"This is how I think": Skate Life, Corresponding Cultures
and Alternative White Masculinities

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Communication)
in The University of Michigan
2007

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In loving memory

Colin Matthew Chivers
1982-2004

To my forever love,
Chris Yochim

to oneself and others. Her theoretical prowess and dedication to her work are exemplary, and if I can even approach her level of rigor, I think I'll be in good shape. I am ever grateful for my friendship with Kamille and the phone calls that have sustained our relationship. Since our first conference in Miami, Kamille and I have navigated the waters of grad school together, and time and time again, her compassion, humor, and astute questions and comments about my work reinvigorated and inspired me. I have taken great pleasure in coming to know Debbie over the years, and her energy, courage, and style move me to cull as much I can from all of my experiences. In the final hours of this dissertation, Debbie read over 100 pages and gave me astute, clear, and invaluable feedback. Each of these women have touched my work in many ways, but more importantly, they have all enriched my life.

I have been lucky to have the opportunity to study, write, and work with a number of other creative, vibrant, and loyal individuals who have deepened my love for teaching and research. Pete Simonson is the reason I came to graduate school. Pete's mind is vast, and as my undergraduate mentor, he constantly pushed me to ask new questions of theory and to find joy – and new knowledge – in the nuances and quirks of everyday life. Pete has remained a steady and supportive friend and mentor through the course of graduate school, and I am always moved by his continued engagement in my work and my life. Catherine Squires has also been a steady presence through graduate school, and her skillful and fiery commitment to theory and practice are exemplary. Roei Davidson's smarts, energy, and wide-ranging knowledge have widened my own experiences. Brad Taylor's thoughtful and dedicated approach to teaching have served as a reminder of its pleasures, Sheila Murphy has guided my thinking about digital media, and Dara

energy and dedication and serving as reinforcement when Butch was too zealous – and mouthy – in his encouragement. The humor, perseverance, and friendship of the many men and women I have met at Z-Force Fitness have made getting up at 5:30 in the morning worthwhile, and the friendly community there was irreplaceable during my solitary days of writing. Though the chocolate chip cookies at The Lighthouse coffee shop in Milan, MI canceled out many of my hours at the gym, the shop's willingness to allow me to commandeer their back booth for hours at a time was crucial to this dissertation's timely completion. Providing coffee and good conversation, The Lighthouse was an ideal space in which to write about popular culture and everyday politics. Both Z-Force Fitness and The Lighthouse are examples of what Ray Oldenberg would call a "third place," or a "great good place," for they serve as small town hubs where regulars actually discuss politics and air their personal troubles and triumphs. In these places, I've had the opportunity to engage in many dynamic conversations about local skateboarding policies, skateboarders' reputations in school, church, and home, and individuals' opinions and attitudes about teenage boys in general and skateboarders more particularly.

Finally, great big thanks to all those who knew me before. My close friends Bethany Lewis, Nicole Conrad, Maria DeBacco, Marie Elia, and Timilee Vaughn have been steadfast in their support – celebrating my accomplishments along with me and keeping my head above water when I was about to drown in work. The Yochim family's cheerful love and creative humor is always comforting. The Chivers family has been supportive so many, many ways. My mom, Mary Chivers, listened to regular end-of-semester breakdowns, cheered me through every accomplishment, and regularly helped

me through the many challenges of everyday life. She is a model of grace and generosity, and I will never be able to adequately thank her. My dad, David Chivers, has encouraged me in my professional endeavors and offered a sympathetic ear as I talked about the challenges of work. My brothers, John and Tim Chivers, are steady in their love and steady in their teasing. Always willing to help with whatever I need, they are worthy, worthy allies, and I'm grateful to have them.

When it comes down to it, we all study what we know and worry about, and I have known and worried about many men. My men past, present, and future inspire and drive my work, and this dissertation is dedicated to them. I tragically lost my brother Colin in 2004, and I forever miss his tender love and mocking humor. My future, as-yet-unnamed little man, who may make his presence known at any minute, has motivated me to finish my work in a way that no one else could. I can't wait to get to know him. And of course, Chris Yochim, my long-time love, best friend, and partner, has offered irreplaceable support, encouragement, and love through the demands of graduate school. The model skateboarder, Chris's sensitivity, gentleness, and creativity have shown me that men can get it right. He always brought me back to earth, reminding me of the absurdity of hegemony, problematics, and theory in the face of true love, friendships, and the everyday joys of regular life. I thank him forever.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction: Regarding Skate Life

"Pay attention to what he's saying, because he's a skate legend. He's saying how

he lived in a small town and skating saved his life. Listen to what he's saying," 15-year-

old skateboarder Braden told me as I sat with him in his mother's living room watching a

skateboarding video. I had met Braden on a sidewalk several months earlier – he was

carrying a skateboard and I was looking for skateboarders to interview. He and I had

gotten to know one another during a lunchtime interview, and he had eagerly responded

to my interest in skate culture, allowing me to tag along during skate sessions in Ann

Arbor, Detroit, and Toledo, introducing me to his parents, and inviting me to participate

in both his everyday life and special occasions, such as his high school graduation party.

On this particular day, Braden and his close friend, 16-year-old Jack, who are both white,

were taking me on a tour through their media lives, waving books, magazines, and videos

in front of me, defining themselves via their media habits.

By the time Braden told me to "Listen to what he's saying," we had settled on

watching excerpts from a number of their favorite skateboarding videos. In my time with

Braden, I had come to realize that he was a teenager with big dreams, a willing student

who was often in awe of the people he met and their varied accomplishments. The only

son of divorced artists, Braden saw the world as a site of possibility, but he also was

easily frustrated with himself and sometimes expressed disgust with his peers and their

seemingly lazy and sole interest in partying. So, when he directed me to listen to the

skater on the screen, it was immediately clear that he was telling me, "This is what skating is all about for me. Skating has saved *my* life:" it had expanded his peer group, opened his eyes to new ways of thinking, and provided him with a social space in which he could hone his strategies of self-expression. For Braden, skateboarding media served as a reflection and projection of himself, his values, and his aspirations. Though I did not know Braden's friend Jack as well as I knew Braden, Jack was far more explicit in making the same claim, noting at one point, "Brian [the professional skater featured on the video] says it very well. This is how I think." Skateboarding videos comprise just one element of a vast network of texts that make up Jack and Braden's highly-mediated culture, and the pleasure they take in finding themselves through niche skateboarding media is complicated by their knowledge and consumption of mainstream media that constructs skate life in ways sometimes antithetical to – and sometimes aligned with – the boys' self-constructions.

In 2006, FedEx released an ad proclaiming its value to corporations' bottom-line as well as its hip sensibilities. Aired during NBC's *The Office*, the latest incarnation of a slew of media texts mocking the banality of the corporate workplace, the ad features three company folks standing in a cubicle farm. A middle-aged white woman wearing a brown suit and a short white man with a receding hairline and glasses wearing a green sweater vest and khakis represent the company's middle-management, and a taller white man with gray hair and wearing an Oxford shirt, tie, and black slacks represents a company executive. The exec notes the time that FedEx has been saving the company and wonders, "So why aren't we getting more done?" The three pause for a beat, thinking, and then the woman suggests, "Maybe we should get rid of the half pipe." The

camera follows the group's glance and settles on a medium shot of a half pipe – a large

ramp on which skateboarders perform their tricks – crowded into a space at the edge of

the cubicles. Two skaters ride the half pipe – and fall – as five others look on. The

camera cuts back to the corporate folks, and the executive decides, "No. The half pipe

stays," to which the woman replies, "Gotta keep the half pipe." Drawing on

skateboarding's cultural cachet to represent its own hip sensibilities, this commercial

constructs skateboarders as slackers while at the same time representing an aversion to

the mundane, buttoned-up world of corporate America and the constrained images of

white masculinity which accompany it. Though the ad does not explicitly reframe

skateboarding in a manner antithetical to skateboarders' principles, its mere presence on

network television may cause some skateboarders pause. FedEx's appropriation of skate

life is just one of many co-optations that more-and-less successfully represent the values

espoused by many skaters.

Utilizing theories of the media audience, youth culture, race, and gender to

discuss ethnographic data collected in a community of southeastern Michigan

skateboarders, this dissertation provides insight into how the media and a community

interact to produce expectations, values, and ideologies regarding male youths' conduct

in everyday life. By considering the interplay of mass, niche, and community media and

introducing the notion of "corresponding cultures," I bridge a false dichotomy between

"subculture" and "mainstream" in subculture theory that perpetuates the notion that

subcultures completely and continuously resist a dominant culture from which they are

wholly separated. In making these theoretical contributions, I hope to illuminate the

ways in which young white men make political and social decisions that have personal,

social, or political ramifications. Revealing the intricate relationship between pleasure, politics, and identity in the varied and contradictory interplay between young men and the media, this dissertation contributes to our scholarly understanding of audience engagement with media as well as evolving notions of race and masculinity.

Skateboarders are surrounded by and ensconced in a media culture that locates them on the cool side of mainstream, and they are also devoted to and take great pleasure in niche media that appeal to them exclusively as skateboarders and that often inspire or supply dominant media outlets with their representations of skateboarders.[1] Skateboarding videos and magazines, produced by skateboarding companies and available for purchase in skate shops, communicate the styles, locations, heroes, and values of the culture. Skateboarders avidly consume this media and say that it provokes pleasurable moments of escape and inspiration. They also produce local, independent videos modeled on niche skate videos.

Defining themselves in, through, and around these multiple representations of skate life, skateboarders comprise what I call a "corresponding culture" that is always in the process of developing and responding to critiques of dominant masculinities that never fully challenge the power of straight, white, middle-class American men. Instructing me to "listen," because "this is how I think," Braden and Jack were instructing me in the norms of skate media consumption, showing me that their personal notions of

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[1] In this analysis, I define mass media as media directed toward a large demographic, such as 18-34 year old males. Though this media is niche-oriented in that it does not aspire to the old "least common denominator" formulation for attracting the largest segment of the population as possible, it is less specific than the lifestyle-oriented approach that many American magazines, for example, may take. Niche media are media designed to attract a segment of the audience via both demographic and lifestyle considerations. Such media may be more readily available in specialized distribution areas, such as skateboarding shops. Skateboarding videos produced by skateboarding companies and skateboarding magazines comprise niche media in this project. Local or "community" media are media designed by skateboarders using equipment and materials developed for personal use.

identity were being constructed in correspondence with the texts of skate culture specifically and popular culture in general. By referring to skateboarders as a "corresponding culture," I am defining them as a culture that both is in constant conversation (or correspondence) with a wide array of mainstream, niche, and local media forms and finds various affinities (or corresponds) with these forms' ideologies. Constantly in motion, a corresponding culture is a group organized around a particular lifestyle or activity that interacts with various levels of media – niche, mainstream, and local – and variously agrees or disagrees with those media's espoused ideas. Skateboarding media and skateboarders, as I will demonstrate, frequently center these correspondences on nascent critiques of dominant masculinities that manage, at the same time, to maintain the power of white middle-class heterosexual American men.

"Modern marketing's mother lode": White Male Teenagers, Alternative Masculinities, and Consumer Culture

As a white teenage girl, I became – I must admit – enamored with a group of white skateboarders who positioned themselves as different from, and superior to, "typical" high school boys. These skaters spent their time listening to punk and indie music that was not on the radio, going to "shows" – small concerts featuring local and national bands – and skateboarding. Their quirky sense of humor, seeming disdain for high school hierarchies, and knowing sense of irony about life in general operated as an apparent foil to the macho displays, ego-driven drug use, and boring preoccupation with "cool" typical of most of my fellow high schoolers, and I quickly began to spend most of my free time with this crowd. I went to shows, the beach, and house parties with these boys, watched their bands practice, hung out with them while they skated idly around convenience store parking lots, and spent my fair share of time sitting around, bored,

while they watched skateboarding videos with just as much enthusiasm as the skateboarders in the current study.

In 1995, at age 17, I began to date one of the skateboarders, and as an undergraduate Communication Arts major, I produced a documentary featuring the skaters in my college town, who were working to develop a skate park with the local government.[2] My senior thesis explored the hardcore music community in Erie, Pennsylvania, a community with whom my high school friends were periodically engaged. At 24, I married the skateboarder I began to date at 17, and my relationship with him has helped to maintain my ties to my high school peers, as has my younger brothers' interest in skateboarding and BMX'ing.[3] My youngest brother, Tim, who is 8 years my junior, has turned an outbuilding on our family farm into an indoor BMX/skate park, and his ramps have been featured in a national BMX magazine with several professional BMX'ers.

Despite my 14-year involvement with the skateboarding and BMX'ing communities, I remain a relative outsider. I am loath to admit that I operate in this community principally as an observer. I have set foot on skateboards more often than many people, but I can only coast tentatively on very, very smooth surfaces. I don't play in the bands; I watch the bands. I am not "in" on all of the boys' jokes; I continue to be invited along primarily as a heterosexual partner; and I have little agency within the group. The boys know me well enough to ask me about my life, to chuckle at my wry

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[2] Skateboarders' opinions about skate parks are highly contradictory; while they frequently lobby local governments for a sanctioned space in which to skate, they also find skate parks, as enclosed places with safety rules, and sometimes fees, to be too limiting and too organized. These contradictions symbolize just one of the ways in which skate culture's relationship to mainstream entities is highly contingent and dynamic.

[3] "Bicycle Moto-Crossing," BMX biking is a sport in which participants ride small one-speed bikes on ramps similar to skateboarding ramps. Participants perform a variety of tricks, flipping their BMX bikes in a manner similar to skateboarders' use of skateboards.

observations about their culture, and to ask about my family. They have attended the major events in my life, and they count me as a friend. And I do, truly, appreciate their friendships. But it is clearly *their* world, a culture in which men remain at the center and carry much of the day-to-day power.

I have carried the relationships from my youth into my relationships with the Michigan skateboarders, and though I have known many of the boys for five years, I still find myself hanging out on the margins, watching as they act, laughing along with jokes I don't find particularly funny, and shyly asking them to explain the context of particular comments. At the same time, I have been invited to their graduation parties, gone to dinner with them, kept in touch via the internet, and spent afternoons watching them skateboard with and without my husband. I am an insider watching from the outside, an outsider with a history of peering in. My position on the borders of this community – a borderland constructed primarily through my gender and secondarily through my age and position as a researcher – has been a privileged location for an ethnographer, a location affording me an insider's access, through my history and my husband's skate culture cachet, to both the community itself and knowledge of its norms and the outsider's insight into the peculiarity of those norms.

In the beginning years of my friendship with skater boys, skateboarding's relationship to popular culture began to shift. In 1995, ESPN launched *The Extreme Games*, later branded *The X Games*, and, as I discuss later, the age of extreme began. Tony Hawk, who was already well-known to skateboarders in the 1980s, became the mainstream face of skateboarding, and the practice began its journey (some might say descent) into a culture of cool. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, my friends had

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seen Tony Hawk up close and in person during a skateboarding demo (demonstration) in a McDonald's parking lot in Erie, Pennsylvania. They had been called "skater fags" throughout their middle-school years in the late 80s and early 90s – and some endured such treatment into the high school years. In 1993, a self-proclaimed "jock" brutally beat up one of our friends after school one day – the victim was an extremely talented skateboarder, swimmer, and artist who occasionally had the audacity to wear skirts to school. For committing these "crimes" – and the skateboarding, swimming, artistry, and skirts were all clearly tied together as part and parcel of our friend's somewhat feminized and sexually ambiguous identity – the "jock" broke our friend's back. He was taken to a hospital in Pittsburgh, where he was put on life support and deemed paralyzed. With much hard work, determination, and luck, he now walks with a walker. Clearly then, for this group of heterosexual, middle-class, white boys gathered loosely around skateboarding and punk music, their identities placed them on the outside of the mainstream, and the outside was not always comfortable or safe. But the introduction of *The Extreme Games* and skateboarding's attendant popularity was also vaguely troubling.

Since 1999, the business and advertising press have been reporting major increases in participation in extreme sports generally, and skateboarding more particularly. In 2000, Fuse Sports Marketing, a self-described "youth culture marketing agency,"[4] reported a 35% increase in extreme sports participation since 1995.[5] American Sports Data reported that participation in snowboarding increased 51% between 1999 and 2000, to 7 million participants, while participation in skateboarding increased 49%, to 12

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[4] Fuse Marketing, http://www.fusemarketing.com/fuse.php, accessed December 1, 2005.
[5] Laura Petrecca, "Going to Extremes," *Advertising Age*, v. 71, n. 31, p. 16, July 24, 2000. Accessed online http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&an=3357939

million participants.[6] In comparison, by 2000, baseball, basketball, volleyball, and softball had all experienced falling numbers, with baseball participation dropping to 10.9 million individuals.[7] In 2004, the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association reported 19.23 million rollerbladers, 11.09 million skateboarders, 7.82 million snowboarders, and 3.37 million BMX'ers.[8]

This marked shift in American sporting practices, from organized team sports to more individualistic "extreme" or "action" sports, prompted, and was perhaps influenced by, new trends in youth marketing. ESPN's *Extreme Games*, a weeklong alternative Olympics featuring 9 extreme sports, including BMX'ing, bungee jumping, barefoot waterski jumping, inline skating, mountain biking, sky surfing, street luge, windsurfing, and skateboarding, was sponsored by Taco Bell, Advil, Chevy Trucks, Mountain Dew, Nike, AT&T, and Miller Beer.[9] By 1996, both Nike and Adidas were developing skateboarding shoes,[10] and in 1999, *Fortune* reported that the IEG Sponsorship Report had noted a 500% increase, since 1993, in "revenue for alternative sports sponsorships" to $135 million.[11]

At the turn of the century, it seemed everyone had jumped on the extreme bandwagon. *Advertising Age* proclaimed, "Everything from cheeseburgers to jeans is

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[6] "Going to Extremes," *American Demographics*, June 1, 2001, p. 26. Accessed online, General BusinessFile ASAP.

[7] Joan Raymond, "Going to Extremes," *American Demograhics*, June 1, 2002, n.p. Accessed online, General BusinessFile ASAP. Soccer has been more successcul, with a 48% increase in "frequent participants" between 1987 and 2000, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association. The National Sporting Goods Association reported 12.5 million soccer players in 1995 (*Pediatrics*, March 2000, v. 105, n. 3, p. 659).

[8] "The WWD List: Going to Extremes," *WWD*, December 13, 2004, p. 110S, accessed online, General BusinessFile ASAP.

[9] "1995 Summer X Games," Skatelog.com, edited by Kathie Fry, http://www.skatelog.com/x-games/1995/summer/, accessed December 1, 2005.

[10] Jeff Jensen, "Vans Readies $25 mil brand blitz," *Advertising Age*, 68(9), p. 30, March 3, 1997. Accessed online, http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&an=9703134485.

[11] Paul Hochman, "Street Lugers, Stunt Bikers, and – Colgate Palmolive! Spokesmen with Nose Rings," *Fortune*, 140(10), 60, November 22, 1999. Accessed online, General BusinessFile ASAP.

being dubbed 'Xtreme,' as marketers use 'X' to get to Y – Generation Y, that is," and

went on to list Right Guard's Xtreme Sport deodorant, Schick's Xtreme III razor,

Clairol's Xtreme FX haircolor, and Burger King's X-Treme double cheeseburger. The

U.S. Patent & Trademark Directory, the magazine reported, listed 296 brands and

products using the word "Xtreme."[12] Indeed, less than a year later, the magazine noted,

"Extreme sports have become so popular they no longer seem extreme," and reported that

ESPN had begun calling this same group of activities "action sports."[13]

Despite industry fears that "extreme" had gone too far mainstream, the business

press indicated that the extreme marketing strategies continued to be successful. In the

eight weeks after its sponsorship of the 2000 Winter X Games, for example, Heinz's

Bagel Bites posted a 20% increase in sales and noted "Action sports is a sport that

embodies the lifestyle and personality of the Bagel Bites consumer."[14] Similarly, Dave

DeCecco of PepsiCo suggested that, until its 1992 "Do the Dew" campaign, Mountain

Dew was regarded as "a hillbilly drink." With its new marketing strategy, tied directly to

extreme sports, Mountain Dew became the fastest-growing soft drink in the 1990s.[15] By

2004, Tony Hawk, spokesman for Bagel Bites and Doritos and the name behind

Activision's *Tony Hawk* line of videogames, was earning approximately $9 million a

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[12] Laura Petrecca, "Going to Extremes," 2000. Dropping the "e" from "extreme" subtly moved the word away from its use as an indicator of a relatively narrow range of characteristics to a branding device that could be attached to any range of products - from cheeseburgers to haircolor. This shift arguably marks a moment of sedimentation in marketing, when a phrase becomes an empty signifier of "cool."

[13] Kim Cleland, "Action Sports Form Fabric of Generation," *Advertising Age*, April 16, 2001, v. 72, p. 22. Accessed online, General BusinessFile ASAP.

[14] Ibid. See also Louis Chunovic, "X Games Score Big with Advertisers," *Electronic Media*, August 13, 2001, 2.

[15] Joan Raymond, "Going to Extremes," *American Demographics*, June 2002. See also Theresa Howard, "Being True to Dew," *Brandweek*, April 24, 2000, 28.

year, reported *Forbes*, and his brand pulled in $300 million in sales of apparel, skateboards, tours, and videogames.[16]

The extreme marketing trend stems not only from the sports' rising popularity, but also from their perceived affinity to teens more generally. Julie Halpin, a youth marketer, contended, "Teens are naturally impelled to test limits. Something extreme pushes the pre-existing boundaries and appeals to that part of a teen who fancies him or herself on the very edge of what the rest of the world considers normal."[17] Others have reported extreme sports' success in reaching the notoriously elusive 14-30 year old male; both the U.S. Marines and the Air Force have sponsored extreme sports events and have used extreme sports in their marketing campaigns. Lt. Col. Ismael Ortiz, assistant chief of staff-advertising, noted the Marines' "inclusive" attitude, "[Extreme sports] events reach our target audience, the 18-to-24-year-old …. We don't let the color of their hair or how they wear their clothes take away from who they are," and Laura Petrecca of *Advertising Age* suggested that the Marines' involvement in extreme sports may be the reason for their continued recruiting success.[18]

Extreme sports were certainly a successful appeal for 12-34-year-old white males. The *Gravity Games* (2001) (NBC's answer to ESPN's *X Games)* boasted a 1.7 rating for 12-17 year old males (approximately 200,000 young men) and a 1.2 rating for males ages 12-24 (320,000 men), while the *Summer X Games* (2001) reached about 178,000 12-17 year old males and 330,000 18-34 year old men. In comparison, the median age of

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[16] Lea Goldman, "From Ramps to Riches," *Forbes*, July 5, 2004, 174(1), p. 98. Accessed online: http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=657165491&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=1782&RQT&VName=PQD. More than a very talented skateboarder, Tony Hawk has become, like Michael Jordan, a brand. His name is attached to various products in order to convey Hawk's aura and his authentic relation to skateboard culture.
[17] Laura Petrecca, "Going to Extremes," 2000.
[18] Laura Petrecca, "Going to Extremes," *Advertising Age*, October 11, 1999.

baseball's audience is 46.4; ESPN's "total-day median age" is 40.7. Brad Adgate,

executive of Horizon Media, claimed, "This is a demographic sweet spot."[19] In 1999,

Fortune reported that corporate interest in extreme athletes resulted from the fact that

"They sit smack in the middle of modern marketing's mother lode, the 17-year-old-male

demographic and its $650 billion in annual spending power."[20]

Within a culture generally inundated by extreme sports, skateboarding has

become particularly resonant, both as a referent within popular culture that produces

particular ideologies of race, gender, and youth and as a material practice that inspires

civic debate about youth's use of public space. Skateboarders have been central to

MTV's contemporary lineup, in *Jackass, Viva La Bam, Wildboyz*, *Rob and Big*, and

Scarred as well as an episode of *Made*[21] and numerous music videos, including those for

Will Smith's "Switch," the Pussycat Dolls's "Don't Cha" with Busta Rhymes, and

Pharrell Williams's "Can I Have It Like That" with Gwen Stefani. Dave Chappelle

adopts a style associated with skateboarding, and Tom Green is closely associated with

professional skateboarder Tony Hawk – Tom Green is sponsored by Hawk's

skateboarding company, Birdhouse Skateboards, and Hawk appeared on Green's MTV

show, *The Tom Green Show*. Skateboarders are also the focus of many advertisements

adopting an extreme marketing campaign, including those for Doritos, Hot Pockets,

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[19] Raymond, "Going to Extremes," 29.
[20] Paul Hochman, "Street Lugers."
[21] *Jackass, Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz* are all "reality" shows aired during MTV's Sunday night "Sunday Stew," a lineup aimed toward teen boys that also includes Ashton Kucher's *Punk'd*. *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam* feature professional skateboarders and their friends engaging in pranks, including launching innumerable objects at each others' groins and building skate parks in their parents' homes. *Wildboyz*, a spinoff of *Jackass*, showcases the skateboarders' friends in various "exotic" locales wearing loincloths and botching local activities such as wrestling alligators. *Made* remakes its participants: for example, a blonde, thin, teenage girl interested in makeup and clothes requests to be made into a skateboarder. She is introduced to a coach and must practice skateboarding for 5 weeks and learn to participate in skateboarding culture – wear the right clothes, be sufficiently irreverent, watch skate videos, and so on.

McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Right Guard deodorant, and Mountain Dew. Finally,

skateboarding has been the subject of two nationally-released documentaries (*Dogtown*

and Z-Boys; Stoked: The Rise and Fall of Gator) and two fictional movies (*Grind*; *Lords*

of Dogtown) in the past five years. Professional skateboarder Tony Hawk, with his

extensive *ProSkater* and *Underground* line of Activision videogames and numerous

appearances throughout popular culture, including on *CSI: Miami* and *The Simpsons*, is

arguably the most recognizable extreme athlete in contemporary culture. Clearly, in the

plethora of practices labeled "extreme," skateboarding is the figurehead.

Moreover, skateboarders have become the subject of rigorous debate in

communities throughout the United States. Unlike surfing, snowboarding, or motorcross,

skateboarding can be practiced virtually anywhere with relatively small entry fees – a

skateboard costs anywhere from 20 to 120 dollars, requires no special clothing, and can

be practiced on any paved street, sidewalk, or driveway. American communities have

spent considerable time debating the legality of skateboarding in public space and the

necessity of establishing public skate parks open for community use. City councils and

citizens routinely voice concerns about skateboarders' safety,[22] pedestrians' safety in the

path of skateboarders,[23] and skateboarders' destruction of public space and disruption of

civil society (e.g., the use of vulgar language, loud and rowdy behavior, the destruction of

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[22] In 2004, New York passed a law requiring skateboarders under 14 years old to wear helmets while skateboarding in public places. California has a similar law. Al Baker, "Law Requires Children to Wear Helmets While Skateboarding," *New York Times*, November 25, 2004, B9.

[23] For example, in response to a San Francisco city supervisor's proposal to legalize skateboarding on all city sidewalks, Bob Planthold, co-chairman of Senior Action Network's Transportation and Pedestrian Safety Committee, asked council members to consider the safety of blind pedestrians and elderly citizens who find it difficult to avoid quickly-moving skateboarders. He complained, "We can't see how the city can authorize night skateboarding …. Why do kids need to skateboard at night? Why can't they be home doing their homework? Or doing laundry? We'd be happy to help them lobby for more skateboard parks, but this is the wrong solution." Carolyn Jones, "Supes ponder plan for greater access for sport on sidewalks," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, April 1, 2005, F1.

property via both the practice of skateboarding and graffiti, and general disrespect toward elders).[24] While marketers celebrate teenage boys' spending power and the cultural appeal of skateboarding, parents, teachers, and local politicians and law enforcement officers sometimes revile these practices in their own locales and dismiss teen boy behavior as immature and irresponsible.

It is crucial to note that skateboarders are not wholeheartedly despised by the majority of adults; their presence is the subject of debate, and many reports indicate that some adults, concerned with the criminalization of this youth activity, do come to skateboarders' defense in city meetings, noting that skaters are simply looking for a place to practice their sport.[25] In fact, many American cities have developed public skate parks in order to give skateboarders an alternative to skating on streets and sidewalks. Heidi Lemmon, director of the Skatepark Association, a California nonprofit, told *The New York Times* in 2005 that there are approximately 2,000 parks in the United States, with about 1,000 more in development, and indicated that cities manage most of the parks.[26] As I've noted, despite their ubiquity, skate parks are fraught by debate within skateboarding communities about the relative containment of skate parks and the rules that often accompany them.

Skateboarders, clearly, are a significant element of both popular culture and everyday life. Their culture and style have become principle elements in popular appeals to young men, and their increased presence in everyday life has given way to the

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[24] See, for example, Jean Laquidara Hill, "Skateboards at Town Hall Mean Trouble," *Telegram &Gazette* (Worcester, MA), August 16, 2000, B1.
[25] For example, one individual said, "We're kind of treating those kids who want to roller blade or skateboard like they're dealing drugs downtown," and another said, "Before we take space away from the kids we should have a place for them to go." George Barnes, "Althol Bans Skateboards Downtown," *Telegram & Gazette*, Worcester, MA, May 16, 2000, p. B2.
[26] Damien Cave, "Dogtown, U.S.A.," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2005.

development of both legal restrictions on the sport and sanctioned spaces for its practice. Skateboarders' ever-shifting location within mainstream youth culture – celebrated yet debated, popular but edgy – suggests that they strike a chord with Americans (parents, advertisers, youth more generally) working to define the boundaries of youth identity, and as such positions them as indicators of the contemporary status of American youth identity who should provide insight into the media's portrayal of youth and youth's encounters with the media.

Identity Politics in Youth "Cultures of Cool"[27]

Taking skateboarders as a case study, *This Is How I Think* contributes to our understanding of youth consumer culture and the pleasure and politics in its consumption by discussing the ways in which white masculinity is presented in youth media and elaborating young men's reactions to these portrayals. Arguing that male skateboarders are dissatisfied with the norms of adult white masculinity but do not challenge the power that white men hold in our society, I suggest that media representations of white male youth present alternative masculinities that rely on both dominant American values and the mockery of non-whites, homosexuals, and women to maintain men's power. Finally, I contend that skate culture creates a space in which young men can experience the mental and emotional pleasure of escape and self-expression – an experience often denied young men in a dominant culture that expects them to be emotionally reticent and in control.

Youth culture is a particularly interesting place to investigate identity because the rhetoric of "youth" is so frequently used as a symbol for the desires of an aging

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[27] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

population; for the anxieties about new ways-of-being, current ideologies, and the state of the nation; for hopes for the future, particularly with respect to the nation; and for the possibilities of resistance. Though (and perhaps because) they so strongly engage the fears, hopes, and desires of the nation and of adults, youth are often the site of moral panics. Viewed as simultaneously *in* trouble and *causing* trouble, youth are highly scrutinized, surveilled, and controlled. Their symbolic resonance also makes them ideal emblems in consumer culture: more than existing as willing-and-able shoppers, youth – and the discourse of youth – are regularly used in advertising appeals.

As Mike Davies argues, "youth has become such a regulated, curfewed and controlled social group in the late twentieth century, that 'the only legal activity … is to consume.'"[28] The dialectics of youth, as a site of anxiety and hope; fear and desire; control and freedom; and consumption and political engagement, present an ideal lens through which we can examine the possibilities for political engagement in a consumption-oriented world as well as a crucial site for considering the production of ideologies of identity. In other words, because youth occupy such a central place in the American imagination, through them, we can shed some light on how race, gender, class, and sexuality inform and are informed by national identity as well as enlivening and expanding our definitions of political work.[29] Youth, then, should help us to reimagine the relationship between pleasure, politics, and identity so that we can provide more opportunities for youths' engagement in the larger world.

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[28] Mike Davies, "On-line interview with *Escape Velocity*, 1995; quoted in Neil Campbell, *American Youth Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.
[29] Though the construction of nation and nationality is not a central focus of this dissertation, skateboarders' and extreme sports texts' construction of masculinity are infused with American values of independence, individuality, and freedom. Throughout my investigation, I return to the particularly American nature of extreme sports' masculinity.

Much work has been done to examine the role of youth in the development of

national identity as well as the production of identity within youth cultures. Most

recently, Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep have proposed the notion of a youthscape,

drawing on Arjun Appadurai's theorization of globalization, which uses the idea of

"scapes" to connote the uneven, conflicted, varied terrain upon which social and political

power are contested. By utilizing "youthscape," we can keep firmly in mind the

dialectics of youth – the contradictions, complexities, and fluidity of a group that operates

both in material culture and in discourse to define our hopes and dreams. As Maira and

Soep contend, "[A] youthscape is not a unit of analysis, but an approach that potentially

revitalizes discussions about youth cultures and social movements while simultaneously

theorizing the political and social uses of youth to maintain repressive systems of social

control."[30]

> Maira and Soep draw on Garcia Canclini, contending
>
> we need to be more attuned to the new forms that citizenship takes
> in an era where relations of social belonging are 'steeped in consumption,'
> acknowledging the ways in which young people, among other social actors,
> may express political motivations or aspirations through their use of the media
> rather than assuming, a priori, that the space of consumption is opposed to
> that of citizenship.[31]

This project contends that skateboarding culture, which is steeped in consumption, is also

a space of citizenship in which young men produce a politics of identity.

Though Maira and Soep contend that "youthscapes" are "not a unit of analysis,"[32]

the fluidity of this concept proves quite useful for summarizing the scope of this

dissertation. Maira and Soep are concerned with the intersections of youth, national

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[30] Sunaina Maira & Elisabeth Soep, xvii.

[31] Maira & Soep, xxv. Quote from Nèstor Garcìa Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 20.

[32] Maira and Soep, xvii.

identity, and the global economy. This dissertation does not address globalism directly; however, it approaches skateboarders as a dynamic group whose conceptions of identity are produced through and within media designed to facilitate consumption and whose identity is tied to broader notions of white American masculinity. The notion of "youthscape" also takes into account the various discourses, texts, institutions, and individuals that cross over, define, and interact with skateboarders, and as such it reinforces the fluid understanding of identity production that this dissertation develops.

Consumption, Politics, and Pleasure in Youth Culture

My investigation of this youthscape moves out of and contributes to neo-Marxist analyses of the politics of consumer culture that posit that media audiences can negotiate and resist dominant ideologies produced and maintained in mainstream media. Current work in this area draws heavily on Stuart Hall's writings, which introduced the idea of resistance into media studies and explained and applied Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony in the context of the media. Hall suggests that the process of hegemony relies upon the "articulation," or connection of ideologies to the material social conditions of the day.[33] He argues, "[T]he effective coupling of dominant ideas to the historical bloc which has acquired hegemonic power in a particular period is what the process of ideological struggle is intended to secure."[34] This dynamic model of the hegemonic process, encompassing the uneven and ever-changing terrain of ideology as well as the crucial moment of articulation, opens up spaces for shifts in dominant ideologies as well

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[33] Hall defines ideology as "the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works" (Stuart Hall, "The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees," in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 26. (First published 1983))
[34] Hall, "The problem of ideology," 44.

as resistance to the status quo, thereby prompting media researchers to explore how

audiences might respond to, resist, and incorporate mediated ideologies into their

everyday lives and their understanding of race, class, gender, and sexuality. *This Is How

I Think* relies on these definitions of ideology and hegemony in order to understand the

basic processes through which the media work, but also introduces the experience of

pleasure and emotion into our conceptualization of hegemony and resistance.

Both subcultural theorists and media researchers have utilized Hall's theories to

analyze the politics of consumption. Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham Centre

for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), for example, posited that youth subcultures

resist dominant ideologies by rearticulating signs of consumer culture with resistant

ideas. Perhaps most influential was Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*,

which argued that subcultures use *bricolage* to imbue banal mainstream objects (such as,

in punk culture, safety pins) with new meanings that mainstream culture can, in turn, re-

incorporate, causing them to lose their resistant undertones. Subcultural symbols, for

Hebdige, are continually in jeopardy of being repackaged and resold to mainstream

consumer culture, and so subcultural politics are always fated to fail.[35] That is, these

ideological, symbolic resistances are only

> *attempts at a solution* to that problematic experience: a resolution which,
> because pitched largely at the symbolic level, was fated to fail. The
> problematic of a subordinate class experience can be 'lived through',
> negotiated or resisted; but it cannot be *resolved* at that level or by those
> means.[36]

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[35] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. See also Paul E. Willis, "Culture, Institution, Differentiation," in Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (eds.) *The Subcultures Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 121-129; and Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), 1-15.

[36] John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, & Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview," in Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson, (eds.) *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1975/2000), 47, emphasis in original.

As Ken Gelder contends, there was "a familiar narrative at the Birmingham Centre, that subcultural empowerment is empowerment without a future."[37]

Contemporary scholars, characterized by David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, somewhat problematically, as "post-subcultural theorists,"[38] have produced several key critiques of the CCCS's "heroic"[39] analyses of subcultures. While the CCCS's work postulated that subcultural styles were a unified reaction to dominant but contradictory demands of class relations, post-subcultural theory characterizes subcultures as dynamic and contradictory groups whose relationship to mainstream culture in highly contested and flexible. More specifically, these theorists question the political nature of subcultures,[40] the strict binary between subculture and mainstream, the theorists' sole and limited focus on class relations to the exclusion of gender, race, nation, and sexuality,[41] and their dependence on semiological methods to interpret subcultural style while ignoring subcultural practice (e.g., producing music, making 'zines). This work rightly disrupts heroic subcultural theory and more accurately describes various subcultural

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[37] Ken Gelder, "Introduction to Part Two," in Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (eds.) *The Subcultures Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87.

[38] David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, eds., *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (New York: Berg, 2003). This moniker unfortunately suggests that subcultures as theorized by the Birmingham School did at one time exist. While the editors never make this claim explicitly, and in fact their contributors frequently refute the idea of traditional subcultures without hesitation, the implication is unavoidable given the temporal nature of the term "post." Muggleton's previous work further makes this implication in locating his analysis in the postmodern era. That is, he implies that post-subculturalists came to existence as part of postmodernity, and so the reader may infer that subculturalists populated the modern era. Such bifurcations are questionable, at best. Perhaps it would be more useful to use the term "post-Birmingham."

[39] Ibid.

[40] Oliver Marchart, "Bridging the Micro-Macro Gap: Is There Such a Thing as a Post-Subcultural Politics?," in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (New York: Berg, 2003), 83-97.

[41] Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, working at Birmingham, first critiqued the male-centric nature of the CCCS's work in 1980. See Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*, ed. Angela McRobbie (London: MacMillan Education, 1991), 1-15.

practices, demonstrating the ways in which subcultures can provide a space in which disempowered groups can vie for discursive power.[42]

However, post-subcultural theorists have fully evaluated neither subcultures' interactions with mainstream media nor the ways in which subcultures and the mainstream influence one another in their portrayals of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation in youth culture. Furthermore, while subcultural practices are undoubtedly crucial to our understanding of subcultural politics, post-subcultural theorists, claiming that traditional subculture theory limits "subcultural practices to a narrow notion of spectacle,"[43] make the reactionary mistake of focusing on practice to the detriment of an understanding of subcultural symbols, or more broadly, the discursive meaning of subcultures throughout popular culture. This omission thus ignores youth subcultures' contributions to changing or static identity norms, and mainstream media stabilization, disruption, and appropriation of subcultural critiques of and resistances to these norms. It is only by considering subcultural practices, values, and discourses in conversation with one another and with mainstream practices, values, and discourses that we can see how the layers of subcultures can critique and maintain power relations.

Sarah Thornton's highly influential discussion of the role of media in British "club cultures" in the late 1980s and early 1990s provides some inroads into the intersections between mainstream media and subcultures. Beyond making crystal clear the false binary between subculture and mainstream, Thornton rightfully contends that media are "a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge" in

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[42] See, for example, Doreen Piano, "Resisting Subjects: Diy Feminism and the Politics of Style in Subcultural Production," in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (Berg: New York, 2003), 253-65.
[43] Stahl, 27.

subcultures."[44] Furthermore, she highlights the specific roles various media play for

youth cultures: "micro-media," such as homemade flyers serve to organize youth into

identifiable groups, "niche media" such as magazines further solidify these groups'

standings as a subculture, and mainstream media can elevate subcultures' status to that of

movements.[45]

A crucial contribution to subcultural theory, Thornton's work deserves to be

extended and revisited. Unfortunately, researchers have done little more than pay lip

service to the intersecting nature of global media flows and local subcultural action.

Treating this intersection only theoretically, some have discussed globalization and its

relation to both homogenization and difference,[46] and others, seeking to illustrate the

fallacy of the subculture/mainstream binary, have introduced new terms to replace

"subculture," including, for example, "neo-tribes,"[47] but few have explicitly considered

the relationship between subcultures and mainstream cultures.[48] Even a cursory

examination of skateboarders' media engagement reveals the difficulty in parsing

"mainstream" and "subculture" – the videos of which the boys are such keen fans are

produced by niche skateboarding companies as a means of marketing their wares. The

skateboarders obviously think of these videos as part and parcel of "their" culture despite

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[44] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 203.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Stahl, 2003.
[47] Theresa M. Winge, "Constructing 'Neo-Tribal' Identities through Dress: Modern Primitives and Body Modifications," in *The Post-Subcultures Readers*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (New York: Berg, 2003), 119-32.
[48] Joshua Gunn's analysis of the production of goth identity is one exception. Highlighting the importance of mainstream meanings of subcultures to the subcultures themselves, Gunn argues that goth identity is constituted in the interstices of subculture and mainstream, in the tension between mainstream conceptualizations of goth (e.g., the much-maligned "Trenchcoat Mafia," to which Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold belonged) and subcultural definitions. Such subcultural statements as "Marilyn Manson is not goth," Gunn notes, are crucial to subcultural goth identity. Gunn's discussion prompts the questions: how do mainstream cultural understandings of a subculture change subcultural identity? Are subculturalists always in opposition to dominant culture?

their commercial intent. Where do niche products fall in this dichotomy? What constitutes "authentic" subcultural fare? By thinking about skateboarders as a "corresponding culture," my work addresses these questions and the relationships between "subculture" and "mainstream."

For subcultural theorists, questions about "authenticity" implicitly draw on concerns about cultural power and individual free thought – that is, such questions are founded upon a frequently unstated assumption that mass culture is concerned *only* with the demands of capitalism and operates as a political void. The other assumption upon which these questions rest is the notion that small pockets of individuals are capable of developing their own concerns outside of the ideologies of capitalism. But, as Stuart Hall has reminded us,

> The notion that our heads are full of false ideas which can, however, be totally dispersed when we throw ourselves open to 'the real' as a moment of absolute authentication, is probably the most ideological conception of all. ...When we contrast ideology to experience, or illusion to authentic truth, we are failing to recognize that there is no way of experiencing the 'real relations' of a particular society outside of its cultural and ideological categories.[49]

Though Muggleton and other theorists of "post-subcultures" certainly understand mass culture and ideology in all of their complexities, their work fails to explain the relationships between what might be deemed "mainstream culture" and "subculture," and they never adequately discuss the politics of these relationships. Muggleton concludes that subcultures are "liminal," "fragmented," and "individualistic," (2000: 158) and operate as "manifestations of self-expression, individual autonomy and cultural diversity" (167). Though my time with the skateboarders has certainly demonstrated that individuality is a key value for all of them, I'd like to push our understanding of youth

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[49] (Hall, 1980: 105).

cultures beyond this to better explain how they develop particular affinities for various "subcultures," and how these affinities are aligned with political concerns such as mediated limitations on expressions of identity, the movement of capitalist and patriarchal ideologies, and youths' capacity for critiquing and reimagining everyday cultural mores. Throughout the course of this dissertation, I examine the appeals that skate life hold for youth and the ways in which it aligns with their identities and produces possibilities for new articulations of identity. In short, I ask, what might youthful pleasure tell us about youthful politics?

Both youthful pleasure and youthful politics are undoubtedly tied to youths' experiences as members of particular identity groups, but subcultural theory has not adequately accounted for identity's role in politics. Though scholars have noted that the Birmingham School's theorization of subcultural politics is limited by its empirical focus on working-class youth cultures, they have specified neither the ways in which class might operate differently in the new millennium than in the 1970s nor the differences between British and American conceptions of class. Though class clearly contributes to American youths' varying experiences, in the contemporary context, its role is frequently downplayed – the United States is, supposedly, a "classless" society.[50] Furthermore, middle-classness, like other dominant identities (masculinity and whiteness) is largely invisible in its normative status,[51] and clear lines between the working-class and the

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[50] Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, eds., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[51] For a discussion of the invisibility of class on American television and American women's subsequent difficulty with articulating class differences, see Andrea L. Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

middle-class do not seem to exist – virtually all Americans, that is, seem to be able to deem themselves middle-class.

Despite such invisibility and the absence of overt discussions of class from many explanations of identity politics, class does play a role in the construction of particular modes of masculinity and conceptualizations of race. "White trash" is a derogation making whiteness visible via class,[52] and working-class masculinity and its attendant physicality and gruff demeanor is imagined to be clearly distinct from middle-class masculinity's association with office work and gentility. Moreover, though working-class men may experience oppression via class, their association with physically dominant masculinity may produce moments when they feel some power over or superiority to middle-class men. Class, in other words, intersects with other axes of identity not only in the construction of identity but also in individual experiences with power and oppression.

Though, as I have noted, masculinity operated as the primary point of identification and politics for Ann Arbor skateboarders, the role of class in this culture should not be ignored. Skateboarding is largely imagined as a suburban, middle-class pursuit, but the skateboarders in my study hailed from a wide range of class backgrounds. In large part because of the invisibility of class in American culture, I found it very difficult to ask the boys directly about their class backgrounds; however, my time with them revealed that several of my respondents lived in trailer parks, others were the children of divorced parents living in distinctly middle-class neighborhoods, and still others were the children of upper-middle-class parents working in the professional world of college professors, engineers, and doctors. The wide range of ages in this group also

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[52] Wray and Newitz, eds., *White Trash*.

complicated any specification of class; though some of the 20- and 30-somethings may have grown up in middle-class families, they were now almost completely independent and relying on their own working-class incomes. Clearly, skateboarding is not a "class culture" – it is not a group organized primarily around class identification – however, various class backgrounds may play a role in the production of multiple masculinities represented in skateboarding culture.

Despite the relationship between particular expressions of masculinity and class, and regardless of the differing levels of opportunity afforded to middle- and working-class skateboarders, masculinity was consistently the salient identity around which skateboarders organized. As such, when skaters produced critiques of dominant society, they focused not on class and the capitalist system but on masculinity and patriarchal norms. This distinction does not mean to deny the very real relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, but it does mean to suggest that in the everyday experiences of skateboarders, gender is significant and visible while class is secondary and less visible. While capitalist appropriation may have threatened the integrity of the working-class subcultures examined by the Birmingham School, such appropriation does little to threaten skateboarding culture's critique of dominant masculinities.

Media researchers have worked to explain how individuals develop and negotiate their identities in relation to media, and they have moved beyond notions of symbolic resistance to explore audiences' cognitive engagement with media, asking how different audiences interpret mediated messages. Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" model remains a major contribution to this body of theory, pointing out that media audiences do not necessarily accept wholeheartedly the status quo messages embedded in mainstream

media – they may accept, reject, or negotiate these messages.[53] This research typically examines a particular identity group's (e.g., working-class white women) interpretation of a specific media text or group of texts utilizing interviews to explore the meanings derived from and developed during media use.[54] These scholars' exciting and innovative work generally relies upon cognitive models of media consumption that focus on the meanings derived from media to the detriment of our understanding of the feelings and experiences developed during media consumption. While hegemony, resistance, and negotiation shed light on the rational level of media use, they have not explained why particular audiences take pleasure in particular media texts, nor have they unpacked the ways in which the irrational contributes to the politics of consumption.

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, an exploration of the development of taste cultures in France, explains the construction of pleasure and the reasons that pleasures differ across audiences. Contending that participation in particular taste cultures imbues individuals with cultural capital, Bourdieu explains how class ideologies contribute to the experience of pleasure. In other words, Bourdieu suggests that we find pleasure in specific modes of entertainment because those modes are saddled with values with which we hope to associate and because our class standing provides us with the knowledge

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[53] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding."
[54] See, for example, David Morley and Charlotte Brunsdon, *The Nationwide Audience*; Andrea Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Robin R. Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000).

necessary to take pleasure in those modes.[55] Here, we have an understanding of the ways

in which taste and pleasure are constructed in a capitalist, hierarchical system.[56]

Though "subculture," "audience," and "taste culture" have each contributed to our

understanding of the relationship between dominant ideologies and media consumers,

these notions are still not adequate for explaining the numerous ways that skate culture is

implicated in skateboarders' constructions of self. By introducing the notion of

"corresponding cultures" to the discussion of youth cultures and politics, I am able to

discuss the multiple ways in which skateboarders interact with various media forms and

their many inflections of young white masculinity. Were I to continue defining

alternatives to mainstream media as "subcultural" – or as "taste cultures," I would be

unable to discuss the interlocked, dynamic, and gradually shifting nature of popular

culture and the importance of ideology and social capital to the development of social

groups' media fandom and ideas about identity. In short, neither "subculture" nor "taste

culture" adequately describes the complexity of the relationships among individuals and

popular culture, and neither allows us the flexibility to examine how power moves

through everyday life.

