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**Colour in the Lines:
The Racial Politics and Possibilities of US Skateboarding Culture**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

This thesis examines the informal sporting culture of skateboarding as a contested site of racial politics in the United States of America (US). Action sports scholars have long identified the 'whiteness' of this sport but rarely created space for the voices of people of colour (POC) within skateboarding. Underpinned by Critical Race Theory (CRT), this project centralizes the previously unheard voices of POC and reveals the unique challenges, strategies, and successes of POC within the elite skateboarding culture across particular historical contexts of skateboarding and within US society.

With the aim of understanding the complex and nuanced experiences of race within the skateboarding culture, sport, and industry, I conducted semi-structured interviews with forty male and seven female skateboarders of colour who have played critical roles in the culture as athletes, company owners, managers and media producers. Participants in the study are from a spectrum of racial backgrounds (African American, Asian American, Latinx/Hispanic) with their skateboarding participation ranging from the mid-1970s to the present day. Interviews were supplemented by a quantitative and qualitative examination of skateboarding magazines over this same time frame.

Engaging the empirical material in dialogue with CRT, the key themes are organized into four chapters. The first explores the importance of family and community in forming the participants' earliest understandings of race, racism, and politics. It then examines their initial participation in skateboarding, including the challenges of facing racial stereotypes from their communities and society in general. The next chapter outlines the path into

professional skateboarding and the racial politics of gaining ‘visibility’ from those in power positions within the industry. It also examines the formation of elite skateboarding teams and the critical role of mentorship and interpersonal relationships with other POC as well as with non-POC allies. The third chapter focuses on the critical role of niche media, and particularly the politics of visibility within skateboarding magazines. The fourth and final chapter focuses on SOC as agents of change within the skateboarding industry as designers of skateboarding artifacts (i.e., shoes, boards) and company owners. In this chapter, we see the power dynamics shifting with POC skaters holding key roles, and with their creative entrepreneurship and unique strategies impacting the iconography of global skateboarding.

Ultimately, adopting a CRT approach, this project is supported by the politics of the researcher—an African American skateboarder, photographer, and critical scholar—who recognized the need to create a forum for the long-overlooked voices and experiences of racial minorities within skateboarding. In so doing, both narratives of the positioning of POC within skateboarding, as well as the politics of researching action sports communities, are challenged. Chronicling the endeavours of pioneering cultural intermediaries within the unique sporting culture of skateboarding, this thesis reveals how individual and collective actions have gained momentum over the past four decades and changed the racial possibilities for future generations.

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Prologue

I was returning home from a routine trip to the store when I encountered one of the neighbourhood kids sobbing on the cement steps of our hi-rise apartment in the downtown of a New England East coast city during the mid-1980s. It was Lil' Markus and he was surrounded by a large group of multiracial groups of kids from our hi-rise. I remember being shocked by the congregation, all embroiled in an odd mixture of cajoling and consoling. Something terrible must have happened for them to care, as the dominant attitude around here was usually 'look out for your own.' This was an attitude we cultivated from our parents and saw practiced most days. However, somehow, three dozen kids were now swarmed around Lil' Markus—the tall but skinny for his age, new arrival to our apartment block—some were even offering words of support. 'What happened,' I asked? 'Markus got got,' someone responded. One of the older boys interrupted, 'So, what—he ain't Puerto Rican! I ain't got to do a thing for him'. A small sub-group off to the side started laughing. 'Shut up—somebody stole his skateboard!' barked Caroline from the third floor, an Asian American elder at all of sixteen. A silence fell across the group. Over the past year, everyone in the building had started dabbling in skateboarding, and we were getting more and more into it with each passing day. Skating was the best activity for a landlocked group of kids living in the concrete six-block circumference that made up our home base. 'That could have been any of us' snapped Michael from the fifth floor. 'You can't just take someone's skateboard,' yelled another kid. 'Let's get it back!' In a flash, a mob of young sugar-high bloodthirsty juveniles descended on the crime scene, a bus line depot three blocks away. Amid the smoke fumes and lines of people waiting for their ride

home, we searched for the culprits. Twenty minutes later, we returned empty-handed, and Lil' Markus continued to sob.

Later that afternoon, most of the kids, myself included, gathered in the stairwell to devise a plan. This was to be my first experience of a 'charity' campaign. 'We're all donating skateboard parts for Lil' Markus—got anything?' one of the older guys asked. My sister possessed some old roller-skate wheels; they were a bit too soft and didn't roll so well on warm asphalt, but I offered up the bounty and joined the procession. From the 18th floor to the third the crusade continued until we achieved the Holy Grail—a semi-broken skateboard deck doctored together with black electrical tape. Six hours later, in the back of the lobby, we nervously cobbled together a complete skateboard for Lil' Markus. Upon giving him the board, his face lit up with joy, and I wasn't sure if it was the realization that he could still go skating tomorrow or that this motley crew had gone to such lengths to produce this gift. Before this event, residents rarely spoke across racial divisions—now, no one could keep quiet. We sat together in the lobby, everyone relaying their individual skateboarding experiences and sharing their dreams of its possibilities.

This early collective experience went on to inform my future understandings of skateboarding culture as a space for diversity and support across multicultural lines. Our group became a motley 'skate-crew,' attempting to navigate parental expectations, survive formal sports, and all the racial sporting stereotypes that went with them, sometimes successfully and other times not. I would eventually head to California and become part of the skateboarding industry as a semi-professional skateboarder, skateboarding photographer, and journalist, later a skateboarding envoy for the US and now a developing scholar. Throughout it all, my early memories of skateboarding with a

racially diverse group of friends from that New England East coast apartment complex mixed with new experiences across race, gender, and class lines, but always intersected with my awareness of living in a highly racialized and divided US society. At times, skateboarding felt like my oasis away from the madness, but at other times, I was struck by how fluidly racism and reverse-racism could develop both from within the culture and from communities of colour opposed to skateboarding.

When I last saw Lil' Markus, he reminded me of my new role as 'an elder.' "Neftalie, you can do something special with skateboarding. You see how it can bring people together and see ways it can tear people apart. Everyone needs to know how both those things can happen—that's your responsibility". This thesis is my attempt to provide space for those people of colour whose lived experiences of skateboarding have not been seen, heard, or told. Their stories are my stories. These stories are our stories.

1 Introduction

In late July and August 2021, millions of viewers will be tuned into the Olympics in Tokyo. For the casual observers, this is an Olympics like any other. However, for the roughly six million US skateboarders (Bradstreet & Barker, 2016), and an estimated 11 million skateboarders worldwide (SkateReview, 2019) this summer marks the debut of 'Olympic skateboarding' on what the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Thomas Bach, refers to as 'the world's greatest sporting stage' (IOC, 2016, 2019). Already approved for the Paris 2024 Olympics (IOC, 2019), the inclusion of skateboarding represents an arguably new sphere of influence for the IOC, potentially allowing inroads into the diverse participants of the global skateboarding community (Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018a). One indicator of the diversity in elite skateboarding culture is evidenced through a photo of the US Olympic team (Figure 1).



Figure 1-1 The US Olympic Skateboarding team

The elite skaters depicted include multiple males and females of colour from diverse racial backgrounds and positionalities, such as African American bi-racial pro skater Nyjah Houston and African American female Samarria Brevard, among others. A further indication of the historical diversity in elite skateboarding was provided in a recent article published by the popular skateboarding website *Jenkem*. Titled “Appreciating LatinX immigrants that shaped skateboarding’ (Kerr, 2019), the article offered an abridged history of elite skateboarders descended from LatinX or Hispanic immigrants. Through the article Kerr (2019) offered a subtle rebuttal to the current wave of anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant sentiment in the broader US culture and acknowledged how racial bias often leads to people of colour (POC) being absent from the broader history of skateboarding culture. In Kerr’s (2019) opinion,

[US skateboarding history] usually places white men from the old U S of A, sometimes even regressive figures like Jay Adams and Jason Jesse, at the core. But that’s a whitewashing of our kaleidoscopic narrative, a lightening of the hue of our history. It minimizes the immense contributions made by people of color, particularly first and second-generation immigrants, and dulls the diversity that makes skateboarding great (p. 1)

Kerr’s (2019) anecdote acknowledges that there are significant accomplishments by POC within elite US skateboarding culture, further signalling a diversity of untold narratives of elite skaters of colour (SOC) waiting for discovery and inclusion.

A similar narrative of diversity within skateboarding culture is reflected in evidence from ‘everyday’ skateboarders in the US. During an interview for this research conducted with Thomas Barker, Director of the International Association of Skateboarding Companies (IASC), Barker revealed that of the current 6.4 million US skateboarders (Bradstreet &

Barker, 2016), roughly 27% self-identify as a person of colour (personal communication, 2017). The *LA84 Foundation Youth Sports Survey* reported that in LA County alone, 52% of skateboarders surveyed identified as Latinx, and 15% as Black/African American (Foundation, 2016). Combined, the elite POC in the USA skateboarding team, the signposting of the ‘missing’ histories in the *Jenkem* article, and the high proportion of POC participants in the skateboarding survey, make clear that there is a racial diversity in skateboarding in the US. However, currently there is limited knowledge and academic discussion of the lived experiences of POC who transitioned from their local community into elite skateboarding culture; nor is there a broader discussion of their contributions to elite skateboarding. This thesis addresses the lack of scholarship regarding the processes and politics of POC transitioning into, and contributing to, elite skateboarding culture.

My interest in the diversity and participation of SOC stems from my position as an African American skateboarder with experiences spanning two decades as a semi-professional skateboarder, a journalist and photographer in the skateboarding industry, and then later as an envoy for the US Department of State using skateboarding as a tool for cultural diplomacy. At multiple times in my life, I have encountered current popular notions and discourses from academics that marginalize—even if unintentionally—the voices of POC and their contributions to global skateboarding culture. These discourses run contrary to the experiences of my youth, and the stories of participants who took part in this research and created space for others within the sport over the decades. Ironically, while discussing the history of US male and female SOC during my ‘official’ role as US sports envoy, I found the lack of literature on race in skateboarding disheartening. Without an open available

history of POC in skateboarding culture to ground my stories of US skateboarding, my efforts could be interpreted by audiences as singular, rather than a continuation of the collective efforts of POC in skateboarding. In my opinion, this needed correcting—I was not the first, nor would I be the last, African American skateboarder wanting to make a better world through their passion for this sport. I recognized the need to create space for the experiences of POC, and for their stories to be documented. Currently, there is no research that centres the experiences of race for elite skaters of colour. Thus, the following primary and secondary research questions are the driving impetus for this thesis:

Primary Research Question

What are the experiences of African Americans and people of colour in elite skateboarding culture in the United States?

Secondary questions

- What strategies were developed individually and collectively by skaters of colour to support one another and navigate power?
- In what ways might skaters of colour have acted as agents of change in skateboarding culture?

With the aim of understanding the rich and diverse lived experiences of POC in elite skateboarding culture, I conducted interviews with 47 SOC from multiple racial backgrounds, positionalities, and identities, alongside an extended media analysis of skateboarding niche magazines (see Chapter Three: Methods). In answering these questions, this thesis is a response to calls posed by other scholars in action sports for more research that brings the experiences of those deeply embedded in action sport cultures to

the fore so that we may better understand the racial politics of these informal cultures (Rinehart, 2000; Wheaton, 2010)

1.1 Key literature

As an academic field of inquiry, skateboarding has been examined through a variety of theoretical lenses (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). Early research focused on understanding the unique cultural values within skateboarding (Beal, 1995). In this vein, there was a focus on ‘authenticity’ and who had the power to define it (Beal & Weidman, 2003). In such work, it was often explained that the dominant framework ‘celebrated’ young white males and marginalized women (Beal & Weidman, 2003; Wheaton, 2004; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). This marginalization has led to a large body of literature focused on gender in skateboarding (Beal, 1996; Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005; MacKay & Dallaire, 2013; Pomerantz, Currie, & Kelly, 2004). Other topics include the exploration of representation in portrayals of skateboarding in informal media (Jeffries, Messer, & Swords, 2016) and popular media (Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2007; Yochim, 2010), processes of commercialization (Dinces, 2011; Dixon, 2015; Lombard, 2010), identity politics (Beal, Atencio, Wright, & McClain, 2016; Willing & Shearer, 2015), spatial politics, (e.g., Borden, 2003, 2019; Howell, 2005), and some limited discussions of race (Atencio, Yochim, & Beal, 2013; Brayton, 2005; Dupont, 2014; Wheaton, 2013; Yochim, 2010).

In reading discussions of race in skateboarding, at times, I became upset and even angry at the lack of depth within the current literature. However, over time, I recognized the limitation of research that is always constrained in what it can achieve within a journal article, book chapter, or thesis. Nonetheless, from my perspective as a person of colour in

the US, the discussions of race are problematic in that they have not included the voices of POC in the research or analysis in a meaningful way. Therefore, such research does not allow for drawing broader conclusions about the impact of race and racism in skateboarding culture.

While POC have been used to illustrate theoretical frameworks in research on skateboarding and action sports more broadly (discussed in detail in Chapter 2), their voices are missing. Too often, they have been used as signifiers, without consideration of their understandings, rationales, and reflections on their experiences in everyday or elite skateboarding culture. This disconnect has left a sizeable gap in the literature on race in skateboarding culture and misses the opportunity to connect action sports scholarship to the literature on race and sport, and the struggle faced by POC in the US more broadly. This dissertation addresses those issues, bridging gaps between fields through the use of a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, which creates room for the stories of elite male and female SOC and their reflections.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The thesis is underpinned by CRT, which posits that racism exists and operates continuously, surrounding us in 'invisible' networks of power (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). CRT further argues that racism is built into the ideas and structure of 'everyday' thinking and leads to systems of literal and 'symbolic' power, which systematically disenfranchise POC and attempt to remove their access to power and resources within those structures (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, Stefancic, & Liendo, 2012). Therefore this research functions with an understanding that racism works in a myriad of intersectional ways:

structurally, culturally, disciplinarily, and interpersonally, in multiple configurations (Collins, 2009, pp. 53-54). These concepts informed both the types of questions asked of participants regarding race, as well as the analysis. This project operated with an understanding that POC are not a homogenous group and that all individuals experience race differently and from multiple contexts, positionalities, and identities (Delgado et al., 2012).

The use of a CRT-guided approach in this thesis required that the lives of POC be the central focus of the area of study and that the voices of POC be placed at the forefront, by inviting them to detail their own experiences and reflections on race (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012). It also provided a framework to understand that the ways in which people experience racism are individual and function fluidly within sets of circumstances, which vary from person to person (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012). Therefore, throughout this project, my engagement with CRT (Delgado et al., 2012) allowed participants' multiple 'truths' to be woven together in a way that offers a critical 'alternative' perspective and reveals the experiences and collective of trends encountered by POC in skateboarding. In so doing, this thesis outlines the role 'race' and 'racism' and forms of racialized 'power' played in impacting POC in the US, while revealing strategies they used to usurp it. As will be made clear, the wide-ranging narratives resulted in an opportunity to decipher how the development of the post-Civil Rights movement impacted the informal sporting culture and created obstacles and opportunities for POC to operate alongside and in opposition to 'white' counterparts in ways still only dreamed of within formal sporting cultures.

The voices of these previously unheard SOC operate in conversation with my own voice. Through the analysis I am reflective of my position as an African American male formerly employed in elite skateboarding culture, with an intimate knowledge of race, and as one who faced similar racialized experiences to those included in this thesis. At times this was difficult and it presented challenges as a researcher dealing with the sensitive topic of race. I consistently worked through and reframed my strategy and analysis to determine the best ways to continue to research, reflect upon, and remain responsive and responsible to the communities of colour described throughout this research. As part of a CRT-guided approach, researchers are responsible for acting as advocates for the communities researched (Delgado et al., 2012). To fulfill that obligation, I conducted a series of panels and discussions on race involving the research participants. Working alongside them in this way created opportunities to elevate their stories beyond academia and bring them into open public discourses to seed future discussions.

1.3 Key Concepts

Throughout the thesis, several terms are used that contain varying degrees of contested definitions. For the purpose of this thesis, I define my use of the terms to provide clarity to my use of specific concepts.

1.3.1.1 People of colour (POC)

The term people of colour (POC) is used to describe the racial background of participants broadly. This term is widely adopted in contemporary US culture and is used interchangeably with the term 'minority', to represent persons of racial backgrounds other

than 'white' Caucasian or European ancestry (Omi & Howard, 2014). Its use in this thesis reflects an advocacy for POC and is a part of the CRT-guided perspective. The use of the term is an acknowledgment of the shared history of 'non-white' people in the US who face collective oppression from the 'white' systems of power. The use of the collective term 'people of colour' (POC) is not an attempt to erase individual histories but instead, to place them in solidarity with collective lives past and present who endure the 'invisible' network of subjugation in the US (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Although the racialized experiences described by participants in this research are 'individual', they make up a larger narrative of the experiences of 'non-whites' (which participants may or may not be aware of). Therefore, POC is meant as a reminder of the shared background and connection within the larger frame of historical racial practices and politics of the US (Omi & Howard, 2014) embraced from the 1960s onward. Thus, POC in this thesis represents a political turn towards 'enfranchisement' rather than separation or 'disenfranchisement.' In so doing, I take inspiration from the writing of Yuen (1997):

The category "people of color" lies in its capacity to articulate a common positioning as the binary to a crumbling white supremacy while at the same time serving as a site of tense but productive interactions between racialized communities who harbor no prior affirmative notions of solidarity. [...] These racialized communities will come to the formation of "people of color" from vastly different economic and political locations. Nevertheless, as long as white supremacy and racism continue to exist, this racial project will retain its discursive salience and political necessity (p. 107)

Recognizing that racism is still prevalent, the thesis reflects and acknowledges there is 'power' within the words chosen to describe POC. It is a small step, but one that holds

responsibility in delivering the stories of POC as they increase their ability to raise their voices and to change the public discourse.

The term 'skaters of colour' (SOC) is used similarly in this thesis. It is offered to introduce and acknowledge a link between the shared racialized experiences of POC within the specific context of skateboarding culture and to allow for further solidarity. Wherever possible, I acknowledge the differences among SOC of various racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. My aim is not to provide a broad brushstroke across all SOC, but rather to reveal the multiple and diverse forms of racism, as well as the unique strategies for those individually and collectively carving out space within elite skateboarding.

1.3.1.2 Agency

Agency is theorized in critical theory in a number of ways. Tiffin, Ashcroft, and Griffiths (2013) offer a useful definition: "In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed" (p. 6). In this thesis I define agency through understanding whether or not an individual has the ability to 'act' or express or make their will known without threat or coercion by covert or overt forces. Additionally, my notion of agency is guided by a CRT interpretation of agency that is rooted deeply in the African American experience in the US. Robinson (2004) translates the meaning of agency within that context:

During slavery, when whites ruled blacks by law, vigilance, and violence, blacks fought and died, all in the name of their natural, normal claim to freedom. Choosing to fight and die, slaves showed us their power to act

purposefully. The power to act is human agency, and these actions can support or transform society (p. 1362).

Robinson (2004) also points to the forces which constrict the agency of POC within that context:

Within a broad structuralist framework, white structural oppression refers to practices like racism that constitute an objective, external power that robs people of their natural right to be free human beings (p. 1362).

My use of the definitions provided by Tiffin et al. (2013) and Robinson (2004) allow me to bookend my definition of agency. The first definition of agency is in more abstract theoretical terms, which suffices in some instances, but the second is the most important and powerful. Robinson's acknowledgement that African Americans in the US operated under less than human conditions, but always with the potential for transformative power, has informed this research into the lives of POC in skateboarding culture. Where does their power come from and what does agency look like for the POC who have been fundamentally oppressed in every aspect of US life? Using CRT as a reminder of the long struggle of POC, I kept all of their stories close to me and let them ultimately tell both the reader and myself what agency meant to them, regardless of how their efforts might 'appear' to those outside of the context. My definition of agency is thus sensitive to the US context and acknowledges that African Americans have an intimate historical relationship with what 'freedom' is, and the inability to control their own bodies due to chattel slavery, and later institutionalized racism. Therefore, context matters when defining agency and freedom, and I was interested in letting the participants interpret it for themselves as POC.

Thus, my definition of agency and change is guided by CRT and from my participants' definitions as POC in the US context.

1.3.1.3 Race/ethnicity

My use of the term 'race' throughout this thesis accepts that scholars debate the use of the terms 'race' (Hylton, 2009) and 'ethnicity' (Jackson, 1998). For the purpose of this thesis my usage of 'race' is informed by CRT scholars who used and developed this approach (Bell, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado et al., 2012) in order to counter the impact of racism in *all* its forms for those oppressed. Similar to those scholars, this work and the use of the term race does not attempt to remove any of the individualism or particularities in anyone's experience and "race is not applied without caution' (Hylton, 2009, p. 2). This project context is framed by an understanding that race also incorporates ethnicity (Hylton, 2009). Admittedly, 'race' is a fluid construct that moves between multiple contexts (Adair & Rowe, 2010; Hall, Mercer, & Gates Jr., 2017; White, 2010). Within this research, I use the term 'race' because participants' experiences broadly operated from a US perspective and context and preferred that term. They also all noted that 'race' is historically the most salient way in which they understood themselves and their struggles within 'historical racial formations' (Omi & Howard, 2014). In conclusion, as posited by Hylton (2009),

The politics of 'race' is such that oppressed groups have used the language of 'race' to their own ends as a tool to challenge racists, deflect abuse, to unify and as a source of pride (Hylton, 2009, p. 28).

This being the case, the use of 'race' stems from my adoption of CRT, and respect for my participants' experiences and self-identification reported in this study.

1.4 Thesis overview

The thesis consists of seven chapters, with findings represented in four empirical chapters. Following this introductory chapter, I provide a review of the current literature on action sports, skateboarding, and race in sport. Chapter 3 explains in detail the methodology used for the thesis (interviews combined with media analysis), ethical considerations, issues of reflexivity, the mode of analysis, sample, racial categorization, praxis as method, and the representation of the narrative. In Chapter 4, I begin the empirical part of this thesis by exploring the early lives of POC and the salience of race in their lives and their communities. I then examine their initial participation in skateboarding, including the challenges of facing racial stereotypes from their communities and society in general. Chapter 5 outlines the path towards professional skateboarding for SOC and investigates the racial politics of gaining 'visibility' from those in power positions within the industry. Chapter 5 investigates further the critical role of mentorship and interpersonal relationships with other POC as well as with non-POC allies during the formation of elite skateboarding teams. It also explores how experiences of racism potentially influence the decisions of SOC. Chapter 6 presents an examination of the critical role of niche media, and particularly the politics of 'visibility' in skateboarding magazines. Drawing upon a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this chapter identifies the most noteworthy images featuring SOC (on covers and inside magazines), the significance of these images for SOC and the culture, as well as the politics and strategies in producing such imagery. Chapter 7, the final empirical chapter, focuses on SOC as agents of change within the skateboarding industry as designers of skateboarding artifacts (i.e., shoes, boards) and company owners. In this chapter, we see

the power dynamics shifting with SOC holding key roles, and with their creative entrepreneurship and unique strategies impacting the iconography of global skateboarding. The chapter also examines how the quest for more power by SOC also connects to the broader historical movement of POC in the struggle for power in the US. In the final chapter of the thesis, I conclude by providing a summary of the key findings and an encapsulation of the broader themes of race and the significance of the contribution to the literature on skateboarding culture. I also offer reflections on the potential power of informal sporting cultures, like skateboarding, for offering alternative spaces for racial politics to emerge. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of the research and insight into potential future research agendas and potential collaborations.

