

Exploring Perspectives: Vancouver Street-Style Skateboarders in Urban Public Space and Beyond

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Abstract

This is an ethnographic project that explores the articulation by urban communities of ways of using public space by examining how and why people skateboard in Vancouver. By conducting semi-structured interviews and employing the use of photovoice, this research project discusses the perspectives of skateboarders to discover the motivations behind their interactions with urban space. This project is contextualized by highlighting the historic process of skateboarding in the urban realm, and the design and development of the skatepark as purpose-built public space intended for skateboarding. The purpose and meaning of the skatepark and other urban spaces is identified by participants using verbal (semi-structured interviews) and visual (photovoice) methods, and analyzed using a place-attachment framework. This study discusses the narratives of street-style skateboarders in Vancouver to tell a story about interactions with the urban environment.

Keywords: skateboarding; public space; people-urban relationship; inclusive planning

Dedication

The privilege to receive an education does not go unrecognized; some transcend their circumstances to attend university, and some never get the opportunity at all because life demands other things. To my mom who went to UBC at nights when my brother and I were little. To my mother-in-law who would have been an exceptional student. And to my children: may I teach them to value the privilege of education, and may they learn ferociously not only from books, but from people, and from life.

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Foremost, I would like to acknowledge the privilege to conduct research and learn from Downtown Vancouver which is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh whom have inhabited these lands since time immemorial, and I am a humble, grateful guest here.

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To my fellow parents of young children who carve out time to better themselves in the cracks of duty: you will look back on this time with a resounding *I did that*.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

This thesis examines the characteristics and attractions of the popular urban recreational practice of skateboarding, as well as certain issues raised by the passionate pursuit of this distinctively urban activity. Unlike sports played in dedicated sport facilities such as hockey rinks, swimming pools, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, or golf courses, skateboarding is an accessible activity that can be conducted in a wide range of urban spaces. But free-ranging and highly mobile skateboarders often encounter resistance to their use of diverse urban spaces that are assigned for other purposes. A commitment to skateboarding, therefore, requires not only physical mastery of demanding techniques but also access to locations that offer new and more challenging surfaces to engage with. In many cities, skateboarding has not been welcomed by civic officials or property owners. Nonetheless, attempts to restrict or contain skateboarding have often led to controversy and unyielding opposition from enthusiasts who insist upon their right to pursue their passion for skateboarding in the urban realm.

This project explores how and why skateboarders interact with the urban realm to better understand the relationship between skateboarding as an activity and its use of the urban environment. The participants engaged in this project are not representative of all skateboarders; rather, by prioritizing the perspectives of the several participants, this project focuses on their collective narratives and tells their specific story. It takes account of the history of urban skateboarding in Vancouver and the difficulties and resistance practitioners have faced. Their determination to keep skating and to advocate for their right to do so has shaped the role they have come to play in fostering a relatively cooperative relationship between themselves and civic officials. The project also considers the impact these collaborations have had on the accommodation of skateboarding in Vancouver. The ability of skateboarders to sustain relationships that enable them to continue to access public space in the city speaks to how processes of advocacy can sometimes produce inclusion. To explain this far from typical outcome requires bringing together activities and perspectives that might otherwise be viewed as being unlike and essentially unrelated to one another. The underlying goal of this work is to show how and why these disparate elements—namely, the attractions of urban

skateboarding and ensuing attempts to accommodate this practice—do, in fact, connect and reinforce one another. To explain this requires looking into the everyday practices, meanings, and importance of skateboarding in the lives of highly committed skateboarders. Their narratives, memories, and lived experiences illuminate the embodied demands and satisfactions tied to skateboarding, as well as their ongoing exploration and utilization of the urban environment as a resource for pursuing personal accomplishments, sociality, and civic engagement. The basis for the inclusion of skateboarding that has evolved in Vancouver becomes more apparent when the narratives of several experienced Vancouver skateboarders are juxtaposed with those of a civic official - who has played a central role in facilitating liaison with skateboarders - and of a local skatepark designer and former skateboarding advocate. The activities, issues, and processes discussed in this thesis are situated in Vancouver. But these also raise larger questions about how urban communities might respond to potentially contentious ways of using public spaces and persist in devising sustainable and inclusive means for accommodating recreational practices that may not be widely shared enthusiasms. Gaining perspective on how and why these specific skateboarders explore and interact with the urban environment provides essential insights into how advocacy has contributed to the gradual inclusion of skateboarding in public spaces in Vancouver. It also demonstrates the significance this urban inclusion has on the lives of skateboarders.

1.1. Public Space and the Relationship Between People and the Urban Environment

People interact with the urban environment in varying ways which can influence the look and feel of a city. The built form of the city is designed to be used in ways specified by urban planning professionals, but it can also be re-interpreted by users of that space. Designing public space that entertains varying uses and interpretations contributes to the provision of more inclusive and diverse urban environments. It does so most effectively when it allows for new and emerging kinds of activities, not just those initially envisioned by planners. When a greater number of spaces cumulatively support a broader range of uses, an urban environment begins to respond to the wishes of diverse user groups and their creative interpretations of space. Urban space which is designed to be used creatively and responsively facilitates individual expression, thereby

encouraging a rippling outcome of inclusivity. Accommodating as many public preferences as possible makes for a city that is truly for *all*.

But there are practical reasons why public space can't always accommodate all potential uses. Some activities have the potential to impact public safety, while others may be practised only in certain times and places. In view of this, planning *for* diversity requires that logistical elements be clearly understood beforehand, not simply assumed. Planning for a more inclusive and diverse public realm—in other words, a *city for all*—requires a detailed understanding of the activities in question and relationships these are likely to generate between people and urban spaces. If planners are to organize, design, and develop spaces that promote both usability and inclusivity, it is essential to acquire a more thorough understanding of the communities these spaces actually serve. This requires careful examination of how, why and by whom the space in question might be used. Discovering the purposes and ways in which people engage with the urban environment can offer invaluable perspective on how to foster the development of more inclusive public spaces.

The importance of this undertaking within the field of urban studies is obvious: paying attention to these matters can contribute not only to scholarly debates but also to facilitating community enjoyment and connection. The relationship between people's preferred pastimes and the urban environment has become particularly important to urban managers as they work to create engaged and vibrant cities. To get a sense of how and why people interact with public space and with one another, planners employ collaborative efforts to garner public opinion and enlist urban residents in the task of planning *cities for all*. Through such public consultations and interactive planning techniques, members of the public are invited to take part in deciding the way urban spaces might be designed. The City of Vancouver, for example, makes the effort to design public space in conjunction with the community through the 'Engaged City Initiative' which includes public consultation processes that apply values borrowed from the International Association of Public Participation (Vancouver Engaged City Task Force, 2013).

1.2. Park Space in the City

Public parks are meant to provide places within which urbanites may seek recreation and encounter one another. Parks are, accordingly, prescriptively designed using purpose-built infrastructure. Skateparks are one example of this. There are currently nine public skateparks in Vancouver, but arguably the most prominent one is the Downtown Skate Plaza which replicates especially desirable skate features found in Vancouver's built form. As a street-style skatepark that aims to emulate features of potential skate spaces found elsewhere the city that are not intended for skateboarding, the Downtown Skate Plaza serves as the primary locus for this project. Probing why and how individual skateboarders engage in this embodied practice offers a grounded understanding of the relationship between skaters and the urban realm. I am interested in the perspective of skaters as a key source of insight into their interaction with the public skatepark, and how their involvement in this prescribed public park space fits into their broader interaction with the urban environment.

Since the skatepark is public space, taking a closer look at the intended purposes and actual meanings of the Downtown Skate Plaza can help to unpack the relationship between park users and planners in this specific urban setting. This is especially the case when a facility such as the Downtown Skate Plaza is viewed through the lens of the personal histories and connections individual skateboarders have of this place, and the activities it permits. By the same token, urban managers engage in a similar process when making decisions about the allocation and design of space in cities. Engaging with skateboarders willing to participate in the process of designing urban skate spaces has been a priority for the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Park Board since the unveiling of the Skateboard Strategy in 2005. Although the Skateboard Strategy has undergone minor revisions since then, the City of Vancouver (hereafter, "CoV") and the Vancouver Park Board are currently working on a complete overhaul of the Strategy as they develop a city-wide network for skateboarding in consultation with the Vancouver Skate Coalition¹. They have also reached out to a larger

¹ The Vancouver Skateboard Coalition is a community organization that identifies their mission as working to influence policies, initiatives and decisions concerning skateboarding in Vancouver. Their purpose is to increase, improve and maintain skateboard spots and parks around Vancouver, The VSC works specifically through local events and programs in order to engage with and support the Vancouver skateboard community (Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, 2018).

range of skateboarders in an effort to be more inclusive in assessing the wants and needs of the overall skateboarding community. The CoV and the Park Board adopted the objective of having more “street style” skateparks throughout the city (Skateboard Strategy, 2005), and incorporating street-style skateboarding continues to be a priority moving forward.

In 2004, the CoV hired New Line Skateparks to design and construct the first ever outdoor street-style skatepark in the world – the Downtown Skate Plaza (Complex, 2013). This private company specializes in designing and constructing integrated skateboarding landscapes and has developed its own ‘skate community consultation process,’ which prioritizes local skateboarders’ perspectives in designing skateparks worldwide (New Line Skateparks). The physical infrastructure of the Downtown Skate Plaza was, therefore, a product of extensive research that sought to ensure the space met the needs of its users. This was achieved by including in the park design various elements of the urban built form that are especially prized in street-style skateboarding. This approach was prioritized because street-style skateboarding was very popular at the time, and Vancouver already had another facility, the Hastings Bowl, which catered to other styles of skateboarding.

Given that the developmental process for the Downtown Skate Plaza exemplified the creation of a public space designated for a specific purpose (i.e., street-style skateboarding) by employing processes that aimed to be responsive to the preferences of a particular type of skateboarder, the Downtown Skate Plaza is an especially appropriate space within which to locate this inquiry. It is important to show how the chosen features of this space - which were selected to replicate the street skateboarding experience - have contributed to its appeal among skateboarders. My research, therefore, centres in large part on the perspectives of individual skateboarders. I seek to account for why and how they interact with the urban environment as they do, both in the Downtown Skate Plaza and in other spaces where they skate. Approaching this inquiry through their perspectives and everyday routines illustrates the advantages of looking into the priorities and practices of dedicated users of specific urban spaces.

They work collaboratively with the City of Vancouver, and are mentioned in this project in several instances, so understanding their positionality in the skate community of Vancouver is important.

This project brings together not only the built form of cities and skateparks but also the everyday practices of several dedicated and experienced skateboarders. The research centralizes their stories and perspectives to reveal in greater detail how this specific group of skateboarders interact with the urban environment. Although I have anchored my inquiry about public skateparks in the Downtown Skate Plaza, I have not restricted the investigation of the relationship between skaters and the urban environment to just this one place. I employ a place-attachment model to elucidate how and why skateboarders attribute meanings to different urban spaces. This approach enables me to demonstrate various ways that public spaces may be interpreted by those who use these, and to ask how skateboarders' interpretations and uses of skateparks influence the decisions of urban planners.

Exploring why and how skateboarders interact with and find meaning in urban spaces is central to grasping the dynamics and impetus of urban skateboarding. To address the relationship between skateboarding and the urban environment, I offer ethnographic and photographic representations of the distinctive perspectives and experiences of skateboarders. Taking account of the meanings they attribute to urban spaces tells a subtle and too often overlooked story. It reveals how their committed participation in a challenging form of physical recreations also involves transcending and extending the formal and official purposes assigned by planners and officials to urban spaces designated for this popular and distinctively urban recreational activity.

1.3. An Overview of this Project

1.3.1. Urban Skateboarding

In an effort to contextualize the practice of skateboarding in Vancouver, this section outlines the process of legitimizing skateboarding in the urban realm. The interconnection between advocacy and public space planning is discussed to describe the shift toward a more inclusive outlook regarding skateboarding in the urban realm. The Downtown Skate Plaza is introduced in this section because it represents many of the important moments for the legitimization of urban skateboarding in Vancouver.

1.3.2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This section provides a summary of literatures about the linkage between skateboarding, urban public space politics, and place-meaning and attachment to act as a point of departure for key concepts that arise in this project. DIY urbanism and the right to the city are brought forward to support the notion of inclusive approaches to planning a city for all. Research about skateboarders in the urban realm are discussed to provide information about skaters as a people. Place-attachment and the process of attributing meaning to an urban space is outlined in order to introduce attributes of the place-attachment tripartite model that will be used in this research project.

1.3.3. Research Design

The two methodologies (semi-structured interviews and photovoice) employed in this research project are introduced to discuss their suitability within this research project. The ways in which the data from these methodologies are collected, coded, and analyzed is also outlined. This section also demonstrates how the interview and photovoice data work together to successfully address the research question.

1.3.4. Findings

This section identifies the themes and sub-themes that arose from analysing the interview data and photovoice data. The data from both methodologies were combined thematically to articulate significances that arose from the stories shared by interview participants. The central concepts introduced in this thesis are supported by the research data by organizing the findings appropriately.

1.3.5. Discussion & Conclusion

The narratives and perspectives shared by participants in this research study are organized thematically to address concepts related to inclusive urban planning to illuminate the relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment. The data is summarized to effectively demonstrate the interconnection and meaning between skateboarders and the urban environment they are determined to occupy.

1.3.6. Research Purpose

To summarize, this study primarily focuses on the perspective of skateboarders, but also includes conversations with a skatepark designer, and a city official in order to encapsulate a fulsome discussion about skateboarding in Vancouver. There are a few key concepts included in the research inquiry that require attention: the history of skateboarding advocacy, the allocation of sanctioned public space for skateboarding, and the process of inclusive public space planning, all amplified by the lived experiences and narratives of street-style skateboarders. The bulk of my interviews are conducted with skateboarders in order to prioritize their perspectives and narratives. I made a conscious effort to lead with the skateboarder's perspectives to get a deeper sense of their connection to skateboarding, and their relationship with the urban environment. These discussions then benefit from the additional perspectives of the two skateboarding informants to address concepts such as the history of skateboarding advocacy in the decades prior to the formal legalization of skateboarding in Vancouver (2001), and the establishment of collaboration between skateboarders and civic officials. This information culminates to address the unique relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment.

Chapter 2.

The History and Context of Urban Skateboarding

2.1. A Brief History

Though a triumphant feat, the colonizing of public spaces for skateboarding has not been free of conflict (Karsten and Pel, 2000). The road to sanctioned urban skateboarding in public space has been a long journey, one that culminated in the development of the urban skatepark.

Following the invention of urethane wheels, the first private “pay-to-play” skateparks opened in the 1970s, but due to liability lawsuits, they closed shortly after, which shifted the sport to urban areas (Public Skatepark Development Guide). The influx of skateboarders in the city in the 1970s was perceived to threaten public order; deemed as inappropriate users of public space, skateboarders in the late 1970s to early-1980s faced bans, citations, and exclusionary cautions from authority figures and members of the public alike (Nemeth, 2006). In the following decades, skateboarders were forced to navigate the illegitimacy of their chosen sport as urban managers continued to prioritize a particular vision of public space that prohibited skateboarding in the public realm (Nemeth, 2006). As popularity grew, more and more skateboarders were using the architectural elements of the city to strengthen their skills, resulting in damage to physical design elements of the city. Moreover, some members of the public were fearful of skateboarders, perceiving them to be rebellious, dangerous, and unsightly (Nemeth, 2006, p.300). For these reasons, city officials saw skateboarding as an urban issue in need of a solution. In Vancouver, city officials attempted to regulate the increasingly popular counter-cultural trend, and banned skateboarding city-wide until the late 1990s (Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, 2009).

The growing popularity of early skateboarding - despite so much official opposition - is attributed to the cultural impact the activity had on young people; clothing brands emerged and skate competitions were organized which revolutionized skateboarding, and made it an international phenomenon (Skate Deluxe Blog). The intersection of skate-specific clothing stores and shoe companies, and nation-wide skateboarding competitions resulted in sponsorships, advertisements, and legitimization

in popular culture. The organization of skateboard competitions like the first ever B.C. Skateboard Championship which took place in Stanley Park in 1976, became pivotal for enacting change because it reflected both the upward-trending popularity and recognition of skateboarding. Over 150 skate competitions took place in Super-Valu parking lots across Vancouver in the late 1970s because the owner's two sons were avid competitive skateboarders (Vancouver is Awesome, 2019). Safety was a huge concern for city officials and the public, and parents of young skateboarders got involved in the city working to promote and advocate for safe spaces for their children to skateboard.

The first few decades of skateboarding were examples of reframing the arena of decision making in cities toward more enfranchisement based on inhabitancy (Lefebvre, 1996). Urban authorities realized that skateboarding was not going away, and in order to reach a state of public harmony alongside skaters, officials began to adapt to and regulate the trend rather than ban it which meant managing the safety of skateboarders in transportation arteries, and responding to skateboarding as an urban sport by means of skate parks (City of Vancouver Skateboarding Bylaw). In 2001, Vancouver relaxed its ban, and in 2003 the city recognized skateboarding as a sustainable and popular mode of transportation permitted on minor streets. Skateboarders earned their "enfranchisement as members of the city" (Iveson, p.945, 2013) by unapologetically inhabiting public space, and innovatively legitimizing skateboarding through cultural representation. Skateboarders proved that skateboarding was not a fleeting teenage hobby, capable of succumbing to fines, and hostile architecture.

The relaxation of skateboarding bans emerged alongside various strategies to ensure safety, discourage skateboarding in areas not sanctioned for this use, and promote the beneficial outcomes of urban skateboarding by designing purpose-built infrastructure for skateboarding in the city (Nathan, 2018). Once skateparks became a more commonplace fixture in cities, it became evident that these public facilities had a positive impact on youth and communities (Jensen et al., 2012). By designing skate parks, urban managers hoped to offer an appealing alternative to skateboarding in other public spaces which are intended for other uses. In the early days, the process of designing and constructing skate parks depended on consultation with the skate community, whereby planners sought the expertise and input of skateboarders to ensure usability. This is evidenced by the City of Vancouver's decision to hire New Line Skateparks for the design and construction of the Downtown Skate Plaza when these

bans were lifted, regulations eased, and attitudes toward skateboarding began to change in the early 2000s. Although skate parks combine landscape architectural features and playground design, their key objective is *skateability*, which only a skateboarder can assess. If the city was indifferent about skateboarding spreading throughout the city, perhaps its officials wouldn't care about how *skateable* a park is. Yet when motivated to deter skateboarders from using public spaces elsewhere, the usefulness of a skate park became evident. The underlying objectives of urban planners in the design of public space are significant to my research inquiry because I too seek to illuminate the complex process of discovering what people need and want from the public realm in the city.

2.2. Public Space: Ex/Inclusion

The modern organization of public space is often aimed at preserving existing social systems by prioritizing the needs of some people over those of others (Meiser et al., 2019). But the City of Vancouver claims to design public space that acts as the outdoor living rooms for everyone's everyday activities (Engaged City Task Force, 2014) despite densification and associated societal disconnection. The City explicitly states that everyone in Vancouver has the right to access public space, and the design of these spaces should demonstrate this right (Public Space and Public Life, 2014). The City claims that public space should be designed to create a sense of identity and a shared place to counterbalance increasing real estate development, thereby allowing for community growth and connection. As a testament to its commitment to the principle of inclusive public space design, the CoV conducted the Public Space and Public Life Study in a commitment as a first step, to observe how public space is being used in Downtown Vancouver, that would inform the direction of the Downtown Public Strategy (City of Vancouver, 2019).

When designing and planning public space in the city, planners must consider for whom it is being prepared. The Public Space and Public Life Study, conducted in 2014, made an effort to determine how public space was being used by people in Downtown Vancouver, and to present potential design options to encourage community connection in the public realm. However, findings of this type can also indicate activities which the city hopes to *discourage*. By observing how public space is used, activities that are disruptive to the intended goal of community connection are documented and strategies

for mitigating and discouraging certain activities may emerge. This prioritization of particular visions of public space use (Nemeth, 2006) introduces the tension that exists in public realm planning, and how it can lead to a variety of approaches in designing space for people. For example, if public spaces are to act as “living rooms,” then likely there are urban activities conducted in certain spaces that are deemed inappropriate by some members of the community. This can lead to exclusionary planning techniques that derail the goal to be inclusive. Public space should be designed in consideration of all people, but in practice, this is a difficult balance to achieve. Because skateparks are public spaces, how city managers approach public space planning is important to consider. However, skateboarding also takes place beyond the confines of skateparks, so understanding exclusionary planning philosophies is also relevant when investigating the relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment.

2.2.1. The Downtown Skate Plaza

The focus of my research is to determine why people skateboard, and develop a deeper understanding about their relationship with the urban environment. To contextualize my research, I situated my inquiry in a tangible space that represents many of the factors relevant to the history of skateboarding. By using the Downtown Skate Plaza as central locale for my research, I am better able to address concepts like community, urban space, the built form, processes of in/exclusion, advocacy, and connection. Furthermore, I am better able to understand the purposes the Downtown Skate Plaza serves for skateboarders in Vancouver, and how skatepark use fits into the broader practice of urban skateboarding.

The Downtown Skate Plaza is hidden in the shadows of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts overhead, nestled between Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside, fronting the last undeveloped piece of Vancouver’s waterfront. It is minutes away from the Downtown city centre, making it easily accessible for users. It is ranked on *Complex* magazine’s list of the 25 best skate parks in the world, and the Downtown Skate Plaza has been heavily skated since its construction in 2004 (Complex, 2013).

