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**SHREDDIN' IT UP:
RE-THINKING "YOUTH" THROUGH THE LOGICS
OF LEARNING AND LITERACY IN A SKATEBOARDING
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ROBERT ANTHONY PETRONE

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RE-THINKING "YOUTH" THROUGH THE LOGICS OF LEARNING AND
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By

Robert Anthony Petrone

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ABSTRACT

SHREDDIN' IT UP: RE-THINKING "YOUTH" THROUGH THE LOGICS OF LEARNING AND LITERACY IN A SKATEBOARDING COMMUNITY

By

Robert Anthony Petrone

This dissertation reports the findings and conclusions of a multi-year qualitative study that examines the learning and literacy practices in which a group of working-class young men engage as part of their overall participation in local and global popular culture communities, especially involving skateboarding. Focused primarily on interactions that occur in a skateboard park, this dissertation illustrates how learning and literacy practices are situated and social in that they differ according to participants' sociocultural position within their popular culture communities, function to produce and index a range of social arrangements and identities among participants, make sense only when in relationship to immediate and relevant contexts of use, and facilitate participants' production of and contribution to their popular culture communities. In addition, the learning and literacy practices the participants engage demonstrate the simultaneous communal and conflictual nature of their popular cultural communities as well as how these communities offer participants key sites for meaning making and identity formation.

Through examining the logics of learning and literacy found within a skateboard park, this dissertation explores and denaturalizes several basic normalized conceptions of youth, especially the construct of youth as incomplete adults and always "becoming." Specifically, this dissertation explains how for the young men of this study participation in popular culture communities facilitates a "relevancy" or "immediacy" temporal mode

or state of being, a set of “participant peer” social arrangements that cross school-based age groupings, a culture of generative failure that supports their learning, and cooperative competition that enables them to produce a group ethos of solidarity and develop an individuated identity within the group that is based more on “subcultural” sociocultural factors such as ability than macro-level sociocultural factors such as race. Looking across these conceptual frameworks, this dissertation problematizes and offers ways to re-think configurations of “youth,” relationships between young people and adults, and social arrangements involving young people, including a range of schooling practices such as age-stratification.

**This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who for better and worse,
first shaped my perspectives on life, love, and the world
and taught me how to be in relation with others.**

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Like the fish that is unaware of water until it has left the water, people often take their own community's ways of doing things for granted.

Rogoff (2003: 13)

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Chapter One

“It’s completely backwards”: Formidable and Flanking Fictions of Youth

RP: The other question I had was...I’m curious to know why you’re willing to help me out with this [my dissertation].

Luis¹: I think everybody should know about it. There’s a lot of people in this world that have a common misconception about skateboarders and punk rockers, and a lot of people just think that we’re just a bunch of loser, drop-out, drug users that have nothing better to do with their time than to raise hell and skateboard, and that’s not the case. A lot of skateboarders are really cultured people, especially kids in the punk rock scene, too. I mean, they may not be intelligent in the ways of traditional teachings, things like that, but as far as music goes, there’s a lot to be learned from kids like me.

Luis, a 20 year-old skateboarder, punk rock drummer, and welder, graduated from high school after 5 years with a 1.4 GPA

Whether he favors shredding it up in the streets, grinding a rail, catching air on a vert ramp, carving a bowl, or simply cruising down the sidewalk on a long board, anyone on a skateboard today owes more to Mother Nature than any of the skateboarders who preceded him. In the mid-1970’s, the State of California suffered one of its worst droughts in history, and all over the state, especially the greater Los Angeles area, it left restaurant patrons thirsty, lawns browned from dehydration—and most important for this story—in-ground swimming pools empty. Innovators of unimagined uses of cement, a group of gritty, hard-nosed adolescent surfers, looking to kill time on days when the waves weren’t breaking at their coveted surfing area below the Pacific Ocean Park Pier in a seedy section of town dubbed “Dogtown” by its locals, discovered that these empty concrete swimming pools offered them a never-ending series of “waves” on which they could apply their surfing techniques to their “land boards,” skateboards. Illegally entering upper- and middle-class backyard after backyard to “surf” these pools, this

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

group of pioneer adolescents, known as the “Z-boys,” almost instantly became local celebrities, and within a few years, international spectacles, and in many regards inspired a movement which revolutionized the sport of skateboarding and youth cultural groups to this day (Beato, 1999; Peralta, 2002).

Since this moment in skateboarding history, albeit not without a series of peaks and valleys, skateboarding has become an international phenomenon that is a virtual mainstream thread in the fabric of today’s worldwide popular culture. It is broadcast on ESPN, featured on the cover of *Outside* magazine, embraced by *Rolling Stone* and the mainstream media, and can be found in one form or another on the backs and feet of thousands of people who have never even touched foot to grip tape. According to American Sports Data, Inc. (ASD), over 12.5 million people did step foot atop a skateboard in 2002, and of those millions, 85% of them were under the age of 18. Although dominated by males, these millions of skateboarders defy a single mold as the sport’s reach extends across national borders and differences in race, class, and lifestyle choices.

Since 1976, when the first skateboard park was built, these skateboarders, through their engagement in an array of civic and literacy practices, have continuously moved closer to fulfilling their dream of “paving the world cement.” Specifically, their grassroots efforts to initiate and solicit financial, community, and political support for the construction of local skateboard parks have been the driving force behind the surge of skateboard parks in communities across the United States and around the world. These parks, each unique in design and cultural practices, have become spaces for literally

millions of kids in the world to learn not only how to skateboard but also how to understand themselves and the world around them.

Similar to many others, Franklin Skate Park in the town of Finley, MI is a space where young people, particularly young men, come to improve their skateboarding skills, develop and sustain friendships, and learn about the world and their place in it. For many of its users, Franklin Skate Park is a haven, a place of freedom, a place for self expression, a place for belonging. Not meant to be representative of all skateboarders and/or all skateboard parks (although I hope that it does do justice to the sport and the people of it), this dissertation tells the story of the guys of Franklin Skate Park and the ways they make sense of themselves, skateboarding culture, popular culture in general, and the ways that literacy helps them in doing so.

By nearly every socially-sanctioned measure, particularly those that determine adolescents' primary social identity—their academic performance—virtually all of the guys at Franklin Skate Park are, as Eckert (1989) might say, “Burnouts,” and most certainly boys in “crisis” as it is defined by several contemporary writers (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Pollack, 1999; Sax, 2007; Tyre, 2006). They unequivocally underachieve in school—many of them carry GPAs below a 2.0, frequently get in trouble with school authorities, and eventually drop out, get kicked out, and/or finish high school on the five-year plan; if at all, they sporadically attend community colleges (never four-year colleges); they smoke cigarettes (many underage), like to “party,” ink their arms, legs, chests, backs, and heads, and adorn their bodies with lip, ear, and nipple rings; overall and in general, they do not ascribe to or aspire for the types of lifestyles and/or careers for which schools typically prepare young people.

Although a range of people use Franklin Skate Park, the predominant users consist of working-class young men who live in or near Finley. These young men, the “locals,” or as one of them says, “the diehard Finley Skate Park people,” range anywhere from four or five years of age to men in their late thirties and forties. It is from this group of locals that I gained access to skateboarding culture, the workings of Franklin Skate Park, and working-class young men’s engagement in popular culture more generally. Although not designed as a set of “case studies,” this project focuses primarily on the experiences and perspectives of this group of young men, who because of their deep commitments and engagement with popular culture offer rich perspectives into the logic of their cultural practice. This study examines the logic of their cultural practice, paying particular attention to how their learning and literacy practices reveal the ways and reasons these young men engage popular culture. Specifically, the central research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What is the nature of my focal participants’ participation in their local popular cultural community at Franklin Skate Park and global popular culture communities? How do they participate? For what purposes? What social arrangements do these forms of participation facilitate and/or make visible? What type of learning environment do these forms of participation and organization facilitate?
2. In what ways do texts mediate my participants’ participation in local and global popular culture communities? Which texts do my participants engage? How and for what reasons do they engage them?

3. What do the answers to questions 1 and 2 reveal about my focal participants, particularly as learners, users of literacy, and “youth”?

In examining the learning and literacy practices my participants engage as part of their overall participation in skateboarding culture, I discovered that my participants’ engagement with popular culture is wrought with tensions and contradictions between egalitarianism and hierarchy, solidarity and division, acceptance and exclusion, and freedom and control. In some ways, popular culture serves as a space, sometimes quite literally, where my participants feel like they matter, where they are powerful, where they are producers and contributors to a cultural community. In these ways, their engagement with popular culture affords them an identity in a world where they otherwise and oftentimes feel alienated and/or unproductive. In this vein, my participants outwardly espouse and invest in a subcultural ideology of egalitarianism and solidarity. However, at the same time, popular culture, especially when examined and practiced inwardly, enables my participants to claim and/or produce statuses and positions within a hierarchal social order that necessitate practices of exclusion, control, and competitiveness. These tensions make visible the ways in which my participants, through their engagement with popular culture, simultaneously form identities and subcultural ideologies in relation to larger macro structures and ideologies of youth, middle-class values, and/or the corporate structure of schooling at the same time that they are enacting, integrating, and/or embodying these practices, values, structures, and ideologies within their local popular cultural community. This tension illustrates the ways popular culture allows my participants to “re-interpret” the social world and create an “alternative social world” at the same time that they are interpolated within the larger social world. By revealing this

tension and my participants' ways with popular culture, this study demonstrates how these young men are neither the cultural dupes nor passive victims of denigrated mass culture or heroic figures who remain unaffected by broader socio-economic-political contexts; instead, this study shows how for these young men, like most, if not all people, the business of making sense of oneself and one's place in the world is a messy, oftentimes contradictory process of struggle filled simultaneously with pain and joy.

Understanding how and why young people, especially those for whom traditional venues such as schools do not feel generative in facilitating their struggle, engage in this struggle is especially important in constituting conceptions of youth, educational practices, and social arrangements. Locating a group of young men's struggle within a popular culture venue might help us re-think the normalized ways our current social arrangements involving young people exist and get practiced. For instance, it becomes difficult, if not impossible to conceptualize young people as incomplete adults when they are understood as significant producers and participants of a cultural community that engenders them an identity and exigency in their present state. By working to help locate and destabilize the ways that young people, especially young men are understood and labeled, particularly as these processes involve literacy and popular culture, this study is situated within a larger project involving the examination of various constructions of "youth," the field of Youth Studies.

Youth Studies

My favorite part is you go to these, you know, I go to these heavy shows. I'll go see like Marilyn Manson or Slayer, or you know, just with my buddies. And people, you know, the rest of society they hear about that or they see my tattoos they're like they're like, "Oh my God! What a waste of the youth." You know? Or something, but if you actually take the time to go to these concerts and to meet these people that go to these tattoo

conventions and stuff—the coolest freakin’ people your ever going to meet. They’re so happy, so loving and caring you know. Just...it’s completely backwards.

Larry, 20 year old skateboarder, musician, poet, and high school dropout

Concerned by the ways young people are oftentimes understood, represented, and advocated for in popular media, educational institutions, and public policies and practices, an interdisciplinary line of scholarship, known summarily as “Youth Studies,” has sought to problematize current, mainstream understandings of adolescence and youth in order to rethink subject positions available for young women and men in contemporary American society. Specifically, this line of inquiry—drawing on a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches—interrogates commonsensical conceptions of adolescence and youth that are rooted in biology and developmental psychology, conceptions that construe young women and men as incompetent and incomplete people who are governed by their hormones and in need of adult intervention. In general, Youth Studies argues that what has become known as the “natural life stage” of adolescence is not a universally-experienced, scientifically-verifiable “truth” as much as it is a social and historically-constructed entity, or as Vadeboncoeur (2005) suggests, a “fiction”—“a function of political, economic, educational and governmental discourses,” or “a story made universal, and as such, a time and space that adults impose on and negotiate with young people” (6). In other words, “adolescence” and “youth” are socially “achieved” and “produced” through a range of social, cultural, political, economic, and ideological factors, including for example, narratives of literacy and academic achievement. From this shared perspective, Youth Studies takes as its central aims the location, exposure, and disruption of the ways these normalized “formidable fictions” of adolescence and youth

circulate in contemporary society (and the subsequent consequences of their doing so). Examining conceptions of young people as “fictions” does not suggest that people do not advance chronologically through the ages of approximately twelve and twenty four, but rather that the ways that this period of time in people’s lives is understood is always contingent on ways of knowing and reasoning available at any one particular time and place. As Acland (1995) explains “Youth is an empty signifier that becomes meaningful only in given circumstances, coming to designate certain attributes and qualities” (20).

The exigencies for much Youth Studies scholarship stems from a shared belief that the formation of various constructs of “youth” oftentimes function as “battlegrounds” for social concerns, anxieties, and panics to be wrought out, and as metaphors for both the problems and promises of America, representing either a range of social fears and panics or the best hopes for the future. For example, in her “history of the present,” Lesko (2001) examines how the relatively new construct of adolescence emerged just over a century ago amidst several historical, economic, political, and social anxieties, panics, and “worries” over “racial progress, male dominance, the building of a nation with unity and power” (6). She argues that angst around degradation of United States society by an influx of immigrants, concern about the feminization of young males, and emerging “scientific” explanations of youth combined to construct adolescence in terms of whiteness (and in opposition to other races and ethnicities), masculinity (and in opposition to feminization and girls), and the building of nationhood. This conception of adolescence, she argues, proved a “useful” construct since it offered a “social space in which to talk about the characteristics of people in modernity, to worry about the possibilities of these social changes, and to establish policies and programs that would

help create the modern social order and citizenry” (5-6). In many respects, the concept and construct of “youth” has become imbued with a symbolism for America’s “potential for unbounded successes and for dismal failures” (Acland, 145), oftentimes at the expense of the young people themselves. Perhaps stating the case most cogently, Austin and Willard (1998) assert: “Youth and young people must be understood as more than longstanding metaphors for adult agendas, desires, or anxieties” (2).

Whether it be concerns about school shootings and upsurges of violence, plummeting test scores, too much time playing video games, or “defiant” fashion styles, “Youth in Crisis” discourses circulate (and have historically) as one of the central and “common sense” constructions of youth. Acland (1995), through his analysis of “the discourses and representations of youth delinquency” (12), argues that youth-in-crisis discourses always form and circulate in relation to larger concerns about “the reproduction of social order” (12), including elements such as the breakdown of the family and/or other institutions, such as education, male hegemony, and criminality. He writes: “At the point of virtually every measure of social crisis—race relations, drugs, censorship, pornography, gender, sexuality, families, poverty, waning tradition—sits the loosely defined, yet rhetorically forceful, youth” (10). In many instances, these crisis discourses are accompanied by attacks on various forms of popular culture and lament at low levels of literacy achievement (Luke and Luke, 2001; Springhall, 1998). For example, childhood literacy scholars Luke and Luke (2001) argue that current print literacy “crises” function “as a form of moral displacement and panic” and a “discourse surrogate” for anxieties about the identities and life opportunities new forms of literacy have opened up for young people, who they suggest are viewed as an “uncivil, unruly

techno-subject” (99). In other words, they suggest that early childhood literacy reform movements that target print-based literacy initiatives are actually backlashes to the proliferation of new literacies and the consequent new forms of identities they create for adolescents. Specifically, they argue that new media and literacies have opened up new forms of identity, technological competence and practice, and new life pathways for children and adolescents—all of which policy makers frame as putting children and adolescents “at risk” and in “crisis”—and that contemporary calls for early childhood print-based literacy interventions and policies are an effect of the clash between former and emerging conceptions of youth, which adults attempt to stave off and reframe as “dangerous.” As a consequence, this literacy crisis discourse converts adolescents’ competencies with new media to “incompetencies” with print literacy and their new media “communities of practice” as “threats” (104). These “panic” and “crisis” discourses reverse the responsibilities for educational failure “from creaking, print-based educational systems to postmodern children and adolescents” and thus displace “moral panic over the emergence of an unruly, unpredictable and multi-mediated adolescence back to an attempt to remediate early childhood” (105-6). They write: “We interpret the push to early childhood, the push to models of deficit and remediation, the push to even earlier intervention, as a moral panic over its Other: over unruly adolescence and youth” (114).

Regarding popular culture, Springhall (1998) explains how over the last one hundred fifty years, various forms of popular culture—from “penny theaters in the 1830s to the ‘penny dreadfuls and ‘dime novels of the 1860s and after, from the Hollywood ‘gangster films of the 1930s to the American ‘crime’ and horror crime’ books of the late

1940s and early 1950s, from television once sets became widely accessible to the ‘video nasties’ of the early 1980s and the violent computer games of the early 1990s” (3)—have been mobilized by various groups of people as ways to construct young people as being in crisis as a way to deal with larger social and moral upheavals and panics. This connection between popular culture and youth in crisis discourses is also evident within the current “boy crisis,” especially for those pundits who argue that American boys are in crisis. Although discussed to different degrees, when it comes to popular and media culture, this line of inquiry typically views these cultural forms as monolithic entities that are the same for everyone (not localized) and experienced the same by everyone; infringements on more productive/acceptable uses of time and activities; and as a mainly negative force in boys’ lives, although they can be at times “good” when they ascribes to and upholds certain ideas, such as going to school and getting good grades. For example, Sax (2007) explains how certain popular culture texts endorse “the right kind of competition” (i.e. Harry Potter), appropriate subject positions for boys, such as someone who finds academic achievement acceptable and desirable; male role models who occupy subject positions that are deemed acceptable and desirable, such as doctor; a hierarchal family structure (e.g. “Father Knows best”). In one example, Sax cites the Sam Cooke song, “Don’t Know Much About History” of 40 years ago to argue how, although “there’s always been boys who regard school’s a waste of time,” what’s changed is that today it is considered “unmasculine” to do well in school.

Furthermore, Sax argues that various forms of popular culture serve detrimental purposes when engagement with them differs from and/or critiques mainstream, middle-class values or subject identities, and/or infringes upon time spent engaging in other,

more appropriate pursuits. Specifically, Sax explains how some forms of popular culture, especially playing video games, are detrimental when they displace engagement with print-based literacy activities; take away from “talking with other kids, playing sports, playing outside or studying”; become “addictive”; offer subject positions for boys that he characterizes as “slackers” or “thugs”; are “foul and degrading.” For example, Sax argues that the “music of American teenage culture today...is foul and it is degrading,” and serves as the “theme song” for a gang and thug culture that “sucks” boys into it. In an NPR interview, he said:

You know, when I do my presentations for parents, I play that music. I play Akon, I play 50 Cent, because a lot of parents don’t understand, your child is listening to this. I find white parents think, oh, my child doesn’t listen to that. You’re wrong, this is the music of American teenage culture today, and it is foul and it is degrading and parents need to know what their kids are listening to.

Moreover, Sax constructs popular culture as a monolithic entity, a singular culture that blankets the entire teenage population of America (“an American teenage culture today”) and in the same ways; in other words, his construction of popular culture does not allow for a plurality of popular cultures, and again locates popular culture within textual forms, not in the engagement or production of various textual forms and/or practices. This perspective of popular culture constructs boys as uncritical consumers (and notably not producers) of popular culture, as a singular mass of cultural dupes, who are indiscriminating consumers of whatever is handed to them. Similarly, Kindlon and Thompson (2000) argue that “popular culture is a destructive element in our boys’ lives...” (16) and part of the culture at large that “...conspires to limit and undermine their [boys’] emotional lives” (xix), specifically by providing boys with a dominant image of masculinity that they ascribe to (xvi). They write:

Although there is a lot of lip service being paid to the new age of the 'sensitive male,' stereotypic images of masculinity are still with us. Whereas boys used to emulate John Wayne or James Dean (who now seem quaint by comparison), today's boys see even more exaggerated images of stoic, violent, impossibly powerful supermen on movie, television, computer, and video screens. The media serves up as role models Neanderthal professional wrestlers; hockey 'goons,' ready at the slightest provocation to drop their sticks and pummel an opponent; multi-millionaire professional athletes in trouble with the law, demanding 'respect' from fans and the press; and angry, drug-using, misogynist rock stars.

Even boys who are not allowed to watch violent movies or play violent video games, but who watch television sports, will nevertheless consume a steady diet of commercials in which a man is not a man unless he is tough, drives a tough truck, and drinks lots of beer. These are not visions of manhood that celebrate emotional introspection or empathy. (15)

While not interested in arguing against their analysis of the actual texts they mention, what is noteworthy is the assumption they—and Sax—make about the ways and reasons boys engage popular culture and media texts. In these passages, boys are positioned as passive, indiscriminating recipients of information and images, who will mimic these behaviors, thus contributing to the further promotion of boys as weak and in need of particular forms of intervention, including censorship of textual forms. Also, this argument implies that the meanings of textual forms of popular culture are inherent in the texts themselves and not through people's engagement with these texts.

One of the main traditions within Youth Studies is the examination of young people's relationships with popular culture—that is, locating the ways young people organize and define themselves through popular culture symbols, rituals, practices, artifacts, texts, and sites. This examination of youth popular cultures directly challenges narratives of youth's engagement with popular culture posited by such pundits as the boy crisis cohort. Specifically, this tradition within Youth Studies demonstrates the complex and active ways youth engage popular culture. For example, Best (2000) examines how

an “iconic” American event, the prom, functions as a form of popular culture through which young people engage a set of practices, rituals, and texts that facilitate their identity formation around issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and politics among themselves and in relation to adults, society, media, and schooling. For instance, Best describes how the act of getting ready for the prom created a space for many young women to “perform” their feminine identities and to struggle—through their bodies—“over what it means to be feminine within culture today” (16). She writes, “More than just a set of frivolous practices of primping, these [practices girls engage as they prepare for the prom] are fertile sites of identity negotiation and construction, where girls are making sense of what it means to be women in a culture that treats the surface of the body as the consummate canvas on which to express the feminine self” (46). Best also argues that the prom as a site of popular and youth cultures facilitated the identity formation of young people through the ways prom goers maneuvered around various school and adult policies that attempted to control their interactions and behaviors—whether related to alcohol consumption, dress codes, or sexual preference. For example, many prom goers wore sunglasses to the prom as a means of resisting adult supervision. Also, the emergence of “gay proms” reveals another example of how young people, through their engagement with popular culture, define themselves. Best writes, “Queer proms exemplify a political strategy to take a cultural resource belonging to heterosexual society and use it to expose its tyranny, to challenge its hegemony. In doing so, queer proms capture the struggles of the disenfranchised to resist and subvert cultural practices that normalize and naturalize heterosexual romance” (158). In general, Best’s analysis of

“a night to remember”—the prom—reveals various ways popular culture facilitates young people’s formation of identities, cultures, and politics.

Since youth studies scholars who examine young people’s relationships with popular culture demonstrate how youth can be understood in society outside or beyond the terms of academic achievement, I draw upon this line of inquiry and situate my own study within it. Specifically, by focusing on the social and literate lives of my participants as manifested through their engagement with popular culture in non-school contexts, I aim to not only destabilize some of the “formidable fictions” concerning young men in contemporary society, especially those who underachieve academically, but also provide a “flanking fiction” that attempts to step aside from naturalized conceptions of adolescence (as much as this is possible) in order to rethink potential subject positions available for young men in American society. To do this, I heed the suggestions of the scholars who are engaged in a similar political project and have made concrete suggestions for how future research might advance this area of scholarship. Specifically, Austin and Willard (1998), in their synthesis and theorization of the scholarship within the purview of the field of Youth Studies, suggest that future research projects involving youth focus on “the everyday tactics, small social collectives (peer groups and youth cultures), and common cultural practices surrounding young people” (5). Similarly, Lesko (2001), whose work emphasizes “discourses” of adolescence and “leaves unexamined the personal, subjective experiences of various youths” suggest that subsequent scholars “pick up these pieces” (13-14).

Furthermore, by examining the nature of my participants’ engagement with popular culture, I am not attempting to sensationalize, glorify, heroify, uncritically

celebrate, or romanticize my participants, their cultural practices, or popular culture in general. Nor am I attempting to demonize, minimize, or neglect schools, academic literacy, or any of the seemingly startling statistics of violence, drug and alcohol use, and mental health issues among young men. What I *am* arguing is that the deeply-embedded, normalized ways of reasoning, understanding, and assessing young men in society have certain consequences, many of which actually constitute some of the “problems” boys encounter and/or have, and therefore, need to be examined and possibly rethought. This project responds to my own personal concerns about the ways young men, particularly those of working-class and racial-minority origins are understood and advocated for/with, especially in educational contexts; and my experiences as a teacher educator where I have witnessed the transformative possibilities reframing perspectives of adolescence and young people have for prospective teachers’ thinking about pedagogy and schooling (Petrone, et al, 2006). In many respects, this dissertation is written with my former English education students in mind (specifically, the fall 2005 section of TE 407 at Michigan State University), a group who demonstrated to me how examining the lived realities of young people’s lives in out-of-school contexts afforded ways to rethink pedagogical and ontological possibilities available in this world.

Overview of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter Two, *Theoretical & Analytical Orientations*, provides an overview of several key theoretical and analytical concepts that inform this study. First, this chapter draws on Cultural Studies, especially as it is informed by the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies, to articulate a working definition of Popular Culture as a contested space where through consumption, production, and distribution of cultural texts and practices,

people ascribe meaning to their lives. Second, this chapter draws on sociocultural theory to articulate a working conceptualization of learning as change in people's participation within cultural communities and literacy as a social practice, especially as it intersects with popular culture. Furthermore, this chapter provides a review of scholarship related to skateboarding, especially as it is examined as a youth culture.

Chapter Three, *Behind the Bowl: Research Methodology and Methods*, details the research design and methods of data generation and analysis used and explains the reasoning that undergirds them. Additionally, this chapter addresses some of the complexities of working with school-age people in out-of-school contexts and explains the social location and political orientation of the researcher.

Chapter Four, *Entering the Bowl: An Intro to Finley, Franklin Sk8 Park, and its Participants*, draws upon ethnographic data to describe a skate contest held at Franklin Skate Park. This description functions as an introduction to the skate park, the focal participants, and a variety of the cultural practices in which they participate as part of their engagement with popular culture. Additionally, this chapter will provide a communal context for the study by including information about the town, Finley, where the skate park is located.

Chapter Five, *Carving the Bowl: Learning how to Skateboard and "Be" a Skateboarder at Franklin Skate Park*, explains how Franklin Skate Park functions as a learning environment. Specifically, this chapter examines how learning practices such as skating with others, watching others, and "doing it" reveal deeper principles of learning and social arrangements within the park, including a tension between solidarity and exclusion.

Chapter Six, *From Poser to Producer: The Logics of Literacy Engagement for the Skaters of Franklin Skate Park*, explains how and why the participants consume, produce, and distribute an assortment of multi-media/modal texts (e.g. magazines, books, tattoos, tagging, music, videos) as part of their cultural participation within their local and global pop cultural communities. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the ways textual activity serves various socio-cultural purposes, such as group affiliations, differently for different participants. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates the ways participants use literacy to learn popular culture and learn literacy through their engagement with popular culture.

Chapter Seven, *Beyond the Bowl: Assumptions, Conclusions, and Considerations*, explains the conclusions drawn from the findings from chapters four, five, and six, especially as they relate to constructions of “youth.” Also, this chapter explores potential considerations the conclusions of this research have for secondary education schools and English/Literacy education.

Chapter Two

Theoretical & Analytical Orientations

This chapter explains the theoretical and analytical orientations and reasoning that undergirds this study. Specifically, this chapter explores the theoretical conceptualizations of popular culture, literacy, and learning, as well as other key concepts such as text, community, and subcultural status. In addition, this chapter will conclude with a review of scholarship that pertains to skateboarding and how this current project is situated within and contributes to this scholarship.

Skateboarding as Popular Culture

Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture—already fully formed—might be simply “expressed.” But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why “popular culture” matters.

Stuart Hall (1981: 240)

For this study, popular culture is conceptualized as part of a larger project of Cultural Studies, especially as developed through the work of the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies [CCCS hereafter] at the University of Birmingham, England during the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. Specifically, the CCCS conceptualized popular culture at the nexus of the Humanities and Social Sciences in that the development, enactment, expression, and therefore the study of popular culture does not only cohere within texts (in a literary sense) but also in “a whole way of life,” (Williams, 1961). This conceptualization of “culture” brings together literary and anthropological perspectives, which is significant because it not only broadens the landscape of studying popular culture “texts” as dynamic sites where meaning gets ascribed through the

processes of consumption, production, and distribution by people in contexts, but it also broadens the object of culture studies to include practices of lived cultures, such as holidays, celebrations, festivals, youth cultures, and subcultural groups (Storey, 15). This enables me to study skateboarding and my participants' engagement with it as a cultural form by both examining the texts involved in their engagement as well as their embodied activities related and unrelated to these texts, especially the learning practices they develop and participate in as a cultural community.

A second key theoretical concept, also drawn from the CCCS is the idea of the “popular” as a contested space in which competing interests get negotiated and reworked. Drawing heavily from the work of Italian Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci, especially his concept of hegemony, the CCCS theorized popular culture as a site of ideological struggle between capitalist, corporate interests and those of the working class. They resisted the idea that popular culture was simply a “mass culture” developed by the “culture industry” to serve up its hegemonic interests to indiscriminating, cultural dupe recipients. Similarly, they acknowledged that popular culture was not entirely a “folk” or “authentic” culture emerging from the “ground up” without mediation from the culture industry or other broader social, economic, political, or cultural factors. Instead, CCCS scholars understood popular culture as a “terrain of exchange,” in which the commodities produced by the culture industry were in dynamic interplay with those who consumed them, often in the struggle for competing class interests. Therefore, popular culture did not have inherent meanings within these commodities; instead, meaning—and popular culture—was produced by the interactions between them and people. Fiske (1989), although not a part of the CCCS, captures this perspective in the following way: “Popular

culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All the culture industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture.” Hegemony, which Gramsci developed as a political concept to make sense of why revolutions did not take place in Western capitalist societies, attempts to explain the processes in which dominant and subordinate classes of people work together to produce the subordinate class’ consent to their own oppression within a society, and culture was an important site of these processes. However, Gramsci’s hegemony does not imply a dominant flow of power from top down; instead, hegemony, which is a process that must be continually constituted, is a space of ideological warfare—a terrain of exchange and struggle—in which negotiation, conflict, resistance, and cooption occur.

When mobilized for the examination of popular culture, this perspective of power and class conflict reveals the many intellectual, cultural, and political processes subordinate classes undergo as they engage with cultural forms produced and distributed by the culture industry. Storey (2001) explains how the concept of hegemony allows scholars of popular culture to conceptualize it as “a ‘negotiated’ mix of intentions and counter-intentions; both from ‘above’ and from ‘below,’ both ‘commercial’ and ‘authentic’; a shifting balance of forces between resistance and incorporation...The commercially provided culture of the culture industries is redefined, reshaped and redirected in strategic acts of selective consumption and productive acts of reading and articulation, often in ways not intended or even foreseen by its producers” (106). For example, Hall and Jefferson (1976) and Hedbige (1979) reveal the ways working-class youth reconfigure commodities of the culture industry to exercise resistance, opposition,

and communal identities. Hall writes, “It is participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects, and events. Things ‘in themselves’ rarely if ever have any one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning” (3). It is within this struggle to “give meaning to people, objects, and events” that popular culture acts as a terrain of exchange, a struggle of articulation where meanings get produced, exchanged, negotiated, and resisted, and it for these reasons that popular culture, as Hall says, “matters.”

Although initially conceptualized as a site of class ideological struggle, subsequent scholars of popular culture have broadened Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to include issues of race, gender, sexuality, meaning, pleasure, and other sociocultural factors. Also, this line of inquiry, moving outside of a neo-Gramscian orientation, brings to bear a range of theoretical and epistemological perspectives, including Feminism, Post-Structuralism, Queer Theory, and Postmodernism—all of which speak to the strong interdisciplinary nature of the field of popular culture studies. Despite their differences, though, the CCCS and those subsequent scholars influenced by them believe that popular culture represents important sites of meaning making, identity formation, and political and intellectual activities. Therefore, the study of popular culture creates a space for scholars, especially those interested in understanding youth, a demographic who typically spend a great deal of their time engaging popular culture, to investigate various ways people make meaning—culturally, politically, socially, economically, etc.—in their lives. Specific to this study, this orientation to the popular enables me to examine skateboarding culture as a dynamic space that consists of contradictions and tensions, many of which reveal broader concerns and issues related to the lives of my participants.

As evidenced throughout this discussion of popular culture, popular culture does not have a fixed meaning but, like the concept of “youth” discussed in the previous chapter, might be better understood as a fluid set of discourses that serve political aims and govern what is and is not popular culture at any given time. In other words, what is or is not popular culture changes over time and gets specified within particular parameters. Some scholars of youth, for example, actually drop “popular” and discuss “youth cultures,” which they typically define as activities or spaces that cohere around age groupings or shared activities that address the desires and/or needs of young people. Other scholars, particularly those from a postmodern perspective, suggest that the concept of popular culture is no longer relevant or meaningful and functions as an “empty conceptual category” (Storey 1). While I agree that this argument makes a strong theoretical case, I also recognize that in popular discourses involving young people, the construct of popular culture still carries great currency, particularly in relation to positioning young people in “crisis.” Therefore, for this study, I maintain the use of the term popular culture and define it as the activities and texts young people engage involving sports, mass media, and a range of other cultural practices.

Franklin Skate Park as a Cultural Community and Learning Environment

Any specific way of reading and thinking is, in fact, a way of being in the world, a way of being a certain “kind of person,” a way of taking on a certain kind of identity.

James Gee (2003: 3-4)

One of the theoretical orientations I draw upon to examine the central phenomenon of interest in this study—youth engagement with popular culture—is a sociocultural theoretical perspective of learning and literacy. Scholars operating from a sociocultural perspective share the central assumption that all activity—whether it be

learning to read, write, or skateboard—is deeply social and inextricably linked to engagement with others, participation in broader social and cultural activities, and a sense of identity (Cole, 1996; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000: 1-50; Rogoff, 2003). Building on Sociocultural-Historical Theory as developed by Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and his colleagues, a sociocultural perspective assumes that understanding how an individual learns “must be understood in, and cannot be separated from its social and cultural-historical context” (Rogoff, 2003: 50). Therefore, a key idea from a sociocultural perspective is that whenever someone engages in an activity within a context, she is always learning to become a certain “somebody” within a particular context, even if that context and activity is a seeming solitary act, such as playing video games (Gee, 2003). For some scholars, this engagement involves a process of apprenticeship in which a novice moves from being a peripheral participant to a legitimate participant (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in a community of practice. For others (Gee, 1996, 2003, 2004), learning occurs within “affinity groups,” in which members of these groups take on “identity kits” and “discourses” that speak to their ways of being as part of their participation in a larger cultural group. Regardless of the particulars, all conceptions of sociocultural theory acknowledge that learning is a cultural process which joins together learning, social engagement, and issues of identity and group affiliations. As Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) write:

Although there are many strands of sociocultural theory, including activity theory (Engestrom, 1999), distributed cognition (Rogoff, 1995), situated cognition (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and cultural psychology (Cole, 1999), all of these strands share a view of human action as mediated by language and other symbol systems within particular cultural contexts. ...From this perspective, activities can be viewed as social practices situated within communities invested with particular norms and values (5).

From within this broad theoretical perspective, Rogoff's (2003) cross-cultural examination of cultural communities and theory of learning is particularly useful in helping me conceptualize Franklin Skate Park as a space and place, the social arrangements, activities, and forms of participation that occur within it, and the ways my participants learn how to skateboard and be skateboarders within this context.

Rogoff (2003) defines cultural communities as "groups of people who have some common and continuing organization, values, understanding, history, and practices" (80). She goes on to explain how a community "involves people trying to accomplish some things together, with some stability of involvement and attention to the ways they relate to each other," and how "being" a community "requires structured communication that is expected to endure for some time, with a degree of commitment and shared through often contested meaning. A community develops cultural practices and traditions that transcend the particular individuals involved, as one generation replaces another." Furthermore, she explains how the relations among participants in a community "are varied and multifaceted," that "different participants have different roles and responsibilities," and the relations among participants "may be comfortable or conflictual or oppressive." She explains:

Their relations involve personal connections and procedures for resolving inevitable conflicts in ways that attempt to maintain the relationships and the community. Participants in a community may provide each other with support and are familiar with aspects of each other's lives. They also engage in conflicts, disputes, and intrigues, as seems inevitable when people's lives are connected and the future of the community is a matter of intense interest. (80-1)

From this theoretical orientation, I conceptualize Franklin Skate Park as a cultural "community" and the people who spend time at the park as "participants." Also, I

developed the analytic of “participatory events,” which I define as those instances when participants partake in the activities of the park. This analytic enabled me to focus my analysis on the space of the park, the activities, social arrangements, and forms of participation developed and practiced by its participants. Also, by looking at participatory events across participants, I was able to locate the ways different participants participated differently and took on different roles as participants.

By focusing on participatory events differentiated across participants, I was able to locate the ways participants learn within this community and how Franklin Skate Park operates as a learning environment, especially by paying particular attention to the ways that people’s participation change over time both in terms of their skateboarding abilities and their relations to other participants and other cultural practices, including textual activity. In this way, Rogoff’s conception of learning as a process of changing participation in community activities through guided participation over time proved useful in that it “provides a perspective to help us [me] focus on the *varied ways* that children learn as they participate in and are guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities” (283-4). This perspective on learning is particularly important for examining the learning activities of my research site since so much of the learning that happens there is the result of indirect and implicit forms of “instruction.” Rogoff explains that in addition to “instructional interactions,” “guided participation focuses on the side-by-side or distal arrangements in which children participate in the values, skills, and practices of their communities without intentional instruction or even necessarily being together at the same time. It includes varying forms of participation in culturally

guided activities through the use of particular tools and involvement in cultural institutions” (284).

It is important to note a certain irony present in drawing upon the work of a cultural psychologist writing about human development given my attempt to step aside from normalized conceptions of youth which have been made knowable in large part by the field of psychology. In one sense, this irony illustrates the difficulty, if not impossible nature, of stepping aside from such deeply-ingrained, normalized conceptions of young people. (In the last chapter, I briefly discuss my concerns about how a project such as this might actually work to reinforce the very conceptions of young people I am attempting to disrupt.) In another sense, however, it is important to note that from within Rogoff’s far reaching theoretical orientation, I am drawing primarily upon her conceptualization of learning as a social and cultural process. In this way, I am able to talk about learning and the participants in this study as being participants within a cultural community without necessarily having to root this work in developmental psychology.

In addition to Rogoff, I draw upon Eckert’s (1989) concept of neighborhood networks and Thorton’s (1996) concept of subcultural status to further make sense of the phenomenon under consideration. Eckert, in her discussion of the places and ways “burnouts” spend time outside of schools explains how their “comprehensive neighborhood networks” are characterized by a fluidity that is not typically present in middle-class youth spaces and activities outside of school contexts. Specifically, she explains how these burnout neighborhood networks demonstrate a sense of self sufficiency, solidarity, supportiveness, loyalty, and egalitarianism among the participants. She also reveals how these participants, while less reliant upon their parents and more

reliant on each other, are typically more age heterogeneous than middle class youth social arrangements. Thorton, in her discussion of music club youth cultures, focuses on the ways and logics whereby her participants develop hierarchies within their cultural communities and make distinctions between authentic or legitimate and inauthentic popular cultures, especially as they do so in relation to their consumption of a range of media. In this way, she is interested in “subcultural ideologies,” which she explains “are a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (10). Drawing on Bourdieu, she develops the idea of “subcultural capital,” which she explains as the subcultural knowledge which functions to confer particular statuses and make distinctions within youth cultural communities. Also, within this phrase, she signifies her shift from examining youth cultures in relation to larger, macro structures (as had been the dominant way of understanding youth cultures), to examining the cultural logics of delineation and power within youth cultures.

The Texts of Skateboarding: Sociocultural Literacy, Youth, & Popular Culture

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people.

Barton and Hamilton (1998: 3)

Situated within sociocultural conceptions of human activities and rooted in sociolinguistics—a field of study that brings together linguistics and anthropology in order to address the social and cultural functions and uses of language—sociocultural conceptions of literacy argue that it is equally important to understand the functions and

uses of literacy as it is to understand the mental processes and skills used to read and write as no instance of literacy is value-free, neutral, or without social and cultural influences. For example, Szwed (1981), extending the work of sociolinguist Hymes (1972a, b), argues that understanding literacy “as simply a matter of the skills of reading and writing does not even begin to approach the fundamental problem: What are reading and writing for?” To do this, he suggests the need to understand “the social meaning of literacy: that is, the roles these abilities play in social life; the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts for their performance; and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts, but by ordinary people in ordinary activities” (422). Throughout his piece, Swzed implicitly and explicitly critiques the cognitive perspective of literacy by claiming that different contexts for literacy activities necessitate a “different set of skills” (425). Underlying his application to literacy of Hymes’ work in language is the assumption that literacy is a social and cultural phenomenon and cannot be understood as simply an individual, cognitive endeavor. Therefore, when people learn and use literacy, they are always learning social and cultural “information” and ways of being, such as the nature of questions (Heath, 1982a) or broader social and cultural values (Ochs and Schieffelin, 2001).

From this perspective, then, literacy does not reside within people’s heads as they engage in reading and writing, but rather in the social engagement around texts; literacy is not the intrinsic property of an individual but rather the participation in social and cultural activities involving texts. The shift from literacy residing in individual’s heads to it residing in people’s participation in social and cultural activities corresponds with the notion of literacy as a social practice. First posited by Scribner and Cole (1981) in their

study of the cognitive effects of literacy, literacy as a social practice suggests that anytime someone engages in an act of reading and/or writing, they are actually participating in a “set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use” (236). As a social practice, literacy is never a neutral, decontextualized, or “autonomous” act but rather always “ideological” and implicated in broader social, cultural, and political contexts and practices (Street, 1984).

Heath’s work (1982a, b; 1983) adds to this theoretical base the analytical tool of a literacy event, which she adapted from Hymes’ speech event. She writes (1982b):

The LITERACY EVENT is a conceptual tool useful in examining within particular communities of modern society the actual forms and functions of oral and literate traditions and co-existing relationships between spoken and written language. A literacy event is any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes (445).

Literacy events focus on the conditions and social and cultural “work” around textual activity, including the people who are present, the manner in which the text is discussed, the time and place of the activity, and so on. Due to its emphasis on the contextual features of literacy activities, this analytical technique enables the researcher to gain an understanding of how, when, and for what purposes people engage in literacy activities, what meaning these activities have for the participants, what roles literacy plays in that context, and how those literacy events represent, reflect, and/or shape the participants and their social and cultural context. By accumulating literacy events over time and across

participants and contexts, a researcher will be able to interpret the literacy “practices²” (Street, 2000) of a cultural group. According to Street (2000), literacy practices refer to the values and beliefs about literacy that a group of people within a context share. He explains that while literacy events are photographable, literacy practices are not. He writes, “Literacy practices refer to this broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (22), or as I like to think of literacy practices, a group’s “ways with texts.” For example, Heath (1983) explains the literacy practices (based on an accumulation of literacy events over time) of the people of Trackton in the following way:

...Certain types of talk describe, repeat, reinforce, frame, expand, and even contradict written materials, and children in Trackton learn not only how to read print, but also when and how to surround the print in their lives with appropriate talk...Authority in the written word does not rest in the words themselves, but in the meanings which are negotiated through the experiences of the group (196).

This example reveals how, over time, Heath was able to interpret what meanings texts and textual activities had for the people in Trackton. Also, because literacy practices are one way of understanding a group’s broader cultural practices (Miller & Goodnow, 1995), these literacy practices help reveal the nature of the group more generally. Similar to these scholars, for this study I utilized what I term “textual events,” those instances in which my participants accessed, consumed, evaluated, produced, and/or distributed texts as part of their larger participation within their local and global popular cultures.