2 Bridging the Gap:

Literature on Race, Sport, and Skateboarding

This chapter offers a review of the two bodies of literature most relevant to understanding the experiences of African Americans and POC in skateboarding culture. It begins by defining action sports (focusing particularly on board-sports) and explains their significance to the wider sociocultural literature of sports. The following sections outline key themes in action sports literature; cultural and identity politics, representation/commercialization, gender, spatial politics, and finally, racial politics. Following this, a more in-depth exploration of the literature on race in skateboarding is offered, which identifies and problematizes the gaps in the current literature. Subsequently, a brief overview of key literature on race and sport in the international and US context is provided, with a specific focus on literature in the United States. This overview provides an outline of leading theoretical frameworks used in the discussion of race and sport, before focusing on Critical Race Theory (CRT). The subsequent theoretical section highlights the origin of CRT and explains its importance in understanding race in sporting contexts. In so doing, this chapter highlights how this research adds to the literature on race in skateboarding culture and to the broader literature of race and sport.

2.1 Action sports – What they are and why do they matter?

‘Action sports’ are a group of relatively new sporting activities defined by scholars as “mostly individualized activities such as BMX, kite-surfing, skateboarding, surfing and snowboarding that differed [...] from traditional rule-bound, competitive, regulated

Western 'achievement' sport cultures" (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014, p. 341). Though each of these sports has a separate genealogical narrative, in some cases (particularly among board sports), the communities and participants may share similar artifacts and ethos. These typically include performing the sport for one's own sake and with less regard for formalized structures in competitions (Beal, 1995) and a do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude in pursuit of the pleasures of the sport (Augustini & Duret, 1999; Beal, 1995; Borden, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014). This early action-sports ethos ran largely in contrast to the 'top-down' hierarchical structures of traditional sport and the machinations and power dynamics behind them (Beal, 1995, 1996; Borden, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014; Wheaton, 2004, 2010). In the early 1990s, the ESPN sports network dubbed these activities 'extreme' sports, in a marketing effort to create an umbrella term for their mega-event the 'X-Games' (Rinehart, 2000). However, 'action sports' has become the preferred labeling amongst members of these communities, especially in the US (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014, p. 341).

Action sports grew in popularity, from the 1990s onward, even while traditional sports continued to dominate US media and sporting culture (Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Borden, 2019; Machemehl & Roul, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014). Scholars hypothesized that this could be due to participants envisioning these activities as a means of 'artistic expression' or 'lifestyle' (Loret, 1995; Rinehart, 2007; Wheaton, 2004). It may also represent participants seeking out a new sporting identity beyond 'team sports' or 'formal sports' in favour of their pursuits or communal achievements (Augustini & Duret, 1999; Wheaton, 2004). An essential question during this first era of scholarship, however, was whether the manifestation of these new sporting 'subcultures' or 'alternative sports' was directly in

response to the norms of dominant sport cultures (Beal, 1995; Loret, 1995; Rinehart, 2000). Scholars also questioned what insight(s) these sports might offer in terms of understanding and interpreting the future of global sporting culture (Beal, 1995; Rinehart, 2000; Wheaton, 2010; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). These early questions still provide the foundation of inquiry for many current scholars, many of whom were influenced by the early work in action sports (Cantin-Brault, 2015; Dupont, 2014; Kara-Jane, 2015; Machemehl & Roul, 2019; O'Connor, 2018; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014).

Furthermore, unlike traditional sports, these nascent action sports were evolving during a 'post-modern' or 'self-aware' era (Rinehart, 2007), without a similar sporting road-map to draw from, and without a clear course of progression (Borden, 2019). Operating under these conditions made these 'action sports' cognizant of themselves, their visibility, and the politics involved, with courtship from outside forces interested in commoditizing their culture (Rinehart, 2000). This unique evolution provided a new lens for understanding how these sporting subcultures' ethos might be affected by commercialization and globalization (Rinehart, 2000; Wheaton, 2000). The histories of action sports offer a window into the complex relationships between youth culture and sport, via commercialization and globalization, gender, identity, and representational politics (outlined in the following sections).

2.2 Action sports literature: Key themes from past and present

The following section briefly discusses some of the dominant themes in the action sports literature to date, focusing particularly on various forms of identity politics, which have arguably generated the most scholarly consideration thus far. The section is followed by an

overview of the politics of commercialization/representation. Subsequently, an outline of spatial politics is presented, highlighting its place in contemporary action sports and skateboarding literature. A brief summary of the scholarship on gender in action sports and skateboarding follows. The section concludes with a focus on the literature on race in action sports and within skateboarding literature.

2.2.1 Cultural and identity politics

Even before the new sporting experiences acquired the title of 'action sports,' some of the earliest themes in the literature focused on identity politics (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Pearson, 1979). As these new sports gained popularity and moved from early terms of 'whiz' (Midol, 1993) to 'emerging' to 'arriving sports' and from 'extreme' to 'action' (Rinehart, 2000, p. 505), defining and examining what made the sports salient to their communities became an increasingly important topic. The origin of this exploration was work by Wheaton (2004), which provided a broad overview of a range of action sports (defined by her as 'lifestyle sports') and discussed how participants derived meaning within their sporting cultures in a post-modern cultural context. Other early scholars of action sports also employed ethnographic methods and media analysis to understand the lives and culture of action sports participants (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Booth, 2001).

Snowboarding culture was a focus of many early action sports researchers. Humphreys (1996) explored the development and origins of the activity and how participants embraced an 'outlaw' mentality that took inspiration from skateboarding culture rather than skiing. Using the concepts introduced by Bourdieu (1984), Humphreys (1996, 1997) illustrated how

the notion of the 'outlaw' intermingled with 'freedom' in a 'neo-liberal,' 'post-Fordist' US society, which provided the environment for snowboarding's growth but also sought to constrain and 'police' these new bodies (also see Thorpe, (2004)). Other themes uncovered by Humphreys (1996); (1997), Thorpe (2004) and Coates, Clayton, and Humberstone (2010) demonstrated how participants envisioned themselves, and attained power through the symbolic use of the body, which placed them in opposition to skiers and other established norms of the mountain. Drawing upon Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus, Thorpe (2004) explored how snowboarders embodied their distinctive identities from other sporting cultures (i.e., skiing) and within the snowboarding cultural hierarchy via their dress, language, and bodily practices.

In early action sports literature focused on the skateboarding identity, key themes of resistance (Beal, 1995, 1996) and authenticity emerged (Atencio & Beal, 2011; Beal et al., 2016; Beal & Weidman, 2003; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Wheaton, 2004; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Beal's (1995) ethnographic research drew from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and other scholars' theorization of subcultures (Bennett, 1999; Rock & Cohen, 1970) alongside Gramscian's (1971) ideas of hegemony. Beal's research attempted to understand how skateboarders related to 'oppositional' politics, and uncover how skateboarding culture might be an active display of 'resistance' (Beal, 1995, 1996). This seminal research by Beal (1995) was the inaugural North American work in the emerging field of action sports studies and led to multiple explorations of skateboarding identity over time, particularly with regard to gender (Atencio, Beal, & Wilson, 2009; Bäckström & Nairn, 2018; Beal, 1996; Wheaton, 2004).

Since then, scholars have mapped the evolution of identities within action sports cultures, from early 'outlaw' imagery to more modern representations, often informed by new efforts to create broader social change (Helvarg, 2003; Thorpe, 2014a; Wheaton, 2007). In skateboarding, in particular, there has been a rise in the creation of formal NGOs and non-profits to tackle social problems (e.g., Skate for Autism; the Tony Hawk Foundation; and the College Skateboarding Educational Foundation) (Atencio, Beal, Wright, & McClain, 2018; O'Connor, 2016) which contribute to new expressions of the skateboarding identity and what it might represent. Some scholars have argued this turn towards the non-profit sector emerged as a reflection of the politics of operating within a neoliberal climate where one must take personal responsibility for oneself and one's community, rather than relying on the government to help constituents (Howell, 2008; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). O'Connor (2016), however, argues that the rise of the action sports for social-good in sports like skateboarding is a natural expression of their maturity. In his opinion, skaters now operate as groups that proactively envision, project, and encourage the type of world they would like to live in, or what he refers to as "an example of prefigurative politics" (O'Connor, p. 41). Additionally, as these sports continue to mature, there has been an exploration of the role of action sports for development and peace efforts (Friedel, 2015; Thorpe, Ahmad, & Williams, 2018; Thorpe & Chawansky, 2016).

2.2.2 Representation/commercialization

As action sports have become increasingly commercialized, commodified and institutionalized, their cultural politics have also shifted, because of their complex relationships with outside forces including mass media (such as ESPN, MTV and NBC,),

transnational corporations (e.g., Nike, Adidas, Red Bull) and organizational bodies (e.g., the International Olympic Committee) (Borden, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). For example, in snowboarding, Humphreys (1996, 1997) discussed how some snowboarders challenged the appropriation of their activities by the media, the Olympics, and transnational corporations (see also Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). Rinehart (1998, 2007) argued that the action-sports individual, DIY aesthetic might be negatively impacted by the mainstream exposure it received from ESPN's X-Games and corporations' attempts to capitalize on the popularity of action sports. Rinehart (2000) outlined the historical differences in the narrative between traditional sports and action sports, highlighting the tensions and philosophies between the X-games (designed for television) and sporting events that became a spectacle like the Superbowl (Rinehart, 2000). Even within the action sports community, however, there has often been debate over how best to represent narratives of action sports to the broader public (Borden, 2019; Rinehart, 1998). These representations were further compounded by entities outside the action sports community (i.e., ESPN, NBC, popular media outlets and non-endemic others) who had the power to portray action sports however they saw fit (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2019; Henderson, 2001; Rinehart, 2000; Thorpe, 2006; Wheaton, 2003). Yochim (2010) investigated the power relationship between action sports and these 'outside forces' in a historical analysis of the representations of skateboarding in popular media. Yochim's (2010) analysis supported Rinehart's (2000) discussions of ESPN's attempts to co-opt action sports during the 1990s.

Tensions around appropriation, commercialization and representation in action sports continue to this day. For example, Atencio et al. (2018) analysed the differing

‘authentic’ and ‘value-driven’ narratives employed by disparate California communities in their efforts to gain municipal support for community skateparks. While the narratives explored by Atencio et al. (2018) examined how different communities ‘sell’ the benefits of new skateparks, other research described how the ‘authentic’ is sold in a more directly commercial manner (see Dixon (2015). In his research in the Japanese context, Dixon (2015) describes how vintage California skate culture first needed to be ‘appropriated’ and ‘reimagined’ through Japanese bodies in order for it to be deemed both ‘authentic’ and commercially viable in Japanese consumer culture.

Newer action sports like parkour are not immune to tensions between representation, institutionalization and commercialization (e.g., Atkinson, 2009; Clegg & Butryn, 2012; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011). Puddle, Wheaton, and Thorpe (2019) revealed how the informal sporting practices of parkour in Aotearoa New Zealand faced threat due to the sport’s increased popularity and Olympic attempts to commercialize the activity. Wheaton and Thorpe (2018a) also revealed shifting intergenerational perspectives about the inclusion of skateboarding, surfing, and sport climbing in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

2.2.3 Spatial politics

Scholarship has emerged that examines the politics of participants’ ‘right to space’ or ‘spatial politics.’ For example, Olive et al. (2016) reveal the complexities in the ‘right’ to a wave in surfing through the subjective lenses of multiple surfing researchers. lisahunter (2017) argues the lack of active women depicted in surfing media severely limits women’s ability to visualize a ‘right’ to the beach. In snowboarding, scholars such as Thorpe (2004)

and Coates et al. (2010) highlight the complexities of who has the 'right' to access the resource of the mountain. These examples show that there is often an unwritten hierarchy of elite male participants allowed to engage in the use of the resources of the mountains and the ocean. The discussion of spatial politics also included the urban environment and Borden (2003, 2019) offered a significant contribution to the skateboarding literature, particularly in a focus on spatial politics and identity in the ways skateboarders relate to the city and its architecture.

Borden's (2003, 2019) research is based on his 'insider' perspective into skateboarding culture, derived from his participation in and longstanding relationship with skateboarding culture in the UK, and his role as an architectural scholar. With a historical focus on the origins of skateboarding, Borden (2003, 2019) described how skateboarding spaces are created and adopted, and provided an overview of the DIY 'ethos' of skateboarding culture. Employing the theoretical framework of Lefebvre (1991), Borden (2003, 2019) argued that skateboarders access the city in unique ways and that they are citizens with the 'right' to exist and extract value from the city without adding a necessarily tangible contribution. Borden (2019) offers an update to the groundbreaking research, which offers an even closer reading of the relationship between (street) skaters, their use of space and their pastime as its popularity has grown globally.

Building upon Borden's (2003, 2019) foundational work, Howell (2005, 2008) explored US skateboarders' use of public space, negotiation of identity, architecture, and consumption, adding a particular focus on how gentrification (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2013) affected urban areas. Howell (2005) explains how skateboarding fits into the multiple

agendas of parties' decisions (with competing ideologies) regarding the needs of a city. Howell (2005) refuted Borden's (2003, 2019) argument that suggests skaters adopt urban spaces and do not contribute to the community. Howell (2005) instead suggests that skateboarders have a more reciprocal relationship to urban spaces and infuse them with social capital, which elevates them to the level of the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002; 2004). In subsequent work, Howell (2008) argued that whereas for previous generations, 'spaces' or 'parks' were established as a part of the community, in the US, skateparks and skaters are increasingly expected to provide for themselves rather than be supported by the state.

Scholars have continued to add to the discussion of spatial politics in the US (Lorr, 2015; Snyder, 2017; Vivoni, 2013) and more internationally (Borden, 2016; Drissel, 2013; Orpana, 2015). For instance, Roth Wiggin and Bicknell (2011) examined how skateboarders use public art as a place to express themselves, suggesting that although they may damage the art, there could be a way for skateboarding to be incorporated into the art to generate a mutual value for all involved. Orpana (2015) further develops understandings of spatial politics and gentrification (Howell, 2008; Lees et al., 2013) by offering a Canadian case study, which demonstrated how skateboarders actively transformed a 'public space' into a useable 'skate space' that added value to the community and was granted legitimacy by the local government, and thereby deserved immunity from future attempts to 'gentrify' the area. In the UK, Drissel (2013) examined how the manifestation of an inclusive and communal 'skate space' in Belfast differed positively from the highly religious and segregated spatial politics, which undermined other sporting relationships in the city. Snyder (2017) offered a detailed exploration of the process and politics that transformed an illegal Los Angeles,

California 'skate spot' (a location frequented by skateboarders where they are viewed negatively and policed) to a 'legitimate' sanctioned safe area due to the activism of the Los Angeles skateboarding community (Snyder, 2017). Borden (2016) argued that skateparks' integration into local communities remains a tentative process. While sanctioned space for skateparks contributes to the production of social capital and entrepreneurial capital for skateboarding, it also positions skateboarding in line with arguable neoliberal ideals and consumption practices (Borden, 2016). The literature on spatial politics continues to gain momentum, as the question remains of how to develop the best spaces that satisfy the needs of both skaters and the broader public.

2.2.4 Gender politics

Within the action sports literature, there is a significant overarching thematic focus on gender politics. Building upon the foundational work of Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998), scholars have explored gender relations in an array of action sports (i.e., surfing, climbing, and snowboarding) and adopted a range of theoretical approaches to reveal the multiple ways that gendered power relations operate on and through both men and women's bodies (see Thorpe & Olive, 2016). In surfing, discussions ranged from the perception that there has been no real improvement in gender relations (Booth, 2001) to understanding the role of third-wave feminism, and how young women encounter a complicated victory with increased representation in surfing (Heywood, 2012). Wheaton (2000) investigated how surfing's appeal, or lack thereof, affected women across a variety of backgrounds. Using a critical media content analysis, Henderson (2001) uncovered how niche media perpetuated the surfing patriarchy, while others unpacked popular media's role in presenting the

historical ideas of surfing culture and the formulation of gender identities (Hunter, 2016; Wheaton, 2003). Roy (2014) used the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to argue that 'feelings' and 'affect' are an effective way of creating, embodying, or understanding realities for women in surfing. Arguing that the feeling of 'stoke' is 'real' and inherently linked to a feeling of 'belonging,' Roy (2014) builds upon previous research (Clifton, 2013; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010; Wheaton, 2003, 2004) through an ethnography which suggests that 'becoming' a surfer (amidst threat or assault by the male presence) arguably creates a potentially empowering space for women. More recently, Wheaton and Thorpe (2018b) examined the intersection between gender, globalization, and commercialization while unpacking the idea of the 'Olympic narrative of equality through sports' versus the way women are experiencing and fighting for social change in skateboarding culture. The works presented show that the examination of gender identities and politics in action sport cultures has been extensive and continues to expand.

In skateboarding, the foundational work by Beal (1996) drew upon feminist theory along with her use of the CCCS framework (Beal, 1995) to question how skateboarding culture created new masculinities for the white male participants, but marginalized women (Beal, 1996, 1998). Beal and Wilson (2004) continued to examine gender politics by identifying where gendered ideologies originated, and how skateboarders created their identities amid a new media-rich wave of increased popularity. Using similar media, MacKay and Dallaire (2013) used media content analysis alongside ethnographies of skateboarders to help examine the role of niche-media in shaping skaters' self-image. Other research investigated how 'status' was obtained, and where 'status' intersected with perceptions of

women in skateboarding and their place within the hierarchy (Beal & Weidman, 2003; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Atencio et al. (2009) further contributed to this discussion by adopting the ideas of Bourdieu (1984) to argue that the contributions of women to skateboarding were devalued because men engaged in greater physical 'risks' than women at a time when 'risk' was valued (Atencio et al., 2009).

The focus on gender in skateboarding culture has created multiple opportunities for the scholarship to expand and enrich our understandings of the experiences of women in a variety of contexts and geographic locations (Bäckström & Nairn, 2018; MacKay & Dallaire, 2013; Pomerantz et al., 2004). Pomerantz et al. (2004) note the challenges faced by youthful, multi-cultural Vancouver skateboarding females and their experiences of learning to skate while being questioned about their authenticity by young males. These struggles for authenticity reveal action sports generally, and skateboarding specifically, as an ideological battleground. This notion is further supported by Wheaton (2010), who suggests these sporting spaces operate as "lifestyles where feminist questions emerge, and thus for exploring the potential of sport to be a politically transformative space in relation to gender, sexuality and race" (p. 12). More recently, drawing upon a Foucauldian (1980) perspective, Willing and Shearer (2015) looked to broaden the perspective of gender roles in skateboarding culture, noting that females and older generations present in, and in support of, skateboarding communities may act as advocates for the resources the skateboarding community needs. This suggests that there may be a new dynamic at play with regard to improved gender relations in the skateboarding context (Willing & Shearer, 2015).

Similarly, Carr (2017) argues that the 'skatepark' itself may not be innately gendered, but how we perceive and interpret others' verbal and nonverbal communication may be enough to slow participation by some women. Carr (2017) also noted that some female participants' perceived 'otherness' had dissipated with age, and women's interpretation of how they were perceived had changed more positively over time (Carr, 2017). Curiously, while Carr (2017) touches on many contemporary topics of identity in an attempt to understand issues of gender, the topic of race is noticeably absent.

As noted, there is a significant body of work using a variety of critical theoretical perspectives to examine gender within the skateboarding culture. This large body of research discusses skateboarding culture's ability to resist or adhere to hegemonic masculine values (Beal, 1995, 1996). Scholarship in this vein also postulates its capacity to produce different sporting masculinities for 'white' middle-class males, and how this impacts women and (on a surface level) POC (Atencio et al., 2009; Beal, 1996; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). This approach has yielded a range of understandings of gender in the skateboarding culture. In interpreting these texts, the academic literature in skateboarding and action sports continues to heed Wheaton's (2000, 2013) call for greater exploration of gender, or policies aimed at dismantling the visible and invisible power of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995). Conspicuously absent, however, is a thorough, nuanced, intersectional discussion of race, or race and gender. Furthermore, at present, discussions of race are often limited in scope and do not include the voices of POC. This absence leaves a gap in our understanding of how race and racial formations may impact skateboarding. The following section offers key examples of the gaps in current action sports literature

regarding race, and points to the precariousness of centring discussions of race in 'whiteness' or in 'whiteness studies' as a way to address racism. This is subsequently followed by a detailed reading of the literature regarding race in skateboarding, which highlights the need for a more critical and refined research agenda to provide a better understanding of the role of race in skateboarding culture.

2.2.5 Race in action sports

Within the literature of action sports, the topic of race and ethnicity has been explored most significantly in surfing, through a variety of critical perspectives including post-colonial studies, cultural studies, and feminist studies (Dawson, 2017; Gilio-Whitaker, 2017; Knijnik, Horton, & Cruz, 2010; Thompson, 2017; Wheaton, 2017). Each of these perspectives offered new insights into the discussion of race in action sports. For example, Dawson (2017) adopted a post-colonial perspective, which detailed how Atlantic Africans and Oceanian indigenous peoples developed their cultures and communal knowledge in accord with both the countryside and the aquatic environment as "unified culturesscapes" (Dawson, 2017, p. 136), which differed from those of their Western European counterparts. Furthermore, Dawson contends that these spaces acted as sites of resistance to colonization and were "social, cultural, spiritual, and political spaces despite the onslaughts of Christianity and colonialism" (p. 136).

In surfing in the US, Wheaton (2017) drew upon Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) concepts of '*habitus*' and 'symbolic capital' to shed light on the intricacies of cultural politics and racist stereotypes that the African American surfing community faced in Los Angeles.

Wheaton (2017) established that African American disenfranchisement had extended for generations through racist policies restricting access to the beach. Moreover, within portions of the African American community, surfing had become labeled as a 'white' activity, due in part to both popular and niche media narratives of the white body as the 'personification' of the surfing ideal. The African Americans in her study, therefore, faced complicated negotiations of their identities as African Americans and their identities as surfers, and navigated historic disparities between 'whites' and African Americans. As Wheaton (2017) revealed, African Americans surfers faced a barrage of conflicting circumstances, "cultural, structural, spatial, and ideological" (p. 191) while pursuing an activity that gave them a positive sense of self and "provided a space of relative freedom" (p. 191). All of this was despite the variety of elements that have disenfranchised African American communities from surfing.

While surfing offers several critical perspectives that contribute to the action sports literature on race, within the action sports literature on skateboarding, the scholarship has primarily focused on representations in popular media (Kusz, 2007; Leonard, 2008), or the role that racialized imagery might play in selling consumer products to 'white' males. The latter aspect tends to aggrandize notions that skateboarding media consumption allows 'white' readers to ignore their privilege and re-imagine themselves in new, more desirable ways while obfuscating broader racial politics (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Dupont, 2014; Kusz, 2007; Leonard, 2008; Yochim, 2010).

In a broad discussion of action sports, Kusz (2007) offers examples of what he refers to as 'backlash politics' (Kusz, 2007). Within that context, Kusz (2007) defines action sports

as a space where 'white men' "seek refuge from women and people of colour in response to the progressive rhetoric of 'multiculturalism' during the 1990s in the US" (p. 68) and the reduced visibility of 'white' people in traditional sport. Scholars Kusz (2007) and Leonard (2008) both employed a framework of critiquing 'whiteness' (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009) as a method to argue that the rhetoric of action sports are 'real' political spaces for identity politics.

The evidence put forward to support their claims, however, appears problematic in aiding in our understanding of race in action sports more broadly, because their arguments derive from examinations of the most 'main-streamed' or popular culture versions of action sport representations, such as popular films about skateboarding (Kusz, 2007) and skateboarding video games (Leonard, 2008). These types of popular media arguably may not provide accurate portrayals of action sports culture or accurately reflect the experiences of POC, thus limiting our understanding of racial politics in action sports, beyond the individual unit of study. In the following section I offer an examination of the literature focused on race in skateboarding, followed by a section that provides deeper analysis of the scholarship based on the popular culture depictions of race in skateboarding media.

