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Grassroots Branding: An Exploration of Grassroots Businesses within the Florida Skateboard Community

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Community

By

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ABSTRACT

Why do original/grassroots branding efforts occurring on a local level continue to proliferate despite the existing market saturation created by larger corporate entities? Using existing theoretical frameworks associated with "do it yourself" (DIY) culture, this thesis explores cultures and themes associated with skateboarding, including the production and consumption of brands of skateboarding products; the use of space and spatiality by skateboarders; and, finally, changes in skateboarding. I conducted ethnographic interviews within a network of skateboard entrepreneurs in the Florida skateboard community, seeking to understand why they start brands, their perceptions of their entrepreneurial efforts, and how these businesses operate. Drawing from historical, visual and interview data, I identify the roles that branding efforts play into the formation of skateboard culture. The project analysis creates an understanding of skateboard culture that explores skateboard identity at the intersections of consumer/citizen, individual/citizen and the politics of larger capitalist structures and the entrepreneurial efforts of local business.

Chapter One: Introduction

When I moved to Tampa in the fall of 2014, I became enamored with the history, architecture, and personalities of Florida Skateboarding. I started a blog dedicated to creating and consolidating online media that related to Florida skateboard history and current news. In the search for news content, I keyed into the numerous small brands that are located in Tampa and the surrounding area. Working with the businesses owners to document their various community events, I began to learn about how these businesses operated. These grassroots brands, operated by local community members, focused on the production of original branded skateboarding goods. The blog eventually became a small online skateboard shop dedicated to promoting the locally produced goods in the Florida community. My questions surrounding the continued proliferation of grassroots skateboard brands only intensified considering the densely saturated nature of the skateboard industry. Through labor-extensive, contemporary marketing practices, smaller independent skateboard brands are now able to compete with larger industry brands. Walking into any skateboard shop, hundreds of skateboard brands compete for wall space. Selling and promoting these local brands, I became interested in why these small skateboard businesses continued to operate despite small profit margins and labor intensive operating processes.

Objectives

To understand the economic and cultural environment of small-scale skateboard branding efforts, I conducted research with members of the Tampa skateboard community. I worked closely with the owners of six local skateboard businesses to understand why these small brands are created and how they operate. With data gathered from ethnographic interviews and partici-

pant observation, I analyzed the cultural and economic impacts of grassroots skateboard businesses within the Tampa skateboard community.

Background

The Tampa Skateboard community is historically important in regards to the cultural development of the sport. Since the 1970's, Florida generally and Tampa specifically have been significant within the context of the global skateboard community. Many of skateboarding's iconic figures have come out of Florida; Andrew Reynolds, Elissa Steamer, and Paul Schmidt are just a few industry leaders to come out of the larger Florida skateboard community[1].

Tampa is perhaps best-known for The Skatepark of Tampa, an indoor and outdoor skate facility that has become famous through the media coverage of its annual Tampa Pro contest. The Tampa Pro is the longest running professional skateboarding competition in the world. In addition to the Skatepark of Tampa, Tampa's other skateparks are gaining attention within the larger skateboard community.

One of the most iconic is Guy Perry Skatepark, more popularly known as Bro Bowl skatepark. This recently renovated historic landmark was famous for its longevity and its 1970's-

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[1] These individuals are mentioned because of their contributions to the skateboard community and their ties to the Florida skateboard community. Andrew Reynolds is the founder and owner of Baker Skateboards and co-owner of Baker Boys Distribution. Reynolds has also appeared in two iconic skateboard films, *Baker has a Death Wish* (2008) and *Stay Gold* (2010). Elissa Steamer is a retired female skateboard pro who is recognized for her appearance in *Welcome to Hell (1996)* Paul (Professor) Schmidt has gained notice within the skateboard community as an innovative skateboard maker. Professor is currently the head board shaper at Z-Flex Skateboards.

styled dish shape. Through the iconic Tampa Pro contest and many of Tampa's famous skateparks, Tampa's has become a pilgrimage destination for top industry figures and skateboard fans alike.

The strong historical narrative and the continued development of skateboard parks may contribute to the growth in the local skateboard community. In the Tampa area, I have identified a pattern of production and consumption that is centered around small-scale, grassroots brands. These brands are often one-person operations and focus on producing and selling skateboard goods for their communities. These businesses produce a variety of skateboard related products such as wheels, decks, and clothesline. All of these locally produced goods reflect a trend within a neoliberal marketplace as individual tastes and increasingly niche perspectives of skateboard-ing are brought to marketing by the business owner.

Research Aims and Questions

As I seek to understand the conditions and contexts of small-scale branding efforts in the Tampa skateboard community I build upon three larger theoretical questions.

1)Why do grassroots skateboard brands continue to proliferate despite market saturation?

2)What role do these grassroots businesses play in the formation of the skateboard community?

3) How do grassroots brands affect the process of identity creation for the individuals who par-ticipant in these grassroots branding movements?

To address the larger questions, I explored a series of more specific questions with my research participants. In an effort to understand the interrelated nature of the social, material and symbolic contexts of skateboard brand owners and the surrounding skateboard community, I employed anthropological methods that incorporate aspects of ethnographic interview tied to video production and exploratory analysis of existing skateboard media. I addressed the follow-

ing questions with my research informants: Under what sorts of circumstances are brands created? How are brands defined within the context of skateboard culture? How do these brands operate? How do local brands affect the community? What do local skateboarders think about local brands?

These questions are a way of exploring cultural practice that signifies a convergence of cultural production and consumption. The proliferation of grassroots skateboard businesses is associated with the creation of original skateboard branded materials set within a larger skateboard culture. In the next two chapters, I set the stage for the project analysis through an exploration of existing literature within skateboarding and provide a background into the additional areas of scholarship that contextualize this research. Following the literature review, I provide a discussion outlining the research methodology and research participants. Lastly the project analysis explores the continued proliferation of grassroots brands. The analysis will illustrate the interrelated nature of three converging themes. This analysis will frame aspects of experience, consumer taste, and technology as the driving factors associated with the continued proliferation of skateboard brands. Specifically, this analysis will show how aging members of the Florida skateboard community utilize existing digital technologies to create brands which their personal tastes in skateboarding and reflect the tastes of the local community. Although the utilization of free social media platforms allows the entrepreneurs to create new brand identities, there seems to be a disconnect between the significant amount of labor generated by these business owners in the process of curating their social media feeds and the accumulation of capital generated through sales.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study the of small-scale grassroots skateboard businesses, I will highlight contemporary skateboarding scholarship organized in *Skateboarding: Subcultures, Sites and Shifts* (Lombard 2015), as well as other scholarly contributions. This contemporary skateboarding literature will demonstrate how a study of grassroots skateboard business will forward the current work being done by skateboard scholars.

In addition to the skateboard literature, I will provide brief surveys into the literature of Neoliberalism, Experience and DIY Cultural studies. These bodies of work will provide additional analytical frameworks for understanding the proliferation of grassroots skateboarding brands in the Florida skateboard community.

Literature of Skateboarding:

Skateboard studies are interdisciplinary, with theoretical and methodological contributions coming from philosophy of sport, anthropology, architecture, cultural geography and other social science disciplines. Skateboarding has caught the imagination of critical scholars because of its postmodern sensibilities. Breaking away from traditional rules and structures of gameplay, skateboarding and other action sports have been identified as productive theoretical sites that suggest resistance to hegemonic influences of capitalism. In the mid-1990's, Sociologist Becky Beal paved the way for skateboarding scholarship. In her early work, Beal (1995) provided the theoretical foundation that connected skateboarding practice to skateboarding's resistant nature to capitalist structures. Beal framed skateboarding as an activity that departs from the rigid rules and structures of traditional sports. This theoretical framework opened discussions about skate-

boarding's potential to facilitate social behavior that could subvert capitalist patterns of social behavior. In Beal's other early works, skateboarding's dominant identity is characterized through masculine performance (Beal 1996, 204). Other skateboarding scholars have critiqued the dominant masculine skateboard identity through an analysis of movement in regards to the performance of street skateboarding (Beal & Wiseman 2003; Kelly et. al., 2005; Antecio et. al. 2009). Departing from Beal's early work, social geographers and architectural historians have looked at ways skateboarders appropriate space (Borden, 2001; Howell, 2003; Howell, 2005; Németh 2006). These scholars have theorized skateboarding as it intersects with aspects of space, governance and economic conditions of neoliberal capitalism. Until recently, however, the literature of skateboarding has been quite sparse and disorganized.

The first edited volume on skateboarding was published in 2015. *Skateboarding: Subcultures, Sites and Shifts* (Lombard 2015) brings new and established scholars of skateboarding together. This edited volume illustrates the importance of skateboarding within social science studies through the collection of works that position skateboarding as a productive area of study for understanding larger cultural phenomena beyond the sport. Scholars published in this volume discuss skateboarding as it intersects with issues of mobility, cultural practice, and capitalism. Because of its importance in organizing the work of so many scholars, and thus, starting to define the field, I pay attention to this collection. In reviewing the contributions to this volume, I will highlight its most current themes, and illustrate how my study of grassroots skateboard businesses builds on the past work of skateboarding scholars.

The scholarship of skateboarding represented in this volume addresses three large thematic areas. The first explores aspects of cultural practice surrounding skateboarding. Scholars in the first section focus on behaviors and practices which tie into larger discussion of identity for-

mation and community organization. The second area of discussion focuses on skateboarding's relationship to place. Scholars in this area are interested in how skateboarders utilize their surroundings and appropriate architectural features. Lastly, in the third area of discussion, skateboard scholars analyze how skateboarding fits into broader discussions of neoliberal capitalism and historical change.

In the first identified theme, skateboarding culture is discussed through frameworks of identity tied to physical performance, gender, and media use. In the first chapter, scholars tackle this issues to explore what it means to identify with the activity of skateboarding. Bill Schaffer (2015) specifically looks at how physical performance ties into the identity and experience of skateboarding. Schaffer unpacks physical aspects of skateboarding performance by highlighting a narrative tied to skateboarding progression. Drawing on a series of public talks given by skateboarding innovator Rodney Mullen, Schaffer argues that the progression of skateboarding maneuvers is rooted in an ethic that aims to build new relationships between the body, the skateboard, and the environment. This skateboarding ethic is in opposition to traditional sports where progress and gameplay is structured by coaches and set rules. Schaffer builds this argument through an analysis of a professional skateboarder's accounts of creating innovative skateboard tricks. Shaffer builds his argument for this skateboard ethic in Mullen's discussion of mental processes in skateboarding. Mullen attributes his innovation in the sport to his mental ability to organize his body movements in relation to the skateboard and the environment (Schaffer 2015, 41-45) Like Mullen, other skateboarders develop these mental processes for organizing the body to learn new skills or adapt to new terrain.

Another way that skateboard culture is discussed is through the formation of sub-cultures within the skateboard community (O'Connor 2015; Willing & Shearer 2015). Within the chap-

ters of this edited volume, community is used as an analytical unit to describe populations of skateboarders confined to geographic areas. These communities bound by geography, either physical or virtual, share similar values or common interests in their participation in skateboarding. Scholars discuss how values vary within the specific communities and how the smaller subgroups interact with each other to produce larger community values. Paul O'Connor looks at the ways that the skateboard community engages with various community institutions. Describing the practice of "skateboard philanthropy" (O'Conner et. al. 2015, 61), O'Conner argues that skateboarders engage in philanthropic activities to positively impact their communities. He argues that this type of political engagement is a medium through which the key values of skateboarding can be established and communicated and thus, serves as a preemptive method to maintain skateboarding's authentic values. (2015, 64). The values of skateboarding are created on a both a personal and community level; negotiating takes place internally amongst the skateboarders involved in the community and externally with local governing institutions. Continuing with the theme of community, Willing and Shearer (2015) examine how peripheral groups within skateboarding build prestige and authenticity when confronted with the values and norms put forth by young male skateboarders.

Both these chapters effectively identified unique sub-cultures within a larger skateboard community. The authors also went on to identify the role that these sub-groups play within and outside their larger subculture. In the context of my proposed research, O'Conner and Willing et.al. (2015) are useful in understanding how brand owners, who can be defined as subgroups within skateboard culture, affect the formation of Tampa skateboard culture. Although both articles create nuanced pictures of skateboard culture, their analytical approaches do not incorporate insight from members of the skateboard communities discussed.

Other scholars look at media use as it relates to the formation of community (Jeffries, et.al. 2015; Dixon, 2015). Jeffries, Messer, and Swords seek to locate the source of creativity, which has been ignored in past literature. They argue that the essence of creativity is located within the production and consumption of skateboarding media. The author's analysis of skateboard photography focuses on a formalistic and symbolic analyses of the physical photographs and videos created by six English visual artists connected to the local skateboard community. Through the use of ethnographic interviews, the artists discuss their compositions and intentions of their photographs. This creativity is shown through the unique ways that the photographers portray skateboarding. Each of the six visual artists had distinct methods of framing, lighting and presenting their visions of skateboarding. This variation in the production of visual media is indicative of the production of "creative" representations of skateboard. (Jeffries et. al. 2015, 95-98). Elaborating on the idea of *Scopic Regimes* (Mets 1982; Jay 1988; Rose 2012), the authors argue that there are three distinct themes in which skateboard imagery is produced. These three distinct scopic regimes within skateboard photography indicate three distinct contexts in which skateboarding is produced and consumed.

