NOTE TO USERS

DISSERTATION

YOUTH CULTURES AND CONSUMERISM: SPORT SUBCULTURES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR RESISTANCE

Submitted by

Joy Crissey Honea

Department of Sociology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 2004

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

SEPTEMBER 27, 2004

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY JOY CRISSEY HONEA ENTITLED YOUTH CULTURES AND CONSUMERISM: SPORT SUBCULTURES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR RESISTANCE BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Committee on Graduate Work

(Please print name under signature)

Jay Coakley
JAY COAKLEY

D. Stanley Eitzen
D. STANLEY EITZEN

Bradley J. Macdonald
Bradley J. Macdonald

P. H. Atchison
Advisor
P. H. ATCHISON

Louis E Swanson
Department Head
LOUIS E SWANSON

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

YOUTH CULTURES AND CONSUMERISM:

SPORT SUBCULTURES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR RESISTANCE

This study examined alternative sport subcultures as a potential site for resistance to dominant forms of popular culture. As commercial interests use their control of the means of communication to monopolize cultural space and to dominate it with forms of popular culture that reaffirm capitalist values, including the importance of consumption in achieving success and fulfillment, cultural forms that hold values in opposition to consumerism and commercial success are pushed to the margins. This study asked; to what extent are corporate culture producers able to reconstruct oppositional activities as forms of popular culture that reaffirm consumerism and in what ways are members of these oppositional groups able to negotiate some freedom to construct culture as they wish?

To address this question, the author interviewed professional skateboarders, snowboarders and bicycle motocross riders to examine two primary issues; 1) the perceptions of athletes regarding how their sports have changed with commercialization and 2) whether athletes are involved in attempts to resist corporate control of their sports and how effective they are. Respondents indicated that their sports have become organized more like mainstream athletics, with increasing emphasis on competition, external rewards, specialization and the performance of spectacular stunts. However,

despite these changes, subjects reported that they are not engaged in collective attempts to resist or challenge corporate-controlled versions of their sports. Respondents were more likely to attempt to escape the corporate-controlled events by participating in athlete-controlled forms of the sports including participant-owned demonstration companies and video performances. This "parallel world" of participation exists alongside the commodified version without being readily appropriated by corporate sponsors, or engaging in direct opposition.

The author suggests that the existence of parallel worlds indicates that the dichotomy between co-optation and resistance in the theoretical literature may be overstated. In a world in which the power to control cultural space has become so concentrated and overwhelming that it cannot be challenged on its own terms, perhaps agency exists in the ability to carve out these parallel spaces that can preserve the autonomy, creativity and spontaneity of those original oppositional cultural forms.

Joy Crissey Honea
Department of Sociology
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523
Fall 2004

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No project of this scale is ever the work of just one individual and so I would like to thank all those who contributed to the completion of this dissertation. First, and foremost, I would like to thank the professional skateboarders, snowboarders and bicycle motocross riders who participated as interview subjects in this study. Without their generosity and willingness to share their time and experiences the study would not have been possible.

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their advice, patience and flexibility. Thank you, especially, to Patricia Atchison for serving as chair of the committee, for guiding me through the research and writing process, making sure to gently remind me of deadlines and bureaucratic hurdles and for always having confidence in my ability to finish. Much thanks, also, to Jay Coakley, for generously giving his time to read and edit drafts, to give valuable feedback and to listen at the other end of the phone line as I tried to organize my ideas and make sense of my results. His assistance in the writing process was immeasurable.

My family deserves special thanks, for they acted as both practical and moral support on the long road to the completion of this project. Thank you to Valerie and Sarah for listening to my complaints, for understanding when I was too busy to talk or visit, and for serving as my constant cheering section. Thank you to all four of my

parents for pitching in those last few months to help with housework and childcare and, most importantly, for just being there for me. As difficult as those months were there is no way I could have survived, let alone worked on this project, without their help.

And most of all, thank you to Rich and to Fletcher and Duncan—my boys, who lived with me every day from start to finish (well, except Duncan, who arrived in the world just in time to see Mommy complete the writing.) It would have been simply unimaginable to complete a project like this without such a loving and supportive husband, who never complained about all the extra duties I asked him to undertake and who reminded me, whenever I needed it, that I could do this. And to my children, thank you for your patience, your understanding and your love. All it took was one look in your little faces to put it all in perspective and to remind myself what is truly important in life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables:

Figures:

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

"Popular Culture," "Mass Culture," "Consumer Culture"...are terms that attempt to clarify what, exactly, culture *is* in the modern, industrialized world. The anthropologists' definition of culture as "the whole way of life" shared by people in a society has become inadequate to describe either the material or non-material aspects of life in increasingly diverse societies. In addition, the creation of culture through interaction has become a much more complex process in a highly stratified social world in which cultural production and re-production can be strongly influenced, through control of the means of communication, by representatives of a mere handful of powerful transnational corporations. These corporate culture producers have the ability to disseminate forms of popular culture, including sports, which reinforce dominant values.

Despite the nebulous definition of culture, sociologists have given a great deal of attention to the issue of the "culture industry" in recent years. As more cultural space has become commodified, some sociologists argue that consumption has replaced production as the most significant organizing principle of social life in industrialized nations. Steven Miles contends that consumerism has become a way of life— the basis of our culture (Miles 1998). But while much research and theorizing has been done on the

commodification of culture, sociology has in many ways ignored how commodified culture is received and interpreted by "consumers" and how individuals and groups re frame, oppose and resist dominant cultural messages. These issues have been primarily engaged by what are often referred to as the "border disciplines" of cultural studies and postmodernism. Although sociology has begun to grapple with how to study culture in a "postmodern" world, much work remains to be done, both theoretically and methodologically, if we want to understand how we in society produce and reproduce culture and how, when and by whom these processes are contested.

Though there is no shortage of discourse within sociology on the increasing commodification of culture, the discipline is in need of a fresh approach to analyzing how individuals are constrained by popular culture and, even more importantly, for examining the possibilities that exist for individuals to resist the homogenizing influences of mass culture and to negotiate some personal autonomy. Much of mainstream social theory has either ignored the structural limits to individual freedom, as is the case with traditional functionalism, or it has conceptualized social structures as so monolithic as to render human agency nonexistent, as did the structuralist Marxists. What is needed is a theoretical approach that theorizes the structural imperatives of the culture industry and also analyzes resistance and opposition to mass culture with an awareness of its agentic potential.

A particularly useful starting point in this endeavor is a return to the study of such small-scale phenomena as the development and existence of youth subcultures, whose actual engagement, or lack thereof, with popular culture provide an opportunity for sociologists to study how popular culture is received by groups and individuals and how

these groups might resist or oppose dominant cultural messages. In addition, the behaviors of these subcultures and their reception within mainstream culture hold the potential to provide sociology with an example of the limits of the culture industry in achieving ideological hegemony and the possibility for individuals to retain some power and control over the society in which they exist.

Original studies of subcultural groups included research conducted by the Chicago School in the early decades of the twentieth century that made the case that society is comprised of different, sometimes competing cultures, rather than a single culture with some cultural deviants. But this small-scale approach to culture was largely abandoned in the 1950s, when many sociologists turned their attention to developing macro-level theories of social structures and processes. In the lull, postmodern and cultural studies scholars moved in to study the role of subcultures in the production and reception of culture in contemporary societies. Cultural studies theorists originally focused their attention on working class youth "style" subcultures in post World War II Britain and interpreted them as reactions against dominant consumer culture. Later cultural studies scholars and postmodernists have turned their attention to new forms of cultural production and resistance to mainstream culture. Their research has been diverse and studies of subcultures have included those centered on rock music, punk, rap and hip-hop, cyber-communities and fashion, with a particular emphasis on how these groups resist the commodification of their cultures or adopt and reshape aspects of the dominant culture.

One recent subject of subcultural studies has been alternative sport subcultures. Alternative or "action" sports include such activities as skateboarding, surfing,

wakeboarding, inline skating, bicycle motocross (BMX) and snowboarding. Historically these sports have existed outside the mainstream world of sport and have promoted values largely antithetical to dominant sport forms, including organization by the participants themselves, less emphasis on competition and an individual focus. Additionally, these sports often include a lifestyle component, in which authentic participation requires acceptance into the sport subculture (Rinehart 2000). Over the past decade alternative sports have become an attractive target for corporate culture producers who seek to commodify the activities and market them to consumers through the mass media as commercial entertainment events. Increasingly, "alternative" sports are becoming part of the mainstream, the best exemplar being the inclusion of snowboarding in the Winter Olympic Games in 1998 in Nagano, Japan. As this occurs, there is evidence that the sports begin to lose their oppositional stance and start to be organized more like mainstream sport, despite resistance on the part of participants who seek to retain the sports' authentic roots (Beal 1995; Beal and Weidman 1998; Crissey 1999; Rinehart 2000).

This study examines alternative sport subcultures across three sports; skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX, as a case study of the transformation of oppositional subcultures into mainstream popular culture and the responses by participants to this shift. The aim is to empirically evaluate how participants at the professional level have responded to the commercialization of their sports, what changes they have witnessed in their sports and, if they deem the changes that have come with commercialization to be problematic, to determine if and/or how they are opposing or resisting the activities' new mainstream status, individually or collectively. At the

theoretical level, this study aims to determine whether participants report that oppositional or resistant strategies are having an effect on the organization and presentation of their sports at the professional level. In other words, to what degree are participants at the whim of corporate culture producers and to what extent are they able to negotiate freedoms to organize and present the sports, and their culture, as they desire.

The Rise of Consumer Culture

Historically, sociologists have been primarily interested in the study of large social structures, processes and institutions such as the economy, politics and organizations as a method of understanding social life. With the notable exception of scholars like those of the Chicago School and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, the study of culture was left to anthropologists and to the "border disciplines" of Cultural Studies and postmodernism. But recent years have witnessed increasing interest in a "whole range of cultural texts and practices which had previously been scorned by, or remained invisible to, academic criticism" (Connor 1997: 205). These "texts and practices" include aspects of popular culture like fashion, music, sport and shopping. This trend has paralleled a recognition that much of social life today centers on consumerism—that consumption is an increasingly important force in everyday life under capitalism and that what and how people consume helps shape who they are and what they value.

Since the Industrial Revolution sociology has concerned itself with the central role of production as an organizing principle of social life in Western capitalist societies.

Today, however, consumption may be the more salient force, as consumerism pervades more and more cultural space. Indeed, social scientists now often characterize life in North America as the "consumer society". Rosenblatt (1999) points out that 90 percent of the American workforce is engaged, either directly or indirectly, in the business of producing consumer goods and services. And this has contributed to a cultural value system based on the acquisition of consumer products; "...that life consists of goods acquired for oneself—indeed, that it is to be best lived in splendid isolation, surrounded by as much stuff as one can afford or...not afford" (Rosenblatt 1999: 17).

The origins of consumer culture are debatable, with some tracing the roots of consumerism to the development of trade and barter systems and others claiming that "consumer society" is a postmodern condition. For the purposes of this study, the emergence of pertinent aspects of consumer culture can be estimated to have occurred during the period of industrial capitalism from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, when soaring populations increased demand for consumer goods and when the marketplace began to market these goods to consumers who were increasingly able to purchase them (Miles 1998). This process has accelerated in recent decades as modes of advertising have changed and as new technologies have led to new products and services and novel ways to disseminate information about consumer goods (Orr 1999). For example, as Schor (1999) notes, recent consumerism is marked by new, "vertically elongated" reference groups where people now compare themselves with, or aspire to be like, members of the wealthiest economic classes, thanks in large part to the proliferation of mass media. In addition, media representations of popular culture provide examples of which consumer goods are considered "hip" or "cool" and

encourage individuals to shape their identities through the consumption of these goods and services.

The significant issue here is that the rise of consumerism has been a shift, not just in the economic structure of capitalism, but one of culture. Personal values, definitions of success and acceptable means to achieve life goals increasingly reflect the values of consumerism. And these values are disseminated and reinforced by corporate culture producers, such as the representatives of transnational corporations, who are in the business of generating profits through the sale of consumer goods and services.

While some tout the benefits of consumer culture as providing ways to more effectively meet the needs and desires of consumers, many social scientists worry that the rise of consumerism is contributing to a host of social problems. In addition to growing environmental problems associated with over-consumption of natural resources, there is evidence that consumer culture fosters economic inequality both within nations and globally, rising levels of personal debt, global political instability and individual disenchantment (Ritzer 1999; Rosenblatt 1999; Schor and Holt 2000). As Orr (1999) points out, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines consume as "destroy by or like fire or formerly disease", making the consumer a person who "squanders, destroys or uses up" (Orr 1999: 140).

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of consumerism for its critics is that the values associated with consumerism—the ones perpetuating these social problems—are so effectively transmitted by the culture industry through forms of popular culture like television entertainment, movies, music, newspapers and magazines, commercial sport and fashion. These forms of popular culture are organized, presented and disseminated

via transnational media corporations. Close to 99 percent of all North American news, information and entertainment comes from seven or fewer corporate sources (www.pbs.org). This leaves little space for other sources of cultural production, particularly if they contain messages antithetical to consumerist values (Lasn 1999). When alternative forms of culture begin to gain wider popularity and receive attention from mainstream culture producers, they are often co-opted by commercial interests, altered and re-shaped to reflect consumerist values and then presented through dominant forms of media, thereby losing their critical potential (Crissey 1999; Dretzin and Goodman 1999). In fact, Joseph Heath (forthcoming) argues that we are witnessing "the death of cool" as rebelliousness and individualism are sold to consumers as simply another mainstream style trend.

This domination of cultural space by corporate interests is a major concern for those critical of consumerism as a cultural value. And social scientists have begun to examine the processes through which this happens and the possibilities that may exist for resistance or rejection of dominant consumerist culture. Subcultures, and specifically subcultures that appear to take an oppositional stance toward dominant capitalist values, have been a common target within cultural studies and postmodern literature, even while they lost currency within mainstream sociology for a time.

The Role of Subcultures in the Production and Reproduction of Culture

Subculture is a term used loosely in social science. At the broadest level, the prefix "sub" simply implies that these groups are smaller and distinct from the larger

culture in some way. If we use the conventional definition of culture as a "whole way of life" or a "design for living", then subcultures would be defined groups who have some way of life or design for living that is distinct from the larger culture. Milton Yinger (1962) suggests that subculture requires a more specific definition, since virtually any smaller, distinct group could be labeled subcultural, leading to theoretical imprecision. Yinger argues that the term subculture should be reserved for those groups who are distinct in terms of things like language, customs, religion and ways of life. In this definition, subcultures are different from the larger culture primarily because they have ties to other cultures. Prime examples would be racial and ethnic groups and religious groups, especially ones whose members, or ancestors, have immigrated from other cultures and have preserved those cultural traditions. These subcultures are identified as distinct because of their preservation and adherence to other cultural norms and practices. For Yinger, these groups should be categorized differently than "countercultures", which he defines as generally homogenous groups whose distinct values and norms arise directly from a rejection of the values and cultural ideals of the dominant culture. Examples would include the political radicals of the 1960s, as well as gangs in which members engage in acts widely defined as deviant or criminal.

Despite attempts to categorize different types of subcultures, critics of the term suggest that the term has been so widely applied that it has lost its power as an analytical tool. "Indeed, such is the variety of analytical perspectives in which *subculture* is now used as a theoretical underpinning, that it has arguably become little more than a convenient 'catch-all' term for any aspect of social life in which young people, style and music intersect" (Bennett 1999: 599 Italics in original). But even this critique sheds light

on some specific characteristics of subcultures as defined within social science research. Although Bennett's inclusion of music as a salient aspect of subcultures may be overstated, as there are subcultures that do not use music as a defining aspect of their culture, the focus on youth and style is relevant. Within analyses of the production and consumption of culture, youth subcultural style has been a significant area of inquiry. The original cultural studies theorists of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) identified youth style subcultures as important sites of opposition and resistance to emerging consumer culture in Great Britain and more recent research has focused on groups of young people who are purported to be using aspects of style like fashion, music, art and leisure activities such as dance and sport, to challenge dominant meanings associated with cultural products.

This definition of subculture is more specifically referring to subcultures that are countercultural, which "describes those groups in which the normative system contains as its primary element conflict with or rejection of a dominant culture" (Crossett and Beal 1997: 74-75). Like Yinger, Crossett and Beal argue that what distinguishes a counterculture from the larger category of subculture is the degree of opposition to dominant culture. They point out that most completely oppositional groups (i.e. countercultures) do not exist for very long. They either die out or begin to adopt some aspects of the dominant culture in order to retain the viability of the group. And so many subcultures reject certain aspects of dominant culture while adopting or adapting other aspects.

It is this tension between the oppositional tendencies of subcultures and their tendency toward "mainstreaming" that has made them an interesting site for research on

the process of cultural production and reproduction. The original work of the CCCS suggested that youth style subcultures displayed resistance to consumer culture by purchasing consumer goods and other cultural goods, but then appropriating them for their own uses in a process referred to as "bricolage" (Hebdige 1979). More recent research has made similar claims about music forms: rap and hip-hop in the technique of "sampling", ethnic identities embodied in Chicano music in their appropriation of the music of others, and style subcultures such as punk fashion and "afro" hairstyles among African Americans (Connor 1997). Celebrators of these forms of "bricolage" or "pastiche" make the case that, in a postmodern world, resistance to the homogenizing effects of mass culture is evident in these appropriations of consumer goods for purposes other than their intended ones.

But critics make the case that this resistance or opposition to consumer culture is without teeth because it is largely apolitical. They see it as fruitless resistance because it does not truly challenge the culture industry and consumerism as a way of life or utilize political strategies that are intended to transform the social structures that sustain dominant cultural practiced. Individuals may feel "empowered" by using consumer goods in unintended ways, but this does little to change the material, or even the symbolic conditions of consumer society. In fact, because these individuals are still consuming these cultural products, this "resistance" may actually shore up consumer society. The danger is that, by consuming these cultural products in new and different ways, individuals feel free—empowered *through* consumption and therefore do not seek cultural alternatives to the increasing dominance of consumerism or establish structures through which new cultural practices might be produced.

Even among those postmodern scholars who celebrate the possible liberating aspects of subcultural appropriations of popular culture, there is concern about the diluting of oppositional subcultures as they adopt mainstream cultural products and values and as dominant culture producers co-opt the subcultural forms for dissemination to a mainstream audience. One of the most significant aspects of anti-mainstream subcultures today is that they are rapidly incorporated into dominant popular culture, as was "rage rock", originally a musical form explicitly opposed to more popular, mainstream forms of music. Within a few short years, however, rage rock was appropriated by corporate music producers and packaged and sold back to young people, albeit in diluted form (Dretzin and Goodman 1999).

Perhaps the clearest exemplar of this phenomenon has been within the world of sport. Dominant forms of sport have been commodified for decades and while many critics lament this change and "fear that a once noble pastime is being commercialized...into mere entertainment" (Carroll 1998), the focus of most recent inquiry into the world of sport has been on "alternative" sport subcultures—those groups of young people who engage in, and build a lifestyle around, activities that emphasize values that run counter to the values of dominant sport forms. These dominant sport values include head-to-head competition, elite training and formal organization. And participants in these alternative sports frequently eschew the commodified nature of most commercial sport forms. But these alternative sports are being transformed into commercial activities at an unprecedented rate. As these previously alternative sport forms are appropriated by dominant culture producers and are distributed to a mass audience, they lose their oppositional stance and the alternative becomes the mainstream

(Rinehart 1998). Alternative sports begin to look more like mainstream sports, with an emphasis on competition, commercial success and outsider control of the activity.

But the commercialization of alternative sport is not total. Part of the appeal of these activities to commercial interests is that they foster a rebellious streak and are therefore appealing to the young male demographic that advertisers and sponsors aim to reach. *Sports Illustrated* magazine discusses the "renegade attitude associated with action sports" (*Sports Illustrated* May 6, 2002) while an ESPN representative explains the choice of the location of the first X Games (then called the eXtreme Games) in 1995;

> This is an attitude toward life: passion that comes from the soul. From its beginnings, Rhode Island has been distinguished by its support for freedom, its rebellious, authority-defying nature. Fort Adams, built to defend, looms large this week as a new generation makes its stand. It's an opportunity to redefine the way we look at sports" (ESPN broadcast July 1, 1995 cited in Rinehart 2000).

So commercial interests like ESPN frame alternative sports as different than mainstream sports, yet simultaneously organize and present them more like dominant sport forms, reaffirming in the process the very structures that are rejected by alternative sport participants. Herein lies the tension between the co-optation of alternative cultural forms by the culture industry, with their emphasis on commodification and consumerism, and the potential of subcultural groups to resist outsider definitions of their activities and conceivably, in cases such as sport, play a role in shaping the ways in which certain aspects of culture are produced.

Research Issues

This study will examine the process of cultural production through an examination of three alternative sport subcultures: skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX, with a focus on the commercialization of these activities by corporate culture producers and subcultural responses to the commercialization process. These are all sports that have historically exhibited values antithetical to those emphasized in mainstream sports and are currently undergoing commodification.

There are two primary research issues. The first deals with the perceptions of professional athletes in these sports regarding if and how their sports have changed since commercial interests became involved and whether they deem the changes to be beneficial or detrimental to the sport and its participants. Are there differences in perceptions across athletes in the different sports and, if so, why? The second issue investigates whether athletes who characterize the changes in their sports as detrimental are engaging in forms of resistance or opposition to commercial interests and/or changes in the organization and presentation of their sports. If so, what are the strategies of resistance? Are they individual or collective? Is resistance to commercialization, if evident, effective, and if so, how? Are these sports destined to be organized and presented like mainstream sports or do participants have some ability to shape the future of the sports and to retain some aspects of their "alternative" roots?

This case study employs an ethnographic method, using in-depth interviewing to elicit information from participants at the professional level about the commercialization of their sports. This method is used because it allows the researcher to gather detailed

data from subjects about their perceptions of the commercialization process, both positive and negative, and because it provides the opportunity for two-way communication, allowing the researcher to ask questions specific to the respondent and to the particular issues that respondents raise.

While the research subjects of this study are members of alternative sport subcultures, the study should not be considered to be limited to the sociology of sport, or even to the analysis of subcultures, for that matter. Alternative sports are simply a case study—a qualitative approach to examining larger issues in the sociology of culture. The theoretical task of this project is to identify potential sites for human agency amidst growing evidence that cultural production has become concentrated in the hands of a few, powerful corporate culture-producers whose interests may not reflect the interests of the public.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF TWO LITERATURES:

THEORIES OF CULTURE

AND CURRENT RESEARCH ON ALTERNATIVE SPORT

Introduction

At the broadest level, this study is an examination of the processes of cultural production, re-production and consumption under advanced capitalism. In recent decades, an increasing amount of cultural space has come to be shaped by commercial interests who use their control of the means of communication to monopolize cultural space and to dominate it with forms of popular culture that reaffirm capitalist values, including the importance of consumption in achieving success and fulfillment.

As consumerism increasingly becomes a way of life in contemporary societies, cultural forms that hold values in opposition to consumerism and commercial success are pushed to the margins. Either they can find no vehicle for the dissemination of their cultures and their messages or the cultures and messages are diluted when commercial interests move in and co-opt these cultural forms, reframe them to promote capitalist interests and then sell them to consumers. The latter is often the case with youth subcultures today, whose art, music, fashion and leisure activities have become a target for corporate culture producers in search of fresh, marketable ideas.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than within the world of sport. Previously alternative sports that often included an anti-mainstream subcultural component are being rapidly co-opted by corporate culture producers and being transformed into commercial entertainment events. What is important about this process, from a sociological perspective, is how this co-optation occurs, in what ways subcultures are changed as their activities (in this case sports) are commercialized, whether members of these groups are actively opposing the co-optation of their sports and, if so, whether their opposition has been successful in resisting the desires of commercial interests. In other words, to what extent are corporate culture producers able to reconstruct oppositional activities as forms of popular culture that reaffirm consumerism and in what ways are members of these oppositional groups able to negotiate some freedom to construct culture as they wish? This study aims to add empirical data to the development of theory-building that more adequately identifies both the structural constraints on the creation of culture as well as the potential for groups and individuals to realize their agentic potential.

This chapter first provides an overview of the literature on the rise of consumerism as a way of life in Western societies and a review of the arguments both for and against consumerism as a dominant cultural force. Second, it outlines the theoretical perspectives on the role of consumption and the place of subcultures as sites of resistance to consumer society. Most of the research in this area has been conducted across interdisciplinary fields like cultural studies and postmodernism, although there is some evidence that the question of culture has begun to return to the center within sociology. Finally, the chapter examines recent research on the commercialization of alternative

sports and introduces the sports of skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX as prime candidates for this case study of cultural production.

Consumerism as a Way of Life

Consumer culture is not a new topic in sociology. The scholars of the Frankfurt School, drawing on Marx's original conception of culture as part of the superstructure within the capitalist economic system, analyzed the culture industry and concluded that commodified cultural practices serve to maintain the hegemony of capitalist social relations (Artz and Murphy 2000; Gunster 2000). Those with power and influence in society (in this case, large corporations) have the ability to control cultural messages. Through ownership of the means of communication and control of vast amounts of capital, corporate culture producers have the ability to disseminate carefully chosen ideological messages. Critical theorists contend that these ideologies are ones that promote consumption, competition and individual freedom— values central to the capitalist mode of production. "The culture industry tends to make itself the embodiment of authoritative pronouncements, and thus the irrefutable prophet of the prevailing order" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944: 17). Mass culture in all its forms; music, film, fashion, sports and advertising, for example, serves as a way for people to learn to accept dominant values and beliefs and to "fit in" within their society, all the while feeling like they are exercising their personal freedom in choosing which items to consume.

The culture industry thesis has been criticized for being theoretically speculative and lacking empirical evidence, as well as for being pessimistic about the possibility of

challenging the commodification of culture (Gunster 2000). But this has not lessened the impact of the Frankfurt School's influence on the study of mass culture and there is a growing body of work within sociology on the issue of consumption and consumer culture. Increasingly, sociologists of culture argue that consumption has become a main organizing principle of social life, replacing the production system as the driving force behind how we live our everyday lives (Corrigan 1997; Derber 1998; Lasn 1999; Miles 1998; Ritzer 1999). Miles (1998) makes a distinction between "consumption" and "consumerism." He argues that defining consumption as simply the sale and purchase of goods and services focuses too narrowly on the economic side of consumption and ignores the cultural aspects of consuming. Miles notes that while consumption is an act, consumerism is a way of life. Echoing the earlier claims of the Frankfurt School, Miles suggests that, "Consumerism *is* an important topic for social scientists precisely *because* it appears, at a common-sense level, to be somewhat inconsequential. Because we accept the routine of the consuming experience as legitimate, powerful ideological elements of that experience go largely unnoticed" (Miles 1998: 5. Italics in original). Consumption has become problematized within sociology. Instead of being primarily viewed as a by-product of production, consumption has begun to be viewed as a central aspect of Western, industrialized culture.

While supporters of consumerism tout the emergence of a consumer culture as beneficial— indicative of the triumph of Western capitalist democracy— critics argue that consumerism, far from delivering prosperity and freedom for all, has contributed to growing social, economic and environmental problems. Princen et al (2002) identify three related aspects of the consumer society that cause concern among its critics. First is

consumerism, as mentioned above in Miles' definition. For Princen et al, consumerism is "the crass elevation of material acquisition to the level of a dominant social paradigm" (Princen et al 2002: 3). The second is *commoditization*, or the transformation of more aspects of life into commodities, replacing less tangible parts of culture like personal relationships with the use of goods and services. This characterization of modern society echoes Marx's original concept of the commodification of culture. And third is *over-consumption*, the use of resources beyond what is necessary.

Ritzer (1997) makes the case that consumerism and commoditization have led to personal disenchantment in the lives of individuals, that as we base more of our lives around consumption, we have lost an appreciation for the less material aspects of life. But there are also more tangible effects of consumer culture. Research on stratification indicates that, despite the image of the affluent society often displayed in the media, economic inequality has dramatically increased in recent years. As poorer families have tried to "keep up with the Joneses" savings rates have fallen and debts have skyrocketed. More households require two incomes to make ends meet, resulting in families spending less and less time together (Schor and Holt 2000).

This correlates neatly with the consumption of popular culture, particularly through mass media like television. Schor (1999) found in one study that for every hour of television watched per week, annual spending went up by $208 and that 56 percent of those respondents who reported that they were "heavily" in debt also said that they "watch too much TV" (Schor 1999: 45). Schor goes on to point out that face-to-face socializing has been replaced by television watching. "Viewing hours have risen by about 50 percent since the mid- 1960s and now are thought to occupy as much as 40

percent of adults' free time...Thus television has become increasingly important in providing information about the spending patterns of others" (Schor 1999: 44).

The increasing centrality of consumerism in Western culture means that individuals are more likely to spend time consuming goods and services and to define themselves according to the possession of material goods. The study conducted by Schor found that, not only does increased television viewing correlate with higher rates of spending, but that individuals now associate "the good life" with the accumulation of material items:

> Growing numbers of people believe that vacation homes, swimming pools, travel abroad, really nice clothes, a lot of money, and second cars are symbolic of a good life. Finally, the proportion of the population identifying various consumer items as necessities rather than luxuries has increased substantially since 1973" (Schor 1999: 45).

According to Schor, consumption of mass media has also led to an "aspirational gap" in which people report that they are frustrated because their incomes cannot match their desires for goods and services, contributing to personal dissatisfaction and rising levels of debt. The *2002 Statistical Abstract of the United States* found that, as of 1998, 75 percent of American families had personal debt and the United States Department of Treasury reports that the average American household with at least one credit card carried a balance of $7942 in 2000.

The effects of consumer culture are not limited to Western, developed nations. As markets become saturated in North America, corporations expand their operations into other regions of the world, under the banner of "globalization." The "free trade" agreements being supported by Western governments and global organizations like the International Monetary Fund are designed to open new markets for North American and

Western European corporations and they are highly skewed in favor of the developed nations. In addition to the political tensions caused by these free trade policies and the exportation of western popular culture, detractors point to the ecological implications of creating a global consumer culture. Environmentalists and others worry that the earth cannot sustain the consumption rates of recent decades and that the expansion of U.S. consumption rates to other regions of the world could be disastrous. "We are engaged in the ecological equivalent of running up a very substantial credit-card bill, hoping that tomorrow will take care of itself. It is misguided and dangerous, however, to spend beyond our means or to treat the natural world as a bank that does not have to be paid back" (Taylor and Tilford 2000: 466).