A lot has changed in the years since the construction of the Downtown Skate Plaza, and the future real estate development potential of the Plaza land is tremendous. What is currently a popular venue featuring half-pipes, ramps, stair sets, and ledges will

soon be the new six-lane roadway for the NE False Creek development, merging Expo and Pacific boulevards. The imminent demolition of the Downtown Skate Plaza echoes a long history of site-specific expropriation and subjugation. In the early 1900s, construction of the original Georgia viaduct was undertaken on the traditional land of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam peoples. A historic overview conducted by the Vancouver Heritage Foundation titled *Places that Matter* takes a deeper look into the history of important sites in Vancouver; VHF reveals that in the late 1960s, the western section of Strathcona's Black neighbourhood was levelled for the construction of the new viaducts. Despite half a decade of public opposition led by the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association, the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts were completed in 1972, replacing the first Georgia viaduct built in 1914 (Vancouver Heritage Foundation, 2021). Following significant public protest, the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts were the only completed portions of a more extensive proposed downtown freeway system. The viaducts are scheduled for demolition in 2021, with the space previously occupied by the Downtown Skate Plaza proposed for incorporation into the new transportation arterial footprint for the NE False Creek development.

The construction of the Downtown Skate Plaza came at a particularly significant time for Vancouver skateboarders. Due to the increased popularity of street-style skateboarding, skateboarders were overtaking Vancouver's downtown in search of the skate elements² they were seeing through video footage of skate culture in other settings. The ban on skateboarding had been lifted just a few years before the Downtown Skate Plaza's unveiling, and the energy for sanctioned skateboarding was intense. The construction of the Downtown Skate Plaza marked the beginning of a more welcoming public response to skateboarding, and represented the inclusion of skate space in Vancouver. The Downtown Skate Plaza was designed and built for skateboarders. This space comprised an act of inclusion previously unknown to skateboarders in Vancouver who had faced years of exclusion from the urban realm.

Though the location of the Downtown Skate Plaza was intended to be temporary arrangements (Interview 21), the park has stood the test of time. Over the last 17 years, the DSP has been a destination for skateboarders, and my research seeks to

² As described by interview participants, a skate element is a feature of urban architecture that makes it skate-desired, for example: curbs, flatrails, ledges, handrails, wallrides, kicker (or lip of concrete), concrete gaps, stairs, poles, or other collection of elements that can be skated over.

understand more about the role this skatepark has played in the lives of the research participants. Moreover, do their feelings about the DSP exemplify the skateboarder-urban relationship and if so, how? Understanding the conditions in which the DSP was designed and built will shed light on the specific history of Vancouver skateboarding since the 1990s. Furthermore, inquiring about how skateboarders currently regard the DSP will establish the level of sentiment that space holds for skateboarders as both a local landmark and as a representation or symbol of public spaces allocated for skateboarding more generally.

The NE False Creek Development plans include a redesigned skatepark which will be integrated in the public park space of the new development. Using public consultation and engagement techniques, the CoV has engaged over 2,000 respondents with regards to the skateboarding component of the Plan, and this feedback has aided them in “understanding the needs and expectations of people who use the Downtown Skateboard Plaza which shaped the NE False Creek planning process and park policies” (Northeast False Creek Development Plan, 2018). This statement is critical to the development of my research inquiry because it depicts a thorough consultation effort with skateboarders and indicates a collaborative approach to designing the new skatepark. The City’s skate plaza engagement statement suggests that the planning team consulted the skateboarders who currently use the Downtown Skate Plaza and who are likely to be impacted by the relocation of the park as part of the development. Though my research does not seek to investigate or assess the adequacy of the CoV’s NE False Creek consultation process, it does aim to more broadly contextualize the activities and interests of skateboarders. It does so by looking into how and why they continue to skateboard.

Chapter 3.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

3.1. Background

This chapter reviews various literatures pertinent to the relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment, both in sanctioned public spaces and beyond. I begin by discussing skateboarders as people, drawing on several ethnographic studies skateboarders and skateboarding. I then consider literature on ‘the right to public space’ that touches on the historic process of legitimizing skateboarding by way of claiming ‘the right to the skatepark’ in Vancouver. What follows is a discussion of literature on public space design that examines the role civic officials and urban managers play in designing spaces for people. Finally, I introduce theories of place-attachment to provide a framework for assessing attributed meaning to place to prepare for the data analysis in this study. When brought together, these three bodies of literature suggest that although public space is designed for a variety of purposes, there is a process of asserting one’s right to public space that may deepen one’s connection to that place. This is integral to answering my research question because my research participants will be discussing skateboarding from their perspectives by revisiting their personal histories with skateboarding, and discussing how they engage with the urban realm through skateboarding. In combination, these three bodies of literature offer a means for addressing how the individual *right to the city* can be asserted through advocacy, and legitimized by inclusion in public space, thus enabling skateboarders to pursue their passion.

3.2. Ethnographic Studies of Skateboarders

Historically, skateboarders have often been made to feel unwelcome in public space due to public perceptions that they are social deviants (Nolan, 2003). Yet these perceptions are challenged when skateboarders are observed and studied at close hand. Ethnographies featuring skateboarders have found that skateboarders often function as a loosely-knit yet supportive community regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or preferred form of skateboarding. (Moore, 2003). They tend to approach their sport

with energy, drive, passion, determination, excitement and a desire to have fun (Moore, 2003). Despite the perceptions of skateboarders being rebels, or “simply different” (Moore, 2003), the open-mindedness and inclusive attitude of skateboarders remains a consistent theme in the literature. The ability of skateboarders to creatively navigate the diverse and ranging elements of urban space – often referred to as the ‘skaters eye’ - remains a marvel for onlookers and scholars alike. Their talent for analyzing the cityscape in terms of its ‘skateability’ rather than any aesthetic, historical, or monetary value (Borden, 2001) is testament to the relationship skateboarders have with the urban environment.

Woolley & Johns (2001) developed a framework to better understand the way that skateboarders interact with particular spaces in the urban environment, an approach which helps to underscore the spatiality of skateboarding in the city (Jenson et al., 2012, p.374). Woolley & Johns (2001) found that a few key factors were essential to a skateboarder’s decision about where to skate in the urban realm. These include: the location’s centrality to other places, the quality and quantity of potential tricks that can be performed there (influenced by physical setting and the skater’s ability), the social interactional possibilities the space permits, and the likelihood of encountering conflict with other groups be it security personnel, obstructing pedestrians, and other non-skaters (Jenson et al., 2012). Although Woolley & Johns focused on how skateboarders perceive *their* urban experience, there are many other studies of commonly encountered social perceptions of skateboarders, and how these perceptions have impacted their activities over time. Skateboarders are often depicted as a problem in the city, though more recent literature has identified the potential that some skateboarders have to be viewed as an asset to the city due to their entrepreneurial creativity, their association with gentrification value, and their capacity to provide an informal policing of public space (Dumas & Laforest, 2009; Howell, 2008; Howell, 2005; Woolley & Johns, 2001; Nemeth, 2006; Vivoni , 2009). Skateboarders have also been reported to contribute a certain “ethic of care for the built environment” (Vivoni, 2009, p.146), namely in terms of the DIY culture being associated with skateboarders (Karsten & Pel, 2000).

Street-style skateboarding is a form of practice in which skaters utilize the built environment as a playground to practice and strengthen their skating skills (Howell, 2008; Woolley and Johns, 2001). When a skateboarder interacts with the urban environment, the built form is reinterpreted and reimagined in ways that transcend its

intended purpose and design. This interaction is intensely reliant on the skateboarder's bodily interpretation of the urban space in which they are skating (Platt, 2018, p.831). Skateboarders have been known to physically alter various aspects of the city for the purpose of skateboarding, but even without modifying the environment, the constant reimagining of a city's attributes for the purpose of skateboarding is skillful, creative, and rhythmic (Platt, 2018, p.835).

Skateboarders have an ability to mobilize to pursue their common goal of skating in the urban realm as evidenced by the countless examples of skateboarders coming together to build their own skate apparatuses in derelict areas of the city (Tsikalas and Jones, 2018, p. 58). skateboarders are constantly reimagining their urban environment in creative and innovative ways, and this freedom to express themselves through skateboarding can be seen as an act of empowerment (Moore, 2009). Freedom and self-expression require variety, and skateboarders are excited to skate in the urban realm because of the endless opportunities that can be found in the city. Skateboarders' ability to discover innovative ways to use the urban environment presents new possibilities for public space use in under-utilized spaces of the city, and therefore redefines the usefulness of urban space (Iveson, 2013, p.243). The process of engaging with the urban environment through skateboarding exemplifies public space appropriation tactics that enable skateboarders to stake their claim to the public realm (Geertman et al., 2016, p.593).

Decades of urban skateboarding has demonstrated how skateboarders can transform components of the city into an arena for creative movement and athletic expression (Borden, 2001). Skateboarding, therefore, involves a creative and skillful interaction with the various components of the urban realm, despite the intended architectural purpose and prescribed uses of the built form. Historically, skateboarders have been determined to skateboard in urban areas despite measures taken to exclude them from the urban landscape. Skateboarding has persistently established itself as a familiar urban practice through practitioner resistance, occupation, and appropriation of spaces within which to skate and their continuing renegotiation of more cooperative relationships within the city (Bloomsbury Festival, 2020). This process of working skateboarding into the fabric of urban realm would not have been possible without skateboarder activism. Much like the innovative thinkers who take part in acts of guerilla

urbanism³, skateboarders are involved in the type of change-making that asserts their collective right to use public space. To engage in urban skateboarding, one must retrofit and/or use the built environment in ways that do not always fully coincide with the intended patterns and processes of the city. By skateboarding in the city, skateboarders also increase their visibility, which over time has helped to normalize their presence in the public realm (Geertman et al., 2016, p.594). The needs of the skateboarder were not necessarily considered in urban design, but by skateboarding in the city, skateboarders make their right to public space felt and heard.

3.3. DIY Urbanism & Claiming the Right to the City

Kurt Iveson defines DIY urbanists as people who engage in defamiliarization by identifying new possibilities in taken-for-granted spaces of the city and decommodification in the assertion of use-values (satisfying a want or need, or serving a useful purpose) over exchange values (actual monetary value) in urban space (Iveson, 2013, p.940). Borden (2001) builds on Iveson's statement, claiming that street skateboarding is an example of decommodification, since it asserts the use-value of urban space over its exchange value because skateboarding in the city "does nothing to raise national productivity" (p.233). In other words, by skateboarding in the city, practitioners are using fresh perspectives to engage with the urban environment in ways that do little or nothing to contribute to the traditional capitalistic structure of the city. Instead, skaters use elements of the city simply for skateboarding, which exemplifies a utilization of the city's physical infrastructure in ways that were not intended.

Iveson uses Lefebvre's insights to contend that urban authorities prescribe the ways in which space is supposed to be used in the city. But these authorities are not "all-powerful, and spaces are always available for reappropriation" (Iveson, 2013, p.943). In articulating the connection between DIY urbanism and the right to the city, Iveson states that urban enfranchisement is based on inhabitation (Iveson, 2013), meaning that the way citizens occupy the city challenges the notion of who the city is for. Iveson cites examples of DIY urbanism which outline how DIY urbanists reshape urban space. They

³ Guerilla urbanism is also referred to as DIY urbanism in this project and is meant to define practices and initiatives taken by individuals to "give birth to a new kind of city" using experimental approaches that coalesce into alternative use of urban space (Iveson, p. 942, 2013).

act on the belief that by physically occupying public space, people can “adopt a confrontational stance that affirms their urban rights” (Iveson, p.946, 2013). This approach overlaps with scholarship on skateboarding, which claims that by skateboarding in the city and building skate apparatus’ and infrastructure without consent or assistance from civic officials, skateboarders have continuously interacted with the built environment in a way that “transforms ordinary urban spaces into temporary autonomous play zones” (Vivoni, 2009, p.146).

City centers are predominantly places set aside for economic productivity and commodification, but public space can humanize the city by also allowing for areas of connection and meaning. Public space helps to balance the commodity-centered design of the city in an effort to provide space for people to have a variety of shared, meaningful urban experiences (Almusaed and Almssad, 2019). This supports the claim that “the use of public space is a collective right” (Saari, 2000). However, as Saari suggests, when the city “functions to further the interests of capital... inclusivity in the decision-making process is often foregone” (Saari, 2000, p.2) and the public realm reflects selective interests. Saari contends that by designing public space for all people, the urban environment can transcend productive purposes (Saari, 2000, p.84). Saari’s overall message is that urban public space ought to prioritize the needs of the people more than it showcases and serves capital. Vivoni’s research offers examples of how urbanites – including skateboarders - can challenge the urban capitalistic structure, which results in a humanizing of the city. In doing this, urban space becomes a stage for the variety of activities and experiences that contribute to joy, social connection, and fulfilment, even when these do not include the exchange of goods and services for money or contribute to building economic capital. Balancing the city in this way is a part of enhancing inclusivity in the urban realm.

Vivoni (2009) argues that skateboarders interact in “found spaces” of the city as they ebb and flow between permitted and prohibited urban areas (p.131) They move from sanctioned public skate spaces such as skateparks and skate spots⁴, into and out of skateable public space intended for other purposes. Through the visibility of groups of

⁴ Skate spots are defined by the interview participants as spaces in the urban realm that contain physical attributes that are skateable and make for an enjoyable street-style skateboarding experience. They can be a small series of features (a set of stairs, flat patch of concrete, and then a railing) or one feature (an embankment).

people like skateboarders, the city is no longer exclusively a “site for capitalist accumulation and elite consumption” (Saari, 2000) or a place “just for working and shopping, but [instead] a place where the human body, emotions, and energy can be expressed to the fullest” (Glenney and O’Connor, 2019) thus forcing the city to exemplify a more human experience – a humanized city. The presence of people like skateboarders offers an example of an alternative use of the urban environment that has nothing to do with capitalism. Because skateboarders “are rarely the productive consumers desired by city officials who have goals of economic revitalization” (Owens, 2001, p.1988), the presence of skateboarders in the urban realm defies the commodity-oriented structure⁵ of the city (Borden, 2001, p.257). The idea that every aspect of the urban environment contributes to, or is a part of, a process or system of capitalism lends to traditional understandings of the city as ruled by the movement of capital. Public space, however, offers the opportunity to balance such commodity-oriented structures, as discussed later in this thesis. Furthermore, the notion that skateboarders’ non-consumer presence in the urban realm is an act of defiance that Borden (2001) discusses is articulated by Vivoni (2009) when he argues that skateparks are examples of “an alternative urban politics”, based on the prioritization of use and pleasure rather than capitalism (p.144).

Considering the needs of groups that minimally, at best, further the interests of capital is not usually a priority for urban managers. Although good public space ought to be inclusive, often times processes of exclusion are prevalent. Saari (2000) states that there are spaces in cities which certain types of individuals are discouraged from utilizing (p.85). Borden claims that because skateboarders occupy public space without engaging in economic activity, they are often declared as trespassers by urban managers (Borden, 1998, p.50). Historically, dominant norms and values have represented an anti-skateboarding philosophy leading to the prohibition of skateboarding. Nonetheless, skateboarders continue to inhabit public space despite the enforcement of anti-skateboarding controls (Woolley et al., 2011, p.474) such as the stationing of security guards, anti-skating by-laws, and the installation of hostile architecture like skate

⁵ This ‘commodity-oriented structure’ is referenced similarly by Vivoni (2009) but he uses the term ‘exchange and accumulation’ to define urban processes and structures governed by capital.

stoppers⁶ on railings and ledges. In the face of these measures, the continued presence of skateboarders is an act of rebellion against measures meant to exclude them (Borden 2001,p.257).

Skateboarders persistence in occupying public space despite efforts to exclude them enabled them to successfully claim their right to their own sanctioned space in the city: the skatepark. However, critics of the purpose-built skatepark claim that it actually “enables urban officials to better justify the prohibition of skateboarding elsewhere in the city” (Woolley & Johns, 2001). In short, planners may design skateparks for the purpose of controlling skate activity elsewhere, yet skateboarders appropriate the prescribed space in their own way (Nemeth, 2006, p.313). This points to the connection between skateboarders and the skatepark and how the latter facilitates their use other skateable spaces in the city, in order to gain perspective about the skate network in the city.

3.3.1. Urban Public Space Planning

The motivations behind the design and allocation of public space is a complex urban planning process that city officials approach in a variety of ways. The commodification of the city through private development and real estate investment complicates the ways in which public space is planned and used because planners are managing “competing narratives and prescriptions” (Haas and Olssen, 2014, p.65). When urban managers operate in the interest of economic gain, “public space is increasingly defined by its economic function” (Nolan, 2003, p.314) instead of designed in consideration of the “public good” (Haas and Olssen, 2014, p.61). When urban managers focus on designing the city capitalistically, it becomes increasingly difficult for the public realm to represent the values of the urban collectivity. VanDeusen (2002) argues that urban designers “conceptualize public space in particularly unsocial ways...working with only certain publics” when economic development is seen as the most important function that generates value in the city (p. 150). If urban processes are shifted to include the needs and wants of the people, then the city will become more “social” over time. Haas and Olssen (2014) and VanDuesen (2002) agree that when

⁶ Skate stoppers, or anti-skateboarding guards – are obstacles installed on skateable urban features to prevent damage on skateable features in the urban realm. Examples are small metal studs on flat concrete, aluminum guards on edges, or lifted dots on staircase railings. They are marketed as effective prevention devices proven to reduce property damage and deter skaters.

urban managers work to merge a variety of goals by considering the “link between urban society, public space and planning approaches” (Haas and Olssen, 2014, p.60), designing public space for people can be achieved. How urban managers interpret this relationship - or “link” - between society’s needs and the design of public space determines whether the public realm will represent space that prioritizes the needs of some over others.

Haas and Olssen (2014) suggest that people’s expectation of public space is that it “promotes social life and generates values that are beneficial to all” (p.61). However, planners may interpret public benefit in a variety of ways. Critics argue that public space will always be inextricably linked to commodities because the exchange value of space (i.e., real estate value) is prioritized over its use value (i.e., capacity for human enjoyment) (VanDeusen, 2002, p.150). To balance the interests of urban dwellers with the interests of the economy, Haas and Olssen recommend that planners study the community to achieve designs for public space that are based on assessing, analyzing, and critiquing the needs of the people in question (Haas and Olssen, 2014, p.61).

3.3.2. Skateparks: Meaningful and/or Prescriptive?

The objectives that drive the designing of public space can change the way people interact with a place. Prescriptive planning techniques often produce public places that are meant to solve an urban issue, but which do not prioritize place-making. Understanding the planner’s dilemma in trying to balance various needs in the design of public space allows us to consider why the public skatepark was developed and what purpose it was intended to serve. Skatepark development has often been the byproduct of a more prescriptive urban planning problem solving technique and an opportunity for planners to respond to a growing urban trend. While designing a meaningful space for skateboarders may not have been the primary motivation, the skatepark has become a place of meanings for people who like to skateboard.

The logic driving the development of skateparks has been to corral skateboarding within specific areas to ensure harmonious public space without skateboarding in other parts of the city (Woolley et al., 2011, p.477). Urban managers have generally viewed skateboarding as a deviant use of space, and controlling this activity in the public realm is justified because “skateboarders use public places in ways

that challenge the normative construction” of public space (Nolan, 2003, p.315) therefore defying community norms and values. Skateboarders also cause damage to property, bringing the activity into conflicts with businesses in the city.

Howell argues that skateparks are like playgrounds, “conceived of as places to contain young people who might otherwise be playing in the streets” (Howell, 2008, p.478). He contends that the containment of skateboarding in the form of skateparks is a process of exclusion, and “should be viewed as instances of the erosion of truly public space” (Howell, 2008, p.479). Due to social and physical concerns for public safety, urban managers design skateparks to exclude skateboarders from other civic spaces as part of a larger management strategy (Woolley et al., 2011, p. 478). This “politics of exclusion” implicitly underpins purpose-built urban skateparks. While Vivoni (2009) claims that skateparks are not spaces of confinement, the skatepark still implies the legal exclusion of skateboarders from other urban spaces (p.146). Building on the exclusionary politics linked to the skatepark, Nolan (2003) states that attempts to isolate skateboarders by restricting skateboarding to skateparks is just that - an attempt that is ineffective (p.316) even if skateparks appear to cause skateboarders to limit the range of their urban mobility (Vivoni, 2009, p.146) it’s only for the duration of their presence in the purpose-built spaces. Whether the prescriptive element of skatepark design impedes or facilitates the user’s inclination and ability to attribute use and meaning to both the urban skatepark as well as other unsanctioned skateable spaces in the city is a point of interest in my research. To address this, I employ an analytical framework to assess the dynamics of urban place-making.

3.4. Place-Meaning & Place Attachment

Literature on the theory of place attachment and place meaning provide a framework for assessing how one attributes meaning to public places. When combined with insights drawn from literatures about asserting a right to public space and about the motivations that enter into public space design, this section will examine how the attributes of place might contribute to our understanding the types of that develop between skateboarders and the urban environment.

Strydom and Puren (2013) claim that meaningful places “cannot be designed from the outside” using prescriptive, top-down, bureaucratic planning practices (p.33).

Instead, the making of places requires the active involvement of communities. Skatepark design can be seen as an example of a collaborative planning initiative whereby urban managers work with the skateboard community to “preserve ‘found spaces’ through purpose-built forms” (Vivoni, 2009, p.146) as evidenced in the design and construction of Vancouver skateparks (New Line Skateparks, 2019). Strydom and Puren (2013) claim that by encouraging community involvement in the decision-making process of public space design, it becomes a people-centered approach that enhances the “sense of place within a community” (p.35). The continuing process of allocating public space in Vancouver for the purpose of skateboarding exemplifies a community-based approach to public space design. This is a process that may contribute to an established sense of place in spaces like the DSP, for instance, but does not necessarily limit place-attachment to other parts of the city. For this reason, place-attachment will be discussed in this research project with reference to the DSP as a sanctioned public skatepark space. Opening the discussion about skateboarding in skateparks in the city ensures that discussions about attributed meanings and attachment to place remain specific to each participant’s lived experience. It is important to note that it is only over the past two decades that skateboarders in Vancouver have been afforded the public skatepark as sanctioned urban space. Using literature on place-making offers an opportunity to discuss the meanings sanctioned skate spaces hold for the skateboarders involved in this study.