These three distinct scopic regimes are observed in the subject matter of the skateboard imagery and are further differentiated through the technological and methodological approaches to producing skateboard photography. The first scopic regime is associated with the pervasive marketing practices of the skateboard industry. Photographers who produce imagery under this scopic paradigm utilize advanced photographic techniques and quality equipment to capture the performance of elite skateboarders. These images reproduce the cultural practices of mainstream skateboard media and convey the importance of athletic progression and technical aesthetic perfection (2015, 104). The second scopic regime is defined by documentarian motives. Moving

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beyond the importance of skateboarding tricks, photographers producing imagery under this second paradigm create images that capture the attitudes and culture of the local skateboard scene. Photos that fall into the documentarian scopic regime communicate attitudes and emotions associated with certain spaces (2015, 109). Images that are produced within the third scopic regime are produced with the intention of critique. Photographers who are producing images within the last scopic regime are interested in using skateboarding as vehicle for social critique within the skateboard community or within larger social practice. In another analysis of skateboard photography, Dwayne Dixon studied Japanese photographers as they worked to create commercial images which resemble the imagery of 1970's skateboarding in California. Through participant observation, Dixon theorized on how race, class and authenticity became salient through the production of skateboard photos. As the image of skateboarding becomes commodified within global capitalism, skateboarding becomes a site where identity markers are produced. Dixon argues that there are three common elements present in skateboard photos: skateboarding, grimy urban settings, and white youth. These three elements are utilized in marketing efforts to sell the image of youth culture. Skateboard photography becomes the site where the image of urban cool is produced, then commodified (Dixon 2015, 117-122).

Within the discussion of Theme One, I have identified scholarship that focuses on the symbolic contexts of skateboard movements and media use within a fragmented skateboarding culture. This scholarship has theorized about the "meaning" of skateboard tricks (Schaffer 2015), the formation of subcultural groups within skateboarding (O'Connor 2015; Willing & Shearer 2015) how skateboarding creates meaning within the mediascape (Jeffries 2015; Dixon 2015).

These authors have collectively argued for an understanding of skateboarding which is segmented by unique cultural practices and can be studied as such, through aspects of perfor-

mance. Additionally, the authors indicate that these defining differences in skateboarding cultural practices are shaped through individual and community factors. On an individual level, perceptions of skateboarding are formed by "what the body can do." (Schaffer 2015, 47). Perceptions of skateboarding performance are framed through an individual's ability to organize the body, both mentally and physically, in response to environmental stimuli. Within Schaffer's ethic of skateboarding, relationships between body, mind and environment become the building blocks of conceptualization as it relates to the experience of skateboarding. Stemming from the individual's self-rooted conceptualization of skateboarding, communities are formed through relatable experiences informed by exposure to existing narratives within skateboarding disseminated through shared geographic space (O'Connor 2015) and niche skateboarding media (Mackay, 2015). Larger cultural meaning is informed by these two aspects of skateboard experience. Skateboard communities establish and participate in shared cultural practice, which aligns with specific community values that are informed through participation in specific phenomenological practices, spatial use defined through geographic proximity, and exposure to other skateboard narratives through specific mediascapes.

In this project, I position grassroots business owners as a unique sub-culture differentiated through age and cultural practice. Entrepreneurship as an identity marker within skateboarding has not been disused in the skateboard literature. I will identify unique cultural practices which distinguish grassroots skateboard business owners from other cultural movements occurring in skateboarding. Discussions of these practices will be contextualized through aspects of media production and their conceptualization of skateboarding movements.

Another theme within the literature of skateboarding focuses on skateboarding's relation to space. Scholars reflect on skateboarders' appropriation of space and its effects on urban de-

velopment and the larger theoretical implications of space within culture. Within these discussions, scholars look specifically at the appropriation of urban space, development of skateboard parks, and the development of virtual skateboard spaces. The discussions accompanying these three defined skateboard spaces outline specific practices within skateboarding and illustrate how skateboarding challenges our understandings on space.

The performance of street skateboarding is the process of appropriating skateboard movements onto urban architectural features designed for purposes outside of skateboarding. Participants who engage in street skateboarding scour urban areas for common architectural features like stairs, ledges, and handrails where skateboard movements can be practiced. Iain Borden (2015) analyzes the influence of skateboarding in the development of urban culture in London. The Southbank Centre and surrounding area have been adopted by skateboarding because of the presence of unique architectural features that enable skateboarding maneuvers. The Southbank Centre in London is an internationally famous skateboarding plaza where skaters from all over the world come to visit. As skateboarders initially utilized this urban space, they acted as urban pioneers and were the first to appropriate the space for uses outside its intended purposes. Other urban subcultures, including musicians and artists, followed. Commerce and local business catering to the needs of the users also prospered in the Southbank area. Borden redefines the understanding of architectural spaces to incorporate people's interactions with them. With Borden's conceptualization of space, skateboarding is positioned as an indispensable component in the development of cultural contexts for architectural space (Borden 2015 140-143). The skateboarder's appropriation of the Southbank Centre changed the cultural contexts of the urban environment. The space originally conceived as foot transit for professional commuter became a space that fostered skateboarding moments and the development of other subcultural practices. As the cul-

tural context of the Southbank shifted, the economic practices of the community also changed. This change in economic practices could be observed in the proliferation of new retail spaces catering the Southbank's subcultural occupants. Borden's analysis of space provides a general framework for understanding how space can affect cultural practice for both skateboarders and the larger community.

Developing skateparks or spaces intentionally constructed for skateboarders has traditionally been the role of state institutions. Building from Habermasian discussions of space, public skateparks have been theorized as spaces that facilitate the development of skill and organization amongst skateboarding community members (Lorr 2015). As a departure from this literature, Atencio and Beal (2015) explore the realm of public skate parks developed through private capital. The authors argue that such public skateparks are the iterations of neoliberal discourse, facilitating the behavior that personifies neoliberal ideas such as individualism and hard work (Atencio and Beal 2015, 165-166). The increased frequency of such skateparks is symptomatic of the discourse promoting free economy and limiting state support, since these public-private spaces are developed with profit-making agendas. The skateparks developed by private industry have been used to host contests and other promotional events by the businesses that funded the skateparks. Traditionally, skateparks were part of public domain and were developed by state structures but, now skateparks are being developed by private industry to profit from these publicly used spaces (2015, 83-85). Atencio and Beal highlight a tension between the logics of capitalism and subversive skateboarding practice., in that public skateparks developed with private capital eliminate the emancipatory elements of the public space. Instead of developing ideas through self-discovery, the spaces become a medium for advertisements that reinforce specific narratives within the skateboard experience. The participation of skateboarding becomes a com-

mercially guided experience where narratives reinforcing consumption culture and reliance on private industry are reinforced.

Within this second theme of spatial use, scholars have created a nuanced discussion at the intersections of space and skateboarding. Eschewing the idea that space is neutral, these scholars have shown how space is politicized through unique appropriations of space (Schaffer 2015) and its relation to capitalism (Antencio & Beal 2015). Within this research project, I utilize discussions of space to further contextualize the experience of skateboarding for grassroots skateboarding entrepreneurs. Looking at the historical development of Florida skateboarding, I will address the longevity of local skateboard parks and their role in attracting commercial interest to the region. Continuing this historical account of space, I analyze the intersection of the commercialization of Florida skateboarding and its influence on the development of grassroots business efforts within public skateboarding spaces. Augmenting the discussion of Florida's historical spaces. I look at how social media practices play into Mackay's theory of resistive online spaces. Mackay argues for the presence of online resistive spaces in female-mediated websites. These female-organized websites and blogs provide space where the female skateboard community can create its own cultural practices that deviate from the normative skateboard practice influenced by dominate masculine culture. Looking at the construction of brands within the context of social media practices, I see how virtual space affects business practices and social interactions defined by geographically defined social networks.

The last theme represented in this edited volume identifies the effects of capitalism throughout the history of skateboarding. The authors in this section look at topics of commercialization and creativity through the lens of historical changes in cultural practice.

Building on the earlier work of Howell (2003; 2005) Simon Orpana (2015), examines the rise in popularity of skateboarding and its effects on urban development. Orpana argues that the rise in popularity is being utilized by urban planners for gentrification and revitalization efforts. Skateboarding's ties to urban culture are being appropriated as symbolic capital to promote values of collaboration and solidarity within these revitalization projects (Orpana 2015, 228). Thus, values associated with skateboard communities are being commodified and used in city's re-branding efforts.

Seeking to understand skateboarder's relations to public institutions, Kara-Jane Lombard looks at the production of policy that governs skateboarding, identifying the actors who participate in the governance of skateboarding, including government actors like police, state or local governments, and private property owners (Lombard 2015, 260). She also looks at how self-imposed rules and ethics within the community are seen as an act of resistance to larger government structures. Lombard points to the construction of DIY skateparks, which are built and managed by the skateboard communities. In these situations formal government structures are leaving the skateboard communities alone, under the assumption that this will mitigate further problems (2015, 265). Lombard points to the importance of relational interplay between the two groups, and argues that the interactions are the key aspect of understanding how policy is created for skateboarding.

Looking at the historical development of commercial skateboard goods, Thomas Turner addresses the development of the skateboard shoe. After tracing a brief history of footwear, Turner shows how the skateboard shoe is a product experimentation and reconfiguration of existing shoes. The first skate specific shoes were crafted through the experiments of a few California "sidewalk surfers" in the 1960. These simple modifications mark the beginning of modern skate-

board shoe history. Turner draws attention to the material, function, branding efforts, and community perceptions of the shoes, further illustrating the relationship of skateboarders to their material culture, as practice and products are intertwined. Turner's history of skateboarding shoes shows how skateboarding's DIY experimenting initiated the processes which led to specially designed and mass-produced products. He is thus, making a much bigger claim about people's relationship to the means of production in a capitalist system. First, he argues that sports and other activities are linked to the consumption of material goods (2015, 283), continuing that consumers have the ability to actively change and affect the production of goods. By making this claim Turner makes the argument that people can enact agency within a capitalist system.

The research analysis presented later in this thesis, will make a departure from Turner's argument. Turner argues that the emerging skateboard community in the 1960's and 1970's helped drive the shoe market in a new direction and helped create the technologies used modern skateboard shoe design. Since the development of the modern skateboard shoe, the landscape of skateboard consumption patterns has shifted away from a market driven by product innovation and shifted to a pattern of consumption driven by aesthetic. Today, the contemporary skateboard consumer is presented with hundreds of skateboard options that are nearly identical. The grassroots skateboard brands discussed in this research are brining products to market distinguished by artistic and philosophical differences rather than technological innovation.

Orpana illustrates how skateboarding is co-opted by institutions of power to promote urban development. Additionally, Turner shows how markets adapt to subversive cultural practice in order to generate capital. Turner's discussion on shoe development provides a logical first step into understanding contemporary skateboarding markets and the proliferation of grassroots

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skateboarding brands. Collectively, the authors of the volume identified three larger conceptual areas that are intimately tied to the understanding of skateboarding.

Overview of Capitalism/Consumption/DIY Literature:

There is a gap in the literature which neglects a consideration of small-scale business within the skateboard community. Within my study of grassroots skateboarding businesses, I look at the modes of production, consumption, and areas of capitalism which have yet to be explored within the body of skateboard scholarship. Academic literature from DIY culture studies and consumption studies provides conceptual frameworks that can illuminate issues of identity and behavior at the intersections of consumer/citizen, individual/citizen and the politics of larger capitalist structures and the entrepreneurial efforts of local business.

Literature of Capitalism and Branding:

Political economy scholars have identified the early 1970s as the beginning of a momentous shift away from large-scale industrial production for many Western, industrialized nations (Harvey, 2005). The recognition of this economic shift has been accompanied by scholarship that theorizes the impacts on the lived experience of the work force in these Western states. This shift in labor allowed for the increase of intellectual and media-based services as the need for labor in the manufacturing sectors decreased (Bauman, 2013 [2000]). Building on Bauman's work, Deuze (2007) argues that the proliferation of high-speed mobile technology has contributed to the fluidity of work schedules seen in the technology/information based service sector. This new mode of production characterized by the production of information goods represents a markedly new class of labor, in which distinctions between work and leisure dissolve. As these distinctions become less clear, we see the rise of people working remotely and working from places of leisure (Deuze 2007, 24). Shifts in production also bring shifts in consumer tastes. As consumer

tastes shift away from the nameless industrialized goods of a previous time, we see the advent of large-scale branding movements catering to a populace's desire for a personal connection to their goods. (Klein, 2002) In this branding movement, the brand strategy no longer represents the utilitarian properties of the product but rather represents underlying consumer desires tied to emotional need (Klein 2002, 10). Deuze and Klein contextualize the production of cultural goods in the context of a leisure sport and to provide a framework for understanding the branding of these goods.

Literature of DIY:

Discussions around small-scale branding efforts within the skateboard community fit within the frameworks created by the scholars who theorize DIY Culture. DIY, or the Do-it-Yourself movement, goes beyond common conceptions of self-directed house renovations. The DIY movement is rooted in education reforms initiated by countercultural movements of the 1960's (Gauntlett, 2011). It is not until the late 1980's that we see the emergence of DIY as we understand it today. The proliferation of zines became a mode of media production that melded the politics and aesthetic of counterculture moments of punk and third-wave feminisms. This form of media production broke away from the existing formalized dominant modes of media. Since the 1980's, DIY movements have incorporated the practice of crafting and other forms of critical production. (Spencer, 2005)

Scholars are discussing aspects of DIY culture at the intersection of producing material goods, politics and media utilization, broadly analyzing these three themes within specialized or niche communities that are often described as subcultures or countercultures. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have published in an edited volume, *DIY Citizenship, Critical Making and Social Media,* which seeks to reorient the notion of DIY culture as "DIY citizenship" (Ratto and

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Boler, 2014). They base their scholarship on a definition of DIY citizenship that derives from Hartley's (1999) discussions of the "uses of TV." In this work Hartley outlines the basis for ne-oliberal consumption by conceptualizing DIY citizens as individuals who construct their identity through a process of choosing from the array of available semiotic materials. The process of in-tentional construction of identity or identities) becomes the basis for citizenship. Hartley's defi-nition emphasizes notions of self-determination by framing people's ability to change identity and to the ability to utilize different, multiply-constructed identities. (Hartley 1999, 176-180)

Contemporary DIY scholars frame the practice of various DIY movements as movements that engage in the practice of critical making that seeks to create new forms of participatory de-mocracy. This framework is defined in Mann's (2015) theory of *Maktivism,* a term used to theo-rize a mode of critical production that involves a moral and ethical ethos that seeks to create a sense of democracy amongst the community. In this definition, Mann keys on forms of making which incorporate authentic creativity into the production of goods directed towards social change. DIY scholars discuss authenticity as sets of values constructed by members of specific communities. Constructions of authenticity are motivated by the desire to create and legitimize the cultural identity of distinct cultural groups.