2.2.6 Race in skateboarding

Although race and/or the experiences of POC is a key theme in sociological research on traditional sport, (e.g., Andrews, 1996; Baker & Boyd, 1997; Carrington, 2010; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Coakley, 2010; Cooky, 2009; Edwards, 1969; Gilroy, 2001b;

Hartmann, 2003a, 2003c; Sailes, 2017) when looking at the role of racial politics in the experiences of POC in the skateboarding culture specifically, critical research is limited (Atencio et al., 2009; Beal, 1996; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). Here I look to identify some of the key issues and difficulties. Most of the work is largely anecdotal, involves small samples, or does not include the voices of participants of colour (Beal, 1995; Brayton, 2005; Dupont, 2014), thus limiting our in-depth knowledge of race in skateboarding (for exceptions see (Snyder, 2017; Sueyoshi, 2015; Wheaton, 2010). This gap appears due in part to researchers building upon action sports literature's initial focus on 'white' males, their deftness in navigating resistance or adherence to the 'normative, hegemonic masculine values' (Connell, 1995), and mostly 'white' researchers with narrow explorations into race beyond media, often without bringing POC's voices into the research (Atencio et al., 2009; Beal, 1995, 1996; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010).

For example, in Beal's (1995) original ethnographic research, she attempted to understand how skateboarders related to oppositional politics towards some of the established norms in popular culture. Beal (1995) investigations in a Colorado suburb ultimately led her to believe that skateboarding culture at that locale and time (the early 1990s), still reproduced hegemonic white masculinity, rather than providing a space for new masculinities. Beal (1995) noted that while skateboarding culture tended to "resist capitalism[...] it generally does not resist homophobia, sexism, and racism" (p. 265). Though highly impactful in other areas, with regard to race, Beal's initial study offers only a limited portrait, due in part to the small sample – 'all were Anglo except for two Hispanic males' (Beal, 1995, p. 255), and one geographic location in the US Midwest.

Building upon Beal's (1995) early work, Yochim also conducted an ethnographic study and media analysis to understand better what skateboarding culture meant to young skateboarders in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the US (Yochim, 2010). During the research, she addressed multiple topics, including young skaters' thoughts on race, and skateboarding in mainstream media such as MTV (Yochim, 2010). Yochim's (2010) discussions and analysis of race, however, operated similarly to Beal (1995) in that the voices of POC are significantly missing from both the sample and analysis. According to Yochim (2010), "I interviewed two Latino and one Indian skateboarder; the rest of my interviewees were white.[...] one Asian skateboarder, who declined to be interviewed, and no black skateboarders during my time with the community" (p. 104). While there are multiple factors and difficulties facing researchers, such as positionality, lack of access to communities of colour, and the author's choice of a white-dominated space, ultimately, the lack of contributions from POC constrains our knowledge of race in skateboarding culture from their perspective.

Additionally, while Yochim (2010) described how her 'insider status' among participants allowed her access to descriptions of the lives of skateboarders, on the subject of race, she questioned the validity of those same voices. For example, participants argued that Yochim's interpretations of race in skateboarding were inaccurate; they contended that POC and diversity were present in skateboarding culture via media (even if not within their local sphere) and were important to their understanding of skateboarding culture. Yochim (2010) seems to dismiss their claims, as shown in this example:

Even after reading this book, Kiran objected to my analysis of race in skate culture. He took issue with my (and other scholars') characterization of it as a white culture, naming a host of professional

skateboarders who are not white, [...] Still, mainstream depictions of skateboarding continue to be mainly white, and images of diversity in niche videos can also be read as the type of tokenism that maintains the centrality of whiteness(2010, p. 102)

Yochim's comments appear problematic in that her participants noted that their understanding of diversity in skateboarding culture came from their own lives as well as their interpretations of their "imagined community" (p.104) developed through the niche skateboarding media – "particularly skateboarding videos" (p.104) – rather than traditional media. Therefore, basing understanding of diversity and racial politics on narrow mainstream representations that appear "mainly white" (p.102) appears unreliable, particularly since mainstream depictions of US culture have historically excluded (Mastro, 2009) or maligned (Denzin, 2002) POC, in all facets of representation, including skateboarding. From this perspective, it seems this argument offers little evidence of generalizable analysis regarding race in elite or local skateboarding culture.

Similarly, Yochim (2010) appeared somewhat un-reflexive about her positionality as a 'white' researcher discussing race through 'whiteness,' which as scholars have suggested (Andersen, 2003; Blum, 2002; Glasgow, 2010; King, 2005) can be highly problematic for providing accurate understandings of race. Yochim (2010) stated,

As a researcher and an educated woman, I surely signified a liberal white who would have no truck with overt racism, and the skateboarders were undoubtedly guarded in my presence even after knowing me for five years (p. 105)

This comment suggests that the positionality of the researcher and the relationship to the participant sample is important and complex. These elements call for more in-depth

research, such as this project, which can investigate race through the lives and interpretations of POC.

Another example of the need for more in-depth research into the experiences of SOC is illustrated by Dupont (2014). During his research he suggested, “skateboarding may be difficult or inaccessible for communities of colour because they lack ‘vehicles,’ leisure time or access to media equipment or skateparks” (p. 570). This type of generalization (although seemingly well-intended) nonetheless reflects a wider positioning within the academic literature regarding race; that POC *always* operate and exist within a monolithic space and most likely one of insurmountable oppression (Brooks, Knudtson, & Smith, 2017). Drawing upon CRT to reflect critically on such arguments, I suggest that such analyses do not help scholars to understand the complexities of racial politics in sport and communities in the US. These examples demonstrate a lack of criticality by some authors with regard to where they are situated in the discourses on race. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the current scholarship operates as a ‘whitewashing’ (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2013) of skateboarding culture, which disallows the possibilities and agency of POC, even while they are featured prominently in the media (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010).

The following section problematizes the current literature on race in skateboarding media, beginning with a focus on race in niche skateboarding videos and advertisements. It is followed by an analysis of the popular culture skateboarding skateboarding-related media of video games and documentaries.

2.2.6.1 Unpacking race through the lens of skateboarding videos

Based on her analysis of race in skateboarding media, Yochim (2010) suggested that the presence of POC in skateboarding videos does not stem from their earned status in skateboarding media and culture, and instead suggested that POC are 'tokens' in niche skateboarding videos used to increase the profits of multinationals (p. 102). For example Yochim (2010) critiqued the role of professional skateboarder and skateboard company owner, African American Stevie Williams, arguing that Williams' place in the niche skateboarding video *The DC Video* is 'tokenism' and a thinly veiled effort by DC Shoe's attempts to profit from Williams' imagery that allows white viewers to adopt urban imagery uncritically:

By adopting images and signs of the "ghetto" or black culture, the DC Video legitimates itself via the borrowed authenticity of cultural subordination. Whether or not it is represented at all, the life of African Americans becomes a series of stylistic signifiers rather than a location where relationships of power must be examined and critiqued (p. 151)

Yochim (2010) interpreted Williams' imagery as 'ghetto' and drew upon (hooks, 2015) to suggest he is presented to appease 'white' viewers as the racialized 'other' (Said, 1978). Interestingly, this critique was not lobbied at the same 'white' elite members of the *DC video*, who are pictured directly alongside Williams and who reflected the same type of 'ghetto' imagery Yochim perceived negatively in Williams.

I argue that this notion of 'assumed whiteness' as the norm by Yochim (2010) and other authors (Atencio et al., 2013) in their readings of race and racial formations is problematic in offering a full picture of race in skateboarding. Using 'whiteness' as a basis suggests that Williams is the 'other' or the 'outsider,' which marginalizes Williams and other

SOC, overlooking the possibility that their status has developed based on the merits of their skateboarding prowess. Such interpretations of POC in skateboarding culture strip away POC's potential for agency.

Atencio et al. (2013) made a similar critique in their readings of a professional skateboarder, Paul Rodriguez, and his shoe endorsement deal and accompanying video by Nike. In this analysis, Atencio et al. (2013) suggested two racialized notions, which appear problematic. First, they suggested that because Paul Rodriguez is Mexican-American in Los Angeles, he should be stripped of his representation as a human being experiencing a 'good day' (the theme song and depictions of Rodriguez skating in the video) due to the perceived level of strife in the Mexican American community. This logic assumes Rodriguez must act as a vigilant voice of the community (without questioning whether he does or not in different contexts) and it also assumes that the authors' positions on race relations reflect a proper judgment of what the Los Angeles Mexican-American populace *needs* in representation. Second, the research also posits that skateboarding professionals are being used by companies who are only looking to capitalize on the 'cool' factor of POC (Atencio et al., 2013). While there may be elements of truth to those claims, there is also the possibility that this approach overlooks the strategy and process by which SOC might navigate their representation and agency in dealing with multinationals like Nike and others. This research explores such possibilities by using a comprehensive and inclusive perspective to create space for the voices and lived experiences of POC skateboarding individuals in an attempt to understand the journey of other POC in skateboarding culture.

2.2.6.2 Reading race in skateboarding through popular media depictions

Building upon Kusz's (2007) argument that action sports like skateboarding operate as 'safe' spaces of 'whiteness', Leonard (2008) examined skateboarding video-games. During his analysis of the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* video game franchise, he critiqued the presence and representation of the featured African American professional skateboarder, Kareem Campbell (one of several POC featured in the game). Leonard (2008) suggested that Campbell's role in the game operates as a form of 'tokenism' because Leonard read Campbell's representations as 'stereotypically urban.' These representations led Leonard (2008) to question both Campbell's 'blackness' and 'authenticity' within the game in an attempt to point to racial disparity in action sports like skateboarding. Arguably, Leonard's (2008) reasoning operates from an uncritical assumption of 'whiteness' as the norm in skateboarding as a whole, leading him to mark Campbell's inclusion and his 'urban' representation as a 'tokenistic' attempt to incorporate the radical racial 'other' (Said, 1978) for the sole pleasure of 'white' audiences. As Leonard (2008) argued, "Whether completely absent or existing as hip-hop tokens, the presence of blackness within extreme virtual sports solidifies the meanings of White masculinity" (p. 95)

Leonard's (2008) interpretation does not consider that the African American Campbell exists beyond a 'token' and may have earned his place in the video game; nor does it entertain the possibility that the representations and depictions of Campbell might be those of his choosing. Campbell's history, narrative, and voice as a legendary professional skater of colour are not part of the analysis. Additionally, within the research, Leonard (2008) did not interrogate representations of other POC depicted within the game.

Thus, it is unclear what level of agency Campbell carried in defining his representation, what message he might have put forth during his representation, or how audiences of colour may have interpreted this representation or in combination with other portrayals of POC.

Kusz's (2007) media critique of popular culture films *Dogtown and the Z-boys* and *Legends of Dogtown* also appears problematic for similar reasons. Kusz (2007) posited that he 'read' few POC within the films and argued that representations of POC are not presented so that their racial identities are discernable for audiences. Using these as a basis, Kusz (2007) suggested that the 'whiteness' and perceived lack of communities of colour in these mainstream films are unrealistic for the era and location and the US, thus confirming his assumptions that the 'skateboarding world' (or the larger action sports world) is discriminatory to people of colour. Kusz's (2007) readings, however, are problematic in that many of the participants, which he 'read' as 'white,' were POC, which limits the research's usefulness in discussions of race and an anti-racist agenda. Such readings of racial politics through popular media are problematic because they are drawn from specific contexts where the racialized 'other' is never present or given a voice. As shown in Kusz' (2007) analysis of the *Dogtown and the Z-boys* and *Legends of Dogtown* films and documentaries, though well-intentioned, the research does not take into account an author's positionality, or the difficulty in discerning racial identities, which can be detrimental to producing work that illuminates issues regarding race (Blum, 2002; Glasgow, 2010).

Equally important to this discussion is the method of exposing race and racism through the lens of 'whiteness' and 'whiteness studies,' as used by Leonard (2008) and Kusz (2007) and in other literature on race investigating skateboarding media (Brayton, 2005).

King (2005) suggests that 'white' scholars using a 'critical whiteness' framework to explore race should operate with caution. Such an approach can problematically lead to the exclusion of POC and their experiences and inadvertently convolute and reinforce the racism and discriminatory practices researchers seek to discourage (Andersen, 2003; Blum, 2002; Glasgow, 2010). This critique suggests the need for more in-depth readings of race and racial formation that bring in the voices of the parties being discussed within racial formations, and as suggested by Carrington (2010), allow the athlete of colour 'to speak.' By providing access to the voices of key participants of colour, while unpacking their narratives with different approaches, this thesis aims to develop and enrich our current understanding of race in skateboarding culture beyond the methods, mentioned above, of examining popular culture artifacts.

From this presentation, it appears highly problematic to continue to discuss the presupposed experiences of POC without conducting extensive fieldwork in the community and creating space for the voices of POC. It places POC outside of the discussions of skateboarding culture and provides the opportunity for scholars to perpetuate the notion that skateboarding (and other action sports) should be seen as a haven 'away' from POC (Kusz, 2007). Furthermore, conducting scholarship that de-centres 'whiteness' as the pathway to address racism (Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2007; Leonard, 2008) may prove more reliable and less problematic than 'whiteness studies' as noted by other scholars (King, 2005; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) and seems a significant approach to furthering our knowledge of race within skateboarding culture.

While the voices of POC are largely missing, a couple of exceptions must be noted (Snyder, 2017; Sueyoshi, 2015; Wheaton, 2013). Wheaton (2013a) explored the dynamic space of the Indigo Skatecamp in regions of South Africa. Documenting the lived experiences of POC via interviews and observation, Wheaton (2013) illuminated the variety of forces at work in creating meaning for action sports participants of colour, particularly when evolving during post-apartheid South Africa. Additionally, Wheaton delivered the formerly marginalized voices of the Black Surfers and Skaters Association, contextualized in media portrayals and identity politics in the US, which constrain African American participation in surfing (Wheaton, 2013). In contrast, Sueyoshi (2015) argued that Asian American depictions in skateboarding niche media offered a contrast to racialized depictions of Asian Americans absent from sporting contexts or portrayed as quiet 'model-minorities' focused on assimilation as portrayed in US media (Denzin, 2002; Paek & Shah, 2003).

2.3 Understanding race and sport: Key literature of past and present

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing body of scholarship on race and sport. Each country has unique racial histories, and their relationships to sport are distinct (Carrington, 2010, 2013; Gilroy, 2001b; Hylton, 2009; McDonald, 2005), in international (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Carrington, 1998; Collins & Jackson, 2007; James, 2013; Kaufman & Patterson, 2005; Theberge, 1985; Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004) and US contexts (Andrews, 1996; Andrews, Cole, & Jackson, 1998; Collins, 2004; Cooky, 2009; Hartmann, 2001; Smith, 2015; Staples, 1976; Withycombe, 2011). A brief summary of key race and sport scholarship from the international perspective is provided here, followed by scholarship specific to the US

context. A brief discussion of the contributions of feminist approaches to race and sport ensues, before discussing the significance of CRT applied to race and sport research and how this theoretical framework informs this project more specifically.

In the United Kingdom, sports scholars have discussed the racial formations and narratives of power and race in elite British sports (Gilroy, 2001b; Hylton, 2009) and the former British colonies in a variety of contexts (Gilroy, 2001b; James, 2013). James (1963, 2013) offered a foundational insight into how the sport of cricket embodied the struggle and perseverance of Caribbean players as a way to gain status and power in a postcolonial world. Questioning a 'rags to riches' narrative, Maguire (1991) examined Afro/Caribbean and persons of colour in the elite British sports of rugby and soccer to examine whether their high visibility may have reinforced or deconstructed stereotypes of race. Carrington (1998) added to UK race and sport discussions with an investigation into the importance of cricket as a 'site of contestation' (Hall, 1981, 1998) and a place where racist ideologies are challenged. Through interviews with members of a black West Indian cricket club, Carrington (1998) offered a snapshot of the racial politics of cricket for the West Indians in their attempts to dethrone the power of the monarchy through the pitch. In another significant contribution, Gilroy (2001b) offered a historical argument of the importance of race and sporting life to British citizenship and British understandings of racial hierarchies.

Outside of the UK, Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004) connected the role of sports media in perpetuating racial stereotypes in Dutch media. Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw (2010) revealed that Dutch media fell in line with the US negative descriptions of POC as mythical 'natural athletes' (Hoberman, 1997), which perpetuated

stereotypes in the media. Spracklen and Spracklen (2008) also examined how POC or 'ethnic minorities' playing in elite rugby challenged former notions of the 'French' 'white' identity through their performance. For those players, sport became a space of contestations and challenges to France's racist tendencies in one of the most visible arenas.

Carrington (2010) offers a different context and connects the threads between the US and global African people through his term "the Black sporting diaspora" as a way to "challenge static definitions and at times Eurocentric models of history" (p. 55). Carrington's (2010) terminology signifies the linkages between POC and Africa and the African diaspora through sporting events, which act as a source of pride and shared experience between POC, connecting greater struggles for equality and visibility all over the world. The international sporting landscape continues to grow, with new perspectives on the complex relationships between sport and race as provided by scholars on Africa (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2004; Mwaniki, 2012), and in research focused on Indigenous sporting histories in Australia (Osmond & Phillips, 2018) and Hawaii (Osmond, Phillips, & O'Neill, 2006).

In the US, scholars have approached race and sport from numerous perspectives (e.g., Boyd, 1997; Cooky & McDonald, 2005; Hartmann, 1996; Leonard, 1998). As various contemporary race and sport scholars acknowledge, one of the most important early contributors to the understanding of complex racial formations in sport was Harry Edwards, during the highly political era of the late 1960s. Edwards' (1969) *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* identified the multiple forms of marginalization African American male athletes encountered scholastically, socially, culturally, and politically in the 1960s and 1970s. In so doing, it provided a building block for black sports activism, and a call for scholarship

focused on addressing issues of racism in sport. For those unfamiliar with the limited social and scholastic opportunities available to 'Black athletes' during their athletic careers and their lack of mobility afterward, Edwards' (1969) treatise provided an entry point to examine the symptoms of the fundamentally racist nature of the US. Edwards (1969) indicted US sporting institutions, academic institutions, and other cultural institutions as co-conspirators in creating the malaise of African Americans. Edwards (1969) next advocated for the transformation of the 'Black athlete' into the 'Black athlete-activist'—meaning “utilizing amateur athletics as a means of dramatizing racial injustice” (p. 41).

Edwards called for all 'Black athlete-activists' to aid in the struggle for racial equality through sport. Though labeled a “disgruntled troublemaker,” Edwards (1969, p. 60) persevered in his scholarship and activism to offer a blueprint for the role and future work of the 'Black athlete-activist.' Working with other key activist members of the African American community, he founded the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). Despite extreme pressure from both 'Whites' and African American detractors who wanted Edwards and the OPHR to stop their rhetoric, the movement continued to act as a spotlight on racial injustice. The most visible culmination of Edwards (1969) and the OPHR sport for social change efforts was embodied through the protesting “gloved fists and bowed heads” (p. 104) of African Americans Tommy Smith and John Carlos, with further support from Australian Peter Norman, while accepting their medals at the 1968 Mexico Olympics Summer Olympics. Through this and numerous other efforts, Edwards (1969) and his colleagues generated a broader sports agenda, which includes athletic POC in efforts to point out racism, disrupt racial disparities and emphasize the use of sport as an agent for

broader social change. Though problematically focused on an African American male agenda, Edwards' activism and scholarship provided a crucial foundation for the field. These ideas were built upon and led to a new wave of critical scholarship on sports and race in both US and international contexts (Andrews, 1996; Boyd, 1997; Carrington, 1998; Clarke, 1991; Coakley, 2010; Hartmann, 1996, 2000; Hylton, 2009; Leonard, 1998; Maharaj, 1997; Staples, 1976; Wacquant, 2004).

Continuing this important work in the context of the US, Hartmann (2000) provided an insightful interpretation of the dominant understandings of race in the American academic sporting context at the time. Hartmann (2000) called attention to two schools of thought, with the first being an "institutional approach" that focused on "race and racism in sport and the culturalist orientation" specifically (p. 235). The second involved those who "study the ways in which sport is implicated in the larger racial structure of American culture" (p. 235). Hartmann (2003b) pointed out the advantages and deficits in each framework in an attempt to create synergy and "offer a theoretical synthesis of the two" (p. 245). With this, Hartmann (2000) attempted to create a more meaningful context of African Americans in sport, which takes into account their complicated historical narrative. Hartmann (2000) further argued that there *is* an overarching racialized narrative of American sport. Despite this, however, POC might *also* find agency or power within sports because their increased visibility may have provided opportunities to create social change for men and women of colour. Boyd and Shropshire (2000) also remind us that the lives of POC in the US are complex and multifaceted. Such arguments are essential for this research

because they provide a reminder that both agency and power are fluid and have multiple meanings within specific contexts.

As an example of the fluid power relations and multiple meanings in these contexts, Boyd (1997) provided an excellent (though arguably contentious) context and overview of the rise of African Americans in American Basketball. Later, highlighting black basketball players' influence on the sport and the connection between black players' early lives and the growth of hip-hop culture, Boyd (2003) argued that the visibility and influence of black basketball players should be seen as the embodiment of a new 'black power' and politics anchored through sport in the US.

While this was read as a net positive by Boyd (2003), other scholars held alternative readings of the prominence of African Americans in basketball (Andrews & Silk, 2010; Early, 2000; Primm, Dubois, & Regoli, 2007). For example, Early (2000) argued that while basketball produces an "an entire cadre of narrowly talented, extremely wealthy black men" (p. 29) who imbue basketball with African American 'style' (p. 30), it is the African American legacies in baseball that were "about demanding their place as Americans while defying the practice of a racist America" (p. 40). Early (2000) further posited that baseball's previous centrality in African American life should be looked at as a critical moment in social change in race and sport. Criblez (2015) also adds to the discussion by highlighting the 1970s 'Great White Hope' media narratives propagated in the racialized US. Those stories demonstrated the early anxiety of white players and audiences as African Americans began to swell the elite ranks in US professional basketball.

In their efforts to understand race in sport, other scholars chose to focus on 'whiteness' as a dominant, normative power in sport (Cooley, 2010; Kusz, 2001, 2007; Rhodes, 2011; Walton & Butryn, 2006). Increasingly, however, scholars have cautioned against focusing on white people and their experiences in sport (e.g., Wacquant, 2004) and 'whiteness studies' (King, 2005) as a way to provide understandings of race (Krueger & SaintOnge, 2005) and disrupt discriminatory practices (Hoffman & Fine, 2005). Coakley (2016) offered an extensive historical analysis of the way race, racism and racial formations have played out across racial and gender lines. Recently, race and sport scholarship returned the focus to Edwards' (1969) 'athlete activists' as embodied through POC like Colin Kaepernick and their supporters, such as Megan Rapinoe, reigniting activism in both traditional media and new media spheres (Schmidt, Frederick, Pegoraro, & Spencer, 2018). Feminist scholars have also offered valuable contributions to more intersectional understandings of race, gender, and sport (e.g., Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Caudwell, 2003; Collins, 2004; McDonald & Birrell, 1999; Theberge, 1985; Theberge & Birrell, 1994; Westkott & Coakley, 1981). A particularly noteworthy contribution comes from McDonald and Birrell (1999), who proposed a direct framework or 'methodology' for understanding how particular acts and notable sporting icons are the embodiment of multiple levels of politics of race, gender and thus, "deserve attention because they provide relatively open vantage points[...] to power" (p. 296). In their opinion, examining sport through those sporting icons allowed interrogation of the narratives and offered the potential for developing oppositional narratives as a way to critique power. In her later work with Cooky, McDonald also investigated the power of the narrative of the gendered

commercial rhetoric of sports brand Nike, and its effect in positioning women outside the dominant narrative of male sports (Cooky & McDonald, 2005).