Strydom and Puren (2013) state that “place values are embedded in both the physical space and the social environment” (p.33), which is why it is important to consider both skateboarders and the urban environment for my research. Moulay et al. (2018) define place-attachment as “the positive bonding of people to a particular place” resulting in enhanced social interaction and person-place bonding (p.30). Additionally, Moulay et al (2018) indicate that place-attachment is expressed through behaviour, which can manifest as an emotional investment to a physical environment (p.32) and may include establishing social connections at that location. The process of ‘positive bonding to place’ Moulay et al outline is also discussed by Backstrom and Sand (2019) in their articulation of what constitutes a meaningful encounter with a skatepark. They claim that the physical features of the park influence perceptions of “skateable architecture.” By interacting with the urban architectural elements included in the skatepark, skateboarders experience an overall “joy of discovery” as they imagine and

practice movement within the space of the park, and beyond (Backstrom and Sand, 2019, p.137). When tasked with defining the characteristics of the users of this public space, Backstrom and Sand (2019) define skateboarders who appear at skateparks as skilled practitioners of the urban environment who collectively experience a 'spatial desire' - a term they define as a yearning for demanding material encounters with the built form (p.139). This forges a deep connection between skateboarders and the urban architectural environment of skateparks⁷. The physical features incorporated within skateparks aim to emulate that skateboarders can then interact with elsewhere in the city in unsanctioned skate spaces. Backstrom and Sand's ethnographic research on 'spatial desire' and 'making of place' provides an approach for asking the skateboarders in this study to reflect upon what the skatepark means to them, and how it fits into their broader network of urban skateboarding. Taking account of the skateboarders' memories, emotions, and sentiments, as well as how they use purpose-built public park spaces in relation to other skateable urban spaces, may provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment.

To further refine 'place-making' and attachment to places in the context of this research project, I will be applying concepts borrowed from the place-attachment tripartite model by Scannell and Gifford (2010). This model shows how various physical forms of urban space and social interactions occurring in these contribute to place-making. Using place-meaning literature, the concept of spatial desire as it relates to skateboarding, and place-attachment models, I am better able to contextualize the perspectives of the research participants.

The place-making literature argues that in the process of attributing meaning to a place, people feel more compelled to engage in active and ongoing participation with the space, and therefore become better represented in their community (Strydom and Puren, 2013, p.33). This type of engagement is considered an empowering process and results in feelings of ownership and responsibility toward the meaningful place (Eden, 1996; Strydom and Puren, 2013). By applying insights from the literature on place-making and place-attachment to the relationship between skateboarders and the urban

⁷ Backstrom and Sand (2019) conducted extensive research on the concept of 'spatial desire' through ethnographic investigation of the skateboarder-skatepark relationship and concluded that skateboarders engage in 'spatial desire' through the continuous imagining of place while skateboarding, and the making of place in skateparks (p.140) through meaning and memory.

environment, concepts of engagement, participatory planning, and attachment can be addressed as they arise in the research project. This involves defining 'place' as a combination of physical dimensions, social relations, symbolic meanings, and subjective human experiences (Strydom and Puren, 2013; Schofield & Szymanski, 2011). Identifying the various components that can comprise a 'place' offers a means for discussing the lived experiences of skateboarders and their relationships with the urban environment.

Through discussions of urban skateboarding, participants will convey if/how the urban skatepark and other skateable elements of the city are meaningful to them through emotion, memory, and/or sentiment. My goal in outlining literatures on the political process of claiming urban space is to connect this phenomenon with the history of street skateboarding by drawing on skateboarding-specific literature that suggest skateboarders have engaged in an act of space appropriation similar to DIY urbanists. In doing this, I present literatures that questions the notion of who has the right to the city and who the city is for. Questioning who the city is for leads to an analysis of the motivations behind public space design from the perspective of urban managers. Considering the competing visions for urban public space, I draw on literatures specific to the skatepark as public urban park space shaped both by skateboarding advocacy from below and urban planning initiatives from above. Analyzing how people assert their right to public space, the founding principles behind how that space is designed, and how meaning is attributed to public space suggests why my research inquiry is significant, and equips me with the necessary background to answer my question.

Chapter 4.

Research Design

This project examines the connection between the urban built form and skateboarders by looking closely into the research participants' personal interests in skateboarding and asking how and why they skateboard. Key objectives are to delve into the nature of skateboarders' interaction with the urban environment and to trace how instances of skate advocacy and collaboration with civic officials influence the relationship between skateboarders and the urban realm. Since the focus of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the practicalities and broader analytical implications of urban skateboarding, it has been appropriate to employ qualitative methods in the form of ethnographic research to obtain meaningful understandings from experienced skateboarders. The number of research participants is small, and their experiences and views are not depicted as being statistically representative of those of all skateboarders in Vancouver. The primary objective of this research endeavour is instead to highlight the lived experiences of these individual skateboarders in this study and to consider in detail and tell their individual and shared stories about skateboarding in Vancouver. In addition to the narratives provided by skateboarders, the study also included interviews with two other parties concerning public planning of skateboarding facilities in Vancouver.

The primary method used in collecting research data is semi-structured ethnographic interviewing. Photovoice is used as a secondary method to provide an opportunity for participant-led involvement as well as visual representation of the lived experiences of skateboarders. This combined approach employs the use of participatory action research methodologies to combine the critical dialogues of experiential knowledge with photography (Sutton-Brown, 2015) which offers another means for obtaining participant messages about skateboarding in Vancouver. Using semi-structured interviews and photovoice as mediums of knowledge transfer places the researcher at the receiving end of information which validates and emphasizes the importance of the skateboarders' lived experiences (Wang, 1999; McIntyre, 2003; Sutton-Brown, 2015). The chosen methodologies also speak to the cultural

characteristics of skateboarding, which has a rich history of using visual modes of expression.

4.1. Methodology

4.1.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted ethnographic interviews to ask why the participants skateboard and how they interact with the urban environment including both the skatepark and other skateable spaces in the urban realm. The interview questions were semi-structured to allow conversational flow and yet provide some measure of thematic consistency for narrowing in on the key objectives of the research. The majority of interviews conducted in this study were with street-style skateboarders: Seven skateboarder interviews, and two skateboarding informant interviews. I gained access to the skateboarder interview participants using snowball sampling. The first participant was referred to me after hearing about the project at a local store where a few skateboarders are employed. The first participant completed the interview and agreed to relay his experience to some friends to see who would be interested in participating. Ultimately, over ten referred skateboarders were contacted about potentially participating in the project, and six individuals who accepted that invitation were interviewed for this study. Because snowball sampling was used, the research participants all knew the first participant, and shared his interest in skateboarding the city. This resulted in a set of people who all skateboard at a fairly high level. The participants were mostly in their twenties, ranging between twenty to twenty-nine years of age. All of the skateboarding participants identified as male. Three participants made reference to their race when discussing their lived experiences of growing up as Black skateboarders. All of the participants grew up in Canadian suburbs: four interview participants grew up in the Lower Mainland, one participant was from the Okanagan, one from Northern British Columbia, and one from Alberta. All of the of the skateboarders interviewed currently live in Vancouver, although one also lives part-time at his childhood home in a Lower Mainland suburb.

To address the history of skate advocacy in Vancouver, and the process of participatory skatepark planning, I chose to interview a veteran Vancouver skateboarder and skatepark designer. I contacted the skatepark company that designed and constructed the Downtown Skate Plaza, and the owner agreed to participate in the

research project. The intersection of skateboarding advocacy, the history of urban skateboarding in Vancouver, and the legitimization of skate space in the city in the form of the urban skate park are concepts that were extremely relevant to this veteran Vancouver skateboarder. As a passionate skateboarder in the 1980s and 1990s, he was extensively involved in skateboarding advocacy in the city, and founded the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition to create solidarity in the community. He later started a skatepark design and construction company to prioritize the needs of skateboarders in response to a growing interest in facilitating skateboarding in the city. His company was awarded the contract to design and construct the Downtown Skate Plaza in 2001. He – on behalf of his skatepark design company – continued to work in close contact with civic officials in Vancouver for the purpose of integrating of skateboarding infrastructure in city planning, and referred me to a city official that acts as a liaison between the skateboard community, the Vancouver Park Board, and the City of Vancouver planning department. They are currently working together on ongoing revisions to Vancouver’s Skateboard Strategy.

The last of the nine interviews conducted for this research project involved a city official who has worked for over ten years as a liaison between the skateboard community and the City of Vancouver for the purpose of integrating skateboarding infrastructure in planning and development projects. Including a city official as an interview participant for this project provides further context and perspective about the integration of skateboarding in the urban agenda. Obtaining the perspective of a civic official who has worked collaboratively with skateboarders and planners offers valuable insights about the allocation of sanctioned public space for skateboarding in Vancouver, as well as the City’s overall stance toward the inclusion of skateboarding in the urban realm. Learning about collaborative inclusive planning initiatives sheds light on the type of relationships necessary to legitimize and incorporate skateboarding in the urban recreational options. The collaboration of skateboarders and civic officials has proved significant in the development of urban skateboarding, making it an important aspect of this research study. Moreover, the City is currently conducting revising its Skateboard Strategy, which has not been reviewed for twenty years. My project come at a particularly opportune time given the current revising of the Skateboard Strategy and the impending demolition and redevelopment of the Downtown Skate Plaza. In this moment, impactful decisions are being made regarding skateboarding in Vancouver, and

discussing these events with a civic official not only added depth to this study, but also extended the perspectives provided by the other research participants.

4.1.2. Photovoice

In addition to the nine semi-structured interviews, this study engaged four of the skateboarder participants in using photovoice technology to add a visual component to the research. The use of photovoice gave these research participants an additional mode of expressing why and how they skateboard. By utilizing photovoice images, this project encouraged the participants to feel empowered as skateboarders and research participants. It also invited the participants to explain their unique interaction with skateboarding in the urban environment and to do so creatively by using a different method to express their perspective. The opportunity to visually represent the one's connection to skateboarding and relationship to the urban environment through still images is especially appropriate in light of the important role videography and photography has played in skateboarding culture, past and present. While discussing skateboarding in depth during an interview may not have been familiar to all of the participants, capturing images of skateboarding is something all of the participants do regularly. The photovoice component of this research project, therefore, is an example of a participatory-led approach that seeks to accommodate the participants' unique interests by placing them at the center of the study.

Visual modes of representation are especially relevant today with the popularity of social media and other sharing platforms. By using photovoice, this study offers a representation of an essential popular culture modality in skateboarding and allows the participants to establish relatability and engagement with the research inquiry in a way that feels comfortable to them. Additionally, the visual representation of research concepts is creatively interpreted by participants in a way that transcends the confines of a researcher-led project. Photovoice is participant-directed and guided by an openness that encourages responsiveness to the participants' experiences and personal histories (Patton, 2002; Sutton-Brown, 2014, p.171). By relinquishing control over this method to the participants, the project shifts the traditional paradigm of research, and gains a powerful perspective for representing the community in which the project is situated (Burris and Wang, 1997).

4.2. Data Collection

4.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview data was collected remotely in the form of audio recorded telephone interviews, and then manually transcribed verbatim using audio transcription software. Transcribed interviews were anonymized by adding pseudonyms and code numbers. The number of semi-structured interviews conducted was limited to ensure the interview data could be carefully collected, transcribed, coded, and analyzed within the confines and constraints of a Masters project. Interviews were coded and analyzed individually and collectively in a three-phase process that took approximately two weeks to ensure a thorough assessment of key research findings and analytical insights.

4.2.2. Photovoice

Photovoice was presented to participants as an opportunity to submit photographs that best represent how and why they skateboard, and their relationship with the urban environment, recognizing that the participant's understanding of photovoice as an exercise may influence the way the photovoice was conducted. By employing this participant-led methodology, varying interpretations of the exercise were expected, and considered a beneficial part of the process (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p.170). Each participant was then asked to provide a caption for each photo, identifying why they captured the image, and what it signifies to them in the context of their participation in this research project. Allowing the participants to submit a caption without length requirements and with minimal guidelines provides a window into the participant's lived experiences and personal narrative; these captions act like diary entries that accompany a visual representation of the participant's involvement in the semi-structured interviews, as well as their perspective about skateboarding in the city.

Participants submitted photos they felt reflected how and why they skateboard and their relationship with the urban environment, as well as photos that encompassed their involvement in the semi-structured interview component of the research. The photos submitted were either taken by the participant, or of the participant, which was a product of the individual interpretation of photovoice as an exercise. Some participants provided an initial photo, and then submitted another photo to provide additional

significance or background context. This was also a product of individual interpretation of photovoice as an exercise. The meaning and depth of these photos was amplified by the accompanied captions; the blurb about the photo enriched the subject matter, and made for an impactful submission that allowed for the power to remain in the hands of the participant, rather than interpreted by the researcher. In following the guidelines set out by the scholars that invented photovoice, holding a group discussion about collective photo findings would have been beneficial to the data collection process. However, due to logistical constraints, this was not possible, yet by allowing participants to submit open-ended captions, a participant-led discussion about the photos was not lost.

4.3. Coding

4.3.1. Interview Data

Each transcribed interview was put into individual Word documents, and assigned a pseudonym and an interview code (eg. 1X = skater interviews; 2X = skateboarder informant; 3X = civic official). Individual interview documents were formatted into single-line spacing with line numbers. The interviews were then printed and put into a three-ring binder in the same order the interview took place (eg. The first skater interview that took place is code # 11; the second interview is code # 12, etc).

The coding process was done manually in three phases: the first phase involved going through the interview data several times to get a general sense of how the interviews fit together; the second phase involved going over each individual interview in detail recording 'code notes' with the interview code and line number follow by an identified theme, quote, or key concept; the third phase required the identification of the different themes that emerged from the 'code notes' data using several different colour highlighters. The third phase also involved the merging of themes that presented similarities. Data from each interview was then connected based on theme, and conceptually analyzed to address the research objective.

4.3.2. Photovoice Data

Captions were attached to photos submitted by each photovoice participant. Each photo was analyzed, and connected to the themes identified in the interview data if possible. In no instance did a photo connect to more than one theme; the captions

accompanying the photos allowed each photo to distinctly fit with the messaging of a central theme, or sub-theme.

In terms of the ethical aspects of photovoice submissions, the skateboarders pictured in the photos have all consented to being photographed. Photo locations were only identified if mentioned in the accompanied participant captions. Photos were submitted in either colour or gray-scale, and were not digitally altered in any way. Sizes were adjusted to fit formatting requirements, but no image data was cropped or modified. If the subject matter of submitted photos was unable to be anonymized, or subject consent was unable to be obtained, those photos were not used in this project (only one photo fell into this category).

The timeline for photovoice submissions ranged one to three months, but no photos were submitted outside of this timeframe and therefore all submitted photos have been used for analysis unless otherwise specified.

4.4. Analysis

Instead of analyzing the interview data independent from the photovoice data, I chose to integrate the findings and allow for the photos and captions to provide visual representation to the themes that emerged from the interviews. I chose to do this for two reasons. First, not all of the interview participants ended up participating in the photovoice component of the research project, so there were fewer photos submitted than expected. It is impossible to determine whether more submitted photos and photovoice participation would have resulted in an entirely different set of emergent themes. But as it ended up, the photos that were submitted complemented the interview themes. Second, it became apparent through conducting the interviews how prominent visual media is in the process of storytelling in skateboard culture. This project presents a unique opportunity to use photos taken by street-style skateboarders to accompany their narratives, which represent lived experiences shared with the interviewer. For these reasons, it was appropriate to fold in the findings of the two methodologies and analyze the photos alongside interview data not only to describe the lived experiences of the skateboarders involved in this study, but also to provide images of the themes discussed.

Chapter 5.

Findings

5.1. Introduction

The primary objective of my research is to explore how and why the participants skateboard and the story this conveys about their interaction with the urban environment. In order to do this, I first gained insight the practices of street-style skateboarders by learning more about their respective personal journeys. Exploring the personal narratives of each skateboarder provided necessary context about how and why each participant engages in street-style skateboarding. The participants articulate interactions with the urban politics that govern the spaces in which they enjoy skateboarding, a politics that conveys concepts of DIY urbanism, and the *right to the city*. From the perspective of skateboarders, much is learned about the significance of sanctioned urban skate space, and the meaningful relationships the participants have with the spaces they skate.

The personal narratives and lived experiences of the skateboarders involved in this study reveal a connection to skateboarding as a fulfilling sport, memorable hobby, and positive lifestyle; these discussions also indicate the ways in which meaning, sentiment, and experiences arise while skateboarding in the city. Participants discuss how and why skateboarding in various urban spaces offers a unique experience that triggers memories and emotions including an overall sense of joy. Discussions about meaning, sentiment, and lived experience provide the basis for an in-depth analysis of significant skate spaces. Gaining insights into the perspectives of the unique group of street-style skateboarders involved in this study provides a foundation for addressing further issues and concepts related to skateboarding in Vancouver, such as the collaborative planning processes required to facilitate urban skateboarding.

The second objective of my research project is to understand the relationship between the skateboarders and the urban environment to enable discussions about the inclusivity of skateboarding in the urban realm. I do this by relating the perspectives of skateboarders to my discussions with a skatepark designer, and a planner, both of whom are involved with current revisions to a city-wide strategy to facilitate

skateboarding in the urban realm. I draw on these different standpoints to reflect on the process of designing and planning urban space for skateboarding, and the collaborative relationships necessary to facilitate urban skateboarding, all whilst maintaining a central focus on the perspective of skateboarders.

5.2. Exploring the Personal Narratives of Street-Style Skateboarders

The personal narratives of the street-style skateboarders involved in this study tell a story about the journey of urban skateboarding and the experiences that make it memorable. Through reflecting on their interest in urban skateboarding over time, the research participants revisit moments and memories that offer insight into their skate beginnings, and why they continue to skateboard in adulthood. The lived experiences presented in this section describe interactions with the urban realm that contextualize issues and concepts of urban space use. Relating the skateboarders' urban practices to city planning processes that seek to facilitate skateboarding allows for a discussion about the inclusivity of urban skateboarding in Vancouver.

5.2.1. A History Lesson: Veteran Skateboarder Edition

Skateboarding was officially banned in Vancouver until the early 2000s. The participants involved in this research experience an urban freedom to skateboard that did not exist prior to 2001. They thus benefit from decades of skateboarding advocacy and lobbying that pushed for the legalization of skateboarding in the city.

To gain perspective about skateboarding in the early days of skate presence in Vancouver, I interviewed the founder, president, and CEO of New Line Skateparks who began skateboarding in the mid-to-late 1980s. He was heavily involved with skate advocacy before starting his company in 2001 (21-lines 3-34). Discussions with Leon about early-skateboarding advocacy led to his reminiscences about the social climate for skaters at a time when skateboarders were judged, ridiculed, and excluded. Leon remembers when skateboarding was a divisive activity that was judged by everyone; skateboarding was illegal, and unsanctioned everywhere in the city (21-lines 22-39). Leon articulates the ferocity his generation of skateboarders had to have because they were the anomaly in an urban culture that favoured conformity. In order to continue to skateboard, Leon - and skaters like him - "developed an 'anti' mentality from a place of

conflict” (21-36), and as such, skateboarders were viewed as ‘anti’: anti-establishment, anti-conformist, anti-authority. Leon explains that the ‘anti’ mentality of skaters arose from constantly feeling excluded and neglected from society because of their decision to be a skateboarder. The conflict that developed from constant exclusion made for a group of young people that felt they had to fight for their place. That sense of embattlement inspired Leon to advocate for more acceptance of skateboarding in the city. While civic officials and some members of the public were working to exclude skaters from the public realm, Leon and many other skaters felt compelled to fight back against “the negative connotations that were attached to skateboarding and the conflict with authority” (21-56).

Leon realized at a young age that the best way to be able to skateboard freely in public spaces was to make people see skateboarding as a positive activity. Leon admits, however, that not all of his peers felt the same way as him; many of them allowed their stigmatization and exclusion to anger them and push them into further conflict with authority. Leon contends that feeling as if you’re on the fringe of society can sometimes make people want to belong *less*. But Leon and many others were determined to change misconceptions about skateboarding because they believed in the benefits to practitioners, and to larger urban communities. Leon claims he has been a skateboarding advocate for 32 years and he has had to work hard to educate people throughout this three-decade journey of advocacy, first as a young skater, then as a teenager, and eventually as a new business owner. Leon knew that through educating people about skateboarding, he could shift public perceptions. As a young person, he shifted the perspective of his parents, and then his teachers. As the founder of the Vancouver Skate Coalition, he worked alongside other skateboarders to shift public sentiments, and to eventually influence decision makers to see skateboarding in a different way. In order to shift the perspectives of City officials, the public, and various other stakeholders, he had to help them see the benefits skateboarding has for the broader urban public (21-lines 65-74). By educating people about skateboarding, Leon was part of a movement that shifted the negative perception of skateboarding into a more inclusive, and understanding outlook that acknowledged the diversity of skateboarding and its social benefits (21-lines 90-94).