Of particular concern to sociologists of consumerism is that our forms of popular culture contain messages that reinforce the cultural values that have led to these social and environmental problems. While there is a lively debate in the discipline over the relevance, usefulness and even the meaning of the term "ideology," most scholars agree that we are told, not only by our politicians and formal social institutions, but also through dominant forms of media and entertainment, that consumption is good—it serves as a concrete indication of freedom, it produces happiness and it is an expression of patriotism. Critics of consumer culture contend that the powerful corporations who stand to benefit from increased consumption rates obscure the damage created by mass consumption and use their influence to support forms of popular culture (including music, film, fashion and sport) that contain messages that reinforce the values of consumerism (Artz and Murphy 2000).

While a full discussion of the debate surrounding the concept of ideology is beyond the scope of this review, it is important to note that many theorists studying consumerism have embraced the concept in one form or another in their attempts to explain the methods employed by corporations and the mass media to instill cultural values in consumers that will shore up the capitalist economic system and ensure the companies' financial survival. Much of the most persuasive work on this topic draws on Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which argues that ideology works most effectively when members of the lower classes accept as their own, ideas that serve the upper class (Gramsci cited in Forgacs 1988).

For critics, one of the issues of most concern is that consumer culture leads us to believe that consumption equals freedom. We think we are exercising free choice when we buy goods and services and we believe that we have political power as consumers (Canclini 2001). But this is an ideological message promoted by those in control of our consumer culture. We feel like we are free to do what we want and buy what we need or desire:

> No one seems to be forcing us to do anything we don't want to do. In fact, we feel privileged to be here. The rules don't seem oppressive. But make no mistake: there are rules...We have been recruited into roles and behavior patterns *we did not consciously choose* (Lasn 1999;53. Italics in original).

This notion of individuals participating in the status quo of society as a way to ignore the uncertainty of searching for alternatives has garnered much attention in recent years among sociologists of consumer culture. Sociologist Charles Derber refers to our current consumerism binge as part of an age of "corporate ascendency" in which, "the personal

identity of today's worker, consumer, and citizen is becoming a corporate construction" (Derber 1998: 5).

The culture industry itself has become increasingly sophisticated over the past few decades and is ever-more adept at concealing the ideological messages it promotes while making those messages even more powerful. In a recent discussion of ideology Gunster makes a point originally discussed by Horkeimer and Adorno:

> Perhaps the most terrifying quality of the culture industry is its ability to assimilate critics and incorporate their ideas *harmlessly* within...This...power flows out of how a commodified culture is conceptualized by its audience. Most people suspect that it is a lie (at the very least thoroughly instrumentalized and subordinated to business interests), and yet they still take part in it...We continue to believe because it is the only thing that makes our lives bearable: people know that success and survival demand self-deception in an irrational world beyond human control (Gunster 2000; 61. Italics in original).

If this is the case, it is most certainly troublesome. It means that ideological hegemony has been achieved despite the fact that most people are not ignorant dupes truly believing in the values of consumerism. Instead, if the claim is correct that individuals suspect that the promises of commodified culture are lies, then people have a generalized sense that something is not right in the messages they absorb through their consumption of mass culture and yet they accept them because it seems the "only way" to survive in a world monopolized by corporate interests and dominated by the message to "consume, consume, consume."

Current discussions on the problems of the culture industry and consumer culture are right to be concerned about the seeming ideological hegemony of consumerism, but unfortunately this is where most of them stop. The methods used by corporate advertisers and the mass media to disseminate these consumerist messages are often

covert and can be "read" differently by different consumers and scholars. This makes it difficult to discern how forms of popular culture are received and interpreted by individuals and to demonstrate the mechanisms by which corporate media presentations reinforce values like individual freedom and competition. It is even more difficult to show convincing evidence that advertisers and media executives intentionally produce and distribute material that privileges certain cultural "stories" while silencing others. These problems with empirically demonstrating the avenues through which consumerism is promoted has led some social scientists to shy away from the topic. Despite insightful work by media critics on the effects of advertising and violence in the media (Ewen and Ewen 1992; Gerbner et al 1996; Kilbourne 1999), we are still engaged in debates over whether TV violence "really does" lead people to become more violent and whether the unrealistic size and shape of bodies presented to us through the media has led to distorted body images and personal dissatisfaction in Western societies.

Beyond the methodological barriers to the study of mass culture, there are theoretical shortcomings. Without wandering too far into the minefield of the structure versus agency debate, it is useful to discuss how this issue has played out in the study of consumer culture. As mentioned above, one of the major criticisms of the Frankfurt School in its analysis of the culture industry was that it was overly pessimistic and painted itself into a theoretical corner, concluding that critiques of the culture industry are rapidly co-opted or absorbed and re-presented as harmless, thereby limiting the possibility of resistance or effective opposition to consumerism (Gunster 2000). This would seem to lead to the conclusion that social structures reign supreme. Individuals have little agentic potential in the struggle to control culture and cultural production. On

the other hand, theorists working from a functionalist perspective have often celebrated the emergence of a consumer culture, arguing that the ability to purchase goods and services has opened up access to parts of culture previously closed to those without personal connections or status— the dollar, or in some cases credit, serves as the great equalizer. This pluralist or "voluntarist" view holds that consumer choice is equivalent to political power (Canclini 2001). Sociological theory on the issue of consumer culture has lacked adequate ways to discuss the relationship between the "empowering" aspects of consumerism and the social structures that limit the social and cultural power of consumers.

One of the ways to examine the power of consumer culture and possibilities for resisting or opposing the culture industry is to study groups that seem to be doing just that. The legacy of the study of these groups began with the Chicago School in its acknowledgment of the existence of "subcultures" as groups that exist on their own terms— not simply as cultural deviants. This was a revolutionary turn in social theory; the recognition that there might not be just *one* culture in a diverse society with some cultural deviants, but many, competing and coexistent cultures. But after a brief heyday of ethnological research, most sociologists abandoned these "small scale" approaches to social life and turned to the lofty aims of conflict theory and functionalism to develop grand theories on the social world as a whole. As a result, the work on subcultures and countercultures, and eventually the role of culture itself was taken up by other social science disciplines. In particular, the "border disciplines" of cultural studies and postmodernism have been prolific on the subject of the existence and meaning of subcultures and on the effects of popular culture.

Note: For an overview of the following discussion and a comparison of cultural studies and postmodernism, see Table One on page 44.

Cultural Studies: The Legacy of the Birmingham School

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University (CCCS) was established in 1964 and has been highly influential in the study of subcultures. Cultural studies was articulated by Stuart Hall in 1980 as an attempt to mesh structuralism and culturalism because they "confront— even if in radically different ways— the dialectic between conditions and consciousness" and "pose the question of the relation between the logic of thinking and the 'logic' of historical process" (Hall 1980 cited in Peck 2001: 203). Cultural studies theorists were particularly interested in the emergence of youth subcultures in post-WWII Europe. While the scholars at the Birmingham school often defined "subculture" differently, in general terms subcultures can be thought of as groups of young people that share common interests that distinguish them from others in society. But as the term "sub" suggests, these subcultures were always drawn only from dominated classes, not dominant ones (Cohen 1972). For CCCS theorists, subcultures were always tied to class, in particular, to the working class. Cultural studies scholars argued that youth subcultures arose in Britain in the mid 20th century as a way to resolve conflicts with the "parent generation." "The succession of subcultures which this parent culture generated can thus all be considered so many variations on a central theme— the contradiction, at an ideological level, between traditional working-class puritanism and the new hedonism of consumption" (Cohen 1972: 94). These theorists explicitly viewed the emergence of subcultures as an

historically-bound phenomenon; an attempt by young people to deal with the fracturing of the working-class culture of their parents by developing their own cohesive cultural groups.

Cultural studies theorists have done much analysis on particular "style" subcultures (punks, mods, skinheads, etc.) and their rejection of dominant culture. The style of dress of these subculture members was of particular interest, as it could be read as a "text" that indicated the rejection of dominant consumer fashion, and by extension the rejection of the values held by members of the "mainstream." In this sense, Cultural Studies theorists were concerned with ideology— the perpetuation of ideologies through popular culture (particularly fashion and music) and resistance to this on the part of disillusioned youth. Perhaps the clearest exemplar of this is Hebdige's work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Hebdige contends that youth subcultures represent "interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media" (Hebdige 1979b: 130).

The work done by CCCS theorists contributed to the study of consumerism and popular culture in a number of ways. First, it was among the first to attribute political significance to the seemingly frivolous world of style and fashion. Cultural studies scholars brought the issue to the center and showed that, in the changing world of post-war Britain, with its new emphasis on mass consumption, style subcultures arose as a novel way for members of subordinated classes to win space back from the dominant classes in the hegemonic world of culture (Gelder and Thornton 1997). They argued that subcultures were not simply ideological constructs, but served to win back cultural space,

in the forms of actual territory, in recreation and entertainment and in the world of style and fashion (Clarke et al 1975).

Second, and particularly unique in the approach of the CCCS was its focus on youth. Historically, within the study of popular culture and consumption, young people have often been ignored, or at least seen as less important than adults since they did not possess the material resources to exert "consumer power" and had to convince their parents to purchase goods and services for them (Males 1999). But Cultural Studies was ahead of its time. Instead of taking the conventional view that young people who did not "fit in" with the larger society in terms of their style, attitude or forms of recreation were somehow "aimless" or "delinquent" the CCCS contended that these new forms of youth expression were "symptomatic of the central contradictions of the time" (Gelder and Thornton 1997). Youth subcultural style was read as meaningful and important. This observation takes on even greater significance today, as more and more of what becomes "cutting edge" popular culture has been appropriated from these very subcultures; corporate culture-producers co-opt these forms of fashion, music, sport and so on, and most often, sanitize them, package them neatly and sell them back to "mainstream" teenagers (Crissey 1999; Dretzin and Goodman 1999). The role of young people in the culture industry cannot be underestimated, as they are often both an important target market for consumer goods as well as a significant source of ideas for corporate culture-producers themselves.

The third, and perhaps most intriguing contribution that the CCCS has made in the study of consumer culture is its attempt to show how commodified culture is used by youth subcultures themselves. Rather than completely reject the whole world of popular

culture, subcultures often borrow from the styles and fashions of mainstream culture and use them in new and different (and unintended) ways. Cultural studies theorists were among the first to grapple with the relationship between consumerism and resistance. In a world that was already becoming increasingly commodified, in which individuals were forced to participate through the purchase of items like clothing and food, cultural studies examined how young people worked to negotiate some freedom in an oppressive marketplace— a realm they felt represented "others" and not their own interests. Whether it was the Edwardian suits of the Teddy Boys or the Italian scooters of the mods, members of subcultures purchased items and appropriated them for their own uses, to convey messages other than what was intended by the producers of those consumer items. Borrowing from the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss, both Clarke and Hebdige refer to this process as "bricolage." Hebdige asserts that bricolage occurs when subcultures appropriate a "range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which serve(s) to erase or subvert their original straight meanings" (Hebdige 1979b: 136). The emphasis here is clearly on resistance to popular culture and the attempts by subculture members to develop a sense of identity not dictated by the dominant culture-producers.

Cultural studies is an useful place to begin any exploration of the role of consumer culture in contemporary society and how we might challenge its hegemony. However, the approach does have some limitations. One of the most common critiques of the CCCS approach to subcultures is that the researchers tended to assume that subcultures were necessarily political and that all subcultural trappings, such as fashion, could be read as resistance to mainstream or straight society. Cultural studies made the

assumption that subcultural style was *intended* as resistance, without necessarily having empirical evidence that this was the case. While Hebdige admits, in reference to his analysis of punk culture, that not all subculture members are "equally aware" of the political dimensions of their particular style, he insists that we cannot confuse the individuals with the phenomenon (Hebdige 1979a; 22). Even if not every member of a subculture, especially newer members, is aware of what their style represents, it is still the case that the existence of the subculture indicates resistance to conventional culture, rather than simply being a withdrawal strategy or a form of personal expression. Cohen (1980) takes issue with this assertion, cautioning that researchers may not know what is intended by subcultural style. He argues, "the symbolic baggage the kids are being asked to carry is just too heavy, that the interrogations are just a little forced" (Cohen 1980: 158). It is one of the methodological shortcomings of the CCCS that they tended toward semiotics— the reading of style as a text, rather than using a more ethnographic approach and considering what the subculture members themselves articulate as the symbolic meaning of their style or what activities the groups actually participate in that might also be considered political.

A second methodological problem of the CCCS approach is that their studies were both location-bound and time-bound. Not only did the research focus only on subcultures that arose after the Second World War in class-conscious Great Britain, they conceptualized these groups as short-lived. Data gathered on subcultures were generally cross-sectional, with any longitudinal evidence stretching across only a few years, and usually only through anecdotal information, rather than a lengthy field study. While this occasionally allowed them enough latitude to discuss "original innovators" of a particular

style and the later followers, with some analysis of the issue of authenticity within a given culture, the lack of rigorous analysis across time limited their ability to draw accurate conclusions about the effectiveness of resistance. It may seem that a subculture emerges quickly, makes a bold statement that is picked up on by corporate style-producers, the style becomes co-opted and mainstream and the subculture fades away. But what happens to those original, authentic innovators? Do they join conventional culture? Do they continue to participate in some other version of their cultures? Or do they engage in further bricolage, creating new symbolic forms of resistance? And what about the challenges to hegemonic ideologies? Are these challenges lost in the absorption of subcultures into the mainstream, or are there values antithetical to the Western ideals of personal freedom, consumption and unfettered competition that remain—stowaways hidden within the mainstream version of the original subculture? Any comprehensive examination of subcultures and possibilities for resistance must address these issues, as they are crucial not only as methodological issues, but as theoretical ones as well.

Despite the important contribution that cultural studies has made in linking social class and production issues to those of culture and consumption, there are some gaps in the CCCS approach in terms of theorizing the relationship between the power of consumer culture and our ability to contest that power. These gaps relate directly to the methodological issues discussed above. One of the goals of the Birmingham School was to facilitate social transformation by critiquing political forms that promoted oppression and supporting "texts and representations" that held the potential to produce a more egalitarian social order (Durham and Kellner 2001: 17). As discussed at the top of this

section, cultural studies hoped to develop a theory that would take account of social structures that promoted oppression as well as explore avenues of counter-hegemonic potential, supporting cultural forms that seemed to be refusals of the dominant social order. Unfortunately, much of the theoretical work of the Birmingham School falls victim to the same trap as did the work of the Frankfurt School, painting itself into a theoretical corner where social structure is too powerful to overcome and real agency disappears.

While the CCCS theorists do celebrate resistance to conventional culture, much of this seems to be fruitless resistance. Hebdige makes this clear in his analysis of the role of the media in appropriating and normalizing spectacular subcultures, pointing out that after the initial shock of the unconventional style wears off in the straight culture, the media "recuperate" the subcultural style by (1) converting the subcultural signs (fashion, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects and by (2) labeling and re-defining the originally deviant behavior as acceptable and "cool" (Hebdige 1979a: 131-133). Commodification seems inevitable. And once a style is commodified, it loses its counter-hegemonic potential. Looking at the issue from a slightly different angle, but coming to the same conclusion, Willis (1977) argues that the subjects of his study, the lads, experience a sense of empowerment through their resistance to the conventional "ear 'oles," but that this resistance helps reproduce capitalist inequalities. He contends that the non-conforming antics of the lads relegate them to the same lower class position from which they came. After schooling, they end up in working-class menial jobs, rather than the white-collar professions that might offer them upward mobility. Put more harshly, the work of the CCCS can be viewed as "ambivalent about the politics of subcultures,

alternately seeing them as resistant and subordinate, politically hopeful and spectacularly impotent" (Gelder and Thornton 1997: 3). This theoretical ambivalence within Cultural Studies has created an impasse in the study of consumer culture and resistance. In the lull, other disciplines have moved in to offer their take on subcultures as forms of resistance. In particular, postmodernism has moved in and picked up on the concept of bricolage and the myriad symbolic uses of consumer goods.

The Postmodern Turn in the Study of Consumer Culture

Postmodernism as a theoretical approach to the social sciences began to gain popularity in the 1970s, as older theories of society and social change seemed to lose currency in a rapidly changing world. While functionalism continued to try to explain society as a system of interrelated parts, Neo-Marxist conflict theory maintained that, while economic determinism was problematic and that there is more reciprocity between the base and superstructure than Marx theorized, production continued to be the dominant feature of modern capitalism and therefore promoted a political economy approach to social theory. Postmodernists, on the other hand, argued that contemporary capitalism could no longer be adequately characterized as "modern" or "industrial" and pointed to the rise of information technologies, communication networks and the proliferation of mass media, among other phenomena, as evidence of the emergence of a "post" modern or "post" industrial economic and social world. Postmodern theory has been influential across a wide range of disciplines, from literature to political science to communications, and it has made important contributions in the study of consumerism and popular culture.

According to postmodern theory, one of the most salient characteristics of this new postmodern world is the central role of consumption. Like many other social scientists, postmodern theorists contend that society is no longer organized around production, but around consumption. Specifically, consumption has become more important for its sign-value than for its use-value (Miles 1998). The act of consumption has become less about what the products and services that individuals buy are actually used for and more about what those purchases symbolize. Postmodernist Jean Baudrillard asserts that the capitalism of the industrial revolution was a stage of history organized around production while the current era of capitalism is a stage of history organized around simulations. In a world where everything— even meaning, truth and knowledge— has become a commodity, the process of consumption has become a simulation for "real" life (Miles 1998; Durham and Kellner 2001). Baudrillard's term "simulacrum" refers to a copy without an original. He argues that Western postmodern society is "hyperreal" with the media presenting us with images of life, through advertising and entertainment forms, that are more-than-real— they are role models for a perfect world that does not actually exist (Durham and Kellner 2001). Baudrillard uses the example of Disneyland as a simulation of a perfect world. Another example would be the re-presentation of bodies in advertising— a world where women (and men) are the perfect size and shape, with white, gleaming teeth, no wrinkles or body odors. This is a representation of an ideal that doesn't exist, and yet, in the age of consumerism, these are the images that lead individuals to crash diets, cosmetic surgery and compulsive exercise, in the fruitless drive to achieve the unattainable. Postmodern theory has been a leader in

problematizing consumer culture and in analyzing the role played by the mass media in shaping the way we experience our social lives.

A second contribution made by postmodernism in the study of consumerism and popular culture, as well as in social theory in general, has been its critique of the grand narratives of older social theory and its call for an acknowledgment by social scientists of the heterogeneity of experience in contemporary society. Postmodernists reject the claim that sociological theories can be developed that accurately describe or explain the characteristics of all groups in all societies across all of human history (Harvey 1990). Societies and social groups exhibit attributes and behaviors particular to them and bound by constraints like time and cultural context. Classical theories developed at the end of the 18th century to help explain the societal changes brought by industrialization do not account for current conditions of social life and are outdated, if they were ever useful in sociological understanding. Like the cultural studies scholars, postmodernists hold that a comprehensive understanding of culture requires the study of groups and individuals outside the mainstream or "straight" society. The beliefs and activities of these groups and individuals hold the potential to inform our knowledge of both dominant culture and reactions to mainstream beliefs and practices.

But postmodern theorists take issue with the Birmingham School's privileging of social class as an explanatory tool for the study of subcultures and other subordinate groups. They argue instead that in the postmodern world, subcultures and countercultures are characterized by a "hyper-individuality" and not by collectivist ties to a working-class parent culture (Muggleton 2000). This means that an analysis of consumer culture and resistance cannot be explained by reducing the discussion to one

about class as *the* organizing principle of social life. In addition, postmodernists criticize cultural studies scholars, and other academics in general, for their presumption to speak for others. They argue that the legacy of ivory tower theorizing has privileged primarily white, male, middle to upper-class perspectives while silencing the voices of dominated people. "The idea that all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate is essential to the pluralistic stance of postmodernism" (Harvey 1990; 48).

Analyses of subcultures coming from a postmodernist position have thus emphasized marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, women and the poor. Connor notes; "...one of the most important themes in this form of work has been the experience of relegated or excluded ethnic groups, and theorists have drawn increasingly on postmodern categories and concepts to evoke and understand this experience, which will often seem to require a more expanded focus than previous forms of sociological enquiry" (Connor 1997: 215). And these experiences frequently centered on issues of style and culture. For example, one study of black hairstyles in the United States concluded that "the question of style can be seen as a medium for expressing the aspirations of black people excluded from access to 'official' social institutions of representation and legitimation in the urban, industrialized societies of the capitalist First World" (Mercer 1987 quoted in Connor 1997: 215). Other examples include analyses of musical style among Chicanos and African Americans, interpreted as expressions of ethnic identity within the confines of a dominant culture industry that does not provide those opportunities.

Postmodernism has provided an important corrective in its critique of the elitist bias of much social science research and has been helpful in pointing out that the systems theories of industrial capitalism may be too time-bound to be useful in their totality in a world made more complex through exponential rates of mass consumption and the dissemination of popular culture through the mass media. However, in setting forth to correct these problems, postmodern theory is often guilty of the very pitfalls of which it accuses cultural studies and traditional social theory.

Postmodernists have taken issue with the methodology of many social scientists, arguing that their research obscures difference and presumes to be speaking for an unified whole (Harvey 1990). While they hold that this is certainly true for most quantitative research, postmodernism also takes aim at qualitative studies, contending that the interpretation done on the part of interviewers, ethnographers and analyzers of various forms of text distorts the experience of the subjects themselves and fails to paint an accurate picture of how they characterize themselves and their lives. As mentioned in the previous section, this is one of the major critiques leveled at the empirical work of the cultural studies scholars. Some postmodern researchers have corrected this problem by presenting the sentiments expressed by subjects in their own words, through art, poetry and story telling (Denzin 1997, 2002). While this has made for some interesting results, the significance of any findings tends to get lost, as there is often little in the way of social scientific interpretation, an important corollary to the reporting of subjects' own interpretations, if the goal is to highlight the importance of the research for anyone but the subjects themselves.

By far the larger problem, however, is that many postmodern scholars have not taken their own advice and have engaged in a great deal of theorizing with very little empirical evidence to support their claims. "[T]here has, in fact, been a tendency to assume that postmodernism has become widespread in modern societies. However, less attention has been devoted to demonstrating that this is the case" (Strinati 1995 cited in Muggleton 2000: 5). And while it is certainly a problem that postmodernists often assume that the conditions of postmodernity actually do exist— with human beings experiencing fragmentation, time-space compression and superficiality— Miles asserts that an even larger concern is that postmodernism has failed to connect these experiences with the role of social structure in late capitalism, "Postmodern conceptions of consumption are, in effect, limited by their dependence on an abstract theoretical discourse that contributes little to an understanding of the actualities of everyday life" (Miles 1998: 26). As this critique articulates, the lack of empirical evidence to support its claims about the conditions of postmodernity (and about the experience of life within this consumer society) indicate that postmodernism faces, not only a problem in methodology, but also one of theory.

Postmodernism has been an important new approach in the study of consumer culture and cultural production. Not only have postmodern theorists pointed out that the material and non-material conditions of social life have changed drastically since the development of classical social theory and suggested a closer look at the usefulness of those grand narratives, but they have provided a possible opening around the impasse arrived at by both the Frankfurt School and cultural studies, suggesting that there may be space for agency in the postmodern world. Postmodernists have pointed out that the

emerging world of consumerism gives everyone a sense of control in their lives. "The essence of consumerism therefore lies in the feeling that as consumers we are all gaining some semblance of authority over the everyday construction of our lives *through* consumption" (Miles 1998: 25). Derrida contends that the heterogeneity of the world of consumption and of the images presented to us through the mass media, as well as new technologies that allow interactive communications, stimulate the audience or "reader" of the text to assign their own meanings to what they experience (Harvey 1990). In other words, because individuals interpret popular culture in ways not intended by the culture industry, the consumers of popular culture, not just the producers, participate in the production of meanings.

However, their case may be overstated, as critics contend that postmodern theory sidesteps issues of power and ignores social structure. Harvey points out that; "Minimizing the authority of the cultural producer creates an opportunity for popular participation and democratic determinations of cultural values, but at the price of a certain incoherence or, more problematic, vulnerability to mass-market manipulation" (Harvey 1990: 51). There also tends to be a valorization within postmodern theory of new technologies, particularly computer technologies, as holding great emancipatory potential in the production and distribution of these alternate cultural meanings. "But there is a covert determinism in assuming that new technologies automatically generate alternative subjectivities and identities. It is...too linear and reductive to claim that modern technology and culture produces one type of (rational, autonomous, centered and stable) subject, while the rapidly proliferating and mutating cyberculture produces multiple, hybridized, and flexible subjects" (Durham and Kellner 2001: 517). In other

words, the agency of individuals in postmodern society has been overstated, while the ability of corporate culture-producers to disseminate ideological messages through the colonization of these new media and technology forms has been overlooked. And while the emphasis within the postmodern approach to consumerism has been on the development of alternative forms of culture that challenge dominant, hegemonic forms of culture, the theory if carried to its logical conclusion bears a striking resemblance to the pluralist or voluntarist position that consumerism is democratic, participatory and empowering.

But this is clearly not where postmodernism intended to wind up. Baudrillard's disdain for the Disneyland-type simulation of life, and his concern that power need only be a simulation to be effective, is one clear example that postmodernism has always contained a critical thread. And while celebrations of relativism and models of postmodern culture that made for a difficult distinction between text and audience, in its extreme forms "...exclude(d) the very possibility of progressive or critical encoding or decoding of cultural texts, or production of alternative cultures" (Durham and Kellner 2001: 514), there is some evidence that postmodern theory is attempting to remedy this problem. McRobbie (1985), having bridged the fields of cultural studies and postmodernism from a feminist perspective, contends that there are three approaches to postmodernism; (1) those who defend the values of modernism and argue that postmodernism offers nothing new to the study of culture, (2) those who are fully engaged in postmodern culture and celebrate it, and (3) those who refuse to deny the existence of a postmodern culture or to positively affirm it, insisting that there is something new "going on" in culture that needs further analysis. For McRobbie, this

third approach holds the critical potential. She argues that this postmodern approach contains "a remorseless critique of modernity and a looking to those accounts of postmodernity as a way of finding a place from which to speak and a space from which to develop that critique of the places and the spaces of exclusion inside modernity" (McRobbie 1985: 598).

Jameson is a second example of a theorist whose postmodernist work has been helpful in retaining the agentic potential of postmodern culture while resisting the tendency toward celebrating personal freedom through consumption. Jameson, coming from a Marxist position, suggests that every position on postmodernism in culture is necessarily a political one. He goes further to contend, "there is a fundamental relationship between the positioning of postmodernism in the economic system and its impact upon the sphere of culture in contemporary consumer society" (Miles 1998: 27). Jameson cautions us not to focus simply on cultural difference, the fragmentation of identity, or the hyper-individualization of postmodern society as evidence of some unprecedented cultural shift. Instead, Jameson argues that we should recognize how the conditions of "post" industrial society may actually contribute to the perpetuation of the capitalist economic system— as culture becomes yet another capitalist commodity, with cultural production controlled by the same corporate representatives who produce our other commodities. In this way, Jameson returns social structure to the discussion of cultural production and resistance to dominant cultural forms.

A more general example of the meshing of the strengths of both postmodernism and the Birmingham School is in the emergence of newer forms of cultural studies, in the United States and globally. Ferguson and Golding (1997) make the case that

contemporary cultural studies has moved away from textualism and semiotics and back toward more social scientific, empirical modes of inquiry. In addition, there is some evidence that newer cultural studies approaches are integrating economic factors with cultural ones in the analysis of social life, in a more robust definition of political economy:

> ...'political economy' does not merely refer solely to economics, but to the relations between the economic, political and other dimensions of social reality. The term thus links culture to its political and economic context and opens up cultural studies to history and politics. It refers to a field of struggle and antagonism and not to an inert structure as caricatured by some of its opponents (Ferguson and Golding 1997: 105).

The authors also contend that American cultural studies, as a reaction to positivism, has focused more on culturalist theories based on interactionist approaches and less on structuralist issues than did British cultural studies and is therefore better situated to address both the cultural and structural forces at work in the production of culture.

These examples are evidence of how postmodernism has influenced cultural studies and how the approaches developed by each might not be mutually exclusive and may be combined, with some correctives, to further problematize consumerism and the production and contestation of culture. It is at this point that sociology must re-enter the discussion.

Table One

Comparison of Cultural Studies and Postmodernist Approaches to the Analysis of Cultural Production

	Cultural Studies	Postmodernism
Assumptions About the Role of Subcultures in Cultural Production	• Subcultures are drawn from dominated classes and groups •Youth subcultures arose as a way to resolve conflict with the "parent generation" •Youth subcultural styles can be read as "texts" that indicate rejection of mainstream culture and values	•A full understanding of culture requires analysis of groups outside "straight" or dominant society •Subcultures are characterized by hyper-individuality •Styles of marginalized groups can be read as expressions of identity from those whose voices are rarely heard in dominant culture
Conclusions About Possibilities for Resistance Against Dominant Culture	• Subcultures serve to win back cultural space from dominant culture producers •Rather than fully reject dominant culture, subcultures appropriate consumer goods and use them in novel and unintended ways •Subcultures are rapidly co-opted by dominant culture producers, thereby reducing their counter-hegemonic potential	•Authority over cultural production can occur through the heterogeneous consumption of goods use of items in ways other than intended) •The distinction between text and audience has been overstated: both dominant culture producers and consumers define meaning •Technology is a key tool for the dissemination of oppositional cultural forms
Limitations of the Approach	•Original studies were time, class- and location-bound •Assumes that subcultural resistance is intended, without empirical evidence •Overemphasizes structure: concludes that most resistance is fruitless	•Methodology privileges subjects' interpretation, omitting scientific analysis •Assumes the conditions of postmodern culture without empirical evidence •Overemphasizes agency: concludes that consumption of popular culture is power

Returning Culture to the Center

As the preceding sections indicate, since the 1970s much of the work in the social sciences on cultural production has been conducted in the border disciplines of cultural studies and postmodernism. With its historical commitment to rigorous methodology, sociology can apply the theoretical conjecture of the CCCS and postmodern scholars and set out to demonstrate empirically both the workings of the culture industry and the ways in which popular culture is received, interpreted and contested by individuals. And with its tradition in developing and refining social theory, sociology must continue to pursue the issue of the relative roles of social structure and personal autonomy under late capitalism. The assumption of a relationship between dominant culture producers and oppositional subcultures that results in a dichotomous outcome of *either* appropriation *or* resistance has limited the theoretical discussion surrounding the extent of the culture industry's power and of the possibilities for groups to carve out some cultural space in which they maintain their autonomy.

