

## **Skateboard Programming**

### **- Encouraging Female Participation**

#### **A case for girls involvement/ “girls only” programming:**

Lower Mainland Municipalities have been in the business of developing and running skate parks and skate facilities since the 70's. However, it appears that money spent on skate facilities really means money spent on facilities for “boys”. Only an estimated 5-8 % of skateboarders counted at skate parks are female. We believe that this is not a reflection of girls disinterest in skateboarding, but rather a reflection of the additional obstacles which girls might face. Girls only programming/encouragement of female involvement is a positive way ahead. It is a commitment which needs to happen on a planning as well as programming level if we are serious about attempting to change the statistics.

#### **Some of the obstacles girls (might) face:**

##### **1. The history of skateboarding/gender socialization process:**

The history of skateboarding right from the beginning always entailed an element of skating which was driven on adrenaline and out-doing each other with tricks. Elements of skateboarding culture are and have always focused on aggressive, competitive and limitless behaviour. The spectacle of the sport has evolved from there on, with the skate park being an arena in which tricks are performed and skills are honed off against one's competitors' skills. Girls tend to be socialized in a way which promotes non-aggressive and co-operative behaviour, “they often seem to put limits on their physical output due to fear of getting hurt and intimidation of the sport (quote by a female skater)”. It can also be argued that the gender socialization process includes other pressures for girls, such as avoiding to display their bodies in a non-sexualized manner and not to damage and injure their bodies.

- 2. Male-dominated arenas (such as skate parks) can be intimidating environments for females, especially young girls**
- 3. Beginners block (who wants to be seen on public display if they are just starting out?)**
- 4. Design is not girl/beginner –friendly; girls might feel different about space and also want secluded space to socialize and/or for beginners to practice. Make sure to involve girls in the design consultation process.**

**Tips for successful girls-only programming:**

- 1. Outreach to find good female instructors, which could function both as peers and mentors**
- 2. plan for extra time to promote the program and recruit /outreach girls into the program, programs tend to grow over the years**
- 3. Allow for space to involve parents and peers/friends as spectators/participants. Girls often do sports when a peer encourages them/when a friend is already doing it, so take this into account when you develop the program**
- 4. plan a “theory session’ and some social time– let instructors show girls how to take their board apart/assemble it and/or show girls skate videos and talk about the history and culture of skateboarding, give the group some time to bond**
- 5. focus on teaching the basics first – if a beginner moves on to tricks without mastering the basics, they might be more prone to get injured and hence possibly discouraged from continuing**
- 6. buy skateboards/safety equipment (which participants could have on loan during the program) and keep the programs affordable: if a child/youth is just “testing out” a sport and not fully excited about the sport, they/their parents will not necessarily be prone to spend money on a good quality skateboard. Having good quality equipment on loan can make all the difference when it comes to accessibility/affordability**
- 7. if you can’t find female instructors, involve female youth workers when the male instructor are teaching, they could function as mentors and peers, too and join the girls in the learning process**
- 8. timelines of programming needs to be fit in with the “less busy hours of the park” to avoid conflict about the use of space – there is an inter-municipal skateboard committee which can share experiences**
- 9. Share your good experiences/instructor info with other centres/programmers**

**Finally: there isn’t necessarily a clear-cut answer for all girls, after all, there is a difference between a gender role and “accepting” a gender role. Some girls might thrive on male competitors which might push them to develop their own skills.**

**Mixed/co-ed programs are necessary, too.**