Mann's theory of maktivism focuses on aspects of cultural production that position par-ticipants in DIY culture as members of society who can make critical decisions about their envi-ronment. This sort of theory gives the masses agency within their environment. This is counter to the arguments found in classic mass-culture theories that theorize society as being influenced by hegemonic media (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944; Benjamin, 1955). This agentic theory of criti-cal making positions brand owners as individuals engaging in behaviors that are resistant to larg-er capital structures.

One of the most common forms of critical making practiced in DIY culture can be observed in the production of independently produced magazines called "zines." Chidgey (2015) focuses on the production of zines that are non-commercial, amateur-produced, politically driven texts. Through the combination of art and politics, zines usually contain voices from the margins of society who are not regularly represented in mainstream media. Zines become ways of resisting hegemonic media as a media form which cultivates a sense of empowerment and identity within marginalized communities Also in the vein of DIY production, Orton-Johnson (2015) discusses shifts in the practice of craft making, identifying *craftivism* as a shift in production that incorporates both the domestic production of craft and the activism framed through feminist epistemologies. She focused on knitting communities that are mediated through online digital platforms. The web-forum is key to the formation of culture which draws on larger discussion of Web 2.0 (Wesch 2009), which highlights the interactive, community-building features of the online landscape.

The discussions surrounding the production of zines and crafts are central elements to the production of cultural meaning of sub-groups. The production of alternative media and cultural goods plays a role in canonizing important moments or values within groups unrepresented or misrepresented by mainstream media outlets. Orton-Johnson and Wesch's discussions will play a role in understanding effects of grassroots skateboard brands within a skateboard community.

A majority of the DIY scholarship puts a theoretical emphasis on modes of production within subgroups. DIY often emphasizes the production of crafts, zines and other forms of material goods, the production of goods is motivated by a desire to create individual and community identity. Although this may be a dominant factor of DIY culture, there is a limited discussion of political economy, which limits their explanatory power. Borrowing frameworks from both DIY

studies and consumption studies, my analysis emphasizes both the production and consumption of grassroots skateboard brands.

In a study of micro-label music produces Strachan's (2007) has utilized an analytical framework which incorporates both the production and consumption aspects in an analysis of independent music production. Strachan conducted ethnographic research with micro-record labels in the UK, analyzing the discourses used by the micro-record labels. He argued that the development of these micro-labels is directly tied into the larger industry labels, in that the discourse that micro-labels utilize in their everyday practice is created in dialectic relations to the more powerful industry label. This discourse utilized by the micro-labels is utilized as means to communicate authenticity and passion of the music. Strachan interprets the logic of the micro-label owners within the context of capitalism to sell records in opposition to larger record labels. In this analysis the author considers issues associated with financial risk and defines owner's intentions within the contexts of producing social and physical capital. Stranchan's description of the discourses created by the UK micro-labels makes it seem as if consumers are presented with purchasing options which subvert the hegemonic capitalist practices of mainstream record labels. Micro-labels utilizing values like authenticity seem to create a new and more ethical approach to producing music they sell. The authenticity-based strategy provides consumers an outlet to express their opposition to mainstream music, but it also hides the capitalistic practices that the micro-labels must utilize to sell their music. The idea of the micro-label becomes an aesthetic or branding difference within the music industry where all music is available for purchase. Likewise, understanding grassroots skateboard businesses and their situation within capitalism frames the motives and behaviors of the skateboard entrepreneur

Moving Forward:

  Within the skateboard community, there are unique factors that differentiate skateboard business owners from the larger subset of the skateboarding community. Phenomenology, historical development of space, and technology inform the experience of these grassroots skateboard business owners. Through a nuanced understanding of skateboard experience, I create holistic analysis that will look at the motives for starting these business and address tensions sounding subversive aspects of skateboarding.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The field of Anthropology has distinguished itself from the other social sciences through its incorporation of research methods that are rooted in ethnographic tradition. Research methodologies that stem from the ethnographic tradition are capable of extracting data in social situations where traditional scientific methodologies cannot easily be applied. I have incorporated ethnographic methods into this study of grassroots skateboard businesses to understand explicit cultural knowledge tied to the production and operation of grassroots skateboard businesses. Additionally, ethnographic methodology collects data on tacit cultural knowledge which provides insight into how specific cultural meanings affect the proliferation of skateboarding business. The ethnographic process from beginning to end is embedded in the writing process (Clifford 1986, 23). Within the research process, the act of recording field notes and transcribing interviews allows for cultural knowledge to be transcribed into texts which can then be studied.

I used a mixed methods approach emphasizing ethnographic interview and participant observation to collect implicit and explicit cultural data which contextualizes the experience of skateboarding for the local business owners. The project is centered around ethnographic interviews featuring six business owners from the Florida skateboard community. I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews which investigated topics of participation in the activity and discussions about their business. In addition to ethnographic interviews, I utilized an exploratory media survey and participant observation to understand how and why these businesses continue to proliferate.

Approaching this research from an applied anthropological standpoint, I am aware of the power embedded in my position as a researcher and its effect on the production of knowledge. Considering my position as both a member of the skateboard community and a researcher, I address participant reciprocation in ways that provided long-term and sustainable benefits for the Florida skateboard community. As a form of reciprocation, I used my videography skills to produce branded media content for the business owners to use in their future marketing efforts. The process of creating the branded media content outside of ethnographic interviews provided insight into the research topic that would not have come out of the interviews in the first place.

Research Participants: Demographics

The skateboard entrepreneurs included in this study share specific skateboard practices in a geographic region. These skateboard businesses were based out of Tampa or the greater central Florida area. In addition to their shared geographic region, all the skateboard entrepreneurs involved in this research project participate in the physical performance of skateboarding, but differ from the larger skateboard community through their production of original branded skateboard goods. Of the six research participants, two businesses focused on selling urethane skateboard wheels, two businesses sold skateboard decks, one business produces clothing dedicated to skateboarding, and one company sells protective skateboard gloves for downhill racing. One shared commonality in the business models of six of he companies is their reliance on larger, third-party industrial manufacturing companies to produce their goods. Cultural products like the ones being produced by the skateboard entrepreneurs, have multiple functions: to entertain, to inform, or as social display (Dueze 2002, 46). Dueze distinguishes cultural products through a distinct pattern of production where the raw materials are often manufactured overseas by individuals who have no relationship to the product being produced. The producers of these cultural

products become the intermediaries which assign value to wholesale mass-produced goods. Pro-

duces like the grassroots skateboard business owners assign art and value to the skateboard

goods manufactured in a third-party context. In this situation, the third-party manufacturers of

the skateboard decks, wheels, and clothes have outsourced the creative and artistic aspects of

production to intermediary individuals, which are the grassroots skateboard brand owners.

The participants included in this study were all males. These skateboard brands are usual-

ly one-man operations run out of home offices or garages. Although it is not unusual to see "old-

er" participants in skateboarding, there is significance in the fact that the businesses owners are

at a point in their life where they have steady full-time jobs and have many adult responsibilities

that many young skateboarders seldom worry about. These skateboard entrepreneurs have to

maintain full-time jobs outside of their businesses because these businesses do not produce capi-

tal beyond what is necessary to subsidize their participation within skateboarding. The spectrum

of careers that these entrepreneurs worked ranged included; media/advertising, professional beer

brewing, construction and full-time college students. Most commonly, the skateboard businesses

do not provide any additional income for the owners, since the owners utilize any profits that the

business may generate to grow the businesses. I worked with skateboard business owners who

live in Tampa or central parts of Florida. Shared common experiences are formed within the

group using the same skateboard terrain and the participation in regional skateboard events either

vendors or as spectators.

Ethnography: Understanding business practice and the skateboard experience

I conducted research with a cultural group defined through shared social networks, geo-

graphic location, and shared practice of social behavior. In previous research on skateboarding,

ethnography has been used to understand how photographers' perceptions of skateboarding af-

fected the composition of skateboard photography (Jeffries et. al. 2015). Through ethnographic interviews, Jeffries and his research team generated explicit cultural knowledge concerning technical aspects of composing skateboard images. This explicit cultural data highlighted the photographers' processes for capturing skateboarding images that is tied to an understanding of camera equipment in addition to technical aspects of framing and lighting. Their ethnographic methodology also elicited tacit knowledge which provided insight into the individual photographer's perceptions of skateboarding (Jeffries et al. 2015, 100-102). An analysis of this ethnographic data illustrated how different modes of representations in photography are based on the photographers' personal interests in skateboarding. The different modes of representation described in skateboarding photography points to a unique system cultural meaning which could be gleamed from tacit cultural data. The symbolic constructions of skateboarding understood through the ethnographic data were used to differentiate skateboarders' perceptions of the activity. The study of grassroots skateboard companies incorporates visual data from art printed on the branded goods and photographic media found in the entrepreneurs' marketing efforts. Jeffries et. al. (2015) employed an ethnographic method that enabled his research team to analyze cultural variance in skateboard community from both ethnographic interviews and visual data. This previous research illustrates the importance of studying behaviors that are at the periphery of skateboard performance. The production of skateboard media relates to ways that participants in the sport conceptualize their practice.

I incorporated ethnographic methodology into the study of grassroots skateboard businesses to collect data on both the explicit knowledge that is associated with skateboard entrepreneurship and the tacit knowledge that informs underlying motives driving the contained proliferation of grassroots skateboard businesses. Studying the proliferation of grassroots skateboarding

within the context of the *skateboard experience,* I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with the business owners of six grassroots skateboarding companies. The interview questions were designed to elicit information in the form of short narratives contextualizing the experience of skateboarding. They specifically keyed into the business owners' conceptualization of skateboarding, reasons for starting their businesses, and how their brands operate.

Participants included in this studied were; 1) involved in the production of original skateboard related goods; 2) are producing goods with the intention of selling the products to people within the community. I located research participants through my established connections developed through my personal skateboard business and additional snowball sampling (Guest 2014, 225). My research began with my already established connections. Following the ethnographic interviews, I utilized the social networks of the skateboard entrepreneurs to connect with the other business owners in the Florida skateboard community.

Ethnographic interviews were conducted during the Summer/Fall of 2016. Although the sample size of six may seem small, my sample represents approximately 1/3 of the business owners in the Florida skateboard community. Their status as key informants makes their inclusion relevant. In the context of this research, I conducted research with entrepreneurs in Tampa and cities in central Florida. Throughout these interviews (Levi and Holland 2015, 314), I pursued lines of questioning that position the business owners as experts within their own community. The interview process allowed the respondents to define the parameters of their skateboard community and to further specify the cultural contexts that differentiate their community.

In addition to demographic information, I wanted to elicit cultural data that may inform underlying motives for starting grassroots skateboard business. I utilized interview questions

that prompted self-generated narratives. The individual owners were asked to discuss their personal relationship to skateboarding and how they define the community in which they exist.

- Demographic information? (age, occupation, gender, and geographic location)

- How long have been skateboarding? Why did you start skateboarding?

- Why do you like skateboarding? Why do you continue to skateboard?

- Who do you skateboard with? How do you define the skate community? What are

  attributes that define your skateboard community?

- How do you define your role within the skateboard community?

After discussing the participants' relationship to skateboarding, I wanted to understand why these business owners decided to start their businesses. This line of questioning was incorporated into the interviews to elicit an understanding of cultural behaviors associated with skateboard entrepreneurship.

- Why did you start your business?

- How does your business operate? What goods do you produce? Why? How?

- What are the goals of your business? How have the goals for your

  business changed since you first started?

- How do you communicate about your brand? What ways do you advertise your

  brand? Why do you choose those media or methods?

Lastly, I pursued a line of questioning that explored aspects of taste and creative influence. Through a discussion of branding, I wanted to understand how the larger skateboard industry influenced the production of grassroots businesses in the Florida skateboard community. This line of questioning prompted the business owners to share insight into their conceptions of authentic skateboarding.

- What constitutes a skateboard brand?

- What make a good brand? What makes a brand bad or less appealing?

- How do local brands affect the community?

- How do skateboard brand owners define community?

- How do they see themselves within the community (relevance, roles, etc.)

- What do brand owners think about the larger skateboard community and the role of

  their brands?

- What do local skateboarders think about local brands?

The data collection took place in the various public skateboard parks within the greater Tampa area. In addition to serving as a place to practice, skateboard parks serve as centers of socialization where dialogue serves as a means of communicating shared values (Lorr 2015, 15). I am both a business owner and researcher, and the skatepark played an essential role for meeting and networking with research participants, and maintaining rapport. In addition to skateparks, I collected data with the research participants in locations that are important for the production of their local skateboard goods, such as garages and offices from where they operated their businesses.

I met with each of the business owners once for a duration of 1-2 hours.The open-ended interview structure allowed for deviations from the list of discussion questions. The interviews were frequently stopped, so that I could pursue further clarification on specific points or responses, which proved to be helpful in the process of data analysis. The interviews were recorded with an audio recorder.

Participant Observation:

As a member of the Florida skateboard community, participant observation allowed me the opportunity to study skateboarding in a variety of cultural contexts. Through observation, I am have been able to observe the practice of skateboarding uninhibited by my position as a researcher or the research process (Musante 2015, 252).

My position as both a videographer and skateboarder in the community afforded me the opportunity to observe skateboarding in a variety of cultural contexts. In the course of the month of data collection, my personal participation in skateboarding consisted of frequent visits to the numerous skateboard parks throughout the state. The process of observing social interactions at the skateparks has provided insight into many aspects of skateboard culture. In my observations, I listened to conversations about elements of skateboard culture. Larger values related to skateboarding become salient through discussions of tastes related to preference of skateboard tricks, brands and professional athletes. Observing these mundane conversations provided insight into what is valued by skateboarders segmented by location, age, and ability.

