`Keeping It Real' : Subcultural Media and the Discourses of Authenticity in Alternative Sport

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Subcultural Media and the Discourses of Authenticity in Alternative Sport

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Abstract This article examines the consumption of alternative sport’s subcultural media. Our research is situated in the context of “post” CCCS subcultural research which has explored how the media and the market are central to the authentication of popular cultural practices. Qualitative audience research was conducted with windsurfers from the UK and skateboarders from the US, examining the meanings that the niche magazines have for the participants of those alternative sports in the construction of their sporting identities. We focused on participants’ readings of magazine advertising images, exploring their discourses about ‘authentic’ identity and status in their subcultures, particularly through their complex and ‘creative’ readings of the meanings of images and brands. Our empirical research suggests that the magazines played an important role in providing and circulating cultural knowledges, but also were an avenue for the participants to display their subcultural capital. We map the interpretive frameworks used by both groups to discuss ‘authentic’ discourses of their sports. These centred on action photos of people ‘doing it’ and their associated lifestyles and social worlds. Inauthentic images included those that portrayed equipment simply as commodities, or brands that could not demonstrate long-term commitment to the sports and lifestyles, or were targeting outsiders/beginners. Additionally authentic status was based on assumptions of maleness and whiteness, making full inclusion complicated for females and non-white participants.

Key words • consumption • media • sport • subculture • youth

Introduction: Media, Youth and Consumption

The 1990s has seen the emergence and consolidation of a body of research examining a range of sport and leisure activities, particularly youth cultures, that has diverged in both methodological and theoretical underpinning from earlier seminal ‘subcultural’ research at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), and North American deviance studies. One of the most widespread critiques of the youth subculture research associated with the CCCS is that much of it did not directly involve the subjects of their study, relying on the researchers’ ability to interpret symbols and behaviours of the subculturalists. (For such a critique see Muggleton, 2000.)

This highlights a central weakness in textual approaches to cultural con-
sumption more widely; the assumption that the researcher can accurately identify meaning systems of the social actors or ‘audiences’ without consulting them. In media studies, these, and wider criticisms about ‘manipulated’ and ‘passive’ audiences/consumers, were addressed by a wealth of studies that emerged under the banner of the new audience studies, particularly ‘reception analysis’ of television audiences (see e.g. Fiske, 1987; Morley, 1992; Radway, 1984). However, such studies in both the fields of media consumption and (youth) cultural consumption more broadly have been criticized for their ‘romanticization’ of consumer creativity and autonomy, for being overly preoccupied with ‘empowering’ the audience of the text, and for overstating the resistive capacities of the audience, resulting in what Morley2 terms a pluralistic acceptance of a postmodern ‘semiotic democracy’ (Morley, 1995; see Curran, 1990).

Herein lies an enduring and contested problematic in the development of cultural studies: how to understand theoretically, and make sense of methodologically, the ‘creative’ role that consumers play in the construction of meaning, whether it is in ‘mainstream’ media culture, or the context of more differentiated subcultures, neotribes or ‘interpretive communities’ (Radway, 1988) based around media consumption. Furthermore, to understand these dialectical relationships between texts and audiences, cultural production and consumption, and structure and agency in the creation of identity in the context of late capitalism, requires a recognition of the multiple ways in which the media and cultural representations more broadly have become pivotal to how our cultural identities are defined, constructed, contested and reconstituted (see Morley and Robins, 1995). In our postmodern image culture, media culture in all its forms provides many of the resources for identity, how we come to understand ourselves (Kellner, 1995). The complex association between the lived experience, and ‘ways of seeing’ (embedded in intertextuality and discourse) is fundamental to understanding contemporary sporting practices, including alternative sports.

This is the underlying context for the research project that this article is based on. Commentators have highlighted the increasingly evident influence and control of multinationals and media corporations like ESPN in alternative sport’s development, sporting practices and identities (see Rinehart, 1998):

In the world of extreme sport sponsorship, pierced and tattooed skaters and skysurfers mix quite amicably with buttoned-down corporations such as AT&T and Toyota. [. . .] For all of the counter-culture cachet associated with ESPN’s X Games and NBC’s Gravity Games, the truth is that the events were co-opted from the start. (Ostrowski, 2000: 24)

In this ‘age of lifestyle branding’ (Klein, 2000: 24) it is undeniable that the media and consumer industries have appropriated alternative sport to sell everything from soap to Pepsi. However, we were interested in understanding how alternative sport participants experienced the increasingly evident commercialization, commodification and institutionalization of alternative sports, as evidenced in their own subcultural communities and media. Our empirical research draws on two case studies, skateboarding in the USA and windsurfing in the UK, and explores the relationship between the subcultural media and the consumer industries, and the meanings that the subcultural media have for the participants of those alternative sports in the construction of their sporting identities. We focus
on how the advertising images in specialist magazines were used in the construction of subcultural hierarchies, particularly discourses about ‘authentic’ identity and status. As has been demonstrated in other contexts, the symbolic consumption of brands can help to establish and communicate sociocultural categories such as social status, gender, age, as well as subcultural values such as the marking of authenticity (McCracken, 1993).

First, we will briefly sketch out the key influences that have shaped our theoretical understanding of the relationship between subcultures, identity and media culture, particularly in understanding the ‘creative’ role that consumers play in the construction of meaning. In the second, and main part of the article, we will illustrate participants’ readings of, and discourses around, specialist media focusing on the hierarchy of values, the structures of ‘authenticity’, that emerged from those readings.

Subcultural Media Consumption

Within the ‘post’ CCCS literature referred to in the introduction, Sarah Thornton’s research into British club cultures (1995) remains one of the most influential, empirically informed critiques. Thornton contends that to understand the ‘distinctions’ of youth subculture, a ‘systematic investigation of their media consumption’ is critical (Thornton, 1995: 14).

Yet, surprisingly, detailed attention to the role of ‘specialist’ subcultural media in constructing and performing identities in different subcultural contexts is limited, in sporting as well as other contexts. Thornton’s (1995, 1997) research illuminates the multiple and complex ways in which different forms of media influence the subculture, raising fundamental questions about conceptualizing the impact and influence of these media, the ‘mainstream’ and how they relate to subcultural ‘distinctions’. These are the theoretical concerns that underlie this research.