This area of scholarship continues to grow, with intersectional approaches to unpacking how women are marginalized in sport worldwide (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Cooky, 2009; French, 2013; Tyler-Eastman & Billings, 2001). In the US, discussion of college basketball by Tyler-Eastman and Billings (2001) uncovered the ongoing prevalence of racial and gendered biases in announcers who resorted to describing Black male players as being imbued with a natural physicality, which explained their success. Tyler-Eastman and Billings (2001) also noted that white players were rewarded with narratives about their cerebral prowess and critical thinking in games. These racialized narratives extended into the reporting of women's games, which still presented explicit biases. Tyler-Eastman and Billings (2001) noted that while there were signs of progress in reducing gender stereotypes in announcing, racialized stereotypes remained present. During an interrogation of the WNBA, McPherson (2000) examined the media portrayals of women of colour in the WNBA to reveal that even in the women's league, hegemonic norms of racialized femininity were prevalent. Heywood, Dworkin, and Foudy (2003) also investigated the role of race in normalizing POC through sport and the 'contradictions' between third-wave feminism and popular sporting narratives, arguing that there needs to be a more in-depth understanding of sport by those who have played it and are both academics and athletes. Heywood et al. (2003) noted that absolutes regarding the "abstract notions of women's sport [...] and the destructiveness notion of the sport beauty ideal" might discount the "meaningful moments" (p. 48) experienced by women in sport, which are often not experienced by non-

athlete academics. Ring (2009) also adds a critical voice to the discussion of race and young girls in sport, noting that baseball was not historically gendered in the US, but was later systematically stripped away from women and replaced with softball.

Moving beyond the US context, Pelak (2005) offered a detailed example of intersectionality in sport. Pelak (2005) examined historical narratives of sport, gender, and racialization in her analysis of post-Apartheid South African women soccer players. Her study applied a feminist perspective to the women's football community, which "is not waiting to be treated with fairness" (p. 64), revealing the level of creativity, camaraderie, and fortitude necessary for women of all ages to find their place in South African sport. As revealed by Pelak (2005), only through concerted efforts and an "ethic of care and everyday acts of mutual support" are women able to "negotiate structural and ideological constraints" (p. 64) and further develop their sporting selves.

As shown, scholarship on race in sport has grown significantly since the 1960s across a wide range of sports, particularly in the US context, the subject of this thesis. Studies have included men's and women's basketball (Andrews & Silk, 2010; Baker & Boyd, 1997; Leonard, 2012), US football and college sports (King & Springwood, 2001; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017), track and field, volleyball, soccer (Withycombe, 2011) boxing (Wacquant, 2004) and baseball (Cole & Mobley, 2005; Conyers Jr., 2014). However, critical scholars in race and sport have paid little attention to action sports and have maintained a primary focus on team sports.

The following section highlights some of the key theoretical perspectives used in race and sport scholarship, paying particular attention to critical race theory (CRT). It then

defines CRT and provides a few examples of its use in sports scholarship. Subsequently, it highlights the need for CRT in skateboarding research over other race-focused theories, and explains how this thesis applies CRT to make visible the stories of POC in skateboarding. It concludes with a summary that explains how this research answers previous scholars' calls for new frameworks for understanding action sport and skateboarding culture.

2.4 Theoretical Framings: CRT, sport, and skateboarding

Scholarship on race and (traditional) sport has been discussed using a range of theoretical perspectives to understand how race and racial politics are used overtly and covertly in the arenas of traditional US and international sports (e.g., Carrington, 2010, 2015; Coakley, 2010; Edwards, 1969; Gilroy, 2001a; Messner, 1992). Among critical race theories there is a significant amount of overlap, and a key thread among them is a concern with power; particularly where power lies and how that power is reinforced (Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram, & Tincknell, 2004). Contemporary critical race scholarship builds upon the work of classic social theorists, including Habermas (1984), Horkheimer and Adorno (1973), Gramsci et al. (1971) and Bourdieu (1984), who used a critical theoretical approach to understand the workings of power with the aim of ultimately improving the lives of others (Bohman, 2005; Held, 1980). This remains a common goal in contemporary critical frameworks, with research that aims to create a better society and free individuals from constraints that affect their lives in ways they may or may not be aware of (Asghar, 2013).

Cultural studies is one critical approach that investigates power, explores its effects, and hopes to reveal subjugation and opportunities for agency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Turner, 2012). In British cultural studies, interrogations often focus on how people

understand and assign values and meaning to practices individually and collectively (Kellner, 1997). Through this approach, theorists attempt to decipher and interpret “the production or organization of meaning as a site of power” (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 12). At the CCCS, discussions of race developed at a particularly political time of racial and political struggle in Europe, when Black men and POC were heavily profiled and excessively policed due to broader media stereotypes that emphasized them as ‘muggers’ and perpetrators of crimes in the UK (Hall, Clarke, Critcher, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1978). Although there was no change in the crime rate, young men of colour became the victims of a new ‘law and order’ conservative agenda – propagated by the media – where the rhetoric of creating ‘safety’ only focused on ‘white’ people’s interpretation of the term (Hall et al., 1978). This analysis revealed how racialized power operated in the UK, fueled class warfare, and propelled racist ideologies and unnecessary social anxiety during an economic downfall, which led to the abuse and disempowerment of young men of colour (Hall et al., 1978). Stuart Hall offered extraordinarily influential works in cultural studies examining how race, ‘power’ and politics were inscribed, reinforced and ‘contested’ through common practices, which when examined might reinforce racism, sexism and classism and subjugate people in ways they might not understand or intend (Hall, 1981, 1993, 2018, 1998; Hall et al., 2017). Hall has remained an intellectual force, particularly in understanding ‘race’, celebrated well beyond the UK context (Giroux, 2000). When applied to race, cultural studies thus offer a particular viewpoint of exploring the ‘power’ and ‘resistance’ in the ‘everyday’ in order to uncover and examine racial injustice.

Taking a cultural studies approach in the context of sport, Carrington (1998) interrogated the 'everyday' practices of cricket as a site of racial politics, which offered the possibility of power to the West Indian diaspora. Within that treatise he investigated how West Indians living in the UK attempted to reaffirm their collective identity through sport as a site of resistance and collective agency against the British monarchy by beating the colonizers at their own game. Carrington (2010) further argues that sport is a historical site of struggle for POC, as sport is one of the mediums through which non-POC encounter and understand the 'other.' Therefore according to Carrington (2010), sporting contexts should be a central focus of interrogation because these sporting bodies act as bellwethers for broader racial politics and represent a visible collective site of struggle for POC.

In the US, cultural studies similarly investigated power relations, but their approaches evolved differently and with a particular focus on popular culture and media (Johnson et al., 2004). Some of the key works were developed by McLuhan (1994) and Grossberg (1992); (1997). Lawrence Grossberg (1992) offered a theoretical approach known as 'radical contextualization', which highlights the "moving racial signifiers", or the overt and covert politics embedded within a subject, and the subject's broader cultural significance. This is an approach that has been taken up in race and sport scholarship, including Andrews' (1996) important work on Michael Jordan. Andrews (1996) borrowed heavily from Hall (1981) and Grossberg (1992) in his analysis of the racial formations and media representations of the National Basketball Association's (NBA) most prominent player. In so doing, Andrews (1996) unpacked the commercial narratives surrounding Jordan's 'Blackness' as a 'floating signifier' which could be used to paint him as a non-

threatening, hard-working, and importantly 'non-political' African American. Andrews (1996) noted that Jordan's ability to succeed problematically supported the new 'post-racial' and 'colour-blind' politics of the era (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Conversely, this same rhetoric succeeded in painting other African Americans players as threatening, unworthy, and ungrateful for their 'status' within the NBA. As Andrews (1996) argued, "Jordan's comeback [...] accenting the neo-Reaganite personal traits [...] implicated him [...] [a] vindication of Reagan's color-blind ideology, and that set him apart from popular stereotypes of the African American male" (p. 152). Therefore, according to his analysis, Jordan's 'Blackness' could be manipulated in ways to negate the power of other African American players who might use their visibility and 'difference' within the sport as a platform for resistance (Andrews, 1996). These Black players arguably more accurately represented the feelings and popular politics of POC than the more prominent and apolitical Michael Jordan. Andrews and Silk (2010) also drew upon a similar US cultural studies approach in their critique of the NBA's 'Ghetto-centric' logic, or the politics of the NBA's 'use' and portrayals of POC, which are often in the service of conservative political practices, and only align and aid individual POC in particular circumstances (Andrews et al., 1998; Andrews & Silk, 2010).

Other key theoretical frameworks that have been applied to understanding race and sport include 'post-colonial' theory (Bale & Cronin, 2003; Carrington, 2015; King, 2017) and decolonization theory (Clevenger, 2017; Sotomayor, 2016). These theories broadly involve the complex set of histories, actions, and consequent relationships resulting from imperialism (Moore-Gilbert, 2000). Tiffin et al. (2013) offer a concise definition for all forms

of discussion that “deal with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies” (p. 168). One of the key texts derives from the writing of Said (1978) in *Orientalism*. In this seminal work Said (1978) outlined the West-East relationship as a social construct, which presupposed the West as a conquering imperial power, established through a mythos that framed it as the holder of power and intelligence and the East as the ever-looming ‘different’ ‘exotic’ ethnic ‘Other’ (Said, 1978).

Another key contributor to post-colonial theory is Fanon (1986), whose book *Black Faces, White Masks* revealed how the politics of the colonizer and the colonized resided in dispute within his corporal form. A central argument to the treatise involved Fanon coming to terms with being disconnected from any ‘imagined’ homeland or ‘essentialized’ spirit, because for Fanon (1986), and arguably all of the colonized diaspora, one did not exist. This argument alluded to the long-term effects of the European colonial powers over their subjects and the residual effect on the relationship between both the colonized and the colonizer (Moore-Gilbert, 2000). The colonized often continue to face great difficulty during their struggle for autonomy, in the naming and identifying of the self (Gandhi, 2019), and in understanding what practices are wholly unique and what have become a hybridity of cultures (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). A number of scholars have applied postcolonial theory to sport, and explored the processes of hybridity and how the colonized attempt to reposition themselves apart from the former colonizer through sport (e.g., Bale & Cronin, 2003; Carrington, 2015; King, 2017; Rollason, 2010; Sotomayor, 2016).

Within the array of theoretical approaches used in race and sport scholarship, a particularly significant approach has been CRT (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Stemming from Critical

Law Theory (CLT) and the work of young legal scholars Kimberly Crenshaw, Derrick Bell, Angela Harris, Richard Delgado and Charles Lawrence (Delgado et al., 2012), CRT emerged as a theoretical framework to address systematic racial biases within the legal system in the US in the early 1990s. CRT then emerged as a practical tool and discipline to engage with subjects beyond the law. CRT helps make visible the overt and covert ways racism maintains its presence in US culture, even while the specific concept of 'race' was rebuffed as being a social construct or 'imagined' state of difference between people (Delgado et al., 2012; Jr. Graves, 2004). This 'rebuffing' of race led to a 'colour-blind' (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) ideology that consisted of claims to not 'see' race, and thus began a fraught attempt to move 'beyond race' or become 'post-racial.' Rather than creating greater understanding between POC and non-POC, during the 1990s this narrative became a way to ignore and leave unacknowledged the systemic way race and racism were prevalent in American media (Denzin, 2002) and culture (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, 2015). CRT is thus a response to 'color-blind' rhetoric and Americans unwilling to see the past in order to develop more robust solutions for the future. CRT thus acknowledges the longstanding privilege of 'white' people in America and offers a tool to dismantle it and face racial 'invisibilities' in the debate (Delgado, 1987; Delgado et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998)

Beyond its original law perspective, CRT operates as a dynamic framework for countering racism. CRT offers a radical new approach due to its insistence that the central analysis focus on race, racism's durability, and the unraveling of the power relations that permanently disenfranchise POC across all cultural and structural aspects of life in the US (Bell, 2018; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1987). Some have also used these ideas to

examine race relations in the UK and other global contexts (Burdsey, 2011; Gillborn, 2006). The work of CRT scholars thus comes from a particular critical perspective that incorporates both 'postmodern' and 'poststructural' scholarship and heavily relies on narrative and a race-centred realist schema, due to its roots (in CLS) about the challenges POC face in attempting to disrupt racism (Christian, Seamster, & Ray, 2019; Denzin et al., 2008; Dunbar, 2008). Broadly, the central tenets of CRT require scholars to: have race and racism as the focus; apply an intersectional approach to dismantling oppression, with a research focus on liberating, transformative work responsible to those researched; operate from an interdisciplinary perspective; centre the research on the voices of POC; and disavow a 'colour-blind' approach (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado et al., 2012; Denzin et al., 2008; Dunbar, 2008; Hylton, 2010).

An advantage of CRT over other frameworks is that it operates as a practical, multipurpose perspective to investigate and counter racism by *assuming* it is present in the lives of POC. It thereby logically includes the voices of POC in the questions and analysis to identify racialized issues and attempts to defeat them, in line with its activist dimension. CRT also advantageously offers a "flexible framework", which "embraces pragmatic transdisciplinary tenets" (Hylton, 2010, p. 349) in order to allow the researcher to ascertain the best and most responsive methods available. The pliancy of CRT has thus proven useful for many scholars and thus CRT scholarship has developed across multiple fields, with extensive use in education in the US, and with growth in the UK (e.g., Chakrabarty, Roberts, & Preston, 2016; Harper, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). It has proven useful in deepening understandings of how race and racism affect

students and their families (e.g., Cooper, 2016; Gillborn, 2015; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and faculty (Louis et al., 2016; Solorzano, 1998), making it useful for interrogating the structures of power and allowing us to see how people are affected by power.

Narrative ‘counter-storytelling’ is often used in CRT and as a part of its activist dimension. This approach led to some radical activist research that renounces common stereotypes of POC as unable to thrive in the US despite its racist nature (Bernal, 2002; Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2013; Harper, 2009). For example, Yosso (2005) used CRT to argue against Eurocentric models of knowledge, rebuking a past theoretical framework of “Bourdieuian cultural capital theory” (p. 70) in favour of the development of a more responsive theory that she referred to as “community cultural wealth.” She believed this offered a more ethical education framework that did not misrepresent students of colour as en masse operating with “cultural deficiencies” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). Instead, her CRT-driven framework advocated young students of colour as possessing unexplored “cultural wealth” that needed to be addressed through the education system (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).

CRT has also proved beneficial as a tool to investigate racism in ways in that might be undiscovered through other means. For example, CRT investigations reveal how racial ‘micro-aggressions’ quietly and negatively impact the quality of life of POC (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009). Subtle actions and verbal ‘slights’ from non-POC peers operate as covert racial affronts designed to remind POC that they are part of a racially disenfranchised group regardless of their status (Sue et al., 2007). Significant research has focused on how the lives of POC are affected in the workplace, which includes Asian Americans (Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja,

& Sue, 2013), Chicano/Latinos (Huber & Cueva, 2012), and African American men and women (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Pitcan, Park-Taylor, & Hayslett, 2018). Building upon this work, Decuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016) revealed the types of coping mechanisms used by African American men to survive in racialized workplaces, and provided recommendations for additional preparedness strategies for POC when entering the education workforce.

While CRT has been used to deliver new insights into racial politics in a range of social spaces, it is not without detractors. Critics of CRT argue that it initially focused too intensely on dismantling the systemic racism in the lives of African Americans placed upon them by 'white' people (Yosso, 2005). A focus on the duality between African Americans and 'white' people, though significant, did not allow for other POC. Nor did it consider other marginalized identities and their unique histories. Thus, some critiques called for CRT to better explore the complexities of identity, which later developed through Crenshaw's (1991) seminal work on intersectionality. Bonilla-Silva (2006) also explored how the rhetoric of colour-blind politics swiftly became a way to shy away from unpacking the long-standing history of racism in the US and its effects on POC.

Other frameworks have built upon CRT, including Asian Critical Race theory (AsianCrit), LatinX (LatCrit) and Tribal Critical Race theory (Brayboy, 2005), alongside Indigenous studies. Each critical development offers a more detailed mapping of the way oppression operates in multiple manners for POC in specific contexts (Christian et al., 2019; Denzin et al., 2008). Some critiques of CRT highlight fear of POC framing 'whites' as the perpetual 'enemy' with no future path towards progression with attitudes locked, or

“irreversibly cynical with respect to the possibility of racial reconciliation” (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 1206). Others question whether CRT addresses intersectionality pragmatically in providing a thorough understanding of race (Hylton, 2009). While these critiques might have been issues in early scholarship, CRT continues to evolve, with researchers adopting, adapting and applying CRT with care and concern (Christian et al., 2019).

CRT has been used in research on sport in the US (Bimper, 2015; Brooks et al., 2017; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017) and in sport and leisure in the UK (Arai & Kivel, 2009; Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2009, 2010). In *'Race' and Sport: Critical Race Theory*, Hylton (2009) posits, “we live in a fundamentally racist and unequal society where processes systematically disenfranchise and limit the potential of black and (white) people” (Hylton, 2009, p. 41). According to Hylton (2009), when CRT is used in discussions of sport, it allows us to understand how POC or the ‘black or minority athlete’ are situated within a broader context, including socioeconomic status, gender, their ability to speak to power, and individual agency. CRT also allows us to ‘see’ how their presence and sporting lives signify more than just the individual athlete, as documented by Carrington (2010). In other words, they are at once a combination of historical oppression and progression encapsulated with the corporal form of the person of colour.

Hylton (2010) points to the intersection of race and sport with a focus on CRT as a key theoretical tool that is highly effective for those taking race seriously and looking for more significant ‘tools for anti-racists in sport’ (p. 335). Furthermore, Hylton (2010) presents CRT as a pragmatic device which “presents anti-racists with a framework to challenge orthodoxies, narrow ‘race’ thinking and under-theorized approaches in sport, and

thus to enable their praxis to be strengthened in what -critical race theorists view as a fundamentally racist world” (Hylton, 2010, p. 336). The use of CRT in sports also allows us to ‘hear’ the voices of black athletes in unison with other voices that are a part of a larger historical narrative of POC. Carrington’s (2010) research posits how their voices add to the diasporic thread of POC, which can “re-articulate wider political struggles to re-claim localized and discrepant histories” (p. 51). Understanding the broader context is important and allows us to consider better the dynamics that may disenfranchise, discourage or disempower persons of colour, and help us to act as advocates to create a more favourable environment in the future.

In this project, CRT is used to create space for the voices and lived experiences of African American and skateboarders of colour (SOC) in the US and to add their narratives to the larger discourse of the use of race and sport to create social change. This project investigates how POC navigate, challenge, and operate within the fundamentally racist United States. Using CRT, it attempts to uncover where POC may have had agency and power to impact their own positionings and representations within the industry and the strategies they devised to resist various forms of racism.

The use of CRT provides a framework that acknowledges that everyone’s experience of race and racism is different (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and creates the space for many critical insights into the way POC experience skateboarding culture. An argument for CRT rather than other critical theories is that CRT applies an activist dimension that encourages a set of principles focused on the researcher using the knowledge given by participants in a manner that creates social change. A CRT-driven framework also differs from other

approaches because it focuses on the voices of participants and their experiences, rather than on interpretations of texts or media. This approach offers the potential for gaining a greater understanding of how racism may operate in multiple, intersectional, invisible ways (Collins, 2009), which may have been overlooked in previous literature. Such an approach encourages a meaningful method of understanding how racism and racial formations may operate differently within particular contexts. When applied to skateboarding culture, it allows for an acknowledgment of the ‘invisible’ web (Collins, 2009) in the lives of POC. Using CRT, it thus creates a structure to draw from, which informs the types of questions, comments, and empathy necessary to create the space for the participants to contribute to this research. Guided by CRT, this research operates reciprocally with the researched communities—giving ‘voice to the voiceless,’ the primary tenet of CRT (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado et al., 2012).

CRT encourages the researcher to interview participants and then analyse those voices while providing context for analysis by framing them within the broader cultural forces of race, racism, and segregation. This approach acknowledges the historical elements that influence the racial formations experienced by POC in the larger US society and which form a primary tenant of life in America for POC (Collins, 2009; Delgado et al., 2012). Highlighting the experiences uncovered through CRT potentially offers a new forum for the discussion of race in skateboarding culture and provides a platform for both recognizing and enacting future social change (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2010). CRT scholars Delgado et al. (2012) suggest that there are multiple “ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times” (p. 9)—meaning that racial formation is ‘fluid’ and

racism is often obfuscated in ways that make it difficult to understand the complexities of race in every context. This is made notably more difficult in a rhetorical context where people claim not to see race or enact a 'colour-blind' perspective (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) that leaves previous institutionalization and structural inequities unacknowledged (Delgado et al., 2012).

In line with the call for context and to reveal the intricacies of POC's lives in skateboarding, the narratives of these multigenerational SOC are provided alongside a contextualization of their stories and descriptions of significant 'dominant' racial formations in the US. In effect, this follows a CRT perspective and provides a 'map' of contexts, allowing identification of the racial formations that reside within participants' lives, as well as offering insights into the multiple configurations, positionalities and racisms they or their community may face at any given time. The use of CRT acknowledges the positionalities and intersectional identity of the participants, and how their communities may be complicated in ways that show that "everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances" (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 10). This thesis provides a more in-depth investigation into the contextualization of complicated racial formations and identities, to allow for the highlighting of the experiences and voices of participants that illustrate the complicated ways in which race and racism have affected their lives. It also provides first-hand accounts of how POC developed strategies to survive and thrive in the US.

Furthermore, the use of CRT attempts to illustrate how the need for survival and safety affects perspectives, shapes definitions of success and agency, and intersects with lives in ways previously unexamined in the literature on skateboarding culture. In accord

with the activist dimension, this thesis attempts to transform our thinking about race among skateboarders by outlining the politics in their actions, and experiences through their eyes, while also providing a framework for understanding their positionality, and how the strategies incorporated correlate with broader movements of POC in the march towards justice. Thus, these narratives of SOC begin within a history of POC to provide context or a 'ground zero' discussion of race in participants' lives, allowing us to discover from where their actions arise. This discussion facilitates the understanding that these racial formations are a set of 'real' impactful social constructs that provide context to the lives of POC and develop through forces beyond participants' birth, scope, and control.

To deliver an accurate reading or understanding of participants' actions, this thesis acknowledges an important CRT tenet: POC experience multiple racialized formations along a wide-ranging spectrum. To appropriately frame a discussion of the themes of racialization, a broad range of participants and histories and positionalities for POC offers a sample of how race and racism present themselves in the US. Within these themes, strategies of POC range from actions that appear logically unquestionable, through to those that are controversial, or even detrimental to the survival of POC. This concept speaks to the 'messiness' of effectively combating and surviving racism, a generally unacknowledged insidious fixture of US life (Collins, 2009). Delgado et al. (2012) discuss how this 'messiness' informs the need for a CRT perspective in understanding and unpacking of race:

Racism is ordinary, not aberrational—"normal science," [and] the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country [...] Ordinarity, means that racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged. (pp. 7-8)

This approach highlights the ‘ordinariness’ of racism (Delgado et al., 2012) and makes visible the condition through the anecdotes of multiple participants. From there, we may discern how this informs their family and their personal framing of concepts of safety and security, while revealing how their positionality influences the actions developed and demonstrating how this connects to significant movements towards social justice by POC in the US. Creating this connection to broader social change movements by POC follows other CRT-informed scholarship. Hylton (2010) sporting application of CRT, and Omi and Howard (2014) investigations of race in the US also provide extensive context because “racism is a complex process and must be understood as historically situated, operating dynamically at any level of society” (p. 340). Their work creates a valuable opportunity to apply a similar framework to action sports; specifically, skateboarding. The following methodology chapter reveals the multiple ways in which this research demonstrates this responsibility. The use of CRT is an attempt to reveal how POC navigate the multiple elements that threaten to impede their progress. In my application of CRT to skateboarding, I acknowledge the historical racism and racial formation ingrained in sport within the US, but also examine how POC find agency within skateboarding, and attempt to connect them to broader struggles by POC to attain social justice.

