Masculinities Journal of Culture and Society
Autumn, 2020, 14, 61-86 | Research Article

Resistant formations of alternative femininities within skateboarding – an exploration of gender at a time of feminist transformation

Yuliya Kulynych*
University of Manchester

Received: 29.12.2019 | Accepted: 24.09..2020

Abstract: Based on semi-structured interviews with 8 female skateboarders, this paper offers an in-depth analysis into the physical and aesthetic practices of alternative femininities amongst women in a skateboarding community. Skateboarding sites are prominent carriers of alternative femininity because they allow women to reclaim traditionally masculine traits such as physical strength, resilience and assertiveness (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2013) and in turn experiment with their gender performance by integrating these elements of masculinity within their gender identities. As a result, female skateboarders actively challenge sexist 'assumptions as to what their bodies can do' (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2015: 10) and confront misleading stereotypes of physical fragility and mental weakness.This research will therefore provide an informative account into the ways in which skateboarding practices facilitate collective gender performance and with it resistance against male hegemony amongst women.

Keywords: Female masculinities, gender performance, resistance, feminism, skateboarding

* PhD student, Department of Geography. e-mail: yuliya.kulynych@hotmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4044-7582

Introduction

This paper will examine the nuanced construction of alternative femininities within the gender normative structure of skateboarding. In particular it will explore formations of resistant femininities, which oppose the dominant hyper-feminine discourse and inevitably disrupt hegemonic gender relations (which symbolically confine women within the position of inferiority). This inquiry is particularly based on Connell's (1987) theory of gender hegemony, which suggests that emphasised femininity is organised "as an adaptation to men's power" (Schippers, 2007, p. 3), as it is rendered through expressive characteristics; such as being 'nurturing, sensitive, demure or sweet' (Windsor, 2015, p. 8). Connell (1987) argues that these characteristics simply do not hold the capacity to adequately compete with traditional masculine expressions of power; such as self-assertion, physical strength and emotional stoicism (Burn et al, 1996, p. 2). Such inability to compete ultimately situates the hyper-feminine gender expression/identity within a position of subordination. Therefore, in this work I have put Connell's (1987) theory into practice through a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced ways in which skater girls opposed certain elements of hyper-femininity and in turn creatively integrated elements of masculinity within their gender identities. Through this gender performance they resisted the exclusive male ownership of masculinity — by suggesting that masculinity is a mere collection of cultural practices, that can be taken up and enacted collectively by various gender groups (Schippers, 2007). The participants therefore viewed their femininity as a discourse that could be actively redefined, in relation to conventional masculine and feminine cultural expressions. Thus, while this project re-affirms and evidences theories on gender by Connell (1987), Schippers (2007) and Halberstam (1998) that I use to support this project — it also brings a new element which focuses on new forms of feminist resistance as utilised by the participants. Consequently, this work supports and evidences the argument made by some feminist scholars who argue for feminist resistance to have taken more of a decentralised and localised

form amongst young women today, in comparison to the former collectivist, second wave movement (Kelly et al, 2004; Harris, 2003). This work therefore contributes to sociological understandings of the changing mode of feminist resistance within everyday, local practices against the popular claim that young women have betrayed the legacy of political action and "have no politics to speak of at all'' (Kelly et al, 2004, p. 3). Consequently, the originality of this paper lies in its examination of the ways in which oppositional skater femininities are reshaping contemporary feminist ideologies with their complex forms of gender performance and views on gender inequality. Therefore, by putting Connell's (1987) theory into practice this work has the potential to refine sociological interpretations of hegemonic gender relations and the ways in which those could be challenged through resistant, feminist action.

Sport as a site of male hegemony

Most academic literature on sport studies has widely conveyed that women have historically been excluded from participation in mainstream sports (Beal, 1992), as a way of restricting their bodies from strong and powerful feminine expressions. Beal and Wheaton (2003) write that in the 19th Century women were advised by medical doctors to avoid physical exercise, because it was believed to "damage their reproductive system and contribute to 'mannishness" (Beal and Wheaton, 2003, p. 50). Such institutional suppression of masculine behaviour served to confine women within weak and docile modes of hyper-femininity, as a way of denying them access to masculine expressions — such as physical strength, competitiveness and bravery. Hyper-femininity is therefore enacted through the embodiment of 'expressive' characteristics and has historically been idealised in terms of "delicacy, dreaminess and sexual passivity'' (Conboy et al, 1997, p. 94). Such feminine discourse has been particularly reinforced by the post-feminist promise of sexual attractiveness as a determinant of a successful experience of womanhood; which can only be attained

through the purchase of goods that guarantee sexual appeal — as an ideal norm of femininity (Velding, 2014).[1] Thus, such such form of femininity positions itself as polar opposite to maleness and therefore preserves masculinity's hegemony and exclusivity within the male body. Therefore, the institutionalisation of these practices presents femininity as an ideological construction, which is structurally and symbolically confined to a narrow version of hetero-normative expressions — that are essentially constructed to compliment masculinity.