First, Thornton (1995) highlights the necessity of differentiating between mass media (television, newspapers, etc.) and specialist media (what she categorizes in the club culture context as ‘niche’ and ‘micro’ media), arguing that, for the subculturalists, such mass media forms often have very different ‘cultural connotations’. The mass media ‘label’ or define many (youth) subcultures, thus the subculturalists see the media as a ‘colonizing co-opting’ force ‘against which subcultural credibilities are measured’ (Thornton, 1995: 5). Conversely, specialist niche media play a central role in the creation and evolution of these cultures. Within the ‘economy of subcultural capital’ the specialist media are ‘a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge’ (Thornton, 1995: 14). Likewise, as this research — and earlier research on alternative sport (Wheaton, 2000a) — demonstrates, alternative sport cultures are ‘taste cultures’ in which the specialist subcultural media play a central role in disseminating information about their activities to their members, and the creation and circulation of the symbols and meanings of subcultural capital.

Second, academics have tended to uncritically ‘position media as incorporating or co-opting rather than aiding in the formation of subcultures’ (Thornton
and Gelder, 1997: 473; emphases added). This is a key point; one that is reflected in a number of critiques of the CCCS theoretical approach to subcultural analysis alluded to above. Subcultures for the CCCS were seen as ‘counter hegemonic responses to specific historical contradictions’ (Muggleton, 2000: 20), specifically youths’ subordinated working class status. The CCCS saw the emergence and meaning of stylistic subcultures as a form of resistance (mythical resolution through style) to the ‘parent’ and ‘dominant’ cultures.7 In this framework, working class culture was seen as an ‘authentic’ culture separate from the dominant culture’s bourgeois (and commercial) ideological domination. Youth subculture (according to Hebdige) shifted from ‘originality and opposition’ to ‘commercial incorporation’ (Storey, 1999: 55); at the moment of incorporation, styles lost their subcultural status and authenticity. Centrally for this paper, it was the cultural and media industries that were seen to be responsible for this ‘ideological diffusion’ and ‘commercial incorporation’ (Storey, 1999: 55). As Thornton puts it:

The idea that authentic culture is somehow outside media and commerce is a resilient one. In its full blown romantic form, the belief suggests that grassroots culture resist and struggle with a colonizing mass-mediated corporate world. (Thornton, 1995: 116)

Yet, Thornton’s (1995) research (and others — for examples see Brick, 2001; Gillespie, 1995; Muggleton, 2000; Redhead, 1993) has illustrated that the media and consumer industries roles are more complex, contradictory and fluid than simply incorporation and co-option; that subculturalists are not simply ‘victims’ of commercialism (Skelton and Valentine, 1998b), but shape and ‘re-shape’ the images and meanings circulated by the media (Gillespie, 1995). So rather than imagining an opposition between hegemonic incorporation and resistance (via polysemy) research needs to examine how the cultural commodities provided by these cultural/media industries are made meaningful in specific acts of consumption, in particular time and spaces. This approach does not necessarily ignore the process of production, nor structures of power, but recognizes that consumerism is not unilaterally negative, that it is a discourse that can contest as well as embody power (Nava, 1987: 209–10). To understand the relationship between materiality and people’s (media) consumption practices, it is therefore misleading to think of a ‘pure’ ‘authentic’ participant perspective, outside of the commercialization process, or distinct from representations of, and contemporary discourses about, these alternative sport activities. As Thornton (1995: 9) suggests, we need to ‘problematize the notion of authenticity’ seeing the media and commerce as central to the authentication of popular cultural practices. The niche media are an integral part of the commercialization process that both produces and circulates subcultural meaning and symbols and, as this chapter will illustrate, are key definers of notions of ‘authenticity’.

**Discourses of ‘Authenticity’ in Alternative Sports**

However, despite this deconstruction of ‘authenticity’ as an aesthetic or philosophical idea, and the challenge to notions of an essentialized ‘authentic’ identity in a postmodern media culture, this does not prevent participants in subcultures...
from laying claim to it (Barker, 2000; Muggleton, 2000) nor advertisers and marketers from claiming to provide its essential essence. For example, an advert for a sports marketing company is headed: ‘Authentic Youth Marketing Opportunities’. The adverts offer extreme sport as a way to ‘Make an authentic connection with 12–24 year olds’ (Miller, 2000: 26). As the plethora of empirical research on youth in the cultural studies tradition has demonstrated, claims to authenticity are central to the internal and ‘external’ status hierarchies in youth subcultures. For example, Widdicombe and Wooffitt’s (1995) interviews with young people from a range of subcultural affiliations suggest participation is explained by reference to the idea of a ‘true’ inner self — an essential self that emerges and is maintained through subcultural involvement, and is constituted in relation to the ‘in-authenticity’ and shallowness of others. ‘Authenticity, then, is an accumulated social achievement’ (Barker, 2000: 339), seen as what constitutes ‘real’ or genuine membership. The subculturalists themselves have a sense of status hierarchy — who is seen to have more ‘status’, or legitimacy, what constitutes the criteria for it, and that it is fluid and contested. Thus, as Muggleton (2000) highlights, it needs to be assessed with reference to the ways members of the subculture define it, which is not necessarily connected to ‘resistance’, and specifically not resistance to the commercialization process.

Previous ethnographic research on alternative or lifestyle sports had suggested that ‘authentic’ membership status was influenced by factors including commitment, attitude, gender, class, and ‘race’. For example, Wheaton (2000a) discussed that practising commitment to the sport was much more important than conspicuously displaying ‘appropriate’ brand names. The impact of gender and sexuality on membership status and associated exclusion processes has been illustrated in skateboarding (Beal, 1995, 1996), windsurfing (Wheaton, 2000b; Wheaton and Tomlinson, 1998), and snowboarding (Anderson, 1999). Thus, our research set out to question how different groups of participants negotiate their identities, and claims to subcultural authenticity in consuming these media texts. Was the diversity of identities negotiated in the lived cultures reflected in magazine texts and industry discourses? And how was the marking of ‘difference’ or otherness related to processes of inclusion and exclusion? Subcultural capital, as Thornton has observed, ‘is the linchpin of an alternative hierarchy in which the axes of age, gender, sexuality and race are all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupation at bay’ (1995: 105).

Methodology: Researching Media Consumption of Alternative Sport

As highlighted in the introduction, there is a well-documented history of the theoretical and methodological development of audience research in cultural media research, typically dating back to Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model (see e.g. Alasuutari, 1999; Moores, 1993; Morley, 1992; Wilson and Sparks, 1996). Nevertheless it is misleading to see the field’s development as smooth, nor as resulting in a clear-cut paradigm. As Alasuutari (1999: 6) outlines in his characterization of the ‘third generation’ of audience studies, this ‘discursive or constructionist view of the media and audiences’ is an ‘emergent trend’ based on
a wave of ‘critique and self-reflection’ which has led to the reappraisal of many previous concepts and premises (for some questioning the existence of ‘audiences’ and ‘texts’ other than as discursive constructs). Methodologically, it involves a broadened framework within which one considers the place of the media, media use and of media research, emphasizing an exploration of the role of ‘media culture’ in contemporary everyday life (Alasuutari, 1999: 6). Our methodology, which can be broadly situated in this tradition, drew on varied qualitative approaches including ethnographic research in the sporting cultures, analysis of media texts, and primarily in-depth interviews focusing on how, in what ways and in what contexts participants read their sport niche magazines, and particularly magazine advertising. Our analysis was influenced by these trends in discourse analysis which see audience interviews not simply as a picture of ‘decoding’ but as discourses on the media and everyday life (Alasuutari, 1999: 15).

