have fully evaluated neither subcultures' interactions with mainstream media nor the ways in which subcultures and the mainstream influence one another in their portrayals of race, gender, class, sexuality and nation in youth culture. (p 17)

In other words, postsubcultural theory is not able to adequately analyse the intersections between global media flows (such as mainstream and alternative skateboarding media) and subcultural projects (such as the Skirtboarders' blog). As Wheaton (2007) notes, we need a theory that will account for “. . . the flux dynamism and change experienced by self-identified participants but should also examine the stability and distinctiveness in the culture's collective identity and forms of status” (p. 300).

The Skirtboarders and their users repeatedly referred to a movement, which prompted us to turn to the social movement literature rather than rely on notions of subculture, postsubculture, etc.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the Skirtboarders want their blog users to take up skateboarding and they want to transform and open up the skateboarding scene to the expression of various femininities – they want to challenge dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen. Pelak (2002) claims that “collective identity offers a promising framework for understanding the role women athletes have played and continue to play in challenging and reconstructing the dominant gender order” (p. 111).

⁶⁰ While Taylor and Whitter's (1992) concept of collective identity seemed to fit the analysis, the Skirtboarders' case can also, arguably, be categorized as a NSM (New Social Movement) for the following reasons: (a) the blog transcends class structures (to a certain degree – not all women have access to the Internet); (b) the production and consumption of the blog involves the emergence of a new dimension of identity (gender); and (c) the boundaries between the individual and collective are blurred – e.g., the blog represents all Skirtboarders and their users and although it is hard to distinguish whose views are whose on the site, each woman still has her own individuality.

We agree with Pelak (2002) and consider the concept helpful in examining cases of Internet (re)presentation to understand the process by which sportswomen use the Web to virtually congregate and challenge male-dominated institutions, such as skateboarding. Young women can adopt subject positions with a shared meaning (such as a female skateboarder identity) and build a sense of group affiliation. These subject positions are taken up (and redefined) with varying degrees of commitment by each individual, but are shared nonetheless. A thorough appraisal of the Skirtboarders' case suggests that these women are not just constituting individual "Skirtboarder" identities through their blogging; their self-work and their larger Internet project satisfies the three conditions for the construction of a larger collective identity proposed by Taylor and Whittier (1992), which include: (a) establishing boundaries; (b) consciousness; and (c) negotiation.

The first condition involves establishing boundaries, defined as the social, psychological and physical structures that highlight differences between subordinates (in skateboarding culture, subordinates are girls and women) and dominants (boys and men). The Skirtboarders created the blog to share photos and videos with each other but also out of a sense of duty to other girls and women (MacKay & Dallaire, accepted). They *construct boundaries* by exclusively highlighting female skateboarders' performances. (Re)presentations of female skateboarders are rare in the mainstream media, and when girls and women are portrayed, they are sexualized and objectified. Scholars argue that such forms of marginalization are even worse in the alternative skateboarding media (Beal & Wilson, 2004). Furthermore, Donnelly (2008) claims that media (re)presentations focusing on female skateboarders must be legitimated by men (considered the skateboarding experts), which reinforces rather than challenges ideologies of gender difference. On their blog, the

Skirtboarders intentionally (re)present female skateboarders only – male skateboarders are notably absent.

The Skirtboarders also fulfill the second condition in the construction of a collective identity through their *consciousness* that their blog allows them to question feminine codes that may limit women's resistance to the normalizing effects of disciplinary power, and thus deprive them of the opportunity to skateboard (and perform their complex and fluid gender identities). For Taylor and Whittier (1992), consciousness refers to the interpretive frameworks used by a challenging group to define and realize its interests. The idea of consciousness is similar to the "problematization" aspect of the trajectory required for Foucault's (1988) technologies of the self. Taylor and Whittier (1992) claim that consciousness is developed through an ongoing process in which participants re-evaluate themselves and their experiences and Foucault (1985) suggests that people problematize their identities by becoming more self-reflexive of the ways in which they are produced in discourse (they develop a critical self-awareness). Both consciousness and problematization lead to some sort of action. For Taylor and Whittier, this is community mobilization and collective action and for Foucault this is strategically choosing a discursive position (rather than being docile and taking up subject positions without reflecting on them). The Skirtboarders contend that the blog constructs them as subjects (Skirtboarders), but that it also contributes in instigating a larger female skateboarding "movement" (this term was employed by numerous crew members and blog users in interview conversations and on the blog) to promote the sport among young women and to encourage them to challenge the sport's current gender inequities (MacKay & Dallaire, accepted).

The third condition, according to Taylor and Whittier (1992), is that collective identities are negotiated and built through the symbolic and everyday actions used by subordinate groups to resist existing systems of domination. The Skirtboarders contribute to such *negotiations* by offering alternatives to the persistent sexist mainstream and alternative media (re)presentations of female athletes by creating and posting stories that express a variety of femininities both on and off a skateboard (MacKay & Dallaire, in press).

Although the Skirtboarders vary in their level of self-awareness and desire to be reflexive about their gendered skateboarding experiences, they practice what Foucault (1985) calls “ethics of the self” and they strategically offer alternative discursive constructions of skateboarding women, rather than merely (re)producing dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen (MacKay & Dallaire, accepted). Therefore, instead of adopting strategies to “manage the masculine culture into which they are entering” (Chambers, 2005, p. 342), which scholars argue happens in other sporting milieus (see Thorpe’s (2010) discussion of the snowboarding patriarchy), the Skirtboarders destabilize these cultures by creating alternative spaces for women.

However, the Skirtboarders are not part of a formal social movement nor do crew members identify as political activists (in fact, many of them reject a “feminist” label (MacKay & Dallaire, accepted)). The women nonetheless intentionally mobilize through their blog production to challenge the gender order within skateboarding culture and enact their project through their offline skateboarding and their online skateboarding (re)presentations. The blog becomes a space where the Skirtboarders’ resistance creates ripples in the system of skateboarding gender inequality and where they reflexively contribute to the promotion of a female skateboarding movement which incites girls and

women to get out and skateboard and, in so doing, to express multiple femininities. Yet, echoing Millington and Wilson (2010), we understand the significance of complementing textual and media production analyses with an exploration of how users of the Skirtboarders' blog (apparently consisting mostly of girls and women) make sense of the Skirtboarders' iterations. This paper attempts to undertake this task by exploring whether the Skirtboarders' blog fosters a female skateboarding "movement" among its users, thus creating a larger collective female skateboarder identity.

Research Protocol

To assess how a selection of users interpret the blog and the Skirtboarders' goals, three sources of data were included in this analysis. First, user comments about 262 blog posts on the Skirtboarders' website from March 2007 to May 2010 were examined. Second, information provided by Roux⁶¹ during an in-person group interview conducted in Montreal with three other Skirtboarders (conducted in September 2010) was useful to explore how a young woman learned about the crew through their Web project and eventually became an insider: a friend and crew member.⁶² Third, individual, in-depth one-on-one qualitative

⁶¹ The name of this Skirtboarder was not changed because she has used her name and/or posted photos or other identifying personal information on the Internet. She agreed to be named in the research.

⁶² Interviews with crew members were conducted to better understand how the Skirtboarders engage in the practice of the self as they negotiate and reinvent discourses of femininities in fluid and conflicting ways both as producers and as users of Internet text. The young women were asked a variety of questions about their skateboarding activities and the Skirtboarders' development and goals as a crew (and also how they became a Skirtboarder). They were invited to describe and discuss the creation, purpose and impact of their blog. Conversation topics also included their mainstream and alternative media consumption as well as their assessment of typical media (re)presentations of women. The results of this analysis are outlined in Authors (accepted). However, interview excerpts from the group interview including Roux have been exclusively used in this article to outline her integration from a blog user to a crew member.

interviews lasting from half an hour to 1.5 hours conducted in person or over Skype⁶³ between May 2011 and September 2011 with four users⁶⁴ illustrate the experiences of other users, non-crew members, with regards to the blog and with the larger movement. These women identified as users by the Skirtboarders or by other blog users through a snowball approach ranged in age from 18 to 27 years, lived in different geographical locations (Hanoi, Vietnam (one user), Ottawa, Canada (three users), and entertained different relationships with the blog (e.g., one woman frequented the blog daily while three women frequented the blog monthly) and different skateboarding lifestyles (e.g., two women identified as skateboarders and two as former skateboarders). Conversations with the blog users focused on: the meaning of their skateboarding practices (how important is skateboarding to them); what they think of the Skirtboarders crew and how they view themselves relative to the crew; the significance of gender in skateboarding; how they view the Skirtboarders' blog and other skateboarding media coverage.

Skirtboarders' Blog Commenters: Insiders and Outsider/Insiders

The blog primarily consists of stories, photos and videos of the Skirtboarders' skateboarding (e.g., in skateparks, on skateboarding trips, etc.), but also includes posts about Skirtboarders' crew gatherings (e.g., birthday parties) and promotion of other female skateboarders and their endeavours (e.g., a celebration of the Mexican female-only skateboarding magazine *Pink Spot*). Three Skirtboarders post the majority of the blog entries

⁶³ Skype is a voice over Internet Protocol service and software application that allows users to communicate with peers by voice, video, and instant messaging over the Internet. Calls to other users within the Skype service are free of charge. The service is owned by Microsoft.

⁶⁴ User names from blog posts were not changed in this article; however, pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of interview participants' identities.

(elected to do this on behalf of the group), but the blog is accessible to anyone. Many young women “follow” the Skirtboarders’ through their Web productions, which include the bilingual blog (all posts are written in French and translated to English, comments excluded), a Facebook page (which has close to 10,000 followers), YouTube and Vimeo channels and a Twitter account. One way of engaging with the Skirtboarders is to add comments to the blog. Anyone who visits the Skirtboarders’ blog can comment on blog entries. Notably, of the 1,128 user comments analysed, 814 (72%) were from users profiled as Skirtboarders on the Web site (insiders who, as members of the crew, share the “Skirtboarder” subjectivity (see MacKay & Dallaire, accepted)), and most consisted of praise for a trick in a video or photo, or encouragement regarding a featured skate session. These comments help reinforce the “Skirtboarder subjectivity.”