While early scholars operating from a sociocultural perspective focused exclusively on print-based texts (e.g. Basso, 1974; Heath, 1983; Szwed, 1981), the recent proliferation of new textual forms and practices have expanded the purview of

² This is meant to be distinguished from Scribner and Cole’s notion of practice. I almost think a better word would be “values” or rather the phrase “ways with texts,” since Street’s notion of practices gets both at the values and the ways of participation around texts.

sociocultural conceptions of literacy to include examination of “new” literacies. Proponents of the new literacies argue for expanded notions of text and literacy, suggesting that the changing nature of the world—economically, technologically, and socially—is changing the nature of texts and textual activities (Alvermann, 2002; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kist, 2004; Kress, 2002; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003; 2007; New London Group, 1996). For example, Kress (2002) suggests the image and screen are replacing the long-held dominance of writing and the book as the central mode and medium of textual production. Also, Lankshear and Knobel (2003) argue that the rise of an attention economy could potentially give rise to a range of new forms of literacy such as “Meme-ing,” “Contact Displaying,” “Attention Transacting,” “Scenariating,” and “Culture Jamming.” Therefore, literacy can no longer be understood as solely the province of print-based reading and writing, but as Lankshear and Knobel (2007) explain “blogging, fanfic writing, manga producing, meme-ing, photoshopping, anime music video (AMV) practices, podcasting, vodcasting, and gaming are *literacies*, along with letter writing, keeping a diary, maintaining records, running a paper-based zine, reading literary novels and wordless picture books, reading graphic novels and comics, note-making during conference presentations or lectures, and reading bus schedules” (6). This expansion is exemplified in how Morrell (2004a) revises Heath’s definition of a literacy event to the following: “a communicative act in which *any text* is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and interpretive processes [emphasis added]” (11). For this study, a broadened definition of text is especially important since my emphasis is on my participants’ engagement with popular culture, including their activities involving videos,

tattoos, music, blogs as well as more traditional textual forms such as books and magazines.

Within the field of sociocultural conceptions of literacy, a growing body of scholarship investigates the complex relationships between the ways young people engage popular culture, use and develop literacy, and form identities (Alvermann, 2002; Dyson, 2003; Finders, 1997; Fisher, 2007; Gee, 2003; Kirkland, 2006; Mahiri, 1998, 2004; Moje, 2000, 2002; Morrell, 2004a, b; Patel Stevens, 2005). Although varied in the degree to which these scholars explicitly identify themselves working within the fields of popular culture and/or youth studies (all identify themselves within sociocultural scholarship), taken together, this line of inquiry's central object of study is the location and examination of the ways young people's engagement with popular culture facilitates their literacy development and identity formation.

In general, this emerging body of scholarship notes that the nearly ubiquitous nature of popular culture in American society today, especially in relation to young people, makes it an essential "context" to take into consideration when attempting to understand young people's literacy development, the various ways literacy functions in their lives, and their identities in contemporary society. Similar to Youth Studies, several of these scholars conduct research in this area in an attempt not only to locate the various ways literacy and popular culture intersect but also to reveal the wide range of ways young people exist in the world beyond those most commonly constructed and perpetuated. For example, Mahiri (1998, 2004)—concerned by the ways youth, especially African American urban youth, oftentimes get represented as "dangerous Others" (2004, 14) and youth popular cultures essentialized as monolithic entities

separate from adults (1998, 5)—argues that examining young people’s engagement in youth popular cultures and the literacy practices associated with them “allow for a more comprehensive view of urban youth and young adults than is usually presented in the media, in politics, and in schooling” (2004, 14). As might be expected given this phenomenon, and consistent with the “in/out-of-school” tradition within the field of sociocultural literacy, many of these studies examine youth’s engagement in popular culture and literacy in and outside of schools, locating the ways these differing sites not only contribute to differing identities and literacy practices but also how youth and educators transport these across sites.

Whether focused on gangsta adolescents (Moje, 2000), urban boys who play basketball (Mahiri, 1998), children who play video games (Gee, 2003), middle- and working-class teenaged girls reading teen zines and romance novels (Finders, 1997), or minority, urban youth “becoming critical researchers” (Morrell, 2004b), this line of inquiry documents a range of ways young people use literacy to engage popular culture and/or use popular culture to support their literacy learning and development. In other words, for some of these scholars, young people’s participation in popular culture creates meaningful contexts and exigencies to seek out and engage a range of literacy activities whereby participation and “becoming” a certain somebody within a popular culture deepens. For others, the texts and practices of popular culture become important resources—linguistic, textual, ideological—upon which young people draw to learn and develop literacy. All of these scholars believe that understanding these phenomena offer literacy (and other) educators powerful opportunities to develop generative points of connection between young people and adults, academic content, and the world. What

follows are examples from this body of scholarship that illustrate how youth learn literacy through popular culture and use literacy to learn popular culture.

Dyson (2003), concerned by the ways young children's literacy development is often understood and educational policies consequently created and enacted, describes the processes in which young children draw upon popular culture to develop literacy. Specifically, she explains how the "brothers and sisters," a group of first grade African American boys and girls in an urban classroom, "transport" and "recontextualize" a variety of textual material from their "unofficial" literate and cultural lives, especially related to popular culture (e.g. songs, animated films, and sporting events), in order to facilitate their development of "official" literacy, namely writing. Furthermore, she explains how transporting these textual forms from one context to another, or "across symbolic forms and social practices" (108), necessarily engenders her participants to grapple with meaningful ideological tensions and shifting identities. Her documentation of this oftentimes "messy" process demonstrates how literacy development is "enacted as children participate in, and thereby enact interpretations of, the recurrent social activities of their daily lives" (11), a process she argues, "...should render anemic those views that attempt to fragment written language into a string of skills or to narrowly define those home and community experiences that can contribute to school learning" (185).

Patel Stevens (2005), interested in the relationships between out-of-school literacy activities and subjectivities of young people, describes how a fourteen year old African American girl uses literacy to engage popular culture through her development of a fan-based website for the R & B group, Destiny's Child. Beyond demonstrating the ways that Desiree uses literacy to engage popular culture, Patel Stevens also examines the ways

that Desiree's literacy use was constitutive with her sense of "being" and "becoming" somebody, especially a female somebody within the broader social and cultural contexts of the fans of Destiny's Child specifically, and the Hip Hop and R & B industry more generally. For example, Desiree contemplates adding to her site a link to a site for a male R & B musician but is hesitant to do so because she wants to maintain her site as a space for female musicians "cus it's mostly guys in hip hop and R & B, ya know?" (57), as she says. Patel Stevens explains how Desiree's textual decisions as part of her continuous reconstruction of the site facilitate her own engagement with various aspects of her subjectivities, especially in relation to the ways gender intersects with this popular culture.

Also interested in the links between literacy, popular culture, and identity formation among youth, and concerned by the oftentimes vilified or deviant representations of adolescents' marginalized literacy practices, Moje (2000) draws on three years of ethnographic data to explain how three adolescents peripherally involved in gang culture used their literacy practices, such as note writing, graffiti writing, hand signs, raps, and poetry, as meaning-making, expressive, and communicative tools in order "to be part of the story," to "claim and mark spaces or territories, construct identities, and label and identify—or position—themselves and others" (661). For example, she demonstrates how several gang-related young people used poetry as a means "to express their fears and concerns, to construct identities, and to position themselves in particular ways" (663). In addition to literacy practices, Moje discusses the way learning functions within this cultural group, explaining that it is "informal" in comparison to the ways learning is structured in schools, it is situated and community-based as well as one

imbued with power. Specifically, she explains how the young people with whom she researched “learned these practices by apprenticing to others in a community of practice and by practicing the different forms in various spaces” (672). A key aspect of their learning process was that the learning of literacy was always hand-in-hand with learning the various social arrangements by which the cultural group existed. Finally, Moje explains how these young people, as they traversed a range of contexts, or “attempted to be part of the many different stories written for and about them” (679), also negotiated their practices within these contexts.

The findings of this body of scholarship offer implications for literacy education by calling into question some of its basic tenets. Perhaps the most significant implication of this research is the view of young people it puts forth. Through its documentation of young people’s everyday engagement in popular culture and literacy activities, it offers a more comprehensive view of youth than is oftentimes constituted within schools. Patel Stevens, for example, reveals how the dominant discourse of “adolescence” negates, marginalizes, and undervalues the literacy practices Desiree participates in as part of her negotiation of a range of subjectivities available to her through her engagement with popular culture. Patel Stevens argues that educational reforms have not been informed “by the literate, embodied, and performed lives of young people within and out of those spaces [officially sanctioned spaces of schools],” and she wonders how a reconceptualization of the construct of “adolescence” might differently inform educational reform: “How might the reform of middle schooling be shaped differently if the biological and developmental underpinnings of the stage of adolescence were

interrogated with both quantitative and qualitative research about the lived worlds, both material and figured, of young people outside of schooling contexts?” (66-67).

This study draws upon this line of inquiry in order to make sense of how the participants in this study use texts. This study contributes to this line of inquiry by exploring the ways literacy and popular culture are in recursive relationship with one another—that is, that my participants both use literacy to learn popular culture and learn literacy through their engagement with popular culture.

Scholarship on Skateboarding

Skateboarding may indeed be a sport. Hell, maybe it’s even an extreme one. But it’s a simplistic, and in the end, unfortunate vision of it. We must also draw the line in our portrait to account for skating as a subculture, a cultural response, as a dance and a political act and a religion. If we don’t, skating doesn’t lose, we do.

Howe (2003: 368)

As skateboarding’s popularity and far geographic and demographic reach have increased over the past ten or so years, so too has scholarly attention to this cultural group, enough so that there exists a small, yet rich body of scholarship focused on the phenomenon of skateboarding. The two most prominent lines of inquiry within this scholarship examine the relationships between skateboarding, space, and architecture (Borden, 2001; Karsten and Pel, 2000; Willard, 1998; Woolley and Johns, 2001); and skateboarding as an “extreme” or “alternative lifestyle” sport and/or youth subculture (Beal, 1995, 1996, 1998; Beal & Weidman, 2003; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Howe, 2003; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). These two lines of inquiry have been most prominently forged, respectively, by the work of Iain Borden, professor of architecture and long-time skateboarder himself, and Becky Beal, Sociology of Sport associate professor.

In the only published book-length study of skateboarding, Borden (2001) traces the history of skateboarding from the homemade scooters of the 1930-1950s to today's urban street skaters by focusing on the relationships between historical developments and skateboarders' production of space and relationships to architecture. By drawing on spatial theory, particularly the work of Lefebvre (1991), Borden argues that architecture cannot simply be understood as "object with a role to play, but is constituted by the discourses and practices of social life" (9), and in so doing, demonstrates the ways that skateboarders enact social critique through their production of space and engagement with architecture. For example, in his discussion about skateboarders and the city, he explains how urban skateboarders "constitute themselves as subjects through producing space" (171). He writes: "To understand skateboarding, we must, then, consider it directly in relation to the spatial. Skateboarding subculture is enacted not as a purely socio-economic enterprise, but as a physical activity, undertaken against the materiality of the modern city, and hence it is when practiced as a simultaneously spatial, socially lived and temporal practice that a critique does [as we shall see] emerge" (171). Not an ethnographic study, Borden utilizes a range of industry, or what Beal (2003) might call "specialist" texts, such as magazines (e.g. *Skateboarder*, *Thrasher*) and videos in order to reconstruct his historical and spatial analysis.

Willard (1998), also interested in the ways space, especially urban space, and skateboarders constitute one another, explains how skateboarders "jump scale" in order to "expand the spatial range and scope of their self-activity—beyond the limits imposed by external organizations of power—to larger internally defined extensions of community and affective experience" (332). Drawing on the field of geography, Willard explains

“scale” as that which is produced whenever a place is constructed “both architecturally and socially” (332). In the context of his article, Willard explains how the section of Los Angeles (“Broadway”) he studies has been separated and contained from other urban spaces, and skaters and the other inhabitants of Broadway “experience scale as separation, as the attempt by those with greater power to produce scale that limits the extent of their social activity and everyday life” (332). “Jumping Scales,” then, is the process whereby people, in this instance, skateboarders deliberately overcome the imposition of scale in order to “insure continued inclusion in, and ability to shape, urban spaces” (332). In doing so, he argues that skateboarders forge their identities as they produce a “translocal” community through their contestation of spatial limitations and marginalization.

Through a series of articles and book chapters over the past decade, mainly targeted toward a Sociology of Sport academic audience, Becky Beal examines skateboarding from a Cultural Studies perspective. Specifically, she has been interested in the ways that skateboarding as a subculture and sport relates to larger discourses of the corporate bureaucracy of sport, and skateboarders form identities through their cultural practices in relation to larger cultural frames and discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In her early work, Beal (1995, 1996, 1998), rooted in the CCCS tradition of subcultural studies (especially a neo-Gramscian perspective of popular culture), examined the ways in which skateboarders constructed identities through their resistance of mainstream, or hegemonic values, such as competition and conformity, especially those adherent in “conventional sport identities” (32). For example, she (1995) explains how a skate contest functioned as a site of social resistance whereby skateboarders

negotiated their interests and counterhegemonic values with those of the corporate form of skateboarding. She argues that the actions of the skateboarders during the contest—their pinning of their identification numbers on their t-shirts in ways that were difficult to read; their disregard for the warnings by the officials about breaking the rules of warm-up time usage of the park; their lack of anxiety about competing and the official outcome of their efforts; and their support and encouragement of other skateboarders—demonstrates the skateboarders' critique of mainstream sport values and articulation of their own values, such as the rejection of conformity, participant control, open participation, and a de-emphasis on elite competition.

In another article, Beal (1996) examines the ways a group of young males created a “nonhegemonic,” or “alternative” form of masculinity through their participation in skateboarding at the same time that they contradicted these forms of masculinity by reproducing patriarchal relations within the subculture. Beal argues that young male skateboarders create an “alternative form of masculinity,” that not only differs from hegemonic masculinity, especially as it is seen to “naturally” relate to sport as having aspects of physical domination, aggression, competition, sexism, and homophobia, but also critiques it explicitly. For example, she notes how young male skateboarders critique conformity to adult authority and structured competition whereas they felt that these were important aspects of more traditional sports, such as football. They also felt that skateboarding allowed them more space for creativity and freedom than traditional sports. Also, the group of skateboarders critiqued elite competition and actually oftentimes worked together, valuing cooperation and encouragement. Skateboarding, Beal argues, “differs from traditional sport in that it devalues competition and rule-bound

behavior while it promotes self-expression” (6). However, Beal also notes and explains how skateboarding “also serves as an alternative conduit for promoting an ideology of male superiority and of patriarchal relations within the subculture” (6). In other words, while skateboarders created an alternative masculinity in relation to dominant conceptions of masculinity, they identified skateboarding as a “naturally” male enterprise. Furthermore, she explains how her research demonstrates some of the ways “incongruities” arise when “people negotiate new social relations” (10), in this instance by the ways the males defined skateboarding as a male activity. She explains how skateboarding served the function to have some of their needs met while creating a space from the feminine. She writes,

Because many of these male skateboarders did not participate in mainstream athletics (either by choice or size/ability), it is my contention that they created an alternative sport which met some of their specific needs, such as participant control and a de-emphasis on elite competition, and skateboarding also served to meet social needs that traditional athletics have met for other males—a place where boys create friendships and differentiate themselves from girls and that which is labeled feminine (11).

In general, Beal’s early work focuses on how popular culture functions as a site where competing hegemonic and counterhegemonic interests are expressed simultaneously, which oftentimes prevent it from being a source of significant social change, and in some cases leads to “the reproduction of dominant social order” (264).

In more recent work and consistent with trends in subcultural theory and research, Beal (Beal & Weidman, 2003; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Wheaton & Beal, 2003) moves away from examining skateboarding as a youth culture that strictly forms its identities through resistance of mainstream and hegemonic values, especially in opposition to “conventional sport identities” (2003, 32). She explains how skateboarders’ resistance,

particularly in relation to commercial interests is often full of contradictions, and have forced her to no longer “assume that skateboarders’ identities are created in a separate ‘marginal’ space and, therefore are a uniform response created in opposition to the mainstream” (32). With this new position, Beal has turned her attention to examine more specifically the ways discourses and ideological representations circulate within the cultural group of skateboarding, especially as they relate to commercial processes and texts. She explains that “it has become apparent that identities are partially constituted through mainstream commercial processes which provide some of the materials as well as the discourses from which skaters can draw” (32-33). She also recognizes that skaters themselves are “part of the marketing of these discourses and products,” especially with the blurring of “subculture” and “mainstream” (33). Therefore, in a series of articles, Beal explores various relationships between skateboarders’ identities, media texts, and increased commercialization.

Beal and Weidman (2003) explore the concept of “authenticity” in the skateboarding “world” from the perspectives of skateboarders and the skateboarding industry. From the perspective of the skateboarders, Beal argues that “participant control” (and the absence of authority) and “devaluing competition” are two key values and norms that constitute legitimacy, or authenticity for skateboarders. These values and norms she argues formed a “skateboarding structure” that encouraged skateboarders to develop a sense of individualism, particularly “to create a personalized form of skateboarding” (340). She explains how this was visible through newcomers who “proved their interest in skateboarding by conspicuously displaying name-brand clothing and equipment,” (340), something older skateboarders saw as an “initial stage” that

signified that those were not “true skateboarders” (340). Another way skateboarders defined their sport was through its difference from mainstream sport and a sense of nonconformist behavior, which was valued when it was seen as a “creative means of self-expression” and not “simply an unreflective rebellious act” (342). Creativity and self-expression constitute the valued means by which skateboarders enacted their nonconformity. These skateboarders felt that skateboarding enabled them greater opportunities for creativity and self-expression than organized sports, as well the ability to more creatively challenge authority. “In fact several skateboarders felt that the essential values of skateboarding—participant control and lack of concern for competition—directly defied the status quo” (343).

In another article, Wheaton and Beal (2003) examine the meanings “specialist media,” especially advertisements within magazines, has for skateboarders in the formation of their identities as members of their subcultural group. Specifically, they examine the relationships between these texts and discourses of authenticity. For example, they show how, through the skateboarders’ textual engagement, the discourses of authentic status include “risk” and “functional gear” (165). Specifically, they explain how advertisements were deemed “good” when they conveyed through its imagery people actually “doing it [skateboarding],” especially when the imagery demonstrated “particularly skillful, technical, or risky maneuvers or ‘tricks’” (165). The ads were also stipulated as “good” when they were promoting “functional” products. In addition, the authors explain how magazines functioned to circulate cultural knowledge and as a forum for members of the group to display their cultural knowledge and delineate their status within the group. For example, they explain how beginners and intermediates were most

likely to pick up magazines and discuss them “to demonstrate their cultural capital by conspicuously discussing their insider knowledge” (162), whereas more advanced and long-standing participants were “often unenthusiastic” about buying or reading magazines, “seemingly not needing to use that medium to practice or display their subcultural identities” (162).

Explicitly building on this work, Beal and Wilson (2004) explore the ways skaters construct their identities in light of the changing nature of skateboarding, including its “increasing popularity and extensive commercialization” (31). Specifically, they “examine the skaters’ interpretation and use of industry products in creating their identities and resultant status hierarchies” (33). To do this, they focus on the ways skateboarders use “specialist and mass media in their identity construction” (33), and the ways skateboarders “position their identity in relation to the ‘mainstream’” (33), especially in relation to how gender power is reproduced. Citing Wheaton and Beal (2003), they explain how “participants’ consumption of specialist magazines served to provide information about equipment, techniques, argot, places to skate, and the values of the skater community” (35). Citing Borden (2001), they also explain how skaters themselves mimic skateboarding videos by creating their own on hand-held video cameras and use these videos to explain “true” skater identity. They also note that while skateboarder identity “is centered on the notion of being committed to the activity for its own sake, as an avenue of self-expression, and not primarily for money,” “skaters are [ironically] using mass mediated commodities to express an anti-materialist and individualist stance” (36) and construct an “authentic” identity. In addition, they explore the ways the specialist media depict a masculine gendered norm and place advertisements

to reflect an “insider” mentality, “one which highlighted core values including risk-taking, individualism, and traditional masculinity” (38-39).

Drawing again on Wheaton and Beal (2003), they explain how status within the subculture was based on normative assumptions of maleness and whiteness whereby these two aspects “provided immediate access to legitimacy” (39). They go on to discuss how skaters are not wholesale against commercialization—it is characterized by ambiguity and contradiction—but do “show concerns about how their activity is portrayed and the resultant impact they may have” (40). Specifically, they explain that three resultant “discourses” circulate around this issue: 1. concerns about commercialization undermining the “anti-authoritarianism core value” of skateboarding; 2. embracing commercialization as evidenced by skate parks and coaching and lessons and parent involvement; 3. the impact commercialization of skateboarding has had on the mainstream itself. In general, they argue that these ways of understanding the impact of commercialization “demonstrate the subject positions they take within their subculture” (45). A central rift they noticed was between long-time skateboarders and relative newcomers in relation to the “goals and attitudes of skaters in relation to the mainstream” (45). For example, having the “proper attitude” was often linked to an older age, whereas the “wrong” attitude was usually ascribed to young kids. From there, they examine how the status hierarchies and distinctions created around “risk,” one of the central determinants of status within skateboarding, get linked to gender, class, and age.

Specifically, they argue that risk and pain are linked with heterosexual maleness gender and sexuality is often inscribed to confer status. Also, they argue that “the lack of respect most skateboarders had for in-line skating is frequently equated with femininity

and homosexuality” (47). Risk is associated not only with masculinity but also the type of skateboarding one practices (i.e. Street, Vert, and Ramp), each of which uses different spaces and connotes different social classes. She argues that street skating, the form least closely linked to middle class social status and access to resources, “maintains its status as more ‘core’ because it most strongly reinforces the ethos of the activities which values physical and legal risk-taking as well as being equally open to all who want to participate” (48-49). They also argue that age and attitude link to indicators of status as well. They argue that many of the long-term skaters view the next generation as having the “wrong attitude,” as evidenced by their interest in the “product” and not “process” of their efforts, the “competitive and commercial scene” (49), and their “oblivion” on how to use space. In general, these authors argue that as skateboarding’s popularity and commercialization increase, so, too, do the distinctions made within the sport. Specifically, they argue that these distinctions suggest “that the younger skaters are more professionally oriented, and thus there is a growing separation among street, vert and ramp skaters” (50). Finally, the authors argue that despite these changes, the core value of traditional masculinity and “its resultant power relations has not significantly changed” (51).

While Beal and Borden’s work has proven foundational in putting skateboarding on the academic “map,” their body of work has not given much attention to the phenomenon of the skate park. While Borden (2001) does offer a historical analysis of purpose-built skate parks of the 1970’s and 1980’s, which focuses on the ways these spaces facilitated new spatial relations, moves, and considerations of time for skateboarders, his study focuses primarily on the phenomenon of urban street skating that

emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. (Beal's work virtually ignores skate parks.) I insist that skateboarding—due to its increased popularity and the subsequent emergence of new municipal skate parks over the last decade, parks that oftentimes bring together vert and street skaters to participate together on common ground for “free”—has entered a new stage of its development as a global cultural group, one that must take into consideration the ways that skate parks impact the sport, its participants, and the communities in which they are situated. Therefore, I hope to extend the scholarship on the “world” of skateboarding by examining the phenomenon of the skateboard park. Specifically, this study examines the ways skateboard parks function as learning communities and “educative spaces” for young people in society. For instance, this study focuses on the micro-practices that occur within the park, especially the means by which members learn to become skateboarders, authentic members of the community, and the ways they use texts to mediate these processes. In other words, how does someone become an “educated person” within this locale? While Beal has discussed several of the distinctions skateboarders make among themselves, my work more closely examines the processes and social relations, within a particular context, whereby these distinctions get formulated and reworked and learned. For example, whereas Beal argues that a divide exists between age groups within the subcultural group (e.g. newer members don't know how to use space), my analysis locates the ways newer participants learn how to become more experienced participants (e.g. how they learn to use space as a skateboarder) and how different age groups interact in order to produce a lived culture together. Finally, I am interested in understanding the ways a skateboard park functions at a more macro level to help constitute constructions of “youth” within a community. Furthermore, my

work problematizes two of the ways Beal discusses authenticity within skateboarding culture—de-emphasis on competition and participant control. Specifically, my work complicates both of these essential features by revealing how they are “outward” ideologies my participants develop as part of their group identity in relation to broader macro structures, but look differently when pointed “inward,” especially considering how learning and developing one’s style within a context interferes with participant control and imbues a sense of competition within the local cultural community.

Chapter Three

Behind the Bowl: Research Methodology and Methods

Absolute occurrence is irrelevant. A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth.

From Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" in
The Things They Carried

...As critical scholars of education and culture we also note that we often live a contradiction. In our research and writing, through our own ethnographic practice, we may valorize 'popular' knowledge and values. We often serve as advocates of subordinated groups, attempting to show the logic, vitality, and dignity of their cultural worlds. We serve, in other words, as vehicles of what has come to be called a counter-hegemonic discourse. Yet we also stand at the top of dominant educational institutions. We are the products of their knowledge-making machinery. However much we may have 'resisted' this machinery, we bear the handiwork of its imprint.

Levinson, Foley, and Holland (1996: 23)

Although written in places in an authoritative style and tone, this study acknowledges that it, like all knowledge, is constructed. This chapter, therefore, offers an explanation of how this report was constructed—the particular ways data was generated, sorted, and analyzed, and how the social location and political orientation of the researcher—both “there” and “here”—informs this work. Stated more “etic-ly,” the purpose of this chapter is to develop ethnographic validity (Sanjek, 1990), to expose the reasoning and particular mechanisms I, as a researcher, used and drew upon to govern my methodological choices, to let my readers in “behind the curtain,” or as I refer to it regarding this study, “behind the bowl.” What follows, then, is an exploration into how and why I undertook and designed this study, generated and analyzed data, constructed this report, and the ways in which my socio-political orientation, particularly in relation to my experiences with popular culture and working-class youth, inform these construction processes.

Research Design, Questions, and Internal Sampling Decisions

As an educational researcher with deep personal, professional, and pedagogical interests in popular culture, literacy, constructions of young people, and the relationships between these topics, I designed this study in order to see a group of “failing” young men on different terms than those by which they are normally judged. I wanted to observe and interact with them in spaces and enactments when and where they are engaged and motivated, are actively consuming and producing culture, and are not just written off as being “resistant” or “oppositional” to adult and/or mainstream values. Rather than attempt to understand why they are *not* succeeding, in schools, for example, I seek to understand why they *are* succeeding, in their engagement with popular culture. Implicit in my research design decisions is the assumption that popular culture not only matters to my participants but also mediates their lives in ways that other socio-cultural-political contexts and venues might not. In short, I wanted to see young men doing things that mattered to them, so I could discover on their terms not only what mattered to them but how and why those things and their engagement with them mattered to them.

While grounded in ethnography and its use of data generation through participant-observations, in-depth interviews (individual and group), and document and artifact collection, this study takes a “critical” anthropological approach to educational research (Levinson, Foley, Holland, 1996), one that purposefully aims to locate sites and sources of knowledge from places and people not normally legitimized as such. Specifically, I set out to examine the logic of these young men’s cultural practices and the logic of education found within them in order to draw attention to and call into question the normalized terms by which young men in American society are defined. Although not a

cross-cultural comparative study per se, my hope is that by calling attention to the cultural and literacy practices of young men who are typically constructed as “failing” or in “crisis,” I will push up against, or denaturalize many of the implicit, normalized, and oftentimes hidden assumptions about young men, literacy, popular culture, achievement, and success that circulate in American society. In this way, I refer to my methodological approach as an “implied comparative study,” by which I mean a study that relies upon its readers’ abilities to hold it in comparison to their own normalized ideas and implicit assumptions related to young people, popular culture, learning, and/or literacy in order to provide a contrast from which, as Meade (1934) writes of her classic examination of the educational system in Samoa, “we may be able to turn, made newly and vividly self-conscious and self-critical, to judge anew and perhaps fashion differently the education we give our children” (11).

To these aims, I designed and implemented a multi-year qualitative study that examines the way a group of young, working class men engage popular culture. Specifically, I studied the ways and reasons a group of focal participants, the “diehard” locals at Franklin Skate Park, participate and learn how to participate in local and global popular cultural communities and the ways texts mediated these processes. I selected the popular culture community of skateboarding generally and Franklin Skate Park in Finley specifically for a range of theoretical, methodological, and practical reasons. Practically, I had a pre-existing relationship with the community, school, and some of its students and teachers. Prior to this study, I conducted an 18-month collaborative research project with a teacher at Finley high school and met many community members, administrators, teachers, and students, some of whom became important contacts and helped me gain

access to the population I am studying for this project. Theoretically, Franklin Skate Park provided me an opportunity to observe a group of boys in an environment that is not overtly supervised or controlled by adults and so enables me to see a side of these boys that might otherwise be hidden from a researcher. This space enabled me to observe the boys as motivated participants in a rich learning environment in which they consistently play the roles of learner and teacher and as producers of a “successful” cultural community. Also, due to its particular history of development (of which many of the boys who currently use the park have played a significant part) and social situation within the community, the skate park and its users offer me a window into various aspects of the community and its members. Finally, despite the fact that skateboarding has reached the lives of approximately 10 million American boys between the ages of 6-18, skateboarding culture and the literacy practices in which many skateboarders engage have been virtually unstudied by literacy and educational scholars. Methodologically, the skate park offered me the opportunity to observe, meet, and interact with a large number of young working-class boys. Also, the nature of the skateboard park (and the sport of skateboarding more generally) is such that spectators, and even people taking photographs and shooting video, are an acceptable and almost expected part of the culture. This has allowed me to conduct naturalistic observations of these participants without being overtly noticed and with little alteration of their activities.

The design of this study consists of four phases organized chronologically. Throughout each, I generated a variety of types of data by means of participant observations, in-depth interviews, and document and artifact collection (data sources and generation procedures will be discussed later in this chapter).

Phase One (Pre-existing): Finley, MI & Finley High School—Prior to this study, I carried out a study at Finley High School, and as part of that project, I conducted research in the community in order to develop a sense of the community and its residents. I established contacts with community members, including school faculty, school board members, and city council members. The data set from this phase of my research includes official city documents, interviews with community members, and field notes from a variety of participant observations (e.g. city meetings, police ride along). This research enabled me to contextualize Franklin Skate Park and my research participants in the broader socio-cultural-economic-political dimensions of Finley.

Phase Two (April 06-October 06): Skateboarding and Franklin Skate Park—I investigated the general nature of skateboarding culture by visiting skateboard parks and shops, reading skateboarding books, magazines, and websites, viewing skateboarding films, and interviewing a professional skateboarder and others involved in the industry. This research proved useful to contextualize my participants and Franklin Skate Park in the broader cultural-historical framework of skateboarding. Also during this phase, I conducted a series of participant-observations at Franklin Skate Park, focusing my attention on understanding the make up and nature of the users and cultural practices at the park, establishing contacts and developing rapport with many of its participants, and making initial internal sampling and research design decisions. Specifically, during this phase I selected focal participants, or as I refer to them as my “guides.” The basic criteria I used for my selection of these guides was that they would be deemed “in crisis” according to the measures as discussed in the first chapter, namely terms of academic achievement and attainment.

During my time in the field, I interacted with most of the regular users of the park, although the level of interaction ranged from several in-depth interviews, to casual conversations, to nods or words of acknowledgement. From this group of locals, I cultivated deeper relations with a cross section of them, ranging in age, ethnicity, and skating ability and status at the park, a group that I determined would offer me a realistic and comprehensive representation of the majority of the users of the park categorically and the cultural practices in which they engage as part of their participation in this community. More thorough introductions of these participants will be provided as the story of their engagement with popular culture unfolds. For now, it is important to note that while these particular participants served as my core guides, I also draw on data generated with and about other participants at the park and others related to the skateboarding culture in general but not necessarily Franklin Skate Park. While the emphasis of this study is on skateboarding as a form of popular culture, and more specifically, the skateboarders of Franklin Skate Park, I will discuss the bikers who use the park when it is necessary and helpful to do so to illuminate aspects of the skateboarding culture or the experiences of the skateboarders. Finally, although skateboarding is not necessarily a working-class sport or cultural group, at this particular park, the locals are working-class, and in many ways, the park, while obviously a site of popular culture could just as easily be viewed as a site of working-class culture. I mention this so as not to suggest that skateboarding and skateboarders at large are synonymous with a particular social class association, as well as to call attention to the distinctiveness of this particular skate park and group of skateboarders within the larger culture of skateboarding. In other words, I am not claiming that what happens at this

park is generalizable to other parks, although there will certainly be points of similarity between this one and others. Below is a chart of my more key informants, or in-depth guides:

Table 1: Participants

Participant	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Participant Status/ Skating Level	School Success/ Occupation
Houston	12-15	White	Beginner to Intermediate	“Not the best student” gets Cs and lower
“Mexican” Matt	13-15	Latino	“Next Generation” Beginner to Intermediate	Does “OK” in school; wants to go to college
Archie	13-15	White	“Next Generation” Intermediate	Cs, Ds, or Fs
Derrick	13-15	Latino	“Next Generation” Advanced/often referred to as best bowl skater at park	“Not the best student” self reported; gets Cs and lower
Tony	14-16	Latino	Beginner	Special Education; Kicked out of school
Terry	15-17	White	“Next Generation” Intermediate to Advanced	Does well in school; works at McDonalds
“Hollywood”	17-19	Hawaiian & Filipino	“Next Generation” Beginner to Intermediate	Graduated from an Alternative high school; expelled from regular high school
Larry	19-21	White	“Regular Skater” Advanced	Dropped out of HS; Wants to make a living in the music business
TS	21	White	“Regular Skater” Advanced	5 yrs to graduate HS Tattoo artist apprentice
Luis	19-21	Self identifies as “Hispanic”	“Regular Skater” Intermediate	1.4 GPA 5 yrs to graduate Welder
Thurman	Mid 30’s	White	“Old guy” Advanced	Self-employed
Crazy K	Early 30’s	White	“Old guy” Advanced	Struggled in school, but did graduate; Self-employed contractor

Phase Three (June 07-October 07): Delving Deeper into Franklin Skate Park—During this phase, I focused my data generation to flesh out my preliminary findings from the previous phase. Specifically, this phase consisted of participant observations and in-depth interviews with participants of the cultural community at Franklin Skate Park. (Details about the interviewing process will be discussed in the section on generating data.)

Phase Four (March 08-June 08): Following up and Member Checking—During this phase, I returned to the park to conduct “member checking” and to fill in any gaps in my research that my write up exposed. It was common during this phase to write during the day and go to the park in the early evenings to talk with participants, and then write after my field visits, oftentimes integrating into my writing the interview and/or field notes from that day’s data generation.

Gaining Access and Site Entry

During the third season of data generation, I started skateboarding at Franklin Skate Park. Although I purchased a board and other equipment during my first season of data generation, I deliberately chose not to skateboard during that or the next season. In fact, the main reason I even started in the third season was because two participants noticed my skateboard in my car and prompted me to join them, that I should give it a try. I did and really enjoyed it and continue to do so. When I go to the park now, I do so primarily to skate and secondarily to research. I held off from skateboarding for as long as I did not only because I did not want to fall and hurt myself but also because I did not want to pretend to be a skateboarder or someone who wanted to skateboard. When I started this project, I was not interested in skateboarding; I was interested in learning

about skateboarders. In other words, I did not want to present myself to my research participants in a false way—as someone who wanted to skateboard. From the start, I presented myself as a researcher and writer and student at a university who was working on a research project he was hoping to turn into a book. Eventually, I became known as the guy writing a book about the skate park, or as one participant said, “They know your name is Rob, and they know you’re trying to write a book. So they respect that because you’re doing something, you’re not sitting here causing problems. If no one wants to cooperate with you, you pretty much say that’s fine. You’re not ragging on people, trying to say, ‘Come on, just do it,’ stuff like that. So people respect that.” Over time, I earned a spot in the community unlike any one else—I was not a skateboarder, parent, or friend necessarily. I became an interested observer who participated in the non-skating aspects of the community, namely hanging out at the picnic table. I did not become friends with my participants although I became very friendly with them. I never attempted to or desired to be “one of them” nor have they adopted me as one of them. More than anything, I functioned as a listener of their stories, someone who sought to understand what they did and why they did what they did, and I believe for many of them, not only were they surprised by my sustained interest but also appreciative. One participant thought it was “cool” that I’m interested in telling their story. This is not to say that my participants may not have had ulterior motives in working with me; certainly they did, whether it the promise of being written about, getting rides, or some recognition even within their local cultural community.

Cultivating the relationships, access, and status I did within this cultural community took a long time, constantly changed and got re-negotiated, and relied upon

some good old fashioned luck. Like I mentioned above, when I entered this site I did so under the pretense of wanting to study it and write about it, not to become a skateboarder. To do this, I approached my site slowly and cautiously. At first, I visited my site for short amounts of time, did not initiate eye contact or communication with anyone, and did not take any notes while within visibility of participants. I simply walked into the park, sat down, and looked around. During this phase of my research, and really through the first two seasons of data generation, I wore non-descript clothing that marked me an outsider to the community but not “too much” of an outsider, with the exception being my footwear—a pair of Chaco sandals. Specifically, I wore worn blue jeans or ripped/worn cargo shorts, plain white or colored t-shirts, and sometimes worn button down shirts, mostly plaid flannel, and my sandals. I never wore clothing that displayed name brands, attire that affiliated me with a sports team or university, or the clothes I would wear to teach at the university. Also, I always wore my clothing “messy”—kept my shirts untucked, for example, and I kept my hair as unkempt as possible. In fact, during the second season of generating data, I grew my hair longer than I did the first summer. Also, during that second season, I began wearing a Washington Nationals baseball cap to the site, but almost always wore it backwards so as not to as visibly affiliate with a professional team sport.

In addition to these clothing choices, as I began to interact with participants, always at first in response to their initiation, I tried to maintain a sense of neutrality and non judgment. For example, I felt it was imperative that I not comment or convey judgment about their smoking cigarettes, swearing, and talk about each other, sex, drugs, and drinking. I wanted them to feel free in front of me to talk about and do what they

would if I was not there, and I took it as a good sign in terms of access when they would light up cigarettes in front of me and talk about their drinking and other activities. This is not to say that this was easy or without ethical dilemma for me, especially as someone who, as a younger person struggled with alcohol, drug, and nicotine consumption. In some instances, participants “tested” me by explicitly asking me if I would call the cops if they lit up a cigarette (to which I said, “No.”) or implicitly discerning my interest in purchasing them alcoholic beverages. Over time, I established a boundary that it was ok for them to talk with and around me (in fact, I would ask them about these things and share my own past experiences) about these types of activities but that I would not participate in them with them. The most difficult part of this, for me, was not returning to cigarette smoking, especially during the times when I would be sitting at a picnic table with a group of them all smoking and talking.

Along with a nonjudgmental and neutral ethos, I attempted to convey a genuine sense of interest and curiosity in the particulars of my participants’ lives, especially related to their cultural practices. At first, I did not ask many questions and answered their questions as honestly and straightforward as possible. For several visits, no one acknowledged my presence, but soon thereafter, several participants, particularly younger, less experienced participants inquired into my presence, asking questions such as “Who are you?” and “What are you doing here?” Over time, as who I was and what I was doing circulated among the participants (which did not really take hold until toward the end of my first season and beginning of my second season of data generation), inquiries into “how’s the book coming?” increased for awhile. My entry into the park during this time was often disrupted quickly by a younger participant or two coming up

to me and asking about the book, asking me questions about who I'd talked to, if I had a title for it yet, and how many chapters it was going to be. They would sometimes stand by me for some time, offering me advice on who I should talk to or what I should write about. Over time, however, these inquiries abated, and there came a time in the middle of my second season of data generation where my entry into the park was a normalized occurrence in which I would walk in, say hi to people I knew and who knew me, sit down, and just hang out. In addition to these aspects of my developing rapport and access, my display of commitment to the project and my participants evidenced primarily by my time spent in the field facilitated my gaining and ensuring access. It took me approximately a season and a half to develop what I would consider to be solid access, to be "in" with this group, and part of that, I believe is due to my participants not taking my commitment for granted, but that like their visual learning, seeing is believing and, in this case, trusting.

In addition to these very deliberate moves I made as a researcher negotiating site entry and access, several other factors, including pre-existing relationships and a bit of luck made the access I got possible. A former university student of mine, Sandra, actually turned me onto the idea in the first place of studying skateboarding culture in general and Franklin Skate Park in particular. For a class project she spent time at and interviewed a few of the skaters from Franklin Skate Park, which is not only in the town in which she lived but also the park her husband, Crazy K, a long-time skateboarder, regularly participated. In the process of looking for a research site, knowing I wanted to study a group of young men in an out-of-school context, having previously researched the community of Finley (where Franklin Skate Park is), and discussing the idea with Sandra,

I decided to study the site. From that point, Sandra and Crazy K proved to be invaluable points of contact for me, especially in helping to establish contacts with participants of the park. Specifically, at the annual skate contest during my first season of data generation (which will be discussed in the next chapter), Sandra and Crazy K introduced me to several participants, who, although I would have to put in the leg work to build rapport, recognized and associated me with Crazy K, who fortunately had a good reputation at the park, was well respected there, and held in high regard. In this way, I had some “street cred” with my prospective participants, and to some at first I became known as “Crazy K’s friend.” In fact, I would use this during my early contacts with participants, saying things like, “Hey, I’m friends with Crazy K,” or “I remember when Crazy K introduced us,” or “Do you know Crazy K?”

Perhaps the greatest single factor in my access, though, had to do with TS. During my previous research at Finley High School, TS was a student in one of the classes I studied. In fact, he was taking the 10th grade English class for the second time and barely passing it. However, during that semester, TS got his first tattoo, and by happenstance one day the local free newspaper in the town I lived had a cover feature story on tattoos and tattooing. Seeing it, I thought of TS and decided to bring it in to him. I did so, and he and I developed a rapport—not a particularly deep or intense one—but one that had not been there prior to me giving him that article. It turns out, and I did not know this prior to starting my research, that TS was an avid skateboarder, and in fact, as will be discussed throughout this dissertation, one of the key young people behind the development of Franklin Skate Park and one its most known and respected participants. On one of my early visits to the park, I noticed TS skating, and after some time, he

noticed me. In fact, it was one of the most nerve-wracking experiences I had during my early visits. He had just stopped skating and stood about seven or eight feet from where I was at the picnic table, and he looked at me, did a double take, pointed his finger at me, and then smiling and shaking his finger, said, “You look familiar.” He paused and then said, “Teacher!” I smiled weakly, terrified that I had been “found” out, my cover blown, and that I would be forever associated with being a teacher in the eyes of the skateboarders, and muttered, “Student. Cassidy’s class. I know you from Cassidy’s class.” “Yea, that’s right,” he said, “I knew you looked familiar.” Over time, TS became one of my key informants and most helpful guides as well as offering me access to so many other participants. It seemed that all I had to do once I had TS’ approval was mention that I knew him and had talked to him about my project and others would agree to help. It turns out that the reason TS was so willing to help me was because of the article on tattooing I gave him and the rapport it helped us develop. In one of my subsequent interviews with him, he explained to me that he was willing to help me out with my study because as he says, “...like when you were in Ms. Cassidy’s class you were always helping me out with stuff, so it’s like, I don’t know. You showed me that kind of solid stuff. Like I’d be a dickhead to just be like, ‘No’ [I’m not going to help you out].”

Data Sources and Generation Procedures

I generated data over the course of three outdoor skate seasons (late spring through early fall, although mainly during the summer months) in 2006, 2007, and 2008. Physically, I generated data at three skate parks in Michigan, at three different skateboard shops in the state, and at several locations in and outside of Finley where my participants

would skateboard or engage in other activities. For example, I spent time with participants in a tattoo shop in Finley, at pizza places and other restaurants, at church on one occasion, school on another occasion, one of my participants' homes, and at various locations where my participants skateboard outside of the skate park. However, the majority of my data was generated at Franklin Skate Park, especially after my first season of data generation when I decided to focus specifically on Franklin Skate Park.