There are, of course, other alternatives to defining skateboarders and other youth

groups as "subcultures," or "taste cultures." These choices include "lifestyle enclave,"[57]

"community," or "public sphere,"[58] and each of these terms certainly encompasses some

of the qualities of the group of young men with whom I have spent my time. At

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[55] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

[56] Sarah Thornton has applied Bourdieu's analysis to subcultures, introducing the notion of "subcultural capital." She argues that subcultures are hierarchical, and subcultural youths' engagement in these cultures is contingent upon particular knowledges – of music, style, and so on.

[57] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[58] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, 11 ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1962; reprint, 2000).

particular moments, skateboarders "enclave" themselves – the clubhouse atmosphere of

the skate shop absolutely suggests that skateboarders are a closed group centered on

skateboarding as a lifestyle. But, skateboarders do not define themselves simply as

skateboarders, and their group is far more mutable and open than suggested by the term

"enclave." Furthermore, "lifestyle" connotes a superficial concern with the trappings of a

particular practice or hobby and is intimately tied to notions of consumer demographics,

niche marketing, and style replacing substance. For the skateboarders, their community

and practice are more than that.

Conversely, both "community" and "public sphere," in popular parlance, suggest

an idealized group uncorrupted by marketing and concerns with style. Both of these

terms have been widely discussed by scholars, and it is not the place of this dissertation

to engage with these debates. However, I will suggest that "community" and "public

sphere" are terms meant to suggest relatively bounded groups of individuals who have

articulated in some way a mode of engaging with other communities or public spheres.

Despite numerous scholars' attempts to trouble our understanding of public spheres, I

would suggest we use this term to describe groups (organized or not) who engage with

public issues – legislation, regulation, funding, and so on – in some explicit manner.

Skateboarders certainly come together as publics at certain moments, particularly when

they lobby their local governments to change skateboarding laws or develop skate parks,

but such engagement does not adequately define their day-to-day lives. As such, they

might be deemed a "satellite public,"[59] a group that periodically interacts with larger

publics to deal with a particular concern.

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[59] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002).

Though the notion of "community" is appealing in its ability to encompass a wide variety of groups – diffuse or cohesive; built around geographic proximity, taste, activities, or other needs; mutable or static; open or closed; and diverse or homogenous – it does not provide us with a strategy for understanding these various groups' relationship to culture, power, and media more specifically. Furthermore, in everyday use, "community" tends to connote simple and egalitarian relationships while smoothing over hierarchical differences and oppressive practices within the community. With respect to the skateboarders, at times, they behave as a community – they come together to organize skateboarding demonstrations, viewings of self-produced videos, and other local events; they provide for the needs of other skateboarders by introducing them to new skate spots, discussing places to avoid security guards and police officers, and teaching one another new skateboarding tricks. The boys videotape each other, invite each other to parties, and discuss developments in the skateboarding world. But, they don't all know one another well, they are not all regarded as equals within the group, and different individuals consider themselves more or less involved with other skateboarders. None of these characteristics necessarily precludes me from defining this group as a community; however, the term is woefully inadequate for understanding their relationship to various media forms. "Corresponding culture," I argue captures this constantly moving relationship and allows space for its complexities.

"Corresponding," as a concept, offers two meanings which, when taken together, successfully explain the ways in which skateboarders come together as a community around the shared culture of skateboarding. First, the values attendant to skateboarding – individualism, cooperation, artistry, independence, self-expression – align with, or

correspond to the skateboarders' values. Second, the importance of these values to skateboarding are communicated via numerous forms of mediated- and in-person *corresponding*, including skateboarding videos, magazines, and television shows as well as competitions, informal gatherings, and even style. Skateboarders, I would argue, have an affinity toward both the core values expressed through the culture and the various accoutrement of the culture. These affinities inspire multiple forms of engagement with other skateboarders and with skateboarding media – and they also allow for continued discussion of, or corresponding about, the core values and their relationship to everyday life. Furthermore, the notion of "corresponding" allows us to consider that which does not correspond to the needs, desires, or values of skateboarders – and as I discuss, they usually locate such discord in a stereotypical "jock." Finally, the idea of corresponding opens up space for examining the culture's relationship to – or correspondence with – various media lines, including those produced by niche marketers, local skateboarders, and national television networks. In its underlying reliance on notions of taste, communication, alliance, and affinity, "corresponding" provides the flexibility for a more complete examination of a group that previously might have been deemed a "subculture," (with its focus on resistance) "taste culture," (with its focus on cultural capital) "community," (focusing on relationships between members) or "public sphere" (focusing on overtly political engagement). Furthermore, the active nature of the verb "corresponding" serves as a reminder that youth cultures are always moving in relationship to dominant conceptions of youth, current norms of identity, and contemporary appeals to youth. "Corresponding culture" allows me to examine the many

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elements of skateboarding while maintaining a spotlight on the relationship between individuals and the media.

Pleasure, Emotion, and Politics

Since the Frankfurt School's denunciation of the escapist mode of consumer culture, cultural theorists have suggested that escapism is a depoliticized, disengaged state that simply contributes to the status quo. In fact, audience research exploring audiences' interpretations of media content relies on the idea that audiences are not escaping while consuming the media and are actively interpreting, arguing with, or negotiating media content. This standpoint suggests that, when we escape, we do not engage with, resist, or critique dominant ideologies and the powerful institutions they sustain. Rather, we consent to these ideologies. Unfortunately, these claims have largely gone uninterrogated. In addition to exploring the meanings skateboarders derive from skate media, *This Is How I Think* will explore how moments of escape or transcendence (of the mind, of the body, of earthly boundaries) are productive of particular modes of identity and particular forms of politics. Does escapism play a central role in the definition of skateboarders' identities?[60] To what extent can these transcendent moments promote new ways of being that challenge dominant ideologies? Finally, does escape provide the emotional sustenance necessary for confronting the problems of a system so embedded and ubiquitous as capitalism?

This Is How I Think examines skateboarders' experience of emotion, taking seriously their claims that skate media make them feel excited, inspired, or happy. Again, while these emotions may be produced in taste culture, audiences' experiences of

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[60] My initial analysis suggests that skateboarders frequently define themselves around their ability to literally escape, or transcend, the bounds of earth and to, more metaphorically, transcend the boundaries of capitalism by escaping corporate culture while skateboarding.

them may have other political repercussions. Emotions are, clearly, tied up with ideology. Patriotism, for example, may conjure pride or disgust for different people, and identity politics are also working against ideas about identity that are often grounded in fear responses (e.g., the fear of terrorism prompts racial profiling (formal or not) that designates people of Middle-Eastern descent as terrorists). In Hall's terminology, ideologies articulate emotions (both "speak" emotions and "connect with" emotions) – they hinge together in order to produce a particular response. Emotions are also highly gendered; men may become emotional through anger, for example, while women are expected to express a fuller range of emotions – and to do so more often.

Both Fredric Jameson and Richard Dyer contend that popular culture's production of emotion is simply an "ideological resolution" to the "contradictions and anxieties" of late capitalism.[61] Jameson concedes, however, that mass culture has "Utopian or transcendent potential" in its implicit critique of dominant ideologies. Unfortunately, this analysis leaves us in a frustrating theoretical bind – contending that popular texts both resolve and display the problems of the dominant order does not open up new lines of research or new areas of critique. Rather, as with subculture theory, we find ourselves bouncing between media's contribution to dominant ideologies and its potential for resistance. As such, I contend that it is time we look carefully at the ways in which emotions are enacted and experienced by media audiences as well as the potential these emotions might open up for ideological critique. In other words, rather than stopping with the media's effect on emotions, we must explore emotions' effect on everyday life.

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[61] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, v. 0, n. 1, Winter 1979, p. 144. See also Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia" in Simon During, ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader, 2nd edition* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 371-381.

Ien Ang has argued that we "take pleasure seriously" in our critique and analysis of media texts and audience responses. Part of Ang's point is that we do not reclaim our conception of audiences from Frankfurt School conceptions simply by imposing on them particular progressive worldviews. Rather, she wants us to better understand the redemptive value of pleasure. So, for example, she critiques Janice Radway's analysis of romance readers, arguing that romance reading provides a form of escape from the daily drudgery of housework and demands of children and husbands. We must recognize that such escape has value in its own right. Ang does not expand upon the directions in which pleasure can point us theoretically or the values it may have for human existence. *This Is How I Think* will work to do so by addressing the ways in which emotion and escape work *in tandem* to contribute to skateboarders' perceived resistance to identity politics and their experience of everyday life.

As Andrew Ross argues of the practices of music subcultures, "[T]he sensual activity of losing oneself and regaining something else on the dance floor opens up a social space that is quite different from the public and private boundaries that hold our identities all too tightly in place."[62] Similarly, Susan McClary contends that youth and other groups can find new "ways of construing the body, ways that bring along in their wake the potential for different experiential worlds. And the anxious reactions that so often greet new musics from such groups indicate that something crucially political is at issue."[63] My preliminary work with skateboarders suggests that they can experience such bodily transcendence and new modes of experience through their reactions to portrayals

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[62] Andrew Ross, "Introduction," in Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, eds., *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 11.

[63] Susan McClary, "Same as it Ever Was: Youth Culture and Music," in Ross and Rose, *Microphone Fiends*, 34.

of skateboarding in niche skateboarding videos. As such, I plan to extend Ross and

McClary's arguments out of the musical realm and into an analysis of visual media.

<u>Whiteness and Masculinity</u>

Examining skateboarding culture as a corresponding culture affords a means to

interrogate how notions of white masculinity and mediated tropes of gender can be

simultaneously codified and deconstructed. Over the past decade, scholars have applied

feminist theory and critical race theory to whiteness and masculinity to discuss how these

identity categories have been constructed and deployed in dominant culture. Much of

this work dismantles essentialist notions of whiteness and masculinity as natural, all-

powerful, and monolithic and discovers the ways in which these identities are

constructed, contradictory, and multiple.[64] These theorists have also noted that the

construction of identity is intersectional,[65] depending on gender, race, class, sexuality,

and nationality. Gail Bederman's cultural history provides a useful example of such

intersectionality, in that it proposes that white men retained cultural power in the early

20th century through a discourse of civilization, gender, race, and "millennialism" that

situated white men as more evolved and civilized than other (non-white, non-male)

individuals. In other words, "whiteness" and "masculinity" were imagined together in

order to hold up white male power.[66] *This Is How I Think* relies on these basic

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[64] See Michael Kimmel, (1996). *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press; E. Anthony Rotundo, (1993). *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from
the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books; and E.J. Gorn, (1986). *The Manly Art: Bare-
Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. These histories of masculinity
demonstrate the changing terrain of masculinity in the United States and highlight its constructed nature.
[65] Valerie Smith, *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
[66] Bederman, G. (1995). *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United
States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See also Leo Bersani, who essay explores how gay men
embed themselves in and critique dominant images of masculinity. (Leo Bersani, "Loving Men." In M.
Berger, B. Wallis, and S. Watson (Eds.). *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 116-
117.)

approaches to white masculinity to expand upon our understanding of white male youth in the early 21st century. Scholars who have discussed representations of and resistance to whiteness and masculinity have not taken generation into account in their analyses. As I have suggested, surely cultural and industrial changes have influenced both portrayals of and responses to race and gender in popular culture.

Richard Dyer's wide-ranging analysis of the values and characteristics associated with whiteness is a highly useful contribution to critical whiteness theory that can be expanded upon by considering how various media may portray whites differently, and how youth may envision whiteness differently than adults. Whiteness, Dyer contends, glorifies "endeavoring" displayed through "suffering, self-denial and self-control."[67] Further, stemming from racial genealogies positing that the "Aryan" race came through the mountains, whiteness is perceived to be imbued with "energy, enterprise, discipline and spiritual elevation."[68] Finally, whites have been culturally constructed, in literature such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in Westerns, as "enterprising."[69] Dyer's crucial and extensive work demonstrates clearly the multiple discourses that have produced whiteness.

While I discuss how whiteness and masculinity retain their power in youth culture, I also examine how male youth may resist or critique current representations of whiteness and masculinity. Here, I must address how even critiques of current portrayals may serve to uphold white male dominance. Several theorists have interrogated the maintenance and resistance of hegemonic masculinity, which Robert W. Connell defines as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to

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[67] Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. New York: Routledge, 17.
[68] *Ibid*, 21.
[69] *Ibid,* 31-38.

the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."[70] Connell notes that, while many men do not actively work to uphold patriarchy, most are "complicit" with it.[71] Theories of hegemonic masculinity indicate that we cannot simply read resistance onto apparently alternative forms of masculinity. Rather, we must examine how differing masculine modes may work hegemonically.[72] The literature on masculinity can be quite frustrating in its (I think, correct) argument that many seemingly subversive portrayals of masculinity actually contribute to its continued dominance. Like subcultural theory, the work on masculinity finds itself in a theoretical tunnel bouncing back and forth between resistance and acquiescence to dominant ideologies. Though this may be a necessary condition of arguments about popular culture, one way to expand upon this body of work might be to consider more fully – and take seriously - how men respond to these representations.

Within the still relatively small field of men and the media, very little work has been done on men's responses to media. George Yudice's discussion of a pro-feminist white men's group reveals that in the context of identity politics, men seeking to claim

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[70] Connell, R.W. (2001). "The Social Organization of Masculinity." In S.M. Whitehead & S.J. Barrett. (Eds.) *The Masculinities Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

[71] Connell, R.W., 41. Arthur Brittan extends our understanding of the shifting nature of hegemonic masculinity, noting that while the behaviors and attitudes of masculinity might change, the ideology of "masculinism," which is the "ideology of patriarchy," is relatively unchanging, holding up the binary split between men and women, heteronormativity, the division of labor, and men's power in both public and private. (Arthur Brittan, "Masculinities and Masculinism," in S.M. Whitehead & S.J. Barrett (Eds.) *The Masculinities Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 53).

[72] See S.J. Douglas, "Letting the Boys be Boys: Talk Radio, Male Hysteria, and Political Discourse in the 1980s," in M. Hilmes & J. Loviglio (Eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2002) 485-503 for a useful example of media analysis that explores alternate modes of masculinity ("the male hysteric") that serve to uphold men's dominance. See also A. Solomon-Godeau, "Male Trouble," in M. Berger, B. Wallis, & S. Watson (Eds.) *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 73, who argues that feminized expressions of masculinity do not necessarily constitute a rejection of patriarchy and that we should examine their historical context in order to understand their relation to dominance.

identity often resort to claims that they, too, are oppressed.[73] Though such claims can be

quite aggravating in their erasure of white men's long history of dominance over

everyone else, scholars must take seriously the ways in which men *with good intentions* –

men who believe they are working toward a more egalitarian society – end up reasserting

their own power. Whitehead maintains that white men must learn to be self-reflexive in

order to contend with their power.[74] It is imperative that we consider the course of such

self-reflection. One course of action is to evaluate how men interpret mediated images of

masculinity and how they conceive of themselves in relation to perceptions of hegemonic

masculinity. In other words, what do men believe to be the traits of dominant

masculinity? How do men who consider themselves non-dominant define their own

masculinity? My consideration of skateboarders' construction of masculinity will

provide crucial insight into the ways in which men who think of themselves as outside of

the mainstream imagine their own masculinity and contend with the demands of

hegemonic masculinity.

　　　This Is How I Think also considers how the dominance of whiteness could be

either sustained or resisted in skateboarding culture. In my review of the literature, I

have not encountered any work that directly addresses resistance to dominant ideologies

of whiteness; however, bell hooks's "Eating the Other" does discuss this issue. Building

upon the argument that discourses constructing whiteness generally go unseen, and

whiteness itself is invisible on several levels, hooks analyzes how non-white bodies are

used as "an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual

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[73] Yudice, G. (1995). "What's a Straight White Man to Do?" in M. Berger, B. Wallis, and S. Watson
(Eds.). *Constructing Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 267-283.
[74] Whitehead, M. "Man: The Invisible Gendered Subject?" In S.M. Whitehead & S.J. Barrett. (Eds.) *The
Masculinities Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 351-357..

practices affirm their power-over."[75] Part of hooks's argument is that, while such

practices affirm white dominance, they are, in part, a reaction to racial discourses

suggesting that "whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race,"[76] and that

whiteness is thought to be "pure spirit,"[77] or to be "cultureless," "homogenous," or

"bland."[78] hooks asserts that we must more fully consider the politics of "eating the

Other," as we may discover that in some cases, "desire disrupts, subverts, and makes

resistance possible."[79] It is absolutely fundamental that we recognize the power relations

surrounding white fascination with blackness; however, part of the work in specifying

more closely the politics of whites' racial appropriations should be considering how

whites interpret such actions. This literature prompts several key questions. First, how is

whiteness constructed in youth culture? In a culture that supposedly values

"slackerdom," are whites still represented as enterprising, disciplined, and self-denying?

Second, as youth culture increasingly melds "black culture" and "white culture," do

whites remain invisible? Third, as popular culture exhibits supposedly multicultural

values, how do whites reassert their power?

Within this culture, the skateboarders' subscription to a generalized notion of

individuality allows different groups within this culture to express an affinity toward

various expressions of masculine identity. Put more simply, the value placed on

individuality allows skateboarding culture a degree of heterogeneity. Though almost all

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[75] hooks, b., "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 23.
[76] Dyer, 3.
[77] *Ibid*, 39.
[78] Frankenberg, 197-199. Dyer notes that the invisibility of whiteness is part of a paradox of whiteness, wherein it entails embodiment and disembodiment and being "everything and nothing." Through these contradictions, however, whiteness gains "flexibility and productivity" and thus, "representational power." (Dyer, 39-40).
[79] hooks, 39.

skateboarders suggested that their desire for a space of freedom, cooperation, and self-expression corresponded fully with skateboarding culture, they also imagined such self-expression via various styles. Most important, perhaps, is the difference between what 21-year-old Jeff called "hesh" and "fresh." He explained, "Hesh, hessian, would be more of the tight clothes, studded belts, bandannas. Just a more form-fitting style with probably more gnarly things! (Laughs.) Uh, but the fresh thing would be a cleaner cut, the clothes look really good, crisp, the shoes look really good. The shoes are bigger, puffier tongues, uh, rap music, just generally you know, it doesn't have to be, people can pull off different kinds of music, but if someone's listening to rap music, their style's generally gonna reflect that." "Hesh," and "fresh" refer to two styles within this culture that suggest, respectively, a more aggressive approach to skateboarding and a more stylistic, precise approach to the practice. Both "hesh" and "fresh" skaters can express themselves, both can cooperate with one another, both feel that skateboarding moves them away from the perceived competitiveness and institutionalization of the traditional sporting world. Both, in other words, correspond with the culture's more general critique of dominant norms of masculinity; however, each also corresponds to skaters' various stylistic affinities.

Methodology

This Is How I Think represents substantial movement toward an understanding of the scope of male youths' media use and the role of media in the production of identity. My deployment of the phrase "media use" should not suggest that my analysis will approach the media in a functionalist manner that ignores how power permeates the media's incorporation into everyday life, nor should it suggest that I think of media

effects in a unidirectional manner. In fact, this dissertation is an account of the media's involvement in one community's everyday life and the intersection of the construction of identity in mass-, niche-, and community-produced media and identity development in everyday life. This account depends on a "radically contextualized"[80] ethnography that utilizes participant observation, interviews, focus groups, historiography, and textual analyses to consider skateboarders' range of media consumption and production as well as their everyday interactions and practices, all of which have implications for identity, particularly masculinity and whiteness.

Importantly, this ethnography utilizes a constructivist approach to reality which rejects the notion that there are particular truths to be uncovered by researchers. As Robin R. Means Coleman notes, "Qualitative research relies upon discourse rather than fact, meaning over truth. It works to locate meanings in texts … versus discovering knowledge."[81] As such, I will consider the construction of whiteness and masculinity in the numerous contexts of the skateboarding community, noting contradictions between stated ideologies and practice as well as between different skateboarders. Furthermore, the constructivist paradigm acknowledges the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge, asserting that the researchers' identity, politics, and practices all figure in data collection and analysis.[82] Throughout, I take into account my role in skateboarders' articulation of constructions of whiteness and masculinity as well as my own analyses of media texts, considering most specifically my race and gender as well as my personal relationships and history with skateboard culture.

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[80] Ien Ang, "Ethnography and Radical Contextualism in Audience Studies," in James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg, and Ellen Wartella, eds., *The Audience and Its Landscape* (Westview Press, 1996), 247-262.
[81] Robin R. Means Coleman, "Methodology Appendices," in *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy:Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 265.
[82] Ibid, 268.

As I have noted, this dissertation addresses the complexities of identity production in everyday life, considering how the media are incorporated into everyday practice and meaning-making. Consequently, I take seriously Ellen Seiter's assertion that "If ethnography is really done right, it requires that the researcher contextualize media in a wide range of practices and institutions, which have conventionally been studied by sociologists, psychologists, economists, and others."[83] Part of the work of such "radical contextualism" is to determine how audiences understand various media.[84] Though Ien Ang focuses on the meanings ascribed to television,[85] I contend that radical contextualism should expand to our understanding of identity production, the ethnographer's role in a particular community and a particular research endeavor, and the intersections between the media, the audience, and everyday life generally.[86] In other words, a media ethnography should not simply explicate individuals' assertions about the meanings of various media texts and mediums; rather, media ethnography should look beyond and around the media to examine the borders and junctions between media use and other practices (e.g., work, hobbies, family life, friendships), between researchers and participants, and between media text and context (e.g., the medium used, the site of media consumption). Such context affords us valuable insight into the contradictions individuals face in their everyday lives, including in their media use, and allows for rich description and analysis that addresses the myriad everyday intersections (of messages

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[83] Ellen Seiter, *Television and New Media Audiences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 134.
[84] Ien Ang, "Ethnography and Radical Contextualism." See also David Morley, "An Ethnography of the Television Audience," in Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992/2003), 173-197.
[85] Ibid. See also Lynne Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) for a discussion of the complexity of the meaning of television as a medium.
[86] See Herman Gray, "Foreword," in Robin R. Means Coleman, ed. *Say It Loud! African-American Audiences, Media, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.

from the self, family, friends, coworkers, and the media) that produce our knowledges of, arguments with, and applications of ideologies and particular ways of being. In sum, as David Morley contends, "The world of everyday life is not one which can be satisfactorily viewed through a single pair of spectacles, or from a single position. It requires varieties of distance, magnification and position, and it requires to be understood as the dialectical product of inside and outside: of biographies, personalities, meanings, actions, spaces, times, opportunities and material constraints."[87]

Throughout his account, Morley suggests that such situated ethnography must begin with the family and the domestic setting, "for it is here that the primary involvement with television is created, and where the primary articulation of meanings is undertaken."[88] Though it may be the case, particularly in Western, middle-class societies, that initial understandings of television are developed within the home, Morley's focus ignores the importance of public consumption of media, particularly for youth, who arguably may embark on new modes of media use as their attention moves away from their families and toward their peer group. Furthermore, Morley's continuous concentration on television use belies his assertion that we look at media use in context – in other words, if we are to consider the various practices of everyday life and their interplay with media use, it would be prudent to take fully into account how different media impact one another.

As we begin to understand media ethnography as a research method that must not only take into account, but also analytically situate, practices that seemingly exist outside of the realm of media consumption, it becomes crucial to define the parameters of our

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[87] Ibid, 184.
[88] Ibid, 183.

work, most notably our definitions of the audience and the media text. We must ask ourselves, who are we interested in? How do they comprise a media audience? What are their important texts? Though answering these questions does not provide an ultimate solution, it does work to mitigate the problem that Ang notes: "If not held in check, awareness of the infinity of intercontexuality could lead to contextualization gone mad!"[89] While Ang suggests that we keep firmly in mind that the ethnographer is always producing a narrative account of her data – and while this narrative does not elucidate all viewpoints, it does elucidate some – I contend that we must also make very clear that viewpoint from which we do speak. Part of this imperative is that we develop clearly defined terms of enunciation – and in media ethnography, those terms must include our conceptualization of the audience and the text.

To be an audience is to inhabit a dynamic and indefinite subjectivity[90] that is both discursively constructed and exists in material reality.[91] As Ang notes, "In day to day reality audience membership is a fundamentally vague subject position; people constantly move in and out of 'the TV audience' as they integrate viewing behaviour with a multitude of other concerns and activities in radically contingent ways."[92] The media construct audiences as relatively coherent groups divided, in an era of niche programming, along demographic lines. At the same time, individuals create friendships or communities based on their media use,[93] and lifestyle enclaves, peer groups, and subcultures may be comprised both within and outside of media use.

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[89] Ang, "Radical Contextualism," p. 254.
[90] Ien Ang, "Wanted: Audiences," in Ellen Seiter, et al. (eds.) *Remote Control* (New York: Routledge, 1989), cited in Morley, "Ethnography," p. 197.
[91] Morley, "Ethnography," p. 178.
[92] Ang, "Wanted: Audiences."
[93] Jenkins.

Such a dynamic existence produces a conundrum for media ethnographers who must, in the name of getting some work done, define boundaries for their work: who should they study, when should they study them, and what practices should they consider? Researchers have produced some terminology that seeks to rectify this issue: Stanley Fish terms various audience groups "interpretive communities," in an effort to point up the similarities in meaning-making within a particular group; Henry Jenkins proposes we use the term "interpretive repertoires" so as not to reify audiences as formally comprised groups.[94] Though such careful terminology nuances our understanding of audiences, its continued reliance on audiences and texts to define the limits of media ethnography prohibits the type of radical contextualization that Ang and Morley venerate. In other words, by focusing on interpretive communities or interpretive repertoires, we conceive of individuals and groups solely in terms of the ways in which they decode mediated messages, thereby ignoring how meaning is developed in moments that are not explicitly interpretive.

Janice Radway's approach to this issue is particularly compelling. She suggests we "begin with the habits and practices of everyday life as they are 'actively, discontinuously, even contradictorily pieced together by historical subjects themselves, as they move nomadically via disparate associations and relations, though day-to-day existence…'. This would be to move towards 'a new object of analysis … the endlessly shifting, ever evolving kaleidoscope of daily life and the way in which the media are integrated and implicated within it.'"[95] Radway's suggestion thus allows media

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[94] Cited in Robin R. Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), p. 17.
[95] Janice Radway, "Reception Study," *Cultural Studies*, 2(3), 1988, p. 366, quoted in Morley, "Ethnography," p. 197.

researchers to start on the ground – to explore media use in everyday life by starting with the practices of everyday life. Nonetheless, the researcher must still make crucial decisions about which practices to consider; such decisions should be theoretically based, seeking to answer questions about particular theoretical issues.

Within this framework, this dissertation considers how and why a group of mostly-white, mostly-middle-class, mostly-heterosexual young men might purposefully set themselves apart – that is, how and why they might adopt a type of willful otherness. It is crucial to note that this otherness is highly contingent – skateboarders are not throwing off their social privileges, nor are they adopting a highly radical way of approaching the world. Rather, they are expressing an affinity with a culture that seems, somehow, different from most institutionalized youth cultures, particularly those centered on sports or physical activity. I argue throughout this dissertation that skateboarders' particular expressions of masculinity serve as a nascent critique, a not-fully-formed sense of dissatisfaction with what they perceive to be expected of their masculinity. This burgeoning critique relies upon continued expressions of heterosexuality, dominance over non-white "Others" and women, and traditional American norms of freedom and independence. Using my framework, skate culture easily corresponds with such expressions of dominance while at the same time aligning with an expressive, artistic, cooperative masculinity. It is this degree of correspondence – with both alternative and dominant norms – that allows skateboarding to maintain itself as both "subculture" and "mainstream" and provides skaters with space to question dominant norms while maintaining their own dominance.

This Is How I Think traces skate culture's multiple images of dominant and alternative white masculinities in mainstream, niche, and local media outlets, taking care to discuss skateboarders' responses to these images. Chapter 2, "'The mix of sunshine and rebellion is really intoxicating': American Mythologies, Rebellious Boys, and the Multiple Appeals of Skateboarding's Corresponding Culture, 1950-2006," traces skateboarding's discursive history in the mainstream press to demonstrate the correspondence between skate culture and dominant American values such as independence, exploration, and conquest. The history explores the multiple moments during which skateboarding emerged into dominant culture and discusses the contemporary branding of the practice as both rebellious and mainstream. This history provides the context for Chapter 3, "'Freedom on four wheels': Individuality, Self-Expression, and Authentic Masculinity in a Skateboarding Community," an ethnographic examination of Southeastern Michigan skateboarding culture that demonstrates the ways in which media are interwoven into the construction of skateboarders' identities. The chapter argues that skateboarders see skate culture as a space in which they can perform alternative masculinities centered on self-expression and cooperation rather than competition and physical dominance. This chapter also contends that skaters' alternative masculinities rely upon the high value they place on individuality and freedom, and in this reliance, skateboarders produce a not-necessarily anti-patriarchal critique of patriarchy. Chapter 4, "'Why is it the things that make you a man tend to be such dumb things to do?': Never-ending Adolescence and the (De)stabilization of White Masculine Power on MTV," argues that mainstream representations of skate culture, particularly MTV's *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz*, also develop critiques of dominant

masculinities that nevertheless maintain the power of white masculinity. Presenting

alternative masculinities and mocking masculinity as a construct, these shows ensure

their white male stars' power by constantly making fun of non-white, non-male, non-

heterosexual "others." Chapter 5, "'It's just what's possible': Imagining Alternative

Masculinities and Performing White Male Dominance in Niche Skateboarding Videos,"

evaluates niche skate videos and skateboarders' independently-produced videos to

discuss the corresponding nature of mass, niche, and local media outlets as well as to

argue that niche and local skate media reject dominant formulations of adult white

masculinity. Further, this chapter suggests, the videos only imagine alternative

masculinities by overvaluing individuality; that is, rather than imagining new social

formations that would produce radical notions of masculinity, these videos simply

suggest that skateboarders can perform any type of masculinity they wish – as long as it

is decidedly heterosexual. Taken together, these four chapters situate skateboarding as a

culture in correspondence with dominant ideologies that nonetheless operates as a space

in which young men can develop nascent critiques of dominant masculinity and explore

strategies for taking on alternative identities.

Conclusion

As I watched skateboarders watch TV, listened to them speak about the pleasures

of skate life's practices and portrayals, and followed them through multiple corners of

skate life, the skateboarders introduced me to their constantly-changing and complex

processes of identity construction. Skateboarding culture's multiple locations – in local

skateboarding shops, on network and cable television, in marketers' appeals to both

young men and aging hipsters, in skateboarding magazines and videos, and on local

streets and sidewalks – operate in correspondence with one another to establish the many-layered and dynamic norms of skate life. The mainstream press, MTV, and niche skateboarding companies each produce a variety of representations of skate life that speak to its principles of identity – masculinity, whiteness, youth, and so on – in various and sometimes contradictory ways. In their everyday lives, skateboarders are in constant negotiation with these representational layers, and their conversations about and responses to skate media serve to indoctrinate themselves and others into skate life's possibilities for identity. In the community of southeastern Michigan skateboarders, these negotiations tend to center on masculinity – conversations about race, as I will demonstrate, are comparatively tentative and uncomfortable. Skaters in a different group may focus on other issues; however, the contours of skate media suggest that discussions of masculinity pervade skate culture. In its many corners, skate life produces and celebrates alternative masculinities that never fully challenge patriarchal power relations; they express dissatisfaction with the demands of masculinity and create space in which they may transcend those demands. Watching their heroes skateboard on TV, practicing their skateboarding skills on the sidewalk, talking with one another while watching videos, and articulating their reasons for skateboarding to a curious researcher, the skateboarders announced, "This is how we think." It is my hope that the following chapters adequately articulate the intersections and correspondences between skate media and skate life and accurately transcribe and interpret what skateboarders mean when they point to the media and say, "This is how I think."

Chapter 2

"The mix of sunshine and rebellion is really intoxicating":[96] American Mythologies, Rebellious Boys, and the Multiple Appeals of Skateboarding's Corresponding Culture, 1950-2006

Introduction

First commercially released as a toy in 1959, skateboards have "rolled in and out of the public's consciousness" over the course of almost five decades.[97] Several popular histories of skateboarding suggest that the first skateboards were born of youthful imagination in the early 20th century, when children made milk crate scooters from two by fours and old roller skate wheels.[98] Skateboarding quickly grew into a popular childhood toy that would later be remembered, with both nostalgia and derision, as a fad akin to Hula-Hoops and yo-yos.[99]

More than a simple fad, by 1995, skateboarding had come to be a key discursive marker of white male youth. That is, throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, extreme sports – and skateboarding in particular – became a powerful marketing tool, the go-to lifestyle for appeals to white male teenagers, who by 1995 comprised the largest group of adolescents in history.[100] During its many moments of popularity in each of the

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[96] Kate Betts, "The Whoosh of What You'll Be Wearing," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2002, 6.

[97] Michael Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding* (Los Angeles: Warwick Publishing, 1999), 14.

[98]Ibid.;James Davis, *Skateboarding Is Not a Crime: 50 Years of Street Culture* (Buffalo: Firefly Books, 1999).; *Thrasher: Insane Terrain*, (New York: Universe Publishing, 2001).

[99] See, for example, Sarah Pileggi, "Wheeling and Dealing," *Sports Illustrated*, September 1, 1975, 22.;;Mary Alice Kellogg, "Rebirth of the Boards," *Newsweek*, June 21, 1976, 56-57.; Frank Deford, "Promo Wiz in Kidvid Biz," *Sports Illustrated*, February 7, 1977, 30-33.

[100] "The New Teens Market," (Packaged Facts, 1995).

decades since 1959, layers of mythologies have been built onto skateboarding's practice

and portrayal. By considering the articulation of these mythologies, as well as their

particular connections to ideologies of gender, race, class, and nation, we can begin to

understand both the relationship between youth subculture and mainstream culture and

skateboarding's contemporary symbolization of white male youth.

Skateboarding's earliest roots in the nostalgically-remembered children's culture

of suburban postwar America provide it with a distinctly mainstream origin myth.

Remembered either as a childhood creation or a commercial toy enjoyed by white,

middle-class kids, skateboards sometimes represent a more carefree time, when the

streets were safe and children could go out alone. In other words, this early history

associates skateboards with conformist-but-simple 1950s Middle America, and thus, with

dominant society.

These roots have certainly been eclipsed of late, as skateboarding has come to

represent "Extreme Youth" via media texts such as MTV's *Jackass*, *Viva la Bam*, and

Wildboyz, which each feature skateboarders' gross-out humor, and the award-winning

documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys*,[101] which rewrites skateboarding's beginnings as the

product of working-class teen boys' energetic rebellion. Skateboarding, in short, has

experienced a discursive evolution from innocuous childhood game to rebellious youth

subculture.

The contours of this evolution – the various moments at which particular

mythologies of the skateboarding culture are solidified and disrupted – demonstrate

skateboarding's flexibility as both a discourse and a practice built in and outside of

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[101] *Dogtown* won both the audience and directors awards for documentaries at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival as well as the IFP/West Independent Spirit Award for best documentary. See Beth Pinsker, "Personal Documentaries Are New Form of Marketing," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2002, 12.

mainstream culture. Skateboarding traverses mediascapes[102] and youthscapes,[103] moving in and out of – and accepting and rejecting – a host of cultural locations that define it, variously, as a diverse and dangerous subculture, as a mainstream marketing mechanism, as a childhood toy, and as a creative enterprise. This discursive flexibility, I argue, allows skateboarding fans to imagine themselves as both in and outside of dominant culture, and consequently, as both resistant to and in possession of dominant modes of power. That is, skateboarding's multiple locations of engagement – or correspondence – with both dominant ideologies and images of resistance situate skate culture as a corresponding culture in which notions of resistance are fluid.

By tracing the movement of the key ideas, heroes, and innovations of skateboarding into and out of mainstream media, I highlight the ways in which enduring ideas associated with skateboarding – enterprise, innovation, individuality, creativity – correspond with values embedded in American origin myths and associated with white masculinity. Despite these associations, however, skateboarding maintains its status as a culture on the edges of mainstream American life. By mapping these (seeming) contradictions, this chapter accomplishes three goals: 1.) expand the boundaries of subculture theory to make clear the ways in which American subcultural values may interlock with key values of American mainstream culture; 2.) illuminate the specific ways in which subcultural and mainstream media overlap and correspond with one

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[102] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 269-95. Appadurai uses the notion of a "scape" to connote "the fluid, irregular shapes" of these "deeply perspectival constructs," (275). By employing his terminology, I point to the dynamic and interactive nature of the various media in which skateboarding is portrayed and constructed as an appeal to teen boys.
[103] Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep, *Youthscapes: The Popular, the National, the Global* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).As I noted in the introduction, Maira and Soep's extension of Appadurai's "scapes" usefully illustrates the complexities of the numerous groups with which youth associate.

another, highlighting mainstream media's use of skateboarding's multiple performance and portrayals of masculinity and whiteness; 3.) explain the scope of skateboarding discourses with which contemporary skateboarders contend, thereby locating my analysis of a skateboarding community's proclaimed pleasures and politics in the current discursive moment.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that many of the values associated with skateboarding ally with fundamental tropes of American origin myths produced in stories of the Pilgrims, the Puritans, the pioneers, and the American frontier. These stories construct the foundation of the United States as a fight for freedom from religious persecution and as a quest for independence. Almost needless to say, these myths are the myths of white male America that completely ignore or whitewash the genocide of Native Americans, slavery, the denial of women's rights, and the destruction of land that accompanied white American men's pursuit of liberty. Nevertheless, in many ways, these myths present the United States as a land of subculturalists, as a country founded on the backs of brave and independently-minded individuals fighting for nothing less than the freedom to live their lives as they wished. The Pilgrims and the Puritans, in other words, were "sticking it to" the man-of-all-men, the Church of England.

Contemporary discourse frequently locates American discomfort with sexuality in our Puritan roots, but we must also consider the ways in which these stories might contribute to a particularly American mode of engaging with subcultures. While individual subcultures may produce specific ideologies that directly confront a variety of American mores, arguably, their broader appeals to individuality and freedom align closely with values learned in kindergarten. American subcultures, then, may correspond

quite easily with dominant culture while at the same time critiquing it in specific and subtle ways. In the case of skateboarding, enthusiasts regularly refer to the freedom and independence that skateboarding allows while also producing a nascent critique of dominant norms of white teenage masculinity.

In the American context, then, it makes sense for a subculture, or a corresponding culture, to find itself in advertisements, on television shows, and in the movies, for subcultural stories can be refashioned as stories of the American spirit. What's more, in this refashioning, the fundamental claims of that subculture need not necessarily be forfeited or even reworked. As Angela McRobbie notes, much subcultural practice is entrepreneurial,[104] and even when it is not explicitly market-based, I argue, subcultural practice is about the creation of a culture, the production of cultural codes, modes of communication, gathering places, and so on. These independent productions can find their roots in stories of the development of American colonies, and entrepreneurs can surely place themselves in the context of the American dream. As such, the correspondence between American subcultures and American mainstream cultures may take on a different shape or tendency than that in other cultural contexts. This chapter takes the specificities of American identity into account, keeping firmly in mind the ways in which the values of the subculture parallel those of the mainstream.

In tracing the evolution of skateboarding discourse, this chapter sheds light on the dynamics of corresponding cultures, noting the moments at which they converge and diverge. This chapter will also serve to characterize the cultural moment in which current skateboarders exist, elucidating their ideas about resistance, subcultural identity,

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[104] Angela McRobbie, "Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket," in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997).

and their relationship to dominant cultural ideas and institutions. Most broadly, this discursive history should showcase the ways in which institutions imbued with economic and discursive power open up and close down spaces in which individuals and institutions with less power formulate ideas about whiteness, masculinity, and youth.

Boyhood Creativity: Skateboarding Pre-1959

Popular accounts of skateboarding's early history locate its origins in the hands of creative and enterprising male youth looking for entertainment in the mundane world of the neighborhood. From the early 1900s through World War II, the stories suggest, restless young boys borrowed the wheels from their "sister's rollerskates" and worked with "backyard mechanics (dads)"[105] to fashion milk crate scooters. Recollected distinctly as a boys' culture, the practice in which youth tinkered with found objects to build their own skateboards is highly reminiscent of other boy-dominated subcultures.[106] Such nostalgic accounts, laden with myths of a better time when children didn't turn into zombies in front of the television and fathers were available to their sons, belie the exclusionary and homophobic undertones of such cultures. For example, skateboarding fan Bob Schmidt remembered building skateboards with his group of friends in the 1950s: "We tried painting them, then we found out the girls liked 'em that way, so decided that was for sissies and we soaked off the paint and left them plain. But the girls got mad, mostly because it was usually one of their skates we were using!"[107] While Schmidt's use of the word "sissies" is surely meant to evoke the simplicity and innocence of childhood, it also points to the way that girls are excluded from discourses of early

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[105] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*.

[106] Consider, for example, early radio boys. Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

[107] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*, 18.

skateboarding, and the creativity and hard work that these discourses are meant to conjure.

More than just male, these memories are almost exclusively white memories. While skateboarding's earliest history as a homemade toy can be located in urban neighborhoods, its commercial and more mainstream history is located in a space explicitly denied African Americans through redlining practices: the suburb. Skateboard magazine *Thrasher*'s book-length retrospective includes a two-page black-and-white photo from 1952 featuring an "'anything on wheels' derby" in New York City.[108] This photo portrays white girls in bloomers, mothers pushing strollers, and both white and black boys pushing milk crate scooters. The photo's city scene, set in front of the Children's Aid Society on New York's East Side, connotes working-class simplicity and child-like lightheartedness.

This urban image of easy diversity, however, is overshadowed by most nostalgic accounts. Skateboarding's early incarnation as a milk crate scooter in urban neighborhoods is located only in industry retrospectives, and by most accounts, its most significant origins are situated alongside other images of white youth rebellion in the 1960s. That is not to say, however, that images of skateboarding in the 1960s evoke the counterculture. In fact, sixties skateboarding oscillated uncomfortably between, first, being defined as a harmless childhood game and a dangerous and annoying teenage craze, and second, between being associated with suburban childhood and California teen surf culture. As *Thrasher* asserts, "Product development and skating styles coincided with the invention and perfection of two other modern American postwar activities: Surfing and suburban sprawl," and "The dawn of skateboarding coincided with the

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[108] *Thrasher: Insane Terrain*, 8.

56

realization of the industrial revolution in America and the increase in cheaper mass-production of steel products for car parts, tools, and toys."[109] As it moved to the world of the suburbs and California, skateboarding also became distinctly white, as the availability of leisure time and access to the relative quiet and space of suburban streets and sidewalks were distinct to whites. At the same time, however, its surfing roots in both Polynesia and California and its relative danger, as well as its association with the burgeoning teen culture, lent skateboarding a rebellious and even exotic edge.

Suburban Roots/ California Myths, 1959-1966

Skateboarding emerged at a moment in U.S. history when the figure of the youth rebel was gaining prominence. Leerom Medovoi argues that figures such as James Dean, the beats, and Holden Caufield all served to shore up the Cold War image of America as "antiauthoritarian [and] democratic."[110] That is, in order to present itself as the better alternative to communism, the United States had to demonstrate that it would welcome rebellious characters even in the context of its homogenous middle class suburbs. Medovoi's genealogy of identity and identity politics demonstrates the ways in which countercultural symbols are a fundamental part of the imaginary of American myths. Along with images of middle class America, they demonstrate that the United States offers the freedom and security to "be all that you can be."

Skateboarding, however, did not emerge into this context as a fully-formed symbol of suburban youth rebellion. Rather, its location in a moment when youth rebellion was moving to the forefront of public consciousness as well as its seemingly simultaneous existence as a commodity toy and a new symbol of California surf culture

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[109] Ibid., 12.
[110] Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

57

set skateboarding up to take on a number of dualities that have followed it through its

history and make possible the particular culture surrounding it today.[111]

Shot through the contours of skateboarding's early history are two quintessential

images of idyllic America: the postwar suburb and California surf culture. More than

situated within such nostalgic American places, skateboarding in this moment is tied

closely to suburban (white) children – mostly boys – and California surfers – mostly male

teenagers. The ideas and values associated with skateboarding in its many guises, then,

bespeak America's youthful identity. As I noted earlier, images of youth are tied strongly

to American myths: the United States is imagined as a youthful nation replete with the

energy, desires, and modern ways of thinking of the young. *Thrasher*'s retrospective

comments, "Skateboarding has a rich history charged with youthful intensity and

adventurous spirit."[112] "Youthful intensity" and "adventurous spirit" quite easily evoke

notions of American inventiveness and vigor,[113] and skateboarding's origin narratives

certainly call these traits to mind.

By 1959, surfers and suburban kids seem to have found skateboarding virtually

simultaneously, and skateboarding's suburban origins overlap and interlock with its

location in California surf culture. While Michael Brooke's *The Concrete Wave* makes

no mention of surfers until after the development of a commercial toy skateboard, both

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[111] Though it is beyond the scope of this piece to discuss the movement of surfing from Polynesian cultures
to California – and its subsequent whitening – it is important to suggest that the exoticism imagined in the
Islands most likely follows in our cultural imagination of surfing. Note, for example, the markers of
Hawaiian culture that are frequently attached to surf culture, such as leis, tropical flowers, and hula
dancing.

[112] *Thrasher: Insane Terrain*, 12.

[113] I want to note here that in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the war in Iraq, benevolent images
of America as resilient, energetic, adventurous, and pioneering have been both shored up and critiqued.
While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully analyze changing images of the nation, my
discussion of post-September 11 media representation of skateboarding will surely take this into account.
For now, however, I submit that while the foundational myths of the United States – the centrality of the
Pilgrims, the pioneers, and westward expansion more generally – may come under scrutiny, they endure as
fundamental characteristics of what it means to be American.

Thrasher and James Davis contend that surfers discovered homemade skateboards in the late 1940s and early 1950s, before a toy board was produced. The particular sequence of events is relatively inconsequential to contemporary narratives of skateboarding, for it is the overlap that allows for its multiple meanings. What matters, in other words, is that both surfers and commercial interests play a central role in the early days of the skateboard, and the tension and cooperation between "independent" youth culture and consumer culture traverses the remainder of skateboarding's history.

Surely, the overlap between the technologies (that is, the boards) used for surfing and skateboarding cemented the connection between the two practices. What is more telling, however, is the way in which mainstream media picked up on skateboarding's suburban appeal and surfer style. Constructing skateboarding initially as a craze among kids "who have gone land-surfing berserk"[114] and later as the latest menace to children's safety, the media served to make skateboarding decidedly suburban and decidedly subcultural. In other words, by simultaneously playing up a rather non-threatening practice as a fad (and therefore, short-lived, simplistic, and superficial), linking it to a strange and non-mainstream counterculture of California surfing, and asserting its eminent danger, mainstream media in the 1960s laid the foundation for its current discursive/cultural location as a practice wherein white male youth can imagine themselves as outside the mainstream actively critiquing particular modes of masculinity while concurrently asserting traditional forms of masculine power.

As early as 1959, the *Los Angeles Times* was reporting efforts to outlaw skateboarding. On June 14, 1959, the *Times* reported that "Students comprising the Pasadena Youth Council board of officers" asked the City of Pasadena to outlaw

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[114] "Skateboard Skiddoo," *Newsweek*, May 10, 1965.

skateboarding because of the number of injuries it caused. The paper reported that more than six teens were hurt riding skateboards in the previous month.[115] Only a month later, the *Times* reported that a teenage boy had his arm amputated after a skateboarding accident.[116] Not yet regarded as a subculture, a commercial toy, or even a central part of youth culture, skateboarding was deemed dangerous (by students, no less!), and therefore, the business of city councils.

The *LA Times* does not discuss skateboarding again until 1962, but in just three years, the practice had moved from simply dangerous to a distinctly rebellious and masculine fad. Reporting on a growing push to ban skateboarding throughout Los Angeles County, the paper enthused:

> Skateboarding, to the uninformed, is one of the latest rages of the
> teen-age set. Most of the demons either are roller-skating enthusiasts
> with a yen for high adventure or surfboard novices who feel they
> can acquire additional practice …. Others are just roller rebels without
> straps …. You don't need an expensive surfboard. Junior just grabs a
> length of 2x4 from the wood pile, tears apart his sister's roller skates
> and nails them to the board.[117]

Skateboarding, the paper reported, was "such a nuisance" that schools were prohibiting it, and coaches of both high schoolers and younger children were upset about the loss of players to skateboarding injuries.[118]

While the paper deemed skateboarding a craze, it only mentioned it once more in 1962 and once in 1963, when it discussed a National City effort to ban the practice.[119] Not once in these four years did skateboarding reach the national news, but by 1964, it

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[115] "The Week in Review," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1959.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Gene Early, "Skateboard Ban Drive Growing," *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1962, SG14.
[118] Ibid.
[119] "Views and News," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1963.

became a hot topic in the *Los Angeles Times*, and skateboarding began to be reported on nationally in 1965.