Couldry (2005) reminds us that the relationships between the audience and media industry and between media consumption and media production are changing as audiences become both consumers and producers of media texts (e.g., in Internet situations). In the Skirtboarders’ case, the crew members are the primary producers of both blog posts and blog comments. This could suggest that non-Skirtboarders (outsiders who cannot perform the “Skirtboarder” identity since they are not officially part of the crew) may not be accessing the site regularly, but also that users visit the blog but do not comment on the blog posts (i.e., that they consume but do not necessarily produce, at least on the blog). Conversations with members of the Skirtboarders crew reveal that the blog does, indeed, have an extensive worldwide following. Young women from Quebec and elsewhere in Canada and from other countries such as Brazil, New Zealand, Sweden, Mexico, the USA, the United Kingdom and Vietnam engage with the Skirtboarders through the Internet. Although many of these users

do not comment directly on the blog, the Skirtboarders' Facebook page has an extensive following. More notably, the crew receives constant and numerous email messages from followers – so many, in fact, that after 10 years of managing the Skirtboarders' crew and Internet site, founder Mathilde Pigeon felt she needed a break from her role (MacKay & Dallaire, accepted). While no administrator (gatekeeper) controls Skirtboarder blog entries or limits access to users or user comments, Mathilde acts as the crew's "agent" by responding to all requests (e.g., from mainstream and alternative media organizations and from blog users seeking information or encouragement). Non-Skirtboarder users are producing extensive amounts of media (emails) in response to the blog. Some of these communications may have affected subsequent content but are not directly accessible to all blog users. Why are blog users not posting more comments? Is it because these women see email as an easier and quicker means of getting their questions answered? Are they perhaps uncomfortable with the "public" character of a blog comment? If they are not bilingual, are they reluctant to post a unilingual comment on the bilingual blog? The reasons why blog users prefer to communicate with the Skirtboarders via email are unclear, but they undeniably seek interaction with the crew.

Of the 28% of comments from non-self-identified-Skirtboarders (outsiders), many suggested that the Skirtboarders are achieving their goals of (re)presenting skateboarding women in the media, challenging feminine codes that constrain the practice of skateboarding and advancing the female skateboarding "movement" by establishing a community where women can virtually congregate. For instance, in response to a blog post and photos about an amateur skateboarding competition for both male and female athletes for which the Skirtboarders had exhorted, "Be there girls! 'Cause for once, there are bigger prizes for the

girls!” (Pigeon, 2008, July 13), Kim commented: “It was a nice competition and it was mostly fun to skate with girls who have talent”. Blog user responses suggest that the blog inspires young girls and women to join their cause because it promotes skateboarding, and sports more generally, as viable options for young women either within mixed (male and female) events or in women-only sporting activities. A frequent theme among user comments highlights the Skirtboarders’s gender and their accomplishments as young women in this male dominated sporting culture. One user proclaimed her admiration of the Skirtboarders in response to a post celebrating the return of the Sideproject.com, a web site dedicated to women’s skateboarding, “Yes, it’s finally back on the world wide web, THE girls skateboarding website!” (Pigeon, 2008, August 26):

Hello girls,

I’m leaving a comment to say that I truly admire you when you skate. I hope to achieve your level some day.

Hugs and kisses (Nanou)

The blog’s content shows that young women can have fun forming communities centred on their participation in physical activity and it motivates users to either start, or to persist in, skateboarding. For example, Lucile a blog user from France commented about a blog post and photos about a Skirtboarder trip to California:

Hello I just wanted you to know that you’ve turned me on to skating and there!! I’m trying to learn from Internet videos but it’s not easy. No one skates in the sleepy little place where I live!! I’m trying not to give up! (Théorêt, 2008, December 31; our translation)

She later wrote to invite the crew to travel to her region in France so that she could skate with them in her local skate park. Her invitation was deemed a future possibility by a Skirtboarder who replied, stating that some crew members would certainly be motivated to embark on such a trip. Although not insiders who routinely perform the “Skirtboarder” identity, Kim, Nanou and Lucile are social actors in the larger “movement” and can thus be considered outsider/insiders (i.e., non-Skirtboarders who adopt and perform some aspects of the “Skirtboarder” subjectivity illustrated in MacKay and Dallaire (accepted)). The aspects they perform include: recognizing the boundaries between male and female skateboarders; viewing the blog as a tool that defines and promotes female skateboarding; and negotiating and resisting male skateboarding cultural norms through their skateboarding. The mere fact that “outsiders” would adopt and perform these aspects of the “Skirtboarder” subjectivity suggests that the Skirtboarders are constructing and circulating a collective female skateboarding identity (larger than the “Skirtboarder” subjectivity) on their blog that at least some users find accessible and appealing.

Readers of the blog are certainly keenly aware of the Skirtboarders’ web project to support young women in their skateboarding endeavours. One of their Montreal male friends, a photographer that has contributed images for their blog, wrote in response to an upcoming outing:

Promise, I’ll wax my legs, and I’ll shave my beard while taking on a girly suave voice if you bring me (...) I’ll be the photographer (Pigeon, 2008, July 12; our translation)

He recognizes that the Skirtboarders perform with other women. To take part in a “Skirtboarder” activity, he would be limited to playing a supporting role (as a photographer). Thus, the demarcation between male and female skateboarders and the emphasis the crew

puts in promoting young women is made obvious to blog users. Indeed, comments on other blog posts suggest that female non-Skirtboarder (outsider) users find inspiration in the Skirtboarders' blog and see it as a space that encourages girls and women to join the skateboarding "movement." Many of these outsiders are, in fact, outsider/insiders who perform the collective female skateboarding identity initiated by the Skirtboarders blog. In their comments, users also note that this collective identity extends beyond the virtual space where it circulates: like the Skirtboarders, they actively construct their identities through skateboarding rather than through the passive consumption of media. Their performance of the collective identity is therefore rooted in active participation in their personal female skateboarder lifestyles.

Dayna, like Lucile, Kim and Nanou, can be considered an outsider/insider. While she does not post comments on the blog, she visits the site daily and communicates (via Facebook) with the Skirtboarders four or five times a week (Dayna, personal communication). She feels that the blog and crew members are accessible and noted that while the Internet may not be the most important tool for getting more girls and women on boards, it fills a crucial need by allowing women who lack proximal female skateboarding communities to at least join a virtual collective (mirroring Lucile's feeling of isolation). She talked about her passionate connection to the Skirtboarders because of the lack of female skateboarders in her Vietnam neighbourhood, and hopes to live in Montreal one day so that she can skateboard with the Skirtboarders. However, she recognizes a difference between the "Skirtboarder" subjectivity and the larger collective female skateboarding identity (which she sees as accessible and transparent) and believes that a collective identity is, indeed, emerging from the Skirtboarders' website and their interactions with blog users.

From Outsider/Insider to Insider: Roux Becomes a Skirtboarder

Scholars suggest that continuity exists between online and offline life, contradicting the idea that the Internet is separate from the “real” world (Wilson & Atkinson, 2005) and reminding us of the importance of the connections between (re)presentation and practice in identity production and performance. The story of Roux Centea is a particularly interesting example of a user who intensified her skateboarding (practice) because of the blog ((re)presentation).

Roux claimed that had she not visited the blog, she would not have taken up skateboarding as a lifestyle and would certainly not have become a Skirtboarder, a significant identity for her today. Prior to accessing the Web site, she skateboarded occasionally with boys in her neighborhood and one female friend, but was afraid to go to skateparks⁶⁵ and did not identify as a skateboarder. After discovering the blog (following an appearance by Anne-Sophie, a Skirtboarder, on community television skateboarding show), she claims that her life changed. She contacted crew members, began skateboarding with them at local parks, was invited to continue skateboarding with them, eventually joined the crew and now proudly adopts and performs the “Skirtboarder” subjectivity. Now an insider, she considers the blog a site that encourages young women to join the larger “movement”:

It can be the spark that starts something, that gives them the confidence to go out and do it, or inspires them to go do something similar in another sport or with another group of girls that do whatever else... It's not only an inspiration and a motivation to

⁶⁵ Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie, 2008; Laurendeau, 2004; Wheaton, 2004 suggest that lifestyle sports have been sexist since their inception and women have always been considered “intruders” in masculine territories like skateparks, beaches and cliff jumping areas.

skate, but it proves that once you get a certain number of girls together, we can do anything (...) (personal communication, our translation).

Roux suggests that the blog not only inspires young women to skateboard, but also to come together for other sporting and non-sporting activities that may challenge gender discourses. Although she is now an insider through her membership in the crew, like Lucile, Dayna and other outsider/insiders, her efforts to join the “movement” began with her recognition of the binary division between male and female skateboarders, her awareness that the blog launched her transformation as a female skateboarding subject and her negotiation of gender discourses through her offline skateboarding actions (now (re)presented online). Unlike Lucile, however, Roux went beyond performing the larger collective female skateboarding identity as a user of the blog (outsider/insider) and acquired the more exclusive identity of a “Skirtboarder” (an insider).

Skirtboarders’ Blog as Inclusive Collective Identity Building

Both Lucile and Roux credit the Skirtboarders’ blog for encouraging them to skateboard and take up the larger collective female skateboarding identity circulated by the crew. These users view the blog as an inclusive space where a collective female skateboarding identity is constructed (and reconstructed since collective identities are fluid). However, not all young women had the same understanding of the crew or their blog. For example, after hearing about the Skirtboarders through an appearance on television (*Musique Plus*), Madame X sent the crew an email stating that although she considers them fantastic, she does not see the point if the same girls always benefit from media exposure. Convinced that many girls would like to participate in Skirtboarders’ activities and trips, she regretted

that one would have to be a “luxury chick” with many sponsors to be rewarded, presumably through media coverage and inclusion in the crew. Her comments suggest that the crew and their blog may not be as inclusive as purported, and that their extended media coverage may actually undermine the promotion of female skateboarding as an accessible option for *all* girls and women.