Our previous research has shown that the two predominant forms of specialist media used by subculturalists in skating and windsurfing were magazines and videos, although internet web pages were becoming increasingly popular, especially within the windsurfing/skating industry. We chose to focus on specialist magazines. For windsurfers, the magazines were by far the most influential and widespread media form consumed by participants. For skateboarders, video was the preferred medium, but magazines were more available because they are less expensive than videos and one can read them without purchasing them. In both cases, magazines are the sports industry’s main forums for advertising. Ultimately, the popularity of the magazines makes them an important part of the identity creation and reconstruction process.

Belinda Wheaton conducted interviews with the windsurfers in England, first in 1997 (as part of a wider ethnographic investigation of the windsurfing culture which included investigating media consumption) and then in 2000. Becky Beal interviewed the skateboarders in California in the US. In this article we draw primarily on the 12 interviews she conducted in 2000. Both sets of interviews were structured in a similar way. First, participants were asked about their magazine reading habits, then researchers presented the interviewees with a variety of magazines and adverts. Our aim was to get participants to talk about the magazines: when and why they read them (or why not), what they found useful, important, and interesting (or not). Participants were asked to identify and discuss the adverts they thought were particularly good or bad, liked and disliked, and to explore the reasons for these distinctions. However, we adopted a reflexive approach that encouraged participants to discuss other issues around the media and commercialization process, which often grew out of their responses to particular imagery in the magazines. We analysed the transcripts of our conversations using a broadly grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), allowing the themes to emerge from the data, but focusing on what role their readings of the mediated images played in constructing subcultural identity, status and ‘authenticity.’

Although the empirical investigation focused on consumption, we attempted to conceptualize the analysis by considering the consumption/production nexus. Our comprehension of the magazines’ content was based on ‘formal’ textual analysis of these niche magazines (Beal and Weidman, in press; Rinehart, 1999;
Treas, 2000; Wheaton, 1997) and more recent informal analysis of the magazine content. Our insights into the production process, and the wider sociocultural environment of these cultures were based in part on the researcher’s role as a sub-editor and journalist for a windsurfing magazine (BW), involvement in the consumer industries (BW) and interviews with media professionals/those involved in the industry (BB).

However, a final note of ‘methodological’ caution should be added. As Moores (1993) suggests, we need to be conscious of the methodological as well as theoretical limitations in the ‘audience’ approach we have adopted, and thus be ‘modest in our analytical insights’, in particular highlighting the cultural specificity of the groups, and the media genres studied (see also Wilson and Sparkes, 1996). Alternative sport participants are not a homogeneous group of consumers. As our analysis underlines, the subcultural communities around these alternative sports are made up of different consumers in terms of age, social class, gender and ethnicity, as well as levels of involvement in the activities. Furthermore, the different ‘local’ contexts of these two ‘globalized’ subcultures need consideration (see Wilson and Carrington, 2001), specifically differences between North American and British audiences, niche media and the influence of the consumer industries in these national settings. The magazines we examined were all produced nationally; nevertheless we also found evidence of the availability and consumption of magazines from other countries and some nationally based magazines were distributed transnationally. For example, *Big Brother* is owned by Larry Flynt publications and *Transworld Skateboarding* is owned by Time Inc. Furthermore, magazines were informed by more ‘global’ influences. For example, the sports industries that constitute the main advertisers in the magazines are often transnational companies, such as the clothing manufacturer Quicksilver in windsurfing and Santa Cruz in skating. The subcultural communities represented in the windsurfing and skateboarding magazines included both national and international stars and locales.

‘Keeping it Real’: Consuming (Discourses of) Authenticity

The remainder of the article focuses on our analysis, examining the consumption of the niche magazines and their adverts, revealing the underlying discourses of authenticity in participant’s readings of magazines advertisements. We begin with an overview of each group’s discussion of the magazines more generally, and the respondents’ attitudes to the magazines.

*Attitudes to Magazines*

The niche magazines served a variety of purposes but, in particular, they informed readers about the (local and global) sports subculture and were important ‘membership documents’ for the wider community. The main forms of subcultural ‘insider knowledge’ were reflected in the magazine content. In the windsurfing subculture these ranged from knowledge about the value system,
equipment, the ‘weather’, travel and techniques to windsurfing ‘chatter’. The key focus however was equipment and testing, travel and technique articles. In the skateboarding subculture important forms of insider knowledge were similar, except for the weather. Whereas windsurfers were concerned with travel to exotic locations, skateboarders (also termed skaters) were concerned with unique or challenging places to skate.

In both sports, the participants’ initial commentary about the advertisements tended to be a judgement about whether it was a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ advert. Participants had a clear sense of what constituted these categories, and displayed what Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) call a high ‘advertising literacy’. The visual material in these niche magazines seemed to be particularly meaningful, more so than the written text, and reader comments often focused on stylistic aspects such as photo quality, design and layout. As Sean, a 21-year-old skater explained: ‘I look at magazines on the rack, advertisements that have big pictures of skating. Look who’s good. If there are enough good pictures, I’ll buy it.’

Participation’s enthusiasm to buy and read magazines in both sports was impacted by their level of involvement and gender; beginners and intermediates were most enthusiastic because they used magazines to pick up and, as we will see, to demonstrate their cultural capital by conspicuously discussing that insider knowledge. Women tended to be less avid readers of windsurfing and skating magazines unless they were very keen participants. We will briefly exemplify these trends.