While the first commercial skateboard dates to 1959, it was not until 1963 that a commercial skateboard associated with surfing was developed. *Surf Guide* publisher Larry Stevenson began producing skateboards through his company Makaha, and as a promotional device, Stevenson organized a team to participate in skateboard competitions, the first of which Makaha sponsored in 1963 in Hermosa, California. In May, 1964, the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium showed Bruce Brown's movie, *Surf Crazy*, and the screening included a live demonstration by Makaha's skate team.[120] Zody's store began to advertise the Champion "sidewalk surf board" as "Exciting healthful, safe fun!" and public debate about skateboards' safety heightened. The *LA Times* asked, "Skateboards – are they a menace to life and limb or one of the greatest boons to childhood since the printing of the first comic book?" According to the paper, the public debate was favoring the skateboarders: one citizen bemoaned, "A child nowadays has a hard time being a child," and another celebrated the "skill" required for "this healthy sport."[121]

Noticeable in these debates is their focus on children's safety and the absence of a more fraught argument about teen rebellion or boys with attitude. While such rebellion was a more general concern during this era,[122] skateboarding had not yet been broadly associated with such rebellion in public debate about its safety. In other words,

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[120] "*Surf Crazy* Advertisement," *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1964, B3. "Santa Monica Civic Shows Surfing Movie," *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1964, B4.

[121] George Garrigues, "Skateboard Ban Plea Puts Burbank in Spin," *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1964, G1.

[122] For an illuminating discussion of the role of rebels in post-war American culture, see Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*.

skateboarding was troubling because it appeared to put children at risk for many accidents and injuries, particularly given the poor materials used in their construction.

Between 1964 and 1966, the mainstream media spent a significant amount of time warning of these dangers. *The Los Angeles Times* published several letters to the editor warning of the dangers of skateboarding in 1964.[123] In 1965, the California Medical Association deemed skateboarding "a new medical menace," and the national media paid attention despite the Association's lack of statistics and dependence on doctors' reports. *Consumer Reports* noted that one auto insurance company dubbed skateboarding a "new traffic menace.'"[124] *Good Housekeeping* offered safety rules provided by the National Safety Council, warning of the possibility of facial fractures, permanent damage to growing bones, and even death.[125] Doctors at the Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. blamed skateboards for doubling the number of fractures they treated in one summer, and the chief of radiology there told *The Washington Post*, "'The skateboard should be outlawed.'"[126] So dire, and so numerous, were such warnings that by November, *The Washington Post* reported, the latest issue of *Changing Times* commented, "'The ski season is at hand, at least for you lucky few who survived skateboards.'"[127]

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[123] For example, one man cautioned that the nurse treating his for an arm broken while skateboarding said that she had seen four broken arms over the course of one week. The letter implies that the fractures were due to skateboarding, but does not say so outright (Philip T. Allen, "Letter to the Editor: Dangerous Sport," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1964, A14.). Another reader warned that skateboarders were "either spilling into the sidewalk or into the street (Janet L. Holt, "Letter to the Editor: Sidewalk Surfers," *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1964.). Several articles that year reported skateboarders either injured or killed while riding ("Boy Avoids Bad Injuries as Car Runs over Chest," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1964, E7. "Skate-Board Rider Dies after Crash," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1964, C8.)

[124] "A New Sport, or a New Menace?," *Consumer Reports*, June 1965, 273-74.

[125] "Skateboarding: Hazardous New Fad for Kids," *Good Housekeeping*, August 1965, 137.

[126] Thomas Plate, "Snap Goes the Skater," *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1965, A3.

[127] Bill Gold, "The District Line," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 1965. By June 17, 1966, *The Washington Post* declared, "Last spring skateboards caused an epidemic of fractures and injuries which hit

But beyond being dangerous for children, skateboarding was perceived as a growing nuisance to pedestrians, especially women and the elderly. The city of Arcadia's citizens worried that a sidewalk planned for students walking to school "would become a 'juvenile freeway' with skateboards, wagons and bikes,"[128] and the editor of *Consumer Bulletin* reported, "Shopping centers find skateboarding a nuisance because women with arms full of bundles find it difficult to get out of the way in time to avoid a swift collision."[129] The July 27, 1965 "Nancy" cartoon portrayed a mailman falling and spilling all of his mail after tripping on a skateboard.[130] Some city officials also began to speak of the property damage skateboarders might cause.[131] Skateboarding was so annoying that the *Wall Street Journal*'s "Pepper …. *and Salt*" column joked, "The scientists who unlocked atomic energy for industry are now seeking a peaceful use for the skateboard."[132]

The tension between images of skateboarders as children in need of protection and as teenagers who pose a threat to adults came to a head in Jerry Doernberg's *Los Angeles Times* article "Skateboarders Near Thin Ice." He paints a picture of the city of Arcadia's downtown, with "skateboarders zooming up and down the sidewalk in front of the West Arcadia Shopping Center. The head of the West Arcadia Business and Professional Association told the city council that fifty teenagers were hanging out in front of the shopping center: "'Sixty per cent of these kids have skateboards,'" he said, "'and they terrify older women. These are good kids. But there's a real danger of

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hardest at boys in the 10- to 12-year-old-age bracket" (Joan Beck, *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1966, D6.)

[128] "Sidewalk Plan Hits Obstacle," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1965, SG1.

[129] "Skateboards - Fun but Dangerous," *Consumer Bulletin*, August 1965, 13.

[130] Ernie Bushmiller, "Nancy," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1965, A7.

[131] "Ban on Skateboards Enacted 'Reluctantly'," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1965, 23.

[132] "Pepper .... And Salt," *Wall Street Journal*, November 2, 1965, 18.

runaway skateboards seriously hurting people.'"[133] Others noted the problems with enforcing skateboarding laws: "'We have enough trouble with "public relations" as it is without six-foot cops handing out tickets right and left to 8-year-old kids,'" one police officer said. Others were not as forgiving. The police chief in Bountiful, Utah, *Newsweek* noted, "was confiscating all visible skateboards, calling them a common public nuisance," and the police in Chattanooga, Tennessee was using an old law banning "'any coaster toy vehicle'" to legislate against the boards.[134] These laws point to the control that can be exerted on youth by irate adults and the ways in which youth labeled "troublemakers" or "nuisances" may be subjected to such violence.

The media focused on characterizing this new sport as a wild new youth fad that would hopefully soon die out. The new laws prohibiting skateboarding were upsetting to skateboarders, *Newsweek* lamented, "But with such a fad, there has to be a break in it somewhere."[135] In claiming skateboarding to be a "fad," the 1960s media deemed it passing and thus less threatening. However, the media also characterized the popularity of skateboarding as a "craze," suggesting skateboarding fans might, in fact, be crazy and were also sweeping the nation. A 1966 *New York Times* article discussing children's safety quotes one pediatrician, who managed to proclaim skateboarding, at once, a serious danger and a passing trend:

> 'Skateboards are treacherous,' he says, 'and should be absolutely prohibited. It's wise, in general, to beware the fad of the moment, which always seems to involve some sort of danger. We used to get a lot of dislocated bones from hula hoops, and next year something equally hazardous will come along.'[136]

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[133] Jerry Doernberg, "Skateboarders near Thin Ice," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1965, SG8.
[134] "Skateboard Skiddoo," 45.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Katharine Davis Fishman, "Danger: Children at Play," *New York TImes*, September 25, 1966, 286.

Some adults, including parents and community leaders as well as industry spokespeople, did take skateboarding seriously, characterizing it as childhood fun or healthful exercise. Skateboard manufacturers, in particular, began efforts to reverse the negative press their product had been receiving. One manufacturer began printing safety rules on their board,[137] and S.A.F.E., the Skateboard Association for Education, was established, urging skateboarders to wear helmets, participating in campaigns to advocate for safety rules, and providing awards to organizations promoting safe skateboarding.[138] Even those adults who enforced bans sometimes did so with some reservation, most often because they perceived skateboarding to be a healthy childhood activity. One city leader explained, "'I've been for the kids and skateboarding looks like a lot of good, clean fun. But lack of supervision or control creates problems.'"[139] In order to create control, some cities began to sponsor skateboarding competitions and exhibitions.[140]

While media reports of these competitions indicated that they included girls' divisions, boys generally seem to be the default sex on which most stories of skateboarding rely. When they included images, advertisements for skateboards usually showcased boys, who were always white. Only one advertisement in the 1960s used a female image: Stern Brothers Children's World advertised a "Tite 'n top set switched on for the skateboard crowd." This advertisement is for an outfit, not a skateboard, and it uses an image of a young girl with her foot on a beach ball, rather than skateboarding.[141]

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[137] "Business Bulletin," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 1965, 1.
[138] "Skateboard Award," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1965, WS2.
[139] "Ban on Skateboards Enacted 'Reluctantly'," 23.
[140] For example, Sierra Madre, California's Parks and Recreation Commission contemplated running a "Skateboard Day" after banned skateboarders complained ("Glendale Police Chief's Edict Bans Skateboarders," *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1965, SG9.). The city also instituted a "Skateboard School," offering six weeks of instruction over the course of the summer ("Sierra Madre Plans Skateboard School," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1965, SG8.).
[141] "Stern Brothers Advertisement," *New York Times*, August 29, 1965, 101.

Perhaps the most logical conclusion to be derived from this ad is that the outfit is meant to attract the male skateboarding crowd, not to be worn by them.

Most feature stories used masculine pronouns. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a skateboarding competition in the Covina City Park had achieved a "separation of 'men' from boys," and contest judge Hobie Alter, a professional skateboarder and the namesake of a popular brand of skateboards, told the paper that the skills acquired while skateboarding could help to "train a boy to become an expert surfer or skier."[142] It is important to note that the *Los Angeles Times* did sometimes run photographs of the winners of the girls' division at various contests. In fact, skateboarders Colleen Boyd and Wendy Bearer appear in the newspaper several times, apparently the best – or the only – girls competing in many of these contests.[143] Still, very few articles about contests listed the winners of both the boys' and girls' divisions.[144]

The only space where girls are relatively regularly featured are in human interest photos presenting skateboarding as an interesting new children's hobby. Many of these show pre-teen girls with their dogs or parks and recreation officials.[145] Far from a nuisance, a danger, or a craze, skateboarding in these photos is cute and interesting. Female skateboarders are represented as competitive only when included in listings of contest winners; at their more prominent location, female skateboarders are not to be taken seriously.

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[142] "A 'Good Skate' Competes above Board," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1964.
[143] "Winning Form," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1965, WS2. "Skateboarders in Action," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1966, WS2. "Good Skates," *Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 1966, A1.
[144] "84 Compete in Skateboard Tournament," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1965, WS13. "Skateboarders Wheel around in City Finals," *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1965, SF8.
[145] "Skating Dog," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1964, B8. "Skateboard Award," WS2. "New Skateboarder," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1965, 27. Lucy and the other girls from the 1966 CBS special *Charlie Brown's All Stars* also had skateboards. J.M.C., "'Peanuts' on Tv," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 10, 1966, 4.

By 1965, skateboarding had been banned in 20 cities, and companies that had been working hard to fill holiday orders suddenly found themselves overstocked, victim of numerous cancelled orders.[146] On the other hand, the practice was the subject of *Skaterdater* (1965), an Oscar nominated short and winner of the 1966 Cannes International Film Festival Grand Prix for Best Short,[147] and the magazine *The Quarterly Skateboard*. The national press praised *Skaterdater;*[148] Kevin Thomas of *The Los Angeles Times* called the short "delightful," and enthused that it "skims across the screen with style and verve."[149]

In 1966, skateboarding simultaneously became a part of everyday culture and a diminishing trend. Several articles wondered if skateboarding was becoming less popular. "Is the skateboard going the way of the hula hoop?" asked Charles R. Donaldson of the *Los Angeles Times*. Studio City recreation administrators suggested that skateboarders' interest in competitions was on the wane, but children were still interested in skateboarding recreationally. At the same time, a member of the Studio City Recreation and Parks department claimed, "'To our knowledge, nobody is manufacturing skateboards any more,'" noting that skateboards are durable and parents are still bothered by their noise.[150]

Not quite a waning trend, skateboarding became an easy symbol for youth in 1966, and the mass media spent far less time defining the practice or discussing its origins and dangers. The *New York Times* discussed British and French Samsonite

[146] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*, 21-31.
[147] "Movies," *The New York Times*, http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=138604. Accessed 23 July 2006.
[148] Bosley Crowther, "Who Says There Is No Talent?," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1966, X5.
[149] Kevin Thomas, "Film Short Is Long on Artistry," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1966, C11.
[150] Charles R. Donaldson, "Few Youths Entering Skateboard Contests," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1966, C8. See also "Skateboards on the Way Out? Not in This Generation," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1966, SF9.

commercials featuring mannequins on skateboards[151] and demonstrated the free feeling

"plebes" at the United States Military Academy felt while their older classmates were

gone by describing "a young cadet … rolling down the tiled corridor on a skateboard

[who] went winging around a corner with a swift and beautiful grace."[152] Johnny Carson

joked that an NBC vice president was angry with General Motors because "'a wheel has

broken off his skateboard.'"[153] Skateboards, in short, seem to have become the part of

the fabric of everyday life.

Skateboarding Disappears, 1967-1974

By 1967, skateboarding had lost its hold on both the mainstream media's and

mainstream youths' attention. Michael Brooke attributes the downfall in popularity to

manufacturers' inability to produce a higher-quality product: "skateboarders were faced

with poor technology (that is, clay wheels) and concerns about safety."[154] While clay

wheels certainly were rickety and unreliable, the media's coverage of skateboards as "a

new medical menace" and skateboarders as a nuisance surely contributed to the practice's

decreasing popularity. However, I also want to note that this dramatic disappearance

occurred at a moment of clear strife for young people. With the Tet Offensive in 1968,

war protests escalated. In this same period, the country was also rocked by urban riots,

civil rights protests, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert

Kennedy. The end of this moment also coincides with the Watergate scandal. Perhaps

the dramatic nature of this moment – as well as youth culture's explicit engagement in

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[151] Marylin Bender, "Advertising Heeds the Eloquent Call of Fashion," *The New York Times*, August 16, 1966, 30.
[152] McCandlish Phillips, "Family Visit Is Happy Day in Life of a Plebe," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1966, 31.
[153] Lawrence Laurent, "Johnny Carson Knows His Job," *The Washington Post*, May 4, 1966, B17.
[154] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*, 15.

and reaction against a well-defined establishment – rendered discussions of skateboarding's rebellious nature rather banal.

Over the course of the seven years between 1967 and 1974, skateboarding was scarcely mentioned in the mainstream media. Periodically, the news outlets would note a municipality's decision to ban skateboarding or include it in a list of dangerous toys or California fads, but not a single report features an in-depth discussion of the practice. By 1968, the *Washington Post* had declared motorized mini-bikes the "successor to the skateboard."[155] Though skateboarding did not entirely disappear from public discourse, its presence decreased dramatically, though it did continue to be defined as a risky childhood endeavor and an interesting California fad.

Technology and Dare-devilry, 1975-1979

Stacy Peralta's *Dogtown and Z-Boys* (2001) remembers skateboarding's 1970s resurgence as distinctly working class. For Peralta, the famed Zephyr Skateboarding team from Santa Monica, California was a group of aggressive and energetic boys with little to lose who gave skateboarding their all and shunned the contemporary norms of the sport. The winner of the Sundance Film Festival's Audience Award and Director's Award, the documentary positions its protagonists as products of "the last great seaside slum." The story begins with a tour of Dogtown, the California coastal communities of Venice and Santa Monica, as narrator Sean Penn intones, "There is a place where America's manifest destiny collides into the Pacific Ocean. A place where the fabled route 66, the roadway of America's dreams, terminates. This is Dogtown." Juxtaposing the American dream with economic and social hardship, Penn guides us through Dogtown and the wreckage of its myriad amusement parks, including the Pacific Ocean

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[155] C.W. Kirk, "Around the Beltway," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 1968, F2.

Park, which one skater describes as a "dead wonderland." This narration suggests that by growing up in this run-down, formerly utopic place, the (mostly) white boys of Dogtown developed the raw, creative, independent ways of thinking that produced and pushed forward the practice of skateboarding. In forwarding this argument, the documentary aligns American mores of independence, freedom, and adventure with working-class, white masculinity.

The film consolidates these values through archival footage of California in the 1960s and 1970s that contrasts sunny beaches inhabited by lily-white surfers with run-down, gritty working-class towns. As white bourgeois beach culture collides with racially diverse, working-class beach culture, *Dogtown and Z-Boys* envisions a distinct group of "raw," authentic white teenage boys. The mythology of California, as a utopic site of possibility haunted by racial and economic divides, serves as a central trope accounting for the particularities of white adolescent masculinity. Because *Dogtown and Z-Boys* functions as a foundational myth explaining skateboarding circa 1970 and guiding contemporary skateboarding, I argue, its portrayal of white masculinity reverberates in current visions of this identity.

While *Dogtown and Z-Boys* illuminates a key element of skateboarding's history, it does not tell the whole story. In fact, while skateboarding did take on a distinctly masculinist tinge and was regarded by some as rebellious, it also opened up doors for women's participation and became a far more expensive – and thus middle class – pursuit. Erupting in 1975 as a major money-making industry, skateboarding came to be defined as a daring and graceful sport requiring a particular set of skills, rather than a fleeting childhood fad. Skateboarders, in turn, were represented as both risk-taking and

70

rebellious teenagers and expressive young athletes and artists. As this newly defined

sport/art evolved, its expense pushed it farther into middle- and upper-middle class

enclaves, and its multiple definitions invited girls' involvement. Most crucially, the

varied and contradictory ways in which skateboarding was defined during this moment of

popularity made the sport and its culture a discursive space – or a youthscape – in which

it was possible to envision multiple modes of masculinity.

Inventing the Wheel: Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

As I have noted, skateboarding's rapid demise in 1966 is most often attributed to

the dangers that clay and metal wheels presented. But by 1975, the popular press was

heralding the "rebirth of the boards,"[156] crediting skateboarding's newfound popularity to

the triumph of male ingenuity and technological innovation. Several publications

recounted the story of Frank Nasworthy, a Virginia Polytechnic Institute student who was

suspended for participating in a political demonstration in 1970, and who, "in the annals

of skateboarding … will go down as the man who invented the wheel."[157] The myth

recalls Nasworthy hanging out in a Virginia plastics factory that made polyurethane

wheels for roller skates. While roller skaters often complained about the slow speed of

these wheels, Nasworthy realized that they would work for skateboards and in 1973

opened his California-based business, the Cadillac Wheels Company. Virtually

overnight, these articles suggest, skateboarding was popular again.[158]

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[156] Kellogg, "Rebirth of the Boards."

[157] Pileggi, "Wheeling and Dealing," 22. See also "Wheel Crazy," *Time*, October 27, 1975.

[158] Pileggi, "Wheeling and Dealing."; Tony Hiss and Sheldon Bart, "Free as a Board," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1976, 211.; Judi R. Kesselman, "The Skateboard Menace," *Family Health*, August 1976, 34-35, 76.; David F. Salisbury, "Skateboarding: From Fad to Sport," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 3, 1976, 6.; Mary McHugh, "Skateboards Are the Hottest Thing on Wheels," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1976, 101. *The Washington Post* offered a pre-history to this story, describing scientist Vernon Heightfield, who at his son's behest, used the urethane with which he was experimenting to make skateboard wheels. According to *The Post*, Frank Nasworthy worked at Heightfield's factory and began

Nasworthy's story highlights several key values that follow skateboarding throughout its history. Kicked out of college for going to a political demonstration, Nasworthy represents a member of the '60s counterculture and brings rebellion to mind. More than a rebel, though, Nasworthy became successful because of his creative approach to the relatively new plastics industry as well as his entrepreneurial spirit. The *Los Angeles Times* called him a "visionary."[159] While he lost access to the educational institution, he found success independently and in the process revitalized the practice of skateboarding. Nasworthy's story is, in essence, the American Dream. This myth's centrality to popular accounts of skateboarding carries through the various veins of a skateboarding discourse that allows skateboarders to be perceived (and to perceive themselves) as subcultural and mainstream at one and the same time. Skateboarders can reject certain institutions (in Nasworthy's case, higher education) and creatively, independently, innovatively participate in mainstream culture – like Nasworthy.

While Frank Nasworthy did not take center stage in all accounts of skateboarding's resurgence, the reinvention of the wheel certainly did,[160] and the development of urethane wheels serves as an origin myth even in contemporary accounts of skateboarding. *Dogtown and Z-Boys* attributes the 1970s evolution of skateboarding to these wheels. Urethane wheels were more stable and softer than clay and metal wheels, and so small obstructions in the skateboard's path did not so easily cause it to skid or stop short. The *Los Angeles Times* describes the new wheel almost lovingly: "It is

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marketing his own wheels after doing so. Dave Scheiber, "Science Comes to Skateboards and the Sport Is Booming," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 1977, D9.

[159] William K. Knoedelseder Jr., "Skateboarding: A Story," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1977, T99.

[160] See, for example, Lynde McCormick, "Skateboards Come Back with Fresh Set of Antics," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 27, 1975, 19.; ; Joe Helberger, "Skateboards Scoot up in Popularity," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1975, 9-10.; Jon Nordhiemer, "Skateboards Make Comeback as Older Boys and Girls Join In
" *The New York Times*, October 9, 1975, 46.; Kellogg, "Rebirth of the Boards," 56.

translucent, often amber in color, softer than the old wheel…."[161] In fact, the article

implies, use of the new wheels may have even saved 18-year-old James Robert

McClenahan, who died on May 4, 1975 after falling off his skateboard and hitting his

head. An innovation in safety, urethane wheels also allowed enthusiasts to progress

athletically and provided them the freedom to experiment with daring new tricks.

Technological ingenuity did not only bring a safer wheel to skateboarding. The

mid-70s skateboard was completely redesigned. Skateboard decks (the board) could now

be constructed of wood or fiberglass, and the trucks (axles) on which the wheels were

mounted had been redesigned[162] to be steadier and to allow for greater ease in turning.

The *New York Times* enthused that new skateboards "are marketed with a space-age

supersell that points out superwide, supergrip and superspeed features, including such

things as unidirectional fiberglass deck, aerospace locking nuts, aircraft aluminum

fittings, hand-laminated super-flex board, alloy steel axles and so on."[163] The discussions

of skateboarding's new technology were so intense that by 1976, the *New York Times*

joked,

> Somewhere in this country – maybe a small garage, maybe in a
> large factory – someone who understands the American marketplace
> is building the ultimate skateboard. It will come equipped with radial
> tires, a rear heel defogger, a citizen band radio and air-conditioning. It
> will sell for $1000, local tax and dealer prep not included. And there
> will be lines around the block to buy it.[164]

Despite the joking, this celebration of technology legitimized skateboarding as a wholly

American and masculine sport – an activity to be taken seriously, rather than a forgettable

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[161] Richard O'Reilly, "Skateboard: Personal Rapid Transit, Southern California Style," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1975, OC_A1.
[162] "Sidewalk Surfin'," *The Washington Post*, June 8, 1975.
[163] Nordhiemer, "Skateboards Make Comeback as Older Boys and Girls Join In
", 46.
[164] Tony Kornheiser, "Whoosh! Skateboards Zip Back into Big Time," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1976, 35.

fad. Indeed, William Zinsser of *Sports Illustrated* noted, "American technology in its relentless push solved the various problems" of skateboards.[165]

"Hotdogging of a High Order"[166]: Skateboarding Redefined

These technophilic descriptions suggested that the skateboard was far too complicated for any "backyard mechanic" to produce with his young son. With new technology, skateboarding changed in several ways. First, the skateboard became far more expensive; second, skateboarders were able to develop new tricks; and third, skateboarding was elevated from a fad or pastime to a sport. In this evolution, skateboarding became simultaneously more grown up and thus the domain of teenagers and adolescents, rather than children; more feminine, as the new tricks could be classified alongside gymnastics and dance; and more masculine, as the new technology allowed greater speed and specialization. As an adolescent sport, skateboarding also took on two contradictory qualities. It could be associated closely with teenagers and juvenile delinquency while at the same time being legitimized as a sport fit for televised contests and marketing campaigns, and these multiple meanings carry through to the present moment.

Skateboarding simultaneously became a daring new masculine teen culture and a newly sophisticated sport through which young men and women could develop athletic skills and grace. Grown up and more daring, skateboarders were portrayed as risk-takers. Far from young boys hammering together 2x4s and roller skate wheels with their dads – or even neighborhood children getting in the way of shoppers on city sidewalks, skateboarders in 1975 were tackling empty swimming pools, where they skated up and

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[165] William Knowlton Zinsser, "Super Rad Means O.K., Dad," *Sports Illustrated*, April 24, 1978, 36.
[166] Hank Burchard, "Riding the Skateboard Wave," *The Washington Post*, August 5, 1976, D7.

down the sides of the pool walls "like the steel ball in a roulette wheel."[167] At the same time, *Sports Illustrated* characterized pool riding as "breathtaking" and noted the "grace" of 1970s skateboarding more generally.[168] *Newsweek* described "solos and couples do[ing] graceful figure-skating routines as well as acrobatic backbends and handstands" and "Skateboard hotdoggers look[ing] for exotic sites to conquer."[169] *The Washington Post* captured the duality of skateboarding succinctly in its description of a skateboarder who "duels with disaster, the semisoft wheels making sighing sounds on the hard asphalt. It is hotdogging of a high order, beautiful and dangerous and done for the pure pleasure of it, performed not because but in spite of the onlooker."[170]

The dialectic of grace and aggression that exists in 1970s discourses about skateboarding provides a space in which young boys can be reimagined or redefined. In other words, in this dialectical space, skateboarding boys can be graceful and creative while simultaneously conquering space and participating in a sport that encourages ever-more-athletic progression in skills. William Zinsser of *Sports Illustrated* commented after observing his son and others at a skate park, "I felt that I was watching a random ballet. In a society that suspects the worst of its teenage males, I would rather have a skateboard park as my neighbor than a grown man with power tools."[171] Zinsser's comment implies that skateboarding attracts or produces a different type of masculine performance – one that is expressive and stylish.

Dangerous, Annoying, Criminal – and Legitimized

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[167] McCormick, "Skateboards Come Back with Fresh Set of Antics," 19.
[168] Pileggi, "Wheeling and Dealing," 24.
[169] Kellogg, "Rebirth of the Boards," 56.
[170] Burchard, "Riding the Skateboard Wave," D7.
[171] Knowlton Zinsser, "Super Rad Means O.K., Dad," 38.

The burgeoning interest in skateboarding caused worry, as the practice was still

considered to be very dangerous. *Newsweek* announced, "In the Midwest,

[skateboarding] is causing parents more terror than Junior's first time out with the car."[172]

Several articles reported on injuries to skateboarders,[173] and medical reports indicated

that 27,000 injuries in 1975 were due to skateboarding.[174] *Family Health* warned that

with the new technology, young skateboarders would be pressured by their peer groups to

try risky moves, as "a cult glamorizing both risk and pain is rapidly developing around

the sport. According to the code, if you haven't been badly hurt at least once, you

haven't attempted a really difficult trick."[175] On the other hand, others noted that the new

equipment was far safer,[176] and officials from the U.S. Skateboarding Association

insisted that skateboarding was safe as long as enthusiasts didn't try to do more than they

were prepared to do.[177] Mary McHugh of the *New York Times* reported that the United

States Product Safety Commission had found skateboarding to be relatively safe, ranking

it 25th in a list of dangerous sports, which bicycling topped.[178] But, by November 1975,

the Consumer Product Safety Commission noted skateboarding's role in the increase in

toy-related accidents,[179] and the Consumer Affairs Committee of Americans for

Democratic Action warned consumers that skateboards were dangerous and suggested

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[172] Kellogg, "Rebirth of the Boards," 56.
[173] Jerry Belcher, "Georgia's 'Colonial Dream' Wins Top Prize for Floats," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1975, A1, A4.; "Blood Transfusion Ordered for Youth," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1975, OC5.; "Skateboard Fall Fatal to Youth," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1975, OC1.
[174] Hiss and Bart, "Free as a Board," 81.; Kesselman, "The Skateboard Menace," 35.; Kellogg, "Rebirth of the Boards," 56.
[175] Kesselman, 35.
[176] Phyllis C. Richman, "Try It!" *The Washington Post*, September 26, 1976, p. 276; Mary Alice Kellogg, p. 56.
[177] Salisbury, 6.
[178] Mary McHugh, p. 35.
[179] "…No List," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 1975, p. 75.

76

that they buy cheaper models, which were not as fast and did not "have streamlined and lethal points in front."[180]

Some, as in the sixties, complained of speeding youth and the nuisance and danger they presented to pedestrians and adults more generally. The California Highway Patrol began to ticket skateboarders, "some of whom have been clocked zooming downhill at speeds up to about 30 m.p.h.," because they were hazardous to pedestrians.[181] Reader Patricia Bayley grumbled in a letter to the *LA* Times, "[A]ny lives or limbs endangered should be those of the skateboarders, alone, not some innocent pedestrian's." She went on, criticizing another letter that suggested that people should accept a modicum of risk in the quest for accomplishment: "Try to tell a mother who has just miscarried because of an irresponsible youth on a skateboard about a fair trade-off …. Set up daredevil courses for skateboarders in neighborhood parks where they can maim themselves, but not the rest of us."[182] Bayley's letter puts in sharp relief a perceived disconnect between responsible adults and reckless youth.

Skateboarders also came to be associated with a variety of crimes. Though few articles suggested that skateboarders committed crimes (aside from skateboarding) more than other groups of youth, several articles did mention that juveniles were in possession of skateboards while committing their crimes. For example, the *LA Times* reported that a ten-year-old boy escaped on his skateboard after stealing $2.68 from an ice cream shop,[183] and a mall Santa reported that he "got his quota of smart comments from older

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[180] Judith Martin, "Tagging Toy Prices," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 1975, p. D1.
[181] "CHP to Ticket Skateboarders for Speeding," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1975, p. SE2.
[182] Patricia A. Bayley, "Skateboards," Letter to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1975, p. C6.
[183] "Christmas Eve a Time of Fear for Young Burglar," *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1975, p. 3.

boys riding down the mall on skateboards."[184] A report of a "street melee" featured a

photo of three young men in handcuffs, "one holding a skateboard and another standing

on one."[185] Also, as interest in skateboarding in swimming pools mushroomed,

skateboarders began to trespass on properties with empty pools.[186] Promoter Bill

Riordan, Jimmy Connors' manager, described skateboarding in the following way: "'It's

clandestine – the kids have all these secret riding spots. It's got speed and danger. It's

got its own language. It's got a mystique.'"[187]

While Riordan found skateboarding's "mystique" to be ripe for marketing, other

adults were less than enthused. As in the sixties, many cities responded to the perceived

dangers and nuisances of skateboarding by banning it.[188] Safety clinics at schools and

shopping centers[189] were another solution to the problem of skateboarding. The Pro-Am

Skateboarder Racers Association teamed with communities, police, and schools to

develop safe skateboarding guides and programs.[190] This organization supported the

creation of skateboarding "areas" or parks in the vein of other public recreational

facilities such as baseball diamonds. Seeking to legitimize the practice, one spokesman

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[184] Tom Gorman, "Playing Santa Can be Tough Sledding," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1975, p. SE7.
See "Robbers Flee on Skateboards," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1975, p. SF_A2 and Leslie Berkman,
"Swap Meet at Fairgrounds Raided by 130 Law Officers," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1975, p. 6A for
more examples of such associations.
[185] Tom Newton, "104 Arrested in Tujunga After Street Melee," *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1975, p. A3.
[186] Kesselman, p. 35.
[187] Frank Deford, "Promo wiz in kidvid biz," *Sports Illustrated 46*, February 7, 1977, p. 33.
[188] "Manhattan Will Apply Brakes to Skateboarding," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1975, p. CS4; Doug
Smith, "Lorenzen Seeks Law to Regulate Skateboard Use," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1975, p. SF_A1;
"City Will Study Skateboarding," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1975, p. OC_A10; "Peninsula Cities Get
Tough on Skateboards in Streets," *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1975, p. CS2; "Skateboarding Ordinance
Okd," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1975, p. D2.
[189] "Safety Series on Skateboards," *Los Angeles Times,* July 13, 1975, p. WS5; "41 Groups Plan Safety
Exhibits," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1975, p. SE5; "All-Day Safety Program Slated at Laurel
Plaza," *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1975, p. SF14.
[190] Mary McHugh, p. 35.

enthused, "'Skateboarding is a beautiful way to develop poise and self-confidence.'"[191]

The International Skateboard Association, an organization of 12 skateboarding companies, was set up in 1976 to advance the sport. The ISA also staged safety clinics and competitions.[192] The city of Glendora even decided to make ticketed skateboarders and bicyclists attend safety lectures on Saturday mornings.[193] These clinics served to normalize skateboarding, as did the development of skate parks, which exploded in the mid-1970s.

Municipalities nationwide began to respond to skateboarders' needs with skate parks in 1975: The *New York Times* lists the following locations as opening skate parks between 1975 and 1976: "California, Texas, Florida, Maryland, Chiba Beach, Japan, the town and shire of Albany, Western Australia, and Huntington, Long Island,"[194] and *Maclean's* reported in 1978 that approximately 200 skate parks had been built since 1976.[195] Skate parks required their patrons to wear safety gear, including helmets, elbow pads, and knee pads, and effectively negated the danger of a skateboarder being hit by a car. In fact, in 1977, the Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that skateboarding in parks was significantly less risky than doing so elsewhere – and in that year, the risks of skateboarding had risen from the 25th riskiest sport to the 2nd (after bicycling),[196] causing at least 188,000 injuries in 1976.[197] Skate parks also became a prime source of revenue, and skatepark owners opened "pro shops" near their parks and

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[191] *Ibid*.

[192] Scott Moore, "Skateboarding Industry Rolling to Success," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1977, p. OC1.

[193] "Glendora Will Prohibit Skateboards Downtown," *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1975, p. SG5.

[194] Hiss and Bart, p. 40.

[195] Macbeth, p. 62.

[196] Lynn Darling, "Skateboard: Status Symbol For the Young in Suburbia," *The Washington Post*, November 13, 1977, p. 36.

[197] Earl Gustkey, "Skateboarding May Be Kids' Stuff But It Pays," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1977, p. E1.

sponsored lessons and contests.   Skateboard World in Torrance, California wooed

customers with music, an arcade, closed circuit television so that skateboarders could

review their skills, and a concession stand.[198]

"A Real Sport"[199] – Skateboarding Contests as a Legitimizing Tool

With the development of the urethane wheel, Frank Nasworthy claimed

skateboarding to be "'a real sport.'"[200] As marketers and promoters began to notice the

success of the industry, they developed contests and exhibitions to further promote

skateboarding and gain monetarily from it. These contests, in turn, worked to shore up

skateboarding's status as a sport.

Of course, not all contests were sponsored by big industry players, and various

California locales held contests beginning in the summer of 1975. Most of these events

included slalom races and "freestyle" events which tested skateboarders' ability to

perform gymnastic or acrobatic tricks, such as handstands, on their boards. Skateboards

were also included in parades,[201] YMCA holiday events,[202] and utilized for charity

events.[203] These contests and events were not new, particularly to the Los Angeles area,

as they were held throughout skateboarding's boom in the 1960s. However, as more

people proclaimed the activity a true sport, television began to take notice, and in 1976

ABC broadcast the World Skateboard Championships.[204]

In June 1976, National Skateboard Shows Inc., a new production company, spent

$250,000 to develop the Skateboarding World Masters Invitational, and the World

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[198] Leo C. Wolinsky, "Skateboarding the Next Pro Sport?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1977, p. CS1.
[199] Pileggi, p. 22.
[200] *Ibid.* See also Hiss and Bart, p. 81. A sporting goods store owner in New York City told them, "'It's not going to be a fad this time' …. 'This time it's going to be a sport.'"
[201] Catherine Coyne, "Family Guide to Weekend Events," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1975.
[202] "Vacation Events Set for Children," *Los Angeles Times,* December 19, 1975, p. U16.
[203] "5,266 Raised for MS," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1975, p. SG4.
[204] Hiss and Bart, p. 40.

Professional Skateboard Championships Invitational was held in California in September

1976. Wholly developed by industry organizations, the titles of these contests are meant

to instill skateboarding with cosmopolitanism as well as an aura of tradition. These

contests feature "professionals" and "masters," invited by a legitimizing organization to

exhibit their skills. In reality, the *New York Times* scoffed, "the main floor of the arena

… looked rather amateurish for what was billed as the World Professional Skateboard

Championship."[205] While supposedly world events, the contests were always located in

the United States, and the World Masters Invitational was only "worldly" in that some of

its contestants came from the non-mainland United States: Hawaii.[206] In this context,

rumors also began developing that skateboarding would be a part of the 1980 Olympic

Games in Moscow.[207]

Manufacturers hoped to further legitimize skateboarding by paying to promote it

widely and raise it to the level of a popular family sport enjoyed even by non-

participants. "With a second lease on life," the *New York Times* reported, "skateboard

companies are sending 'teams' on nationwide tours to push skateboarding as the new

family sport."[208] Manufacturers began to pay skateboarders up to $30,000 to demonstrate

skateboarding at exhibitions around the country and on television,[209] and between

sponsorships and prize money, skateboarders such as Russ Howell, who told the *Los*

Angeles Times that he had been in "'seven or eight movies, written two books and won

18 major championships,'"[210] made $60,000.[211] Though *Dogtown and Z-Boys* positions

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[205] "With Money on the Line, Coast Skateboards Roll," *New York Times*, September 7, 1976, p. 14.
[206] Kornheiser, p. 35.
[207] Hiss and Bart, p. 83.
[208] "With Money on the Line," p. 14.
[209] *Ibid*.
[210] Penelope McMillan, "Top Skateboarders Spin Their Slicks," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1977, p. B3.

the Zephyr Skateboard team as distinct from the larger culture of skateboarding in the 1970s, team member Tony Alva did indeed reach the mainstream press. He told the *Los Angeles Times* that other professional skateboarders are "'sportsmen and health freaks. They're people just having fun.'"[212]

Bill Riordan started to manage skateboarder Ty Page and endorsed a skateboarding tournament to be held in Long Beach, California. "'Anything that generates $300 million in annual sales,' Riordan said, 'can't be all bad.'"[213] He also developed a children's show featuring skateboarding for CBS with former American Basketball Association commissioner Jack Dolph.

Riordan's discussions about promoting Ty Page capture some of the many layers of discourse that have accumulated onto skateboarding and its culture. He told the *New York Times*,

> 'To make this sport viable in America,' … 'you need to create national heroes to sustain it. Ty is a super athlete, he jumps off Oceanside cliffs, he was the national boys' surfing champ at age 12 … and his image is apple pie and ice cream. He's clean-cut, wears proper safety equipment, and everyone wants to mother him. Jimmy Connors came up in the age of the anti-hero. It was easy to make a rascal out of him. Those days are over.'

Describing Ty Page elsewhere as "'a Huckleberry Finn in a blond Afro,'"[214] Riordan represents Page as an All-American boy with a twist. That is to say, he was white, childlike, adventurous, and good spirited while at the same time stunning audiences with his daring skateboarding ability and perhaps even his hair. Ty Page's father claimed that before his son became a professional skateboarder, he was interested only in "surfing,

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[211] David F. Salisbury, "Skateboarding: From Fad to Sport," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 3, 1976, p. 6.
[212] Elliott Almond, "Skateboarding's New Young Pros," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1977, p. OC1.
[213] Frank Deford, "Promo wiz in kidvid biz," *Sports Illustrated 46*, February 7, 1977, p. 30.
[214] Deford, p. 32.

skateboarding, and girls" and was "'a ne'er-do-well in the making.'"[215] Not only all-American, Page was decidedly heterosexual and possessed at least the potential to be a rebel. Riordan was certainly successful in making Page a star; he estimated that Page would earn between $75,000 and $100,000 in 1977.[216]

By 1976, *The New York Times* declared, "[P]eople are getting rich on skateboards …. [Skateboarding] has gone Hollywood. And everybody who is anybody wants a piece of the action."[217] With the development of new technology, skateboards' price rose from approximately ten dollars in 1965 to as much as $125 in 1976. The *New York Times* claimed, "Though many of the early boarders were kids who couldn't afford two roller skates, today skateboarding is not a sport for the poor. Like, stereo freaks, the stoked often buy components and assemble them themselves."[218] By 1977, sales had risen approximately 25 - 35% to $550 - $650 million,[219] and skateboard manufacturer Hobie Alter was selling his boards through J.C. Penney and Sears.[220] Toymaker Mattell Corp. launched its Magnum Skateboard division in 1977 as well, and their marketing manager said, "'We do see permanence to the sport. The outlaw nature of it is changing, and skateparks are providing an anchor to the sport. It has become less faddish, and a more year-round sport.'"[221] Skateboarding was so big that the *Today* show reported on it, estimating that the industry's sales would rise to $1 billion in 1978.[222]

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[215] Earl Gustkey, p. E1.
[216] Gustkey, p. E1.
[217] Tony Korneiser, p. 35.
[218] Hiss and Bart, p. 81. While this quote points to the changing availability of skateboarding to the working class, it also invokes, like accounts of skateboarding's earliest history, the radio boys who tinkered with radio equipment. See Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*.
[219] Scott Moore, p. OC1.
[220] *Ibid*.
[221] Scott Moore, p. OC5.
[222] Macbeth, p. 62.

More than an industry, skateboarding was perceived to be part of a new youth culture along with rock music and surfing, and the producer of the World Professional Skateboard Championship was a concert promoter.[223] Skateboarders began to be featured elsewhere in the media besides in televised contests. In 1977, skateboarder Ty Page reported doing 4 television commercials.[224] The *Los Angeles Times* listed skateboarding's reach into popular culture: "Six national TV commercials (Pepsi, RC Cola, Three Musketeers, Master Charge, Orange Plus and MG) use skateboarding in their pitch. Three slick new magazines have been devoted to the subject, each full color and filled with expensive ad lineage. Universal will soon distribute a feature film titled 'Skateboard.'"[225]

At least part of this youth culture was focused on "authenticity." Some professional skaters made it a point to proclaim that they were not participating in skateboarding for financial gain: "'The thing is … they could be giving away lollipops at this meet and it would have the same importance as if they were giving away thousands and thousands of dollars,'" one professional skateboarder told the *New York Times*.[226] Still, even Bill Riordan's all-American skateboarders began to demand compensation. "[C]heerful little tyke" and 13-year-old professional skateboarder Bobby (Casper) Boyden, when asked what he likes most about skateboarding, responds, "'The money, the money!'"[227]

More than a money-maker, the culture of skateboarding was widely perceived to be the domain of young people, and it operated as Never Never Land for some: Skitch

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[223] Warren Hoge, p. 28.
[224] Gustkey, E8.
[225] William K. Knoedelseder Jr., p. T99.
[226] "With Money on the Line," p. 14.
[227] Deford, p. 32.

Hitchcock, a 24-year-old professional skateboarder, enthused, "'I got to be a kid forever, Peter Pan.'"[228] Indeed, skateboarders were frequently defined as "junior high and high school students"[229] or "teens and pre-teens,"[230] *Family Health* defined skateboarders as "generally boys in their teens and pre-teens."[231] Print journalists maintained the barrier between young skateboarders and adults by publishing lists of skateboarding slang indicating that skateboarders had a language of their own. *Sports Illustrated* listed a variety of slang terms to which promoter "Riordan and his middle-aged colleagues"[232] had to become accustomed. *The Washington Post* claimed "[S]kateboarding is still something of an outlaw art, its grace and beauty heightened by the ever-present possibility of the board's betrayal. It's an esoteric world as well, its language nearly incomprehensible, its mythology rich with teenaged heroes who have found fame and fortune in a world of nearly perpetual motion." [233]

The *Los Angeles Times* remarked that skateboarding "may be the ultimate sport for today's youth. You don't need a natural landscape (a street, sidewalk or driveway is all that is needed), it's something you do alone, and it appears to be something that older people neither understand nor can ever do as well."[234] The ability to skateboard alone, the *L.A. Times* explained, means that skateboarders are not "dependent on anyone."[235] The independent nature of the practice was tied to its relationship to the self: Pro skater Russ Howell claimed that skateboarding "'tells you a lot about yourself,'" and that "'The

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[228] "With Money on the Line," p. 14.
[229] *Ibid.*
[230] Lynde McCormick, p. 19.
[231] Kesselman, p. 35.
[232] Deford, p. 43.
[233] Lynn Darling, "Skateboard: Status Symbol for the Young in Suburbia," *The Washington Post*, November 13, 1977, p. 36
[234] Penelope McMillan, p. B3.
[235] *Ibid*.

last three years the emphasis has been off teams and on the individual.'"[236] The editor of

SkateBoarder magazine told the *Los Angeles Times*, "'Skateboarding is an individual

freedom'"[237]

Boys Only?

Skateboarding in the 1970s was still a male-centric sport; however, women were

taken far more seriously in this decade than they were in skateboarding's first moment of

popularity.   The *Los Angeles* Times asserted that 10% of professional skateboarders were

female.[238] Part of the reason for this shift may be that Title IX, the Education

Amendment mandating equal opportunities in sports participation for men and women,

was passed in 1972.[239] But I would argue that changing definitions of skateboarding also

contributed to girls' increased acceptance.

These changing definitions categorized skateboarding as two distinct endeavors:

the first, as represented on Peralta's documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, focused on

defying gravity and included riding in empty swimming pools and racing down hills.

This mode of skateboarding later evolved into "vert," or vertical, skateboarding which is

done on large ramps called half-pipes. Vert skating is heavily represented on ESPN's *X

Games*. The second mode of skateboarding was more akin to gymnastics or dance and

involved performing a variety of tricks with the skateboard on flat ground, including

handstands and lifts. Because of its relationship to the more "artistic" pursuits of dance –

or even ice skating – women's role in the practice did not seem contradictory. This mode

of skateboarding evolved into today's street and flatland skateboarding, which are not,

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[236] *Ibid*.
[237] Elliott Almond, "Skateboarder Means Business," *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1976, p. D8.
[238] Gustkey, p. E8.
[239] While this amendment did a number of things, the most well-known is its requirement that schools
provide equal opportunity for both male and female athletes.

unfortunately, as open to women, in part, I would submit, because of their public nature and their frequent reliance on trespassing.

Women, however, were not only represented as graceful skateboarders. Several achieved the status of professionals; Bill Riordan included Ellen O'Neal and Laura Thornhill on his "team" of skateboarders.[240] The *Los Angeles Times* featured Thornhill in June 1977, and the lead picture portrayed her skateboarding on a ramp with one other male skater. The article reported that Thornhill had suffered "two major injuries and scores of scrapes," and when asked why she skateboards, the 16-year-old replied, "'Because it's fun and because of the money – it's nice making money when you're doing something you like.'"[241] Ellen O'Neal told the *Los Angeles Times* that she loved the competition associated with skateboarding, and in her first competition, she placed 2nd in a field of 200 boys.[242] The *Times* also ran a photo of Desiree Von Essen waiting for the start of a skateboarding race. She's perched leaning backwards on her board, holding on to two poles and wearing a helmet, gloves and elbow and knee pads. She stares intently in front of her, her body is tense, and she appears to be focused and strong.[243] Von Essen, in short, is a far cry from the young girls posing with their skateboarding dogs. One exception to this trend is in the *Los Angeles Times*, which reported the following about the 1976 California Free Form World Professional Skateboard Championships:

> Ernie Martin from the East Coast broke another record by high-jumping
> 4 feet 7 inches. Bob Jarvis of Laguna Beach whirled through 15 ½
> consecutive 360-degree turns, and little Ellen Berryman performed a

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[240] Deford, 33.
[241] Leo C. Wolinsky, p. CS1.
[242] Penelope McMillan, B3.
[243] *Ibid*.

freestyle show complete with gymnastic and ballet maneuvers.[244]

This same article claimed, "The girl skaters, using gymnastic and ballet techniques, add a soft touch to skateboarding. But some, like Laura Thornhill, are as aggressive as men."[245]

Clearly, women did not achieve equal recognition or respect within the culture of skateboarding, and the same *L.A. Times* article featuring O'Neal and Von Essen claimed that most pro skaters are men and many girls associated with the sport are fans looking for "'cute guys.'"[246] Still, it is clear that the sport's relationship to girls and women was malleable and changing. While important on its own terms, this development was also crucial to masculinity. As masculinity and femininity are mutually constitutive, changing norms regarding female participation surely shift the context of skateboarding so that it may allow for alternative definitions of masculinity.