There is no shortage of discussions of consumerism within sociology. Unfortunately, though, much of the written work in the field presently leaves the reader wanting for solutions. Ritzer, despite his alluring title, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, offers little in the battle against the social and environmental ills being created by consumerism. In fact, he tells us that those who are worried about our global consumption binge have much to be worried about, but concludes by writing that the more immediate concern is how "to live a more meaningful life within a society increasingly defined by consumption" (Ritzer 1999: 217). Other examinations of the

effects of consumer culture are similarly individual-oriented, touting the return to "voluntary simplicity" in our daily lives (Elgin 1993) or calling for "a small core of fired-up individuals" to engage in "culture jamming" by disrupting the activities of corporate culture-producers (Lasn 1999). While these suggestions are certainly more useful than the claim that we can be political simply through our consumption choices, they are limited in scope. What is needed is a way to examine how culture producers disseminate ideological messages through forms of popular culture and how we might uncover these themes, deconstruct them and develop cultural forms that challenge the hegemony of consumerism as a way of life. Without an attack at the ideological level, individual or small group rejection of consumerism is unlikely to disrupt consumer culture.

As the cultural studies scholars suspected, subcultures hold the potential to play a central role in the task of developing counter-hegemonic cultures, despite some criticisms that the concept of subculture is out-dated in a postmodern society not defined entirely by social class. We should not abandon the study of subcultures or "countercultures" that implicitly or explicitly reject the values of mainstream popular culture and seek to develop their own alternative cultures. For it is these groups from which we stand to learn the most. David Muggleton returns to the study of subcultures in his ethnographic study of punks in Britain, and challenges the argument made by some postmodernists that subculture as a terminology has become obsolete, concluding that "the distinction between collectivist working-class subcultures and individualistic countercultures is overemphasized" (Muggleton 1999: 6). Muggleton goes on to argue that, while he agrees that the relationship between social class and subculture involvement was overstated by

the CCCS, we ought not to think that style cultures are so individualistic and fragmented that they are powerless.

It is during adolescence and early adulthood when individuals begin to assess their relationship to mainstream culture and decide whether or not they want to actively participate or perhaps resist and oppose the values they are fed by corporate culture-producers. And the power of these oppositional groups is most evident in the fact that the mainstream culture-producers themselves often rely upon the music, fashion or sport forms developed by these subcultures as a source of inspiration for the development of their "cutting edge" popular culture trends. It is the creations of these subcultures that help corporate culture-producers stay "cool." And while this process certainly reaffirms the claim by the CCCS that subcultural style is rapidly co-opted by the culture industry, it is also evidence that there are cracks in the facade of the culture-producers. If the culture industry needs these groups, even just for creative inspiration, there is the potential for agency and for challenges to the hegemony of dominant popular culture.

If the goal of a new critical sociology is to not only accurately assess conditions in contemporary society but to assist in improving social life, then engagement with consumerism and the production of culture is imperative. And central in this world are young people, particularly those who choose to participate in "anti-mainstream" subcultures and engage in the production of their own forms of culture. Sociology must examine how these cultures develop and how their styles, fashions, music and entertainment forms are appropriated by the culture industry, sanitized and disseminated through the mass media as new forms of popular culture. But most importantly, sociologists must concern themselves with how this co-optation process might be

prevented, the strategies these groups employ to preserve the original versions of their cultural forms and how these subcultures might be a key to an effective challenge to consumerism as a way of life.

Consumerism seems to have currently achieved hegemony in Western culture. But as Gramsci reminds us, hegemony is never total. Because there are always spaces for resistance, supporters of the hegemonic order must continually reinforce their cultural messages. As Artz and Murphy argue, "Capitalist hegemony is actually quite fragile and dearly needs subordinate participation for its survival. The culture wars are part of the battle over what kind of participation subordinate groups and individuals will be allowed, what kind of hegemony will be negotiated, what kind of society we will live in, now and in the future" (Artz and Murphy 2000: 303). They go on to suggest that fostering counter-hegemonic ideas might actually be easier now than in the past, as capitalist culture-producers have adopted and assimilated subordinate cultural practices, and so values that might have previously been considered radical have since achieved a certain degree of respectability. This is where subcultures can play their most significant role. Not only do the cultural forms of subcultures enter the dominant culture industry, albeit in diluted form, and help "normalize" subordinate values, but the continued emergence of these groups, with their differing cultures and values serve to remind the rest of us that alternative visions of the social world do exist. So when the inevitable openings in capitalist social structure do appear, we can be armed with counter-ideologies that might allow us to mount an effective challenge to consumerism. The world of sport is one such potential site of cultural transformation.

Alternative Sport Subcultures: A Case Study of Cultural Production

Alternative sports are generally defined by what they are not: mainstream. Though they differ greatly from each other, alternative sports can be loosely defined as participant controlled and directed, individually focused with less emphasis on competition than traditional sports and generally possessed of an insider requirement. That is, they are more likely than traditional sports to encompass their own subculture—one that stands in opposition to the dominant culture (Rinehart 2000). In other words, skateboarders, for example, are not just people who happen to ride skateboards, but are "skaters", expected to participate in a lifestyle associated with involvement in the sport. Some alternative sports were originally titled "extreme." This appears to have meant that they involved risk-taking that more mainstream sports did not (like BASE jumping or cliff diving) but the media appropriated the term and applied it to any sport that was not generally considered a sports staple on television in the 1990s and the label has by-and-large been abandoned by participants and, to some degree, by the media. Increasingly, mass media narratives refer to alternative sports as "action sports".

Throughout the 1990s, alternative sports became increasingly popular. All-sports cable television networks like ESPN and Fox Sports have been instrumental in exposing the sports to the public; particularly targeting the attention of young males (aged 12-34) in their coverage. Now they are featured on ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNews, ESPN Classic, and ABC. The best-known alternative sporting events are ESPN's annual X Games and Winter X Games, which feature sports including skateboarding, snowboarding, in-line skating, motocross, BMX, ski boarding and snow mountain biking. The X Games

premiered in 1995 and ESPN reported that since 1994 its audience for alternative sports increased 119 percent (*Time* November 9, 1998) and the 2003 X Games were expected to reach more than 110 million homes in 145 countries and territories worldwide (http://www.thedesertsun.com/news/stories2003/sports/20030814011137.shtml Retrieved Dec. 20, 2003). Corporate sponsors have also gotten into the action and previous X Games sponsors include AT&T, Coors, Nike, Taco Bell, Mountain Dew, Chevrolet, VISA and Snickers (Crissey 1999, Rinehart 2000). According to a recent newspaper article, sales of skateboard shoes exceed $1.4 billion, annually, more than the total regular season game receipts of major league baseball, skateboarder Tony Hawk's series of video games earned him a $20 million advance from Activision and his clothing line brings in $50 million annually (Ruibal 2004).

Participation rates also reflect the increasing popularity of alternative sports. According to a survey conducted by the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA), between 1996 and 2001 participation rates for snowboarding increased 72 percent and skateboarding participation rates increased 106 percent. These two historically alternative sports had the highest growth rates of all sports surveyed. For example, baseball, a more traditional sport, had a growth rate of only eight percent and two other traditional sporting activities showed a decline in participation rates; down four percent for football and 12 percent for basketball (www.nsga.org November 5, 2002).

The rapid increase in popularity of these sports has led researchers to examine why they are attracting so many (especially young) people and what they offer that perhaps mainstream sports do not. NSGA Vice President of Information and Research Thomas B. Doyle points out that snowboarding participation rates have tripled since

1990, while alpine skiing rates dropped more than 30 percent and adds that skateboarding has experienced phenomenal growth since 1995, when it hit a low of only 4.5 million participants. Doyle contends, "The growth of these two sports, dominated by America's youth, may reflect the fact that young people often choose activities that set them apart from adults. Perhaps skiing and inline skating had become too mainstream" (www.firsttracksonline.com/news/stories/99070264234975.shtm November 5, 2002).

Sociologists have addressed the claim that traditional sports are too mainstream for young people today and have examined what has historically attracted individuals to alternative sports. Beal (1995) analyzed the subculture status of alternative sport in her study of skateboarding. Beal examined the competing potentials of sport as an enforcer of dominant ideology and as a site of social resistance. Using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Beal conducted a study of skateboarders in the early 1990s. She found that the members of the skateboarding culture she studied held beliefs about their sport that stood in contrast to the ideals of commercial sport. They were generally noncompetitive, process rather than goal-oriented, and emphasized participant control of sporting events. She determined that, to some degree, the skaters were successful in resisting outsider control of their sport. Rinehart and Grenfell (2002) studied a group of BMX riders and examined the differences between the participants' experiences riding at a self-made bicycle track and at a corporate-sponsored "park". They found that the riders often preferred the homemade course, as it was truer to the original values of the sport, including participant control and informal organization.

Rinehart has studied a variety of alternative sports and their associated subcultures and has addressed the conflicts that arise as the sports become increasingly

commercialized. Rinehart (2000) argues that participants' desire to have their sports legitimated and to prosper individually from their participation leads them to take part in commercial events like the X Games, but there they encounter conflict with corporate and media sponsors who have different ideas about how to organize and present the sports. Rinehart contends that, while athletes participate in commercial events like the X Games, they simultaneously resist outsider definitions of what and who they are. He concludes, "The story of who controls the presentation of these sports is the story of the conflicts and contestation over who owns, and who will control the economics, but also the soul of these sports" (Rinehart 2000: 513).

What is emerging within alternative sport subcultures are struggles between corporate culture producers who are attempting to organize and present these sports like mainstream sport forms and the participants themselves who seek to maintain some control of their sports and of the "authentic" roots of their cultures as they become commercialized. Beal and Weidman (1998), for example, found that skateboarders were indeed resisting outsider definitions of their culture and were participating in the production of their culture by influencing the advertising industry in its marketing strategies toward skaters. Within snowboarding, Crissey (1999) found that Winter X Games participants were dissatisfied with ESPN's organization and presentation of their sport and engaged in symbolic forms of resistance to the commercialized nature of the event. Snowboarders refused to be interviewed, criticized the judging format and called the competition "a joke". However, this resistance did not appear to be having much success, as the opposition was largely in the form of verbal complaining, rather than organized action directed at change. In addition, their complaints were certainly not

broadcast by ESPN or affiliates and the participants were essentially supporting the commercialized version of their sports by participating in the X Games events. The snowboarders appeared to be ambivalent about the role of commercial interests. Kleinman (2003) comes to a similar conclusion in his analysis of professional skateboarders, who expressed both positive and negative sentiments toward the commercialization, or "mainstreaming" of their sport.

Skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX are ideal candidates for a case study of this struggle over the control of cultural production. As noted above, they are all historically alternative sports that are undergoing commercialization. While there are a myriad of candidates for examination, these three have been targeted by scholars as exemplars of the contestation over the control of the organization and presentation of alternative or action sports. In addition, Stacy Peralta, one of skateboarding's first recognizable professionals and now a documentary film maker, identifies these three sports as ones that are associated with an "aggressive" approach to participation and rebellious attitudes among participants. Peralta also identifies these sports as the ones that have become commercialized in recent years. In explaining his reasons for making the recent skateboard film, *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, he states, "...I wanted to somehow be able to present the culture to people because skateboarding, snowboarding and bicycle motocross...have become so much a part of our world today. This gives people an understanding of where some of this comes from" (Ednalino 2002).

Snowboarding is arguably the closest to achieving full mainstream status, as its inclusion in the Winter Olympic Games indicates. Drawing its original adherents from the worlds of surfing and skateboarding, it appears to have developed in the early 1970s,

when a couple of entrepreneurs, working independently, strapped their feet to wooden boards and slid down snow-covered hills. Jake Burton is generally given credit for "inventing" the sport, though at least one other novice inventor was working on the same idea (Finkel 1997). At the outset there was limited interest in the sport on the parts of both winter sports enthusiasts and ski resorts themselves. In the early 1980s only six percent of ski resorts allowed snowboards on their mountains (Baird 1993).

But today, snowboarding is a winter sports heavyweight. According to the National Sporting Goods Association, there were 5.3 million snowboarders in the United States in 2001, compared to only 1.6 million riders a decade earlier, making snowboarding the fastest growing winter sport in the country (Marshall 2003). There are now a variety of snowboarding organizations. The World Snowboarding Federation (WSF) boasts 60,000 members through their National Associations and has announced its desire to develop a "working relationship" with the International Ski Federation, an organization that has previously attempted to encompass snowboarders under its banner, amidst much resistance from other snowboarding organizations (WSF press release 2002). Marketers have also identified the sport as a way to reach young consumers. A *Marketing* magazine article reports; "Snowboarding's accessibility and global reach means it represents a broad age range. Car brands such as Nissan in the U.S. acknowledge its ability to connect with affluent, but still slightly rebellious, young car buyers with exclusive models like the Xterra" (*Marketing* 2002). In her analysis of the commercialization of the sport, Heino concludes:

> Snowboarding is now going through the process of becoming more mainstream, suffering from pains of growth and discipline. The media have appropriated the image of youthful rebellion in snowboarding and have commodified it...So, as snowboarding becomes more mainstream

> and is more accepted, it might continue to be commodified as the resistant sport to skiing, but there will be much less animosity between the two (Heino 2000: 190).

BMX, according to most accounts, began around 1970 and existed for many years on the margins of mainstream bicycling. Over the past decade, however, the sport has begun to experience growing commercialization, due in large part to media coverage of made-for-television events like the X Games and the Gravity Games. An EXPN.com article (the "extreme sport" sister website for ESPN's main site) quoted one rider who has taken note of the sport's newfound popularity; "Even going back three years ago I can never remember all that many kids in my area riding BMX. Since the start of this year, however...it now feels like every kid has a BMX of some sort in my area." The article goes on to state that BMX is one of the fastest growing sports among youth 12-24 years of age and that BMX participation increased 70 percent between 1997 and 2000 (www.expn.com). And like the indication of snowboarding's "arrival" as a sports heavyweight, BMX racing has also been accepted into the Olympic Games, to debut in Beijing in 2008 (Harksen 2003).

Skateboarding is the oldest of the three sports under study, getting its start in California in the 1950s. Since then, the sport has experienced a number of ups and downs in its popularity. One author of a history of skateboarding makes the case that the sport has, in the last decade, experienced a "fourth wave" of popularity with the rise of commercial media interests and corporate sponsors (Brooke 1999). Skateboarding is increasingly attracting "mainstream" advertisers like Ford Motor Co., Sony Corp. and Best Buy Co. *Skateboarding* magazine publisher Fran Richards characterizes the commercialization trend in the sport; "Kids turn to this sport in their early teen years as a

way to express themselves. Skateboarding has started to bleed into the mainstream culture in fashion and music" (Fitzgerald 2001). Indeed, skateboarding is one of the centerpieces of ESPN's annual X Games and Tony Hawk, perhaps skateboarding's most famous professional, has signed a deal with the network that restricts his skating only to ESPN events, makes Hawk a commentator at the X Games and online reporter for expn.com and the creator of a televised tour of the nation's skateboard parks. The deal is reported to be worth $1 million (Ruibal 2000). If that is not enough evidence of the sport's newfound mainstream status and commercial success, *The New York Times Magazine* recently published an article of professional skateboarder Mark Gonzales in its "Men's Fashion of the Times" edition (Weyland 2003).

Despite the increasing popularity and commercialization within skateboarding, it has not fully achieved mainstream status. The sport continues to have a reputation as attracting a rebellious, anti- establishment subculture and as having an "essential 'outlaw' nature" (Booth 2003). Brooke argues that; "skateboarders view the world differently from non-skateboarders" and that the sport has, in some ways, successfully resisted commercialization because it is a "rebel sport" and draws participants with a "hardcore attitude" (Brooke 1999: 38, 79). Of the three sports under study, skateboarding is the only one that has not been adopted as an Olympic sport. In fact, there is vocal opposition to such a move. One skateboarding website contained a message board debating the issue. The overwhelming consensus was that skateboarding should not become an Olympic sport. One respondent noted; "...skateboarding just can't be judged in the traditional Olympic way. It doesn't allow for personal style...can you imagine being told: 'well, your song has to be so many minutes long, and you have to have this many

flip tricks, and that many grinds'????????" Another added; "I'd much rather keep skateboarding ours. If we need some sort of sanctioning body (which we don't), we should create our own- not let some media/sports conglomerate do it for us" (http://boards.pathfinder.com/cgi-bin/webx?50@215.JdrMbeyi7DW.0@eef9f8a). *Thrasher*, a popular skateboarding magazine, articulates the anti-commercial orientation of the sport:

> 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 (Brooke 1999: 95).

Though skateboarding may be the best example of opposition to takeover by corporate culture producers, there is evidence within both snowboarding and BMX of similar trends. Snowboarding continues to be characterized as an "alternative" to skiing and is characterized as a youth activity drawing a group opposed to the regimented, mainstream organization of winter sports like alpine skiing. There are even differences between snowboarding events organized by snowboarders and those hosted by commercial interests. *Outside* magazine compared the fifth annual World Quarterpipe Championships, hosted by *Snowboarder* magazine and snowboarding competition at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002. The conclusion was that the Quarterpipe Championships were much less formally organized and "serious" than the Olympic games. The feel, according to the author, was more like a party than an athletic event. In the article, one snowboarder talks about riders sponsored by a snowboarding company that he respects:

> They are so not the corporate way that snowboarding has maybe become over the past five years. Once the big money started coming in, [riders] started getting a lot more focused and not going out one or two nights before the contests. One of the coolest things about the Grenade crew is

> that they went out and partied harder than anyone and still came in and won. It made me go 'Shit, man.' That shows that you're an amazing athlete. You don't necessarily have to drink Gatorade 24 hours a day (Hagerman 2002).

BMX espouses a similar philosophy, celebrating those who stay true to the original anti-mainstream roots of the sport. A renewal notice for *Ride BMX* magazine includes a letter charging; "We know you're not a poser- just riding 'cause it's the popular thing to do. You live, breathe, and eat BMX, just like us."

These examples provide evidence of the competing trends toward commercialization and mainstreaming of alternative sports on the one hand, and attempts by participants to retain some control over the image and organization of their once-alternative activities on the other. While there is clear evidence of the first trend, as corporate culture producers increasingly wrest control of the sports from participants, there is less data on the reactions to commercialization on the part of athletes who participate in the commercial versions of these sports as well as on the potential for participants to resist commercialization and outsider definitions of their sport. With Beal's (1995) notable exception, the limited data indicate that participants are ambivalent and that attempts at resistance have been largely ineffective (Crissey 1999; Kleinman 2003). But there is a crucial gap in the data related to the control of cultural production.

The cultures associated with these traditionally alternative sports often serve as innovators of mainstream popular culture. "A growing segment of Gen Xers, especially teens, are disenchanted with team sports' big-business element...extreme sports embrace values that have always been meaningful to youth: individualism, rebelliousness and a pioneering spirit" (Lefton and Warner 1997). This fact means that the sport cultures may be uniquely positioned to play a role in shaping the mainstream culture of sports. Not

only do alternative athletes serve as trendsetters in the world of fashion, but their very orientation to sport participation may be entering the mainstream. As young people grow increasingly disenchanted with dominant sport forms, with their emphasis on training, coaches and material rewards, they are leaving those sports behind and turning to "action" sports. Professional skateboarder Tony Alva urges them to try the alternative:

> If you can't handle skateboarding try snowboarding, or paddle out and catch a few waves. Just do something that's in tune with an individual type of expression. I think that's what's so important about skateboarding. There's no rules, there's nobody telling you what to do, you don't need a team or a special place to do it. Just get on your board and ride and that's the most important thing (Brooke 1999: 175).

The question to be addressed in the remainder of this study is whether alternative sport professionals are taking a role in shaping the direction of their sports—retaining the "alternative" elements that are their legacy, or whether corporate interests are dominating the organization and presentation of the activities and molding them into replicas of mainstream sporting events.

While alternative sports have become increasingly popular, they have not become completely mainstream. Participants continue to wrestle with the conflicts between the financial benefits of commercialization and their commitment to the (generally anti-mainstream) subcultures associated with involvement in these sports. And as noted above, even newcomers to the sports appear to be attracted to their alternative characteristics, particularly the rejection of outsider control of their activities. This study will explore the experiences of participants in alternative sports who are personally faced with the conflict between the benefits of commercialization and the consequences of turning their culture over to commercial culture-producers. Though the sports have, without question, become increasingly commercialized in the last decade, their

continuing reputation as anti-mainstream subcultures is testament to their ability to resist, to some degree, the agendas of commercial interests. This research will center on this possibility of effective resistance to corporate culture producers and the potential for alternative sports to affect changes in the world of mainstream sports. After all, if young people are abandoning Pop Warner and Little League in favor of skateboarding and snowboarding in such large numbers, we may eventually be forced to re-think our cultural orientation to sports participation in general.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to employ a case study approach to examine the process of cultural production. Three alternative sport subcultures were selected for examination: skateboarding, snowboarding and bicycle motocross (BMX), with a focus on the commercialization of these activities by corporate culture producers and subcultural responses to the commercialization process. Since these three sports have historically exhibited values antithetical to those emphasized in mainstream sports and are currently undergoing commodification, they are ideal candidates for an analysis of the respective roles of corporate interests and sport participants in producing and reproducing the cultures associated with these alternative sports.

While the commercialization of alternative sports has been well researched and documented, less data exist on the attitudes of participants toward the newfound popularity of their activities, especially among participants who earn material rewards from their participation. In addition, few studies have explored the potential strategies employed by participants at the professional level for resisting outsider control of their activities and playing a role in shaping the organization and presentation of their sports. This study takes a "bottom-up" approach, analyzing first-person accounts and using

qualitative data to examine two primary research issues. The first concerns the attitudes of participants about the changes in their sports as they have become increasingly commercialized and the second addresses potential strategies used by participants to resist these changes and/or to challenge the organization and presentation of alternative sports by corporate sponsors.

This chapter outlines the research questions to be addressed in the study, then details the method of inquiry employed, including a description of the sampling and recruitment procedures and a summary of the subjects who participated in the study. A description of the data collection technique and method of analysis is also included and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the chosen method.

Research Questions

The approach utilized in this study was designed to examine the following research questions about the process of cultural production within skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX, and the control of this process as the sports become increasingly commercialized and commodified.

1. How is the experience of being a professional athlete in an alternative sport different than participation at the amateur level and do participants perceive these differences to be positive or negative?
2. How are these alternative sports different today than they were in the past, according to participants, and are these changes positive or negative?

3. If participants at the professional level were in control of the organization and presentation of their sports, what would they look like? How does this compare to the way that participants perceive their sports to be currently organized and to their expectations of the future of these activities?
4. What strategies, if any, are participants at the professional level using to try to shape the direction of their sport, in terms of organization and presentation, and are these strategies successful? Why or why not?

Research Design

The data collection method used in this study was in-depth interviewing of professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders. The interview method was used because it makes it possible to gather rich information from a small pool of respondents about the process of commercialization in alternative sport. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity for two-way dialogue, allowing the researcher to ask questions specific to the particular subject, clarify answers and probe for more detailed responses. This method is particularly well-suited for the theoretical framework employed in this study, as explorations of cultural issues are most fruitful when they seek direct contact with those involved in the process of production, reproduction and transformation. A total of 14 respondents were interviewed between November 2003 and May 2004.

Study Population

The target population for this study consisted of self-identified skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders who were currently competing or had formerly competed at the professional level. For the purposes of this research, the term "professional" refers to any participant who regularly received material compensation for their participation in the activity. Forms of compensation included, but were not limited to, the provision of equipment and attire from sponsoring companies and individuals, monetary prizes for competition and financial compensation for travel and lodging at events. Participants did not have to be earning a living through sport participation to be considered professionals. The number of skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders who support themselves solely through their sports participation is so limited that it was unrealistic to restrict the target population to that group.

Professional athletes were selected for this study because they hold a unique position in the world of alternative sports. Although they may identify with the largely anti-mainstream, anti-commercial roots of their sport subcultures, they are also benefiting financially from the new commodified status of their activities. In this way, they may be more likely than amateur participants to approve of and/or accept changes designed to make their sports commercial successes. Conversely, their close involvement with commercial interests and commodified versions of their sports may also better position them to play a role in cultural production than their amateur counterparts. In other words, professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders may have more potential to

shape the organization and presentation of their sports and cultures, since their participation is central to the commercial success of their sports.

Much of the previous research on the attitudes of alternative sports participants toward commercialization and mainstreaming, as well as on strategies for resistance has focused on amateur participants (Beal 1995, Beal and Weidman 1998, Rinehart and Grenfell 2002). Although Kleinman's (2003) study of skateboarders' attitudes toward mainstreaming does include some professional-level participants, no study of alternative sport has specifically identified professional-level participants as a target population for an analysis of the process of cultural production. This research attempts to correct for that gap and to examine the role of professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders in shaping the organization and presentation of these historically alternative sports.

As discussed in Chapter Two, these three sports are particularly apt choices for an analysis of subcultures and cultural transformation because they are historically alternative sports that are undergoing rapid commercialization. In addition, both scholars and participants have identified these activities as exemplars of the contestation over the control of the organization and presentation of alternative or action sports.

Sampling Procedures

This study employed a combination of non-probability sampling approaches. Purposive sampling was used in order to select particular characteristics of the population under study and snowball or chain sampling was used to reach subjects who could not otherwise be easily contacted. Since alternative sports are highly individualized and the population widely dispersed and because participants are not represented by any

governing body or other organization, no other adequate sampling frame could be determined.

Purposive sampling has two principal aims: to ensure that all key criteria relevant to the subject matter are covered and to ensure that, within each key criteria, some diversity is included, so that differences in responses can be explored (Ritchie and Lewis 2003.) Both issues were addressed in the sample selection for this study. The most basic criterion for selection was current or previous professional involvement in one of the three sports under study. I attempted to select roughly equal numbers of participants from each of the three sports. Age was also a selection criterion. Because only adult participants were approved for the study, participants under the age of 18 were excluded from consideration. There was no upper limit for age of respondents. Race/ethnicity and sex were also factors in consideration. Participants in all three sports are primarily Caucasian and male (Baird 1993, Beal 1995, Rinehart 2000) but attempts were made to include both female participants and people of color. Finally, I attempted to introduce geographical diversity, drawing participants from different regions of the United States and Canada.

Sample selection began with personal contacts. I initially approached a personal friend and next interviewed subjects referred by family members and other acquaintances. These subjects recommended other participants. In addition, I requested participation from subjects whose names and contact information were available through business websites or team affiliation lists. For example, professional skateboarding teams often have websites with biographies and e-mail addresses for team members, and other websites offer BMX or skateboarding demonstrations as business ventures. I

contacted individuals through these sites and asked them to recommend participants for the study. These participants often referred other skaters, snowboarders and BMX riders whose input they thought I might find helpful.

Overview of Participants

A total of 14 subjects were interviewed for this study. Four were skateboarders, six were snowboarders and four rode BMX. They ranged from 22 to 40 years of age. All but one was white/of European descent and 11 were male. All three of the female subjects were snowboarders. The following table outlines the characteristics of the participants.

Table Two

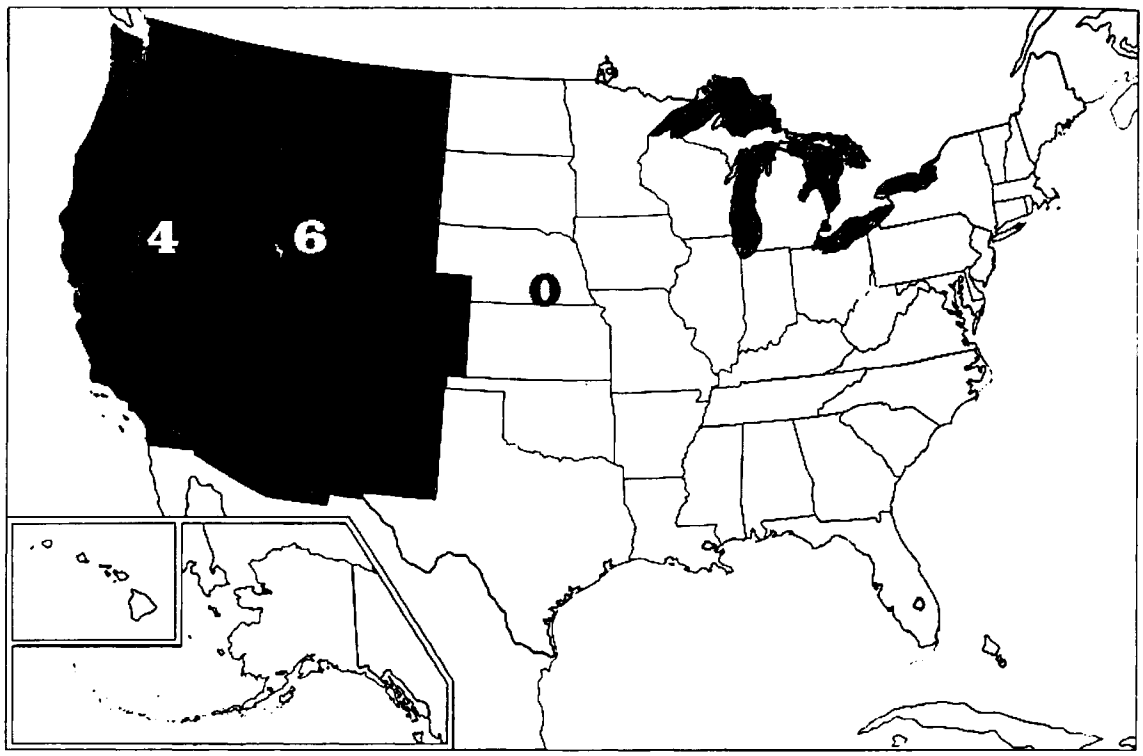
Basic Demographic Characteristics of Subjects

Sport	Number of Subjects	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Ages
Skateboarding	4	4 male	4 white	24,33,39,40
Snowboarding	6	3 male/3 female	5 white 1 Asian	22 23,23,27,29,40
BMX	4	4 male	4 white	27,31,32,33

The participants were also drawn from various regions in North America. The map below provides a general image of the geographical diversity of the sample.