The intermediate skaters who had been involved from one to three years, and thus were actively procuring a subcultural identity, were the most likely to buy and read magazines. Advanced and long-standing participants in both sports were often unenthusiastic, were least likely to buy or read magazines, seemingly not needing to use that medium to practise or display their subcultural identities. For example, one skater, Mike, explained the role of magazines as ‘not an identity of a skateboarder because they can be whatever, this is just a reference guide’. Likewise, only the really keen, intermediate to advanced windsurfers were very passionate about the windsurfing magazines. This group bought or read the magazines religiously, and welcomed the emphasis on insider information, particularly techniques and skills. The core elite windsurfers, the complete beginners and especially novice women, seemed to be the groups least likely to buy windsurfing magazines. Windsurfing magazine readership is extremely diverse in relation to age, subcultural involvement, and windsurfing ability. While the main audience is men, their ages range from teenagers to men in their 50s (whereas skaters were predominantly under 25). The disparity between attracting the newcomer, while also retaining the exclusivity of the subculture through the media text, was a contributing factor; elite windsurfers found the content ‘boring’, it was too wide-ranging to address their specific specialist interest on the ‘hard core’ elements of the sport. Contrary to media representations that emphasized the individualized performer, both groups expressed a desire for the magazines to have more coverage of their social communities. The majority of windsurfers suggested that the pleasure of the windsurfing magazine resided in illustrations of the windsurfing community, that is, travel, pleasure seeking, performer profiles and gossip about the windsurfing world and its lifestyle. Likewise skaters’ main
criticism of the magazines was that they do not represent the ‘brotherhood’ of skateboarders.

Nevertheless, ‘diss-ing’ the magazines, claiming not to read them — or to take them too seriously — was also a display of subcultural capital. Advanced and committed participants were clearly very knowledgeable about the magazine content, and just as keen to ‘get their hand on a new copy’, even though they ‘read’ the magazines in less depth than when they were getting into the sport, skimming or flicking through the majority of the text.

Windsurfers: Discourses of Pleasure and Escape

From the occult to raves to riots to extreme sports, it seems that the eternal urge for escape has never enjoyed such niche marketing. (Klein, 2000: 64)

For the windsurfers, good adverts were seen as those that were stylish in layout, a seamless part of the magazine content in which abundant, big, bright and usually high action imagery was essential: ‘The ones I did actually mention were all the ones I thought windsurfing was about. The high action, image rather than words’ (Simon).

Aesthetically pleasing visual presentation was vital to their reading pleasure in all parts of the magazines, and especially adverts: ads had to blend in. The advanced performers emphasized the importance of technically difficult and risky skills, particularly wave sailing manoeuvres. Their ‘reading’ of these images involved imagining themselves as the performer: ‘Because it’s high action, you kind of want to picture yourself doing what he’s doing’ (Shaun). There was also a preference for the individual sailors to be de-individualized, not ‘named’. Although readers were very skilled at identifying national and international windsurfing personalities, and demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of which sailors were sponsored by different brands, they were quite ambivalent about the idea of ‘celebrities’. As James claimed, ‘No, the sailor doesn’t really matter. I mean it could be a completely unknown sailor and it could be like a really good photo.’ This applied regardless of the photographic subject’s gender, nationality, or ethnicity.

The most popular adverts were those depicting ‘exotic’ beach imagery, symbolized by white sand, blue water and cloudless skies. On the other hand, ads with poor style and/or photographic images were referred to as ‘naïf’. The back few pages of each windsurfing magazine constituted several pages of small adverts, mostly for individual retailers, ‘learn to windsurf’ centres, holiday companies and some classified ads. All the interviewees disliked and claimed to ‘ignore’ this section. Although ads did have an information-bearing function, and the readers commented about this, they did not like the text to ‘ruin the image’. They preferred it if (only) essential technical information on the product was stated inconspicuously (such as at the bottom of the image, or a web-page address they could follow up). Adverts, for the consumers of these magazines, were not ‘read’ (for the most part) as text selling commercial products, but as a source of pleasurable imagery of the windsurfing lifestyle.

For example, a Rip Curl clothing advert titled ‘The Search’ was particularly...
The double page advert’s main photo was a wave sailing action photograph; along the bottom were a series of what the participants described as ‘lifestyle photos’ depicting people camping on the beach, seascapes of waves, crystal turquoise water, deserted white sand beaches lined with palm trees and dolphins swimming. The advertised product was of little relevance; the attraction was the exotic and idyllic locations that drew the reader into a fantasy. As Shaun explained, ‘The fact that there’s no product there doesn’t really matter because you know what it’s about.’

Like the travel articles, that were the most universally popular part of the magazines, these images of an idyllic idealized ‘lifestyle’, one that is free, unrestricted, individualistic and at one with nature, seduced the reader and fostered fantasies of ‘escape’ from the cold, rainy venues, the reality of windsurfing experience in the UK. As Jason explained: ‘I used to look at these pictures of Mike Waltz and Mark Angulo . . . sailing in these waves in Hawaii, and it just looked gorgeous, and I just used to dream about going to Maui.’ Despite the fact that most of the windsurfers interviewed would never actually windsurf in a remote and costly location like this, this representation was constructed as the authentic image of the windsurfing lifestyle:

... it’s the kind of shot I want to see in a windsurf mag . . . I’d like to be there . . . I think it reminds you that windsurfing is sort of grass roots stuff. Back to nature . . . I think they’ve hit the spot because they’ve got dolphins, which you know, are beautiful creatures. They’re natural. You’ve got sail power. You’ve got scenery. You’ve got everything really. Yeah, it’s a really nice windsurfing spread. It doesn’t matter who’s in it, and what it’s for. (Ian, emphases added)

You’d like to be there, you know, camping on the beach. Nice waves. Sunny . . . You know, ‘the search’, that’s sort of hardcore, it’s just pure about the sport. Yeah, it’s a good ad. (Shaun)

An affinity with nature plays an important part in these discourses, suggested by the words emphasized in their readings. As Hetherington (1998) suggests, such notions of authenticity in which the rural is presented as utopic, are based on an idealized past in which it is perceived that people lived in harmony with nature. Furthermore, as has been detailed elsewhere (Wheaton, 1997) this image of the ‘soul surfer’,13 appropriated from the surfing culture to describe the type of windsurfing (usually wave sailing) that pitted an individual against the environment, not other people, was a reaction against both competition and commercialism (see also Booth, 2001). Windsurfer’s idealized and constructed image of the ‘soul’ windsurfer as at one with ‘nature’, unfettered by materialism, distances it from its discursive binary — the ‘civilized’ urban and commercial spheres. As the editorial for a windsurfing magazine issue titled the ‘Soul Issue’ and devoted almost entirely to travel claimed, ‘Our mission was to rediscover the spirit of windsurfing, rebuild the foundations . . . man (sic), board and rig at one with the wind and the waves’ (Kasprowicz, 1997).