Over the course of my field work, I amassed approximately 450 pages of field notes and over 1000 pages of interview transcripts on my approximate 65 field visits. As I was negotiating how I was going to generate data during my first summer of data generation, especially during my very early visits, I would physically position myself in the periphery of the skate park, usually sitting at a picnic table in one of the grassy areas of the park, so as to make myself as unnoticeable and as uninvolved as possible. On these occasions I would park far away from the park, so as not to announce my presence, sit in my car for a while to take in the sounds of the park and then walk toward the park, sometimes stopping and sitting by one of the trees outside of the park to listen to what was happening in the park. I would in those instances, safe from being visible to the users of the park, jot some notes down in my pocket-sized notebook. Also, during these earliest visits, I did not take jottings once I was within visibility of the users of the park. I would enter, deliberately not making eye contact with anyone, sit at a table and try and look uninterested or that it was not unusual for me to be there. For the first few visits, I would only spend approximately twenty minutes sitting before I would leave and walk back to my car to make my jottings and write my field notes. On several occasions throughout my research, especially during these early visits, I would leave the parking lot

to get something to eat or write out my field notes and then return to the park for more observation. This was helpful for me to gain a sense of the relationship between time of day and activity level, who spent time at the park during what time, and how long people typically spent at the park. Once I became more familiar with the users of the park and they me, I came more “out” with my jottings within the park, although I would never take jottings during this first summer while I was part of an activity. For example, if a group of guys was sitting at the table talking among themselves and I was sitting at the table, too, a typical occurrence during the latter part of the first summer of data collection, I would wait until the group left the area before taking out my notebook and taking jottings or I would leave the park and return to my car to write down my jottings. However, if I stayed at the table after the group finished talking, I would write my jottings down at the table, oftentimes keeping my notebook on my leg under the table. My reasoning in selectively taking jottings during this season is because I did not want to draw attention to myself, especially as someone who is explicitly paying attention to what the users were doing and saying. In this way, I attempted to disrupt or taint the naturally occurring activities as little as possible. By the second and third summers of data generation, I was much more “out” with my jottings, especially once I started, during the second summer, conducting formal audio-recorded interviews at the park. Also, during the second and third summers, I would physically position myself wherever in the park would enable me to best capture what I was observing, except of course, when it interfered with the activities of the park. In fact, in one instance during the third summer I brought my lap top into the park so several participants could actually write a section of my dissertation with me.

On most occasions, I would construct my field notes immediately upon leaving the skate park. In fact, upon leaving the park, I would get into my car and if it was parked out of site of the park I would type my field notes on my laptop while sitting in the driver's seat. On some occasions, I would actually drive two blocks from the park to a dead end street and write my field notes in my car there. On rarer occasions, or when my laptop battery would drain, I would audio record my reflections from the field visit during my drive home (approximately thirty minutes) or to a coffee shop where I could write or continue to write my field notes. I always selected times for fieldwork when I would have adequate time to write field notes immediately after my visit. In general, my construction of field notes emerged from my jottings, audio reflections, and any digital audio, video, and/or photography I captured during my visit. The day after writing field notes, I would re-read them, edit them, and then print them out, number them, and place them in order in a three ring binder with previous field notes.

In my jottings and field notes during my early visits, I focused on “casting my net wide” and getting as broad a sense as possible as to the happenings of the skate park. “What is happening here?” was my mantra during this phase of my data generation, and I attempted as best as I could to suspend all judgment and not take anything for granted. For example, these early notes contain information on the physical description of the park and the users of the park, including their hairstyles, clothing, and equipments. These notes also focused on the way these users used the park, including how and where they arranged themselves within this space. For these early visits, I relied upon the newness of this environment to me in order to document those activities that would soon become invisible to me as my familiarity with the park and cultural community developed. A

difficulty I had during this phase of my data generation was describing the skating activity that I observed. Other than basic terms such as ollie, bowl, and quarter pipes, I had no schema or lexicon to describe skating activities. Over time, as my knowledge of skateboarding increased and my relationships with the skateboarders developed to the point where it was normalized for me to ask them to explain different tricks and moves to me, I was able to write about what I was seeing using their language.

As my research progressed, my field visits and data generation during them became more focused. Once I had a sense of the general organization of participation in the park, I focused my observations on particular elements within them to generate a more robust data set. For example, as I came to understand that one of the ways skaters participate in the life of the skate park is by skating alone, I focused several of my observations on individuals skating alone. One such account to emerge from these focused observations is the description of Matt skating alone, practicing several moves on page 158-9. Also, within my field notes, what I actually wrote consisted of one of the following three items: Descriptive notes, Reflective notes, and Methodological notes. The majority of my field notes consisted of descriptive notes which focused on capturing a “thick description” of the activities I observed and/or participated in. Within my field notes, I bracketed [] reflective and methodological notes so as to set them aside from the descriptive notes. In these bracketed notes, I recorded my reflections of my observations, paying attention to how my observations pushed against my own assumptions, linked to other observations or studies, or connected to theoretical perspectives. These reflective notes, which emerged both during the process of making my jottings and while I subsequently wrote my field notes, became places for me to start charting and cataloging

what I was seeing and in many ways served as my first layer of analysis of my data. For example, in one of my first sets of field notes, I bracketed a methodological note that said to be sure and take a photo of the sign of rules posted outside the gate to the park, and I bracketed a reflective note that mentioned how the terms the skaters were using, such as “you’re a fag” or “you’re gay” could link to some of the tags within the park that addressed issues of sexuality and masculinity to potentially help me understand the ways masculinity and gender and sexuality are understood within this context. An important aspect of these reflective notes, or one of the ways reflective notes became particularly useful in my data analysis, was through the ways they revealed and allowed me to explore my “surprises.” Finders (1998/1999) explains how “surprises” for researchers or observers are useful in that they help to reveal one’s implicit assumptions about the phenomenon they are examining. For me, many of my reflective notes functioned as opportunities for me to pay attention to my “surprises” and “confirmations” of action and behavior. In fact, I came to rely upon these moments of surprise, confirmation, and tension as intuitive indicators to salience in this site. For example, upon first entering skateboarding culture, I was “shocked” at several factors all at once: not only the seeming lack of competition among the participants but also the sense of cooperation, empathy, assistance, and compassion between and among them. I had not expected this at all, and so this “surprise” allowed me to not only focus on events around these ideas but also push me against my own oftentimes implicit assumptions about skateboarders, males, and adolescents, asking myself, “Why am I so surprised about these things?” Upon reflection, I came to understand that I “expected” adolescent boys in a group setting to be competitive, cut throat, mean-spirited, and have a fend-for-yourself attitude. Another

surprise for me came in my recognition in the disparities of ages of the participants who all shared the same space, and again, this surprise pushed me to get in touch with my own implicit assumptions about seemingly normal or naturalized behavior among a group of adolescent boys—they only hang out with people their own age. Methodological notes functioned as a way for me to keep record of my methodological processes and decisions. For example, during the course of generating data, I would note both instances in which my methodology was brought into focus particularly in relation to my participants, and methodological decisions and their reasoning I made throughout my study.

While field notes served as the “backbone” of my study, especially during the first summer of data generation, formal and informal interviewing of participants served as an essential aspect of this study, especially in the subsequent summers of data generation. By the second summer, I was a known entity at the park and interviewing began in earnest. I amassed well over 1000 pages of transcriptions from the formal interviews I conducted with sixteen of the “diehard” skateboarders of Franklin Skate Park (several of whom I interviewed formally on more than one occasion), a parent of one of these skateboarders, a teacher of two of the skaters, two city officials who had a part in establishing the park, and several other non-focal participants, including a professional skateboarder, industry-related people, skaters from other communities within and outside of Michigan. I transcribed or had transcribed all of the interviews with the skaters from Franklin Skate Park and portions of these other interviews, selecting sections to transcribe based on their representative and/or theoretical significance. The locale of these formal interviews fluctuated. In most instances, I conducted formal interviews with the skaters of Franklin Skate Park at the actual park. We would do the interview at one

of the picnic tables, other areas of the park (e.g. ledges, grassy areas), or outside of the gated area of the park at an outlying picnic table or standing near or sitting on cars. Sometimes interviews “moved” as our conversations did. For example, during one interview, the interviewee began talking about his music endeavors and asked if I wanted to hear one of his CDs, so our interview moved from a picnic table to his car to later sitting on the trunk of his car while he played guitar. In other interviews, participants would leave the table and skate a section of the park to demonstrate to me what they were explaining to me. The majority of these interviews, though, were at the picnic tables, making them visible to others, which created an interesting dynamic since on occasion others would come over to the table and sit with me and the interviewee and sometimes enter the interview. At first, I found these interruptions frustrating, especially since I was an “outsider,” trying to tread lightly on their “turf,” and I did not know how to stop this from happening. However, over time, I both found a way, if I wanted to talk alone to the participant to ask the “intruder” to leave us alone (I would typically say something like, “Hey, is it cool if we talk alone for a few minutes, and we can talk when we’re done?”), and integrate the intruder into the interview itself. In fact, one thing these intrusions forced me to recognize was that group conversations and disseminating information was a part of the culture and so these “group interviews/discussions” actually became important opportunities for me to capture the phenomenon I was studying. In this way, these group conversations often took on a life of their own, and my “interview” turned into a group discussion or debate about as aspect of the cultural community of Franklin Skate Park or the global cultural community of skateboarding. In addition, the interviewees themselves, if they wanted to talk alone, would convey that to the intruders,

saying something like, “Can’t you see we’re doing an interview?” or “Get the fuck out of here.” I did make sure, however, that I interviewed each of the focal participants at least once alone, for I wanted them to speak to me on record without the dynamic of others around. The interviews with non-focal participants took place in a range of locales depending on the interviewee (e.g. place of work, home, neutral meeting place) and the format of these interviews more closely resembled a typical interview format. Also, once I formally interviewed a participant, subsequent conversations happened more spontaneously, were conducted less formally, and typically lasted shorter than the initial formal interview. In addition to formal interviews, I “conducted” dozens of informal interviews. I put the word *conducted* in quotes since these interviews were spontaneous and brief conversations—sometimes occurring at a picnic table, sometimes while skateboarding—and my goal in conducting these interviews was usually to build rapport, seek some clarification about something discussed previously, or find out what a participant thought about a particular aspect of the park, sport, or activity. In some instances, these informal interviews and casual conversations turned into formal interviews usually signaled by me saying something like, “Hey, do you mind if I record this?”

The interview protocols changed over time as did my research design and familiarity with my participants and their local and global cultural community. At first, the formal interview protocols consisted of questions designed to learn biographical information, including involvement in the local and global popular cultural communities, as well as their perspectives on school, literacy, and work. As my research progressed, I drew upon my field notes and the themes emerging from them to create interview

protocols designed to ascertain my participants' perspectives on particular facets of their cultural communities. For example, as I, through analysis of my field notes, came to understand that one of the forms of participation at the park consisted of skating with others in a "session," I would generate questions related to sessions, such as the following: what is a session? When do people skate sessions? Can you tell me about a time when you wouldn't skate a session with someone? Is the game of "skate" considered a session? In this way, I used interviewing as a way to provide participant perspectives on commonplace activities and other aspects of the cultural community. Therefore, as my understanding and analysis of the phenomenon I was studying became more focused, so too did my interview protocols.

Throughout my data generation, I captured particular moments at the park with my digital camera, shooting digital photographs and video. With the exception of the skate contest and instances when no one was at the park while I was, I did not capture digital images during the first summer of field work. In fact, even after the first summer, I was very selective in capturing digital images because of the way it brought attention to me and whatever activity I was capturing. In other words, I wanted as much as I could to mitigate the participants "performing" for me. Notable exceptions include when participants were already capturing digital imagery, at which point my doing so would be less obtrusive than normally to the scene, or when participants requested that someone capture something that is happening. By the third summer, it was not uncommon for a participant to say, "Hey Rob, you got your camera on you?" at which point we would set up a shooting session. I used these photographs for my own data purposes, especially in helping me reconstruct field notes and make sense of different moves and tricks and the

ways my participants use space within the park. Also, though, capturing digital images functioned to help me develop rapport with participants. Specifically, as I got to know participants and would capture video and photographs of their skating feats, I would send them to them (sometimes ending up on their myspace pages), which would more easily facilitate our email correspondence.

Finally, I collected a variety of participant-created and industry-created texts, including books my participants read (e.g. *Scar Tissue*, *American Hardcore*, *Getting Over*), skateboarding magazines (e.g. *Thrasher*, *Transworld*, *Skateboarder Magazine*), videos (e.g. *Dogtown and Z-Boys*), tattoos (through digital photography), and songs my participants listened to and/or wrote.

Data Organization, Analysis, and Final Report Writing Procedures

Data organization and analysis was an ongoing process that occurred simultaneously with data generation. As I mentioned in the previous section, as I generated data, especially field notes, I logged my analytical reflections regarding the data I generated, making connections across sets of data, other studies, and relevant theoretical literatures. In this way, my analysis, generation, and research design was an inductive and recursive process. As I generated data, I would go through the process of open coding it, by which I mean read it and write in the margins of the documents ideas and concepts that struck me and/or repeated themselves. For example, in early rounds of going through my data, I noted things such as “selling boards,” “selling trucks,” “tool box for fixing skateboards,” “discussion of costs of boards and clothes,” “slapping board on ground while watching others skating,” “saying ‘you’re gay’ when someone lands a trick.” Once I compiled a list of literally hundreds of these notations, I typed them out

and began to notice patterns emerging and would link several of these notations together under broader headings. For example, two of the headings that emerged in relation to open codes discussed above were “Equipment” and “Giving each other Feedback.” As I developed this next list of codes, I reread my data in order to both develop deeper connections among these smaller notes, start to notice potential linkages across these broader codes, as well as generate interview questions that would help me ascertain participants’ perspectives on these issues. After generating more data, then, I would do focused coding in which I would read through my data looking to make connections across particular sets of codes.

In this way, I organized my data thematically, developing units of analysis inductively. Spending time reading and rereading my field notes, I paid attention to recurring themes and issues, particularly those relating to activities involving participation, learning, and textual activity. Using my field notes as my initial source of developing a coding system, I referred to my interview transcripts and other data sources in order to be sure that my coding system was in fact representative of all of my data. Interested in how the users of Franklin Skate Park learned how to skateboard and become “skateboarders” within this popular cultural community, I put the following questions to my data: What is the nature of participation in this community? In what ways do texts mediate these forms of participation? From these analytical questions, I developed two basic units of analysis: participatory events and textual events. Participatory events I define as instances in which participants partake in the activities of Franklin Skate Park. Textual events I define as those instances in which my participants accessed, consumed,

evaluated, produced, and/or distributed texts as part of their larger participation within their local and global popular cultures.

To further illustrate my data analysis procedures and methods, I will discuss textual events in more detail. Once I developed textual events as a unit of analysis, I listed all of the bits of data that pertained to textual events and looking across this data set, developed sub codes, such as accessing texts, consuming texts, producing and distributing texts. I reorganized my data accordingly and then developed another layer of codes within these codes, this time by text genre. For example, within consuming texts, I had sub codes such as “reading magazines,” “viewing videos,” and “listening to music.” I then rearranged my data within this coding scheme. The list below shows a sample of these different coding categories and the relationships between them:

2.2 Consuming Texts

2.2.1 Magazine Reading/discussing

2.2.1.1 Read to learn about equipment

2.2.1.2 Read to identify/construct an identity as a particular skateboarder, to be in the know; product affiliation

2.2.1.3 Learn the sport—photos vs. text

2.2.1.4 Social functions—bring people together

2.2.1.5 Younger-Older differentiation

2.2.2 Reading Books

2.2.2.1 Reading Non-skateboarding books—locate oneself historically and among others within the cultural practice; repetition

2.2.2.2 Critique of books about skateboarding

2.2.3 Listening to Music

2.2.3.1 Listen for the beat/not all that into music

2.2.3.2 Analyze and/or play with lyrics/”puzzle”

2.2.3.3 Listen to radio and lots of music

2.2.3.4 At the park

2.2.3.5 Affordances of listening

2.2.4 Viewing Videos

2.2.4.1 Watch with friends (Bring people together—social function)

2.2.4.2 Repetition of viewing

2.2.4.3 Exposure to new possibilities; To learn how to skate/get new tricks; Motivation (Function)

2.2.4.4 Supplement reading/Provide a visual “personified”

- 2.2.4.5 “Canon” of videos/shared videos
- 2.2.4.6 Introduce to sport
- 2.3 Textual Production & Distribution**
 - 2.3.1 Designing Tattoo
 - 2.3.1.1 Group Designing processes (with friends and/or tattoo artists)
 - 2.3.1.2 Group affiliation
 - 2.3.1.2.1 Familial and Racial/Ethnic and Religious
 - 2.3.1.2.2 Subcultural Group
 - 2.3.1.2.3 Philosophical, Religious, and/or Political beliefs
 - 2.3.1.3 Design/Creative Process is engaging, never ending
 - 2.3.1.4 Documentary Function—mark a moment, a person, a memory
 - 2.3.1.4.1 Mark a fun moment
 - 2.3.1.4.2 Memorial
 - 2.3.1.5 Sponsorship/Inspiration for ideas
 - 2.3.1.5.1 Album Covers/Music
 - 2.3.1.6 Tell stories, write letters
 - 2.3.1.7 Aesthetic engagement
 - 2.3.1.8 Distribution/cultural practice opens career options
 - 2.3.2 Writing Graffiti
 - 2.3.3 Shooting Video and/or photography
 - 2.3.4 Creating/Writing Music/Songs and poetry
 - 2.3.4.1 Writing/Creating/Producing Music with others and alone
 - 2.3.4.1.1 Collaborative process—feed/build off of each other; sharing it with others for feedback
 - 2.3.4.1.2 Multi-modal
 - 2.3.4.1.3 Inspiration for producing texts
 - 2.3.4.2 Producing and Distributing poetry for radio station
 - 2.3.4.3 Distribute Music
 - 2.3.4.4 Playing Music
 - 2.3.5 Writing a screenplay

From this organization of data, I then looked across these different groupings to develop and test analytical assertions. For example, looking across the instances of textual consumption, I developed the following assertions: textual consumption differed for participants according to their subcultural status, and all textual consumption was multi-modal and served social functions. Looking across assertions from each coding scheme, I developed and tested broader assertions about the nature of my participants’ textual activity, such as all textual activity functioned to index participant subcultural status at the same time as it worked to produce subcultural status. Finally, looking across my

larger coding schemes, I developed a set of broad findings and conclusions about the phenomenon under examination in this study. Finally, an important aspect of my data analysis procedures was the involvement of my participants. As I developed coding categories and analytic assertions, I discussed them with my participants. In a few instances, I shared drafts of chapters or sections of them with participants asking for their feedback. The majority of feedback I received from my participants in terms of “member checking” happened in the third season of my data collection, in which I would interview participants with very specific questions about my analysis. From these conversations, I was able to fill in any gaps and/or revise my assertions accordingly.

Although small sections of this report were written as data was generated and analyzed, the vast majority of the actual writing of this report occurred over an eight-month time frame (October 2007-early June 2008), with the bulk of it being done in the last five months of that time frame. Much like the generation and analysis procedures, writing this report occurred in a recursive manner. In addition, writing the report facilitated even further analysis through the processes of putting my findings and conclusions up against theoretical literatures more explicitly. Also, writing enabled me to locate areas of my analysis that needed more dis/confirmation, which facilitated several field visits and focused member checking sessions. Finally, as I conducted these final field visits, I would sometimes elicit the direct assistance of participants in the writing of this document, asking them, for instance, to listen to a section I read and offer feedback, word choice suggestions, or descriptions that better capture what I am trying to convey.

Socio-Political Orientation of the Researcher

At the risk of navel gazing, I offer two aspects of my autobiography that I believe are integral to understanding the ways and reasons I undertook and made sense of the phenomena I studied—my relationship with popular culture and my relationship with, as a secondary English/literacy teacher, non-academic achieving young men. By highlighting these two aspects of my socio-political orientations, I aim to show and hold in tension the ways I feel like I am like and relate to my participants and the ways I feel like I am unlike and do not relate to my participants. To lead into this discussion, though, I start with a brief discussion in the way I feel as I have shifted as a result of doing this study and writing this report.

Despite the fact that I have suffered hearing damage as the result of a decade and a half of intensive rock n roll concert going, I could still hear the click clack of wooden skateboards on cement and the rattle of “broken” ball bearings as I walked along the platform of the Long Island Railroad with a piercing train whistle and shudder of wheels on tracks next to me. I was visiting my family in the town in which I grew up, a small hamlet on the north shore of New York’s Long Island, and as my sister, Joann, waited for me in a nearby car, I watched a group of young men skateboarding in a section of the railroad station parking lot. The group cavorted together as one at a time they pushed their way toward a ledge and attempted to tail slide it. Never before would such a sight have caused me pause or wonder, and yet, now, two years into my dissertation research, I find myself keenly aware of the presence of these young men, wondering about their “stories” and their relationships with skateboarding and popular cultures. Like my participants discuss the ways they “see” city streets and municipal spaces “differently” than non-skaters, I can no longer see “youth”—whether they be on skateboards or not—

without an altered consciousness and heightened awareness—geospatially, culturally, and interpersonally—of the fact that they do not exist only as embodiments of adult fears, anxieties, and hopes. It no longer possible to see young people wearing Element t shirts, carrying guitars in airports, arms full of tattoos, or underachieving in school, and ascribe to the dominant narratives that position them in “crisis,” as “punks,” “resistant,” or “oppositional.” Now, behind every tattoo and atop every skateboard, I see a participant in a local and global cultural community, complete with its own cultural logics and exigencies.

As a secondary English/literacy educator, I struggled with relating to and “successfully teaching” the young men in my classes who in many respects relate to the young men I researched for this study. For all intents and purposes, I was one of Eckert’s “jocks,” someone who bought into the achievement ideology and rewards of formal schooling. It never crossed my mind, or my family’s mind, that I would not go to college right out of high school. And so when I began teaching and met students for whom college, the achievement ideology, or the rewards of the corporate structure of schooling did not make sense, I had no way of making sense of them or their seeming resistance to what was natural to me, other than through dominant discourses of boys in crisis and deficit models of thinking about them, popular culture, and literacy. I could not comprehend and/or relate to them, let alone successfully “teach” them in any ways other than those that made sense to me as a “jock.” In these ways, the exigency of this entire study stems from these experiences I had as an educator, and in some ways, I see the teacher I was then, and the many teachers who are like who I was, as the audience for this research study.

However, at the same time I felt completely disconnected and different from these students and their current manifestations, my research participants, I felt akin to them in their engagement with popular culture. Like them, popular culture facilitated a sense of and space unlike any other for pleasure, escape, connection, intellectual engagement, socio-political critique and action, and psycho-spiritual development. As will be discussed in more detail in the beginning of the next chapter, engaging popular culture, especially films like *Taxi Driver*, *Blade Runner*, and *JFK*, albums like Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska*, Woody Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads*, and Uncle Tupelo's *Still Feel Gone*, and television programs like *The Simpsons*, brought me together with others like nothing else had and taught me more about class politics, socio-political critique, aesthetics, romance, alienation, angst, how to relate to others, and how to be a man in more meaningful ways than formal school ever did, or as Springsteen sings, "I learned more from a three minute record that I ever learned in school."

Finally, in the spirit of holding in tension the ambivalence I have experienced in relation to the participants of this study, I feel it is important to draw attention to the irony of my methodological choice. As Levinson, Foley, and Holland (1996) note in the quotation at the opening of this chapter, I am living "a contradiction" in that I am critiquing the very thing (i.e. educational institution) upon which I stand, from which I have so greatly benefited, and in which I am complicit. Here I am, a "jock," telling the story of a group of "burnouts."

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Without further ado, this dissertation turns its attention to the young men of Franklin Skate Park and their cultural practices. To this end, the next chapter, "Entering

the Bowl: An Intro to Finley, Franklin Sk8 Park, and its Participants,” will be a “dropping in” into their world, an “in media res” if you will, as it describes an annual skate contest held at the park and many of the ways the park operates. Pedagogically, this chapter is meant to orient the reader to the skate park and the community in which it exists, to introduce in detail some of the young men of the park, and to offer a glimpse into the processes of field work.

Chapter Four

Entering the Bowl: An Intro to Finley, Franklin Sk8park, and its Participants

This is my favorite skate park. This is home. I love this park. I mean I've seen a lot better parks, you know, but this is my home. Nothing will ever beat Franklin Skate Park because that's the best one.

Hollywood

RP: So what was that like? When the park was finally opened?

Luis: When it was finally open? It was like...heaven...made out of concrete and coping. I mean seriously. We'd been waiting four years for them to build that thing. The original plans were laid out my freshman year and ever since then we'd just been waiting for them to build it. And they were waiting for an extra 50 thousand dollars or something like that. And once it was finally laid out, I went out there and started skating it before they were even done laying the final pieces of cement.

Getting there

The cloak of humidity so typical for an early August afternoon in the upper Midwest pushes beads of sweat to my forehead as I walk to my car for my trip to the skate park to cover its annual contest. I shoulder two book bags—one with my laptop, the other with my research equipment—my digital voice recorder and camera, notebooks, consent forms, pens and the like—while I carry a plastic grocery bag filled with leftovers from dinner two nights before. After I throw my bags into the back seat, I check out my “look” in the reflection of the window of my car. I scan myself from top to bottom—a plain white t-shirt with a few visible stains, untucked and hanging loosely over a pair of ripped and torn gray cargo shorts that do not display a name-brand, such as Aeropostale or Old Navy. Although my cargo shorts are not a common type of clothing for the skaters at the park, they at least pass for the unpretentious gritty aesthetic valued at the skate park.

The one part of my field wardrobe I've never been satisfied with, my open-toed Chacos, most obviously mark me as an outsider since skateboarders do not wear sandals to skateboard. However, having worn skater shoes for earlier visits and feeling fraudulent doing so, or as the skateboarders themselves might say, a "poser," I decided to stick with the Chacos. With this sense of ambivalence about my attire, I nestle into the driver's seat of my car and pull the rear view mirror to check my face—dissatisfied with the neatness of my short-cropped hair, I run my hands through it, rubbing my scalp back and forth for a few seconds in an attempt to make it look less kempt. I then move my hands over my face, reassuring myself that I'm not clean shaven but also not too overgrown with my facial hair. I rearrange the mirror, start the car, and pull out of the driveway as I muse that this business of trying to "fit in" without seeming a "poser" seems more an arduous task than finding key informants.

Once on the road, I get my music situated. Today's choice, Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run*, an album released the year I turned one, an album for which I know every lyric and every beat from the first sound of the harmonica in "Thunder Road" to the last sounds of the organ on the album-ending opus "Jungeland." I never tire of the album, and with every listen, I revisit memories of my initial foray into popular culture, which include my brother, Michael, who is 8 years older than me, inviting me into his room to listen to Springsteen's music. "Here, read along," he might instruct me as he pushed me the liner notes to Springsteen's *Nebraska*, or "Robert, get in here and listen to this," he might yell to me as he would lie on his floor, eyes closed absorbed in the sounds of the boardwalk life in "4th of July, Asbury Park." From this introduction, I would sneak into his room when he wasn't home and play his LPs, strumming my air guitar to "Rosalita,"

using my hockey stick as a microphone to sing “The River,” or just lying where my brother did, staring at the ceiling to “Candy’s Room.” And while it would take me years to grasp some of the deeper socio-political meanings of Springsteen’s music, this entry into popular culture was not merely entertainment for me even then—it politicized me long before the novels of Steinbeck did, exposed me to worlds unlike my own much as the early films of Martin Scorsese later would, facilitated something akin to a sense of spirituality that I would later revisit through the Transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and connected me to others, most notably my brother like no other text had prior to then and perhaps since then has. Although I did not have the language and theoretical training to understand it then, popular culture set me on a course—intellectually, politically, emotionally, and spiritually—that I am still traveling as I drive on the highway to learn about how and why a group of young men, only a few of whom seem to do well in school, excel in many areas of their lives as they intersect with various forms of popular culture.

Pushing eighty on the open road with my windows rolled down, I hit a crest on the highway that always marks the midway point in my journey to Finley. “Backstreets” comes to an end and my mind snaps back to the present moment: I remember that I am on my way to collect data and anxiety courses through my body. I’m grateful that the night before I ate dinner with “Crazy K,” a thirty year old self-employed tile contractor who has been an avid skateboarder since he was an early teen, and his wife, Sandra, who I know through my graduate schooling experiences—both of whom are residents of Finley and spend time at Franklin Skate Park, Crazy K to skate, Sandra to “hang out” or read. Over dinner they assured me that today at the contest they would introduce me to some of

the younger skaters they know, regulars who they think will be helpful for me to talk with and get to know. As I come to terms with this plan, my anxiety wanes, and I soon pull off the highway at the exit for Finley, during which time “Meeting across the River” closes and the violin from “Jungleland” kicks in. I lower the volume as I slow down to enter the stream of traffic on the main thoroughfare into the heart of Finley.

Finley, MI

Although located only approximately 25 miles from a major urban area (Liberty) and the main campus of a research one university, Finley has historically been a relatively remote, rural and light-industrial community. As a hamlet of approximately 8,500 people, 97% of whom are White, Finley serves as the county seat to a predominately rural and Republican constituency. However, despite its racial homogeneity, Finley and its community members defy a single taxonomic label, such as suburban/rural or conservative/liberal. By some of its members, Finley is described as a “bedroom community,” serving as a residence for university and government employees for nearby Liberty; by others, it is considered a “blue collar town” serving as a hub for small manufacturing companies; and by others, “a small hick town,” meant to signify Finley as a rural, agricultural community. This confluence of varying and oftentimes conflicting identifications have become especially visible as Finley, deeply imbedded for generations in the traditions of local agriculture and industry, both of which have undergone major changes in recent years, has had to find new ways to reinvent itself as a community.

As a whole, the community has put forth concerted efforts to provide its current and future residents with a high quality of life as well as make its municipality a more

attractive destination for “outsiders.” In fact, Finley’s downtown area has recently been designated one of Michigan’s “cool cities,” which is essentially a program designed to retain and attract people, especially “urban pioneers and young knowledge workers” (www.coolcities.com) to live and work in the state. During the early part of my research, the city brought in “urban revitalization” consultants to help them with their efforts, and the central focus of a series of town meetings during that time of my field work was on the continued revitalization of the city’s downtown. An aspect of one conversation at one particular meeting, for example, focused on what types of businesses, such as fine dining establishments, would most likely draw in people who do not live in or near Finley. With several long-standing, independently-owned and operated, “mom and pop” stores in downtown Finley closing within the last few years (due to what some believe is the recent influx of a Wal-Mart and a major regional-chain supermarket, Meijer) leaving several store fronts for lease in the heart of the town, many participants at the meeting expressed concern over a potentially “empty” downtown.

Also during this conversation, the issue of broadened “diversity” within the community was raised, especially as it relates to race. A younger member of the meeting (a white male in his late 20’s/early 30’s who works downtown) raised the concern that the community is stigmatized as, and very may well be “racist,” and that if the community wants to create ways to bring in outsiders, it must address this issue. He went on to explain how he has had African American friends who were harassed in the community during their visits to see him. While several of the older members of the group dismissed these concerns as being invalid and the topic eventually dropped from the discussion, they speak to a long-standing concern that has been a part of the fabric of

Finley. While there have been conflicting reports about the racist attitudes and particular instances in the town (nearly everyone I spoke with about this issue retold an incident that they had heard about from someone else), much of this stigma, especially as it exists in the minds of people who do not live in Finley, stems from an incident that occurred in Finley some ten years ago. The Ku Klux Klan, wanting to demonstrate in Michigan, located Finley as what they called an “ideal place” for their demonstration and applied for a permit to demonstrate there. And although the town of Finley refused their request and the KKK did not demonstrate there, the incident sparked such publicity within and outside of the community, that it has been since branded a home of the KKK and racist attitudes.

Finally passing the long stretch of fast-food restaurants and various other chain enterprises, the old county courthouse comes into my view, and I imagine Finley’s downtown as the set for any one of a dozen Hollywood films set in small town America. The courthouse, a building erected in 1885, serves as the symbolic heart and geographic hub of the downtown and the county at large. No longer functioning as an actual courthouse, the building has been converted into a museum, county archive, and home for the town’s chamber of commerce. Frequently, the grassy areas around the building serve as areas for local markets and crafts shops and other events. Turning at the courthouse to drive through downtown’s main street, I notice a sign for next month’s annual “Wild West Week” festival. Wild West Week, started nearly thirty years ago has become one of the hallmarks of Finley’s identity for outsiders and major points of pride for many insiders. A several day country-and-western-themed celebration, complete with a rodeo, beauty queens, parade, square dancing, drinking, mock gambling, and mechanical bull

rides, Wild West Week has served as one of Finley's main attractions and biggest draws for outsiders. In many respects, the downtown area has taken on the semblance of an old western town as many of storefronts play up its "cowboy" theme by displaying horseshoes and wagon wheels as exterior decor. In fact, Wild West Week has become such a significant emblem of Finley such that Finley is known by many people—insiders and outsiders of the community—as "Fintucky," meant to suggest its "country" identity.

Along with a series of saloons, the stretch of storefronts on main street consist mostly of locally-owned businesses, including a pharmacy, pizza place, movie theater, craft supplies store, gun shop, tattoo shop, and a bank. As I make my past this stretch of stores, I steadily move from the old Victorian-style homes, through a subdivision until I pass one of the trailer parks that dot the outskirts of the town. Fixed on a trailer with children's toys strewn on the dirt patch outside of its main entrance and plastic sheets stretching over the windows, I remember the evening I spent with a local police officer on a "ride along," pulling cars over for speeding, patrolling the local parks to stir up any young people making out or cavorting after hours, breaking up an outdoor party for its noise disturbance, and responding to a call in this trailer park for a potential domestic violence situation.

As I make my way past the trailer park (and what is quickly becoming the outskirts of town), I pass the industrial section of town, which has been revitalized by recent war projects that have enabled the largest manufacturing company in the community to continue to employ many residents, and in fact hire more people recently, so that while it had typically employed 400-500 people, it now employs well over 1500 people, which does not include the 500 or more new employees this company's local

suppliers have hired. In many respects, this “boom” has had positive ripple effects on the economic vibrancy of the city as a whole, thus helping to insulate Finley to a certain extent from the economic downturn impacting the state as a whole.

I turn a corner and gently rise to a point at an intersection where I can see an area of farmland that extends beyond the town of Finley proper. Fields growing corn, soy beans, and alfalfa stretch for over ten miles around, interrupted only by several communities throughout the county, each significantly smaller than Finley. As I sit at the intersection, the high school is to my right, and I’m taken by what may be the greatest symbol of Finley’s current state as a community: the juxtaposition of a ranch-style house that has been converted into a small bar restaurant where the menu consists of drafts of Coors and cheeseburgers across the street from the newly-constructed, multi-million dollar performing arts center connected to Finley high school. As I wait for traffic to clear, I think of the way one of my participants described Finley as a town that “wants the image to be white collar but it’s not.” I also remember the words of a city official, who described to me a certain “tension” that exists within what he refers to as “a tale of two cities.” Specifically, he explained to me that the tension exists between two basic groups of community members: those who consider Finley a “bedroom community” and work in Liberty and those who view and experience Finley as a self-contained entity separate from Liberty.

Because we’re far enough away from Liberty that we’re self contained community, and we’re the county seat, so we have all of the social services and stuff are based here, and tons of people, you know, live their whole life, or I should say, *most* of their time they spend in Finley. They work here, they shop here, you know. In that sense, it’s fairly self-contained. But then there’s a whole other half of the city that lives here and works in Liberty and treats it more of a bedroom community, and that can certainly create tensions or conflicts between

people who want to push for certain ideas about projects and then there is another group who feels differently about projects.

In a follow up email correspondence, he explained how he thinks this “dichotomy” causes tension and conflict because the “commuters” are constantly comparing Finley to the places they see in Liberty every day, and to the other suburban communities where their Liberty colleagues and co-workers live. Likewise I believe a higher percentage of them are not native Finleyans, so they have less attachment to the ‘way things are.’ Whereas ‘true Finleyans,’ do not confront the differences between communities as often, are likely to be less affluent and less willing/able to support community improvement projects financially. They are also often skeptical of need or benefit, as they have thus far lived their lives without ‘Project-X’ whatever that may be.”

The performing arts center was constructed as part of the community’s recent attempts at revitalization. Built with the expressed intention of not only serving the public schools and community at large but also drawing in people from the surrounding region, including the nearest urban area, the arts center, since its opening a few years ago, regularly hosts a variety of national touring acts from stand up comedy shows, to pop concerts, to symphonies. In addition to the performing arts center, within the last five years, the community has built a new football and sports complex and a new middle school complete with an aquatic center available for community members. Hoping to revitalize its community through increased support of its public education, the town also paid for a billboard on the highway placed halfway between Finley and its nearest urban center highlighting these recent additions and promoting Finley schools as ideal places for young people to learn.

Finley high school has a population of approximately 1,000 students, who reflective of the town's demographics lack much racial diversity but represent a range of socioeconomic statuses. 84% of the student body is reported to be involved in extracurricular activities, which range from activities such as sports, drama, band, to an active auto mechanics shop and a Future Farmers of America organization. While like most schools, athletics holds a major place in the social doings of the school culture, other programs such as band and drama rival them in terms of social significance. In fact, one teacher, a former cheerleader and now drama director, explained to me at the homecoming football game, when one of her "actors" was named part of the homecoming court, that at Finley it is not always the jocks who get all the recognition, but that kids who participate in other programs do as well. I was surprised actually that during one of my observations at a school board meeting, several members of the FFA presented on some of their recent activities. This was a surprise to me since the FFA would most likely not be an organization found within many "suburban" school districts.

"Hollywood" and the Historical-Cultural Context of Franklin Skate Park

Back inside my car in Finley, listening to Clarence Clemens make his entrance into "Jungleland" via his signature saxophone solos, I pull into the parking lot for the skateboard park. More a dirt and gravel patch of earth than a paved space with officially-designated parking spots, the parking lot, at any one time, typically hosts five or six, or on a "busy" evening, nine or ten vehicles. Upon turning into the lot, though, I'm taken aback by the rows of vehicles jammed into it, and I have to three point turn out of the lot and find a spot on the street adjacent to the park.

Franklin Skate Park, built just three years earlier, sits on a 20-acre plot of land known more generally as Franklin Park, which in addition to the skate park, has a sand volleyball court, some picnic tables strewn throughout the park, and open grass areas dotted with trees³. Situated on a rectangular corner lot, Franklin Park is bordered on the south and west by two-lane roads that help connect the hub of Finley's downtown area to some of its outlying housing and rural areas. A row of houses sits along the other side of the north-south bound street and on the other side of the east-west bound street is a quarry that also hosts the city's water tower, which has painted on it a colored line drawing of the county courthouse, a pine cone (which stands for Finley's nickname of "Pine City"), and the phrase "Celebrate Finley" written above them. Where the park ends to the north houses begin, and to the east of the park, across from the parking lot, a barbed-wire fence separates Franklin Park from a sunken open field in which on occasional late summer evenings deer can be seen roaming about. Railroad tracks run parallel to the park and visits to the park are never without the accompaniment of Amtrak or cargo trains blaring through. Abandoned since the 1970s by its former owner, a local manufacturing company, the land was procured by the city, environmentally restored (since it had served as a series of "lagoons" to hold the waste water from the manufacturing plant), and made into a vibrant space for local residents to recreate, which have been made possible largely by the efforts of those behind the development of the skate park.

The idea of the skate park emerged from a "Youth Assets" survey conducted in 1998 by the city and schools together in order to assess and conceptualize the needs and wants of its young people. A skate park surfaced as one of the top two priorities for young

³ Between the first and second summers of my research, the city built a nine-hole disc golf course and so "traffic" at the park increased significantly from the first to subsequent summers. There are also near-term plans for restrooms, a 'boundless' playground structure, and nine more disc golf holes.

people (the other being a new community swimming pool), and after a long series of activities, including procuring funds, meeting and selecting park designers, and the actual construction, Franklin Skate Park was built and open to the public in late summer of 2004. In addition to the city's community developer, mayor, and other city officials, an important figure in the process of making Franklin Skate Park a reality was Frank Rodgers, a 70-year old retired railroad worker and lifetime resident of Finley. During a recent term as a city council member, Frank helped coordinate, with the consistent help of many of the young men and women of Finley, especially those interested in skateboarding and BMX biking, the many processes it took to make the idea of a Franklin Skate Park a reality—from the official proposals to the city government, to procuring funds, to selecting the site of the park, to brokering all of the contractors involved. One skateboarder even said, "Anyone who skates at Franklin Skate Park owes his life to Frank." As a \$415,000 project, Frank and many of the future users of the park, who Frank affectionately refers to as "the kids," raised over \$50,000 during a two and a half year time frame by collecting pop cans, soliciting donations from retail businesses and community members, raffles, video advertisements, and letter campaigns. In many respects, the park's annual skate contest, hosted by a local church, is the most public, celebratory activity or moment of recognition of the hard work of Frank and the "kids" who helped him and use the park.

For many of these "kids" (that is the users of the park), Franklin Skate Park has become a "second home," a place where they can go and be free of the entanglements of their daily lives involving school and family, a place where they feel a sense of "freedom." Luis says, "I mean, that place [the skate park] is as big a part of my life,

possibly as my family. It's like my second home. And, I have so much respect for that place." What follows is an excerpted conversation between me and three participants, Kevin, Houston (Hous below), and "Hollywood" (H below), discussing the meaning the park has for them:

Kevin: This is honestly, our getaway. This is *our* getaway, This is *our* paradise. If we didn't have this, what else would we have? Finley doesn't have a lot to offer. This is one of the only places Finley has for kids, for teens to hang out.

RP: Tell me more about what you mean by *paradise*.

Kevin: Well, for some of these kids it's a second home. It's a place to get away from the problems that you have, you know, that you have in your life. This is my way to get away from everything, from my home stress, work stress. I get out of work, I come up here every night. Meet up with my friends and skateboard a little.

H: If I didn't have this skate park, I'd be in jail. I would.

RP: Why do you say that?

H: Before I started skating, well, I had skated when I lived in California, but I fucked up my leg, so I hadn't done much...and I didn't start skating till this skate park opened here. Before that I was in and out of detention at school, I was doing drugs, doing stupid shit, going into stores and stealing shit. When I started skating, I started smoking up here, and everyone was like, 'that's not cool,' and I stopped. Since then I've been skating a lot. Plus, I wouldn't have the friends I do.

Kevin: But, the thing is, you're accepted when you come up here. I mean it doesn't matter if you're bad, you're good [at skateboarding]. If you show respect, you're accepted. And that's a good feeling to have. I mean there's no where in town you can go to get that level of respect. You know, people will come up and show you how to do things, all that, and you learn from it. It's like you are building your own charisma, like through these kids.

H: Like, he's what? [pointing to Houston]—you're 13? 6th grade. Five foot...zero.

Hous: Four foot...

H: Four foot, what *two*? I mean, shit, where else is he going to fit in?
Especially with his smart-ass mouth?

[Everyone, including Houston, laughs.]

Kevin: This is our freedom. This is where we go to open up.

Within this excerpt, Kevin and Hollywood explain not only how the park is like a second home for them but also how they believe that having the skate park as a place to go, see friends, and be productive with their time, has actually saved them from getting into serious trouble with the law or school. Hollywood, as others with whom I talked, is convinced that if the park was not in his life he would be in jail, a place by age 20 he has on two occasions spent time. In fact, during the second summer of my observations, Hollywood was on probation. Having recently graduated from the local alternative high school after being expelled from Finley high school, a place he never feels like he fit in, Hollywood, after the second summer of my data collection started at an out-of-state four-year culinary school. At the very beginning of my third season of data collection, however, I unexpectedly ran into Hollywood at the park as he was temporarily back in Finley to bear witness to his ex-girlfriend giving birth to his daughter. Unequivocally the most crass participant at the park, Hollywood curses more than anyone else at the park and displays constant and loud bouts of frustration, something for which he sometimes gets mocked by others. Hollywood's broad-shouldered, dark-complexioned half-Filipino, half-Hawaiian body is dotted with a series of tattoos that represent his affiliations with his family and skateboarding as well as designs he finds aesthetically appealing, or as he says of one of his tattoos, an image from a CD cover of one of his favorite bands, "it was the sweetest design." Specifically, he has his family's nickname tattooed on his body, a sequence of images of a broken skateboard with the words "Skate

Free...Die Hard” accompanying it, his skate park nickname, “Hollywood” inked across his knuckles, and he plans on getting his daughter’s name inked on his body after she is born. Hollywood received the nickname *Hollywood* because he used to dress like a “gangster”, and on his first day at the park, TS saw him and gave him the name *Hollywood* to represent this aesthetic. He explains: “I got *Hollywood* up here from TS. He, uh, first day I ever started skating here, came here dressed like a gangster. I had my hat tilt, I had braces on. They thought it was a grill so they got the movie *Hollywood’s Most Wanted* they gave me that nickname *Hollywood*.” In addition to his participation at the skate park, Hollywood also, or at least prior to going to college, played bass with a local “ska, punk, metal” band. Similar to Hollywood’s attitudes toward the park, some of its users believe that the park saved or rescued them from continuing to head down a path of “trouble” and “doing bad things” and facilitated turning their lives around.