Figure One

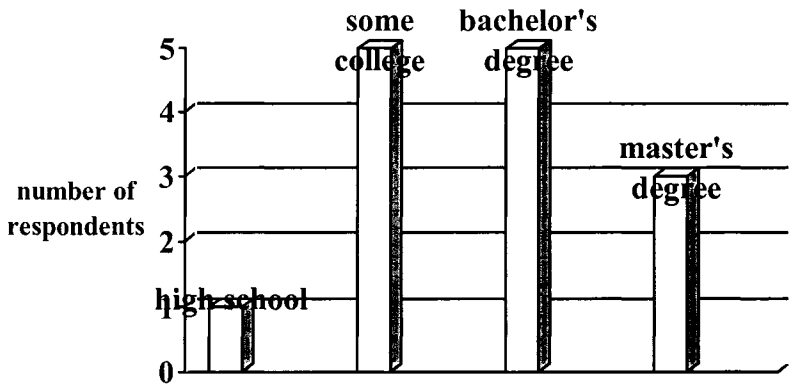
Geographical Location of Respondents



Although it was not a selection criterion, participants also represented a range of educational levels. Respondents were not asked about income level. The following chart depicts the educational attainment of interview participants.

Figure Two

Respondent educational level



Below are short profiles of the study participants. Their names have been omitted and some minor details changed to protect the anonymity of subjects.

Subject A is 39-year-old white, male skateboarder with a Bachelor's level college education. He began skateboarding at the age of twelve and began competing at the "semi-pro" level in junior high as a sponsored member of a skateboard team who received compensation in the form of equipment and gear. He continued to skate at the semi-pro level until his senior year in high school, when he determined that he was not "good enough" to earn a living from skateboarding and decided to enter college instead. He currently skates recreationally.

Subject B is a 31-year-old white, male BMX rider with a Master's level college education. He began riding BMX when he was 14 years old and competed at the amateur level almost immediately, but was unable to afford to travel to contests and did not compete during his undergraduate college career. He began to ride professionally in his mid-20s, competing as a sponsored rider at national contests. He has since retired from

professional competition but organizes and performs in demonstrations around the United States.

Subject C is a 40-year-old white, male snowboarder, originally from Europe, with a Master's level college education. He began snowboarding at the age of 23, after retiring from a career as a semi-professional motocross rider. He began competing professionally soon after, using his experience in the world of sports to attract sponsors and competed in contests in both Europe and the United States. He retired from professional competition in his 30s and is currently an alpine snowboard coach.

Subject D is a 27-year-old white, male BMX rider who is currently a college student. He began riding BMX recreationally as a child and turned pro in 1992. He began by competing locally and was approached by a team organizer and asked to join the team and travel to national contests. After a particularly good performance at an important contest, new sponsors approached him and offered opportunities for financial compensation and additional travel to competitions. He continues to compete professionally.

Subject E is a 32-year-old white, male BMX rider with a Bachelor's level college education. He started riding BMX in 1983, originally in racing, but switched to freestyle. He rode professionally throughout adolescence, with material compensation coming primarily from small sponsors like bicycle shops and through contest prizes. He stopped competing professionally when he entered college but continues to ride BMX and performs in demonstrations, for which he is compensated monetarily.

Subject F is a 27-year old, white, male snowboarder with a Bachelor's level college education. He became involved in winter sports as a skier when he was a toddler

and switched to snowboarding when he was 10 years old. He experimented with both freestyle and alpine snowboarding and chose to concentrate on alpine racing. As a teenager he received a sponsorship from a local business that financed his travel to competitions. Despite wanting to pursue his professional career at the age of 18, his parents refused and his career was put on hold until after college. After finishing his degree he contacted friends who enabled him to establish "connections" in the form of sponsorships. He actively competes and his ultimate goal is to qualify for Olympic competition.

Subject G is a 23-year-old white, male snowboarder who is currently a college student. He began snowboarding at the age of 10 and started competing in both half-pipe (freestyle) and alpine racing events while he was in high school. He initially focused on freestyle competitions, but found the focus on attracting sponsors and financial support to be over-emphasized and turned to alpine racing, where his sponsorship arrangements are more limited, but where he believes the focus is more on the snowboarding events. He currently competes professionally around the world.

Subject H is a 29-year-old Asian American, female snowboarder with a Bachelor's level college education. She began snowboarding at the age of 22 and has competed as an alpine racer for four years. She currently rides for the Philippines national team, and as the first female rider for that team, has been able to negotiate lucrative sponsorship arrangements with product and equipment companies, as well as a major ski resort in the United States.

Subject I is a 23-year-old white, female snowboarder with a Bachelor's level education. She grew up skiing and switched to snowboarding at the age of 13. She

decided to "make a lifestyle of it" and began competing in freestyle contests as a teenager, receiving compensation in the form of contest prize money and equipment sponsorships. She has since moved away from a town with a ski resort and is competing less frequently, but continues to ride recreationally and is considering future professional-level competition.

Subject J is a 22-year-old white, female snowboarder who has completed some college-level coursework. She began snowboarding in junior high school and her first competitions were in halfpipe contests. She initially competed in freestyle events, but after attending a snowboard school she decided that she was better at alpine racing and switched to that event. After high school she moved from her hometown to a town with a ski mountain and established snowboarding training program. She does not currently have sponsors and earns money primarily from contest wins. She works in non-sport jobs during the off-season to support her snowboarding career.

Subject K is a 33-year-old, white, male skateboarder who has completed some college level coursework. He started skateboarding at the age of eight and began competing professionally at the age of 15, when he got his first sponsor. He retired from major competition in his late 20s, due to injuries that prevented him from performing at the necessary level. He continues to participate in skateboarding as a performer and organizer for skateboard demonstrations and has no plans to stop his participation at that level.

Subject L is a 33-year-old white, male BMX rider with a high school education. He began riding BMX recreationally as a child and turned pro in his late teens, with a sponsorship from a major bicycle company. He rode professionally as a member of the

company's team for a number of years, until the team disbanded. He continues to ride professionally for other sponsors and travels around the country competing in BMX events.

Subject M is a 40-year-old white, male skateboarder with a Master's degree who has been skateboarding since he was 15. He competed actively throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, ranking in the top ten freestyle skaters in the United States. He currently performs at demonstrations as part of a private skateboarding team and has numerous product sponsors.

Subject N is a 24-year-old year old white, male skateboarder who is currently a college student. He began skateboarding when he was 12 and received his first sponsorship in his mid-teens. He competes in skateboarding competitions across the country and travels around the world as part of a team formed and supported by a company that performs professional skateboarding, BMX and inline skating demonstrations.

As the summaries above indicate, careers in alternative sports depend on a range of factors. Though most of the subjects began participating in childhood, two did not enter their sports until their early twenties. Family connections, friends and chance encounters all contributed to the availability of sponsorships and professional opportunities. Though none of the subjects reported supporting her/himself solely through skating or riding, there was a wide range of financial compensation levels, ranging from small prize winnings at contests to lucrative arrangements with corporate sponsors, to regular paychecks for team performances. Nearly half of the subjects had retired from professional-level competitions, however all but two continued to earn

money through participation in demonstrations, shows and video appearances. A majority of the subjects participated as members of loosely organized teams, but they organized their sponsorship arrangements individually.

Data Collection

Data were collected from participants through the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. A copy of the interview guide is included as Appendix A. While the interview schedule contained a number of specific questions that were asked of all subjects, different probes and prompts were used to elicit clarifications and/or further detail on topics raised by participants in response to the more general interview questions. In addition, the order of questions varied depending on the issues raised in participants' responses. Participants were encouraged to speak at length in response to general questions and occasionally raised issues related to other questions in the interview schedule. In these cases I would ask questions relevant to the topic a subject raised, rather than follow the sequence of questions in the guide.

I personally conducted all interviews, either in person, or as was often more practical, via telephone. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes and were recorded via audiotape and in handwritten notes, with the approval of subjects. All interviews began with a briefing, in which participants were read a short statement about the general purpose of the research, the use of recording devices and the researcher's confidentiality policy. Participants were then asked if they had any questions and if they were willing to be interviewed. Face-to-face interviewees then signed a consent form (included as Appendix B). Telephone participants were excused from written consent forms and their consent was recorded via audiotape.

Following the initial briefing, participants were asked a short series of questions regarding demographic information, including age, sex, race/ethnicity, location and educational level (see Appendix C). The introductory section of the interview concluded with general questions about how the participant had become involved in her/his chosen sport, the history of her/his involvement and how s/he had arrived at her/his current position. While intended primarily as "ice-breaker" questions, they often served to raise interesting information relevant to the research questions.

At the conclusion of the interview, once I had asked all relevant questions as outlined in the interview schedule and the participant appeared to have finished speaking, the process closed with a de-briefing segment in which the subject was asked if s/he had anything further to add and then was provided with more detailed information about the objectives of the study. Finally, interviews ended with a thank you to subjects for their participation, a reiteration of the confidentiality of their responses and an offer of a copy of the results of the study when the project reached completion. *(Note: As the data collection process continued, response themes began to arise and additional probes were added to later interviews in an attempt to access those themes and gather more information. Occasionally, I did re-contact earlier subjects to ask these emerging follow-up questions, as both an attempt at interview consistency and as a way to clarify findings.)* A complete sample transcript of one interview is included as Appendix D.

Interview recordings and notes were coded with matching identification numbers and participant codes, so that names could be separated for confidentiality purposes. Interview audiotapes were then transcribed individually, in edited form, marked with proper identification numbers and participant codes, and checked against the hand-

written notes collected during the interviews. Both transcripts and notes were used in the coding and data analysis process.

Method of Data Analysis

Interview transcripts and handwritten notes were studied and coded within multiple categories. At the most general level, data were coded according to the research question or questions to which they pertained. These categories served as a "start list" of codes, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984). Other codes were developed as themes and issues emerged within the data analysis process. These are discussed in the results section. As the researcher, I personally conducted all data analysis.

Limitations of Method

A case study, interpretive research approach is well suited as a method for eliciting rich, detailed data about a particular group or set of individuals, but like all scientific inquiry, there are limits to its explanatory potential. Qualitative research, by its nature, poses specific obstacles related to generalizability, researcher bias and the potential inability to replicate findings.

One of the hallmark tests of the robustness of social scientific data has traditionally been whether the findings could be generalized beyond the sample to the population at large (Kvale 1996, May 2002, Ritchie and Lewis 2003). By definition, qualitative data are not statistically generalizable. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative data are not typically derived from large, randomly selected samples. The data gathered for this study utilized only 14 subjects. And while this is a standard sample

size for qualitative research (Kvale 1996), it falls well short of the minimum sample size for statistical generalization using probability coefficients with associated confidence levels. In addition, the sample was not selected at random so findings cannot be assumed to represent the population of professional athletes in these alternative sports as a whole.

For example, the recruitment methods used in this study meant that certain alternative sport participants were more likely than others to be selected. First, the snowball method of recruitment meant that certain individuals were more likely to participate. Specifically, since initial subjects recommended others, athletes with more social connections were more likely to be selected. Those with fewer social contacts, and their associated beliefs and experiences, were likely to be underrepresented in the study.

Second, recruitment through team rosters and websites meant that alternative sport participants who were "advertising" themselves had a greater chance of selection. Those whose participation levels were more marginal were likely to be underrepresented. Moreover, those athletes who were "famous" within their sports were more difficult to contact since contact with them occurred through agents and because they were more likely to have other engagements that prohibited their participation in the study (being out of the country at competitions, for instance.)

Third, subjects participated voluntarily and thus people who were comfortable speaking with a stranger, were more generally outgoing, and who had the time and motivation to return my phone calls or e-mails were more likely to participate than more introverted sport participants. Finally, because the target population is associated with membership in an anti-mainstream subculture and because of the nature of alternative sport involvement, my experience was that members were more difficult to access than

more traditional populations. For example, professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders were unlikely to work 9:00—5:00 hours or to have office telephone numbers where they could be easily reached. A number of potential subjects were eliminated from the study simply because they were unreliable. They often did not return phone calls and even failed to attend pre-arranged interview sessions. For these reasons, conclusions drawn from the results of the study must be used cautiously, as participants drawn from these underrepresented groups might well hold opinions and engage in practices different than those in groups who were well represented in the research.

The fact that statistical generalizations cannot be made with this research does not limit the findings simply to the 14 interview subjects, however. Kvale (1996) distinguishes between statistical generalization and analytical generalization and makes the case that qualitative data can be applied to contexts beyond the individuals or groups under study. "Analytical generalization involves a reasoned judgment about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation. It is based on an analysis of the similarities and differences of the two situations" (Kvale 1996: 233). In this sense, the findings of this study may potentially be generalized, at least as a tool to guide further analysis of the process of cultural production and reproduction among subcultural groups. After all, with the exception of strictly postmodern descriptive studies, most social scientists desire to generalize their findings beyond an individual case study or ethnography:

> ...the sociologist is interested in knowing something of the social world beyond isolated and fragmented accounts of interactions, or individual biographies. The sociologist wants to know about how social 'structures' are created, maintained or destroyed and must therefore look to evidence manifested in the specific features of the social world to do so. Such features are quite often at the level of micro-detail, but must be understood

> in such a way as to explain how they do, or do not, create, reproduce or destroy social structures. If one looks to the history of sociology, it is precisely at the level of micro-detail that researchers have claimed to find evidence of structure and indeed many of the classic interpretivist studies in sociology are attempts to explain particular forms of social structure (Williams cited in May 2002: 126).

The keys to accurate analytical generalization lie in sound research design and data collection. Care was taken in this research to clearly define and operationalize the concepts under study, avoid data collection bias such as leading questions and analyze the data as objectively as possible. Nonetheless, some researcher bias always exists. It is in the nature of using oneself as the research instrument that despite how systematic one attempts to be, some issues that would be seen as significant to another scientist may have been overlooked, while significance may have been attributed to issues that others might have viewed as trivial. This bias is reduced by clear definitions of concepts, careful data collection and transparency in analysis, but it cannot be eliminated. The subjectivity inherent in qualitative analysis would make exact replication of this study difficult. Despite these limitations, this research provides valuable insight into the process of cultural reception, production and reproduction among subcultural groups and holds the potential to guide further research on subcultural forms and the tension between the agentic possibilities among anti-mainstream groups and the dominance of corporate culture producers.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

This research aimed to address two primary issues related to the production and reproduction of culture within alternative sports. First, the study examined the attitudes of professional-level skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders toward the changes in their sports as they have become increasingly commercialized. Second, it probed whether professionals are resisting commercialization and commodification and/or developing strategies to maintain control of the organization and presentation of their sports.

The specific research questions outlined in Chapter Three address these two broader issues. The first two questions were designed to elicit responses related to the participants' attitudes toward the commercialization of their sport while the second two questions asked subjects to discuss their beliefs about the directions their sport might take in the future and any attempts by professional participants themselves to shape the organization and presentation of these activities—in other words, to control the production and reproduction of their cultural form. This chapter presents the results of the study according to each of those four research questions. Findings are presented

according to themes that arose in the data collected. Verbatim responses and selected quotes are included when helpful in illustrating those themes.

Results

Research Question One: *How is the experience of being a professional athlete in an alternative sport different than participation at the amateur level, and do participants perceive these differences to be positive or negative?*

This question was designed to assess how participation in the commercialized version of the alternative sports under question has personally affected professional-level athletes. All 14 subjects responded that professional-level participation is different than amateur involvement. The most commonly identified difference was that professional-level participation puts "more pressure" on individuals than does amateur involvement. When asked to elaborate, subjects responded that going pro means that "people expect things from you" or that "you have to worry about beating people". All but one respondent (a snowboarder with the goal of Olympic competition) mentioned increased pressure or expectations as a difference between their pro and amateur-level involvement.

But attitudes toward this added pressure varied more. Nine subjects clearly viewed the additional pressure as a negative consequence of professional involvement, and stated that the additional pressure made their sport "less fun". One BMX rider, who now primarily performs in demonstrations, articulated this sentiment:

> When I started getting paid, I liked it at first, but then I started to realize that it kind of took the enjoyment out of it a lot, for me, because I...ummm...first of all, the pressure to ride well. Sometimes I would have to ride when I didn't want to ride...I wasn't really riding for myself. I was

> kind of riding for the money. I just found that I was almost regressing as a rider because I just practiced things that I did in shows and things I already knew. I wasn't even into getting better...I was getting bored with it... After a while, it kind of took the fun out of it.

Another BMX rider identified the sources of the pressure as both the audience and one's sponsors:

> When you're getting paid to ride, people expect things from you. Not so much to be better but they want you to kind of perform sometimes—to step up and show them 'this is why I'm so-and-so'. And it's not always the nicest place to be because you don't always feel like going off or trying hard stuff. Sometimes you just want to enjoy the fact that you ride a bike and you just want to cruise around and do the easy tricks and remember the days when it was just simply fun...And you always have to be on your best behavior because even if you're not working someone is still looking at you. Sometimes you want to let your hair down and you have to do it in the right spot. I'm not saying I'm sitting there drinking beers at the skatepark and getting smashed. But you can't be running your mouth and yelling and swearing and being an idiot because it also reflects on anybody you might be promoting at the time, or whoever hired you.

Despite these responses, participants also acknowledged the positive aspects of going pro, often in the same breath in which they lamented that their participation had become less fun. The first BMX rider quoted above went on to point out the positive side of professional riding. He qualified his complaint, saying, "But I did enjoy it. I loved the travel, all the opportunities, all the people I met." A snowboarder pointed out that, despite the added pressure and the fact that riding had become "a real job", she was glad that it allowed her to ride every day.

Four of the respondents did not feel that the added pressure of pro competition had negative consequences or interfered with their enjoyment of the sport. Three of these subjects were snowboarders and one was a skateboarder. While these participants agreed that there are challenges to pursuing a professional career, such as "hard work" and "sacrifice", they did not believe that this correlated with less enjoyment of their sport

when compared to amateur-level participation. In fact, three of the subjects (all the snowboarders) reported that they actually preferred having specific goals related to their professional advancement. One respondent stated that, "what I am doing has changed...it's for a purpose" and pointed to the "simple joy" of accomplishing new skills. Another made the case that her desire to improve has increased since going pro, because it provides concrete goals.

In terms of personal experience, the only other ways that professional-level involvement is different from amateur participation, according to subjects, is that it requires more training (a comment made by two respondents) and that it increasingly requires more formal coaching, in the judgment of one participant. Snowboarders made both these observations. No BMX rider or skateboarder mentioned formal training or coaching arrangements as part of their professional involvement.

Overall, subjects were ambivalent about the changes that came with the move from amateur to professional participation. Virtually all respondents identified increased pressure to perform as a characteristic and the majority believed there were at least some drawbacks that accompanied the pressure. Some found it problematic enough that they chose not to continue professional competition. But even among that group, individuals were also able to identify positive aspects of professional participation. Additionally, four subjects did not believe that the added pressure detracted from their enjoyment of the sport. Of the three sports under question, snowboarder responses were slightly different than BMX and skateboarder responses. Snowboarders were more likely to frame the professional experience as positive and were the only ones to identify organized training and coaching as a characteristic of professional level participation, although only two of

the six snowboarders mentioned this trend (one alpine racer and one freestyle participant).

Research Question Two: *How are these alternative sports different today than they were in the past, according to participants, and are these changes positive or negative?*

This question addressed the perceptions of participants regarding how their sports have changed, in general, as they have become increasingly commercialized over the past decade. All 14 subjects concurred that the sports have, indeed, changed since they first began participating. They all also agreed that the changes have had both benefits and disadvantages. The most common response to the question was that the sports have become more popular. More specifically, respondents felt that there are more "kids" getting involved in the sport, that there is "more money involved" and more media coverage. Media coverage itself was identified as a catalyst for a number of organizational changes within the three sports.

All participants answered that the sports have become more popular, or as one snowboarder put it, "It has grown a lot". Twelve subjects specifically identified rising participation rates as a way in which their sports have become more popular. In the majority of cases, participants viewed this as a positive outcome. They were pleased that more young people, or in the case of one snowboarder's response, even older adults, are being exposed to alternative sports and believed that this provides the opportunity for others to experience the same enjoyment of the sport that they have. One snowboarder reported that she was glad that there is "more acceptance" of snowboarding, as compared to skiing, because it means more children will take up the sport with the support of their parents, who have begun to see snowboarding as a viable alternative to skiing. A

skateboarder elaborated on how a greater acceptance of alternative sports has led to increased participation:

> For the most part, nowadays you've got—I don't know—back in the 80s, even the 90s, mainstream society looked at skateboarders as just these punk kids and destroying property and getting ticketed. You still do—you get arrested for skating in certain spots. But at least nowadays people realize that kids could be doing a lot worse things than riding a skateboard...A lot of the same people who used to beat you up and make fun of you and yell things at you are now into it because they've seen the X Games on TV.

A BMX rider simply stated that, "It's more mainstream now. People didn't used to give it any respect."

However, this support of increased participation rates was not unqualified. Respondents also asserted that individuals are entering into alternative sports with different goals than they did in the past. They equated this with the increase in money-making opportunities into the sports, in the forms of sponsorships, well-funded, televised competitions and related business ventures. Ten of the 14 subjects mentioned new participants entering into the sport either with the desire to "go pro" or "getting into it for the money". The four respondents who did not identify this as an issue were all snowboarders (three alpine racers and one who rides both alpine and freestyle.) Interestingly, only one respondent reported that he had begun his own participation in the sport with the goal of going pro or making a living (an alpine snowboarder.)

In all cases subjects viewed these motivations for entering into the sports as less favorable than getting involved for simple enjoyment of the activity. A skateboarder asserted that, "Anybody can be a pro. The biggest difference (in skateboarding today) is that people want to go pro and that puts more pressure on them to succeed." He also contended that this trend has led to an influx of skaters who have "the attitude" to go pro,

but don't have the talent to be professionals. A snowboarder worried that new participants are not riding for the intrinsic rewards, but for external vested interests:

> You know what might be interesting, too, in snowboarding—the trendsetters right now like Shaun White...Is Shaun White really deciding what he wants to do, or is he also doing what the sponsors want him to do? And I know for myself, I had really good sponsors in the past and O'Neil asked me to do certain photo shoots, for example, and to show up for a dinner. And I had to do a lot of things that were not that nice. It would just be work for me...I'm still from the generation where you had to fight to be allowed on the hill at all. In the beginning, if we would meet other snowboarders on the hill, we would have a conversation immediately. We were like snowboarders, you know? We didn't know where our sport would go. We were all interested in development...we had fun doing it and it was kind of a lifestyle, too. But right now you have been able to buy a snowboard anywhere in any shop already for a while and snowboarding is almost allowed in any ski resort, so it's not a big deal...From my perspective, when I look, you know, if you really look in the eyes and faces of people, are they really happy with what they are doing or are they just putting a smile on their face because the camera is going? You know what I mean? It's very interesting. For example, in the half-pipe at the finish, they put their hands up and smile. Is it because they are really so happy, or to impress the judges?

Four subjects specifically referred to participation with financial rewards being the main goal as "selling out". A snowboarder stated that she is disappointed to hear young people express their desire to get sponsored and said, "That's one of the areas where I feel it's getting sold out and a lot of people are just looking for the sponsorships instead of doing the sport for enjoyment." A fifth respondent, a BMX rider, did not personally believe that the popularity of the sport meant that it had lost its focus on the intrinsic rewards of participation, although he recognized that this was a common complaint. He made the case that anything that "was underground" and becomes popular "gets accused of selling out." But he did not agree that BMX riding has sold out and felt that the popularity of the sport has been a positive change.

Subjects did recognize the irony of critiquing others for having professional aspirations when they, themselves, are or were professionals. And they appreciated what one BMX rider called "the double-edged sword" of the newfound popularity of alternative sports. He stated:

> It's hard, because you see a lot of money that can be made, and who wouldn't want to make money doing something they love? It's a double-edged sword. You've gotta kind of stay true, but then you also gotta think 'why am I doing this?' if I'm going to have to work at Stop And Shop when it's all said and done and I'm hurt and I can barely walk anymore, so a lot of guys are going to take the opportunity to make the money any way they can.

This was a common theme among respondents—that going pro meant risking the "soul" or the "grassroots" of the sports and that the most authentic form of participation is amateur, unstructured riding. In fact, another drawback of the increased popularity and financial opportunities in these alternative sports, according to subjects, is the lack of opportunity for amateur-level involvement. Six participants identified a decrease in the number of amateur-level opportunities within their sport as a way in which the sport has changed. They asserted that competitions are increasingly geared toward professionals and that there are fewer "shows" and "demos" (demonstrations) and more contests than in the past.

Large-scale media coverage of alternative sports was frequently identified as a causal factor in the professionalization of these activities, attracting corporate sponsors and larger viewing audiences. Respondents felt that major contests like ESPN's The X Games had created a more formally organized system of competition that had both advantages and drawbacks. One skateboarder pointed out that it had made for more organized contests in which events occurred on time and in order and therefore reduced

the level of confusion that is relatively common at more loosely organized competitions. A BMX rider added that it has meant safer ramps and other equipment. But the same BMX rider also stated that the more formal events have lost some of the allure of the original participant-directed contests. He compared the past and the present:

> It's come a long, long way. I remember being at a contest with like 50 people and it would last the afternoon. Now it goes a whole weekend and it's nonstop. They have different events going on at the same time and there are cops and baggage checkpoints and you can't get a hotel room. We used to sleep in our cars in the parking lot with ramps in it. That's how much it's changed. Now you can't even go up to your other friends. If you're not competing in the contest you can't even get in the gate unless you have a pass. Where before, everyone knew who you were and it was cool and now everyone is worried that you're some lunatic fan. The guys today, still riding, wouldn't care if someone walked in and wanted to meet them. They are happy to have someone interested in what they do. But everyone else there is so worried about what the other sports are doing that they try to follow the model. You know, like, if you go to a big football game and you go past a guard. But we were just having fun and nobody cared. Now it's the exact opposite of what it used to be. It's much stricter when you walk into a contest, or if you try to get a ticket. You have to pay a spectator's fee. Before you didn't have to pay a spectator's fee. You just showed up and you hung out all weekend. You didn't worry about getting a hotel—you just slept in your car. Now you can't even find a place to park.

In addition to the more formal schedule of events and more restricted access to athletes and contest areas, some participants identified a shift away from athlete control of the sports. Four subjects stated that there are "more rules" today than there were in the past and one BMX rider provided an example, stating that there is "too much structure" at contests today, and that riders used to naturally take turns riding and now they must follow rules about riding order. Another BMX rider reported that, at least in the past, ESPN was regularly criticized for not "catering to the riders" at the X Games and not "giving them respect", citing an example of security guards "hassling" contest participants and denying them access to certain areas at the events. A third BMX rider

responded that ESPN's X Games are not a legitimate way of determining the "best riders". He asserted that some of the best riders do not participate in the X Games, either by choice or because they do not have the financial means or the sponsorship connections to compete in the "right" contests that would allow them access to the Games. A skateboarder criticized the division of revenue within the X Games:

> The amount of money that the X Games brings in—I mean they have sponsors—everything from Cotton, to the Army, to candy bars, to Gillette razors. They have billions of dollars of sponsorship money that go in for the X Games for the fliers and the banners on the back of the ramps and stuff, and the athletes are still just getting paid peanuts. I mean, this is supposed to be the Olympics of skateboarding—the X Games—and I have a friend who has consistently been in the top five. He got second in doubles- vert and fifth in the regular contest and he came home with a total prize winning of $7,500, which may seem great, but I don't know, if I'm watching the Goodwill Games or something on TV, and people are just swimming across the pool and whoever makes it to the other side of the pool first gets $75,000! I've never heard of these people, you know? Skateboarding—the ratings are just—and ESPN is making so much money off of it, yet the riders are just getting paid peanuts and it's a TV show. If they don't have the riders in it, if all the riders boycott it, they don't have a TV show.

These are all examples of how the control of the organization of alternative sport contests, as well as the control of revenue, is increasingly in the hands of corporate event-organizers, according to respondents.

Skateboarders and BMX riders were the ones primarily making these observations. While snowboarders did identify organizational changes in their sport, as a result of media coverage and the accompanying fan interest, they were more likely to point to attempts by organizing bodies, like the International Ski Federation (FIS), the United States Ski Association (USSA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to control the direction of snowboarding, pointing out that these groups had historically had no interest in incorporating their sport. One snowboarder, in comparing these "top-

down" organizations with ESPN's snowboarding competitions, asserted that the ESPN-sponsored events were "kind of cool" because there are fewer rules and the media company can "style it like they want". He contended that the more rigid organizations like the FIS and IOC have the potential to "limit creativity and development" because they are slower to respond to changes within the sport.

But there were issues that participants in all three sports discussed in a similar manner, related to the effects of media coverage and spectator interest. One such topic was the rise of alternative sport-related business ventures including equipment and merchandise companies, video games, videos and demonstration (demo) teams. Eight respondents mentioned the growth of these corollary businesses as an effect of increased popularity and media interest in the sports. Five of the subjects made the case that there are both advantages and disadvantages of the rise of these businesses for the participants themselves, while the other three reported that they worried that the control and the proceeds of these businesses go largely to corporate interests, rather than riders and skaters themselves.

On the positive side, subjects made the case that the increased popularity of the sports has allowed participants to capitalize by starting rider-owned or skater-owned businesses and to earn money through video appearances and even video games based on their likeness. A skateboarder used the Tony Hawk skateboarding video games as an example while a snowboarder pointed out that riders are able use their popularity at mediated contest events to spark interest in their appearances in snowboarding videos. In fact, she added, some snowboarders participate in televised contests just to achieve notoriety and then quit the competition circuit and earn their money through video

appearances. Another snowboarder added that the videos and demo companies provide an attractive alternative to snowboarders who commonly, according to him, prefer a less competitive type of involvement in the sport. He explained that, within freestyle snowboarding, those with a "do it on your own time" personality can take the video and demo route. "You can market yourself by your lifestyle, even if you don't win" in the contests. A BMX rider identified the emergence of new trade magazines, websites, skate/bike parks and BMX camps as a positive result of media and corporate interest in the sport, allowing participants more avenues for involvement in the activity.