This construction of the authentic lifestyle can also be seen in an advert for a multi-sport holiday company that was universally seen as ‘naff’, largely because the advert represented a more institutionalized and commodified aspect of windsurfing. The advert was a montage of photos — some of windsurfing action,
along with boat sailing and images depicting the Mediterranean location of the centre. It thus portrayed a ‘realistic’ image of the reader’s windsurfing holiday. However as Simon put it, it was ‘really boring. Absolute crap. Wouldn’t even pass the time looking.’ Ian acknowledged that, although he might enjoy being at the place, the imagery ‘conjures up images of clubs – club holidays. You know, you’ve got to do this at this time and this and that and all being together and that’s not actually what it’s about to me.’ Like travellers, typified in Alex Garland’s novel The Beach, shunning the ‘inauthentic’ organized and commodified experience laid on by the travel industry for ‘tourists’ (see Desforges, 1998), windsurfers were searching — symbolically — for their own private utopias. Their readings of the ‘authentic’ meaning of travel in the windsurfing lifestyle in these two adverts, particularly how windsurfers distanced themselves from discursive constructions that did not present the authentic ‘experience’ as a ‘free’ ‘natural’ nomadic, non-commercialized individualistic lifestyle, illustrates some of the complexities and contradictions in their meaning, and experiences of commercialization and institutionalization.

Skateboarders: Discourses of Risk and Functional Gear

Just show a guy doing a rad trick. (Sean, skater)

Most skaters discussed that they felt the skating magazines — and the ads — were similar in layout and content (the one exception was the magazine Big Brother). As Andy explained: ‘all the advertisements to me are pretty much the same, they usually have a picture of a skater and then a picture of the item they are advertising’. Like the windsurfers, skateboarders primarily enjoyed the full-page photographs of action, particularly skilful, technical or risky manoeuvres or ‘tricks’. Skaters, like windsurfers, were also ambivalent about adverts other than as sources of such imagery. Tom’s comment reflected many of the skaters’ initial reading of the magazine: ‘when I read these, I don’t really look at the ads. I just look at the pictures, look at the tricks and stuff’.

However, unlike the windsurfers, skaters’ paradise is not an escape to some nostalgic essentialist concept of nature. Instead, it represents a mastery over an urban and very ‘civilized’ landscape. Iain Borden (2001) has documented the rise of urban skating since the early 1980s. With the demise of supervised skate parks in the 1970s, skaters were forced to look for other places. Simultaneously, the technical advent of the ‘ollie’ revolutionized the style of skateboarding, allowing skaters to ‘jump’. These two trends encouraged the use of urban settings as the new space for skateboarders. This urban move became well documented and promoted in skateboard magazines. In Treas’s (2000: 3) analysis of Thrasher and Transworld skateboarding magazines she found this representation: ‘skating takes places in trash-littered underpasses, abandoned industrial loading docks, and graffiti-covered alleys’. In this manner, the means to authenticity is easily accessible because it is the public spaces of the city, but the ends are more difficult to achieve. It is a contradiction that is set up in most of the skaters’ ethos — open access, but an exclusive membership based on commitment, risk and elitism of skill.
Skaters stipulated that good ads had to be based on products that were functional for the sport; bad ads represented products that were not essential, or irrelevant to the practice of skating. As David noted about an ad for sunglasses, ‘skaters don’t wear them while they’re skating’. Eric commented that a jeans commercial was ‘off the mark’ because they would be too hard to be comfortable skating in. Jay also mentioned that ads for clothing that you ‘just wouldn’t skate in’ were bad. Skaters were also critical of brands they believed were not made specifically for skating. For example, John commented about a specific shoe ad ‘they’re a poser brand, can’t skate in them, they’re not made for skating’. Even Tom, who had skated for about a year, was cognizant of ads that were not dedicated to skateboarding. He mockingly commented about extreme sport deodorant and an ad that pictured a razor blade with stitches on it, ‘Everybody’s extreme. I think it’s stupid.’ The skating magazines contained a number of such adverts for products unrelated to either the sport or its lifestyle, such as soda, deodorant, sunglasses and scooters. Skaters were critical of these ads, seeing them as an intrusion into their subcultural space by the ‘mainstream’. In addition, many enjoyed how skate companies intentionally subverted such conventional norms. For example, skaters who read the notoriously sexist and misogynous Big Brother, enjoyed it because they interpreted its style as not being concerned with mainstream. As Mike noted,

They make fun of everything traditional . . . They spoof the basic culture of everything that people hold dear, like ‘you can’t make fun of that, that’s something you can’t make fun of,’ that’s what they go for.

Another skater commented that he liked Big Brother because it has no respect for the commercial aspect of skateboarding because they do not play it safe like other skate magazines that advertise mainstream brands. Many skaters also appreciated a humorous look at the skateboard industry. Frequently they pointed to the brand Consolidated. For example, one of their adverts, ‘You can be pro for consolidated!’ mocked the commercial aspects of skateboarding. Its by-line read:

Are you getting tired of sending ‘sponsor me’ videos to every company out there? Is entering amateur contests and working your way up through the seemingly endless ranks getting a bit old? Do you feel cheated because you’re better than a lot of the pros out there? Are you looking for that magical ‘springboard’ to get your career started? Well, we got the answer for you! For just $40,000.

Conversely windsurfers did not seem at all concerned about these ‘mainstream’ companies using windsurfing as a means of promotion: ‘I mean if they’re putting something across and the image is good, then I don’t mind what they’re putting across. It could be for a bar of soap, toilet cleaner or whatever’ (Simon). One plausible reason for this difference is the differing cultural contexts between the USA and UK. In the UK windsurfing is still a very marginal sport, and as such subcultural membership retains a degree of exclusivity by being different. This marginality is reflected in the windsurfing magazines that rarely include advertisements for non-windsurfing/surfing industry products. In the USA the
‘incorporation’ of alternative sport into the ‘mainstream’ is much more advanced. This is reflected in niche magazine content which contained many more adverts for ‘mainstream’ companies, as well as the more widespread representation of alternative and extreme sport in the mass media, especially television. Second, skaters are a much younger (male) audience, and therefore closer symbolically to the ‘dominant’ youth culture from which they need to mark their difference.

**Brand Fetishism**

Readings of adverts often focused around specific equipment brands. Equipment featured centrally in both sets of magazines, for example in the forms of tests and reviews, but particular in advertisements. The magazines’ main advertisers were sport-specific equipment manufacturers, retailers and importers; particularly for the ‘hardware’, that is, boards, wheels and sails. As noted earlier, knowledge about the brands was one of the most important components of subcultural capital. It became apparent to both researchers that this dialogue around brands was a way to demonstrate identity and ‘insider’ status. As Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1998) argue, advertising literacy becomes an important factor consumers employ to locate and relocate their group identities. Although most participants agreed about the basic distinctions between a good and bad advert, knowing which brands were considered ‘legitimate’, ‘in’ or ‘cool’ was a way to demonstrate their subcultural status. One of the reasons interviewees were so willing to talk about equipment seemed to be to ‘display’ subcultural capital; the interviews themselves were a performance to demonstrate that status. In both sports, the more ‘core’ interviewees talked about the adverts with a greater degree of confidence and certainty.