Also within their discussion, the participants explain how the park offers them a place and a group of people to be a part of, to be “accepted” into, which Kevin says is a “good feeling” and helps to “build charisma.” To illustrate this point, Hollywood uses Houston as an example, asks where is someone like him—someone short for his age with a “smart-ass mouth” going to fit in? This feeling of fitting in at the skate park resonates through many of the ways my participants discussed their feelings of alienation from school, the “jocks” and “preps” there, and the recreational outlets offered through it in contrast to the skate park and people who participated there. Finally, the above excerpt alludes to the perception the users of the park have about recreational options for young people within Finley. For example, Kevin says that the park is “one of the only places Finley has for kids, for teens to hang out.” The users of the park explain how the options

for young people in Finley are limited to the bowling alley (which they explain is occupied by league activity most evenings), the movie theater, a tiny arcade housed within a pizza place, an outdoor park with biking trails (which they claim no one uses since the park is heavily supervised by the police), and the community pool housed in the middle school. Everything else, they argue, involves money, not something they or many of the kids who use the skate park have in abundance.

Still a relatively new part of the larger community of Finley, Franklin Skate Park has become a site where various interests get played out. Community members seem split about the park, if they have any opinion of it at all—some maintain that it is a waste of money since as one person said, “every time I pass it, no one is there. And, you can’t use it in the winter!”; some think it is “ugly” because of the graffiti; and others think the park is a wonderful idea and a great place for kids to spend time. The graffiti at the park seems to be the central point of contention community members have with the park, which ironically is a central point of contention among the skateboarders as well. Not opposed to “good” graffiti done with a certain type of paint, the skateboarders do not like the current graffiti and are largely not responsible for it. In fact, they appreciate the fact that there is a video camera that monitors the activities at the park, and they wish it was more effective at stopping people from tagging at the park. According to a city official, the 24-hour camera, which is accessible as an internet webcam to anyone with internet access, was installed primarily as a way to advertise and/or showcase the park as a feature of Finley and for users to see if their friends are up at the park at any one time. The users of the park believe that the camera was installed as a way to monitor their behavior and the activities at the park, especially the graffiti writing that occurs there, and it often gets

invoked threateningly among them whenever something illicit or controversial happens at the park. For example, in one instance several users were smoking pot at the park, and a group of others called out to them to stop and said that they would not be surprised if the police were going to head down to the park at any time to arrest them because they were watching them via the video camera. In addition to the graffiti, controversy about the park involves litter, underage smoking, and noise, especially the playing of music. In fact, threats that the park will be closed down for any of these or other reasons continuously circulate among its users. This self-policing among the participants at the park and the constant threat of the park closing that they circulate among themselves is particularly curious considering that, as one city official says, threats to shut down the park have never come from “credible local officials with any real responsibility for the operation or maintenance of the facility.” He explains: “It’s inconceivable that we [the city] would devote so much money and so many resources to this park’s creation and then shut it down over some spray paint.”

Crazy K, Derrick, and the Users & Spatial Design of Franklin Skate Park

The beads of sweat return to my forehead as I sit in my car, windows rolled up, and finish out “Jungleland” and thus the entire *Born to Run* album. I take a deep breath to alleviate the anxiety that returned to me as I remembered that I was here to “work.” I rummage through my equipment bag, and stuff my shorts pockets with my notebook, pens, some folded consent forms, sunglasses, and voice recorder. I place my camera case over my head so it runs diagonally across my chest, and I decide since there are so many people present to risk wearing my Yankees baseball hat, not something I’d done up to this point, although I turn it backwards so as not to so visibly claim my allegiance to a

team from a different state and more significantly a professional “team” sport like baseball.

Aside from the powder blue converted school bus that fashions a “Congregation of Christ” painted display on its broadside, parked dead center in the main grassy area of Franklin Park, I’m most surprised by the smell of hot dogs cooking on an open grill between the bus and the skate park. Normally, bags of chips, fast food, bottles of water and soda, and the occasional pizza are the only food items found at the park, and it is rare to ever smell food prior to sitting at one of the picnic tables where it is being eaten. And although music sometimes communally plays at the park either through someone’s portable radio they set up or a car stereo, it is never as loud as it is today—two large speakers connected to a full fledged stereo system bookend a wooden “stage” set up near the school bus and blast a range of heavy metal, hardcore, and hip hop music. I make my way toward the skate park, weaving in between people congregating in groups on the grass, dodging Frisbees, stopping on occasion to pet some of the friendlier looking dogs, and even contemplate getting on line to wait for a free hot dog, remembering the first lesson I learned in graduate school: “exploit free food.” The throngs of people inside the actual skate park block me from seeing the action, and so despite the fact that I enjoy the carnivalesque vibe outside of the fenced in skate park, I keep my attention focused on making my way to the action. I stop, though, to snap some photos of the scene and do a rough count of people; I eventually stop counting at 200 and muse that this is much different from most afternoons when I’m one of twenty or so users of the park.

In general, the users of Franklin Skate Park consist predominately of white, working-class young men who live in or near Finley and who skateboard, bmx bike, or

roller blade. Although the majority of users are white, there exists a small cohort of Latino young men who are among the most known users of the park. In addition, many people who do not skateboard, bike, or blade also “use” the park, more or less as a “hangout.” These people include friends of skaters or bikers or just others looking for a place to spend time away from direct adult supervision. These non-skaters/bikers/bladers are perceived by the skaters/bikers/bladers differently depending upon their affiliations with skaters/bikers/bladers. For example, people who hang out at the park without knowing or closely associating with skaters/bikers/bladers are generally perceived as being in the way or “losers,” whereas non-skaters/bikers/bladers who have affiliations with skaters/bikers/bladers are more accepted as spectators. While very few females skate, bike, or blade at the park, it is not uncommon for several young women to be at the park at any one time. These young women are typically either girlfriends of a male participant, a friend of a “girlfriend,” a sister, or a “ramp tramp,” which is, as described by my participants, a girl who hangs out at the park to flirt with guys and “cause trouble.” In addition, “outsiders,” or skaters or bikers who do not live in Finley also use the park. These “outsiders” are quickly and visibly marked as such due to not only their clothing, their style, or even their vehicles but also because the group of locals is small enough whereby they all know or at least recognize each other. Additionally, parents, especially those of very young children, and other adults interested in observing the skateboarders also spend time at the park.

As I enter the gate to the skate park, Crazy K, a stocky, white male with a crew cut, an array of tattoos on his back, legs, and arms, and a five o clock shadow walks toward me and tells me that Sandra, his wife, went home to get his helmet (helmets are

mandatory for participating in the contest), that the judges are going to let him compete. At our dinner-interview the night before, Crazy K explained to me that because he was over 25 years of age, he was ineligible to compete, which he was surprised and irritated by since the categories for the contest—beginner, intermediate, and advanced are not age-specific. Later when I checked the official entry forms to the contest, several of the advanced participants were some of the youngest participants overall while several intermediate participants were in their late teens or early twenties. Within a minute of us talking, Sandra walks up to us, gives Crazy K his helmet, and says to me with a smile, “I’ve got a kid for you!” Wearing a black t-shirt with the words “Listen to Slayer” written across the front of it, a pair of large sunglasses, and jean shorts, Sandra stands at about 5’2”, can immediately light up any room with her smile, and speaks with uncompromising passion and excitement. We maneuver through the mass of people, but I soon peel off to snap pictures of the action, taking advantage of the large crowds of people and flurry of activity as a way for me to blend into the scene or at least not be as obtrusive as I would if I were to try and snap photos during a “regular” night of skating and hanging out at the park. I circle the concrete edge of the two bowls, snapping pictures of particular graffiti and skaters and bikers.

The skate park, which was co-designed by several of the skateboarders who served on the Franklin Skate Park committee in conjunction with the builders, is a concrete area that consists of two concaved sections, one known as the “bowl” and the other “the street,” as well as a range of “ledges,” “boxes,” rails, stairs, and flat surfaces. Small grass areas line the fringes of this entire concrete structure, and it is all enclosed with a three foot high fence with two gates, both of which have posted next to them the

official rules of the park and a warning that the premises are under surveillance. The bowl consists of three separate pool areas that are connected by, what the skateboarders refer to as, “waterfalls,” which are sloped declines from one area to another. These three areas have various points of entry with different heights from which to drop into the bowl, including four, six, seven, eight, and nine feet. The space where the walls of the bowl meet the concrete flat surfaces from which the skateboarders drop into this bowl rests a metal circular coping. The “street” is a mostly flat surface save a “pyramid” with a “fun box” on top of it positioned on one side. The entire street side of the park sits three feet below the level of the flat areas of the park and is accessible by several smooth points of entry as well as a six-foot roll in and a six-foot quarter pipe. The cement areas around and in between these two main areas of the park consist of flat surfaces as well as a range of street-style obstacles, such as stairs, rails, and ledges. Several picnic tables and garbage barrels also take up space in the park and these are sometimes moved to be included as part of the obstacles within the skate park.

When I reconvene with Sandra standing on the grass just off of the concrete edge of the park, she points to a skater—a tall (approximately 6’2’’), lean brown-complexioned guy with “shaggy” sandy-blond hair. I recognize him from previous visits, and his attire—a tan Hurley t-shirt and darker tan shorts down to his knees—is consistent with what he normally wears, although he oftentimes wears a plain white t-shirt or no shirt at all. Sandra explains to me that he, Derrick, is the “kid” she mentioned to me last night; she spoke with him before I arrived, and he said he is interested in talking with me about my project. She goes on to tell me that he is 14, going into 8th grade, has “lots of family problems right now,” and would be “a great person to talk to about

skateboarding.” Over the course of getting to know Derrick over this and the following two summers, I discover that for Derrick, skateboarding feels like “freedom” and the skate park specifically a place where he can be in control of his life. Feeling caught between his divorced parents and his responsibilities as the second oldest sibling of four children, Derrick turns to the park and his “friends” there as a space where he can “get away” from the pressures of his day-to-day life, “relax,” and take his mind off of “other things you have to deal with” like parents, home, and school. During the second summer of research, Derrick was spending a great deal of time “couch surfing” at his friends’ places, spending up to a week at a time at any one friend’s place, and had begun to seriously consider the possibilities (at age 15) of moving out on his own, possibly with a friend, much like his sister had already done at age 17. By the third summer, Derrick was living full-time with one of his friends’ family and was waiting until his sixteenth birthday that summer to start working more regularly in order to pay for an apartment with another friend of his. Self-reported as “not the smartest in the book,” Derrick is committed to finishing high school, mainly so he can show his family that he is capable of attaining more than they have in their lives. Specifically, in an interview, he said about wanting to finish high school: “It [graduating from high school] proves to everyone that I’m better than them. Showing that I try hard for what I’ve got. It makes me feel better, showing that, yeah, I finished high school you know, I’ve got my diploma.” Despite the difficulties he faces within his familial contexts, Derrick, when he is of age, plans on getting a tattoo of “Mexican prayer hands” in honor of his heritage and family. He wants to have a ribbon that wraps around them three times, each wrap with one of his sister’s names on it, and then his parent’s birth dates on either side, “so it’ll have my

whole family.” Consistently touted as the best bowl skater at the park, or if not the best, the most improved, Derrick has a “smooth” style to him, making the skateboard look like a natural extension of his feet and catching air look like surfing a wave—an aesthetic that would more easily place him in southern California than the upper Midwest. Probably the only skater at the park with a legitimate shot at doing something more with the sport, Derrick is “not sure” as to what extent skateboarding might fit into his future, since as he says “I could possibly break a leg” or it might get “annoying to him,” and in usual skateboarder fashion, he says about his future: “I thought I’d just go with the flow. Whatever happens, happens, I guess. Try to make the best of it, though.”

TS and the Forms of Participation at Franklin Skate Park

As I stand with Sandra in one of the corners of the park, the sun blazing down on us, nearly twenty skaters take to the bowls at once. In the shallow, street-side bowl skaters are rolling into it from each area and within the course of no more than two minutes, I observe three collisions between skateboarders, something that may happen once during a three-hour observation on a normal evening. In the vert bowl in front of me, eight skaters share the small space, rolling past one another without collisions. The highest number of skaters I had seen in the bowl at any one time is three and that is only when the run is choreographed. The unorthodoxy of not only the ways the skaters are skating but also the throngs standing along the edges of the bowls, easily marks the ways the normal flow and protocol of the skating activities seem suspended for this special occasion.

Normally, participants who do not actually skateboard and for the times when skateboarders are not actually skating, their participatory activities including “hanging

out” in one of the following areas: the parking lot, on the grassy areas within or outside of the gated area for the skate park, within the bowl areas itself (on ledges and boxes), or most commonly at one of the few picnic tables within the skate park. While each of these forms of participation has its own functions (e.g. sitting within the bowl area itself to observe the skating; hanging out in the parking lot and/or grassy areas to relax), hanging out at the picnic tables proved to be the most prominent form of non-skating participation. In many respects, it served as a space for participants, especially those who skateboard, to take a break from the action, relax, eat and drink something, smoke a cigarette, and/or talk with friends about stuff other than skateboarding. One participant explains how the picnic tables are sort of like a “gentlemen’s club,” a place to leave the skateboarding in the bowl:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| RP | Okay. Umm what about the bench? There’s a few park benches up there or picnic tables up there. What umm and I noticed some people just hanging out there. |
| TS | It’s more or less, honestly I’m grateful to hang out on the benches more now then to hang out sitting on the stuff at the skate park cause you know they used to sit on the ledges and stuff and (cannot hear) I’ve always thought they needed to have bleachers mainly because of the fact that I think that would be fun to drag them up and use them as a obstacle, but you know? |
| Chase | There should be more seating not so much as lawn chairs but picnic tables are a good thing. |
| TS | Not to mention too like whenever like when we want to take a break from skating no one wants to sit on the freakin’ ground like no matter how lazy it sounds. No one wants to have to sit on the freakin’ ground to drink a pop or like if you go get food, you know? |
| RP | Right. Umm... |
| TS | And plus it kind of a place...like, when you’re up by the coping that’s all you talk is skateboarding and stuff like that. When you |

leave, it kind of gets left in the park. Like you know when you're talking on the picnic tables it's always about completely different topics.

RP I've noticed that actually like when the guy is standing around the edge waiting to go into in they'll talk about the moves but when they get to the picnic tables it's like they talk about all sorts of stuff.

TS That's more like, I don't know, that's almost more like gentlemen's club time where you just sit there and talk about, shoot the shit about stuff that's going on.

Chase (Cannot hear) ...you don't want talk about, think about, (cannot hear) skateboard (cannot hear)

While actually skateboarding, participants are typically engaged in one of three ways: they are either skating alone, within a small group (approximately 2-5) of others, or as part of a large group of skateboarders who skate an entire bowl or section of the park together—the most extreme example of which is the annual contest. (The instances in which groups of skaters skate together are known as “sessions” and will be discussed in more detail below.) These forms of skating participation typically occur simultaneously in the park, and it is a common during a single moment of observation for some skaters to be skating alone, small groups of skaters skating together, and possibly even a large-group of skaters occupying a large section of the park together. For example, during a moment of one evening of observation, five skaters were involved in a session in which they were taking turns trying to ollie over two barrels they placed just outside of the street side bowl, five other, less advanced skaters were playing a game of skate in one of the corner areas of the park, and a younger, less advanced skater was skating the perimeter of the park alone, working on improving his ollie.

The most popular form of skating at Franklin Skate Park is a small “session.” A session is when two or more skaters skate together, taking turns skating a bowl or another area of the park, such as a rail or the steps. TS explains: “A session is like, I don’t know, just a general term for like you and a bunch of friends going out and skating. Most of the time you call it a session when you’ve got two or three friends with you at bare minimum.” At the park, sessions develop either through the advanced and deliberate coordination of skaters, in the case where a group of friends will set out to skate together, or they happen more spontaneously whereby the people at the park, although not there to skate with each other specifically, will create a session together, oftentimes through one skater asking another to skate the bowl with him. In other instances, sessions will form more “naturally,” whereby virtue of sharing limited space, skaters find themselves skating together. For example, one participant, when asked how he got to know the guys at the park explained that he “just skate[d] with them.” He then pointed to another skater at the park at the time and said that he did not even know who that guy was, that he was from another town, but that he would probably skate with him by the time he left the park that day. In many respects, the proliferation of free, municipal skateboard parks in recent years brings together skaters who would not normally skate together.

On occasion, especially when the park fills with users, several small sessions will be going on at one time and will sometimes merge into larger sessions, sometimes consisting of up to twenty skaters and even more observers. These “whole group” or “large” sessions operate in many of the same ways that smaller sessions do but differ in several significant ways, too. For one, whole group or large sessions involve a large number of people, oftentimes all of the users of the park at one time. It is also the time

when digital video and photography is most likely to be used to capture a move or a moment. It is also the time when more of the demanding tricks are performed. It is a more performative time and space, a time to display one's abilities and efforts. It is in these moments that one's legacy can be more strongly built since it is in these spaces where your feats are on display and are more likely to resonate throughout the park's oral culture and lore. Finally, and as one might imagine, these sessions are more intense, faster moving, and involve more risk taking. The long and short of it is that while skateboarders are always "performing" to some extent while skating at the park, whole group sessions are the largest public peer performances these skaters get. In other words, whole group sessions are not the times for practicing or giving explicit instructions, they are for showing "what you got."

While sessions predominate the way someone participates in the skating portion of the park activity and life, oftentimes people skate alone. During these times, skaters typically spend time alone working on new moves, experimenting with different areas of the park, or putting the finishing touches on a move. These "solo sessions" (as I refer to them) are opportunities for skateboarders, particularly those not as advanced to practice, especially without external review of their peers. It also affords them "alone time," which for some functions as a time for getting grounded. These solo sessions are oftentimes accompanied by the listening to music through an ipod, tape cassette player or mp3 player. The majority of solo skaters I observed were either out-of-towners who came to the park alone, or younger, less experienced skaters who were still working deliberately on some of the basic moves that would enable them to participate more fully in sessions with other, more advanced skaters. While more advanced skaters skated

alone on occasion, the majority of their skating time was done with others. For beginning skaters, solo skate time is necessary to advance their skills and develop a certain level of comfort in order for them to be ready to more fully participate in skate sessions. For example, during the summer of my observations, Matt skated alone throughout the entire summer. While less advanced skaters like Matt use solo skating time to work on new tricks, more advanced skaters typically use the solo skating time to practice and refine what they already know, and instead take bigger risks and work at learning new tricks when skating with others. Derrick explains how skating alone is about “trying to do stuff by yourself... like I, every so often, when I skate myself I just try to practice the same tricks that I do, try to make them better maybe or something like that.” He goes on to how when he skates in small groups he “practices new tricks,” which he says he could and on occasion does do when he skates alone “but it’s not as fun” as learning new tricks with others.

As Sandra and I watch this one of a kind free-for-all, Crazy K takes cigarette breaks and joins us. During one of these cigarette rests, TS comes over to him, smiling, and says nodding to Crazy K, “I want to hang out with a geezer.” Sandra, also smiling, retorts that TS is kind of a geezer himself and the four of us laugh. Mostly covered by various tattoos, which seem to increase on a daily basis, TS’s milky-white lanky frame protrudes from his long black shorts and plain white t-shirt. Although his light brown hair is still long enough to warrant the use of a brush this summer, by the dawn of my second summer of research, TS shaved his head, mainly because he had a tattoo inked on it. At age 20, TS is a recent high school graduate, taking five years to earn his diploma, and he is now an apprentice for a local tattoo artist. I remembered TS mainly because it

was during my research in his classroom that he got his first tattoo, something that seems unbelievable to me now considering TS's body is virtually covered in ink. TS's efforts at helping to make Franklin Skate Park a reality are unsurpassed among the users of the park, so much so that his name is on the plaque in the park. For TS, the park is one of the things he is most proud of in his life. Frank Rodgers, the city councilman who spearheaded the development of the park, said that TS was "amazing" when it came to helping out with park and that working on establishing the park "completely turned him around."

Terry, Luis, and The Skate Contest

Within a few minutes of Crazy K and AJ jeering each other, Derrick comes over to them, turns to Crazy K and says, "Follow me," to which Crazy K asks, "Where are we going?" Derrick says he doesn't know yet just before entering the bowl in front of us. Crazy K enters the bowl right behind him and follows Derrick. After dropping into the 9-foot bowl, Derrick, with Crazy K following his every move, grinds the coping of the other side of the bowl before dropping back into it, doing a 50/50 on the lip of the bowl closest to where I'm standing and then glides back down into the bowl to build up momentum to ollie out of it and transition to the shallower bowl on the other side of the park. I lose sight of the two amidst the many other skaters until they are breathing heavy asking for water standing near us again a few minutes after they began their run. As the two debrief their run, Crazy K turns to me and asks, "Did you see the snakeline that I was talking about yesterday?" Shortly after their run, the MC of the contest announces that the open skate time is ending and it's time for the next round—the advanced category—of the contest.

As a rule, skate contests are organized around self-determined ability levels and not age groupings. Specifically, participants have the option of self selecting into one of the following three categories: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Contestants within each category get a total of two or three “runs” during which they are scored by judges on difficulty of their tricks, style, number of tricks landed, and variety of tricks. Starting with the beginner category, each contestant gets two minutes for a run, followed by the next person, and so on. Once everyone in the category has had the opportunity for a first run, they each go on a second run and then a third one. Once all of the beginners have gone, the intermediate contestants perform in the same way, and then the advanced contestants. The advanced contest begins and Derrick skates first. As Sandra, Crazy K, TS, and I stand together waiting for the announcer to release Derrick to begin his run, Crazy K says to TS, “Derrick is *good*,” to which TS replies, “Yea, Derrick *is* good. He’s improved *a lot* since last summer.” Derrick starts his run by dropping into the three foot bowl, doing a rock and roll, then a rock to fakey before he glides down the waterfalls into the nine foot bowl where he carves its deepest section, pumping his legs by bending his knees and crouching down a bit. Generating momentum, Derrick rides out of the nine foot, over the waterfall into the six foot bowl when he rides up the wall and grinds on the coping, at which point both TS and Crazy K smack the tail of this boards on the ground loudly, which is known as “board slapping” and is analogous to congratulatory clapping. As he drops back into the bowl, Derrick’s mouth is slightly open, his eyes completely fixed on the upcoming concrete, his helmet, although buckled sits on the side of his head as if it is ready to fall off at any moment, and he looks as if he moving through water cascading on the concrete. His intensity and focus demonstrate what another

skateboarder would explain to me later in my research as “having a lot going on” when one is skating: “There’s a lot to think about, man. You’re flying through a concrete bowl, and there’s a lot of concentration involved. Getting on that rail, and doing a certain trick. There’s a lot of concentration, there’s a lot going on. The more technical you are, the more you’ve got going on. There’s more working, and there’s a lot of skill involved doing it. I mean, something like that [hitting a rock with your skateboard] could happen at fifteen, twenty miles an hour, and you could slam face first into a concrete wall.” Derrick ends his run with a “big air” out of the deeper bowl and an ovation of board slaps and whistles from the spectators encircling the park.

Derrick’s run is followed by one from Terry, who later described the feeling of landing a trick one works hard to get like “climbing a mountain.” Perhaps the local who least “fits in” to the culture of the park in terms of fashion style, wears tight, “girl” jeans, whereas most of the locals wear baggier jeans, and he explained to me in an interview that he skates because it is “fun” and he does not “get caught up in the whole thing.” Currently working at McDonald’s part time, Terry self reports that he does “pretty well” in school, earning As and Bs, and that he aspires to be a tattoo artist. As he puts on a borrowed helmet, his long, thin hair, which he shaved during the second summer of my observations, shoots out, falling on his shoulders. During his run, Terry performs several of the tricks he was practicing last night at the park, and at one point, he misses a trick, falling on the ground, and gets up, says, “Fuck,” and smiles a broad grin, looking up at TS and Crazy K, who tell him to keep going. As the timekeeper announces “15 seconds,” TS yells “Get it, get it, get it” to him.

TS, then Crazy K go after Terry, and after Crazy K's run, which marks the end of the first round of the advanced category, skateboarders rush the bowls until there are close to forty people skating at the same time. Crazy K, standing near Sandra and me, lights a cigarette, and is greeted by Luis, a 19-year old skater who competed in the intermediate category. Luis says, "Nice run, man. I've never seen anyone try to catch air on that hip before." The two talk for a few minutes, mostly Crazy K explaining his run with Luis asking questions, and after Luis walks away, and Crazy K, Sandra, and I are alone, watching the action when Derrick moves in front of us, facing the bowl. As he looks into the deepest part of the bowl, his eyes scanning its contours, he stands with one foot on his board, propping it up in the air, and says to Crazy K, glancing quickly over his shoulder, that he doesn't know what he is going to do, but that he is going to "bust something good." Crazy K tells him that he is "too nervous" and that he should "just do your thing." As I watch their interaction, I notice Derrick's skateboarder shoes, torn at a few places, and I ask Sandra why skateboarders have their own special shoes. She explains how those shoes have special grips on the bottom, that are sticky, flat soles, and how they are tripled stitched and have "ollie pads," which are designed to, as one skateboarder writes on his blog, "to keep the sides o' my shoes from gettin' destroyed." As she explains the various aspects of skateboarder shoes, she bends down to show me on her shoes. In front of us, Derrick and Crazy K are joined by Terry, and the three talk about the contest and the upcoming next round of runs. Derrick says that "they [the judges] don't know skateboarding." Crazy K and Terry agree, and Crazy K explains that since the judges don't really know the "technical aspects of skateboarding" what would appear impressive to them would be "big air." Upon hearing that, Terry tells Crazy K

that he should “land air.” Crazy K replies that he hasn’t landed air in almost five years and that he has “a mental block,” to which Derrick says, “Well, bust it up!” Terry asks the group, “You know what’s in my head?” to which someone says, “Nothing,” and everyone, including Terry laughs. Terry and Derrick continue talking and jeering each other, and soon their conversation moves into the next rounds of runs coming up. As they look over the bowls, Terry places his left hand over his eyes to block the sun, and lightly slaps Derrick on the arm and says, “I’m about to tell you this so I can plan it out in my head.” He begins to tell Derrick what he is going to do next, pointing his index finger into the bowl using it to outline the line he will make in his next run. Within about thirty seconds, Derrick says, “Do I care?” and Terry says, “No, *Listen*” and continues to explain what he plans on doing as Derrick eventually engages him.

As they continue to talk about their moves, Luis, who competed earlier in the intermediate category walks by me talking with another skateboarder, one of the guys who live in a nearby community, Smallville, and skates at the park on occasion, that “even if I get a trophy, I’m still going to feel unsatisfied.” As the two walk by, I turn to Crazy K and ask who that was, and he tells me that he will introduce me to him. Crazy K skates over to Luis, talks with him, turning to point toward me at one moment in their conversation, and then both saunter toward me. Luis introduces himself, putting out his hand, and as we shake, I tell him he looks familiar, that I’ve seen him skating down here before, and ask if he’s friends with TS, to which he says that they are “roommates.” As I begin talking with him I realize that I also recognize him from my research at the high school even though he was not a student in one of my focal classes. Lighting up a cigarette as we begin to talk, Luis, shirtless, wears camouflage shorts that run just past his

knees and a black bandana over his shaved head. His dark-brown complexioned skin serves as the canvas for an array of tattoos, many of which he designed himself and all of which has political, communal, familial, and/or aesthetic value for him. One such tattoo, the word “Familia” scripted over a Sacred Heart and sparrows pays homage to his mother. He says that he got that tattoo for her “because I figured it was the least I could do since I played around with a lot of shit while I was in school. So, that little bit of pain was the least I could do. I was into drugs, smoking; I was all around not a very good kid.” One of the very few skateboarders at the park whose physique does not fit the prototypical thin, lanky frame, Luis looks better equipped for a football field than a skateboard park. I explain to him that I am working on a book project about skateboarding and he tells me to “shoot” with questions. Over the course of our conversation, he tells me that he’s been skateboarding since 7th grade, recently graduated high school with a 1.4 GPA at the age of 19 after five years, since he failed one year, last year, and he is currently working as a welder, a trade he feels lucky to have picked up during his time in school. Initially drawn to skateboarding because of its “subversive attitude,” Luis explains that skateboarding is “much more than just a hobby—it’s a culture, a way of living.” After recounting his injuries, which include 32 ankle sprains, several knee sprains, and 5 wrist sprains, he explains how he used to read skateboarding magazines, like *Thrasher*, even though he didn’t have a subscription. He explains how he’d take them from TS, who had a subscription. As our conversation winds down, he tells me that whenever I am down there and he is there, too, to feel free to ask him questions. He says that skateboarding is “accepting of anyone who wants to skate,” and

that he is interested in my project because he is interested in “getting the message out there.”

“Mexican” Matt, Thurman & the Social-Cultural-Political Arrangements of FSP

As the advanced competition ends, the focus of the festivities shifts from the park to the makeshift stage set up on the grassy area outside of the skate park, and as the crowd transitions from one locale to another, a group of people, including Crazy K, Sandra, and TS congregate right outside of the gate by the parking lot—some leaning up against or sitting on the hoods of cars, others sitting on the ground. In addition to Derrick, Luis, Terry, TS, and Crazy K, “Mexican Matt” sits on the deck of his skateboard which he slides slightly back and forth as he picks at the grass. Matt neither looks up much from his downward gaze nor enters the conversation happening among the others. As his nickname suggests, Matt is of Mexican heritage (actually his mother is White and his father of Mexican heritage), and he is a dark-complexioned, 14-year old ninth grader, whose black bushy hair frames a broad, warm smile that rarely presents itself at the park during my first two summers of observation. In fact, during the first summer of my fieldwork, Matt rarely spoke to anyone at the park and mainly skated by himself. He spent a great deal of time watching others during this summer and typically only skated when very few people were at the park. Although he and his family lived in Finley (and very close to the skate park), he and his sister attended the public schools of a neighboring town. Hence, Matt did not know many of the other participants at the park who lived and went to school in Finley. By the second summer, Matt had both improved a great deal in his skateboarding skills and began to more visibly forge relationships with the other participants, and by the third summer, Matt was a fairly well-known participant

at the park. Interested in finishing high school and going to college to become a pharmacist “cuz the money,” Matt earns mainly Cs and Ds in school and prior to my third summer of data collection, was finishing his tenth grade year (and first year in Finley public schools) at the community’s alternative high school because he missed too much school during the fall semester since he explains he spent all of his time at the skate park instead of school.

The conversation among the group shifts from recapping the events of the contest to the “rock” that was cemented into place just outside of the skate park two days prior and has since been covered with graffiti. TS holds court: “Has anyone seen the rock? It’s only been in for two days and it already has graffiti on it! People think it’s a graffiti rock, but it’s *not*. It’s for landscaping.” No one says anything as he pauses for a few seconds and then continues: “Frank [Rodgers] is going to have something to say about this for sure. The city is going to want to shut down the park.” Crazy K replies, “The city spent \$500,000 on this park—they’re not going to shut it down!” TS holds up 4 fingers and says, “400 grand...I was on the committee; my name’s on a plaque,” as he points toward the park wall with the plaques on it. The conversation comes to an end when TS says to no one in particular, “Don’t think they won’t [close down the park]. Don’t think they won’t.” As the crowd disperses to move closer to the awards ceremony, I wonder what Thurman might have to say about this situation. In his mid 30s, Thurman is the oldest consistent participant at the park. As a resident of Finley and inspired by the new skate park, Thurman rediscovered skateboarding after a long hiatus from the sport. Short-haired, clean shaven, and well built, Thurman, an ex Marine, enjoys the recreational outlet skating provides him, especially on nice evenings after work.

Although there is no formal, organized form of leadership or government for the park, there exists a complex set of socio-cultural-political arrangements among its participants. One explained how the participants at the park have created “a community within a community” that “has its own energy to it,” works together to take care of problems, and “where everyone knows each other.” For example, during my second summer of observations, the park was vandalized by a local group of kids who think of themselves as a gang. Late one night or early one morning, this group poured motor oil into the bowl and wrote their gang name in the bowl with latex paint. By the next afternoon, the participants of Franklin Skate Park had organized clean up efforts and had begun to organize potential ways to publicly respond to the incident. For instance, when I showed up at the park that afternoon, several participants were in the bowl, scraping the paint and/or cleaning the motor oil, while many more were at the park on cell phones communicating with other participants to see what they might, as a community, do. Eventually, the police were called and after being told to take care of the situation themselves by the police officers, they contemplated the idea of organizing everyone to engage in a fight with this other group. While there were reports of smaller groups of participants threatening members of the alleged vandals, no large scale rumble ever manifested. However, one of the oldest participants of the park, Thurman went to city hall to speak to public officials about the incident. Also, several participants “stood guard” at the park for several nights after that. This type of group collaboration, although not officially organized or governed, was common when conflicts arose at the park, whether it be with people “disrespecting” the park, issues related to graffiti, or people sustaining serious injuries at the park. The above discussion of the graffiti rock provides

a glimpse into this type of distributed problem solving and community-based participation.

Another aspect of the social-cultural-political arrangements of the park these examples illustrate is the dissemination of information. Primarily, this community transmits its cultural knowledge and lore orally. For example, the day after the annual contest discussed in this chapter, Thurman, who was not present for the contest, entered the park and immediately asked someone there to confirm what he had heard about the contest. Another form of disseminating and storing information is through digital texts, especially participants' myspace blogs. Digital photographs and/or video of participants performing particular tricks or stunts at the park can be captured and quickly disseminated through these web blogs. For example, one evening Derrick performed a trick (jumping four barrels) no one at the park ever had before. The photographs and video of the performance were captured, downloaded to his myspace page, and within 24 hours many participants who were not at the park to actually witness Derrick's feats were discussing them, explaining how they not only heard about them but also saw them on his myspace page. In these ways, even participants who take a less active role in the skating portions of the community have points of entry for participation within the community.

This type of community organization is also made visible in the ways that participants "look out" for one another. For example, one participant explains how there exists a certain kind of "trust" between participants. He says, "You find you're almost a family there. Like, you know, people up there I trust with more then I trust some family members with, you know?" Similarly, another participant explains how this trust works at the park:

People leave their cars unlocked and windows down, they leave their boards laying out while they go to the store for 20 minutes just because there's that commonality that, you know? Even if a dickhead comes up and decides he wants to be like that, they will protect it. They'll recognize it. Nobody is afraid to ask if you're using somebody's board and they've never seen it before. They recognize, it's a recognizable thing.

This is not to say that theft does not happen at the park; it does, and in fact, is seen as evidence of the way the park is changing, when the "locals" do not know who is using the park.

Much of the socio-cultural-political organization is conducted by the park "locals," that core group of participants who live in Finley, skate there frequently (some every day), and are committed to the well being of the skate park and community. These locals are typically the ones who assume "control" and responsibility for the park and act as, as one participant said, "park bosses." One participant explains how this is actually a common practice at most skate parks: "No matter what park you go to, there's always a group of locals that just kind of keep order in the whole thing. And they're always the ones that usually have the seniority when people are going, and stuff." Within this group of Finley Skate Park locals, several distinctions exist. There are "older guys," such as Crazy K and Thurman, who act almost like elder statesmen in that they do not get too involved in the day to day particulars of the park but will take part in some of the group decision making or maintain a sense of responsibility to the well being of the community. For example, Thurman sometimes brings a push broom to sweep out the bowl and on one occasion paid a visit to city hall on behalf of the skate park. There are the "regular skaters," such as TS and Luis, who are those participants typically in their late teens and/or early twenties. This group of participants is the closest the park has to leaders, in

that they are typically out of high school, have cars and money, and clout among the other skaters. For example, TS in the above discussion of the graffiti rock demonstrates this role. These are the participants who purchased cleaning products to get rid of the vandalism. There is also the “next generation” of regular skaters, such as Derrick, Matt, Archie, and Houston. These participants, who are typically younger (middle and high school age) and do not have access to the same types of resources as the older skaters do, but are still dedicated to the community and cultural practice. These skaters have been groomed to a certain extent by the regular skaters and will replace them in due time. These are the participants who work the hardest at improving themselves as skaters, whereas the other two groups of participants still work to improve themselves but skate more for recreation in that they do not have to prove themselves like the younger skaters do.

Outside of this group of hardcore locals are other status delineations. “Little ones” are typically younger participants who have not yet learned the implicit rules of the park, nor have they yet proven themselves, and while several of them will eventually become up and coming skaters and then “regular skaters,” most of them will fade away or stop participating before achieving that status. There are also more casual participants, who skate on a regular basis but do not get too involved in the doings of the park or the people. These participants are typically older skaters who are looking for some recreation. As one participant says of another skater who is in his early 20s and primarily skates alone, listening to his ipod: “You watch, and you can see he’s just skating for himself. He just sort of hangs out, and does his own thing.” There are also participants who never seem to coalesce with the community at large and maintain “asshole,”

“weird,” or “poser” status. There are also out-of-towners who are either accepted or are viewed as “disrespectful.”

Respect is a key factor in determining one’s status, and respect is earned by and bestowed upon participants in several ways. Skating ability is one factor in that better skaters typically get more respect for their abilities from other participants. Age operates similarly in that older guys typically receive more respect since they have more experience and are oftentimes the better skaters. However, these factors are not the only ones used to bestow a skater with respect and participant status. In fact, while how good one skateboards and how the age of a skateboarder are factors in determining a participant’s status, what matters equally, and perhaps even more, is one’s devotion to the skate park, his commitment to learning how to skateboard, and his overall “respect” and heart for the sport and others. For example, it is possible for a participant to be an excellent skateboarder *and* “an asshole.” Or, as Luis says, “As long as you’re trying real hard and giving it all you got, you’re just as good as anybody else.” Also, TS explains how Luis, while not the best skateboarder is a well-respected participant since he is dedicated. He explains:

When you skate like I think most of the respect from the skate park comes from being down there. Like even if you aren’t that good a skater, like I know kids who like, look at Luis, Luis has never been that great of a skater, but the fact that he’s down there constantly skating, people respect the fact that, you know, what he’s committed to something and it doesn’t matter like how many times he fell the day before. He’s going to be back up there and whatnot. So that’s like the really cool thing about it. You just kind of build, I don’t know, a reputation for the way you skate, like the way you hang out with people, the way you treat people and you just build a respect level on that.

In this excerpt, TS explains how respect “comes from being down there [the park]” and how skating ability does not necessarily bestow status on people. One’s commitment “to

something” is valued above being able to skate well. In fact, one’s reputation is built on “the way you skate,” which TS qualifies not by discussing ability but rather “the way you hang out with people, the way you treat people.” For example, Hollywood, who throws litter on the ground and not in the trash canisters, curses a lot, and is overall one of the most abrasive participants, is “accepted” into the community by most but is still considered “an asshole” by others, and he is made fun of more than most participants of his status level. One participant says, “The ones that are really good [at skating] tend to get a lot more respect. There are a couple that don’t, but that’s just because their attitude is bad.” A bad attitude can, in part, be from being too boastful about one’s accomplishments. In addition to the way participants treat the park, treat others, and carry themselves, one of the central ways a participant earns respect and gains in participant status is by helping others, especially younger guys. One participant says, “Part of it is kind of taking the younger guys, and putting them under your wing, so to speak. You look out for them, and take care of them. And in return, you get respect for that.” This system of mentoring and looking out for one another is a central aspect of the social organization of the park and will be discussed throughout the rest of this dissertation.

Participant status within this context does not seem to be as dependent upon the socio-cultural factors of race/ethnicity and gender/sexuality as in most other contexts. While whiteness and heterosexuality operate as norms within this context, they do not necessarily exclude participants from developing status within this community. These factors do, though, seem salient in the ways the participants relate to one another in broader socio-political ways. For example, the term “Mexican” is used regularly at the

park to both indicate particular participant's racial/ethnic affiliations as well as a general term to index certain qualities such as laziness or thievery. For instance, if someone takes someone else's beverage and drinks from it, someone else might say, "Don't be Mexican." Instances in which the term "Mexican" is used to demarcate someone's racial/ethnic affiliation is evident in the nickname, "Mexican Matt," as well as in a discussion of tattoos when after Derrick explained how he wanted to get a tattoo of Prayer Hands, a White participant said, "All the Mexicans have it." However, when it comes to indexing and conferring participant status as it relates more directly to and within the local community of Franklin Skate Park, these affiliations do not seem to be important factors. This is best evidenced by the fact that, while Whiteness is the norm, three of the most highly respected participants—Luis, Matt, and Derrick—are of Mexican heritage. In fact, Derrick is consistently referred to as the best skater and Luis as one of the participants most dedicated to the well being of the park. Similar to the way race/ethnicity functions, gender and/or sexuality seem to have more significance for broader socio-political relations among the participants rather than status within the local community. For example, a participant's sexuality was called into question by several of the participants after a rumor of a sex video recording of him, his girlfriend, and another guy in which he (the participant) performed oral sex on the guy. While this rumor was problematic for many participants, it did not stop them from fully participating with him as part of the cultural activities of the local community. In this way, while sexual orientation seems to be a significant form of demarcating social affiliations and boundaries among participants within broader socio-cultural-political contexts and identities, within the local community it seems to hold less significance or impact. This

is not to say, though, that the community is necessarily openly accepting of non-heterosexual participants; in fact, there have times when I have wondered what it would be like if more openly homosexual participants participated within this community. While the majority of participants would most likely say that it is, or would be, my sense is that it would be more complicated than that. Also, heterosexual norms are also evidenced in the participants' use of the terms "gay" and "fag." Specifically, participants use these terms as both a way to let participants know they are behaving poorly and to indicate to others that they themselves feel jealous, inferior, or "gay." For example, if one participant sees another participant do a really outstanding trick, the participant who is observing might say to the other, "you're gay" or "you're a fag" by which he really means, "that was a really great trick. I never even thought of doing that, and now I feel jealous and/or inferior." In other instances, if a participant is becoming too boastful about his accomplishments, other participants might say to him, "stop being so gay." The uses of the words "Mexican," "gay," and "fag" help to distinguish what the norms of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity are. Although not the central focus of analysis for this dissertation, these concepts will be discussed as they become particularly salient in understanding the learning and literacy practices of this community. For example, the use of the terms *gay* and *fag* will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter and the ways texts index particular racial and ethnic affiliations will be discussed more thoroughly in the chapter (chapter 6) that deals with textual activities.

More so than race/ethnicity and gender/sexuality, class and age play a role in indexing and bestowing one's participant status within the local context. As a predominately working-class context, "white collar kids" (as my participants refer to

them) are easily identified and to a certain extent excluded. These class distinctions are most visibly marked by clothing, especially as related to skateboarding styles. As one participant explains: "You can tell the white collared kids right away. They're the ones who have brand new boards, they got brand new t-shirts, ipods, you know, stuff like that. Kids we skate with, you know, they're still rocking tape players every once in awhile." He goes on to explain how white collared kids do not really fit into the community of Franklin Skate Park and typically stop coming: "Honestly, I hate to say it but they [white collared kids] really don't fit in too well when they do come up. Like remember that kid who used to come up in a Mercedes? That kid like he didn't last too long. No one really liked him." This class distinction is made quite visible when placing this local community up against other local skate park communities. For example, when beginning my research, I conducted observations at another skate park, one in which more middle-class, more visible "scene" kids participated. These participants regularly wore expensive, trendy industry-related clothing, such as skateboard-specific jeans and sported special "skateboarder haircuts," trends within the larger skateboarding culture that would be laughable and/or points of ridicule among the participants at Franklin Skate Park. A, a skater who lives near and has skated at this other skate park, but prefers Franklin Skate Park because it is more "laid back," explains this distinction: "Well, I hate going to the [name of other park] because all the little kids are little pricks, little snobby rich kids...they're amazing at skating and know they are and they're jerks about it, I hate...that's why I don't go there, just because of it. It's a good park, but I don't like going there because of the attitude."