Mathilde responded that the Skirtboarders are first and foremost “a group of friends who get together to have fun. This concludes then the large definition of the word “Skirtboarder” (Pigeon, 2008, February 8, our translation). She went on to explain that the impetus to form the crew was to bring together these women to support each other and share in their passion for skateboarding. She opposed the use of the term “luxury chicks” to describe the Skirboarders because:

We each made our way, each one of us, alone and without sponsors and without adulation! Our crew consists of 3 generations of female skateboarders that mutually encourage and respect each other despite our age difference, talent levels, sexual orientation and distinct personalities. Yes, today we are covered by the media. Why? Because as a group, we represent a growing phenomena (and not an exclusive circle). How do we finance all this? By working very hard (sponsorships don’t fall from the sky!). Our goal? « Meet chicks on wheels from all over the world! If you come by Montreal, give us a shout and we’ll be happy to welcome you » (quoted from our My Space) (Pigeon, 2008, February 8, our translation).

In fact, she agreed that many girls and women likely want to take part in Skirtboarder events which is why she has been devoting herself to “be able to help, finance, inform and encourage participation among the greatest number of girls possible” (Pigeon, 2008,

February 8, our translation). Mathilde then asked Madame X if she could post her original email and the subsequent response to the blog so that users could comment on it (Madame X agreed). There were 22 responses to the post, 17 from members of the crew who mostly complimented Mathilde on her response. Chantale is one of the insider/outsideers that expressed her disagreement with Madame X's accusation. A Quebec City 27 year old skateboarder she claimed to having personally "ALWAYS"⁶⁶ felt welcome and had a convivial rapport with the Skirtboarders when she joined them to skate and this despite her lower level of ability. Rather than be jealous of the crew, Chantale believed that other skateboarding women should be proud of their "friends" and of the fact that a female crew had achieved so much, with regards to performance (talent level) and to media exposure.

Such statements reflect disagreement with the idea that only sponsored female skateboarders are worthy of (re)presentation on the blog (sponsorship suggesting not only greater financial resources but also greater talent enabling access to such monetary rewards). In fact, the blog features all crew members, most of whom do not have sponsorship deals. It also includes photos and videos of other young female skateboarders that communicate with the Skirtboarders via the Web. But Madame X's comments call attention to the distinction made by crew members between highlighting Skirtboarder performances, promoting the skateboarding practices of other young women and meeting other aspiring female skateboarders in skateparks as a way to encourage girls and women to skateboard on the one hand, and integrating other female skateboarders into the crew on the other. That even one user felt strongly enough about the exclusionary potential of the blog to write to Mathilde

⁶⁶ In capital letters in her original blog comment.

about it confirms the complicated association between lived experience and the ways in which media intertextual (re)presentations are digested by audiences (Wheaton & Beal, 2003). A line is drawn between becoming a “Skirtboarder” and being part of the larger female skateboarding movement. This distinction may not always be obvious in the production of the blog and users may mistake the crew’s larger project to promote skateboarding among young women as an open invitation to join the crew. While various users express a wish to meet and skate with the crew, recognizing the distinction between the larger movement and membership in the crew, other users manifest a clear desire to become a Skirtboarder, such as Kyairra’s comment to a post about the Chicks Flip Out 2007 Contest held in Ottawa: “I want 2 join skirtboarders. I want 2 be pro black female skater.” (Pigeon, 2007, August 25).⁶⁷

The ways in which audiences engage with the media are complex and depend on geographical, cultural and social circumstances. Madame X and Kyairra’s comment also reminds us that collective identity can be shared among the Skirtboarders’ blog users without necessarily unifying all of them, or lending itself to one definitive, coherent reading. Madame X shares the Skirtboarders’ goals of promoting female skateboarding (i.e., the “movement”), but feels excluded from the crew and believes that the Skirtboarders self-portrayals on their blog does not lead to inclusion of other young female skateboarders while Kyairra focuses on elite performance and adds a racial dimension to her identity as a skateboarder. This confirms that “...actors do not necessarily have to be in complete

⁶⁷ This comment is one of the rare statements on the blog that underlines users’ awareness of race as an additional dimension of skateboarding identity other than gender. Kyairra also seems to share Madame X’s interpretation of the Skirtboarders as talented, sponsored (or professional) athletes as opposed to a group of female skateboarders of various ability levels.

agreement on ideologies, beliefs, interests or goals in order to come together and generate collective action...” (Fominaya, 2010, p. 395).

Madame X and Kyairra’s comment also demonstrates that collective identity can be characterized by tensions – the Skirtboarders perform an identity accessible only to members of the crew (i.e., the “Skirtboarder” subjectivity), but they also attempt to promote the larger “movement” on their blog. The collective identity attached to this movement shares some but not all aspects of the “Skirtboarder” identity: not all young women who perform the collective female skateboarding identity can be Skirtboarders (crew membership depends on proximity and friendships as well as a commitment to promoting female skateboarding – as demonstrated by Roux’ case). It was never the Skirtboarders’ intention to open membership in their crew to all blog users; their intention was to skate with young women and encourage them to continue skating. Therefore, although insider/outsider blog users who attach themselves to the “movement” can certainly take up the larger collective female skateboarding identity and feel a sense of affiliation with the Skitboarders, they cannot become “Skirtboarders.”

Like Madame X, Mika had an ambivalent reading of the Skirtboarders’ blog. She understood the Skirtboarders as female skateboarding community builders; each has her own individual goals but they come together collectively to “foster and support female skateboarding” (Mika, personal communication) and read the blog as a political space where the Skirtboarders respond to women’s under(re)presentation in skateboarding culture. She noted the positive aspects of online, women-only ventures distinct from sites produced by male skateboarders, as illustrated by the Skirtboarders.com and its purposeful gender agenda. However, she also felt that the crew’s blog might not be the best tool to promote a

larger collective skateboarding identity since one would have to have followed the crew from the onset of the blog to develop the kind of familiarity with the Skirtboarders that results from years of online interaction. For Mika, irregular browsing of the site was not sufficient to integrate users within the collective female skateboarding identity. She also appears to confound being a longtime fan of the Skirtboarders and developing a sense of identification with the crew with the wider project of promoting female skateboarding and a larger collective identity. Her comments, like those of Madame X, point to the tension arising between identification with the Skirtboarders as a frequent user of their blog and becoming part of a larger movement to advance female skateboarding through a web site that focuses on the exploits of one crew.

Ultimately, Mika and other interviewees felt that the best way to be an actor in the “movement” was not to spend time on (re)presentational sites like the Skirtboarders’ blog but instead to actively challenge oppressive male-dominated milieus (like skateparks) by getting on their boards and engaging in skateboarding practice. To encourage more girls and young women to participate, some had contributed to strategies such as opening up parks for women-only sessions, while others suggested running women-only clinics and contests and the inviting role models, like the Skirtboarders, to skateparks to meet girls and women (a practice the Skirtboarders have indeed engaged in since the crew’s formation).

Mika, Gina, Dayna, Van and Roux also alluded to the notion that the Skirtboarders’ blog users should first and foremost be considered as part of a larger female skateboarding community (who take up and perform the collective identity) – and only secondarily as a Skirtboarders.com audience. Indeed, media (re)presentations surrounding sport, the body and gender identity, like the Skirtboarders’ blog, must always be thought of in relation to “real”

or “everyday” experiences of physical culture (Millington & Wilson, 2010). All interview participants claimed that they do not actively consume sports media (mainstream or alternative) on a regular basis because they prefer to be skateboarding – doing the sport rather than watching or reading about it. They did, however, feel that more positive media (re)presentations of female skateboarders were necessary in order to challenge the current gender skateboarding culture. Therefore, they viewed the blog (and the collective identity circulated on it) as one political strategy for improving the global female skateboarding landscape.

Conclusion

The Skirtboarders’ blog and Internet (re)presentations of sportswomen more generally might therefore be seen as a catalyst for the reorganization of patriarchal systems. Indeed, research on the Internet and sports-related websites indicates that despite its potential, cyberspace has not been an empowering space for women (see Hardin, 2009; Shade, 2002; Worthington, 2005). However, recent studies (Hardin, 2011; Authors, in press, accepted) have shown that the Internet can be a space where women open up access to a predominantly masculine sport, create more fluid definitions of sporting femininity, and gain opportunities to control their own (re)presentations. Through their skateboarding and Internet coverage of their performances, the Skirtboarders contribute to a larger “movement” promoting skateboarding among girls and women. But doing so through the promotion of their crew raises tensions between access to the Skirtboarders’ subjectivity and the development of a wider female skateboarding community.

According to the blog users included in this analysis, the female skateboarding “movement” promoted through Skirtboarders.com has helped construct a (non-homogenous) collective female skateboarding identity, but they are not in complete agreement about its accessibility. And accessibility is an important factor: in order for blog users to take up this collective female skateboarding identity, boundary construction, consciousness and negotiations are necessary (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Yet, regardless of their assessment of the accessibility of the identity promoted on Skirtboarders.com, the blog posts by users and the statements by the young women interviewed imply that Internet projects such as the Skirtboarders’ blog could be initiating an awareness of the effects of gender discourses among site users. Despite their differences, user comments and interviews suggest these young women are reflexive (have a critical awareness) toward the (re)presentational and practical struggles that female skateboarders face and have committed to being part of the “movement” to challenge the current system through engagement with the virtual Skirtboarder community and/or through their skateboarding practice.

References

- Beal, B. (1996). Alternative masculinity and its effects on gender relations in the subculture of skateboarding. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 19, 204–220.
- Beal, B., & Wilson, C. (2004). ‘Chicks dig scars’: commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders’ identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). New York: Routledge.
- Brayton, S. (2005). “Black-Lash”: Revisiting the “white negro” through skateboarding. *Sociology of Sport* 22(2), 356–372.
- Bruce, T., Falcous, M., & Thorpe, H. (2007). The mass media and sport. In C. Collins & S. Jackson (Eds.), *Sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand society* (2nd ed.; pp. 147–164). Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Thompson.
- Bury, R. (2005). *Cyberspaces of their own: Female fandoms online*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chambers, C. (2005). Masculine domination, radical feminism and change. *Feminist Theory*, 6, 325–346.
- Consalvo, M., & Paasonen, S (Eds.) (2002). *Women & everyday uses of the Internet: Agency & identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Couldry, N. (2005). The Extended Audience: Scanning the horizon, in G. Marie (Ed.), *Media Audiences*, Open University Press, Berkshire, pp. 184–220.
- Crosset, T., & Beal, B. (1997). The use of “subculture” and “subworld” in ethnographic works on sport: A discussion of definitional distinctions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 14, 73–85.