The driving factor that pushed Leon into skate advocacy was the way he felt about skateboarding from a very young age. Understanding more about the strong

connection Leon has with skateboarding aids in understanding the type of advocacy that allowed for the legitimization of skateboarding in Vancouver. The most important factor for Leon in his decision to advocate for skateboarding in the urban realm hinges on accessibility, and the equal right to recreational enjoyment. Leon believes that skateboarding is a positive activity that has *“very low barriers for entry, and shares the same benefits of recreation that every other sport shares”* (21-131). Acknowledging that skateboarding is accessible to all who want to learn it, is essential in advocating for the legitimization of skateboarding in the urban realm because it becomes a symbol of equality. Allotting other sports a share of public space in the city even if they have significantly more barriers to access than skateboarding suggests a broader inequity in evaluations of who merits access to urban space. That didn’t sit right with Leon, and his advocacy was based on the principle that everyone has the right to enjoy urban space. Leon chooses to highlight the benefits associated with skateboarding such as *“persistence, athletic ability, perseverance, and creative expression...all of which are positive and need to be celebrated”* (21-lines 103-105). Leon believes that the process of legitimizing skateboarding in public space is an act of celebration for all that skateboarding is, and all that it means to those who skateboard.

5.2.2. Beginnings

Collecting the participants’ stories about their first interactions with skateboarding as youths resulted in a deeper understanding about what provoked their desire to learn to skateboard, and their determination to continue to skateboard into adulthood. What began as a simple curiosity blossomed into a keen interest to learn how to skateboard, which was intensified by seeing someone display ability on a skateboard in the way it was intended to be used. The ability to learn how to skateboard was attainable because of the low barriers of entry: skateboarding has a low start-up cost, and requires very little direct involvement from others. The fact that skateboarding required few external resources allowed practitioners to feel a sense of independence and freedom, which is a rare and valuable prospect for a child. Upon reflecting on skateboarding in their youth, participants emphasized that the independence attained through skateboarding influenced their desire to cultivate their skills further. Discussions with the participants about early skateboarding depicts a collection of *beginnings*.

Through recollection and story-telling, research participants revisited their earliest experiences with skateboarding. By starting at the *beginning* of their skate journey, research participants were able to reflect on consistent elements about their first interactions with skateboarding that contributed to their individual and collective connections to the activity; these 'elements' are still relevant as they continue to skateboard in adulthood. Each participant's *beginning* reveals consistencies between their respective sentiments about skateboarding as a child. Overall, four key elements were prominent across all the interviews: feelings of intrigue, a desire to improve one's ability, low-barriers to access/accessibility, and a sense of freedom. Participants describe feeling some variation of curiosity when first interacting with a skateboard. All participants also experienced an '*I gotta do this too*' situation in the early days of skateboarding whereby they witnessed someone demonstrate ability on a skateboard, and felt a distinct desire to be able to *do it too*. Accessibility played a prominent role in this because participants were able to begin to - and continue to - skateboard as a result of the low-barriers to access. The ability to access freedom while skateboarding was a consistent factor in their desire to continue to skateboard into adulthood; the empowering feeling of being free will be discussed later in this chapter. Overall, gaining insight about the participants' *beginnings* allows for a better understanding about the skateboarders involved in this study. Encouraging participants to revisit their *beginning* through story-telling established a sense of trust between participant and researcher and encouraged participants to feel comfortable about discussing their respective personal trajectories in this practice.

All of the research participants began skateboarding in the first 12 years of their lives, and some of the participants began skateboarding as early as 4 years old. When describing how they first started skateboarding, participants recall being introduced to a skateboard by a friend or family member. Participants describe both curiosity and interest in the first moments of being introduced to the skateboard. Darren describes his introduction to skateboarding at the age of 4 as "*playing with a toy as a child*" (4-7) and recalls being absolutely "*enamored with this thing that wasn't a bike or a hockey stick...and the [sense of] wonder that came with that*" (4-266). Another participant describes a similar kid-like fascination with the sport: "*[skateboarding] is a good way to feel like a kid again cause you are playing on a children's toy when you think about it. It gives you that sense of freedom and playing*" (6-52). One participant – Nate – recalls

finding his dad's old skateboard lying around which sparked his curiosity; Nate recalls immediately trying out the board by pushing around on it with his hands and then his feet. The participants shared an initial sense of curiosity which got them onto the skateboard; but the determination to improve their skills is what keeps them on the board today, and *that* drive came from seeing someone else demonstrating a particular skill on a skateboard and thinking to themselves "*I gotta do that too*".

Becoming: Skilled Street-Skaters

The journey to become highly-skilled street-style skateboarders began in childhood for the participants in this study. Decades of persistence and hard work eventually led to an ability to skate as if it's a second nature. Each skater articulates a progression in the way they have come to feel toward skateboarding as they reflect on its implication in their transition from childhood into adulthood. Recognizing the countless hours, falls, injuries and moments of frustration and disappointment involved in honing this craft is to appreciate what it took to achieve the high skill level of this group of skaters, and understand that the way they interact with the built environment is interconnected with the development of this agility. This section aims to shed light on the journey of *becoming* that each skater involved in this study has gone through in order to achieve their current engagement with urban skateboarding.

While learning to skateboard as children, the participants describe seeing someone else demonstrate a particular ability on a skateboard and recall it driving their interest to improve. Nate – a Black skater in his early twenties - began learning to skateboard at four or five years old. Nate was first introduced to skateboarding by seeing his dad's skateboard in their garage. Nate recalls his dad trying out many sports. His dad immigrated from Jamaica just a few years before Nate was born, and Nate recalls always doing "something active" with his dad. Nate's dad recognized his son's early interest in skateboarding, and then showed him some "freestyle moves" on the board. Watching his father demonstrate an ability to use the board in the way it was intended to be used furthered Nate's interest in skateboarding, and encouraged him to try to use the board in the 'proper' way, instead of the way he initially used it. Nate's *beginning* illustrates a progression from interest to intention; Nate had no knowledge base when he first discovered the skateboard, and his curiosity inspired him to push around on it with his hands and feet, but after seeing his father using the skateboard 'properly' (i.e.

standing on it, kicking and pushing around), Nate's interest shifted toward a determination to achieve the agility and balance his father was demonstrating. Nate's story encapsulates how both curiosity and demonstration created a desire for the four-year-old to learn to skateboard. Similarly, Darren – who grew up in a small town in Ontario - recalls witnessing *“someone else using [the skateboard] and they've kind of got it figured out and you're like oh, how does this work”* (4-268). Xavier's beginning encompasses many of the themes shared by other participants; Xavier was introduced to skateboarding by his little brother and was initially quite hesitant about the new activity. Xavier remembers witnessing his little brother land his first skateboard trick – the infamous *ollie* – and in that moment, he said to himself, *“alright, my little brother is doing this, I gotta do this too”* (1-9). For all of the participants, the notion of *“I gotta do this too”*, played a significant role in their first years of skateboarding because it served as a motivating force to learn and improve their skills. The ability for a skateboarder to inspire someone else who is at an earlier stage of learning how to skateboard is a significant theme in this research project because it indicates the power demonstration has to inspire and motivate practitioners to push themselves and build their skills. So, while skateboarding may be solitary in one sense, it is profoundly communal in another. Skateboarders observe each other and then try out on their own what they've seen another skateboarder demonstrate.

Because all of the study participants have been skateboarding for one to two decades, they are now able to skateboard at a level that allows them to do it with seeming effortlessness, but this journey of advancing their ability came with some frustration and disappointment along the way. Having spent years developing their skate skills, and working through periods of disappointment, now, in adulthood, the participants don't have to direct a lot of attention to the fundamentals of skateboarding, and are therefore able to 'zone out' and enjoy the experience.

Each skater articulates how their advanced ability to skateboard has influenced their changing engagement with the craft. Xavier summarizes how his skill level contributes to his ability to use skateboarding as a release when he says: *“I'm at a point now where I'm comfortable on the board [and] I forget a lot of my daily problems when I'm skateboarding. It's a release from every day. I could have the worst day and then I get out skateboarding and forget about all of that...I'll be bombing down a hill and it's a beautiful day and I'll forget that I have all these other things”* (1-line 48-53). In order for

Xavier to be so comfortable now on the board that he can *zone out*, he spent years developing his skills when he was younger. When Xavier was younger, he admits that skateboarding would cause him frustration when he wasn't "*seeing any progress*" (1-33); at times, this pressure to improve became overwhelming and he would break his board in frustration (1-382). Xavier, like other skaters, had childhood dreams of becoming a professional skateboarder, and when he realized that wasn't going to happen, it "*plateaus and burns you out...you get bummed on yourself and wanna quit [especially growing up] watching all these crazy pros doing all these crazy tricks*" (1-lines 32-35). As Xavier got older, skateboarding shifted from being a source of disappointment to a source of appreciation: "*I'm just happy I'm skating...blessed that I'm healthy enough to do this...having fun and inspiring people to be stoked to skateboard*" (1-46).

Darren also remembers being young and going through moments when skateboarding became a "*frustration...just the concept of trying to accomplish physical feats on a little piece of wood*" (4-33), but claims that "*now, more than ever, [he] appreciates the physical aspect of it...something that [he] looks forward to*" (4-46). Over the last 3 years, Ben has suffered a torn patella tendon, a high ankle sprain, a separated left and right shoulder, and ongoing hip impingement problems - all of which are related to pushing himself to perform tricks on a skateboard. Ben admits that it has been frustrating recovering from so many injuries "*out of nowhere*" especially because he was "*an ironman*" (2-199) when he was younger. Ben has been skateboarding for 16 years, and claims that throughout his childhood and teens, he had no injuries related to skateboarding. For Ben, getting injured from skateboarding as an adult after so many years injury-free has caused some frustration for him, but he still gets out to skate regularly and claims: "*it's really satisfying in that I appreciate every aspect of it, even if I'm not at my full potential. I appreciate just being able to be on a board and push around and skate something that's really beginner level even, or try a trick that is very basic and just be satisfied with that*" (2-lines 200-205). In all of the instances, the participants describe how much they appreciate the ability to skate as adults, which depended on the several years they spent learning to skateboard in their childhood. As young skateboarders, the participants describe moments of frustration; however, years of learning in childhood now affords them the ability to skate meditatively, which they now appreciate.

The ability to skate meditatively is referenced by many of the participants in this study. Skating meditatively refers to the ability to disconnect from the action of skateboarding, and allow your mind to drift somewhere else; essentially, the skateboarder's body is moving on a skateboard, but their mind isn't focusing on this action at all. Elaborating on meditative skateboarding in adulthood, Xavier says he *"doesn't think about all the stresses...[he's] just focused on the trick at hand [and] it's relieving. [He's] at peace with everything else without a care in the world because [while skateboarding he's] not worried about anything, just having fun"* (1-370-374). When he was younger, Xavier felt pressured to perform and succeed, but now, he states skateboarding is *"my release from life. When I'm skateboarding, I'm just content. Content with life."* (1-386). Nate echoes the shift Xavier describes by reflecting on skateboarding as a young beginner - a journey that *"had some stress involved when you're trying stuff"* (6-195), but claims that *"once you get past that barrier, everything kinda falls into place"* (6-219). And once skateboarding *falls into place*, it becomes an entirely different experience.

Beginning the interviews with childhood skateboarding naturally progressed into present day skateboarding through a relatively open-ended exchange. Discussing the progression of skateboarding from childhood into adulthood results in an understanding of the participant's individual skate journey. The differentiation between skateboarding in childhood/teen years to adulthood is attributed to the fact that all of the participants have been skateboarding for the greater part of their life, so they are able to observe a noticeable shift in *why* they skateboarded then versus now. Though some motivating factors to skateboard remain constant over time (feelings of accomplishment, freedom, expression), there were some factors that changed as the skateboarders entered into adulthood; as the skaters aged, they no longer felt the need to prove their ability to others, and care less now than they ever have about onlookers and acceptance. There are also some motivating factors that emerge as the participants aged, gained more responsibilities, and worked through skate-related injuries and stress, such as the sense of gratitude and appreciation for the physical outlet of skateboarding, and the ability to perform tricks. Overall, the most consistent motivating factor to continue skateboarding over time was the sense of community and belonging they feel as a skateboarder. Skateboarding contributes many things to the individual lives of the participants; choosing to continue to skateboard into adulthood outlines several shared motivations.

As the skaters enter adulthood, they reference a shift in their lifestyles which limits the amount of free time they have; when they were teens, skateboarding dominated their extracurricular schedules, whereas now, life demands more from their time. Almost all of the participants have recently moved to Vancouver from their suburban childhood home; they are employed, pay rent, have bills, and other responsibilities which differs from their lifestyle as children and teens. The participants state that having more adult responsibilities increases their stress, and skateboarding offers a release from the build-up of everyday pressures. For example, Nyall remembers skateboarding all the time as a kid whereas now, he says: *"I'm 25, so I have to work a job, I have responsibilities, bills to pay. I can't just go to the skatepark all day every day"* (3-23-31). When Xavier discusses the ability of skateboarding to relieve stress, he says: *"It's a release from every day. I could have the worst day and then I get out skateboarding and forget about all of that...I'll forget that I have all these other things"* (1-line 48-53). Nyall defines the feeling of *release from every day* that Xavier mentions by using the phrase *"mindless calm"* (3-472) in reference to his mental state while skateboarding. Nyall explains: *"when you're skateboarding, you're so hyper-focused on not falling, doing your trick, where you're going next, and [that] demands your mental attention, so it's really hard – actually impossible – to skateboard and remain focused on it while thinking about other stresses in your life"* (3-472-477). Nyall states that skateboarding is *"a great release for [him]...it allows [him] space to just turn [his] brain off and really focus on just skating and let go of that stress for a bit and come back to it with a calm mind"* (3-480). In short, skateboarding provides a release from the stresses produced by adult responsibilities so they use their free time to skateboard. Nyall, for example, *"tries to skateboard as much in [his] time off as possible"* (3-32). But free time becomes constrained in adulthood. Growing up, the participants remember skateboarding every single day, but as they shift into adulthood and gain more responsibilities, they have less free time to spend skateboarding. Because they use skateboarding as a release from the buildup of everyday life, they make an effort to skateboard as much as possible, working around the demands of life's responsibilities. In order to continue to skateboard in adulthood, skateboarding has to be an efficient use of time; the ability to self-determine the perimeters of skateboarding contributes to an ease of access and freedom that fits the lifestyles of the skaters involved in this study.

Freedom

The low-barriers to access influenced the participants' initial involvement in skateboarding as children, and remained a significant factor in why they continue to skateboard in adulthood. The low barriers to start skateboarding allowed the participants to learn as children; the freedom skateboarding continues to offer them is a significant reason they to continue to skateboard as they get older. As children, each participant remembers the moment they were first introduced to skateboarding, and sought to get a skateboard of their own shortly after this encounter, which was a relatively easy process. The fact that there were minimal barriers preventing the children from being able to get a skateboard suggests that skateboarding is an accessible activity. Though a parent was involved in the process of getting each participant a skateboard, whether it be new, or second-hand, the participants recall very little further involvement from their parents after the point of purchase. All of the participants began skateboarding in the mid-2000s when the start-up cost to learn to skateboard was around \$60 (Vice Magazine, 2018).

Skateboarding is unlike conventional sports: there is no uniform cost, no registration fee, or set practice and game time, all of which require consistent resources and involvement from a parent or guardian. The low start-up cost made a huge difference for skaters like Brennon who says: *"coming up, me and my family, we were pretty poor, so skateboarding was cheap and it was a way for me to meet people [instead of] regular conventional sports that cost money"* (5, line 3-9). Ben describes how the low barrier to access skateboarding was hugely important for him as an early skateboarder because *"all you really need is a skateboard and your body and you can be in any place. You can have a two-by-two chunk of concrete to try some skateboarding...it has this completely free aspect to it...with so many more possibilities"* (2, line 44-27).

After the initial investment of a skateboard, skateboarders required very little outside involvement, which played a significant role in the participant's individual skateboarding journey from childhood to present day. Participants' describe the ability to feel independent as a consistent factor that contributed to their involvement in skateboarding throughout their youth; when it came to skateboarding, reliance on parents was minimal which meant a lot to the participants when they were younger. The ability to feel free while skateboarding is significant because it gave them agency during the years of their lives when a lot of decisions were made for them. Freedom while skateboarding is articulated throughout the interviews in many ways: when the

participants reflect on their childhoods, they are able to identify that they disliked being told what to do, and skateboarding offered them a sense of control; in adulthood, they identify that they are able to escape daily stresses through skateboarding. The ability to get on a skateboard and define the parameters without interference enables the participants to experience freedom and this remains a fundamental element in their decision to keep skateboarding.

The juxtaposition of 'being controlled' versus 'in-control and therefore free' is a dynamic that the skateboarders refer to in many ways. Reflecting back on skateboarding as kids/teens, the participants compare the freedom of skateboarding to the constraint of conventional sports. By comparison, skateboarding always seemed more appealing to the participants. Ben describes other sports as being *"stuck in one place and your objective is pretty much written on paper for you"* (2-49). Nyall recalls playing soccer and feeling stifled by the regime: *"when I played soccer when I was a teenager it was like ok, your soccer practice is 2 hours and you show up... and we are gonna run some drills...whereas what I like about skateboarding is I can...decide for myself how hard I wanna skate, what I wanna skate, where do I wanna skate, there's a lot more diversity in what I can actually do on a skateboard as opposed to other sports that are [geared] to a goal like score the basket, shoot the hoop, kick the ball in the goal"* (3, line 43-50). Darren describes skateboarding as *"more individualistic...[not] having to rely on anyone else, [not] not needing anyone else to do it"* (4-57). Darren compares the freedom of skateboarding to sports like soccer and hockey and describes the difference as the ability to define the terms of engagement, claiming that with *"a sport like soccer or hockey, there's only so many ways you can kick the ball or shoot the puck, but with skateboarding, there's endless ways you can manipulate the board"* (4-60). Brennon recalls growing up skateboarding thinking *"wow, this could be something here. I don't have to settle with the norms of [sport] or listening to a coach or anything...over just a piece of wood and 4 wheels"* (5-line 190-198). Nate's dad, on the other hand, encouraged Nate to play every sport growing up, but Nate stuck with skateboarding because *"no one tells you how to do it or why you should do it"* (6-41); he got to *decide for himself*.

The participants collectively described the ability to define skateboarding for themselves as a key factor in choosing to continue skateboarding throughout their lives. The sense of diversity of options skateboarding affords the skaters is important to them,

but the ability to *choose* from among these options is even more significant. The value of individual choice and the freedom it affords the skaters continues to be a driving force in their decision to skate in adulthood. The freedom described by the participants exemplifies the value the skateboarders involved in this study place on being able to exercise individual choice. Because the sense of freedom became such a prominent factor in the skaters' motivation to skateboard over time, it became important to understand what this freedom *feels* like to the skateboarders involved in this study in order to contextualize why it is so significant, and how it impacts – or is impacted by - their interaction with the urban environment.

During each interview, I prompted the participants to tap into what they *feel* while skateboarding, and the responses revealed stories about the importance of freedom, and how intricately linked it is to self-expression, individualism, and the ability to be one's self. Brennon is a visual artist and Olympic-qualifying track athlete who moved to California shortly after high school to train for the Olympics. Though previous narratives pitched conventional sports against skateboarding, Brennon feels skateboarding *"is like running track... or making art to me...it makes me feel, just freeing, it's a moment in time...that allows me to be exactly who I am"* (5-lines 301). Brennon is passionate about both track and skateboarding. Though the fundamentals of these two sports are different, his connection to each sport is the same: he feels like himself as a runner, and he feels like himself as a skater. Nyall works full-time and has grown to appreciate that *"there's no specified rule on how much you have to skate, how hard you have to skate...[he] just decides for [him]self how hard [he wants] to skate, what [he] wants to skate, where [he] wants to skate"* (3-44). Nyall often asks himself: *"what's my goal today for my time skateboarding?"* (3-56) understanding that his job takes up a lot of his free time, and prioritizing hobbies is a part of adulthood. Darren, the University-educated 'fair-weather skater', emphasizes that *"the freedom part of [skateboarding] is important...just a sense of freedom"* (4-248); it's what keeps him interested in skateboarding, despite the several injuries he's endured from the sport. Nate expresses that skateboarding *is* freedom because it goes beyond *"the feeling of being free. Skateboarding is your own thing. It's your own art form"* (6-40). Sandro – a sponsored skater in his early twenties - shares sentiments about individual freedom; when he's skateboarding, he says he *"can be 100% [him]self"* (7-178) which has contributed to his decision to skate for a living at this stage in his life. Each skater involved in this study has other things they are

passionate about (other sports, talents, responsibilities, hobbies, etc), but the driving force behind their continued involvement in skateboarding is how much *themselves* they feel on their boards. The ability to feel like oneself while skateboarding is a testament to the freedom of self-expression skateboarding affords the practitioners. The value of self-expression and individual freedom transcends skateboarding; it shifts from simply a hobby or learned skill, into a lifestyle. The participants' commitment to skateboarding as a lifestyle acts as a doorway to understanding their relationship with the urban realm because viewing skateboarding as a way of life provides insights into how each skater engages with the urban environment. The process of becoming a street-style skateboarder has offered generous understandings about key motivating factors to skateboard over time, namely the feeling of freedom skateboarding affords its practitioners. These understandings have culminated in a present perspective on the lifestyle of urban skateboarding; it is from insights about lifestyle that much can be learned about participants' engagement with the urban realm.