As already discussed to a certain extent, age is a significant socio-cultural factor in both indexing and producing participant status within this community. In fact, one of the core features of the social organization of the activities at Franklin Skate Park is the close interaction of participants of varying age groups. As evidenced in the skating in between official runs at the contest, it is a legitimate and encouraged practice for skaters of different age groupings to skate together. In one instance, for example, Derrick, a 14 year old requests that Hank, a 30 year old skate “a line” with him. These types of cross-age interactions occur frequently and naturally during “business as usual” at the park. Although not always the case, the terms “older” and “younger” typically correlate to ability levels whereby the older skaters are more advanced and the younger ones less advanced. There are instances, however, where younger skaters are, in fact, more advanced than older ones; for example, there was one instance I observed where a novice skater in his early 30’s solicited assistance from a more advanced skater in his mid teens. This is also marked when a younger in age skater displays abilities beyond his age cohort; this younger, more advanced skater is typically discussed by other, older skaters (when the younger skater is not there) as being or having exceptional abilities and skills “for his age.” The social arrangement of age heterogeneity is a central feature of the community and will be explored more thoroughly throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

The Role of Competition at Franklin Skate Park

As the group breaks up and we make our way to the awards ceremony, I get a chance to speak with TS. I tell him I’m interested in researching skateboarding, and he immediately snaps his head toward me and asks, “Just skating or the ‘culture’”? “Both,” I

say, and he asks laughing, “If you’re interested in the culture, do you like to party?” I tell him that I just picked up *Thrasher* and he says that he’s got a stack of them at which point we make it to the area where everyone awaits the awards ceremony, which after the actual skating seems anticlimactic, especially since very few people actually stayed for it and the skaters themselves seem uninterested in the formal results. I sat with Sandra and Crazy K, just in front of Chris and Derrick who were sitting next to each other. We clap as each recipient gets called up to receive their trophy: Derrick, 3rd place, Chris 2nd, and Terry 1st.

As a former competitive athlete throughout high school, I was not only surprised by the seeming lack of enthusiasm in the participants’ responses to their trophies but also their “rooting” for and helping one another during the actual contest as explained above, especially when it involved people against whom they were competing. For example, both TS and Crazy K encouraged Terry to “keep going” toward the end of his run during the contest. Derrick and Terry, both participants within the same category, helped each other plan out their runs, and Crazy K, Terry, and Derrick even collaborated to think about how to impress the judges since they did not really know much about skateboarding. Also, Luis explained how even if he did win a trophy, he was not going to be satisfied with his performance. Unlike my experiences as a high school athlete, competition does not have the same significance or meaning within this community than it did for me in my career as an athlete. For these participants in this community, competition functions to bring people together and push each other to develop themselves as skateboarders rather than rank and sort each other. In this way, I refer to the idea of a “collaborative competition”; in that competition, or competing against one another is

done for the greater good of the community rather than for the individuals involved. For example, one participant explains how this functions within skate contest:

But when someone else is going good, you want to do better. You don't want to do better to do better than them, but you want to do better because they're doing better. But even at a contest, it's like that. You're out there trying your best tricks, or trying to put together a sweet run. Here, if you put together a sweet run, it just kind of happens. "Oh, hey, that was sweet!" Sometimes you get on a trick run, and you just keep going and going and going. It's one of those deals where it just happens.

As this participant explains, competition is not about beating someone or outranking them, as much as it is about pushing them to do the best they can and for one to do the best he can: "You don't want to do better to do better than, but you want to do better because they're doing better." In this way, competition is not about winning but about everyone doing better.

Other than the annual skate contest, the game of "Skate" is perhaps the practice that makes the role of competition most visible. "Skate" is similar to the game of "horse" found in basketball. Essentially, a small number of skaters will take turns performing a certain trick. The person whose turn it is selects the trick and performs it. If he performs it successfully, the other participants take turns attempting to "land" the trick (which means completely the trick successfully). If a participant does not land the trick then he receives a letter, starting with S and moving through the spelling of the word *skate*. As people spell the word skate they drop out of the competition and the last person left is the winner of the game. Skate differs from more traditional sessions in that it draws explicit attention to competition and emphasis on successfully landing a trick. While games of skate are sometimes played for money or to test one's ability against another's, the game is performed mainly as a learning activity, in which skaters have to push themselves to

experiment and take risks. It is also a venue through which participants get exposed to and learn new tricks. For example, Matt explains how a recent trick he learned, a “double kick flip,” emerged from a game of skate: “Uh, I was playing a game of skate with a friend and he did it and I didn’t know how to do it so then after the game I just kept on tryin’ it and I landed it like not too long after it.” This collaborative competition is also evidenced in the fact that some participants opt not to compete in the annual contest in order to give other people a chance at being in the spotlight.

Heading Home

After the ceremony, I walk to the parking lot, say good bye to Sandra and Crazy K, and get into my car where I eat dinner within five minutes. I drive to a nearby dead end street, pull in, lower my windows, and reach for my laptop before turning off my car. I sit in the driver’s seat, typing up my scratch notes into more cohesive field notes as the light of day gives way to the emerging darkness of evening. I turn my car on to listen to music as I continue to type for another hour and a half until the battery on my computer dies, at which point I close my laptop, and pull out of the dead end for my half hour drive home—this time listening to Uncle Tupelo’s *Still Feel Gone*, something I can sing along to so I do not think too much about my note taking or what happened today. Upon my arrival at my apartment, my dog, Augustus, who during one of the field visits I took him to the skate park was dubbed “skater dog” by several of the skateboarders, greets me before taking off down the street. After our 30-minute cat and mouse chase through the neighborhood, I am finally able to get him back to our home where I finish recounting my day’s field visit into formal notes. When finished, I take a shower, roll into my bed, and fall asleep dreaming of backside grinds, kick flips, and 50-50s.

Chapter Five

Carving the Bowl:

Learning how to Skateboard and “Be” a Skateboarder at Franklin Skate Park

- RP How does someone, let’s say, someone walked in right now, has never skated before, how would they learn how to skate?
- A You can’t really be taught. People always ask me, can you show me how to do this? You can’t...I mean, it helps a lot to watch people skate, so you can get an idea, you really can’t teach people how to skate. You’ve just got to get on the board, get comfortable, get a feel for it, you know, once you get to that point and you feel comfortable, you can ride around smooth, then after that a little bit of insight helps learning tricks and what not, but for the most part, just for riding a skateboard you’ve just got to get out and fall a lot until you get comfortable. Like walking, you don’t really teach a baby to walk. They just get up and keep doing it until they got it.

Introduction

One of the essential aspects of being a skateboarder at Franklin Skate Park (or, an “educated” person within this educative space) is that one must actually skateboard. Therefore, understanding how participants at Franklin Skate Park learn how to skateboard is an important aspect in understanding this community and my overall exploration into how and for what purposes my participants engage popular culture. This chapter explores how the guys at Franklin Skate Park learn how to skateboard, paying particular attention to their purposes, goals, and processes as well as the ways the organization and social arrangements of the skate park facilitate these. Specifically, this chapter answers the following questions: What are the learning practices my participants engage in as part of their learning how to skateboard? What principles of learning do these learning practices reveal, or, how does Franklin Skate Park operate as a learning environment?

In answering these questions, I discovered that for my participants learning how to skateboard is a difficult, painful, fun, never-ending, and satisfying process that

involves both a strong sense of individual and group/social facilitation and responsibility. In learning how to skateboard my participants invest a great deal of resources, including their money, time, and effort. In addition, they make themselves vulnerable to a process of learning that includes many joys as well as pains. Specifically, they push themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally beyond the limits of what they thought they were possible, take risks, and sustain short and long-term injuries. For them, these “costs” are easily outweighed by the benefits of their commitment and hard work, which include pleasure and fun, mental, emotional, physical, and aesthetic stimulation and release, and the opportunity to be a contributing participant in a cultural practice.

In fact, my participants’ initial and continuous self-selected participation in skateboarding stems from their deeper interests in finding a physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual outlet; connecting to other people; and having fun and experiencing pleasure. “It is fun” is most common response my participants gave to my inquiry into why they skateboarded. Specifically, they would talk about the pleasure they got out of the feeling of riding on their boards (one participant called it “heaven on wheels”), the sense of satisfaction they would get when landing a trick (one participant compared landing a trick he had been practicing for a long time to “climbing a mountain”), and the “high” they get from progressing with their skills. In other instances, or when asked to speak more about why they skateboard, participants discussed how they enjoy skateboarding because of the ways it connects them to other people and allows them to be a part of something. This was most evident in their retelling of how and why they first got into skateboarding, which almost universally stemmed from a relationship with friends and/or family members. For others, this desire for a social network and

connection with others stemmed from an interest in locating others who shared similar socio-political beliefs and identities (For example, one participant mentioned how he was drawn to skateboarding because of its “subversive attitude.”) or its socio-cultural sensibilities, interests, and social arrangements, especially its sense of aesthetics. In other instances, participants discussed the ways learning to skateboard and being a part of the larger cultural practice creates an outlet for them to explore their creativity (whether it be through their kinesthetic designing, their writing music, or graffiti artwork), provides a “safe space” for them to get away from other pressures of their lives, and/or to get physical, intellectual and emotional stimulation.

While it may seem so obvious as to not warrant mention, the *sine qua non*, or absolute prerequisite, to learning how to skateboard is the desire to do so. Without this desire, simply put, learning to skateboard will not happen. To try and teach someone, for example, how to skateboard if they were not interested or invested in this learning in some way would be not only unsuccessful but also absurd. As Derrick says of people who, while ostensibly learning to skate, “give up,” “If you give up, that means you’re not trying, obviously, and you don’t want to skate. So why have a board in your hands if you’re not gunna do nothin’ with it?” In fact, one of the distinguishing features among participants at the park is the degree to which they are committed to learning and developing their abilities and knowledge of skateboarding. The excerpted exchange below between me (RP), Matt (M), and Derrick (D) occurred in response to my inquiry as to whether there are differences among the skateboarders at the park:

D: Kids who come up here every so often compared to kids who come up here and try more?

RP: Yea, tell me about that.

D: The kids who come up every so often, they don't skate, I want to say, harder than we do. They come up here for the fun of it, and we come up here to try and learn stuff.

RP: Tell me more about that. What do you mean?

M: Ok, like they come up here to not even learn anything, just like what they already know...ride around, just do the same thing. We come up here every day to learn new stuff so you get better and better at it.

Therefore, in considering who does and does not "succeed" in learning to skateboard and how they do so, it remains important to consider that learning how to skateboard does not necessarily suggest an innate ability to do so but more so an attitude and desire to learn and be a participant within this cultural community. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, if one has this desire and is willing to make themselves vulnerable to the learning process and support available to them, they will learn how to skateboard. In essence, learning to skateboard consists of the following three general practices:

1. Skating with others: This facet of learning how to skateboard consists of skating with other skateboarders, especially those who are more advanced in their abilities. The general practice of skating with others highlights several other learning practices, including the importance of soliciting and receiving instruction from others, providing assistance to others, receiving and providing motivation, and being exposed to skating activities beyond what one can do and imagine on his own.
2. "Doing" it: This facet of learning how to skateboard consists of actually getting on a board, practicing, falling, and getting back up and trying it again. The general practice of "doing it" highlights several other learning

practices, including the importance of practice, repetition, and acceptable “failure.”

3. **Watching others:** This facet of learning how to skateboard consists of spending a great deal of time actively watching other skateboarders, paying attention to the ways they perform tricks and moves in order to eventually incorporate into one’s own skateboarding. The general practice of watching others highlights several other learning practices, including the importance of active observation and mimicking/imitating others.

Taken together, these learning practices reveal several of the deeper learning principles that undergird how Franklin Skate Park operates as a learning environment. Specifically, these practices reveal how the learning environment within Franklin Skate Park accepts, promotes, and normalizes “failure” as a necessary aspect of learning; exposes participants to the full range of activities and allows them various points of entry into these activities; and distributes cognition/resources in order to problem solve and facilitate learning.

Furthermore, the learning environment establishes and promotes an apprenticeship model of learning that necessitates mentoring; embeds learning within participation in cultural activities (as opposed to being de-contextualized and separate from participation); promotes a form of “cooperative competition,” in which skateboarders’ learning is invested in by the other participants; and values and draws upon differences among participants as resources in order to keep the community vibrant and continuously changing. Revealing these deeper principles that undergird how Franklin Skate Park functions as a learning environment demonstrates the ways individual learning is predicated on participation in the community and the support mechanisms it provides.

As explained more thoroughly in the theoretical overview in chapter two, a central assumption underlying an investigation of learning is the belief that in order to understand how my participants learn how to skateboard it is necessary to situate this learning in the larger socio-cultural scene in which it occurs. Specifically, learning how to skateboard for my participants is predicated upon their understanding the terms of cultural participation and how to “be” a skateboarder within this context, which includes, for example, knowing how to use the physical space of the park, how and when to acceptably “fail,” how and when to congratulate and/or ridicule each other, how to deal with physical pain, how to wear clothing, how and where to buy equipment, which boards to ride, who, how, and when to ask for and/or give help, and how to carry oneself. Without understanding these terms of cultural participation, my participants will not learn how to actually skateboard within this context, particularly since access to other skaters and their “ways with boards” is an integral aspect in learning how to skateboard. Therefore, learning how to skateboard and how to be a skateboarder within this context are mutually constitutive processes which cannot be understood as separate from one another. In other words, issues of learning and identity cannot be separated in this context as learning how to skateboard is part and parcel with becoming a skateboarder, or a participant in this community.

The remainder of this chapter, then, explores how my participants learn how to skateboard and be skateboarders within this local cultural community, paying particular attention to the ways their learning practices are situated within the terms of cultural participation in this community. Specifically, these terms of cultural participation are characterized by a tension between egalitarianism, solidarity and acceptance, and

competition, status, positioning, exclusion, control, and hierarchies. At the same time these participants tell themselves how theirs is a community which identifies itself against certain aspects of corporate structures of schooling (such as competition, etc.) it is also enacting these very principles. This tension is evidenced in practice by looking at the ways in which participants index status through their learning practices, especially the three central learning practices of skating with others, “doing it,” and watching others, each of which will be explained below. The social “work” participants engage as part of their engagement with learning will be woven through the discussion of each of these practices. In addition, other practices (e.g. mimicking, motivation) will be explained as part of these larger practices, and although the learning practices are integrative with one another in practice, I discuss them separately in order to accentuate the deeper principles of learning and social arrangements they produce.

Learning Practices

“Yo, it’s friends that teach you.”: Skating with Others

Skating with others serve important functions for participants. Specifically, skating with others provides skateboarders the opportunity to practice while getting support from others, learning new things from them, as well as enabling skaters to demarcate and index their subcultural statuses within their local cultural community. More specifically, skating with others provides one with motivation, as well as various forms of assessment and instruction. In addition, skating with others provide participants access to others skaters, which is especially important for younger, less advanced skaters. What follows is an example of a small session between Derrick and Chris, two skateboarders of approximately equal ability and age. In this instance, the two are in the

park in the middle of a hot summer day when five others are in the park at the same time, two of whom are skating alone, the other three skating a small session in another part of the park. I use this excerpt to illustrate several of the features of learning found within the skate park, including their communication in helping each other learn to skate better.

An overcast, muggy mid summer evening hovers above the skate park as I settle into one of the picnic tables at the edge of the concrete bowl, only a few feet from where Derrick and Chris stand together with their boards “flipped up.” Derrick, hands on hips, stares into the bowl, nodding his head as Chris proclaims that he skates so much better when music plays, an allusion to the fact that three skateboarders (TS being one) recently left the park and took their radio and punk/hardcore music with them. The two go on to talk about the wax they discover on the coping, which they say makes the bowl slick and difficult to do certain tricks, particularly that it is too slippery to do a “disaster.” Intermittently, the boys enter the bowl one at a time reconvening on the concrete deck after each entry. Their conversation continues even when one is in the bowl. For example, at one point, Derrick rides up to the coping in front of where Chris is standing and says, “I don’t know what I’m doing here.” He then slides back into the bowl, grinds the opposite coping, and slides back into the bowl. “Nice, nice, nice!” Chris shouts to him while he lifts his board in both hands and smacks its “tail” on the concrete. Once out the bowl, Chris asks to try Derrick’s skateboard, enters the bowl, does a rock and roll, then a blunt, then skates down the waterfall into the six foot section, then into the second waterfall into the nine-foot bowl where he skates up and down the walls, building up enough momentum to bring him back to where Derrick awaits him and his board. As Chris ollies out of the bowl, he exclaims, “That board rides tight,” and he rolls it back toward Derrick. Derrick, pushing his board toward the bowl, hops on it and says just as he is about to roll into the three-foot section of the bowl, “Try this.” He rolls into the bowl, does a 50-50 on the opposite side coping, rolls back toward Chris, and when reaching the coping does a rock to fakey, slides back into the bowl and does a 360 to dismount. Chris, inching his deck to the coping, yells across the bowl, into Derrick’s back, “That’s gay!” and then drops into the bowl himself, does a rock to fakey on the opposite side coping, slides back down the bowl and tries and lands the 360 dismount, to which Derrick, now watching, yells “You’re a fag!” Derrick rolls into the bowl, pops out on the side where Chris is standing and skates over and stands next to him. The two peer into the bowl and talk about the graffiti in the bowl, and how not only does it look stupid but how it makes the bowl “too slick.” They again take turns riding back and forth across the bowl, although at this point they ride much more slowly, talking back and forth the entire time they are skating. “Have you ever tried a ‘double kick’?” Chris asks Derrick. Derrick says that he has not but that he has been working on a “tail slide” to which Chris claims are “scary” and how he does the trick with his hand, saying “Once you do it with your hand, you’ll never go back to a regular ollie.” Derrick responds,

“You know what I am worried about? Not being able to push out of the tail slide into the ollie,” to which Chris responds, “That’s why I came up with using my hand.” The turn taking and talking continue as the two skate for another ten minutes until they both take a seat at the picnic table to drink some water and watch the others in the park.

As demonstrated in this excerpt, skating with others, particularly in a small session consists of participants taking turns, one entering the bowl/trying a trick, while the other(s) watch. Perhaps the most salient feature of skating together is the communication between those involved. In some cases, like the one described above, the skater and/or the observers talk about what is happening while one of them is skating. Typically, though, talk occurs between the people standing with each other, watching the person skating, or is directed at the skater himself. Also, the time in between turns offers the recently-finished skater an opportunity to debrief his run with the others in the session. The talk during sessions, like in the example above, consists of the riding conditions (i.e. the two discuss how wax makes the cement “too slippery”), particular moves (e.g. “tail slide”), and their own feelings about doing particular tricks (i.e. Chris says how a certain trick is “scary” to try a certain trick.). Participants also use talk to offer advice, suggestions, motivation, and words of encouragement and congratulations to each other. For example, in the session above, Derrick pushes Chris to try a certain move (“Try this.”). Also, Chris, acknowledging a good move by Derrick, provides him with congratulations (“Nice, nice, nice!” combined with a board slap). Also, as will be discussed in more detail below, the two “heckle” or “harass” one another through their language (i.e. “you’re a fag!” and “that’s gay!”), which are both a means of motivating and congratulating one another.

These learning practices of skaters skating together are consistent with other instances in which skaters skate together. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, during one session between Derrick and Crazy K, Crazy K mentioned how he had not “landed air” in almost five years and has a “mental block” to which Derrick said, “Well, bust it up!” Also, it is common during sessions for those watching someone skate, to say things like “get it, get it!” or “Nice job!” In other instances, participants will use these opportunities during sessions to plan out their run, solicit help from one another, and assess one another. For example, in a session described in the last chapter between Derrick and Terry, Terry tells Derrick, “I’m about to tell you this so I can plan it out in my head” as he points into the bowl, tracing a line through the bowl with his finger.

As a central facet of the social organization of activities at the park, skating together, particularly in sessions establish a set of social arrangements in which it is normalized practice for skaters to skate with, learn from, and observe one another. Within these social arrangements, skaters provide one another with support, motivation, “insight,” assessment, and access and exposure to resources, including ways of skating beyond one’s own ability and differing “styles.”

“You complain?”: Motivation

Motivation, which skaters receive from one another (and texts, such as videos, magazines, and music) constitutes an important function of others in learning how to skate. TS explains below:

So...and it’s just like, the difference between skating and a session is just when you’re in a session there’s a lot more energy flowing around. Like there’s a lot more, like *pushing*, like you know you can be out skating by yourself trying to land a trick, and you know when you fall there’s not much motivation to get up, but when you got your friends sitting there, “you got it, you got it,” you know, it just adds to it, plus you land stuff a lot quicker. You get a lot more motivated. You can work through pain.

But most of the time it's always somebody, like especially with your friends being with you skating. Like it was always motivational, like, cause you see them start, like especially when you talk about having a session together. Like they start doing something, they start getting a little bit more, like you know, they start doing bigger airs or like longer grinds, and it just makes you want to do that, so you start pushing yourself and keep pushing. And the best part is it's not like a team sport where you know you're required to progress. You can kind of just go at your own pace, but you just become comfortable with pushing and pushing and pushing...

Significant in TS's discussion is how skating a session with others helps him to "push" and "keep pushing and pushing" to "work through pain" and develop his skills.

Implicitly, he suggests that without this motivation and support, he would not progress or want to progress as he does when pushed by others. Also, TS distinguishes between two ways of receiving motivation—through verbal suggestions and words of encouragement, such as "You got it, you got it!" and through the power of seeing others push themselves, how seeing others "doing bigger airs" or "longer grinds" "makes you want to do that, so you start pushing yourself and keep pushing." Within a session, "energy" builds among the participants and pushes them to push themselves and each other to try things they might not otherwise try and in many instances "land stuff a lot quicker." This is also evidenced in the above description of the session between Chris and Derrick. Chris, upon Derrick's prompting, inspiration, and seeing him land it, attempts and lands on his first try a 360. In general, motivation is a key aspect to learning how to skateboard and the functions skateboarders serve for one another, particularly when skating sessions together. As one participant said in response to my inquiry into what role friends play in his learning to skateboard, "Full out motivation!" Additionally, for many participants, skate videos and music also provided them with motivation, getting them "amped up" to skate harder. While receiving motivation from others most certainly facilitates one's

skating abilities, it also indexes participant status. Part of the motivation in receiving motivation and pushing oneself has to do with maintaining or producing a certain participant status, especially in relation to other participants. For example, in the session between Chris and Derrick described above at the same time that Derrick shows his 360 to Chris and Chris' attempt has to do with both their desire to learn the trick for its own sake and for what social worth landing the trick affords them. This point will become more visible in the discussion in the next chapter of how textual activity, particularly capturing video of particular tricks, helps participants produce status in relation to their local community.

Sometimes the motivation one receives verbally comes in the form of what is known to my participants as "heckling" or "harassing" one another. Heckling or harassing with one another is when skaters "give each other shit," saying things like, "you're gay," "you're a fag, or "you're a punk." For example, during one of my first days on a skateboard, Luis, who had not yet seen me attempt to ride, yelled across the park at me, "Who's the skater fag?" In many instances, this heckling/harassing serves as deliberate attempts to motivate and push each other, not to mention confer a particular status as a novice, "next generation," or more advanced skater. Luis explains how heckling is "not done with any aggression or anything, it's more of a friendly kind of, you know, razzing each other up a little bit." TS further explains:

RP: So, okay I've heard these phrases up at the park; "that's so gay", "you're a fag", and "you're a punk". What do those things mean?

TS: Ah, dude, most of the time it's just antagonizing, like trying to get somebody to do better stuff. Like dude, that's just more or less like when somebody goes up and says well, "I don't want to do that because I don't like the fact that I might fall." You're gay. You know, you just kind of, it's more or less just picking on them trying to progress them. It's more like

daring somebody. Like you just sitting there like, “I dare you dude,” like “dude, do it.” Peer pressure.

Chase It’s nothing with sexual preference it’s just become like *fuck*. *Fuck* means, but you know you can use it in so many different realms.

Also, heckling/harassing is an indirect way of expressing congratulations or admiration for one another. For example, if a skater lands a difficult trick, there are times when other skaters, impressed and slightly “jealous” of the other’s abilities, will say, “that’s gay,” or “you’re a fag.” This form of heckling is seen in the above description of the session between Chris and Derrick. When Derrick lands a 360, Chris responds by saying, “that’s gay” and then tries the trick himself, which upon landing, Derrick says, “You’re a fag.” In many respects, this use of heckling is a way in which participants both acknowledge another’s achievement as well as grapple with their own feelings of “jealousy” and “inferiority.” Below, James and Terry discuss this function of heckling:

RP: So, I know you’ve heard phrases like, “you’re a punk,” “that’s gay,” and “you’re a fag.” So what do those things mean?

Terry: (Laughter) Yeah, we hear that.

James: What they sound like.

Terry: Yeah, pretty much- like someone lands a trick before you and you’re like, “you’re gay; I hate you man.” Like just jokin’ around but-

James: You feel inferior.

Terry: Yeah.

James: Like what was my quote the other day? “That’s bullshit you son of a bitch.” [Laughing.] Just cuz he landed somethin’ that I didn’t even think about tryin’.

This analysis of their use of heckling is supported by Houston (H) and Kevin’s (K) discussion of the same phenomenon:

- RP: When someone does something, and someone else says something like, “you’re gay,” or “that’s gay” or “you’re a fag,” or “you’re a punk” or something. What does that mean, or can you give me an example...
- H: Mainly, like, when it’s people from out of town, they’re probably being serious, but like, if he’s doing a trick that I can’t do, I’ll probably call him gay or something because I can’t do it.
- K: In all honesty, what it is, is like to express a form of *slight* jealousy, but at the same time, you’re like, “Wow, my friend just did that. That’s awesome.” It’s almost like saying, “Man, I can’t believe you just did that, I wish I could do that.” In all honesty, it’s not portrayed as negativity in most scenarios up here.

While both Houston and Kevin suggest that heckling/harassing, specifically terms such as “You’re/That’s gay,” “You’re a fag,” functions to acknowledge someone else’s achievement, they both suggest how there are instances where these same terms and phenomenon of heckling/harassing takes on different meanings in different situations, particularly when involving out of towners who are “disrespecting” the park. Luis explains:

Most of the time it’s not done with any aggression or anything, it’s more of a friendly kind of, you know, razzing each other up a little bit. But sometimes, very rarely, you get some people that come up here just being jerks. People talking shit back and forth. And it just, I dunno, it’s usually the older guys that are doing that, too. You could almost take it as a kind of offense, because you got these people out of town, and they come up here and show disrespect in your park. It’s more of a turf thing.

Overall, heckling/harassing functions as a mechanism through which the participants express solidarity at the same time that they communicate the “rules” of participation and enforce normativity within this community. In this way, heckling/harassing demonstrates the central tension underlying the learning environment of the park. For example, while all participants espouse and in many instances enact a sense of solidarity (“In all honesty, it’s not portrayed as negativity in most scenarios up

here.”) and non-competitive spirit, they also exhibit certain competitiveness or status delineations, evidenced in this instance as “slight jealousy.” In other words, heckling is used both and oftentimes simultaneously to index solidarity and distinctions. In these instances, the practice of heckling/harassing serves as a way of motivating and/or acknowledging someone’s skating ability as well as a means of indirect social control and therefore serve important pedagogical and/or cultural functions.

“Whatta ya gotta be a scene kid?”: Indirect Forms of Social Control

Heckling/harassing function to correct behavior by implicitly calling attention to “misbehavior” or behavior not deemed “appropriate.” For example, Archie’s clothing choices contrast with many of the other participants at the park, and on occasion people will heckle him about it. For example, one evening, Archie was wearing sweat pants (something I had not seen someone doing before or since) and a bandana rolled into a headband. TS, upon seeing him, said aloud, “You look like you’re ready for an aerobics class.” In another instance, Hollywood ripped his jeans, which are designer, specially made jeans for skateboarding (designer or specialty clothing is not a common aspect of the culture at the park), after trying a move unsuccessfully and was complaining about it as he made his way over to the picnic table. An older, more experienced biker heard him complaining and asks, “How much did you pay for them?” Hollywood says, “\$40 bucks. They’re supposed to be reinforced for rough skateboarding—yea right.” The biker responded to his statement by saying, “Whatta you gotta be a ‘scene kid?’ Gotta have the clothing? You can go to Meijer and get 4 pairs of jeans for the same price,” at which point another kid listening in, said, “Yea.” In these instances, heckling/harassing functioned to implicitly teach the norms of behavior for participants within the community, in this case selection of appropriate clothing.

Heckling in these ways can also function to help people maintain a sense of humility or keep in check an over-inflated sense of conceit or superiority. For example, Derrick, one of the best skaters at the park, will get heckled on occasion when he is helping someone learn a trick or a move. In one instance, other skaters teased him, saying in mocking tone: “What are you giving out free lessons?” In another instance, Archie beat a few older kids at a game of skate and was boasting about his accomplishments, saying during the game, “I’m only 14 and I’m winning” to which one of the other, older guys said to him, “Why you such a faggot?” When the game ended, and Archie said, “You just got beat by a 14 year old,” one of the older boys said, “I can still beat the shit out of you.” And another said, “Especially with that headband...I’ll take it off you and choke you with it.” In this instance, the older skater was not literally threatening to choke Ashton as much as he was attempting to put him in line and let him know that his behavior was inappropriate.

Another function heckling serves is to teach implicitly appropriate emotional responses to particular situations, especially in this community, falling and dealing with pain. For example, TS explains how if someone falls and “scrapes their hand, it’s like, “You Pansy, get the fuck up.” He goes, though to explain how if someone *actually* gets hurt (e.g. breaking a wrist), people are pretty good about helping him out. He says:

Which we’re pretty good about that [helping people who get really hurt], though. Remember when Houston tore that part of his finger off and Ralph took him to the hospital. It’s like we’re pretty good about, we watch out for everybody and when they *actually* get hurt. It’s one thing when they fall, scrape their hand. It’s like, “You pansy, get the fuck up!” But they fall and break a wrist there is most likely someone going to be there, one of us older skaters who is going to take care of them cause it’s like what we were talking about earlier it becomes kind of like your family. Like you know people you look out for, people you, I don’t know, just kind of like have this understanding with that, you know, it doesn’t matter what’s going to happen, we’re always going to be here.

TS' statements about helping someone when they are actually hurt is consistent with other instances when skaters convey a sense of empathy and "I've been there" sentiment when people experience pain or sustain an injury. Upon seeing someone fall or get injured, comments such as, "I remember when I fell on my tailbone...It hurt so much!" are normalized practice.

In these ways, heckling/harassing serve similar roles that teasing and shaming serve in other communities. Rogoff (2003) explains how teasing and shaming function as indirect forms of social control by "...inform[ing] people indirectly that their behavior is out of bounds or to indicate the appropriate way to act" (217). She goes on to explain how teasing and shaming are especially important forms of social control in "small interrelated communities," since "people avoid intrusive or hostile interactions for expressing everyday criticisms or complaints, to avoid jeopardizing long-term relationships (citations). In such settings, teasing provides an indirect means to express criticism, carried in discourse that is softened by humor and that does not call for a serious response" (217). She explains: "Teasing and shaming, like discipline by parents and teachers, involve cultural variations in ways of compelling, persuading, or guiding children to behave in accepted ways" (220).

In addition to heckling/harass, "snaking" and responses to snaking serve as ways in which the participants of the park implicitly teach and learn how to participate properly within the park. "Snaking" is a practice in which a skater skates in front of another and "cuts off" the other skater, thus interfering with his run. Snaking is done both accidentally, usually because a skater does not have a sense of how the park operates, or deliberately by a skater in order to teach another skater a lesson on how to use the park or

to claim space. More experienced skaters typically snake less experienced skaters when they (the less experienced skaters) are not using the space correctly. In fact, the biggest complaint from the more experienced skaters at Franklin Skate Park involving the people who use the park has to do with the “little ones” who stand in the bowl, interfere with runs and sessions, and generally get in the way. Many of the skaters discuss snaking as learning how to use the park “the hard way,” by as Crazy K says “maybe getting run over a couple of times,” or as Luis says, “There is no easy way to learn that [the unwritten rules of how to use the park]. You have to get hit a couple of times.” Below TS explains his experiences of learning the hard way *and* his teaching of others at the park through snaking:

RP So let me ask you, I mean you guys talk about these almost like kind of rules at the park. I mean they’re not written rules.

TS Park etiquette.

RP Park etiquette, yeah. How do you learn them?

TS It’s not so much something like you just get taught in the classroom or something like that when someone will pull you aside. I remember when I learned park etiquette about don’t drop in on people like I was in Ripping, California and I got taken out by some guy who just was just slashing every pool and I came around the corner and he didn’t see me and I just got leveled. Like you just learn little things by just like...

Chase Any environment you’re in. I’ve learned there’s a respect at this place. I don’t tell Chris, you know this about him or he does this wrong. I don’t tell him that because _____. It’s something you learn. You acquire it and feel it out and say one wrong thing...

TS And most likely you’re getting knocked back down to the bottom of the totem poll you know? Like no one really gets kicked out of the park unless their really screwing stuff up but you know like most of the time it’s just kind of like you go down a pay grade you know when you screw up it’s like dude now people don’t trust you as much. You got to earn that trust back. You goof around one day, you know you shoot your board into somebody’s ankle, that person ain’t going to trust you that much anymore.

It's more or less like you just got to build it back up, build it back up. And that's the good thing with skateboarding. Most people never stop trusting you. They'll just kind of like you know I don't want to be anywhere near him when he does that. Most of the time, like we all have big mouths up there, like were not afraid to let somebody know when your pissing us off. Like not to mention like most of the time the general consensus is the good news is that you do one stupid thing your most likely not pissing one person off, you're screwing with everybody at the skate park. The whole vibe. You're messing with that fact that if there is a session going on and your just goofing around, realize you're screwing up somebody's day and it's like you'll get told if not like us. I'm not going to lie I've shot my board out at people when their really pissing me off. It's like you know you get the point across no matter what and either they learn or they don't and the ones that don't learn aren't going to be in skateboarding that long...

Although many skaters use a limited space together without any written rules of how to use it, collisions between skaters occur regularly but not frequently. For example, during my observations, it would be common for one collision to occur during a three-hour block of time. By virtue of a group of people using a limited space, collisions occur, even when people are using the park "properly." For example, skaters who fall oftentimes lose control of their board, which become hazardous for other skaters. When they lose their board, they or others who are observing typically yell "Board!" to indicate to those skating that someone has lost control of their board and to be alert to that fact. In some cases, skaters actually stop skating to retrieve another's loose board. When collisions do happen, either between two skaters or because of a loose board, responses are mixed. When the collision happens due to normal circumstances, the two parties involved typically apologize to one another, maybe help each other, or at least check to see if each other are ok, and then move on once again to pursue their individual endeavors. In other instances, these collisions are caused by a skater's irregular or irresponsible use of the space (e.g. dropping into a bowl when someone else is skating it), usually a less

experienced skater interfering with a more experienced skater. In these instances, the more experienced skater oftentimes responds by tossing the less experienced skater's board out of the bowl or area where the collision happened, saying something like "What the fuck are you doing?," or more subtly shaking his head or making eye contact with another skater and rolling his eyes. Crazy K explains an instance he had with a biker who did not yet grasp the flow of activities at the park:

Well, like when it first started, I don't remember if you were down here, but there was this biker, and I was in my run going, and he comes out of the blue, and I'm doing a frontside 5-0 grind, and he just goes right in front of me. I had to go flying off my board.... And I had to basically go up to the guy and tell him to fuck off, you know? You don't do that shit around here.

Snaking and responses to collisions serve as important forms of social control at the park in that they teach participants "park etiquette," including how to use the park, and various social arrangements at the park. Additionally, these cultural practices reveal the ways in which an implicit hierarchy exists within the community. For instance, people who violate the norms of using the physical space of the park get, as TS explains "knocked back down to the bottom of the totem poll," "go down a pay grade," and are not "trusted" as much within the community. At the same time, TS explains how he has deliberately "shot his board" at people in order to teach them how to use the park. Furthermore, his discussion of snaking speaks to the mutually constitutive nature of learning to skateboard and learning to be a certain person within this context. Specifically, he explains how participants who do not know how to use the park and get snaked by older, more experienced participants either learn or do not, "and the ones that don't learn aren't going to be in skateboarding that long..."

"Why don't you try it like this?": Assessment & Instruction

In addition to receiving motivation, encouragement, and implicit forms of instruction on how to utilize the park, skating with others also provides skaters with opportunities for directly learning how to improve their abilities as skateboarders. Specifically, sessions serve as important places where participants receive and provide assessment and instruction as well as index their status as participants within the local cultural community. For example, in the above excerpted session between Chris and Derrick, the two both assess each other's skating at the same time as offer each other instructions on how to improve. In a different session involving Derrick, Hollywood, and Brad, the three were attempting to jump two barrels as they came out of the street side bowl. Derrick was the only one who could do this trick when the group started and throughout the session assisted the other two, especially Brad. Specifically, he would watch Brad as he kicked his board into the bowl, approached the barrels, and made his attempt, and once Brad had gotten back on his board, offer him suggestions based on what he observed. For instance, after one attempt, Derrick told Brad to try and lower his front foot on the deck to keep it closer to his back foot so he could get more "pop" out of the board. As he was talking with Brad, he hopped on his board to demonstrate visually what he was talking about. Brad, after Derrick showed him, hopped on his board to get a feel for it, and Derrick, looking at his footwork, confirmed that it looked good before encouraging him to try it again. After the next attempt, Derrick watching again, Derrick said to Brad, "A little more speed, and I think you'll get it." Brad said that that was what he was thinking, too. While many participants receive and provide assessment and instruction for one another, it is most common for more advanced participants to offer assistance to less advanced participants, for example, the way that Derrick does for Brad.

In this way, in addition to literally helping someone learn to do a trick, offering assistance to another skater functions to index participant status as either expert or authority or novice or someone in need of assistance. While status delineation is more clear in instances (as will be discussed below) when participants' abilities and statuses range widely, when participants' statuses are more closely aligned the learning-teaching process is more recursive since each participant has different areas of expertise to share.

In many instances sessions serve as ways for less advanced skaters to solicit assistance from more advanced skaters by asking them how they do a certain move, or as Derrick explains in response to my question about how he learns all of the tricks he knows, "it's not always videos, it's watching other people skate. You ask them, 'Oh that's a cool trick,' you know, and they'll say, 'thanks man,' and you'll be like, 'what is it?' and they'll tell you." Although not represented in the above excerpted example of a session, this is a commonplace practice evidenced in the previous chapter when two skaters went up to Crazy K and asked him about a move he did. Also, one of the variations of sessions found at Franklin Skate Park is instances when there are very explicit learning/teaching situations which usually involve young, novice skaters learning or attempting a trick, such as dropping into the bowl, for the first time. These instances, what I call "explicit instructional sessions" focus attention on one individual and their attempt at a particular trick. While there are instances during whole or large-group sessions where someone attempting a move is the focus of everyone's attention, in these small group explicit moments constitute the actual substance and exigency of the session. What follows is an instance of an explicit instructional session excerpted from field notes:

While a few small groups of skaters congregate at different areas of the park, a small boy (probably somewhere in middle elementary age group) stands with one foot on his skateboard near the coping of the bowl—he is fully adorned in helmet, knee pads, and wrist guards, all of which seem way too big for his small, thin body. Standing right next to him is an older (probably early 20s), more advanced skateboarder. Both stand with one foot on their respective skateboards, the younger boy with hands on hips, the older smoking a cigarette, peering into the bowl, watching an older, more advanced skateboarder cruise back and forth from one side of the bowl to the other displaying an array of moves each time he makes it to the coping. When the boarder in the bowl dismounts across from the two, they inch up to the coping. The older skater quickly maneuvers the tail of his board onto the coping so it is perched at a 45 degree angle, suspended in air. The young boy slowly follows the older skater's lead, awkwardly placing his board in a similar manner, having to reach down and use his hand to position the board. The younger skater has yet to drop into the bowl in his life and the two older boys have agreed to show him how. The skater who just dismounted from the bowl, looks across at the young boy and says calmly, "Get your back foot comfortable on the board," and the younger skater shifts his foot, digging the ball of his right foot harder into the grip tape. Another older skater is standing in the bowl at this time, looking up at the younger skater. The skater standing next to the younger skater, the one who has his board in the same position as the young boy's, says, as he moves his left foot to the nose of the deck, gently resting it on the deck, "Put your other foot on the board around here." At this point, two of the smaller groups of skaters skate over toward the bowl and in almost an instant a crowd forms around the bowl, all eyes on the young boy. Once the young boy stops fidgeting his left foot and stands in the correct position to drop into the bowl, the older skater next to him, says, "Put all your weight forward and then drop in." He pauses for a couple of seconds and then says, "Like this," as he pushes down on his extended foot and drops into the bowl rolls to the other side and dismounts. The little boy stands, looking intently into the bowl, but hesitates. The older skater across from him, the one who first skated the bowl to demonstrate to the younger skater how to drop in, says in a tone more assertive than the calm, coaxing tones the older skaters had used up to that point, "Do it, dude, There's no more advice to be given." A few seconds pass, none of the other skaters saying anything, and the younger skater pushes his front foot down on his board, starts to roll into the bowl and quickly hops off of his board, running to the bottom of the bowl as the board passes him, rides up the slope and rolls back down to him. He leans down, grabs it, looks up, and says "I did it!" One of the older skateboarders, looking down at him, says, "No you didn't." The boy climbs out of the bowl, carries his board over to the group of boys still standing watching him, puts his board on the coping to make another attempt. As the young boy stands ready for his second attempt, one of the older skateboarders says assertively, "Just do it. Don't think about it. Just do it." His voice softens, "Just lean into it." Another skater says, "The easier way to do it is to 'roll in'" to which another older skater says, "Fuck that. He needs to learn how to drop in before he can roll in." Again

attention focuses on the younger skateboarder and one of the older skaters provides some instructions on what to do in case he falls.

As evidenced in this excerpt, explicit instructional sessions consist of demonstration and modeling of a particular trick or move by more advanced skaters accompanied with verbal instructions. For example, in the above excerpt, as one of the “instructors” demonstrates how to place his feet on the board, another of the instructors says, “Get your back foot comfortable.” In addition to the combination of verbal explanation and modeling (and the motivation discussed above), these sessions function to demarcate what constitutes landing a trick or successfully completing a move. For instance, while the boy exclaims that he “did it!” his instructors are sure to let him know that he, in fact, did not (“No, you didn’t.”). As discussed above, also, these sessions can also be pedagogical in the sense that they teach novice skaters how to handle pain and “failure.” In many of these sessions, it is common for the instructors, after the learner has fallen, to say things like, “get up,” “Stop whining,” or laugh at them. These are done, like the use of heckling discussed above, to teach new skateboarders the appropriate cultural responses to pain and failure, which are that they are inevitable and necessary aspects of learning to skateboard and not to be used as excuses for not landing or attempting a trick.

These explicit instructional sessions are made possible in part by the normalized practice of soliciting assistance, something that is not seen as shameful or embarrassing, and providing unsolicited feedback and assistance to skaters. Crazy K explains in response to my question as to if it is common for one skater to ask another one questions:

Oh, yea. You find it with the better skaters, they’ll be skating, and it’s obvious who are the better skaters. And you’ll have other skaters who will walk up and start conversations and once you get conversations going, you say, “oh, I’ve been trying this.” And the better skater will say, “Oh, why don’t you try it like this.” You know, just different things. You know, sometimes what I’ll do is, I’ll see a younger kid drop in or something and I’ll kind of watch him and see if I can’t

give him positive feedback. That's usually with an older skater to a younger skater.

As evidenced in Crazy K's discussion is the ways that explicit instructional sessions are relegated for early, novice participants. While all participants continuously receive assistance, only early, novice participants receive this type of specialized instruction and attention. In this way, this practice serves to demarcate novices from more advanced participants and more generally reinforces solidarity while simultaneously expressing social distinctions. In addition to the solicitation of assistance discussed by Crazy K, he also mentions how he will offer unsolicited assistance and feedback for skaters, particularly those less advanced than him. This giving unsolicited feedback is a common and accepted practice among the skateboarders. In many ways, it seems as if the practice is not only accepted but to a certain extent expected, especially if a skater is making a genuine attempt at learning to skateboard and is ready for a particular form of help. For example, while skating a session with a few people, Archie noticed a younger, less advanced skater consistently trying to jump a set of stairs. In between his turns, Archie observed this younger skater trying this move, not getting close, and without being asked for help, said to him, "Billy, learn how to ollie first." When Billy recovered from his latest attempt, he looked at Archie, and Archie, rolling out on his board and performed an ollie, and said, "Practice that one first." In this way, Archie is publicly claiming his expertise and his status as a more advanced participant (as well as indexing Billy's status as a less advanced participant). This practice demonstrates how learning within this context is not only tied to status and identity but also filled with tensions between egalitarianism and practices of exclusion. For instance, in this seeming benevolent act of

providing unsolicited feedback to Billy, Archie is doing social work by distinguishing himself from Billy.