Moreover, even as skateboarding achieved heightened legitimacy via technology, marketing, and new and daring tricks, it maintained a kinship to more "expressive" and graceful modes. Arguably, this kinship, along with skateboarding's riskiness, has created a sporting space in which young men can at one and the same time conquer space, progress toward larger tricks, and express themselves artistically.

A Fading Fad?: Skateboarding 1979-1984

In 1977, some industry insiders were already direly forecasting the 2nd demise of skateboarding. George Powell of Powell Corp. worried that companies intent on cashing in on skateboarding's success would sell inferior products; at the same time, however, he also suggested that more adults might begin to participate in the sport, thus maintaining

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[244] Elliott Almond, p. OC1.
[245] *Ibid*, p. OC8.
[246] Penelope McMillan, B3.

or increasing its popularity.[247] Still, in 1979 *The Washington Post* noted that the

Consumer Product Safety Commission was reporting such a dramatic decrease in

participation in skateboarding that it no longer felt a ban on skateboarding was necessary.

Money magazine stated that skateboard sales were down 50% between 1977 and 1978,

and in those same years, skateboarding injuries dropped from 140,070 to 87,800.

Moreover, the Commission suggested, those who were still skateboarding were tending

to do so in the more private and safer realm of skate parks.[248]

By 1979, roller skating had replaced skateboarding as the sport du jour, catching

on as a sport open to everyone, unlike skateboarding, which appealed to teenagers

generally and boys more specifically.[249] "'It's got beautiful demographics, just

beautiful,' says Sure-Grip's general manager, John Poe. "Skateboarding was all male, 10

to 15. This is everybody, 5 to 70 with a big bulge in females 40 to 45 – that group has

never had an athletic program.'"[250] Mr. Poe, almost certainly, was not celebrating the

development of sports accessible to women as a feminist win; rather, he was pointing to

the broad appeal of roller skating as an industry. Indeed, women were represented quite

frequently with rollerskates: Linda Ronstadt posed in roller skates for the cover of an

album, and *Playboy* featured a woman wearing only roller skates. Sharon Borstin

published *Keep on Rollin'*, which heralded the benefits of roller skating for women,

including burning calories, relieving menstrual pain and "strengthen[ing] vaginal

muscles."[251]

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[247] Scott Moore, p. OC1.
[248] Judy Mann, "Skateboard Fever," *The Washington Post*, May 25, 1979, B9.
[249] Edwin McDowell, "Roller Skates: 300,000 Pairs a Month," *New York Times*, May 13, 1979, p. F13.
[250] Henry Allen, "The New Fad Afoot," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1979, p. D1.
[251] *Ibid.*

By 1981, several reporters were again calling skateboarding a "fad," reducing it to a passing childhood phase with little social relevance. Sebastian DiCasoli, the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association's marketing director, said of rollerskating, "'It definitely isn't a fad, at least not like skateboards;'"[252] the *Los Angeles Times* asked, "Wonder what ever happened to skateboard parks,"[253] and *The Washington Post* suggested that video games had overtaken skateboards as the go-to youth activity.[254]

Skateboarding's demise in the late 1970s was indeed contested. In February 1979, a skateboarder told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, "'Skateboards were supposed to be a fad,'" but many people continued to skateboard, competitions and skate parks continued to be well-attended. The skater proclaimed, "'It's here to stay, and I think rollerskating is, too.'"[255] Continued discussion about the safety of skateboarding and potential bans, as well as coverage of events such as contests, skate parks, and exhibitions suggests that, though its popularity as a marker of youth culture may have faded, young people continued to engage in skateboarding in both public and private.[256] Furthermore, despite being reduced to a passing fad by most media accounts, skateboarding managed to maintain some of its relevance as a marker of troublesome youth, daredevils, and even teen rebellion. Californian Representative Barry M. Goldwater Jr. reported that his staff

[252] David J. Blum, "U.S. Makers Confident of Victory in Trade Battle with Cheap Skates," *Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 1981, 25.

[253] Scott Ostler, "Some Things Will Just Never Be the Same," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1983, D3.

[254] Jura Koncius, "Video Games: Regulating America's Latest Craze," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1981, VA1.

[255] Lynn Myking, "New Wheels Help Spur Revival," *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1979, SD_A4.

[256] On safety, see, for example "The Week in Review," L3.; Annette Rick, "Fifty-Four Hours," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1983, G8.; "Views and News," 48.; Mayerene Barker, "Law, Order Become Part of Curriculum," *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1981, SG8. On bans, see Barry M. Horstman, "Shrinking Territory Upsets S.D. Skaters," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1982, SD_A1. On events, see "Santa Monica Civic Shows Surfing Movie," WS6.; Debora Robinson, "Good Scouts Get Together to Show Off Their Skills," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1982, OC4.; Marc Appleman, "Celebrations, Color Will Mark Easter," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1983, SD_A1.; "Sierra Madre Plans Skateboard School," N2.; Don Snyder, "Skateboarder Plunges Feet First into Routines," *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1979, GB1.

made him give up his skateboard because "'They were worried about my image,'"[257] and several articles invoked skateboarding youth as signs of trouble.[258]

Michael Brooke suggests that skateboarding's second demise can be attributed to its "old nemesis, safety concerns," because many skate parks closed in response to high insurance premiums.[259] He also argues that skateboarding was a victim of its own success; as companies began to gain monetarily from the practice in the late 1970s, corporate values overtook a formerly untainted pastime. As I have demonstrated, however, skateboarding has always existed in relationship to and within mainstream culture; it has always been a product for sale; and it never enjoyed a pre-capitalist moment when it existed primarily for a mythically pure subcultural group. Nevertheless, even the mainstream media suggested that skateboarding's demise was due, in part, to the media's interest in it. In 1985, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted skateboard manufacturer Tom Sims: "'The sensationalism of the media hurt [skateboarding] tremendously. Media overemphasized certain elements, the more radical turns and maneuvers.'"[260]

In these interstitial years, when skateboarding no longer dominated mainstream representations of adolescent males, a niche media industry serving dedicated skaters developed. Once-popular *Skate Boarder* magazine transformed into *Action Now* and began to feature a wide variety of "action sports," including horseback riding, but two new publications devoted entirely to skateboarding were released: *Thrasher* magazine was first published in 1981, and *Transworld Skateboarding* was released in 1983.

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[257] Ellen Hume, "'Sharks Circling,' Hayakawa Concedes," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1981, A8.
[258] Liz McGuinness, "Cities Ponder What's in a Game," *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1981, D1, D16-17.; Sharon Launer, "Ah, the Sounds of Summer," *The New York Times*, July 12, 1981, LI20.
[259] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*, 45.
[260] Mike Granberry, "At 21, Top S.D. Skateboarder Is Sport's Old Man," *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 1985, SD_C25.

Thrasher and *Transworld Skateboarding*, as the two sign posts of the skateboarding world, established a discussion that defines skateboarding's existence in relation to mainstream culture to the present moment. Fausto Vitello, who owns the company Independent, a manufacturer of skateboard trucks (axles), started *Thrasher* with the following editorial statement: "Skateboarding attracts a unique person. It influences the rest of society. *Thrasher* is not about hypocrisy or selling out to corporate America. We are about skate and destroy."[261] Later, Vitello told *Sports Illustrated,* "'We just wanted to be outlaws. The mainstream thing hadn't worked, so we just terrorized. That was how we saw we could promote the sport.'"[262] George Powell also told the magazine, "'We knew skateboarding had to become a more underground activity to survive, that mystique was good for the sport.'"[263] Larry Balma, founder of *Transworld*, conceived his publication explicitly as an alternative to *Thrasher*, which he defined as "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll." *Thrasher*'s tone, he argued, turned off parents, and thus potential customers.[264] Despite their divergent approaches, both magazines were clearly interested in developing discursive constructions of skateboarding that would be marketable. Vitello and Powell's statements, especially, drive home the always-already commercial nature of skateboarding, even as it is being defined as rebellious and non-corporate. Toggling back and forth between mainstream and subcultural appeals even in its niche market, skateboarding is constantly in correspondence with the broader culture. These two poles of existence are crucial for understanding skateboarding's next wave, during which it was defined both as the domain of punk rebels and a highly athletic endeavor.

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[261] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*, 95.
[262] Karl Taro Greenfeld, "Skate and Destroy," *Sports Illustrated*, June 7, 2004.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*, 96.

"Skate and Destroy" or the New Little League? Corresponding Anew, 1985-1993

Skateboarding's drop in popularity was short lived, and by 1985, it was again the subject of feature articles discussing the state of male adolescents. In April 1985, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story on Tony Magnusson, who was "Believe it or not, a professional skateboarder." The paper noted that "skateboarders see a fight for acceptance as legitimate and long overdue. They may be men in a boys' world, but they're as serious as a 16-foot fall onto concrete."[265] This movement toward mainstream culture was fraught with contradiction from the beginning. Magnusson described skateboarding "'danger … freedom … a big rush, like walking on the edge of an out-and-out disaster,'" but the paper said, "it is also brutally competitive and serious stuff to the man-child heroes who don the equipment and risk its indiscretions."[266] Skateboard manufacturer Tom Sims characterized the industry as "'more of a grass-roots thing but climbing on a solid basis.'"[267] The *L.A. Times* also ran a story on Russ Howell, "The Pied Piper of Sidewalk Surfing," in which they claimed, "You hope the sport is making a more wholesome comeback, but you know it has a long way to go before society accepts it."[268] A "wholesome" sport with a punk image, the domain of man-children, a multimillion dollar grass roots industry, an edgy but serious endeavor, skateboarding in 1985 was loaded with contradictions, and these oppositions and incongruities follow it to the present moment.

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[265] Granberry, "At 21, Top S.D. Skateboarder Is Sport's Old Man," SD_C1.
[266] Ibid., SD_C24.
[267] Ibid., SD_C25.
[268] Dick Wagner, "Hanging 10 at 36," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1985, LB8.

By 1986, skateboarding was again popular enough to be featured in *Sports Illustrated*, this time with Tony Hawk as the central character.[269] His role as skateboarding's spokesperson is deeply contradictory and has been received in contradictory ways by contemporary skateboarders, as I discuss later, and *Sports Illustrated*'s 1986 profile helps to establish these contradictions. Of the sport more generally, *SI* reported:

> Today annual skateboard and accessory sales are again approaching $300 million. Models pose in Macy's catalog in skateboarding garb; MGM moguls are talking feature-length movies. But the sport is still struggling, split right down the middle. Anarchists to the left. Little Leaguers to the right. The Defiant Ones – artistic, almost poetic in many cases – live to skate the streets …. They're turned on by the breeze blowing in their hair and the nihilistic, satanic sounds of hard-core or speed rock groups like Metallica, Megadeath, and Slayer …. Across the fence stands the [National Skateboarding Association]. Its members are no less artistic or inclined to plaster their boards with skulls or skeletons, but the NSA strives for a more clean-cut, competitive and organized image.[270]

SI associated the former with *Thrasher* magazine and the latter with *Transworld Skateboarding* and reported, "Tony Hawk admits he sits 'right between' the two magazines in this culture clash."[271] The magazine's description of Hawk's "punk hunk look" emphasized his space in-between: "Blonde hair spills like a waterfall over the left side of Hawk's soft-featured face. He comes across as articulate, sensitive, unswayed by others," but his knees are also "bloodied and scarred by cement."[272]

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[269] Currently deemed "The Michael Jordan of skateboarding," Hawk has been tapped for numerous marketing endeavors by manufacturers of teen and "tween" products such as Bagel Bites, has played a key role in *The X Games* as both competitor and announcer, and has made appearances as himself or fictionalized versions of himself in media texts as diverse as *The Simpsons*, *CSI: Miami*, and *XXX*.
[270] Armen Keteyian, "Chairman of the Board," *Sports Illustrated*, November 24, 1986. http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/itw/informark/881/967/79172598w7/purl=rc1_GR GM_0_A4564033&dyn=5!xrn_3_0_A4564033?sw_aep=lom_wmichanna
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.

Sports Illustrated's depiction of Tony Hawk and skateboarding represents not only the practice's existence in-between what might be traditionally called "subculture" and "mainstream," but also represents the multiple masculinities encouraged by and represented within skateboarding. Both "hard core" and "sensitive," "aggressive" and "poetic," skateboarding boys can maintain the power implied by aggressive or dominant masculinities while expanding the realms of masculinity to thoughtful self-expression. The multiple discursive markers that follow skateboarding from this moment into current depictions are surely part of the reason that skateboarders in the 2000s can proclaim alternative masculinities that are not anti-patriarchal without appearing to notice the contradictions in their claims.

Between 1985 and 1993, skateboarding was represented equally as both rebellious and as an all-American sport, a practice for both punk teens and innocent schoolchildren. In 1985, Tony Hawk's father, Frank, president of the NSA and former Boy Scout Leader, convinced the Boy Scouts to take over the Del Mar Skate Ranch in order to alleviate its insurance difficulties. Though the Scouts would operate, for all intents and purposes, as an invisible partner, they did train the skate park employees "in the goals and principles of Scouting: citizenship, patriotism, character building and such."[273] In 1987, sporting-goods store owner Steven Grigorian told *The New York Times*,

> 'Some people think it's a radical activity, some kind of rebellion, involving a lot of hippie-types. Actually it's a very healthy sport that has a national sanctioning board …. A lot of kids use their boards for transportation, riding them to school, for example. And some use them for their paper routes.'[274]

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[273] Nancy Ray, "Scouts to Save Skateboard Park," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1985, SD_A4.

[274] Jack Cavanaugh, "Towns Cite Safety Cares as Skateboarding Gains," *The New York Times*, May 10, 1987, CN15. Though Grigorian certainly has a vested interest in encouraging skateboarding, his comment still speaks to the controversies surrounding the practice's image.

American Health magazine suggested skateboarding was an activity through which teenagers could channel their energy and aggression;[275] a letter to the *Washington Post* called skateboarding "wholesome and time-consuming fun,"[276] and the mother of an 11-year-old with HIV defended her son as "a regular kid," declaring that "He loves to skateboard."[277]

Between 1987 and 1992, skateboarding fashion became a clear marker of youthful cool,[278] and in 1992, Curad released neon bandages designed to match "kids' fashions, rollerblades and skateboards."[279] Skateboarding fashion was relevant-yet-hip-enough in 1992 for *Vogue* to run a feature article on it. Declaring skateboarding "a lasting subculture with its own patois, rituals, and fashion,"[280] *Vogue* praised both the "grace"[281] and "outlaw aura"[282] of skateboarding. Featuring a variety of photos of black and white teen males wearing baggy jeans, oversized shirts, and graffiti-style logos, the article concluded, "Skateboard culture may already be suffering the fate of punk: it's being institutionalized and marketed for a mass audience."[283]

Indeed, skateboarding had become a marker of youthful cool in the mainstream music, television, and film markets. Skate-punk hip hop artists the Beastie Boys released their first number one album, *Licensed to Ill* in 1986,[284] and Nickelodeon launched in

[275] Rich Levine, "Curbing Teen Violence," *American Health*, April 1989, 108.
[276] Richard Bienvenue, "A Little Bit of Noise, but a Whole Lot of Fun," *The Wasington Post*, A18.
[277] Dennis Hevesi, "Parents Vow to Protest Aids Student," *The New York Times*, September 16, 1990, 34.
[278] Michael Gross, "A Club Scene Just for Teen-Agers," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1987, 56.; Elaine Louie, "In Schools, Fashion Is Whatever Is 'Fresh'," *The New York Times*, September 22, 1987, C11.; Brenda Fowler, "Teen Taste: Like, Trendy," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1988, EDUC7.; Deborah Hofmann, "Clothes for Beach (or Mall or Main Street)," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1989, 44.
[279] Jene Stonesifer, "Kids' Fashion Cuts," *Washington Post*, April 23, 1992, 15.
[280] R. Rugoff, "Get Big! Fashions Worn by Skateboarders," *Vogue*, September 1992, 191.
[281] Ibid., 194.
[282] Ibid., 207.
[283] Ibid., 212.
[284] Beastie Boy Adam Yauch told *The New York Times* in 1992, "'I never go anyplace without my skateboard.'" Penelope Green, "Absolute Necessities," *The New York Times*, October 18, 1992, SMA94.

1986 and began airing *SK8TV* in 1990.[285] In 1987, *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* animated series began, and the Turtles loved not only pizza, but also skateboards. And perhaps the quintessential radical skater/ innocent child, Bart Simpson, came to network television in 1990.

Despite the skateboarding industry's – and *Transworld Skateboarding*'s – efforts to convince the public that skateboarding was simply a new mode of competitive sport, many media outlets continued to portray it as a highly rebellious activity. *People Weekly* introduced "the world of thrashing," a subculture of skateboard "punks – mohawked, skinheaded, tattooed types, proud of their bravado and oblivious to the dangers of hard surfaces."[286] A 1985 *Los Angeles Times* article also included young women in its depiction of rebellious skaters. The article suggested, "Audrey Ritter is strong, if not admirable. The 14-year-old … considers herself hell on four wheels. 'I skateboard, but I'm dangerous,' said Ritter …. 'I'm suicidal – a suicidal skater.'"[287]

Aside from these two articles, however, the press ignored female skaters, and by the early 1990s, as I will discuss, skateboarders were defined exclusively as male. In the interim, discussions of skaters as rebels continued. *Maclean's* dubbed skateboarders "hell on wheels,"[288] and *Time* ran an article describing skaters as "bigger, badder, radder and more streetwise than ever." The magazine also quoted one skateboarder declaring, "'I mean, this is not a "nice" sport like golf,'" and *Thrasher*'s Kevin Thatcher proclaimed

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[285] Tamar Lewin, "Hey There, Dudes, the Kids Have Grabbed a Network," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1990, H35.

[286] Susan Reed, "From Homemade Chutes to Steep Streets, San Francisco's Thrashers Just Love Riding for a Fall," *People Weekly*, December 3, 1984. http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodIdEAIM&docId=A3547814&source=gale&srcprod=EAIM &userGroupName=lom_umichanna&version=1.0

[287] Derek Raser and John McCoy, "Over Board," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1985, V_B13.

[288] Jane O'Hara, "Trouble in Paradise," *Maclean's*, April 6, 1987, 48.

skateboarders to be "'the punk-rockers of the sport set.'"[289] In 1990, *The Washington*

Post Magazine depicted skateboarders

> lighting up smokes and swigging Cokes …. [S]tripping down to T-shirts
> that reveal biceps decorated with some truly baroque tattoos. The boom
> box blares Metal Church – music that sounds like the midnight shift at the
> steel plant or a psychopathic dental drill or a garbage disposal eating a beer
> can.[290]

This article also made clear that women in this group serve solely as girlfriends

and spectators. "Two skate bettys in black leather jackets," the article says, "sit watching

[the skateboarding] with no noticeable interest." The article depicts the young women

reading books, smoking, drinking, eating, "and gossiping" about clothes and ruining the

skateboard ramps so that the skateboarding boys will be forced to stop skating.[291] To

channel John Berger, "Men act and women watch and appear bored."[292] Though here we

see women watching men, rather than vice versa, the men are still doing/ acting/

performing – displaying their agency – while the women are sitting on the sidelines.

Placing Boys on Display

Between 1989 and 1992 several articles took pains to define skateboarding as the

domain of young men. Reporter Peter Watrous described the Red Hot Chili Peppers'

"perfectly formed surfer bodies" and the Urban Dance Squad's video for "Deeper Shade

of Soul," as "advertisements for the good life in California, where boys can do what boys

do, which is play music and skateboard. Clearly this is a closed world that posits a type

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[289] Jay Cocks, "The Irresistible Lure of Grabbing Air: Skateboarding, Once a Fad, Is Now a National Turn-On," *Time*, June 6, 1988.
http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/itw/infomark/511/726/80486120w4/purl=rc1_GR
GM_0_A6389020&dyn=5!xrn_1_0_A6389020?sw_aep=lom_umichanna
[290] Peter Carlson, "Ragin' on the Ramp," *The Washington Post Magazine*, February 25, 1990, W23.
[291] Ibid., W25.
[292] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). Notably, the description of these young women echoes my own early experiences with skateboarders, as I have discussed.

of joy and community without female interruption."[293] Similarly, a 1989 article in

Seventeen magazine titled "Why Boys Have More Fun" suggested that while boys "are

attempting to perfect the art of bouncing a skateboard from their feet to their hand," girls

"are plotting a course that will lead them to become solid, self-sufficient grown-ups."[294]

The girls, however, are making a poor choice, for "worrying about things like your future

twenty-four-hours a day is not going to help."[295] These two reporters invoke a tired

stereotype of women as civilizing figures,[296] and they do so at a moment when a

"backlash" against feminism was consolidating in mainstream culture.[297]

Not simply an aggressive subculture, skateboarding had morphed into Never-

never Land, where young men could continue to act like boys, content in their playful

immaturity. In 1991, Spike Jonze, then 21, teamed with several others to develop *Dirt*, a

spin-off of then-popular *Sassy*, an alternative to other teen magazines like *YM* and

Seventeen. *Dirt* editors had been employed with smaller BMX and skateboarding

magazines, and *Dirt* was designed as a general-interest magazine for teen boys, but it

relied upon skateboarding as a cultural marker.[298] By 1995, *Dirt* was defunct,[299] and

Spike Jonze later went on to produce a variety of niche skateboarding videos and now

owns his own skateboarding companies, "girl" and "chocolate."

This playful boys' culture, however, was also clearly a space in which boys were

being looked at. Surveilled by authoritative adults, skaters also became the object of

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[293] Peter Watrous, "Pop Turns the Tables - with Beefcake," *The New York Times*, February 10, 1991, H27.
[294] Jim Schaefers, "Why Boys Have More Fun," *Seventeen*, July 1989, 68.
[295] Ibid., 69. Emphasis in original.
[296] Garry Whannel, "From Pig's Bladders to Ferraris: Media Discourses of Masculinity and Morality in Obituaries of Stanley Matthews," in *Sport, Media, Culture: Global and Local Dimensions*, ed. Alina Bernstein and Neil Blain (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003).
[297] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).
[298] S. Enfield, "Boy Talk," *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, September 1991.
[299] Patrick Phillips, "Boy Wonder Gets the Purple Crayon," *The New York Times*, May 7, 1995, 59.

marketers. Reporter Watrous discussed skateboarding as part of a new era of "beefcake" in depictions of men, suggesting that "Feminism, in its attempt to give decision-making powers to the exploited, inadvertently allowed for a whole new type of commerciality" in which women (and apparently men, as well) exploit themselves as a mode of power. Images of skateboarders in videos are, for Watrous, both characteristic of a moment in which men must be vigilant of their own bodies as well as signs of a men's-only playground.[300] *Sassy* also discussed skater boys' performances in article titled "Skater Babes: Asexual or Not?" The article gushes, "Skater boys. Yummmm," and suggests, "Practically every girl knows why all skater boys are babes: They are the perfect combination of attitude and excess fabric." But, 16-year-old author Mary-Kate Arnold notes, skaters rarely seem to express any interest in women, and "that's probably the very reason we're so attracted to them." The article makes clear that skateboarding is a boys' culture, and despite their apparent disinterest, skateboarders are defined as heterosexual. But, the article claims, "they're just not worthy of our attention. They're too obsessed with their concrete fantasies to ever give a relationship the attention it deserves." Perhaps more importantly, Arnold pointed out the discomfort many male skateboarders exhibited when being watched. "Sort of like how girls feel when guys watch them walk down the street, eh?" she teased.[301]

Sassy's short and snappy critique keeps heterosexuality firmly at front, a move particularly necessary for denying any homoeroticism in boys-only cultures. Though Watrous suggested that women now had enough power to exploit themselves (!), the exclusion of girls from boys' culture only serves to further marginalize them. In the late

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[300] Watrous, "Pop Turns the Tables - with Beefcake."
[301] Mary-Kate Arnold, "Skater Babes: Asexual or Not?," *Sassy*, December 1992, 46-47.

'80s and early '90s, the adolescent girls on the edges of skate culture played one key role: they watched the boys in order to shore up the heterosexuality of skate culture. Not quite the innocent white youth of the Little League, but also not overtly rebellious teens like Dogtown's Z-Boys, the skaters of this moment were positioned as cool, cute, and stylish boys who hovered on the outskirts of mainstream culture.

Teen Demographics and *The X Games*, 1995-1997

In the mid-90s, the teen youth market began to grow, in part because of a growth in the number of teens. In 1994, the Rand Youth Poll reported that American teens were spending $61 billion each year on goods for themselves and were influencing $139 billion of their parents' spending decisions each year. What's more, the experts at this time predicted that this spending would increase between 12 and 15 percent each year through 1999.[302] Surveys in 1998 were showing that teenagers were helping their parents with the shopping, and therefore were highly influential in household products, but were also spending lots of money on themselves.[303] By 1999, *Advertising Age* reported that "Teen boys pack spending power estimated at $650 billion a year."[304]

In 1995, ESPN introduced *The Extreme Games*, which *TV Guide* described as "the first truly 'gnarly' (translation: cool) made-for-TV sports show."[305] *The Extreme Games* were conceptualized by Ron Semiao, a programmer for ESPN2, after he took note of multiple advertisements utilizing extreme sports. From the beginning, *The Extreme Games* were designed to take advantage of this trend, and the programmers worked to

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[302] Esther D'Amico and L. Maxine Sanford, "Pint-Size Purchasers," *Home Office Computing*, October 1994, 98.

[303] Jennifer Steinhauer, "Lulu and Her Friends Are, Therefore They Shop," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1998, G6.

[304] Petrecca, "Going to Extremes," 37.

[305] Michael Hiestand, "Going to Extremes," *TV Guide*, June 24-30, 1995, 32.

maintain the "extreme" tone of these individualistic sports through extreme production values. "[E]xpect wild camera angles, rock music, and announcers who know each sport's slang phrases," *TV Guide* declared.[306] *TV Guide* further shored up the notion that the sports featured in *The Extreme Games* were different from other sports by pointing out that the prize money, totaling $370,000 for the entire event, was a pittance compared to other sports. No worry, the magazine noted, because "Most extremists insist that they compete for the love – and thrill – of their sport, and they probably do."[307]

　　The Extreme Games – deemed *The X Games* by 1996 – cut a skillful path through the counterculture/mainstream athlete dichotomy set up by *Thrasher* and *Transworld* magazines. The event represented "outlandish, on-the-edge sports"[308] but also "true athletes."[309] ESPN marketed its event skillfully, deeming extreme sports "sheer unadulterated athletic lunacy" in its promotional materials. Marketing exec George Bodenheimer claimed, "'These sports come from the streets, not from a TV studio.'"[310] For skateboarding specifically, the mainstream press made clear that despite its success in the wake of *The X Games* and an Olympic showcase, "skateboarding has not entirely shed its underground image, which might explain its attraction to teenagers …. It may be the only sport in which participants can get arrested."[311]

　　The *Games* also showcased the branding power of extreme sports. Marketers for the first games included Taco Bell, Mountain Dew, Chevy Trucks, Miller Lite Ice, and

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[306] Ibid., 33.
[307] Ibid., 34.
[308] Michael Burgi, "Don't Try This at Home," *Mediaweek*, June 12, 1995, 24.
[309] Hiestand, "Going to Extremes," 35. See also Stuart Chirls, "Extreme Gear," *Popular Mechanics*, May 1996.
[310] Stuart Elliott, "*The X Games*: Going to Extremes in an Effort to Tap a Growing Segment of Sports," *The New York Times*, June 21, 1996, 6.
[311] David Winzelberg, "Skateboarding, a Big Business, Seeks More Venues on L.I.," *The New York Times*, October 27, 1996, LI13.

Pontiac Sunfire.[312] Marketers delighted in the Games' alignment with their consumers:

Janine Bousquette of Pepsico claimed that *The X Games* "'reinforces [Mountain Dew's]

active and cutting-edge image," and Peter Waller of Taco Bell said, "'*The X Games* are a

distinctive property with an outdoor attitude that delivers a pure audience. *The Games*

reflect the free-spirited, energetic attitude of our consumers.'"[313]

More than an "energetic attitude," *The X Games* represented a shift in interests

from team-based to individualized sports. In 1997, *The New Yorker* ran an article

discussing the new marketing strategies of the NFL, which hired MTV's co-president,

Sara Levinson, to remake its image. Levinson's hiring represented a major shift in the

NFL's strategy, and not simply because she was a woman. The League wanted Levinson

to bring MTV's noncomformist values and rock and roll aesthetic to the traditionally

disciplined, team-based sport, without, of course, alienating its older and more traditional

fans. The article notes that changes in the sport's rules – the introduction of free agency

meant that players could go on "the open market" four years after being drafted –

encouraged players to see and market themselves as individuals rather than team players.

Further, more general cultural shifts, from an economy based in physical labor to one

based in information and entertainment, encouraged us to value creativity and

individuality over the willingness to follow rules. Levinson explained that the NFL did

not have a "rebellious" image that young people could relate to, and Rick Welts, the

president of NBA Properties, explained that youth were responding well to the NBA's

personalized marketing of individual players. "Football players, on the other hand –

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[312] Burgi, "Don't Try This at Home," 24.
[313] Elliott, "*The X Games*: Going to Extremes in an Effort to Tap a Growing Segment of Sports," 6.

hulks behind helmets – are faceless performers for the team. Football is about character, not personality."[314]

Such cultural shifts are surely crucial for understanding the rise of the individualistic sports represented in *The X Games*, though participants also invoke a more personalized dissatisfaction with the on-the-ground patriarchy that traditional sports – and their coaches – represent. Shaun Palmer, a snowboarder and mountain biker, told *Time* "that individualistic extreme sports are 'a lot better than going to football practice every day and having your coach yell at you.'"[315]

Cooptation and Rebellion, 1998-2001

By 1998, the mainstream press was beginning to discuss the ways in which extreme had gone mainstream while at the same time maintaining that extreme sports were alternative and edgy. As *Forbes* reported, "Extreme sports are coooool. Edgy, adrenaline-inducing pursuits."[316] In fact, the games were so cool that NBC launched its own version, *The Gravity Games*, in 1999. Still, *Forbes* claimed, "These guys are no Michael Jordans," for the athletes' involvement in extreme sports was not resulting in huge incomes. [317] *Sport* suggested that, while extreme sports "emphasize freedom and self-expression and are fueled by equal parts talent and adrenaline" and are characterized by … a somewhat rebellious manner," their stars, such as Tony Hawk, are "overexposed."[318]

Marketers were indeed wary of attempts to co-opt this subculture. *Forbes* warned of the fate of Nike's 1995 attempt to break into the skate shoe market. Though the

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[314] J. Seabrook, "Tackling the Competition," *The New Yorker*, August 18, 1997, 47.
[315] Karl Taro Greenfeld, "A Wider World of Sports," *Time*, November 9, 1998, 81.
[316] Peter Spiegel, "Gen-X-Tremist Pitchmen," *Forbes*, December 14, 1998, 188.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Dan Gordon et al., "Future Shock," *Sport*, September 1999, 93.

company released an award-winning marketing campaign depicting golfers, runners, and tennis players being chased by police and asking, "What if we treated all athletes the way we treat skateboarders?" a boycott led by skateboard manufacturer Consolidated Skateboards rendered the shoe unsuccessful. Tony Hawk told *Forbes,* "'Nike has a tainted image, because people consider it cashing in on skateboarding's success.'" Still, *Forbes* reported, many marketers had been successful in their appropriation of skateboarding, and Hawk advised, "'You have to make sure that whatever you're doing is hard core.'"[319] He later told *The New York Times* that he had rejected a proposal to market pasta shaped like him,[320] and his manager and sister, Patricia Hawk, refuses to sell the Tony Hawk clothing line anywhere but department stores.[321] In a later article, *Forbes* explained the limits some extreme athletes were putting on their endorsements, including refusing sponsorship by alcohol and tobacco companies and "reject[ing] brands that depict their sport as a sideshow."[322] *Business Week* discussed shoe company Vans' strategy for maintaining its authenticity, noting that it focused its efforts on "events, sponsorships, and even a documentary film [*Dogtown and Z-Boys*] to celebrate the outlaw nature of skateboarding culture." Vans' efforts were apparently successful, for its sales were up 23% between 2000 and 2001.[323]

At the same time, however, extreme athletes, and skateboarders more particularly, were still defined as edgy or alternative. Reporting on *The Gravity Games*, *Advertising Age* claimed that the festival's "stars aren't exactly the clean-cut, All-American types,"

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[319] Zina Moukheiber, "Later, Skater," *Forbes*, November 29, 1999, 108.

[320] Rob Givens, "Skateboarding's Best Seller," *New York Times Upfront*, December 11, 2000, 21.

[321] L. Goldman, "From Ramp to Riches," *Forbes*, July 5, 2004. Apparently, department store prices will demonstrate Hawk's authenticity, for she went on, "You won't ever find a Hawk T shirt for $5 in the discount bin. It ain't gonna happen."

[322] Lea Goldman, "Going to Xtremes," *Forbes*, April 3, 2000, 140. See also Terry Lefton, "Alt-Sports: Popular, Yes, but No Salvation for Licensing," *Brandweek*, February 7, 2000, 32.

[323] Arlene Weintraub, "Chairman of the Board," *Business Week*, May 28, 2001, 96.

and that after a rain-out, the show's organizers were worried the athletes might spend so

much time partying that they would not be able to resume competition. *Rolling Stone* ran

a feature on professional skateboarder Bob Burnquist, describing him as a "Fearless

skater who completes death-defying tricks with ease."[324] Jake Phelps, editor of *Thrasher*,

told *Rolling Stone* that he had discovered Burnquist in Brazil and that "skateboarding 'is

about the constant thrill of scaring yourself.'"[325] Though Burnquist's father is American,

and he reads, phenotypically, as white, his Brazilian roots may contribute to the

construction of him as fearless. As with much of its discursive history, these rebellious

attributes were a source of conflict. Jim Fitzpatrick, executive director of the

International Association of Skateboard Companies, told *The New York Times*, "'They're

not urban gangsters or terrorists who are hell-bent on destroying significant and historic

locations,'"[326] and a Parks and Recreation director told the paper that in spite of their

clothing and chain wallets, skateboarders "'are the leaders of their high school' …. Many

are honors students or Eagle Scouts."[327] Not "urban gangsters or terrorists," but "Eagle

Scouts," skateboarders' construction as rebellious quite easily brought up signifiers of

race. Fitzpatrick's claim is notably fraught by racist stereotypes – he all but says

skateboarders are white kids, and so one need not worry about them. Clearly, industry

folks and authority figures had an interest in determining whether skateboarders were

participating in a harmless rebellion expressed sartorially – the domain of white kids who

during the week were honors students – or a dangerous, scary, and purposeful destruction

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[324] Alec Wilkinson, "Bob Burnquist," *Rolling Stone*, June 10, 1999, 105.
[325] Ibid., 108.
[326] "Skateboarding: Hazardous New Fad for Kids," 33.
[327] Susan Pearsall, "Soaring Teen-Agers at the Skate Park," *The New York Times*, October 11, 1998, CT19.

of "significant and historic locations" – apparently the work of "urban gangsters" (read black kids) or terrorists (read Arab kids). Whiteness, it seems, was good for business.

Whether skateboarders were defined as rebellious trouble-makers or all-American good kids, they were certainly utilized as markers of youthful style. *Advertising Age* suggested, "the adrenaline athletes are more accessible role models for the baggy-pants crowd, and they're beginning to show up as endorsers of everything from sneakers, sports drinks and fast-food to telecommunications products and automobiles."[328] Between 1994 and 1999, several publications invoked skateboarding style as trendy and hip. A "cool-hunter" for Converse shoes deemed skateboarders, along with transvestites, to be "the most innovative and experimental of dressers,"[329] and in 1998 *The Times* reported that Calvin Klein had appropriated the skateboarders' wide-legged jeans.[330]

Though they were still regarded, at times, as rebels or trouble makers, extreme athletes were also aligned with "American" values. Several journalists attempted to explain the popularity of extreme sports in terms of the cultural moment, and each suggested that risk-taking was part of the American fabric:

> The early explorers – men who were willing to set off in the direction of the edge of the world with no clue where they were headed – were extreme, as were the Western Pacific Islanders who jumped off cliffs with vines knotted around their ankles.[331]

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[328] Petrecca, "Going to Extremes," 36.

[329] Jennifer Steinhauer, "Feet First into the Clubs," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1994, V1.

[330] Frank DeCaro, "Forgotten, but Not yet Gone: French Blue, Platforms, and Pierced Navels," *The New York Times*, July 19, 1998, ST2. See also Amy M. Spindler, "Flip-Flop: The Runway Leads the Street," *The New York Times*, September 19, 1995; Arnold, "Skater Babes: Asexual or Not?."; Maryellen Gordon, "It's Fitted Skaters Vs. Baggy Ravers," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1998; Joseph Oppedisano, "Wheel Men," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1999.

[331] "With Money on the Line, Coast Skateboards Roll," *The New York Times*, September 7, 1976, 104.

Invoking both the white masculinity of early explorers and the "exoticness" of Islanders, the magazine manages to suggest that extreme sports are a part of a long history of daring, adventure, and achievement. *Time* magazine also made such claims:

> America has always been defined by risk; it may be our predominant national characteristic. It's a country founded by risk takers fed up with the English Crown and expanded by pioneers – a word that seems utterly American. Our heritage throws up heroes – Lewis and Clark, Thomas Edison, Frederick Douglass, Teddy Roosevelt, Henry Ford, Amelia Earhart – who bucked the odds, taking perilous chances.[332]

The magazine also suggests that Americans would be more interested in creating opportunities for such chances during a time of relative peace: "at the end of a decade of American triumphalism abroad and prosperity at home, we could be seeking to upsize our personalities, our sense of ourselves."[333] Such risk-taking could be the path to greatness, the magazine suggests, but it also helps to explain why Americans were so "forgiving" of Bill Clinton during "Monicagate." *Men's Journal* editor Mark Bryant told *The New York Times* that extreme sports helped Generation Y "'reject the apparent dullness of modern life'" in a successful economy.[334]

Tony Hawk provided perhaps the most direct image of skateboarding as all-American. Portrayed frequently in his role as a husband and father, and an entrepreneur,[335] Hawk also often espoused the value of hard work. Hawk told *Sport*, "'[T]he kids who see us really understand the level of athleticism and dedication required to succeed – that it's not just a 'go for it' sport that takes guts to try,'"[336] and he told

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[332] Karl Taro Greenfeld, "Life on the Edge," *Time*, September 6, 1999, 29.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Patricia Leigh Brown, "This Is Extremely Sporting," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2000, 2.
[335] See Dan Gordon, "Airborne," *Sport*, June 1999.; Ellen Liberman, "Gravity Games - Hawk Is Skating's Chairman of the Board," *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, September 11, 1999., which notes "Like all parents, he is juggling late-night feedings with work the next day" (1A). See also C. Luna, "Tony Hawk," *Current Biography* 61, no. 6 (2000): 22-25.
[336] Gordon, "Airborne," 97.

Sports Illustrated for Kids, "'When I skate, I never go half way. If I don't do my best, it eats at me. It kills me inside.'"[337] Hawk also continued to lobby for skateboarding's acceptance: "'[W]e are finally getting the legitimate coverage about the talent and athletics instead of the lifestyles, the tattoos and the hairdos. Maybe that's part of our culture, but that's not what the emphasis should be,'" he told the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*.[338]

Women's Sports and Fitness also suggested that extreme sports were "a mode of self-expression … a reaction against everything considered to be mainstream" that was "co-opted as a way to sell stuff."[339] *The New York Times* was even more direct: "While high-risk, attitude-laden extreme sports … might have once been about having fun and busting free of the confining rules of traditional sports, they are now increasingly about money,"[340] and in October, the paper claimed, "'Mere skateboarders have become nearly as dull as the once-amazing triathletes and endurance athletes."[341] An ad for Wild Turkey Kentucky Bourbon made fun of extreme sports' trendiness,[342] and *Sport* deemed "the skateboarder-as-tattooed-troublemaking-outcast-teen … a tired cliché."[343]

The New York Times also quoted Kevin Thatcher of *Thrasher*, who declined ESPN's invitation to work with them on *The X Games* skateboarding contests because "'TV flattens skateboarding into one big ad.'" Kevin Semiao, the creator of *The X Games*, retorted that the event encouraged more kids to skateboard, and so was highly

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[337] Sean Mortimer, "Chairman of the Board," *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, July 1998, 62.
[338] Liberman, "Gravity Games - Hawk Is Skating's Chairman of the Board," 1A.
[339] "With Money on the Line, Coast Skateboards Roll," 105.
[340] Bill Donahue, "For New Sports, Espn Rules as the X-Treme Gatekeeper," *The New York Times*, March 11, 1998, G2.
[341] Andrea Kannapell, "Taking Sports to the Limit," *The New York Times*, October 11, 1998, NJ1.
[342] Andrew McMains, "Call of the Wild: Saatchi Unveils Bourbon Effort," *Adweek*, January 18, 1999, 26.
[343] Gordon, "Airborne," 97.

supportive of the industry.[344] In many ways, the debate between Thatcher and Semiao

skillfully manages and reinforces the false dichotomy between subculture and

mainstream by suggesting that skateboarding should be – and was, at one time – one or

the other. As I have noted, *Thrasher*'s long-running campaign to define skateboarding as

subcultural was in and of itself an effort to market the sport. Though *Thrasher* promotes

itself as an "authentic" part of a "pure" skateboarding culture, the culture to which it

refers never did exist. On the other hand, as my interviews with skateboarders reveal,

The X Games focus on competition does feel, in part, like a corruption of the practice's

values, for many skateboarders are in fact attempting to escape the competitive world of

traditional sports.

Mythmaking, Brandmaking, and Authenticity, 2001-2006

In 2001, former professional skateboarder Stacey Peralta released *Dogtown and

Z-Boys*, a documentary depicting the lives of the Zephyr Skateboarding Team based in

South Santa Monica and Venice, California (Dogtown). As I have noted, this award-

winning documentary[345] positions the 1970s skateboarding era as a moment of working-

class teen rebellion. More than telling a partial history of skateboarding, this

documentary produces a myth central to skateboarding's current definition as a

mainstream-but-edgy culture. Released just as the mainstream media were beginning to

worry about marketers' cooptation of skateboarding, the film serves as a cultural

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[344] Donahue, "For New Sports, Espn Rules as the X-Treme Gatekeeper," G2.

[345] *Dogtown* won both the audience and directors awards for documentaries at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival as well as the IFP/West Independent Spirit Award for best documentary. See Pinsker, "Personal Documentaries Are New Form of Marketing," 12.

reminder that the practice is supposedly rooted in rebellion – and thereby, I argue, mitigates the dampening effect that marketing may have on skateboarding's image.[346]

Though the mainstream press noted the self-mythologizing operating in the documentary – it does, after all, feature Peralta and his friends prominently – critics were generally enamored by what Roger Ebert called its "infectious enthusiasm."[347] More importantly, the press used the film as an opportunity to discuss skateboarding's "roots." *The New York Times* reported in one article,

> The golden days are resurrected in explosive, freewheeling montages
> that synchronize old home movies and [skateboarding photographer Craig]
> Stecyk's photographs with a rock soundtrack … into a synergistic rush that
> captures the sport's exuberant bad-boy aesthetic and lends it a mystical glamour.
> Beyond being an exhibition of physical prowess and daring, the essence of
> skateboarding excellence is that elusive personal quality known as style. That's
> why the movie's suggestion that skateboarding is an art form – with its emphasis
> on grace, inventiveness, and self-expression – doesn't seem so far-fetched.[348]

Dogtown and Z-Boys reinserted notions of style and expression into discussions of skateboarding that had come to be dominated by a focus on *The X Games* and competition. Of course, *Dogtown*'s styles were quickly appropriated by the fashion world. Vintage skateboard t-shirts and Vans became popular, and high fashion picked up on this trend. One fashion industry insider said of the *Dogtown* style, "'So much of youth culture has been overexposed and this feels so fresh. They had so much attitude and style, and it was so natural – the bright, colorful, sporty, fun feeling.'" Another said, "'That whole Dogtown look is really so much about lifestyle and belonging, and the mix

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[346] Of course, I have noted already that Vans Inc. sponsored the film, investing approximately $750,000. This investment is only evident in the logo for Vans Off the Wall Production Company in the opening credits and in the frequent appearance of Vans shoes on the featured skateboarders. Still, Peralta suggests that Vans' sponsorship ensured that he could control the development and production of the film. See Ibid.
[347] Roger Ebert, "*Dogtown and Z-Boys* Review," http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20020510/REVIEWS/205100301/1023.
[348] Stephen Holden, "Skating on Top of the World During an Endless Summer," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2002, 25. See also Neil Strauss, "Where the Wheel Was Reinvented," *The New York Times*, April 28, 2002, 17.

of sunshine and rebellion is really intoxicating.'"[349] The appropriation of this image did

not seem to negate its power, for even 2005's fictionalized version of *Dogtown*, titled

Lords of Dogtown and written by Stacey Peralta, was well-received. *The New York*

Times accredited director Catherine Hardwicke (who also made *Thirteen*) for its

"appropriately scruffy, unpolished look consistent with the resourceful, do-it-yourself

aesthetic of the place and time it depicts …. [The] scenes have both the loose, stop-and-

start rhythms of a long summer day and the restless, competitive energy of young men in

the heat of adolescence." The reviewer continued, "there is something about it that feels

right – the looseness of its construction, the eclectic welter of its soundtrack, the faces of

its cast."[350] *Entertainment Weekly* deemed the film "rare in its grit and authenticity," and

praised its use of "a God-on-the-street's-eye view of skateboard heaven,"[351] and though

these point-of-view shots evoke reality in their tone, they are also a convention of the

niche skateboarding videos, which I discuss later.

> *The New York Times* summed up skateboarding's image as such:
>
> Much of its current appeal comes from the image of skaters as loners
> whose very status as outsiders makes them all members of a tribe of sorts.
> This quality of being an individual and yet still belonging is classic
> Americana – and it's what corporations and magazines try to sell with T-
> shirts that say 'Skate or Die.' Perhaps this makes skateboarding not an
> extreme sport, but a trick of balancing extremes.[352]

Skateboarding certainly did begin to balance extremes, as I have been arguing,

and *The X Games* also worked to maintain the edginess of extreme sports even as it

proclaimed their centrality to modern athletics. "While business has gotten bigger," *TV*

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[349] Betts, "The Whoosh of What You'll Be Wearing," 6.

[350] A.O. Scott, "When California Started Riding on Little Wheels," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2005, 13.

[351] O. Gleiberman, "You Say You Want a Skateboard Revolution? Then Hold On," *Entertainment Weekly*, June 10, 2005, 81-82.

[352] Bushmiller, "Nancy," 10.

Guide reported, "the sports themselves are still conducted in a heady cloud of street-style, indie machismo. Competitors perform against a pumping wall of music."[353] The industry continually worked to maintain this image. *The New York Times* reported,

> An insider's understanding has kept the lucrative board-sports industrial complex – skateboarding, snowboarding and surfing – mostly in the hands of hard-core practitioners, even as these sports have grown more popular. Mainstream companies like Nike that have easily penetrated other sports often find themselves on the outside looking in, struggling to gain traction with action-sports athletes and fans who define their world by its anti-establishment bent.[354]

The article further explained the meaning of "authenticity," which in large part relied on distribution decisions, rather than perceived level of sales. Lora Bordmer of Action Sports Retailer, a board-sports industry trade show, explained that exclusive distribution to smaller board shops – rather than to large retailers – is a key component of authenticity. In 2006, Nike was more successfully breaking into the skateboarding market by distributing its shoes in board shops and sponsoring small contests; Pacific Sunwear, a mall chain that sells extreme sports apparel, made a major mistake when it ran an ad in skateboarding magazines with a skateboard's trucks (axles) on backward.[355]

By the time *Dogtown* was released, Tony Hawk had become both a myth and a brand. Stacey Peralta called him "a part of American culture," and *Sport Illustrated* deemed him "a one-man marketing phenomenon" as well as "a legend in the world of skateboarding." Youth marketing company Alloy found him to be the "coolest big-time athlete" in a survey, and fellow professional skateboarder Bucky Lasek claimed, "He

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[353] Robbie Fraser, "Thrill Ride," *TV Guide*, August 10-16, 2002, 28.
[354] Matt Higgins, "In Board Sports, Insiders' Status Makes Gear Sell," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2006, 1.
[355] Ibid.

could put his name on toilet paper and sell it to the world."[356] Though, as I have noted,

Tony Hawk claims that he has made careful choices in order to preserve his authenticity,

his history in the sport as well as his sheer talent have also served this purpose. Still, his

image is constantly in question.