5.2.3. Urban Skateboarding

Skateboarding is a physical activity, and yet throughout the interviews, participants emphasize that skateboarding has meant far more to them than its physical aspects alone. Skateboarding has managed to transcend physical activity, and become a lifestyle for the practitioners involved in this study. In order to understand how this was possible, and what it means for their engagement with the urban realm, I inquired into what has made skateboarding so irresistible to the participants over time. I wondered how using a skateboard could be so captivating that the participants still skate regularly in adulthood, despite having more responsibilities, increased time demands, and even severe injuries from this engagement. Participants' answers revealed that their deep interest in skateboarding began in childhood, but not necessarily through just the act of skateboarding in itself. Once the participants began learning to skateboard, they felt invited into a club meant only for skaters: they *belonged* somewhere. This club for skateboarders was made possible by the skate industry. The skate industry penetrates many aspects of society: art, fashion, music, and even language. Skateboarding intersects with an expressive culture, and the participants were exposed to the culture as young, new skateboarders which perked their interest in skateboarding and sustained it over time. Skate culture created a *look and feel* of skateboarding, and when

skateboarders were exposed to this depiction of 'skate identity', they were fascinated. As youth, the participants remember resonating with the visual representation of skate culture; they idolized skate identity, and this allowed skateboarding to trickle into other elements of their lives such as the way they dressed, who they surrounded themselves with, and how they interacted with one another. The personal narratives shared by the participants in this study conveys how impactful the skate industry is in transcending a hobby into a lifestyle. Through engagement and subscription to skate culture through the skate industry, skateboarding influenced several elements of the participants' life simultaneously and this made a lasting impact. The participants share lived experiences, stories, and narratives that exemplify how their fascination with skate culture infiltrated into their lifestyle. Skateboarding is a lifestyle for the participants; it informs the way in which they approach the world. This impacts the way a skateboarder moves in and through the urban environment because their motion is layered with meaning; every urban interaction a skateboarder has is reminiscent of a part of themselves resulting in a poetic movement through urban space that tells a story, inspiring others that watch and engage. And the skate industry recognized the poetry of motion skateboarders participate in, which is why it has been so influential and effective at shaping the culture of skateboarding. The street-style skateboarders involved in this study express their connection to the urban environment by discussing their first exposures to skate culture, and how it impacted their involvement in skateboarding. The ability to perform skate tricks in complex urban environments originated from skate culture; these urban performances tell a story of motion about engagement with the urban environment.

Urban Performances

Participants describe their early interest in skate culture mainly through exposure to skate videos, and magazines. The skate videos featured footage of professional skateboarders doing street-style tricks in urban settings; each pro-skater had their own unique skate style, and represented various industry brands through sponsorships. These videos were distributed by skateboard companies and were intended to be viewed by skateboarders. Participants describe being inspired by skateboarding videos, and recall becoming motivated to emulate the tricks they were seeing in them. Ben – a skater now riddled with injuries - describes the skate industry he was exposed to as an early skater as a collection of skate brands that “*marketed...what can be done on a skateboard*” (2-111). Ben remembers being a kid watching skate videos and feeling

drawn to replicate what he saw, which was usually filmed in an urban environment. Nyall recalls establishing his intention to emulate skate video content, going as far as buying a video camera to shoot his own videos (3-168). Nyall and several other participants would travel hours by bus and SkyTrain from the Lower Mainland suburbs into Vancouver to skate in urban settings that looked similar to the structures they saw in the skate videos. The ability to organize a day of skating in a place far from home by mapping out a transit journey demanded incredible initiative at a young age and confirms how influential skate videos were in motivating young street-skaters. Skate companies perpetuated interest in skateboarding because they understood the power of the *motivation to emulate*. The video footage that showed “*what can be done on a skateboard*” (2-111) successfully inspired the participants to develop their own personal skate style, and improve their skate skills and ability. Performing skate tricks to demonstrate their skills and ability became a fundamental part of street-style skateboarding for the participants. These urban performances not only act as a stage for skateboarding style, ability, and skill, they also serve as platforms for inspiration, engagement, and connection. Furthermore, by capturing urban skate performances through video or photo, the moment is documented and therefore everlasting. Re-engaging with the documented performances can later evoke feelings of joy and nostalgia. Attempting and landing a skate trick in an urban environment encapsulates many of the remarkable features of urban skateboarding. The following photovoice submission encapsulates how the act of performing skate tricks in an urban setting can result in community connection and personal achievement; because this urban performance was captured in photo, it is an everlasting moment that can be re-visited therefore evoking memories, feelings, and sentiments.



Figure 5.1. *'Trick Joy'*

Photovoice Contributor: Michael Ray, Photographer: Ryan McKellar

"This photo is taken on June 21, 2019 at the Law Courts in Downtown Vancouver. It was on summer solstice (day with the most hours of sunlight every year, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Go Skateboarding Day). I am in the middle being hugged by two other skaters after landing a trick down some stairs in front of a crowd of about 400 skaters during a Go Skateboarding Day event in which skaters congregate and take over public spaces in the city to skate. This photo is special to me in many ways. I treasure this photo because it was a photo taken by Ryan McKellar – a skateboarding photographer who passed away from complications of Cystic Fibrosis several months later. Ryan loved skateboarding with every part of his soul, and was constantly documenting things going on in the Vancouver skateboard community. It makes me smile to think of this day where he was still with us, enjoying skateboarding to the fullest with the rest of our community. After landing the trick I had worked really hard for I was showered with hugs, high-fives, and support from a community I love so much. I would say it was one of the moments in my life where I felt completely on top of the world. Many skateboarders will talk about the feeling of working tirelessly just to land a trick one time, and go hug and high-five your crew after. There really is no better feeling in my opinion, so having a moment like this was pretty incomparable to other types of joy I've felt in my life."

The documentation of urban performances through video and photo is a way for skaters to tell stories about skateboarding in the urban realm in a way that inspires others and keeps the culture alive. The participants involved in this study recall engaging with skate videos in their childhood, and this exposure to the industry impacted them in many ways: the idolization of professional skaters fueled their drive to become more skilled; watching the professionals execute skate tricks in diverse urban environments encouraged the participants to journey to the city to explore; ultimately, the content in the skate videos inspired a lifestyle that would become paramount as they skated into adulthood. Idolization through skate culture still occurs today through video and photo, but more prevalently in shorter visual clips using social media, or video sharing platforms like YouTube. Documenting and sharing urban skate performances is still a huge part of the participants' lives. The desire to capture a skater landing a complex trick in an urban environment tells a story about skateboarding in the city that offers insight about the relationship between skateboarders and the urban realm. Sharing an urban performance may seem self-motivated, but the street-style skateboarders involved in this research claim it goes beyond each individual skater and keeps the skate community intact. Ben reveals that street-style skateboarding isn't about *just* learning a trick; he claims that "*the stuff that you would want to share with somebody and show that you've done, you would wanna do that in the street*" (2-138). Nyall, the skater that used to capture video footage as a kid, admits setting out to film skate videos is "*to this day, still what I do with my weekend*" (3-182). The fact that skateboarding still dominates Nyall's free time illustrates that skateboarding is a passion and a lifestyle, not *just* a hobby; but the fact that he spends his weekends documenting his urban skate performances begs deeper explanation.

We know that the participants involved in this study skateboard at a high-level, which suggests that they have moved beyond the learning stages. The participants claim that learning and landing a trick is an accomplishment that took up a lot of their time in the first several years of learning to skateboard. But as advanced skaters, being able to carry out a variety of tricks in a unique style on various challenging elements of the built environment - *that* is what keeps street-style skateboarding exciting, and *that* is the type of content skaters are hoping to capture and share with others. Ben works for a skateboard distribution company and is involved with managing content for sponsored skateboarders; he knows a lot about the linkage between urban skate content and

establishing a sellable product. Ben claims that creating and sharing skate content is more about the lifestyle than the industry. Ben describes the desire to share skate content as follows: *“there’s so many tricks you can do, and the combination you do them, your own style you bring to it, just can really stand out”* (2-229). Sandro is a sponsored skater required to create skate content in order to maintain his sponsorships. Sandro describes going skating and filming content as routine; he does not go skateboarding without *“trying to get stuff on film”* (7-136). But the requirement to submit documented urban skate performances for the purpose of maintaining a sponsorship that offers monetary rewards is completely different than spending one’s free time capturing content as a hobby. Nonetheless, sponsored or not, going somewhere specific in the city to capture a video clip is one of the main motivations to skate for participants. Participants that are not sponsored admit that they prioritize getting video clips and photos of their urban performances, even though they don’t receive monetary compensation for it. Nate provides insight about the significance of capturing video or photo evidence of urban skate performances during his recollection of landing his first skate trick: *“I remember the first time I met and found skate friends. They were the reason I wanted to learn to flip my board. I practiced all the time. One day after school I went in front of them like “guys, I can do it!” and I did it first try out of nowhere. That was the best feeling. Having all your friends hug you and like just be so stoked that you learned a trick...you feel like you’re on top of the world and nothing is bringing you down”* (6-line 207-212). Creating and sharing skate clips is still a way for brands to gain exposure, and perpetuate the marketability and commodification of skateboarding, as evidenced by Ben in his role as a skateboard company sponsor manager, and Sandro as a sponsored skateboarder. But other participants share experiences of capturing and sharing skate content which indicates that documenting their urban skate performances can be an important expressive vehicle for establishing and maintaining a community connection. By sharing a video or photo of an urban skate performance, the skaters inspire others which is reminiscent of the idolization the participants described in their childhood. Nate’s memory of his first kickflip as well as the above photovoice submission indicates that the documentation of urban skate performances evokes a response and reaction from other skaters that *feels good*, and therefore strengthens connection with fellow skateboarders. Sharing a visual representation of *what can be done on a board* was – and is – an integral part of shaping skate identity. When skateboarders interact with video or photo of an urban skate performance, they identify with the content and

feel a sense of belonging. This indicates that the idolization of skate identity is a positive feedback loop: skaters create and share content of their urban skate performances which then inspires other skaters to emulate what they see and document it, and then share *that* content which inspires whoever sees it. By creating visual content of *what can be done on a board*, skate culture lives on.

The following photovoice submissions represent the process of capturing a spontaneous moment from an urban skate performance, and the subsequent publication of the image in a skate magazine. The participant was practicing skate tricks in an urban setting in his free time – unknowingly being photographed. He was out in the urban realm, doing what he loves to do: perform skate tricks in the city. The spontaneity of the event allowed a wonderful picture to be captured that was eventually published in a skate magazine. The publishing of this image encapsulates the process of sharing urban performances with the like-minded individuals that engage with skate culture through magazines, and other modes.



Figure 5.2. 'Sneak Shot'
Photovoice Contributor: Malik Walker

"This photo means a lot to me because it was the first photo I've ever gotten published in a magazine. The thing I like about skateboarding is the unexpected moments. This was on my birthday and I didn't know my friend was even shooting the photo. A few days after, I got a text and saw the photo. By the end of the year, it was published in a skate magazine.



Figure 5.3. 'Sneak Skate Moment in Magazine'
Photovoice Contributor: Malik Walker
Accompanies Figure 5-2.

Skate Community

Though the ability to perform tricks, push oneself, and strengthen skate skills are motivating factors that contribute to the participants' determination to continue to skateboard into adulthood, other key factors came up in the discussions that shed light on the various attributes that transcend skateboarding from a hobby into a lifestyle. As a hobby, the physical demands of skateboarding are consuming; countless hours are spent learning to land a trick in innumerable ways using diverse elements of urban architecture. The endless combination of tricks can become overwhelming and lead to pressure to improve. But the participants experience a shift in expectation for themselves, claiming that the pressure to improve/excel - or even become a professional - was very high throughout their childhoods, but now, in adulthood, they find relief from that outside pressure, and enjoy accomplishing/progressing *for themselves*. The ability to focus on their individual definition of accomplishment contributes to the participants' sense of belonging within their skate community. Being able to self-express, and then be understood and accepted by fellow skaters through that expression is a rewarding aspect of skateboarding that the participants appreciate. Each skateboarder describes the process of developing their own style of skateboarding which began in childhood with the idolization of the unique style and ability demonstrated by professional skateboarders. The ability to hone a personal skate-style is described as an act of self-expression; while skateboarding, the skater is involved in a constant motion of self-expression which other skateboarders may observe and get inspired by. This process of expression resembles the consumption of other art forms. Brennon is a freelance photographer and artist that has worked in LA. He confirms that skateboarding is art by describing how influential skate culture is in other places in the world; he claims that *"fashion, style, music, it's all intertwined"* with skateboarding (15-37). As the participants describe, skate culture is composed of individual acts of skater self-expression, that - when consumed as a collective - is influential, relatable, and transcendent which enables skate culture to infiltrate fashion, music, and art.

Skateboarding as self-expression rewards the skaters with a sense of inner accomplishment, independent of outside pressure; the repeated testaments about self-expression and inner accomplishment suggest why the community is described as being inclusive and supportive of one another. Xavier claims that *"skateboarding is a part of him"* (11-66), and being embraced by fellow skaters while he is being fearlessly himself

offers him a sense of acceptance and belonging; he goes on to describe that *“the community that skateboarding provides... doesn’t see colour. It doesn’t see age. It doesn’t see gender. It just sees this person’s rippin’ or this person’s learning”* (11-92). Ben echoes Xavier’s description of the skate community by saying: *“any skateboarder can share a common ground regardless of age, colour, gender...you have something in common. You see one anywhere, and there’s a mutual respect...positive encouragement...[and] a sense of community”* (12-line 98-101). Nyall says that *“being amongst peers...really meant a lot to [him] growing up”* (13-64) and he recently realized that the community aspect of skateboarding is one of the main things that keeps him motivated to continue skateboarding. Nyall states that skateboarders are connected (13-84), and Darren builds on this by saying that skateboarding *“is a community, a network of different people and places...[with] different layers to it that are relatable on a lot of different levels”* (14-70) which allows him to grow and change with skateboarding. Darren admits that when he was younger, he felt he *“had something to prove to others”* (14-206), but as he’s gotten older, he has developed the *privilege* to not care what people think. Darren’s motivations to skateboard have shifted from needing to prove something to external spectators to doing it for his own feeling of accomplishment and joy. Darren is recovering from several injuries and, as a result, he’s not able to skate at the level he used to; if he still had something to prove to onlookers, it might have impacted his desire to skateboard. Instead, the ability to disconnect from others’ judgements has been essential in keeping Darren interested in skateboarding, despite his shifting ability and skill level. Because Darren no longer cares to prove himself to other skaters, his interactions with his skate community have changed over time. Even though he doesn’t skate at the level he once did, he is still able to connect with other skaters and has come to understand that his ability is not as significant as he once thought. In contrast, Brennon states that being able to skateboard at a high-level can create opportunities; he states that skateboarding well can initiate connections within the skate community. Brennon suggests that the feeling of belonging is instantaneous *because* of the level at which he can skateboard. Brennon has skateboarded in several countries including America, Spain, Malaysia, and the Philippines and he claims that being able to skateboard is *“an international language”* (15-74). Brennon tells stories of not knowing a single person in a foreign city, and when he *“pulls up to a spot that other people are skating, and they see [him] skating, and they see what level [he] skateboards at, it’s just like oh, he’s fam. They can see the hours [he’s] spent doing the same thing*

and [it's a] common ground and mutual respect...they know how it feels to fall and get back up...it doesn't matter about skin colour or anything, as soon as you see someone doing something sick on a skateboard, you're gonna be like what's up, what's your name" (15-line 74-81). Darren and Brennon both describe a sense of belonging within their skate community even though they skate at different levels, which indicates that their acceptance and connection to one another as skaters has less to do with the level at which they skate, and more to do with their shared passion for skateboarding. The stories shared by these two participants indicates that connection within the community can occur regardless of skill level. The ability for strangers to skateboard in the same place, feel connected and understood contributes to the sense of community the participants describe. Built on a mutual understanding, skaters are able to feel like they can relate to one another despite differences because of their shared understanding about the journey of skateboarding; for this reason, skateboarding is an inclusive activity that transcends social barriers. The following photovoice contributions encapsulate the way skateboarding can create unlikely connections, bridge social differences, and have a lasting impact.



Figure 5.4. 'Unlikely Pals'
Photovoice Contributor: Alex Savage
Photographer: Michael San Felipe

"This photo is taken by a friend I met through me doing the Black Lives Matter movement at my local skatepark in Walnut Grove. I ended up meeting the photographer from him seeing the post in the newspaper. He's actually from San Francisco and I spent a lot of time in San Fran when I lived in California. He just got engaged to a Canadian woman from my area and we created a friendship from the BLM event, and him wanting to actually shoot me skating. Being able to bridge the gap and have a common interest; we not have a very unique friendship that – from the outside we look different but when we talk, it's all the same like he was a skater. And that's what makes these 4 wheels and a piece of wood so amazing – you don't know who you'll meet but it can give you friendships of a lifetime."



Figure 5.5. 'All One'
Photovoice Contributor: Will Savage

In this photo I'm skating back from buying flowers to hand out to people with children from my local park w/ my brother. We did this to spread positivity around the time the BLM movement was really causing trouble last year. This photo means a lot to me because in this photo you can see by my smile that I'm joyful. what skateboarding means to me is pure happiness and bliss and to share skateboarding with others is to share joy and passion through the art of skateboarding.

Feeling Joy

In addition to documenting and excelling at urban skate performances, and establishing skate community connections, there is another factor that contributes to the lifestyle of an urban skateboarder: skateboarding makes them happy. The feelings of happiness and joy that are described by the street-style skateboarders involved in this study indicate that skateboarding is essential to the way the participants live because it has become an indicator for other lifestyle factors. Through skateboarding, the participants express an ability to feel happiness, uplift themselves, and feel self-motivated through a determination to accomplish a skate trick. The stories shared by the participants illustrate that the way in which people live their lives can change depending on exposure. This section describes the emotional contribution that skateboarding makes for the daily lives of the participants involved in this study in an effort to illuminate the benefits skateboarding has for a valued lifestyle.

Xavier states that the social aspect of being a skateboarder can sometimes “open pandoras box drinking beers, and chilling” (11-337); but he tries not to let it get there because he has recently realized “there’s a lot more than just chillin’ and drinkin’ beers” (11-338). Xavier is in his early twenties and when he moved to Vancouver last year, he started working as a bartender, which unfortunately led to a “really bad rollercoaster” (11-396). Xavier was “heavy into drinking and partying and doing drugs...working all the time, and after work drinking, and up all night” (11-399). Xavier said that it took a while to realize he had a problem; the bartending habits and schedule kept him functioning for a lot longer than he realized without recognizing he had a worsening addiction and needed help. Xavier wasn’t skateboarding during this time, and “when [he] did get skating...[he] was so weak from the drinking and partying that [he] couldn’t skate” (11-405). He remembers “waking up one day [and saying to himself] yo, I’m a piece of shit”. Xavier has been skateboarding every day since he was a child, and the fact that he was physically unable to skate was a wake-up call to get sober. Xavier went to Narcotics Anonymous for thirty days and had been sober for five months at the time of our interview. He said that his inability to skateboard acted as an alarm, signaling him to get help which was “probably the best choice of [his] life. It probably saved [his] life. It brought [him] back to what [he] loves to do... [and he] was so much happier” (11-line 407-411). Because of his experience, Xavier defines skateboarding as “an outlet” (11-390); overcoming his addiction showed him that skateboarding is also an indicator for his overall wellbeing. Xavier’s epiphany of ‘I can’t skateboard right now, what’s going on’ saved his life. Brennon describes how he overcame a difficult time in life in a similar way: “I went through some stuff in the summer where I was super depressed and didn’t talk to anybody” (15-313). Brennon skated through his emotions claiming that “if [he] couldn’t skate, everything would be 10x worse [because skateboarding] gives [him] time to free [him]self...and get to be back at ground zero” (15-311). Brennon claims that when he’s skateboarding, it’s “like nothing ever happened” (15-312). Brennon describes the way he got through his rough patch: “every day I’d be rolling around, skate, not talk to anyone, just skate, sweat, be huffing and puffing...I feel gratitude from landing tricks. It feels like a really good accomplishment even though it’s only for myself” (15-line 315-320). Because skateboarding offered a sense of accomplishment, physical activity, and independence, Brennon was able to use skateboarding as an outlet even though he didn’t feel like seeing anyone; he recalls that “it would be hard to get out of the house but as soon as [he] was out of the house rolling [he’d] be like what am I doing being sad

right now!" (15-324-326). Brennon recalls the moment he was able to push through his rough time: *"I'd be lying down like I don't wanna go skate [but then was like] I gotta at least try and I'd skate harder when I'd be sad, cause I'd be like trying to get it out of me"* (15-326). By skateboarding, Brennon was able to get out and get to the other side of a self-isolating state.

Darren states that skateboarding is a dry, outdoor sport and claims that living in Vancouver with so much rain can affect the ability to get out and skate which is *"frustrating with it being an outlet for mental health issues"*; Darren explains that *"skateboarding is something that makes you feel better and when you can't do it because of the weather, it feels more limiting"* (14-244). Darren goes on to state that on a nice, dry day, he's that much more motivated to get out and skateboard to take advantage of the weather, knowing that it will improve his mental state. Sandro describes skateboarding as his *"life coping tool"* (17-28) that he uses to deal with life stresses in adulthood.