Conversely, the newer members of the skating community who had limited subcultural knowledge, had difficulty explaining some adverts, particularly interpreting the intention of the company. As noted in previous research (Beal and Weidman, in press), companies intentionally incorporate ‘insider mentality’ in their adverts in order to engender authenticity. In more recent interviews, this insider mentality was exemplified by an Adidas ad that showed skateboarders wearing conventional athletics clothing and doing systematic training of plyometrics. One of the ways alternative sport participants have defined themselves is by distancing themselves from the norms of the dominant athletic sport culture, such as the emphasis on ‘training’ routine and discipline that characterize plyometrics. Younger skaters tried to cover their inability to read this advert by calling it ‘random’ and claimed that randomness was cool or acceptable. More seasoned skaters assumed that Adidas was using ‘old school’ images for ironic purposes. As noted above, skateboarders appreciate ironic sensibilities in the adverts. In this case, Adidas was trying to position itself within skater mentality by poking fun at their own history of being connected to traditional sports, highlighting the values which skaters reject. What was interesting is that seasoned skateboarders who understood the irony still did not highly rate the advert, claiming that it did not grab their attention. They preferred seeing an actual skateboard trick.
Lifestyle Branding and Identity

Despite windsurfers being hostile to conspicuous consumption of the ‘kit’ (cf. Wheaton, 2000a), their discussion of brands demonstrated the depth and complexity of readers’ relationship with the kit. Conversations around the adverts centred around which brands they used and ‘bought into’, yet, concurrently they talked about equipment as a ‘necessary evil’. The interviews also illustrated the complex part that advertising played in creating a brand’s identity, as well as the ways in which individuals made decisions about which brands to purchase. ‘Cultural meanings are transferred to brands and it is brands that are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity’ (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998: 131):

Well the it’s kind of making me think, yeah I could do that with — I could be him if I had that kit. The thing is I’m already convinced of the name Mistral and Naish, they’ve done enough to convince me that the brand is a worthwhile brand so . . . I already own some Naish’s anyway. The ad just sort of reconfirms what I already know which is that they’ve got a good range and they’re worth considering. (Jonathan)

The windsurfers demonstrated an emotional attachment to some brands and their products. Their ‘readings’ demonstrated the ways in which they constructed brand identities, confirming brands they owned as superior. Furthermore, interviewees used the adverts to construct narratives of ‘self’ that demonstrated their own ‘subcultural history’ based around the consumption of equipment:

Well for me, it’s Naish. Right. But only because I really like it. I really like sailing it. It’s really small but I can still float if the wind goes. So, whereas I find these (pointing at a board in the advert) quite slothful. Really hard work but then it’s probably just the way I sail. But it’s good, I like the ad. (Susan)

Through advert consumption readers constructed and demonstrated both their individual self-identity, and how it related to a collective subcultural identity.

Nevertheless, as Warde (1994) has described, the definition of ‘self’ through consumption is an ‘uncertain process’, and beginners/newcomers, in particular, found insider knowledge about equipment quite excluding and alienating. More advanced interviewees emphasized the individual character of equipment, by stressing how equipment ‘felt’ to the individual:

I’d physically want to look at it, and the first thing I’d do is check the material. That ad does not convince me to buy a Gul wetsuit because I’m afraid wetsuits, really the brief of it is the wearing, the fit and the longevity. (Jonathan)

Stuart claimed, ‘I would try one and I would go on what I know the general gossip is in the industry and people using them.’ Interviewees expressed a much greater scepticism towards brands trying to sell products on ‘new’ technical ideas. Those with high levels of insider knowledge described this as ‘marketing crap’:

Most of it is bullshit anyway. It’s about feel and what you like. . . . I’d try it, and if I liked the shape or have a look at it and if I thought it looked good and would work and rigged well. (Simon)
Pete highlighted that the board used in the ad was not the ‘genuine’ product — the one you could buy off the shelf — but a custom-made copy, designed and individualized for the needs of the elite windsurfer, and then sprayed-up to look like the mass-produced version. He suggesting the advertiser was trying to ‘dupe’ the consumer.15

These dialogues demonstrate consumers’ active engagement with the commercialization process. The windsurfers did not explicitly ‘resist’ the influence of the consumer industries, but constructed ‘alternative’ discourses of authenticity within the context and discourse of consumerism. One of these alternative discourses was to focus on the aesthetic feeling of the product — an experience that was hard(er) to commodify. Similarly as the next section documents, skaters’ and windsurfers’ evaluation of brands, and the corporations that underlie them, was primarily based on the companies’ commitment to and understanding of their sport and lifestyle.

The Commodification of Attitude: ‘Doing it’ Fetishism

As described, part of the rationale for participants to accept products as legitimate was the brand’s attitude of commitment to the activity and community; ads that depicted skill and risk were not automatically accepted as legitimate. For the skaters, this outlook is illustrated by their commentary about Nike entering the market. Surprisingly, given its mainstream status, most skaters liked the Nike skate shoe ads. However they were very concerned about Nike’s motivation because there was not a long-standing commitment to the skateboarding community. Mike did not appreciate Nike’s entrance to the market, ‘they have to invade everything, like Microsoft’. Eric made a similar comment about Nike’s intentions, ‘just to get a piece of it, they don’t have to take over everything’.

Skaters acknowledged this type of authenticity, a long-term commitment to the sport, if the company or brand demonstrated a working knowledge of the sport. Many skaters positively commented on equipment that was designed by skaters. Andy commented, ‘right now I wear Emericas and they’re really cool, they have all kind of ollie guards, you can tell it was designed by somebody who skated’. This type of corporate commitment was also recognized by the participants in their reading of who the intended audience was. If the intended audience of the product is perceived to be ‘core’ skaters, the company is given more credit. A brand was considered weak if the intended audience was assumed to be newcomers or outsiders. For example, Sara noted that World Industries, Blind, and Gameboy adverts were geared towards ‘little tikes’ (those younger than teenagers) and thus lost legitimacy. Ely and his friend were adamant about the ‘goofiness’ of ‘Ghetto Child’ brand. It was initially thought this reading had a social class or ethnic dimension, but they claimed that they did not like it because it was geared toward kids, or even those who do not skate: ‘They (that brand) are just trying to get people to buy their stuff, they don’t care if they like skating, they just want them to buy stuff’ (Ely). Ely’s friend chimed in, ‘they are trying to make it ok for people who don’t skate to wear it’. Andy noted, ‘The issue is who they are catering to, if the company is trying to get the mainstream to buy their stuff, that
doesn’t cut it 'cause usually that means they aren’t going to make a good skate shoe.’