Marketer John Griffin called Tony Hawk "a guy who, for corporate America, can

reach parents. You get a family guy, a squeaky-clean guy." But Hawk's image is not all

goody-goody, for he appeared on MTV's *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam*, and *Jackass*

executive producer Jeff Tremaine reported, "'His concern about damage to his image

doesn't override his sense of humor.'"[357] Crucial to Tremaine's claim is the notion that

Hawk appeared in the MTV shows because he found them amusing – not because they

would balance his family-guy image well and remind viewers of his roots in the

skateboarding community. These roots have been used by corporations to project the

legitimacy of various mainstream products – *The X Games* owes its success, in part, to

Hawk's early involvement, as "He signed on and enlisted cool skateboarders who might

otherwise have rejected the event as crass commercialism."[358] Hawk also brought such

authenticity to Activision's line of Tony Hawk videogames: "An avid gamer, Hawk

insisted on creative input," advising the developers on the game's combinations of

skateboarding tricks as well as nixing over-the-top moves and cheesy settings.[359] In

2006, Hawk participated in a major cross-promotional endeavor with Jeep, *Rolling Stone*,

and Activision which included an "advertorial" in *Rolling Stone*, a Jeep Wrangler

outfitted with a skateboard, snowboard, and surfboard, an appearance by Jeep and its

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[356] Tim Layden, "What Is This 34-Year-Old Man Doing on a Skateboard? Making Millions," *Sports Illustrated*, June 10, 2002.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Goldman, "From Ramp to Riches."
[359] Ibid.

114

Toledo, Ohio factory in the latest Tony Hawk videogame, and several other initiatives.

Pat Hawk again made clear Tony's commitment to authenticity, noting that he was once a

teenager intent on spotting sell-outs. She told *The New York Times*, "'That's why Tony

doesn't have a deal with Nike'" or Gap – because skateboarders do not buy Nike or Gap

products. Conversely, Tony Hawk has explained that he endorses McDonald's because

"I take my kids to McDonald's. I always order a No. 2."[360]

Hawk's image, carefully maintained, is also carefully naturalized. His company,

Birdhouse, sponsors a team of street skateboarders (whose legitimacy has been less-

frequently challenged than the vert (vertical) skateboarders who are featured in *The X

Games*), and he makes surprise appearances on their tours in such mundane spaces as

Fargo and Wichita. Hawk also maintains a foundation that sponsors public skateparks,

and his demo fees support the foundation. He defends himself against claims of selling-

out by arguing that he skateboards for the love of it, rather than for the money or the

fame.[361] Hawk told *Time*,

> I always keep the focus of what I do on the skating itself. I've turned
> away plenty of endorsements and promotional opportunities when the
> basis was not around skating. Quality skating will always be at the fore-
> front of the image I project, and if I start sucking, then I don't deserve any
> of this stuff, and I won't be out there promoting it.[362]

This argument is supported in part by Hawk's history in a sport that has not always been

popular. His autobiography, distributed by Disney, takes care to detail Hawk's struggles

when street skating became more popular than vert, and he is routinely characterized as a

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[360] Stuart Elliott, "Tony Hawk's New Trick: 2 Marketers in 1 Campaign," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2006, 10. As I note later, this strategy seems to have been successful with at least one skateboarder, who excused Hawk's sponsorship of McDonald's as a true representation of his fondness for the chain.
[361] Layden, "What Is This 34-Year-Old Man Doing on a Skateboard? Making Millions."
[362] J. Ressner, "10 Questions for Tony Hawk," *Time*, May 9, 2005, 8.

skateboarder who did not take his success to heart at earlier times when skateboarding was popular.

In fact, Hawk is positioned as a success story in the face of other skateboarders who allowed fandom to go their head during skateboarding earlier heyday in the 1970s. Several cautionary tales enforce this notion while at the same time reminding audiences of skateboarding's rebellious undertones. *Stoked: The Rise and Fall of Gator*, a 2003 documentary by Helen Stickler, told the story of former professional skateboarder Mark "Gator" Rogowski, who is in jail for murder and rape. The film positions Gator as a legend of the 1980s skateboarding scene, an early professional who was making $100,000 annually in 1984, at the age of 17. As *The New York Times* reports, "the fame would prove destructive. Mr. Rogowski grew arrogant, alienating himself from his skateboard buddies, falling into trouble with the law," and in one scene in the movie, Gator says, "I love getting arrested. I'm one of the most illegal skaters in the circuit."[363] Filmmaker Helen Stickler, a former stripper, pushes this cautionary tale even further, suggesting that she could identify with Gator in that both skateboarding and stripping are "alternative communities, industries where 'youth and vitality are sold.'" That youth, she said, is fleeting and easily lost, and without it, Gator had nothing. [364] Though a review of the film notes that Rogowski had symptoms of manic depression, much of the film focuses on his poor response to fame.[365]

In yet another cautionary tale, *Sports Illustrated* ran a feature story on former professional skateboarder Christian Hosoi, who was a champion vertical skateboarder in

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[363] Lola Ogunnaike, "A Skateboard King Who Fell to Earth," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2003, 1.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Stephen Holden, "Review: *Stoked: The Rise and Fall of Gator*," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2003, 11.

the 1980s and 1990s with Tony Hawk and was invited to be a central contestant in the first *Extreme Games*. Hosoi did not attend the games, however, because in the zeal of his early fame and fortune, he had descended into drug addiction and was on the run from authorities. *Sports Illustrated*'s overview pits Hosoi and Hawk against one another, pointing out that Hawk's father instructed him to do calisthenics before contests while Hosoi's father "would alternate sucking pure air from an oxygen tank and taking bong hits."[366] Furthermore, Hosoi was highly successful in the mid-80s, sponsored by Oakley and Swatch and appearing in a Beastie Boys video as well as Coke and Pepsi ads. But, in response to that success, he "bought a Mustang, a Harley-Davidson, a tricked-out Jeep and a McLaren sports car, all before he had a driver's license. He hung out with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Beastie Boys, Ice-T and the actors River Phoenix and David Arquette," unlike Tony Hawk, whose father urged him to invest his money in a house.[367] Hawk reported, "'I didn't fall into the trap of celebrity and partying and burning out, so when things turned back around, I was one of the only guys from that generation still skating hard.'"[368] By 2005, Hosoi had been released from jail and was serving as an announcer at *The X Games*,[369] solidifying the notion that Hawk had taken the correct path.

Hosoi and Rogowski's stories serve several purposes. They operate as mythic cautionary tales, reminding audiences of a moment when skateboarding was supposedly rebellious, underground, and "subcultural." They suggest that skateboarding has a long history that should be remembered reverentially, and that its rebellious roots are

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[366] Greenfeld, "Skate and Destroy."
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Matt Higgins, "Champion Thanks a Legend of the Air up There," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2005, 3.

117

somehow innate to the practice – not a construction of the niche industry. At the same time, these stories remind us that Tony Hawk was a part of an industry that crashed and that, through both business acumen and dedication to the practice, he managed to survive. Hawk, then, cannot be a sell-out, for he clearly loves skateboarding so much that he stuck with it even when times were tough for other skateboarders. Finally, these tales remind us that fame can have consequences, and so current skateboarding stars should not get caught up in money, attention, or celebrity. Rather, they should, like Hawk, keep their focus on skateboarding.

Alongside these reminders of rebellion, however, the mainstream press between 2003 and 2006 began to suggest that attitudes about skateboarders were changing. By 2002, the press was certain that skateboarding and extreme sports had become firmly entrenched in youth culture. One 26-year-old told *American Demographics*, "'Extreme sorts are my Monday Night Football,'"[370] and the president of American Sports Data, Inc. said "'These new sports are an authentic slice of the wider youth culture and not just a fad.'"[371] In 2002, *Better Homes and Gardens*, which had long decried the dangers of skateboarding, noted, "The label 'extreme sport' is outdated for skateboarding, as is the stereotype of skateboard kids – radical daredevils with multicolored hair who hang out on street corners." The magazine deemed the practice "a mega sport that attracts the whole family," pointed out its cooperative nature, and noted that professional skater Bob Burnquist likened it to a new form of playing catch.[372]

Hartford, Connecticut was dubbed a skateboarding hot spot, and rather than fighting this designation, town leaders embraced its potential for increased tourism.

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[370] Raymond, "Going to Extremes," 28.
[371] Ibid., 29.
[372] Debbe Geiger, "Get Aerial," *Better Homes and Gardens*, June 2002, 112-19.

While the owner of a local skate shop there worked to promote Hartford's skateboarding

potential, convincing national skateboarding companies to tape parts of their videos in the

town, local officials tacitly and explicitly supported the effort. The Hartford mayor,

rather than denouncing the skaters' increased presence, said, "'I hope they're spending

money in our city,'" and local business people, while worried about liability and thus

asking skateboarders not to use their private property, characterized the practice as

"exciting" and the skateboarders as "friendly." Local fast food restaurants noted their

increased revenues, and an employee of Hartford Proud and Beautiful stated vigorously,

"Don't you write anything bad about those kids. Skateboarding is just youth and

exuberance."[373] In November 2003, *The New York Times* reported, "Demographers who

made a fetish of soccer moms in the 90s may well be swooning over skateboard moms by

this decade's end," as many suburban parents were supporting their children's

skateboarding by allowing them to build ramps in their backyards. The newspaper also

reported that liability was not a major issue at public skate parks, for the Consumer

Product Safety Commission had found that skateboarding yielded a smaller percentage of

injuries than basketball and football, and Doug Wyseman, who served local governments

as a risk management consultant, noted that skateboard injuries do not often result in

lawsuits, for skateboarders see them as "a badge of courage."[374] In 2005, the Manhattan

Parks Department in New York City decided to redesign the Brooklyn Banks near the

Brooklyn Bridge as a "skateboard-friendly park," that would include benches, ramps, and

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[373] Abigail Sullivan Moore, "Skateboarding Heaven," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2003, 1.
[374] Bradford McKee, "Ramping up the Suburbs," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2003, 1. See also
Robert Strauss, "Skaters Want a Better Image," *The New York Times*, January 25, 2004.

planters on which skaters could practice as well as areas to be used in other capacities.[375] More than a brand and more than a myth, skateboarding has again been legitimized as a relatively harmless – but still cool – practice.

It remains to be seen whether skateboarding's continued acceptance in mainstream culture will cause its eventual downfall. Though I have argued throughout that the practice's "subcultural" roots are mostly a discursive production of the media, skateboarding is, nonetheless, an activity that has generated its own niche industry and culture and is supported by enthusiasts who regard it as, as I note in the next chapter, a location of difference. Skateboarders are in constant correspondence with these depictions of their culture, and in their own spaces – particularly the skate shop – they teach one another how to manage skateboarding's appropriation. Through their discussions about and with niche skate media and their explications of skateboarding's appeals, skateboarders construct a seemingly "authentic" definition of their practice.

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[375] Justin Porter, "A Skateboarder Gets a Voice in the Redesign of a Beloved Spot," *The New York Times*, June 24, 2005.

Chapter 3

"Freedom on four wheels": Individuality, Self-Expression, and Authentic
Masculinity in a Skateboarding Community

"Skateboarding is freedom on four wheels."
(Brian, age 29, Ann Arbor, MI)

Introduction

During the summers of 2002, 2004, and 2006, I spent much of my time in a small

skateboard shop tucked below the street in Ann Arbor, Michigan. There, amidst a jumble

of skateboard gear, skateboarder boys gather regularly to meet up with one another before

skateboarding sessions, to take a break from skateboarding, to watch skateboarding

videos, or simply to hang out. More a clubhouse than a place of business, the skate shop

is home to a few worn out lounge chairs, a 13" television/VCR, and a metal rail sitting

approximately 8 inches off the ground, upon which skateboarders can practice their

tricks. Sitting in the shop's exposed metal rafters are a multitude of worn-out or broken

skateboard decks (the skateboard itself, without the wheels or trucks – the axles –

attached). Each of the four walls is covered with handmade pictures, professional

posters, racks of skateboarding shoes and new skate decks, and the shop's glass counter,

which houses skateboard wheels, trucks, and ball bearings, is peppered with stickers

issued by various skateboard companies. The area behind the counter is littered with

shoeboxes, CDs, skateboards, magazines, and videos, and crowded racks of

skateboarding apparel are gathered in the center of the room.

It is in this comfortable and stimulating space that the Ann Arbor skateboarding community is consolidated. Neither singular nor self-enclosed, this community is characterized by movement – individuals move in and out from season to season, members enjoy differing levels of intimacy with one another, and individuals gather together at varying levels of regularity. That is, within the large community of skateboarders who come to the skate shop regularly, there exists a variety of peer groups, cliques, and relationships. The skate shop operates as a space in which individuals who might not otherwise know one another meet and relate as skateboarders, first and foremost. It is here that the community, as a corresponding culture, develops and articulates the norms of the culture, its primary values, and so on. Corresponding with one another and with the media of skate life – particularly videos and skateboarding magazines[376] – and exploring the variety of ways in which their sensibilities correspond with mediated images, the boys instruct one another and themselves about their culture's norms of masculinity and the values of skateboarding.

The skateboarders who populate this shop love skateboarding, imagine it as central to their lives and identities, and consider it an everyday part of their lives. As 24-year-old Kiran told me, "It's like addictive too, you know. If I don't skateboard for 3 or 4 days, I start going crazy. I'm just like, 'Oh man, I need to skate!'" Through their discussions of the skateboarding community and the practice of skateboarding, it is possible to glean those values central to the skateboarders' lives, and in turn, to examine the ways in which these values align with those produced in the media of skate culture.

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[376] Unfortunately, this dissertation does not discuss skateboarding magazines, which like many niche publications, serve as instructional documents about the norms of the culture. An analysis of these magazines would be a productive way to explore more fully the ways that niche media interpellate their audiences and educate them in terms of cultural mores.

This chapter, then, serves as an analysis of those values, and in subsequent chapters, I discuss the media associated with the subculture.

This broad-ranging analysis of skateboarders as first-and-foremost a community – and only secondarily an audience – distinguishes my work from most audience research, which often defines its audience by either demographic variables[377] or fandom of a particular media text.[378] Though such work offers a great deal of insight in its own right, my work approaches audience studies more holistically, placing skateboarders' media use in the context of their everyday lives, their multiply-produced ideologies and values, and their interactions with one another. Examining how media and skateboarders' lives correspond in the production of their identities, my research is not primarily a consideration of how skaters talk back to media but instead constitutes a discussion of the construction of male youths' identity and the media's contribution to that construction. What follows below is an elaboration of the values and ideas central to skateboarders' identity.

Without fail, skateboarders speak passionately and lovingly of their practice; they make it clear that skateboarding is deeply important to their lives – some even suggest that it has changed their lives – and their descriptions of the community and its practices are delivered with a sense of reverence. Though mainstream culture has managed to paint skateboarders as an aggressive, highly-competitive group of adrenaline junkies or as slacker-stoners, skaters' are far more passionate about the value their culture places on freedom, individuality, and self-expression. That is to say, skateboarders imagine skate

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[377] See, for example, Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience*.
[378] See, for example, Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Della Couling (New York: Methuen, 1985).

culture as a location of difference, an alternative to dominant demands that adolescent boys, as exemplified by "jocks," should overvalue competition, physical dominance, and emotional repression. For skaters, the culture's esteem for freedom and individuality seems to be an alternative to mainstream adolescent culture and an opportunity for various expressions of masculinity. Interestingly, however, it is this very reverence for freedom and individuality that places skateboarding culture firmly within mainstream America – what could be more American than a freedom-loving, individualistic group of young men?

Still, for skaters, the unquestionable dominance of individualism and freedom means that skateboarding culture can also allow for an emotionally-expressive, cooperative, and artistic expression of identity that is clearly tied to their own dissatisfaction with dominant notions of masculinity. Though this mostly-white, mostly middle-class, mostly heterosexual group of young boys occupies a clear position of social dominance, they nonetheless feel limited by social expectations of their identity. It is in this difference within dominance that skateboarders enact a critique of patriarchy that is not necessarily anti-patriarchal and offer an alternative to masculinity that does not necessarily strip masculinity of its social power.

The complexity of skateboarders' social position and their expressions of a personal mode of politics reveal the inadequacies of current theories of identity, power, and politics. Though conventional academic knowledge suggests that identities are constructed via binaries – male or female, homosexual or heterosexual, black or white, and so on – the skaters' struggles with masculine identity make clear that these binaries are multiple and complex. Though Kimberle Crenshaw and Valerie Smith have offered

"intersectionality" as a theoretical and methodological approach complicating our knowledge of identity,[379] it is not enough to consider gender along with race along with sexuality along with class along with nationality. In fact, we must consider the multiplicity of masculinities in relation to the multiplicity of whiteness and so on. That is to say, it is only through evaluation of the ways in which various masculinities are articulated with national ideologies and tracing the ways in which particular expressions of masculinity (e.g., the Sensitive New Age Guy, the Urban Cowboy, the Male Cheerleader) traverse expressions, locations, and identities vis-à-vis power relations that we can understand the political implication of these identities and their mediated depictions. Skateboarders are neither radically different nor conservatively alike; they are neither challenging male power nor violently maintaining it. Rather, they are moving through youthscapes[380] that operate as alternatives in a manner appealing to these boys while shying away from an explicit engagement with gender politics.

There's something simultaneously progressive and regressive going on here.[381] The skateboarders' individualistic standpoint belies a lack of concern with issues of social equality and power, but their passionate explanations of skateboarding's appeal – its acceptance of difference (within particular parameters of gender, especially), its space for self-expression, its cooperative nature – suggests that skateboarders harbor a dissatisfaction with traditional masculinity that should complicate scholarly notions of male identity.

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[379] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* (1991). Valerie Smith, *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[380] Maira and Soep, *Youthscapes*.

[381] See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Popular Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). In her chapter, "Prophets of Rage: Rap Music and the Politics of Black Cultural Expression," Rose offers a discussion of the "hidden transcripts" of rap music and its contradictory political stance, pp. 99-145.

The point to be made here is not that skateboarding operates as the only available culture in which adolescent males can challenge dominant notions of masculinity. Perhaps interviews with skateboarders' proclaimed opposite – the jock, as imagined through football players – would reveal similar dissatisfaction with competition and emotional reticence. The point is that in both their conversations and their media, skateboarders offer up a version of masculine interaction that contrasts with images of athletes competing for physical dominance or even rock musicians dominating stages.

Of course, a key caveat to be made is that dominant identities – masculinity, whiteness, heterosexuality – rely upon their multiplicity for their power. That is, it is precisely because dominant identities can shift and take on various expressions while keeping their institutional and social power that they are so easy to live in. However, I would suggest that in explicating skateboarders' negotiation of the multiplicity of adolescent masculinity in addition to the mainstream and niche media's depiction of the multiplicity of this identity – we can elaborate on the routes through which adolescent boys both maintain and challenge power relations.

Power is not simply something that white men continually exert over everyone else (though one can quickly conjure up numerous instances of such exertion). Following Foucault, power is part and parcel of the production of knowledges; it moves through every relation; it exerts itself upon all expressions of identity.[382] Skateboarders' enactment and negotiation of masculinity serves as both challenge to and protection of power – as both critique of and subscription to dominance. Skateboarders are clearly dissatisfied with the status quo – but only with the limitations placed on their own lives.

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[382] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

Their dissatisfaction does not extend to the limitations that women, homosexuals, or people of color may face on an everyday basis. Still, I believe that the development of masculine emotional capacities, self-expression, and cooperation are part-and-parcel of the progression of power relations – that is, they serve as a modest beginning, a location of some promise, a glimpse into the possibility that young men can operate for social progression.

Skateboarding's Appeal and the Construction of Adolescent Masculinities

As Fred Pfeil noted in 1995, feminist scholarship frequently thinks of masculinity as monolithic, without taking into account the variations in power afforded by class, race, sexuality, and so on.[383] While critical race and queer theory have begun to explicate masculinity via its intersections with other axes of identity, and a mere glance at the title of R.W. Connell's oft-cited *Masculinities*,[384] published in the same year as Pfeil's *White Guys*, reveals that at least some scholarly work on male identity has taken into account its multiplicity, scholars more than ten years later continue to struggle with analyzing male identity. What to do with such multiplicity? How to pin it down? How does one make a claim about male identity when it seems to be constantly shifting? One strategy is to examine how masculinity is negotiated by men – how men justify and respond to their particular expressions of masculinity – and then align these expressions with men's particular expressions of or encounters with power. That is, rather than assuming that masculinity equals power – or even that straight, white, American, middle-class masculinity equals power – we should first explicate how that masculinity is expressed and how, in turn, it does or does not manifest as various demonstrations of power.

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[383] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (New York: Verso, 1995).
[384] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

In their discussions of their identity as skateboarders and their devotion to skateboarding culture, skaters reveal that masculinity poses a problem for them. In reverent descriptions of the experience of skateboarding, the adolescent boys I interviewed disclosed a yearning for the opportunity to express themselves and a space in which to feel a sense of freedom or transcendence. Though at first glance it may seem as though white middle-class boyhood is entirely focused on freedom and self-expression, in the minds of the skateboarders, male adolescence – and even adulthood – are characterized by institutions that serve to stifle such individualized joy. Work, school, family, and most importantly, organized team sports, all operate as personifications or institutions of patriarchy that place limitations on the type of transcendent, inspirational, and boundless sensation imparted by skateboarding.

The expression of such desires – and the suggestion that they are limited by work, family, school, and home – hovers dangerously close to legitimizing an evasion of responsibilities that frequently leaves women, in particular, alone to contend with financial constraints and familial demands. However, when read with the demands of patriarchy firmly in mind, the skateboarders' desires reveal a nascent critique of dominant modes of masculinity, a movement toward expanding the possibilities for male emotional, spiritual, and bodily expression, a sense that things are somehow not as they should be. In other words, the skateboarders' descriptions of transcendent pleasure and self-expression, individualistic though they may be, stand just outside of the norm and give the lie to the caricatured angry or emotionally-reticent male teenager who can express himself only through violence, competition, or sex. More than Sensitive New

Age Guys – and certainly not simply adrenaline junkies or slackers – skateboarders seek sustenance in the transcendent experience afforded by their boards.

This ever-so-small step outside of dominant norms suggests that the possession of societal dominance, as afforded by masculinity, whiteness, middle-classness, heterosexuality, and American citizenship, does not necessarily bring about an absolute adherence to hegemonic standards. It is nothing new to define hegemony as an ever-shifting process by which new or alternative ideas are subsumed by the mainstream; however, the boys' negotiation of masculinity suggests that even while a community may challenge one ideological entity, it may do so while holding fast to another swathe of dominant ideas. Though skaters may challenge masculine norms ever-so-subtly, they are doing so in a community that places great value on larger American norms, such as individuality and independence. As such, their experiences do little to challenge the status quo.

Skateboarders' dominant identities do not entirely safeguard them from being restricted and policed, and so they are aware of the experience of being targeted as trouble-makers by authorities. However, their own encounters with the limiting effects of institutions have not been translated into a sense of empathy for other groups outside of their community. In fact, as they seek freedom in the skateboarding community, skaters actively (though not always consciously) exclude women, gay men, and people of color. Their exclusionary practices stem in part from a desire for dominance and in part from contemporary understandings of diversity, as I will discuss at length.

Finally, as self-proclaimed and sometimes willful outsiders and as a group seemingly committed to insulating themselves from mainstream demands, skate culture's

correspondence with mainstream culture – particularly the mainstream media – remains of paramount importance. In fact, discussions with skateboarders make clear that their simple presence within mainstream culture is not entirely troubling; rather, it is the mainstream's presentation of their masculinity that skateboarders find troubling. The skaters exhibit a type of relativistic tolerance for media portrayals – they suggest that while mainstream media may make mistakes in their portrayal, it is only the continued existence of "true skaters" that is of importance. That is to say, as long as skaters can rely on their fellow skateboarders to stay true to the key values of the culture, they are ensured that a community exists in which they can experience transcendence, freedom, and individual expression. As such, a key element of skate life is constant correspondence with each other and with various media in an effort to communicate the culture's core values.

"A desire to be different": Subcultural Aspirations, Mainstream Actualities

Skateboarders imagine their practice and their community to lie outside of mainstream happenings – they proclaim themselves to be "outsiders," a "minority." As 21-year-old Jeremiah, an employee of a chain skate shop, explained, "I wasn't really attracted to skateboarding by the actual sport. I was more attracted to the fact that nobody did it and I was like wow, this is cool, I'm going to try this. And that's pretty much how I got into it. A desire to be different, I guess, at a young age." A former hockey player, Jeremiah explained that as a middle-school student, he began to feel dissatisfied with his then-current group of friends and turned to "underground" music – punk and indie rock – along with skateboarding, in an attempt to differentiate himself.

Though, as I have noted, skateboarding's relationship to mainstream culture has certainly shifted in the time since Jeremiah was a middle schooler, skateboarding continues to be presented as an oppositional activity. Despite its expansive presence in advertising appeals and pre-teen and teen media and its general importance to such mainstream behemoths as ABC/ESPN/Disney, skateboarding has been used primarily for its rebel or subcultural image. Though many skateboarders object to the culture of extreme exemplified by *The X Games* and Mountain Dew's advertising campaign, they also frequently remind one another and themselves of the numerous run-ins they have had with police, business owners, parents, and teachers disapproving of their activity of choice. As such, though the mainstream amplification of skateboarding's extreme, risk-taking nature mischaracterizes, in most skaters' judgment, their culture, skateboarding's illegality and general aura of rebellion is appealing. In this way, the skaters correspond with the interstices of media representations of skate life – critiquing and accepting their portrayals in a fluid way.

Skateboarders' attachment to their practice's association with rebellion, however, pales in comparison to their firm insistence that it offers an alternative to other teen boy activities, most notably, mainstream sports. Timmy, a 20-year-old skateboarder who worked at a local diner, explained, "It's not like a sport. It's not organized, there's no teams …. It's completely up to you, how much better you get, and what you want to work at, and it's like self-propelled." Matthew, a 21-year-old college graduate, claimed

> It's just like disassociated from the rest of the normal world, almost ….
> With the snowboarding … you're in the mountains, in a place where they
> allow you to be, where you pay to go there, and you ride a chair lift and
> go down the mountain and everything's, they have little slopes built for
> you, but skateboarding is not like that, you know. You are in places that
> you are not meant to be for skateboarding, and … you have to look at things

like, 'How can I use this for skateboarding, even though it's not meant for it,' you know. And, I don't know, it makes you think a little different, right?

Sixteen-year-old Jack, a student simultaneously earning his high school degree and Associate's Degree at a local community college, made this point most adamantly:

> And that's not what skating's all about, you know. The whole competitive thing. I'm just really not into it at all. It's like, 'He made the X Games and got a gold medal!' It's just like, that doesn't mean anything! This isn't the Stanley Cup! …. The other thing is that skateboarding is NOT a sport …. It's just that you don't skate to be better than anyone; there's not a coach who's saying, 'I want you to do a 360 first, and then a kickflip, by the end of the week!' you know? You don't have to wake up at 5:30 in the morning to go skate. That's what sports are all about. It's like tournaments. They're not worth it! You better be good, and that's not how I see skating."

Jack also explained, "The possibilities are endless in skating, and there's no restrictions, there's no, like, codes, there's no rules; it's just like, open, you know. Just get on your board and ride." Thirteen-year-old Eric explained,

> Like a team sport, you have like, coaches yelling at you, and people depending on you. You have a time limit. But um, with skateboarding, you're on your own, you're like on your own team, you just push each other. It's not, it's not, you don't compete against each other. Like, you see *The X Games*, it's not skateboarding, like it's not about competing. It's just skating together.

Jim, age 15, said, "It's just awesome, to ride and do it wherever you can do it. There's not a court, it's not like basketball or something that, where you have certain limitations. There's like no limitations at all. And, you can do it wherever you want, and do whatever you want or anything." For each of these skateboarders, the trappings of team sports, including sanctioned spaces for participation, established rules, and coaches all signify patriarchal control, and for skateboarders, their practice offers an escape from such control.

Not all of the skateboarders felt quite as adamant about defining skateboarding in opposition to sports. Eleven-year-old Adam, for example, explained, "It's not a sport to a

lot of people – it's more like how they live their lives, what they do and stuff.

Skateboarding for me, it's a sport, but it's also a lifestyle, and how like, knowing that

other people can help you if you're having trouble skateboarding or something, like

knowing that you have friends." Despite considering skateboarding a sport, Adam still

found the cooperative nature of the practice to be key. His focus on other people's help

was not surprising, given that many of the older boys in the skate shop were willing to

give the younger skateboarders advice not only about how to skate more successfully, but

also about the values of the culture. That is, skateboarders frequently communicate to

instruct one another in skateboarding's core principles and values. However, such

instruction is contingent in form, for were it too direct or formal, it might begin to

resemble the restrictions skaters' see in traditional sports. As 29-year-old Brian

suggested,

> If you want to treat it like a sport, it could be a sport …. Where I can see a
> lot of people saying it isn't a sport, is because they don't look at it from a
> competitive point of view, okay. Um, just 'cause that's so, it is a sport.
> Just like water skiing, or surfing, it's a sport. The only thing that makes it
> different as a sport is it doesn't have to be for trophies and stuff like that ….
> You just choose not to treat it like a sport, 'cause you get this crazy idea, that
> set notion that a sport has to be win, lose, competition, competition, competition,
> but not necessarily.

Brian's directive – "If you want to treat it like a sport" – demonstrates the contingency I

have discussed. The boys avoid controlling one another while at the same time

maintaining the boundaries of skateboarding's values. John, a 21-year-old University

student and skate shop employee explained that, as a teenager, he skateboarded while

continuing to participate in football and basketball. Jeremiah pointed out that while

skateboarding "doesn't have the limitations that other sports do have," such as rules, the

practice still requires physical prowess. He said, "You see something, you try to do it,

the only limitation you have is your own natural ability. It's cool in that sense. Other sports aren't like that."

Though, clearly, not all skaters feel strongly about distancing their practice from traditional sports, the relative lack of organization, rules, routines, coaches, playing fields, game times, and so on in most types of skateboarding is appealing to many skateboarders. These skaters and others also approach their characterization of the practice by discussing its artistic and individualistic nature, as I discuss below. Whether or not skateboarding is indeed distinct from other sports – many could claim, for example, that runners frequently operate independently from the organized sporting world – skateboarders' imagined outsider status is important to their identity and is, arguably, encouraged by both mainstream and niche skateboarding media. Furthermore, their often-adamant assertion of difference suggests that they find traditional sporting culture – still a central domain of adolescent boys – dissatisfying or even stifling. When I asked 19-year-old Joe, "Do you think there's a difference between kids who are skateboarding and the kinds of kids who join the football team or something like that?" Joe replied, "Yeah, there's definitely a difference. They're told their whole life that that's what they should do 'cause their dad probably was a football player for [the university] or something, and sometimes their dads won't even let 'em skateboard. I've seen it happen." For Joe and the other skateboarders, participation in football represents submission to patriarchal demands.

Skateboarders' descriptions of the traditional sporting world, with the demands of coaches, set practice times, and fellow players, also allude to the highly disciplined male

subject that David Savran describes in *Taking It Like a Man.*[385] Though the skaters'

complaints hinge on the idea that someone or something else will be regulating their

activities in the sporting world, Savran's self-disciplined, overly policed, pleasureless

male subject is still applicable, for the sporting world absolutely esteems self-discipline.

Savran's argument suggests that a self-flagellating ideal male subject has given rise to a

culture in which male self-violence is a foundational aspect of white masculine identity,

and in her analysis of *Fight Club,* Lynn Ta reveals that even texts that seem to be critical

of such norms end up resorting to self-violence. I would suggest that skateboarders'

rejection of the perceived norms of sport culture – and their discussion and performance

of the norms of skateboarding culture – enacts an alternative mode of adolescent

masculinity that does not rely on male self-violence and in fact operates as a promising

option.

Skateboarders place a tremendous amount of importance on their ability to act as

individuals and the feeling of freedom facilitated by skateboarding. Their breathless

descriptions of the opportunities to express one's individual style and for self-guidance in

the practice of skateboarding bring to light the highly American nature of skateboarding.

The related desire for a sense of freedom is also highly American; however, the ways in

which skateboarders describe a feeling of bodily transcendence reveals a particular

experience of freedom that sits outside of traditional white male rationality. The skaters'

correspondence with mainstream American culture is complex in its various assessments

of mainstream codes. The values and ideologies central to skateboarding culture blur the

boundaries between subculture and mainstream and reveal that, while masculinity may

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[385] David Savran, *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

operate as what I call a "location of difference" for the skateboarding culture, other ideologies – such as freedom and individuality – sit firmly within mainstream America.

"It's just you and your board": Individuality and Self-Expression

In sharp contrast to their sometimes-adamant rejection of the norms of traditional sports, many skateboarders wax poetic about the expressive and individualistic nature of skateboarding. In many cases, as skaters described their love for skating – these descriptions were usually in response to the question, "Why do you skate?" – they shifted tone, staring off into space, grappling for words that would describe the joy of the experience. Far from the overly aggressive, in-your-face skateboarders on mainstream television, these boys spoke quietly and passionately of their devotion to skating.

> It's just you and your board …. It's like an art form in a sense. The only limitations you have in skateboarding [are] your own. And the idea that you can just take a thought, a pure idea, a thought in your head and go attempt to do it, it's kind of like art (Jeremiah, age 22).

> There's not too many, you know, like there's teams, or whatever, but they're not teams; it's not like they huddle. There's not a game plan. And it's not a choreographed thing, so it's not like you go out and have a play, you know. It's like, the play is in your head, you make it up. Um, that's part of the art of it too, it all just comes from your soul and your heart …. And I think that's part of the joy that builds up in style (Mike, age 29).

> It's pretty much about expressing yourself! (Eric, age 13).

> It's an art. That's the only way you can define it. Just like, the way I see it, there's so many different styles of painting and stuff, and music too …. That person, like, I'm just saying, if you can know what their personality is, you know their art …. So with skating, like I take who I am as an individual and bring it to my skating …. Watching a skateboard video, you'll see people with … dreads and stuff, they'll have the whole rude style, and the hesh rats, and like, I don't know, it just seems that you take the exact individual that you are and put it in your skateboarding (Jack, age 16).

The skateboarders' claims move easily from imagining skateboarding as a concrete representation of an abstract sense of self or, in Jeremiah's words, "a pure idea," and

136

imagining skateboarding as an extension of style. While the former suggests that

skateboarding is expression for expression's sake, for the joy of baring, as Mike claimed,

"your soul and your heart," the latter connotes a more superficial outwardly-motivated

desire to demonstrate to the world "who I am as an individual." Jack's quote not only

exemplifies the notion that skateboarding is a space of self-expression, but also that such

self-expression is imagined via lifestyle or style and is manifested via such stylistic

markers as dreadlocks. Their self-expression, that is, could still be based in the

consumption needed to mark particular personalities/ styles. Fifteen-year-old Braden, a

close friend of Jack's, echoed the discussion of expression via style in his explanation of

the "roots" of skateboarding as represented in the film, *Dogtown and Z-Boys*:

> Everyone had their own style. They were all progressing. So, it's all about
> progression and individual style. Um basically, like. Like, having, um, define
> style. I'd say just skating and doing what you want …. And that's the big thing
> of skating, like it's for you. Like, just individual art. Art not sport! And uh, it's
> all about doing things for yourself.

Twenty-nine year-old Mike explained how one expresses style via skating:

> Once you learn a trick, you start to appropriate your own style, like squeak out
> a trick, like slide it out, the way you use your foot …. You just teach yourself,
> like different ways, like you would do it the way you're more comfortable. And
> when you teach yourself that, you know, you completely make it your own at that
> point, because not only have you learned to do the trick, and maybe do it quite
> well, but you're able to put your piece on something that's already been done
> many times, and you do it in a way that no one does it …. You're not just doing
> any old trick all the time, that's just gonna get boring, so you kind of make it
> creative.

Self-expression for the skaters is, in part, about asserting one's individuality –

"you do it in a way that no one does it" – and the individuality of skateboarding also

permeates skateboarders' pride in being self-taught. Twenty-nine-year-old Mike, a

bartender, explained that skateboarding "feels good. It's part of me. I've done it so

much. It's one of the 3, 4, 5 things that I'm really good at. I taught myself everything.

That kind of meant a lot. So I just did a trick or whatever, and just want to keep learning.

You teach yourself. I didn't really have anyone to help me out, so." Matthew, age 21,

echoed Mike's claims:

> It's very individual, you know. It's uh, it's like you don't have to rely on
> anyone else, you can do your own thing, you know. Just have fun, skate the
> way you want …. I didn't have to stay after school and go to practice for
> anything. I didn't have to like, rely on other people. I could go out by myself
> and just practice …. It's like an individual activity. It's for yourself, you know.
> And uh, what you can make yourself do, what you can like, push yourself to do,
> right?

Though such individual effort echoes, in some ways, Savran's self-surveilled man who

must embrace pain in order to become a fully-realized individual[386] – to be a good

skateboarder, you must "push yourself," presumably through some pain – the skaters'

frequent claims that when skateboarding, one should "Just have fun, skate the way you

want," and that it "feels good," suggest that the general experience of skateboarding is

one of pleasure, not pain. Such pleasure also rejects the constraints associated with

masculinity by allowing young men to experience a range of emotions and revel in

mental pleasure.

"It's like spiritual fulfillment": Skateboarding as Escape or Transcendence

Indeed, contra Savran's self-flagellating male, skateboarders consider

skateboarding a way to escape pain, rather than a demonstration of their ability to feel

pain. Though (and in part because) skateboarding requires a high level of concentration,

it offers a sense of transcendence, escape, meditation, or fulfillment seemingly

unavailable in the boys' other domains. School, work, families, and relationships all

produce stress in the skaters' lives; the practice of skating mitigates that stress.

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[386] Ibid.

There's so much enjoyment and community in just riding around a parking lot, just cruising around the streets downtown …. But the reason I skate is just the pure enjoyment I get (Jack, age 16).

But it's freedom! I feel free when I'm skateboarding and I can forget about everything that's bothering me for that hour or two of the day. It's like liberating, so it's kind of like therapy, as well …. Some people do meditation, some people do yoga, I skateboard. That's my meditation, I guess. It's the one thing I can focus on and not think about anything else (Brian, age 29).

There's this certain feeling that I get. Like personally, when I bomb a parking structure [i.e., skate down its ramps rapidly], which I usually do two times a day, there's just a feeling that you get when you're on the edge of control, like cruisin' around the corner on a big skateboard …. You get an adrenaline rush, and it, it keeps me young, too (Jason, age 32).

It's just so fun, it's like, you're just in your own world when you skate. Like it's really fun …. You're focused just on skateboarding, and … you can like get away and stuff, you know (Marc, age 15).

You get stressed out with school or work or just like relationships and stuff, and when you start skating, it's like the only thing in your head is just cruising down the street, it's super relaxing. And you can't beat it, no one can take it away from you (John, age 21).

When you're skating, there is sort of an escape involved. Like, when you're really concentrating on just skating, I mean, it's that sense of focus that you don't really, I don't get it from anything else. I've got all sorts of other hobbies, like music, but I don't know, skateboarding is the true, like, it's almost like meditation in a way …. It even helps me think about things …. It just makes me feel good about yourself … and, I don't know, it's just cool too! (Timmy, age 20).

When I'm skateboarding, there's nothing else on my mind but skateboarding. So, in that aspect, it's freeing. If I have exams or stress from anything else … like, I could have a midterm tomorrow and I go skateboarding, I, for that time … I'm thinking about nothing but skateboarding. And just, like totally immersed in how much fun I'm having, you know (Matthew, age 21).

It's just like, orgasmic …. I'll fall in love with skating when I'm just alone in the middle of an abandoned street …. You get a lot of thinking done (Braden, age 15).

And like … this is gonna sound cheesy but it's like spiritual fulfillment. In a way, where it's just, if there's any problems any time, you go skating and you don't really think about it and it feels good (Kiran, age 24).

In these descriptions, the skateboarders elaborate on the emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental pleasure that accompanies skateboarding. Their reflective and passionate tones contradict dominant images of surly white male teens as well as notions that men are not and cannot be expressive, emotive, or introspective. Furthermore, their discussions of stress and problems, belies suggestions that young men are unable to reflect on or talk about what's troubling them. Both the practice of skateboarding and skateboarders' discussions of it provide skaters an opportunity to engage in a manner contradictory to dominant norms of masculinity, and as their passionately stated descriptions reveal, they place a high value on this opportunity.

Nonetheless, though skaters are highly devoted to the notion that skateboarding is pure fun, the value that skaters place on independence and the progression of skills reveals a continued loyalty to the value of hard work. In fact, the skaters seem to be expressing the American Dream via skateboarding – they are self-taught, successful, skilled, and dedicated. Though skateboarding usually earns them no monetary reward, the development of their skills seems to be enough to merit such devotion.

Tied closely to the skateboarders' ideas about self-expression is a clear sense that skateboarding evokes a type of passion or love not produced by other activities or hobbies. Their expressions of passion also seem to belie the hyperrationality of masculinity and whiteness, but the attendant importance of devotion and dedication to the advancement of skateboarding culture and the progression of individuals' skateboarding skills suggests that the passion is easily translated into traditionally American modes of masculine engagement. Jack elaborated: "I eat, drink, sleep skate, you know …. When you're a skateboarder, you have that love, that strong love for it." Brian suggested that,

despite starting skateboarding because of its subcultural or outsider status, he continues to skate because of "passion."

The subtle shift in skaters' descriptions of skateboarding – from expressive art form to the product of individual hard work – demonstrates the ways in which traits associated with masculinity and American identity are dynamic in their relationship to normative identities and expressions of dominance. Skaters' breathy descriptions of the art of skateboarding certainly challenge masculine norms of rationality and emotional reticence, but the underlying commitment to such masculine American values as independence, progression, and physical work reveals the enduring nature of these values, their flexibility in relationship to other expressions of identity, and the inextricable relationship between dominant norms and subcultural alternatives.

Claiming the Outside/ Maintaining the Inside: The Preservation of Power in Skateboarding Culture

"Wanna Talk About a Real Minority": Demonstrating Individuality Via Outsider Status

Skateboarders construct their identity, in part, by claiming outsider or even minority status. Though some of these claims very clearly imply a sense that minority groups are asserting, unfairly, that their own experiences with oppression are unique (see Brian's discussion below, especially), others suggest simply that skateboarders do indeed imagine themselves to stand outside of mainstream culture generally. Many skateboarders take pride in this outsider status, arguing that it has provided them with a unique outlook on life. Again, individuality becomes paramount to skater identity – not only have they independently trained themselves to participate in a creative activity, but they've also developed distinctive identities that supposedly stand out from the crowd.

And we gotta band together. It's the only way we're gonna be able to

141

> fight oppression. We're still being oppressed. Wanna talk about a real
> minority. Skateboarders, is a true minority. 'Cause you know, cops hate
> us, uh, everybody hates us. Middle-class people, oh we're so dangerous,
> yet somebody can barrel down the street on a mountain bike, they never say
> nothing about that. You know what I mean? …. They profile us, big time,
> skaters. Just have a skateboard, even if you're walking with one, the cops'll
> watch ya. It's terrible …. I've never been ticketed for skateboarding. I'm
> proud to say that. Never been ticketed for skateboarding (Brian, age 29).

Brian's claim that he is continually surveilled but has never received a ticket is curious

and at first glance suggests a feeble attempt to claim special status via an unrealized

oppression. Studies of whiteness and masculinity have both described such behavior, and

surely a proclamation of oppression is one manifestation of "the possessive investment in

whiteness."[387] After all, it takes only a small step to move from claiming to be "a real

minority" to suggesting that other minorities are inflating claims of oppression or asking

for "special treatment" when it is not needed. In a moment when affirmative action is

continually under fire, such insinuations should not be taken lightly. Notably, Brian had

recently arrived in Michigan from California – both states where affirmative action cases

have been major news.

Other skateboarders' discussions of difference, however, were aimed toward

explaining why skateboarders might think differently from the norm. While in some

respects these claims align with the skateboarders' argument that skateboarding is not a

sport in that they situate the practice and culture outside of more normative practices,

they also gesture toward the origins of skateboarders' sense of dissatisfaction. As I have

noted, skateboarders are policed and surveilled, and these experiences, along with their

fraught relationship to their non-skateboarding peers, result in the sense that they are

outsiders.

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[387] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

And it's a subculture … because we get sort of a raw taste of life. We have to argue with people on a regular basis about getting out of the area (Jeremiah, age 18).

We don't care what other people think about us (Eric, age 13).

Fifteen-year-olds Brandon and Jim, interviewed together, explained. Jim: "I think, like, like, skaters are like, they're more like open, not as uptight. Like we're stupid little kids that got made fun of, like some jock or something would be like, 'Dude, that's stupid!'" Brandon: "Yeah, 'cause basically you get made fun of. 'Cause skateboarding to other people it was like a, a phase that everyone went through, and now it's over or something. So, when you stick to it, you know, you know, like, it's a skateboarder, so they make fun of you, so basically you get used to that, so everything just doesn't really matter anymore. You know, what people say.

Like, you'll always be accepted into skateboarding, and unlike football or something, kids'll make fun of you if you're small or something like that. Look at me, man, I'm scrawny. I skateboard. Kids, I have a bunch of friends. Kids love me, you know? It's awesome. (Joe, age 19).

The skateboarders' descriptions of being teased about skateboarding or body type and

their references to arguments with authorities about the practice of skateboarding make it

clear that they feel as if they have been somewhat forcibly excluded from dominant

groups – such as the jocks in high school. Skate media and culture does tend to suggest a

lanky body type as an ideal – one need only look at Tony Hawk to see this – and I suspect

that bulkier men who would be valorized as football players or wrestlers may feel

excluded from skateboarding culture. It is important to note, however, that the

dominance of this body type in skate culture may play a role in skaters' attraction to it.

The boys' assertions of difference serve as a strategy by which they establish a sense of

agency; if one chooses not to participate in a particular group, then he cannot be excluded

from it by others. More germane to my argument, however, is that the skateboarders'

solution to the exclusion is highly individualized and lacks an articulation of larger

structural issues, such as the idea that a "real man" would be big – and physically

dominant – not scrawny like Joe. Skateboarding in this sense becomes a type of

enclave,[388] a location in which skateboarders can feel comfortable with themselves and

escape from the demands of dominant norms. Skaters' inability or unwillingness to live

up to established markers of masculinity does not necessarily effect an articulate critique

of those norms, nor does it inspire a conscious effort to change them. Instead, it forces

withdrawal into a more accepting community.[389]

From Punk to Hip Hop: Style as Cultural Difference

Skateboarders frequently translate their outsider status into assertions of cultural

acceptance. Referencing such stylistic markers as music and clothing, skateboarders

deemed their community "multicultural" or "diverse," and indicated that their acceptance

of multiple peoples stemmed from their own experiences of exclusion or oppression.

Using code words such as "rasta," "punk," and "hip hop," skaters implied that their

culture is racially diverse, but these words seemed to weigh equally with generic terms

associated with high school cliques – "geeks," "nerds," and so on. The skateboarders'

explanations of difference served to elide race, making it seem as if any and all racial

differences were easily subsumed by a common devotion to skateboarding. Even when

explicitly discussing race, as Kiran does below, skateboarders slid easily into references

to lifestyle or music.

Such elision is not surprising in a community of youth who have come of age in a

culture celebrating tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism while rarely explicitly

discussing the continued effects of racism and racial differences. In youth culture, race is

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[388] See Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.

[389] Not all skateboarders, of course, experienced such exclusion. Some did participate in traditional sporting activities and explained their love of skateboarding in descriptions that didn't reference being teased.

frequently associated with particular music forms, and contemporary youth culture

suggests that crossing-over via music is acceptable but still problematic. Skaters seem to

suggest that anyone can "cross over" into skateboarding, just as long as their primary

concern is with skateboarding.

> Skateboarders are, they're pretty um, unbiased culturally, so, 'cause they're outsiders, especially back in the day they were outsiders, even now, still. So, you kind of come up with your own music and you start liking different things, you know? Kids that skate aren't just listening to punk, they're not just listening to pop anymore, they listen to everything. They listen to jazz, all kinds of stuff. (Mike, 29).

> It's just stupid to define a skateboarder in one way, it's like defining what a person is in any other sport in a certain category, I guarantee you there are all different kinds of personalities and all different kinds of people (Jeremiah, age 21).