In the negative column, respondents asserted that even these corollary businesses are being co-opted by corporate interests. One skateboarder provided a personal example, explaining how his own skater-owned skateboard, BMX and inline skating demonstration company has begun to lose out to corporate-sponsored companies who can provide a similar performance at a lower cost:

> Some of these companies, they don't understand that they are hurting the real, true skateboarders and the people who have been trying to do this, because they've got the corporation behind them—the corporate money behind them, they can come in and take things like this from us. Like the tour that I ran got taken over by a bigger company with big corporate sponsors. We've always been a rider-skater-owned and skater-run company and there are very few. I really don't think there are any other teams that do what we do that aren't backed by a major bike company or anything like that nowadays.

A BMX rider made the same claim about companies making and selling bikes. He lamented that the days of the small bike company and bike store appear to be numbered, and expressed disappointment that BMX equipment is now available through corporate retailers like K-Mart and Wal-Mart.

An area of even greater agreement among respondents was that they felt that the lure of corporate sponsorships and media fame has led to increased specialization within alternative sports. Half of the subjects identified specialization as a change in alternative sports, as they have become more popular as media and spectator events. Subjects defined specialization as focusing on one type of sport participation, where historically participants had been more likely to focus on all forms of their sport. The clearest example is within snowboarding, where the sport has divisively split between alpine snowboarding (downhill racing) and freestyle snowboarding (including half-pipe or vertical [vert] riding, slopestyle and big air contests). While the Winter Olympic Games include both types, the X Games is exclusively freestyle snowboarding, with the exception of boardercross, an event in which six snowboarders race down a course together. But as one respondent pointed out, the boardercross event at the X Games includes rules that require participants to use freestyle snowboards, not alpine equipment. Subjects reported that more snowboarders are choosing to focus on either alpine or freestyle riding and among freestyle riders, according to subjects, there has been more specialization to a certain event, such as focusing only on half-pipe riding.

Subjects reported that skateboarding and BMX are witnessing the same trend. Within BMX there has also been a split between racing and freestyle forms of participation, with freestyle receiving more media coverage. Like snowboarding, only freestyle BMX is included in the X Games. Again, subjects reported that more riders are focusing on one or the other and, within freestyle riding, are specializing as either vert (ramp) riders, dirt jumping or flatland (street) riders. While skateboarding does not have

the same history of racing, subjects also reported more specialization within that sport. Again, skaters are reportedly increasingly likely to be vert specialists or street specialists.

Participants attributed this trend to the emphasis on "going pro" or "making money" in the sport, explaining that more athletes are attempting to master one area of competition, rather than spending time practicing all forms of the sport. All subjects viewed specialization as a negative consequence of the media popularity of the sports. A snowboarder's comments typify the attitude of participants toward specialization:

> I think that specialization is a huge part of how it's different. When I started snowboarding everybody on our team, when I was younger, did every event. That's how it went. We all raced and if you didn't have a race board, that was fine, you raced on your freestyle board...everybody had a good time. There was no—okay, you're ten years old; you have to decide whether you want to be a pipe specialist, a slopestyle specialist, or a rail specialist, and you're ten years old, so make your decision. There was none of that. Now that seems to be the case...That is something that has evolved in the past six years, where children—and they ARE children—have to decide what they want. Do you want to be a racer? Do you want to be a freestyler? What do you want to be?
>
> *Interviewer: Do you think there are benefits to that or would it be better not to specialize so early?*
>
> I think there are zero benefits to that, mainly because it makes your sport, uh, a one-hit-wonder. Because of that, there's always going to be some up-and-coming kid who cycles in, gets hurt and cycles out. Whereas, if a kid is given the opportunity to grow and really, really enjoy himself, and try everything he wants and find his own identity...When these kids are labeled at such an early age, I don't think that's good at all. It also takes away from a rider's overall ability. A lot of these riders these days, they are really good at what they do, but if you take them out of their element, they really, they don't have the talent to really ride. They can throw a switch nine mute that's torqued, over a 75-foot tabletop and blow your mind, but then, all of a sudden you're like, "hey, you wanna go ride powder?" It snows three feet and they don't want to ride because they can't. They can't make a turn. They can't do a heelside, they can't do a toeside. And that takes away from our sport so much because basically, we all become, comparing it to the NBA, we all can only do dunks. Whereas, if you want to be the best in the world, you have to be able to do everything.

The most commonly cited problems with specialization were the risk of injury, the risk of burnout and a loss of the intrinsic value of participation—i.e. the fun.

The clearest area of agreement among respondents in all sports, related to the effects of media interest in alternative sports, was that there is now a much greater emphasis on 'spectacular' kinds of performances—those that feature particularly high jumps, popular tricks or dangerous feats. Ten participants identified this as a major effect of mediated sporting events and all believed it to be a negative consequence. One BMX rider concluded, "We should be able to win without doing back flips. This is not a circus act." This kind of comment was common. A snowboarder also used the circus analogy as he explained that alpine snowboarders are encouraged to participate in parallel slalom racing (two riders at once) because it rates higher on television. He said, "To a certain extent you have to bend, but before we know it we're going to be jumping through fire hoops like we're at the circus."

Participants attributed this focus on the spectacular to what "sells" on TV and to an audience that is new to alternative sports and thus less able to appreciate the more nuanced aspects of the activities. A BMX rider compared flatland riding to vert and dirt riding, pointing out that flatland riders receive fewer sponsorships and that half-pipe riding is "where the money is". He explained this by saying that the half-pipe riders are "a different breed. They are all guts and glory," while the flatland riders are more focused on "personal expression". He asserted that flatland riding is just as difficult as half-pipe riding, but that people who don't ride don't understand it and therefore find it monotonous to watch, as they do not appreciate the technical skill it requires. Similar comments were made about alpine snowboarding versus freestyle.

Despite all these changes identified by skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders, the majority of respondents did not believe that their sports have become mainstream. Only one subject, an alpine snowboarder, reported that snowboarding has reached mainstream status. In particular, respondents said that there continues to be "something different" about those individuals who participate in alternative sports—that there is still a "lifestyle" that goes along with participation, even if it has diminished somewhat, with increased participation rates. Twelve subjects agreed that there are qualities that distinguish skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders from the larger society generally, and specifically from participants in mainstream sports. Though many subjects acknowledged that the sports have lost some of their "bad boy", rebellious image, only two respondents made the case that the subculture associated with alternative sports has disappeared. A BMX rider asserted that, before BMX became so popular, it had an active subculture, that riders "used to know everybody" in the area and could relate to each other because they rode. Today, he claimed, "it's so huge that people keep to themselves" and that cliques have developed within the culture of BMX riders. The other respondent who did not identify differences between participants in alternative sports and others was a snowboarder who said she didn't think there were any particular qualities that made snowboarders different from other athletes.

There were a number of ways in which subjects identified alternative sport participants as different from those in mainstream sports. Most commonly, subjects pointed to the emphasis on "individuality" within alternative sports and to resistance to the values of mainstream sports, especially team sports and a focus on competition. Eight respondents identified values antithetical to mainstream sport as a difference between

themselves and others. This was most often articulated through references to a focus on the "internal rewards" of participation in the sport: four subjects said the activities are more of an "art form" than a sport, to individualism: two BMX riders suggested that "group" was a more apt term than "team" for BMX freestyle teams, and to the "freedom" that alternative sport involvement allows. When asked to elaborate, one snowboarder suggested that the term freedom meant that snowboarders are able to "do what they want, when they want," in contrast to professionals in more traditional sports.

Respondents also identified youth as a difference between their own sport participants and those in more mainstream sports. And they pointed out that alternative sport subcultures are closely connected with other aspects of youth culture, particularly fashion and music. Four subjects identified fashion as a component of the alternative sport lifestyle and three others specifically named music, either "punk rock" or "rock 'n roll" as historically associated with the sports under study. One snowboarder described how freestyle snowboarding competitions are often combined with music concerts, citing an example of a half-pipe competition that featured the rock band The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Six subjects maintained that there continues to be a lifestyle or a subculture associated with the sports specifically related to the rebellious, anti-mainstream reputation associated with these activities in the past. A snowboarder, in discussing the reputation of snowboarders as rude, delinquent and inconsiderate to skiers, concluded that the sport "just seems to draw that kind of person". He went on to explain how the behavior of some snowboarders contributes to this reputation:

> I believe it (snowboarding) can still be portrayed as one of those sports (alternative or extreme) because of the lifestyle it portrays. You don't see

> what goes on behind the screens. Football and basketball and golf and all those kinds of sports they have coaches, they have teams, they have structure and you see that. In snowboarding, what you see is some young kid who is making funky gestures at the camera man, standing at the top of a half-pipe, listening to his beats on his huge headphones, bouncing, and then all of a sudden he just drops into the pipe, looks like he could give a shit, but he's an incredible athlete. And all of a sudden he's doing the most amazing aerial acrobatics—this is from a layman's perspective—and then he crosses the line in front of the judges, shows some attitude, takes off his board, and he looks like he's hanging out with his friends down at the bottom of the half-pipe. And he's got his pants down around his ass, he's got camouflage on, you can barely see his nose because his goggles are so low. He just looks really, definitely different.

However, this snowboarder did acknowledge that some of this behavior is simply an act and he pointed out that professional snowboarders do train and prepare for competition, even if that training is not organized in the same way as it is in more traditional sports. A BMX rider talked about drug and alcohol use as an example of delinquent behavior, citing an example from snowboarding:

> Say it (BMX) becomes an Olympic sport, there is a certain pressure to perform as a professional because now it's considered this thing. When snowboarding became a sport in the Olympics, it was a whole big thing about if you were drinking and all this stuff because they look at it as 'how hard could it be? This guy was drunk and hung over and he won.' So, you really have to be careful. One of the guys who won, I guess had smoked weed or something. I don't, but he did. And he was high when he won and they proved it and they took his medal away. Now, if he was better than everyone else high—so be it. But they took his medal away because he used drugs. I mean, what? Were they mad because he could have rode better? But that's the kind of thing you get into when you're in mainstream America.
>
> *Interviewer: Is that a good thing that that's happening, or is it a bad thing?*
>
> I think it's good, if you want to set an example, but it also teaches people kind of to conform, which isn't right either, because it means 'if you want to get this, you gotta be this' and I think people need to just be more open-minded and accept everybody for who they are, just in general, like the bigger picture, outside of every sport. Not enough people are willing to just accept people for who they are as they walk in the door. And with

> money coming into play in any sport, it gets tricky, because anything is marketable but it just depends on the time and who's selling it. I mean, there are companies that have guys drinking beer and stuff and the guy's not even near a bicycle in one ad...

As the end of the quote above suggests, respondents were well aware of corporate and media attempts to market this alternative lifestyle and to organize and present events that portray the "rebellious reputation" of alternative sport participants. Snowboarders, in particular, focused on fashion as a marker of this subcultural status. Four snowboarders identified this issue and they pointed out that freestyle snowboarding, in its mediated version, seems to "put fashion in front of function", in the words of one subject. He went on to discuss how ESPN emphasizes freestyle snowboarding and its associated culture by regulating what participants wear during boardercross competitions (the only X Games racing event.) Another snowboarder pointed out that this phenomenon occurs even within Olympic snowboarding:

> Boardercross is now in the Olympics and they just made a rule that you can't wear speedsuits because it won't sell product. Who's going to buy a speedsuit? They want people wearing Burton sweaters and stuff because that's what's going to sell.

Participants also recognized that corporate sponsors and media interests wish to use the "renegade" reputation of alternative sports to attract consumers and to "sell product" at the same time that they expect sponsored riders and skaters to behave in a "professional" manner and not engage in behavior (like drug or alcohol use) that might reflect poorly on sponsors or hosts. One BMX rider asserted that:

> That's why a lot of guys don't make it, because they're too rough around the edges. You've gotta have a company that wants that image, because image is kind of the thing now, whether people like it or not. You do fit into a category, which takes us back to style and everything else. Marketing is just a messed up thing and if you fit into a category and you're at the right time and place, you get a contract, maybe...there's

> always going to be somebody willing to take a chance on somebody because they're good enough, no matter what they stand for, because they're going to sell product because they're that good.

In general, respondents were not concerned with the appropriation of subcultural fashion, music and "style" by sponsors and media interests. They often expressed amusement over the use of the term "extreme" to sell products ranging from clothing to personal hygiene items and images of "action sports" athletes in television commercials and children's toys. Only one participant, the BMX rider quoted above, criticized the marketing of the alternative sports lifestyle, claiming that the proliferation of action figures, television programs and other consumer items "makes riders out to be what they aren't." He asserted that alternative sports should not be used to "sell cars".

Two subjects actually made the case that the appropriation of alternative sports style by mainstream interests has benefits for participants themselves. Both respondents, a snowboarder and a skateboarder, suggested that, since corporate outsider images of alternative sport subcultures are not authentic, this creates an opportunity for more authentic rider and skater-owned companies to find a niche in sport-related business ventures. The snowboarder asserted that the ability to sell the "extreme sports lifestyle" associated with snowboarding is the one factor preventing ski companies (that generally have larger operations and better technology, according to him) from taking over the snowboard manufacturing business. The skateboarder claimed that skaters are wise to inauthentic marketing and choose to support companies that have "street credibility", in the sense of accurately reflecting the culture of skateboarding. He did acknowledge, however, that some big corporations are "getting close" to having this credibility and cited Nike as an example. He also admitted that small skate shops are having a harder

time surviving these days, as big retailers like toy stores begin to carry what he called "toy boards".

For the most part, respondents in the study were in agreement about how skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX have changed as they have become commercialized. Most were enthusiastic about increased participation rates and welcomed the chance for more young people to be exposed to the activities, reporting that they are happy when others experience the same intrinsic enjoyment of the activities as they do. However, they expressed disappointment that some newcomers to the sports appear to be attracted by chances for fame and fortune, rather than the intrinsic rewards of participation. They also concurred that corporate sponsorships and media attention, while providing professional opportunities, have led to some problematic changes in alternative sport, especially a trend toward specialization at an early age and an overemphasis on risky, dramatic and spectacular stunts. Subjects felt that these changes contributed to high injury rates, burnout and a decrease in the enjoyment of riding or skating.

The only significant area of difference in responses among participants in the respective sports was related to organizational changes. Again, snowboarder responses differed somewhat from those given by skateboarders and BMX riders. Skateboarders and BMX riders identified outsider control of competitions like the X Games as problematic, despite some advantages like safer equipment and better organization of events. They felt that ESPN organizers do not show adequate respect to participants, do not provide an accurate measure of talent in the sports and fail to distribute revenue fairly. Snowboarders, on the other hand, were more likely to complain about attempts by

larger winter sports governing bodies like the IOC and FIS to control snowboarding as umbrella organizations. They pointed to resistance among snowboarders to control by these bureaucratic groups and were less concerned about the organization and presentation of events like the Winter X Games.

Even though participants identified a long list of changes that have come with commercialization, the majority did not feel that the sports have become mainstream, or that they have lost their subcultural lifestyle component. Even though they demonstrated awareness of the appropriation of their style, behavior, fashion and music by commercial interests, they asserted that an authentic version of the culture continues to exist and that members exhibit characteristics that distinguish them from athletes in traditional sports including individualism, a focus on intrinsic rewards and an appreciation of the "freedom" from schedules, coaches and training that alternative sport involvement allows.

Research Question Three: *If participants at the professional level were in control of the organization and presentation of their sports, what would they look like? How does this compare to the way that participants perceive their sports to be currently organized and to their expectations of the future of these activities?*

Building on Question Two, this question asked subjects to discuss how they might organize their sports in an ideal world and how that may or may not look different than their current forms of organization. In addition, the question probed the ways in which respondents' ideal vision for their sports was similar or different from their expectations of what the sports will "really" look like in the future. In more academic terms, the question began to address the issue of agency—did subjects believe that participant

control of alternative sports would be important in terms of shaping future changes and direction and did they perceive that opportunities exist for riders and skaters to play a role in the future of their sports?

One of the most common responses to the question of how respondents would organize their sports differently was that they would put less emphasis on corporate sponsorships and money-making. Five subjects identified corporate involvement and an emphasis on financial rewards as a problem they would address. One snowboarder's image of an ideal future included the following:

> It would have nothing to do with the commercial sense. It would have to do with the athlete development...The commercial presence can be there and should be there, just because it needs to be there. In order for sports to survive, you have to have the people playing it and the people watching it. So there has to be some commercial involvement. However, it doesn't have to be a corporate sell-out. It has to be a corporate sponsor. Not someone that, like Mountain Dew, who wants to just steal a kid as soon as he starts to show some potential—put him on the front of their bottles, put him on a commercial and ship him off and then as soon as he breaks his ankle or something like that, pull him off the bottles, totally renege his contract and you're done snowboarding, you'll never be anything—nothing like that. We need something that's a nonprofit organization sponsored by a corporation that can start to offer strong programs all over the place, not just emphasizing short term.

Only one subject, another snowboarder, envisioned the ideal future of the sport as focusing more on corporate sponsorship and financial rewards. This desire for the sports to emphasize intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards reflected responses to Question Two about an increasing focus on financial goals as alternative sports have become more popular.

Related to a de-emphasis on money-making as a goal, respondents stated that they would like to see more opportunities at the amateur or "grassroots" level, fewer professional contests and more demonstrations and shows. Half of the subjects identified

amateur-level involvement and less focus on competition as desirable directions for their sports to take in the future. One BMX rider explained:

> I would definitely like to see more contests and events geared toward amateurs because a lot of people don't get a chance anymore because if you want to compete, there's not even a class for you because there's no money in it. So, I think I'd like to see more chances for people who like to ride and are doing it for just the pure fun of it—give them a chance to see what they can do, and push it, and let them compete if they want to. Or have more events where they aren't contests but just gatherings, more like conventions. Like you see these tattoo conventions and stuff. I think it would just be fun to have stuff like that where people get together and ride and go to other places.

Again, these responses reflected concerns that commercialization has moved the sport away from "grassroots" level participation and fears that professionalization risks "taking the fun out" of alternative sports involvement.

Three subjects added that they would like to see more participant involvement in the future of alternative sports. A BMX rider asserted that there need to be "more people involved who know about the sport" and a skateboarder added that, "real skaters need to be involved" to help ensure that skateboarder interests are represented in contests and business ventures. Two respondents stated that they hoped there would be more ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in the sports in the future.

The wish-list of respondents about the ideal version of their sports was relatively short, in comparison to responses to other questions. This may be explained by their answers to the question of how they think the sports will "really look" in the future. All 14 subjects expressed optimism about the future of alternative sports. And the vast majority believed that their sports would continue to exist as alternatives to traditional sport forms. Only two subjects thought that their sports would achieve mainstream status

(both snowboarders) and even they made the case that the original, alternative form would exist alongside the mainstream, commercial version.

Ten respondents speculated that alternative sports would, at some point in the future, lose their popularity and return to their more marginal status. Four of the ten argued that all trends go in "cycles" and that mainstream interest in snowboarding, skateboarding and BMX will wane as part of a natural pattern. The other six subjects used phrases like "it's a bubble that will burst", "it will go bust", or "it will peak", suggesting that widespread interest in the sports is simply a fad. A BMX rider's comments represent the sentiment:

> I think it will slow down. I think that everything kind of needs to run its course and I don't think anything can happen without some kind of fluctuation. Nothing is going to be better and better forever...and I think riding will definitely slow down. I think all these sports are going to slow down, maybe not all at the exact same time, but within the same period or stretch. And it will pick up, and the guys who are really into it will stick with it and you'll still see a lot of the stuff. And again, with money again, it's going to be less in your face, but it will still be there and people will have the same respect for it. Some people will think 'oh, that's like the hula hoop, it's over. That's so yesterday' and all that kind of stuff. But, if that happens, at least people will have a better respect for it and leave you alone.

The two respondents who made the case that snowboarding will eventually become mainstream qualified their statements. One added, "I think that snowboarding will always have a little bit of a rock-n-roll side...but it definitely will become more mainstream. But that's probably a belief I have because I think if something new comes out, the developments are going crazy and quick and in all kinds of directions and when it's a little bit older, you get more structures, and it's like a life cycle of a sport." The other subject who believed that snowboarding will become mainstream said that she believed that snowboarding will remain in the Olympics but that many riders will choose

to opt out of this formal version of the sport, choosing instead to do "free riding", "big mountain riding" (snowboarding in remote locations, often with the use of a helicopter for access), or smaller-scale contests like "rail jams". She explained; "It will probably branch off in two separate directions: those who want to go the Olympic route...and then there will be the ones who want to be sick, who want to have fun."

Two other subjects also suggested this dual direction as a possibility for the future of alternative sports (one BMX rider and one snowboarder.) While the BMX rider did not believe that the sport will ever become mainstream, he did admit that a commercial version of the sport was likely to survive alongside a more authentic, original version. He suggested that, while some riders might opt for the commercialized form, most BMX riders would be more likely to choose a route more in line with the original roots of the sport, such as participation in videos, demos and shows. The snowboarder asserted that, although the sport will become more mainstream, it will not completely become like traditional sports and opportunities will remain for participation in the more original form of the sport.

Respondents did not usually offer explanations when initially asked if they believed that their sports would become organized like mainstream sports in the future and seemed to struggle to identify why they felt so sure that their activities would not begin to look like baseball or football. But when asked specifically if they thought that skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX might, for example, become high school sports with junior varsity and varsity squads, coaches and organized practices, they provided a variety of theories as to why this would be highly unlikely. The majority of respondents cited reasons either inherent in the sports or within the participants. The most common

response, identified by six participants, was that their sports are naturally more difficult or dangerous than other sports and so they would not draw enough athletes in an organized venue like a school or competitive-level team. A BMX rider contended that the "baby steps" in the sport are much slower (i.e., there is a longer learning curve) and so that would discourage involvement. A snowboarder made the case that snowboarding is more "physically demanding" than other sports. A skateboarder, in making the case that skateboarding is harder to do well than traditional sports concluded that it is "a shut-up and show me" sport. Another BMX rider added that the sport is "technical" and that that would discourage mainstream interest in participation.

Other explanations aligned with the characterization of alternative sports as more of an "art form" than conventional sports. For example, a skateboarder denied that the sport would ever begin to look like more traditional sports, saying that skateboarding is simply not an organized sport and that, therefore, it would not be possible to structure it within a school or team format. A BMX rider added that the subjective nature of judging the sport made it ill-suited as a formally organized activity. A snowboarder elaborated on this point, suggesting that there is no way to determine "the best" snowboarder:

> There's no world championship type of thing. There's just lots of different little competitions. I mean, there's the U.S. Open, there's other stuff in the states that just has such a variation to it. You see little competitions on TV all the time. I don't know—there's never like the big World Cup, or the playoffs of snowboarding. I don't think snowboarding could pick out who's the best snowboarder.
>
> *Interviewer: Why is that?*
>
> Well, it would be the best snowboarder in half-pipe, the best snowboarder in big air, the best snowboarder in big mountain. That's not what I feel would be the best snowboarder. I think the best snowboarder would be someone who could do it all. And it is too much of a judgment sport, as well, so it's very hard to tell. And snowboarding has more of the best

> people doing this stuff every day, instead of at competitions...they're more like who can kill that day, or throw the craziest trick off of—I don't think—there isn't really a desire to be the best in snowboarding...
>
> *Interviewer: Do you think it will stay that way, despite becoming so popular?*
>
> I hope so. I really like it like this. Everybody respects everybody and everybody just wants to see everybody improve and push each other. It is very—a camaraderie sport. I can go up to the hill and ride with anybody and start trying a new trick that day and by the end, I know I'll have it because those guys will be pushing me; 'Do it. Do it. You can do it. You're just about there"...and that's why I think the sport has developed so much, because there's the camaraderie and it's hard for best friends to compete all the time. All the top snowboarders, they know each other from years of competing, going to video shoots, traveling together, and all that sort of stuff. I really don't think there's a desire for a champion of the world type thing.

Other subjects also made reference to the type of participant in these alternative sports as a reason why they are unlikely to become organized like tradition sport forms, though few specifically identified characteristics that make alternative sport participants unsuited for mainstream sports. Like the subject quoted above, one other respondent also discussed a focus on camaraderie as a trait. Three subjects mentioned "individuality" or "individualism", while two identified a desire for "adrenaline" as a quality that distinguishes alternative sport athletes from those in more traditional sports. More common responses to this question were general dismissals such as "skaters wouldn't be interested in it" (high school teams) and "the riders would walk away." When pressed to explain why skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders would not participate in versions of their sports organized like mainstream sports the most common response was that organized sport is antithetical to the values of alternative sport participants, especially the focus on external rewards, rules, competition and organized training. A

BMX rider characterized his sport as a "soul thing" and made the case that "85 to 95 percent (of professional riders) would do it even if they didn't get paid."

The only other explanation for the belief that alternative sports will not become mainstream, given by a snowboarder, is that they present more obstacles to involvement:

> It's easier for kids to get involved in basketball and soccer and football; all you need is a ball. You can be anywhere and dribble a basketball, or put on some running shoes and go for a jog. But you can't snowboard everywhere or ski everywhere, you can't ride a dirt bike everywhere. And all those things cost so much money. Even a skateboard is $70...whereas a basketball, you go to Wal-Mart and it's probably $10. So, I think especially as far as inner city, or not wealthy families, or those who have it a little more rough, it's not easy to do extreme sports.

When asked how they might organize alternative sports if they were in charge, subjects identified only a few changes that they would make, including less focus on the extrinsic rewards of participation like sponsorships and financial success, more opportunities for amateur-level involvement and more organizational opportunities for participants themselves. These suggestions align closely with respondents concerns over the changes that have occurred in their sports as they have become increasingly commercialized. The fact that few suggestions were offered for change appears to be related to the fact that a remarkable number of respondents—all but two—did not believe that their sports will ever become organized like traditional sports such as baseball and football and that they will continue to exist as alternatives to mainstream sports. Ten subjects even speculated that the sports would eventually return to their pre-commercialized form, as the alternative sport craze in the mainstream runs its course.

Asked to explain why these sports would not be successful as activities organized like mainstream sports, respondents largely made claims based on traits inherent within the sports themselves or within those people drawn to participation in alternative sports

and their associated cultures. They asserted that the sports are more difficult than other sports and that they take longer to learn, that they do not lend themselves to objective scoring or ranking criteria, that they cannot be coached nor mastered in regimented training sessions. Subjects made the case that skaters and riders themselves privilege camaraderie over competitiveness, are too individualistic or want more "adrenaline" than traditional forms of sport offer. In the judgment of these participants there is little to fear in the future of alternative sports. Overwhelmingly the subjects did not believe that commercialization is a threat to the original, authentic version of the activities, and despite the problems they reported as a result of commercial and popular interest in the sports, they expressed confidence that skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX will eventually return to their original form.

Research Question Four: *What strategies, if any, are participants at the professional level using to try to shape the direction of their sport, in terms of organization and presentation, and are these strategies successful? Why or why not?*

This final question specifically targeted the possibility of agentic potential within alternative sport subcultures. It was designed to investigate whether participants are engaged in any attempts to remedy the problems they identified as a result of commercialization and, if so, whether those strategies appeared effective in shaping the current and future direction of the sports under study.

Given that all 14 subjects expressed optimism about the future direction of their sports, despite the negative changes they identified as a result of commercialization, they did not often identify attempts to change the current form of organization or shape the future direction of the sports. This is not especially surprising, since the majority

reported that they believed that the problems that have arisen will solve themselves, as the alternative sport fad in the larger culture runs its course. But three approaches to resisting commercialization did arise in the data. The first two were individual solutions: quitting professional involvement, or participating in participant-owned or directed ventures, while the third approach called for organizing participants to push for change.

The first method of resisting the commercial, commodified form of these sports was simply to end one's professional involvement and go back to recreational participation. Though six of the subjects in the study had retired from professional competition, only three identified dissatisfaction with current forms of organization or representation as the reason for their retirement. These three reported that they chose to retire from professional competition "because it took the enjoyment out of it" or because they "wanted to go back to doing it for fun". The other subjects who had retired cited reasons like injuries or not being "good enough" to keep competing.

This method of resistance to the commercialized version of alternative sport is not particularly effective, however, for two reasons. First, it requires participants to leave professional involvement, meaning that they sacrifice their ability to supplement their income or potentially earn a living through participation. Second, this strategy does nothing to address the problems associated with commercialization beyond the level of the individual unless, of course, all professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders were to drop out of commercial participation. Respondents were aware of the shortcomings of dropping out as a solution to dissatisfaction with commercialization. Five subjects (two skateboarders, two BMX riders and one snowboarder) pointed out that, in order to avoid having to "sell out", or do things that they did not enjoy for their

sponsors, they would have to quit. As one BMX rider articulated, "The guys who really want to keep themselves intact, and keep their integrity, they just will, but they sometimes have to sacrifice the big bucks." He went on to assert that the riders who have the luxury to do this are the ones who have income from other sources, especially those who are independently wealthy and can afford to spend their time riding "for fun". This was a common response, that one could avoid the "tie downs" of professional-level competition, as a snowboarder put it, by quitting but that this was an unrealistic option for those who need the income and so most pros continue to participate, with the acknowledgment that sometimes, according to another BMX rider, they "might have to do things they don't want to do, but they can make a living."

The second individual response to the problems associated with the commodified version of the sports was to opt out of competitions and to earn financial rewards through paid performances (demonstrations), video appearances or one's own business venture related to the activity. Four subjects reported that they, themselves, had chosen this route and five pointed out that this is an option, in general, for participants who do not enjoy competitions organized by media or corporate interests. This parallels subjects' contention in response to Question Three that there are two different types of professional involvement in alternative sports: the commodified version, controlled by commercial (and largely corporate) interests and the participant-owned and participant-directed form.

Respondents suggested that, if alternative sport participants are unhappy with the terms of involvement in the corporate controlled version of the activities, they can create or join sport-related businesses, either as riders/skaters or as organizers and promoters of events like demonstrations and videos. General examples were listed under the responses

to Question Two, but participants provided personal examples, as well. They reported that they either exclusively earn money through these corollary arrangements, as with the four subjects who chose this route, or, in the case of two others, that they do so in tandem with more conventional sponsored competitions. A snowboarder explains the company he started:

> I've been inspired to start my own company. It's called _____. Myself and two friends of mine are going to do trips—learn to surf and snowboard trips—in Chile. Chile is one of my favorite places and this summer we're going to do one for adults and one for kids. I want to be able to give people the experiences I've had with traveling. I've met, especially a lot of women, they're afraid to travel because they maybe don't have a group, or whatever. They want to go and travel, but they're afraid. I want to be able to provide that service for people. Or, I've got buddies that are spending $2,000 to go watch a football game in Miami for a weekend, and I could take you to Chile for a week and a half for that money and you'd have a much better experience...Kind of the draw is, when we go to places, we're accepted as locals.