Similarly windsurfers were sceptical of brands that could not demonstrate long-term (‘real’) commitment to windsurfing or surfing, or were targeting newcomers/beginners. An informal group discussion about why a new British clothing brand was considered ‘uncool’ was revealing in understanding this construction of authenticity. The discussion showed that, like the skaters, ‘being real’ came from understanding the surfing aesthetic, which could only evolve from having been involved with the sport — ‘doing it’. Thus, although all surf brands had become big corporations, their favoured surfing brands had a ‘hard core’ image that came from ‘being real’.

Commodification of ‘Other’

The social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what is dislikes and by what it emphatically isn’t. (Thornton, 1995: 105)

Textual analysis of skateboard and windsurfing magazines has shown that male subjects dominate images, and that a traditional or hegemonic masculinity is prevalent (Rinehart, 1999; Treas, 2000; Wheaton, 1997). In addition, it has been observed that images of these activities seem to be dominated by white participants (Wheaton, 1997), and in North America are seen as potent symbols of whiteness (Gottdiener, 1995; Kusz, 1999). Our analysis demonstrates that masculinity is central to the representation of the ‘authentic’ windsurfers and skaters. However, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality all contribute to the ways in the ways Otherness is inscribed in these texts (see Wheaton and Beal, 2002). While space precludes a discussion of the complex and often contradictory ways in which the white male subject was constructed as the ‘authentic’ subject, we will briefly summarize the key findings illustrating how reader’s discourses constructed, and contested, women, and non-white participants as the Other.16

Beach babes and skate betties  Both subcultures, their niche media and consumer industries use traditional, white hegemonic masculinity as a standard for acceptance. Yet among both groups there was a hesitancy to make gender or ‘race’ central, or even a part of, conversations and analysis about their sports. Instead, the participants wanted to discuss the ‘generic’ characteristics needed of a ‘person’ to be considered accepted, characteristics that nevertheless invariably reflected values associated with hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Similarly, Thornton (1995: 105) has documented the ‘double articulation of the lowly and the feminine’ in dance cultures; ‘authentic’ culture is depicted as gender-free or masculine and remains the prerogative of boys (1995: 105).

Nevertheless we also noted that there were differences between and within the sports, both in terms of the types and extent of the sexist imagery being used, authentic discourses of femininity, and how images of women as ‘other’ were consumed. This is perhaps not surprising as skating magazines are targeted at the teenage male, whereas the readers of windsurfing magazines included older,
more affluent men. Correspondingly, skating magazines contained a great deal of overtly sexist and misogynist imagery; almost all of the images of women were sexualized (Rinehart, 1999), very rarely depicting women skating. The windsurfing magazines predominantly portrayed male performers, however representations of women included both imagery that commodified the female body, and photos representing women as active, competent and advanced performers. Whereas the majority of male skaters relied on explaining sexist advertising and women in passive role as relatively unproblematic, ‘a reflection of skate culture’, the older more ‘privileged’ male windsurfers were more uneasy about the commodification of femininity as a beach babe.

Nevertheless, constructions of femininity in passive non-sporting roles, such as the ‘beach babe’ were contested by women (in both sports) and by many of the windsurfing men. While acknowledging that images of women in bikinis will always be open to sexualized readings, interviewees read images that pretended the subject was ‘doing it’ as ‘not real’, or inauthentic:

There’s no like, ‘oh let’s find the tiniest bikini we can and pretend we’re going to go out to surf the waves.’ I mean okay, she’s got a bikini on but she’s actually doing it. (Emma)

Whiteness Likewise, both groups also used assumptions about ‘whiteness’ as significant indicators of group membership; the Other is defined as black, the self is defined as white. Although non-white performers can be considered as ‘authentic’ participants, stereotypes of ‘race’ play a part in these discourses. Windsurfers in southern England were primarily white, and where non-white windsurfers were represented in magazines it was usually as the exotic ‘native’ in a travel feature, or one of a handful of international windsurfing personalities, predominantly from the Caribbean or Hawaii. Skateboarders in northern California included a wide range of ethnicities (all the women were white but half of the male subjects were Hispanic or Asian-American). However, their conversations around racial issues were often contradictory. Most of the participants noted that they skated with people of different ethnicities, and suggested that magazines present a racially diverse set of skaters, yet these skaters drew on traditional stereotypes of ‘race’ to describe this (claimed) diversity. Frequently, African-Americans were described as being able to ‘ollie’ higher, and that Asian-Americans to excel because they ‘take it seriously’ and ‘work harder’. It was acknowledged that it’s easier to be accepted as a skater if you are an average white guy rather than an average African-American or female: ‘I think that’s why you see a lot of black skaters who are good, they had to be good because if they weren’t they wouldn’t get respect at all’ (James).

Wilson and Sparks (2001) argued that, even though various ‘interpretive communities’ share cultural competencies in explaining texts, structural factors such as gender and race will influence those interpretations and the impact those have on lived experiences. Our research would concur with this. Most participants could articulate the same core values, but males and females had different interpretations about the impact of gender representation. With respect to issues of ‘race’, white skateboarders overwhelmingly claimed that race was not a central issue, while those non-white skaters were more forthcoming about racial
dynamics, such as being perceived as ‘whitewashed’ if one participated in skate-
boarding.

To summarize, the participants’ reading of adverts demonstrates that mascu-
linity is central to the representation of the ‘authentic’ windsurfer and skater, 
evertheless gender and ethnicity, as well as age, sexuality and nationality, all 
contribute to the ways in which ‘otherness’ is inscribed in these texts. However, 
forms of exclusion are not rationalized directly in terms of gender or ethnicity but 
in terms of ‘authenticity’ and subcultural ‘style’, such as being committed and 
having ‘attitude’.