> I think the type of people it attracts … very multicultural, multi-diversity crowd. (Yochim: Okay, do you think it's a diverse crowd?) Oh, very much so. (Yochim: Do you think in Ann Arbor it's diverse?) Ummm, that I really can't say for sure …. Um, from what I've experienced, yeah. I've seen a whole bunch of different types of people coming from different backgrounds. 'Cause when you're skating, it doesn't matter if you're a geek, a moron, a nerd, any of that stuff. It kind of transcends all that kind of behavior (Brian, age 29).

> Skateboarding's for everybody. Like everyone can skateboard, and like, skateboarding's full of so many – it's so diverse, like there's so many different kinds of pros …. [T]here's like Rasta dudes, there's like hip hop soldier whatever, there's little like punk rock kids …. If people on the outside just see a skateboarder as some kid that grows in a rat 'stache, and those are the kids we hate, that annoys the hell out of us. We hate kids like that. (Yochim: What's a rat 'stache?) You know, when kids grow a mustache and they don't shave it so it's just like peach fuzz that's growing out of control? …. [Y]ou always see ratty white trash kids with 'em. And I hate white trash. 'Cause I'm from Lansing (Joe, age 19).

> [Skateboarding is] a mesh of cultures …. You know, people who listen to punk rock music or, and then there's your rocker, there's your hip hop heads, and then there's everything in between …. [L]ike style of clothing, right, you know, like there's people who look like rockers, people who look like hip hop heads …. There's people who dress real nice like [pro skater] Andrew Reynolds, you know, he wears a sports coat (Matthew, age 21).

Jim: "There's like preppy skaters, there's dirt skaters, there's all different kinds of skateboarders." Brandon: I mean you could have a football player that skateboards.

One of the things I've always liked about skateboarders is that it's diverse …. Like culturally diverse, it's socioeconomically diverse. It's not about rich people that skateboard, poor people that skateboard, middle class people, there's like, all sorts of different races. It's awesome. There's pro skaters that are half Indian like me …. In India there's not really a skateboarding scene, but in most other countries, like in Africa and stuff like that, there's skateboarders, South America. It's so cool. That's one of the things that makes skateboarding, in my opinion, a superior culture to any other kind of youth culture, or like, thing that other people would consider cool. That's one of the reasons that it's cooler than snowboarding. Like who snowboards? Rich white kids. For the most part …. I think that's what keeps the majority of people out of it … they can't afford to buy a five hundred dollar board and lift ticket …. Skateboarding's low cost keeps it diverse and that rules. There's so many different things you can be into and still be a skateboarder. Punk rocker kids, hip hop kids, metal, whatever. There's dudes that listen to Britney Spears and they all skateboard. 'Cause that's their common bond. There's diversity (Kiran, age 24).

As I have mentioned, skateboarders view their level of cultural acceptance or tolerance to be an outcome of their own experiences as outsiders. For skaters, superficial discrimination is inexplicable, and skateboarding's tolerance is another measure of the culture's superiority to other youth cultures. Notably, however, in describing skating's diversity, Joe established a clear boundary excluding "white trash kids." Furthermore, the invocation of "white trash" allows Joe, especially, to displace intolerant attitudes onto a group of folks deemed less educated and less accepting of diversity than most skateboarders, who present themselves as middle-class.[390] "White trash" signals not simply economic difference, but a difference in taste. I would suggest that boundaries of taste permeate skate culture, despite skaters' claims that one can wear any style and listen to any type of music and still be accepted into the culture. Certainly, skaters display a particular sense of "cool" that operates as a requirement for entry into the culture. The

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[390] Wray and Newitz, eds., *White Trash*.

clothing skateboarders wear falls into a limited spectrum – and adoption of tight clothing or business attire, for example, must be suitably ironic. Matthew, for example, described another skater with admiration: "You see a lot of skateboarders that are really, really fashionable …. Like, they stand out. Look at [Joe]. He's got like, wears girls' jeans and like a striped sweater. Sometimes I see him rockin' the headband! …. Yeah, [Joe's] hilarious!"

Though many of the skaters' comments on diversity are centered on issues of style, it is important to take note of Kiran's succinct and smart analysis of the opportunities afforded by skate culture as opposed to snowboarding culture. Though skateboards usually cost approximately $100, depending upon the level of the skateboarders' use, they can last a relatively long time. And, without the cost of lift tickets and transportation to ski resorts – or even the costs of participating in club sports – skateboarding is a relatively cheap and accessible practice. Of course, Kiran's life experiences – he is neither native to the United States nor white – have probably enabled him to be more attendant to such issues than his white counterparts.

"We just want to skate, you know?" Skateboarding as Transcending Race

Skateboarders' claims to tolerance, even when explicitly referencing race, serve to support their claims that it is the practice of skateboarding itself that is crucial to the culture – not the performance of different lifestyles. In other words, their discussions of tolerance, which, in a nutshell, say "Race doesn't matter – skateboarding does," assert the authenticity of this culture by suggesting that it is only about the practice of skateboarding and not about appearing to be cool, maintaining power, or developing an

exclusionary group, each of which would be aimed toward stylistic ends, rather than the

experience of pleasure, joy, or transcendence, as I discuss below.

> Skateboarding's open to all different cultures, like African Americans,
> Asians, all kinds of people. And they wear baggy clothes, whatever you
> want to wear. It's pretty much accepted in skateboarding (Adam, age 11).

> Skateboarding is really multicultural. Like if you skateboard it doesn't
> matter, like, what background you are, what race you are. And usually in
> society it really matters, like what color your skin is or what your background
> is, you know …. I would say skateboarding is more like a mix of people from
> all different backgrounds. They're just kind of there to skate (Alex, age 19).

> (Yochim: Do you think it's diverse race-wise?) Yeah, absolutely. (Yochim:
> In Ann Arbor, do you think it is?) In Ann Arbor, you know what, there's more,
> um, I seen more, like, uh white skateboarders then, but you know, like I skate
> with like, um, some of my friends are black and they skate, you know. Um, but
> yeah, it's really diverse. I mean, what I see around here, yeah, maybe more white
> kids skate, but like, that's not true everywhere else (Matthew, age 21).

> (Yochim: What about race? Is there, from what I've seen it's mainly a white
> sport.) Yeah. Um, I don't have any opinions on anybody doing anything that
> they want to do, but. (Yochim: I just want to know, like in your experience has
> there –). Yeah, it's mainly a Caucasian activity, but there's definitely um, not
> any discrimination that I have run into between skaters and like minority skaters.
> So, yeah, it's really no big deal. We just want to skate, you know?" (Braden, age
> 15).

> Not as much a race issue these days in skateboarding. Skateboarders are kind of
> hated, looked at as thumbs down by the rest of society. It doesn't make sense for
> white skaters and black skaters to not skate together. I evaluate if things are
> racist, and generally, it's more positive – like, 'Wow, black guys have good style
> when they – or Asian guys' …. Race is not a problem in skating (Jeff, age 21).

Despite the skaters' indications otherwise, my own experiences with the

Southeastern Michigan community suggest that it is mainly white. I interviewed two

Latino and one Indian skateboarder; the rest of my interviewees were white. Of the white

skateboarders, one indicated, without being asked, that he was Jewish. I encountered one

Asian skateboarder, who declined to be interviewed, and no Black skateboarders during

my time with the community.

The skateboarders' responses to my prompts about race also reveal a sense of discomfort in talking about race. Though the skaters frequently tended to use highly informal language punctuated by linguistic qualifiers and false starts, their unease when explaining race relations in their community was palpable in the extent to which they lapsed into such qualifiers during these discussions. Though Matthew could not vouch for diversity in his own experience, he relied upon a sense of diversity in the "imagined community"[391] of skateboarders, and skate media – particularly skateboarding videos – support this assertion in their representation of diverse "teams" of professional skateboarders. Also notable is Jeff's attempt to make clear that he does think about racism and guard against it. For him, positively-valenced , but still monolithic, descriptions of various racial or ethnic groups ("Black guys have good style"), are not racist. The boys' uncomfortable and problematic discussions of diversity and race should be understood in the context of their own culture as well as broader American cultural constructions of race.

The disparity between claimed diversity and the reality of the community is not surprising, given the skateboarders' general sense that they operate differently from other adolescent groups, their existence in a culture that supposedly values diversity while doing little to promote it, the community's specific location in a liberal university town, and my presence. As a researcher and an educated woman, I surely signified a liberal white who would have no truck with over racism, and the skateboarders were undoubtedly guarded in my presence – even after knowing me for five years. My status as researcher was always known, and even to those skateboarders who regarded me as a

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[391] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

friend, I was generally an older, more established – and thus relatively authoritative –

figure. As such, the skaters' struggled to acknowledge racial differences and even racism

while at the same time denying its presence in their own culture. As one skateboarder

told me, "I mean, it could be different in the South and stuff." Like most white

Americans, these skaters shunned the notion that their community might be exclusionary.

Taken together, however, the skateboarders' elision of race and their continued

reliance on individualized notions of identity and community served to maintain the

power of white, middle-class skateboarders. Because their main claim to difference and

solution to dissatisfaction with other more mainstream groups (as encountered in high

school, for example) amounts to the repeated refrain that "skateboarders can do whatever

they want," the group saw no need to make a conscious effort to include frequently

excluded groups. Whiteness and masculinity remained the unstated norms, a status

which cultural theorists have demonstrated to be a position of power.[392] As such, the

dominance of individuality operates to maintain white dominance in this group.

"**You do it for the love of it": Authenticity, Love, and Individuality**

The skateboarders' notion of authenticity is firmly grounded in their general ethos

of individuality. As such, to be an authentic skateboarder, one must be doing so for his

own reasons – rather than to impress others. Consequently, mainstream images of

skateboarders as "extreme," or even as competitive (as in *The X Games*), are labeled

inauthentic – or, in Jack's words, "very wack." Jack elaborated that skateboarders in

media "are portrayed as getting air. Being extreme. It's not about … doing tricks! It's

all about having fun. And if doing tricks is having fun, then that's what it is. If it's

riding around a ramp, it's having fun, you know." Jack's somewhat roundabout claim

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[392] Richard Dyer, *White* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1997).

reveals the contradictions that the skaters' primary concern with individuality evokes. That is, if the bottom line, for skaters, is that each skateboarder takes part in the culture for his own, individual reason, then judgments about what does or does not constitute authenticity become highly contingent – skateboarding is not about doing tricks, unless that's what's fun for you; if riding ramps is fun for you, then it's authentic, and so on. Such individualistic evaluations also translated into skateboarders' correspondence with the media. For example, many skaters excused Tony Hawk's excessive monetary success and corporate involvement as a personal choice – as long as he still loved skateboarding and displayed his skills, they suggested, he had every right to participate in its mainstreaming.

As much as individuality pervades skateboarders' descriptions of their practice, a sense of true love, fun, joy, or devotion must motivate their participation in it in order for skaters to deem it authentic. Such emotional commitment to skateboarding – and the attendant devotion to feelings of pleasure – can be read as a negotiation of masculine norms deeming pain to be paramount, as I have discussed via David Savran's work. Still, when developed through the lens of individuality, the skaters' expressions of pleasure lose some of their political steam. That is to say, skateboarders' experiences and descriptions of the pleasure of skateboarding, and pleasure's overriding importance to their sense of authenticity, act as a nascent critique of norms of masculinity. However, that critique remains nascent inasmuch as it relies upon individuality for its expression. Individuality, in part, disallows skateboarders from developing a broad-based, institutional critique.

It is important to note, however, that the skaters' regard for individual satisfaction with skateboarding is often couched as the antithesis of commercial interest in the practice. That is, one marker of disingenuity in this culture is the notion that an individual is skateboarding for profit rather than pleasure. To skateboard for profit, one must focus on competition, physical prowess, and constant progress – values antithetical to skaters' ideas about self-expression and cooperation. Skateboarders, then, sometimes communicate a critique of commercial culture; however, the critique is that commercialism disallows individual expression, not that capitalism causes structural inequalities, exploitation of various peoples, overuse of natural resources, and so on. The critique is always located in their valorization of individuality.

> You do it for the love of it, not to be cool, or not to be good at it, it's all the same thing, you know. Its like, the whole jock stereotype, usually you see it in sports, like the football jock, you know like some guy with slick back hair you know, ladies man or whatever, plays all these sports…. A lot of them get caught up with skating, for whatever reason they see it and think, this'll be kind of fun. And they just skate to be like, skate to be good. They don't skate, they'll only do something really big and crazy if it's on film or if someone's taking a picture of it. Or if you know they just do it to be better than other people and not to have fun. That's not the way all of it is (Jack, age 16).

> That's a true shop, you know? (Yochim: What do you mean when you say that?) True shop? Uh, you know, there's like the main reason you know to get money. It's people's career. But they support skateboarding in a really true way, not branching out into some sport shop, like MC whatever! Because you can be in those true shops, and … they know what true skateboarding's all about. They're just there to support the scene (Jack, age 16).

> I don't think like anything could change skateboarding because kids that actually love it so much that that wouldn't happen (Joe, age 19).

> When I first started … I didn't know people got paid. I just thought it was something that people were doing, you know, when they weren't working and it was just having fun. Kids now look at it like, my little brother skateboards and he looks at it like, 'Oh, I need to get a sponsor now,' stuff like that. And it's just like, you don't really need to, you know? I

mean, I'd be skating if I didn't have any sponsors (Alex, age 19).[393]

Right now, skateboarding, it just seems like, everybody's trying to start their own company and tryin' to make a lot of money and just trying to make their own impact on skateboarding and I think that, the companies who are really down for skateboarding since like, they've started and companies that are all about skateboarding sound fun, will survive. And skateboarding companies that are just all about the money will just die. So it kind of just separates out. Survival of the fittest I guess. Survival of the funnest, I would say (Alex, age 19).

Some of these kids just get too like, 'When am I gonna get sponsored? How am I gonna get sponsored?' This, that and the next thing. I don't remember ever having that mentality. I just went out and did it and had fun (Matthew, age 21).

If you're not having fun when you're skating, you're skating for the wrong reasons (Braden, age 15).

Tony Hawk and the 900 makes young skaters think, I need to be able to do a 900 or a 720 or something, I need to be able to these big tricks. And they're not satisfied with how they're skating …. They'll start skating 'cause it's cool. You know 'cause like, man, Tony Hawk's on TV! And like, he's a regular guy, I'm a regular guy, you know! I can do a 900 if I practice. And like, they start skating for the wrong reasons. You know, like I can accomplish this, by this time (Braden, age 15).

In these claims, skateboarders communicate a sense of dissatisfaction with the current media climate and the importance of sponsorship and commercialism to skate culture. This discontent, however, does not translate into a rejection of niche skateboarding media and in fact belies most skateboarders' appreciative fandom of the professionals featured in skate videos. Demonstrating their dynamic and contradictory relationship to commercialism, these comments suggest that skaters' reverence for individualism also serves as a strategy by which skaters can evade developing a definitive critique of

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[393] Skaters frequently located inauthenticity in skateboarders younger than them, espousing a lay theory of the current media culture that suggests that media texts such as *The X Games* have corrupted the latest generation of skateboarders. Exhibiting the "third-person effect," these claims also construct skateboarding as a culture that could be at risk. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to do so, these lay theories deserve further analysis.

commercial culture. Furthermore, this focus on individuality allows skateboarders to continue to regard their culture as authentic even in the face of the extensive media appropriation I have detailed.

Tony Hawk, *The X-Games*, *Jackass, Viva La Bam, Wildboyz*, and other mainstream depictions of skateboarding pose a contradiction to many skateboarders, who regard the mainstream popularization of their practice to be both promising and problematic. The importance of individuality to skateboarding, the relative lack of concern with the pitfalls of capitalism as an institution, and arguably, mainstream producers' skillful appropriation of the heroes and signs of skate culture mitigate skateboarders concerns with dominant portrayals of their culture. As I discuss in the next chapter, MTV's representation of skate culture draws on its commitment to individuality, pleasure, and youthfulness while also reinscribing skateboarding as extreme and rebellious. MTV's skateboarders, furthermore, without question assert American white males' power over women and people of color while mocking the preservation of masculinity via self-inflicted pain.

Conclusion

Listening to skateboarders' passionate descriptions of their practice, I was struck by the boys' devotion to their culture and willingness to express enthusiasm and dedication. More succinctly, I was taken by their evocative and almost poetic language as well as by their poignant mode of delivery. This is not to say that the skateboarders were always thoughtful, constantly emotive, or solely cooperative. In the space of the skate shop, the boys displayed their physical acumen on the skateboarding rail, teased one another mercilessly, and often ignored me. I remained on the boundaries of their

culture in part because I was the only woman present, and together, this group of boys was able to erect invisible borders that served to exclude me. The skateboarders' expressions and performances of masculinity, then, are always and continuously contradictory – they move easily and seamlessly from rough-and-tumble aggression to thoughtful introspection; they mock one another's skateboarding skills and then offer friendly advice; they rely on gross-out humor yet elaborate powerfully on grace and beauty. These contradictions pervade skate life's constructions of masculinity and correspond with the multiply-valenced masculinities that saturate mediated portrayals of skate culture. These complex and dynamic codes of masculinity produce skate life's not-anti-patriarchal critique of patriarchal limitations.

Chapter 4

"Why is it the things that make you a man tend to be such dumb things to do?":[394] Never-ending Adolescence and the (De)stabilization of White Masculine Power on MTV

Introduction

The highly-mediated culture of skateboarding has played a key role in mass mediated appeals to adolescent boys since ESPN's introduction of *The Extreme Games* in 1995, but it was in 2000 that MTV launched *Jackass*, a series that served not only as a counterpoint to Tony Hawk's clean-cut athleticism and *The X Games*' competitive focus but also as a consolidated representation of skate culture's irreverent construction of alternative masculinities. Locating its roots in niche skateboarding culture's popular *Big Brother Magazine;* the *Big Brother* video series, lovingly titled *Shit*, *Number Two*, *Poop*, and *Crap*; and Bam Margera's CKY video series, *Jackass* showcased former *Big Brother* employee Johnny Knoxville subjecting himself and other cast members to a series of pain-inducing pranks and gross preoccupation with bodily fluids. Knoxville, together with professional skateboarder Bam Margera, former *Big Brother* employee Chris Pontius, former clown Steve-O, and a host of other irreverent young men, are now featured in a group of shows developed by producer Jeff Tremaine's (also a former employee of *Big Brother*) aptly-named Dickhouse Productions. Spin-offs *Viva La Bam, Wildboyz,* and more recently, *Bam's Unholy Union,* have placed skate culture in the center of MTV's reality-show lineup and continue to correspond with skateboarding's

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[394] Steve-O, *Wildboyz*, "Brazil," Season 2, Episode 2.

156

simultaneous challenge to and reinscription of dominant masculinities. Each of these shows displays young white men reveling in adolescent humor, taking pleasure in pain, and mocking dominant norms of masculinity, all while maintaining their power at the expense of women, people of color, and working-class whites. As such, they carry on skate culture's not-quite-anti-patriarchal critique of patriarchy.

In MTV's version of a nature documentary, Steve-O and Chris Pontius morph from *Jackasses* into *Wildboyz* traversing the world in search of exotic rituals, gnarly wild animals, and opportunities for hypermasculine risk-taking, bodily humor, and homophobic/erotic display. In Season 2, these intrepid heroes interact with the Amazon's Mee-Mee Indians. Steve-O and Pontius, wearing their shirts wrapped around their heads, introduce the scene. Steve-O: "Today, we're gonna become men." Pontius: "And it's gonna hurt!" They both dissolve into trademark growling, self-mocking laughter. Steve-O then looks at the camera and asks, "Why is it the things that make you a man tend to be such dumb things to do?" This knowledge, of course, does not preclude the boys from attempting to prove their manhood. After drinking and throwing up some "killer Mee-Mee Indian booze" consisting of fruit chewed up, spit out, and buried for fermenting by Mee-Mee Indian women, the boys take part in "the hand in glove ritual," a "traditional" male initiation, in which a boy must wear a glove filled with "the meanest ants in the entire world" and endure the stinging. Pontius wears the glove first, and as he jumps around, screaming in pain, Steve-O asks, "Why don't you take it off dude?" Pontius, smirking, replies "I wanna be a man!" After Pontius survives the glove, Steve-O takes his turn. With the glove on, he frowns and starts screaming, "I'm gonna pass out! Dude! I do not want to be a man! Get it off! Get it off! Get it off! Okay, I'm a man!" After a

157

Mee-Mee Indian, dressed in traditional garb, proclaims they've succeeded in becoming men, the boys are shown sitting with topless Mee-Mee Indian women massaging their hands. Pontius smiles, "Oh man that sucked. But being a man is going to be awesome! Heh heh heh." In the next scene, the boys are in the emergency room with swollen hands, pulling down their pants for antibiotic shots.

In this short segment, the Wildboyz demonstrate the multiply-inflected, ironic-yet-sincere mockery and reinscription of masculinity-as-construction, white dominance over ethnic "others," and men's exploitation of women that pervades *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz*. Though each of these shows operate in this manner, *The Wildboyz* consolidates the nexus of irony, self-inflicted pain, simultaneous mockery of women, non-whites, and white men, and adolescent humor that characterizes each of these shows. Displacing the overt performance and reinforcement of masculinity onto Amazonian "natives" or "savages" while repeatedly mocking such performances as "such dumb things to do," the Wildboyz demonstrate their knowledge of masculinity-as-construction while suggesting that they are above such display, particularly because of their whiteness, but also because of their own confidence as men.[395]

The Wildboyz, then, and their counterparts on *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam*, enact a mode of white masculinity that seems to indirectly align with – or correspond to – skateboarders' mockery of "jock" masculinity, adherence to cooperation over competition, and the core valuation of confident individuality. The intertextual relationships between the Dickhouse oeuvre and the niche media of skate culture

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[395] Though the show's portrayal of male initiation rituals in "faraway places" may suggest the universality of the process of becoming a man, the white, American Wildboyz are *always* mocking these rituals – while the "natives" who guide them through the initiations appear to be taking them seriously. The show's main point, then, is not the cross-cultural existence of the rituals; rather, it is that the rituals are inherently dumb – and thus unnecessary – in the eyes of the white Western heroes of the show.

establish these similarities, and viewers' extratextual knowledge of these shows' industrial histories – particularly their key personnel's involvement with *Big Brother* – solidifies the significance of skate culture to mainstream appeals to white male youth as well as the intersecting nature of the media's portrayals of young men. Though the show does not exhibit a one-to-one relationship with skateboarder values, its simultaneous critique and reinscription of dominant masculinities certainly demonstrate an affinity with skate culture. The shows' masculine performances also overemphasize the adolescent masculinity frequently on display in niche skateboarding videos.

These shows' representations of masculinity are dynamic and contradictory, relying on multiple axes of identity – age, race, and gender, in particular – to continually decodify and consolidate hegemonic masculinity. In playing up and valorizing their adolescent antics, the characters make visible the demands of adult, white, middle-class masculinity to reject bodily or emotional excess and to be rational and in control. Their adolescence, then, affords them the opportunity to critique adult masculinity from a safe space. Furthermore, the boys transfer masculine performance onto non-white "natives," ridiculing their traditions *while at the same time taking part in them*. As such, the Wildboyz demonstrate the flexibility of whiteness and the tendency of whites to fetishize ethnicity or non-white skin in the name of solidifying their coolness[396] while disrupting masculine norms and alerting viewers to the inconsistent and contradictory construction of masculinity. Their renegotiation of masculinity relies upon their whiteness. Furthermore, such renegotiation rests on and reconstructs a new mode of masculine dominance, in which men can demonstrate their confidence and power by suggesting that

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[396] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, ed. bell hooks (Boston: South End Press, 1992). Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

they are "man enough" to ridicule dominant norms of manhood. It is through these

contradictions that Dickhouse Productions carries on skateboarding culture's process of

criticizing masculinity without being anti-patriarchal.

As David Savran points out, the notion that one should "take it like a man," and, I

would add, the existence of male initiation rituals,

> seem tacitly to acknowledge that masculinity is a function not of social
> or cultural mastery but of the act of being subjected, abused, even tortured.
> It implies that masculinity is not an achieved state but a process, a trial through
> which one passes. But at the same time, this phrase ironically suggests the
> precariousness and fragility – even, perhaps, the femininity – of a gender identity
> that must be fought for again and again and again. For finally, when one takes it
> like a man, what is 'it' that one takes? And why does the act of taking 'it' seem to
> make it impossible for the one doing the taking, whoever that might be, to *be* a
> man? .... Why can the one doing the taking only take it *like* a man?[397] (38).

In asking, "Why is it the things that make you a man tend to be such dumb things

to do?" Steve-O echoes Savran's thesis, though he uses the irreverent and ironic lingo

that characterizes adolescent male culture and the culture of cool. Steve-O's lament

simultaneously points out the fragility of masculinity and the centrality of pain to making

a man while developing a new mode of hegemonic masculinity. As I have pointed out,

hegemonic masculinity is not a stable, ahistoric identity, but the mode of masculinity

which allows men to remain in power in a particular moment.[398] As such, as dominant

expressions of masculinity are critiqued and challenged by social movements as well as

cultural, economic, and social changes, masculinity must shift forms in order to remain

powerful. The Dickhouse products can be read as a response to a host of images and

movements sending men back to "true masculine" displays such as violence, dominance

over nature, and initiation rituals, including, for example, The Promise Keepers, the

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[397] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, 38.
[398] Connell, *Masculinities*.

mythopoetic men's movement, and *Fight Club*. Such a response intersects with skateboarders' dissatisfaction with the traditional or institutionalized sporting world, as represented by football, in which young men are celebrated for their adherence to externally-defined rituals and ability to enact violence. Furthermore, the shows' mockery seems to rest on skateboarders' irreverent sensibility, suspicion of adult modes of masculinity, and their alignment with a culture of cool that takes "irreverence as worldview."[399]

"Tarzan, Schmarzan. You don't see any Janes on this boat, do you?": Irreverence and Irony as Safe Gender Critique

Like so many live-action Beavis and Buttheads, Johnny Knoxville, Bam Margera, Steve-O, Chris Pontius, and the rest of the *Jackass* crew revel in adolescent humor in all of its grotesqueness. *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz* each place on display a boys-only world in which young white men subject themselves to bodily harm, delight in bodily (mal)function, explore and mock homoerotic bonds, and ridicule and dominate the adults in their lives. These three shows clearly rely upon a "boys-will-be-boys" mentality that suggests that male misbehavior is simply a product of biology and not the result or demonstration of power. At the same time, however, the bodily humor and harm takes on and reimagines masculinities which seek to reinscribe male power via physical dominance, and the experimentation with homoeroticism suggests an awareness of the constructed and slippery nature of sexuality, the problematic nature of the cultural relationship between masculinity and heterosexuality, and, in David Savran's words, "the precariousness and fragility"[400] of masculinity.

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[399] Susan Fraiman, *Cool Men and the Second Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xi.
[400] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, 38.

161

What's more, the Wildboyz' use of Tarzan as the icon of maleness operates as far more than a cheeky reference – or an easy cultural marker of virile masculinity. As Gail Bederman and John Kasson both explain, Edgar Rice Burroughs's famous hero, a British nobleman raised in Africa by apes, represented the apex of masculine physicality in an historical moment when American men were largely moving into white collar jobs characterized as boring and feminine. Importantly, Tarzan's exaggerated strength and sexuality relied upon both his simian upbringing – and African apes were aligned with African people – and his "civilized" English background and genetics.[401] As Bederman argues, *Tarzan* "constructed Africa as a place where 'the white man' could prove his superior manhood by reliving the primitive, masculine life of his most distant evolutionary forefathers."[402] *Tarzan*, then, represents what bell hooks calls "eating the other," or white appropriation of black cultural markers in the name of experiencing the perceived vitality of blackness.[403] Tarzan's duality – both white and black, "noble" and "savage" – affords him physical dominance, sexual virility, and masculine power. More importantly, as Kasson argues, it is Tarzan's whiteness that allows him the ability to glean the best from a wild upbringing – a genetic luxury that the black Africans simply do not have in the story.[404] Invoking Tarzan, the Wildboyz evoke the power of whiteness to take on blackness, the power of white males to adopt the perceived masculinity of black males while leaving their vulnerabilities behind, and the supposed strong masculinity located in the wilderness and among "savages."

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[401] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

[402] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 220.

[403] hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance."

[404] *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the boys' alignment with Tarzan makes evident the show's function as a response to the recent history of masculinity in the United States, during which Robert Bly's mythopoetic men's movement heralded a return to the wild in the name of upholding masculinity, strengthening men's psyches, and reaffirming men's place in the world.[405] As I discuss below, however, Tarzan is never invoked in full seriousness – from irony to homoerotic play, the Wildboyz never fail to remind the viewers that they understand Tarzan as an easy marker of hypermasculinity and seek, in some ways, to disrupt that marker. *The Wildboyz* and their predecessors *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam* each in their own way say "Tarzan Schmarzan," throwing off dominant masculine conventions and playing with masculinity's fragility, all the while reminding us that white boys rule.

"God, that's an ugly wiener": Male Vulnerability as Spectacle

Susan Bordo suggests that the 1990s saw a rise, so to speak, in pop culture's obsession with penises. From Lorena Bobbitt to *The Crying Game*, she notes, penises – and their vulnerabilities – were placed on display.[406] Cultural images of the penis embraced its contradictions, valuing "the phallic mythology of Superman masculinity"[407] while simultaneously rallying around everymen in texts such as *Seinfeld* and *There's Something About Mary*. Reflecting further on "this most male of bodily sites,"[408] Bordo demonstrates the contradictions inherent in imagining ultimate masculinity through the penis, arguing that its felicity – its dependence upon sexual rhythms and hormones – is contrary to the notion that men rely solely upon reason and logic in their actions. For

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[405] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[406] Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 15-35.
[407] Ibid., 32.
[408] Ibid., 34.

many men, she says, the penis is still aligned with "the ugly, the instinctual, the 'primitive.'"[409] More to the point, "No other part of the body is so visibly and overtly mercurial as the penis, capable of such dramatic transformation from passivity to alertness,"[410] from a hard tool ("jackhammer"), weapon ("torpedo") or hero ("The Lone Ranger") to "suggest[ing] vulnerability, fragility, a sleepy sweetness."[411]

Such vulnerability shadowed by heroism, Brenton J. Malin asserts, came to the fore in dominant images of masculinity post-September 11. "If the masculine hero of the '90s offered a conflicted blend of hypermasculine toughness and new age sensitivity," he argues, "the September 11 hero is still more profoundly conflicted, eminently heroic and eminently vulnerable."[412] Furthermore, the male hero's – and the United States' – hypermasculine displays of heroism are justified by their concurrent vulnerability.

It is in this climate that *Jackass* and *Wildboyz* in particular send up the contradictions of the penis, male dominance, and homosocial boys' cultures. This mockery is perhaps most concrete in the shows' metonymical abuse of their stars' penises. In the *Wildboyz* series premiere, Chris Pontius and Steve-O sit shirtless on top of a van in South Africa watching a group of baboons whose genitals are prominently visible. Pontius cracks, "I was looking at that baboon's wiener and I'm like, God that's an ugly wiener. And then I looked down at mine and I'm like, it looks kind of like mine. Ha ha!" Aligning his "wiener" with the animal's, Pontius drives home Susan Bordo's suggestion that the penis serves as a source of conflict for men. His remark, however, also simultaneously highlights his animalistic masculinity and the vulnerability –

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[409] Ibid., 21.
[410] Ibid., 43.
[411] Ibid., 44.
[412] Brenton J. Malin, *American Masculinity under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties 'Crisis of Masculinity'* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

weeniness – of that masculinity. Throughout the series, the Wildboyz turn their penises into jokes, from imagining an anaconda as a snake that is "a little bit bigger than the ones we're used to working with" (Episode 2.2) to asking, "I wonder what animal will bite my wiener off?" while wearing a kilt (Episode 3.4). Steve-O and Chris Pontius's delivery is important to understanding their anxious expressions, for they always end their comments with a gruff "heh heh" and look goofily at the camera – they are, in short, clearly in charge, stars of the show who dominate the television screen and are "man enough" to publicize their masculine anxieties.

At the same time, however, by publicizing and laughing at their own "weeniness," their inability to live up to the norms of dominant masculinity – in their body types, especially – the men in these shows beat their detractors to the punch. The self-deprecating humor that pervades these shows operates as a rhetorical suit of armor that deflects any criticisms of the boys' nonhegemonic masculinity. Such ego defense is also at work in the boys' routine characterization of masculine rituals as "stupid" – the mockery of these rituals allows the boys to repel any claims that they are unable to live up to the codes of hegemonic masculinity by simply responding that they do not want to live up to the codes.

The boys in *Jackass* and *Wildboyz* also routinely put their penises at risk. *Jackass*'s constant representation of such risk is perhaps exemplified by "The Cup Test," aired in both *Jackass: The Movie* and episode 2.1 of the television series. Johnny Knoxville, wearing short jean shorts (what might be called "Daisy Dukes") and a tight red t-shirt, straps a cup over his shorts and says, "I'm Johnny Knoxville, and this is the cup test." He then subjects himself to a series of penile abuses, from children kicking his

crotch to a friend dropping a cue ball on the cup from the top of a multi-story building.

After each test, Knoxville groans, clearly in pain, and at the end of the test, he shows the audience the bruises resulting from abuses that missed the cup and landed on his leg. On *Wildboyz*, Steve-O engages in "some good old fashioned penis fishing" in Florida. He wraps a string tied to small fish around his "package," and a close-up shot shows him pulling the "noose" tight. Steve-O then throws the string into the water, and large Tarpon fish attack the small fish. Steve-O prances around, screaming in pain, while Pontius and the others on the boat laugh hysterically.

As David Savran argues, such displays of vulnerability are central to the production of masculinity, modern versions of which, he says, are founded in male masochism. Such masochism derives from the modern shift from beating to schooling in the production of "civilized" young men. As men learned to police their own natural instincts toward rowdy behavior, self-induced pain became part and parcel of middle-class masculinity – and such pain had to be associated with masculine freedom, or pleasure. What's more, the experience of pain aligns masculinity with victimhood and feminizes and blackens it while at the same time asserting its power.[413]

The boys' hysteric laughter in the face of self-inflicted pain certainly is suggestive of the masochism central to white male identity. I would add, however, that it also represents disdain for male displays of physical power characteristic of the 1980s action films discussed by Susan Jeffords[414] or the late-1990s *Fight Club*. By raising such masochism to the level of the absurd, these shows suggest that masochistic displays are "stupid," which is to say, unnecessary *or too obvious*. In a culture that valorizes self-

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[413] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, 1-32.
[414] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

reflexivity and irony, the overt display of masculinity – such as that produced through both self-flagellation and hypermasculine physical prowess – in fact reveal that a masculinity is at risk, and Savran's deconstruction of the phrase "take it like a man" says as much. I would add that irony and irreverence provide a means by which young men can prove that they are manly without revealing that they are doing so. In other words, they can take the construction of masculinity back underground, making their own process of proof invisible by exposing and laughing at the means by which other men demonstrate their manliness. They are, in short, "man enough" to mock masculine proving grounds.

The boys' ever-present irreverence, Steve-O and Pontius's frequent cheeky referrals to demonstrating their manhood, and Johnny Knoxville's pseudo-hipster, laid-back demeanor all indicate their disdain for dominant masculinities while producing an ironic style through which they can shore up their own masculinity without letting anyone know they are doing so. These men are not the glistening hard bodies of *Rambo*, *Die Hard*, or *Fight Club* – they are skinny and impertinent adolescents, mocking one another, their ugly penises, and susceptibility to pain. As I discuss next, the boys, over and over again, place on display their physical vulnerability, succumbing time after time to the dominance of nature, other men, and sometimes women.

"Well, if you're asking me if I'm always a pussy, Andre, I probably am": "Taking it like a man" by Admitting Defeat

While *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam* make a point of placing male pain on display, it is *Wildboyz* that most clearly articulates a critique – or at least an awareness – of the cultural construction of this display and its relationship to masculinity. Its relationship to whiteness, of course, goes largely unmentioned. From declaring male proving rites to be

"dumb things to do" to characterizing a snake expert who attempts the "kiss of death" with a cobra to be "idiotic" (Episode 1.3), Steve-O, in particular, routinely makes clear that such dangerous displays of physical dominance are silly and unnecessary. The extremity and absurdity of such displays in *Jackass* – from the skits "Beard of Leaches" (Episode 3.1) to "Extreme Unicycling" (Episode 3.3) – and *Viva La Bam*'s routine reminders that even Bam, the show's alpha male, is afraid of snakes cue the audience that this group of young men are far removed from hypermasculine heroes like Bruce Willis and Steven Seagal. Still, *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam* never explicitly make fun of such display in the way that Steve-O does throughout *Wildboyz*. While Steve-O has always been the cast member who most often sends up homoeroticism and masculinity, perhaps it is their presence in the "wild" space of predatory animals and "savage" native peoples that allow the Wildboyz to play with masculinity more freely. That is, their encounters with the animals and their whiteness in the presence of the dark native "others" may in fact provide the Wildboyz with a kind of protective shell from which they can critique Western masculinity.[415] That is to say, because the show routinely suggests that non-Western men are "crazier" and more grotesque than its white heroes, Steve-O and Chris Pontius are presented to be firmly in control – and even rational in their knowing mockery of male rituals. So, even while they characterize themselves as irreverent goofballs, they can, at least, abide by the codes of hegemonic masculinity more easily than the non-white "natives" can. What's more, the non-Western men on display do not

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[415] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002). Rothenberg characterizes whiteness as an "invisible knapsack" of privilege, an identity perceived to be the norm. Though she does not discuss the ways in which it can open space for the critique of other identity norms, her notion of the "invisible knapsack" is useful for characterizing the privilege Steve-O and Chris Pontius enjoy in their travels to "faraway lands."

live up to the physical norms of hegemonic masculinity – they are frequently presented as shorter and skinnier, and of course, less white – than the American version of the ideal male. The "natives" inability to inhabit dominant masculinity makes Steve-O and Chris Pontius appear comparatively "manly" even while they make fun of hegemonic gender norms.

The boys also deploy sarcasm as a kind of protective shell. In the *Wildboyz* series premiere, Pontius and Steve-O travel to the Cape of Good Hope's "Shark Alley," where the Great White Shark dominates. Dressed in snorkel gear and black wet suits while riding in a boat, the boys explain their plan to the audience:

> Steve-O: All these seals are doing is waiting to die in the jaws of a Great White Shark.
>
> Pontius: So we're going to go swim with them. SO stupid!
>
> Steve-O: This is the world's dumbest place to swim.
>
> Pontius: And we don't even like seals.
>
> Steve-O: We hate cold water!
>
> Pontius: We're swimming in Shark Alley right now, with a bunch of seals, that are the main food source for the Great White Shark. And it's starting to get towards sunset, which is the main feeding time. Which makes us pretty stupid.

In admitting the error of their ways, the Wildboyz set up a situation in which their fear of the sharks does not threaten their masculinity. They acknowledge the completely arbitrary nature of their choice – they are certainly not doing it for pleasure – and thereby acknowledge it as an exercise in taking risks for the sake of the hypermasculine performance. By openly mocking themselves, they suggest that they are secure in their

masculinity. A "real man" does not need to put his masculinity on display – he does not need to prove himself and can even deride such displays as out-and-out dumb.

This valorization of stupidity upholds the Wildboyz' dominance in another manner. As I have noted, women – particularly white, heterosexual, middle-class women – are constructed as "civilizing" or controlling agents in American culture. They hold the power to reign men in, to bring them under control. In the boys-only world of *Wildboyz*, boys are free to do whatever they please. Such reinforcement of white male power operates in tandem with their critique of traditional male norms.

Steve-O and Pontius also use sarcasm to make fun of their inability to dominate nature. In Alaska, Pontius, Steve-O, and Manny, the show's resident wildlife expert, approach a group of Black Bears. Steve-O, dressed in a bear costume, proclaims that he will protect Manny should he get into trouble with the bears, who will "recognize me as one of their own" and listen to him. Pontius chimes in that he will help by "cuss[ing] to them and … swear[ing] at them, and if they still won't listen, I'll go ahead and give them a taste of my middle finger." The absurdity of this remark is driven home as the bears actually do approach the men and the crew yells nervously that they need to back up. Steve-O, still in his bear costume and floating lazily in an inner tube in the river, solemnly proclaims, "It's not often that a grizzly bear fights a black bear, but if I have to, I will." Pontius says, "Thank God Steve-O's here to protect us." By sending up their clear inability to dominate the bears, the boys make fun of the relationship between dominance over nature and masculine power. They make evident men's relative lack of power and suggest that masculinity need not be proven via dominance over "the wild."

The Wildboyz, however, go beyond making fun of masculine displays to making fun of their own feminized or homosexualized selves. After the boys dive naked into a shark cage and fearfully jump back out in a matter of seconds, a guide asks, "Do you always look like that when you jump in a cage?" Steve-O replies, "Well, if you're asking me if I'm always a pussy Andre, I probably am." Such slang displaces Steve-O's fear onto a feminized object while at the same time suggesting that Steve-O is confident enough to admit to his own fears. Such displacement is also demonstrated on *Viva La Bam*, though in a more conflicted manner. The show has posited snakes as Bam's kryptonite – he is largely in control of himself and others until snakes are introduced. Cast members Ryan Dunn and Johnny Knoxville plot to throw a snake onto Bam, predicting that he will "squeal like a little girl." Bam's response, however, is hypermasculine in its aggression: "Get it the fuck off of me now … I'm serious, get it off! I fucking hate it! … Dude, stop it, don't even do it. Dude, PETA's going to come after you if you throw it on me, it's not even worth it." Despite Johnny Knoxville's celebratory proclamation that Bam "screamed just like April [Bam's mother]," Bam's invocation of PETA, a group that I would argue is feminized in its attention to animal rights (in opposition to the hypermasculine NRA, for example), transfers his fear of snakes onto fear of the feminized institution. Dunn should back off not because of Bam's fear, but because of PETA's requirements (Episode 3.3).

The Wildboyz also enact such confidence when they learn about the World Eskimo Indian Olympics from world record holder Carol Pickett. Steve-O explains, "She's going to explain each event, and then kick our asses in it" (Episode 1.2). Pickett, who as an Eskimo, a woman, and a guest on the show, is darkened and othered, again

both makes the boys' relative lack of physical prowess evident and reminds the audience that the boys are far too manly to be threatened by a woman's strength. It is in this contradiction that the Wildboyz produce a new mode of hegemonic masculinity that seems to be a direct response to feminism – and Title IX. Male power is predicated upon admitting defeat and demonstrating imperviousness to feminine strength.

Wildboyz and *Jackass* take such imperviousness a step further in their experimentation with homoerotic performances. Though *Viva La Bam* also operates from a boys-only world, the show keeps homoeroticism at arm's length, preferring to remain in the realm of boyish pranks during which the boys certainly have fun with one another, make each other laugh, and even violate each other's bodies with tacks, bees, and other mundane weapons. While this boyish fun does have a homoerotic tint, it never crosses into the type of homoerotic experimentation on display in *Jackass* and *Wildboyz*. What's more, Bam Margera has solidified his heterosexuality in his latest show, 2007's *Bam's Unholy Union*, a reality show depicting Bam and his fiancé as they make their wedding plans. Though Steve-O and Chris Pontius do periodically play their sexuality "straight," the more frequently, and arguably, more passionately, "cross that line" into homoerotic performance.

"Oh my God, I think we might have crossed that line. It was an accident!": Performing Homoeroticism and Femininity as Masculine Display

> Steve-O: If a big scary jaguar was actually a cute housecat, what would it be?
>
> Pontius: It'd be a Margay. We thought this show was getting a bit too macho working with all these jaguars and stuff, so we decided to start working with something a little mar-GAY!

Steve-O: What could possibly be margay than this? (Pontius, wearing only a jock

strap, sits on Steve-O's shoulders.) So, we worked with the margay, now let's go

find the most gay.

Steve-O and Pontius's adolescent wordplay and snickering puns place the complexity of

adolescent male identity on display. Conflating "macho" with both the danger of

wildcats and heterosexuality, they construct a false dichotomy between dominating

modes of masculinity and homosexuality. In the subsequent scene, the boys solidify this

dichotomy as they raft down a river wearing only life jackets:

Pontius (lisping): We're rafting down this bumpy wild river to go swings from

some vines.

Steve-O: Tarzan Schmarzan.

Pontius: You don't see any Janes on this boat do you?

The boys lean toward one another, faux-kissing, and then dissolve into disgusted

laughter. Pontius protests, "Oh my God, I think we might have crossed that line. It was

an accident! We hit a bump in the rapids! Our lips touched!" Perhaps to drive home the

point, the boys begin to swing from vines. Pontius claims, "I've seen them do this one on

Tarzan a million times. It's definitely going to work." Enacting Tarzan's

hypermasculinity while sarcastically commenting on the absurdity of vine-swinging,

Pontius sends up dominant gender roles. The boys further the (self)-mockery later, when

Steve-O proclaims, "We came to the jungle, we swang on vines, and I think we proved

our point." Pontius replies, "Tarzan ain't got nothing on the Wildboyz!" Both yell

together, "Yeah!" They start to kiss, and then dissolve into laughter, never fully "crossing

that line" (Episode 3.4). As I have noted, Tarzan represents the hypermasculine virility

of the "darkened" jungle and whites' power to appropriate that perceived masculinity. Juxtaposing Tarzan with fey homosexuality, the boys demonstrate the instability of the line between the hypermasculine and the homoerotic and between homosocial boys' cultures and homoerotic boys' cultures. In playing with these lines, the Wildboyz produce a critique of dominant conceptions of masculinity and sexuality usually unseen in adolescent boys' popular culture. Nevertheless, this critique is immediately mitigated by the Wildboyz laughter, and most of Pontius's homoerotic and/or feminized play – from Pontius stripping for a moose and hanging his clothes on the animal's antlers to his *Jackass* persona as Party Boy, in which he prances around in a g-string dancing to techno music – is laced with a mocking irony that could be read as out-and-out ridicule of gay men. Steve-O, on the other hand, tends to play his homosexualized and feminized self "straighter." Commenting on a walking stick, he says, "You can tell that it's a ballerina. Because it does pliés and relevés." Performing some pliés, he goes on, "You can make fun of me all you want for going to dance class. But I know my pliés and relevés" (Episode 2.2). Rather than marking his masculinity with teasing laughter, Steve-O continually reinscribes it by beating potential ridiculers to the punch and suggesting he is confident enough to absorb derision. In fact, Steve-O transfers "taking it like a man" from the physical domain to the mental domain – the masochism David Savran discusses can be found in Steve-O's willingness to subject himself, constantly, to mockery.

Repeatedly approaching "that line," crossing it, blurring it, and playing with it, the *Jackass* and *Wildboyz* cast members demonstrate the relationship between constructions of masculinity and constructions of sexuality while continually upsetting them. The freedom to do so, however, relies not only upon their whiteness but also upon the

174

constant deployment of irreverence and irony. In this manner, in correspondence with skateboarding culture, these shows and their cast members critique norms of masculinity without disrupting its power; disturb patriarchal constraints without being anti-patriarchal. Furthermore, as I demonstrate below, the Dickhouse Productions casts frequently enact patriarchal power over women, non-whites, and each other.

"It's a jungle out there. And we're Tarzan": Irreverence and Irony as Reinscription of Male Dominance

Off the coast of South Africa, the Wildboyz again reference Tarzan. After observing the Great White Sharks' feeding area, which is teeming with dolphins, Chris Pontius provides the audience with a recap: "So today we had a bunch of dolphins getting hunted down by Great White Sharks. At the same time, hundreds of kamikaze seagulls tried to stab the dolphins with their beaks. And, like three whales trying to eat everybody! It's a jungle out there, and we're Tarzan" (Episode 1.1). Pontius dissolves into his trademark "heh heh heh" laughter, the camera pans to the sun setting on the ocean, and the sound of "native" chanting rises. Cut to a shot of the "natives" dancing on the waterfront with Steve-O, who is dancing sloppily alongside them and periodically breaking rank to spin in his own way.

The juxtaposition of Pontius's ironic claim on Tarzan, the simultaneously noble and savage He-Man, with Steve-O's simultaneous participation in and mockery of traditional dancing, points to the Wildboyz' concurrent mockery of and participation in dominating masculinity. Steve-O and Pontius, clearly, find Tarzan to be a funny archetype in its exaggerated masculinity, but at the same time, they also routinely place themselves in a dominating relationship to themselves, non-whites, and women. Though such dominance is usually mitigated by irony, it is nonetheless powerful. Even more

175

strongly, the men of *Jackass* and, to a greater extent, *Viva La Bam*, place on display an adolescent masculinity impervious to rules, disrespectful of parents and other adults, and superior to just about everyone. Though *Jackass* and *Viva La Bam* also play their power with humor, the repeated assertion that their boyish pranks are acceptable reveals the sense of power the cast members share.