A BMX rider and a skateboarder also discussed the companies they launched, organizing alternative sport demonstrations at events like private parties and school functions.

This approach to escaping the perceived problems with alternative sports in their commercialized, corporate form, while more effective than quitting professional-level involvement, also has limits, as the respondents recognized. First, as discussed under Question Two, subjects recognized that these rider and skater-owned companies are being co-opted by corporate interests. According to participants, corporate sponsors are increasingly taking business away from the smaller, participant-directed companies since they have the capital to provide the same services (like demonstrations) at a lower cost. In addition, as a BMX rider and a skateboarder pointed out, the smaller bike stores, skate shops and companies are selling out to corporate producers because they cannot compete with equipment sales at large discount stores.

To complicate matters, these corollary businesses depend largely on the existence of the commercial, mediated version of their sports for success. As subjects pointed out, these rider and skater-owned companies have grown with the popularity of the sports among mainstream audiences. While eight respondents identified the growth of these businesses as a result of the rise in popularity of alternative sport, only five of them reported that there were benefits to the trend, while all eight felt that there were drawbacks—namely that mainstream interest in the sports had led to corporate takeovers of previously rider/skater owned companies and industries. Subjects pointed out the paradox: the popularity of their sports in the larger culture created a boom for related businesses, but the lure of profits from these businesses drew interest from corporate outsiders, threatening the success of participant-owned and participant-run companies.

The third strategy for addressing the perceived problems with commercialization, and the only collective method raised by respondents, was to organize participants to try to push for better representation of skater and rider interests within professional skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX. Two respondents mentioned this as a possibility (one snowboarder and one skateboarder). The snowboarder identified this as an option for snowboarding to resist incorporation into governing bodies like the USSA and FIS. He made the case that freestyle snowboarders, who choose not to participate in the USSA because its regulations interfere with the demands of their individual sponsors, "do not have to sign to make money" and can represent themselves. He suggested that freestyle snowboarders might benefit more from a self-organized group that would help protect their interests and generate revenue.

The skateboarder was the only one to make reference to an existing group dedicated to representing the interests of skaters. He expressed concern that participants in events like the X Games are not sharing adequately in the revenue produced through the contests and explained the formation of this group:

> A lot of them have been forming this union. It's called PRO: Pro Riders Organization. It's kind of like a union that will negotiate the prize money and even a guarantee. I'm in the TV and film business, and like I said, it's a TV show. They should have a guarantee for just for showing up because they're part of this TV show. Whether they get last place in the contest, they should get, let's say, a couple thousand just for showing up and then base that on what you win. It's sickening to see how much money—like one of the guys, actually, at the contest, he had this shirt on, this handmade shirt, that said ESPN down the side. For the 'E' it said 'Extreme', for the 'P' it said 'Profits'—the 'S' was a dollar sign—and for the 'N' it said 'Network': Extreme Profits Network. And he wore that and he won the best trick contest, got his little trophy, flipped the cameras off, threw it into the audience, walked away and said 'I'll never ride in the X Games again.' So, you've got certain guys that will really stay true to the roots of skateboarding and then you've got others, you know, a lot of the other guys that are pros competing they've got kids and a family, so they've kind of gotta do that. It's a necessity to make a living. It's about fifty-fifty. But there's still a lot of guys who will just not take part in it. There's a lot of really good skaters that won't even compete in the X Games because they don't feel it's something that should be shown on TV like that, or portrayed the way they do it.

He went on to make the case that skaters have the potential to force corporate interests to share in the profits of sport-related business ventures, because the skaters themselves are the product. He relayed the story of a friend who had signed an exclusivity agreement with the creators of the Gravity Games (a corporate sponsored alternative sport competition) and when the friend's picture appeared on the Gravity Games video game and DVD he was not entitled to any share in the profits from their sale. He warned that participants might not tolerate these arrangements forever: "You gotta start cutting us in sometime, otherwise we're going to walk away and you're not going to have it anymore."

The potential effectiveness of collective organizations in achieving more favorable revenue distribution or merchandise rights remains to be seen. According to the skateboarder above, this type of organization is relatively new and the snowboarder who suggested this approach noted that there is not yet a boarder-run organization that is designed to represent the interests of snowboarders as a group. Although respondents did not identify them, I did find evidence, however, of other attempts at collective organizing, at least within skateboarding. An organization called the United Professional Skateboarders Association (UPSA) has a website citing that "it is an association created and run by skateboarders that is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Professional Skateboarders." But the most recent activity listed on the site is from 2002 and attempts at contacting the members went unanswered, so it is unclear whether the UPSA remains active.

There was little evidence in the data of attempts among professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders to challenge outsider control of the organization and presentation of alternative sports. The majority of respondents believed that the sports will eventually return to their pre-commercialized form, or that the commodified version will exist alongside a more authentic form, and therefore did not see a need to take action to preserve the original "roots" of the activities. Even when subjects did identify problematic changes as a result of commercial interests, they were likely to conclude that there were few options for countering them. One BMX rider regretted that contests have become "huge media events" but then remarked, "What are you going to do about it?" Another BMX rider discussed the sport getting " big" and the

control of events by corporate organizers like ESPN and made the case that it is fruitless to resist:

> I feel like people that complain about it being too big, they're not particularly educated, or they don't really think about it. To me, it's a natural progression of anything in life. This is like a sport, this is how it's progressing—society. To me, to say it's stupid, that's stupid, because it's just like a natural progression it goes through. I guess an individual could technically try to resist it. But I think, overall, it's pretty hard to stop something like that, especially when you have like ESPN, drilling it into kids.

When subjects did suggest ways to escape the problems they associated with the commercial version of their sports, they were generally individual methods: either quitting professional involvement or choosing to avoid corporate sponsored contests and, instead, to create or join rider/skater-controlled companies and perform in demonstration, shows or videos. Collective strategies to control the organization of the sports (particularly the division of revenue) were mentioned by only two of the 14 respondents and only one identified an existing group organized for that purpose. In general, it seemed that participants in all three sports were not involved in, or interested in the formation of participant-controlled organizations designed to represent the rights of riders or skaters, although snowboarders were more likely to discuss the issue of control by a governing body. This is likely because snowboarding is the only one of the three sports that organizations (primarily groups representing skiers) have expressed interest in incorporating and it is the only sport that is currently an Olympic event.

Summary

This study collected data to address two primary issues related to the production and reproduction of culture within alternative sports. The first issue explored the attitudes of professional skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders toward the newfound mainstream popularity and commercial success of their activities. Subjects expressed ambivalence about changes that have occurred with commercialization. At the personal, individual level participants reported that becoming a professional had altered their experiences within the sport. Most significantly, subjects felt that going pro led to increased pressure to perform and to behave in ways amenable to sponsors. But they framed that pressure in different ways, some claiming it was a beneficial change while others asserting that it had decreased the enjoyment level of participation.

At the general level, respondents were in agreement about how alternative sports have changed as a result of commercial interest. They were largely happy about increased participation rates and reported that they enjoyed seeing more people getting involved in alternative sports. But they were displeased about what they perceived as a trend toward entering the sports with professional aspirations, believing that this detracts from the intrinsic rewards gained through participation. Subjects attributed the desire for professional-level participation to increased media coverage and sponsorship possibilities and contended that an emphasis on going pro has contributed to trends toward specialization and a focus on risky, spectacular performances, which reportedly lead to increased injury rates, more burnout and less pleasure in participation.

Subjects also pointed to organizational changes in the sports, with control increasingly in the hands of corporate sponsors or event hosts like ESPN, or they identified attempts by mainstream governing bodies to incorporate the sport, as was the case with snowboarding. Again, attitudes toward this shift were ambivalent. While subjects believed there were some advantages, like better safety precautions and less chaotic event schedules, they disliked what they perceived to be unfair treatment of participants and unequal division of revenue.

Despite all these changes in the sports, subjects largely did not believe that alternative sports have become mainstream and suggested that there are traits inherent in the structure of the sports themselves or within individual participants that protect skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX from mainstream status. They reported that there continues to be an identified subculture associated with alternative sports and that the traits associated with these groups; individualism, an emphasis on intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards, a devaluing of competition and a rejection of the organized sports model, with its focus on governing bodies and organizational hierarchies, will prevent the sports from achieving mainstream status in the future.

In addition, subjects made the case that the sports themselves are ill suited for organization in the manner of traditional sports. They suggested that alternative sports are more difficult than other sports, that they are too subjective—more like art forms than sports, and that they cannot be mastered with traditional coaching and training regimens. The inherent qualities of the sports and their participants were cited as reasons why the majority of respondents held that alternative sports will eventually run their course and that mainstream interest in them will inevitably wane.

The second research issue focused on strategies for resisting commercialization and/or for participant control of the future direction of alternative sports. Because participants were optimistic that the problems that have come with commercialization will be naturally remedied in time, they did not spend a great deal of time discussing how they might organize and present their sports, if they were in charge. The suggestions that were put forth, though, echoed the drawbacks of commercialization cited above. Subjects reported that they would like to see less focus on extrinsic rewards and professionalization, more opportunities for amateur-level participation and more athlete involvement in decision-making and event organization.

Subjects rarely discussed strategies for implementing these changes or shaping the future of alternative sports, but three methods of escaping the problems of commercialization were mentioned. Two of the methods were individually focused: quitting professional-level involvement or opting for participation outside the corporate-sponsored events and joining or creating participant-directed demo teams or performance companies, or appearing in videos. These methods had the potential to protect participants from the effects of the commodified versions of their sports, but they did not affect change at the level of the sport and they often had real disadvantages for participants such as an inability to earn revenue through participation or the risk of one's business being usurped by corporate interests. Nonetheless, these alternative forms of participation (outside the corporate-controlled version) were commonly cited strategies for escaping the problems associated with commercialization.

The only attempt at collective resistance to the commodified, corporate-dominated form of alternative sports that was identified in the study, and noted only by

two respondents, was the possibility that participants might organize to push for the representation of rider/skater interests. Only one subject, a skateboarder, identified a currently existing "union" designed to represent skaters to ensure fair distribution of revenues from contest like the X Games.

The data do not indicate that alternative sport participants at the professional level are engaging in attempts to control the current and future direction of their sports, at least within corporate-controlled versions, despite dissatisfaction with the changes that have come with commercialization. While there was some evidence that subjects do not perceive the potential for agency in countering the power of corporate interests, the primary reason for this lack of interest in participant control appears to be that subjects feel it is unnecessary, since the structure of the sports and their associated cultures will prevent the co-optation of the activities and because authentic versions of the activities will survive the current pop culture "fad" version. All respondents expressed confidence that the sports will retain their alternative core and were optimistic about the future. The possible reasons for these responses are discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This project was designed as a case study of the control of cultural production and reproduction. In a world where the creation and distribution of popular culture is increasingly concentrated in the hands of representatives of a few global media corporations, there are fewer opportunities for the development and dissemination of alternative cultural forms, particularly those forms that do not support dominant consumerist values. While much work has been done on the commodification of culture, less research has been conducted on how groups and individuals respond to dominant cultural forms and the methods they use to accommodate, resist, challenge or escape the commodification of their own cultural products. Alternative sport subcultures served as an apt choice for an analysis of the contested terrain of cultural production because they traditionally promote oppositional values and because they are currently undergoing rapid commercialization. This chapter provides an analysis of the significant findings in the study, explores the implications the results may have for oppositional subcultures and for the study of the processes of cultural production and contestation, as well as the limitations of the study, and suggests directions for further research on these topics.

Analysis of Significant Findings

The most basic question asked in this study was how skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX have changed as they have become commercialized, according to participants, and whether subjects characterized these changes as positive or negative. Table Three below summarizes the results:

Table Three

Perceived Changes That Have Come With Commercialization of Alternative Sports:

PROS	CONS
Personal level: - Greater chances for professional participation - More concrete goals for achievement General level: - Increased participation rates (allows opportunity for more people to experience the enjoyment of the sports) - Better organization, safer equipment - Increased opportunities for creation of rider/skater-owned companies	Personal level: - More pressure to perform at the professional level - Expectations of personal behavior (reflecting positively on one's sponsors) General level: - Individuals entering the sport with professional/financial goals (takes away from the intrinsic enjoyment) - Specialization (leads to injury, burnout, less intrinsic enjoyment) - Emphasis on risky, spectacular stunts (leads to injury, burnout, less intrinsic enjoyment) - Outsider control of events (more rules, more structure) - Unequal distribution of revenue between sponsors/hosts and athletes - Takeover of rider/skater-owned companies and events by corporate interests - Competition from corporate interests with skater/rider-owned companies - Lack of opportunity for amateur or "grassroots" level participation - Overemphasis on competition

The changes in the sports identified by participants are consistent with the process of commercialization. Gruneau (1984) characterizes dominant, commercial sport culture in western society in the following way:

> (A) completely open, achievement based activity, conducted for the purposes of sporting careers and economic reward. Within this definition is the notion that enjoyment in sport is tied to skill acquisition, that specialization is the basis for excellence, and that some form of economic reward is justified and necessary in order to achieve at the highest levels (Gruneau 1984: 14).

Respondents identified all of these characteristics as emerging as their sports have become more popular. They pointed out an increasing focus on extrinsic, economic rewards, professionalization, specialization and the performance of particular risky skills.

Moreover, the commercial version of the activities has moved away from the original values of alternative sport culture identified by Rinehart (2000), which include, in addition to a focus on intrinsic rewards, participant control of activities, a loose organizational structure, and less emphasis on head-to-head competition. As the table above demonstrates, subjects reported that skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX are increasingly controlled by outside, corporate interests, that events are more rigidly organized and that they emphasize competition.

What this means for professional-level athletes is that participation in the commercial version of their sport requires abandoning the original values of the activities and tacitly supporting a form of the sport that more closely approximates the organization and presentation of more mainstream sport forms. Though subjects recognized that there are some benefits to the commercialization of their sports, including more opportunities to earn a living through participation, they acknowledged that there are trade-offs. Despite lip service paid by corporate sponsors to the "alternative" nature of contests like the X Games, the events reinforce the values of dominant sport forms, leaving little room for oppositional attitudes and practices. In order to continue receiving financial benefits through participation in the corporate- controlled version of the sports, athletes are

required to compete at major contests and perform particular stunts and are expected to behave in ways that will please their corporate sponsors.

While subjects identified a long list of problems associated with the commercialization of their sports, they did not believe that the sports have achieved mainstream status, nor did they believe that skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX will ever be organized like traditional sport forms. At first read, this finding appeared to contradict the available evidence. Indeed, although it was noted in Chapter Two that alternative sports have not yet become entirely mainstream, there are ample clues that they are well on their way. A simple canvas of daily consumer products yields myriad examples of the "mainstreaming" of these sports including; a newspaper photo of Senator (and presidential candidate) John Kerry on a snowboarding trip, an advertisement for a skateboard that features an integrated computer with "coaching" setting to teach children how to ride correctly, and a McDonald's Happy Meal box advertising Tony Hawk's "Boom Boom Huck Jam", a skateboard, BMX and motocross contest (see Appendix E to view these items.)

How is it that interview subjects felt so strongly that corporate interests, given the aforementioned examples, will never appropriate their sports? It is tempting to attribute this to naiveté—a belief that their own activities and cultures are so unique and transgressive that they can never be fully co-opted. It is a common belief among adolescents and young adults that their own styles and activities are original and somehow beyond the comprehension of mainstream culture. In this interpretation one might conclude that alternative sport participants view their sports in essentialist terms and thus firmly believe that there is "something about" these activities and lifestyle that

can never be corrupted, nor represented through the mainstream mass media. This essential "soul" of the sports is what gives participants their identity and differentiates them and their activities from inauthentic copies and imposters (i.e. "posers").

Certainly there is some validity to this interpretation, as the data indicate that subjects did, indeed, believe that there is an essential soul to their sports. But the analysis should not end there. Concluding that alternative sport participants are naïve suggests that they are dupes, making them easy targets for corporate culture producers. Since they believe their sports cannot be co-opted, they need not resist, making appropriation of their cultural products that much easier. This analysis hints at the "scientist knows best" fallacy, asserting that subjects have been fooled into believing they are safe from outsider takeover, while the researcher is wise to what is "really going on". While this would explain why subjects reported little in the way of resistance to the commercialization of alternative sports, it ignores another possible explanation.

Respondents made the case that overt resistance to the commercialized versions of these sports is unnecessary because there are professional-level alternatives available. Riders and skaters can opt to participate in rider- and skater-controlled versions of the activities, in the forms of demonstration teams, video appearances and participant-directed shows and contests. In other words, there is a "parallel world" of authentic participation that exists alongside the corporate controlled version. It did not disappear when media giants like ESPN appropriated the sports, as cultural studies theorists suggest is the fate of subcultures whose styles become commodified. In fact, the popularity of events like the X Games has, in some cases, even created greater opportunities in the parallel world, according to subjects. And, respondents said, while this parallel world is

at risk of invasion by commercial interests, it is one in which the sports can be organized and presented according to the original values of the subculture associated with the activities. If this is the case, it explains why subjects were more amused than concerned by the representations of the sports in the mainstream media through events like the X Games. The caricatures of snowboarding, skateboarding and BMX crafted by ESPN and other event sponsors do not threaten the authenticity of the cultural form, according to participants, and can even provide some benefits like greater demand for videos and demos.

The notion that different forms of an activity can co-exist is not new within the study of culture. It is evident that grassroots versions of these alternative sports can continue to survive and to emphasize the values originally associated with alternative sports, even alongside their professionalized versions, in much the same way that pick-up games of basketball continue to exist even as basketball has risen to the forefront of commercial sport at the collegiate and professional level. But what has been ignored in the study of cultural appropriation and resistance is the development of parallel worlds that provide similar benefits to the commercialized version of the cultural form without relinquishing control of its organization and presentation. These parallel worlds might hold the potential to challenge the hegemony of the culture industry without being overtly oppositional. In other words, we must consider the possibility that there is something between appropriation and resistance that has yet to be adequately theorized.

If this were the case, it would explain why respondents rarely mentioned collective forms of resistance to commercialization and, instead, reported that "opting out" was a more common strategy for escaping the perceived problems associated with

corporate-controlled versions of their sports. If professional-level participants wanted to continue being involved in their sports beyond the recreational level, they were able to earn money in this parallel world of professional skating and riding, where participants themselves control the organization and presentation and have sole access to any profits earned. While this parallel world of professional involvement is not as lucrative as the corporate-controlled version, according to participants, it is one that emphasizes the original values associated with alternative sports: participant control, de-emphasis of competition, individuality and lifestyle.

The parallel world of professional-level involvement is clearly not the only alternative to the corporate-controlled version of the sports. There are groups of participants, according to interviewees, who refuse to participate in any commercial form of the sport and fervently guard the original, amateur, individualist, non-organized roots of the sport. Numerous skateboarding websites, for example, criticize profit-seekers and those who seek to expose the sport to outsiders. SkateboardingSucks.com explains its goal in the following way:

> It has been said that "Genius flows from the Skateboard industry". Well, stupidity sure as hell leaks out of skateboarding's ass-crack every once in a while also. SkateboardingSucks.com is here to report, discuss and make fun of all of the bullshit and media surrounding skateboarders and our self-built industry. There are countless individuals, organizations and corporations that are trying their best to sneak into skateboarding's back-door and grab a pile of cash. We built our own businesses and lifestyles from the ground up and we don't need or want you. No censorship and no industry relations to protect. We're here to let you know what sucks.

Directly below this introduction the site posts a survey. Readers are asked to vote on "Who has benefited most from our sweat and broken bones?" Choices include ESPN, Mountain Dew, MTV and Boost Mobile (see Appendix F for an excerpt from the

website's homepage.) This oppositional approach most clearly resembles the type of groups of interest to the Birmingham School. The resistance to dominant culture is explicit and the subcultural form is held up as antithetical to mainstream popular culture. This "rebel" image is what corporate culture producers have appropriated (and then sanitized), thereby neutralizing its oppositional message.

Respondents also identified individuals that engage in symbolic forms of resistance, who, in the words of postmodern scholars, might be assigning their own meanings to what they experience and participating in commercial, mediated sporting events without buying into the associated dominant values. For example, the skateboarder who wore the "Extreme $ Profits Network" t-shirt to the X Games awards ceremony, in which he won first prize, criticized ESPN's emphasis on money-making. Other strategies include examples from Crissey (1999) who identifies a variety of symbolic tactics for resistance, including purposeful disqualification (a snowboarder stripped off his clothing during competition) and a refusal to wait for network interviews after performances. These individuals continue to participate in the commodified versions of their sports, but they attach their own meanings to their involvement to avoid the impression that they support the values of event organizers. While this approach might help alleviate any cognitive dissonance on the part of participants, who might be criticized for "selling out", it does little to challenge corporate-controlled versions of these activities.

One other form of resistance emerged from the data, though it was rare. Subjects reported that there are some attempts at collective organizing within skateboarding and snowboarding, although the groups mentioned are still in their infancy and previous

attempts appear to have been abandoned. Interestingly, and perhaps evidence of the multiple and contradictory identities in postmodern culture, SkateboardingSucks.com bills itself as "a political watchdog website, just like Greenpeace or PETA, but for skateboarding" and posted a story on the formation of USA Skateboarding (USAS) as a new attempt at creating a governing body for the sport (see Appendix F). Of course, the website is a .com, rather than a .org, so it is not an official non-profit organization and the tone of the article on USAS was unenthusiastic (the author, a board member, stated that skateboarding groups need to organize, but wrote "I wish we didn't have to.") The potential for alternative sports to collectively organize remains to be seen, but it is likely to be difficult, as the values of the cultures themselves stress individualism and informal modes of organization.

While the formation of a parallel world of professional-level sport participation is not the only response to the commercialization of skateboarding, snowboarding and BMX, it is perhaps the one that requires further examination, given the frequency with which subjects reported it as a strategy. Overt resistance by oppositional groups appears to be rapidly co-opted, or silenced, limiting the agentic potential of its critique. Symbolic resistance, while perhaps personally empowering for individuals, does little to challenge the hegemony of corporate culture producers. And thus far, collective forms of resistance have not developed enough to demand accommodations from sponsors and organizers like ESPN. Parallel worlds may provide the opportunity for subcultures to appropriate cultural space in which members maintain their autonomy and preserve their cultural forms. In fact, parallel worlds might hold the potential to serve as sites of negotiation in

the production of culture, where the culture industry and counter-hegemonic forces meet and where actual cultural change could occur.

Implications

Cultural theorists often give lip service to the diverse, multidimensional and contradictory characteristics of contemporary cultural forms, but there are few theoretical tools for the examination of the complex sphere of modern culture. Inevitably, as noted in Chapter Two, analyses of the control of cultural production seem to be reduced to debates over whether particular groups or cultural forms have *either* been co-opted *or* remain oppositional, as if these are the only alternatives. Parallel worlds may be places where participants are able to carve out cultural space that is neither controlled by the pop culture machine nor constructed in direct opposition to commercialized culture.

Parallel worlds can perhaps be best understood through analogy. In his insightful work on the relationship between fashion, culture and identity, Fred Davis (1992) points out that we ought to recognize both "antifashion" and "fashion indifference" as alternatives to fashion. Certain groups, like punks, are engaged in antifashion—a deliberate resistance to the fashion of the time, or as Davis puts it, a "scathing rejection of conventional wear" (Davis 1992: 161). Others are not so oppositional:

> At the subjective level, the oppositional stance of antifashion, however timid or tentative its gesture, distinguishes it at once from fashion *indifference*. There one is either oblivious to, or for one reason or the other, thoroughly unconcerned with what the reigning or ascendant fashion is (Davis 1992: 161).

The comparison is not perfect, as alternative sport subcultures are not "indifferent" towards the mainstream world of sport, but Davis' example identifies the need to consider the existence of a third position, one that is not constructed in deliberate or overt opposition to mainstream cultural forms, but provides an alternative method through which to achieve the ends sought through participation in mainstream cultural forms. In the case of alternative sports, this would be the ability to earn a living through participation and to profit financially through corollary businesses, such as equipment and attire companies.

The danger in ignoring the possibility of a position between appropriation and resistance in cultural production is that we might erroneously conclude that either resistance to dominant culture is futile, as did the theorists of the Birmingham School, or that agency is experienced primarily through the individual reframing of cultural forms and the production of heterogeneous cultural meanings, as suggested in postmodern theory. In doing so, we might miss a source of actual agency, however limited.

Parallel worlds may exist as sites of cultural transformation not entirely dictated by dominant interests. Because they exist "in the middle" between fully co-opted cultural forms and overtly oppositional groups whose position is marginalized, there is room for negotiation. In his analysis of cultural transformation within sport Donnelly (1993) hints at the existence and role of a parallel world in the sport of climbing. He points out that, as climbing has become commercialized since the 1960s, most organizations have adopted an "if you can't beat them, join them approach" and have become participants in an international governing body, in the attempt to maintain some control of the direction

of the sport (Donnelly 1993: 131). Some climbers, he asserts, disapprove of the strategy and fear the full incorporation of the sport:

> On the other hand, there are many others who have accepted competition as an inevitable development of the sport, accepted the argument that this is just another "game" and will not have an impact on the sport as a whole, or that the two types of climbing (now widely referred to as "adventure" climbing and "sport" climbing) will coexist. While the latter outcome is the most likely possibility at this time, this significant shift toward the dominant sport culture has the potential to cause a major transformation in the sport replete with both intended and unintended consequences. For example, the use of power drills to make bolt holes, which earlier met with derision, is now widely accepted among sport climbers (Donnelly 1993: 131-132).

Donnelly makes the case that the original, non-mainstream form of climbing exists alongside the incorporated version and that transformations in the cultural form occur through the "bleeding through" of certain aspects of one version into the other. Certainly, aspects of the mainstream, or corporate controlled, version of alternative sports have bled through into the original forms, but this might also work the opposite direction. Aspects of the original version might well make their way into the more mainstream form. When this occurs, cultural change has occurred.

This method of cultural transformation is not equivalent to control of cultural production in an overt way. But it does exist as a potential challenge to the hegemonic position of corporate culture producers. Agency may exist, not in direct challenges to the culture industry—attempts to wrest control of the production and dissemination of culture from the hands of the mass media, but in individuals and groups' ability to appropriate some cultural space for the preservation of alternative cultural forms. Participants in these parallel worlds do so deliberately, with the explicit goal of escaping corporate-controlled versions and their dominant cultural values while retaining the benefits

enjoyed through mainstream participation. As such, the cultural space that they "win back" is potentially more political than the style subcultures analyzed by cultural studies theorists, whose appropriations of cultural space were often without an articulated purpose, despite the researchers' hopes to the contrary. And, as the postmodernists speculate, technology might play a role in the successful maintenance of parallel worlds. For example, skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders can produce videos and distribute them via the Internet without assistance from media or distribution companies. In this way, participants in the parallel world of alternative sport can reach the buying public with their cultural forms and earn financial rewards without "selling out" to commercial interests.

But it is not only within alternative sports and other oppositional style subcultures that parallel worlds might exist. In fact, the potential of the concept lies in the fact that these alternate cultural forms might be evident in many other spheres. For example, a recent study of the growth of contemporary Christian rock music concludes that:

> ...the movement toward religious messages in the form of popular music enables the subculture of evangelical Christians to resist against a dominant secular society by taking possession of a cultural form and redefining it as their own, empowering them to effect an influential voice in the cultural discourse of American society (Gormly 2003: 251).

While the author takes a postmodern approach to explain Christians' "redefining" a cultural form, one could employ the concept of parallel worlds to explain how evangelicals are able to take part in cultural production. The parallel world of Christian rock exists alongside the mainstream world of rock and roll. Christian musicians are able to participate in music-making, sell albums and achieve fame without participating in the mainstream rock culture that does not promote their values. Cultural change occurs as

aspects of one world bleed through into the other. Certainly, in its appropriation of rock music, we see evidence of secular culture in the evangelical world. But in addition, Christian culture has bled through into the dominant secular world of music, as evidenced by the dramatic growth of contemporary Christian music. In the words of the author, in creating a parallel rock and roll world, Christian rock musicians have "contributed an evangelical voice to that culture" (Gormly 2003: 251).

Another example comes from an analysis of "queer subcultures" which posits that homosexual "uses of time and space develop in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction" and concludes that this represents a "disrupt(ion) of conventional accounts" (Halberstam 2003: 313). While the author takes a cultural studies approach, suggesting that we should examine the "stylistic resistance" within queer culture, one could also apply the theory of parallel worlds. Queer culture exists alongside dominant, straight culture and provides, according to the researcher, an alternative to kinship-based notions of community. One might examine whether queer communities have appropriated some aspects of straight culture and/or if aspects of queer culture have changed dominant community arrangement. If there is evidence of this process, we could conclude that the oppositional group has participated in cultural production.

It remains to be seen whether the notion of parallel worlds holds true across these other cultures. But if the preliminary findings of this study are true then the concept might serve as a useful tool in the analysis of the process of cultural production and reproduction. It provides a way to explain the dominant position of, and lack of challenges to, the culture industry as well as potential sites of counter-hegemonic forces.

In other words, it theorizes the structural power of corporate culture producers as well as the potential spaces for agency in the contested terrain of cultural production.

Limitations of the Study

Though the data collected in this study are useful in helping to understand the process of cultural production, like all research, there are limitations to be noted. This study has limitations at three levels: implementation of the methods, methodology and theoretical framework. As noted in Chapter Three, there were limits to the sampling frame and sampling method that resulted in a sample that did not accurately represent the population as a whole. First, juveniles were excluded from the study because the researcher was not granted permission to include them. Second, subjects were not chosen randomly. They were selected using a purposive and/or chain approach, skewing the sample to over-represent subjects who were accessible via personal references and contact information on sport-related websites. Third, certain segments of the population were under-represented because they were more difficult to contact. Famous and highly-paid professionals (like Tony Hawk) were not accessible because contact must occur through intermediaries such as managers and because their level of involvement in their sports meant that they were more likely to be away from home, even out of the country, competing. Moreover, due to the nontraditional nature of professional-level alternative sports more generally, participants were difficult to reach and were unreliable. They did not have office phone numbers, or places of employment where they could be contacted. A number of sampled individuals were excluded from the study simply because they did

not return phone calls or did not show up at arranged interview sessions and could not be re-contacted.