Concluding Comments: Keeping it ‘Real’ (or you can’t Commodify ‘Attitude’)

Our initial interest in this project was to explore the role of subcultural media in 
the formation and reaffirmation of the participants’ identities, particularly how 
commodities and their images are used in the construction of subcultural identi-
ties. Our research suggests that these media played an important role in provid-
ing cultural knowledges, but also as an avenue for participants to practise or 
display their subcultural capital through a critical analysis of equipment or 
brands. While individuals ascribed different and at times contradictory meanings 
to specific products and brands, in both cultures there was a ‘shared imagination’ 
based around collective understandings of the meaning of advertisements. In 
these subcultural contexts, advertising literacy itself becomes a form of sub-
cultural capital and identity. We also found that respondent’s subcultural status 
impacts the interpretation and use of these magazines and their images. In par-
ticular, those just attaining status find them useful, whereas more established 
participants only read them sparingly. In addition, gender and ‘race’ were perti-
nent to subcultural status. Both sports, and their media, are based in normative 
assumptions of ‘maleness’ and ‘whiteness’, making full inclusion complicated 
for female and non-white participants.

For the windsurfers and skaters, legitimate or authentic discourses of their 
sports centred on action photos of people ‘doing it’ and their associated lifestyles 
and social worlds. Inauthentic images included those that portrayed equipment 
purely as ‘soul-less’ commodities, or reduced its meaning to technological func-
tion, such as in the testing of equipment. In neither sport did the (majority of) 
readers overtly critique the corporations within their sport industries, for exa-
ample, windsurfers for the over production and expense of equipment, and skaters 
for ‘selling out’ to mainstream companies like Nike. However they were critical 
of adverts and images that tried to commodify the aesthetic experience of their 
sports, contesting the authenticity of these representations and discourses, if not 
the industry itself:

What those other ads are doing for me, however, is reminding me of the sort of the whole 
reason I windsurf which isn’t to buy equipment. It’s to live a lifestyle and to do a sport that is 
fantastic. So those ads hit the spot because they appeal on all of those things, not just the 
equipment, which I don’t take enough pleasure out of just looking at my equipment or other 
people’s equipment. I take more pleasure out of sailing or being somewhere or thinking 
about sailing somewhere. Or hanging out or . . . (Ian)
In both sports, participants were critical of the magazines, and particularly the control they — that is, the producers and advertisers — had to define representations of their sport. Strategies adopted included not buying magazines, and verbal disapproval — claiming not to read and buy magazines.

Attempting to explain the meanings of alternative sports and their media in relation to ‘market incorporation’ and ‘resistance’ to the market ignores the centrality of consumer capitalism and the media industries in their very inception and meanings. Alternative sport cultures were produced within the context and discourse of consumerism; processes of commercialization and commodification were integral from the creation of the products of consumption (equipment, clothing, etc.), to impacting the meanings, and distribution of cultural knowledges. In these subcultural spaces, participants did not resist materiality, they contested the discourses about materiality, and importantly who has power to define and shape those discourses. Resistance, in these contexts is not a struggle with dominant hegemonic culture, but located at the level of the everyday (Malbon, 1998: 280); in the spaces of the subcultural media the ‘challenge’ is principally a ‘contest of representation’ (Hetherington, 1998). This shifting emphasis does not represent a ‘de-politicizing’ of popular culture, but illustrates the complex webs in the ‘“micro politics of subordination and dominance” that characterise popular culture’ (Thornton, 1995: 168), and the relationship between media forms and sports cultures and practices.

Notes

1. Linked to this point is the critique that their research was theory-led. The research was based on Gramsci’s theorization of class, adopting his notion of hegemony. It has been widely argued that the CCCS researchers became theory-led and the empirical basis was limited.
2. This is not Morley’s position. He uses this term in addressing criticisms of his work.
3. It should be noted that in this article we predominantly address critiques of the CCCS cultural consumption work from within the ‘culturalist perspective’. Nevertheless, the most vociferous critiques of new audience research have come from political economists such as James Curran. (See e.g. Curran’s (1990) highly critical discussion of what he call the ‘New Revisionism’ in mass communications research.) Furthermore, linked to these concerns about media consumption and active audiences is a wider concern raised by the political economy perspective, arguing that increasingly cultural studies has lost a link with the material world, ignoring the influence and power of the capitalist (media) systems that produce these contexts (see Philo and Miller, 2000). Such criticisms could of course be directed at this research project.
4. The literature on media and cultural consumption is extremely extensive, and we do not claim to present an overview or review. For an excellent overview of media audience studies related to the sporting context see Wilson and Sparks (1996).
5. Similar arguments about subcultural media consumption, and the discourses of authenticity are made in Wheaton and Beal (2002).
6. Thornton’s work has since been adopted by researchers like Muggleton (2000) and similar ideas are developed by Gillespie’s (1995) in her study of media consumption (including adverts).
7. It should also be noted that male academics tended to celebrate male subcultural practices as oppositional or resistant even when those practices were sexist or racist (see Skelton and Valentine, 1998a: 16).
8. Collectively we interviewed 44 people over a three-year period
9. Beal’s research suggests that considerable changes have occurred in skating since her original research from the early 1990s. Future work will explore differences between the original and
latter sets of data, particularly in relation to the increased commercialization of the skating culture. The windsurfing data suggest that change since 1997 had been minimal, hence we draw on both data sets (1997 and 2000).

10. In this article we discuss a selection of these themes, focusing on commonalities and points of divergence between the sporting cultures and their media.

11. Wilson and Carrington (2001) warn that cross-cultural research on subcultures has tended not to engage theoretically with issues relating to the local and global, particularly how local cultures relate to global forces.

12. *Boards* magazine’s own audience research suggests only 5 percent of *Boards*’ readership were women (Wheaton, 1997).

13. We (and the windsurfing magazines) use the terms soul surfing to differentiate the anti-competition type of windsurfing activity, usually wave sailing. See Wheaton (1997).

14. Stedman (1997) makes a similar point in her discussion of surfing’s anti-mainstream attitude. She suggests that one of the reasons for the surfing media adopting an extreme sexist attitude is a reaction to the increased commodification of their culture by the mainstream, and particularly symbols such as surf style.

15. That he made such a distinction between the real and the copy again suggests a belief in an essential original authentic object and self.

16. These issues are discussed and exemplified in detail in Wheaton and Beal (2002).

17. Correspondingly the male skaters interviewed were aged 16–22, whereas the windsurfers were 25–40.

18. Discourses around travel that promote such radicalized images of exoticism encourage readers to become ‘media tourists’, a form of ‘symbolic colonialism’ (Davis, 1997: 112) that reinforces the colonial mentality, viewing the (post)colonialized Other as an exotic spectacle. For example, the Hawaiian windsurfers were often depicted as having a ‘natural’ affinity with the water, being closer to ‘nature’, thus perpetuating western mythology about (post)colonialized countries (and subjects) being more primitive than the ‘civilized’ West.

19. From informal reviews, there does appear to be broad ethnic representation, although there is no data on whether specific skaters are over-represented. Most skaters identified the same African-American pro skater as evidence of representation.

References


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