I am frequently invited to document community events because of the videos I have produced for Palms Skateboard Supply, my website dedicated to Florida skateboard news. The edited footage from the events are posted on my website and is shared with the larger Florida skateboard community. Sometimes these videos are created with an explicit marketing purpose. For most occasions the videos are produced as a means of showcasing the skateboarding that happened during the event. My position in the community allowed me behind-the-scenes access to discussions from event organizers. These discussions reveal insight into the politics associated with the cultural authorities within the Florida skateboard community. They provided deeper context into how social networks operate within the area, and also revealed themes related to

shared community values. The skateboard entrepreneurs and community members would engage in opinionated discussions around larger skateboard trends or discuss future events for the Florida skateboard community. Participant observation methodologies this allowed for the study of conversations uninhibited by my position as a researcher.

Survey of Existing Media:

Prior to conducting ethnographic interviews, I utilized my existing understanding of skateboard media to uncover possible themes that may be discussed by the research informants. Popular skateboard media outlets that produces image, video and text based content in both online and print formats, such as *The Berrics*, *Thrasher Magazine*, and *Transworld Skateboarding,* commonly produce interviews and documentary-style films that showcase interviews with owners of up-and-coming brands. During the research process, my personal media consumption was centered around daily updates of the previously mentioned skateboard media hubs. Prior to entering the field I viewed a 12 part series of videos produced by the *The Berrics,* which interviewed the owners of skateboard companies with growing popularity. The "Trajectory" videos series focused the business owners and their reasons for starting their businesses and their opinions about skateboard culture. These videos helped provided the background information for ethnographic interviews conducted later in the research process.

Participant Reciprocation:

Working from an applied anthropological standpoint, I wanted to compensate the research community in ways that provided long-term and sustainable benefits. To compensate the business owners for their participation in the project, I offered to produce branded media content that could be used at their discretion. Thus, outside formal ethnographic interviews, I worked with the skateboard business owners to produce branded media content that could be used in

their marketing. This production of branded media content also enhanced the process of rapport building. As discussed in the literature of skateboarding, media production is a pervasive cultural practice within the skateboard community (Jeffries et.al. 2015; Dixon, 2015). One trend seen in skateboard media is the production of short documentary-style films which outline historical narratives about the long-standing brands within the community. The data I collected through the ethnographic interviews with the business owners was utilized to produce the short documentary-style videos and print-style ads commonly seen in the existing skateboard media. Carlson et al. (2006) theorizes that the process of creating portraits with research participants through photography can improve the processes of rapport building and data collection, and this was effective in my research.

In addition to building rapport, Carlson et al. argue that the researcher's ability and willingness to produce quality photos of research participants can serve as an element of sustainable research which addresses critiques of power associated with researcher positionality. Researchers who utilize quality equipment to capture and share collaborative portraits of their participants are creating images of self-representation which are then solidifying and legitimizing the identity of the research participants. Through this process of portraiture, the researcher is utilizing his/her access to media production to legitimize the values community and in turn giving something back to the community. By utilizing my existing skills as a photographer/videographer I emulated Carlson et al.'s processes of portraiture in my research.

Ethical Concerns:

Ethical concerns in this project arose from my position of being both a researcher and member of the skateboard business community. Clear communication about my research and my research goals played an important role in distinguishing research communications from our usu-

al business correspondence. When conducting research, I needed to be explicit about the intentions for meeting the research participants. To address this concern, the participants signed an IRB-approved consent form prior to interviewing.

In addition to issues of confidentiality and data collection, it was important to consider the relationship between the research participant and me, as both research and business partner, as there may be potential for the research informants to feel a sense of coercion because of my position as a skateboard shop owner. Clear communication about my research goals and assuring anonymity was an effective way of addressing potential issues of power that may have arisen from during the research. To maintain confidentiality of the research participants, I utilize pseudonyms. Each participant is assigned a random set of initials which is consistent throughout the data collection and analysis portion of this research

Chapter Four: Skateboard Culture and the Presence of Branding

Discussions around identity and experience frame the analysis of grassroots skateboard businesses. To explain how grassroots skateboard brands continue to proliferate despite larger market saturation, this analysis will explore the presence of branding within skateboard culture. This will illustrate how the business practice of branding within the skateboard industry affects the experience of skateboarding, especially in terms of aesthetic and physical performance. These two aspects of the skateboard experiences not only guide consumer taste, but signal toward differences in the way that skateboarding can be conceptualized by the participants.

After exploring the significance and impact of branding within skateboard culture, I will address aspects of skateboarding tied to the continued proliferation of grassroots skateboard businesses. I will elaborate on themes of regional history and age to explore the continued proliferation of grassroots businesses within the Florida skateboard community, and last, I will explore the implication of grassroots skateboard businesses within a neoliberal capital system. In this section, this discussion will illustrate how these grassroots skateboard brands create value through the construction of new aesthetics, crafted from the combination of new and existing imagery from the visual landscape. The construction of new aesthetic combinations become the foundation of new approaches to skateboarding which can then be sold back to the consumer base of skateboarders. This analysis will look at the participatory culture of skateboarding and the intersection of media practices where the media is increasingly blurring the lines between life, work, and entertainment.

Capitalism and the Dominant Skateboard Identity:

      The proliferation of grassroots skateboard entrepreneurship exists outside of the normative skateboard experience associated with the dominant skateboard identity, which is the masculine performance of athletic excellence (Beal 1996, 204). The pervasive media narrative created by the skateboard industry focuses on the measure of athletic performance. This can best be seen in the media coverage of the most recent skateboard contests. In 2010, professional skateboarder Rob Dyrdek founded Street League Skateboarding (SLS). The contest series, originally designed for popular consumption, was created to popularize the practice of street skateboarding. The proliferation of the SLS competitions produces and reproduces a narrative centered on masculinity and athletic excellence. The format of SLS contests rewards participants for consistently performing tricks that are both technically and high-risk. The invitational contest series showcases athletes who embody these specific skateboarding skill sets. Broadcast on ESPN, the series showcases hand-picked athletes, who become representative of skateboarding to popular audiences.

"Q. What is the SLS Nike SB Super Crown World Championship?

A. Winning the Super Crown World Championship is the most coveted title in competitive street skateboarding. Not only do they receive the biggest prize purse in skateboarding history, the Super Crown trophy and Championship watch, they'll join a club of the best of the best in skateboarding history. The winner-takes-all championship event takes place on October 2nd at the Galen Center at USC in Los Angeles, California. The Super Crown features the top 8 overall SLS Pros and SLS Picks from the Munich and New Jersey stops competing for the most elite title in skateboarding – the SLS Super Crown World Champion. Kelvin Hoefler is the 2015 reigning champ." (Official SLS Website, 2017)

With large cooperate partnerships like Nike SB, SLS portrays skateboarding as viable

career opportunity with large prizes for skateboarders who can conform to the extreme athletic

rigors. The performances of the competitors within the SLS events are judged and assigned

points based on the performance of individual tricks. Skateboarding performance becomes

commodified through a points system used to rank the athletes' performances. Top scoring ath-

letes are rewarded with large cash prizes. In 2016, the winner of the SLS took home a cash prize

of $200,000. As the performance of certain tricks are valued over others, standards for "good"

skateboarding are created for the cultural masses. In the context of mass consumption, good

skateboarding is defined as a male-centric sport geared towards consistency and high-

risk/technical skateboard performance. Although SLS contests foster opportunities for female

skateboarders, the contest emphasizes masculine skateboarding though larger cash prizes and

increased coverage of the male events. The SLS's media coverage covers both the contests and

lives of its participants, and creates a dominant skateboarding narrative. This dominant narrative

of skateboarding created within the spaces of popular television, portrays skateboarding and its

top athletes as living a rockstar lifestyle. With the large cooperate endorsements, athletes who

participate in the SLS series are shown winning large contest prize dollars, driving exotic cars

and living extravagantly. Although this dominant narrative may be true for a few of skateboard-

ing's most talented athletes, for the majority of skateboarders this is not the case. This remains

true for the spaces and people involved in this research.

This dominant narrative has been critiqued by scholars (Beal, 1996; Nolan, 2003; Antecio

et. al., 2009; MacKay, 2015; O'Connor 2015; Willing & Shearer 2015) . These scholars examine

alternate practices that fall outside the hegemonic experience of skateboarding seen in Street

League Skateboarding, such as McKay's (2015) exploration of female skateboarder identities

constructed in online spaces. Her work and others have opened up the possibility for other identities to exist.

In this project, I argue for the presence of a unique skateboard identity that emphasizes the practice of entrepreneurship within the community. The grassroots entrepreneurs are individuals who participate through the practice of producing uniquely branded skateboard goods. In this project the idea of "grassroots" builds from the idea of *symbolic resistance* (Hebdige,1979). In Hebdige's classic study of punk culture, he theorizes how the deviant aesthetic of punk music and fashion represent forms of resistance to dominant ideologies. Grassroots entrepreneurship within the skateboard community refers to participants within skateboarding who legitimize niche aspects of the skateboard experience through the production of original branded goods which are contextualized by the community and geographic of skateboarding on a local geographic level.

Moving forward, I will further explore the significance of the brand within skateboarding. First, I will illustrate how the brand presents itself within skateboarding both in the products and media of skateboarding. Next, I will discuss how brands are constructed within skateboarding, specifically looking at how meaning is created. These discussions will provide insight into the interrelated cycle of consumption and production of skateboard brands which outline unique conceptions of the skateboard experience.

Mainstream Skateboard Branding: More than Wood and Wheels

The pervasive branding practices found in skateboarding are indicative of the distinct approaches to participation within skateboarding. These skateboard brands utilizing unique aesthetic symbolic constructions to highlight different aspects of skateboard culture. These differences become apparent in the process of buying a skateboard. Buying my first skateboard was a mo-

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ment that I vividly remember. Like many skateboarders, I can recall every detail of my first set-up. New to the activity, I also remember the stressful process of selecting the individual components of the skateboard.

The skateboard is composed of a few interchangeable components; deck, trucks, wheels, bearings, and hardware. The skateboard deck is the most recognizable piece of any skateboard. The skateboard deck or "deck" for short, is the wooden platform on which the user stands. Skateboarders frequently replace the deck because of wear or breakage from performing tricks. Griptape is the large piece of adhesive sandpaper which is applied to the top of the deck. The griptape provides friction to the rideable surface of the skateboard deck and allows for more control of the skateboard during performance of maneuvers. Skateboard trucks are the aluminum axles that allow the board to turn. The trucks attach to the bottom of the deck at sets of drilled holes on the deck. The trucks are held in place by a set of nuts and bolts that are inserted into the holes at the top of the deck and fastened in place by a locking nut. The skateboard wheels are made from polyurethane and provide the rolling surface for the skateboards. Encased ball bearings are placed inside the polyurethane wheels and then attached to the end of the trucks.

Selecting skateboard components is a process rooted in aspects of both technical performance and consumption-based identity building. As I was buying my first skateboard, the shop owner prompted me to make purchasing decisions based on the expected performance of the skateboard parts. Depending on the types of terrains and movements that are envisioned by the skateboarder, participants can choose from a variety of shapes or sizes for each component. There are no definite rules for building skateboards. However, skateboarders who primarily spend their time riding ramps and other steep terrain would generally choose to ride a wider skateboard with larger wheels for stability and more speed. Skateboarders who are more interest-

ed in jumping down stairs and performing maneuvers where the board is flipped would generally ride narrower skateboards with smaller lighter wheels in order to cut down on weight and improve the overall control of the board. The material development of skateboarding and skateboard products has been characterized as the appropriation of existing manufacturing goods (Jeffries 2015; 269). Originally adapted from scrap hardwood and metal roller skate wheels, the skateboard was invented out of experimental curiosity. In the decades to follow, experimentation in skateboard movements led to the development of distinct styles of skateboarding which also lead to the development of specific skateboard products. As skateboard movements evolved, product adaptation and experimentation created the diverse skateboard products that are available today.

Skateboard branding plays an equally important role in the experiences of buying parts. In addition to picking out components based on performance, the skateboard market offers a wide variety of brands. New to skateboarding, I was naive about specific brands. I did not understand the symbolic value behind the intricately constructed brand identities printed on the skateboard products. Staring into to the glass display case, I was amazed at the vastly different styles of art that could be printed on each of the components. I remember trying to decipher the possible meanings behind each graphic. The most visible difference in branding and aesthetic can be viewed in the skateboard decks. Decks are prominently displayed on the walls in most skateboard retail spaces, each deck competing for the consumer's attention. The aesthetic of branded skateboard decks spans the imagination. Some deck art utilizes skateboarding's countercultural aspects, displaying intricately drawn caricatures of demons and reference to illicit substance use. Other skateboard decks featured collage style designs, or simply feature the names of professional skateboarders.

Naomi Klein's discussion of branding aligns with the proliferation of the branded skateboard decks. Klein links the beginning of the brand to the industrial revolution and the advent of mass-produced consumer goods. Manufacturers of the mass-produced goods incorporated branding into their sales strategy to create trust in the production of mass-produced goods alienated from their consumer base and to differentiate their products from other similarly produced goods. (Klein 2002; 2-5). Most skateboard decks share similarities in size, shape, and construction because brands are commonly consolidated under larger distribution companies. These companies consolidate their production efforts by producing similar items which are differentiated through branding efforts. The unique branding efforts can sell the same physical product to skateboarders who relate to different aspects of skateboarding culture. The presence of branding in skateboarding closely aligns with Kline's later discussion of *super brands.* In the late 1980's businesses like Nike prioritized brand development over the production of their physical products. As Nike turned its focus to branding, the company produced intellectual goods that bolstered the image of athletic excellence. Branding became the priority and the production of the physical goods was contracted out to 3rd party manufactures. When consumers took to the idea of buying into ideals as opposed to specific products, the branded logo could be applied beyond the applications of shoes to various goods that aligned with the brand's identity (Klein 2002, 270).