"What will he do next? Whatever the fuck I want": Bam Margera's Total Domination

Without question, *Viva La Bam* exhibits the most explicit claims to male dominance in the Dickhouse oeuvre. From the show's credit sequence, in which a voiceover asks, "What will he do next?" and Bam responds, "Whatever the fuck I want" before appearing to jump off a multistory building with his skateboard in hand, *Viva La Bam* places Bam in charge of his parents, his friends, and the community of Westchester, Pennsylvania. The ultimate alpha male and the leader of the multiple male minions who took part in producing the CKY skateboarding videos, Bam routinely performs the superiority of white adolescent[416] males over women, people of color, adults, and even his other white male friends. I would argue that the trait allowing Bam to dominate other white males is his athleticism. The only skateboarder of the bunch to be a well-known professional – he is featured in one of Tony Hawk's Activision video games – Bam positions himself as the reason for the other boys' success on the show. Though the superiority of male adolescents over adult men does correspond to the critique of adult masculinity in niche skateboarding videos, the show's overt displays of dominance and

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[416] In his late 20s, Margera is by conventional standards no adolescent. However, he operates in a moment when adolescence seems to be lengthening as more and more young people put off marriage, children, homeownership, and other traditional markers of adulthood. Furthermore, he performs adolescence, continuing to live with his parents and a host of roommates and reveling in childhood pranks. Though, as I have noted, his latest reality show depicts his wedding, the show makes clear that Bam is reluctant to participate in marriage as an institution and will only do so on his arguably adolescent terms.

Bam's clear level of power over his friends depart from the values espoused by many skaters.

Much of *Viva La Bam* is predicated upon Bam's unusual relationship with his parents, April ("Ape") and Phil, who represent caricatures of contemporary parents unwilling to place limits on their children. From routinely waking them up abruptly in the middle of the night – in one memorable moment, Bam's obese friend Preston crawls into bed next to April, replacing Phil without her knowledge – to ironing hamburger decals onto all of Phil's shirts, Bam and his friends absolutely torture April and Phil. While Phil allows most of these pranks to roll off his back, April responds to Bam with high-pitched, hysterical screams. They get angry, but have absolutely no control over Bam, who can, after all, "do whatever the fuck [he] want[s]." Leading the crowd and making his parents a mockery, Bam highlights the power of his youth.

Phil's brother Don Vito also serves as a constant source of laughter. Obese and largely unintelligible, Don Vito represents a working-class white male grotesque, the picture of excess. In fact, in the series' third episode, Bam places his father and Don Vito's working-class family on display for absolute mockery during a family reunion. After asking his friend to replace the family home's front door with a drawbridge that will allow appropriate space for his reportedly obese relatives, Bam travels to his grandmother's house with Phil. There, he makes fun of her living room rug, her old-fashioned values, and her clear frustration with her family and their drinking habits. Bam summarizes his father's family as such: They all "grew up next to this gnarly power plant in Lynwood PA, and I have a feeling that all that radiation just fucked with my whole family because everybody's nuts!"

177

Characterizing his father's family as the product of radiation, Bam solidifies his own power, indirectly characterizing himself and his friends as "not nuts" – that is, not irrational, not grotesque, not old-fashioned. Though Bam does not use the term "white trash" to describe Phil's family, the reference to the power plant, the family member's excess weight, the grandmother's out-of-date rug, and their excessive beer consumption all serve as markers of "white trash." As John Hartigan, Jr. explains, "[W]hite trash … materializes a complicated policing of the inchoate boundaries that comprise class and racial identities in this country."[417] That is to say, the invocation of these markers of white trash sets up Bam as incontrovertibly powerful in his mode of white masculinity. Compared to Phil's family, Bam and his friends are rational and in control. By framing his father's family as excessive, Bam mitigates his own adolescent excesses, thus maintaining the power of white masculinity's association with reason and control while rejecting the hyperrational, uptight, bureaucratic image of adult middle-class masculinity. Furthermore, by placing himself in opposition to his "white trash" – and therefore lazy – family, Bam can highlight his own vitality, energy, and enterprise. Unlike Don Vito, who supposedly spends much of his day eating and drinking beer, Bam and his friends take great strides to build elaborate clubhouses and skate parks and to formulate pranks. Using their young, middle-class, white vigor, Bam and his friends showcase American mores of hard work without subscribing to traditional models of employment. In this way, this show aligns with Dickhouse Productions' ongoing critique of white masculine norms and subscription to white male power.

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[417] John Hartigan Jr., "Name Calling: Objectifying "Poor Whites" And "White Trash" In Detroit," in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1997), 47.

Beyond asserting his dominance over working-class adults, Bam continually suggests that he and his friends are far more rational and in control than his mother. Phil Margera contributes to this representation. While Phil is calm, April is a shrieking, hysterical shrew. As Bam and his friends begin to break down the family home's front door with a sledgehammer, April screams at them to stop. Phil stands idly by, and April turns to him wailing, "How are you watching them chop our door up? Any? Any? Hello-o?" Phil just chuckles and looks on (Episode 1.3). April is placed in the role of the mother-who-must-civilize, the calming influence on a group of men, but she routinely fails at this role. By Season 3, Bam asks, "Ape, do you just bitch all day, is that what you do?" and institutes "Ape's 24 hour Bitch-No-More Marathon," challenging his mother to abstain from complaining for an entire day during which, of course, he and his friends work to torture her (Episode 3.3). Though April protests, "Bam, I am not bitchin' all the time, it's just that you do so much shit that's bad," Bam is clearly represented as rational, in-control, and in-the-right, while April must "dig deep" to find the self-control necessary to make it through the day. While April seems irrational, out-of-control, Phil functions as a grown-up who has not fallen prey to norms of adult white masculinity.[418]

By casting adult family members as objects of ridicule, Bam and his friends can indeed do whatever they want without suggesting that they are out of control or excessive. Though they may run through a grocery store dressed as Vikings (Episode 1.3), fill the Margera house with soap suds (Episode 3.3), purposely fail or sabotage a host of jobs from baker to farmer (Episode 4.3), and saw a "moonroof" into Bam's Lamborghini (Episode 5.2), Bam and his friends appear to be in control in comparison to

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[418] For a discussion of women's "civilizing" impact, see Whannel, "Media Discourses of Masculinity and Morality."

the adults of the show. As I discuss in Part 3, people of color, particularly "Compton Ass

Terry," a Black skateboarder, also serve as irrational foils to the CKY crew.

Though *Viva La Bam* does, in some ways, continue the mockery of traditional

masculinities characteristic of *Jackass* and *Wildboyz*, the show's premise valorizes white

adolescent male dominance and exhibits an explicit mockery of the working-class,

women, and people of color. In this way, the show represents the low point of Dickhouse

Productions, failing to produce even the contradictory critique present in *Jackass* and

Wildboyz.

"A well-groomed woman's undercarriage": Irreverent Sexism and "Straight"
Heterosexuality

My criticism of *Viva La Bam* should not imply that *Jackass* and *Wildboyz* are

without fault. As I have made clear, both of these series serve to uphold patriarchal

power while at the same time ridiculing traditional modes of masculinity. Despite (or

perhaps because of) their relatively frequent blurring of boundaries between

homosexuality and hegemonic masculinity and between homosexuality and

heterosexuality, the cast members of both shows exhibit blatant sexism and play their

heterosexuality "straight." That is to say, the characters on both shows largely drop their

sarcastic and irreverent tones when discussing heterosexual encounters, instead picking

up an adolescent tenor that suggests a fascination with sexuality and a sense of awe at

their ability to express such sexuality freely. After attempting the numerous events in the

Eskimo Olympics, for example, Steve-O asks their female instructor who makes the

better Eskimo. As she is deciding, Pontius proclaims, "What we really want to find out

though is which is the better lover, because Carol's hot!" (Episode 1.2). Though Pontius

never operates in full seriousness, his sense of glee in proclaiming "Carol's hot!" is

palpable, and it is this glee that solidifies his heterosexuality. Always joking, Pontius plays his heterosexuality straight.

The men also speak irreverently as they toss off sexist comments, and their irreverence in this case serves to shore up their power in that it acknowledges the absurdity of sexism without ever abandoning it. Dressed in an Uncle Sam suit, Chris Pontius proclaims, "The Bald Eagle. Not only our national symbol, but also the nickname of a well-groomed woman's undercarriage. God bless 'em all. Heh heh heh" (Episode 1.2). Though the conflation of a national symbol with such sexist slang does demonstrate the slippery and constructed nature of symbols, such sexist slang coupled with Pontius's gruff and somewhat aggressive chuckle, places Pontius in a location of dominance. Free to judge and objectify women – even while laughing at either himself or the slang – Pontius solidifies his power as a white male.

Though women, in the rare instances when they are present on *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz*, serve as either irrational foils (April Margera) to the boys' adolescent but controlled irreverence or as sexual objects, it is people of color and indigenous groups who truly serve to maintain the boys' power in spite of their mockery of masculinity. Though they seem capable of negotiating through various masculinities and mocking, reimagining, and remolding masculine rituals, the cast members of these shows do so on the backs of the various people of color who periodically appear in the three shows. Furthermore, as I have mentioned, their adolescent irreverence seems to break from the rational and enterprising construction of whiteness highlighted by Richard

Dyer,[419] but in defining the actions of various people of color as "crazy" or "out-of-control," the shows mitigate the "wildness" of the Wildboyz and their crew.

Part Three – "This is some freak show crap": White Western Dominance

Homi Bhabha has noted that colonialist discourse relies on "fixity" in the construction and representation of indigenous peoples' identities. Such representation, he argues strongly, "connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition."[420] In contrast, as Richard Dyer notes, whiteness is characterized by flexibility in its representation and derives much of its power from that flexibility. Whiteness, he contends, is "everything and nothing." Though it is frequently tied to rationality and enterprise, it also enjoys freedom of movement and metamorphosis. The white male adolescents of *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz* delight in this flexibility and use it to perform alternative modes of white masculinity, as I have discussed throughout this paper. But, their maintenance of white male power in the face of these negotiations is dependent upon fixed images of indigenous peoples and American people of color in two ways. First, hypermasculinity is displaced onto people of color, particularly indigenous people in *Wildboyz*, allowing the shows' stars to take part in such hypermasculine display while simultaneously mocking it. Second, the cast members' irreverent, over-the-top actions are played in relationship to the "Others'" actions, and people of color are routinely characterized as "crazier" than the regular cast members. The boys then, are able to walk a line between serious modes of dominant masculinity and absurdist antics; they can be "everything and nothing," both critical of hypermasculinity and adherent to norms of "civility" in comparison to the darkened

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[419] Dyer, *White*.
[420] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1983/1997).

"others." In comparison to the "natives" "crazy" antics and non-normative bodies, the white heroes of these shows appear relatively dominant, and from this position of power, they are able to make fun of dominant gender codes. Furthermore, the "natives" participation in hypermasculine displays of masculinity discloses their need to prove their manliness – and thus suggests that they are not *truly* manly. It is this relationship that contributes to the Dickhouse crew's ability to enact a critique of patriarchal norms that is neither anti-patriarchal nor anti-racist.

In the first episode of *Wildboyz*' second season, Steve-O and Pontius travel to Jipur, India, which, the voiceover explains, is "home to a number of bizarre street performers." Having made their way through South Africa, where they swam with Great White Sharks; Alaska, where Steve-O mixed salmon semen and eggs – directly from the source – in his mouth; and a host of other locations that presented numerous opportunities for the boys' silly pranks, daredevilry, and gross-out humor, the boys introduce Jipur's street performers as "some freak show crap" (Episode 2.1). The "freak shows," Indian men who Pontius describes further as a "crazy bastard" and "creepy guy," eat light bulbs and walk on broken glass. Steve-O remarks, "Where we come from, playing with broken glass is totally frowned upon. But as you can see, in Jipur, it's cool!" The boys laugh, delighting in their discovery of such "crazy" men.

Positioning himself and Pontius as "we," Steve-O implicates the Indian men as "they," a group who are positioned as being more irrational and pushing the boundaries of "civility" farther than the Wildboyz ever would. Though light bulb-eating is certainly shocking, it pales in comparison to the extent of bodily harm and disgust to which Steve-O subjects himself repeatedly. It is through this positioning that the Wildboyz secure

their own normality – or their relative sense of rationality or even "civility" at the expense of the Indian men. *Viva La Bam* makes a similar move when African American skateboarder "Compton Ass Terry" appears on the show. Again, though the show is driven by Bam and his friends' adolescent antics, Terry is characterized as "wild and out of control" by Bam. Furthermore, Bam suggests that his desire for excitement is driven by Terry's presence. Preparing for his family reunion, he declares, "I can't just have some boring-ass dinner. I gotta do something cool because Compton Ass Terry's here." His declaration of desire, which can certainly be read as an assertion of Terry's naturalized knowledge of "cool" as a black man, is followed by a shot of Terry wearing ski goggles and speaking something unintelligible. The episode is punctuated throughout with images of Terry dancing to hip hop, and shows Terry losing control while driving an ATV and crashing into an Audi. Though Bam routinely loses control of this ATV, Terry's mishap is characterized as a result of his "wild and out of control" nature. Bam is purposefully daring and irreverent; Terry seems to have no choice.

Beyond characterizing Terry as "crazier" and "cooler" than Bam and his friends, the show absolutely others him. Introducing Terry to his parents, Bam says, "I seriously made a wrong turn off the 405 and I ended up in Compton. I met this dude. Look at the bling bling shit he has." His story suggests that Bam, save for a wrong turn, would never be found in Compton, and Terry is positioned as a novelty brought in from a strange land. Terry is even employed to teach Phil about bling, accompanying him to Philadelphia to get an Elvis pinky ring. Phil asks Terry, "Do you gotta tell him that you have it [bling], or do you just let them see it?" Terry, in other words, is positioned as a cultural tour

guide, leading Phil and Bam through the culture of bling. Phil and Bam are the norm;

Terry is novelty.

Beyond mitigating their own irreverence and "craziness," which is to say, their

chosen distance from mainstream norms of behavior, by displacing such transgression

onto people of color, the boys in these shows also transfer hypermasculine displays onto

people of color. This dual displacement positions the boys in a location in-between, from

which they critique masculinity while maintaining their power. In Florida, Steve-O and

Pontius meet William Cypress, a Seminole Indian wearing traditional dress. With

Cypress, the boys participate in "the traditional party dances of the Seminole Indians,"

dancing around a fire, jumping around, and humping the ground. Steve-O declares, "So

you could say that the Seminole Indians are the original Wildboyz of Florida." In this

statement, Steve-O aligns himself with native peoples, an action not dissimilar from

Robert Bly's mythopoetic men's movement, while at the same time suggesting that it is

Seminole Indians, not the white Wildboyz, who participate in masculine displays in all

seriousness. They do the same with the male initiation ritual described at the beginning

of this paper, and in India, where after walking through coals, Steve-O proclaims, "If us

three didn't just prove that we're the most bad-assed dudes in India, then you've got to be

an absolute idiot!" Though the boys have participated in this performance, they've also

repeatedly characterized the Indian men as "creepy." As such, they can perform

hypermasculinity while mocking such performance.

The Dickhouse boys' whiteness serves as a cultural shelter from which they can

safely play with dominant norms of masculinity while maintaining its power. Positioning

people of color as both irrational and hypermasculine – characteristics that are antithetical

in dominant codes of gender – the shows suggest that the boys' actions are normative or at least purposefully transgressive. In this manner, the shows also place on display the willful othering characteristic of much of skateboard culture. Possessing the freedom to operate within or without dominance, these white male adolescents can pick and choose those elements of mainstream culture they deem worthy. Though the Wildboyz, in particular, mock performances of masculinity in a manner suggesting their knowledge of the constructed nature of gender identity, their clearly produced dominance over people of color operates to maintain systems of white male power. This contradictory relationship to power and critique certainly corresponds to skateboarding culture's not-quite-anti-patriarchal critique of patriarchal norms.

Conclusion: "Does it look cool? You guys suck so bad": Performance on Display

Dickhouse Productions' *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz* cannot be discussed as clear appropriations of skateboard culture. In fact, only Bam Margera has suggested a measure of thievery and exploitation in the development of these shows, telling *Entertainment Weekly* that Johnny Knoxville stole material from his *CKY* video series to use in *Jackass* without acknowledging or paying the CKY cast. Margera's somewhat whiny complaint is interesting given his subsequent success as an MTV reality star, Knoxville's history in the skateboarding industry, and the CKY cast's presence on both the *Jackass* television show and movies.

In fact, the Dickhouse Productions oeuvre is far more appropriately read in correspondence with skateboard culture. Not so much an appropriation as a series of documents in correspondence with and corresponding to the values of skateboarding, and related intertexually to skate media, *Jackass*, *Viva La Bam*, and *Wildboyz* each align in

186

some way with skateboarding's reverence of male adolescence, discomfort with

dominant masculinities, and willingness to explore and play with alternative

masculinities. The complexity and contradictions of these correspondences are made

evident by skateboarders' responses to the shows, most of which demonstrate a level of

appreciation for both the shows' humor and the stars' success while at the same time

suggesting that the shows, at times, misrepresent skateboarders:

> I watch *Viva La Bam*. And I guess *Jackass*, it's really funny sometimes
> and sometimes it's just really stupid. Like when I see them do stuff it's
> really funny, but I'd never do it, really. It's just like stupid. But the fact
> that someone would go do that is kind of funny. And *Viva La Bam* has a
> lot of skateboarding in it, so I like watching it. But when it doesn't have
> skateboarding, it just has Bam being himself, doing whatever he wants,
> so I watch it, to see skateboarders (Adam, age 11).

> The shows are giving skateboarding a bad name. They're doing stupid stuff
> while they're representing skateboarding. Like they talk shit to older people
> or something just because they think that like, 'cause they went and saw some
> Bam show and they're like, that's what Bam would want me to do. But actually
> that dude was pretty smart. He doesn't - he just does that shit 'cause like, MTV
> pays him and like, he usually, if you notice, doesn't harm other people. He just
> does stupid shit to himself. But all these kids see it and they're like, 'Man, that's
> what I need to do to become popular' (Joe, age 19).

> I actually like *Viva La Bam*. But uh, its funny 'cause I think, like, a lot of
> people, like get this idea of that's what skaters are like. Which is true, you
> know, a lot of, you know, a lot of us are, I don't know, some people are like,
> I don't know, just goofy like that. But other people are goofy that don't skate.
> But like, I don't, that's what a lot of people think skateboarding is like. These
> like CRAZY kids, doing CRAZY stuff, you know? But that's not all true, you
> know. But uh, I think it's funny, there's no doubt about it, there's some funny
> stuff that goes on on those shows, you know. You just gotta like, um,
> deevolutionize yourself to, like take a step back in evolution to like enjoy that
> humor, you know, but there's nothing wrong with it. It's funny (Matthew, age 21).

> Those guys, are cool, you know, but Bam, Bam's cool. He sold out, a little bit.
> Like, I don't know, not really. Like he's makin' movies and stuff. He's collectin'
> his checks, I've got respect for that. He's been doin' that, that's him, you know.
> He's been doin' that for years and years. That's his straight up thing. He's lucky
> he can sell it, you know. I mean I wish I could sell my life …. But *Jackass* …
> it'd be cool if they just kept the skateboarding out of it. If they did everything

else, and not have um, skateboard involved I'd be happy …. People, like have said to us, "This isn't *Jackass*" or something like that. I'm like, "Oh, ok. Sorry! We're out to be jackasses, to look cool you know? (Braden, age 15).

The skateboarders' contradictory responses to *Viva La Bam*, in particular, demonstrate the shows' active and inconsistent correspondence with skateboarding culture as well as the complex nature of that culture and its multiple takes on commercialism. Eleven-year-old Adam actually quotes *Viva La Bam*'s opening sequence and implies that it demonstrates his authenticity: "it just has Bam being himself, doing whatever he wants." For Adam, Margera is not a persona constructed for media culture; he is authentically presented. Braden also invoked Margera's authenticity – "that's him, you know" – while admitting, "He sold out, a little bit." The skaters also all suggested that they, at times, at like the characters on these shows while at the same time critiquing others for doing so and bringing a bad name on skate culture.   Here again, we can see that a straightforward discussion of mainstream appropriation of subcultural forms does not do justice to the relationships between these varied expressions of skateboarding culture, nor does such a discussion adequately explain skate media's varied and multiple expressions and understandings of masculinity, race, sexuality, and class.

I want to conclude this chapter by drawing attention to the notion of performance. Much of these shows' critique of masculinity is made clear by the overt nature of the cast members' performances. That is, the boys on these shows remind the audience that it is watching the performance and production of multiple modes of white masculinity. In India, Steve-O interacts with an Indian face piercer, who pierces his cheek everyday with a long needle. Steve-O, of course, chooses to pierce his own cheek. Moaning and yelling in pain, he pushes the needle into his cheek while the cameraman tells him to turn his

head so that he can get a better view of the process. Steve-O moans, "Is it cool?" The

cameraman eggs him on, and Steve-O goes bugeyed. "Does it look cool?" he asks again.

"You guys suck so bad." Having given up his face in the service of this hypermasculine

display of "native" daring and the shocking and television-worthy exoticism so

mundanely deemed "cool," Steve-O makes explicit the ongoing construction of

masculine identities and cultural cool. In the same moment, Steve-O has also constructed

himself as willing to reveal his susceptibility, "man enough" to take such pain, and white

enough to take on the Indian man's ways. It is in such multiply-inflected performances

throughout the Dickhouse oeuvre that whiteness, masculinity, and sexuality are all

destabilized, demonstrated to be tenuous and malleable. Concomitantly, however, these

identities' boundaries are reinforced as they are placed in relationship to blackness,

homoeroticism, and the working-class. As I have noted, these contradictory relationships

are present throughout skateboarding culture, particularly the niche videos I examine in

the following chapter.

Chapter 5

"It's just what's possible": Imagining Alternative Masculinities and Performing White
Male Dominance in Niche Skateboarding Videos

Introduction

Fiddling with a cup of coffee as he stared pensively out of Starbucks' window at

the groups of university students walking down the street, 16-year-old skateboarder Jack

reflected upon the pleasures of watching skateboarding videos:

> It just kind of inspires you like, I don't know, just seeing what [the featured
> skateboarders] do, during the cold winters and stuff, just to see their style. How
> it's so effortless and graceful, and beautiful. You just look at it. It's just like, I
> don't know, it's just like watching people who are really, really good at skating,
> it's just like, you know, like what's possible, you know. It's just fun. Better than
> TV!

Jack's comments, delivered with quiet emotion and conveying a sense of awe, exemplify

skateboarders' devotion to the myriad industry- and independently-produced

skateboarding videos that highlight professional and local skateboarders' skills, document

their everyday lives, and offer a sense of their personalities. Invoking "grace" and

"beauty" as well as physical talent and aspiration ("what's possible"), Jack's passionate

explanation brings to light the multiple pleasures that skate videos produce. While

physical prowess and achievement are certainly part of dominant codes of masculinity, an

appreciation for grace and beauty are not. In this way, skateboarding videos open space

in which boys can give expression to types of pleasure that are normatively off-limits.

Skateboarding videos are not how-to videos, "greatest hit" compilations, or taped coverage of skateboarding contests. Rather, they are videos produced by niche skateboarding companies to highlight the skateboarding skills and lifestyles of skateboarders. Numerous and widely-varied in their aesthetics and tone, they are highly similar in form. Each 30-60 minute video is segmented into song-length montages of individual skateboarders skating through numerous public and private spaces throughout the "developed" world[421] – parking lots, city parks, loading docks, city sidewalks, and skate parks. Using a variety of lenses and film formats, multiple camera angles, and jump-cut and continuous editing, the montages operate to define each skateboarder's – and when taken together, the company's – sense of "style," which loosely refers to his or her[422] identity and attitude toward skateboarding or the world at large. A skater's – and a video's – style can take a variety of forms: expressive, artistic, aggressive, laid-back, and so on. Most skateboarding videos also include "slam scenes," or images of the skateboarders falling, as well as "skits" and "lifestyle scenes," which are scripted and caught-on-tape images of the skateboarders when they are not skating that are meant to represent the skateboarders' personalities and styles.

Though skate videos are produced by the skateboarding industry as promotional materials for their products, they are widely regarded by skateboarders as "authentic," and their representation of individual skateboarders' various identities signifies this authenticity. In fact, the videos are so firmly regarded as a "true" element of

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[421] Skateboarders rely on the concrete and metal of urban and suburban spaces; thus, unlike surfers, they rarely venture into the so-called Third World. They do, however, tour through the urban centers of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.
[422] Women do, at times, appear as professional skateboarders in these videos; however, their presence is rare. In response to both this reality and the present study's focus on masculinity, henceforth, I use the male pronoun.

skateboarding culture that many amateur skateboarders produce their own short versions

(lasting approximately 3-10 minutes each) of skate videos as representations of their own

"unique" identities. Often called "sponsor-me tapes," a moniker signaling the fact that

the amateur tapes are sometimes sent to skate companies as auditions for employment as

professional skaters, these videos are usually just shown to friends in the relative privacy

of their own homes or the skate shops.[423] Sometimes operating as stand-alone

documents of individual skaters' skills, the "footage" is also contributed to local skate

shops' composite videos.[424]

Taken together, these videos comprise what I call "documents of identity" that

define the boundaries of skateboarding culture and the individuals participating in it. A

central element of the culture, skateboarding videos mediate the personas of both

professional and amateur skateboarders, exhibit the generally accepted and sometimes

celebrated practices of skateboarders both on and off their boards, highlight the cultural

forms and styles associated with skateboarding culture, and display the aesthetic

preferences of the culture. Stated more simply, skateboarding videos work to define

skateboarding culture; they tell skateboarders who they are. Sponsor-me tapes are

developed in dialogue with skate videos and operate to define individual skateboarders

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[423] For the purposes of clarity, I use "sponsor-me tapes" throughout this chapter to refer to this group of videos, despite the fact that most amateur recordings are never actually used to ask a skate company to "sponsor me."

[424] Despite the fact that some of these videos are created in the hopes of national or international recognition, they are rarely seen by an audience outside of the local audience. It is, of course, difficult to define the boundaries of "local," particularly in the era of YouTube, MySpace, and other internet sites that allow for simple and cheap world wide distribution of video content. Nevertheless, "local" videos usually remain just that: shown mostly within interpersonal relationships where the members know one another personally, or distributed within a small skateboarding "scene" usually imagined at the regional level. For the purposes of this project, Ann Arbor, Southeastern Michigan, and the state of Michigan comprise increasingly large, but still regional, points of identification for "local" skateboarders.

and claim individual skaters' identity and place within the larger skateboarding culture and community.

Skateboarding videos and skateboarders' responses to them reveal that this culture contends with identity, particularly notions of masculinity, in a highly contradictory manner that both challenges and upholds hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, both skate videos and skateboarders reject the identity norms and responsibilities associated with middle-class, white, adult men and uphold a highly individuated ideal of masculinity purportedly open to multiple forms or expressions of masculinity – including expressions that are emotionally sensitive and expressive, centered in corporeal pleasure, or non-competitive. In actuality, skateboarding videos actively work to exclude any non-heterosexual expressions of masculinity and use non-white masculinity to uphold the power of white masculinity.

Skateboarders, in the images of the videos, either never grow up or grow up to support heterosexual families via fulfilling and creative work. These images position skateboarders against a highly traditional conceptualization of white, middle-class adult masculinity characterized in the 1950s as an Organization Man and represented today in the images of cubicle-apathy in *Dilbert*, *Office Space*, *Fight Club* and *The Office*. This is the responsible, middle-management individual working simply to support his family,[425] suffering daily through mindless work, clueless bosses, and neurotic coworkers. Implicit in the rejection of Organization Men and the endorsement of individual, multiple masculinities is a critique of traditional images of white masculinity as hyper-rational, aggressive, physically dominant, and emotionally reticent. In opposition to this image of

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[425] Though there are exceptions, this individual is usually a white man. Though he is sometimes single, he is always seeking heterosexual family life.

adult masculinity, skateboard videos and skateboarders present two alternatives: the perpetual Peter Pan and the independent entrepreneur and family man.

Skateboarding videos' critiques of hyper-rational and controlled masculinity, however, do not translate into the practice of producing amateur videos. Rather, skateboarders approach this process with a great deal of care, carefully considering the formal norms portrayed in professional videos and rigorously choosing appropriate footage and accompanying music. Many of the Southeastern Michigan skateboarders have high-level digital videoing and editing equipment at their disposal – either in their own or friend's personal computers or at work or school. This equipment affords the skaters the opportunity to produce professional-level videos, and rather than adopting the cut-and-pasted do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic that could be found in the "micro-media" of punk culture, for example, skateboarders use this equipment to make videos that can blend almost seamlessly with industry-produced videos.[426]

Documents of Masculinity: Individualized Collectivity, Hegemonic Masculinity, and Perpetual Peter Pans

Unlike the advertising industry and mass media, which generally represent skateboarding as a competitive sport or the domain of slacker/stoner male teenagers, skateboarding videos render the practice and culture as an individualized collectivity in which young men may reap the rewards of hegemonic masculinity while at the same time rejecting those norms of masculinity deemed restrictive, unappealing, or inauthentic. Highly homosocial documents, these videos actively exclude women and girls while simultaneously suggesting that male skateboarders, *as long as they are heterosexual*, can choose to perform any identity and inhabit any space that they wish. Skateboard videos

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[426] Sarah Thornton, "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital," in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997).

construct a fantastical world in which white male adolescents can live as Perpetual Peter Pans, mocking bourgeois norms of white masculinity as embodied by adults and in turn living a life unencumbered by limitations of hegemonic whiteness and masculinity as well as by male and female adult authority. What's more, skateboarding videos' content and form strategically suggest that the world depicted on the screen is a world available to skateboarders everywhere.

Individualized Collectivity and Multiple Masculinities

Montages of both individuals and groups of skateboarders are the central form in skate videos. By highlighting both the individual style of each skateboarder and blending them together in group montages, the videos suggest that skateboarding is a culture that highly values individuality while at the same time promising the benefits of cooperation and inclusion in a larger group. As I have noted, Southeastern Michigan skateboarders value such individualized collectivity in their own everyday lives, pointing to skateboarding's cooperative nature and its acceptance of varied forms of masculinity as part of its appeal. Strongly valuing individuality, skate life comprises an idealized space for the individual that also ignores larger social concerns and the ways in which society is structured by various economic, educational, and social institutions. That is, skateboarding videos echo and reinforce skate culture's rather apolitical concentration on individual skateboarders' well-being, to the detriment of a more broad-based cultural, political, or social critique.

It is through this highly individualized form that skateboarders respond to their nascent critiques of hegemonic masculinity as restrictive, overly competitive, and lacking in emotional and bodily expression. Despite the utter absence of structural critique or

195

organized protest, it is important to take seriously these boys' burgeoning dissatisfaction

with traditional masculinity, for it reveals the changing standpoint of young men as well

as the ways in which hegemonic masculinity may reassert itself. As R.W. Connell

reminds us, a particular cultural moment's expression of hegemonic masculinity – that

mode of masculinity that maintains men's power – constantly shifts in response to

criticism.[427] Furthermore, in taking these boys' ideas seriously, we can reveal the

changing modes of what subcultural theorists call "resistance." As I have argued,

subcultural theorists too often take "resistance" for granted, defining it very loosely

without examining the particular modes of resistance or identifying the particular objects

of resistance taken on by particular subcultures. Here, I assert that skateboarders are

resisting hegemonic masculinity in a manner that does not disrupt men's power but shifts

the demands of adolescent masculinity.

As I have noted, each skate video features individual and group montages as well

as lifestyle scenes. While the individual montages and lifestyle scenes highlight

individual skateboarders' personalities and lifestyles, the group montages and the

particulars of the individual montages suggest that the differences between individuals

are vastly unimportant, only to be sublimated by the norms of the group. In fact, only the

highly trained eye can discern individual skateboarders during each montage, and even

individual skateboarders' montages frequently include guest skateboarders. The videos'

focus on the practice of skateboarding, with their low camera angles (often focused on

the feet and board) and quick segments, draws the viewer's eye away from the

distinguishing features of each skateboarder. As such, viewers must be accustomed to

individual skateboarders' skateboarding style as well as highly familiar with their

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[427] Connell, *Masculinities*.

individual appearance in order to accurately and consistently identify particular skateboarders.

This is not to suggest that the videos do not distinguish between skateboarders at all. As I have noted, each individual on a skateboarding team is highlighted at some point during the video, and during their individual sections, skateboarders' names are displayed on title screens. Even the uninitiated viewer is given a sense of each skater's personality via the lifestyle scenes. For example, in *Bag of Suck*, an industry-produced video, professional skateboarder Caswell Berry's part is introduced with a montage of him jumping into the air and landing sitting down on his skateboard. In many of these segments, Berry breaks his board, but in the final section, the board does not break, and he yells "Bastard!" The video then segues into his skateboarding, which is set to the relatively aggressive tone of Dead Prez's song "Hip Hop." In contrast, professional skater Louie Barletta's segment in the same video opens with a reverse-edited shot of him jumping onto his skateboard, which breaks and then miraculously fixes itself. Barletta then falls off his board and laughs hysterically. The next scene shows Barletta at a house party wearing a smart grey suit and mugging to the camera. "Hey, I'm Louie. I'm a Taurus!" he introduces himself in a goofy voice. Even a cursory reading suggests Caswell Berry is being presented as an aggressive skateboarder while Louie Barletta is to be perceived as a silly, fun-loving guy. Despite the differing personalities (and arguably, differing approaches to masculinity), these two skateboarders are presented as equally important members of the team.

197

Though such individualistic collectivity may be present in many representations of sports, particularly as sports coverage moves to a focus on individual players,[428] notions of personality and lifestyle are preeminent in skateboarding. Though skateboarders wear apparel provided by their sponsoring companies, they do not wear uniforms that designate them as members of a team, and their success in the sport does not contribute to the success of a team in the quantifiable manner that a particular basketball player's ability to sink baskets does. Though the skateboarders "need" their sponsoring companies in order to make a living, they do not need their teammates as other sports enthusiasts do. Furthermore, the development of personas for individual skateboarders is couched as absolutely natural; because of the subcultural requirement for authenticity, any appearance of the manufacture of persona would be detrimental to a skateboarder's popularity. As identity, personality, and persona blur together in the representation of individual skateboarders in the videos, it seems as if skateboarders can adopt a wide variety of masculinities – aggressive, artistic, serious, or silly – while maintaining their acceptance in the culture. In a culture where personality rules, such acceptance is a critical element.

Authentic Individuals

As identity documents in a corresponding culture that sometimes prides itself on its difference from a monolithic "mainstream," skate videos must be situated incontestably within the "authentic" boundaries of the culture. They cannot, that is, appear to be created in the name of anything but the advancement of skateboarding as a practice or the pure pleasure of skateboarding. Skate videos cannot be overtly about

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[428] The basketball industry, in particular, has discovered new success via a focus on individual players' personalities (think Dennis Rodman and Michael Jordan). Despite the elevation of personality, the coverage of basketball and other mainstream sports continues to center on gameplay.

making money, asserting dominance, or showing off; they must be of the culture and for the culture.

Skateboarding videos employ a variety of signifiers of authenticity in their portrayal of an individualistic collectivity. While the skateboarding montages are highly-produced, the lifestyle scenes simulate home video or "caught-on-tape" footage. Depicting skateboarders in their "natural" settings – hanging out on the sidewalk, in skate shops, at home, and at parties – these images are often shaky, poorly lit, and feature ambient noise that overpowers the audio track. It is nothing new to suggest that these unprofessional qualities signify "reality" to viewers; however, these realities are authentic for skateboarders only in relation to the videos' other signifiers of authenticity.

Throughout most skateboarding videos, one can hear skateboarders cheering during their friends' successes and moaning in pain during their failures. We also see skateboarders engaging in seemingly spontaneous pranks, dumping flour on their sleeping friend's head, for example, and bursting into peals of laughter. These scenes also include man-on-the-street encounters, in which skateboarders are depicted chatting with various characters they meet while skateboarding. These characters are often homeless men, street performers, or children, and the professional skateboarders talk with them, giving them a chance to expose their eccentricities, and frequently burst into laughter. These encounters serve two key purposes: 1.) they shore up skateboarders' power, authority, and superiority; 2.) they suggest that everything that happens in the videos is spontaneous and could happen to anyone. In other words, these encounters are meant to evoke the experiences with public/street figures that many skateboarders have

had while playing in public. Professional skaters, then, seem to be everyday people engaging in skateboarding culture in much the same way that all skaters might.

Most of the images in skateboarding montages are in stark contrast to the lifestyle scenes. Highly professional, these images are characterized by professional lighting, complex camera angles, steady-cam footage, and seamless editing. Though such professional-quality work could signify that the practice of skateboarding is solely a performance for the camera – and thus, inauthentic – the combination of images and music are compelling enough to easily draw the viewer into the world of the featured skater: they bring the viewer along for the ride. The videos visually assert the joys of skateboarding, and so even these professionally edited montages are about the individual experience of pleasure rather than the outwardly-directed performance of physical skill. The frequent use of the fisheye, or extremely wide angle lens, reimagines public spaces in a curvy, almost carnivalesque manner. These spaces, then, become playful, open, and new through the camera lens. Furthermore, regular low-angle shots draw the viewers' eyes up and into the action of the skateboarder, making the viewer feel as if he is experiencing what is on the screen.

Not all of the videos employ such high production values. Some skateboarding montages make the process of production evident. The crew sometimes uses hand-held cameras, which skateboarders crash into, and we sometimes see other camera operators in the scenes: these videos, in other words, do not work to maintain the "fourth wall" of fictional, narrative-based television and film. The very fact of letting their production gear show heightens the reality effect and the comprehensibility of these videos: the spectators "get it" and can believe that they can create such videos on their own. This

belief, in turn allows viewers to imagine the production of skate videos as an authentic

element of their own lives. In their own way, that is, these images also draw the viewer

into the world on the screen and proclaim that world's authenticity.

Most skate videos include "slam montages" or "slam scenes" in which the

skateboarders are depicted falling. These scenes work to several ends. First, they

highlight the difficulty, the challenge, of skateboarding, demonstrating that skateboarders

are taking bodily risks that might be described as "gnarly," a.k.a. "tough" and "manly."

Many videos include skateboarders thrusting bloodied hands toward the camera, showing

off dislocated fingers, and grimacing at temporarily deformed knees. Second, the slam

scenes make it clear that the skateboarding on the screen is real; that it has not been

produced via stunt performers or trick photography, and that the skateboarders have had

to work hard to achieve the level of skateboarding depicted. Closely related to this last

point is the third: slam montages present professional skateboarders as real and fallible.

Not supermen of the skateboarding world, pro skaters simply work hard, endure physical

pain, and try, try again to achieve their skating prowess. They are, in sum, just like us.

Finally, pro skaters move through knowable space. The locations depicted on

skate videos range from the mundane to the mythic, but they are always "real"

recognizable locations that are often archetypal and that are nominally accessible to all.

Pros engage in skateboarding in parking lots, near schools, in front of courthouses, on

loading docks, in front of businesses, and in their homes. They also utilize skate parks,

some "famous" within the skateboarding world, and go to locations famed for their

perfect obstacles and cool scenes. On such location is Love Park, Philadelphia, home of

Jasper John's iconic LOVE stamp monument. This mythic space is revered by

skateboarders for its once permissive attitude toward their practice, its host of engaging

obstacles, and the number of skateboarders in the park. When depicted on the screen, it

signals viewers, inviting them into a knowable and accessible world.

Borrowed Legitimacy: "Multiculturalism"and Skateboarding's Culture of Cool

Most professional skate videos feature multicultural casts which include White,

African American, Latino, and Asian skateboarders. Though these casts may be a

product of both skateboarding's international scope and its primary location in California,

they also serve to construct skate culture as modern, hip, and dynamic. Because of the

highly varied nature of skate videos' content, it is impossible to produce a definitive

analysis of skate videos' representation of race. However, in the following paragraphs, I

offer a discussion of two videos that can be thought of as opposite ends of the spectrum.

The first, *The DC Video*, produced by DC shoe company, draws on "ghetto" imagery to

shore up its characters' coolness. The second, *Hallowed Ground*, produced by Hurley

International, presents a thoughtful tour through Brazilian culture that nonetheless uses

that culture to reinforce authenticity of the skaters on the screen.

The differences between the videos can be read as artefacts and signifiers of their

producers' brand identities, which are presented most clearly through the personas of

their star skateboarders. DC is a company that has taken on a fairly mainstream status,

sponsoring major events such as the X Games and advertising on MTV, but it manages to

maintain some of its subcultural credibility. The brand presents itself as urban, and its

shoes and clothing retain some signifiers of urban sporting culture, such as oversized

jerseys and overstuffed white sneakers. The brand's mainstream persona, professional

skateboarder Rob Dyrdek, has gained recent mainstream attention in the MTV show *Rob*

and Big, which is spun off of personas developed in *The DC Video* (as I discuss below).

Rob Dyrdek, is aligned closely with hip hop music and culture, adopting hip hop (read

black) *and* working class signifiers such as heavy gold chains, oversized clothing,

"trucker" hats, and scruffy facial hair. He exhibits the flexibility of whiteness in his

adoption of black and working-class signifiers.[429]

Hurley International has not developed the clearly-identifiable brand identity

possessed by DC, though it has recently acquired mainstream status in its sale to Nike.

Originally a surfing company, Hurley products can readily be found at popular suburban

malls in stores that capitalize on subcultures, such as Hot Topic. Still, like DC, it has

managed to maintain some credibility. Its public persona, professional skateboarder Bob

Burnquist, dominates the *Hallowed Ground* video, and the video can be read as an

expression of his persona, rather than a particular identity attributable to Hurley's image.

Burnquist, as I have noted, is a white Brazilian who immigrated to the United States in

order to pursue his career as a professional skateboarder (he was "discovered" in Brazil).

Though he does not enjoy the same mainstream recognizability as Tony Hawk, Burnquist

has become a recognizable character within the niche culture of skateboarding that

includes *The X Games* and MTV's *Cribs*. Burnquist has constructed himself as an

environmentalist and a family man. Along with his wife, professional skateboarder Jen

O'Brien, Burnquist owns an organic farm and raises a young daughter, Lotus. Burnquist

and O'Brien also founded the Action Sports Environmental Coalition in order to promote

environmentally sustainable practices in action sports events such at the X Games. His

Brazilian heritage is well-known, and we are meant to understand that Burnquist is a

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[429] Though I mean to neither conflate "Black culture" with "hip hop culture," nor essentialize either of these dynamic locations, the images deployed by DC are clearly meant to evoke both.

skater with a social conscience. Clearly, the elements of this persona have worked their way into *Hallowed Ground*. The video does not make explicit that as a white Brazilian, Burnquist probably enjoyed a relative level of cultural mobility not available to all Brazilians. Both Burnquist's persona and *Hallowed Ground*'s tone, then, simultaneously portray cultural, racial, and class difference while smoothing over the issues of power crucial to understanding such difference.

The DC Video attempts to present skateboarding culture and the DC brand in particular as "hip" to hip hop culture and, perhaps more insidiously, urban, working-class culture. That is, *The DC Video* suggests that skateboarders experience discrimination from authority figures that is quite similar to the discrimination felt by black teenagers, particularly young black men.

The video's representation of black skateboarder Stevie Williams begins with a montage of scenes from North Philadelphia, including run-down town homes and garbage-strewn streets. At the end of his skateboarding segment, Williams punches his fist toward the screen to reveal a DC pinky ring and then juts his chin toward the camera. Clearly, the viewer is meant to conclude that Williams is a product of the Philadelphia underclass who has a street-smart, aggressive attitude. Whether or not this conclusion is accurate, it may convey two important ideas. On the one hand, it attempts to present a black skateboarder as a product of "authentic" black culture. On the other hand, particularly given the absence of other black skateboarders on the screen, it simply reinforces stereotypes of African Americans as aggressive products of "the ghetto."

The DC Video also presents African Americans as employees of white skateboarders. After a long montage during which skateboarders are portrayed clashing

with various security guards and policemen, Rob Dyrdek turns to the camera and says, "I'm sick of cops, I'm sick of security guards. Okay from here on out, I'm bringing a security guard to deal with security guards, cops, I'm over it." Dyrdek carries out his promise by hiring an African American man called, simply, "Big Black." The video then features a skit during which Big Black is "interviewed," telling the audience, "I do the dirty work." The "interview" and accompanying montage of images suggest that Big Black works to make skateboarding more convenient for Dyrdek, not only fending off security guards, but also preparing concrete curbs with skateboarding wax, shooing away autograph seekers, and acting as Rob's friend and confidant.[430] Dyrdek not only adopts the accoutrement of hip hop culture – frequently wearing oversized DC sports jerseys and large white sneakers while listening to hip hop music – he also adopts a "Big Black" friend who operates to bring Rob both physical security and cultural authenticity.

Between Rob Dyrdek and Stevie Williams, then, DC Shoes aligns its privileged, corporate identity with an underprivileged and disenfranchised – but still street-smart and cool – image of Black culture. In this way, the video suggests that skateboarding culture is authentic and worthy of attention. That is, according to this logic, skateboarding culture is not the development of a corporate world interested only in profit; rather, it is a group of oppressed individuals simply trying to make their way in a hostile world. By adopting images and signs of the "ghetto" or of black culture, *The DC Video* legitimates itself via the borrowed authenticity of cultural subordination. Whether or not it is represented at all, the life of African Americans becomes a series of stylistic signifiers, rather than a location where relationships of power must be examined and critiqued. By

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[430] This relationship, and MTV's spin-off show, require analysis which falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

letting its spectators off the hook – by allowing the audience to experience black culture as a lifestyle choice – the videos' adoption of back culture, what bell hooks would call "eating the other,"[431] serves to shore up the power of white masculinity. That is, white spectators can continue to "choose" various modes of masculinity – including Black masculinity – in the "supermarket of bodies"[432] and personas made available through skate videos. White spectators, then, can bask in the freedom of choice and accept the borrowed legitimacy of blackness while ignoring racial inequality and subordination.

Hallowed Ground, on the other hand, presents a more sympathetic and rounded image of racial difference, though, somewhat unsurprisingly, this difference is filtered through its international scope, and differences in nationality seem to trump differences in race. Because Bob Burnquist, who hails from Rio de Janeiro, reads visually as white and aurally as American, his "difference" can only be signified via culture and so can be signified at will.

Hallowed Ground's title screen presents it as "A Hurley International skateboarding documentary." The video offers itself as a trip through its skateboarders' histories, a glimpse into their personal and family lives. As such, it makes great use of confessional lifestyle scenes which employ documentary images of the skateboarders' home towns. For example, when skateboarder Lincoln Ueda is introduced, his voiceover intones, "It's always good to go back home, back to Brazil. Because, uh, now that I have a nephew, it's a totally different feeling of life. I remember skating three to four different ramps, that's it. And all cement." The montage of black and white and color images depicts Ueda hugging his father, women in a small sewing factory, and Ueda holding a

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[431] hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance."

[432] Martti Lahti, "As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasure in Videogames," 166. Though Lahti is discussing videogames, her phrase aptly describes skateboarding videos.

child's hand. We also see a large "half pipe" ramp covered in graffiti and sitting in the

middle of a field with a large puddle in it. These images convey not only a sense of

poverty (particularly the women sewing and the graffiti-covered ramp), but also a sense

of familial happiness. Despite his poverty, these images suggest, Lincoln Ueda grew up

in a close-knit, happy family.[433] Later, as a different skateboarder moves through Brazil,

eating a tostada, a voiceover marvels, "There's too many things that can go wrong,

growing up where he did. And if you don't have an exit, an escape, you really end up

just going down a path that you shouldn't follow. It's really amazing and it shows a lot

of personality on his part and I am very proud of him. I thank God for skateboarding."

This skateboarder, moving through the sites of his upbringing, is presented as a member

of the Brazilian underclass who was lucky enough to have found a way out. The specter

of poverty and a life of crime or worse ("a path that you shouldn't follow") serve not to

examine the social inequalities producing such circumstances but to invest the

skateboarder with authenticity.   Though *Hallowed Ground* attempts to present the

nuances of a particular culture and to imagine nationality and class as determining factors

in its skateboarders' histories, it still utilizes these histories to trumpet the authenticity of

skateboarding culture and professional skateboarders.

As I have noted, George Yudice has suggested that men in pro-feminist groups

end up resorting to assertions of oppression in an attempt to justify their claims on

identity.[434] Further, Yudice asserts, "The argument that men are donning the mantle of

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[433] Though not made clear in the video, the director's comments on the DVD reveal that the women sewing are employees of the small sewing factory owned by Ueda's mother, and that Ueda's father owns a motor repair shop. While such ownership may not make his family upper-class, it becomes clear here that they are not in poverty. Such knowledge makes the implied poverty of the images that much more disingenuous.