As a result, Beaver (2016) in his comprehensive work on femininities within sport has suggested that sportswomen are often required to display normative, hyper-feminine appearance; such as wearing make-up or pink uniforms, as a way of proving that they are 'still essentially feminine', despite a contradictory performance of masculine behaviour (Beaver, 2016, p. 3). Jan Felshin (Beaver, 2016, p. 3) deems this strategy as 'apologetic', where sportswomen apologise for their controversial embodiments of masculinity, which deviate from their social roles as women. Sportswomen are therefore more readily recognised as athletes, when they exhibit traditionally feminine characteristics, such as "grace, beauty, charm and balance'' (Beal, 1992: 172), often through the participation in feminised sports like gymnastics or figure skating.

Furthermore, Vikki Krane (2001) argues that such display of heteronormative, hyper-feminine appearance often results in sportswomen being "sexualised, trivialised and devalued'' (Krane, 2001, p. 9) by their male counterparts. Indeed, sportswomen are often perceived in sexual terms, which inevitably discredit their athletic ability and reduce them to objects of male desire (Beaver, 2016). According, to Connell (1987) this is because hyper-femininity is "organised as an

[1] Post-feminist, feminine ideal is defined by a slim, beautiful and sexually available female who seeks empowerment from her hyper-feminine appearance (Gill, 2007). The post-feminist movement/theory argues that women can now freely reclaim their hyper-feminine identities as powerful in opposition to the second wave feminist thinking which deemed hyper-femininity as oppressive and in line with heterosexist standards.

adaptation to men's power", and is "oriented to accommodate the interests and desires of men'' (Connell, 1987, p. 183). Connell's (1987) theory therefore poses an important critique on the post-feminist theory, which presents hyper-femininity as an empowering and liberatory identity (Gill, 2007). Connell asserts that such hyper-feminine gender identity/expression is "not in much of a state to establish hegemony'' (Connell, 1987, p. 188) over masculinities, because it is ideologically constructed to complement male hegemony.

Consequently, such feminine requirement in mainstream sport, enables men to position themselves as polar opposite to femininity, and therefore assert expressions of masculinity as natural preserves of the male body. Thus, by rendering physical prowess and competitiveness as natural and fixed possessions of masculinity, sport has traditionally acted as a site in which men exercised their presumably biological superiority over women. Halberstam (1998) argues that this strategy has enabled men to symbolically distance their natural maleness from dominant notions of femininity and therefore "stand unchallenged as the ultimate bearer of power" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 5). Consequently, Atencio et al (2009) argue that such relentless exclusion of women from aggressive sports, has enabled sportsmen to conjure their own masculine habitus within the field. Particularly, by constructing 'idealised practices and taste distinctions' as exclusive markers of symbolic capital, in opposition to women's habitus, which was deemed as "lacking in skill'' (Atencio et al, 2009, p. 2) and cultural power. This brief discussion of the existing academic literature within the field suggests that the positioning of women as outsiders has enabled men to exert control over women's bodies, and inevitably dictate legitimate ways in which they could experience themselves within sport.

Sport subcultures as cultural sites of resistance

Within existing sociological literature sport subcultures are often described as cultural sites of resistance in which "normative relations are contested and struggled over" (Beal, 1992, p. 48). They can be

contended as progressive spaces, which accommodate "alternative ways of thinking and being that challenge the dominant culture'' (Beaver, 2012, p. 6). Wearing (1998) suggests that such leisure sites provide women with spaces for "rewriting the script" (Wearing, 1998, p. 147) of normative femininity, beyond the dominant, hyper-feminine discourse. Therefore, alternative forms of sport may act as symbolic platforms, which enable women to enact non-normative, feminine practices and actively expand the concept of femininity "beyond the homogenised images found in popular culture" (Beaver, 2016, p. 19).

Skateboarding could therefore be considered as an alternative sport, due to its fluid structure and absence of rules. It is normally practiced on an underground, informal scale at public skateparks or street corners and is not considered as an official, organised sport (Borden, 2001). Alana Young (2006) writes that skateboarding has traditionally been regarded as a male practice, due to its aggressive nature and risk of severe injuries, which are aligned with mainstream masculinities (Young, 2006, p, 12). Also, public skateparks and street corners have often been regarded as unsafe territories for young women (Atencio, 2009, p. 164) and have traditionally been considered as male domains of power. Therefore, women have often been excluded from street spaces, which have normally symbolised danger and sexual harassment (Atencio, 2009). However, Natalie Porter (2003) argues that in the last few years women have "taken it upon themselves to create their own visibility'' (Porter, 2005, p. 3) within skateboarding, by producing 'all girl skater competitions', blog posts, zines and social media accounts. Such recent emergence of female skaters has validated women's position within the sport and inevitably posed a threat on male monopoly and domination (Porter, 2005, p. 76). Consequently, according to Currie et al (2009) by occupying street skateparks from the subject position of a skater, girls are beginning to actively challenge male dominance of social space and reconfigure street skateparks as legitimate sites of femininity.