“Do it, dude. There’s no more advice to be given.” : Doing It

A central facet of learning how to skateboard is that explicit instruction and talking about various aspects of skateboarding are limited in their ability to teach someone how to actually skateboard, and that learning how to skateboard is done by “doing it.” For instance, in the above description, one of the skateboarders, after providing the novice skater with instructions and suggestions, said, “Do it, dude. There’s no more advice to be given.” When asked how they learned how to skateboard, virtually every respondent explained that they got on a board and just started doing it. For them, *learning how* to skateboard is not separate from *actually* skateboarding, it is not something that is learned “about” but learned by doing. For example, Crazy K explains:

...that’s the thing about skateboarding. That’s how I learned it. I just got on the board and did it. I think that’s what makes the attraction for some people versus other people. Because it’s not something that you say, “Well...do this and do that.” I mean, we talk among ourselves, like if there are skaters who are not better skaters, we’ll say, “OK, try this, or lean back,” or whatever, but it still takes you *doing* it to learn it. A lot of muscle memory, a lot of falling.

This learning by doing reveals how learning in this context is not a de-contextualized activity in which participation is removed from actual practice in order to be prepared to participate at a later time. In this way learning by doing is an embodied practice and imbued with a greater sense of authenticity, credibility, and integrity than learning *about* something, particularly at the wrong moments. That is not say, however, that learning about something is not valuable because it is, but it must be done in a timely manner. Perhaps more than any other form of participation, skating alone epitomizes the learning practice of “doing it.” What follows is a vignette of “Mexican Matt” during a

solo session the first summer of my observations, followed by an analysis of this description and how the various features of learning skating alone highlights:

A black t-shirt with a photo of the heavy metal band ACDC drapes over the thin, short torso of Matt as he leans over his knees, one foot on his skateboard, drops of sweat pool together at the peak of his forehead before falling to the concrete. After holding this position for about thirty seconds, Matt stands erect, lifts his shirt to wipe his brow, and then rolls his board toward the coping before leaning his body toward the bowl, preparing for yet another dropping into the bowl—his 14th straight attempt. At this point in his skating career, Matt has successfully accomplished how to drop into the bowl, although once he does so, cannot sustain or generate by “pumping” much momentum, and he always ends up climbing out of the bowl instead of coming out of it by catching air. Essentially, his runs consist of him dropping into the bowl, riding up the opposite wall to the coping, turning his board around (without doing a particular move, like a rock and roll or fakey or grind) and then riding back up the wall he initially dropped into, but losing momentum before making it to the coping, which pushes him back to the bottom of the bowl. He follows this same pattern eight more times in a row, making slight changes with each run—bending his knees a bit more, attempting to pump with his body, and on two occasions even attempting a 50-50 when he makes it to the first coping. Each time he places his board on the coping to drop in—tail down, nose popped up in the air—his feet twitch and move, almost dance around the board, unsteady and uncertain. He looks down at his feet and board frequently, something more advanced skaters do not do as much, and his eyes quickly move from his feet to the bowl back to his feet and then the bowl, before he pushes his top foot down into the board and glides down the side of the bowl. After his eighth run (and second fall), he climbs out of the bowl, hops on his board and pushes into the street side, smaller bowl where he floats across it, picking up speed both through the initial dip into the bowl and riding up and then down a “hip.” He skates the street side bowl and then the perimeter of the park, not attempting any real tricks other than one where, when leaving the street side bowl, he bends his knees, lowers his body so he is in nearly in a sitting position, grabs his deck with one hand and “hops” to catch some air.

Matt’s status as a beginner is indexed in part by his methodological approach to his moves and skating in general, accentuating each aspect of his movements; he has not yet formulated his own “style” of skating. After skating the perimeter and street-side bowl for a few minutes, Matt stops in a corner of the park, positioning his board parallel with about a fifteen-foot straight stretch of flat concrete which ends in a slight crescent in the concrete. With the ball of his left foot pressed into the back half of his deck, he kicks into the ground with his right foot until he builds enough speed to carry him to a small crescent of concrete about fifteen feet away at which point he places it on the deck, quickly maneuvering (while looking down at them) both feet so they rest perpendicular to the direction his body travels. Nearing the small crescent of concrete, he crouches down, bending his

knees, twisting one almost into the other and bringing his feet together, dropping his front foot to where its toes are almost touching those of the back foot and then pressing down and jumping up, sending the board spinning like a corkscrew, hoping that it lands right side up as he feet come down. On his first attempt, the board lands on its side and while his left foot lands on the side of the board, too, his right one finds the cement, preventing him from falling or twisting an ankle. He slowly rolls back to the point at which he started and attempts it again. This time, the board shoots out from under him before he has a chance to spin it, and he falls backward landing on his backside and hands stretched behind his body. He walks to the board resting on the grass, skates back to his starting point, and re-attempts the same move. On this try, he gets the board to land on its wheels and his left foot to land on the deck, and he moves more quickly back to the starting point to try it again. Matt re-attempts this move eleven more times, landing two successfully, although not fluidly, before he skates the street side bowl and perimeter a few times, packs his board into his backpack, hops onto his bicycle and pedals slowly out of the park, across the dirt and gravel parking lot to the south side street.

As evidenced by this description, learning to skateboard takes consistent practice, repetition, and lots of “failure,” all of which will be discussed below.

“It’s not like they could just do it right away”: Repetition, Practice, and “Failure”

Implicit thus far in the discussion of the learning practices of skateboarders is the idea that learning to skateboard takes practice, repetition, and “failure”—features that skating alone make quite visible. For example, in the above excerpt of Matt’s solo skating, he attempts two different tricks more than ten times each, with a very small “success rate.” This repetition is necessary for skaters to develop muscle memory, various techniques needed to successfully land a trick, and the confidence to do so. In addition, these cultural practices offer social rewards in that mastery of certain basic skills affords participants opportunities to skate with others in small sessions and move beyond the early or novice status. Repetition and “failure,” therefore are understood as inevitable, necessary, and not something to be ashamed of. As Crazy K says, “No matter *how* good you are, you *are* going to fall!” When asked what advice he would give someone just learning how to skateboard, Derrick says, “If you fall, get back up.” When

asked why, he explains that falling is unavoidable and part of the process of learning how to skateboard.

As Derrick offers new skateboarders the advice of getting up if you fall, the skaters at the park have a deep understanding that learning how to skateboard is a process that takes a lot of practice, a lot of “falling,” and “failure” in the pursuit of improved abilities. In fact, “failure” is not only an accepted aspect of the learning process but an expected one. TS says, “You got to know you’re going to fall, and you know, you got to get used to that idea in your head.” In many respects, failure, like injuries, is an indicator that someone is trying, pushing, and improving. Therefore, failure, injuries and the like are valued aspects and important features of learning in this context. Falling or failing is not shameful or embarrassing as Tommy, a beginner skater explains that everyone has to start somewhere:

RP: So what about umm you said when you started with Derrick you were watching other skaters?

T: Yeah we watched other skaters and we just tried tricks that they did.

RP: Like you would go to the park and watch other skaters and stuff?

T: Yeah. And if we fell it’s not like an embarrassment. It’s like if you can’t do the trick you just got to keep trying it. It’s not like *they* could just do it right away. They had to practice.

RP: So what do you mean, tell me more about that, that it’s not an embarrassment? What do you mean?

T: It’s not like, okay let’s say you can’t do a kick flip. See Derrick still can’t do kick flips to save his life. See like he can keep doing it and he messes up, that’s not an embarrassment. He just can’t do it. There’s people who can’t do it. Like umm he can double heel flip but he can’t kick flip. See like I can double kick flip but I can’t double heel flip. It’s just different. See like if we were all the same it wouldn’t be any good. Like we all have different things we can do and stuff like that. But like if you keep practicing and practicing, you’ll be sure to get it.

While it is true that all participants are expected to “fail” and fall, the more experienced one becomes and the “higher” status he has, the more difficult it becomes for him to fail without social consequences. For example, if a more experienced participant falls attempting a trick that is easy or below his ability level, he exposes himself to ridicule and heckling.

Also, while Tommy reveals the attitude toward “failure” and practice, he also touches upon another key aspect of the community of practice developed at the skate park—that is of the importance of differing abilities and styles. Specifically, he explains how failure is not only not embarrassing because it is a necessary and expected aspect of learning (“It’s not like *they* could just do it right away. They had to practice.”), but also that just because one fails or doesn’t know how to do one trick, does not mean they do not have something to offer. Specifically, he notes that without difference and skaters “hav[ing] different things,” skateboarding “wouldn’t be any good.” Derrick echoes this sentiment when he discusses “style.” He says: “If everyone skateboarded the same, you know how boring skateboarding would be? That’s what *makes* skateboarding...doing your own thing, creating your own style.”

“That’s what makes skateboarding”: Difference and Style

Although there is no finish line, final examination, diploma, or graduation ceremony in skateboarding, there does exist something akin to a goal in learning how to skateboard—the development of one’s unique “style.” A personal style—which is signified by having a unique approach to skating the park, an unmistakable aesthetic, or being able to land particular tricks, especially ones that no else can—is like a skater’s signature and serves to produce a more permanent status as a “made man” within the

community. Although every skater looks differently in the way they skate, even those on a skateboard for the very first time, one's style develops over a period of time and really takes shape as one gets "comfortable" on a board and with their skateboarding abilities. Matt explains what getting to that level feels like: "Well, when you get used to riding and it feels like, kind of like you're walking...you just get used to it... You get a lot more confident what you can and can't do." At the time when a skater gets comfortable and forms a style, he is taken more seriously as a participant of the community and no longer has to prove himself. Using a comparison to the Mafia, Luis explains about reaching the point of being accepted:

You start fitting in. People become more accepting of you. And then it just progresses from there, really. With the stages of progression in skateboarding, once you finally become accepted... it's almost like... I want to compare it like being in the mafia, even though I never have been in it, obviously... you start off as being a grunt, then you start wearing a suit, you do enough right things and you become one of the guys, and become a made man. You're finally accepted by everyone, you just come in and try and skate, not looking for acceptance from anyone. It's kind of like being made. You don't have to worry about anyone. You just come in and think about your board.

In addition to functioning as an indicator of status within the community and providing a sense of personal satisfaction, developing one's own style also functions as a communal resource, for once someone has his own style, he has something unique to contribute to the community and to others. Individual skaters and their accomplishments become important resources (especially in light of the community's accepted learning practices such as observing, mimicking, soliciting assistance, and providing unsolicited feedback), and a skater's learning is a communal investment and therefore facilitated by others. In this way, skaters do not help other skaters for altruistic reasons necessarily (although many discuss getting a "high" or feeling good about helping others), but they

help because it will benefit them in terms of indexing their status as well as helping them develop as a skateboarder and the community at large. For example, Derrick explains how helping Matt actually helps him, too:

D: Like let's say Matt teaches me new stuff, and then I teach him new stuff. Then he's about as good as I am now, but yet I'm still that notch better because I just learned his stuff, and so he teaches me stuff again.

RP: So, then even if you're the one who is who is more advanced, you still learn from the guy who's not as advanced?

D: Yea, because every guy is different, he's got different stuff you want to learn.

In addition to learning new tricks directly from another, helping someone else has potential to pay off in the long term, also, since you are helping them get better, which will in turn give you someone else to skate with eventually and push you to develop as a skater. Achieving the goal of developing and having recognized one's own style does not suggest that one's career is over or that there is nothing more to learn or achieve. In fact, one of the main appeals of the process of learning how to skateboard is the seemingly-endless possibilities for growth and development it offers. While learning how to skateboard is a life-long, never-ending learning process that promises continued growth, one of the features is that within that process, one has various levels of competency. In fact, learning to skateboard is a recursive process in which one moves between a degree of felt competency and a progression to a new level of competency. In this way, as skateboarders continue to develop, they do so without the feeling of deficit; in other words, the never-ending progression of learning to skateboard is met by a constant sense of competency. Derrick explains: "You practice more of your tricks and get 'em better and then all of sudden out of nowhere, you get the balance for it to where every time it's

perfect. And then you like, put a revert into it or something. Or, try something out of it, or whatever.”

“Like, you try to picture in your head how they would do that.”: Watching Other Skaters

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, watching or observing other people skate is one of the key practices (and one that virtually every skateboarder stressed) in learning how to skateboard and indexing one’s subcultural status. Observation provides less advanced skaters with models and examples of moves and tricks, many of which they may never have actually seen before. Also, through observation of other skaters, the less advanced skaters see a range of ways to use the space and materials at the park. Finally, observing other skaters reveals particular “insights” or “clues” as many of them say, about how to do certain tricks. In watching others, skaters pick up on footwork, body movements, and other aspects of skating. For example, during one of his first summers of skating (and my first summer of fieldwork), Matt typically sat on one of the ledges or boxes in the park and observed the action when whole-group sessions occurred. He explains: “When I first starting came up here, I didn’t know anybody, so I just sat around—I didn’t talk to anybody...like you watch someone try to do something, you’re like, you just think about it, and you’re like, ‘I can do that.’” In addition to watching “live” skaters, my participants also learned a great deal about how to skateboard by viewing skate videos and photography in skateboard magazines. As Tommy says about him and his friends watching videos together, “...like we see the moves and we go out there and try them and stuff.” Likewise, in response to my inquiry in whether he reads magazines, Terry explains how the photographs in *Thrasher* assist him in developing his abilities as a skateboarder: “I look at *Thrasher* cuz some stuff in there—like the photos

are insane. Like, you try to picture in your head how they would do that.” Derrick also explains how video images help him “see where to put your feet” on the board to do certain tricks. Also, in response to my inquiry as to a recent trick he learned, Hollywood explained how he watched a video of a trick and mimicked it:

I envy a lot of people that can do some of the shit I can’t, but, you know, I just watch them and try to learn it. Like the latest trick I’ve learned that I actually attempted and pulled off was like this (inaudible) Indy boneless. It’s where you grab your board, flip it around, stand on one foot and jump back in and I learned that by watching the (inaudible) *Mentality* video at least 20 times just rewinding that part. I don’t know when I landed it the first time I felt fuckin’ sweet. It was cool.

Observation is also an essential aspect of learning how to skateboard because part of their development of a unique style of skating, skaters “mimic” and imitate other skateboarders. In fact, imitation and mimicking are seen as both normal aspects of learning how to do a certain move (for example, one imitates another’s way to do a move in order to learn how to do it and then do it uniquely) as well as a phase or stage of development everyone goes through on their way to developing a unique style. Imitation and mimicking are analogous to “borrowing” something for a short while until one can move beyond it. TS explains how observation of others function to help skateboarders see beyond what they thought was possible, to learn specifically how to perform certain tricks, and how skaters mimic or imitate others as they work toward developing their own style.

RP So when you think about where you were in 5th grade and I don’t know how old you were when you started, and you look at yourself now like how did that happen this 8 or 9 or 10 years? I mean now that you step on a board, how does that happen? How does someone move from point A to point B?

TS Like I said it just kind of consumes you. Like you start seeing videos and stuff. Like when you start skating your really, like you know you have a

Walmart board or something like or a world industry, something that you know you thought it was just cool to have one and then when you start getting into it you start watching skate videos and stuff and you start seeing all these pros doing all these crazy tricks that you had never even thought of. Like all you were thinking about was you know riding off the curb and maybe doing like little slappy grinds everywhere. And all of a sudden you start seeing them doing that and you start trying to figure out how they do that, how they position their feet. You start adapting to styles, like to stuff you like to see. ...And you know you just kind of start finding that through stuff you watch or stuff you see friends do. And then you just kind of roll through it and most of the time like when you've been skating as long as I have you add your own little tweaks to stuff. You just start seeing ways easier for you to do it and then you start just getting used to doing it that way and like that's how you develop into your own style or you know sometimes it doesn't look that great but either way it just becomes your style of doing it.

In his explanation, TS explains how watching others skate—either friends or skaters in videos—pushes skaters to try different things by helping them to conceptualize beyond what they are doing. He says, "...You start seeing all these pros doing all these crazy tricks that you had never even thought of." He also explains how watching others is helpful in learning footwork: "And all of a sudden you start seeing them doing that and you start trying to figure out how they do that, how they position their feet." In addition, TS explains how through watching and learning others, skaters borrow other people's styles before "add[ing] your own little tweaks to stuff" in order to "develop into your own style." Finally, observation—who observes and who gets observed—serves important social functions, especially when related to whole-group sessions. Whole group sessions enable more advanced participants to perform for others by showcasing and documenting their moves, which in turn build up their status as participants in the community. For the majority of skaters who participate in whole-group sessions, the event provides an opportunity for them to both push themselves to try and land more difficult tricks and to have themselves recognized doing so, especially among the group

of participants within the community. During these whole group sessions, participants have all eyes on them. As one skater had said to another during one whole group session, “the stage is all yours.”

Conclusion

Taken together, the learning practices described throughout this chapter reveal several larger principles that undergird the ways Franklin Skate Park functions as a learning environment. The underlying goal or purposes of the learning environment established within the community of Franklin Skate Park is to provide full success for any and all of its participants who want it at the same time that it works to make distinctions between participants. In this way, this site of popular culture functions to provide its participants both with a sense of solidarity and social distinctions.

To achieve these goals, the environment exposes all participants to the full range of practices within the community and embeds learning within participation in cultural activities (as opposed to being de-contextualized and separate from participation). In this way, learning how to skateboard and be a skateboarder is an “embodied” learning, quite literally in this context, the relationship between skater’s bodies as kinesthetic entities and their learning. Gee (2004) explains that “disembodied” learning—that is learning that attempts to exist solely in people’s minds removed from their bodies, participation in cultural processes, and “outside any context of decisions and actions” (39)—does not work. Conversely, he explains that when learning as a cultural process happens it involves people’s bodies “because cultural learning always involves having specific experiences that facilitate learning” (39). He writes:

...humans understand content, whether in a comic book or a physics text, much better when their understanding is embodied: that is, when they can relate that

content to possible activities, decisions, talk, and dialogue. When people learn as a cultural process, whether this be cooking, hunting, or how to play video games, they learn through action and talk with others, not by memorizing words outside their contexts of application (39).

Additionally, this environment offers various points of entry into it, thus allowing all participants access in one form or another regardless of ability level or time skateboarding. Another central principle underlying the environment at the skate park is an understanding that while learning how to skateboard is a social, group endeavor, it also honors the individual. In fact, while the learning process is inextricably tied to social and cultural, it is also an individualized educative process, in that the “curriculum” for a particular skater is based and built on where he is in his process, and what his interests and goals are. While there are status, labels and indexes within the group, when it comes to one’s individual learning, their progress, growth, and development is based on where they are individually, similar, in many respects, to an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) found in public schools, one that is co-designed and facilitated between the individual participant and others. Everyone is at a different stage of their learning and development, and their assessments are typically determined based on this, where and who they are as a skater—not a final standard or determinant.

Individual learning in this environment happens in and on time and is facilitated by distributed cognition and resources, “cooperative competition,” and apprenticeship-like features of learning. Cognition, knowledge, and resources are distributed among and throughout the community in order to problem solve as well as facilitate individual and group learning. However, resources are not given out freely or without discretion. In order to gain access to resources and the support system in place within this learning environment, one must have the desire and willingness to learn, to become a participant.

Otherwise, resources will not be spent on people who do not want to learn and/or are not willing to put forth the effort to learn, which is evidenced in part by one's commitment, practicing, concentration and "doing it." Also, this environment establishes and promotes an apprenticeship model of learning that necessitates mentoring and collaborative learning relationships between participants. Through this model of learning and "teaching," instruction is predominately indirect and implicit, thus emphasizing observation and learner-motivated solicitation of assistance. Also, within these learning-teaching relationships, participants engage in fluid, mutually-beneficial arrangements where both participants potentially help each other along. In this way, a range of subject positions are available to all participants at many times, including both mentor and learner, sometimes even within the same relationship. This is made possible, in part, due to the fact that there is not a linear progression of development or even a particular set of skills or knowledge base one must master. In this way, differences are assets and become generative for learning relationships. In other words, a participant's unique "style" is what makes him a valuable contributor to the community. In this way, a skater who is not "as good" as another skater can still teach the "better" skater something. In some respects, this more egalitarian form of measuring success enables all participants to be contributors and producers of culture within the community, as well as keep the community vibrant and continuously changing. Furthermore, this learning environment accepts, promotes, and normalizes "failure" and risk-taking as necessary aspects of learning and enables participants to develop competency while they enjoy the prospect of endless progress. Also, and perhaps most significantly for my participants, this learning

environment offers every participant the promise of making original contributions to the community, of being a contributor and producer of culture.

All of these features of learning within this context are also imbued with a tension between egalitarianism and solidarity and practices of stratification. This understanding not only illustrates the ways that learning is inextricably tied to identity but also complicates other conceptions of youth cultural communities as put forth by Eckert (1989) and Beal (1995; 1996). For example, while Beal explains how lack of emphasis on competition is one of the hallmarks of cultural authenticity and status, I actually reveal how competition is a contested concept for my participants in that while they espouse egalitarian values and beliefs of solidarity, their actual practices reveal how competition, status, positioning, and hierarchies actually get produced through learning practices, many of which are enacted under the pretense of solidarity and egalitarianism. In investigating these issues, I also complicate Eckert's perspective of burnout youth spaces as egalitarian spaces by revealing the ways in which participants, while espousing an egalitarian narrative about themselves actually enact the very corporate structures of schooling against which they are defining themselves. Furthermore, this reveals the nature of working-class youth's engagement with popular culture as a contested space in which the narratives they tell about their engagement functions to facilitate their re-orientation of their social realities more so than their actual practices.

Chapter Six

From Poser to Producer: The Logics of Literacy Engagement for the Skaters of Franklin Skate Park

Like all people, young people use popular cultural texts and experiences in unpredictable ways to make sense of and take power in their worlds. What is more, close-up studies of youth often show youth to be making productive uses of literacy, to be sophisticated users of print and other forms, and even to be kind and generous people who are concerned about making a difference in the world.

Moje (2002: 116)

Introduction

In addition to actually skateboarding, one of the central ways participants within this community both learn how to be a skateboarder and index their status as a skateboarder is through their textual engagement. To understand the ways texts mediate my participants' experiences as skateboarders in their local context and as young men in broader socio-cultural-political contexts, I developed the analytic of "textual events"—those instances when my participants accessed, consumed, produced, distributed, and/or evaluated texts. By examining these textual events, I located the various ways my participants engage texts and their purposes in doing so. Analytically, this chapter answers the following questions: Which texts do these young men access, consume, produce, distribute, and evaluate as part of their participation in skateboarding culture and their overall engagement with popular culture? How do they access, consume, produce, distribute, and evaluate these texts? What functions, roles, and/or purposes do these texts serve these participants?

In answering these questions, I discovered that texts play a significant role in helping my participants form and/or claim their identities as skateboarders at Franklin Skate Park, participants within popular culture more broadly, and young men in larger

communal and socio-political contexts. Within the local community of Franklin Skate Park, texts were used in order to help produce and/or index certain statuses among the participants. For instance, shooting video of a participant at the park works to draw attention to the participant and his accomplishments, thus helping to produce a certain status for that participant, especially once the captured video gets distributed or circulated through the oral culture of the park and/or a digital text, such as a myspace page. Outside of producing and indexing status within the local community of Franklin Skate Park, participants engage texts in order to gain access to and form identities in relation to more broad popular culture practices and communities, including the music industry. For instance, many participants spend a great deal of time reading books related to the music industry in order to get a better sense of the history of particular music genres or movements or biographical information about particular musicians. Situated within larger communal and socio-political contexts, texts function to help my participants make sense of and/or form who they are as young men in relation to these contexts. For instance, for some participants, textual activities such as tattoo design and distribution function to make socio-political critiques or to claim racial/ethnic affiliations. Furthermore, the nature of my participants' textual activity demonstrates the way literacy engagement is situated, in that their textual activities were informed by and informed their sociocultural subject positions, especially in relation to their age and length of time/degree of participation within the local and more global popular culture contexts. Specifically, as participants become more full participants of local and global popular cultural communities, their textual engagement shifted from consuming industry texts in

order to “fit in” to more critical consumption of these texts as well as production and distribution of their own texts.

To further illustrate the ways texts mediate my participants’ experiences within their local community of Franklin Skate Park, popular culture more broadly, and larger socio-cultural-political contexts, the remainder of this chapter describes and analyzes the texts my participants engage and the means by which they access them; consume and, produce, and distribute them; the functions these textual activities serve my participants; and the situated nature of these activities. Specifically, this chapter illustrates how participants’ differentiated engagement with texts (or, how they move from being posers to producers) is made visible through their textual selection, critical textual consumption, and textual and cultural production and distribution. In exploring these activities, this chapter argues/demonstrates that texts serve important socio-cultural-political functions for the guys of Franklin Skate Park as they help them form, claim, and produce identities as well as index and demarcate status delineation within the local community as well as other, larger socio-cultural-political contexts. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates the ways that participants both learn popular culture through literacy and learn/develop literacy through their engagement with popular culture. Finally, this chapter illustrates the cultural logics and reasoning behind my participants’ literacy engagement, or what I refer to as their “logic of literacy.” Specifically, for my participants literacy only makes sense when it is multimodal, cross-pop cultural, connected to lived/real practice/cultural engagement, and leads to further engagement (production begets consumption, and vice versa), or as Gee (2004) writes, “people learn new ways with words, in or out of school, only when they find the worlds to which these words apply compelling” (3).

Textual Mediation

Textual Access, Features, and Selection

As part of their engagement with skateboarding and popular culture in general, my participants' accessed, consumed, produced, distributed, and evaluated a variety of texts, including, but not limited to the following:

- Nonfiction books about aspects of popular culture (e.g. biographies, histories)
- "Industry" Magazines and Catalogs (e.g. skateboarding, music)
- Skateboarding and Music Videos—both industry and self-produced
- Digital, web-based texts, such as blogs, webpages, and zines—both industry and self-produced
- Tattoos
- Graffiti/Tagging
- Music and Poetry
- Skateboard decks, T-shirts, and stickers

This section will examine the ways that my participants accessed these texts, the multimodality nature of these texts, and how text selections index participants' subcultural status.

"I had one one time": Textual Access

While skateboarding and popular culture texts are virtually ubiquitous (one participant explained to me when I asked how he hears about videos, "They've got it on TV, all over. You go to the skate and bike shop up town, they've got videos up there. You ever hear of Bam Mangera? He's even got his own clothing line"), I was surprised at first that many of my participants do not actually own many of these texts. My surprise was primarily the result of the fact that during my first summer of data

collection, I conducted a series of field visits at a different park in which more middle-class and more-visibly “scene” kids skateboarded and regularly discussed the various industry-produced magazines, web pages, and videos; therefore, my assumption entering Franklin Skate Park was that the participants there would also be as saturated in industry-produced texts as the more visibly “scene” skaters were at the other park. While there are certainly instances where some participants owned texts, for many of my participants access to popular culture texts were relegated to “getting hooked up” by friends, relatives, and/or industry-related professionals; sharing and borrowing texts from each other; and downloading free videos and accessing magazines and catalogs from the internet, renting books from the library, and/or watching events on TV. The most commonly known and owned text among all participants is *CCS*, a free catalog that can be received online by subscribing to it or by calling once a month in order to receive a free hard copy, which due to limited internet access seemed to be the preferred method for most of my participants, particularly the younger ones. Nearly all of these younger participants asked me during my initial contacts with them if I had heard of and/or seen *CCS*. In addition to *CCS*, skate videos and on-line, industry magazines and skateboarder-produced zines were accessed and downloaded through the internet for free.

It was not uncommon for a participant, particularly younger ones, to respond to my inquiry as to whether or not they read skateboarding magazines with a response similar to one participant who said, “I had one one time.” In fact, many texts were circulated among the participants, oftentimes the owner giving the text away, or as Luis responded to my question about a book he’d read, “How did you even hear about this book?, “My friend Ned let me borrow it and then just told me I could keep it.” I, too,

experienced this phenomenon when I would inquire into the textual activities of my participants and would walk away from the conversation with several videos, magazines, and/or books—none of which were ever asked to be returned. This circulation of texts is also evidenced by the “borrowing” of video cameras to shoot film. While virtually all my participants at one time or another capture digital videos and/or photos of themselves skateboarding, very few of them actually own digital video cameras. The normalized practice of circulating texts among themselves oftentimes provides access to texts participants might not otherwise have. For example, Derrick explains how he heard of the movie *Grind*, one of his favorites from his friends. He says: “Friends, and I’ve had someone say, “do you wanna watch a movie called *Grind*?” I was thinkin’, ‘Aw sounds like a dumb movie,” you know, and he showed it to me, and it made a good impact on my life.” Also, Tommy explains to me how he does not own any skate videos and only has access to them by watching his friend, Matt’s downloaded videos: “Matt usually gets them or something or we’ll just watch them at a friend’s house or something.” In another instance, Luis explains to me how in response to my inquiry if he has or had a subscription to skateboarding magazines responded that his friend, TS had a subscription and that he, Luis, would “steal” them from him. Also, Luis explains how a skate video circulated among his group of friends when he was younger:

Well, I guess when I was in like... ninth grade, there was “the tape” that we called it, and it was *Sight Unseen*, on VHS, and the whole group of skaters that were there, it just kept going around a circle, everybody’s pass it on to somebody else. We’d keep it for a while and then pass it to the next person. That’s pretty much what it was. In the time I had it, I just watched it over and over and over again.

This circulation of texts is also seen in the ways participants sometimes get “hooked up” by others. For instance, some of my participants’ tattoos are the result of their tattoo

artist or shop “cutting them a deal.” Hollywood explains how one of his tattoos, for example, was the result of his tattoo shop offering a discounted rate as part of their customer appreciation day. Also, Derrick and Matt explain to me how they recently attended a “tattoo party,” which is an event during which a tattoo artist goes to a house party and basically inks people for free or for a reduced price. It was in this way, actually, that Derrick received his first tattoo, for which he had to go “underground” since he is not of the legal age to get one.

“Well, I play guitar”: Multimodality and Cross-Pop Cultural Recontextualization

All of the texts my participants access, consume, produce, and distribute are multi-modal. In addition to the more obvious multimodality found in the combinations of audio and visual in videos, audio and lyrics in songs, and the visual imagery, iconic symbols, and words found in tattoos and graffiti, all of the more prominent or traditionally-understood print-based texts such as magazines and books are also multimodal in nature. Even biographies and books written about these popular cultures consist of visual images and are oftentimes accompanied or distributed/produced with a documentary or other audio-visual text, such as a compact disc. For example, when asked to tell me about *American Hardcore*, a book about the history of hardcore music, A explained to me that there were “lots of old pictures and fliers” in it that helped to tell the history of punk rock, “you know, where it came from, stuff about early band, the early shows...Back through the late 70’s up until almost now. It goes through the times and the eras.” In most instances, the visual aspects of these texts actually carry more significance than the print—not necessarily because the visual is “easier” but rather because the visual is more closely linked to the values of the cultural group as a whole. For example, seeing a picture or sequence of pictures of a skateboarder is more helpful in demonstrating how

to perform a trick or to learn how to do something than reading print text about it. In this sense, seeing is not only believing but actually more pedagogical for these participants. In general, the visual is a predominate value within this cultural practice—both locally and more globally—for it is in the visual representation of something that the practices of the culture are embodied and personified and imbued with a greater sense of authenticity, credibility, and integrity.

As in textual consumption, multimodality is an essential feature of textual production and distribution as it oftentimes brings together the audio and visual with words to produce a range of texts. Perhaps the best example is through the writing of lyrics and music. All of the participants I interviewed who write music explained how their writing of lyrics inextricably tied to the audio aspects of the songs. For example, Larry explains his process of writing songs:

It's kind of like, you remember when you're a little kid and you're taking your writing classes. You got English class and you learn how to brainstorm? You do the bubble and then you branch out you know and make like a tree? It's like I try and do that and I try and analyze all these words. I'll just write down feelings, words, ideas and I just try and just, I don't know. It's too hard to even like explain, you know? And then you got to hear the music. I'm not one to write lyrics before I write a song. I got to write the rhythm you know and get a feel and kind of hum to it. I always hum to the [in a singing voice] "an na na na." What can I say to fill in that gap you know? I've had a lot of good stuff come out of it. You know what, do you want to hear a CD?

Similarly, Brett, a budding musician who can play "Smoke on the Water" and "a couple of other songs" on his guitar, explains his process of writing songs, something he has only begun to do more recently, noting that "Like you just listen to a song and you like listen to a beat and try to put words to it and you say lyrics in your head and sometimes you write them down, sometimes you don't. Or if you think of a cool saying and you write it down and you're like, hey that could be part of a song." This sense of combining

two or more modes is consistent with other forms of textual production. For example, each of my participants' myspace pages are filled with printed text, videos, photos, audio files, and visual imagery—many of which they themselves produced and compiled, including digital film and/or photography they captured at the park with the expressed interest in using it on their myspace pages. Additionally, the compilation of video clips to be put together for a larger video is always accompanied by corresponding music selections that illustrate each participants section. Finally, tattoos combine iconic symbols, words, and visual imagery to serve rhetorical, political, narrative, and aesthetic purposes. For example, Tommy already has designed a series of tattoos he hopes to get once he turns eighteen years old. Specifically, his design includes his deceased grandfather's name (in "Old English" because he likes that style) across his shoulder blades, an image of the Virgin Mary going down the center of his back with roses (which will be the only color tattoos—"everything else will be black and white") coming out of the side of the image with his mother and grandmother's names (in cursive) also next to the image of the Virgin Mary. Within this series of tattoos, Tommy strategically places together words, iconic religious symbolism, and visual imagery.

The normalized multimodal nature of my participants' textual engagement also facilitates their broadened understanding and practice of literacy activities such as reading and writing. For these participants, skills such as reading and writing are not isolated from other skills for textual engagement such as viewing, designing, speaking/singing, and listening. For example, the following interview excerpt with Larry reveals how for him, reading and writing are part of a broader integrative project of textual consumption and more significantly for him, production and distribution:

Rob Okay. Tell me about your reading and writing.

Larry My reading and writing?

Rob Yeah, when you came over here you said you like to write.

Larry Well, I play guitar. When you don't see me here that's what I'm doing. I don't know. I always try to incorporate everything with it you know?

Rob Do you write lyrics?

Larry I do. I write songs. I'm not the best singer. I like to play guitar but I consider myself a valuable asset on the musical side of things, you know?

Later in our conversation, when I ask Larry if he has a notebook where he keeps his writing, he says: "Dude I have so many different things. I draw too. I drew all these tattoos on my arm right here [pointing to his arm]." Larry's stance/perspective toward textuality and literacy both represent the other guys from Franklin Skate Park's textual production and reflect the texts they consume. In this way, the multimodal nature of skateboarding—the various and oftentimes carefully combined and choreographed elements of music, clothing, physical movements, and style—is reflected in and reflective of my participants' textual engagement. Ironically, almost all of my participants when asked whether or how they read and write say that they "hate" to read and/or write, and/or are not "good" readers and writers, oftentimes drawing upon their experiences in school to verify their responses.

In addition to the multimodal nature of texts and textual activity opening up conceptions of literate activities, it also creates opportunities for what I refer to (drawing on Dyson, 2003) as "cross-pop cultural recontextualization," which is the process in which participants transport texts and/or textual practices from one popular culture community to another. For instance, participants get tattoos related to skateboarding,

write and perform music about skateboarding, decorate their boards and bodies with symbols and words related to their musical influences, and integrate a range of musical genres into their production of video texts and blogs. TS explains how it is virtually impossible to distinguish skateboarding as an entity or cultural group separate from other popular culture practices and/or communities:

Like basically there's so much around skateboarding like with the culture of it like you know its influenced music, its influenced like tattoos. Like, I have friends with like skateboarding tattoos. I think it's one of those things that just kind of takes over your life once you get into it. Like most of the bands you listen to like there's bands like Suicidal Tendencies, all they sing about has its influence in the skateboarding culture. Thrashing in the Streets, all they sing about is skateboarding, you know? I don't know like everything about being a skateboarder is just something I don't know entirely different from the rest of what people are doing I think.

Early in my research, it became apparent to me that it would be impossible to study only "skateboarding culture" as a form of popular culture or subculture without taking into consideration other forms and practices usually ascribed to other subcultural groups, such as punk music, tattooing, and film. In many respects, participation in skateboarding culture is only one aspect of a much broader engagement with popular culture more generally understood, and as my research progressed it became impossible for me to keep the bounds of my research, especially when focused on textual activity on just "skateboarding."

"That one's bad ass": Text Selection

Text selection changes in degree and kind over time for my participants.

Specifically, less experienced skaters tend to be more consumption-oriented than production-oriented (a point that will be discussed more thoroughly in the next two sections of this chapter), and the texts they consume are predominately industry-related texts, such as catalogs, videos, magazines, and webpages. In addition, very early skaters

oftentimes read mass-produced books about skateboarding (mostly books they take out from the library), books such as Matt Christopher novels involving skateboarding and introductions and “how to” books. For example, when he first began skating, Matt explains how he read books he took out from the library about how to skate vert and how to skate street. More experienced participants move away from these basic, introductory texts in favor of skateboarding-related, industry-produced texts that focus on practice in action, such as magazines and videos. For example, Matt explains how now he downloads and views videos about skateboarders. He says in response to my question as to whether he watches videos, “Yeah. The ones I’ve seen are mostly the ones I’ve downloaded off of the internet. I have *Almost Round 3*, old *Lords of Dogstown* one, and *Almost Cheese and Crackers*.” I tell him that I’ve heard of *Almost Cheese and Crackers*, and he goes on to explain how “That one’s bad ass. It has this mini ramp where Chris Hazelman [lands a certain trick] on.” It is also during this time, that participants will begin to produce their own texts, mainly documenting their own skating, not normally within the context of a whole-group session but rather within small group of friends either away from the park or during non-peak times at the park. Also during this time, virtually all of my participants either actually put together a video with others or want to do so.

From this point, my participants strategically select skateboarding texts to consume and begin to make their textual productions more public. For example, Derrick, during the third summer of my data generation, explains how he doesn’t have much time for skate videos and books and magazines anymore, especially since he is at the park, skating with others a lot more than he used to be. He explains, though, that he recently

reached a point where he felt like he hit a “plateau” and watched videos to help him move past it. It is also during this time that participants begin to select texts that extend beyond the practice of skateboarding. For example, Derrick, during my third summer of observation not only designed and received his first tattoo (an illegal, underground tattoo), he also began writing and producing music with some older participants. From this point, participants begin to spend more time listening to music and paying attention to lyrics, get more serious about conceptualizing and designing tattoos, and begin reading in-depth books related to these other cultural communities of practice, books that offer historical perspectives on the cultural practices and biographical information about some of its key figures. For example, at the time of my first round of in-depth interview, Luis had just finished a book that chronicles the history of the hardcore music scene. Also, Larry, when I first spoke with him had just finished reading *Scar Tissue* by Anthony Kiedes and Larry Sloman, a biographical perspective of Flea, the lead singer of the band, The Red Hot Chili Peppers. He says: “When I read it’s like I like to read like mostly like biographies and stuff. Like umm like dead musicians, people before my time. Stevie Ray Vaughn, Randy Rhodes, the good guys. I don’t know. I just read a book on, do you like the Red Hot Chili Peppers? I read an autobiography that the lead singer wrote. It’s called *Scar Tissue*.”

In these ways, text selection not only differs and is situated for participants, primarily due to their level of participation but also functions to index a participants’ status within this local and other larger socio-(pop) cultural-political contexts. Which texts my participants select to consume, produce, and/or distribute reveals a great deal about who they are in relation to the contexts in which they are situated. The texts my

participants select—whether to consume or produce—helps to index/reveal their subcultural status as a participant within the local community, much in the same way Finders (1996) discovered with her participants that text selection, even the act of carrying a certain text marks one's status within the group. She writes: "Identification with and division from friendship circles might be accomplished by carrying a particular book or folding a note in a particular manner" (23). "Carrying the wrong kind of book, writing the wrong kind of story, passing notes to the wrong people, all might mark one as an outsider or as insider in the wrong group" (118).

Textual Consumption

Texts are consumed to help participants situate themselves within their local context, more global popular culture, and/or larger socio-cultural-political contexts, whether it be to learn literally how to skateboard (including receiving the motivation to do so), how to "be" within a cultural group or socio-political context, or where one belongs or fits in historically with a larger cultural practice. It is important to note, too, that textual consumption is situated in that it differs depending upon the participant and his socio-cultural "make up," especially in relation to age and/or status within the cultural group. For example, younger, less experienced participants consumed texts mainly to learn how to actually skateboard and to learn cultural information regarding skateboarders, places to skate, and various other industry-related information whereas older, more experienced participants consume texts in order to help them get a better sense of the historical perspective of their cultural engagement. In addition to the actual texts participants consume and the ways this shifts over time (as discussed above), another feature of this differentiated textual consumption is the kind and degree to which

participants are “critical” consumers of texts and attitudes towards texts. What follows in this section is a discussion of how less experienced participants consume texts to learn practical information, how more experienced participants consume texts to locate themselves historically within other communities and forms of popular culture, and how attitudes toward texts and critique of them differs according to subject position.

“You’d see if they turned it into something else or like maybe if they had different shapes or different sizes”: Learning practical information

For some, especially less advanced participants, textual consumption is a way for them to learn how to skateboard and learn practical aspects of the sport and culture. This was demonstrated with several instances discussed in the previous chapter in which participants watched videos to help them learn moves, receive motivation to skate, and/or learn about other skateboarders and places to skate. Other texts, such as magazines and catalogs also serve these functions for participants. For example, TS explains how when he first got into skateboarding when he was in 5th grade, he would spend lots of time looking through *CCS* in order to become familiar with the equipment related to skateboarding. He explains,

I remember every time that it [*CCS*] came. I’d flip through like every page at least four or five times. Same stuff but you’d still look through and see if they turned it into a fiber light board which is just a lighter type of board and different construction to it. You know, you’d see if they turned it into something else or like maybe if they had different shapes or different sizes, you know?

In addition to *CCS*, industry magazines such as *Thrasher*, *Transworld*, and *Skateboarder Magazine* also function to introduce my participants to a range of practical matters related to skateboarding. In the field note excerpt below, which takes places at Tommy’s 15th birthday party, Tommy, Nate, and two of their friends, assist me in preparing for my foray into learning how to skateboard. During the party, which consisted of viewing the film *Gridiron Gang*, a pizza dinner, a trip to the skate shop, and some time throwing the

football around in the pizza restaurant parking lot, the four young men and I spent time reading and discussing a recent issue of *Transworld*. The five of us had just returned from the skate shop during which they helped me purchase the requisite parts of a skateboard—a deck, trucks, bearings, and wheels (Nate agreed to sell me grip tape he had at his home for a cheaper price than I could get at the shop.) and our conversation, aided by the magazine, shifted to helping me think about skateboarding shoes.

As we continue to look through the magazine, Nate and I continue talking and he brings up *CCS*, and asks me if I get that. I say I do and that I get the email and the catalog in the mail. I ask if he ever orders from them and he says that he orders shoes from them, and that “Lakys” are good. Tommy shows me in the product section of the magazine an ad for Adidas shoes and tells me that Adidas has started making skateboarding shoes. To emphasize his point, he reaches down below the table, takes off one of his shoes, which is an Adidas skateboarding shoe, and plops it on the table right next to the magazine. After about thirty seconds of examining the shoe, Tommy takes it off the table back to his foot, and when he does I ask the group if it is possible for me to just wear regular sneakers. Virtually in unison, the four say, “No,” and Tommy and another of the young men, the one wearing a Volcom t-shirt, talk about how when they started skateboarding, they wore Filas. Nate explains that regular sneakers don’t grip as well as skateboarding shoes. I ask about Nike shoes, and Nate tells me that Nike skateboarding shoes are not that good, that they have never been good, and Tommy turns to me, lifting his head from the magazine he grips with both hands, and says, “Don’t get Nikes.”