- Donnelly, P., & Young, K. (1988). The construction and confirmation of identity in sport subcultures. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 197–211.
- Donnelly, M. (2008). Alternative and mainstream: Revisiting the sociological analysis of skateboarding. In M. Atkinson and K. Young (Eds), *Tribal play: Subcultural journeys through sport* (pp. 197–216). Bingley, UK: JAI press.
- Downing, J. (2001) *Radical Media: rebellious communication and social movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fominaya, C.F. (2010). Collective identity in social movements: Central concepts and debates. *Sociology Compass*, 4(6), 393–404.
- Foucault, M. (1985). *The use of pleasure*. New York: First Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds.), *The essential Foucault* (pp. 145–169). New York: The New York Press.
- Gajjala, R. (2004). *Cyberselves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.
- Giulianotti, R. (1999). *Football* (Vol. 30). Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Harcourt, W (Ed.) (1999). *Women@internet: Creating new cultures in cyberspace*. New York: Zed Books.
- Hardin, M. (2009, Sept. 24). Does “new media” bring new attitudes towards women’s sports? *Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport Web* site. Retrieved at <http://tuckercenter.wordpress.com/2009/09/24/does-%E2%80%99new-media%E2%80%99-bring-new-attitudes-oward-women%E2%80%99s-sports/>

- Hardin, M. (2011). The power of a fragmented collective: Radical pluralist feminism and technologies of the self in the sports blogosphere. In A. Billings (Ed.), *Sports media: Transformation, integration, consumption* (pp. 40–60). New York and UK: Routledge.
- Heywood, L., & Montgomery, M. (2002). Ambassadors of the last wilderness: Surfers, environmental ethical and activism in America. In M. Atkinson and K. Young (Eds.), *Tribal play: Subcultural journeys through sport* (pp. 153–172). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Hughson, J. (1999). A tale of two tribes: Expressive fandom in Australian soccer's A-league. *Culture, Sport and Society*, 2(3), 10–30.
- Hughson, J. (2002). Australia soccer's ethnic tribes: A new case for the carnivalesque. In E. Dunning, P. Murphy, & A. Astrinakis (Eds.), *Football's fighting fans: Soccer hooliganism as a world problem* (Vol. 6, pp. 37–48). Dublin, Ireland: University College Dublin Press.
- Jones, D. (2006). The representation of female athletes in online images of successive Olympic Games. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 12(1), 108–129.
- Kelly, D.M., Pomerantz, S., & Currie, D.H. (2008). "You can break so many more rules": The identity work and play of becoming a Skater Girl. In M.D. Giardina and M.K. Donnelly (Eds.), *Youth Culture and Sport* (pp. 113–125). New York: Routledge.
- Kiewa, J. (2002). Traditional climbing: Metaphor of resistance or metanarrative of oppression? *Leisure Studies*, 21, 145–161.
- Laurendeau, J. (2004). The "crack choir" and the "cock chorus": The intersection of gender and sexuality in skydiving texts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21(4), 397–417.

- MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (in press). Skirtboarder net-a-narratives: Young women creating their own skateboarding (re)presentations. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.
- MacKay, S., & Dallaire, C. (accepted 2012). Skirtboarders' Blogging as Technologies of the Self. *Sociology of Sport Journal*.
- Millington, B., & Wilson, B. (2010). Media consumption and the contexts of physical culture: Methodological reflections on a "Third Generation" study of media audiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(1), 30–53.
- Ogden, D.C., & Hilt, M.L. (2003). Collective identity and basketball: an explanation for the decreasing number of African-Americans on America's baseball diamonds. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 35(2), 213–227.
- Paasonen, S. (2005). *Figure of fantasy: Internet, women & cyberdiscourse*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Pelak, C.F. (2002). Women's collective identity formation in sports: A case study from women's ice hockey. *Gender and Society*, 16(1), 93–144.
- Pigeon, M. (2008, February 8). Toute question mérite une réponse! [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/toute-question-merite-une-reponse/>. (2010, June 3).
- Plymire, D.C., & Forman, P.J. (2000). Breaking the silence: Lesbian fans, the Internet, and the sexual politics of women's sport. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 5(2), 141–153.
- Polletta, F., & Jasper, J.M. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 283–305.

- Shade, L. R. (2002). *Gender and community in the social construction of the Internet*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Snow, D. (2001). Collective identity and expressive forms. University of California, Irvine eScholarship Repository. <http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/01-07>. Last accessed January 19, 2012.
- Spaaij, R. (2008). Men like us, boys like them: Violence, masculinity, and collective identity in football hooliganism. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32(4), 369–392.
- Taylor, V., & Whittier, N. (1992). Collective identity in social communities: Lesbian feminist mobilization. In A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (pp. 104–129). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Théorêt, É. (2008, December 31). Les matantes débarquent aux US! [Web log post]. Retrieved from Skirtboarders Web site: <http://www.skirtboarders.com/les-matantes-debarquent-aux-US/>. (2010, June 3).
- Thornton, S. (1996). *Club cultures: Music, media and subcultural capital*. London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Thorpe, H. (2010). Bourdieu, gender reflexivity, and physical culture: A case of masculinities in the snowboarding field. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24(2), 176–214.
- Wheaton, B., & Beal, B. (2003). Surf divas and skate betties: Consuming images of the other in lifestyles sports. In S. Fleming and I. Jones (Eds.), *Leisure cultures: Investigations in sport, media and technology* (pp. 69–90), Eastbourne, UK: Leisure Studies Association.

- Wheaton, B. (2004). 'New Lads'? Competing masculinities in the windsurfing culture. In B. Wheaton (Ed.) *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp 131–153). London: Routledge.
- Wheaton, B. (2007). After Sport Culture: Rethinking Sport and Post-Subcultural Theory. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 31(3), 283–307.
- Wheaton, B. (2009). The cultural politics of lifestyle sport (re)visited: beyond white male lifestyles. In J. Ormond and B. Wheaton (Eds.), *On the edge: leisure, consumption and the representation of adventure sport* Vol. 104, Eastbourne: Leisure Studies Association.
- Wilson, B. & Atkinson, M. (2005). Rave and Straightedge, the virtual and the real: Exploring online and offline experiences in Canadian youth subculture. *Youth & Society*, 36, 276–311.
- Wilson, B. (2007). New media, social movements, and global sport studies. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(4), 457–477.
- Wilson, B. (2008). Believe the hype? The impact of the Internet on sport-related subcultures. In M. Atkinson and K. Young (Eds.), *Tribal play: Subcultural journeys through sport* (pp. 135–152). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Worthington, N. (2005). Women's work on the World Wide Web: How a new medium represents and old problem. *Popular Communication*, 3(1), 43–60.
- Yochim, E. C. (2010). *Skate life: Re-imagining white masculinity*. Michigan, USA; University of Michigan.

Young, K., & Atkinson, M. (2002). Introduction: A subcultural history. In M. Atkinson and K. Young (Eds.), *Tribal play: Subcultural journeys through sport* (pp. 153–172). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts

Conclusions to research projects like this one often attempt to accomplish two things including: (a) revisiting the main arguments made in the project and (b) raising some of the limitations of the work done. In this chapter, I will not repeat or summarize my arguments, nor will I discuss at length the limitation of my work. Instead, I consider the importance of this work (for both me and the field of sociocultural sport studies) and answer the question “so what do we learn from all of this?” I also suggest future lines of inquiry and provide a brief reflection on my personal experiences undertaking and completing this project.

So What Can We Learn From All of This?

I spent over four years working on this project hoping to come away from it with some valuable lessons learned (e.g., how to formulate, conduct and write up an extensive research project, how to apply for research funding, how to present my work at scholarly conferences and how to work with a research colleague). I feel that I achieved these goals. I also believe that I have learned more about the complexities of feminism and hope that I can accept and celebrate different approaches and refrain from imposing my brand of feminism on others in the future. Finally, this project makes some important political, methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions to my field, the sociocultural study of sport, which I believe can provide others with new insights.

Different Feminisms: Who Cares!

As I was writing up Chapter 5, I felt a supreme disappointed that the Skirtboarders’ were not insistent that they were “talking back” to mainstream and alternative media (which, as previously discussed, I find problematic due to lack of quantity and quality) (re)presentations on their blog. I had hoped that the Skirtboarders would have plastered their contempt for skateboarding media all over their blog and bragged that they were doing

something different, something they deemed better, something *feminist*. They were claiming no such thing.

However, as I completed the analysis, I realized that regardless of whether or not the Skirtboarders claim the “feminist” label or attach themselves to a social justice movement, they are producing media texts that focus on their sport performances rather than (re)presenting themselves as stereotypical feminine athletes. They do not feel the need to prove their femininity nor their (hetero)sexuality. Is this not what we (scholars, feminists, social justice advocates) are looking for? While they do post some photos that seem to parody dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen – the interpretation of whether these photos are a parody or whether they are a slippage into a spontaneous reproduction of fragments of dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen is ambiguous – it could be either or.

Furthermore, I worried that scholars might contest my celebration of the Skirtboarders’ project by arguing that their (re)presentations of themselves as polygendered subjects could prove problematic if their goal for the blog is to improve the situation for skateboarding women. I thought that these folks might argue that, in fact, the Skirtboarders’ non-recognition of the category of woman completely denies and dismisses the political project of feminism (whether that be “stealth feminism” (see Heywood, 2008) or other strands of feminism). However, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, the Skirtboarders’ blog posts are complex and we cannot claim that they are denying the category of women altogether, despite some of their polygendered texts. In fact, rather than denying the category “woman,” the Skirtboarders (re)present women who perform a variety of masculine and feminine traits. Therefore, rather than destroying any collective concept of woman or women through non-

recognition (and the fragmentation of female subjects) they celebrate the concept of “woman” as a non-unified aspect of subjectivity and on focus on it almost exclusively (e.g., there is a near absence of (re)presentations of men on their Internet site).