2.5 Summary: Bridging the gap from race and sport to skateboarding

As shown throughout this chapter, this research on African American and POC skateboarders' lived experiences in the US seeks to address an important gap in the action sports literature. In applying CRT to skateboarding culture, this research hopes to allow researchers to better ‘see’ POC and reveal how racial formations within skateboarding

culture are experienced and interpreted through the eyes and voices of POC. Applying a CRT perspective to the discussion of race in skateboarding is imperative to developing an understanding of how race impacts skateboarding and action sports, and scholarship more broadly.

As discussed, previous efforts have been mainly anecdotal and have discussed race using the lens of 'white' participants' experiences and observations of non-POC in the field. This perspective has inadvertently led to privileging 'white' narratives, problematically allowing researchers to operate uncritical of their positioning and the need for greater reflexivity about the research produced regarding race in skateboarding culture. Without including POC in their analyses, there is the risk of providing a presupposition of 'white' worldviews as the 'natural' order (Beal, 1995; Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2006, 2007; Yochim, 2010). This project aimed to fill the gaps in the previous literature on race in skateboarding, responding to calls, particularly from Rinehart (2000), and Wheaton (2013) for more research on race in action sports. Simultaneously, this research highlights the similarities and differences that may be present in the distinctive sporting cultures and industries of skateboarding in ways that differ from traditional sports in the US. The next chapter explains how CRT informs the methodological approach developed in this thesis.

3 Methodology:

Can the Black (action sport) Athlete Speak?

This chapter describes how critical race theory (CRT) (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) informed the methodological approach in this project. It begins by outlining how and why the research fits into a critical research paradigm. Following this is discussion of the qualitative approach and data collection methods, including media analysis and interviews with key members of the US skateboarding culture, media, and industry. Attention is paid to the participant sample, and an explanation of the paradigm and the theoretical framework used for this project is provided. The full adoption of CRT required multiple operations and sensitivities and a deep engagement with race and reflexivity, which reveal the complexities of discussing racial identity formations throughout the research process. This chapter also highlights the various elements that influenced the representations of the data, and explains why a turn toward public intellectualism is important to help build research that better serves marginalized subjects and their agendas. In short, this chapter highlights how both the methods and praxis were informed by CRT, which asks scholars to create research grounded in the spirit of advocacy for POC.

3.1 Research paradigm

As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Markula and Silk (2011) suggest, research that uses CRT lies within a critical paradigm. This project, which is concerned with power, racism and ultimately creating social change from this knowledge, is firmly located within the Critical paradigm (Asghar, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Indeed, as noted by DeCarlo (2018):

Researchers in the critical paradigm might start with the knowledge that systems are biased against, for example, women or ethnic minorities. Moreover their research projects are designed not only to collect data, but also change the participants in the research as well as the systems being studied. The critical paradigm not only studies power imbalances but seeks to change those power imbalances (p. 147).

As described in the literature review (Ch.2), CRT acknowledges that racism is always present in the lives of POC (Delgado et al., 2012). In this thesis, I use the activist dimension of the critical paradigm and CRT, focusing on using the knowledge gained from participants' experiences to thwart the negative effects of racism and to create a more just environment for the research participants and skateboarders in the US and around the world. Thus, the Critical research paradigm fits the purpose of this research to examine the lived experiences and representations of key POC in skateboarding culture, to create space for their voices, and ultimately advocate for change in society, sport and skateboarding culture. Working within the critical paradigm, this research sought to develop a methodological approach that illuminates the various elements—people, politics, and positioning—and US racial formations that influence and inform the lives of SOC.

I approached this project with the understanding that each participant would have multiple ways of 'knowing' about the skateboarding world. I took into account that each of my participants would 'see' a particular 'reality' or 'truth' through their lens and perspective, as discussed in CRT and other research on qualitative research (Delgado et al., 2012; Fontana & Prokos, 2007; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Thus, my choice of the critical theoretical framework gave me the greatest latitude in understanding diverse lived experiences of participants, and their multiple interpretations of events and racial formations in skateboarding history. Additionally, participants' 'positioning' also carried a

subjective interpretation of events, images and contexts; thus it was necessary to approach communications with participants with the anticipation that, at times, their viewpoints might vary widely, or be synchronistic when least expected (Roulston, 2010; Seidman, 2006; Thorpe, 2012)

In the interviews, I took into account a common critique of CRT, which is that it focuses on the lives of African Americans (Christian et al., 2019) or it lacks multiple perspectives of POC (Darder & Torres, 2004). To combat this, I recruited a large group from multiple positionalities. In so doing I also understood that among those parties there would be multiple subjective 'truths' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011).

3.1.1 Participant sample

The selection of participants followed a purposeful sampling model (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), with a specific invitation to individuals who occupy or represent critical nexuses in the racial discourses of skateboarding culture. Drawing upon decades of personal experience in skateboarding culture, the invitation was extended to participants I believed would be well positioned to discuss the experiences of POC through different periods and in different sectors of skateboarding culture. This is in line with a theoretical sampling perspective adopted by Patton (2002) to pinpoint those individuals who have witnessed or participated in key moments or acted as agents of change themselves. While each of the participants operated within the skateboarding industry from a variety of perspectives and positionalities, they all represented the spirit of Bourdieu's (1984) 'cultural intermediaries.' This meant that each of these selected participants had obtained high levels of 'social

capital' in the skateboarding culture based on their experiences and contributions to the sport, culture, and industry. In order to understand the broader themes of race in elite skateboarding culture, I selectively recruited from multiple SOC—African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Native/multiracial Americans (described in detail in the participants' interviews)—who have held positions of cultural influence in the skateboarding culture (e.g., professional athletes, professional photographers, skateboard company owner, magazine editor). This approach aimed to provide the widest understanding of the multiplicities and complexities of race in skateboarding. These participants purposefully represented a myriad of different backgrounds and positionalities (e.g., across generation, race, gender, sexual preference, socioeconomic background, and geographical location).

In total, forty male and seven female participants of colour were interviewed for this research, representing a broad spectrum of skateboarding culture (see Table 1). In Table 1, all research participants are listed and personal data for each including: name; the geographic location they represented during the research; their age/generation; gender; occupation (such as professional, skateboarding company 'owner', photographer, skateboarding team manager, professional videographer, artist, or media personality); and self-identified racial identity. Following Table 1 I discuss these identities in more depth giving an overview of participants' positions within skateboarding culture, and an explanation of how each participant fits into my research framework.

Table 1: Research Participants

Elite Skateboarding Participants	Location represented	Gender	Generation	Occupation	Race/ethnicity
Marty Grimes	west coast	male	1960s	pro	African American
Glen E. Friedman	east coast/west coast	male	1960s	photographer	Iranian American
Brian Ridgeway	west coast	male	1960s	team manager	African American
Kim Cespedes	west coast	female	1960s	pro	Asian American
Ivan 'Pops' Hosoi	west coast	male	1960s	parent	Asian American
Rodney Smith	east coast	male	1970s	company owner	African American
Chris Ortiz	west coast	male	1970s	photographer	Latino Hispanic American
Stacy Peralta	west coast	male	1970s	pro/owner	Latino Hispanic American
Freddie Destota	west coast	male	1970s	pro	African American
Cleo Coney	east coast	male	1970s	pro	African American
Mike Jones	UK	male	1970s	photographer	UK Black
Stephanie Person	west coast	female	1970s	pro	African American
Peggy Oki	west coast	female	1970s	pro	Asian American
Judi Oyama	west coast	female	1970s	pro	Asian American
Chris Dune Pastras	east coast	male	1980s	pro	African American
Kareem Campbell	east coast/west coast	male	1980s	pro/owner	African American
Socrates Leal	west coast	male	1980s	filmer	Latino Hispanic American
Chuck Treece	east coast	male	1980s	pro/musician	African American
Ray Barbee	west coast	male	1980s	pro	African American
Sal Barbier	east coast/west coast	male	1980s	pro, owner	African American
Kenny Anderson	west coast	male	1980s	pro	Asian American
Alfonso Rawls	west coast	male	1980s	pro	African American
Jahmal Williams	east coast	male	1980s	pro, owner	African American
Salman Agah	west coast	male	1980s	pro	Iranian American
Jeff Hartsel	east coast/west coast	male	1980s	pro	Asian American
Pep Williams	west coast	male	1980s	pro	African American
Rodney Mullen	west coast	male	1980s	pro/owner	White
Ron Allen	west coast	male	1980s	pro/owner	African American
Aly Asha Owerka Moore	east coast	male	1980s	artist, owner	African American
John Reeves	west coast	male	1980s	pro	African American
Christian Hosoi	west coast	male	1980s	pro/owner	Asian American
Stevie Williams	east coast	male	1990s	pro/owner	African American
Karl Watson	west coast	male	1990s	pro	African American
Spencer Fujimoto	west coast	male	1990s	pro	Asian American
Jamie Reyes	west coast/east coast	female	1990s	pro	Asian American
Megan Baltimore	west coast	female	1990s	owner	White
Eli Gessner	east coast	male	1990s	artist	Jewish American
Rb Umali	south/east coast	male	1990s	videographer	Asian American
Sal Masekela	west coast	male	1990s	media/owner	African American
Danny Montoya	west coast	male	1990s	pro/owner	Latino Hispanic American
Vern Laird	east coast	male	1990s	filmer	African American
Seu Trinh	west coast	male	1990s	photographer	Asian American
Jeron Wilson	west coast	male	1990s	pro, owner	African American
Steve James	east coast	male	1990s	pro/owner	African American
Chad Tim Tim	west coast	male	1990s	pro	Asian American
Vanessa Torres	west coast	female	1990s	pro	Latino Hispanic
Kanteen Russell	west coast	male	1990s	pro	African American
Oscar Jordan	west coast	male	1990s	pro	African American
Paul Rodriguez	west coast	male	1990s	pro/owner	Latino Hispanic American
Johnnie Schillereff	east coast/west coast	male	1990s	pro/owner	Jewish American
Rod James	west coast	male	1990s	pro/owner	African American
Samariah Brevard	west coast	female	2000s	pro	African American
Ishod Wair	east coast	male	2000s	pro	African American

In addition to the forty seven participants of colour, two key 'white' company owners (one male and one female) were also interviewed as their companies historically represented some of the most diverse brands in skateboarding culture. Their voices are not included in this thesis, but my interviews with them were helpful in understanding the reasoning for the wide ranging racial diversity within their corporations over time.

As outlined further in this chapter and at length in the subsequent data chapters, discussions of race and racial formations are often difficult. Therefore, it should be noted that the racial categorization/background information in Table 1 is not inferred. All participants were asked how they self-identified. I return to questions of participation self-identification, and other issues such as anonymizing the data, in this chapter and in subsequent chapters (i.e., Chapter 7).

3.1.1.1 The positioning of participants in the sample

The research participants in this sample can be divided into three key categories: professional skateboarders, industry insiders, and media influencers. The sample includes 30 professional or elite level SOC; this collected data outlines their rise from everyday practitioners to professional athlete status. This provides a pathway to understanding their motivations, inspirations, aspirations, struggles, and their interpretations of their impact on skateboarding culture and the impact of skateboarding on their lives. This category offers the perspective of athletes of colour. The research sample also includes 14 industry insiders. These participants include those whose work specifically has or is focused on

skateboarding culture in terms of involvement in design, manufacturing or team management of athletes, or as product managers and owners of skateboarding companies, and apparel and footwear companies linked to skateboarding culture. These participants offer insight into social change and internal politics from the point of view of POC involved in the business sector.

The research sample also includes five POC who have contributed or continue to contribute significantly to the skateboarding media. These participants were from the skateboarding niche media industry, including former and current editors and photographers of *Thrasher* magazine, *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine*, and *Skateboarder* magazine. As Wheaton and Beal (2003) illustrated, niche media operate as a foundational point of authenticity in skateboarding culture. These key participants thus offer valuable insights into the creation, politics, and dissemination of niche media and a significant opportunity to investigate both the representation and the key roles of POC in niche media over time.

The gender makeup of my research participants included both male and female POC from within the US skateboarding industry. The gender makeup of the skateboarding industry roughly reflects the makeup of the wider participation levels defined in a recent skateboarding participation survey, where currently the percentage of males is 76% and that of females is 24% (Bradstreet & IASC, 2016). From this research and my own experience, there is a significant gender disparity. This was also reflected in the research participants. Within the industry and in this project, there are more male cultural intermediaries of colour than female. Empirical chapters in this thesis address some of the

barriers facing women of colour in elite skateboarding culture, as well as the strategies some women used in attempts to overcome them. Every effort was made to include multiple perspectives of women of colour. Additionally, in keeping with a CRT perspective (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and with reference to feminist work in race (Collins, 2009), the research attempts to focus on the multiple forms of oppression faced by women of colour across multiple generations, in the data chapters. While this is not nearly adequate, it does align with what this work attempts to do—give ‘voice to the voiceless’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) by creating a new space which includes POC in the discussion of race from a variety of positionalities and intersectional perspectives (Collins, 2009).

Understandably, the recruitment of such a large and diverse sample was time-consuming and posed some challenges, but capturing the diversity of voices was of utmost importance to me as the researcher. When it came to making meaning of such complexities, I recognized that within the context of the unknown, *each* lived experience carries with it a facet of the ‘truth’ and the individual’s ways of ‘knowing’ the world (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, my role as a researcher in this project was to collect and decipher these cacophonous multiple narratives and multiple ‘truths’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011), and place them together in a meaningful way that might reveal the multiple, significant and complex experiences of the lives of POC in the US. This operates in accordance with CRT in that it might create a ‘counternarrative’ (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to previous literature on race in skateboarding culture.

The methodological approach and sampling technique adopted in this project are also inspired by Carrington’s (2010) question: “*Can the Black athlete speak?*” (p. 12). While

the context of my work differs from Carrington's (2010) (action sports versus traditional sport), my research seeks similar answers—can the 'Black (& POC Action Sport) Athlete, speak?' As Carrington (2010) asks: 'Why must people of colour only be used to illustrate theory and discussions of power, without including their interpretations of how that power is experienced, acted upon and realized?' (p. 12). And, in relation to my work, what facets of 'truth' might we learn when we create space for the multiple stories of POC in action sports? If we attempt to 'see' and 'hear' POC in skateboarding culture, how might such lived experiences contribute to larger discussions of race and power in sport and society more broadly?

3.2 Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative

To understand the lived experiences of SOC who have made significant contributions to US skateboarding culture required the application of two key methods: 1.) qualitative interviews and media analysis; and 2) quantitative media analysis. Informed by CRT, throughout this project, I also engaged in various community and awareness-raising activities, which are included in the methods section because the insights, relationships, and rapport developed through these activities informed the analysis and overall understandings of the complexities of race in skateboarding culture in the US. While some may argue that such forms of praxis are not a method per se, this project is deeply informed by CRT, which calls for researchers to be 'researcher-activists' (Delgado et al., 2012) in the service of creating greater awareness of their research participants and their agendas. Such activities—informed by theory and contributing to my methods and analysis—also answered this call for research to live beyond the page through a public intellectualism in

service to the subject. In the following sections, I outline these various components of my methods in detail.

3.2.1 Interviews

In my efforts to understand the complexities of the experiences of POC in skateboarding, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a common form of knowledge gathering (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Roulston, 2010) and the semi-structured approach has a significant history in feminist studies (Collins, 2009; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Gluck & Patai, 2016) and in broader critical perspectives (Carrington, 1998; Fontana & Prokos, 2007; Roulston, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While there are several approaches to interviewing, the one I used was grounded in creating space for participants' experiences. I also attempted to create a shared sense of power, which was informed by the work of Gubrium and Holstein (1998) and Warren (2002). These approaches recognize that interviews are a joint effort between the subject and the interviewer, and should reflect a conversation between two parties who respect each other and are willing to give something of themselves to the engagement (Benson & Anderson, 2002).

In action sports, semi-structured interviews are also a commonly used method to gain insider perspectives (Thorpe, 2012). An excellent example of a critical method of interviewing and analysis akin to this research appears in the work of Olive (2016) on surfing. In that research, she applied a feminist cultural studies approach (McLaren, 2012; Turner, 2012) in order to create liberatory research for female surfers. Olive (2016, p. 173) sought to create a situation where the “research approach, method, findings, and

dissemination became intertwined” in order to “create change within the lives of women who surf” (Olive, 2016, p. 173). This approach allowed interviews that “preserve the viewpoint” (Fontana & Prokos, 2007, p. 66) of the participant and work in a collaborative service between the researcher and participant. The goal of this research was similarly placed, in that it attempted to identify how POC have experienced race and racism in their lives, and used interviews and analysis to examine the workings of power with the aim of ultimately creating avenues to disrupt it in the future.

The use of interviews is also in line with my theoretical framework of CRT. Interviews are a common method in CRT, as used in the contexts of education (e.g., Harper, 2009; Harper, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor et al., 2009) and in sport (e.g., Brooks et al., 2017; Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2009; Withycombe, 2011) According to Christian et al. (2019), narratives from interviews are used in CRT scholarship, “draw[ing] on stories that center the lived experiences and voices of communities of colour, to both challenge racism and validate its reality” (p. 1735). Interviews here are incorporated to provide space for POC to discuss how they are affected by racism. As the voices of POC are often marginalized in academic literature and popular discourse, CRT places a particular emphasis on drawing out their stories, which this work does, and places them at the front of any anti-racist research (Delgado et al., 2012). As noted by Solórzano and Yosso (2002), the voices of POC often provide a ‘counter-narrative’ to popular racial discourses in the US. This thesis uses the interview process as a method that incorporates the voices of POC to give light to their understanding of race and to further develop ways to thwart it and create change.

Throughout the thesis, all quotes from interviews are referenced as personal communication.

In this project, I conducted semi-structured interviews in a ‘conversational’ style, where participants had the right to elaborate on topics as they saw fit. Using this approach allowed participants to discuss broader themes of race, along with the ‘micro-aggressions’ (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sue et al., 2009) or small ways that interactions were racialized in their lives, which might not have been disclosed in a rigid structure.

While this interview method allowed for expanding on topics, participants were also made aware that they could refuse to answer questions and could proceed at their own pace. This spoke to my need as a researcher to create an ethically-centred space during the interviews (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012). I was aware that all qualitative interviews have a power dynamic, and in my role as a researcher I needed to remain aware of what might seem ‘questionable’ or unjustifiable’ within the line of questioning. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) point to the role of ethical research as stemming from knowing what constitutes a strong foundation for inquiry, versus ‘dangerous’ ground. As a researcher throughout the interview and analysis process, I was aware of the need to create safety for my participants and scrutinize my process. This was my attempt to “evaluate [...] practice and learn to recognize ethical issues” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005, p. 178), and I looked to the literature on ethical and reflexive interviewing for support (Thorpe, 2012). The goal of the research was not permitted to overtake the safety of participants, and the interview process methods allowed POC to speak on their own terms, in their own voices,

and to explore new topics as they developed safely and organically (Fontana & Prokos, 2007; Roulston, 2010; Warren, 2002).

All interview participants received an information sheet and a consent form (see Appendix A and B(ii)) after receiving ethical approval from the University of Waikato (granted 27 June 2017). Each of the participants was contacted via email in a formal letter to invite their participation in this project. These forms explained the benefits and any risks of participation; how to withdraw from the research; the levels of confidentiality; what would happen to the data collected; and how to resolve any disputes. All of my participants were over the age of 18 years (the legal age of consent in the U.S.) and were required to sign a consent form to participate.

Between September 2017 and December 2018 I completed 47 interviews, aiming to create 'narrative diversity' (Czarniawska, 2004) so that the research could address a breadth of narratives and the cross-section of voices could give light to the whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To understand the world views of my participants and gather their narratives, my semi-structured interviews were coupled with open-ended questions. My approach operated in the tradition of establishing narrative (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Seidman, 1991; Warren, 2002) so as to reveal the power and the multiple perspectives of the participants and their unique understandings of the world, thus allowing space for the interview to breathe and proceed naturally and in a conversational style. Developing rapport with my participants while operating in an open-ended conversational style was important to this research because this strategy allowed a two-way dialogue. This casual style increased the comfort levels of participants, helping to build rapport.

The type of questions I posed came from a combination of my understanding of the literature, my cultural understandings of skateboarding, and my biography as a POC; an African American male from the North East with experiences across multiple racial formations throughout the US. I also sought to bear my experiences as a person of colour engaging in skateboarding culture over several decades, moving from local practitioner to the level of sponsorship, establishing and chairing skateboarding NGOs, and moving into the professional ranks of skateboarding culture as a writer, photographer, and most recently a skateboarding diplomat. Using CRT allowed me to formulate and ask questions designed to explore how POCs' lived experiences were informed by race and racial formations, which I have personal experience navigating.

My application of CRT as a framework to structure my question guide was influenced by my understanding that within the CRT perspective is the tenet that the lives of POC are multifaceted and unique. How one person responds to and experiences a situation may differ from the next, and this is important in understanding how people navigate racial formations. In other words, for CRT as a method, context matters. Thus, my interview questions (and later analysis) had to be personalized and comprehensive to paint a picture of each participant's world before, during and after their skateboarding lives. My personal history and CRT perspective guided these processes. I operated slowly and methodically to formulate questions that might accurately reveal the advocates and adversaries faced by the participants, without preconceived notions. Only then, after carefully executed questions, was I able to slowly peel back the layers to give space to how racial formations

may exist, and may or may not influence my participants' lives, and the strategies and modes used to navigate race and racism in the US.

During the interviews, I asked roughly 20 formal questions (depending on the participant) about their experiences in the skateboarding culture, sport, and the industry (see Appendix B). These interviews typically lasted two to three hours. Though initially scheduled for a shorter time, after the first few interviews, it was apparent that my initial proposal to conduct interviews ranging from 60-90 minutes in duration would often not provide enough time for satisfactory conversations because, as many told me, this was often the first time SOC were afforded the opportunity to speak candidly about race in skateboarding. In keeping with my CRT approach of creating room for the previously silenced (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and for this to be a proper exchange of ideas, I allowed the interviews to run as long as desired by the interviewees. The length of discussions further highlights how much the participants valued the opportunity to share their experiences, and their investment in this research.

Following the interviews, I contacted them to verify their answers or to ask to follow-up questions (if needed) to amend their transcripts. The research participants were asked to verify their final transcript and assign their level of anonymity. When working in a space as sensitive as race and racial formations, there may be a natural tendency to want to anonymize the data. What was made apparent by the participants, however, was their desire not to be anonymized or made 'invisible.' This is discussed in depth in the data chapters and reveals the power participants felt in being named and the potency of their individual stories. 'Naming' versus 'anonymity' created challenges in this study because it is

of the utmost importance to keep research participants safe, especially considering many participants are still employed in the skateboarding industry. There are, however, also politics involved in carefully naming participants as a sign of respect for their wishes and the values of their stories. Svalastog and Eriksson (2010) provide insight into the challenges of mitigating this type of request with indigenous peoples. They remind researchers that “For groups in an uneven power relationship, it has been crucial to gain ownership over their own history” (p. 109) They then conclude that “risks need to be weighed carefully through the context because creating anonymity can cause greater harm in some instances” (p. 110). Their work provided critical insight that aided my process of protecting my participants and respecting their wish to be named.