In the skateboard industry, competing manufacturers' methods of skateboard construction do not vary dramatically, with companies producing decks that are similar in durability, materials, and shape. Most skateboards that line the walls of skateboard shops feature a shape commonly referred to as a "popsicle" shape. This features a rounded nose and tail and is usually nearly symmetrical in shape, and is the shape most commonly represented in popular culture. In the past few years, skateboard designs deviating from the popsicle shape have entered the market. Some

skateboard companies have revived historically famous asymmetrical designs used by professional athletes of the 1970's and 1980's, while other companies have tried bringing new shapes to the market. Although these shaped skateboards are being adopted by some participants, they do not reflect the majority of skateboards produced, sold, and used. The homogeneity in the construction and shape of the skateboard decks contributes to the industry's pervasive use of branding. Although, minor variations in skateboard design can affect a skateboard's performance, the most influential factor affecting purchasing decisions is aesthetic differences in the skateboard brands.

As a first-time skateboard purchaser, I made purchasing decisions based on aesthetic reasons. I made these decisions because I was unfamiliar with the numerous different brands that the shop carried. My first deck was a gold and back Goodwood branded deck which featured a silhouette of California subtly drawn into the background. To match the deck I picked black wheels made by Bones. The bearings were manufactured by the same company. Last, I picked out a set of black Destructo trucks which gave the setup a nice uniform look. I relied on the experience of the store employee to navigate through the hundreds of seemingly identical skateboard components. In an industry competing to sell nearly indistinguishable products, branding techniques have mediated the experience of buying a skateboard. As a new skateboarder, I was drawn to the idea that I could have a completely customizable skateboard, which would communicate my personal tastes in art and skateboarding through the combination of different skateboard components. This was a new level of customization and interaction that I had not previously experienced with other activities.

Grassroots Skateboard Businesses

The business model utilized by the grassroots skateboard companies is centered around the use of branding and third party manufactured goods. The grassroots skateboard businesses involved in this research focused on producing skateboard products in the following categories; skateboard decks, urethane wheels, skateboard apparel, and downhill racing gloves. From the business owners who agreed to participate in the research, two businesses focus on selling urethane skateboard wheels, two sell skateboard decks, one produces clothing dedicated to skateboarding, and one sells protective skateboard gloves for downhill racing.

"The current boards are alright. But, I'm always trying to find a better source for my skateboard decks." (DP, 2016, June 8)

Ethnographic interviews revealed that the process of locating quality goods was central to starting skateboard business, with two distinct processes involved in sourcing goods. Initially, skateboard owners turned to internet sources to find third party manufacturing companies to produce their goods. They discussed how quality, price, and order size were factored into the decision making process of choosing a manufacturing company, with quality being the dominant factor. Goods not only needed to be durable but the construction and form had to be authentic to the skateboard industry.

"When choosing wheels, I decided to order through Anonymous Distribution. Anonymous offered the best quality urethane for the lowest minimum order… The [urethane] formula work really well for cement parks. But they don't hold up well at wooden parks." (SJ, 2016, June 20)

This quote shows how one of the businesses owners chooses a manufacturing company and how product quality is factored into the production of his skateboard wheels. These wheels

are not the best quality wheels on the market, but the best that his small budget could afford. Access to capital becomes a major factor in producing the goods.

Thus, businesses owners wanting to sell skateboard hard goods, like skateboard decks or wheels, rely on specialty manufacturers to produce small-batch skateboard goods. Owning the equipment to produce skateboard goods requires space, crafting skills, and access to large amounts of capital. Although there are skateboard craftsmen producing small-batch skateboards from garages, it is important to consider that these skateboard craftsmen had to hand-build the tools required to make skateboards. Developing the pneumatic presses and the skateboard molds requires a level of craftsmanship that most skateboarders do not possess or desire to pursue. The inability to access manufacturing equipment is a significant factor driving the grassroots entrepreneurs to turn to third party manufacturing. Using third party skateboard manufacturing facilities allows the business owners to focus on other aspects of running their business.

The manufacturing companies that produce small-batch skateboarding goods for small businesses do not produce the highest quality products on the market. Although there is steady demand for their services, their business model and scale of production limits their access to quality materials and efficient production methods. Larger distribution companies like DXL produce skateboards from some of the bestselling skateboard brands like Real, Krooked, and Anti-Hero. Because of the high demand for these brands, DXL can order quality raw materials at a much lower price. The small distribution companies that produce for independent brands, have smaller operating budgets and must settle for inferior woods and glues, or make less profit. Although the brands produced by smaller manufacturing companies may have some minor manufacturing discrepancies, they are able to compete in the skateboard market by bringing new artistic visions to the table and creating a new or cool factor not previously seen in the industry. Alt-

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hough these smaller companies are often revered for being independent from larger cooperate influence, these smaller companies still require capital to operate and utilize innovative marketing strategies to sell their products. These smaller brands may be revered for their independent roots within the skateboard community, but it is important to conceptualize these smaller brands as part of the skateboard market, utilizing their small company size and their DIY roots to differentiate themselves from other brands.

Only a handful of companies produce skateboarding decks and even fewer produce urethane skateboard wheels. These manufacturing companies have developed their own distinct shapes for both wheels and decks. Small businesses interested in starting skateboard brands must choose products offered by the select few manufacturing companies. In this context small skateboard businesses are buying the same products to bring to market. The only differentiation within these products is branding and the application of new art, and this is used to differentiate their products.

Once the grassroots entrepreneurs have produced a line of skateboard goods, there are strategies used to introducing their product to the community, such as the utilization of social media platforms. Uploading branded media content to social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube is a method of building social networks and building brand presence within the community.

The process of bringing products to market changed my interactions with members of the Florida skateboard community. After starting my blog, I used social media platforms to develop the brand presence of my own website. After several months of producing content on social media, other business owners began to recognize my website and online store as a "legitimate" entity within the Florida skateboard community.

"You are good people. I like people who are actually doing thing in skateboarding"

<p align="center">(MN, 2016, July 10)</p>

MN, an owner of a local skateboard clothing company, discussed his support of members of the Florida skateboard community who bring new services or value to the local community. Once I was recognized as a business owner and videographer within the community, I started to received invitations to participate, sponsor, and document skateboard events across the state. Attending these events, I started networking with other business owners in the community. When I met other local business owners in person, many shared advice on running my new businesses. "The Skateboard businesses in the community are supportive of each other, It doesn't really feel like we are competing with each other" (MN,2016, July 10).

The theme of collaboration amongst the local businesses owners came up in the same discussion. MN discussed how he liked how small skateboarding brands worked together in the community to organize events. This mutual support among local business owners is visible on social media platform, where many owners leave approving comments about other user's posts.

Branding is thus, utilized as a pervasive marketing practice within the skateboard industry to differentiate and sell nearly identical products differentiated through branding values. These new branding values being created by new skateboarding companies create new forms of participation in the sport. The creation of a new skateboard brand within a local or larger community presents new avenues of participation for skateboarders. In a literal sense, new companies create new positions for skateboarders to act as liaisons or branded athletes. A new brand also presents the opportunity for a new type of customization that allow for participants in the sport to align themselves with new branded products, becoming the ideals that the brands has created. As branded skateboarders become popular in the skateboard media, new styles of skateboard

<p align="center">45</p>

moments enter the consciousness of the skateboard community. These brands create new values associated with movement and aesthetic, allowing consumers new ways to mindfully participate in skateboarding.

Due to the inability to access equipment to build skateboards parts or commercially produce clothes, grassroots skateboard brands turn to speciality third party manufacturing companies to produce small batches of branded skateboard goods. The process of starting these brands creates new knowledge associated with the production of skateboarding. As other members within the skateboard community engage with this knowledge and communicate their experiences, a community of skateboard entrepreneurs is created.

Skateboard Branding: Symbolic Constructions of the Skateboard Experience

In the 1980's, skateboard manufacturers started paying talented skateboarders to represent their products. Occupying space within the pages of skateboard magazines, the images of the athletes riding the products were used in marketing campaigns to reach skateboarding's growing audience. The commodification of skateboard imagery resulted in a new relationship between skateboard manufacturers and the producers of niche media. In this relationship, the skateboard manufactures relied on the magazines to sell their products and the magazines relied on the sales of skateboard products to ensure continued advertising revenue. This mutually beneficial relationship moved skateboard photography to adopt professional photographic practices (Jeffries et. al. 2015, 98-101). The professionalization of skateboard photography created a media space where content and advertisements became almost indistinguishable. In the skateboard magazines, the difference between skateboard photos and advertisements can only be distinguished through the placement of brand logos. Further blurring the lines between content and advertisements, skateboard brands will sponsor the production of skateboard videos and provide

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free access to the video. The contemporary media environment of skateboarding is distinctly characterized through this blending of commerce and entertainment.

As previously discussed, branding is used as a marketing tool to sell nearly-identical products. Branding has become standard business practice within the skateboard industry because of the brand's ability to appeal to postmodern consumption preferences geared towards ideological consumption. The consumption of skateboard goods mirrors the production of the branded goods. As skateboard companies produce goods bearing specific ideological conceptions of skateboarding, consumers respond to the branding by purchasing the goods that align with their personal experience of skateboarding.

In a discussion overheard at a local skateboard park, two skateboarders in their early 20's discussed their favorite brands, while talking about their favorite professional skateboarders. One skateboarder discussed how his favorite skateboarder was Andrew Reynolds. He favored Reynolds's simple style of fashion, trick selection, and longevity within the sport. The young skateboarder specifically referenced Reynolds' memorable kick flip down the Ivy Gap, a notoriously big gap at UC Davis, which was featured in the full-length video *Stay Gold (2010).* This video was funded by Reynolds's shoe sponsor, Emerica, and exclusively featured athletes who were sponsored by the company. This skater professed his allegiance to Reynolds's shoe sponsor by claiming that he only buys Emerica skateboard shoes. While at the skatepark, I observed a Andrew Reynolds fan; his performance and aesthetic loosely resembled his favorite skateboarder. In addition to wearing Emerica shoes and tight pants characteristic of Reynolds's style, he spent most of his time performing basic tricks down the biggest set of stairs at the skatepark. To contrast this image of an Andrew Reynolds fan, other skateboarders embody other common tropes within skateboard culture. Transition skateboarders are skateboarders who focus on preforming

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skateboard maneuvers in pools or concrete skateparks. The movements of transitions skateboard-

ing involve participants riding, grinding and airing on or over the coping of ramps. These skaters

focus on finding "lines," or finding new ways to navigate the curved features of a pool or

skatepark. Frequently, transition skateboarders embody the fashion and aesthetic of southern

California skateboarding. This aesthetic is commonly defined by dickies pants with the pant legs

cuffed and cuffed beanies. Transition skateboarders often look up to professional skateboarders

who also practice this style of sport. They may look up to more established professional skate-

boarders like Jason Jesse or Tony Turjilo, or new pros like Ben Raybourn. Although there are

common tropes within skateboard movements and aesthetics, many skateboarders are trying to

find variation and redefine these tropes, mixing and remixing the movements, music, and fash-

ions of existing skateboard culture.

This short vignette illustrates how skateboarders build relationships with specific skate-

board brands. Skateboard participants become receptive to skateboard brands that embody spe-

cific experiences of skateboarding understood by the individual participant. As brands and niche

media spaces engage in media practices that blend advertising and content, commercialization

penetrates all aspects of skateboarding culture. The pattern of production and consumption asso-

ciated with branded skateboard goods goes beyond their use value; these goods represent a cycle

of ideological production and consumption that utilizes visual representations of symbolic mean-

ing constructed from the real-world experiences of skateboarding.

Meaning of Movement

Because of the pervasive use of branding in the industry, new brands usually become

more specific, often catering to increasingly niched segments of the community. Thus, differ-

ences in the community can be observed through aesthetic differences found in the media envi-

ronment of skateboarding, which indicate differences in the perception of cultural institutions outside of skateboarding. These aesthetic differences are seemingly constructed on skateboarding media through a process of pastiche, differentiating brands through combinations of fashion, music, art, distinct skateboard movements or choice of terrain. The larger cultural understanding of specific brand identities is rooted in a system of meaning contingent on skateboard performance and spatial use, and these two elements are politicized through historical narratives and other cultural institutions.

Skateboard progression, in terms of tricks, is fueled from a desire to build relationships. Drawing upon a series of Ted Talks featuring Rodney Mullen, one of skateboarding's biggest innovators, Schaffer discussed the ethic of skateboarding as a set of relationships which can be explored with other bodies, environments, and social groups (Schaffer 2015: 41). The progression of skateboard tricks is understood as an exploration of the body in relationship to the skateboard. Under Schaffer's specific ethic, participants focus on exploring the possible relationships instead of scoring goals or beating an opponent. This is different from other traditional sports where participants adhere to pre-defined rules or techniques.

As skateboarders explore relationships to their body and their environment, their movements and spatial use are politicized and given meaning. Meaning is constructed through exposure to specific historical narratives of skateboarding (Lorr 2015, 208-209). Different generations of skateboarding are associated with different moments and cultural expectations. The 1970's and 1980's are associated with the progression of halfpipe skateboarding. Halfpipe skateboarding, rooted in the surf-inspired movements, became the dominant style of moment for the larger skateboard industry. Skateboarders who grew up in this era utilized wide skateboard shapes and were exposed to narratives about skateboarding which valued powerful moments on vertical ter-

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rains. As companies started to sponsor athletes, the production of skateboarding images increased. Photos featuring sponsored athletes performing high airs, long grinds and tall inverts became commonplace within skateboard magazines. The magazines set the standards for a normative skateboard culture that outlined standards for trick selection, equipment, and preferred terrain. The halfpipe narrative became reinforced and reified through imagery portrayed in skateboarding magazines. According to Lorr (2015) the ramp itself becomes a politicized space. Skateboarders who came into skateboarding during the 1970's and 1980's would develop attitudes and tastes that favored the aesthetic and movements associated with ramp skateboarding. To outline specific cultural practices associated with halfpipe skateboarding, my brief description of halfpipe skateboarding condenses many of the nuances that accompanied ramp skateboarding. In this period, skateboard brands drew upon the aesthetic of punk rock, surf, and jock culture. As halfpipe skateboarding intersected with these subcultures, it became segmented though fashion and skateboard technique. As skateboarding intersected with different subcultures, the aesthetic of skateboarding changed. Skaters who associated with the punk scene dressed like punk rockers and would perform reckless and powerful skateboarding maneuvers that mimicked the aesthetic of punk music.