Currie et al (2009, p. 8) further argue that skateboarding allows women to define themselves as alternative to the dominant form of hyper-femininity, through their unapologetic enactment of traditionally masculine traits of physical strength, risk taking and bravery. According to Schippers (2007) it can be viewed as an empowering leisure space within which women actively reclaim conventionally masculine traits, and directly attempt to ''challenge the idea that women and men's bodies are significantly different enough to legitimate gender inequality'' (Krane, 2001, p. 10). Thus, through their physical performance of traditionally masculine characteristics within a male dominated space, skater girls not only pose a critique on the naturalisation of masculinity but also attempt to conjure their own habitus by accessing power that was normally withheld from them in street spaces (Atencio, 2009, p. 14). Furthermore, by asserting their presence in public spaces, skater girls challenge the idea that "the street remains in some ways a taboo for women'' (Porter, 2005, p. 32) and inevitably reconstruct traditional gender roles by occupying the urban landscape via a "boisterous display of physical activity'' (Antecio, 2009, p. 103)

Becky Beal (1992) argues that skateboarding does not promote conventional hyper feminine practices of the "immaculately groomed, petite china doll" (Beal, 1992, p. 177). Thus, skateboarding practices allow girls to re-code conventionally masculine expressions as feminine and therefore re-construct essentialist forms of femininity and masculinity beyond the gender binary. Consequently, the existing literature within this field suggests that skateboarding often accommodates oppositional behaviour which disrupts the hegemonic relationship of subordination and dominance (between skater girls and their male counterparts), and ultimately undermines oppressive gender relations not only within the sport, but also the wider patriarchal gender order (Beal, 1992, p. 177).

Methodology

Through a number of internet searches, I came across a website to a female only skate night in a city in the southeast of England, which was the only running female exclusive night within the city. I contacted them via their Facebook page and arranged to interview them at an indoor skate park in which the night took place every Thursday. Out of the 10 girls present, I interviewed 8, that agreed to speak to me. They were between 16 and 18 years of age.

I used semi-structured interviews as a research technique, which I also audio taped. This method was particularly appealing to me, as I was committed to allow my participants to enhance this project with their own perceptions and views. And, although I had some pre-planned questions and topics that I wanted to discuss, the course of the interviews took more of a fluid form, where girls had the agency to formulate their own "conceptions of their lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 11) and therefore the freedom to construct authentic narratives. Thus, the conversations which emerged were around themes such as gender, in particular what it is like to be a female skateboarder and to occupy public skateparks from such a position. As well as, embodiment, sexuality and femininity in relation to their skateboarding practices. My willingness to allow girls to lead our conversations reflected my genuine interest in what they had to say — which enabled them to feel comfortable in my presence, as the researcher. Consequently, semi structured interviews provided meaningful, individual responses that could not have been obtained through technical, quantitative techniques (Silverman, 1943).

I began my data analysis by closely transcribing the recorded responses from my participants. This was an interpretative process in itself, where I systematically traced primary connections and emerging themes from the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). I had a lot of complex and overlapping narratives, which at first was highly overwhelming. But I then began to unpack those by detecting emerging categories and codes within each interview, and later proceeded to establish overarching

themes across the whole data set (Barbour, 2007). Also, because I adopted an exploratory objective of gender, I allowed "knowledge to evolve through dialogue" (Kvale, 1996, p. 55) — which I then compiled into narratives or stories, that my participants collectively told. I then proceeded on to analysing the way such narratives communicated with broader sociological concepts, by creatively engaging with existing literature and theoretical frameworks. My final step of data analysis consisted of locating my findings within broader social and political contexts, as a way of interpreting the way in which my emerging theory further illuminated those debates (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 227).

In regards to ethical issues, I made sure that my participants were 16 years old or above, and so were able to consent independently without a legal guardian. Before conducting each interview I provided my participants with an Information Sheet and gave them adequate time to read it before asking them to sign the consent form. I also elaborated on the aims of my research and explained why they seemed like suitable candidates; as well as answered any of their questions before proceeding with the interview process. I emphasised that at any given point they had the right to withdraw, stop the interview or change the topic in discussion. I also assured them that the recordings of the interviews would be destroyed after they were transcribed and that their identities would remain completely confidential throughout the final write up. I remained mindful of the questions I asked my participants, and made sure that they were not too personal or emotionally difficult to answer. Thus, this study was low risk and did not induce any psychological stress or anxiety, beyond the risks encountered in the everyday life of the participants (Miller et al, 2012).

Fetishism of the feminine

Most girls reported that their gender and sexual expressions were subjected to relentless policing and governance by the male skaters. Their appearance was routinely critiqued and insulted, particularly when it deviated from the hyper-feminine, heteronormative discourse.

Girls that displayed masculine behaviour or aesthetic attributes, such as wearing baggy clothes or having short hair said that they were "penalised for looking too boyish and accused of being gay''. One of the girls argued that this was because "male skaters like to fetishise feminine girls, because that's what they like in a sexual and romantic way". Therefore, performances of masculine expressions were de-valued and stigmatised as 'excessive' or 'butch' (Windsor, 2015) because they appeared as threatening to the compulsory model of heterosexuality, which serves to facilitate men's sexual preferences. Connell (1987) argues that the hyper-feminine identity is organised "as an adaptation to men's power", and is "oriented to accommodate the interests and desires of men" (Connell, 1987, p. 183). Such required mode of femininity within skateboarding is "not in much of a state to establish hegemony" (Connell, 1987, p. 188) over masculinities or other femininities, because it does not possess enough cultural power to assert patriarchal dominance or hierarchy over other gender identities. This is arguably because hyper-femininity is rendered through 'expressive' characteristics such as being caring and accommodating, which are also communicated through culturally devalued expressions of compliance, weakness and passivity. Indeed, one of the girls supported this by stating:

> whenever I go to street skateparks there's this thing where if you are in a guy's way they like expect you to move, because of this whole thing that girls are supposed to be polite and caring and so they'll like clear the way for you because they're meant to be nice.