[434] George Yudice, "What's a Straight White Man to Do? ," in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. M. Berger, B. Wallis, and S. Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995).

victim hood for the sake of maintaining hegemony, however, is not fully explanatory, especially in the case of progressive, profeminist men."[435] Arguably, skateboarding videos use claims of difference to instill their brands and skateboarders with an "authentic" and recognizable identity. Though skateboarders do not present themselves as profeminist (and, in fact, far from profeminist, their culture serves to exclude women), I would also contend that the maintenance of hegemony is not fully explanatory. Rather, this adolescent subculture's valorization of authenticity, paired with the authenticity (or legitimacy) bestowed upon subordinated groups and American culture's denial of unequal power relations, all operate to make such claims understandable. As Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson note, "Middle-class culture defines authenticity as a state of individual, social, and cultural integrity originating from the conditions of existence in everyday life," and as such, the economic strife of working-class and black culture serve to make them commodifiable as authentic.[436] Of course, race and class have been dissolved into decontextualized signifiers through this process – the histories and power relations associated with these identities are never addressed, particularly in *The DC Video*.

Though they operate somewhat differently, when taken together, the videos' erasure of racial identity and the strategic employment of difference-as-authenticity in an individualized collectivity suggests that identity is constructed through lifestyle; that lifestyle – and culture – can be put on and taken off at will; and that it is acceptance and tolerance of these differences that reigns supreme, rather than a collective examination of structural differences in power. Again, such a stance represents a highly individualistic

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[435] Ibid., 272.

[436] Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 104.

stance that serves to create a location of choice for white heterosexual skateboarders while ignoring the relations of power that subordinate nonwhites. As I have noted, such individualism is somewhat unsurprising in 21st century American youth culture in that it aligns easily with U.S. culture more generally; however, what is interesting is the ways in which these videos present themselves as an alternative to mainstream ways of thinking.

Skate videos' individualized collectivity is important because it permeates skateboarding videos and operates as the ethos under which the videos document masculine identity. In other words, while the videos mock some tenets of hegemonic masculinity while subscribing to others, they more generally suggest that anything goes – that skateboarders can be any type of man they wish, as long as they do not exert their views on others or force others into occupation of a particular masculinity. As such, though skateboarders assert in a rather opaque way that a central tenet of skateboarding is respect for multiple masculinities, their culture and cultural products make this claim in an individualistic, apolitical manner. Again, this is not about social change, but about finding a space in which individual idiosyncrasies and multiple masculinities are accepted, within certain boundaries.

Homosocial Heterosexuality and Hypermasculinity

Though generally left unstated and even denied, the most crucial boundary for the exploration of various masculinities is a subscription to homosocial heterosexuality. Homosocial heterosexuality is characterized by a boys-only culture wherein boys sometimes interact with one another through playful touch while actively asserting their heterosexuality and masculine dominance through the exclusion and mockery of homosexuality and women. To be clear, this claim is not to suggest that female and gay

209

skateboarders do not exist, nor is it to suggest that all gay skateboarders are closeted. Rather, I wish to assert strongly that skateboarding culture operates systematically to exclude, or at least make entry difficult for most women and most homosexuals. Furthermore, these exclusions operate to produce an exclusionary modality of masculinity – that is, despite their denial of such exclusions, it is clear that skateboarders are expected to assert their dominance over women and their suspicion of homosexuality in order to maintain their place in the culture. In fact, though the videos seem to allow multiple expressions of masculinity, the images in the videos frequently revert to hypermasculine representations which operate to mitigate the more introspective or artistic representations of the culture. Taken together, the homophobia and hypermasculinity serve to shore up the heterosexuality of skateboarding culture, even in a homosocial context where homoeroticism is sometimes allowed and even encouraged.

Skateboarding videos generally represent a culture from which women are systematically absent and in which men are revered. Only one of the five professional videos I analyzed included a female skateboarder, and her presence in the video lasted less than the length of one song and was confined to one individual montage of her skateboarding. In contrast, the male skateboarders in these videos usually enjoy the exposure of at least one song-length montage as well as highlights throughout the videos. The lone featured female was Alexis Sablone in *P.J. Ladd's Wonderful, Horrible Life* (2002). Notably, *Hallowed Ground*, which devotes much of its time to prominent skateboarder Bob Burnquist, also includes in its footage professional skateboarder Jen O'Brien. Rather than being presented as a pro skater, however, Jen is only defined as Bob Burnquist's wife and his child's mother. She is portrayed holding their young

daughter, Lotus, while she sits on a skateboard at the top of a ramp. We never see

O'Brien riding on her skateboard, let alone performing the tricks that she is capable of.

Only extratextual knowledge reveals her professional status.

Women in general are excluded from the videos. Appearing sometimes as

authorities (teachers or mothers), nonskateboarding females are also included as sexual

objects, though even this occurs rarely. Skateboarder Caswell Berry's title screen in *Bag*

of Suck features a shot of him laying on a bed, torso bared, with a woman on each side of

him. One woman holds a cigarette in his mouth while the other uses a container of

whipped cream to finish spelling his name on his body. An image of total male

heterosexual decadence, the absurdity of this sketch also works to mock such

hypermasculine images. In fact, at the end of film, an outtake features the two women

smearing the whipped cream all over Berry and laughing – this scene is decidedly not

sexual, but it is silly. The women are laughing loudly, not giggling flirtatiously, and they

are frenetically smearing the whipped cream on Berry – not lovingly caressing his chest.

Bag of Suck also concludes with a small drawing of a woman, blue in the face from

choking herself, and wearing a sweatshirt reading "Hairdiaper Cameltoe." This

misogynistic mockery of a woman's genitals, paired with the woman's self-inflicted

oxygen deprivation, actively works to exclude women in its violence and cruelty.

Furthermore, it suggests to skateboarders that such misogynistic imagery is funny,

harmless, and worthy of inclusion in representations of their culture. Skater boys, then,

are encouraged to participate in such humor and to position themselves in opposition to

women.

More than misogynistic, the videos are also homophobic, though the expressions

of homophobia are not as explicitly violent as the expressions of misogyny and are

presented in a more seemingly banal, playful manner. Given their propensity toward

gross-out humor, their misogyny, and their hypermasculinity, the use of the epithet "fag"

is notably absent from the five videos I review here, but this absence should not imply

even tolerance for homosexuality. Furthermore, the videos do assert what Adrienne Rich

has famously deemed "compulsory heterosexuality."[437] From *Hallowed Ground*'s

reverence of skateboarders' families and procreation to the focus on the phallus in both

P.J. Ladd's Wonderful Horrible Life and *Bag of Suck* – at various moments, the

skateboarders and cameramen hold their skateboards and camera equipment to their

crotches – the videos present heterosexuality as the desired norm.[438] *The DC Video*

mocks the possibility of a sexual relationship between skateboarder Rob Dyrdek and his

"security guard" "Big Black," who jokes, "We went to the movies last week. We watched

that new Kate Hudson flick. *Ten Things I Miss About You* or something like that. We

wanted to go check that out. We go to a lot of movies. Share a slurpie." The "chick

flick," the seemingly innocent sharing of the slurpy (and its attendant sexual – but

adolescent – overtones), present Rob and Big as a couple, and Big's goofy, off-the-cuff

remark makes clear that homosexual relationships (or even boys' outings that can be too-

easily-construed as a date) are decidedly effeminate. Not overtly or violently

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[437] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 4 (1980).

[438] Skateboard magazine *Big Brother*, famously purchased by Larry Flynt in [FIND DATE] was decidedly more homophobic in its stance. In _____ it issued its "gay issue," *Bi Brother*, which operated to suggest "We're so secure in our masculinity that we can deal with homosexuality." The issue is decidedly ambivalent.

homophobic, this remark nonetheless privileges heterosexuality and uses even implied

homosexuality as a source of laughter.

Beyond these attempts to characterize their same-sex relationships as social and

nothing else, the videos make sure to valorize hypermasculine images. The videos'

expressions of gender and sexuality are inextricably linked: homophobia,

hypermasculinity, and misogyny work hand-in-hand to uphold the skateboarders'

normative identities and to place limits on the range of masculinities acceptable within

the culture. *Bag of Suck* opens with the adage, "Pain is weakness leaving the body" and

features several shots of skateboarders or cameramen holding cameras as phalluses next

to their crotches. *P.J. Ladd's Wonderful Horrible Life* frequently represents its

skateboarders wrestling with one another and giving each other "wedgies" and "swirlies."

A young fan in this video takes such physical hypermasculinity to the next level, telling

the camera, "I want them to attempt something so dangerous, something so cool that it

would threaten their life." In *The DC Video*, skateboarding star Danny Way tells the

audience, from his hospital bed, "It's not the glorious life you think we all live. … Gotta

pay to play."

Each of these scenes is accomplished with a level of irony that suggests the boys

know that they are engaging in hypermasculine behavior designed to prove both their

gender and sexuality. Like Steve-O and Chris Pontius, the skateboarders frequently

follow their hypermasculine remarks with knowing glances at the camera and self-

deprecating laughter. Extratextual knowledge of skate life also suggests that claims such

as "Pain is weakness leaving the body" are to be mocked – as I have demonstrated

repeatedly, though skateboarding is a physically demanding – and pain inducing –

213

activity, skateboarders constantly make fun of masochistic rituals designed to shore up masculinity. Danny Way's tone of voice – dry and mocking – and his facial expression, complete with rolling eyes, imbues his "glorious life" remark with sarcasm. Way's presentation is particularly interesting – shot in a hospital bed here, he is usually portrayed, as I discuss below, as fearless and physically unstoppable.

Skateboarders do participate in hypermasculine displays, and skate videos suggest that the boys can do whatever they want, whenever they want. *The DC Video*, in particular, presents the life of the skateboarder as epic, In this video, "big air" skateboarder Danny Way demonstrates his prowess on a larger-than-life skateboarding ramp by breaking two world records: the longest jump on a skateboard (75 feet) and highest air (23.5 feet).   Aerial shots of the ramp demonstrate its impressive size, and the images make it seem as though Danny Way is skateboarding all by himself on this ramp – out of pure dedication, rather than for adoration. Low and high angles, sweeping shots, and slow motion all make Danny's skateboarding appear heroic. In other words, the camera functions to objectify Way as larger-than-life, to inspire awe, and to magnify the displayed feats of physicality. More than silly boys participating ironically in hypermasculine shenanigans, these images suggest, skateboarders are heroic men cut out for daring physical feats.

Perpetual Peter Pans

At the same time that they elevate the physical prowess of hegemonic masculinity, skateboarding videos present skateboarders as perpetual Peter Pans wary of the norms of white adult suburban masculinity. As such, the videos showcase skateboarders' discomfort with hegemonic demands of adult suburban masculinity as

well as their adherence to norms of identity that serve to maintain white male power. Skateboarding videos portray urban and suburban space as a Never-never land where boys can be perpetual Peter Pans, never growing up to face the responsibilities and demands of adult masculinity.

All of the videos reviewed present their featured skateboarders firmly in the realm of childhood at some point – *P.J. Ladd's Wonderful, Horrible Life,* for example, features a skateboarder asking his mother for laundry and then ironing a slice of pizza – but it is Enjoi's *Bag of Suck* that does so most consistently. In particular, a skit introducing skateboarder Jason Adams works overtime to highlight the absurdities and hypocrisies of white suburban adult masculinity.

Adams's section in the video begins with a caught-on-tape lifestyle scene during which the other featured skateboarders are swinging on a playground swingset. "Push me, Daddy!" yells one of the skateboarders, and the camera pans to reveal Jason Adams dressed in an Elvis wig, a Henley shirt, and large pants pulled up to his waist. As Presley's "Love Me Tender" plays in the background, Jason looks at the camera and at his friends with discomfort. This lifestyle scene marks Jason as a suburban father oblivious to the fashions of the day, and Jason makes it clear that he feels uncomfortable playing this role.

The following skit elevates Jason's discomfort with suburban fatherhood to an indictment of the absurdity of post-war myths of suburban utopia. In this skit, Adams, dressed in striped Bermuda shorts, a polo shirt, white loafers, black socks, and a hat with a brim, plays a white suburban father. He and a young girl, perhaps five years old and dressed in a striped sundress, white cardigan, white tights, black mary janes, white

gloves, and wearing her hair in a bun with a tiara, move into the shot simultaneously.

Adams, mowing the lawn with a non-motorized push mower, stops briefly to take a swig

of beer while the little girl approaches the camera to "serve" a tray of cookies to the

audience. The set's post-war suburban ranch, 1950s car, pink lawn flamingos, and Elvis

crooning in the background all signify post-war suburban aspirations while at the same

time making clear that Jason and his friends harbor no illusions about the joys of

suburbia. In fact, by the end of this section of the video, the father (Adams) is passed out

on the lawn with Miller Light bottles strewn around him.

We can align this father with the Organization Man, the figure that William H.

Whyte in 1956 characterized as a middle-management automaton trapped in a

meaningless job. This is the organization man aware of his entrapment, and finding

escape only in drinking to excess. As this clip makes fun of this suburban father, it

suggests that white male adulthood is a limited, stifling identity to be avoided if possible.

Simultaneously, the image of the little girl in a cute dress and white gloves serving fresh-

baked cookies to the audience sends up postwar images of domestic femininity. While

such femininity is mocked in passing, white male adulthood represents a mode of

masculinity against which skateboarders define themselves.

Though the Organization Man version of white adult masculinity operates as a

model of dominant masculinity against which skateboarders position themselves,

skateboarding videos operate to prescribe very particular boundaries within which this

nascent critique may take place. As I have made clear, skateboarding videos valorize

hypermasculinity and heterosexuality while excluding women and homosexuals, and they

present a world in which young men can perform heroic feats of the body. At the same

time, however, they do suggest that some variation in masculine expressions is acceptable, and they operate as documents of identity that open more possibility for artistic or emotional expression than traditional images of sporting contests and masculine competition. In the next section, I consider skateboarders' responses to these videos and the ways in which the videos operate as locations of escape from the demands of adult masculinity.

Back to Life: The Pleasures of Skate Videos

As Jack's quote at the beginning of this chapter exemplifies, skateboarders take lasting, profound, and multi-faceted pleasure in watching skate videos. Taken as a mode of inspiration and a document of lifestyle and identity, skateboarding videos promote skateboarders' vicarious identification with the featured skaters and prompt skateboarders to experience a host of emotions, including excitement, awe, and admiration. Such identification provides a space in which skateboarders can experience pleasures normally off-limits to white males – pleasures of the body, the mind, and the spirit.

Vicarious Identification and Inspiration

Over and over again, skateboarders raved about videos' ability to inspire them to go skateboarding. This inspiration often derived from skaters' vicarious identification with the practice of skateboarding as featured on the videos. In other words, skateboarders repeatedly reported that they could identify with the skateboarding that was being done on the screen – the way it might feel to the featured skaters, the sense of accomplishment and freedom it might supply. After he told me that skateboarding videos are "better than TV," I asked Jack, "So, do you feel like it kind of makes you, makes you want to go out skating more?" He replied with certainty, "Yeah! I watch, you know,

certain things you just watch and you get a spark! And then, might as well go out and skate!" When asked why they watch skateboarding videos, others echoed Jack's excitement:

> I watch [skate videos] all the time. I love watching 'em 'cause it always makes me want to skate. I've grown to love 'em even more because when you start seeing things that you can do, it makes you feel really good. You're like, 'Oh! I did that   yesterday! Some pro just did it.' And it's just awesome 'cause no matter who you are   when you skateboard and it's in a video, I love to watch it (Joe, 19).

> And, it's just kind of a really fun thing to watch, especially with the music. It makes you excited and like, makes you want to go out and skate. It's amazing to see, like if you watch somebody do something really hard, you believe that it's possible, and then you kind of like, I don't know, when I watch skating, like sometimes like, I actually felt the trick happen as I was watching it (Timmy, 20).

> But when you watch professionals you get a better understanding of what you actually need to do with your feet and your body. And it's amazing when you watch it, some of the things people can do. (Yochim: It's a source of inspiration?) Jeremiah: Yeah, it really is. It can really get you excited about skating (Jeremiah, 21).

The skateboarders' enthusiasm about skateboarding videos reveals that much of the pleasure of watching the videos derives from their ability to echo or evoke the pleasures of skateboarding as a practice. As the above quotations make clear, vicarious identification and inspiration are very closely tied to one another; the videos' ability to inspire is frequently reliant upon skateboarders' identification with the screened experience. Such identification takes several different forms, from Timmy literally "feeling" the trick to Joe seeing his abilities on the small screen and Jonas applying learned knowledge from the screen to his everyday life. Skateboarding videos may prompt a vicarious experience of pleasure; as Timmy admitted "I almost felt the trick happen as I was watching it." With some embarrassment and a series of linguistic qualifiers traditionally deemed feminine (note the "you kind of like, I don't know … like

sometimes, like" in the full quote above), Timmy articulates an absolute relation to the life on screen. Watching the video here becomes a physical experience reminiscent of actual engagement in the mediated practice. Even when the videos do not provoke such direct identification with the text, they almost always encourage skateboarders to recall the pleasures associated with skateboarding. In other words, seeing skateboarding on the small screen, skateboarders imagine and desire the experience of skateboarding in real life.

Pleasure and the Power to Escape

The level of absorption and devotion in which skateboarders engage with skate videos is a mode of audience reception frequently coded in popular culture as feminine. Though skateboarders do not regularly identify themselves as fans in the way that fan communities surrounding cult television series such as *Star Trek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* do, their communal viewing practices, repeated viewing, and vast array of knowledge in skate videos and skateboarding culture more generally echo such communities' viewership. As Henry Jenkins notes, fans are typically perceived as anti-social and linked with "religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness."[439] Male fans are labeled "de-gendered, asexual, or impotent," while female fans are over-sexed and crazy.[440]

Arguably, skateboarders' fandom may be closely allied with the traditionally masculine mode of sports fandom, which, as Henry Jenkins makes clear, enjoys far more status than other fandoms. Not only coded as masculine, sports fans are engaged with

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[439] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12.
[440] Ibid., 13.

"reality," rather than fiction. As such, in hierarchies of taste, they are sanctioned.[441]

Sports fans are revered and courted by mainstream media and marketers. Importantly, such marketable fandom is centered on the competitive sphere: fans are depicted as coming out to support "their" teams, competing along with the players by both cheering them on and participating in small- and large-scale gambling such as Final Four tournaments and Fantasy Football. Sports fans, then, engage with sports through competition. They also participate as fans via recordkeeping and the acquisition and display of knowledge about the intricacies of sporting statistics as well as knowledge about sports' celebrities, following the careers of the likes of Michael Jordan and working to predict upcoming successes and failures.[442]

Though sports fandom does carry a certain amount of cultural cachet, skateboarders actively reject defining their fandom as sports-centered, noting frequently that skateboarding is neither competitive nor team-based. Skateboarders have not defined skateboarding in opposition to sports without some help from skateboarding media; outside of the limited sphere of *The X Games*, skateboarding is rarely conceived as a traditional sport. It carries few statistics, is non-competitive, and does not rely on scoring. Though skateboarding, as a practice and a mediated sport, does not possess a magical resistance to normalization within the mainstream sporting world, its wider sphere of practice and portrayal diverges significantly from traditional sports. As I have made clear, the primary media of skateboarding culture positions it as a lifestyle or an

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[441] Ibid., 19.

[442] This discussion of sports fandom is not meant to essentialize the practice. Rather, I mean to delineate why images of sports fandom are valorized in popular culture while images of fans of fictional television are frequently negative. Though sports fans arguably identify with athletic stars via personality or stories of hardship, such identification does not mitigate the respect garnered sports fans in American culture.

expression of personality – not as a competitive sport. Further, the reception of these videos bears little resemblance to traditional modes of sport spectatorship.

In fact, skateboarders' viewing practices align more closely with the reception of fictional media. Scholars have suggested that fans of "women's media" such as romance novels, soap operas, and melodrama, use these texts to soothe the anxieties and boredom endemic to "women's work" in the home,[443] to quiet fears and disenchantment with patriarchal relationships and romance,[444] and to imagine a life where choices are abundant, simple, and easily made.[445] In short, such viewership can be defined as a mode of escape from everyday life and from the pitfalls of being female in a patriarchal, postfeminist world. Ien Ang encourages us to take such fantasy seriously, understanding fictional texts as presenting a range of possibilities in terms of gender identification and "modes of femininity" while also remembering that such fantasy often takes place at the level of emotional involvement rather than "realistic" identification. Such involvement, for Ang, is vital: "[T]he pleasure of fantasy lies in its offering the subject an opportunity to take up positions which she could not do in real life: through fantasy she can move beyond the structural constraints of everyday life and explore other situations, other identities, other lives. It is totally unimportant here whether these are realistic or not."[446]

Skateboarders, indeed, claim a high level of emotional involvement in skateboarding videos. At the basic level of affect, skateboarders' descriptions of the

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[443] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Metheun, 1982), 88.
[444] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984/1991).
[445] Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 193-94.
[446] Ien Ang, "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy," in *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, ed. Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci, and Lynn Spigel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990/1997), 162.

depiction of skateboarders in videos as "amazing" and "awesome," and skateboarder Mike's assertion that watching videos just "fills you with EVERY emotion," suggest that watching skating on the small screen is a moving experience. What's more, skaters claim to physically feel the screened experience. Unlike the fantasies encouraged by the fictional "women's" texts described above, however, skate videos seem to provide skateboarders a portal through which they can escape *to* life, rather than escaping *from* life. That is, skateboarding videos, rather than providing skateboarders with emotional experiences they cannot find in their everyday lives, evoke the emotions and feelings the boys get while skateboarding. While the texts' status as non-fiction certainly invites viewers to believe that they, too, can experience the fantasy depicted on the screen, the skateboarders' willing and optimistic belief that they can transfer the screened experience to a lived experience suggests the particular level of agency these mostly middle-class, mostly white, adolescent boys have in their lives. The simple fact that they can enact the free and awe-inspiring practice of skateboarding requires that they possess not only the money to purchase the necessary equipment, but also the leisure time to develop the requisite skills to feel free while skateboarding. Such monetary and temporal capital is surely more available to middle-class adolescent males than to, for example, the working- and middle-class mothers discussed by Janice Radway.[447] The practice of skateboarding also prefigures a particular mode of engagement with public space that involves moving quickly through space, appropriating civic and private monuments as obstacles on which to perform their tricks, and sometimes, running from authorities. It also requires a high-

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[447] Radway, *Reading the Romance*.

222

level of risk-taking in terms of bodily injury.[448] In these ways, the ability to experience this type of fantasy in real life is a privilege endowed to only particular populations.

In fact, as other scholars and I have noted, skateboarding works to actively exclude everyone but adolescent males. In particular, though skateboarders frequently report that more young women should participate in the activity, the boys' club nature of skateboarding communities presents a challenge to adolescent girls interested in the practice. As Becky Beal reports, male skateboarders frequently see the lack of females in their culture as a result of "natural" differences between the sexes – the girls did not want to skate, Beal's interviewees suggested, because they did not want to risk getting hurt or getting dirty. Furthermore, Beal notes, the boys regarded female skateboarders as "Skate Betties," meaning that the girls were only skateboarding to get the boys' attention or to fit into the group. Girl skateboarders, then, were defined from the start as "posers" uninterested in the "true" pleasures of the practice.[449] Beyond the fact that skateboarding is a practice requiring economic and leisurely capital, the skateboarding community has developed further barriers to entry in its delineation of "authentic" modes of participating.

Still, such escape to life remains an escape, and as such, is not about everyday norms of living. Skateboarders, when imagining skateboarding, are imagining escaping to a particular part of life where they are unencumbered by the everyday demands of the workplace, school, and the home and family. Skateboarders imagine and experience skateboarding as a practice through which they can experience their "authentic" or true

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[448] Though I do argue in Chapter 1 that skateboarding's risk is vastly overstated in popular accounts, it nevertheless presents certain risk to joints and muscles, particularly for beginners.
[449] Becky Beal, "Alternative Masculinity and Its Effects on Gender Relations in the Subculture of Skateboarding," *Journal of Sport Behavior* 19, no. 3 (1996).

selves unmediated by responsibilities or the pressure to obey or conform to rules or social norms. As skateboarder Brian explained, "I'm just disengaging from, 'cause when I'm skating, my mind's somewhere else. It's not, it's all about the skating; it's not about like, 'Oh I wonder if the puppy needs to go to the bathroom, or did I feed the cat, or did I iron this shirt.' You know, none of that stuff even comes into play." Analogously, thirty-two year-old skater Jason told me, "It's a freedom! I feel free when I'm skateboarding, and I can forget about everything that's bothering me for that hour or two of the day. It's liberating, so it's kind of like therapy, as well." Listing the mundane responsibilities of everyday life, Brian suggests that skateboarding is truly an escape to a freer mindset. More than everyday life, though, Brian is referencing domestic life, which is generally coded as feminine. The responsibilities he escapes are traditionally women's responsibilities. Moreover, this type of domesticity is associated with white, middle-class, suburban family life.

It is unsurprising that Brian would reference the responsibilities of suburban life in his discussion of escape, or as he puts it, "disengagement," as his whiteness, masculinity, and middle-class status locate him in this space. It is important to note that he explicitly discusses the responsibilities and rule-bound nature associated with not only domestic life, but also working life, particularly when he refers to ironing his shirt. Though ironing is stereotypically "women's work," the need to have one's shirt ironed is linked to the appearance required for either white or pink collar work or middle-to-upper-class leisure pursuits. More, the requirement that one's shirt be ironed for these activities symbolizes the restrictions associated with them; the requirement to present oneself in a particular manner, to look "put together" rather than wrinkled and relaxed. The ironed

shirt is decidedly not the purview of adolescent masculinity during leisure time. To

engage fully in responsible, *adult* masculinity, then, requires an ironed shirt or its

equivalent – rules, restrictions, and responsibility. Skateboarding, for Brian, is an escape

from this domain.

As I have argued, women are also associated with such grown-up, responsible

masculinity. Garry Whannel argues, women (and mothers in particular) have a

"civilizing and rounding impact" in "the transition from carefree youth to family

responsibility."[450] The stereotypical gender roles that skateboarders escape while

skateboarding, then, are not only those of women, but also those of adult men.[451] The

struggle with identity that so many skateboarders imply in their discussions of

skateboarding's pleasures suggest not a simple understanding of gender as male versus

female, but a conceptualization of gender that is imbued by and intersects with notions of

race, class, and most importantly, adulthood. Skateboarders' opposition to and

discomfort with both adult masculinity and feminine authority reaffirms Robert Hanke's

assertion that masculinity is not a cohesive "discourse" defined solely as the reverse of

femininity, but a system of sometimes contradictory meanings "articulated" in various

ways with other systems of meaning and power.[452] In this case, skateboarders'

masculinity is defined via the superiority of youth over adulthood. Youth comprises an

identity category that plays a key role in the construction of gender, and our

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[450] Whannel, "Media Discourses of Masculinity and Morality," 80.

[451] There is an important point to be made here about young women, as well, though unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this chapter/this dissertation to do so. I would argue that, in participating in what many of us would call "postfeminist" behavior, playing along with sexist jokes, participating as "one of the boys," many young women are actively rejecting the idea that one role all women play is the civilizing role. That is, they are working against the stereotype of the fussy, rule-bound, civilizing woman (usually mother), while at the same subscribing to or allowing sexist behavior.

[452] Robert Hanke, "Redesigning Men: Hegemonic Masculinity in Transition," in *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, ed. Steve Craig (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

understanding of the politics of gender should examine how youth inflects the construction of identities.

On one hand, skate life's mode of adolescent authenticity works to shore up masculine power. Despite their refusal of the status obtained in adulthood, the male adolescent can sometimes enact his adolescence by refusing accountability; by suggesting that he can do whatever he wants. The simple portrayal of skateboarders moving through public and private spaces suggests that they believe they are entitled to dominate these spaces – that they can do whatever they want, wherever they want. As Schwichtenberg argued of the men in *Miami Vice*, the movement of men through space, particularly when combined with music, creates "a sensualization of movement … linked to a romanticized notion of male freedom of movement within the public domain."[453] Skateboarding videos certainly make male movement sensual, and the skateboarders' responses to these videos make clear that they experience these portrayals as sensual.

On the other hand, the rejection of male adulthood suggests that it represents a position of inauthenticity, limitations, and restrictions. Couching adult white masculinity as inauthentic, these tropes critique hegemonic masculinity and whiteness, particularly their association with rationality and disassociation from the pleasures and comforts of the body. In contrast, youthful masculinity is constructed as a space in which boys can experience corporeal pleasure while at the same time enjoying the power endowed upon middle-class white males. Presenting a critique of some aspects of hegemonic masculinity and whiteness while at the same time ignoring inequalities between men and

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[453] Cited in Diana Saco, "Masculinity as Signs: Poststructuralist Feminist Approaches to the Study of Gender," in *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, ed. Steve Craig (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 31-32.

women and the power of masculine expressions of physical prowess and technical acuity, skateboarders engage in a highly individualistic form of resistance.

Though skateboarders' resistance has been associated with adult masculinity, skateboarders still believe that they can live an adult male life authentically. Taking professional skateboarders and local skate shop owners as their models, skateboarders dream of growing up to be entrepreneurs. As owners of skate shops, producers of skate apparel, or as professional skateboarders, young skateboarders imagine that they can be successful adults in charge of their own lives. That is, skateboarders reenvision adult masculinity in opposition to the Organization Man, imagining an adult life characterized by independence and freedom.

Producing Videos, Producing Masculinity

The culture of skateboarding is appealing, in part, because it allows for the enactment of the multiple forms of masculinity displayed in the videos. This perceived freedom in terms of personality extends through the practice of skateboarding, which skateboarders characterize as boundless, spiritual, expressive, and cooperative and thus characterized by multiple expressions of masculinity as creative and passionate rather than aggressive and hyperrational. Though the mode of skateboarding shifts from individual to individual and aggressive homophobia and misogyny characterizes parts of the videos, the pleasures evoked by the videos still contradict such hypermasculine codes. Unlike skateboarding, though, the practice of producing sponsor-me tapes is rule-bound, formulaic, and precise.

Skateboarders often discuss the practice of filming with some sense of contradiction. They note that they like to capture video and try to "film"[454] as frequently as possible, but at the same time, filming can make skaters appear to be interested in the performance of skateboarding, rather than the experience itself. As Matthew told me, "We're videotaping for the Launch video right now, but it's just us going out and goofing around. We try to get stuff on videotape but it's not like top priority at all, you know. Some of these kids just get too like, 'When am I gonna get sponsored? How am I gonna get sponsored?' This, that, and the next thing. I don't remember ever having that mentality. I just went out and did it and had fun." In other words, the practice of filming itself can make the skateboarding seem inauthentic, as if it is done to "get sponsored" rather than for pleasure.[455] The seemingly rational end of earning money for skateboarding is derided in the name of pleasure. Here again, we can see that responsible, rational pursuits – such as those in which adult men make take part – are deemed suspicious or inauthentic. The process of filming, then, may be antithetical to the image of the perpetual Peter Pan operating solely in the interest of fun.

Furthermore, the process of editing videos together is vastly different from the practice of skateboarding in its rather superficial focus on display and its requirement for precision. As I have noted, the availability of professional-level editing suites – at home, at school, or at work – allows skateboarders to strive for high production values that are vastly different from the DIY aesthetic of 1970s – or even 1990s – punk culture. Making

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[454] Though skateboarders never actually "film" – they use video – they frequently use the verb "film." It is unclear whether or not this discrepancy results from linguistic norms or suggests an elevation of their practice from a practice akin to home videotaping to a professionalized art form.
[455] Notably, Mark's use of the phrase "these kids" does refer to younger skateboarders within the culture, and there is a perception that younger skateboarders (those under the approximate age of 13) are skateboarding for recognition rather than for an authentic love of the culture. The accuracy of this perception cannot be analyzed using the data I have collected and is outside the purview of this project.

their sponsor-me tapes, some skateboarders spend countless hours perfecting the editing, choosing music, and aligning music with the motion on the videos. What's more, the process of creating a sponsor-me tape is a process of representing the self, and in the case of composite videos, representing a community or group of people. Not evoking an inherent feeling of pleasure, the practice of editing videos produces a high level of anxiety for many skaters.

Kiran explained editing as "very formulaic," discussing what he called a "hierarchy of tricks" and a generic formula for each video. Jeff, with some anxiety, discussed the process of creating videos: "It's just, it's gotta be really well edited, there can't be too much non-skating, and there can't be too much of a serious attitude if the skating's not there." Jeff has recently taken on the task of creating a video for Launch, his local skateboarding shop. The skateboarders who work at Launch have been telling me for the last five years that they would soon be releasing the Launch Video; however, it has yet to be finished. Jeff recently told me, "I'm somewhat happy with the way the montages look, but yeah, there's lots more work to be done before a video can ever be done. It seems like to make a good video would take about a year more, even though it's always getting pushed back." Though both the practice and portrayal of skateboarding reveal it to be an unbounded and expressive culture, the process of creating skateboarding videos involves precision, perfectionism, and rules – precisely those elements of adult white masculinity against which skateboarders position themselves.

To conclude, skateboarders' DIY videos comprise a space for the exploration and expression of masculine identity. Appearing on the videos, skateboarders situate themselves within the larger culture of skateboarding, align themselves with professional

229

skateboarders, and place multiple modes of masculinity on display. At the same time, the process for creating the videos is highly contradictory, placing skateboarders at risk for appearing inauthentic and requiring attention to detail, formula, and rules. Working through these tensions, skateboarders wrestle with what it means to enact or refute the cultural, institutional, and social power of hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

As documents of identity, skate videos – and the sponsor-me tapes modeled after them – situate the "authentic" boundaries of skateboarding culture and instruct skateboarders in its norms and values. As they talk about these videos – to me and to one another – skateboarders reveal and express an appreciation for self-expression and beauty that they also draw upon when explaining the pleasures of skateboarding. At the same time, the videos themselves are almost relentless in their mockery of women, people of color, homosexuals, and adult men. Skateboarders rule in these videos; their expressions of dominance mitigate their more gentle expressions of emotional and spiritual fulfillment.

Taken together, these contradictory ideas reveal that skateboarders have constructed an unarticulated lay theory of masculinity which imagines white adult men as the embodiment of the limitations of patriarchal structures. Simultaneously, this lay theory constructs youthful masculinity to be an identity characterized by freedom, corporeal pleasures, and authenticity. In their ability to escape to never-never land, skateboarders enact and use masculine power while at the same time thinking through and pushing against traditional norms of white, adult masculinity.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: "You do it together, and everyone just does it in their own way":
Corresponding Cultures and (Anti)Patriarchal Masculinity

Nineteen-year-old Joe, reflecting upon his reasons for skateboarding, told me,

"You go around and meet people that enjoy the same thing you do, and love something

just as much. And you do it together, and everyone just does it in their own way. So like,

there's no way it can't be fun, you know, it's what you love to do." Joe's claim explicates

skateboarding as a corresponding culture. He suggests that through skateboarding, he is

able to find others whose affinities and interests align with his own while at the same

time providing a space in which he is able to express his own individuality – "*You do it

together, and everyone just does it in their own way.*" Toggling between group and

individual identification, skateboarders produce and reproduce their identities in

relationship to the culture of skating.

The notion of a "corresponding culture" not only captures this relationship, but

also opens up opportunities for discussing the multiple ways in which skateboarders –

and arguably, a variety of youth cultures – might negotiate with both mainstream

constructions of identity and power relationships between independent and corporate

cultural producers. From Stuart Hall's "negotiated readings"[456] to Dick Hebdige's

"bricolage"[457] to Michel de Certeau's "making do" and "cultural poaching," scholars

have posed numerous conceptualizations of the interaction between cultural producers

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[456] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980).
[457] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

and cultural consumers.[458] I would contend that skateboarders engage in each of these

practices. In fact, 16-year-old Jack inadvertently channeled de Certeau when he

explained the history of skateboarding as one of "making do" with inadequate equipment

and terrain:

> [Early skaters] just took some … roller skates and put 'em on a 2
> by 4. Which is like super ghetto, and like, they didn't even use bolts,
> they just nailed and screwed 'em on. And like, that's making do with
> what you have! And it just keeps going on and on and on like that. …
> You just make do with what you have, because it's not like a basketball
> court where there's like nets put up and everything. You know, a skate
> park's just stuff that came later. But for the original, like art that
> skateboarding is, there's nothing, there's nothing there. So you just had
> to make do with what you had.

For Jack, part of skateboarding's creativity derives from its reuse of public space – and

the lack of a court or a field signifies skating's openness, the ways in which it provides

opportunity for self-expression. As another skateboarder explained, "It's like, the play is

in your head, you make it up. Um, that's part of the art of it too, it all just comes from

your soul and your heart."

The multiple media comprising skate life and skaters' principles of engagement

with these media operate as a nexus through which skateboarders deconstruct norms of

white masculinity while maintaining its power. Venerated by, used by, rejected by, and

reinvented by dominant society, skateboarders also venerate, use, reject, and reinvent the

mainstream. In constant correspondence with many representations of skate life – from

FedEx's commercial to MTV's *Wildboyz* to Enjoi skateboarding company's *Bag of Suck*

– skateboarders persistently explore constructions of masculinity. Explaining, "this is

how I think," the skaters lodge their complaints with the demands of dominant codes of

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[458] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1984).

masculinity – its preoccupation with competition and physical dominance, its rejection of the emotional, spiritual, and mental pleasures of self-expression and exploration, and its obligatory rationalism and stoicism. These complaints, however, do not preclude skateboarders from expressing their dominance over women, gay men, non-Westerners, men of color, and working-class folks. Though skate life – both in and outside of the mainstream media – sends up the constructed nature of white masculinity, it does so without questioning power relations.

Skateboarding's (anti)patriarchal revelations regarding the codification of dominant masculinities demonstrate not only the staying power of white male power but also the need for a theoretical stance that can account for the ways in which constructions of identity and power relations are both inextricably related *and* operate independently of one another. The scholarship on masculinity and whiteness has suggested that in exposing the constructed nature of these identities, we may denaturalize them and consequently strip them of some of their power. Though such exposure does destabilize identity, it does not necessarily eliminate its power. R.W. Connell has made perhaps the most useful contribution to this dilemma in defining hegemonic masculinity as highly contingent – hegemonic masculinity, he argues, is the mode of masculinity that, at a given historical moment, is most able to uphold the patriarchy.[459] Scholars of identity and popular culture would greatly benefit from a broader theory that captures the fluidity of identity and power and explains why alternative – or even radical – constructions and performances of identity might not be sufficient for remaking power relations. Such a theory would certainly help to establish the importance of popular culture's

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[459] Connell, *Masculinities*.

representation of identity as well as its relationship to the many everyday practices that are infused by power.

The notion of "corresponding cultures" begins this discussion by creating a conceptual space in which we can think of the interactions between multiple media and individuals as dynamic, constantly-in-progress, and generally mutable. As Joe's description of "do[ing] it together" while "do[ing] it in your own way," suggests, individuals carry some independence in their interactions with culture and society, but that independence is decidedly limited. One step toward elaborating upon these ideas would be to offer a more in more depth examination of the corresponding culture's relationship to the public sphere. In skate life, for example, we might explore the relationships between portrayals of skate parks in Tony Hawk's Activision videogames, the rhetoric of the Tony Hawk Foundation, which supports the construction of local skate parks, and the grassroots activism of a skateboarding community attempting to erect a skate park in its locale. We might ask, how do corresponding cultures and counterpublic spheres intersect and interact?

As skateboarding becomes more and more entrenched in American culture – a California man recently established a skateboarding league for high schoolers that will operate like a club sport and be sponsored by Nike[460] – its racial and gender borders, as well as its notions of identity, may expand and transform. The emergence of the "skatepimp" not only exemplifies how cultural phenomena are discovered and commodified by mainstream media but also points to the ways that such commodification redraws the lines of cultural forms. Embodied by hip hop artists Pharrell Williams and

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[460] Matt Higgins, "Riders of the World, Unite! Skateboarding Sprouts as Team Sport," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2007.

Lupe Fiasco, the skate pimp is a hip hop skater. Though hip hop and skateboarding have a long history of confluence within skateboarding culture, the mainstream construction of this image highlights continuing conflicts about race, lifestyle, and the blurring and crossing of racial boundaries. An analysis of these figures' would speak to the ways in which racial identity and cultural style intersect in the construction of masculinity as well as the ways in which signifiers of authenticity shift across lines of race and culture. Do Pharrell Williams and Lupe Fiasco enact the same critiques of masculinity as Bam Margera and Chris Pontius? Does the fact that Williams and Fiasco might regarded as authentic by skateboarders impact their hip hop cred – or vice versa?

Professional skateboarder and Olympic snowboarder Shaun White's recent catapult into celebrity also exposes the solidification of skateboarding's space in mainstream culture. After winning an Olympic gold medal in the 2006 Winter Olympics, White, whose long red hair, pale skin, and skinny body defy the norms of athletic masculinity and physical dominance, was featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone* with an American flag draped around his shirtless torso. This cover, which deemed White "the coolest kid in America," presents a seemingly unlikely confluence of signifiers – of youthful cool, of patriotism, and of alternative masculinities. How do these signifiers work together to reimagine white American masculinity? Why might such a negotiation be effective in this particular cultural moment? How do the Olympics' desire for cultural cachet, White's charisma and talent, and contemporary concerns about masculinity and dominance intersect to make White, "The Flying Tomato," resonate?

Skate life and extreme sports culture certainly resonate through youth media, and this dissertation has only analyzed a few key pieces of that media. Tony Hawk's line of

Activision videogames is on its ninth installment, with the latest iteration, *Proving Ground*, acting as a key element in a cross-promotional effort involving Jeep, *Rolling Stone*, and Sirius Radio (on which Hawk has his own show). As an icon and a brand, Tony Hawk traverses mediascapes[461] and simultaneously presents himself as a grown-up family man and a youthful troublemaker. In 2006, MTV's *Rob and Big*, featuring professional skateboarder Rob Dyrdek and his "bodyguard," Chris "Big Black" Boykin, debuted, and in 2007 MTV released *Scarred*, which showcases home videos of terrible extreme sports accidents and the resulting industries. These two series place skateboarding front and center and complicate some of the norms of skateboarding I have discussed here. Dyrdek's appropriation of hip hop culture and his interactions with Big Black upset notions of whiteness, and *Scarred*'s fetishization of male pain appears to be a darkly serious version of the "boys will be boys" masochism on display in *Jackass*. How might adolescent males who do not define themselves primarily as skateboarders respond to these media? Do skateboarding's multiple constructions of masculinity reverberate in broader youth cultures? Do they challenge male youths' understanding of masculinity?

Skate life's mockery of male proving rituals, which is on display in *Wildboyz* but also permeates skate culture, deserves to be analyzed more fully in terms of the contemporary cultural moment. Over the past five years – the years when I got to know the Michigan skateboarders and started to pay close attention to skate media – American culture has been increasingly criticized for its hypermasculinity. In recent months, cultural discourse has portrayed the United States as getting far too big for its britches. Hummers and McMansions have run up against the mainstreaming of environmentalism and the "green" movement (which has now been fully commodified), and key criticisms

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[461] Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy."

of the Bush administration have revolved around the arrogance of its foreign policies, particularly in the use of pre-emptive strikes. A recent *Newsweek* article trumpets the rise of "beta males – losers who are winning." Noting the popularity of non-normative men – actors such as Steve Carrell and characters like Shrek – and the downfall of such hypermasculine icons as Don Imus, Mel Gibson, and Donald Rumsfeld, the article suggests that self-deprecating, non-aggressive men are coming to power. *Newsweek* does not suggest that this shifting image will substantially change power relations – though it does note that the possibility of a First Gentleman exists.[462] This article prompts a variety of questions. Can we think of Johnny Knoxville, et al, as precursors to the beta male? Could the beta male provide space for more egalitarian gender relations? Why are all the beta males white? How might skateboarders respond to various images of the beta male? The answers to these questions would help to further explain the shifting nature of hegemonic masculinity, the ways in which power and images of identity work separately and in tandem with one another, and the extent of skate culture's correspondence with mainstream culture.

Throughout its history, skateboarding has occupied a liminal space in which it has been defined as both decidedly American and decidedly countercultural. Perceived as a childhood pastime, the rebellious destruction of property, an athletic pursuit, and a cool lifestyle, skateboarding functions in multiple ways to uphold disrupt and consolidate dominant masculine codes. Both the practice and culture of skateboarding corresponds with skaters' seemingly authentic desires, values, ideas, and dreams, and this corresponding culture provides an open space through which they experience emotional, mental, intellectual, and spiritual pleasures that they believe could not be derived from

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[462] Jennie Yabroff, "Betas Rule," *Newsweek*, June 4, 2007.

237

other youth cultures, including institutionalized sports. The skaters' individual desires and pleasure are tied closely to their negotiations of dominant modes of masculinity and constitute a nascent critique of hegemonic masculinities without reimagining power relationships or relinquishing the power of white masculinity.

As they told me their stories and escorted me through their culture, skateboarders taught me the norms for engaging in skate life. Proclaiming skateboarding to "come from the heart," demonstrating the feelings evoked while watching skate videos, and struggling with their analyses of mainstream representations of skateboarding, the boys elaborated the credos and directives that provide a paradigmatic template for multiple social situations and mediated constructions. Skateboarders' discussions of skate culture and their interactions in the skate shop and in front of the television operated to indoctrinate me, as well as each other, into the rituals of skate life. Knowing how to watch skate media, how to speak about the practice, and how to be a skater in everyday life, the skateboarders operate as a corresponding culture that informs their impressions of self and identity more generally. Telling me and telling one another the tenets of engagement in skate life: "You do it together, and everyone just does it in their own way;" "The play is in your head;" "You just make do with what you have;" "This is how I think," skateboarders correspond with multiply mediated representations and elaborate their culture's and their own correspondence with alternative masculinities. Skate life opens space for alternative masculinities: "This is how I think."

Appendix 1: Method

Much of the data for this project was derived from interviews conducted, starting in May 2002, with Southeastern Michigan skateboarders, including skateboarders from Ann Arbor and the surrounding areas (Brighton, Flint, Novi, Howell, Milan). The skateboarders were contacted via flyers posted in Launch Skate Shop and the now defunct Modern Surf and Skate in Ann Arbor as well as through a snowball sample, wherein I asked interviewees to recommend friends to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in local restaurants over meals I provided in return for the skateboarders' time and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

This Is How I Think also depends upon participant observation with this community, conducted in Summer 2002, 2004, and 2006. My observations were surely aided and otherwise affected by my point of annunciation, which perhaps most significantly derives from my own experiences as a skateboarder's girlfriend and wife. I first entered Launch Skate Shop when my husband, Chris, was shopping for skate apparel, and I frequently told Michigan skaters about my husband and his attempts to teach me to skateboard. Arguably, this relationship gave me some credibility with the skateboarders and situated me in a position that many women in this culture inhabit – that of the girlfriend. I could, quite easily blend in as a typical girl when sitting on the sidewalk watching the boys skate. Chris attended several of the boys' skate sessions with me, and so I was easily able to fit in with this community. This personal history also means that I have, over the past decade, observed a variety of skateboarders behaving in immature and sexist ways, while I have also become quite attached to skateboarders who are kind, generous, and politically engaged. I report this information to better explain my

entry into this community as well as to acknowledge that my personal history has some relevance in my interpretation of my data.

I spent an average of 4 hours/week in Launch Skate Shop for approximately 2 months each in the summers of 2002, 2004, and 2006. During this time, I engaged in whatever activities the skateboarders were engaging in: watching skate videos on the shop's small television, hanging around the counter talking, or just sitting around. Skateboarders came and went during this time; consequently, I spent the most significant amount of time with the shop's employees, all skateboarders. When skateboarders invited me along, I attended skateboarding sessions in Ann Arbor, Brighton, Detroit, and Toledo. These sessions were more difficult to attend, as they are often spontaneous. I have also developed a more extensive relationship with 2 skateboarders and have attended a concert, gone out to dinner, and "hung out" with them on numerous occasions (e.g., going shopping, walking around Detroit and Ann Arbor, participating in a photo session for a college class, attending graduation parties, and meeting girlfriends, parents, and siblings, etc.) Finally, I have participated in Milan skateboarders' ongoing fundraising efforts for a skatepark in Milan.

Interview Questions

1. How did you get into skateboarding?
2. Why do you skate?
3. If someone asked you to define skateboarding, what would you tell them?
4. Describe your group of friends. Describe a typical weekend.
5. What is a stereotypical skater? How true is the stereotype?
6. What perpetuates the stereotype?
7. Is there anything that you see in the media that portrays skater culture accurately?
8. Is there anything that you see in the media that is a poor representation of you and your friends?
9. Do you play the skating video games (e.g. ProSkater)? What do you think of them?
10. Are there any "must go" skater events?

11. Tell me about your favorite skate video.
12. How can you pick a skater out of a crowd?
13. If you could control the future of skateboarding, what would it be?

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