The method selected for this case study presents limitations in itself. Though qualitative methods provide rich data and allow for an in-depth analysis of a particular group or phenomenon, findings are particular to the case under study and cannot be generalized to the population as a whole or to other, presumably similar, populations. While quantitative analysis such as survey methods would have compromised the depth of analysis in this study, they would have been likely to obtain a more representative sample. In addition, the method of analysis in this study was highly interpretive, and although care was taken to carefully operationalize concepts and to reduce researcher bias in interpretation, the techniques are imperfect and this may have compromised the validity of the study.

Even within qualitative methodology there are limits to the findings of this study. Though the researcher determined in-depth interviews to be the most effective form of data collection, the use of additional methods would have been helpful. Interviews depend upon the subjects' reporting of issues and topics under study. Interviewees' recall may be imperfect, they may not always answer truthfully, and they engage in their own interpretation of events and trends. Integrating an additional fieldwork component would have addressed these shortcomings. For example, participant or non-participant observation at contests and demonstrations could have been used to check the reliability of subjects' reports of the changes in the sports and their current organizational form.

The theoretical framework employed in this analysis also presents limitations to the study. Though the author determined the concepts of structure and agency and co-

optation and resistance, articulated by cultural studies and postmodern scholars, to be the most useful starting point in an analysis of cultural production and contestation, it is not the only approach with explanatory potential. Other researchers might find a more interactionist approach useful in explaining the formation and maintenance of identities tied to anti-mainstream subcultures and the relationship between dominant cultural production and the resilience of oppositional identities. Or, in a more concrete exploration of the control of culture, researchers might begin with traditional or new social movements literature and develop a study of organized resistance to the corporate media and their control of cultural production, as with groups such as Adbusters.

Despite the limitations of the research, this study provides valuable insight into the contested terrain of cultural production and suggests further directions for research on the role of oppositional subcultures in shaping the organization and presentation of forms of popular culture. In addition, the study uncovered some gaps in the theoretical literature that warrant further investigation.

Suggestions for Further Research

The case study approach to research is explicitly designed to raise questions for further study and the findings of this research are no exception. Social scientists could gain further understanding of the control of cultural production by expanding this study in a number of directions. First, it would be useful to interview the subjects who were excluded from this case study, but whose experiences would likely shed light on the attitudes of subculture members toward commercialization and attempts by these

individuals to resist or avoid corporate control of their activities. Young skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX riders (adolescents and children) would be an important target population, as they are new arrivals to these historically oppositional sports and cannot make the same historical comparisons as their twenty- and thirty-something counterparts. Their attitudes toward commercialization and types of involvement might well differ from those of the older participants studied for this project. Furthermore, professionals who earn a living through participation in these sports, particularly those who have achieved fame, would be an important group to sample in a later study. Those who have become "household names" might also articulate different opinions and participate in different ways than their less-than-famous peers who participated in this study, since their livelihood depends upon participation in the highly commercialized versions of these sports.

Further research should also explore the theoretical concept of parallel worlds that emerged from this study. Researchers might apply this concept to studies of other subcultural groups, both oppositional and non-oppositional, whose cultural forms serve as alternatives to dominant popular culture disseminated through the mass media. For example, Donnelly (1993) identifies two different types of leisure subcultures: residual cultures, that are "resilient and conservative maintainers of tradition" and emergent cultures that are "the most active sites of cultural production" (Donnelly: 121). These cultures, centered around such products as art, music, fashion and dance, could also develop parallel worlds that do not appear to be forms of direct resistance to commercial interests, nor to have been appropriated by the culture industry. Studies of other subcultural groups would help to ascertain whether the existence of non-mainstream

(rather than anti-mainstream) versions of cultural activities are unique to the world of sport, or whether the notion of parallel worlds holds merit as an explanatory tool in the sociology of culture.

Finally, studies of the process of cultural production and the struggles over its control should not be limited to work on subcultures that produce alternatives to dominant popular culture. There is much work to be done if we are to develop a better understanding of the nebulous concept of culture. More research should be conducted on individuals' reception, interpretation and transformation of popular cultural forms and on the formation of identities mediated by mass culture, though the work of some postmodernists is a good start. Further studies should analyze the formation, strategies, membership patterns and effectiveness of anti-consumerist organizations and movements, whose explicit goal is to challenge the hegemony of the culture industry and its ideologies. And sociologists need to empirically evaluate dominant culture producers themselves. While the discipline has in recent decades turned toward "studying down", we need to return to "studying up" and evaluate the strategies of the popular culture creators themselves. Only then will it be possible to fully understand how culture is produced and by whom and how alternative forms of culture might find a vehicle for dissemination to a wider audience, without having been repackaged to reflect dominant values.

Concluding Remarks

The findings of this study are but a preliminary attempt to examine both the structural constraints and the potential spaces for agency in the realm of cultural production. In a world in which power has become so concentrated and overwhelming that it cannot be challenged on its own terms, how do we define agency? When alternatives to dominant culture are so rapidly co-opted and transformed into commodities and when resistance seems most evident in the creative uses of consumer goods, how does anyone outside of the culture industry participate in the production of culture? Given the plethora of social problems created and exacerbated by consumerism as a way of life this seems a crucial question to answer.

The concept of parallel worlds might provide a new way to examine sources and methods of cultural change. Though the culture industry appears to have achieved a hegemonic position in promoting cultural values, particularly those associated with consumerism, hegemony is never total. While challenging dominant culture producers directly might currently seem to be an exercise in futility, it does not mean that agency has been rendered nonexistent. Nor does it mean that we must conclude that agency exists only in individuals' reframing of consumer goods and consumerist messages. Parallel worlds are examples of the ability of groups and individuals to carve out autonomous space for the development and maintenance of alternative forms of culture. And though these parallel worlds are not immune from contamination by mainstream culture, nor is mainstream culture exempt from the infiltration of oppositional messages.

Culture does change. Though the cultural change might be almost imperceptibly slow, rather than a spectacular coup, it is change, nonetheless.

REFERENCES

--------. 2001. "Snowboarding and Skateboarding Lead 2000 Sports Growth." www.firsttracksonline.com/news/stories/99070264234975.shtm Retrieved November 5, 2002.

-------. 2001. "The 2001 Dave Mirra BMX Super Tour." http://www.expn.com Retrieved December 20, 2003.

-------. 2001. "Media Giants." http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/giants/ Retrieved September 20, 2002.

-------. 2002. "News of the World: Using Snowboarding Culture to Target Young Consumers." *Marketing* December 19: 36.

-------. 2003. "X Games' popularity a hit with advertisers." http://www.thedesertsun.com/news/stories2003/sports/20030814011137.shtml Retrieved Dec. 20, 2003.

-------. 2003. "Should Skateboarding Be an Olympic Sport?" Message board from *Transworld Skateboarding* Magazine. http://boards.pathfinder.com/cgi-bin/webx?50@215.JdrMbeyi7DW.0@eef9f8a Retrieved September 26, 2003.

Artz, Lee and Murphy, Bren Ortega. 2000. *Cultural Hegemony in the United States*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Baird, William. 1993. *Recreation Conflict Between Skiers and Snowboarders*. Ft. Collins, CO: Colorado State University Masters Thesis.

Beal, Becky. 1995. "Disqualifying the Official: An Exploration of Social Resistance Through the Subculture of Skateboarding." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12: 252-267.

Beal, Becky and Weidman, Lisa. 1998. "The Skateboarding Image: An Analysis of the Industry's Impact on Participants' View of Authenticity." Paper presented at the annual Meeting of the International Sociology of Sport Association, in conjunction with the World Congress of Sociology. Montreal, Quebec, July 29-August 1.

Bennett, Andy. 1999. "Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste." *Sociology* 33(3): 599-617.

Berger, Peter L. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Blair, Elizabeth M. 1993. "Commercialization of the Rap Music Youth Subculture." *Journal of Popular Culture* 27(3):21-34.

Booth, Michael. 2003. "A Star's Bursting Bubble: Skateboarding Documentary Questions Pursuit of Fame." *The Denver Post*, September 26.

Brooke, Michael. 1999. *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding*. Toronto, CAN:Warwick Publishing.

Canclini, Nestor Garcia. 2001. *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Carroll, John. 1998. *Ego and Soul: The Modern West in Search of Meaning*. Sydney, AUS:HarperCollinsPublishers.

Clarke, John; Hall, Stuart; Jefferson, Tony and Roberts, Brian. 1975. "Subcultures, Cultures and Class." Pp. 100-111 in *The Subcultures Reader.* 1997. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thortnon editors. NY: Routlegde.

Cohen, Phil. 1972. "Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community." Pp. 90-99 in *The Subcultures Reader.* 1997. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thortnon editors. NY: Routlegde.

Cohen, Stanley. 1980. "Symbols of Trouble." Pp. 149-162 in *The Subcultures Reader.* 1997. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thortnon editors. NY: Routlegde.

Connor, Steven. 1997. *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (second edition.) Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Corner, John. 2001. "'Ideology': A Note on Conceptual Salvage." *Media, Culture and Society* 23: 525-533.

Corrigan, Peter. 1997. *The Sociology of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGEPublications Ltd.

Crissey, Joy C. 1999. *Corporate Co-Optation of Sport: The Case of Snowboarding.* Unpublished Masters Thesis: Colorado State University.

Crossett, Todd and Beal, Becky. 1997. "The Use of 'Subculture' and 'Subworld' in

Ethnographic Works on Sport: A Discussion of Definitional Distinctions. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 14: 73-85.

Davis, Fred. 1992. *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Davis, Joseph E. (Editor.) 2000. *Identity and Social Change*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Denzin, Norman K. 1997. *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Denzin, Norman K. 2002. *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Derber, Charles. 1998. *Corporation Nation: How Corporations are Taking Over Our Lives and What We Can Do About It*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

Donnelly, Peter. 1993. "Subcultures in Sport: Resilience and Transformation" pp. 119-145 in *Sport in Social Development: Traditions, Transitions and Transformations*. Alan G. Ingham and John W. Loy (editors). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Downing, John D.H. 2001. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Dretzin, Rachel and Goodman, Barak. 1999 "The Merchants of Cool." *Frontline*. PBS Video Series.

Durham, Meenakshi Gigi and Kellner, Douglas M. (Editors.) 2001. *Media and Cultural Studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Ednalino, Percy. 2002. "'Dogtown and Z-Boys' Runs the Course." *The Denver Post*. May 6.

Elgin, Duane. 1993. "Voluntary Simplicity and the New Global Challenge." Pp. 397-413 in *The Consumer Society Reader*. 2000. Juliet B Schor and Douglas B Holt editors. NY: The New Press.

Ewen, Stuart and Ewen, Elizabeth. 1992. *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Ferguson, Marjorie and Golding, Peter (Editors.) 1997. *Cultural Studies in Question*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Finkel, Michael. 1997. "Chairman of the Board." *Sports Illustrated* 86(1): 9-10.

Fitzgerald, Kate. 2001. "Skateboarding Nails its Flips: Youth Culture Drives Big-Spending Market for Shoes and Apparel." *Advertising Age*. Pp. 11-12.

Forgacs, David (Editor.) 1988. *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*. NY: Shocken Books.

Gelder, Ken and Thornton, Sarah (Editors.) 1997. *The Subcultures Reader*. NY: Routlegde.

Gerbner, George, Mowlana, Hamid and Schiller, Herbert I. (Editors.) 1996. *Invisible Crises: What Conglomerate Control of the Media Means for America and the World*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gormly,Eric. 2003. "Evangelizing Through Appropriation: Toward a Cultural Theory on The Growth of Contemporary Christian Music." *Journal of Media & Religion* 2(4):251-276.

Gruneau, R. 1984. "Commercialism and the Modern Olympics" in *Five Ring Circus: Money, Power and Politics at the Olympic Games*. A. Tomlinson and G. Whannel (Editors). London: Pluto Press.

Gunster, Shane. 2000. "Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis: Mass Culture and the Commodity Form." *Cultural Critique* 45 (Spring 2000): 40-70.

Hagerman, Eric. 2002. "The Cool Shit: After Its Triumphant Coming Out Party in Salt Lake City American Snowboarding Faces a Bright Future. Is that a Good Thing?" *Outside*, November.

Halberstam, Judith. 2003. "What's that Smell?" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6(3):313-334.

Harksen, Marny. 2003. "Hey, Dude, Olympics are Cool." *The North County Times,* December 21.

Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell . Publishers, Inc

Heath, Joseph. Forthcoming. *There is No Alternative: Style, Rebellion and the Myth of Counterculture*. Unknown publisher.

Hebdige, Dick. 1991 (1979a.) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. NY: Routledge.

Hebdige, Dick. 1979b. "Subculture: The Meaning of Style." Pp. 130-144 in *The*

Subcultures Reader. 1997. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thortnon editors. NY: Routlegde.

Heino, Rebecca. 2000. "What is So Punk About Snowboarding?" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24(2): 176-191.

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. 1944. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." Pp. 3-19 in *The Consumer Society Reader.* 2000. Juliet B Schor and Douglas B Holt editors. NY: The New Press.

Kammen, Michael. 1999. *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change in the 20th Century.* NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Kilbourne, Jean. 1999. *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising.* NY: Free Press.

Kinloch, Graham C. and Mohan, Raj P. (Editors.) 2000. *Ideology and the Social Sciences.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Kleinman, Alon. 2003. *Post X-Games Skateboarding: An Exploration of Changes in the Skateboarding Subculture.* Unpublished Masters Thesis: Temple University.

Kvale, Steinar. 1996. *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Writing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Lasn, Kalle. 1999. *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge—And Why We Must.* NY: Quill.

Lefton, Terry and Warner, Bernhard. 1997. "Surf's Up." *Brandweek,* January 27: 25-32.

Males, Mike A. 1999. *Framing Youth: Ten Myths About the Next Generation.* Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.

Marshall, John. 2003. "Winter X Games off to Roaring Start." *Fort Collins Coloradoan.* January 31.

May, Tim (editor). *Qualitative Research in Action.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

McRobbie, Angela. 1985. "Feminism, Postmodernism and the 'Real Me'." Pp. 598-610 in *Media and Cultural Studies.* 2001. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner editors. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Miles, Matthew B. and Huberman, A. Michael. 1984. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods.* Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

Miles, Steven. 1998. *Consumerism— As a Way of Life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.

Muggleton, David. 2000. *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*. NY: Berg.

National Sporting Goods Association. 2002. "Sports Participation Rates Survey." www.nsga.org Retrieved November 5, 2002.

Orr, David W. 1999. "The Ecology of Giving and Receiving". Pp. 137-154 in *Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Roger Rosenblatt, editor. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Peck, Janice. 2001. "Itinerary of a Thought: Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies, and the Unresolved Problem of the Relation of Culture to 'Not Culture.'" *Cultural Critique* 48 (Spring 2001): 200-235.

Rinehart, Robert. 2000. "Emerging Arriving Sport." In *Handbook of Sports Studies* edited by Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rinehart, Robert and Grenfell, C. 2002. "BMX Spaces: Children's Grassroots Courses and Corporate Sponsored Tracks." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 19: 302-314.

Ritchie, Jane and Lewis, Jane (editors). 2003. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social*
Science Students and Researchers. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Ritzer, George. 1999. *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Robbins, Richard H. 1999. *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Rosenblatt, Roger (editor). 1999. *Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Ruibal, Sal. 2000. "Chairman of the Skateboard: X Games Star's Net Worth Soars, But Some Question the Soul of the Deal." *USA Today,* March 9.

Ruibal, Sal. 2004. "X Games X." *USA Today*, August 8.

Schlosser, Eric. 2002. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. NY: Perennial.

Schor, Juliet B. 1999. "What's Wrong With Consumer Society? Competitive Spending

and the 'New Consumerism'." Pp. 51-64 in *Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Roger Rosenblatt, editor. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Schor, Juliet B. and Holt, Douglas B. (Editors.) 2000. *The Consumer Society Reader.* NY: The New Press.

Shuker, Roy. 2001. *Understanding Popular Music* (second edition.) NY: Routledge.

Taylor, Betsy and Tilford, Dave. 2000. "Why Consumption Matters." Pp. 463-487 in *The Consumer Society Reader.* 2000. Juliet B Schor and Douglas B Holt editors. NY: The New Press.

Weyland, Jocko. 2003. "Men's Fashion of the Times: Freewheeler—The Skateboarder Mark Gonzales Brings His Devil-May-Care Attitude to the Art World." *The New York Times Magazine*, Spring 2003: p. 58.

Wheaton, Belinda and Beal, Becky. 2003. "'Keeping it Real': Subcultural Media and the Discourses of Authenticity in Alternative Sport." *International Review for the Sociology Of Sport* 38(2): 155-176.

Willis, Paul E. 1977. "Theoretical Confessions and Reflexive Method." Pp. 246-253 in *The Subcultures Reader.* 1997. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thortnon editors. NY: Routlegde.

Woollard, Robert F. and Ostry, Aleck S. 2000. *Fatal Consumption: Rethinking Sustainable Development.* Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.

World Snowboarding Federation. 2002. "The Future of Snowboarding—Expect the Unexpected." Press release. Munich, Germany: August 10. Retrieved from http://www.spocus.com/home/news/PressRelease_World%Snowboarding.pdf September 9, 2003.

Yinger, J. Milton. 1962. *Countercultures: The Promise and Peril of a World Turned Upside Down.* NY: Free Press.

APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Prior to the interview, participants will be told the following;

"My name is Joy Honea. I am a graduate student at Colorado State University working on a Ph.D. dissertation project. I am doing a study looking at the rise in popularity of sports like (x) over the past decade and what participants in this sport think of the new popularity and media attention they are getting. I would like to ask you some questions about your experience in (x) sport. Your participation is completely voluntary and your identity will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 15 to 30 minutes and will be audio-taped. Are you willing to participate?"

Preliminary interview schedule;

Interviews will begin with basic demographic information, including age, race/ethnicity, sex (although I assume that the bulk of respondents will be male) and educational level.

1. How long have you been doing (x) sport?

2. When did you go pro and how did that happen?

3. Did you always want to go pro? Why or why not?

4. How is it different being a pro in (x) sport than before you went pro?
   - Differences in time spent training or competing?
   - Financial differences?
   - Different attitude toward your participation?

5. In what ways are these changes a good thing or a bad thing?
   - Have you made any attempts to make things better or to fix the problems (if any) that have come with these changes? Examples?
   - Are there other pros that you know of who are trying to change things in (x) sport?

6. How has (x) sport changed since you first got involved?
   - Differences in popularity of the sport?
   - Differences in the organization of the sport?
   - Changes in the level of competition/competitiveness?
   - Changes in who is in charge of events and organizations?
   - Differences in type of participant?

7. What do you think of all the media coverage and sponsorships of (x) sport?
   - How have media and corporate involvement changed (x) sport?

8. What do you think of the media characterizing people in (x) sport as "extreme" or "alternative?"

9. Do you consider yourself an athlete? Why or why not?

10. What, if anything, makes people in (x) sport different from people in more traditional sports like say, football or basketball?

11. If you were in charge of (x) sport, what kinds of changes might you make? Would you want anything to be different than it is now?
   - Changes in who is in charge of events and marketing?
   - Changes in the focus of competition or judging criteria?
   - Changes in the amount of time spent training and competing?
   - Changes in the level of corporate sponsorship or type of sponsors?
   - Changes in rules and regulations?
   - Are there people who don't like the new popularity and commercialism in (x) sport?
   - What kinds of people are likely to disapprove of the new popularity and commercialism in (x) sport?
   - In what ways do they show their disapproval?

12. What do you think (x) sport will look like in the future?
   - In what ways do you think that is good or bad?

APPENDIX B

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: Youth Cultures and Consumerism

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Patricia Atchison, Ph.D.

NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR: Joy Crissey Honea

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS: Joy Crissey Honea

PHONE NUMBER: 406-657-2996

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: This project involves gathering research about the increasingly popularity of skateboarding, snowboarding and bicycle motocross. The data gathered will be used to examine the effects of increasing commercialization and media interest in these sports and to learn about how participants at the professional level have reacted to recent changes in their sports.

METHODS TO BE USED: You will be asked a short series of oral questions in an interview format, lasting approximately 15 to 30 minutes. Your responses will be recorded by hand and on audiotape. The notes and tapes from the interview will be kept in a locked office until three years after the completion of the study and then the notes will be destroyed and the tapes erased.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURE: There are no known risks. However, it is not possible to identify all possible risks in research procedures. The researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

BENEFITS: Although this research will be of no direct benefit to you, the interview will provide you with the opportunity to share your experience as a professional athlete with an interested and engaged audience. The results may be used to make improvements in the organization and presentation of alternative sports.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All written notes and audiotapes of interview sessions will be protected by the researcher and transcripts heard or read by others will be identified only by single-digit numbers. In the results section of the study individual responses will be identified by a generic pseudonym to protect the identity of respondents.

 Participant's initials_____ Date_____

LIABILITY: The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Questions about participants' rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at 970-491-1563

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

_____
Participant name (printed)

_____ _____
Participant signature Date

_____ _____
Witness to signature (project staff) Date

 Participant's initials_____ Date_____

APPENDIX C

Demographic Profile Question Sheet

Demographic Profile:

1. Age_____

2. Sex_____

3. Racial/ethnic group with which you most identify_____

4. General geographic location (state)_____

5. Highest level of education attained_____

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Can you start off by telling me your own history in skateboarding. How long you've been doing it and how did you get started?

Subject: Well, I started when I was eight years old and I am going on 34—I'm 33—so I guess that's, I don't know, I guess that's 26 years. So, most of my life, certainly all of my adult life, I've been a skateboarder and have pretty much made a living doing it. Mainly it's through shows that I do. And I am also an actor out here in Los Angeles and I've done a bunch of professional commercials and things like that. You know, because of the popularity of it, it's a great way to market things, so a lot of companies are hopping on the bandwagon.

Yeah, I basically started out playing in punk bands—punk rock bands—when I was a little kid—when I was seven or eight years old and everyone, you know, we'd go and do these shows. This was back in _____. I grew up in _____. And everyone had skateboards, so that's kind of what got me into it. There's always been sort of a correlation between music and especially that lifestyle—that punk type lifestyle—and skateboarding and so it kind of just blew up from there. I got a mail order board because, of course, there were no skate shops back then, in _____ where I lived.

And I ended up moving to _____ in '84 to start high school. That's kind of where I got my first sponsor. I started competing in a lot of the local amateur contests. I picked up my first sponsor when I was about15 or 16 and did that for years and years and I just sort-of grew out of the competition stuff, because, you know, I would put a lot of pressure on myself and it was so much...you know, you're basically trying to beat some of the top guys in the world and I got to the point where I just wanted to skate and just have fun doing it and not have to worry about beating anyone, but I ended up getting involved in these shows and eventually took the business over and have been running this team since '96. It's called the _____ team. It's easier to do these shows because, as far as money goes, at least, it's a guaranteed paycheck, you don't have to beat anyone and it's just for laughs. You don't have to go

real crazy because people appreciate what they are seeing, regardless of how easy it is for you. The demos and stuff are always really great because you get to showcase what you've been doing and there's just no pressure of any competition or anything.

So, that's kind of where I'm at today. I've had a lot of injuries that sort of prevent me from, I guess, progressing a lot, but I'm always constantly trying to work on new tricks and stuff like that, but I've just broken about every bone in my body. Knee strength, you need it, and I just don't have that anymore.

I: **That sounds like it's a tough sport on your knees.**

S: Yeah, just on your joints in general. I mean, not even if you get injured. It's just twenty-something years of repetitive use of certain things. They just wear down after a while. So, at this age, I definitely am extremely old for a skateboarder, although _____ is 40 and still going at it. But yeah, I am going to continue to do it as long as I physically can and at least always be involved to some extent. I do all the announcing and hosting for the live shows and I have a lot of fun doing that. And with my acting background and my theater background and stuff, I kind of look at it as a mix of everything, you know. I get to be behind the microphone and be in front of an audience and I get to skate. The best of the both worlds for me. Yeah, so I guess from when I was a kid to where I am now, that's kind of the abbreviated version.

I: **At what point did you come to realize that you could, or wanted to, go pro and do it for a living? Did you start out saying "I'm going to make this a career" or did that just kind of come about?**

S: Not really. Actually, it was the shows that kind of turned it into it. I mean, I competed but I always went through a local store. Back in _____ there was a team that would do a mix of everything. Like nowadays we just basically do inline skating, BMX and skateboard, but I mean, we had Frisbee-catching dogs, we had yo-yo guys, BMX people, it was all mixed in this one thing. So, I started doing those. And I guess transitioning into the pro era from the amateur era, was basically the shows that did that. I always worked full time but I would do the shows and the next thing you know we were starting to—and a lot of them were just local—and then we started getting stuff booked out of state and actually doing tours, you know, where you—kind of like a rock band, where you get the ramp hooked on a trailer and you hook it up to the van and you pile everyone in and you go.

I started doing that and then I took it over, so I guess I kind of realized, like in '96 or '94, is when I thought maybe I could just do this and not

have to worry about another job. So, I did that for, gosh, from '96 until last year when I finally had to actually get a little job at a skate shop to kind of supplement things. Yeah, I managed to make a living doing that, pretty consistently, for probably eight years or so. It's been really lately that I been kind of having to re-establish things because, it's a long story, but it was a tour that I ran for Got Milk and I did that for five years and last year it kind of got stolen from me last minute by another company. So it kind of left me standing there, scratching my head, going "Uh oh. Now what?" We even had to blow off the old shows that we did, with the trailer ramps and everything, because this was a big marketing campaign tour, where there's a separate ramp company that's hired to provide everything and we just flew in and flew out and didn't have to drive anywhere and it was great. That was a great ride for five years but that ended and we're back to kind of...back in the real.

But one thing we did do, that was kind of a groundbreaking thing for us is two weeks ago we just got back from Jamaica. We did a week's long trip out there. We did two days of shows in different locations. They had never even seen skateboarding before. They had never even seen white people before, in one of the little villages we first performed at, let alone guys doing back flips on bikes and flips and tricks like that on skateboards. It was really amazing. It was just one of those things, where, hey this is something I've been doing my whole life and here I get to kind of show it to people and they were just completely blown away and literally getting into it. Like, Mountain Dew sponsored it, and was giving away a bunch of skateboards, so I'm hoping when we go back, because they want to have us back a bunch of times this summer, that you know, we kind of started a little scene, you know, and inspired people to get going. We ended up getting a key to the city, actually, from Kingston, a really nice plaque that's engraved and a picture of me on it, even, and to the _____ stunt team and thanking us for a positive influence and inspiration to the people of the West Indies. So, you know, you can do stuff like that. It takes skateboarding, and sports that we've been doing, to a whole new level, you know. When you kind of take it for granted, I guess, or people over here at least, because they see it everywhere. You see it on TV, you see it in all the commercials, there's live events and things like that going on all over and here they've never even seen one before. It was quite an event.

I: **What you've said has already given me some indication, but my next question is, how has skateboarding changed since you first got involved in it?**

S: Well, it has changed a lot. It has changed for the good, it has changed for the bad. For the most part, nowadays, you've got—I don't know—back in the 80s, even the 90s, mainstream society looked at skateboarders as just

these punk kids and destroying property and getting ticketed. You still do—you get arrested for skating in certain spots. But at least nowadays people realize that kids could be doing a lot worse things than riding a skateboard. What in the world are we going after, hassling kids for? A lot of the same people who used to beat you up and make fun of you and yell things at you are now into it because they've seen the X Games on T.V., which, in '94 came on national T.V., or '95 and exposed the whole world to vert skateboarding, which is the halfpipe riding. And they suddenly realized that, wow, these guys have skill, they have talent. They aren't just a bunch of kids out there destroying things. And it's grown to be a spectator sport. I mean, vert skateboarding actually beat football out in the ratings on ESPN. And so it's good, in that aspect, because, you know, for the shows and things that I do. You know, a lot of these big companies now hop on the bandwagon and use it in their marketing campaigns, or their ad campaigns.

But the bad part of that, though, is that you've got the little guys like me who have dedicated basically their whole life to the sport and are trying to make a go at it, to make a living doing it. Like, I've had a couple of instances where, there are a lot of cell phone companies that are coming in and sponsoring skateboarders. I had an event that we did a couple years back that was a private birthday party, where we just set up a ramp—you know, it was a really wealthy family up in Beverly Hills that could afford all this Disneyland type-thing going on—and we were putting everything together and at the last minute LG mobile phone stepped in and said they would provide all the athletes for free and I get kicked out of the whole equation and basically lost all of the money I was going to make and managed to cancel the whole team who was counting on the money from that because this mobile phone company decides that they're going to throw in some of their guys to do a show for free. Well, of course they've got the money because they are a big corporation, but it was a private birthday party—what kind of advertising are they going to get out of that??

Some of these companies, they don't understand that they are hurting the real, true skateboarders and the people who have been trying to do this, because they've got the corporation behind them—the corporate money behind them, they can come in and take things like this from us. Like the tour that I ran got taken over by a bigger company with big corporate sponsors. We've always been a rider-skater-owned and skater-run company and there are very few. I really don't think there are any other teams that do what we do that aren't backed by a major bike company or anything like that nowadays.

So, I mean, the changes, it's like it's been good because we've got Tony Hawk's video game now that everyone, of course, knows Tony Hawk's

name and associates that with skateboarding. And you've got these three video games that are basically like number one in all age groups from elementary school to college campuses. He's made $300 million on just his video game. This is a guy I grew up skating with, too! You've got me, got a few hundred bucks to his name, struggling to get his next meal, and that kind of stuff happens.

So, yeah, it's real hit or miss, I guess. A lot of kids want to get sponsored and want to be pro skateboarders and all that kind of stuff, but it's really, really difficult in this day and age. It was much easier back in the '80s—just, there wasn't as many people doing it. But nowadays, a lot of the stuff that was pro level tricks back when I started skating are the basics that kids learn the first day they hop on a board now. So, the progression has really come a long way. I mean, there's tricks that I never even thought were possible that people are doing now.

So, that's good, but I'd say a lot of the corporate companies that are getting into it just because they think it's a cool advertising campaign sort of hurt the sport in a lot of ways that they don't even know about. Like I've shared, that mobile phone company had no idea they took $1,500 out of my pocket when they took that birthday party away from me.