Another way that skateboarding has a positive impact on participant lifestyles is by practicing street-style skate tricks. The participants' claim that accomplishing skate tricks is exciting and fun and makes them feel happy. Participants use analogies to describe the feeling of attempting and landing a skate trick. Nyall says: *"it's the best feeling...I try for hours and hours and then you finally do it and you're like oh my god I feel like I'm on top of the world! You feel like you won the lottery or something...I'm so happy like I don't have to keep trying and trying, I did it! I accomplished it! That feeling of accomplishment is probably my favourite thing"* (13-line 505-517). The *"pure joy"* (13-503) that Nyall describes is similar to Nate's description of accomplishing a trick: *"[it's] probably one feeling I'll never be able to recreate because you almost feel like you're on top of the world and nothing is bringing you down"* (16-212). Sandro compares landing a trick to taking drugs: *"trying a trick for like 4 hours straight or 2 or 3 different days and you finally get it, you feel like you're on cocaine or ecstasy or something...it's really hard to feel like that, sober"* (17-line 212-214). The combination of joy, happiness, and excitement that the skateboarders describe when landing a trick they have spent a lot of time attempting is so memorable that they find themselves chasing those kinds of moments time and time again. This chase for the rush of joy involves hours, and days of skateboarding in many different environments. Whether they skate alone, or with friends, skateboarding is filled with these joyous moments of happiness; the skaters are outdoors

breathing in fresh air, enjoying their environment, and exerting themselves in physical activity. The participants describe skateboarding as an outlet that impacts the way they live their daily lives in a positive way, whether as an indicator for their overall wellbeing, an outlet from life's difficult moments, or as a source of happiness through accomplishment, skateboarding consistently uplifts them. The following photovoice submission depicts many of the concepts covered in this section: the determination to skateboard despite inconducive weather, the uplifting feeling of accomplishment from landing skate tricks, and the positive impact skateboarding has on wellbeing.



Figure 5.6. 'Positive Mental Attitude'
Photovoice Contributor: Michael Ray

"This photo represents why I skateboard in several ways. It is taken on a snowy day in an underground parking lot underneath a Best Buy. During the Winter in Vancouver, there are not many places to skateboard that are covered. Many skateboarders (myself included) spend the

Winter months seeking out places to skate. I find skateboarding to be the perfect activity for me to do to maintain my mental well-being, exercise, have fun, and challenge myself. I decided this Winter to write 'PMA' on my skateboard, which stands for 'Positive Mental Attitude'. I did this because I find no matter what is going on in my life, skateboarding can take me to a positive and stress-free place where my only objective is to enjoy myself. Even though this photo showcases me skateboarding in a less than ideal environment (a parking lot with some flat ground and a wall that I can try to ride up onto), I still choose to take the time to go do it because it makes me really happy and takes me to a positive place.”

5.3. The Relationship Between Skateboarders and the Urban Realm

5.3.1. The Benefit of Gaining Perspective About Street-Style Skateboarders

Outlining the lived experiences and personal narratives of the street-style skateboarders involved in this study helps to prepare for discussions about the relationship between street-style skateboarders and the urban environment because learning more about the lives of this unique group of participants is essential to understanding how they interact with cityscapes. Gaining insight about Vancouver’s skate history from a skater that was involved in early advocacy laid the foundation for acknowledging the types of urban freedoms present-day street-style skateboarders enjoy. By outlining the participants’ personal narratives about their individual skate journeys from childhood into adulthood, I contextualized how and why the freedom to skateboard in the urban realm is a celebrated phenomenon that skateboarders value deeply. Delving deeper into the meaning and importance of urban skate performances suggests an intimate and creative connection between street-style skateboarders and the urban environment that is layered with feelings of accomplishment, encouragement, and belonging. The process of documenting and sharing urban skate performances through video and photo is not only reminiscent of the history of skate culture, it also represents the transfer of inspiration between members of the skate community. The willingness of the skateboarders involved in this research to share feelings, sentiments, and details about their lived experiences has afforded us valuable insights about the group of street-style skateboarders involved in this research and aided in understandings about how they interact with the urban environment. The personal narratives discussed also reveal aspects about the skate community that echo other ethnographic studies conducted on skateboarders: the skate community is inclusive, and encouraging. Through the revisiting of the participants’ memories, we develop an

understanding about urban skateboarding as a way of life – a lifestyle which illuminates the impact skateboarding has on the participants’ ability to self-express and feel a sense of belonging. The participants reveal their feelings while skateboarding in the urban realm and articulate how and why skateboarding in various urban spaces culminates in nostalgia, and a sense of release, freedom, and joy. Discussions about meaning, sentiment, and lived experience have now laid the ground for an in-depth analysis of participant-identified skate spaces in Vancouver whereby aspects of the place-attachment model are applied to illustrate the relationship the skateboarders in this study have with urban spaces. Understanding more about the perspectives of the unique group of street-style skateboarders involved in this study has laid a foundation for addressing further issues and concepts related to skateboarding in Vancouver, and related urban planning processes in this city.

5.3.2. The Urban Skateboarding Network

Introduction

In order to better understand if/how the street-style skateboarders navigate the urban environment they skateboard in, it was necessary to inquire about where they skateboard, and observe consistencies and patterns that developed across participant responses. Looking at the participants responses as a collectivity helped to determine if a group of street-style skateboarders at the same skill level approach the urban environment in the same way. I asked all of the participants where they skateboard the most in the city; the responses were then organized into a) sanctioned public skate spaces (skateparks), b) temporary unsanctioned skate spaces, c) community-built DIY skate spaces, and d) formerly unsanctioned skate spaces that were previously DIY.

A lot can be learned by looking at the collective location-based responses regarding urban skateboarding in Vancouver. Organizing data in this way formalizes discussions about what kind of urban spaces skateboarders enjoy, which is significant when considering planning initiatives that aim to be inclusive of urban skateboarders. Though the small sample of skateboarders involved in this study are not representative of all skateboarders, reviewing the participants’ urban preferences tells a story about their unique relationship with the urban environment. Discussions about the various types of urban skate spaces the participants enjoy reveals valuable insight about the

relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment. Discussing the preferred urban skate spaces also provides information about the various attributes that contribute to skateability in the urban environment, which provides a useful context for my conversation with a civic official regarding the process of planning for skate spaces in the city. The process of legitimizing urban skateboarding by sanctioning skate spaces in the city indicates an attempt to incorporate skateboarding into the urban realm, exemplifying inclusivity; however, conversations with the participants reveals that many of the most enjoyable skate spots are privately owned, and sanctioning skateboarding in private urban spaces remains a difficult enterprise. Overall, the participants articulate a process of navigation in and through sanctioned and unsanctioned urban skateable space that has become a type of 'skate spatial network; by understanding more about this network of street-style skateboarding in the city, we can discuss examples of in/exclusivity in the urban realm in preparation for discussions about the relationship between skateboarders and the urban environment.

Sanctioned Skate Spaces

The participants mention the following skateparks, which represent their use of sanctioned public skate spaces: Downtown Skate Plaza, Mount Pleasant Skatepark, Kensington Skate Plaza, Bonser Skatepark in Burnaby, and Walnut Grove Skatepark in Langley. The Downtown Skate Plaza was mentioned as the most frequently skated by all the participants and differences in other responses were due to the notion of 'proximity-based skateboarding'. The skaters claim to use the skatepark as a place to warm-up before venturing out elsewhere in the city to various 'skate spots'. It became evident that skating at the skatepark closest to their home was commonplace. Because the skaters live in different neighbourhoods, it is not surprising that a variety of different skateparks were mentioned. Responses become more consistent when referencing the unsanctioned skate spots throughout the city - regardless of proximity - indicating that proximity-based skateboarding applies to the first, initial warm-up skate spot, which is usually a skatepark where apparatuses are plentiful, and the space is sanctioned so skaters won't risk an interruption of their activities.

Unsanctioned Skate Spots

The unsanctioned skate spots listed by participants demonstrate community cohesivity through the shared understanding of a skate network. The list of skate spots

also indicates the extent to which external factors play a role in street-style urban skateboarding. Participants all mentioned Terry Fox Plaza, and the Vancouver Art Gallery as long-standing spaces to skate in the city; they also mention two commonly skated spaces that were collectively referred to by nicknames: 'Bricktown', located on West Hastings at Burrard Street downtown, and 'New Spot', which is quite literally the newest skate spot found, located on Howe Street at West Hastings, near the Vancouver Convention Center. Two anomalous spots were mentioned that weren't mentioned by the majority of other participants: UBC campus, and the Adenac Bike Trail, which is due to unique circumstances that have impacted those particular skaters' motivations when street-style skateboarding in an urban setting. Sandro, for example, is sponsored and needs clean, unpopulated footage to give to his sponsors, which impacts where he chooses to skateboard; because of this, he often goes to UBC campus where there is a lot of 'dead space' and a variety of architectural elements that offer a lot of trick possibilities for video footage. Darren and Ben have suffered injuries, and though they still enjoy skateboarding, they do not skate at the level they once did; because of this, they prefer to skate in less-populated spots. Ben explains: *"coming back from injuries, you're not at your full ability and don't necessarily wanna have all the eyes on you that expect better from you...it can definitely vibe you out...so I've been skating more low-key spots"* (12-lines 155-175). Parkades were another common unsanctioned space to skateboard in the city, mentioned by all of the participants because it enables them to skateboard in a covered, well-lit environment when it is wet, raining, or dark outside. The most recent weather statistics for Vancouver indicate that it rains 193 days a year, which is 53% of the time (Weather Atlas). Given that street-style skateboarding is an outdoor activity that relies on dry urban conditions, this amount of rain can impact a skateboarder's ability to get out and skateboard. The participants are motivated to skateboard even when it's dark, or raining, and because there are no sanctioned covered skate spaces in the city, they find refuge in parkades. Participants mentioned that they build and transport boxes, rails, and other apparatuses into the parkade to create their own covered skate spaces (11-225). The determination and ingenuity of skateboarders to work around external factors in order to skateboard leads into the concept of DIY skate spaces, and their function in the city.

DIY Skate Spaces

Two DIY skate spaces were mentioned by participants that shed light on the process of legitimizing skate space in Vancouver. Leaside Tunnel, for example, was once a DIY space that was set to be demolished when the city re-developed Hastings Park (22). Through protest and advocacy, the city recognized the value of this DIY skate space, and helped bring Leaside up to safety code and ensure that it fit with the aesthetic of the 10-million-dollar park improvements nearby. The civic official involved in this research study claims that the process of recognizing and legitimizing DIY spaces is a part of the City's revised Skateboard Strategy in their efforts to remain inclusive of skateboarding in the urban realm. Britannia Tennis Courts was mentioned as the most current DIY skate space that skateboarders continue to construct, maintain, and defend. They have worked alongside the Vancouver School Board and other community groups to ensure the skateboarders understand how to remain at the tennis courts without disrupting the intended activity of the space (13-line 236-262). It is uncertain whether Britannia Tennis Courts will be made into a formal sanctioned skate space in the future, following suit with spaces like Leaside; but the point is that a process for formalizing and legitimizing DIY skate spots exists, and it originates with skateboarders being so *"driven by what [they] wanna skate"* (13-276) that they take the initiative, and work together to make an unsanctioned space skateable. The following photovoice submission speaks to many of the concepts covered in this section. The skateboarder that submitted this photo articulates a recognition of the perimeters that constrain DIY initiatives in their pursuit of constructing skateable space in the city. This photo also illustrates that DIY skate spaces are born out of a need for a specific kind of sanctioned skateable infrastructure that is missing in the city; DIY skate spaces are illegitimate, and this photo discusses the unpredictability such spaces face, regardless of the effort that went into making the space work, or the popularity and enjoyment skaters get from the space. The photo submission also suggests the opportunity the City has to legitimize DIY spaces, if and when resources allow.



Figure 5.7. 'DIY Skate Space'

Photovoice Contributor: Michael Ray

“This is a skateboard space built by several individuals under the Burrard Street bridge. This photo was taken a week before all the builds were taken out due to the builders not having proper permission or approval from land owners or the City to build there. The space evolved out of a need for a covered skate area which could be used for the Winter, with the people building it understanding they did not have permission and that the space would likely be torn out at some point. I picked this photo because it represents how skateboarding in urban landscapes can fluctuate. A skateable space could be here and ready to skate one week, and then removed or made unskateable the next. Obviously skaters should get permission, but I felt it was an interesting example of the time and effort skateboarders are willing to put in to create spaces for themselves.”

The next photovoice submission illustrates both the physical feat required to perform a skate trick, as well as the ingenuity and determination required to construct the apparatus being pictured. This image shows Britannia Tennis Courts – a recent DIY location mentioned by the street-style skateboarders involved in this study. This image depicts the conversion of public space intended for other purposes (playing tennis) to unsanctioned DIY skate space.



Figure 5.8. 'Not Tennis Tricks'
Photovoice Contributor: Malik Walker

"This photo happened out of the blue. I was skating Britannia Courts with my friends and my one friend was just shooting random photos of his friends while they were skating and he took this and we both forgot about it. Britannia Courts has these structures built by skaters and it's an informal spot to skate."

Urban Skate Spots

The participants describe the regular routine of warming up at a skatepark and then skating elsewhere in the city to continue their skate session. They enjoy the Downtown Skate Plaza because it is a street-style skatepark, and many of its elements replicate street elements desirable for skateboarding (granite ledge, stair sets, railings, curbs, etc). Many of the participants explain that from their perspective, skateparks were great to learn at, and are now great to warm-up at, but "*taking it to the street*" (11-280) is where they have the most fun because of the variety of unpredictable elements featured in the urban realm. The participants claim that skateboarding in the city is an adventure, and each "session" is filled with endless possibilities (12-222). As a street-style skateboarder, the participants describe that they are "*always trying to look at things differently*" (12-224). Skateboarding in the streets is an act of individual expression because it is a social-urban interaction that applies individual skater-style and ability on

elements of the urban built form; the possibilities are endless, and participants contend that there are never two sessions that are the same. Ben explains this by stating that a street skate spot can be *“approached from more than one direction which opens up a lot of possibilities [combined with] the variety of tricks you can do and the combination you do them, your own style that you bring to it”* (12-230). Ben claims that skateboarding in the streets is exciting, and he is always looking for interesting places to skateboard in the city: *“pretty much anytime you’re in the car as a skater you’re always looking for spots no matter what you’re doing. Driving to the dentist even, just always looking at every piece of architecture around you thinking about the possibilities of what you can do”* (12-lines 241-247). Darren shares this excitement and explains that he looks forward to *“the exploration aspect of skateboarding in city streets”* knowing that around every corner could be *“something new to skateboard”* (14-lines 380-384). Nyall says that the adventure-aspect of skateboarding in the city keeps him motivated to skateboard in adulthood; his goal much of the time is to *“get around the city and go explore”*. Nyall also discusses the excitement of learning something new, and then taking that newly learned trick elsewhere in the city to get creative with it on various urban elements (13-55).

The following photovoice submission depicts the ‘system’ of urban skateboarding: the process of using a skatepark as a place to warm up before venturing out into the urban unknown, filled with possibilities.



Figure 5.9. 'Warm Up and Branch Out'
Photovoice Contributor: Michael Ray

"This is a photo I took in the Spring time of a group of youth at the Downtown Skate Plaza. This crew was just about to leave the Plaza to enter the city and look for spots to skate! I thought it was cool that these young people were looking at public spaces in a unique way. Hopefully they found some cool stuff to skate!"

Urban Exclusion

The participants articulate their motivation to skateboard in the city is to get outside, push around, explore, and have fun. They have a few key unsanctioned skate spots that they enjoy because of the combination of architectural elements, and ability to spend time at the spot approaching the area from many different angles, trying many different tricks in a variety of combinations. Because they enjoy street skateboarding so much, they are willing to accommodate some of the restrictions and regulations associated with the desirable spaces. Recognizing that these skate spots are spaces that are not sanctioned for skateboarding, the participants exhibit the ability to understand why they are unwanted during certain times, especially in terms of privately-owned spaces in the city. The participants are able to rationalize their exclusion from certain urban spaces because they understand how skateboarding can be disruptive to

the intended use of the space. The participants mention one of their top places to skateboard in the city is the CIBC Bank Downtown; the skaters understand that *“it’s for banking, and skateboarding is disrupting someone coming to do their banking”* (13-137). Although the participants exhibit an ability to understand the reason for their exclusion, the space holds value for the skateboarders, so instead of risking getting kicked out of the space, they develop ways to avoid disrupting the intended use of the space. In terms of the CIBC bank, each participant describes an understanding that this space is best used by skateboarders on Sundays, or after 5PM on weekdays when the bank is closed (13-223). The CIBC bank installed skate-stoppers on the hand-railings – a form of hostile infrastructure meant to deter skateboarding on staircases - and the skaters responded by dismantling that infrastructure, and adjusting the times they occupy the space (12-220). Similar to the CIBC bank, the Vancouver Art Gallery is another street spot mentioned by the participants, at which they have developed a pattern of circumvention so that they can continue using the space for skateboarding; they avoid the Art Gallery on Sundays because the space is usually bustling with protestors, vendors, or patrons (14-136). Darren describes the desire to navigate the restrictions of skateable public spaces as skateboarders exhibiting “coordinated efforts” to accommodate parameters in order to continue to skateboard in unsanctioned urban space. The fact that the participants express an understanding of these ‘rules’ indicates that accommodating these limitations is widely understood by street-skaters that know about the spots (14-138). The participants are logical and understanding people whose primary motivation is to have fun; they just want to skateboard in a space that has architectural elements they find enjoyable to skate. Though they are sympathetic to the intended use of private urban spaces, if these spaces contain attributes that they find enjoyable to skateboard, they will continue to use it, albeit by accommodating some parameters. This ability to rationalize their exclusion and still exercise their right to occupy urban space is driven by the fundamental beliefs that public space is open to user-interpretation, and ultimately intended to be enjoyed by all. Nyall articulates this by saying he *“thinks it’s great if a space can be used for multiple things...it’s beautiful when space can be opened up to be interpreted in multiple ways. Sometimes a space is built for one particular thing, and someone comes along [and reinterprets it]”* (13-lines 109-123). Nyall goes on to say that *“public space is in the eye of the beholder”*; he believes that when any kind of public space has infrastructure installed that *“tries to stop things from happening, like skateboarding or stop a homeless person from sleeping somewhere”* it *“blocks off the*

potential for different interesting things to happen because you never know who will come along and reinterpret the space innovatively” (13-lines 90-150).

5.3.3. The Relationship Between Street-Style Skateboarders and the Urban Environment

The Public Skatepark

The participants describe the public skatepark as a welcoming place in which they feel they belong. Growing up, the skatepark was a place in which they knew they would be safe, which was important depending on what was going on in their lives at the time. The participants state that the skatepark is like a community center, and this was especially true when they were younger. There was a sense of stewardship that took place at skateparks whereby older skaters mentored and helped younger skaters, and this act of role modelling meant a lot to the participants growing up. Reflecting on the role the skatepark has played in their lives over time, the participants consider the skatepark an essential component of skate infrastructure in the city. Though the function of the skatepark has changed for the participants throughout their skate journey, the skatepark still serves a purpose as they continue to skateboard in adulthood.

The participants claim that, growing up, mentorship and stewardship was commonplace at the skatepark. The ability to feel safe, included, and be around like-minded people meant a lot to the participants when they were younger. As children, the participants knew that when they went to the skatepark, they would be in the presence of other skaters they admired, and could share common ground with anyone that was there at any given time. The mentorship the participants experienced had a lasting impact on them, and as a result, they feel a sense of responsibility to give back to younger skaters to ensure the next generation feels similarly supported.

The participants refer to the skatepark as being a microcosm of the larger world, offering teachings, lessons, and exposures that they feel they wouldn't have otherwise experienced safely; as a result, the participants learned invaluable lessons as kids at the skatepark that have benefitted them in their lives in immeasurable ways. As adults, the participants are able to look back and determine how their childhood experiences at the skatepark have influenced their lives; the appreciation they had for these experiences

inspired them to give back to their skate community. The stewardship discussed by the participants contributes to their connection to the skatepark as a place.

Xavier remembers spending all of his time at the skatepark as a child, and this *“taught [him] how to deal with stuff a lot earlier than some people”*; Xavier states that *“[older] people would almost mentor [him] and steer [him] in the right direction”* (11-lines 99-102). Xavier still feels appreciative of the guidance and support he received as a young kid at his neighbourhood skatepark, that now, in his early 20s, Xavier *“tries to do [his] part as somebody that passes it on”* (11-110) because he *“remembers all the good deeds people did for [him] when [he] was super young, giving [him] a skateboard, or a pair of shoes, or a ride home, making sure [he] gets home safe”* (11-line 108-110). In fact, Xavier sees several young skaters regularly at the skatepark and has taken them under his wing; he recognizes that they don’t have a lot of resources or role models, and he does what he can to provide support with rides home, or extra clothes and shoes. Xavier acts as a big brother figure to the younger skaters, similar to the role models he was exposed to as a child. Xavier goes the extra mile for one teenager by paying for a phone plan; Xavier saw the teen travelling long distances to skateboard without a phone, and felt it was unsafe. Upon learning that the teen could not afford his own phone, Xavier put the teen on his phone plan: *“I put him on my phone plan because it’s like \$50 and I spend that on a t-shirt. I felt it was the right thing to do. You can’t be going [across the city] without a phone. What if someone tries to abduct you? There’s a lot of weird stuff. I thought it was the right thing to do. I’m pretty much buying him a t-shirt every month”* (11-lines 136-141). Xavier’s act of kindness for this teenager exemplifies the connection skateboarders have with one another, and indicates the lasting impact that mentorship has on an individual.