According to Connell (1987) such performance of 'expressive' characteristics by women does not hold the capacity to adequately challenge and compete with masculine expressions of power; such as 'self-assertion, physical strength and emotional stoicism' (Burn et al, 1996: 2). Consequently, the suppression of masculine embodiment by female bodies within skateboarding, acts as a symbolic attempt to confine female skaters to a narrow version of compliant, hetero-normative femininity; as a way of positioning skater masculinity as "the ultimate bearer of power" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 5). This inevitably

creates a "hierarchical and complementary relationship" (Schippers, 2007, p. 6) between the dominant, hegemonic masculinity and the subordinate feminine identity.

Such hyper-feminine requirement within skateboarding is also reflective of a post-feminist subjectivity, which presents sexual attractiveness as a source of empowerment and determinant of a successful experience of womanhood (Velding, 2014). For example, one of the participants stated:

> male skaters like girls that are typically feminine, like even in skater competitions I've seen some guys give higher marks to the girls that are like traditionally feminine, so they'll like be dressed in something a bit more provocative or something that shows off their body a bit more.

Consequently, the regulations and demands directed at skater femininities, mirror gender policing practices in affinity with forms of post-feminist rationalities. Gill (2007) argues that young femininities are often surveilled in relation to these incentives, which require girls to present themselves as hetero-feminine, sexual subjects. However, another participant highlighted a significant contradiction, by stating:

> even when girls do wear something feminine, something that reveals their bodies, like a skirt and a vest top, boys would then look at them in a sexual way, and accuse them of trying to get attention.

This quote reveals a sexist double standard, fostered by post-feminist rationalities, that require girls to "look and constantly be up for it" (Phipps and Young, 2010, p. 10) yet have to conceal their own sexual desires. Therefore, the requirement to perform sexual prowess through a hyper-feminine appearance positions "sexual agency into a form of regulation itself" (Phipps and Young, 2010, p. 10), rather than a source of empowerment. Skater girls' inability to independently exploit a hyper-feminine image in order to serve their own agendas, such as to 'seek male attention', presents a certain difficulty to develop a positive sense

of themselves as autonomous, sexual beings. And to further echo Connell (1987), this is because emphasised femininity is only supposed to be "oriented to accommodate the interests and desires of men" (Schippers, 2007, p. 3). And so by positioning themselves as sexual subjects, rather than objects of male desire, skater girls would establish an unwanted hegemony as sexual choosers and disrupt misogynistic gender relations within the sport.

This discussion reflects a paradoxical nature of post-feminist sensibilities, which do not really mean that girls could construct themselves as autonomous beings in charge of their own sexuality, but rather have to appear as powerful only in ways that accommodate the male gaze. MacRobbie (2012) points out that this post-feminist masquerade underlies ''female vulnerability'' and serves to ''re-assure male structures of power'' (Scharff, 2012, p. 34). This is particularly performed through hyper-femininity locating itself as polar opposite to maleness and therefore contributing to the preserve of masculinity's hegemony and exclusivity within the male body. This is exemplified by the sexualisation of hyper-feminine gender expressions by male skaters; which enables them to trivialise girls' athletic abilities and position their sporting skills as exclusive attributes of the masculine identity (Beaver, 2016, p. 4).

McRobbie (2012) further suggests that ''femininity always appears more uncertain and less secure than masculinity'' (Scharff, 2012, p. 7), due to constant beauty advertisements presenting femininity as a fragile identity in constant need of fixing and strengthening. These marketing strategies contribute to the further entrenchment of gender binaries into popular belief, which serve to position masculinity as a superior entity. Such vulnerability and instability of the feminine identity is also highlighted by one of the participant's responses — "if you are overly feminine then they'll literally treat you like meat, like an attractive thing, but then if you're not girly enough then they'll accuse you of being a lesbian and like not really see you as attractive — so you can't really win''. This points towards the precariousness of skater femininity, where any expression that is exhibited is inevitably met with scrutiny and social

devaluation by the male audience. This quote illustrates the equation of feminine expressions with sexual capital in the context of heterosexuality — degrees of which are then turned into sexist forms of regulation and stigmatisation. Consequently, although hyper-femininity seemingly acts as the most respectable and desirable identity within skateboarding, when performed in excess it is then disempowered through sexual trivialisation by the male skaters. Skater femininity is therefore an inherently controversial identity, which simultaneously acts as a point of praise and stigmatisation. Therefore, there is an apparent lack of neutral ground that the feminine body is able to occupy, due to it being charged with contested and ideological dispositions. According to Connell (1987), to be in a hegemonic gender position is to be in a position of power, where one's monopoly is unchallenged and fixed as part of the gender order. A neutral gender identity could arguably act a hegemonic gender position, protected from conflicting connotations by the safety of its neutrality. Consequently, skater girls' subjection to various sexist double standards and paradoxical feminine expressions, could be understood by the inexistence of a hegemonic feminine identity, which would guarantee them a neutral social status within the gender hierarchy of skateboarding. This is also arguably because hyper-femininity is ideologically constructed to complement male hegemony, and does not exercise enough independent power to establish its own hegemony, due to being structurally and symbolically confined to the inferior position within the gender order (Connell, 1987).