In particular, some of the participants felt the need to ‘set the record straight,’ from their perspective both as an individual and, at times, on a collective level. For example, at the individual level, this was particularly true for those who had been discussed by ‘name’ in prior research, but not interviewed, such as Stevie Williams and Paul Rodriguez. They both have been discussed as ‘tokens’ or as ‘pawns’ in neoliberal politics (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010). Williams felt it was important to address the previous research, which marked his representation in media as ‘tokenism.’ During our interview, Williams reflected:

That happens to Black people all the time—they always want to leave us out or portray us negatively. That’s written by people that just don't want us to be in skateboarding history in a positive way. If they think I didn’t earn my place in skateboarding, they obviously didn’t read that much. Transworld [Skateboarding Magazine] already gave me my props. Out of the 30 Most Influential skateboarders of all time, I'm number 27. People [scholars] can write about it how they see it, but the kids who study skateboarding—they will do their research and see there's

heritage with the name 'Stevie Williams' (personal communication, 2018).

While Williams' accomplishments and narrative are discussed further in the subsequent data chapters, this comment highlights the importance of providing alternative readings of race by those who are part of the discussion or whose lives and legacies are affected by research on race. It also underscores how my use of CRT allows the 'black athlete to speak' rather than only be spoken about, and highlights the importance of giving the black athlete a voice, a face, and a name.

CRT also imposes upon the researcher the responsibility of connecting the voices of POC and revealing larger 'collective' narratives regarding POC (Delgado et al., 2012; Hylton, 2009). Thus, through my use of CRT, I was able to determine that this research helps push forward a 'collective' proposed by African American skaters' decades before. This element was brought to my attention by African American skater and company owner, Aly Asha Owerka-Moore:

A group of us have wanted to create a documentary about African Americans in skateboarding since 1996. We, Sal Masekela, Atiba and Ako Jefferson, Mirko Magnum, Sal Barbier, Damon Morris, and others—all realized it simultaneously. We would meet up and make lists of every black skateboarder and existing amateur that we could think of starting from Marti Grimes, the first Black pro from our recollections at the time. We just thought that it was important to document and showcase the contribution of black people to skateboarding because nobody has touched on it (personal communication, 2018).

Other members of this original collective, like Selema Masekela, X-Games announcer, mirrored the sentiment that making his name public mattered to him and supported the notion of creating collective power for generations of POC:

For me, I just love it, man. I love this opportunity to speak because—all we [POC] need to know is that we are capable of doing great things and if my story can do anything to help someone feel affirmed in that capability, that simple capability, then I'm good. We really tried to finish the original [collective] project but everyone was also busy working, that we couldn't dedicate the time we wanted to (personal communication, 2018).

Here Masekela is addressing a collective desire to record a history of elite POC in skateboarding. They faced difficulty, however, navigating their roles as cultural intermediaries *and* as researchers. Therefore, my ability to focus on gathering these collective narratives carries a significant responsibility because I feel the expectation to bring to light the collective narratives of communities of colour. Masekela's statement also points out the importance of the voices of POC being named and the weight of those names being held up as an exemplar of what is possible.

In order to learn from participants, another function of my role as a researcher was to facilitate a *safe* 'space' to engage in conversations about race. As CRT posits, we live in a fundamentally racist world (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), and thus, for many, it is difficult to bring up issues of race within US institutions for fear of tapping into covert racial tensions by white counterparts. According to Sal Barbier, professional skater and company owner,

Sometimes people get touchy about someone like you [POC] doing interviews like this [singularly focusing on POC] or someone making a black documentary. Normally I don't get involved [in those projects] and, you won't hear stories of me talking about race and skateboarding or any of my experiences that I told you about. I'm not interested in triggering some sort of divider [with people] or drawing a racial line (personal communication, 2018).

What Sal Barbier is addressing here is the duality felt in being both 'Black and American' (Du Bois, 2007), or more specifically, Black and a skater. His statement highlights the tension

POC face when openly engaging in critical dialogue with race and racial formations. Hylton (2010) similarly highlights these types of tensions in-depth in his essay on the importance of a CRT perspective employed in discussions of race and sport. Hylton (2010) further addresses the type of backlash POC face when a non-POC attempts to address their anti-racist notions by blaming the POC for their perspective. Therefore, my adherence to a critical race theory (CRT) framework and my ability to obtain information were openly informed by and acknowledged the need to create a safe, respectful space for the two-way flow of information. As suggested in the quote from Barbier above, what is needed is an 'empathetic' ear, safe spaces and a 'trusted' person for openly discussing race relations. In order to gather such sensitive information, my CRT-guided method of a 'reciprocal respect' approach through interviews needed to be employed to create a bridge of ideas between myself and the participants. Adopting this method acknowledged that talking about race is complicated. There are often few respites from this tension, and few people able to conduct these difficult types of conversations that require mutual understanding. My use of a CRT perspective also brought with it an added level of responsibility to the research and the subjects.

3.2.2 Praxis as a method

The notion of 'service' is central to CRT, and thus was instrumental throughout my research process. Inherent in adopting CRT is a 'call to action' that relies on motivating researchers to attempt to see injustice in the world and work to change it (Collins, 2009; Delgado et al., 2012). I therefore hosted numerous events and forums to discuss my research (Williams, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). My goal has been to allow my participants to have their voice both

in conversation with me and with the skateboarding community. Importantly, these functions create space for POC to have their story in a place where there is an intersection between both the public and private; where the dialogue, history, and knowledge can intertwine with current discussions, and allow the broader public to learn from these topics. Such experiences contributed to this project in both formal and informal ways. For example, during *The Nation Skate* event held at University of Southern California in 2017, I worked with Vanessa Torres, a female SOC from the LGBTQA community (Williams, 2017). There we discussed race, gender and sexuality in skateboarding, as well as skateboarding's role as a tool for social change, which was well received. It was the first time we both had attempted to tackle these topics in an intersectional manner in a large public forum and we were both nervous about the event's reception as we had previously experienced some resistance. The impetus for Torres and I to think reflexively about using this public platform to discuss her identity as a queer woman of colour developed through our earlier discussions of gender and sexuality during an *LGBTQ Experience in Sports* event (Williams, 2016). During this Torres and I were (problematically) questioned about whether there were 'really any LGBTQA' participants in skateboarding culture. Furthermore, it seems that the event's organisers wanted to deliver on a singular identity question (i.e. sexuality), and race was largely left out of that discussion. The questioning and roadblocks we faced to gain access to that event programming reminded me of the personal responsibilities to my communities. First, it is important to create space to examine the intersectional identities of SOC from multiple positionalities. It is also *equally* important to develop opportunities for the voices of action sports as a *whole*, lest they be marginalized in discussions of diversity

in sport and popular culture. These events are just two examples of my ongoing public intellectualism and community engagement.



Figure 3-1 Neftalie Williams at LA84 Foundation and The Nation Skate at the Ford Theater



Figure 3-2 Neftalie Williams panel at The Nation Skate

3.2.3 Media analysis

In the action sports field, content analysis has been used by several scholars, particularly with a focus on how women are portrayed in niche media (e.g., magazines, videos) (see, for example, Rinehart (2005); Thorpe (2004); Wheaton (2003)). This research builds upon such studies by examining POC represented on the covers and featured in key niche skateboarding magazines historically and investigating how both quantity and quality may have changed over time. While the quantitative analysis of skateboarding magazines plays a ‘subsidiary’ role within the research design, it was important, in that it provided contextual background for the research, and a foundation for the qualitative media analysis to build on. For instance, longitudinal analysis across several decades of skateboarding magazines

created a familiarity and identification of the key images (photos) that participants mentioned during their interviews. This familiarity aided in developing rapport and provided a basis for other discussions. Unpacking niche media prior to interviews also allowed for clearer, more specific questions regarding participants' interpretations and reflections on representations of individual POC.

For this analysis I selected key skateboarding niche media (e.g., *Skateboarder* magazine, *Thrasher* magazine, *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine*, *Big Brother* magazine) through three eras: the mid-1970s to 1980, the early-1980s to mid-1990s, and roughly the mid-1990s to the 2010s. The analysis focused on images and text on covers, and in editorials and advertisements. The purpose of this was to quantify (approximately) the number and percentage of POC appearing on the cover of niche skateboarding magazines, allowing me to note any changes over time, as well as to identify important trends to inform the interviews. The tabulated results of this analysis are in the appendices, which I draw on in the discussion, particularly of the niche media (see Chapter 6). In summary, Table 2 in Appendix C shows the number of covers of *Skateboarder Magazine*, and the percentage of POC appearing on those covers. Table 4 (in Appendix D) shows the frequency of SOC from *Thrasher Magazine* from 1981-2004. In addition, a more in-depth racial breakdown of magazine content from 1981-2004 in *Thrasher Magazine* is given in Appendix E. *Skateboarder Magazine* represents the most revered cultural source during the 1970s to 1980, and *Thrasher* gained considerable cultural significance from 1981-2000s.

Working in this manner followed Seale (1998) 'informal' or 'limited quantitative' approach guidelines—meaning gathering quantitative data to enrich and support

qualitative themes. For this project, this approach allowed for the gathering of the empirical data to present some of the skaters' visibility, as well as demonstrating the percentage of SOC across particular eras. This helped establish the key influential individuals in each era, which supplemented qualitative data to understand the context informing the experiences of SOC. This approach also allowed for an understanding and analysis of both 'who' is present and 'what types' of representations are present for POC in niche skateboarding media to identify trends. Furthermore, in subsequent chapters, I examine research showing representations of POC in traditional sport media (Andrews et al., 1998; Andrews & Silk, 2010; Hylton, 2009; Primm et al., 2007; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010) to determine how representations of race in skateboarding media might be similar or different to their findings, as a way to provide context to the stories of my participants. Ultimately this approach allowed for the mapping of trends in skateboarding to be examined alongside shifts in broader sport and popular culture, particularly concerning POC (Boyd, 2008; Boyd & Shropshire, 2000).

Using Seale's (1998) 'limited' quantitative approach also encouraged me to chart the exposure and prominence of persons of colour to inform and point to key images or POC's representations, which might be known to my participants. My approach was informed by an understanding that niche media were a significant component of the skateboarding experience for each generation. It also provided me with the background to work across multiple generations of participants and demonstrated that I cared for their individual and collective histories – a key requirement of my CRT perspective. Working from this data

allowed me to ask meaningful questions about race, which took into account each participant's life.

3.3 Race, relationships and reflexivity

Within this research, the concept of reflexivity is explored extensively via my dialogue and relationship as a person of colour with a history in skateboarding, and as a person with shifting positioning in the skateboarding cultural and sporting landscape at different times. Carrington (2008) posited that “sport provides a contested *arena* through which competing definitions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and region are articulated,” and queried “how are different versions of what it means to be black confirmed or challenged within particular sporting locales?” (p. 424). In this research, I grappled with these concepts not only in discussions with my participants and their lives as POC, but also within my own positionality. What does it mean to be black, male and a person of colour and a skateboarder in the US, conducting research on race? While I initially began looking at creating space for the participants, the process of discovery within the project and over the past three years required constant navigation of my own positionality. I thus held an ever-shifting status of both ‘insider and outsider’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) status during the process of this research.

3.3.1.1 Reflexivity within this research

Within the scholarship on race and race in sport, there has been an extensive call for ‘reflexivity’; in other words, for researchers to take into account or ‘reflect’ upon their multiple positionalities and how those positionalities influence research outcomes, agendas

and our understandings of race (Andersen, 2003; Carrington, 2010; Collins, 2009; Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012; Hylton, 2010). Reflexivity, broadly defined, calls for the researcher to be aware of their positionalities, alongside those of the participants, and aware of power relationships, and to be responsive to how the ever-changing shifting contexts and agendas influence the construction, analysis, and outcomes of research (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012). In race scholarship in particular, in the employment of CRT, reflexivity is an essential component of an 'ongoing process' of examining how and why we develop our research and conclusions in order to create meaningful work responsive to the POC communities researched (Collins, 2009; Delgado et al., 2012).

Within this research, the concept of reflexivity is explored via outward and internal dialogues with participants, and also by negotiating my identity and relationships as a person of colour with ever-shifting positionalities within the skateboarding industry, academia, and communities of colour to create a more accurate reflection of the narratives of other POC. Throughout this project, my position might best be identified as an 'insider-outsider' 'member' researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Being an 'insider' broadly refers to belonging to the same community or group that one is researching and generating scholarship that is at least partially facilitated or influenced by operating with a set of shared or common customs, narratives and/or baseline experiences and understandings, which aids in the development of the rapport and research (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha, 2000). A reflexive approach to the 'insider-outsider' positionality requires recognition that within qualitative research, there are benefits to being an 'insider' and also shortcomings (Wheaton, 2002). Attempting to determine the interplay of these different factors allows

both readers and researcher to identify the parameters where 'blind spots' or biases may operate during the research (Andersen, 1993; Marcus, 1998; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thorpe, 2011). Marcus (1998) acknowledges that the process of creating qualitative research is fundamentally flawed because the act of communicating 'feeling' and 'experiences' between people is fallible; others cannot read your mind and language is imperfect. Reflexivity, however, operates beyond this premise. For researchers, 'meaningful reflexivity' (Carrington, 2008; Serrant-Green, 2002) involves identifying personal flaws, biases, and changing positionalities, which affect the information-gathering process, its analysis, and attempts to situate where and why those biases and shortcomings come from, thus exposing one's vulnerabilities during the researching process. My deep commitment to skateboarding culture certainly influenced this project in terms of who I was able to speak to and my passion in producing this work. But, as a US citizen living in New Zealand while conducting this research, I was also able to gain some 'critical distance' from the community and thus view the project and data from a different perspective. This time away from the core of the skateboarding industry allowed me to think deeply about how these stories from SOC align with the larger narrative of the history of POC beyond skateboarding culture, which is reflected in this analysis of this thesis.

In a detailed reflection on the interplay of race and ethnicity when establishing oneself as a racial or ethnic 'insider', De Andrade (2000) considers how one's 'otherness' may be less 'visible', prompting participants to question the researcher's 'status' as a member of the community. During this research, I applied that reflection in seeking to understand the racial politics involving research participants who were able to 'pass' for

'white' (a positioning which as a 'dark-skinned' male I have not experienced) and the complex history that informs those politics (Smith, 1994). As an African American male, who at times represented a different racial background to my participants, I carefully considered how the inclusion of voices of those who could 'pass' created not only the opportunity for more varied positionalities of POC, but also risked creating greater emotional difficulties for myself and participants. From personal experiences as a POC, and through reviewing the literature, I was reflective and sensitive to how some communities of colour (and participants in this study) criticize or 'discount' the experiences of those not as easily 'discernible' as POC, often calling into question their views and credibility on race (Dawkins, 2012; Elam, 2011; Wald, 2000). By pursuing a diverse sample of minority ethnic participants, I was aware that I was potentially opening myself to criticism from some participants.

When I did encounter criticism I often drew upon scholars like Serrant-Green (2002), who noted that there can be difficulty in doing work among POC when you are an 'insider' and questions of your credibility and actions may arise *because* you are a person of colour in ways that might not be questioned by a 'white' researcher. For example, a 'white' researcher might simply state they are unaware of those politics, and that they are merely collecting a broad sample of POC. Within my positionality, however (an African American male who cannot 'pass' for white), I was familiar with how the severity of racialized notions are often reflected in the darkness of one's skin (Dawkins, 2012; Elam, 2011; Mallon, 2004; Smith, 1994). Mindful of this, I focused on the scholarship that informed those intragroup discussions, in order to be responsive and respectful to the stories of all POC, which exist

along a spectrum—a key function of the reflexivity necessary to effectively use CRT to disrupt the racism experienced by all POC.

Carrington (2008) offers an excellent example of this self-reflexivity, which I drew from throughout this thesis and used as a guide. Critiquing his previous work, he discussed how he omitted key instances where, while his racial identity within the Black British community was less in question, his sporting identity as a ‘legitimate’ cricket player was challenged by POC who insisted on calling him ‘a footballer’ to delineate him as ‘different’ when playing and researching Black cricketers. In this instance, the delineation was the ‘price of entry’ for access to the community he studied, and it required an acknowledgment that he was indeed ‘different.’

Similarly, in this research, there was an interaction with a participant that highlighted how the insider-outsider positioning is fluid and context-dependent. I shared the same racial background with this participant, and we had similar experiences growing up in urban environments, but when this participant questioned how illicit drugs and their sales impacted my relationship to skateboarding, I instantly became an ‘outsider.’ Having not had the same experiences as this participant, I lost some ‘credibility’ in the ‘hard facts’ of street life. Although we joked about it, the topic still became an instance where I became an ‘outsider’ and less ‘authentic’ to Black street life. However, as the discussion progressed and we came to the topic of racism within the city, I regained my credibility in the eyes of the participant and was re-located back to an ‘insider’ position. This is just one example that highlights the phenomenon of my ‘insider-outsider’ positioning in this project.

I experienced another 'outing' when my positionality as an 'academic' was noted to mark my difference. In a discussion among a group of participants, they joked that I was now 'the professor' and 'I was out the hood,' so I did not need to speak in our shared 'urban vernacular' anymore. The group even joked that I was now a 'narc' or 'informant' reporting on the streets, therefore I should no longer be allowed access to 'street-level' conversation. These responses to my new 'academic' status made me appear 'less black' and 'more different' (which some scholars might uncritically mark as 'white' (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Singer, Murray, & Demmings, 2010), as also posited in experiences by Carrington (2008). In his retelling of ever-changing status, Carrington (2008) described similarities in his 'working-class' roots and 'speech,' which aided him in being accepted as an 'insider' in his community of colour, but he lacked other key aspects of navigation capital commonplace within the community, having "clear regional differences to being black British/English that quickly became apparent" (p. 435). These experiences exposed him as an 'outsider' to the performance of local 'Blackness' common within the group he researched.

In other contexts during this research often the same participants applauded my role as an 'academic' and implored me to create more venues to discuss the impact of all of our experiences together so we could represent the diversity of the 'Black life.' Part of using CRT requires being responsive to the communities being researched (Delgado et al., 2012). I felt this then, and continue to operate reflexively, evaluating the weight and responsibility of this research and the requirement to bring POC experiences into the public sphere beyond this thesis. I have done this on several occasions, but it has not been without real

‘work.’ There is at times precariousness in coming together to discuss ‘race’, as other scholars have noted (Carrington, 2010; Kun & Pulido, 2013)

Sometimes merely *surviving* the data-gathering process and the presentation of findings with my shifting positionalities and responsibilities was enough to rate an event as a ‘success.’ Thinking reflexively, my ideas of a ‘tension-free’ event evolved to discussing race publicly without having both hostile intragroup fights and critique (Serrant-Green, 2002). At times I witnessed POC publicly questioning other POC about their ‘dedication’ and ‘solidarity’ in the struggle. I also sat alongside a group of non-POC attendees who felt that as an ‘academic’ I should be ‘beyond race’ or ‘race-neutral’ and that the topic was moot or at worse ‘race-baiting’, all of which have been discussed by other academics greater than myself (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Du Bois, 2007; Glasgow, 2010; Hartmann, 2003b; Hylton, 2009; Jackson, 1998; Twine & Warren, 2000; White, 2010). Within those experiences I was relegated to ‘insider-outsider’ status depending on the moment, all of which operated beyond my control and which needed to be negotiated throughout those events and within this final project. Again, I look to other scholars of race who have discussed their own experiences and worked to critically unpack them, offering inspiration in how such deep (and at times painful) reflection helped them become better scholars (e.g., Carrington, 2008, 2010; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Edwards, 1969; Hylton, 2009; Shropshire, 1996a).

During this research, I experienced how this affected the data collection when I struggled in discussions of gender and sexuality with LGBTQ participants on multiple levels, which required ongoing reflection. Williams and Heikes (1993) pointed to the gender

differences and inherent biases that occur when men interview women. For example, I shared a similar background as a POC and in my skateboarding history alongside women and young females throughout my career, (some of whom were LGBTQ). At times, however, having some pre-existing cultural, racial and sporting knowledge was insufficient. I am not a woman or a member of the LGBTQ community, thus relegating my position again to that of an 'outsider' (at a minimum) among my participants who self-identify as women (see also Wheaton, 2002).

In these cases, I looked towards feminist research in action sports (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Wheaton, 2013) to draw from their accounts from multiple positionalities within the local action sporting spaces. This literature helped me to think critically through my own biases and assumed norms about the ways men and women experience skateboarding culture. This process offered a necessary grounding to ask questions that attempted to critically examine their experience with males and patriarchy in skateboarding culture *alongside* race. Additionally, during the research, I also created space for questions that 'had not been asked,' which proved to be highly valuable as participants used these opportunities to share the complexities of their experiences, thus highlighting some of my blind spots as a male and a non-LGBTQ person.

Other interviews acted as a reminder of how my 'outsider status' operated generationally, which caused reflection on how my academic positioning offered a 'long view' of racial dynamics, which might not resonate with younger skaters within this research. For example, during an interview with a young skater, I thought I might create rapport in commonalities based on experiences of racism or gendered fields in

skateboarding, but none of those things increased our communication. While this individual recognized the identity politics of previous generations, they could only cite the experiences of 'older' skaters. There seemed to be little reflection on racism and racial politics in their own life and career in skateboarding. This tension forced me to create new questions focused on discussing race and gender not through barriers to POC, but rather in understanding what they felt their role was as an SOC. I allowed them to reveal how they viewed niche media and popular media and their impressions of those media and creating space for themselves and the generation behind them. This strategy proved fruitful and created new knowledge regarding how race is experienced by younger skateboarders who often find the discussion of racialized experiences 'passé'. This required creating a different dialogue in order to elicit responses to the strategies that younger generations are using to discourage or avoid racism and racist people.

Recruiting participants also required a degree of reflexivity in order to develop a broad range of positionalities, outlined in the participant sample. In selecting participants, I drew upon specific scholarship on scholarship on race and reflexivity and diversity of narrative (Chase, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012). Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) posit that scholars focused on race tend to only focus on one particular racial group and/or their intragroup identities and experiences, (p. 584), rather than building a more expansive case across groups. According to Emirbayer and Desmond (2012), the centralized focus on those experiences may "propagate a distorted view of the social world wherein (reified) racial groups exist in relative isolation from one another" (p. 585). This limits one's ability to see how racism as whole subjugates all POC in the multiple

‘invisible and visible’ intersecting ways suggested by Collins (2009). Taking a cue from these authors (Collins, 2009; Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012), this research operated across POC in multiple groups and positionalities in order to provide a broader understanding of how racism impacted upon the lives of elite SOC. This approach creates a shared platform to build upon in the future.

The ability to build a large sample across communities, as called for by Emirbayer and Desmond (2012), stems directly from my ‘insider status’ within the skateboarding industry, because my relationships in the skateboarding industry created access to participants. Within my network, I could draw upon individuals to vouch for my ‘authenticity’ in skateboarding (Beal & Weidman, 2003; Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017; Wheaton, 2013) and receive the benefits of “acceptance... [and] a level of trust and openness [...] likely not have been present otherwise ... to ‘outsiders.’” (p. 58). Access to this and other networks in skateboarding allowed me to engage with and interview a diverse group of elite skateboarders. Arguably, other researchers might not have been granted the same ‘level’ of availability to these individuals, even if they also shared some of the same attributes (e.g., male, POC.). In that way, I was privileged beyond many other researchers studying skateboarding and this must be acknowledged.