In 1977, professional skateboarder Tony Alva founded Alva Skates. Incorporating punk rock and heavy metal influences, Alva and his sponsored riders use skateboards to embody the rebellious mentality of this music genre. The Alva team members, who embodied the ideals of the punk counter-culture, were draped in the tattered leather and denim worn by the punk bands of the time, and were notorious for their aggressive approach to skateboard performance. At contests, Alva and his team were known for skating faster and airing higher than other professional

skateboarders. Their disregard for technical aspects of trick performance aligns with punks focus on emotional power and uninterested in technical aspects of music performance.

In the early 1990's general interest in skateboarding dropped. The industry suffered a loss of revenue and it became difficult to maintain dedicated spaces. As the infrastructure of dedicated skateboarding spaces deteriorated, the industry shifted its attention to street skateboarding. Movements originally developed on vertical terrain were adapted to urban architectural features like stairs, rails and ledges. As the terrain changed, the technology also changed. The skateboard decks and wheels became smaller and lighter allowing for higher ollies and more board control. Moving away from ramps, urban spaces that enabled skateboard movements became valuable within the larger skateboard culture. With commercial interests shifting to core practices of street skateboarding, the magazines featured athletes that embodied the values of street skateboarding.

Within both distinct eras of skateboarding, rigid guidelines defined acceptable movements, terrains, and technologies. These skateboard behaviors took on different aesthetic forms and different approaches as they intersected with other subcultures. Outside fashion, music and political movements differentiated the aesthetic and approach to skateboarding. Within 90's street skateboarding, hip hop culture was commonly appropriated. Bands like Zoo York built their brand identities around baggy clothes, hip hop music and technical street skateboarding. Zoo York's famous video, *Mix Tape (1998)* utilized live footage of famous 90's DJ's and MC's to contextualize the skateboarding. Additionally, the off-board antics captured in this video revealed the misadventures of inner-city youth and presented the rebellious attitude that aligned with the street culture of NYC. Branded skateboard videos represent the attitudes and lived experiences of skateboarding. Skateboard videos like *Mix Tape* become the sites of cultural

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knowledge that defined politicalized skateboard movements, contextualized through music choice, fashion, and political attitudes.

As the development of skateparks became common in the early 2000's, skateboarders now had the opportunity to choose from a variety of dedicated skateparks or adapted urban environments. With the array of skateboarding spaces available, the participants within skateboard industry are pushing the aesthetic direction of skateboarding towards many different avenues. These differences in the aesthetic of skateboarding are creating many specific niches within the culture segmented by movement, art, and approaches to the activity. Despite this diversity, mainstream commercial skateboarding still places high value on the practice of street skateboarding. Street skating, captured through video and photography, is the practice that most professional skateboard utilize to maintain a skateboard career. Indeed, street skateboarding, for many participants, is considered the most pure practice in skateboarding (Antecio et. al. 2009, 5), because of its labor-intensive process, higher skill requirements, and extra danger. Unlike skateparks where features are perfectly constructed and readily available, skateboarders who participate in street skateboarding must locate the spots and evaluate the risk associated with performing tricks at the location. Generally, street skateboard spots are also more difficult because a skateboarder must adapt architectural features not intended for skateboarding. The prestige of street skateboarding is also associated with risks, such as traffic, security/surveillance, and danger from obstacles (Antecio et. al. 2009, 6-10). Some brands key into street skateboarding's prestige by assembling elite skateboard teams that exclusively skate and film in the streets, and many skateboard brands emphasize street skateboarding in their media content.

Some skateparks and architectural features can gain fame and cult value within skateboard culture, through the production of skateboarding media. Specific spots may be notoriously

difficult or the spot allows for certain types of skateboarding movements. Histories are constructed around unique street spots and gain more notoriety as skateboarders continue to perform new tricks. Within skateboard culture, it is often frowned upon for professional skateboarders to perform tricks that have already been done at specific historical spots, and skateboard brands utilize these specific histories of spots in their branding efforts. Often athletes will catch industry buzz if they perform NBD tricks at spots with a long history of existing tricks captured in the skateboard media.

As skateboarding develops in countless directions (Lorr 2015, 215), contemporary branding efforts actively utilize cultural elements produced from distinct eras. Brands identities are informed through combinations of historical narratives which specifically define movement, terrain, and skateboard technology. Unique brand identities are communicated through visual representations that use intentional combinations of skateboard culture and outside cultural groups. As brands saturate the market, brands may cater to niche experiences of skateboarding understood by skateboarding participants.

When brands are brought to market, they become the raw cultural materials that structure the different experience of skateboarding. Tia DeNora (2000), a sociologist who has theorized on how music structures agency, argues that music is the raw cultural material which structures mood, attitude, and movement. The ability to choose music represents the ability to choose experience that is indicative of the process of identity building. Through ethnographic vignettes, DeNora illustrates how an individual's choice of music can mediate experience of romance, contemplation, or specific types of moment. In this argument, certain types of music mediate specific types of experience. In one example she looks at how heavy metal rock music does not mediate romantic experiences for most women. Building off Latourian argument, music has its own

agency structuring experience (DeNora 2000, 46-48). Much like DeNora's discussion of music, skateboard brands are raw cultural materials that structure specific experiences. Skateboarders exercise agency by buying branded boards that represent specific attitudes and experiences within skateboarding.

In this discussion I have shown how specific cultural elements specific to skateboarding are used to construct brand identities, as companies draw upon historical narratives that outline specific movements, terrains, and styles of skateboard technologies. Historical movements which contextualize skateboarding performance are further differentiated through combinations of art, music, and philosophies. Some brands focus on prestige elements, while others incorporate specific cult-value locations to build meaning. A brand's combination of these elements creates a unique identity and value system for the brand. Brand-based businesses practices play an essential role in understanding the continued proliferation of grassroots businesses.

In the next chapter, I will address grassroots skateboard entrepreneurship, identifying distinct cultural elements associated with the experience of skateboarding that link individual participants within the Florida skateboard community to the continued proliferation of grassroots skateboard brands. Informed through my experiences as a native researcher, my analysis of the ethnographic data will show common themes within the experience of skateboarding relating to historical understandings and phenomenological aspects of performance. I use a brand-centric discussion to show how the pattern of production, consumption and reproduction of skateboard brands commodifies lived experiences of skateboarding to explain the businesses practices of the grassroots skateboard. To show how brands are differentiated from one another, cultural elements of skateboarding will be unpacked to illustrate how meaning is constructed within skate-

boarding culture. Last, I will show how technology plays a role in the continued proliferation of

grassroots skateboard brands.

Chapter 5: The Grassroots Skateboarding Entrepreneurship

What are Grassroots Skateboard Businesses?

This chapter defines aspects of the skateboard experience for the Florida skateboard entrepreneurs and how these aspects are brought to market through the utilization of social media platforms. An analysis of the ethnographic data revealed three salient themes that connected the business owners. First, business owners are connected through shared geographic location. The first part of this discussion will unpack the historical narrative of Florida skateboarding and illustrate how the past historical developments are linked to the contemporary development of skateboard businesses. Secondly, the skateboard entrepreneurs are all long term participants within skateboarding. The second part of the analysis will focus on how physical performance and the body influence the proliferation of skateboarding brands. The last part of the discussion will examine economic factors driving the use of social media and the effect of free media platforms on business. The last part of this analysis will show how social media becomes the catalyst for the proliferation of these grassroots skateboard brands in the Florida skateboard community.

Florida Skateboard History: The Skatepark Tradition

Specific aspects of skateboard history can become cultural symbols that are utilized by skateboard brands. The production of grassroots brand identities is more closely affected by local skateboard histories. These grassroots brand identities are also informed through local norms and cultural expectations that exist outside the skateboard community. As these Florida grassroots skateboard goods are brought to market, they become cultural goods that directly or indirectly represent the experience of skateboarding for Florida skateboarders. The grassroots skateboard

businesses included in this study exist within a space shaped by past historical events, which have shaped conditions in which the businesses have developed.

This brief outline of skateboarding history, will identify a longstanding tradition of skateparks in Florida. The enduring operation of Kona and the Original Bro Bowl provided the conditions to bring commercial interest to the region through contest organization and subsequent media representation. These parks also served as centers of organization, which facilitated communications between some of skateboarding's most influential deck crafters. These parks also provided the experiences and cultural conditions to produce skateboard industry leaders Tim Payne and the Skatepark of Tampa. Skateparks are continually being developed within the Florida skateboard community and providing the space which facilitates development of talented athletes and new ideas.

In the early 1970's, skateboarding was characterized by the introduction of the polyurethane wheel, which dramatically improved the performance of skateboards and led to a second surge in the activity's popularity (Turner 2015, 275). In the skateboard's original form, the skateboard decks were built from pieces of solid hardwood, which were transformed into skateboards by attaching wheels and axles repurposed from roller skates. These wheels were built from clay or metal, which made the skateboard dangerous during use. While in motion, the hard-material wheels would catch on small rocks or other floor debris, which would stop the skateboard and throw the rider forward. The rubber-like properties of polyurethane improved the experience for the skateboarder by providing a smoother, faster, and safer ride, which led to a second surge in skateboarding popularity.

This resurgence coincided with the increased development of skateparks. From the mid-to-late 1970's, approximately 200 skateparks were developed nation-wide, primarily as for-profit

initiatives. These skateparks featured large cement wave-like features and enabled skateboards to mimic the surf maneuvers that are tied to the sport's surf origins. Unable to keep up with high operation costs, the parks developed in this boom quickly closed down. (Snyder 2015, Appendix A)

During the skatepark building craze, Florida was home to approximately 30 skateparks, but after the boom and bust of skatepark developments, only five remained in operation nation-wide, with two of these in Florida. Today we see the continued operation of Kona Skatepark in Jacksonville, Fl., which still has many of the original features from the its early development. The second park, Bro Bowl in Tampa, was torn down in Spring of 2015 and rebuilt, providing a new facility for Tampa skaters.

Skateparks are centers of socialization and organization for skateboard communities. Studying the proliferation of Do-It-Yourself skateparks, Lombard (2015) has studied how infor-mal governance develops within skateboard communities who develop these DIY parks. DIY Skateparks are skateparks that are independently developed on reclaimed land without permis-sion from local government. The DIY skateparks are a productive site to study skateboarding because skateboard culture within the parks develops independently of a private or government interest. The formation of unique governance within these DIY skateparks indicates the for-mation of unique cultural circumstances which define ethical behaviors for skatepark participants (Lombard 2015, 252-254). The skateparks serve as a place in which ideas and communities can organize and produce cultural materials that foster a unique skateboard identity defined through geographic proximity to these skateparks.

For many towns across America, the closure of the skateparks developed in 1970's boom marked the end of easy access to terrain dedicated to skateboard spaces, and decentralized the

skateboard communities that formed around them. Moving to Florida, I have witnessed how the destruction of skateparks decentralizes communities that formed through the use of shared space. For example, the original Bro Bowl Skatepark was demolished in 2015, after substantial community debate. After that, the community that frequently utilized the space was disbanded and forced to skate at various skate parks in the area. After the construction of the remodeled Bro Bowl, these original social networks were lost, and the new Bro Bowl has created a new community with a different experience of skateboarding. Urban cities bolstering architectural plazas like Pier 41 in San Francisco and Love Park in Philadelphia became exceptions, and formed their own unique histories based upon the skaters and tricks performed in the spaces (Howell 2005, 23). The South also developed a tradition of constructing backyard ramps, where access was limited to the close social networks of the owners of the ramps. For other regions, the closure of skateboard parks resulted in restricted skateboard practice.

The longevity of both Kona and Bro Bowl skateparks have contributed to the cultural conditions that brought commercial interests to Florida skateboarding and allowed for the continued proliferation of skateparks.

Kona Skatepark - Ramp Design and Commercial Contests

Within the discussion of Florida skateboard history, Kona Skatepark was instrumental for bringing commercial interest to the region. Kona pioneered the design of the flat-bottom halfpipe and became the hosts of the National Skateboard Association's East Coast contests. The NSA Vert Competition hosted at Kona provided a point of connection between Florida's athletes and the dominant skateboard industry centralized in California. Kona Skatepark, located in Jacksonville, is one of the oldest skateparks still in existence, having opened June 4, 1977 Kona has seen varying levels of usage throughout the decades, corresponding with the varying levels of the

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sport's popularity (Lorr 2015, 210). Kona is iconic because of its sheer size and the types of wave-like features available to skaters. Today, Kona still operates and is a premier contest destination for the east coast skateboarder.

Originally opened by a group of investors, the park's early history was characterized by financial instability. A year and a half after Kona opened, the park had gone bankrupt twice. Despite the lack of initial commercial success, Martin and Helen Ramos decided to buy and reopen the park with the intent of incorporating family values into the sport.. With the Ramos family in management, Kona saw expansions on the facility (Roberson & Dwight 2015). At a time when skatepark design was in its infancy, Kona skatepark made large contributions to contemporary halfpipe design. In 1980, a flat-bottom halfpipe was erected by Jeff Hoot. This design feature is standard on all halfpipes and improved the performance of the ramps, enabling riders to perform new and innovative maneuvers.

In an interview with Martin Ramos, he recounted how his parents were instrumental in bringing professional skateboarding to the East Coast. The Kona/Variflex Summer Nationals in 1981 was the first professional halfpipe competition (KingSlate 2015). This event was featured in the September 1981 issues of Thrasher. In addition to an article, the cover image featured skateboarding legend Steve Cabellero performing a Lein Air on the Kona Ramp. Skateboard magazines like Thrasher played a pivotal role in the formation of contemporary skateboarding, because the magazine was the only way that skateboarding culture was disseminated during this time. The Kona/Variflex Summer Nationals held at Kona, placed Kona and the region as a place where serious skateboarding occurred. The space and the features enabled skateboarders to progress their skills. In addition to the progression of commercialized vert skateboarding, another obvious representation of the Kona's progressive narrative can be seen in the skills developed by

Rodney Mullen. Mullen, who developed his freestyle skateboarding talents at Kona, is one of the most influential innovators of modern street skateboarding.