Additionally, male skaters' hegemonic position was highlighted by their ability to freely transgress gender binaries, in a way that skater girls couldn't. One of the participants stated:

> 'Boys are never called gay or get taken the mick out of for looking gay or too feminine. Like recently boys have been wearing a lot of pink stuff, and like eyeshadow as part of the whole emo trend, and like no one is really saying anything, but when a girl looks boyish, she is then called gay or like too masculine — because that's not what girls are supposed to look like'.

This quote is reflective of the way male skaters were able to utilise their hegemonic gender position to re-inscribe powerless feminine characteristics into legitimate identity resources. Through their masculine embodiment of femininity, they were able to credit those traits with validity and respectability, by turning them into fashionable dispositions of power. Whilst doing this, male skaters were protected by the symbolically neutral and value free territory that they occupy within the gender order, which maintains their social power and reputation. Conversely, female skaters weren't permitted as much gender fluidity or reflexivity, and so were fixed within static gender parameters. Inevitably, their expressions of masculinity were stigmatised and devalued due to the female body not holding enough hegemonic power to match the degree of hegemony that masculine expressions convey. Therefore, feminine embodiments of masculinity within skateboarding were viewed as an invasion of hegemonic territory and essentially a politically charged statement.

Rejection of hyper-femininity

Through their skateboarding practices, girls actively resisted the forms of hyper-femininity that were imposed on them by the male skaters (as discussed in the previous chapter). They did this by symbolically distancing their feminine expressions from the 'girly' gender discourse. For example, one of them stated:

> girls that are girly care about their make-up and like the way they look, but like here it's not about that whole make-up thing, you're never not gonna be bruised — so I suppose girly girls especially wouldn't want to do it, because they wouldn't want to get bruises on their face, cos it doesn't look good — but here girls don't really care about that'.

This description of the 'girly' girl who maintains her attractiveness with the use of cosmetic products echoes a dominant, post-feminist female aesthetic which promotes a blemish free, flawless image of femininity,

achieved through constant self-regulation and improvement with the use of consumer goods (Velding, 2014, p. 17). Consequently, skater girls used the term 'girly' in a derogatory sense, as a way of symbolically distancing themselves from those connotations, particularly by stating ''but here it's not about that whole make-up thing''. Therefore, by being unafraid to risk their beauty with bruises and scars they dismissed dominant post-feminist and neoliberal self-reflexivities, which require women to rigorously improve their appearance, as a way of obtaining the ''immaculately groomed'' (Beal, 1992, p. 12), and 'perfect' image.

It is also important to understand how interviewees perceived traditional femininity and as a result ''placed themselves in opposition to it'' (Holland, 2004, p. 9). One of the respondents stated:

> stereotypically when I think of femininity, I think of like a woman who does her make-up, who is very classy, who's like really dainty, polite and delicate and who maybe wears a lot of pink. And obviously here we still wear pink and stuff, but it's different, you won't see us giggling and looking all pretty, like here the most respected way of being a girl would be to be a really good skater and have a lot of like mental drive and physical power and that's what I kind of associate with femininity the more girl skaters I meet.

This response suggests that powerful femininity for skater girls was not one that displayed post-feminist, heteronormative qualities. Girls' performance of "mental drive and physical power", symbolically re-coded conventionally masculine expressions as feminine and therefore rejected the vulnerability of the female identity, which has been used to "re-assure male structures of power'' (Scharff, 2012, p. 34). Therefore, by actively constructing oppositional forms of femininity, skater girls established new patterns for the gendered interaction within the sport, that did not replicate hegemonic gender relations (Schippers, 2007, p. 9). Thus, by discrediting traditional elements of hyper-femininity, girls refused to compliment hegemonic masculinity "in a relation of subordination" (Schippers, 2007, p. 11), through the embodiment of

culturally devalued, 'expressive' characteristics. Carrie Paechter (2006) argues that such distancing from hyper-femininity could be interpreted as a rejection of the "disempowerment that comes with it" (Paechter, 2006, p. 9). Indeed, as previously discussed, hyper-femininity is ideologically constructed to complement male hegemony (Connell, 1987) and is therefore symbolically confined to the inferior position within the gender order. Therefore, a rejection of hyper-femininity amongst skater girls, could be viewed as a power claiming strategy (Paechter, 2006, p. 9), through which they refuse to participate in a "relation of subordination" (Schippers, 2007, p. 11) and as a result attempt to conjure a hegemonic gender identity within the given sport.

Furthermore, skater girls resisted restricting norms of hyper-femininity with their 'strong and active bodies' (Porter, 2005, p. 80). For example, one of the participants stated: "I think it's made me think about my appearance much less and actually think about what my body could do to achieve something rather than just look a certain way''. This quote points towards skater girls' refusal to protect their feminine image from injuries, and therefore 'contain their bodies in acceptable post-feminist ways' (Aapola et al, 2004, p. 132). Instead, girls actively exhibited control over their physical activities and participated in the ''act of self-governance and regulation'' (Young, 2006, p. 130) over their own bodies. They freely navigated their bodies at public skateparks and therefore "made room for themselves in spatial terms" (Backstrom, 2013, p. 5) in opposition to the idea that "the street remains in some ways a taboo for women'' (Porter, 2005, p. 32). Thus, by asserting their presence in public spaces, skater girls re-negotiated traditional gender roles by occupying "the urban landscape" via a boisterous display of physical activity (Antecio, 2009: 103).