Ben describes skateparks as: *“a place where people feel welcome, people who don’t really have anything else, like a purpose or a place they feel welcome, they can go there and talk to someone who is in the same situation as them, make friends, feel safe”* (12-lines 310-313). Nyall remembers that growing up, he would get dropped off at the skatepark, and stay there all day; his parents trusted it was a safe place, and as long as there was *“someone they knew at the park that would keep an eye on [him]”* (13-27), he was free to stay there all day at just 10 years old, which indicates the skatepark was regarded as a safe place that adults trusted. Brennon recalls being at the skatepark all the time as a child, enamored by the older skaters there. Because Brennon went to the

skatepark so often, the older skaters started to *“teach [him] how to skateboard, and just take care of [him]”* (15-224). Brennon recalls that growing up, his family *“didn’t really have that much, so having like good older people around...always taking care of [him] and doing stuff with [him] making sure [he] gets to the park, making sure [gets] home meant a lot to him”* (15-225). Brennon was so impacted by the connections he made at the skatepark as a child that these acts of stewardship are *“the reason [he] stays around [his] home skatepark when [he’s] not in the city because now, [he] takes care of the kids that come to the park”* to return the favour (15-230). Brennon describes a sense of responsibility to carry forward the acts of mentorship and kindness shown to him as a child. He believes that feeling a sense of belonging at the skatepark is integral to continuing to skate at a young age: *“it’s the people that make it better, and a lot of these kids, they come to the park, and they’ll lose passion for it and maybe won’t skateboard because they don’t have that one person at the skatepark...that makes them wanna go to the skatepark...they might not think about it in the long run but I remember when I was that age, so I try and stay around”* (15-lines 225-239).

The following photovoice submission depicts a typical post-skate day at a public skatepark. The image conveys many of the concepts discussed in this research project thus far: social connection at the public skatepark, and frustration while learning tricks (broken skateboard).



Figure 5.10. 'Skatepark and More'

Photovoice Contributor: Michael Ray

"This is a photo of a bunch of skateboarders hanging out after skating Mount Pleasant Skatepark. Moments like this are important to me because I feel that outside of the actual act of skateboarding, there are a lot of great conversations to be had between skating. Skateparks can not only serve as recreational space, but can also be a hub for having genuine conversations about things going on in the community".

Skatepark Place-Attachment: The Downtown Skate Plaza

Leon's company - New Line Skateparks - was hired to design and construct the Downtown Skate Plaza in 2004 and upon completion, it became the first ever street-style skatepark in the world. Leon defines street-style skateboarding as "*skating the space between things*", and claims that the overarching goal in the DSP design process was to

focus on representing the poetry of street-style skating (21-213). He reflects on the process of designing the Plaza by saying *“the Plaza is so special because it was designed for street skating specifically...a very specific sport and discipline within that sport...the Plaza is really a sanctuary for skateboarding and it’s very unique compared to most skateparks that are catered toward multi-use all-wheel”* (21-170-180). In terms of the physical aspects Leon’s company chose, he highlights that he incorporated the physical elements of popular skate spots in the city and put them together in one place at the Plaza (21-198). Leon intentionally re-claimed elements of *“skate spots around Vancouver that were taken away from skateboarders...by replicating the dimensions and materials”* in the Plaza (21-200) as represented by the coveted real granite ledges, real brick, and other *“real materials you would experience in the street which recreated some of the features people were skating on”* (21-288). Skateboarders were excluded from authorized urban space just a few years prior to the debut of the Downtown Skate Plaza; the process of designing a sanctioned public skate space that replicated skateable elements of an urban environment once regarded as off-limits to skateboarders was a significant act of reclamation because it legitimized skaters’ interaction with the urban built form. The Plaza was pivotal for street-style skaters at the time; it became a safe place that skateboarders could practice tricks on the elements they desired in the urban environment without getting kicked out, or hassled.

In terms of the location of the DSP, Leon states that it was never meant to be a long-term spot; the current location of the DSP was originally a parking lot and City Engineering overflow property, so the current Plaza was supposed to be a temporary plan, and eventually relocated, but that never actually happened. When constructing the Plaza, New Line had to deal with asphalt ground that covered contaminated soil, coupled with a limited budget, and various development restrictions (21-lines 278-281), but the company did the best they could, and it quickly became a beloved area of the city for skateboarders. Leon defines the DSP as the *“one legitimate gathering spot that you could go and you knew you were allowed to be there”* (21-489), which was significant for skaters at the time, given that skateboarding was banned just a few years prior to the construction of the DSP. Leon remembers the DSP as a *“guerilla community centre where skaters could go and connect, branch out from there...but that was our spot...whereas before it might have been a rail in the city somewhere, and everyone would show up there and have a session, but it was only your spot until you got kicked*

out... the Plaza was this constant spot that was ours” (21-lines 493-498). Though the security of having sanctioned space to skateboard continues to be important for skateboarders, in the early days, it was a necessity, whereas now, there are plenty of sanctioned spaces in which to skateboard in the city. Today, the DSP offers a sense of belonging rather than a necessary space of inclusion.

Before Leon’s company was commissioned to design and construct the DSP, he was very active in skate advocacy; in fact, he founded the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, a skateboard advocacy group which is still active today, albeit under new leadership since 2001. The DSP, therefore, was the vision of a long-time skateboarder who was passionate about skate advocacy, and understood both the general social value of skateboarding, and the needs of street-style skateboarders in particular. Understanding the background context and passion behind the conception of the DSP is critical to realizing its tremendous success as public skate space.

Given the history of exclusionary tactics that skateboarders have faced in unsanctioned urban space, I wanted to assess the participants’ feelings toward the Downtown Skate Plaza as representative of sanctioned public skate space. I also wondered if the Plaza was a place of value to the street-style skateboarders involved in this research, both as a street-style skatepark, and in consideration of its impending demolition and relocation. Using some aspects of the place-attachment tripartite model and the PPP (person-place-process) framework, I reviewed all interview data referencing the DSP in an effort to organize the participants perspectives and opinions regarding the a) **person**: perceived meaning of the skatepark, b) **process**: cognitive and behavioural aspects of the skatepark, and c) **place**: specific physical characteristics of the skatepark that contribute to individual enjoyment. By implementing this PPP framework, I organized the perspectives of the participants, and assessed their collective sentiments toward the DSP to determine the value of the public skatepark as representative of sanctioned space for skateboarders in the city.

I asked an open-ended question about the participants’ first memory of skateboarding in Vancouver because I wanted to see if the DSP would come up as a significant and memorable place. By allowing the participants to lead the discussion about the DSP, I was able to organically learn about the significance of the Plaza to the street-style skateboarders involved in this research. The participants’ responses

regarding the DSP and its impending demolition exemplifies the ability for their past experiences and personal milestones to shape their sentiments toward the DSP; these experiences, milestones, and realizations about the significance of the DSP indicate an attachment to place. For example, the participants mention journeying into the city from their hometowns to skate at the Downtown Skate Plaza. Xavier recalls *“begging his parents to drive us...to the Plaza because it’s like a mecca for lower mainland skateboarding”* (11-169). The perceived notoriety of the DSP was attributed to the fact that the Plaza was the first street-style skatepark in the world, and also because they knew of the Plaza from the skate videos they watched growing up. As I described previously, the skaters involved in the research grew up idolizing the professional skateboarders they saw in skate videos, and seeing their idols skating at a skatepark they recognized was very significant; skating the same place as pro-skaters made the prospect of attaining that level of skateboarding more possible. Xavier expands on this when he states that watching skaters he admired do tricks at the Plaza made him determined to make the journey from Langley into the city; he remembers thinking: *“I gotta go skate Plaza. That’s the stop...there was no other park like it”* (11-line 173-175). Nate felt similarly to Xavier claiming that knowing *“thousands of pros have been there and made their mark”* (16-228) made him excited to visit the Plaza from his hometown outside of Calgary, Alberta. Darren grew up in rural Ottawa, and when asked about his first experience skating in Vancouver, he eagerly mentions the Plaza: *“skateboarders around the world know about [the Plaza]. It was one of the first of its kind in terms of spaces to skateboard that aren’t...the traditional style of park...so that’s the starting point if you’re a new skateboarder in Vancouver...I think a lot of people probably share the same experience”* (14-line 99-103). As Darren reflects on the impending removal of the Plaza, he states: *“the Plaza is definitely beloved, it’s iconic...what the city might deem to be a prestige, amazing new space might not be interpreted the same way by the users”* (14-line 362-364). Darren recognizes that there are some negative aspects of the DSP that, ideally, could be upgraded or redesigned in a new skate space in the city; but he felt strongly that the sentiment toward the DSP meant more to skaters than the aesthetics. Brennon affirms this by discussing his feelings about the removal of the DSP: *“I feel bad that they’re tearing down that park...I’d be definitely sad. That park has a lot of history toward skateboarding, not just toward Vancouver, but skateboarding around the world...the history behind it. I feel bad about it...they definitely need to replace it with something of equal worth in the community because that’s like the totem pole of*

skateboarding...I am concerned to see what they're gonna do" (15-lines 417-445).

Touching on the concept of community at the Plaza, Nate felt that the DSP has the power to bring people together and that the Plaza represents the larger skate presence in the city: *"it's the most iconic skatepark in North America...it's a staple of Vancouver...it's what makes Vancouver skate scene a skate scene...people wanna come here just to skate Plaza, not even necessarily skate street...[that] aspect of that park - bringing people together - is iconic" (16-237).*

Not only is the DSP a landmark for the participants, but it still serves a function in their skate routines. In reference to the DSP and a few other Vancouver skateparks, the participants have a process for integrating their use of skateparks into their broader skate routines in the city. The participants describe an *urban skateboarding network*: they utilize skateparks as both a proximity-based meeting place, and a place to warm-up, and then branch out and skate elsewhere in the city. The process of establishing a routine around skatepark use in street-style skateboarding extends beyond individual habit; the participants describe skate tendencies that demonstrate an interconnection between people and places. For example, when asked where they skate the most in the city, each participant names the same places. Because most of these 'skate spots' are informal, have DIY origins, or are simply a series of architectural elements on private property, the participants have a nickname for each skate spot. Given all of the participants are street-style skaters who have a similar process for skating in the city, not only did they name the same spots, but they also referred to the spots using the applicable nickname. The fact that all 8 skateboarders are able to describe consistent skate patterns demonstrates that an urban skateboarding network exists for the street-style skateboarders involved in this research. The skaters' ability to apply knowledge and schemas to develop an urban skateboarding network demonstrates a place-attachment process; this network is described in every interview, exemplifying that this process of place-attachment is made possible through memory, meaning, and knowledge of place. For example, Nyall describes the urban skateboarding network by explaining his regular skate routine; it is evident that a continuous process is taking place by which he warms-up at the closest skatepark to his house, then skates to another park to meet up with another skater, and they both skate several spots in sequence throughout the city (13-lines 285-287). Through his knowledge of skateboarding in Vancouver, Nyall has created a proximity-based network of urban

skateboarding that branches out from a public skatepark to several other consistent places. Ben seconds this notion that skaters use the skatepark to “*meet up...warm up, and branch out elsewhere*” (12-372). Several participants describe this central understanding about the public skatepark: it’s a starting-point - a place to warm-up *at*, and branch out *from*, to other street spots in the city. Nyall describes this by sharing how he contemplates a typical nice, sunny Saturday by considering the following: “*which skatepark am I gonna go warm up, and what street spots am I gonna go to*” (13-183). Darren also considers the urban skatepark “*the meet up point*” and from there, “*you venture out into the city*” (14-106); he says “*it’s nice to have a common meeting place*” (14-123) because it reminds him of when he went to the skatepark as a child and “*whoever else was there is who you end up with*” (14-130). The ability for Darren to relate his current use of the skatepark to the purpose his childhood skatepark served exemplifies how interwoven memory is in establishing place-based sentiment and attachment. Darren’s *current* skate network is reminiscent of his *past* skate network; even though the skateparks are physically different places, their place-purpose holds meaning in the process of skateboarding, regardless of their different locations. Darren’s ability to feel connected to memories from his past illustrates the individual attachment he has to the public skatepark as a place; through place-based memories, the skatepark exhibits continuity across time by reminding skaters like Darren of events that occurred there in the past (Scannell & Gifford, p. 6). As illustrated in previous sections, the participants describe receiving clothes, shoes, rides home, advice, care, attention, and friendship at the skatepark as children. Having some of their social and physical needs met at the skatepark manifested strong place attachment bonds for the participants that have been life-long. The connections made at the skatepark as children have also influenced their connection to skateparks as they continue to skateboard in adulthood; the skaters’ exhibit this connection through role-modelling and mentorship, exemplifying the continuation of place-bonds over time. Through place-bonds, the participants are able to engage in “place-referent continuity” – an ability to use a particular site as a framework for comparing their present and past selves; the participants’ reflect on the positive impact past skatepark encounters had on them, and they are now motivated to continue that same mentorship by forging mentorship-type relationships with younger skaters.

The physical aspects of a place also contribute to place-attachment; a place's function and user-potential is an important part of developing attachment to place. The participants have an ability to describe specific elements of the urban skatepark that contribute to the functionality and enjoyment of the place. Several physical attributes of the skatepark contribute to the sense of attachment to place. Participants articulate that the placement and variety of apparatuses determines the *flow* of a skatepark which impacts enjoyment. Nyall describes the flow of a skatepark by saying: *"there's multiple different diverse things there that you can...learn on...and then take that elsewhere into urban space"* (13-443). Nyall states that *"good flow at a skatepark is important"* (13-444); he appreciates a skatepark that allows for smooth transitions and fluid movement on a skateboard (13-445-449). Nyall's description of an ideal skatepark indicates how the physical layout of a skatepark can impact a skater's ability to enjoy the space. Darren feels similarly and claims that a skatepark that *"combines a variety of different...features with ample space...creates a welcoming space to skateboard"* (14-195). Darren expresses an awareness of feeling unwelcome as a skateboarder, and when he's at a skatepark, he doesn't want to feel like he's being hidden away from society, *"trapped in a little cage because people around it don't wanna see it"* (14-198). Darren appreciates an open layout because psychologically, it makes him feel accepted by the broader community, which allows him to enjoy his time skateboarding. Darren's response represents how the social perception of the skatepark can influence how the space is received, both for non-skaters and skaters alike. When Darren is skating at a skatepark, he doesn't want to be perceived as unwelcome in that urban space; the physical openness of a skatepark is important to him because it represents social acceptance. Nate explains an experience similar to Darren upon moving from Calgary to Vancouver: *"when I moved here...everything felt more open...especially compared to Alberta [where] everything is a bit more close-minded...I came here and it felt more welcoming"* (16-75). Nate's experience skateboarding in Calgary as stifling, similar to the 'caged in' feeling Darren expresses. Nate felt that Vancouver is more socially accepting of skateboarders, and he found it more enjoyable to skateboard in a friendly, fun, open environment (16-127). Building on this concept of acceptance, Sandro claims that the reason he enjoys skateparks is because the space is *for skateboarding*; he said that because everything in the space is made for skateboarding, skaters don't have to worry about getting kicked out, or making things work for them (17-161). Skateparks are designed prescriptively to accommodate skateboarding, and Sandro states that because

of this, skateparks are “*concentrated environments where everything is automatically easier...everything is ideal*” (17-162). Sandro discusses the ease of accessibility at skateparks as integral to his ability to enjoy the space. Overall, the participants explain how physical aspects of the urban skatepark such as the apparatus layout, materials, and social perception work together to impact enjoyability; their ability to enjoy a skatepark allows for connection to place.

The place-attachment findings from the participants’ experiences with the public skatepark have been summarized and organized into the place attachment model, adapted from Scannel and Gifford’s (2010) PPP framework. The original model is shown in Figure 5-10, and the adapted model for use in this research project is shown in Figure 5-11.

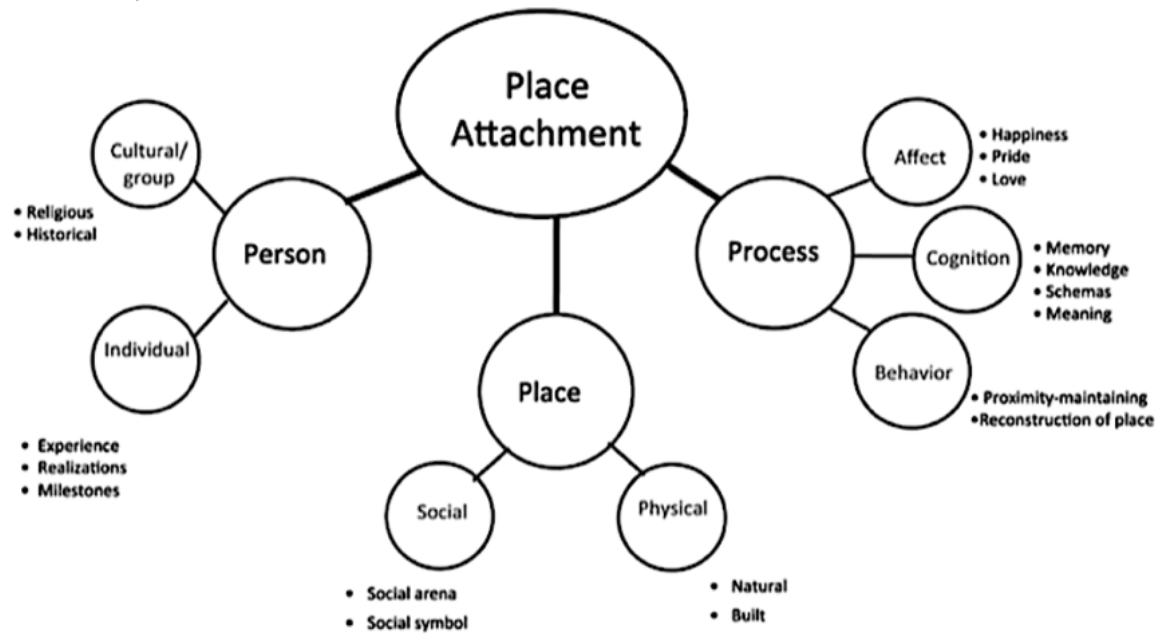


Figure 5.11. Place Attachment Model: Person-Place-Process (PPP) Framework
Scannell and Gifford (2010)

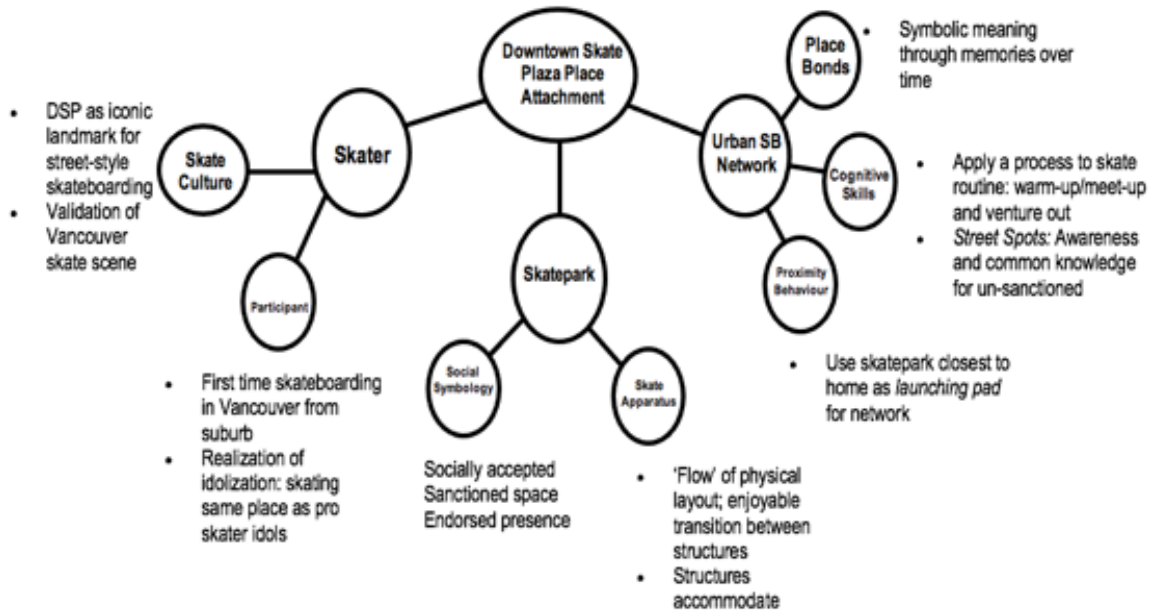


Figure 5.12. Adapted Place Attachment Model
Jenna Aujla (2021)

A Meaningful Urban Relationship

The goal in establishing the skateboarders' attachment to the skatepark is to provide evidence to support the theory that skateboarders feel a sense of responsibility for the public space allocated for skateboarding in the city. Place-attachment theory suggests that through attributing attachment to place, users feel represented in and through the use of that space. Representation in the urban realm allows users to feel empowered, which contributes to civic engagement, stewardship, and community involvement. By outlining the various ways in which the skateboarders involved in this study attribute meaning to sanctioned public skate space, I provide evidence to suggest that the way they interact with the urban environment is reminiscent of their interaction with the public skatepark. The lived experiences of the skateboarders involved in this study indicates a deep connection to public skate space through memory, stewardship, and enjoyment; though the interview data also indicates how seamlessly the public skatepark fits into the participants broader urban skate network. Establishing the public skatepark as part of the participants' skate network in the city indicates a continuation of meaningful connection to skate spots throughout the city.

5.4. Urban Planning and Skateboarding

After having discussions with the participants about how, why, and where they skateboard, I was able to gain insights into the skateboarders' relationship with the city. The participants engage in an intimate interaction with the urban built form, whether the space is sanctioned for skateboarding or not. In order to skateboard in the city, the participants have developed a process, established routes, routines, and patterns; they rely on physical aspects of the city to be able to practice their sport, improve, and reap enjoyment. The participants are therefore connected to the urban realm and they articulate this connection physically (through a variety of skateboarding tricks and expression), emotionally (through feeling joy and excitement), and psychologically (through their ability to use skateboarding as an outlet for daily stresses). Every time the skateboarders get on their board and begin pushing through the city, they are celebrating their connection to the urban environment, and they articulate a desire to have that celebration reciprocated through inclusion in urban planning and design decisions that directly affect their craft. Through my interview with a City of Vancouver planner and Parks Board member, I gained insight about how the City approaches skateboarding in urban design decisions and overall planning initiatives. The City is currently revising the twenty-year-old Skateboard Strategy, and the City aims to be inclusive of the perspectives of skaters in the changes they make to the Strategy. The revisions to the Strategy also aim to improve the urban skateboarding experience by taking into account the way in which skateboarders interact with city spaces. I was able to overlay key perspectives from the skaters with information from the City planner to determine if there is a marriage of ideas, opinions, and outlooks about planning for skateboarding in the city.