The history of Kona's skatepark is defined through innovative ramp design and early commercialization of skateboarding. Despite early closures and financial instability, the continued operation of Kona provided a skateboarding specific space that facilitated the development of the flat-bottom halfpipe. As the Kona halfpipe became the host NSA's early commercialized competitions, commercialization of skateboarding was brought to the region and became part to many Florida skateboarders. Over the years, Kona provided the space where many of today's industry professionals and leaders started skateboarding. While most skateboard parks closed nationwide, Kona's continued operation provided a space where skatepark technology and skateboard technique could progress.

Bro Bowl: Centers of Organization

The other long-standing skatepark in Florida is the Guy Perry Skatepark located in Tampa. Colloquially referred to as "Bro Bowl," this park was constructed in 1975 by Joel Jackson, a City of Tampa Employee. Jackson pioneered this project to provide a space for inner city youth. Unconventional by today's standards, the original Bro Bowl was physically characterized by the Snake run and Mogul course. The original park was demolished in Spring of 2015 and remodeled months later.

In the 1980's the Bro Bowl was the only public skate facility in the state and became a space utilized by many of Florida's former professional skateboarders. The Bro Bowl and local backyard ramps provided the space that allowed the tradition of skateboard deck building to emerge. From interviews seen in the documentary, *The Bro Bowl: 30 Years of Tampa Community*, it becomes apparent that the Bro Bowl was central to skateboarding practice for some of the

sport's most influential deck crafters. In an interview with former professional skateboarder Buck Smith, Smith describes the expansive social network built around the bowl. According the Smith, the Bro Bowl mediated interactions between Paul Schmidt and Chuck Hultz, both renowned skateboard builders. Currently, Chuck Hultz's company, Deckcrafters, builds hand crafted decks that revive historical skateboard shapes, while in 2005, Paul Schmitt's company, Schmitt Sticks, produced 10,000 skateboards. Although the film does not explicitly link the Bro Bowl to the innovation of skateboard decks, it is clear the Bro Bowl facilitated communication between the two craftsmen. The longevity of Bro Bowl and its frequent use by many professional skateboarders increased the recognition of the park and strengthened of the Florida skateboard identity. Through the coverage of contests and other events, the skateboard media canonized Florida skateboarding, which became the site of progressive skateboarding movements, progressive park and deck design, and a premier vert skateboarding location.

Continued Skatepark Development: Tim Payne and the Skatepark of Tampa

In the 1990's, skatepark development resumed in Florida. Tim Payne emerged out of the Florida skateboard scene and started his own skatepark construction company. Another innovator, he is famous for commercializing the construction of wooden and cement skateparks. In an interview for the Wall Street Journal (2012), Payne talks about his introduction to skateparks through his own desires to build skateable terrain. His interest in ramp building was inspired by through conversation with other participants in Florida. He discusses the influence of visiting the Bro Bowl and Jacksonville. During this time Southern states, including Florida, had a strong tradition of building backyard halfpipes. Payne's interaction with other Florida ramp builders, provided him with the necessary cultural knowledge about building ramps to start his own company. He now frequently works with local governments in Florida to build community skateparks.

Tim Payne played an influential role in developing the Skatepark of Tampa, or SPoT, considered by most skaters to be the most widely recognized skatepark in the world. In 1993, it opened out of Paul Zitzer's and Brian Schaffer's desire to have an indoor half-pipe, and has become internationally famous for an annual indoor contest that has been running since it opened. The Tampa Pro is perhaps the most iconic skateboard competition in contemporary skateboard culture. Every winter, skateboarding's most talented athletes come to Tampa to compete in Tampa Pro. Popularity of the contest has grown in the past few years through the incorporation of online live streaming which allows skateboarders from all over the world to watch the event live. The Skatepark of Tampa is a cultural center for skateboarding. Larger companies involved in skateboarding, like shoe companies, pay the Skatepark of Tampa and its Athletes to film promotional videos showing the shoes use at the skatepark.

In the context of grassroots skateboard brands, these brand owners exist within this historical narrative. The influence of the Florida Skateboard history became apparent in both the interviews and the actions of the grassroots skateboard entrepreneurs. The skateboard parks play an essential role in the continued proliferation of the grassroots skateboard businesses, since they offer opportunities to build shared experience for a community. Local discourses form around the performance of skateboard tricks on specific features of the skateboard parks.

"The Skatepark is really important to my business. A lot of kids at my skatepark support my brand. I definitely sell the most wheels from my park. It's pretty awesome. Sometimes its pretty annoying when the local kids keep asking for stickers… I really enjoy hosting impromptu skateboard competitions at the park…" (SJ, 6/20/16).

Thus, the skatepark has literally become the marketplace in which the skateboard wheels can be sold. In the process of selling the skateboard goods, the skatepark owners use local discourses to build relationships with other community members who buy the goods.

The enduring presence of both Kona Skatepark and the Bro Bowl have contributed to the conditions that have led to the commercial practices within skateboarding and promoted the continued development of skateboard parks. The longstanding commercial development of Kona's halfpipe competitions created the opportunity for many Florida skateboarders to have successful professional careers. Over the past 40 years, many local skateboarders have recognized the success of previous members of the Florida community. This narrative of commercial success within the Florida skateboard community becomes apparent in local discussions about former Florida pros and industry leaders. The continued development of these publicly accessible skateboard-specific spaces within Florida gave the opportunity to any Florida skateboarders to build social networks necessary to sell locally produced goods. In addition to this regionally-specific narrative of skateboarding, age and the aging body factor into the continued proliferation of grassroots businesses within the skateboard community.

Phenomenology: Age and the Aging Body:

The discussions around age and the aging body became a salient theme in the ethnographic interviews with the grassroots' business owners, through lines of questioning that probed into each businesses owner's early skateboarding experience and lines of questioning that explored their continued reasons for skateboarding. In the literature, physical ability becomes a dominant aspect of skateboard experience (Schaffer 2015, 42). An individual's ability to organize the body in the performance of skateboard movements becomes the framework to under-

standing skateboarding. As the business owners start to conceptualize their age in relation to skateboard performance, the skateboard owners scale back their participation in the activity.

In the ethnographic interviews, each of the participants discussed their introduction into skateboarding. With some variation to the narrative, they had been introduced to skateboarding in their youth through a relative or neighbor. These narratives about the early experiences were accompanied by a discussion of how it felt to ride the skateboard for the first time. As these six business owners shared their personal introductions into skateboarding, each of the research participants keyed into their emotional responses as it related to their first physical interactions with the skateboard. This initial interest was expressed through an excitement in the feeling of rolling.

The theme of *rolling* is a direct extension of Schaffer's (2015) discussion of skateboarding ethic. In Schaffer's ethic, progress in the activity is framed through the formation of new relationships between the body, space, and other individuals. *Rolling* refers to the positive emotional response which is linked to movement on the skateboard. The feeling described as rolling is the moment that the first-time skateboard user becomes aware of a new phenomenological perspective, Schaffer refers to as the *skateboarder ethic* (Schaffer, 2015). The skateboard ethic is the unique cognitive processes that allow participants in the activity to organize their bodies and environments in ways that enable skateboard performance. The skateboard ethic enables the development of skateboarding culture. During the interviews, the research participants expressed notions of rolling in the following ways.

"I was hooked from the moment I stepped on the skateboard" (SJ, 2016, July 15)

"Some of the older kids in the neighborhoods skateboarded… I fell in love with skateboarding after rolling around in their driveway…" (DP, 2016, June 8)

I want to forward Schaffer's discussion by framing the ethic of skateboarding as an ethic rooted in the phenomenological process of developing *Skill*. Challenging the dichotomy between art and technology, Tim Ingold (1990) positions the development of material goods as the development of skill which is characterized as the refinement of motor skills. Developing skill involves "both practical knowledgeable skill and knowledgeable practice (1990, 18)." In this discussion, Ingold looks at the process of weaving baskets amongst the Telefol youth in Papua New Guinea. As the Telefol youth engage in the process of learning how make baskets, they are aware of the exiting cultural forms associated with shape and size of the baskets. In the beginning stages of learning to make baskets, the Telefol youth are physically unable to produce the baskets. Through the practice and the refinement of the repetitive motor-skills, the Telefol are able to produce the baskets. Ingold's discussion of skill emphasizes the total field of relations which incorporates the development of mental processes within a culturally structured environment (1990, 22). In the example of the basket production, skill does not determine the final cultural form of the basket. Instead the final cultural form is the result of mental and physical processes used to develop the motor-skill necessary to make a basket, the development of skill is then influenced by other existing cultural practices.

Ingold's (1990) discussion of skill emphasizes the importance of the mental and physical processes in the development of skateboard culture. The process of learning to make specific movements becomes the basis of experience for skateboarding and also contributes to proliferation of grassroots skateboard businesses. The individuals who own and operate these businesses are separated from the larger skateboard community by their age and time spent in the activity. Making the conscious decision to scale back in their physical participation in the sport, these business owners channel their efforts into building their skateboard businesses. Although it is

not unusual to see "older" participants in skateboarding, there is significance in the fact that the businesses owners are in a point in their life where they have steady full-time jobs and share many "adult responsibilities" that many young skateboarders do not have to have to deal with. As many of the business owners disused their participation in the sport, age and their responsibilities factored into their conceptualization of the activity. They were much more aware of how injuries from skateboarding could affect their quality of life, saying things like "I can't skate as hard as I used to" and " I can't skate all day and party all night anymore." These discussions reflect a conscious decision to scale-back their participation in the activity. Despite the increasing awareness of their aging bodies, the business owners all expressed that the "feeling of rolling" which initially sparked their interest in the activity is what keeps them involved in skateboarding today.

As skateboard business owners engage in the physical processes of refining body movement for skateboarding, they create the foundational understanding of the experience of skateboarding. As the businesses owners age, the physical process of refining body movements for skateboarding performances becomes more difficult. From the framework of youthful bodies, these business owners gained a sense of knowing what it "feels" like to be skateboarder, and as age comes into play the "feeling" is different. This sense of the changing body becomes expressed in concerns for health and injury. The physical experience of age is expressed in the decision to scale back participation in the performance of skateboarding. This physical experience of age is culturally framed through Schaffer's ethic of skateboarding progress. As business owner feels the effects of their aging bodies, they also become aware that they will not explore new bodily relationships in accordance to Schaffer's ethic. Through years of practice, the business owners still have an innate sense of what it "feels" like to be a skateboarder. This skaterly "feel-

ing" is reinforced by the social connections and perceptions of other as being skater. In the context of this research group, individuals reconcile the inability to explore new bodily relationships on the skateboard, the aging skateboarders start grassroots skateboard businesses to explore the other relational aspects of the skateboard ethic. Bringing new branded goods allows the brand owners to explore new relationships with the community members and replaces the social expectation of relating to community members through physical performance. As the individual makes the transition from a physical participant to a grassroots business owner, the individual decreases the physical participation within the activity and finds new avenues of participation within skateboarding commerce. The decline of physical participation in skateboarding for the skateboard entrepreneurs indicates the decline in the production of embodied capital that comes from the performance of skateboard maneuvers. The production of skateboard movements, a form of embodied capital, previously helped many of these business owners find equipment endorsements that helped them pursue the activity of skateboarding further. For other business owners, the performance of skateboard maneuvers was a form of socialization that helped them network and form alliances with other skateboarders in the community. As these skateboarders refocus their efforts into entrepreneurial avenues, they focus their efforts into the production of a physical cultural capital that involves the production of new aesthetic forms which are placed on skateboard goods. The production of skateboard goods becomes a vehicle for to commoditize their personal skateboarding experiences and tastes. The shift in skateboard participation changes the way that relationships are mediated for the grassroots business owners. In these situations, the grassroots skateboard entrepreneurs develop skateboard goods which can be brought to market, and sold to their skateboarding networks. In my experience, not all skateboarders deal with age in the same way. While some start grassroots businesses, others members of the aging mem-

bers of the Florida skateboard community become photographers or community organizers. Some leave skateboarding all together to explore new experiences.

Further reinforcing the applicability of skill within skateboarding, I discuss the absence of non-skateboarding grassroots skateboard business owners within the Florida skateboard community. Skateboarding has entered mainstream consciousness through the coverage of events like X-Games and Street League. Additionally, skateboarding has entered into the realm of pop culture through the development of skateboarding video games. Between the mass-media coverage and exposure to the videos games, non-skateboarders have the opportunity to learn about the cultural forms of skateboarding and should be able to identify skateboarding tricks. As non-skateboarders develop an understanding of skateboard culture, cognitively they are separated from actual participants through the development of skills; they cannot relate to the "feeling" associated with the skateboarding experience.

The experience of these grassroots skateboard entrepreneurs is distinguished from a more dominant skateboarding identity through the experience of age and the exposure to the historical narrative of a commercially successful Florida skateboarding. As aging members of the Florida skateboard community seek relevance in the activity beyond the physical performance, some participants create skateboard branded businesses which are contextualized through local skateboarding and individual experiences outside of skateboarding. These variances in the individual experience of skateboarding provide the aesthetic direction of the brands. I will provide short ethnographic examples of how differences in individual experience work to differentiate branding identity and aesthetic

Skateboard Wheels and the Embodiment of Home Town Pride:

In July of 2016, I drove across the state to conduct an interview with an owner of a wheel company. After the interview, we took advantage of the remaining time by producing a bio-graphical video outlining the brand history and the overall concept of the brand. In front of the camera, the business owner talked about his home town and the famous skateboarders who lived there. He also discussed his participation in a now defunct skateboard magazine dedicated to east coast skateboarding. His passion for skateboarding is defined through his local networks and in-dividuals. To show his passion for Florida skateboarding he revealed a subtle detail in his wheel art. Within the margins of the printed art, he incorporated the coordinates for his hometown. In this example, the owner's identity as a Florida skateboarder manifested in the physical art of the skateboard wheels he sold. The wheels become the canvas to display the unique intersection of skateboard culture and geographic identity. This geographic identity is comprised of the people, ideas and aesthetic unique to the area. In the case of this particular wheel company, the utiliza-tion of the florida brand moves beyond the wheel art. Additionally, all of the athletes are skate-boarders from Florida. Many of these skateboarders identify with their Florida roots and his all-Florida skateboard team embodies the style and talent of the region. The geographic identity is used as a branding technique within the context of a larger skateboard industry.