Therefore, through their bodily performances, skater girls persistently challenged ''sexist assumptions about girls being unable to skate'' (Currie et al, 2005, p. 11) or what their bodies could do, beyond cultural imaginings. For example, one of the participants stated:

> It still kind of shocks guys, when girls are really good, like if a girl falls they think we are gonna break our nail and start crying over it and I think its cos the world seems to believe that girls are fragile compared to guys. But like the amount of times you see girls falling over in skateboarding — we can take a hit, and guys don't seem to get that'.

This quote illustrates skater girls' active rejection of stereotypical characteristics of femininity, such as fear of injury or physical fragility. They spoke about their injuries with a sense of pride and achievement, with one participant stating: "I'm never not bruised, but it's kind of nice though, cos they're like markers of hard work, like for example when I learn a really hard trick, I know that I'm gonna be covered in massive bruises, cos that's what it takes — it takes a lot of falling and getting back up''. Through their embodiment of pain and injury, skater girls resisted the hyper-feminine characteristics of emotional vulnerability and physical weakness and inevitably challenged the ''gender binary that equates athleticism and toughness with masculinity'' (Beaver, 2014, p. 7). Consequently, skater girls' enactment of bodily and psychological endurance of pain, bravery and physical strength, enabled them to challenge cultural assumptions that ''women's and men's bodies are significantly different enough to legitimate gender inequality'' (Krane, 2001, p. 7). Therefore, through their physical performance of traditionally masculine characteristics, skater girls posed a critique on the naturalisation of masculinity, against the common assumption that men are biologically defined by those traits (Connell, 1987, p. 167). Consequently, skateboarding practices allowed girls to enact masculine expressions and therefore resist the exclusive male ownership of masculinity — by suggesting that masculinity is a mere collection of cultural practices, that can be taken up and enacted collectively by various gender groups (Schippers, 2007).

However, although participants rejected the 'girly', post-feminist discourse of femininity, they did not necessarily dismiss their own feminine identities. Skater girls perceived femininity not as a fixed identity category, but as a collection of diverse behavioural and aesthetic

dimensions. For example, one of them stated "I feel like I'm feminine in character, but my appearance varies, like sometimes I can wear the girliest outfit like a prom dress out skating and other times I'll wear the baggiest jeans, it just kind of depends what I feel like and where I'm going''. This suggests that femininity is in a constant state of formation and renegotiation and is therefore not a unified, or cohesive identity practice (Kelly, 2004). Another participant preferred to blend traditionally masculine aesthetics with conventional feminine attributes, such as wearing ''man's boots with fishnet tights and pink, puffy skirts but with a lot of black smudged eye make-up and messy hair''. These gender performances are reminiscent of the Riot grrrl movement, which ''constructed subcultural femininities'' by mixing elements of aggressive punk masculinity with sartorial images of femininity (Leblanc, 1999, p. 163). Such blending of various gendered attributes can be seen as a symbolic performance of 'undoing' gender, by consciously manipulating gendered expressions, in an attempt to "create subject positions that are not constrained by the rigidity of the masculine/feminine binary'' (Beaver, 2016, p. 16; Finley, 2010). Skater girls therefore viewed their femininity as a discourse that could be actively redefined, in relation to conventional masculine and feminine cultural expressions. This practice fits in with Mimi Schippers' (2002) 'gender manoeuvring' framework, which is defined by “an effort to transform the gender relations in a localised setting, but also part of the larger gender order of male dominance” (Finley, 2010, p. 4; Schippers 2002). Therefore, by producing new modes of femininity, skater girls collectively undermined gender binary categories by signalling that there is 'no one femininity or masculinity with which to identify’ (Butler, 2004, p. 51). This is particularly true because their gender performance encompassed conventionally masculine and feminine expressions, which inevitably constructed "new patterns for gendered interaction in this setting’’ (Finley, 2010, p. 7).

Whilst skater girls refused to comply to the post-feminist aesthetic and behavioural subjectivities, they still utilised post-feminist slogans, such as 'just do what you want' as a form of empowerment. For example, one of the participants stated: "I think there are challenges, but I think it is important to just do what you want and not care much about people's criticisms''. This quote was a response to the policing and control that skater girls were subjected to by the male skaters, as discussed in the first section. The statement is specifically post-feminist due to the theory's assertion that 'all battles have been won' and girls are now free to do precisely 'whatever they want'. Gill and Donaghue (2013) suggest that post-feminism regards women as liberated, independent subjects who are able to make "free and autonomous choices" (Madhok and Phillips, 2013, p. 241), an attitude that is clearly reflected in the participant's response. This work has therefore pointed towards a further need to examine the interplay between feminism and girlhood and the way emerging, oppositional femininities are reconfiguring contemporary feminist ideologies with complex forms of gender performance. This is not dissimilar to the argument Kelly et al (2004) make in their work as they highlight the importance of illuminating the contradictory ways in which young women engage and interact with feminism, whilst simultaneously re-negotiating their own feminine identities.