Overall, the point is these women are circulating a different message about skateboarding women, which contests the skewed and contradictory messages circulating in mainstream and alternative media texts, and more specifically, skateboarding media texts (Abulhawa, 2008; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Thorpe, 2008). While they may not claim to be feminists, the Skirtboarders are pushing forward with an agenda of self-(re)presentation on their own terms, skateboarding terms, and successfully using the Internet to do so. Hardin (2011) notes that

with a more pluralist lens, feminist sport researchers can engage in research and advocacy that will allow us to see the way that women and men in all areas of sport—including in the blogosphere and other forms of entrepreneurial media—are reforming their own identities, engaging in ethical practices , and countering technologies of power. Through these small, even imperceptible steps, perhaps they are moving us toward the social transformation we seek. It is our obligation assist in this exercise. (p. 58)

Furthermore, Pomerantz, Currie and Kelly, (2004) suggest that, “feminism, as a movement, evolved in order to deal with the everyday realities of being women in this society and to address the inequalities that these realities provoked. But such realities inevitably change, as do the circumstances that surround them” (p. 555). Women are constantly resignifying themselves as subjects. Feminism thus needs to be continually transformed if it is to keep up with women.

Since completing this project, I have come to recognize that as an intellectual, it is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches and encourage girls and women to challenge systems in diverse ways. Although the Skirtboarders do not explicitly proclaim their feminism and critique of mainstream and alternative media, they *act* on it. They seek to offer a different (re)presentation, one they *control*. Their blog is thus a powerful innovation, facilitated by Web 2.0, where the Skirtboarders display womens' empowerment and self-accomplishment through sport and where they celebrate a variety of femininities, something that I was certainly *not* disappointed about.

Political, Empirical, Methodological and Theoretical Contributions

In addition to recognizing and understanding different feminisms, something I would consider a more personal achievement, this project makes some important contributions to the sociocutural study of sport. Politically, through my claim that the Skirtboarders are challenging dominant discursive constructions of women's sporting bodies by posting their activities on the Internet and that these Internet productions are having an impact, I argue that the Internet is a space where women can have access to predominantly masculine sport, create more fluid definitions of sporting femininity, and control their own (re)presentations, which will ultimately challenge male dominated institutions such as mainstream and alternative media organizations. Research (see Hardin, 2009; Shade, 2002; Worthington, 2005) on the Internet and sports-related websites indicates that cyberspace has not been an empowering space for women. Furthermore, sport scholars contend that endeavors such as the Skirtboarders' (i.e., when women create their own sport experiences), ensure that male dominated structures remain unchallenged. For example, Thorpe, (2005), notes that

while women only magazines, films and competitions see positive steps toward female equality, in reality separatist endeavours actually let the big brother structures avoid social responsibility in terms of the moral requirement publishers, filmmakers and organizers have to accommodate and represent women. With women represented in other areas, the so-called real snowboard magazines, films and events can justify their male-exclusive approaches. (p. 94)

Foucault (1980) also recognized that resistance to dominant discourses and technologies of the self do not indicate that power relations (in this case, power of male dominated sport media institutions) are changing. Rather resistance actually strengthens dominant discourse by acting as a mechanism for the creation of new strategies of exercising power (Markula & Pringle, 2006). With respect to the concepts of “transformation” and technologies of the self, Markula and Pringle (2006) state that:

Foucault’s use of the verb ‘transforms’ is often translated to mean that the technologies of the self materialize in ‘resistant’ practices that an individual uses to change dominant discourses. However, Foucault’s work does not indicate that an engagement in technologies of the self necessarily leads to a transformation of power relations. Foucault’s focal point in his analysis of sexuality, for example, was to examine how individuals in power relations learned to recognize the discourses or knowledges of sexuality, how they acted upon this knowledge, and how they came to understand and recognize themselves as humans through this particular discourse. This provides an investigation of the individual both as the object and the subject of power relations. (p. 139)

Importantly, both Hardin's (2011) examination of Women Talk Sports bloggers and this dissertation show that bloggers and blog users participating in the production or reproduction of discourses of femininity on the Web may be aware of existing discourses, yet choose to take them up rather than challenge them. Therefore, what characterizes the technologies of the self is not the "resistance" to dominant discourses but the "awareness" of being produced/defined in discourse and strategically choosing a discursive position (rather than being docile and taking on practices without reflecting on them). I argue that Skirtboarders and non-Skirtboarder users are reflexive (have an awareness) of the (re)presentational and practical struggles that female skateboarders face and have committed to being part of the "movement" to challenge the current system through the production of alternative (re)presentations of femininity where sportswomen are not sexualized or trivialized, through their engagement with the virtual Skirtboarders community and/or through their skateboarding practice. Therefore, women *are* using the Internet in ways that enable collaboration, social activity, critical thought, democratic action and ultimately, the construction of collective identities. When women use the Internet in this way, they are creating (e.g., typing and mouse clicking while constructing a text) and experiencing fluid interactions with their work (e.g., interacting with other users after sharing a text).

Some scholars question whether we should forget about mainstream media as outlets for (re)presenting women's sports (since they continue to sexualize and trivialize sportswomen) and instead tries to find ways of supporting for women-by women media sources (including Internet sites). Beal and Wilson (2004) propose it may, in fact, be better for sportswomen (and skateboarding women in particular) not to be (re)presented in mainstream media so that they can avoid the market/capitalist trap of men's lifestyle sports.

I understand these arguments, however, I argue (only after completing this project!) that the Internet can be a space where women can challenge masculine hegemony and male dominated sport cultures and systems will *have to* change. If women continue to turn to the Internet to self-(re)present and if they actively choose to consume community media produced by other women rather than mainstream or alternative media produced by corporations and other (usually male) community members, markets (including mainstream and alternative skateboarding media) will have to change to include (re)presentations of sportswomen that do not follow the “rules” of the current discursive landscape (i.e., dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen). That the Skirtboarders have been frequently featured in mainstream and alternative media shows us something. Also, that they have been approached to have their image managed by a professional agent (they vehemently declined) shows us that they are considered a marketable commodity.

In addition to the political contributions this project makes to the field outlined above, methodologically, this thesis is distinct from other sport media studies because of the depth of the materials analysed and the rigor used in the analyses. Over three years of blog content was analysed, which includes all of the posts and comments from the first post in 2007 to May 2010, the time at which I had to begin analyzing my materials and writing up this thesis. In the majority of sport media studies, a sample (e.g., randomly selected issues of newspapers over the course of a two year data collection period – see Cunningham, Sagas, Sartore, Amsden & Schellhase, 2004) of data is used. Samples, rather than the full gamut of accessible content, are also used in many studies of Internet texts (e.g., splash pages and reports linked to them posted during a sample period – see Jones, 2006). That this thesis is

not a random (and hopefully representational) sample of a text, but rather a comprehensive examination of it, suggests that it is a unique and important contribution to the field.

Empirically, this thesis makes an important contribution because it is the first attempt in the discipline of sociocultural sport studies (that I am aware of) that looks at three aspects of media – text, context of production and audience reception – in one case study. It therefore goes beyond doing an analysis of media text (i.e., how I, as a scholar, understand the text), which is the most common type of media study in sociocultural studies of sport, and also interrogates the intention of the text producers through interviews with the Skirtboarders and users’ understandings of the (re)presentations through analysis of user comments and interviews with users. The textual analysis (Chapter 5) is interesting and supports important findings. However, the analysis of the intentions of the producers (Chapter 6) and the understandings of blog users (Chapter 7) helps to paint a more complete picture of the Skirtboarders’ blog phenomenon.

In Chapter 6, I examine gender sporting subjectivities in new media where young women can “take charge” of their (re)presentation and produce their own community media which, I argue, challenge many of the dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen circulated on mainstream and alternative media. Other sport media studies have focused on mainstream and alternative media and those looking at community media have not studied gender or examined how and why young people are active on the Internet. Therefore, more than a discourse analysis of media text, this thesis seeks to understand the context of production of the Skirtboarders’ blog (re)presentations.

In Chapter 7, I attempt to understand the effects (analysis of comments and interviews with blog users) of media discourse. Millington and Wilson (2010) claim that

sport scholars continue to focus on analyses of texts rather analyses of production or audience reception and they remind us that although media textual analyses are important, we have to do more than just describe discourses – we must look at their effects. With respect to media and gender, Donnelly, MacNeill and Knight (2008) argue, like Millington and Wilson (2010), that it is necessary to continue to track and monitor the ways in which women and men are represented in various sports media but because there continues to be “no theoretical news,” scholars should engage with advocacy, education, policy, and regulation rather than focus their energy on merely describing circulating discourses. They argue that academics need to go beyond analyzing media (re)presentations by “stepping off the bench” to influence media production processes. This study examines the effects of the Skirtboarders’ blog (as called for by Millington and Wilson (2010)) which gives us a deeper understanding of how women take up discourses that are considered resistant by scholars (as shown in Chapter 5) and by producers (as shown in Chapter 6). I argue that this will ultimately help us to prepare our “game plan” for intervening in mainstream and alternative media production processes, as called for by Donnelly et al (2008).

Theoretically, this thesis makes an important contribution through Chapter 6. It is only the second illustration (to my knowledge) in sport studies of the deployment of the four dimensions of technologies of the self. Shogan (1999) mentions these dimensions in her book, but does not develop them. Pringle and Hickey (2010) describe the modes and use them to understand how male sport enthusiasts—critical of hypermasculine performances and fratriarchies—negotiate sporting tensions and how these negotiations shape their (masculine) selves. However, they do not look at how media (re)presentations play a role in shaping identities. Nor do they suggest that groups of people can be following a similar path

while engaging in the technologies of the self at the same time and through the same channels. I demonstrate how this framework can be systematically applied to sport and communication studies and how it can help us understand the practice and process of creating media texts, such as the Skirtboarders' blog as well as the texts' impact on users. I also argue that the technologies of the self may contribute to collective resistance projects if many people—like the Skirtboarders and the blog users—identify with a “movement” and perform a similar identity (e.g., collective female skateboarding identity) at the same time.