Forty and Sporty

In the conversations with a close friend and owner of a local skateboard deck business, I became interested in his approach to branding. The owner recently started skateboarding again to deal with the negative emotions stemming from his divorce. He started the brand to do some-thing fun and interesting with skateboarding. As a young adult, the owner found a love for punk rock and horror movies, and zombies became a central theme for the art printed on the decks.

The business owner liked the connection between the skateboarder's abuse of the body and zombies' undead bodies. Personal taste formed outside of skateboard and the use of metaphor informed the brand aesthetic for this brand company. The broad appeal of the zombie aesthetic made this brand's online social media marketing grow quickly. His social media followers ran the spectrum of skateboarders, horror enthusiasts, and people who liked metal or hard rock music. The owner involved local skateboarders to promote his brand. Also, the brand owner used the broad appeal of the zombie aesthetic to reach out to other regional skateboard communities in an attempt to sell his goods. He found particular success in a mid-sized Texas community. The relationship among the skateboard community started from a product sponsorship for a prominent athlete within this Texas community particular community. The sponsorship lasted about a year before the athlete moved on to more lucrative sponsorships. This particular athlete started receiving skateboard decks and logo t shirts. In exchange for the skateboard goods, the Texas skateboarder provided the business with video content to use in social media marketing. As the months progressed, the sponsored skateboarder created a demand for the brand. Many people within his community started riding these boards and the local skateboard shop started ordering the boards in larger quantities. In order to increase sales, the business owner started personalizing the skateboard decks with the athlete's name and custom art. This brand customization became specifically tailored to this Texas community, and was reflected in the brand's social media posts, many of which featured skateboarders from this Texas community using the products. Over the span of the year, the social media reflected the blurring of borders between work, life, and entertainment outlined by Dueze's (2007) theories on media convergence. Through the sponsorship of his particular athlete, the brand was able to outsource the process of creating the social networks necessary to sell the products. The sponsored athlete's social standing within his

community became commoditized. Remembering that skateboarding is a leisure sport, the process of documenting his skateboard maneuvers also was used as the marketing content used to sell the product. As the sponsored athlete convinced other skateboarders to buy into the brand experience, the community members themselves became part of the brand as their skateboarding media was shared as marketing content for the brand owned by a Florida skateboard entrepreneur. As the mid-sized Texas community increased participation within the brand, they created the marketing content that they viewed on the social media feeds of the brand. Over the year, the sponsored athlete and the community members became the major focus of the brand's marketing, leading to specialized skateboard products with custom art. Here, it can be observed how this particular mid-sized Texas community, participated with a grassroots brand. The sponsored athlete and the community became the brand that they participated in. This was reflected in the products, the media, and the community purchasing decisions. Popularity for the brand declined after the sponsored skateboarder eventually moved onto other lucrative brand sponsorships.

More Speed More Protection

This last ethnographic vignette looks at how color, material and form play into the formation of aesthetic. Networking through my local skatepark, I met the owner of a local business that produces gloves for downhill skateboarding racing. Previously living in North Carolina, this business owner had found a connection to downhill racing. Now living in Tampa, he discussed the issues of running a business that markets to other states, as well as the process of working with overseas manufactures. The overseas manufacturing facility provided greater freedom when it came to the form, material and colors of gloves. Wanting to create protective slide gloves that stood out from his competitors, he produced a run of purple protective gloves which he affec-

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tionately named "the purp."[2] The name and color both played on pot culture. In the context of overseas manufacturing, this business owner had more freedom in creating his products. His play on words also keys into illicit aspects of skate culture that many skateboarders understand.

These short ethnographic vignettes show how differences in individual experiences can be utilized to produce original skateboard brand identities and aesthetic. Grassroots business owners within the Florida skateboard community utilize social media to communicate the presence of the brand and the brand's unique view of skateboarding.

Branding through Digital Technology

Today, skateboarding companies utilize sophisticated marketing techniques to sell branded skateboard goods in a densely saturated market. In addition to print ads and the production of videos, successful skateboard brands have incorporated social media into their marketing practice. Social media provides skateboard brands the ability to reach wider audiences at instantaneous speed, and to reach audiences at the cost of producing the images. The performance and documentation of specific tricks is a politicized activity where specific skateboarding movements are assigned values based on understanding of specific skateboard histories. Skateboard brands emphasize movements and terrains to construct brand identity. In process of media production, the body also becomes a branded medium. Sponsored athletes produce the movements that are captured through photography and videography. The sponsored athletes embody brand values through choice of clothing and environment in which the body is placed.

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[2] The "purp" is a significant cultural signifier that links multiple subcultures. The term purp more commonly refers to a specific strain of marijuana that is differentiated by an aesthetic created by the presence of purple THC crystals. The use of purp within the context of the skateboard brand draws on the more popular usage which stems from weed consumption and hip hop music references.

"Yo, did you see the latest insta[gram] post from WKND [skateboards]? Their timeline shit is so

funny. I wish I could fuck around in the streets like that."

In this short informal conversation overhead at the skatepark, a teen-aged skateboarder discussed how he liked the social media efforts from WKND skateboards. He related to the antics of the athletes that ride for WKND skateboards. Skateboard brands are currently utilizing time-based image sharing platforms like Snapchat and Instagram to show mundane or unusual aspects of professional skateboarding that exist outside of performance. In the process of publishing photos of athletes eating pizza or "hanging out" to social media, the lives of the professional skateboarders becomes demystified and the consumers of the photos feel a personal connection to the brands. Skateboarders' media consumption practices reflect larger media practices. The proliferation of social media platforms like YouTube has allowed consumers to consume media that directly relates to individual tastes (Wesch 2008). In the context of skateboarding media, skateboarders follow skateboard brands on social media because of the media produced by the brands relates to individual consumers. As consumers continue to find personalized media, the boundaries between work, life, and entertainment become blurred (Dueze, 2007). This becomes the case especially in the previous discussions of demystifying the skateboard industry through the use of social media. In the casual example of companies utilizing intimate or mundane moments of their branded athletes for the social media, like eating pizza, the blending of work, life, and entertainment all become blurred. First, the occupation of the professional skateboarder blurs the aspects between life, work, and entertainment. Skateboarding, traditionally understood as a leisure activity, is now monetized and allows people to build careers from their athletic efforts. As skate companies start to turn to more mundane aspects of everyday life to differ-

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entiate their branding, the "act of eating pizza" becomes the media that others can then consume, emulate, and remix.

Easy access to technology and social media practices become the catalysts which allow skateboard entrepreneurs to start their businesses with substantially less capital that previous skateboard companies. Instead of paying for expensive traditional advertising, grassroots entrepreneurs can start businesses through the exclusive use of social media, allowing them to enter the market. From my position as an observer, the owners of grassroots skateboard businesses spend a significant amount of time posting and curating their social media feeds. The use of social media platforms to engage with traditional marketing practices is another dominant theme with the community of grassroots entrepreneurs. In the context of social media, the process of curating and uploading media into a news feed becomes the visual representations of experience which define brand identities and outline brand history. These artifacts of experience directly represent certain experiential narratives that are commodified through the measures of validation and acceptance quantified by likes, views, and shares. In the ethnographic interviews, the business owners discuss the significance of gaining relevance within their social networks through the use of social networks. In most circumstances the branding efforts of these grassroots skateboard brands result in a few infrequent sales to fans in the larger skateboard community.

The skateboard entrepreneurs' use of social media aligns with Mark Deuze's (2007) work on convergence culture and Henry Jenkins (2006) on participatory media. Henry Jenkins, scholar of media and popular culture, has theorized the idea of participatory media, defined through a culture that incentivizes creative expression and active participation (Jenkins, 2006). In today's skateboard media, the community of skateboarders utilizes social media as a form of entertainment and a tool to showcase their own skateboarding endeavors. Scrolling through endless pho-

tos and videos, skateboarders are able to find and connect with people and brands through partic-

ipatory media channels like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

Social media technologies like the ones previously mentioned play a role in producing the crea-

tive labor force defined through media work which blends "work (production), life (consump-

tion) and play" (Dueze 2007, 74). In the situation of a TV producer, the TV producer works in

TV for a living, is exposed to advertising and other media message in their daily routine, then

goes home and watches TV programing for fun. Work, life, and play converge into a new form

of labor that blurs aspects of production, consumption, and leisure. Skateboarding entrepreneur-

ship fits within this discussion as the skateboard entrepreneurs engage in skateboard practices

that revolve around the production of skateboard goods, participation within skateboarding social

networks, and utilizing the skateboard as a source of enjoyment.

The proliferation of grassroots businesses becomes another sector of labor that fits under

Duezes's convergence culture. These skateboard entrepreneurs have created flexible business

models that heavily rely on the utilization of social media technologies. Despite the lack of sales

generated through participation in social media, the businesses continue to proliferate as a result

of a blending of work, life, and play. As these aspects become indistinguishable from each other,

the convergence of skateboard culture has created a new labor force and a new source of exploi-

tation for larger capitalist structures. In this situation, the exploitation comes from the skate-

boarding participants who utilize social media. The skateboarders not only consume the content

hosted on the social media platforms but also create new content for others to consume, thus be-

coming the source of free labor needed to drive the social media platform (Dueze 2007, 48).

Considering the small profit margins generated through online sales, social media platforms gain

more benefit through the grassroots entrepreneurs' participation on the site. Participation in so-

cial media produces physical capital for the parties who own the social media platforms. In these instances, the entrepreneurs become alienated from capital generated through their participation in social media. As the logics of a neoliberal capitalism seek to redistribute wealth from consumer classes to the global elite, the grassroots entrepreneur's participation in social media drives views and engagement for larger audiences in the platform which creates profits for the owners of social media platforms creating a symbiotic relationship between the grassroots brands and the larger digital technology companies.

Conclusion:

The continued proliferation of grassroots skateboard businesses is the result of individuals within the skateboard community seeking to legitimize their niche experiences of skateboarding through the production and consumption of skateboards goods produced in the context of unique branding and third-party manufacturing. The continued proliferation of these grassroots skateboard brands is the result of individual skateboarders who conceptualize their participation in skateboarding beyond the physical performance of skateboarding. Influenced by age and the aging body, this reconceptualization of skateboarding prompts some individuals to maintain relevance within their skateboarding community by providing branded skateboard goods.

These niche brand identities are a reflection of the individual entrepreneur's experience of skateboarding which is informed by exposure to specific historical skateboarding narratives and the individual's physical skateboarding ability. These two specific aspects of experience play a substantial role in framing an individual's perceptions of skateboarding and taste within the activity. Within the context of this study, taste refers to an individual's preference towards specific skateboard movements and aesthetics outlined within the media of skateboarding. These

exposure to different tropes within skateboard culture, play an essential role in guiding consumer preference toward specific skateboard brands used to differentiate similar skateboarding goods.

Within skateboarding, brands articulate specific experiences of skateboarding which are communicated through the production of skateboard media. Differences in the skateboard experience can be observed through differences in the politicized aesthetic of skateboarding brands. Grassroots skateboard entrepreneurs utilize the production of skateboard media to communicate the cultural elements of skateboarding that define their brand identities and align with their unique experience of skateboarding. A brand identity is actively created through combinations of fashion, music, art and distinct skateboard movements or choice of terrain. Brands present these symbolic constructions through the production of photography and videography. Also, the skateboard goods themselves become channels to communicate brand identity. The branded skateboards are printed with art that represents the brand. Additionally, the form and function of the skateboard goods can suggest specific styles of skateboarding associated with specific brand identities.

These uniquely branded skateboard goods are brought to market through the utilization of social media outlets. With the development of big data technologies, the conditions of the neoliberal economy seek to bring all aspects of human interaction to market (Harvey 2005, 3). Social media platforms provide the means for entrepreneurs in the skateboard community to articulate niche experiences of skateboarding through the symbolic construction of skateboard imagery and art. Social media serve as a catalyst for the proliferation of these small-scale brands by providing inexpensive ways of producing and disseminating branded content and bringing their products to the larger community defined through mutual interests and common cultural practice. As brand owners utilize social media to communicate their brands, their individual experiences

of skateboarding are also communicated and brought to market. Social media provides a seemingly "democratic" means to present unexplored niches of skateboarding.

The brands representing the narratives of skateboarding experience are created and redefined through participation in social media, in which the process of curating and uploading media into a news feed becomes an experience that defines brand identities and outlines brand history. These artifacts which directly represent certain experiential narratives are commodified through the measures of validation and acceptance quantified by likes, views, and shares. In the ethnographic interviews, the business owners discussed the significance of gaining relevance within their social networks. In most circumstances the branding efforts of these grassroots skateboard brands result in a few infrequent sales to fans in the larger skateboard community. The social media platforms receive the benefits of the labor created by the business owners' participation in social media. In this situation the labor and experience of these brand owners are commodified and produce physical capital for the parties involved in the development of the app. Harvey (2005) argues that in the neoliberal economy no new capital is produced. Instead, the movement of capital is redistributed from consumer classes to the global elite.

In this discussion of grassroots skateboarding brands, I argue that the market allows for the continued proliferation of these small-scale business because it contributes to the conditions of the neoliberal economy where wealth is redistributed from consumer class into the global elite. Under the larger western narrative of individual entrepreneurship, individuals within the skateboard community choose to create these branded businesses that communicate their experience of skateboarding and conform to larger societal norms. With small operating budgets, skateboard entrepreneurs turn to social media platforms that provide the opportunity to practice traditional marketing methods with little startup costs. Putting most of their entrepreneurial effort

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into social media branding, the branded goods are brought to market and branded experiences of

the skateboard companies are commodified. Through the accumulation of followers and likes,

the business owners are rewarded with recognition and validation in their social circles as well as

continued participation, they just keep on rolling!

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