According to Angela McRobbie (2006), there has a been a significant 'unfixing' of young women in British society. She argues that girls have been "unhinged from their traditional gender position" (McRobbie, 2006, p. 4), whilst their male counterparts remained fixed within the old forms of masculinity. Such contention is also present in this work, where skater girls actively produced new modes of femininity, in resistance to the old forms of gender binaries reinforced by the male skaters. McRobbie (2006) further argues that the current re-negotiation of femininity amongst young women signals new formations of feminist

identities that embody feminist activism in significantly different ways to the second wave, feminist movement. Anita Harris (2003) has written about the concept of a 'new girl', who reflexively and actively engages in identity practices and critically reinstates new embodiments of girlhood (Harris, 2003). Harris (2003) suggests that the conjunction of neoliberal and post-feminist subjectivities since the early 1990s, has resulted in the growth of educational and employment opportunities, leading to the birth of the 'can do' girl, who is autonomous and able to 'just do what' she wants, to further echo the participant's response. Similarly, Ulrick Beck has argued that the convergence of neoliberalism with individualism and personal autonomy has allowed girls to independently redefine femininity and ''reject aspects of the available model of femininity that did not suit their own visions of themselves'' (Aapola et al, 2004, p. 37). This suggests that skater girls re-constructed old modes of femininity and masculinity by actively producing new forms of gender expressions that suited their individual, skater identities. Such process suggests that femininity is not a stable or fixed identity point, which cannot be represented by a homogenous feminist theory. Therefore, the old second wave theoretical binary, which positioned femininity 'at one end of the political spectrum and feminism at the other' (McRobbie, 2006, p. 8) is no longer a useful conceptualisation of the two entities. This is particularly because second wave feminism practiced a tendency to 'cling onto foundationalism' (Kelly et al, 2004, p. 10) and fix femininity within its essentialist feminist theory; which produced an imaginary dichotomy between the saviour feminist ideology and a homogenous group of oppressed women. Therefore, the unintentional pick and mixing of post-feminism, in which skater girls simultaneously rejected dominant post-feminist aesthetics, yet manifested its slogans points towards the way in which "girls and feminism mutually transform each other in the wake of their shared instability" (Kelly et al, 2004, p. 9). Consequently, the debates about which forms of feminist ideologies are more relatable to young women, fail to recognise the nuanced ways in which young women negotiate their feminine identities and therefore transform feminism through their actions.

As a result of such changes, theorists like Harris (2003) have argued that feminine resistance has in some cases taken more of a decentralised and localised form amongst young women, in comparison to the former collectivist, large scale, second wave movement. Therefore, the popular claim that young women have betrayed the legacy of collective political action (Kelly et al, 2004) is somewhat misleading and sensationalist, because what is missing from such rhetoric is the willingness to recognise the changing mode of resistance within everyday, local practices. Anita Harris (2003) further supports this statement by suggesting that young women's resistance has entered into a more underground and micro level activism, against the prevailing view that young women "have no politics to speak of at all'' (Kelly et al, 2004, p. 3; Harris 2003). Therefore, instead of regarding young women as apolitic, post-feminist subjects, there is a need to recognise their enactment of feminist politics within the patterns of their daily lives (Kelly et al, 2004; Harris, 2003). Consequently, within the current political and economic landscape, feminist action is arguably better understood through "small group practices of women", rather than the "large scale social action" (Currie et al, 2009, p. 22) and explicit agendas that characterised the second wave movement.

Conclusion

In this work I have extensively explored the ways in which gender binaries act as policing frameworks, which in this case have been used by male skaters to exclude women from masculine expressions, and locate skater femininity within inferior, expressive characteristics. Female skaters resisted the dominant, hyper-feminine gender binary via a construction of alternative feminine expressions, which posed a critique on the hegemonic gender order that was imposed on them by their male counterparts. Skater girls opposed certain elements of hyper-femininity and in turn creatively integrated elements of masculinity within their gender identities. Through this gender performance they

resisted the exclusive male ownership of masculinity — by suggesting that masculinity is a mere collection of cultural practices, that can be taken up and enacted collectively by various gender groups (Schippers, 2007). The participants therefore viewed their femininity as a discourse that could be actively redefined, in relation to conventional masculine and feminine cultural expressions.

I would therefore like to point further research towards a wider use of a constellatory approach to the study of gender, by exploring the mutually contingent relationships between masculinity and femininity and the implications those complex gender expressions/identities hold for feminist theory and practice. A close investigation of the characteristics and practices which (re)produce relational categories such as 'man/woman' in the first place, would offer a possibility to de-construct normative gendered performativities and create room for resistant transgressions and a radical re-making of oppressive gendered identities (Browne and Nash, 2010). Similarly to the ways in which female skaters produced new modes of femininities in opposition to hegemonic masculinity and in turn established new patterns for the gendered interaction within the sport, that did not replicate oppressive gender relations (Schippers, 2007, p. 9). Thus, there is much need for further study on the interplay between girlhood and feminism and the ways in which emerging, oppositional femininities are reshaping and innovating contemporary feminist ideologies through their unique forms of gendered resistance.

Work Cited

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*(1), 3-20.

Aapola, S. Gonick, M. Harris, A. (2004). *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beal, B. Wheaton, B. (2003). Keeping It Real. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 38*(2), 155-176.

Beaver, T. (2012). By the Skaters, for the Skaters - The DIY Ethos of the Roller Derby Revival. *Journal of Sport and Social,* 36, 25-49.