Ultimately, my contribution to the discipline is the suggestion that the Skirtboarders and non-Skirtboarder blog users understand the blog and the female skateboarding movement to be spaces in which dominant discursive constructions of sportswomen can be challenged. These women see the blog as only one of many political tools for constructing (new) gender identities – they argue that the physical practice of skateboarding is just as or even more important for change to occur. Regardless, this thesis has demonstrated that the Internet will continue to provide a venue for social resistance and social movement projects related to sport and physical culture in the years ahead and the Internet is a space in which producers and users can practice the technologies of the self.

Future Directions

After completing a project as demanding as this one, it is inevitable that I notice new lines of inquiry that would be worthwhile pursuing if I had another 5 years of PhD life (and funding!) Three of these are outlined below.

First, I argue that the Skirtboarders are attempting (without necessarily claiming to on their blog) to reject mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media (re)presentations of female skateboarders and, instead, (re)present themselves differently online. It is

paradoxical, though, as to why they include links to the mainstream media texts that (re)present them with such ambivalence (in terms of gender) without accompanying these links with criticisms (they direct their users to “check them out” on these texts). This would be an interesting follow up study to attempt to understand the power that the mainstream and alternative media have on even those of us that find them problematic and that engage in projects that challenge or resist (re)presentations.

Second, like Yochim (2010), I acknowledge that skateboarding’s (and the Skirtboarders’ blog’s) flexibility in both discourse and practice (i.e., its engagement and correspondence with both dominant discursive constructions and images of resistance) situate it as a culture in which notions of resistance are fluid. Whether or not the nature of the sport has an impact on the Skirtboarders self-(re)presentations is debatable and worthy of further study. As previously mentioned, I did not set out to study skateboarding – the Skirtboarders’ blog was the most striking example I found of sportswomen “taking charge” and self-(re)presenting their sporting identities. Therefore, further studies examining other lifestyle sporting Internet sites produced by and for women should be completed, as should studies examining other, more traditional sporting Internet sites.

Finally, more studies looking at the processes of the technologies of the self are warranted given that emerging venues (such as the Internet) may be providing sportswomen with opportunities to be more reflective about their identities and subjectivities than in previous times. Future studies looking at the technologies of the self should attempt to understand what types of women have access to these processes (e.g., are they more accessible to educated women, white women, technologically savvy women etc?)

Reflections on this Journey

Perhaps I will have the opportunity to pursue one or more of the lines of inquiry noted above in the future. Should this happen, I hope that my experiences with this project will help make my job a little bit easier. After all, this project was a much harder journey than I anticipated. It forced me to consider how I negotiate my own constructions of gender through sport media texts (including mainstream, alternative and community media (Internet texts can be included in all categories) and lifestyle sport and non-lifestyle sports media) and it challenged me to think about this in relation to the ways in which the women involved with this work negotiate their gender constructions. This thesis thus really forced me to think about the ways in which I might reify or resist (what I am conscious of being) problematic ideas about women's bodies and how others do this too. I aimed, as Markula (2003) suggests, at engaging in my own critical self reflection throughout the exploration of Internet texts and within the researcher-participant relationship in order to avoid the imposition of my own brand of feminism. My findings demonstrate, though, how challenging it is to look for and try to explain resistance and empowerment without making a judgment about it from our own perspective. For example, I was hoping, in my study of the Skirtboarders blog, that I would discover that the women were like me, feminists seeking social justice. However, what the Skirtboarders and their blog users' challenge is not cut and dry. Perhaps if it were, it would be a much easier task for researchers like myself.

It was also evident to me during the analysis of blog comments and the interview process that the majority of my participants got great joy from their production of and interaction with blog materials and skateboarding culture more generally. Despite the fact that most interview participants do not tune in regularly to mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media (both because women are not (re)presented in the ways in which they

like and because they prefer to be skateboarding (doing) rather than consuming media), they generally expressed excitement about skateboarding events (such as the X-Games), about the community (including male skateboarders) and about the ways in which their own identities have been shaped by the sport and the culture. This challenged me to think about my own negativity directed at the discourses circulating through mainstream and alternative media and sports more generally. Since turning away from mainstream and alternative sports media (which used to be a big part of my life), I have developed contempt for sport (particularly male sport) and find that as a fan, I critique it more than I do enjoy it. Thus, before embarking on the project, I was content to think that I did not miss following sports, including lifestyle sports such as skateboarding. But I found myself getting excited when participants described their skateboarding experiences and their enjoyment of being part of a (male-dominated) skateboarding culture. This caused me to question what right I had to be critical of their constructions of a sport they so clearly loved, even if it is so hegemonically masculine.

Throughout the writing up of this project, I hope that I have been able to provide useful insights into the production of gendered identities through (re)presentation and the effects this process has on skateboarding women. Ideally, participants (in particular the Skirtboarders) will see themselves represented fairly throughout the pages of this project. I hope our interactions throughout the process (i.e., interviews, emails exchanges) has motivated them to ask questions and opened up discussions about their skateboarding identities, subjectivities and practices.

All that said, while I complete my journey on this PhD path, I am left with lingering questions about where I stand in all of this. Should I continue to turn away from mainstream

and alternative media coverage of both men's and women's sports (including skateboarding) because of my contempt for the ways in which sportswomen are (re)presented? Or should I turn back to this media coverage and advocate for "better" coverage, as Donnelly, MacNeill and Knight (2008) suggest, using the Skirtboarders' (re)presentations and extensive following as an example. Should I start my own blog featuring sportswomen in either one sport or a variety of sports and (re)present them in ways I deem positive? Should I start skateboarding, since it's something I always wanted to do, and perform the collective female skateboarding identity along with the Skirtboarders and their blog users? I find myself trying to figure out what it is about media (re)presentations of sportswomen that speaks to me on such a personal level, despite my critical reflections on them. Ultimately, I may never figure this out. At least this journey has allowed me to take a close look at an Internet text created by a group of (really cool!) sportswomen to uncover what I believe is an emerging trend – women taking charge of their own sport coverage by creating their own "net-a-narratives."

References

- Abulhawa, D. (2008). Female skateboarding: Re-writing gender. *Platform Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, 3(1), 56–72.
- Beal, B. & Wilson, C. (2004). ‘Chicks dig scars’: commercialisation and the transformation of skateboarders’ identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31–54). New York: Routledge.
- Booth, D. (2004). Surfing: from one (cultural) extreme to another. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 94–109). London and New York: Routledge.
- Cunningham, G.B., Sagas, M., Sartore, M.L., Amsden, M.L. & Schellhase, A. (2004) Gender representation in the NCAA News: Is the glass half full or half empty? *Sex Roles*, 50(11/12), 861–70.
- Donnelly, P., MacNeill, M. & Knight, G. (2008). *Enough, already! A comment on gender representation research*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Prison talk. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews* (pp. 37–54). New York: Pantheon.
- Hardin, M. (2009, Sept. 24). Does “new media” bring new attitudes towards women’s sports? *Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport Web site*. Retrieved at <http://tuckercenter.wordpress.com/2009/09/24/does-%E2%80%99new-media%E2%80%99-bring-new-attitudes-oward-women%E2%80%99s-sports/>

- Hardin, M. (2011). The power of a fragmented collective: Radical pluralist feminism and technologies of the self in the sports blogosphere. In A. Billings (Ed.), *Sports media: Transformation, integration, consumption* (pp. 40–60). New York and UK: Routledge.
- Heywood, L. (2008). Third-wave feminism, the global economy, and women's surfing: Sport as stealth feminism in girls' surf culture. In A. Harris (Ed.), *Next wave cultures: Feminism, subcultures, activism* (pp. 63–82). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jones, D. (2006). The representation of female athletes in online images of successive Olympic Games. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 12(1), 108–129.
- Markula, P. (2003). The technologies of the self: Sport, feminism, and Foucault. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20(2), 87–107.
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport and exercise*. London: Routledge.
- Millington, B., & Wilson, B. (2010). Media consumption and the contexts of physical culture: Methodological reflections on a “Third Generation” study of media audiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(1), 30–53.
- Pomerantz, S., Currie, D. H. and Kelly, D. M. (2004) Sk8er girls: skateboards, girlhood, and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27, 547–557.
- Pringle, R.G., & Hickey, C. (2010). Negotiating masculinities via the moral problematization of sport, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(2), 115–138.
- Shade, L. R. (2002). *Gender and community in the social construction of the Internet*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Shogan, D. (1999). *The making of high performance athletes: Discipline, diversity, and ethics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Thorpe, H. (2005). Jibbing the Gender Order: Females in the Snowboarding Culture. *Sport in Society*, 8(1), 76 — 100.
- Thorpe, H. (2008). Foucault, technologies of self, and the media: Discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32, 199–229.
- Worthington, N. (2005). Women's work on the World Wide Web: How a new medium represents and old problem. *Popular Communication*, 3(1), 43–60.
- Yochim, E. C. (2010). *Skate life: Re-imagining white masculinity*. Michigan, USA; University of Michigan.

Appendix A: Letter of Ethics Approval

File Number: H11-09-16

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 01/05/2010



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
 Service de subventions de recherche et d'éthologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

Ethics Approval Notice Health Sciences and Science REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Christine	Dallaire	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Supervisor
Stephanie	MacKay	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Student Researcher

File Number: H11-09-16

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: Sportswomen Net-a-Narratives

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
01/05/2010	01/04/2010	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:
 N/A

Appendix B: Consent Forms

CONSENT FORM (English version)

Title of the study: Sportswomen Net-a-Narratives

Student Investigator: Steph MacKay, PhD Student, Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society, School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa.

Research Supervisor: Christine Dallaire, Assistant Director, Undergraduate Studies & Student Affairs, School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa.

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Steph MacKay & Christine Dallaire, a study funded by a student bursary from the Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand how Internet texts provide an avenue for sportswomen to challenge dominant conceptions of femininity circulating through channels such as traditional mass media platforms (i.e., radio, newspapers, magazines, television).