I: **Do you think the corporate sponsors don't appreciate the effect they have on the skaters themselves, or the small companies, or do they just not care?**

S: I think they either don't know or they don't care. Which, if you're going to try to break into skateboarding, you really have to have street credibility to do it nowadays. Real skaters and all that, it just comes across really, really cheesy when you get companies that come in and have nothing to do with skateboarding that want to start marketing through it. And you've gotta be involved with the actual skaters to do that, otherwise you're basically a closet sell-out. If you are a skateboarder and next thing you know you take this big paycheck from big company that's reaming other skaters, it makes you look bad to everyone else. It's just a real interesting business. It's not like anything else I've ever seen.

I: **Yeah, that issue of street credibility is interesting to me, when you've got these huge corporate sponsors who know nothing about skateboarding who get involved. In your experience, what has the reaction been to that, among skateboarders?**

S: It all kind of depends on the person. You know, it's getting so hard to make money in skateboarding now. Because of that reason, there's only a select few that get deals with these big companies. They want skateboarding in the Olympics and a lot of skaters are against that, they

don't want that, they think it needs to stay more of an underground thing, they don't want it to be in the Olympics. And I almost kind of agree with that. It's always kind of been like an underground sport that no one has really recognized until they realized they could make money off of it somehow and then suddenly they take an interest in it. So, I don't know, and then like Nike—Nike started to make skateboard shoes and took a lot of flack, a lot of flack, from skaters and they slowly started to build up a team. They've got a pretty good pro team now, with seven or eight guys that ride for them and they're getting close to actually getting the credibility. But then, I think they know that. They're one of the few companies that actually know if you don't have that street credibility with the real skateboarders, you're not going to sell the shoes and it's not going to take off.

So, yeah, some companies are okay with it, some I would gasp at if I heard somebody was sponsored by them. You'd KNOW all they did was just take a check from them, you know. That's fine. You know what? I don't know what I would do if some big company came to me like that and offered me a salary to ride for them, and it's getting so hard to make a living at it, I might just do it and deal with whatever repercussions I get from peers.

I: **Is that the kind of move that would bring calls of "selling out", if you just said "well, I'm just going to take the check, I don't care who the company is, they are giving me money"?**

S: Yeah, absolutely, it would. But the way I look at it, in order for me to keep skating and be out there and be doing shows, unfortunately it takes money to pay your bills, and to do that kind of stuff. If I'm stuck having to work a fulltime job somewhere, then I can't focus on booking shows and ultimately getting work for all the guys I've been riding with and doing shows with, on the team. I'm kind of in that position right now. I've been working part time at this skate shop, kind of helping, to kind of keep going in between my out-of-town events and stuff and it's closing down this month, in about two weeks. And I'm sitting here going, now what do I do? I could get a regular job, but then that might restrict me from a last minute show that comes up, or an audition for something, or I don't know what.

I: **Is the shop closing down permanently?**

S: Yeah. It's hard to kind of make it with skate shops, too, because a lot of it is the wholesale, retail turnover—there's a lot of stuff that's going on. It could be a whole separate paper on the business end of skateboarding and the companies. It's getting so competitive now. A lot of the major companies now are getting their stuff made in China, which is okay, but

the reality of it, it's just junk. The boards are breaking, they are making them for $.50. Board companies aren't passing the savings along to the consumer but it's like, you get these junk boards made in China or Taiwan and then, it's the same price as it was before, but they're paying $.50 a board as opposed to $18 a board, which is what they cost to make them here in the States. And the wholesale rate to a shop is anywhere from $35 to $40, just for the deck, you know, just the piece of wood, and you can only sell them for $42 to $50, so you're making $3 to $5 profit off a board. There's no way you can keep a business open like that. So, I think that had a lot to do with the closing of the shop.

I: **Are there more, like, mainstream sporting goods stores that are selling skateboard equipment now?**

S: Yeah, but there's a lot of these, what we call "toy boards", and they are also made in China and they're really really low quality and they have real generic looking graphics on them. And the thing is, the wheels don't even spin on them, and the trucks don't match up, like the holes and everything are drilled differently and the things that they use, the nuts and bolts and stuff that they use on the trucks are all different sizes, as opposed to any regular skate company that you buy at any skate shop, everything is interchangeable. Well, you can't, you know, you buy the whole complete thing. You know, a good complete board at a skate shop will cost you about $150. You can get these at Toys R Us for $29.99 for a whole complete thing. But you get what you pay for and they just don't work as well. But you know, now that all these regular companies are getting stuff made kind of that same quality, it's just...it's kind of depressing. But I guess it's kind of what some of them figure they need to do to compete because it's getting so competitive. There's so many board companies and so many other companies trying to get involved in skateboarding. And a lot of the major board companies are all run by kind of old-school retired pros from my era, in the 80s. They're the ones who are running the shops, running the companies now.

I: **That's actually an issue of interest to me. Since there are so many more corporate interests in skateboarding, it'll be interesting to see what happens to rider-owned skate shops. Is there a future there, or will Nike just be the one selling skateboards?**

S: Yeah, that's what we were. The shop I worked at was just a little family-run, skater-run skate shop and look what happened to us. You know, who knows. You know Vans has skate parks all over and I heard something about Nike buying those out. Corporate America could be the future of skateboarding. I hope not, but oh well, there's not a whole lot I can do. It's kind of interesting just sitting back and watching all the changes.

I: **Related to that, what do you think of all the media coverage of skateboarding? We've talked about the corporate sponsor side, but what about the whole ESPN thing?**

S: Well, I think it's really good. Even with ESPN in particular, who started with the X Games, and I think kind of were the first to put that on national TV, and show people these sports. That's good, but the amount of money that the X Games brings in—I mean they have sponsors—everything from Cotton, to the Army, to candy bars, to Gillette razors. They have billions of dollars of sponsorship money that go in for the X Games for the fliers and the banners on the back of the ramps and stuff, and the athletes are still just getting paid peanuts. I mean, this is supposed to be the Olympics of skateboarding—the X Games—and I have a friend who has consistently been in the top five. He got second in doubles- vert and fifth in the regular contest and he came home with a total prize winning of $7,500, which may seem great, but I don't know, if I'm watching the Goodwill Games or something on TV, and people are just swimming across the pool and whoever makes it to the other side of the pool first gets $75,000! I've never heard of these people, you know? Skateboarding—the ratings are just—and ESPN is making so much money off of it, yet the riders are just getting paid peanuts and it's a TV show. If they don't have the riders in it, if all the riders boycott it, they
don't have a TV show. And they aren't going to get their money.

So, A lot of them have been forming this union. It's called PRO: Pro Riders Organization. It's kind of like a union that will negotiate the prize money and even a guarantee. I'm in the TV and film business, and like I said, it's a TV show. They should have a guarantee for just for showing up because they're part of this TV show. Whether they get last place in the contest, they should get, let's say, a couple thousand just for showing up and then base that on what you win. It's sickening to see how much money—like one of the guys, actually, at the contest, he had this shirt on, this handmade shirt, that said ESPN down the side. For the 'E' it said 'Extreme', for the 'P' it said 'Profits'—the 'S' was a dollar sign—and for the 'N' it said 'Network': Extreme Profits Network. And he wore that and he won the best trick contest, got his little trophy, flipped the cameras off, threw it into the audience, walked away and said 'I'll never ride in the X Games again.' So, you've got certain guys that will really stay true to the roots of skateboarding and then you've got others, you know, a lot of the other guys that are pros competing they've got kids and a family, so they've kind of gotta do that. It's a necessity to make a living. It's about fifty-fifty. But there's still a lot of guys who will just not take part in it. There's a lot of really good skaters that won't even compete in the X Games because they don't feel it's something that should be shown on TV like that, or portrayed the way they do it.

I: **I understand the unfair division of monetary rewards, but what's the resistance to the way ESPN is portraying skateboarding?**

S: Well, I think that's basically it—it all kind of goes down to that money factor. Not only that, but it's the principle of it. It's kind of like that with me. I get really frustrated, like, I'm doing some shows at a really high profile amusement park this summer and they're going to pay me $100 a day for rehearsal days and $200 for the show days. And I know, I mean I've got friends in that, and I know what everyone's making. They are making $600 to $1,000 a day. And so, I'm kind of replacing someone. And I know that the guy that's the head of this company, it's a major bike company, is offering me that because he has to go do something and while I cover for him he's probably going to put $500 a day in his pocket that should have gone to me, and pay me my $200. It's frustrated when you know that there's other people making money off of you, that were "the enemy", or you know, didn't take notice of you until they realized they could make money off of it. And that's kind of what the X Games is about. It's just a TV show. It's a contest for riders, but it's a TV show to ESPN. It's all about ratings and ratings equals their cash. So, I don't know it portrays necessarily bad, but I just think it's the way the riders are treated, I guess, and no one really sees what happens behind the scenes. There's a lot of good riders that never make it, for some reason, don't get airtime. It's kind of like ESPN sort of has their poster boys and their favorites and it's great, but I get sick and tired of seeing the same exact five top guys being shown on TV when I know that there are 15 others that skated really well that deserved at least a brief clip on TV of them doing their stuff. But it's just kind of like the big five. Andy MacDonald, Bucky Lasek, you know, the names that everyone knows, and that's who you always see when it comes down to the finals on that.

I: **Kind of related to that, what do you think of the media characterizing skateboarding as "extreme" or "alternative"?**

S: That's always been the funniest thing because they made up that word "extreme" and the first two or three years it was called "The eXtreme Games" and everyone kind of bitched about that: "extreme"? So everything else—you've got the "extreme carver sandwich" from Boston Market, and you have to do shows for that, and you've got "extreme deodorant" from Gillette. And how is it any more extreme than what we were doing 10 years ago? We're literally doing the same thing before they took liberties to us. So, it's always a big, funny inside joke among riders. We always try to use the word extreme in everything we say, just as a joke, kind of making fun of it. So, yeah, that's why they changed it to "X Games". And then they changed it to "action sports" over the past couple of years. Oh yeah, action sports, that's much better than extreme sports. But now there's some company out calling it "extreme action sports" and

it's just like, oh man, I was just waiting for that to happen. "EAS: extreme action sports"...I'm just like geez...it's just skateboarding. It's no more extreme than what I was doing when I was eight, and what I'm doing when I'm 30.

I: **How about, even the characterization of skateboarding as a sport does not necessarily 100 percent fit...**

S: You know, I don't know. I call the guys, and riders, athletes because we train. I mean, it's an athlete just like anyone else. I was talking to someone and mentioned athletes and he said "oh yeah, I see you call yourself athletes. The race car drivers I used to work with liked to call themselves athletes." And I was like, what do we do that's any different than throwing a ball into a basket? I guess, it's a sport, but opposed to like team sports, it's just you, for the most part. When you're competing, it's an individual sport, I guess. I mean, I definitely consider everyone athletes, but as far as calling it a sport, I think it could go either way. I look at it as almost more of an art form than anything because everyone has their own style, their own tricks, their own way of doing the certain same trick that someone else does, but everyone kind of adds their own to it. That's the great thing about it. There's no way to lose, there's no really wrong way. You can do a trick differently, or the judges didn't think your trick was as cool as the other one, it's not like you lose the game because you missed the basket, or something like that, or didn't get enough home runs, compared to regular sports.

I: **What, if anything, makes skateboarders different from athletes in more traditional sports like, say, football or basketball? Is it a different kind of person?**

S: Yeah. Definitely, the lifestyle is definitely more laid back. There's a camaraderie among skateboarders and everyone basically has respect for each other and for what everyone does. It used to be like in-line skaters and skateboarders used to really hate each other, same with BMX, but now that they all kind of got put together, lumped together. In-line has kind of been dying down over the years, as far as popularity and stuff. But no, I have as much respect for—I look at guys that do that and it's equally as gnarly and difficult as what I do. Like I said, you're on a team and you may have a similar sponsor, like your skateboard team, but you're never really competing as a team, I guess. You're always an individual. It's more of an individual competitive sport, I guess.

I: **Okay, and now I just have two wrap-up questions. The first being, if you were in charge of skateboarding, and the direction of skateboarding for the future, what kind of changes might you make, or how would you like the sport to look?**

S: Hmmm...I have to think about that one. I mean, I think the direction that it's been going and everything with the mainstream media is good. I like the fact that people now have respect for what I do, at least they know what I do. When I say I'm a vert skateboarder they can comprehend the fact of how I make a living riding a skateboarding, as opposed to 10 years ago they wouldn't understand how you could make a living riding a skateboard. I don't know. I like kind of the direction that it's going. I just think these bigger companies and stuff, even like the hosts and people that announce for Fox Sports and all of that, really got to have real skateboarders involved. It's all about, like I said, street credibility with skateboarding. I don't think it would apply to any other sport other than skateboarding, just because it's always been this underground thing. It's been ours. That's why a lot of guys don't want it to go to the Olympics, because it's always been our sport. People made fun of us for so many years, or giving us crap for so many years for doing it, it's just really weird to see it being so accepted. But I'd like to see it continue to be out there like that and there's no limits to it. The tricks and things that people are doing are getting crazier and crazier. And me, being kind of an older guy, kind of in my retirement, I guess, kind of sit back and smile and watch it go.

I: That ties into my last question, as opposed to your ideal world...now, you see it as pretty positive, so there might not be a huge difference...but, in reality, where do you see skateboarding in 10 years from now?

S: Whenever I think that it's peaked, I'm wrong. I think it's kind of starting to peak now, as far as popularity, but I don't know. I think it's going to be pretty similar to what it is now, but I'm hoping in 10 years, that the people who will be athletes will be at the same level as another professional athlete as far as, you know, treatment-wise and pay-wise. Because you know, if you can't make a living doing it, it's just going to go back to being underground again. That's why it always has been like that. There was never any public skate parks. Public skate parks are everywhere now. You can pretty much find a place to skate in almost every little town across the United States. You didn't used to be doing that. It's growing and growing. There's probably 20 new parks that went up just the past year in California. It's probably going to continue on how it is. The only changes I would like to see is the pay scale and the treatment of the riders, and maybe just a little more respect being thrown at them.

I: How about the corporate involvement? Do you think that there will be success in terms of that unionization and skaters rallying for their own right to get paid, or do you think that there will just be more big

corporate sponsors that take it over and that's where the money will come from?

S: I think that the corporate involvement probably isn't going to get too much worse than it is now because of this union that was recently announced in one of the skateboarding business magazines. And hopefully that will pan out to where there sort of just a governing body and straight regulations will apply no matter, to every contest and every demonstration that goes on out there. Yeah, I mean some of the corporate companies are okay, I think they're going to do fine with it. I think Nike is actually starting to get good credibility, but the ones that, going back to that, the ones that just do not involve real skateboarders in all of the marketing stuff from day one. When they decide they want to use skateboarding in their marketing they need to be contacting a real skateboarder and consulting with them. And I think a lot of companies don't do that and that's when they kind of get shunned by the real skateboarders. Sure, they might be able to sell a couple little things to kids and whatever, but it's gotta be backed by the names and the major player that are out there.

I: And you think that skateboarding is still attracting people who know the difference? There aren't a lot of kids who don't care if they got their board from Toys R Us or it's someone with no street credibility that's selling them their equipment?

S: Well, I definitely think the kids are wise to that. I mean, sure. It just depends because...the market of it...there's different areas. There's a lot of companies, some of the bigger ones, they have these little cartoon-y characters that are part of their logos. I also work at the elementary school, I do an after school skate program there a couple days a week. And whether they're into skating or not, all the kids know these little characters: Wet Willy and Boing Boing, cartoon-y type things that are associated with these skateboard companies. That age bracket isn't really going to care, but if they stick with it, I'd say, like when they're getting into their teen years, yeah, they're definitely going to know what's being ridden or what's approved by the pros they look up to, instead of just liking the goofy little graphics on the bottom of the board and buying it for that reason. The made-in-China type stuff, the few companies that are making them here, in the wood shops like in California and stuff, they stamp right on there "Made in the USA", and you should look for that because, chances are, you're going to be getting something that's made in China and going to break the first time you try a trick on it.

I: That's interesting that you do an after school skate program because I was going to ask you if you thought, in the future, that there would be organized school teams, like a junior varsity and varsity high school skateboarding team?

S: Eh, I don't think so. I wouldn't even want to be in something like that. Basically the teams are either the companies that sell, that put together the teams, the skateboard companies, or a lot of the shops, the skate shops. A lot of kids, that's where they start off. Their first sponsor is like a skate shop sponsor and they get a little bit of a discount through that. But, no, I don't really know what direction you could go with that, unless it was a contest and it was like this school against this school, maybe, but I don't see anything like that picking up and going big.

I: How come?

S: Well, it's a lot of work, putting together a team like that and trying to run it as a group type thing, if you're going to be promoting a contest. I just don't think schools or whatever are not going to be willing to put in the work that would be involved in that. There's a contest that I help run here that's called Battle of the Shops and it's basically five or six riders from each shop and they score them overall, so the overall score of all the five guys and the shop gets crowned the shop of the year. That's probably the closest that I've ever seen that isn't just a strict, straight individual sponsor, sponsored by a company, riding for yourself, on your own.

I: What would be the hesitation of just setting up a team where you competed against another school and said "so and so junior high is the best"?

S: Well, I don't think it would be something that would pick up nationally or anything, it might be something like a local— a couple local schools maybe could do for fun, or something like that? When you think of a skateboarding team you don't think of it as organized through a school or something like that. The school would have to be supplying the kids with equipment and buying all of their boards and stuff and I don't think they would want to do that. But, I could see a big, crazy company: Boost Mobile team against the Sprint phone team, or whatever. But I haven't heard of anything like that in the works, thankfully.

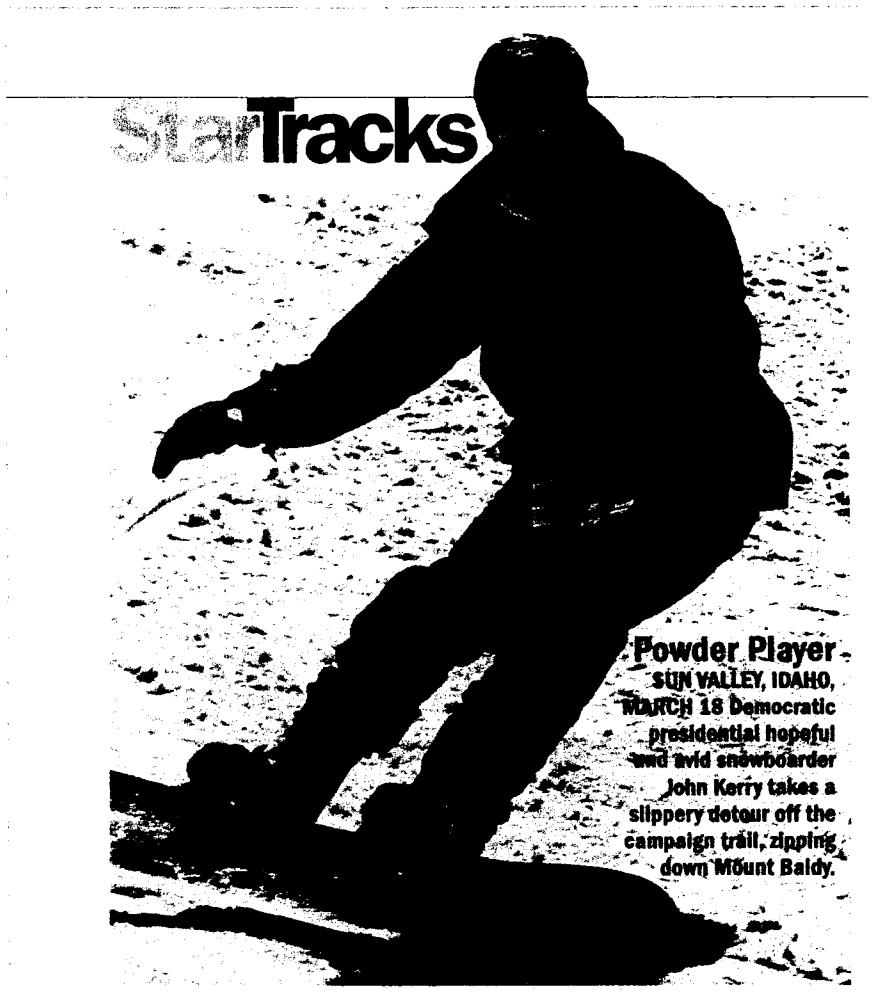
I: Do you think that there would be many skaters interested in that?

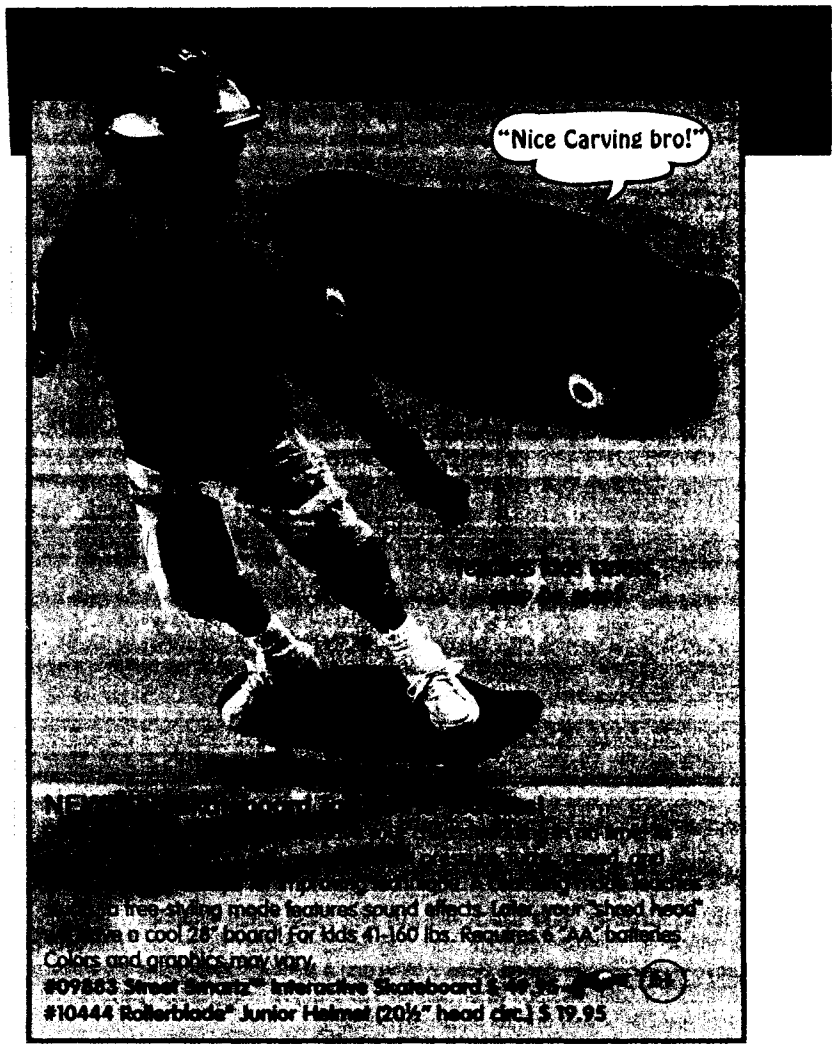
S: No, I don't think so, no. I mean, maybe the kids that are unsponsored and are going to that school would want to be doing something like that, but no, for the most part it has always been a real individual thing. And I think it always will be. I hope it always will be. But I really don't see any other way than doing it that way. Just because, again, I think it's an art form and everyone is different. And I think everyone needs to be judged in each contest on their own unique twist that they add to it, as opposed to the group itself.

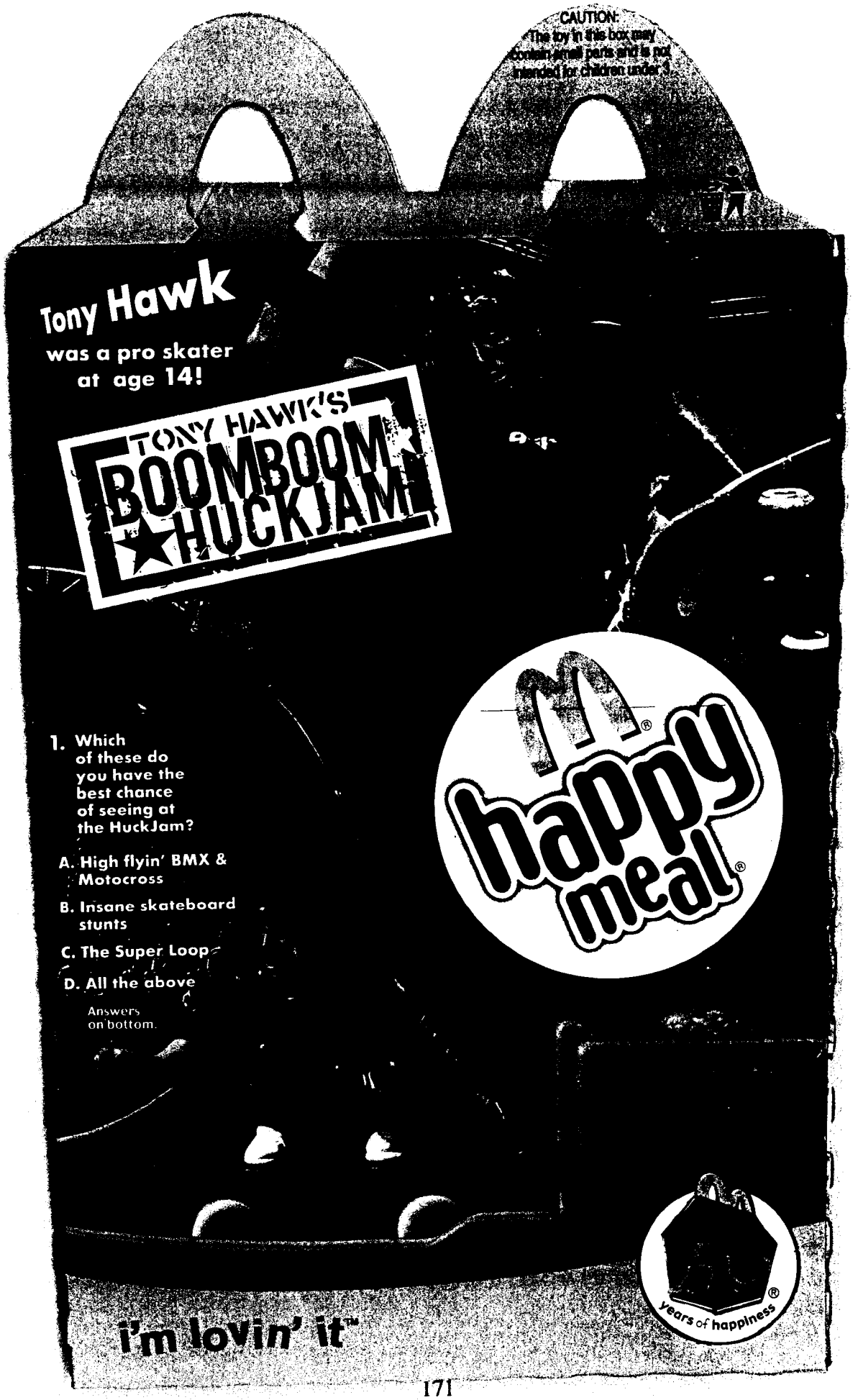
I: Well, thanks. You've been a great help. *(Followed by a more detailed description of the research project and a solicitation for names of others the subject thought might be willing to participate in an interview.)*

APPENDIX E

Examples of the Mainstream Status of Alternative Sports







APPENDIX F

SkateboardingSucks.com Website Excerpt

SKATEBOARDING SUCKS.

A Political Watchdog Website, Just Like Greenpeace Or Peta, But For Skateboarding.

contact us! THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 2004

What Is This Place?

It has been said that "Genius flows from the Skateboard industry" Well, stupidity sure as hell leaks out of skateboarding's ass-crack every once in a while also. SkateboardingSucks.com is here to report, discuss and make fun of all of the bullshit and media surrounding skateboarders and our self-built industry. There are countless individuals, organizations and corporations that are trying their best to sneak into skateboarding's back-door and grab a pile of cash. We built our own businesses and lifestyles from the ground up and we don't need or want you. No censorship and no industry relationships to protect. We're here to let you know what sucks.

Reviewed Crap

Recent Suckers

(poo poo head)
(SEX 4 LIFE)
(penis)
(PLayboydicksex)
(penis in vagina)
(dick hole)
(witness)
(witness)
(fuck you)
(wtf?)

Sucks Survey

Who has benefited most from our sweat and broken bones?

Activision
Bagel Bites
Boost Mobile
ESPN
Mountain Dew
MTV
PS Stix

Vote

* * *

Guest Penis: Dave Carnie

Carn Carn has started writing for [illegible] and has taken a position in the new USAS. We're going to give him an uncensored medium when he has time. Cuz we Love him. Dave sent us some mail...

Dear Skateboarding Sucks,
...The reason I'm writing, is to tell you about the USAS. which I like to call US ASS! which is "USA skateboarding." yes, sounds bad, I know. but guess what? I'm an executive board member.

First of all I'm proud to be a part of this group. Second I don't like it. I mean, this is what I've been clamoring for over a year now: all of skateboarding's groups, IASC, UPSA, WCSK8 and SPAUSA, needing to organize. They did. I just wish we didn't have to. but, in order to retain some semblance of what we call skateboarding, we need to form a governing body. Because if we didn't do it, someone else (like rollersports) will. Now we have one. Hooray.

The meeting itself was hilarious. it was run by Gary Ream and Mike Jacki of Woodward. because of their ties to Olympic gymnastics, they have been approached by the IOC. at first I didn't like what I was seeing, but in the end I'm glad Gary and mike are there. mike has extensive Olympic experience so he was able to "walk us through" everything. like we had to make motions and nominate people and second motions...we had no idea what the fuck we were doing, but mike coached us every step of the way. it was gay, but whatever, it has to be done. so after we formed the board of directors, we had to nominate the executive board, which is as follows:

Gary Ream, President
Tony Hawk, Vice President
Jim Fitzpatrick, Vice President
Don Bostick, Vice President
Miki Vuckovich, Member
Dave Carnie, Member
John Bernards, Treasurer
Mark Waters, Secretary
Neal Hendrix, Athlete
Buster Halterman, Athlete

I'm happy with the way things turned out and though there's going to be a lot of bad decisions in the future, at least skateboarders will be making them. Like I said at the beginning, I wish this didn't have to happen, but it does.

Full story will appear in an upcoming issue of [illegible]