This ‘insider’ status, access, and ‘sameness’ created shortcomings as well. Fay (1996), along with many in sport, argued that an outsider might offer new insight in ways an ‘insider’ cannot see on multiple levels. Reflecting on this experience, a non-participant researcher might be able to extract information, as an ‘outsider’, which comes with less internal scrutiny and responsibility to the culture. As an ‘insider’ within the culture, there

was even a fear of painting the community both ‘critically’ and ‘uncritically,’ which required extra care during this process. To that end, I also encountered multiple parties who indicated that there was ‘no racism,’ thus no need for this line of inquiry. Others noted that skateboarding contained ‘so much racism’ that success for POC was unobtainable. Some shunned me for exposing any racialized instances within skateboarding because it ‘differed from their experience’ and might distract from the future of skateboarding (and marketing) because these narratives stem from ‘the past.’ Some suggested that highlighting negative racial formations in skateboarding might be unhelpful for developing greater social cohesion in the skateboarding community. A few people within the skateboarding industry even suggested I omit any findings that revealed the presence of interracial coalitions at any time in skateboarding because it didn’t reflect *their* personal experience.

To aid my processing of all of these elements and my internal positions and experiences, I continued to look for the stories of POC, while turning to the broader scholarship on action sports regarding reflexivity to understand that in revealing the multiple positive and negative attributes of one’s community and positionality there lies an opportunity for change (Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thorpe & Olive, 2016; Wheaton, 2004, 2013). This element also exists in race and sport scholarship (e.g., Boyd, 1997; Carrington, 2008, 2010; Hartmann, 2000; Hylton, 2010; Ratna & Samie, 2018). My commitment to creating change propagates the use of CRT here and thus I needed to continue to remain reflexive. Throughout this thesis, I worked through how to remain ‘true’ to my skateboarding community. I tried to determine how best to be involved when political issues arose, and how to balance the stories of participants (no matter how difficult). All of this occurred while

reflecting on personal challenges and shortcomings associated with my positionality as an ‘insider-researcher’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) in ways I may or may not have been aware of while creating this narrative of race in skateboarding culture.

3.4 Theoretical analysis

Throughout this project, I explored various interpretations of Critical Race Theory (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Burdsey, 2011; Collins, 2009; Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), as well as other critical theories of race (e.g., Cultural Studies, postcolonial theory, etc.), to consider which would be the most useful for my analysis. As explained in the previous chapter, I opted to use CRT because it prioritizes the lived experiences of POC and is driven by a motivation to create change. Throughout the interviews and media analysis, I focused on how my participants experienced racial ideologies, discourses, and their opportunities to challenge such power relations in ways that stem from an understanding of the way racism exists in the US. CRT also assumes that there are intense everyday power relations that occur between the individual self and the system surrounding a subject. This has been presented previously, and my analysis was guided by the elements that Hill-Collins (2009) identifies as the key ways in which racism “operates and compartmentalizes”: “structurally, culturally, disciplinarily, and interpersonally” (Collins, 2009, pp. 53-54).

Additionally, during analysis I also looked beyond CRT to Holstein and Gubrium (2011) and Gubrium (2010) and their research on narrative inquiry and practice. According to Gubrium (2010),

...narrative inquiry is to analyze narrative material with the aim of identifying patterns of narrativity [...] keeping materials in focus. The goals of narrative practice, in contrast, are multiple and dispersed in and across the interstices of accounts and storytelling as these transpire in everyday life (p. 388)

Gubrium (2010), however, notes that research is now taking a 'modern turn' where formerly rigid rules in qualitative research are dissolving. Gubrium (2010) argues that while the researcher can still look for 'themes,' there is now more room to reflexively reveal how a researcher understands the tenets of the contexts they encounter when 'mapping' the research. Inevitably, my own understandings of race could not be separated from the analysis, and they ultimately inform the overall layout of the multiple narratives. For instance, in the first empirical chapter, I focus on revealing how participants came to understand race during their childhood. This also brings in my own understandings, and informed by CRT, that racialization begins at birth. It also reveals my own standing as a POC who chooses to reveal that element of 'birth' as part of an activist dimension to speak to the insidiousness of race. These elements are always present and 'value driven' as I create a map of the participants' experiences for the reader. I then use both 'narrative composition' and 'narrative control (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998) in my CRT-guided approach to 'counter-storytelling' as I place the stories of participants in concert with others. While these are standard practices in CRT-based research, it is important to note the intersection of approaches that informed this thesis, which is arguably another benefit of the CRT framework.

3.4.1 How CRT informs the analysis

Using a CRT perspective while collecting narratives across a breadth of racial background was helpful because the theory provided me with the notion that race, racism and racial formations operate in multiple ways, both visible and invisible, and that there is a range of experiences. This prepared me for the reality that the stories of my subjects were not monolithic, and each displayed a variety of different power dynamics, biases and assumptions (presented both consciously and subconsciously), which informed their perspectives both historically and currently. Incorporating the framing of multiple 'truths' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011) in my research paradigm, however, rather than logical empiricism or a post-positivist approach, allowed me the flexibility to be 'open' to new narratives and new ways of knowing the experiences of African American and POC in skateboarding culture.

For example, my research revealed that not only were racial formations experienced differently generationally between participants; even the language and '*naming*' of 'race' operated differently across generations. In one instance, a participant revealed the emotional weight of bearing the classification of "negro" on their birth certificate (now an obsolete term) versus the category of 'black' or 'African American' available to subsequent generations. This was beyond the initial scope of questioning but keeping the research questions opened-ended when discussing how participants 'self-identified' allowed me the space to operate beyond my context-specific positioning and knowledge of what the language of race might look and feel like to participants. This approach gave me the room to discover how to ask 'beyond' what I did not know. Thus, for my work, the paradigm of

narrative through inquiry (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) provided me the best way to decipher the range of experiences and stories of my participants.

Uncovering the complexities of these stories aligned with my goal of understanding the 'who' and the 'what' of their narratives (Makula, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I looked for themes within and across the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011). These collective narratives provided a context not only to tie concepts together, but also, under the model of Gubrium and Holstein (1998), provided the ability to 'bracket' out issues and topics.

For instance, during interviews I realized that narratives and voices beyond my participants could be of substantial value. In particular, by 'bracketing' out topics (Tufford & Newman, 2012), I was able to understand the importance of my participants' parents, and then bring their voices into my research. While beyond the scope of my initial project proposal, by 'bracketing' out the topic of parents, an important theme was revealed. 'Bracketing' (Fisher, 2013) subsequently provided me with a new framework for thinking about 'who' these children and parents were and where they were situated within a longer narrative of POC. Initially, I had not thought about their parents' voices, but it was through the research that I realized that this was the first generation of children of the civil rights movement. Post-civil rights generations and their voices help connect the lived experiences of POC skateboarders back to larger discussions of race and identity (see Chapter 4).

The use of CRT also provides an opportunity to present my 'self' in relation to the narratives of the participants. In the empirical chapters I prioritise the voices and narratives of my participants, but in the conclusion chapter I dedicate space to reflecting on the

process of arriving at this knowledge. This is particularly important in that during the research I experienced the 'double consciousness' of race experienced by participants in and through myself. According to Du Bois (2007),

This sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused in contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 9)

In other words, this is the particular knowledge that the 'self' is at once part of the world, but is also a '*black*' or person of colour in the world and that there is *always* a different perspective, dynamic, and racialization involved in this positioning. I am particularly aware of this feeling within my positioning as a dark-skinned African American male working with other POC across a broad spectrum in the US. From my research, many of the participants also feel, appreciate and understand this 'two-ness' and are excited to work through it, navigate around it, or to be enveloped by it. My data chapters reveal that discussions of race contain unwritten, invisible elements, some of which have caused considerable tension in the lives of participants. At other times it was awkward and at times, comedic. In some instances, it was simply problematic operating with white colleagues, friends, academics and the general public's views and understanding of race, race and sport, and race and skateboarding.

At certain points, there was simply the difficulty in the collective 'us'—meaning POC in any capacity of power (the interviewer or the interviewee) needing to be all things to all people (both POC and non-POC); crafting, deciphering and negotiating information when

and where 'we' create knowledge together. I draw upon what Marcus (2007) describes as 'messy baroque' in ethnography. Engaging with CRT, this thesis starts with and builds upon a critique of the (lack of) depth and reflexivity in previous scholarship investigating race in skateboarding. For researchers of colour whose communities are often under-researched, it is often difficult to witness POC as the subjects of unreflexive work on race (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Carrington (2008) discusses these difficulties and the tension of developing 'race work' as a scholar of colour. In many instances, it is perceived as 'niche research' when conducted by Black researchers, with both the topic and findings scrutinized critically and (often hyper-critically) by detractors. This leads to both the researchers and the research not garnering the same respect as when non-POC researchers work in communities of colour and leads to arguments about who is capable of doing responsible race work. Carrington (2008) explains,

That is, white researchers (unreflexively) studying largely white groups and communities are engaged in "mainstream sociological research," yet scholars of color researching "their" communities are suddenly seen to be doing specialist and marginal "race work." This does not mean we should not do such work, we should and we must. Rather we need to remain cognizant of how the same processes of racial formation that our work attempts to grapple with also operate inside the academic field to both normalize and privilege whiteness (p. 443)

All of this is part of a broader discussion of race, scholarship and reflexivity, which poses the question: How does one balance and respond to these conflicting notions, and perceptions of 'race work' when the academic space largely does not value the proposed dismantling of the very system that supports it? (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; Louis et al., 2016; Solorzano, 1998)

During my analysis, my use of CRT involved interrogating these narratives individually, then bringing them into dialogue in an attempt to uncover how racism or racial formations might underline or apply to participants' lives in similar and different ways. Most importantly, a CRT perspective that assumes racism is present (Christian et al., 2019) allowed me to ask how multiple elements may have affected my participants' lives, and how their lives influence the larger narrative of people in skateboarding culture, and the history of POC in the US via sport.

3.5 Representation of narratives

This research was best represented in 'narrative' as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and in accordance with a CRT perspective, which focused on the stories from participants. I believe this allowed for the multi-layered presentation of the narratives of participants. It also allowed for the extrapolation of themes to investigate how these stories may intersect with broader themes and discourse surrounding race and ethnicity.

The narratives in this thesis are presented according to major themes within the chapters, and the voices are placed in dialogue, and in some cases, dissonance, with each other to reveal key themes. My voice narrates the framing of the chapters and offers context to each section and the individual events. For example, in my discussion of media, I frame the role and importance of niche media in skateboarding culture. I then excavate what I was looking for within the media representations to support or refute the current literature. From there, I bring in participants' voices to reveal how their experiences within those contexts were read and felt by them at the time and how they interpret the same situations now. Their voices allow me to give a clear representation of the numerous forces

and voices surrounding movements, events, and eras in skateboarding culture. I then provide framing of where these moments stood in relation to the community as a whole and the larger discourse of race and sport and race in culture in the US. From this, I attempt to create a narrative that moves through the events and participants of the multifaceted narrative that help to earmark eras in skateboarding from the 1970s until now. My research also reveals the cultural contexts of race in the larger American culture generationally, allowing us to see how skateboarding has been shaped by these events.

This chapter and thesis takes into account participants' intersectionality and places us within 'their' context, while being aware that "Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances" (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 10). This means that a single narrative is insufficient for presenting the 'complete' story of a collective. To address this, CRT becomes a tool to weave multiple experiences of POC together, offering a combined representation of the ways in which race and racism influence the experiences of POC, in ways which might not reveal racism or the progressions or regressions of POC when examined on the individual level and in our 'colour-blind' current context (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Hylton, 2010). In accordance with these tenets, the subsequent chapters do not tell participants' origin stories; instead they seek to identify the types of original racial formations that participants encountered from birth or found themselves engaged in over time. This CRT-driven approach provides context and delivers a clearer picture of racialized experiences in life for POC. Subsequently, this research allows for an investigation of the presence or absence of similar racial formations in skateboarding culture, and participants' experiences navigating a new landscape.

3.5.1.1 CRT-guided influence on the narrative

Scholars focused on race have also advocated for a more complete and detailed framing of the actions of Black people en masse so that actions could be understood through their collective contributions, rather than solely analyzing the individual efforts of Black people (Boyd, 2003; Lavouille & Ellison, 2017; Rubio, 2010). For example, Rubio (2010) argued that conveying the Black narrative accurately must also include readings of racial formations in America:

Black history moves out of the context of the experiences of black people in America and judges America on the basis of our experiences. That is the only way in which the society can be judged by black people. Even other people are now learning that the proper way to judge the nature of the American experience is by the way in which the most downtrodden of the society have been treated (p. 6).

For this thesis, Rubio's (2010) statement points to the need for examining the complex histories of POC through an appropriate lens, which allows for articulation of what held meaning for *them* in their context. Only after adopting their 'lens' might we begin to interrogate their past experiences and begin to understand their present and future outlooks. This is seen in the work of other scholars focused on race, such as Deborah Gray White (2009), who also centres modern stories of African American women's narratives by first grounding them in past context to reveal the 'invisible pressures' placed upon upwardly mobile POC because "they were socialized from infancy to use their education to uplift themselves and their communities at the same time" (2009, p. 3). These concealed pressures appear abundantly in the lives of POC in this thesis, in examples where POC must

negotiate their identities and supporting their communities, while also attempting to challenge norms in race and sport.

Rubio (2010), Gray White (2009) and other scholars adopting CRT (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) use it because it creates 'space' to address the issues of racialized pressures affecting POC in ways that may be 'invisible' to white scholars (Carrington, 2010; Collins, 2009; Gillborn, 2015; Hylton, 2009). In this thesis, CRT is critically important because it allows for the establishment of race and racism as significant to the lives of these participants at times, and offers a framework that creates 'space' for POC to discuss those pressures. As the subsequent chapters reveal, once we are able to understand how participants interpret racial formations, and the degree to which they believe they can escape them, it becomes clear how significant is the degree of change that occurs throughout the lives of participants. Thus, skateboarding becomes a site where the culture and all of the ideologies of race and racial formations converge and affect new iterations of skateboarding culture and racial politics for future generations.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the research paradigm, the participant sample, and the methods employed, particularly interviews and media analysis. I also highlighted how these methods fit into a CRT theoretical framework, which offered the best opportunity to understand how race and racism affected my research participants. The subsequent sections on race and reflexivity outlined my understanding of the power dynamics that must be negotiated in order to create ethical work. Here I also discussed the role of reflexivity and my ever-shifting positionality as an insider-outsider. At times I had a strong rapport

with participants and at other times, I returned to the literature on interviewing to aid my understanding and responses in particularly challenging research moments. The following section discussed how CRT guided the narrative analysis, which required that the voices of POC be placed within a context and alongside other POC in order to accurately identify the trends in the experiences of POC. Ultimately this chapter discussed how CRT applied through the research methodology allows the work to take on an activist dimension, increases our knowledge, and focuses on placing marginalized voices at the forefront of the research.

4 The Role of Family and Community: Skateboarders' Early Exposure to Racial Politics

This chapter explores the early influences on US SOC. The analysis is presented in two sections—the first clarifies the essential role of family and community in developing the participants' initial views on race and racial formations. This foundation subsequently provides context for how skateboarding and skateboarding culture became a new site to navigate and develop unique experiences of race for the participants in this study. This section also includes an overview of the various historical events and communities that contributed to the early experiences of SOC from WWII until the mid-2000s. These experiences reveal their varied ideas about identity, communal values, racialized ways of being, and racism in ways previously unexplored in skateboarding literature. Critical race theory (CRT) (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) provides a theoretical framework that allows for analytical examination of the racial formations (Omi & Howard, 2014) experienced by multiple individuals across a myriad of backgrounds and generations. In addition, it offers insight into how participants became familiar with, understood, interpreted, and were affected by race and racial formations during their early lives.

The second part of the chapter builds upon this base, examining how participants' histories within racial formations influenced their viewpoints and activities during their initial transitions into local skateboarding communities. This section presents the participants' early initiations into skateboarding and highlights their interpretations of the experience, as well as community interpretations. Following this, participants' early

influences in skateboarding will be explored while drawing out generational differences in their understandings of racial politics as they intersect with the pursuit of skateboarding. This chapter covers participants and racial formations from the formal segregation of WWII, through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to current racial formations and racial politics. With such a varying degree of positionality, the chapter showcases the significant themes across generations. The approach adopted in this chapter follows the framework of CRT in highlighting the importance of early life experiences, community and how broader racial formations affected the lives of POC in the US in different historical contexts. Such insights are central to discussions on how participants navigated the racial politics within the skateboarding industry.

In summary, this chapter reveals the importance of race and racism to communities of colour in skateboarding. It presents the multiple positionalities, unifying themes, and outlying experiences that set the first stages of participants' transition into becoming cultural intermediaries keenly aware of race as they moved into the public sphere.

4.1 Understanding race via family and community

Prior to encountering skateboarding, all participants described the relationship between racism, discrimination, and attempts to achieve racial equity with 'white' counterparts as an integral component of life for both themselves and their families as POC living the US. Participants traced their earliest exposure to race back to their family, regardless of whether their experiences displayed positivity or negativity. Studies of families of colour in the US indicate that the family unit acts as the primary source for initial meaningful discussions and

observations about race and racism, and provide insight into the covert and overt ways in which race and racism affect the everyday lives of POC (Hill, 2003; Karenga, 2001).

Constituting roughly 10% of the sample, those growing up in the ‘pre’ and actual Civil rights periods (roughly 1950s-early 1970s) witnessed and were affected by the consequences of racialized experiences such as the vestiges of forced segregation, forced integration, discrimination, and alienation in the US context. These encounters framed participants' early views about both their families and their ability to access ‘freedom’ and economic, social and cultural resources. All the research participants were aware of race and racism, affecting each in different ways, but collectively revealed a theme of families and communities searching for strategies to create safety and pass racial knowledge on to their children. The following section presents several examples of the ways that familial cycles of racial knowledge influenced and educated young SOC.

4.1.1 Overt racism in the African American experience: Marty Grimes

The narrative of mid-1970s African American pro skater Marty Grimes offers an example of how the earliest awareness of race in SOC begins at home. Growing up in Los Angeles during the 1950s, Grimes’ first notions of race and racism connect directly to his father’s experience of institutional racism during the 1940s, “My dad was a Tuskegee airman—exceptional for African Americans at the time” (personal communication, 2017). As a member of the acclaimed, first all-black squadron, the ‘Tuskegee Airmen,’ the senior Grimes’ military unit operated during WWII within the discriminatory and segregated United States armed forces. The Tuskegee Airmen’s group faced challenges in enlistment,

certification, and in managing their Black men within the racist and formally racially separated US of the 1940-1950s (Phillips, 2012).

Grimes senior passed on his experiences of racism to his son, who recalled his awareness of the prolific accomplishments of his father, despite the racism prevalent in the US. For example, Grimes Sr. received the US Congressional Medal of Honor, and became “the first black man to hold the position of Deputy State Architect in California” (Grimes, 2015). These accomplishments notwithstanding, young Marty recalled his father’s and family’s sentiment that POC must “work twice as hard—there was no rest for Black people in the [racist] US” (personal communication, 2017). This general hostility against Black people (and other POC) called for the creation of strategies to combat it.

According to Marty Grimes, regardless of family accomplishments and the changing racial climate in Los Angeles, California, since 1917, their family and others from their principally African American community continued to face the perils of ‘everyday’ racism in the US during the 1950s-1970s (Packard, 2002). He recalled that to escape the dominant racist politics of the US, the Grimes family and friends often traveled south to Mexico. These travels offered a different perspective on both the negativity and the inherent ‘natural’ order of informal segregation and formal vestiges of the US Jim Crow laws (legalized segregation) (Packard, 2002) of the 1950s-1960s, and gave insight into the more favourable treatment of POC by other POC in Mexico. During our communication, Marty Grimes reflected on his family’s travels South from Los Angeles and their impact on his understanding of race in the US:

Our family and friends were going down to Mexico. They were listening to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. down there, so we'd all get [and give] the respect that we deserved [as POC] that you didn't necessarily get on this [US] side of the border (personal communication, 2017).

Travel *away* from the US offered Grimes insight into how racial politics operated differently beyond the US context, allowing him to see where African Americans could encounter less discrimination. Gleaned directly from his parent's actions during his formative years, Grimes discussed incorporating travelling away from the US as a learned approach to combat racism. Throughout his life, Grimes also witnessed multiple strategies to combat racism through his parent's civil rights advocacy work: "My parents worked with [actor and civil rights activist] Burt Lancaster and a diverse group [of other prominent activists]" (personal communication, 2018). Grimes noted, however, that it was the tactic of leaving the US to reduce the amount of racism in their lives that created the strongest impression. The Grimes family narrative demonstrates how some African Americans sought out and travelled to more hospitable spaces (in this instance Mexico) due to the public recognition of many African Americans as the 'ethnic-other' (Said, 1978). During the 1950-1970s, access to 'freedom' and economic and social resources could work in a decidedly different manner for those not recognized as the 'other,' thus making racial politics significant at a very early age, although from an entirely different perspective.

In Mexico, Grimes' father and the older generations united through sport-fishing, but for the youth the preferred leisure activity was surfing. The group were introduced to this sport via their godfather's son, African American surfer Rick Blocker (later founder of the Black Surfers and Skaters Association, (Wheaton, 2013). Witnessing the interactions between Blocker and his multiracial group of friends from LA who traveled with them to

Mexico provided the young Grimes with two dramatic discoveries—first that during the 1960s, action sports were being practiced by POC, and second that these activities could offer opportunity for positive intermingling between racial communities in search of a good time. Reflecting on the importance of those interactions, Grimes discussed the profound effect it would have on his life:

Rick [Blocker] and his buddies and a few ‘white’ guys would all go surfing together. That really influenced us. I had experience around them [white people] but seeing everyone surfing together was different. [Surfing] is what the kids did, and he [Rick Blocker] is more or less the godfather of that era—the [L.A.] person of colour—African American who started that initial spark for everyone (personal communication, 2018).

Grimes’ narrative allows us to see how he understood that POC and non-POC could find common ground in ways that were fun and thus more important to him and his cohort. Blocker’s group was influential on the young Grimes and offered an example of positive racial politics through the pursuit of leisure activities. These interactions affected Grimes’ own early ruminations about race, African Americans in action sports, and the possibilities for coalition-building through new action sports (see also Jefferson, 2020; Wheaton, 2013). Through this narrative, we can see how the family travels to the South provided a critical framework for understanding race, which he would carry into the future.

4.1.2 Learning racial loopholes and the politics of ‘passing’

During this research, 20% of the participants described how their early introductions to race stemmed from their family histories of identifying the inequity in the US and attempting to infiltrate the ‘white’ power structure, using the loophole of ‘misreading’ of race—known as ‘passing.’ Passing involves successfully ‘presenting’ and ‘appearing’ as ‘white’ in ways where

a surface level 'reading' of race and racial phenotypes by the dominant 'white' culture of the US accepts a person of colour *as* a white person. According to Hobbs (2014),

The lived experience of passing— the act of negotiating the permeable border between black and white— reveals one way that everyday people have interacted with a racist society since the late eighteenth century. [...] Individuals changed their racial identity by changing location, clothing, speech, and life story, thus seemingly making themselves 'white' (p. 8).

Particularly before the pre-Civil rights movement of the 1960s, this masking of racial identity or 'passing' provided the opportunity to create and gain power and safety for (some) POC and their future generations. Those capable of 'passing' gained access to 'white privilege' and 'white' resources within the US (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Omi & Howard, 2014). Understanding the concept of 'passing' and its significance to participants as a strategy in their lives and family histories allows access to an additional aspect of racial politics. Examining the experiences of 1970s pro skaters and company owners, Hispanic/Latino American Stacy Peralta, and African American and Native American Rodney Smith, shows how participants understood the racial 'loop-holes' of 'passing.' These examples also highlight their awareness that the benefits of this 'invisibility,' allowing POC to gain power within the US, were not without cost. Exploring the experience of passing from their vantage point offers perspective on the duality of this racial politics and its impact on participants and their families, while demonstrating their awareness of race and access to power from birth in the US.