I turn my attention back to the magazine and the five of us all crane our heads downward as Tommy flips through it, stopping whenever he or someone else lunges forward to place his index finger on an image in the magazine. Following suit, I put my finger on an image I recognized, and ask, “What is that?” to which Tommy responded, “Girl...that’s what I used to skateboard. I *love* Girl.” I ask what the difference is between different brands of boards and they say not much and Nate explains that some companies will have different numbers of layers of plywood, between 6, 7, or 8 and how depending on what you want to do, each one will be different. Our conversation moves to trucks, and they tell me that I got good trucks. Tommy grabs one of my trucks lying next to him on the table, and places it in between his two hands, tries to bend it, and unable to do so, says, “these are really good trucks.” Before handing them over to Nate, Tommy points to the place where the screw is and says, “I’ve never seen this before” referring to the type of screw fitting it has. Nate takes the truck, also tries to bend it, and goes on to explain to me, pointing to the screw fixture Tommy mentioned that I need an Allen wrench to loosen and tighten it. He explains to me that I can get the tool

from Element from the CCS catalog but that I will need to make sure I get the right Allen tool. Just as Nate is putting my trucks down, Tommy picks up the box that holds the bearings I just purchased, and he says that he does not think that the guy at the skateboard shop knew what he was talking about that Reds move faster than Lucky's and they are more durable. "Lucky's wear out!" he exclaimed. Tommy goes back to the magazine and as he is about to flip past a page with an array of shoes showcased, the young man, Bill tells him to turn back, that we should grab a pen and "circle the good ones" for me. Tommy says that it is his magazine, and that he is taking it with him, at which Bill suggests that they write them down on a separate piece of paper, so I can take it with me and have it when I buy my shoes. As Nate and I go on discuss how to skateboard, Tommy and Bill close in on the magazine and discuss the shoes, write down their top three choices for me—DVA, Lakai, and Globe—and then hand me the list.

Within this excerpted field note, the issue of *Transworld* and the catalog CCS serve to mediate this group's discussion of the different forms of equipment (trucks, shoes, boards) and tools (allen key) one needs to skateboard. The participants use these texts to suggest to me the means by which I can obtain certain things, such as an allen key or shoes in order to help me become a beginning skateboarder. In addition to learning about equipment, participants engage texts, especially digital texts such as webpages and blogs, to learn other practical information about skateboarding, including upcoming events and places to skate. For instance, during the second summer of my data collection, Matt, Hollywood, and Derrick were planning a trip to Skateteria, a skateboard park in OH and used the internet as a way to learn about the park, including how much it cost to use, what features it had, and who owned and managed it. During one conversation, Matt mentions to me how Rob Dyrdek, "a guy who has a show on MTV, put one [a skate park] in his hometown, Kettering, Ohio," that I could "check it out at www.skateplaza.com," and that "there are pictures and videos on the website."

"I like to learn all I can possibly learn about hardcore, punk, skinhead culture, things like that": Locating Oneself Historically

For some of these young men, texts helped them to locate themselves and their engagement in various forms of popular culture within the larger, more global landscape of a cultural practice, especially from a historical perspective. In other words, some texts helped these young men gain a sense of how what they are doing relates to what has been done before their “dropping into” the cultural practices they engage. For virtually all of the young men who skateboard at Franklin Skate Park, the documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys* and the Hollywood film, *Lords of Dogtown* establish a historical precedence for their own participation in skateboarding and in some ways, these texts function to legitimize their cultural practice by offering a documented historical record.

Additionally, my participants, particularly the older, more experienced ones who had branched out into other forms and communities of popular culture consume texts that also serve to locate them historically within a cultural practice and community outside of skateboarding. For example, when I first met and interviewed Luis, a drummer in a hardcore/punk rock band, he had recently re-read *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* by Stephen Blush and George Petros, a book his friend and band mate gave to him after reading it himself, in order to gain a sense of the history of hardcore/punk rock. In the following interview excerpt, he explains that his reading of the book helped him gain a better sense of the history and culture of the hardcore/punk scene:

Luis: It really opened my eyes to the hardcore scene in general. At first I thought fashion had a bigger part in it than it did, but, it was purely about the music. And people just dressed fucked up because they could. There wasn't really any rhyme or reason behind it, they just did it because they could. Dye my hair fucking blue, green, yellow. Why? Because I can. Shave it? Why not?

RP: Right. Hmm.

Luis: But reading it was definitely...I dunno, it was more just learning...more of a learning experience, really. There's slow parts in the book, but I still took it all in, because I knew it was something. It's all history. Say some people are really interested in American history, or Western civilization, things like that. I like to learn all I can possibly learn about hardcore, punk, skinhead culture, things like that.

RP: Is that probably the best thing you've read on, on hardcore culture?

Luis: Oh yeah. There really hasn't been anything to that extent or depth done before. Stephen Blush really took it to the next level. He just completely went balls out. On the back of it, it even lists every hardcore band from like 1980-1986. And this was before the digital age, before everything was recorded digitally. He has pictures of his entire collection of vinyl, all alphabetized and stuff.

During the same interview, our discussion turned to a documentary, *American Hardcore* that had been recently released on DVD and is based on the book we were discussing.

Luis: You watch that movie. For me, I've been around the hardcore and punk scene nowadays for quite some time, but I look at that, you can't even comprehend how raw and crazy it was back then. There's this part where Black Flag's playing and Henry Rollins is on the mic, and there's this dude in the crowd who's fucking with him up front. Henry's still singing, he grabs the dude with his mic hand and starts beating the shit out of him and the guy's totally into it. He's just like, "Yea, Yea," while he's getting his head busted.

RP: Oh, my god.

Luis: It was just nuts.

RP: And this is like the emergence of it?

Luis: Yea, this was back in like '81, '82. Back then, just what I've gotten from the book and the video... being a Punk Rocker was like... you were completely shunned by society. People would drive by and call you a faggot, throw shit at you, get in fights, constantly. Just because you look different. And it was literally a struggle to survive. You'd have to fight your way just to survive.

RP: So what were these guys doing? Getting together, and keeping each other afloat?

Luis: Yeah, that's where all the crews and stuff within the hardcore scene came together. You'd get crews from different cities, towns, and whatever. It was just a sense of community and brotherhood that everyone had.

Within this discussion, Luis explains how reading *American Hardcore* and viewing the documentary helped him to gain a different sense of historical perspective on his current participation in the punk/hardcore scene than he had previously had. For example, he says how exposure to these texts helped him understand how the fashion styles emerged differently than he understood, saying, "At first I thought fashion had a bigger part in it than it did, but, it was purely about the music. And people just dressed fucked up because they could. There wasn't really any rhyme or reason behind it, they just did it because they could." Also, Luis explains how his interest in reading and learning about the history of the punk/hardcore scene stems from his sense of connection to this popular culture community in general. He says that while some people like to read about American History or Western Civilization, he "like[s] to learn all I can possibly learn about hardcore, punk, skinhead culture, things like that." In this way, Luis locates himself primarily as a participant within this popular culture practice. Luis' interest in learning the history of the cultural practice he's engaged in is reflected also by TS's reading of *The Art of Getting Over: Graffiti at the Millenium* by Steven Powers. TS, a tattoo apprentice and graffiti artist names this text as his favorite book on his myspace page. In a discussion with him, TS explained how, while he didn't necessarily love reading the book, he did appreciate the history he was able to learn about graffiti art. He explains:

I don't know. I'm not going to lie but the book...reading it wasn't that sweet. Like it's more just looking at like all the like how graffiti came to be and like how everything like you know got put together and who the people who were on the forefront. Right on the front there's people like doing chalk on the side of a train

and you know it's like okay that took some motivation or like some ideas and stuff like that. And their real caveman type drawings (Conversation gets interrupted so TS can do some work.)

Similar to Luis' discussion, TS explains his interest in the book stems from the historical perspective it offers ("how graffiti came to be and like how everything you know got put together and who the people who were on the forefront"). Also like Luis, TS discusses his wonderment of the actions of those who came before him ("...it took some motivation or like some ideas and stuff like that."). Interestingly, both participants discuss how the actual reading of these texts was not all that great (Luis discusses how there were "slow parts" in *American Hardcore* and TS says that reading *The Art of Getting Over* "wasn't that sweet"), but that both participants were motivated to read these texts and take away a great deal from them.

In addition to legitimizing their cultural practice, this historical location also helps to inform many participants' current engagement with their culture, namely in the form of "influences." For example, A, another participant who read *American Hardcore* discusses how knowing this history and culture of hardcore/punk music informs his own cultural participation:

RP So who would you say your main influences are, for the band?

A Ah, The Descendents, not musically, but, not like politics-politically, but like politically, like the way they run their band, is something we kind of take after I guess. And musically we probably take after Suicidal Tendencies, The Misfits. Stuff like that.

RP So what do you mean by politically how you run the band?

A Like, it's a punk rock band, so we're not in it to make money, we're not in it to get big, we're in it for fun and for fun for people who are into it, you know? That's what I mean by the politics of the band, you know?

RP Yeah, so you don't want to be pop stars?

A No, that's not punk rock.

As evidenced in A's discussion, knowing the history and normative practices within the hardcore culture are important for the ways he currently participates in the cultural practice in that he can make comparative analyses between who he is in relation to others—historically and contemporaneously.

"It's not a bunch of industry propaganda": Critical Consumption

One of the main ways of distinguishing participants and their textual practices is the degree and kind of their textual critique. While less experienced participants' critique of texts are predominately related to issues of usability and/or costs, more experienced participants critiques of texts focuses on more ideological issues, such as integrity, authenticity, and propaganda. In these ways, less experienced participants' consumption of texts enables their existence "within" a cultural practice, whereas more experienced participants' textual consumption facilitates their existence within and "against" a cultural practice, oftentimes enabling them to restore a perceived loss of its integrity and/or claim a unique, individualized space within the practice as a contributor. This differentiated nature of textual consumption and critique is evidenced in the differing responses to the graffiti and tagging at the park. The less experienced participants typically critiqued the graffiti based on the ways it looks and how it disrupts their actual skateboarding by making the concrete "too slick" and more difficult to skate. While the more experienced participants also critiqued the graffiti for these aesthetic and utilitarian reasons, their critiques of the graffiti focused more on the ways these texts represented them as a cultural group and the socio-political consequences of them, leading many of these more experienced participants to engage in debates about the role of graffiti in the

culture of skateboarding, the socio-demographics and attitudes of the community of Finley at large, the role of the police and city governing body in governing the skate park, and even their own potential political action, in which they would go through the proper channels (i.e. city council) to design and produce one of their own tags. Therefore, while both groups use textual consumption to help them form identities and claim status within the cultural group, they do so differently and for different purposes.

The least experienced participants consume texts more or less uncritically in that they are simply trying to understand the rudimentary aspects of the culture, including the equipment, terminology, and moves. In many respects, this textual consumption is analogous to skating alone discussed in the previous chapters. While these participants typically skate with their friends, they do not yet have full access to others and therefore rely upon texts to help become more advanced participants. As discussed previously within this chapter, these participants read a range of texts, including industry-related catalogs, magazines, and videos. Consuming these texts operates as important ways in which these participants attempt to not only gain access but also display their participant, subcultural status. For example, TS explains the integral nature of skateboarding magazines, particularly the images of skateboarders in them, in helping him to form an identity as a skateboarder when he was a less advanced participant. He says: “Like I remember there was a part, I think I was in 7th grade, every poster I had on my wall was to do with skateboarding. Like I would literally tear apart magazines and just post them up on the wall you know? So it just kind of consumed you and whatever you do.” This being “consumed” by skateboarding during this period of time, and turning to texts and other artifacts to produce this identity is also evidenced in the equipment and clothing

these participants purchase and adorn. These participants are typically the ones who have popular brand boards, whereas more experienced participants use “blank” decks. For example, in the field note excerpt above where Tommy, Nate, and I read and discuss an issue of *Transworld*, at one point, Tommy exclaims how he used to “skate Girl” and that he “loves Girl.” In contrast, Hollywood, a more advanced participant than Tommy explains how when he first skated it was important for him to skate his “favorite company” but now he skates blanks, which is more economical and allows him to personalize his board with his own graphic designs. He says, “Because you know when you first start skating you know you got to skate for your favorite company, but once you start you know spending the money you realize that blank board you know you can design your own graphics is so much cheaper and it’s better.” TS explains how he, too, moved from buying named brand boards to blanks when “the money ran out”: “Not to mention you start buying blanks and stuff like that and posting stickers all over them you know? Stop buying all the 60 dollar custom paint chrome boards and whatnot. You remember those dude [to his friend, Chase] when they started doing the gold and the chrome paint. I was just like, ‘That’s stupid.’ It’s going to be gone in a week and all it’s going to do is leave really bright chrome on any rail you grind on or have done anything on.” Therefore, while least advanced participants draw upon these texts to help them produce an identity as a skateboarder, their textual consumption also works to index their status as a “new” or novice skateboarder, or one who is in the “poser stage” as Luis refers to it. He says,

Luis: There’s the stage where you realize that you’re just that out of place little kid, so you try your hardest to fit in. Then you go through the poser stage, where you have the old guys calling you a “poser.”

RP: What's the poser stage?

Luis: Wearin' the gear, you've got the board beside you, but you're just standing there watching. Posing. Or you send a picture to *Thrasher* magazine. You've got a grimace on your face, doing something stupid, like a backside blunt, or something ridiculous.

The older, more advanced skateboarders have an understanding of these different stages and uses of texts participants undergo as they move from poser to cultural producer.

This, though, does not mean that they will not tease or make fun of those participants who are in the "poser stage." In fact, moving out of the poser stage is indexed not only by one's skating abilities but also textual engagement. Within this stage, participants' textual critique mainly emphasizes the usability and cost of products, not deeper ideological issues. For example, in the above excerpt in which Tommy, Nate, and I are reading and discussing *Transworld*, both Nate and Travis critique various aspects of the equipment and the costs. While these issues are not necessarily unimportant to more advanced participants, they do not constitute the primary form of or reason for critique.

As participants move from their status as the earliest, newest participants, their textual practices change. For skaters, such as Archie, Derrick, and Matt, they, through their textual critique both distance themselves from the identities forged by very novice participants and move closer to more advanced participant status. For example, these participants distance themselves from the types of texts and textual practices in which they themselves participated as newcomers. In some instances, they actually mock these texts and/or textual practices or they adamantly assert that they do not engage them anymore. For example, during one conversation I had with Archie and a friend who were inquiring about my research project, I responded that I was writing about a book about skateboarding, which one of them said was "the coolest subject in the world." During

our conversation they asked me if my book was going to be a “cool’ book? Not like the ones that are out there right now.” Archie interjects with “Yea, like ‘here’s how to ollie.’” The irony in this situation is that Archie himself had read all of the books in the public library about skateboarding, almost all of them which were in the vain of “here’s how to ollie.” In another example, both Matt and Derrick discussed how they read at one time books that provided them with information on skateboarding, particularly how to do certain tricks, but when I asked them if they still read them, they immediately, and quite vehemently, said that they do not, suggesting that they did not need to anymore and did not have the time to anymore since they spent so much of their time with friends at the skate park. Not only does their dismissal of these introductory texts help to distance them from the participant status of newcomer, or poser that gets indexed by those texts but it also implicitly suggests that the functions of these texts—to introduce them to the cultural group and help them learn how to do moves is replaced by skating with others and being at the park.

The older, more experienced skaters’ critical consumption of texts dealt with ideological concerns they, as participants within a cultural community, grappled with, including a sense of authenticity and integrity related to their cultural practice locally and extended more globally. For example, TS discusses at length why he believes *Thrasher* magazine is the best of all skateboarding magazines. He says:

TS *Thrasher* I will say is probably the best skateboarding magazine cause all it is is raw skateboarding. It’s not a bunch of industry propaganda. And like, you know, which it comes into play now [that] Nike is buying like close to everything. Which I’m wearing a pair of Nikes so I can’t really say anything, but you know? Well, it’s kind of funny. People are buying Hurley shirts thinking, you know, I’m buying some independent California company. No. That’s owned by Nike. Like a lot of brands are starting to get bought out by bigger companies because of the fact, you know, it’s [skateboarding] becoming so mainstream and it’s becoming

such a cash crop. Like you know like it used to be like you advertise football teams and stuff and kids always wanted the action figures like ninja turtles or something like that. They always wanted the action figures. Now it's like you know people see Eric _____, Tony Hawk, like all the obvious ones and then unfortunately Bam Margera, that guys a douche bag. But...

Ch Aside from being a dumbass.

TS Yeah dude he made money on just being stupid and that I don't like.

Ch He's a decent skater.

TS Whatever. I think he's a punk rat. He knows how to skate FDR and that's it.

Ch That's hard. He's not the best.

TS That guys sucks. He makes skateboarders look horrible.

[The conversation moves on to discussing the cost of boards and how parents will buy stuff for kids and the overall commercialization of skateboarding.]

RP: So tell me more about the corporate. You were saying *Thrasher* and then these other magazines and how *Thrasher* was all skateboarding and...

TS: *Thrasher* is like, it's just kind of like, you look at the editor. The editor has something to do with every video they put out and it's a lot of the same skaters but most of those skaters are guys who they aren't very popular but their just the diehards you know? They're the ones you see, you know, still like 20 years from now I guarantee I'll still see Tony (inaudible) in magazines. I'll still see John (inaudible) in magazines. You know all those guys. The guys who all they do is just go out and skate, you know? There's parts of their video where all they're talking about is yeah we were out drinking beer and then they decided like I had been thinking about doing this so we headed out to it and we all did it. And it's just kind of like, and when you see the editor he looks like just he looks like he was skater and like when he talks about it he doesn't sound like it's a foreign thing like he's learned about it. It sounds like, you know, he started skating and got into and whatnot and this is what they became and like also with, like back then when they all started skating, too, they did their own magazines. You know now we have everything handed to us, but you know, they did their own magazines, they did their own like photographing and like with that, you know, they got that do it yourself attitude where you know instead of you know just either making it as a skateboarder or not making it as a skateboarder. It came into the play of, you know, there's so many other aspects of board building, board shaping, you know photography, uh editing. You know all that stuff and distribution and they got into all those aspects and are now the like people who

you know we look at nowadays who are like distributing boards out of huge mail order magazines and stuff like that.

Within his discussion of textual consumption (in this instance reading *Thrasher* magazine), TS demonstrates several ways he critically consumes texts and culture. Specifically, through his textual engagement and evaluation, TS makes distinctions between what is and is not authentic within skateboarding culture. For example, he claims that *Thrasher* is the “best skateboarding magazine” because “it is all raw skateboarding” and “not a bunch of industry propaganda.” For TS “raw skateboarding” constitutes skating for the fun of skating, being a “diehard,” and not participating in the cultural practices to get famous or popular or to make money. For example, he explains how the guys who skate for *Thrasher* “aren’t very popular but they’re just the diehard...The guys who all they do is just go out and skate, you know?” In this way, “raw” skateboarding is the practice, about getting on a board and doing it, not getting popular or making money.

However, TS does recognize that skateboarding has undergone (and continues to undergo) major changes, especially related to its growing popularity and commercialization. For example, he explains how “a lot of brands are starting to get bought out by bigger companies because of the fact, you know, it’s [skateboarding] becoming so mainstream and it’s becoming such a cash crop.” He also compares skateboarding’s popularity to more mainstream sports such as football, especially as manifested through the commodification of skateboarders. Within this recognition is a sense of the inevitability of this change in the culture as well as the ways participants, including him are implicated in it: “I’m wearing a pair of Nikes so I can’t really say anything, but you know?” In this way, his critique of texts and culture is not solely based

on making money, commodification, or the commercialization of the culture but rather one that examines and critiques the manner and reasons for making money and/or expense to the integrity of the culture that making money necessitates. What is important is not whether one makes money or not, but more so the manner in which they do it. For example, TS, at another point in our discussion, explains how he could not be happier that Tony Hawk, a skater who has greatly profited from skateboarding becoming a “cash cow,” is skateboarding’s “ambassador” whereas Bam Magera is a “douche bag.” The critique, or resistance, is not in the not doing it (he is wearing Nikes so he can’t say anything) but the motivation and style in doing it. Whereas it is ok that Tony Hawk has made a lot of money, it is not ok that Bam Magera has, since he did so by “just being stupid.”

Also, when TS and Chase discuss the various skaters in magazines, they mention how they do so for the love of the sport, not to get famous. In this sense, as discussed above, understanding the history of the cultural practice is important since one can see the changes that have occurred in the sport. Selling out in this context would not be going commercial and/or making money as much as it would be losing a sense of integrity in doing so. Also, TS mentions how, as a result of their love of and dedication to skateboarding, many older skaters, such as the editor of *Thrasher*, became wealthy and/or famous. He says, “He started skating and got into and what not and this is what they became.” He also says, “All that stuff and distribution, and they [older skateboarders who had to put together their own magazines] got into all those aspects and are now the like people who you know we look at nowadays who are like distributing boards out of huge mail order magazines and stuff like that.” In this way, TS seems to suggest not only

the inevitability of the changing nature of the culture, but also how if one becomes wealthy or famous as a result of this, if it happens *to* them while they are in pursuit of a more lofty goal such as skateboarding for the love of it, then achieving a degree of prosperity is okay. This is similar to another participant's critique of the music industry, especially as related to Hip Hop. He says, "I'm getting sick of the music industry, I'd like to change it a little. I want the right people, the really good musicians and artists to make the money." Within his statement is the recognition of not only the inevitability of the commercial aspects of this popular culture industry but also how there are "right" people who deserve or should get that money and success, people whose art maintains a sense of "integrity" of the cultural practice.

Related to critically consuming texts based on their adherence to "raw" skateboarding versus industry is the idea of credibility and authority. For example, when discussing *Thrasher*, TS explains how the editor of the magazine is credible because "when you see the editor he looks like just he looks like he was skater and like when he talks about it he doesn't sound like it's a foreign thing like he's learned about it." In this sense, credibility and a sense of authority emerges from personal and practical experience with skateboarding, not theoretical or second hand knowledge of the culture. This sentiment is also evidenced in many of my participants' attitudes (especially those of the older, more experienced skateboarder) toward a skate shop in Liberty that is a local, growing chain and is run and operated by non-skaters. One of my participants, for example, when asked if he shopped at this skate shop, said, "Fuck [name of store]" and then proceeded to explain to me how they don't know anything about skateboarding and that the owner is not even a skateboarder. Similarly, Luis, when discussing the author of

American Hardcore, discusses how the author's credibility and authority comes from his wide ranging experiences within the punk/hardcore "scene" when it originated. He says, "Oh yeah, back then this guy [the author]... he wasn't exactly the scene, but this guy knows his stuff. He's been a lot of places, done a lot of things, and he's shared that with everyone else." Participants also critique and evaluate their tattoo artists based on their own ink work. As one participant explains how people "walk right past" a friend of his who is a tattoo artist but only "has a couple arm bands on his leg" whereas people will "walk straight up to [another friend of his] cause he's got his whole neck done." This form of critique is also echoed in the ways my older, more experienced participants discuss music and musicians, especially as related to whether musicians are viewed as being technically good or not at what they do. For example, one participant said about Hip Hop: "Hip-hop now, it shouldn't be called hip-*hop*, it should be called, like hip-*pop*, cause it's pop now, the music industry, I think it's all about 90% of the money now is in hip-hop, and that's like...guys just going out there, like 50-cent, just saying the same thing over and over again in different ways. Can't even rhyme and know it with the song, like he's just kind of talking and making millions off of you. More power to him, but it's not hip-hop, it's hip-*pop*." Another participant explained the differences between "real" music and that which is on the radio. In many instances, these types of critical consumption practices create spaces within popular cultural communities to which they become contributors through a range of textual production and distribution practices, which will be discussed in the next section.

Textual Production and Distribution

Similar to textual consumption, textual production and distribution functions to help participants situate themselves within and in relation to others in their local context, larger popular culture practices, and even broader socio-cultural/political contexts. However, while textual consumption indexes one's subcultural status (as discussed in the previous section), textual production and distribution not only indexes participants' statuses but also actually helps participants "produce," "form," and/or claim identities within these contexts by helping them establish and demarcate socio-cultural and socio-political affiliations, allegiances, and boundaries within the local skateboarding community, larger popular culture communities, their race/ethnicity, religious and philosophical beliefs, and socio-political critiques and ideals. Specifically, textual production and distribution serves a "documentary" function, in which a memory, moment, person can be captured, remembered, and displayed. Also, the very instance of documenting something, especially visibly and locally engenders attention, recognition, and status delineation. Finally, textual production offers a way one can be a part of and eventually "give back" and contribute to the larger cultural practice in which they situate themselves. The remainder of this section will respectively discuss how textual production helps participants form identities in relation to the local skateboarding community, within more global communities of popular culture practice, and within larger socio-cultural and socio-political communities and contexts. Consistent with the textual practices thus far discussed (textual selection and textual consumption), textual production and distribution occurs and means differently for different participants, depending upon socio-cultural factors, especially their age, status within the local community, and race/ethnic affiliations. Specifically, as these young men become more

experienced participants of the local community, their textual production and consumption shifts from functioning to form identities in relation to their local communities to identities in relation to larger popular culture and socio-cultural-political communities.

“That’s going to look great on his myspace page”: Forming identities in relation to their local community

For many participants, especially those who are “next generation” and younger participants, textual production and distribution functions to help cultivate their identities in relation to the local community. Several forms of textual production and distribution that specifically operate for these purposes for my participants include shooting video and/or photographs of their skating feats at the park, designing myspace pages, designing and displaying tattoos, wearing certain t-shirts, and designing skateboard decks. One of the normalized textual practices that occurs actually within the park is capturing digital video and/or photography. What follows is an example such an event in which Archie wants to capture on video his doing a 360 flip, or as he refers to it, a “trex flip”:

At least twenty people are using the park on a warm summer evening, when Archie tells another participant, Joey, that he wants to get a 360 kick flip on camera at some point during the session. It is a move that Archie has been working on for the last week or so, and he does not yet have it captured digitally. After skating for about another ten minutes, Joey, says to Archie that wants to capture the trick now, to which Archie says, “You want the trex flip right now?” Another participant skating with the two responds, “If you ain’t dying, you ain’t living, right?” Joey leaves the park to get his digital camera from his car, and when he returns, goes to where Archie is standing in one corner of the street section of the park, and the two discuss the shot. Archie says to Joey, “Stand in the ‘diamond’ [which refers to a particular location within the street section of the park] and look up kind of. It’ll be the perfect angle.” With camera in hand, Joey skates toward the diamond area, turns and looks toward Archie, and Archie skates over to him in order to show him exactly where he meant. Terry, also skating at the park during this time, skates over to Archie and Joey, and the three discuss the angle, looking at the camera, as Joey holds the camera and Archie, with his hand on Joey’s wrist positions the camera in a few ways, before settling on one. He skates back to the corner of the street area. At this point, several other skaters

either stop skating or slow down and focus their attention on Archie. Archie pushes from his position, rolls into the street section, rides up the pyramid, pops his board into the air, and lands his feet on the ground and not the board, making it an unsuccessful attempt. Joey fidgets with the camera, presumably to delete the captured footage. Archie says aloud to no one in particular, "I'm not doing them right," and then goes on to explain how he usually gets them "up here" and holds his board about 2-3 feet off the ground and parallel to it. As Archie stands on the pyramid, he explains to Joey that he is going to enter into the move differently on his next attempt. As he explains he points out the line he is going to make on his next run, saying to Joey, "Start [filming] when I get up there" and points to a spot on the six foot roll in where he'll be turning back to descend toward the pyramid.

Another participant skates over to Joey and stands next to him, looking over his shoulder as he shoots the film, and Terry skates in and sits on the tabletop right next to where Archie is going to try to land the trick so he can watch. Archie goes again and doesn't land the trick. He tells Joey to hold off and to let him practice it for awhile. On the next try (without the camera at this point) Archie lands the trick, and a participant who was watching him, says, "What I tell you, Archie?" Archie skates around the perimeter of the park a couple of times before telling Joey he wants to try the "trex flip" again. Joey gets into position, and Archie pushes into the concrete to start his descent. Nearly everyone within the park watches him (I think of how in another instance, one participant said to another when he was trying a trick in front of a large group of people, "the stage is yours.") as he rolls into the street area, glides up the pyramid (at which point no one in the park is talking), pops his board into the air, spinning it 360 degrees and landing his feet on top of the deck, thus completing the trick. Board claps and whistles emerge from the observers in the park. Joey skates over to the corner where several participants congregate and starts to show everyone the recording. Archie skates over and he and Joey discuss capturing the same trick from another angle. Joey wants to stand on top of a six foot roll in directly in front of where Archie would be landing the trick whereas Archie argues that it would be "cooler" if he filmed the trick "from below." After a few minutes of discussion, Archie skates off, saying over his shoulder to Joey, "Go anywhere you want."

As evidenced in this description, capturing digital photography and/or video functions not only to document a skater's performance but also help to confer or produce one's status as a participant within the local community. For example, in the above description, by attempting to capture his trex flip on video, Archie draws the attention of other participants in the park, so much so that all activity in the park at the time virtually ceases, save his attempt at a 360 kick flip. Had he been attempting this trick without the

gaze of the video camera, some people would have been observing him and would have applauded his efforts but he would not have had near the attention he did. Subsequent reports of participants' feats by other participants at the park are oftentimes concluded with statements such as, "it's on tape" or "[name of videographer] took video of it." Oftentimes, these captured activities are downloaded to participants' myspace pages, thus offering another, larger venue for circulation and status building than just capturing the video at the park. This was the case when one of Derrick's feats, jumping four barrels—something no one else had done—was captured and within 48 hours downloaded to and displayed on his myspace page. For a skater like Derrick, for whom skateboarding may actually lead to sponsorship and other potential career opportunities, these events, may help to build his ethos and produce his status within the local community as well as potentially to a larger sphere beyond this local community. Additionally, the oral nature in which information gets disseminated quickly and by the next evening, many participants who were not at the park to actually witness Derrick's feats were discussing them, asking other participants questions such as, "Did you hear that Derrick ollied over four barrels?"

This use of textual production and distribution as a means to form an identity and produce participant status within their local context is consistent with many other instances. For example, both Luis and TS have tattoos that signify their allegiance to a "crew" of local skaters that they themselves established. Luis explains the significance of the tattoo: "It's basically me, TS, my friend Fred, Steve, and basically, my closest friends, we're basically like brothers, and we wanted to call ourselves something, like a skate crew." What is interesting about their tattoo is that while everyone else at the park knows

about it, very few people, especially among the younger participants, actually know what it stands for. In this way, and much like other participants' myspace pages, texts help participants to form identities and produce statuses while allowing them also to maintain a sense of privacy, secrecy, and/or sense of exclusion. For example, many participants lie or exaggerate aspects of their identity on their myspace pages or do not even include discernable pictures of themselves on their page.

In another instance, a participant, Larry, created poetry to read on air for a local radio show that actually helped him to produce an identity within his local community and school. Specifically, he explains how he got to know one of the disc jockeys who created a nickname for him and created a forum for him to share his poetry. Larry explains:

I'd call in and I used to write poetry for him like funny poetry like whatever the topic would be whatever he'd be talking about I'd go home after school smoke a bunch of weed, and I'd sit there and I'd write funny poems about whatever he was talking about while I was doing my homework. Half the time I didn't do my homework cause I liked doing it, and I would call in and I'd recite these poems to him and he'd laugh his ass off and play them over the air. And it became this little thing. Like, I'd go to school everyday and people would be like, "Oh I heard you on the radio again. I heard you on there, that's funny. Oh man that's cool." And kind of gave me a good name at school you know? He called me uh, [nickname given to him on the show], "the world's youngest male prostitute," something like [that], cause everybody that called his show that was a regular you know he had names for them. Like umm and I was like the I don't know I was just he called me [nickname] and he'd be like now for another masterpiece theatre with [nickname] and then it'd be me on the air on the telephone reciting whatever poem and I've always loved writing dude.

Within his discussion, Larry explains how his textual production and distribution (in this case, writing funny poetry) worked to help him form an identity within a broader popular culture practice involving a disc jockey and other listeners but also within his more local community, school. Interestingly, Larry explains how his participation within this

popular culture community and the identity and status it facilitated was more significant to him than doing his school work. In fact, throughout our discussions, Larry emphasized how much he loves to write (as he does at the end of this excerpt) and yet goes onto explain how he dropped out of school because he did not feel as if it really facilitated his goals and dreams of writing and playing music, screenplays, and being involved in skateboarding culture. This disparity is echoed by several other participants who would discuss their textual activities, whether they be reading books related to music, to shooting and editing video, to writing and performing music, to making a career of “putting art on people’s bodies” and yet, sometimes within the same sentence explain how these practices felt completely separate from their textual experiences in schools. For example, Brett, after explaining to me his process of writing songs, something he has really begun to do more of and enjoy, explained how, when I suggested that he must do well in his high school English class, said, “Eh, in our English class we don’t write a lot—like we don’t do a lot of stuff like that. We learn like hyperboles and similes and synonyms and all that; we learn the parts of words and that doesn’t interest me.” Luis, an avid reader, explains how, when I asked him to explain why he graduated from high school after five years with a 1.4 GPA, that “traditional studies just didn’t appeal to me.”

*“I hope someday my music will do that to someone like their music has done to me”:
Being a Contributor to and Producer of a Global Popular Culture*

Over time, many participants shift their energy and commit their resources to pursuits outside of skateboarding, especially musical and visual art endeavors. This is especially true for many of the older, more experienced participants, who, while still participants within the local community (and still skateboard at the park), spend increasing amounts of time involved in these other pursuits. In many respects, actually

skateboarding, for these participants, functions mainly as a form of recreation. For example, TS explains how he does not skateboard as much, since his new “livelihood” as a tattoo artist involves using his hands. He says, “I’m starting to fall back in skating and I’m not skating as much anymore cause now I got my hands are my livelihood so you know you got to account for that and you got to start just taking it easy. You can’t just be going out and skating as hard as you used to.” Similarly, James explains how things over the last few years have changed a lot for him. Whereas he used only to skate, having aspirations to go “pro,” he has since branched off into other things, including playing the guitar and drums with a local band. He explains:

Um, things have changed a lot for me the last couple years. Because like all I used to do was skate. Right now, I’ve kind of branched out and started doin’ other things. I’ve been in a couple bands the last couple years...like three years ago that’s all, “I’m doin’, I’m gunna turn pro, I’m gunna do this.” That’s all I gotta do—just skate. And now that I’ve found other things—I can prolly make it in this band. So now I’m juggling skating, working, and being in a band now so it’s like- it’s kinda hard. Now I definitely skate less than I used to last year. Plus, I broke my jaw on that damn ramp right there so that kinda discouraged me a little bit. And I dislocated my shoulder last year too. That was a bad year last year and I don’t want to redo it. Cuz I realize now if I get hurt that bad it puts me out a couple weeks or months that it’d screw the rest of my life up cuz I can’t play guitar with a dislocated arm.

For these participants, their decreased participation in skateboarding is complemented by their increased participation in other, larger communities of popular culture practice, especially related to music and tattooing. In fact, many of these participants either have jobs or are pursuing jobs related to these communities of cultural practice. For example, TS is currently a tattoo apprentice, a job several of the younger, less experienced participants have expressed interest in pursuing; James is a member of a band and works part-time at the local skate shop; Luis, when not skateboarding or working full time as a welder, is the drummer for a local punk/hardcore band; and Larry, in between the second

and third summers of my data collection, actually moved to California from Michigan to try and make it with his band—a long time dream of his. In trying to reconnect with him, he replied to my email with the following message: “hey, wow, thats crazy... ha, yeah i moved far away but i would still take part in your project over the internet if you would like... i moved to california a while back with my band... but yeah, hey! hit me up and let me know whats up man... peace...” For these participants, being a participant in a community of pop cultural practice means being a contributor, a producer of popular culture.

In many respects, skateboarding seems to function as a “gateway” into other popular cultural pursuits. For example, by my third summer of data collection, Derrick, who had not previously had much to say about the role of music in his life, had written, recorded, and distributed via his myspace page several hip hop songs with several older participants, including James. Also during that summer, Matt had for the first time earned money drawing tattoo designs for other people. This shift in textual production and distribution practices reveals how popular culture is not simply pleasurable, fun, or play for these participants but deeply engaging and meaningful forms of cultural expression, so much so that they consistently seek out opportunities within the range of popular cultural activities to make meaning of their lives, find an occupation, and be a contributor and producer of a cultural community. For some of these participants, their pop cultural textual production and distribution is a way for them to cultivate the pleasure, fun, and/or aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual outlets/opportunities that drew them into the practice in the first place. For others, their textual and cultural production and distribution is a way to do/have a job that makes sense to them, one in which they

can maintain a sense of dignity and feel good about, and make money. For example, TS explains how working as a tattoo artist apprentice differs from any other type of work experience he had, how for his job as a tattoo apprentice he is motivated and invested.

He explains:

Most jobs, you know when I was still in school like I used to I got up every morning and I fucking hated it. Like I'd come in in sport shorts and ratty t-shirts just cause I didn't care. Like I didn't want to be there, I didn't care about being there. And then even when I did co-op, I hated being there. I got paid for it and I hated being there. And like look at this place [tattoo shop where he is an apprentice]. I get paid here and there when I manage the shop. Like today [name of a tattoo artist who works at the shop] is gone so yeah I'll maybe get paid at the end of the day like 10% of whatever [tattoo artist working that day] made that day so like you know if he made 200 bucks I'd made 20 bucks. And you know with that, that works for me cause I'm doing something that I know in ten years I'm going to wake up and not hate my life. I'm not going to wake up and go, "Ugh, I should've done this, I should've done that."

It was something that I could still skateboard, I could still do most of the stuff I still liked doing and it was also a lifestyle that I really liked living. You know it's a blue collar job which I've never been about white collar stuff. I've never really liked you know doing paperwork and stuff like that. And you know you got to work everyday for all the money you're getting. You know nothing is just handed to you. You've got to earn your reputation through your work. You know you've got to really apply yourself to make a name for yourself and actually be one of the well paid artists. Some artists make like 30,000 a year or something up to 100,000 a year. And like you just kind of, it all depends on how much you make yourself into and stuff like that. It kind of almost reminded me of skating. Like it didn't matter like you know no one was handing me (inaudible). It's like whatever I did, that's what I got in return. I kind of liked doing that.

Within this excerpt, TS explains how both school and jobs not related to popular cultural communities did not appeal or make much sense to him. Specifically, he explains how he "fucking hated" and "didn't care" about these situations. In contrast, working as a tattoo artist apprentice allows TS to engage in something that feels more congruent both in terms of skills and sensibilities as well as lifestyle. His choice to be a tattoo artist apprentice still allowed him to skateboard, work with his hands, explore his creativity,

not have to sit behind a desk “doing paper work,” and earn money based on how hard he works and how good he gets at what he does. TS’ perspectives on his participation in work, school, and popular culture communities resonate with those of several other participants. For example, Larry discusses how while he was in school, he was not progressing in either skateboarding or musical production. He explains: “Then I dropped out of school my senior year of all years. The beginning of senior year and said screw this you know? I just want to learn how to play guitar and skateboard and you know to date I’ve learned probably 30 really awesome tricks on my skateboard, I’ve learned endless amount of music and I’m so happy that I did that.” He goes on to explain how he wants to go back to school (i.e. community college) to take writing classes (to help him develop screen play ideas, song writing, and to help him write music reviews), graphic design courses (to help him think about how to create, produce, and distribute Compact Discs), and musical theory courses (to facilitate his own musical abilities). For TS, Larry, and many other participants these popular cultural communities facilitate a type of identity formation in which the participants are, or have the opportunity to become producers of and contributors to the community’s cultural practices. For example, one participant explained how in addition to the idea that in skateboarding a participant “can still make up new tricks,” at the park he feels like he “belongs there” because he’s “got something to say,” and he’s “trying to get his word out.” He contrasts this with being a participant in school, where he says, “you can’t say nothing back to the teachers, you can’t, you can’t teach *them*, they just try to teach you. You try to teach them, they’ll just kick you out. As far as teachers, they don’t care what you’ve got say.”

For some participants, textual and cultural production and distribution is an opportunity for them to “give back” to and leave a legacy within a community of cultural practices and other participants within it that they feel like had given them so much. For example, Larry speaks of his aspirations as a musician: “When I get so hell bent, when I get so frustrated with all these thoughts about that kind of shit [large existential questions, such as what is the meaning of life], I listen to music. You know and it just kind of soothes me, and I hope someday my music will do that to someone like their music has done to me, you know? Like I want to be able to, but I mean before I pass the torch you got to receive it, you know? And I mean, you know, like ACDC says, it’s a long way to the top you know and if you want to rock and roll all you can do is try.” In some ways, this desire to give back connects with the ways in which participants, oftentimes through their textual production and distribution and social action, create venues and forums for themselves and others to engage popular culture. Perhaps the quintessential example of this phenomenon is the development of Franklin Skate Park, which was made possible due to the efforts of many of the participants, especially TS. He explains:

It’s kind of, I don’t know, it’s almost kind of rewarding at least for me you know because I worked three years for it and to know that many, like I haven’t seen it one day where people haven’t been there besides like the winter and stuff you know or really bad weather but like it’s good to know like you know you put something, like even if I can say that’s all I’ve really done through skateboarding is put that park there like I did something that you know not many people get to say they’ve done and not many people get to be responsible for and I’m really psyched about the fact that these kids now have somewhere to go. Like when we started skating you know we used to get kicked out of the post office every frickin day, every day. Kicked out of the high school everyday. And the worst part was we didn’t have cars back then so you had to skate all through town to get to these places and you were there for maybe 20 minutes before you got kicked out.

Later in the same interview, TS mentioned how the skate park is one of the things he is most proud of in his life and that he looks forward to the day where he can take his kids

there to teach them how to skateboard. Similarly, other participants have created venues for other forms of popular culture. For example, James coordinated an all day music festival a summer before I started my data collection in order to bring together a range of local bands and people. Actually in response to my inquiry as to how he learns all that he knows about skateboarding and/or music, he explains how he spends time with many other people interested in the same things he is as a way to learn from them. He then goes on to explain the music festival he coordinated: “I had a show out at my house when I lived in Pleasantville with like 20 bands and I advertised for like 2 months and I had like 240 somethin’ people at my house....I called it the show out at Hicktown cuz it was in the middle of nowhere and it was sweet. It lasted from like noon til midnight and so many people went to it- even people from way out of town- from Mt. Sunrise and stuff come. Advertised on the Internet and stuff. It’s frustrating cuz people come up to me- hey what’s up James? And I’m like I don’t even know who you are.” In both of these situations, TS and James created venues for themselves and others to engage popular culture.

Regardless of their particular functions textual production and distribution serves, for all of these participants, their textual production and distribution is about forming an identity within these larger communities of popular cultural practice as well as the larger socio-economic-political contexts. These young men do not see themselves as simply people who skateboard, play music or draw art but as skateboarders, musicians, artists, and producers of culture.

*“I wanted to join something that would take a stand against that [racial bigotry]”:
Socio-cultural-political affiliations*

For some participants, textual production and distribution facilitates their identity formation and indexes their affiliations in relation to larger socio-cultural-political contexts, including race/ethnicity and even conceptions of youth. Perhaps the most obvious—and visible—function of this type of textual production and distribution is through tattooing. Using their bodies as canvases, all of the participants—whether they actually have tattoos or are waiting to reach their legal age to get inked—use tattoos as ways to demarcate socio-cultural/political affiliations. For example, all of the Latino participants (Derrick, Matt, Luis, Tommy) either have or plan to get tattoos related to their racial/ethnic heritage. For example, Derrick explains how he wants to get a tattoo of “Mexican Prayer Hands” (discussed in chapter four), Tommy plans on getting various tattoos representing his family and religious affiliations (as discussed above), and Luis’s tattoo of “Mi Familia” and “Mom” are ways for him to inscribe publicly familial and ethnic/racial affiliations. Additionally, participants typically use tattoos as a memorial to family members and/or friends who have passed away. For example, A explains why he has a tattoo of an angel for a woman whose sons he grew up with; he says that “she was like a second mom, and she passed away like 4 years ago of cancer, so I got that [a tattoo of an angel].” Also, for some, tattoos are used to espouse religious and/or philosophical beliefs. Most of the participants had religious symbols integrated into their tattoos (i.e. crosses, praying hands, imagery of Jesus Christ) and some had sayings or other symbols which denoted a philosophical belief or a remembrance of some type of life lesson learned.