Beaver, T. (2016). Roller derby uniforms: The pleasures and dilemmas of sexualized attire. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *51*(6), 639-657.

Beal, B. (1992). *The subculture of skateboarding: Beyond social resistance*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing – thesis.

Burn, S. O'Neil, A. Nederend, S. (1996). Childhood tomboyism and adult androgyny, *Sex Roles*, *34*(5), 419-428.

Browne, K. (2006). Challenging Queer Geographies*, Antipode*, *38*(5), 885-893.

Browne, K. Nash, C. (2010). *Queer methods and methodologies: intersecting queer theories and social science research*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. US: Rutledge.

Bourbour, R. (2007). *Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student's Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publication.

Backstrom, A. (2013). Gender Manoeuvring in Swedish Skateboarding: Negotiations of Femininities and the Hierarchical Gender Structure, *Young*, *21*(1), 29-53.

Connell, R.W. (1987). *Gender and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Conboy, K. Medina, N. Stanbury, S. (1997). *Writing on the body: female embodiment and feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Currie, D. Pomerantz, S. Kelly, D. (2009). *Girl Power: Girls Reinventing Girlhood*. US: Peter Lang Publishing.

Finley, N.J. (2010). Skating Femininity: Gender Maneuvering in Women's Roller Derby. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *39*(4), 359-387.

Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: elements of a sensibility. *European journal of cultural studies*, 10(2), 147-166.

Harris, A. (2003). *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York; London: Routledge.

Holland, S. (2004). *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity*. UK: Berg Publishers.

Krane, V. (2001). We Can Be Athletic and Feminine, but Do We Want To? Challenging Hegemonic Femininity in Women's Sport. *Quest*, *53*(1), 115-33.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Inter Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: SAGE Publications.

Leblanc, L. (1999). *Pretty in punk: girls' gender resistance in a boys' subculture*. London: Rutgers University Press.

Madhok, S. Phillips, A. (2013). *Gender, Agency, and Coercion*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (2006). Shut up and dance: Youth culture and changing modes of femininity. *Cultural studies*, *7*(3), 406-426.

Miller, T. Birch, M. Mauthner, M. Jessop, J. (2012). *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Paechter, C. (2006). Masculine femininities/feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender. *Gender and Education*, *18*(3), 253-263.

Pavlidis, A. Fullagar, S. (2013). Becoming roller derby grrrls: Exploring the gendered play of affect in mediated sport cultures. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *48*(6), 673-688.

Pavlidis, A. Fullagar, S. (2013). The pain and pleasure of roller derby: Thinking through affect and subjectification. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *18*(5), 483-499.

Pomerantz, S. D. Currie, Kelly, D. (2005). Skater girlhood and emphasized femininity: 'you can't land an ollie properly in heels. *Gender and Education*, *17*(3), 229-248.

Pomerantz, S. D. Currie, Kelly, D. (2004). Sk8er girls: Skateboarders, girlhood and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *27*(5), 547-557.

Porter, N. (2005). *Female skateboarders and their negotiation of space and identity.* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Rubin, H. Rubin, I. (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data.* London: SAGE.

Ryan, G. Bernard, R. (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field methods*, *15*(1), 85-109.

Schippers, M. (2007). Recovering the feminine other: masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony. *Theory and Society*, *36*(1), 85-102.

Scharff, C. (2012). *Repudiating Feminism -Young Women in a Neoliberal World*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Silverman, D. (1943). *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. London: SAGE Publications.

Velding, V. (2014). Depicting Femininity: Conflicting Messages in a "Tween" magazine. *Youth and Society*, *30*(3), 505-527.

Widsor, W. (2015). Femininities. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, pp.893-897.

Wearing, B. (1998). *Leisure and feminist theory*. London: SAGE.

Young, A. (2006). 'The flipside: Young womens' understanding of the risks in skateboarding', (Online) Available at: http://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/27430

Feminist Dönüşüm Zamanlarında bir Toplumsal Cinsiyet İncelemesi:
Alternatif Dişilliklerin Kaykay Etrafında Dirençli Oluşumu

Öz: 8 kadın kaykaycı ile yürütülen yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmelere dayanan bu araştırma, kaykay camiasındaki kadınlar arasındaki eril dişilliklerin fiziksel ve estetik pratiklerinin derinlemesine bir analizini sunmaktadır. Kaykay mekanları dişil erilliğin önde gelen taşıyıcılarındandır; zira, kadınların fiziksel güç, dayanıklılık, rekabetçi dürtüler ve girişkenlik gibi (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2013) geleneksel eril özelliklere sahip çıkmalarına olanak tanırlar. Bu tip sporlardaki kadınlar, aktif olarak 'vücutlarının neyi yapabileceği konusundaki varsayımlara' meydan okurlar (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2015: 10) ve fiziksel kırılganlık ile mental zayıflık gibi yanlış stereotipleştirmelerin karşısına çıkarlar. Dolayısıyla bu araştırma, kaykay pratiklerinin kolektif toplumsal cinsiyet performansını ve böylece eril hegemoni karşısında kadınların direncini kolaylaştırmasının bilgilendirici bir izahatini verecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler*:* Dişil erkeklikler, toplumsal cinsiyet performansı, direnç, feminizm, kaykay