Participation: My participation in this research study will consist of taking part in two interview sessions: (a) a semi-structured interview, conducted either in person or over the phone, lasting 45-90 minutes and (b) a follow-up interview lasting 15-30 minutes. The questions will focus on two key areas: (a) how I view media texts (including traditional mass, non-profit and Internet media texts) and the Internet media text that I created or engaged with and (b) my sporting experiences. For example, questions will include: (a) why did you start your blog/sns site/website/video? Or why did you engage with a sportswoman's blog/sns site/website/video? Were you reading others? Where did you get the idea? Why on the Internet? (b) in what sports do you participate? (c) how are women (re)presented in media texts such as magazines, newspapers, television shows, radio broadcasts? What do you think about this? and (d) how would you like women to be (re)presented in

media texts? Interviews will be scheduled at a date and time that is convenient for me. Face to face interviews will be conducted in the location of my choice such as my home or at the University of Ottawa office of Steph MacKay or Christine Dallaire.

Risks: My participation in this study will not subject me to any foreseeable risks.

Benefits: Benefits for participating in this project include: (a) partaking in a meaningful discussion about my understandings of how sportswomen are (re)presented in the mass media and having the opportunity to explain what prompted me to either create/produce or engage with an Internet text that challenges discourses of femininity put forth by mass media texts and (b) receiving a copy of my interview transcripts as well as a copy of the research report. Potential wider benefits include: (a) documenting the benefits for sportswomen of using the Internet to produce/create self-(re)presentative texts

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from Steph MacKay that the information I will share will remain confidential. I understand that the contents of interviews will be used to identify themes during analysis and to highlight issues raised by interviewees. I also understand that quotes drawn from my interview transcripts may be communicated (in the final dissertation, scholarly presentations, and paper submissions to scientific journals) to illustrate a theme identified in the analysis. My confidentiality will be protected through the following means: (a) only Steph MacKay (Student Investigator) and Christine Dallaire (Steph's Research Supervisor) will have access to the interview audio-recordings and transcripts; (b) data analysis, interview audio recordings and interview transcripts will be kept secure throughout the research study (see conservation of data section below).

Anonymity: I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed if I have used my name or posted a photo or other identifying information about myself on the Internet. If I have not posted any identifying information about myself online, upon my request, I will be identified as “Producer1 of a blog/sns site/website/video” or “Respondent2 of a blog/sns site/website/video” rather than by name. My transcript will be provided to me for review so that I may ensure the accuracy of the details, if I wish. At this time, I will be able to make any modifications deemed necessary. Information and quotes from my interviews will be used, along with other interviews and information from Internet texts, in the final dissertation, scholarly presentations, and paper submissions to scientific journals.

Conservation of data: All data collected including emails, interview digital recordings, transcripts, notes and data analysis will be secured by the Research Supervisor in a locked filing cabinet in the University of Ottawa's Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society office which requires an entrance access code. Research materials will be kept for a period of 10 years after which, the data will be destroyed. Only Steph MacKay and Christine Dallaire

will have access to the information. All computerized information will be password protected on the Faculty of Health Sciences server.

Voluntary Participation: I fully understand that I am not obligated to participate in this study and, if I opt to participate, that I am free to refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw at any point without suffering any negative consequences. If I chose to withdraw from the study, I may decide at that point whether or not the researcher may use the data collected prior to withdrawal from the study. Should I decide that I do not wish my data to be used in the study, I understand that it will be destroyed.

With permission, Steph MacKay will digitally record the interview or, if otherwise indicated, will conduct the interview by email.

Acceptance:

I (please print), _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Steph MacKay, PhD Student, Research Centre for Sport in Canadian Society, School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa which research is under the supervision of Christine Dallaire. I fully understand that by consenting to participate in the study my rights to withdraw at any point are not being affected.

I wish to get a copy of my interview transcript yes_____ no_____

I wish to get a copy of the research report yes_____ no_____

I wish to remain anonymous (this option is only available to those who have not included any identifying information on the Internet blog/sns site/website/video that they created and/or commented on) yes_____

no_____

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact Steph, Student Investigator or Christine, Research Supervisor. Ethical concerns regarding my participation in the study should be directed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa.

Two copies of the consent form have been provided, one of which is mine to keep and the other is to be given to Steph MacKay.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Student investigator's signature:

Date:

Appendix C: Interview Guides

Interview Guide – Skirtboarders (English Version)

1. Introduction, overview of purpose of research, go through consent form with conversational partner, (answer any questions conversational partner has), sign consent form or get verbal consent (for phone interviews)

ROLE SPORT PLAYS IN YOUR LIFE (to establish that these women are “sportswomen”)

2. Name and age
3. In what sports do you participate (including skateboarding)?
 - i. Before?
 - ii. Now?
 - iii. Why did you switch sports? (if switched sports)
4. For each sport participated in:
 - iv. At what level do you participate?
 - v. How often do you participate?
 - vi. Who do you participate with?
5. How big of a role would you say that sports play in your life?
 - vii. E.g., when you meet someone for the first time, do you tell them about your skateboarding
 - viii. Would you call yourself a skater (is skateboarding a large part of who you are, your identity)? What other parts of your identity are the most important to you (e.g., partner, daughter, dog mother, student, hockey player, environmentalist)?

SKIRTBOARDERS...IN THE BEGINNING

6. Describe skateboarding to me. Describe the scene in your hometown (Montreal).
 - i. If they come to it, describe the female skate scene to me (In 2007 (July) at the Skatefest de LaSalle, there was more \$ for the best trick “filles”. Why? Does this happen often?)
7. How did the Skirtboarders get started?
8. How did you become a Skirtboarder?

9. How hard is it to get into the Skirtboarders crew (i.e. who can become a member)?
 1. Age, level of competency, do they have to be able to travel on tours?
10. What are the main goals of the Skirtboarders as a crew? What are your main goals as a Skirtboarder?

FEMINISM AND SKIRTBOARDERS

11. Do you call yourself a feminist? The Skirboarders as a group? Why/why not? (See Pomerantz et al. (2004)).
 - i. E.g, Interview with Margaux (Crux) (Grande, blonde, bien tournée et dotée des magnifiques pairs des yeux bleus...) and Margaux says that the Skirtboarders is not a deliberate feminist act
 - ii. Mathilde's comment about "why not call us skirtboarders?" (<http://skateboardingmagazine.com/blog/2010/05/12/skater-chicks-do-not-call-them-skirtboarders/>)
12. What does the name Skirtboarders represent to you?
13. Do you like being called girls, chicks, broads, poulettes, or women? Why?
14. What do you think about all girl skate/snow/surf teams?
15. How do you act off a skateboard? Would you say you dress in a feminine way? Would you say you act feminine? (E.g., Mathilde and earrings)

YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH MEDIA/SPORTS MEDIA

16. Do you read any sports-related magazines? Sections of newspapers?
 - i. Which ones?
 - ii. What do you think about these texts?
17. Do you listen to sports on the radio?
 - i. Which ones?
 - ii. What do you think about these texts?
18. Do you watch any sports on television?
 - i. Which ones?
 - ii. What do you think about these texts?

19. Do you visit any Internet sites related to sports?
 - i. Which ones?
 - ii. What do you think about these texts?
 - iii. Competence level with computers
 - iv. What other activities do you participate in online (IM, web pages, SN, gaming, etc.)
20. How are women typically (re)presented in the texts you identified?
 - i. How do you feel about this?
21. How would you like women to be (re)presented in these texts?
 - i. Visually?
 - ii. Descriptions?
22. What future do you see for the (re)presentation of women in these texts? What about Internet texts?

SKIRTBOARDERS BLOG

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE SKIRTBOARDERS BLOG

23. How did the Skirtboarders blog get started?
 - i. Were you reading others?
 - ii. Where did you get the idea?
 - iii. Why on the Internet?
24. Have you received feedback from others who have accessed the blog?
 - i. What kind of feedback?
 - ii. What do you think about this feedback?
 - iii. Globally – who is reading the blog
 - iv. Do you think young girls and other women who are interested in skateboarding are accessing it? Or is it mainly friends and family of the Skirtboarders? (e.g., I noticed that you have over 6000 friends on Facebook. How many of these people do you think actually follow your blog? How many are genuinely interested in the Skirtboarders? In the skateboarding you do?)
25. How big of a role does the Skirtboarders site play in your life?
 - i. How often do you log in? Daily? Weekly?
 - ii. How often do you contribute?

- iii. Who do you invite to access/contribute to/watch the Skirtboarders site?
- 26. Does the blog influence your offline relationships
- 27. Why do the Skirtboarders cross post stories, items on Facebook, Twitter, etc.?

SKIRTBOARDERS AND THE BLOG AND IN OTHER MEDIA

- 28. How do you think the Skirtboarders are written/talked about in the blog?
- 29. Was this a conscious choice? Did Mathilde or anyone else say – let's be sure represent ourselves this way on our blog?
- 30. What would you say if I suggested that the Skirtboarders are a group of women that are polygendered (i.e., a world through which the pictures of femininity and masculinity blur, fade, and metamorphose into a new way of accepting ourselves: polygendered)
- 31. What do you think about how the Skirtboarders are represented in mainstream media coverage? Or by others. Is it any different that on the Skirtboarders website
- 32. Let's talk about the Go Bananas photo shoot (June, 2009). Did you like it? Why portray yourselves like that (make-up, out of action, etc.)?
- 33. Ask about the art piece of Annie Guglia done by Mariano (2009-06-26). It was quite different than the photos he was given. Maybe interview Mariano?
- 34. Do you think that the Skirtboarders have gotten all the mainstream media coverage because of the blog?
- 35. What else would you like to say about the blog?

SKIRTBOARDERS BLOG AS PROMOTER OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

- 36. How important was the blog to the development of the Skirtboarders crew?
- 37. For connecting with other all female crews around the world?
 - i. Julie found No Limit on the Internet 2009-06-30 post

38. How important is it for encouraging women to take up skateboarding?
39. What role do you think the Internet will play in encouraging women to participate in other sports in the future?
40. Has this blog changed your life? Do you think it has changes other people's lives?

QUESTIONS OF LANGUAGE

1. Why is your name (Skirtboarders) in English, title of all blog posts in English when most of you speak French? Why translate everything?