In addition to these uses, participants use textual production and distribution as a means to engage in socio-political critique. For example, Luis has two tattoos he

designed related to his socio-political beliefs around issues of racism. One of them is a tattoo with a swastika on fire inside of a no symbol. Near that tattoo, Luis has a tattoo of the word *SHARP*, which is an acronym for Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice, a socio-political organization that is, as its name implies, an anti-racist skinhead organization.

Below Luis discusses his SHARP tattoo:

RP: Tell me about SHARP.

Luis: I don't stand for racial bigotry at all. That's one of the things I will take a hard long stance on, not hesitate to punch somebody in the face for it cuz it's just not good.

RP: How did you get hooked up with SHARP? How'd you hear about it?

Luis: It's appealed to me ever since I was in high school. Especially growing up in Finley and being a minority. This is just ridiculous. Even some of my friends: Nigger this, Spick that. I was just like, come on; this is just pointless. Even some of my friends were using it just all the time and I was getting sick of it. It was funny for a little bit, but after awhile it just gets old. I wanted to join something that would take a stand against that. There's no sense to say something's not right if you don't take action against it. That's just how I feel about it.

RP: So how did you hear about it?

Luis: Um, just being a part of the punk/hardcore scene. Ever since high school or junior high...the skinhead lifestyle appealed to me because it was just your standard blue collar worker guy: they didn't bitch about coming from a broken home. They're just people standing up for what they believe in...and all the other skinheads that they hang out with are like brothers...there's a certain brotherhood within that scene. Everybody just hangs together real tight.

RP: Are there meetings you go to? Or, are you just a representative?

Luis: It's not really like...I don't know...it's tough to explain...it'd be like calling myself a punk...those are different kinds of punk rockers. It's not really an organization...it's a subset of the skinhead movement; it's just somethin' that you can choose to be.

RP: That tattoo you have- have you seen that on other people?

Luis: That's actually something I came up with. But the idea behind it; there's a lot of people that have it. I've seen that numerous places on numerous people.

In this discussion, Luis explains how his textual production as manifested through several of his tattoos, functions not only to index particular socio-cultural affiliations (i.e. SHARP organization) but also make socio-political critique about some facet of society, in this case issues of racism. The two tattoos Luis discusses are both highly visible as they are placed on his forearms; additionally, the swastika on fire draws upon a well-known, emotionally-charged symbol to provoke thought and state Luis' case boldly, as if this symbol is imbued with the frustration he feels about this issue. Additionally, this example illustrates how when compelled to take social action, Luis turned to textual production. Finally, it is important to note how Luis was drawn to this particular socio-political organization and critique through his engagement with popular culture, an aspect of engagement with popular culture that is consistent with many other participants. For example, oftentimes engaging popular culture will facilitate participants' development of a critical consciousness, particularly related to issues of social inequity and injustice related to issues of race, class, and age, as well as a politicized spirit to act on behalf of these things, oftentimes through their popular culture textual production. For example, for several participants assisting me with the production and distribution of my dissertation functions as a way for them to critique and create a counter-narrative around the "stereotypes" of skateboarders, people with tattoos, punk rockers, and/or young people. In some way, my dissertation provides them with an outlet to at least voice their perspectives. In other words, some of my participants saw my project and their collaboration as an opportunity to inscribe meaning to their lives and engagement with

popular culture differently than the ways they believed others perceived them. For example, Kevin, interested in helping me out because he believed I was “trying to build something” with the park, spoke about how he is concerned that he and the other users of the park get easily labeled as “juvenile delinquents,” “skater punks,” or “stoner skaters,” just simply because they skateboard. He explains:

Kevin: People look at the skate park and think that this is a haven for juvenile delinquents, and it honestly isn't. I've met some of the best people up here that I've ever met in my life.

RP: Why do you think people would think that this is a haven for juvenile delinquents?

Kevin: Because of generalization to skateboarders, to skateboarder punks, things like that. I've been skateboarding since I was 14, and the thing is is that everybody that knows me thinks of me as a very respectful person. I don't do any drugs, drink, I'm completely sober with everything. I don't I don't like my mind being altered, and yet, it's sad that if I come up here, I can be labeled as a skateboarder punk, as a *stoner* skater, something like that. It's had a lot of bad rep. Some of the parents that stood up here and said, “All those kids are bad and all that.” They should honestly come up here and actually meet some of us because we're good people. And, the only time you'll ever see any of us with a bad attitude is if we are shown disrespect. And that applies anywhere. This is our getaway, and this is our paradise. If we didn't have this, what would we have? Finley does not offer much at all. This is the only place for kids, for teens to hang out, and I think it should be shown a lot more respect than it does.

RP: You mean by the town, by the community...?

Kevin: By the town, by the community, and maybe have the parent figures look at it in a little bit more of a positive way.

Within this discussion, Kevin explains how he is concerned by the ways young people, especially skateboarders in Finley and in society at large are conceptualized and labeled. He recognizes that just by virtue of selecting to engage in a practice such as skateboarding, he is implicated in a larger web of socio-political arrangements, which in this instance potentially index him as a deviant. Both this understanding that engagement

in popular cultural practices implicates them into larger socio-political arrangements and an interest in problematizing these is consistent with several other participants' views and well as motivation in helping me with my project. For example, Luis, as quoted in the very beginning of this dissertation, explains that he is interested in helping to get the word about skateboarders and punk rockers "out there" since he believes there exists a misconception about participants in the cultural communities, or as he says, "There's a lot of people in this world that have a common misconception about skateboarders and punk rockers, and a lot of people just think that we're just a bunch of loser, drop-out, drug users that have nothing better to do with their time than to raise hell and skateboard, and that's not the case." Also, Larry (also quoted in chapter one) explains how "it's completely backwards" in that so many of the so-called "youth in crisis" are actually some of the nicest people he has every met. He says, "And people, you know, the rest of society they hear about that or they see my tattoos they're like they're like, "Oh my God! What a waste of the youth." You know? Or something, but if you actually take the time to go to these concerts and to meet these people that go to these tattoo conventions and stuff—the coolest freakin' people your ever going to meet. They're so happy, so loving and caring you know. Just...it's completely backwards."

Conclusions

When this group of young, working-class men engages popular culture, they use a range of multi-modal texts both to help index and produce their statuses within the local community, global popular cultural communities, and larger socio-political contexts. In addition to the socio-cultural/political functions, textual engagement function "ontologically" in that it serves as a space/venue/forum for play, fun, pleasure, pain,

exploration, experimentation, and development of their spiritual, philosophical, and aesthetic sensibilities. All textual activity is conducted socially and in relation to others, even when textual activity is done “alone.” In instances when one consumes/produces a text “alone,” they oftentimes do so only to later share it with others, to get feedback and/or for identity formation. Also, textual activity is situated in that it differs depending upon the participant and his socio-cultural “make up,” especially in relation to age and/or status within the cultural group.

In addition to demonstrating these aspects of textual activity within this cultural community, this chapter points to various ways in which textual consumption and production/distribution practices function in relation with one another. Although parsed out into separate sections within this chapter, textual consumption and production/distribution practices are mutually constitutive of one another. In one sense, textual consumption practices depend upon the identity and subcultural status of participants while at the same time, identity and status is actually produced through textual production and distribution practices. In this way, for many participants their textual production/distribution (which produces different identities) changes the nature of their textual consumption. For instance, as participants produce texts such as tattoos graffiti art, or music, they begin to select different texts. More significantly, as my participants themselves become producers and distributors of texts, they more critically consume these texts based on their insider knowledge and ability levels. For example, James discusses how being a musician changes how he listens to music. He says,

James: After being a musician for a couple years, like people that don't really play instruments or know what they're really doin' with music- like you listen to the radio and yeah that sounds sweet but if you're actually in a band and you're trying to do something different and technical. Just like

especially like Caught [name of station] and all that- it's just like all so simple and stupid you know.

RP: What's Caught?

James: Uh, sort of pop rock, Z 104 is what I'm talkin' about like you know- play like- I don't even really pay attention to the radio much. Z 104 plays all the new genres of rock- mainstream styles of rock that apply to people that don't listen to music really or play [that] music really. Cuz you play it and it may be fun at first but it's not technical enough to keep you occupied. I listen to technical, super thorough music that's complicated and you would never learn how to play it. You listen to it on the radio and you're like yeah you could look it up on the Internet and play it. Just- like easy. The type of metal that we play is so complex. You could listen to it but you're not going to figure it out- we've got technical weaves and so forth. We mix- you know our lead's consistent. Go back to Classic Rock- go back to Hendricks and go back to even Pink Floyd and all that stuff- you mix different kind of guitar leads with new age metal and it sounds technical.

In his discussion, James explains first how he distinguishes himself (and other musicians) from non-musicians in that he, as a musician listens to music differently. First, he indicates that he does not “even really pay attention to the radio much.” Also, he explains how something that might “sounds sweet” on the radio usually is “so simple and stupid” and not “technical enough to keep you occupied.” Implicit in James' explanation of this phenomenon is that participants listen to music to facilitate their playing of music. He also uses the radio and the music on it as a method of comparison for his own music production, which is related to the ways other participants establish a distinction between “authentic” or “real” popular culture and “mainstream” or commercial forms of popular culture. Specifically, he demonstrates this distinction by explaining how the music on the radio could easily be figured out (“You listen to it on the radio and you're like, ‘Yeah, you could look it up on the Internet and play it.’ Just—like easy.”) in comparison to his own “complex” music, which if someone heard is “not going to figure out.”

As participants become more “critical consumers” of texts, they begin to conceptualize various ways they can produce and distribute texts, oftentimes in response to these critiques. For example, Larry explains how when he reads music reviews with which he disagrees, he feels like he wants to write music reviews. He says, “I’ve always thought about it [writing for a magazine]. I’ve always wanted to. And more so because I read all these reviews on stuff and all these critics use you know all that is is one person’s thoughts about something you know and I hate it when I see a CD, I got out and buy it and just love it and I look I’m reading Rolling Stone and someone is like this is crap. I’m like what is wrong with the world you know?” This desire to produce texts emerging from critical consumption or even a sense of frustration or desire to restore a perceived sense of loss of integrity is also evident in one participant’s interest in making hip hop the “art it should be.” He says, “My lyrics are like poetry. My goals, to get hip-hop back in poetry, the art that it should be.”

This recursive relationship between textual consumption and production/distribution is illustrative of that between literacy and popular culture. Specifically, participants, as evidenced throughout this chapter both learn popular culture through literacy and learn/develop literacy through their engagement with popular culture. For example, in the process of shooting digital photography and/or video, participants learn, practice rhetorical skills, such as camera angles; when they read magazines, critical skills; or when they design tattoo visual aesthetics elements of design; when they produce music, lyric writing; and when they put together digital blogs learning about issues of spatial design. Also, participants must use their reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and designing skills in order to engage popular culture. For

example, participants read magazines to find out about equipment, read books to learn the history of their global cultural communities, shoot digital videos and create blogs to produce and index certain identities within their local cultural community, and write and produce music to become participants within a global cultural community. Finally, this chapter illustrates the cultural logics and reasoning behind my participants' literacy engagement. Specifically, literacy only makes sense/engaged when it is multimodal, cross-pop cultural, connected to lived/real practice/cultural engagement, and leads to further engagement (production begets consumption, and vice versa).

Chapter Seven

Beyond the Bowl: Assumptions, Conclusions, and Considerations

Assumptions

The ways that teachers envision their adolescent learners has everything to do with how they will teach these learners, especially given that most teacher education programs train teachers to focus on the needs of the learner. Interpreting a learner's needs, however, means that one must have a way of constructing the learner, a vision of who that learner is. Traditionally, this vision has come from developmental psychology which, along with cognitive psychology, has been the theoretical linchpin for most of teacher education. However...this process of constructing the 'psyche' of the learner, and the life stage of that we call 'adolescence,' occurs within a social, cultural, and historical context.

Lewis and Finders (2002: 102)

The central assumption underlying this dissertation is the belief that how "adolescence" and "youth" are understood and conceptualized significantly impacts the ways young people are advocated for/with, intervened on behalf of, and organized and arranged within socio-cultural-economic-political contexts, including formal schooling institutions. In fact, conceptions of "youth" and "adolescence" as knowable, measurable entities and the development of social, economic, political arrangements meant to serve this population are mutually constitutive processes that actually work to produce what has become understood as naturalized aspects of adolescence and/or youth (i.e. being peer-oriented, rebellious), including youth "problems" or "issues." For example, as people between the ages of ten and twenty became knowable as "adolescents" at the turn of the 20th Century—tumultuous, fragile, and in need of adult intervention—they were removed from adult-like responsibilities, especially the world of work, prescribed a "slow, steady coming-of-age" (Lesko, 88), and arranged into same-sex and same-age peer groups. These social, economic, and political reconfigurations left young people with more leisure time, more economic dependence on adults, and fewer responsibilities—all

of which justified increased adult supervision, surveillance, and control over young people's lives. Therefore, at the same time adolescence as a distinct life stage emerged as a construct, so did new forms of governing, interacting, teaching, and disciplining this group of people, or as Lesko (2001) says, a variety of "techniques of naming, studying, diagnosing, predicting, and administering [this] identifiable adolescent population" (69). Austin (2001) explains how the newly-defined experts on adolescence at that time "...built on older traditions of adult chaperonage among the middle and upper classes and argued that this [adolescence] was a period of life best spent under adult supervision within the confines of one's own age group..." (26-7). For example, the "onset" of adolescence brought with it The Playground Association of America (founded in 1906), which attempted to organize young people's leisure time through structured and productive activities "that would promote discipline and control" (Lesko, 75), organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the Future Homemakers of America, and public programs such as the juvenile justice system.

While these social organizations and structures supported the newly-conceptualized adolescence, high schools eventually became a prime locale for the management, surveillance, and coordination of young people's lives and attitudes, particularly in relation to their status as adolescents. Palladino (1996) explains that experts who popularized and reified the dominant discourse of adolescence believed that in high schools adolescents "could work through the storm and stress of their teenage years in a disciplined, wholesome, adult-guided environment...[whereby] in the process, they would discover their talents and goals, develop good work habits, and learn the value of respect for authority" (xv). The school subject "English" especially would be

described as a central place to get adolescents to identify and steer themselves in terms of moral, racial, gendered, and civic ends. For example, Brass's (2006) examination of early 20th century pedagogical texts illustrates how the construct adolescence linked English teaching to a range of racial, economic, and moral panics. On one hand, adolescence was described as a transitional, and thus dangerous, time where students would be turned, or turn themselves, towards what early English educators described as the highest—or lowest— ideals and sentiments of the race. On the other hand, the invention of adolescence made possible pedagogies guided by students' "natures." Specifically, if psychologists like G. Stanley Hall (1904) argued that adolescence was a time of budding emotions, desires, and social identifications, English teachers reasoned that it was "natural" to work upon and through emotions, desires, and identifications to shape how adolescents understood and mastered themselves. Since its emergence, then, English could be described less as a field of study than as a site for shaping how adolescents understood and managed their relations with their self, others, and the world (Peel, Patterson, & Gerlach, 2000).

Collectively, schools and other forms of governing young people "...emphasized the manipulation of emotions, keeping youth asexual, unintellectual, dependent, and watched by peers...in both public and private settings experts organized recreation, school, scouting, and, above all, love" (Lesko, 89). In doing so, these practices normalized and reified a version of adolescence as a time of coming of age, incompleteness, in need of adult guidance, and biological determinism—all of which continued to justify the proliferation of social structures designed to control, monitor, and discipline young people. Denaturalizing these governing mechanisms and commonplace

conceptions of adolescence suggests that adolescence as it was initially conceptualized, subsequently reified, and is currently understood says more about a set of social, political, and economic relations at any one time in America than it does inherent characteristics of human beings. For Palladino (1996), the ways young people are understood “has as much to do with a changing economy, a national culture of consumption and individualism, and the age-graded, adolescent world of high school as it does with inexperience or hostility to adult rule” (xxii). For Finders (1997) “...the characteristics of adolescence as a developmental stage are not so much a part of this stage because they are biologically wired or psychologically triggered. They emerge because they are ideological constructs that are fostered by the schedule and structure of the junior high school” (46).

In addition to broader social arrangements constitutive with particular conceptions of young people, micro-level educational practices, such as curricular decisions, instructional methods, and the ways secondary educators think about their students, content, and pedagogy are also mutually constitutive with conceptions of young people. For example, Finders (1998/1999) explains how the ways a group of pre-service English teachers understood adolescence as a life stage undergirded the ways they conceptualized not only their secondary students but also their own pedagogical practices. Specifically, these teachers regarded adolescence as a biologically-determined “natural life cycle” that ensnared young people in “raging hormones” and rendered them “incompetent.” These conceptions homogenized adolescents by denying their diversity and neglecting their personal histories and thus worked to produce an “invented adolescent” for these prospective teachers—one who is either an “uncivilized beast or as a disembodied

hormonal surge” (256). These “discursive filters,” Finders argues, legitimized these teachers’ primary concerns with classroom management and pedagogical practices designed to “domesticate,” “herd,” “rein in,” “corral,” and “tether” secondary students (258). She writes, “From their perspective, these pre-service teachers reduced the teacher’s position to controlling those surges of energy and helping students gain comfort during this stress-ridden time. In every interview, pre-service teachers characterized the responsibility of the middle school teacher as providing control. In none of the interviews were intellectual capacity or curiosity mentioned” (258). Furthermore, she notes how when the actions of the adolescents matched the pre-service teachers’ normalized understandings of adolescence, these were seen as “normal” or “typical” (e.g. acting up, being out of control), whereas “when the actions did not match (e.g. kids reading *The Bluest Eye*), rather than treat the assumptions [of adolescence] as problematic, these pre-service teachers described the[se] behaviors as ‘extraordinary’ and ‘amazing’” (257).

Lesko (2001) suggests that one way young people are constituted is through the definition of the socio-political “problems” and that re-conceptualizing different “public problems” could work to change the “needs” of youth and reconstitute how young people are understood and intervened with/on behalf of. In this vein, the next section of this chapter explores questions, issues, and “problems” the findings and conclusions of this study make visible in relation to conceptualizing young people and schooling practices and principles. Although not directly related to formal schooling, this study investigates the nature of learning, literacy, and young people’s participation in meaningful cultural activities, and therefore, I believe, has something to contribute to thinking about the ways

young people are understood and consequently schooled. Specifically, the next two sections of this chapter draw attention to the ways the findings of this study help re-think normalized conceptions of young people and organizing principles of schools and secondary English/Literacy education pedagogical practices. Not meant to be prescriptive or even considered implications, I put forth these questions, issues, and “problems” in an effort to facilitate dialogue about deeply-ingrained, seemingly natural schooling practices that have consequences for young people.

Conclusions and Future Directions: Re-thinking “Youth”

Despite the risks of doing so, I think we have to advocate in a way that undermines the monolithic view of adolescents as supposedly all the same and as fundamentally different from adults. We must move between and against the confident characterizations of youth, which involves including teenagers as *active* participants (not tokens) in educational and other public policy deliberations. I am not just trumpeting “one student voice,” but calling for the imagining of concrete practices in which youth demand and exercise adultlike responsibilities, acknowledging that teenagers are also affected by the commonsense reasoning about their group.

Lesko (2001: 199)

This study demonstrates how local and global popular culture communities constitute key sites in which youth actively struggle to ascribe meanings to their lives. For the participants in this study, popular culture, more so than schools and many other contexts and sites, afford them opportunities for this struggle. In this way, I refer to what they find in and through their engagement with popular culture as an “opportunity identity” rather than an “oppositional identity,” which is the way youth identities formed through their engagement with popular culture are normally conceptualized. Within their production of opportunities and the identities they constitute in their production, these young men find pleasure, status, “a second home,” a place to be a contributor, and overall a place to be somebody worth being. As evidenced throughout this dissertation, though,

this process of meaning making and identity formation is wrought with contradictions and tensions which illustrate the complex ways these processes take shape. Specifically, participating within popular culture communities enables the participants in this study to form identities in relation to macro-level conceptions of youth as well as within their own local cultural communities. These oftentimes conflicting identities afford my participants opportunities to create a space, quite literally, that links them in solidarity to others within their local community and makes them feel important, powerful, and unique in relation to larger socio-political contexts at the same time that they vie for status and distinction within their local cultural community. This contested space reveals how for these participants difficulties arise when trying to reconstitute themselves in relation to larger socio-political mechanisms of categorization, such as youth, at the same time that they are reconstituted by these very mechanisms of categorization.

As part of their attempts to be somebody worth being in their eyes and according to their popular cultural community logic, these young men find and/or produce in popular culture a range of subject positions, social arrangements, and relationships among each other that may not readily be available in other contexts. This study uses the learning and literacy practices of a group of skateboarders at Franklin Skate Park to illustrate these subject positions, social arrangements, and relationships produced within this space. Specifically, the analytical chapters of this dissertation (especially chapters five and six) demonstrate how the learning and literacy activities within this space are inextricably tied to issues of local and global identity, subcultural status, and socio-political meaning making. One of the key findings of this study is that literacy and learning practices only make sense to the participants when these practices are part of a

larger engagement within a cultural practice, not as decontextualized activities or skills undertaken to be useful at a subsequent date and time. Another key finding of this study is that literacy and learning practices are unknowable apart from participants' sense of identity and/or status in relation to the local popular cultural community and/or global cultural communities. In this way, this study illustrates how sociocultural factors, especially "sub" sociocultural factors, such as local status, inform, produce, and constitute the nature of participants' engagement in learning and literacy practices. Another central finding in this study is that cross-age groupings function as an important social arrangement within this context as it produces a range of social peer relationships, including mentorship, apprenticeship, and friendships, especially between "adults" and "youth," that are not often available in many contexts. A fourth significant finding in this study is that participants in the popular cultural community examined had available to them and produced a range of points of entry into the cultural community, including as significant producers and shapers of and power brokers within the cultural community. Another major finding of this study is that all textual activity for these participants is multimodal (which is reflective of the values and needs of the cultural community) and reciprocal in that textual consumption and production are mutually constitutive processes.

Looking across these central findings of this study and returning to the main research questions, which ask how and why a group of young people engage literacy and learning practices as part of their engagement with popular culture, this study, by examining the logics by which a group of young men participate in local and global popular culture communities—how, when, where, and why they engage these cultural communities and what their engagement does for and says about them—offers a

perspective of youth that steps aside (as much as possible) from understanding young people through the normalized terms they typically are, especially as related to their academic (non)achievements. In this way, this study reveals how a group of young men understood within one framework of knowing young people and their needs, can be deemed in “crisis,” and when understood within a different way of knowing young people and their needs can be re-conceptualized as “successful.” Both ways of conceptualizing young people produce and justify different sets of social arrangements, concerns or “worries,” and public policies and practices, all of which have consequences for the lives of young people and the welfare of society. My goal in providing this “flanking fiction” of youth is not simply to advocate replacing one fiction with another or celebrating one and denigrating another. Instead, my hope is that by providing a flanking fiction of youth, especially when placed alongside formidable fictions of youth, dialogue that examines the formidable fictions involving youth *and their consequences* may be better illuminated, understood, and re-examined. With this goal in mind, I briefly draw attention to how the findings of this study problematize two normalized ways youth are understood in contemporary society, particularly youth as coming of age or into adulthood and youth as peer-oriented.

Coming of Age: Trapped in Time

Lesko (2001) explains how one of the consequences of normalized constructions of adolescents as incomplete adults and adolescence as a time of coming of age into adulthood place young people in an “expectant mode” in which youth are “waiting passively for the future” (123) and unable to “actively master one’s environment and secure [an] ‘identity’ (123). Specifically, she argues that the normative configuration of “becoming but not being” actually help to produce the “knowable and known

adolescent,” particularly in relation to the normative adolescent “identity conflicts.” Furthermore, she argues that this “expectant mode” puts a “moratorium of responsibility and of power” and is “supported by theories that tells us that youth need dependency because they are confused about their identities” (130). She writes, “For me, these pieces suggest that youths’ passive temporal position, always ‘becoming,’ waiting for the future to arrive, may *effect* the identity crisis that, in turn, *prove* adolescents’ need to be kept with little power and few decisions” (131). This expectant mode is evidenced throughout my own interview data with the participants of this study, who time after time discuss how their experiences in formal schooling contexts felt irrelevant to their lives, a waste of time, and overall disconnected from who and where they are at any current moment in their lives.

In contrast, though, in many ways, participation in popular culture positioned the participants in this study in what I refer to as an “immediacy” or “relevancy temporal mode,” by which I mean their participation in popular culture mattered in real time for them and in an immediate context. In this way, the participants’ learning and literacy practices are imbued with a sense of cultural and temporal relevancy or necessity, not suspended in an “expectant mode” or placed in a holding cell. While it is true that this study locates how and why participants move across different participant statuses over time in relation to the local cultural community of Franklin Skate Park, it also illustrates the various ways in which at all points of participants’ learning and literacy activities they are meaningful participants within the cultural community and directly connected to it. In other words, their learning and literacy practices do not put them in an expectant mode, in which their participation is removed from their being a current participant. In

fact, within their popular cultural community, they are being prepared to participate *as* they actually do participate. In general, this illustrates how an expectant mode and coming of age is not an inevitability or natural occurrence of being an adolescent, teenager, or young person but is a socially produced consequence emerging from particular social arrangements involving youth. Furthermore, the findings of this study illustrate not only how the participants in this study, when situated within their popular culture community are not positioned as inherently “dependent” upon adult intervention but also quite capable of and interested in handling responsibility and power that matters to them in their current lives. It is my contention that young people would actually benefit from social arrangements that enable them to assume responsibility and power that facilitates a “relevancy temporal mode.”

Participant Peers

One of the central social arrangements visible within the popular cultural community at Franklin Skate Park is the age heterogeneity of its participants, which is in sharp contrast to one of the central organizing features of schools and many other youth social arrangements, such as little league athletics. Having spend most of my time with youth within formal K-12 contexts, I was immediately “surprised” and interested in the fact that people from the ages from as young as 4 or 5 years old were sharing a space and were participating in a cultural community as “peers” with people who were ten, twenty, and even thirty years older than them. Although hierarchies and status delineations do exist within the community (as discussed throughout this dissertation), of which age plays a role in determining and indexing, the participants of Franklin Skate Park engage with each other across a wide range of age groups. In this way, I refer to these subject positions within these social arrangements as “participant peers,” which suggests that

“peer” relationships are produced through shared participatory activities and identities rather than age or other demographic categories of membership. In this way, “participant peers” cross-age grouping make it possible for peers to consist of people who might otherwise made distinct from one another as “adults” and “teens.”

This idea of “peer participants” is what I think offers the most direct way to re-think relationships between young people and “adults.” I wonder what it might mean to think of ways to reconstitute relationships between adults and young people as participant peers. Of course, this move would have to be preceded by a view of youth as producers, as competent participants, and as interested in relations with adults—a perspective that counters the commonsensical characterizations of young people as incomplete people who are rebellious and/or oppositional to adults and wish to sever ties with them. For example, Lesko (2001) explains how the commonsensical characterization of young people as “strongly oriented to peers’ ideas and influences” and easily succumbing to “peer pressure” suggests that young people are “less individuated than adults,” are “not fully autonomous, rational, or determining,” and get positioned “as immature, as inferior to adults” (4). It is my contention that popular culture not only affords ready made opportunities for teens and adults alike to come together as participant peers but also enables opportunities for damaging conceptions of young people to be troubled. Also, I believe that youth involvement in popular culture could be drawn upon and taken more seriously by adults as a forum through which young people make meaning in their lives, and a way to locate a point of entry for adults to foster relationships with young people.

Future Directions

Taking into consideration these particular conclusions, I would like to further this line of inquiry in several ways. First, I would like to examine other youth spaces in

which age-heterogeneity functions as a normal social arrangement. Specifically, I would like to locate the ways this social arrangement impacts the learning and/or literacy practices of young people as well as their lifestyle choices and perspectives. I'm particularly interested in exploring the idea of participant peers by discovering particular spaces in which youth and adults are engaged in relations as peers. Eventually, I would like to explore cross-age relations within formal school settings as well. For example, currently Sedona-Oak Creek high school in Sedona, Arizona places 9th, 10th, and 11th graders together in English and Social Studies classes. While not as dramatic in terms of age disparities or exactly representative of adult-youth relations, this example and potential research site potentially offers a window into pedagogical implications of age heterogeneous social arrangements. A second way I would like to further this line of inquiry is by seeking out and understanding other venues in which youth are in a temporally relevant mode. Specifically, I would like to locate the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions by which such venues help to produce this temporal mode and the consequences this mode has on the well being of young people.

In relation to these ideas, I would like to examine the ways power gets produced within youth spaces, especially in relation to how non-school youth spaces operate as a "panopticon," or sites of surveillance (Foucault, 1977), or as I refer to it "surveilled freedom." On a personal level, this study has forced me to re-think concepts of youth space, and I am profoundly ambivalent in my opinion of them, in that while these youth spaces create literal places for young people to make sense of themselves, they do so within a set of governing practices and techniques which manifest themselves through their self-policing of each other and themselves, oftentimes making the direct

intervention of “authority” figures unnecessary. Also, within the line of inquiry that examines youth popular cultures, I think more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which social arrangements actually construct youth and youth “problems” by looking historically and contemporarily at how “youth” and “young people” have been constituted and normalized. Finally, and based on the proposition to re-think “youth,” I think more work should be undertaken that investigates the ways conceptualizations of youth constrain and/or open up pedagogical possibilities within formal K-12 schooling.

Considerations: Re-thinking Normalized Schooling Practices

I was probably one of the smartest kids in my class at the time, but you would have never known it. [laughs] You would have never known it just because where my intelligence lay was not able to be tapped within that particular system, and I didn’t know how to do it myself until music came along and opened me up not just to the world of music but to the world period—to the events of the day, to the connection between culture and society. And those were things that rivet me, engaged me in life, gave me a sense of purpose, what I wanted to do, who I wanted to be, the way I wanted to do it, what I thought I could accomplish through singing songs.

Bruce Springsteen, interview excerpt from 60 minutes, July 27, 2008

As an educator who prior to this project has been invested in the teaching and learning experiences (especially related to secondary literacy education) that occur within formalized K-16 public school-based educative spaces, my research within a non-K-16, school-based, educative space has forced me to push up against, reconsider, and problematize five basic, foundational aspects, principles, and assumptions upon which current K-12 schools are conceptualized and practiced in the United States. I offer a brief discussion of each one below and in doing so hope to facilitate dialogue among educators to re-think these principles and the socio-cultural-political arrangements they produce.

“I didn’t care about being there”: Schooling as De-contextualized Training

The first of these principles is the very idea of schools as educative spaces that are de-contextualized from the cultural practices for which they intend to prepare their pupils. The way that schools in the United States are currently situated, which is a relatively recent phenomenon and by no means “normal” in terms of the global society, people are removed from cultural communities and their practices, “taught” in a context that is de-contextualized from these practices and cultural communities, in order later to be re-inserted back into these communities and practices “prepared” to be participants within them. Rogoff (2003) explains how in the United States “as school became compulsory and industrialization separated workplace from home” (8), young people were segregated “from the full range of activities in their community...Instead of joining with the adult world, young children became more engaged in specialized child-focused institutions and practices, preparing children for later entry into the community” (8). She explains how schools became “prime sites” for this de-contextualized training of young people, which she says are “usually organized to keep children away from adult settings and to ‘prepare’ them to enter mature roles by giving them nonproductive, specialized exercises” (140). Furthermore, she goes on to explain how in many cultures, young people are integrated “in the everyday activities of their communities” in which they observe, participate, and learn in context, and as a result regularly interact and collaborate with people from across generations.

This normalized assumption upon which we base our schools became especially visible to me as I started to conceptualize the possibility of a skateboarding “school,” to which my participants would go in order to be “prepared” to, at a later time, be reinserted back into and “participate” within the cultural community of Franklin Skate Park. While

it is true that there do exist skateboard “camps” where people can go to learn/improve their skateboarding skills, the idea of removing people from this community to prepare to be later reinserted into it seems counter-productive in the sense that their learning and their re-insertion would be artificial and not meaningful for as long as it remains detached from actual practice and participation. This is not to say that there are not or may not be ways and spaces outside of the park itself for these participants to learn and learn about skateboarding. In fact, as evidenced in the previous chapter, this, through their textual practices, does, in fact, happen. Participants read about their cultural practices, view videos of others engaged in the practice, but they do so as part and parcel of their overall engagement within a contextualized community. In other words, these seemingly de-contextualized practices work to facilitate their local and global cultural community participation and status in meaningful, important, and *current* or *immediate* ways, or as discussed previously, these practices do not put participants in an “expectant” mode in which their participation is removed from their being a current participant.

“I just skate with them, you know?”: Age Stratification in Schooling

A second and related basic principle of formal K-12 schooling that this study also makes visible is the age stratification of pupils in schools. Before gender, race, class, or any other sociocultural factor, pupils are taxonomized, indexed, and educated according to their age. Rogoff (2003) looking across cultural communities around the world, contemporarily and historically, locates how age stratification of youth is not only not normalized in global society but also a relatively recent phenomenon emerging from arrangements constitutive with the Industrial Revolution and developmental psychology. This coordinating of young people into same age “batches” enables further distinctions and social arrangements to be made among young people. For example, once organized

into same-age groupings, young people could be conceptualized as “behind” or “ahead” of their peers. Also, organizing young people according to age produces certain consequences, including an increase in competitiveness among peers. For example, Rogoff (2003) explains how the organization of young people according to age actually promotes competitiveness whereas cross-age groupings facilitate cooperation among pupils. She writes, “...the school system organizes children in batches by age and tests their progress (and restricts access to resources) by reference to age and speed of reaching milestones. This places individuals in competition with each other for passing developmental milestones rapidly” (366-7). In addition, Eckert (1989) explains how age-heterogeneity is a commonplace social arrangement in “Burnout neighborhood networks” and provides Burnouts with a greater “fluidity” socially and economically. She explains how due to its contrast with school’s age-grading arrangement, the age-heterogeneity arrangements of Burnout groups is “frequently invoked as the cause of Burnouts’ difficulties with the school” (141). Finally, she argues that “the age-heterogeneity of Burnout groups is not a product of deviance but a sign of deviant status within an age-graded system” (141).

The normalized practice and foundational organizing principle of K-12 schooling of age stratification and age homogeneity became especially visible to me during the course of my research due to the fact that age-heterogeneity is a normal aspect of the cultural community at Franklin Skate Park. The normalized practice of age grading within schools and the social arrangements and their consequences they produce also became visible when I started to imagine Franklin Skate Park as an educative space that was stratified and segregated by age or “grade levels.” What would this learning

environment look like if age was segregated? What social arrangements would this age-segregated and stratified environment produce? What social arrangements and learning principles, practices might disappear? As evidenced throughout this dissertation, having people across age groups (and statuses and abilities) as peer-participants is an absolutely essential element to the workings of the popular cultural community at Franklin Skate Park, especially in the process of learning how to skateboard. If the learning and cultural community at the park was stratified by age, my participants would not learn how to skateboard as easily or well as they do, may not even desire (or have had access initially) to be a part of the community in the first place, and would lose access to the social relationships and arrangements age-heterogeneity affords them (as discussed previously in this chapter).

“What could she do for me?”: Preparation for the Future

A third basic principle upon which public K-12 schools are built is what Eckert (1989) refers to as the corporate structure of schooling. This perspective of schools relates to the goals, purposes, functions of schools, particularly related to the preparation for the future, one that is heavily-based on the corporate model of school, competition, achievement, and success. Specifically, this model of schooling limits its resources and access to them, channeling them to those who adhere to and aspire for the socio-cultural-political-economic norms they promote, namely those that favor going to a four-year college and entering middle-class American society. In these ways, the exigencies for learning within a schooling context are inextricably connected to wanting to be a certain somebody in the world, namely a college-bound somebody. This normalized aspect of schooling became especially visible to me as I came to understand that not only did my participants not particularly feel school was useful for them and their interests but also

that none of them were or had been typically “college bound.” I began to wonder what it would be like for someone to be in an institution that was preparing them for something and to be someone they did not want to do or be. In this way, for the young men of Franklin Skate Park, school was an alienating place socially as well as intellectually, since what was relevant for them pertaining to their future endeavors and pursuits was not for what they were being prepared. What school was preparing them for was not what they wanted, and according to them “needed” to be prepared for. In this way, school put them in an “expectant” mode in which they had to wait to be participants in cultural communities that were important to them, while learning little to anything that felt useful to them for their immediate and/or future lives. In fact, many of my participants viewed school as interfering with their popular cultural pursuits and aspirations. This was most evident in their disdain for and choice not to do homework. Also, it is important to note that for some of these participants, spending time within popular culture communities, especially as manifested through interaction with others, especially others already in the workforce, proved more useful and generative for their careers and occupational pursuits, for it was through this engagement and these interactions that possible job prospects were learned about, contacts and networking opportunities cultivated, and careers conceptualized and supported. It is also important to note that these participants are not opposed to learning or even going to school for that matter; in fact, several of them have or are interested in going back to school (i.e. community college) to facilitate their career opportunities as musicians, welders, tattoo artists, and writers. As a result of my research, I began to wonder what it might mean rather than ask how can we as educators can draw upon the cultural practices described throughout this dissertation in order to

improve academic achievement and success, to ask, particularly in the spirit of this project's interests in understanding and reframing the "needs" of young working-class, men on their own terms, the logic of their cultural practice, the following question: How can schools help young people with their participation in popular cultural communities? What might it mean for schools to change to meet young people's "needs" in order to be made more useful to those they intend to support?

"You can't really be taught": Classrooms as Learning Environments

A fourth foundational principle my research forced me to re-think is the basic ways secondary classrooms are organized and operated as learning environments. Not interested in suggesting that classrooms look more like skate parks, I draw upon my findings involving how Franklin Skate Park operates as a learning environment in order to draw attention to several key features of learning. One of the central findings of this study is that one of the main appeals of popular culture is that participants are not only consumers of it but also contributors to and producers of culture, to their cultural communities at the local and sometimes even the global level. In this way, popular culture communities offered a range of subject positions for participants, a range of kinds of people to be. In addition, my participants' participation in their local and global popular culture communities offered them a "real," contextualized, and immediate engagement in their lives. In other words, their participation did not feel nor was it divorced from their being participants. They were simultaneously students of skateboarding and skateboarders, learners in a cultural community and contributors to and producers of their cultural community. Their learning was meaningful, compelling, and necessary for them being somebody worth being. It was constitutive with their being participants within a cultural community. In these ways, learning was less a process of

acquisition or instruction and more so a “cultural process” (Gee, 2004). In thinking about how this space operates as a learning environment, I wonder what it might mean if classrooms were organized as learning environments that foreground these cultural processes of learning more so than instructed processes? What might it mean if young people in schools had opportunities to be participants and contributors to a cultural community? Had “real” questions to be asked and answers to be found? Genuine possibilities to create, to transform, to be a part of, to leave a legacy? It is interesting to note that my participants found most interesting and/or useful classes, such as creative writing, art, science labs, and shop classes, which more so than others emphasize production and apprenticeship models of learning. When focused on textual activity, this study reveals that textual production is in recursive relationship with textual consumption, in that consumption generates production and production generates consumption. In many instances, textual production and/or the desire to produce actually created, motivated, and supported my participants’ textual consumption. In this way, I wonder what it might mean if classrooms, especially literacy/English classrooms, were production-focused rather than consumption focused. For example, in many current secondary English/literacy classrooms, it is a normalized practice for students to read a text and have to produce a text in response to their consumption. I wonder if allowing for the production of texts to precede textual consumption might help facilitate student literacy learning and engagement.

Another aspect of thinking about learning environments this project pushed me to re-think is the attention given to “subcultural status.” Young people, whether examined within classrooms or non-school spaces are often taken into consideration according to

their relationships to macro-level structures and socio-political demographics, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation. What this study makes visible is how while understanding how young people relate to these macro-level structures it is equally important to understand the ways youth make sense of themselves within local cultural communities—how they index and produce their subcultural statuses and identities. For example, for the guys of Franklin Skate Park locating themselves among each other was less dependant on these larger mechanisms of taxonomy and more dependant upon other ways of being a certain someone within a local context, for example their skating abilities, textual activity, treatment of the park and each other. In this way, I wonder how it might shift the classroom learning environments if in addition to paying attention to how the ways young people are understood and understand themselves as raced, classed, gendered people within the larger socio-political contexts in which they live, educators also paid equal attention to the ways participants within a classroom cultural community index and produce their statuses and identities. What are the practices of exclusion? Of solidarity? How do these things operate? What functions do they serve the participants within that local context? This line of thinking resonates with what Finders (1997) refers to as the “myths” of student centered pedagogy, classroom as a safe haven, free choice, and comfort. She explains how for her participants actions within a classroom had social consequences and therefore affected the way they behaved within these contexts. She argues that the goal of a classroom as safe haven is “both impossible and undesirable” (118) and advocates a “student-negotiated pedagogy,” in which the socio-political nature of literacy learning and classroom practices are made visible and explicit. Specifically, she suggests a pedagogy that examines the power relations and disparities existent within

classrooms: “Rather than viewing a class as a safe haven, perhaps it would be more productive to openly articulate the obstacles, barriers, and risks that accompany literacy learning” (126). In this way, making sense of students would necessitate the following question: Who is this person being asked to be in this context, especially as her status and identity relates to this local cultural community?

A Pop Culture Pedagogy: Re-thinking Secondary Literacy/English

A fifth normalized practice this study has forced me to re-think is secondary literacy/English pedagogy, especially its curriculum. Specifically, this study has made me wonder what it might mean if secondary English/literacy curricula cohered around popular culture, rather than literary studies. This wonderment came to me as I started to contemplate what, according to my participants, are their “needs,” as well as what type of curriculum they did or would engage in secondary English/literacy classrooms. In other words, what would have been “useful” for them? As argued throughout this dissertation, popular culture functions as a, if not the, key site in which my participants inscribed meaning to their lives. For many of them, popular culture is not simply a hobby or something they do to kill time; it is part and parcel with who they are and how they mean in the world. From this logic, I began to wonder about the possibility of a “Popular Culture Pedagogy” in which the examination and production of popular culture was the central component to the secondary English/Literacy curriculum, not an “add on,” an “other,” or a separate class to take, which at Finley high school it actually was. What if, for example, Popular Culture was centrally located and courses, let’s say in “literary studies” were offered as electives under the purview of the school subject “English”? As discussed within the chapter on textual activities, engaging popular culture consists of an array of multimodal, integrated language, literacy, aesthetic, and

cultural practices, that involve lyric writing, visual design, multimodal composing, rhetorical issues, and socio-political concerns and critiques. This engagement also reveals how popular culture not only creates a venue for important identity formation but also critical and creative cognition and intellectual activity. A popular culture pedagogy could not only build on what young people, like my participants are already doing but actually help them do it better. What might it mean for young people for whom school does not feel useful to have opportunities within these contexts to facilitate their participation within cultural communities that are meaningful for them?

A Final Thought...

In offering this “flanking fiction” I recognize the difficulty in attempting to operate outside a set of dominant norms and terms of understanding, and that I may in fact be working to further inscribe the dominant discourses and formidable fictions of young people by writing about them in the way that I have. For example, even the terms *young people* and *youth* are problematic, and I worry that using them works to reinforce or continuously inscribe normalized conceptions of the people to whom I refer. Specifically, these terms position the people to whom they refer in a temporally “other” relation to adults since the term “young” men or women potentially suggests an incompleteness, a coming into, and/or something other than the norm. Similarly, I wonder to what extent the field of youth studies, by taking “youth” as its object of study potentially works to reify the very “thing” it seeks to dismantle. Finally, I am concerned that my project, particularly its use of ethnographic methods to document the lived realities of my participants’ engagement with popular culture, might prove to be detrimental to their well being by actually helping people in certain positions of authority

to more easily monitor, control, manipulate, and/or exploit young people. Given these concerns, though, my hope is that a flanking fiction such as the one I have presented within this volume might help to envision new possibilities for all people—“old” and “young” alike—to continuously struggle with what is, what is not, and what could be.

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