The goals for the City are different than the skateboarder's goals, but this doesn't mean there aren't overlaps between the objectives. The City official has been appointed as the City's representative for all things skateboarding-related in Vancouver. She is currently leading the Skateboard Strategy, and has been involved with all urban planning initiatives that involve skateboarding since she started working at the City over 10 years ago. She explains that there is a lot of moving parts in her role, and she has many different perspectives to consider: the Vancouver Park Board, Vancouver City Council, the interests of the public, budget and other fiscal considerations, safety guidelines, and

also the 'skateboard community', which she uses interchangeably with the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, a community organization that represents skateboarders. As she outlines the variety of perspectives that she has to consider in order to plan and design urban spaces for skateboarding, it becomes evident that some aspects of the wants and needs of skateboarders like my participants may not always be represented in conversations about skateboarding at the City. The City official touched on this and explained that narrowing in on one particular group doesn't help the cause; instead, being able to show the range of users can gain more support from council and the public (22-lines 60-63). The City official therefore must demonstrate the diversity of skateboarding as representative of a wide range of users in order to justify the accommodation of the sport in urban space; she does this by appointing an advisory group comprised of members that represent the range of people that make up the 'skateboarding community' (long boarders, LGBTQ+ folks, Aboriginals, girls, people of colour, etc) (22-lines 80-83). In order to justify the allocation of urban space for skateboarding, the City official states that the Skateboard Strategy has broadened the user group to include "other small-wheeled sports" (22-38). Though some skater perspectives may be lost in the process of planning for more skate infrastructure in the city, there are many suggestions that coincide with desires outlined by the participants in my own study. For example, the City official claims that the Skateboard Strategy is planning to do something innovative to increase the number of *skate spots and dots* throughout the city, understanding that this is a preferred way for many skateboarders to use the urban environment. By working with City Engineering, and developers, the Skateboard Strategy proposes the design and implementation of a 'Skate Toolkit' whereby in the process of road construction, civic operations work, or private development, the space can be adapted to include skateable features (22-lines 30-36). The City official claims this is an important step to "*broaden the breadth of skateboard opportunities*" (22-32), and the participants would agree given many of them expressed how much they enjoy the possibilities afforded by new construction and the discovery of new features in the city. Furthermore, the City official demonstrated an understanding about the benefits of skateboarding, as well as the need to educate the community about these benefits in order to destigmatize the sport and gain more community support (22-lines 52-55). Support from the public is ultimately integral to incorporating more skate spaces in the city.

Leon from New Line Skateparks is also involved with the Skateboard Strategy consultation. Leon began his skatepark design career *“battling the city to try to get a little square of land and try to get a chunk of the budget”* but now he claims *“it’s different”* because he has learned how to navigate politics, bureaucracy, and long-term City planning processes (21-lines 359-366). Leon understands the Skateboard Strategy is a way to connect various aspects of skateboarding in an inclusive way that incorporates indoor controlled spaces, transportation journeys, and the broader network of skate spots and parks (21-lines 390-395). Leon describes the Strategy as *“an overall comprehensive strategy that appropriately accommodates skateboarding into public space”* which he hopes will involve incorporating appropriate *“underutilized spaces in the public realm”* for skateboarding (21-lines 415-427).

5.4.1. The Removal of the Downtown Skate Plaza

The City official addressed the removal of the Downtown Skate Plaza as a process that has been discussed with the “skateboard community” since the potential for the viaduct removal was first suggested years ago (22-100). The removal of the DSP is a bi-product of the removal of the viaduct, which is a part of the NE False Creek development plan, but the City official’s team has been involved since the beginning both from a park planning perspective, as well as an informal representative/skateboard community liaison. The City official’s team has been in charge of engaging the skateboard community, developing an interim solution for the park during demolition, and the design of the new skatepark as part of the NE False Creek development plan (22-lines 90-95).

The skateboarders’ sentiments toward the DSP was not new information to the City official given she has worked closely with the “community”, and has been integral in relaying the historic importance of the DSP to the necessary City channels. Her assurance about both the removal of the DSP, as well as the design and construction of the new skatepark is illustrated in this excerpt: *“We are working closely with the skateboard community. They come to meetings where we talk about the new plaza to ensure the legacy of the old plaza is included in the new plaza, continuing that street-style meaning. It’s meaningful to the community and it’s important to us to not lose that element of history. And support the community. We wouldn’t do something completely different than it in the new park”* (22-lines 100-107). The City official detailed skateboard

community engagement initiatives as *“not solely with the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition...we are trying to include as many different types of styles of skateboarders through an advisory group, and engagement work [like] surveys, pop-ups, and outreach to communities...to capture those users of those spaces...the engagement process will be open to anybody that wants to participate in and share their input”* (22-lines 113-120). The extent of the efforts to commemorate the DSP in the design of the new skate plaza remain to be seen, but to recall what Brennon mentioned *“they definitely need to replace it with something of equal worth in the community”* (15-442), and whether this component of the process is prioritized is uncertain at this point in the development process. That being said, many other participants acknowledge that although the location of the DSP is accessible and partly covered which is a positive, it’s still in a less-than-ideal part of the city. Although it serves as a historic landmark for skateboarders, it also needs a lot of work, and could be improved (17-lines 220-234). For the most part, the participants are optimistic about change in the city with regards to skateboarding, but would still appreciate that the legacy of the DSP be honoured in some way.

Given that Leon designed and constructed the DSP during both the peak of his skateboarding advocacy involvement and the early infancy of his skatepark construction business, I thought it would be interesting to include his perspective about the demolition and removal of the DSP. Leon describes the DSP as *“an important heritage spot”*, and acknowledges that it should be developed as such, but understands that there will always be people who *“want things to stay the way they always were”* (21-lines 433-438). Leon’s business just celebrated its 20-year anniversary, and a lot of his perspectives have evolved since he started New Line. Leon believes that the removal of the DSP is only *“making way for much bigger and better and greater things”* (21-436). Leon understands the process of inevitable development and evolution in a city, and instead of remaining sentimental or nostalgic about the Plaza, he chooses to celebrate the fact that the skateboarding community *“has a seat at the table to discuss how this impacts the community”* (21-440). Furthermore, Leon acknowledges that the current skateboarding community has outgrown the Plaza in a massive way, and has felt that the community has been engaged and included since initial conversations about removing the viaducts. In light of the demolition and removal of the DSP, Leon says *“it’s time to move from that dirty, dingey parking lot that we never wanted to be in, and move into a nice waterfront in the same neighbourhood...it’s going to be nicer, comfortable,*

more welcoming, hopefully larger, more developed place" (21-lines 457-462). Leon is optimistic that the community is now going to get what they should have got originally, and Plaza 2.0 will be more accommodating to the actual needs of the community. Overall, Leon's perspective is, *"it's time for more"* (21-448).

Chapter 6.

Discussion and Conclusion

My inquiry considers the outlook of skateboarders with the goal of determining why they skateboard in an effort to discover more about their relationship with the urban environment in terms of designated skate space (the skatepark), and beyond. By capturing the perspectives of skateboarders, I developed an understanding about the motivations and experiences of skateboarding in the urban realm which narrated a story about the use and meaning of public space from their collective point of reference. Referencing the DSP in the research project aids in understanding if/how the use of prescribed urban space related to skateboarding elsewhere in the city. Understanding the connection between skateboarding at a skatepark in relation to other skate places in the city offers valuable information about the perceived spatial network for skateboarding in Vancouver.

The current Downtown Skate Plaza will be removed forever, and understanding more about the history of this space, and the role it continues to play for the skate community is an important aspect of this research inquiry. By taking a closer look at the perspective of skateboarders, I arrive at a deeper sense of the Downtown Skate Plaza's use value to skateboarders. Offering the interview participants the opportunity to address displacement contention surrounding the demolition and relocation of the Downtown Skate Plaza brought forward ideas about the receptivity of skateboarders toward infrastructure changes caused by broader city planning initiatives. The meaning skateboarders attribute to the Downtown Skate Plaza and feelings about its relocation prove significant in understanding the collaborative relationship between skateboarders and civic officials to plan urban space for skateboarding, especially in consideration of skater concerns about disruption to the established social environment. The ability to layer the concerns and testimonies of the skateboarders with current priorities of a civic official involved in the revised City of Vancouver Skate Strategy presents a unique opportunity to assess collaborative planning techniques and the inclusivity of skateboarding in the urban realm.

By situating place-meaning and attachment at the Downtown Skate Plaza, I suggest that the act of relocation for the purpose of development is a reoccurring process in the area of the city the Downtown Skate Plaza is located. The relocation of people for development profit demands interrogation when considering the meaning of public space. The site-specific history of the Downtown Skate Plaza should alert us to remain watchful of scenarios where private development forces people with established connections to the space to relocate. Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect the “profiteering and capital accumulation from land” to be abandoned for the sake of a place’s meaning to the public (Hern, p. 228) but if public space is continuously left to the whims of the market it will result in the displacement of people time and time again, as evidenced in the Downtown Skate Plaza area given that Strathcona, the DTES, and Chinatown are areas within a “neoliberal, vampiric city [that] constantly keeps its vulnerable residents on the run” (Hern, p.229). In light of this, by exploring skateboarding from the perspective of the select group of skaters engaged in this research project, I offer a platform for the participants to recollect memories and meaning in reference to a place that will soon be gone forever. I offer the unique perspectives of participants’ connection with/to the Downtown Skate Plaza to establish this place as memorable, and meaningful, and therefore sentimental; in capturing the perspectives of skateboarders and their relationship with the Downtown Skate Plaza as an urban space, I tell a story about what this place means to skateboarders, and the reasons this place is significant. Exploring the relocation of the skatepark from the perspective of the Vancouver skaters engaged in this research project allows for an opportunity to consider an optimistic outlook for the future of skateboarding in the city. Though the DSP is a historically significant place for skateboarders – especially street-style skaters – the removal of the skatepark is also linked to a city-wide revamp of skate infrastructure in the city – the revised Skate Strategy termed ‘VanSkate’. In a city where development is constant, I discuss how the removal of the DSP can be both a commemoration of the past, and the beginning of a future for skateboarding in Vancouver, and use interviews with skateboarders and the city official to contribute to this notion.

The group of skateboarders engaged in this research project are by no means representative of all skateboarders neither street-style skaters, nor Vancouver-based skateboarders; but the research findings nonetheless reveal impactful stories about the relationship between skateboarders and the urban realm. The narratives of the

skateboarders involved in this study have indicated their persistence in occupying public spaces despite the historic efforts to exclude them. The connection between skateboarding in the sanctioned space of the city and skateboarding in public spaces that are not intended for skateboarding indicates how public space politics and processes of inclusion play out for the skateboarders involved in this research. I apply concepts of place-making and place-attachment to the relationship between skateboarders and the urban skatepark to exhibit how public space strategically designed by urban planners can also be a meaningful place for skateboarders as part of a broader network of skateable spaces in the city that also instill personal as well as shared meanings and sentiments.

The lived experiences articulated by the specific participants engaged in this study collectively describe various meaningful urban interactions, not meant to summarize or represent all possible meanings or relationship between skateboarders and the city. When overlaid with their longstanding attachment to the public skatepark, it becomes evident that the skateboarders involved in this study have a deep, meaningful relationship with the urban environment. The hard work required to build DIY skate spaces in the city to fill a need and help other skaters indicates a strong desire to use urban space productively for the purpose of skateboarding. The organization required to navigate the restrictions associated with unsanctioned urban space in order to accommodate private interests indicates a thorough understanding of the politics that govern the urban realm. The dedication required to establish a network for skateboarding in the city that encourages community connections indicates a set of shared values that bring skateboarders together in urban spaces. The act of self-expression required to be a street-skateboarder in an urban environment tells a story about the way in which skaters view the city. The lived experiences of the skateboarders involved in this study provides insight about their unique interaction with the urban environment, and how meaningful the relationship truly is. It is through the collection of stories, memories, and sentiments shared by the participants that we understand how their relationship with the urban environment is born from early advocacy, made official by the allocation of sanctioned skate space, and legitimized by their presence in the city as they move within their established skate network of skate spots. In the process of prioritizing inclusivity in urban space, it is important to consider a broad range of perspectives; though this project focuses on the narratives of the select skateboarders

engaged in this project, there are exciting opportunities to continue to allow the participant perspectives to lead inquiry. Constraints aside, this project shows that by prioritizing participant-led research, insightful, meaningful, and significant teachings can be had.

Appendix A. Interview Participant Summary

Skateboarder Participant Codes and Descriptions

Code #	Pseudonym	Age	Started skateboarding at age:	Job/ Lifestyle	Interesting Fact	Notable memory comment	Hometown
11	Xavier	24	12	Retail	Black	Has little brother	Langley
12	Ben	29	12	n/a	Injuries		Terrace, BC
13	Nyall	25	10	Works full time	PMA – photovoice	DIY public space	Tsawwassen
14	Darren	28	4/5	Went to University	Injuries	“fair weather skater”	Small town Ontario
15	Brennon	22	10	Unknown	Black Olympic qualifying athlete team BC track BLM event	Travelled while skating	Langley
16	Nate	Early 20s	4/5	Unknown	Black / in magazine	Photovoice	Calgary
17	Sandro	Early 20s	7	Sponsored skater			Kelowna

Note: This table shows coding information and descriptions about the seven skateboarder participants involved in this research study.

Key Skateboarding Informant Codes and Descriptions

Code #	Pseudonym	Age	Started skateboarding at age:	Job/ Lifestyle	Interesting Fact	Notable memory comment	Hometown
21	Leon	45	1980s 13 yo	Founder, president and CEO New Line Skateparks	Apart of the Skateboard Strategy committee	Designed and constructed the Downtown Skate Plaza	Maple Ridge
22	Nancy	-	N/A; son skateboards	Parks Board Planner, CoV	Saved Leaside Tunnel early in career		-

Note: This table shows information and descriptions about the two key skateboarding informants involved in this research study.

Appendix B. Use of Photovoice

At the onset of research participation, all skateboarders that completed the interview questions were also asked about their ability and willingness to participate in the photovoice component of the research project. Though all of the participants were informed about and consented to the photovoice component of the research project, four of the seven participants followed through and sent over photo contributions. The photos submitted became a collection of participant-chosen photographs with detailed accompanying captions. The four photovoice participants were then asked about their interest in taking more photos during the next month or two, and they agreed. Photos as part of the photovoice component of the research project were therefore requested and collected on two different occasions from the same four participants; these photos and captions were sent either through text message, or email.

Scholars Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris created photovoice methodology in the 1990s with the goal of promoting a participatory action research strategy that prioritizes the perspectives of research participants in the identification, documentation, and representation of their community (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p.169). Wang (2005) identifies three primary goals in the use of photovoice as a methodology in ethnographic research: 1) to assist participants with reflecting on select issues or concepts, 2) to encourage dialogue on these issues or concepts, and 3) to influence policy-makers (Castelden et al., 2008, p.1395). Wang and Burris (1997) also outline a general framework to characterize a photovoice study; because this research project uses photovoice as a secondary methodology, the procedures Wang and Burris outlined have been adapted to fit the perimeters of the study, in recognition that photovoice is malleable in origin. Therefore, though Wang and Burris (1997) suggest steps for conducting a photovoice study that were mostly followed, these steps were slightly amended to adhere to the confines of this research project. Characteristics of the photovoice framework and the adaptations applied to this study are outlined in Table 6.3 below.

Though photovoice is traditionally used for documentary photography whereby individuals who might not have access to a camera are given access to one to encourage empowerment, this is not the case in this research project given that each

participant has access to a camera, and consistently captures video and photo of skateboarding as subject matter. The interpretation for this exercise, however, led to a type of documentary photography, because participants interpreted the exercise in their own way, exhibiting empowerment.

The main purpose for using photovoice in this research project is related to Paulo Freire's (1970) theoretical underpinning which supports photovoice in the theory of critical consciousness by seeking to engage individuals in the questioning of their historical-social situation, as well as the feminist theory which is meant to prioritize the value of knowledge that is grounded in experience, and recognize local expertise and insight that cannot be fully realized from the outside (Castleden et al., 2008, p.1396). By using the theory of critical consciousness and the feminist theory as underpinnings that support the use of photovoice in this project, participants were engaged in this methodology as a means to encourage them to a) question the historical-social situation related to skateboarding in the urban realm, and b) prioritize the abundance of knowledge and experience they have as highly skilled, long-time street-style skateboarders, all in an effort to address the primary research questions. Recognizing that the research project focuses on the perspective of skateboarders in an effort to better understand the relationship between skaters and the urban environment, using photovoice for the purposes outlined helps to gain inner-circle insight about a particular group of skaters that the public, civic officials, scholars, or policy makers may not get the chance to engage with otherwise.

Photovoice Framework Adapted from Wang and Burris (1997) for Use in this Project

Wang and Burris (1997) steps for conducting photovoice study	Process for including step in research project	Final approach used to include photovoice step in this research project
Select and recruit a target audience of policy makers or community members.	Broader study group consisted of selected and recruited members included skateboarders and skateboarding informants that acted as representative of policy makers.	'Policy makers' were not involved in photovoice.
Recruit a group of photovoice participants.	Photovoice participants only included skateboarder participants.	4 of 7 recruited participants took part in photovoice.

Wang and Burris (1997) steps for conducting photovoice study	Process for including step in research project	Final approach used to include photovoice step in this research project
Introduce the photovoice methodology to participants and facilitate a group discussion.	Photovoice methodology was introduced at the onset of research participation. No group discussion was held due to time constraints of the project.	Photovoice was described as an exercise whereby willing participants submit photos of how/why they skateboard and/or their relationship with the urban environment through skateboarding. Instructions were also reiterated post-interview to direct the participants to submit photos that encapsulated what they shared during the interview.
Obtain informed consent.	Consent included photovoice description and was successfully obtained from all research participants.	Though consent was obtained from all research participants, 4 of the 7 participants ended up contributing to the photovoice component of the research project. Terms of consent stated participants could withdraw from photovoice at any time prior to publication.
Pose an initial theme for taking pictures.	Initial theme posed: how/why you skateboard in the city and your interaction with the urban environment.	Theme evolved into a more general statement that instructed the participants to submit a photo that encapsulated what they shared in the interview, addressing how/why they skateboard, and their unique interaction with the urban environment as it is defined to them.
Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use them.	Step is dated. Every participant has access to a phone with a high-quality camera that they use regularly to capture photo and video. No instruction needed.	Participants sent in photos they took prior to/during their involvement in the research project.
Provide a time for participants to take pictures	Participants were given a timeline to submit photos.	Participants had to be reminded once to submit photos and did so promptly. Timeframe for capturing photos wasn't as prioritized as the subject matter of the photo, and how it resonated with participant in the articulation of this exercise.

Wang and Burris (1997) steps for conducting photovoice study	Process for including step in research project	Final approach used to include photovoice step in this research project
Meet to discuss photographs	Meeting individually/collectively was difficult due to COVID-19 restrictions on social gathering and requirements for social distancing set out by BC Public Health. Time constraints also made this not possible.	Though discussing submitted photos as a group was a goal for this project, it ended up not being feasible. Instead, however, the participants were instructed to submit an open-ended caption to accompany each photo. This allowed the participants an opportunity to describe the photo in their own words, and offered a framework for analysis when looking at the photos as a collection.

Though photovoice has a methodological history in participatory-led research endeavors since its inception in the 1990s, the participants involved in this project were not required to be familiar with photovoice as a research methodology; instead, photovoice was used in this project for the purpose of shifting control into the hands of the participants, and for this reason, photovoice is an *exercise* to the participants, whilst a *methodology* to the researcher.

How it Played Out in Practice

Photovoice was described to participants as an opportunity to capture photographs that best represent how and why they skateboard, and their relationship with the urban environment, in recognition that the articulation of the photovoice, and the participant's understanding of photovoice as an exercise may influence the way the photovoice is conducted. By employing the use of this participant-led methodology, varying interpretations of the exercise was expected and considered a beneficial part of the process (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p.170). Each participant was asked to provide a caption for each photo, identifying why they chose to submit the image, and what it signifies to them in the context of their participation in this research project. Allowing the participants to submit a caption without length requirements and with minimal guidelines provides a window into the participant's lived experiences and personal narrative; these captions act like diary entries that accompany a visual representation of the participant's

involvement in the semi-structured interviews, as well as their perspective about skateboarding in the city.

Participants submitted photos they felt reflected how and why they skateboard and their relationship with the urban environment, as well as photos that encompassed their involvement in the semi-structured interview component of the research. The photos submitted were either taken by the participant, or of the participant, which was a product of the individual interpretation of photovoice as an exercise. Some participants provided an initial photo, and then submitted another photo to provide additional significance or background context; this was also a product of individual interpretation of photovoice as an exercise. The meaning and depth of these photos was amplified by the accompanied captions; the blurb about each photo enriched the subject matter, and made for an impactful submission that allowed for the power to remain in the hands of the participant, rather than left up to researcher interpretation. In following the guidelines set out by the scholars that invented photovoice, holding a group discussion about collective photo findings would have been beneficial to the data collection process; however, due to constraints, this was not possible, and by allowing participants to submit open-ended captions, a participant-led type of dialogue about the photos was not lost.

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