Interview Guide – Users of the Skirtboarders Blog

1. Introduction, overview of purpose of research, go through consent form with conversational partner, (answer any questions conversational partner has), sign consent form or get verbal consent (for phone interviews)

ROLE SPORT PLAYS IN YOUR LIFE (to establish that these women are “sportswomen”)

2. Name and age and occupation
3. In what sports do you participate (including skateboarding)?
 - ix. Before?
 - x. Now?
 - xi. Why did you switch sports? (if switched sports)
4. For each sport participated in:
 - xii. At what level do you participate? (e.g., do you have any sponsorships now?)
 - xiii. How often do you participate?
 - xiv. Who do you participate with?
5. How big of a role would you say that sports play in your life?
 - xv. E.g., when you meet someone for the first time, do you tell them about your skateboarding
 - xvi. Would you call yourself a skater (is skateboarding a large part of who you are, your identity)? What other parts of your identity are the most important to you (e.g., partner, daughter, dog mother, student, hockey player, environmentalist) ?

SKIRTBOARDERS...IN THE BEGINNING

- i. Describe skateboarding to me. Describe the scene in your hometown
 - ii. If they come to it, describe the female skate scene to me
6. Who are the Skirtboarders?
7. How do you think the Skirtboarders got started?
8. Would you consider yourself a Skirtboarder?

9. What are the main goals of the Skirtboarders as a crew? What are your main goals?
10. Are you part of any skateboarding crews in your hometown? Online?

FEMINISM AND SKIRTBOARDERS

11. Do you call yourself a feminist? The Skirboarders as a group? Why/why not? (See Pomerantz et al. (2004)).
12. What does the name Skirtboarders represent to you?
13. Do you like being called girls, chicks, broads, poulettes, or women? Why?
14. What do you think about all girl skate/snow/surf teams?
15. How do you act off a skateboard? Would you say you dress in a feminine way? Would you say you act feminine? (E.g., Mathilde and earrings)

YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH MEDIA/SPORTS MEDIA

16. Do you read any sports-related magazines? Sections of newspapers?
 - iii. Which ones?
 - iv. What do you think about these texts?
17. Do you listen to sports on the radio?
 - iii. Which ones?
 - iv. What do you think about these texts?
18. Do you watch any sports on television?
 - iii. Which ones?
 - iv. What do you think about these texts?
19. Do you visit any Internet sites related to sports?
 - v. Which ones?
 - vi. What do you think about these texts?
 - vii. Competence level with computers
 - viii. What other activities do you participate in online (IM, web pages, SN, gaming, etc.)
20. How are women typically (re)presented in the texts you identified?
 - ii. How do you feel about this?

21. How would you like women to be (re)presented in these texts?
 - iii. Visually?
 - iv. Descriptions?
22. What future do you see for the (re)presentation of women in these texts? What about Internet texts?

SKIRTBOARDERS BLOG

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE SKIRTBOARDERS BLOG

23. Why did you start accessing the Skirtboarders blog?
 - iv. Were you reading others?
 - v. Where did you get the idea?
 - vi. Why on the Internet?
24. Was it the first female skate site you visited? Which other sites do you visit regularly? What do like about these sites?
25. Do you give the Skirtboarders feedback about the blog?
 - v. What kind of feedback?
 - vi. Do you think young girls and other women who are interested in skateboarding are accessing it? Or is it mainly friends and family of the Skirtboarders? (e.g., I noticed that you have over 6000 friends on Facebook. How many of these people do you think actually follow your blog? How many are genuinely interested in the Skirtboarders? In the skateboarding you do?)
26. How big of a role does the Skirtboarders site play in your life?
 - iv. How often do you log in? Daily? Weekly?
 - v. How often do you contribute?
 - vi. Who do you invite to access/contribute to/watch the Skirtboarders site?
27. How big a role do other sites play in your life?
28. Does the blog influence your offline relationships?
29. Do you access the Skirtboarders information through Facebook, Twitter, etc?

SKIRTBOARDERS AND THE BLOG AND IN OTHER MEDIA

30. How do you think the Skirtboarders are written/talked about in the blog? Is it different than other media we talked about earlier?
31. Do you think this a conscious choice?
32. Do you like the way the Skirtboarders represent themselves on their blog? What suggestions would you have for them if you wanted them to change the way the represent themselves?
33. How you you like to be represented as a skateboarder?
34. What would you say if I suggested that the Skirtboarders are a group of women that are polygendered (i.e., a world through which the pictures of femininity and masculinity blur, fade, and metamorphose into a new way of accepting ourselves: polygendered)
35. What do you think about how the Skirtboarders are represented in mainstream media coverage? Or by others. Is it any different than on the Skirtboarders website?
36. Do you think that the Skirtboarders have gotten all the mainstream media coverage because of the blog?

SKIRTBOARDERS BLOG AS PROMOTER OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

37. How important was the blog and the Internet, for connecting with other all female crews around the world?
38. How important is it for encouraging women to take up skateboarding?
39. What impact do you think the blog and other posts will have on the female skateboarding scene in the future?
40. What role do you think the Internet will play in encouraging women to participate in other sports in the future?
41. Has this blog changed your life? Do you think it has changes other people's lives?
42. Bilingualism of blog – what do you think about it?
43. What else would you like to say about the blog and or the Internet?

Appendix D: List of Interview Participants

Name	Age	Employment	Resides	Skirtboarder Y/N	Role in Skirtboarders
Mathilde Pigeon	30	Chef	Montreal	Y	co-founder of blog and crew, major contributor to blog, directed <i>Skirtboarders, Le Film</i> , manages Skirtboarders media requests and emails and is the “gatekeeper” of the crew
Amy Mattes	30	Did not identify	Vancouver	Y	co-founder of blog and crew, occasionally writes blog posts and comments on posts by others
Julie	31	Acupuncture, Chef	Ottawa/ Montreal	Y	co-founder of crew writes blog posts and comments occasionally on posts by others
Annie Guglia	19	Undergrad Student	Montreal	Y	took on Mathilde’s role as the primary blog poster for a short period in 2010-2011, records and edits videos and takes photos, has increased the Skirtboarders presence on Facebook and Twitter since taking the reins for short period in late 2010, early 2011
Louise Henault-Ethier	30	PhD Student	Montreal	Y	co-founder of crew takes photographs and films videos for the blog, posts and occasionally comments on posts by others
Anne-Sophie	23	Undergrad Student	Montreal	Y	co-founder of crew occasionally writes posts and comments regularly on posts by others, is one of the more well-known Skirtboarders because she has been a prominent figure in Quebec skateboarding media and in the Quebec skateboarding

					and snowboarding scene since 2005
Eloise	21	Did not identify	Montreal	Y	rarely writes blog posts or takes photographs but occasionally comments on the site, appears in photos as videos often
Roux Centea	21	Did not identify	Montreal	Y	rarely writes blog posts but comments often and is regularly featured in the posts, appears in photos as videos often
Dahn Truong	20	Undergrad Student	Vietnam	N	visits blog daily, communicated with Skirtboarders regularly, occasionally comments on blog posts
Gulia Marcoux	18	Undergrad Student, skateboard instructor	Ottawa	N	visits blog monthly, does not communicate with Skirtboarders, does not comment on blog posts
Vicky Cheung	18	Undergrad Student	Ottawa	N	used to visit blog monthly (when she was still involved with skateboarding), does not communicate with Skirtboarders, does not comment on blog posts
Mimi Galipeau	27	Master's Student	Ottawa	N	visited blog monthly (when she was still involved with skateboarding), used to communicate with Skirtboarders regularly and was friends with some Skirtboarder crew members, does not comment on blog posts

Appendix E: List of Discursive Strategies and Discursive Constructions

<u>Discursive Strategy</u>	<u>Explanation</u>	<u>A Priori or Emergent</u>
Gender marking	Identifying the gender of female athletes, teams and sports without indicating gender for male athletes, teams and sports.	A priori
Establishing heterosexuality	Describing female (and male) athletes as objects of heterosexual attraction and referring to female athletes as ‘girlfriends’ of men.	A priori
Emphasizing female stereotypes	Mentioning physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours stereotypically associated to femininity.	A priori
Infantilizing women	Describing female athletes as ‘girls,’ or using their first name rather than their last name or whole name without referring to similar-age male athletes as ‘boys’ or using their first name.	A priori
Non-sports related aspects	Mentioning the athletes’ family relationships and personal life.	A priori
Comparisons with men’s performance	Comparing female athlete success or losses to male athlete success or losses.	A priori
Ambivalence	Juxtaposition of positive descriptions and images with others that undermine	A priori

	or trivialize women's efforts and successes.	
Polygenderism	A mix of those characteristics, interests, behaviours and appearances that have been traditionally used to sort females and males into exclusive categories called feminine and masculine	A priori

<u>Discursive Construction(s)</u>	<u>Explanation</u>	<u>A Priori or Emergent</u>
Athletic	Referencing women participating in sport	Emergent
Homosexuality	Describing female (and male) athletes as objects of homosexual attraction and referring to skateboarders as 'girlfriends' of women	Emergent
Tattoos, jewelry, beauty, fashion, ponytails	References challenging the physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours stereotypically associated to femininity.	Emergent
Gender play	Challenging references to physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours stereotypically associated to femininity.	Emergent
Gender neutral	Referencing physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours not associated to masculinity or to	Emergent

	femininity	
Motherhood	Challenging references to physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours stereotypically associated to motherhood	Emergent
Injury	References to injuries acquired during skateboarding	Emergent
Skirtboarders' promoting others	Promotion of other female skateboarders	Emergent
Others promoting Skirtboarders	Non-Skirtboarder skateboarders, mainstream and alternative media promoting Skirtboarders	Emergent
Female skate scene	Descriptions of female skateboarding culture	Emergent
Female crews in other countries	Description of female skateboarding culture in other countries	Emergent
Skirtboarders as role models	Descriptions of instances when Skirtboarders acted as role models for other girls and women in skateboarding culture and sport culture more generally	Emergent
Skirtboarders in the media	Explanation and re-(re)presentation of mainstream and alternative media coverage of Skirtboarders	Emergent