4.1.2.1 Stacy Peralta

Born in 1957, legendary California-raised pro-skater and company owner, and inductee to the Skateboarding Hall of Fame, 1970s pro skater Peralta influenced the lives of skaters from multiple generations (discussed in detail in subsequent chapters). Peralta's place in skateboarding is also discussed by scholars such as Kusz (2007), whose focus was on representations of skateboarding in popular film media (specifically, the *Dogtown and Z-Boys* documentary, and *Lords of Dogtown*). In Kusz's (2007) reading of Peralta and his cohort,

[The] white identity of the Z-Boys [...] valorizes racial ideologies, social relations, violence and identities[...] [which] reproduce a centered position for Whiteness in American culture and society (p. 125)

Through this and other anecdotes (discussed in detail in Chapter 3), Kusz reads Peralta's representation as 'white,' suggesting that Peralta (and the Z-Boys more broadly) operated critically unaware of racial politics (Kusz, 2007). During our interview, however, Stacy Peralta reflected on his positioning *as* a person of colour and his intimate relationship with race *and* the politics of 'passing.' For Peralta, 'misreadings' of race, like those of Kusz (2007), figured prominently in his family lineage and introduced him to issues of race and power early in life:

My grandfather was full-blooded Hispanic. His family migrated from Sonora Mexico to Phoenix, Arizona [only] because my grandfather has 'light' skin color! He's one of only two Hispanic kids allowed into the public school in Phoenix. He moves to L.A., becomes a successful musician, and gets to live the American dream based on having a 'lighter' skin color? That's a crazy—insane [unjust] system! (personal communication, 2018).

Peralta's statement demonstrates his awareness of (and arguably disdain for) the US racialized system granting his family access to 'white' privilege while excluding others. Peralta's grandfather's light skin gave him the ability to 'pass' for 'white,' which allowed him largely to escape labelling as 'ethnic other' (Omi & Howard, 2014; Said, 1978). Using their ability 'to pass' and avoiding their background as POC, Peralta and other participants' families in this research illustrate how 'passing' operates as "an act of rebellion against the racial regime" (Hobbs, 2014, p. 8). Passing thus provides some with opportunities and resources unavailable to others, which have not been acknowledged in previous literature on skateboarding, but discussed in literature on traditional US sports (Peterson, 1992; Snyder, 2003)

4.1.2.2 Rodney Smith

On the opposite coast, the narrative of African American pro skater and company owner Rodney Smith provides another perspective on the racial politics of 'passing,' yet under entirely different circumstances. Growing up during the 1960s in New Jersey, self-identifying as African American *and* Native American, Smith discussed how his family's actions and upward mobility were intrinsically linked to effectively understanding and incorporating the politics of 'passing' into their strategies to address racism. While Rodney Smith's own 'darker skin' (and the politics associated with it) (Dawkins, 2012; Hunter, 2005) did not allow him to 'pass,' witnessing the 'passers' in the family revealed the benefits of gaining access to resources and 'white privilege' for those properly 'presented' as 'white' (Fine, Weis, Pruitt, & Burns, 2012; Wilson & Wilson, 1976). According to Smith, those resources aided the entire family while demonstrating unjust US racial politics:

My family is mixed Native American and African American on both sides, and my great-grandmother is white. My grandparents and all my other relatives on my dad's side were what you and I know is called 'passers.' Very good-looking people and very high light in complexion. That helped them –and speaking 'proper' English. I watched them do things to 'pass' without people knowing as they worked their way up [in society]. It helped the rest of the family gain access [to resources] (personal communication, 2018).

Smith's story exemplifies how participants' families used passing as a resource-gathering strategy and passed on the knowledge of race and procedures to avoid racism, enabling all family members to make progress. Within the US context, passing was a way for marginalized POC to attempt to take back the power denied them by the racial injustices perpetrated by the racialized US system (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado et al., 2012).

The anecdotes provided by Peralta and Smith are just a few of the examples from participants who connected to broader historic US racial injustices (and drew upon those experiences to establish diversity in skateboarding culture (see Chapter 6). Each illustrates the significant theme among participants—that access to the 'American Dream,' (meaning 'socio-economic status), often abhorrently intertwines with politics of race and discernable racial identity. As established through these illustrations, 'passing' produces benefits. Historically, however, 'passing' also carries negative connotations within communities of colour. Using 'passing' also requires a complex negotiation of the appropriate time to defend, acknowledge, reveal, and advocate for one's racial identity (discussed further in Chapter 6) in the US. As described by Hobbs (2014),

The iconic image of the heartbroken yet sympathetic black mother who must not speak a word nor lay eyes upon her white-looking child in public lays bare the painful consequences of this practice. A history of passing cannot be written without telling her story too. Passing was

often an intentionally or involuntarily collaborative endeavor. Family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers were often affected by and sometimes implicated in this practice. Those who were left behind describe the pain and the loss of this act just as keenly as those who passed (p. 13).

This description compels acknowledgment that 'passing' inflicts degrees of stress and threat upon communities of colour. Among participants, such as Peralta and Smith, the concept of 'passing' and those who cannot 'pass' (often within the same family) resulted in a myriad of strained, tense formative experiences, which participants discussed as foundational to their understanding of race. Stacy Peralta and Rodney Smith offer further evidence of this and the tension it placed upon their family life.

During our interview, Peralta revealed how his father's darker skin revoked his father's access to his grandfather's 'white' privilege. Peralta's father's inability to 'pass' for white impacted both the happiness of his family and the way young Stacy Peralta would think through and experience race and racial constructs. Reflecting on the impact of racism and his knowledge of 'passing,' Peralta stated:

My dad talked about being discriminated against a lot when I was a kid because he was half Mexican. It really, really tweaked him and hurt him. If you saw him, you wouldn't think, 'Oh—Mexican.' But the last name and *then* the olive [skin] color! He felt it really prevented him from getting opportunities that he might have gotten [otherwise]. He worked at the movie studios in accounting, but wanted to do motion picture sound, but felt he didn't get in because of racism. He felt it a lot and didn't let go of it—he was a brooder. We all saw and felt his frustration (personal communication, 2018).

Peralta's anecdote serves as another example of how racism and 'passing' intermingled in negative ways for participants, providing an intimate knowledge of race and 'difference.' As the experiences of the Peralta family illustrate, the inability of some participants to 'pass'

contributed to racism, detracted from upward mobility, and denigrated the household. For Rodney Smith, the treatment of his African American family members who could not pass offers an unsettling example of the racism stemming from the Smiths' positioning as African Americans.

Hobbs (2014) argues that historically, African Americans offer one of the most extensive narratives and reasoning for engaging in 'passing' in the US. African Americans have been deeply affected by both the positive and negative attributes of this creative strategy to survive in the US:

For African Americans [...] Passing was a potent weapon against racial discrimination, but it was also a potential threat to personal and community integrity. Just as passing exposed the contradictions of white racial thinking, it also revealed the tensions within African American communities about racial identity (p. 13).

While Smith's family contained members who could pass, according to Smith, his grandfather could not hide his identity and "didn't *want to*" (personal communication, 2018). Thus, his grandfather received no respite while living in the racist Southern US during the 1930s -1940s. As a Black man in the US South, Smith's grandfather stood defiantly against racism, which included threats of physical harm. On one occasion, facing certain death due to racial discrimination, only an intervention by Northern family members saved the life of his grandfather. During the discussion, Smith recalled this complex history, the effect on their family, and how it placed racial politics at the forefront of their household narrative:

My grandfather was a gunslinger [cowboy] in the South and was going to be lynched by the [Klu Klux] Klan. His uncle brought him up here before they got down to his name on that [lynching] list. When he came up

here, he wasn't bitter towards all Caucasians, but if someone came at him any way wrong [racist]—It meant trouble. He didn't take [tolerate] anything [racism] from anyone, and we all ended up growing up like that. It was a part of every aspect of my life [including] my business approach with skateboarding at Shut and Zoo York [skateboards]. I didn't take and [racist] shit from anyone (personal communication, 2018).

Within this passage, Smith alludes directly to Hobbs' (2014) notion of the complex politics of 'passing' and tensions between African Americans regarding when, how, and who should defend the rights of POC to exist in America. It also illustrates how those politics provide a foundational strategy for future actions against racism.

In summary, Peralta and Smith's revelations show how race and racism directly relate to the impediment of progress (in terms of both economics and security) for POC, and how some family members can gain access to resources while others collide with 'glass ceilings' or limitations in their attempts to achieve forward movement. These accounts reflect other participants' experiences where the concepts of race and power, and the strategy of 'passing' intertwine in ways that exemplify the complex racial formations that inform the racial politics of SOC in the future, in ways previously unexplored in the literature on skateboarding.

4.1.3 Unpacking racial 'fluidity': race, family, and military

Other participants' early experiences of race and discrimination illustrate the temporary nature of racialization and its basis in social constructs, which fluidly arise and vanish at the whims of the dominant white culture in the US (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado et al., 2012). Offering a CRT-focused categorization of some of the historical racial injustices in the US,

Delgado et al. (2012) provided a foundation for an analysis of the racialized encounters of some participants:

At one period, for example, society may have had little use for blacks but much need for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers. At another time, the Japanese, including citizens of long-standing, may have been in intense disfavor and removed to war relocation camps, while society cultivated other groups of color for jobs in war industry or as cannon fodder on the front (p. 9).

Delgado et al. (2012) writings remind us that among the fleeting nature of the racial hierarchy, there is limited safety within the dominant 'white' narrative. In concord with the ever-changing racial formations present in the US, the impacts on communities of colour fluctuate dynamically. The next examples demonstrate how race, racism, and access operate in multiple configurations in the US. The differing narratives of two Asian American families offer evidence of the fragility of racial constructs, which work only in the service of the needs of the dominant 'white' US culture.

4.1.3.1 Christian Hosoi and Ivan Hosoi

The instability of race and racial formations in the US suggested by Delgado et al. (2012) occurred among the Hosoi family, beginning in WWII, with father, Ivan Hosoi. Those experiences of 'racism' and 'difference' would be passed down to a legendary member of the Skateboarding Hall of Fame (SHOF), Christian Hosoi. In conversation, Christian Hosoi discussed his father's impact on his life and how he taught him about race at an early age:

I learned everything from 'Pops' [Hosoi] about the world. Pops taught me to be proud of my heritage and did all my first Asian-inspired board graphics. He told me about [white soldiers'] racism in the war [WWII] and how my grandparents didn't like anyone, [not Okinawan] Japanese, so I know how racism can be on both sides. Pops helped me be down for

[support] everyone and to keep an eye out for other ‘minority’ kids like me. That’s how I was raised (personal communication, 2018).

Ivan Hosoi discussed his own racialized experiences in the US during WWII and how he exposed Christian Hosoi to racial politics early in his life. As Ivan Hosoi recalled,

I was born in ‘42 in Hawaii during the war and grew up under the ‘black-out’—forced to ‘black-out’ your windows with Army blankets. If you were caught with a light on, you would get sent to prison because of Pearl Harbor (personal communication, 2018).

Being born during the WWII-era solidified Ivan Hosoi’s place as the ‘ethnic other’ (Said, 1978), in the minds of racist ‘white’ soldiers. This experience brought him face to face with the ‘fluid’ (Delgado et al., 2012) function of Japanese discrimination and internment, which had rapidly transformed from a ‘white’ perspective of them as a ‘non-threatening’ populace into ‘traitors’ to the United States mainland (Leonard, 1990). Ivan Hosoi cited this experience as foundational to raising young Christian, alongside other POC during the 1960s and 1970s, in an effort for him to see diversity as positive. Through his son, Christian Hosoi, Ivan would lay the groundwork of experiences that formed the basis for the pro-Asian American and POC perspective of the ‘Hosoi’ brand in skateboarding years later.

Narratives from other participants demonstrate how POC continued to navigate the ‘fluidity of race and racism’ (Delgado et al., 2012), which closed doors for some but provided entirely different opportunities for some POC in the US when the racial dynamics shifted in their favour. The next example highlights how the changeability of racial formations aided families of participants in developing access and status in America through one of its most potent institutions—the US military (Phillips, 2012). The context will be provided by

highlighting the changes in racial dynamics in the military, followed by a participant's experience.

The US Military and Race

People of colour have often used the American military as a way to gain power or at least a stable place (particularly among the African community) where the "GI Bill" promised some men a "leg-up" (Phillips, 2012, p. 102) in the racialized US. At a minimum, the US military provided a regular meal and uniform for POC lacking other opportunities; at a maximum, it operated as a means for POC to develop levels of economic success (Phillips, 2012; Thomas, 1988). The latter perspective intensified after a 1960s Presidential declaration that the US armed forces must desegregate, promoted widely through media, presenting a unique opportunity for multicultural relationships based on respect and dignity alongside 'white' counterparts (Phillips, 2012; Thomas, 1988). For a third of the research participants, the theme of the military option became an essential strategy for participant's families to gain power, class, and status and to pass this tactic on to other family members, illustrating fluid dynamics of race and racism (Delgado et al., 2012). The narrative of 1970s female Guamanian American pro skater Kim Cespedes illustrates the ways participants' families gained power through military service or by enlisting in the armed forces through US financial grants for education and training (Phillips, 2012; Thomas, 1988).

4.1.3.2 Kim Cespedes

During the 1940-1950s, the island of Guam was declared a protectorate of the US (Owen, 2010), with residents being offered citizenship through a process of "military colonialism

[..] [that] both militarizes and normalizes people” (Alexander, 2013, pp. 1-2). This arguably afforded the populace a different experience than what was described by the Hosoi family and experienced by other Asian Americans during the same period of US history (Ancheta, 2006). In the case of Kim Cespedes, Guamanian-American pro skater from the 1970s, her family used the structure of the US military’s reclamation of the island of Guam as a strategy to move forward within the context of the racial formations of the US. Cespedes discussed how this strategy became an immediate mode of upward mobility for their family and carried positive connotations to succeed in a racialized US. Cespedes recalled,

My grandfather and all my uncles served in the military, and that was how they left the small island of Guam. There is a big military base [placed] in Guam [during WWII], and they were the local people on the island. And when you signed up for the military, you got the G.I. Bill and when you got out of the military, and you could use it to pay for university on the [US] mainland (personal communication, 2018).

Cespedes's narrative demonstrates her firsthand knowledge of how service in the military offered a pathway to benefits beyond enlistment—the opportunity for personal development through access to college. Thus, for Cespedes and other participants, becoming a ‘military family’ advanced an acceptable approach to integrating into the predominant ‘white’ American culture.

While the military option for POC allowed the attainment of a degree of power and acceptance, it was not without cost. For participants, inclusion created conscious and subconscious pressure, often leading to subtle changes of identity, exacted as the cost for engagement. In the case of Cespedes (and other participants), coming to the US as 1960s non-European immigrants required more than a permanent change in location; it also

required a change in family name in order to 'successfully' integrate into the dominant 'white' narrative of the US (Alba & Nee, 2009). According to Cespedes, the name change acted as an immediate symbol of the racial politics in her youth,

If I were still living on the island of Guam, my name would be Kimberly Cespedes de Sanchez. But when we came to America, we shortened it to fit in, so I am known as Kimberly Cespedes [Cessped-deez]. I'm half Irish-Scottish and Guamanian, born and raised there [Guam] and came to San Francisco in the [United] States (personal communication, 2018).

The name changes for the Cespedes family in the 1970s marks an erasure of identity, which was passed down through generations. Kim's father, however, imparted to her ideas of self, strength and racial identity, creating a stable base of inspiration during early life in the US.

According to Cespedes,

My dad always said I could do anything I wanted, no matter the color of my skin, and no matter who thought otherwise. If your dream is in your heart, you go out and get it (personal communication, 2018).

Cespedes' father instilled in her the notion that despite the racism faced in the US and its debilitating effects on POC, she should remain diligent in the pursuit of her life goals. Her direct reference to 'skin colour' provides another glimpse of the prominence and prevalence of race and racism for the Cespedes family, even when the family already enjoyed degrees of success within the dominant 'white' US culture. Through these multiple examples, it is clear how Cespedes' father passed down familial knowledge of race and strategies, attempting to thwart racism inter-generationally.

In summary, the experiences within this section offered a historical perspective of race and racial formation in the US, along with the impact of racism upon families of colour. These narratives pointed out the broader notions of race and racism and demonstrated

some of the multiple configurations of race that participants' families encountered as POC, regardless of their positioning. From a CRT standpoint, these narratives collectively demonstrated that race and racism exist everywhere within the US (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), and historically, POC have always needed to develop strategies to navigate the complexities of race in the US.

Analysis of the data supported the notion that living within racial formations is fundamental and inescapable (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Thus, POC lived in reaction to racism and the possibility of racism—meaning that strategies of navigating race and racism were developed early for families of skateboarders just as they were by other families of colour. Examination of participants' anecdotes of early exposure to racism showed that they were aware of the extent and limitations of the power of POC in their immediate vicinity, and how it offered a 'real' sense of the racial context to their lives. While CRT posits that experiences of race and racism operate uniquely, we should not oversimplify by stating all POC understand *deeply* every racial formation and racialized experience they encounter (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), nor should we assume that they are unaware, as has been posited by other scholars (Leonard, 2008; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). The data shows that race and attempts to disrupt it were fundamental in their lives. Therefore, it is natural to assume that these experiences would carry over into other aspects of their lives, including but not limited to skateboarding. The following section offers updates to the methods employed by POC to deter racist practices and create safety and stability within contemporary US society.

4.2 Contemporary experiences of US racial formation via family and community

Many participants continue to experience and understand race and racism through family and community. However, it is also important to appreciate examples of the ways in which knowledge of race and anti-discrimination methods have expanded through other developments, particularly labour unions and interracial marriages.

4.2.1 The role of trade ‘unions’ and government Jobs

Many participants discussed learning anti-racist strategies from the rhetoric of their parents and their beliefs that POC could create safety through work collectives, known as the ‘labour’ or ‘trade union’ (labour associates who bargain for wage and benefits collectively) or ‘government’ and ‘federal’ jobs in the US. This strategy emerged as particularly crucial after the federal legislature, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Berg, 1964), barred discrimination within governmental institutions. Positions in government agencies purported to operate within a relatively ‘colour-blind’ space (though this was not always the case) (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) with merit-based (i.e., seniority in position and time on job) promotion suggesting that they operated beyond race and discrimination. The concept of the ‘union’ job historically links to the greater struggle of POC in the US (Friedman, 2000; Rubio, 2010; Worthman, 1969). In theory, a position with union membership or government work offered elements that allowed POC individually and collectively to dispel racism and protect their communities (Rubio, 2010). Rubio’s (2010) research provides context for the historical narrative of union and government workers creating collective advancement for POC through postal workers. As discussed by Rubio (2010):

The popularly conceived middle-class status that postal work signified among blacks enabled not just individual advancement and capital accumulation, but the potential for labor and civic mobilization as well. Black postal workers generally and Alliance members, in particular, were instrumental in the expansion of the working-class base of the NAACP during and after the Great Depression (p. 4).

Rubio (2010) demonstrates the historical importance of creating safety and power in the workplace through unions and collective working-class status, which allowed POC to join civic organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Subsequently, labour unions, the NAACP, and similar organizations cooperatively advanced Civil Rights in the US (Chong, 2014). The following narratives typify how race became a part of the lives of participants due to the continued need of POC to develop strategies to remain safe in the US, and how this strategy created security.

4.2.1.1 *Danny Montoya*

This theme was particularly apparent through the narrative of the 1990s-2000s Hispanic/Latino pro skater Danny Montoya, whose parents relocated from Medellin, Columbia, to Los Angeles in the early 1960s, searching for a better life. Montoya's father arrived separately from his mother on the Eastern seaboard to focus on education and opportunities to develop upward mobility. In his own words: "My dad moved here to go to college in Washington D.C., but then moved to LA because my mom was here and they began a family" (personal communication, 2018). As the Montoya family grew, according to Danny Montoya, it became more important (for the senior Montoya) to focus on finding work capable of sustaining a family rather than pursuing his studies. Montoya noted his father's new strategy to help the family avoid racism and possible discrimination involved

pursuing the safety of a 'union' job at any level and riding that safety into the future.

According to Montoya,

[My Parents] They're both from Medellin, and they moved to L.A. in 1959 or 1960 for better opportunities. My dad got a job at VONS [grocery store chain] in the Hollywood, CA area, and worked his way up the ladder from 'nothing' to the produce manager—working through the union—for 40 years (personal communication, 2018)

Within the conversations, Montoya revealed how the senior Montoya impressed upon him that union membership made it difficult for racist forces to intervene and for overt racism to detract from their life, resulting in a more stable way to raise a family. According to Montoya's understanding,

The union job meant there is a system in place where there are benefits; you're more secured from firing and earn seniority at your job. From my father's standpoint, he thought, 'what is going to be secure? If you have a union job—it's going to take a certain amount of effort to pull it [safety] away (personal communication, 2018).

Thus, although the form of action may change, the need to create safety for POC in the US remains fundamental to the lives of POC. These strategies continued to provide insight and understandings of racism, also passed down intergenerationally.

4.2.2 The role of interracial marriages

Among participants, another key theme from the late 1970s and mid-1980s onward was the transformation of households into more racially diverse units through heterosexual interracial marriages. Within this research, interracial relationships and marriages between POC and 'white' people (in various heterosexual configurations) were roughly one-fifth of the 47 participants across multiple generations. The integration of families with non-POC

members prompted close examinations of the non-racialized 'other', and in some instances, almost overnight. Scholarship on race has posed that since Du Bois (1978), 'whites' have not reflexively recognized themselves as the 'other' nor as a subject of scrutiny and debate (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012). To provide context and explain the tacit rise of interracial marriages in the 1970s onward, an excerpt from a recent Pew Research Center study of race and marriage is useful. Livingston and Brown (2017) describe this change in US interracial relationships: "17% of US interracial marriages showed a fivefold increase from 3% in 1967" (p. 5).

Particularly important to the rise in these 'openly' mixed-race relationships (and the new racial formation they created) was a judicial event in 1967, the landmark case of *Loving v. Virginia*. Prior to 1967, interracial marriages, particularly between 'white' and 'black' people (who could not pass), were essentially outlawed in America. Therefore, participants whose families were integrated through marriage represented a previously illegal action. Participants whose families were part of this trend openly engaged in pushing back against racial stereotypes and racial stigmas on *all* sides, resulting in a rich mixture of experiences (positive and negative), which placed race at the forefront of participants' lives, again well before entering elite skateboarding.

4.2.2.1 Stephanie Person

An example of this new formation and the tensions that accompany it is demonstrated through the 1980s-era African American professional skateboarder, Stephanie Person. Her mother married a 'white' man, which caused some stress within her African American household. Person reflected on this transition,

My Creole father left when I was young, and a white family that lived across the street, and this white dude [stepfather] saw my [African American] mom and thought, “Oh my god. I'm in awe of this woman; she's so beautiful, this Black woman with an afro” (laughing). He begged her to let him take care of her and had a good job up in San Francisco. She finally gave in, and he moved us to the upper-middle-class white suburbia that was all white. (personal communication, 2018).

According to Person, there was “clearly tension” in *all* communities brought about by their family's disruption of cultural norms. In the case of Person and other participants experiencing this ‘new formation’ (Livingston & Brown, 2017), these unions brought about public scrutiny and distress, even while interaction might remain comfortable privately.

According to Person,

I never had a problem relating to him ever. It was the people staring like crazy. They stared so much at us that I would walk ten feet ahead of everyone. And when we would go to the movies and dinner every Friday—I couldn't stand it when I was a little girl. That was the uncomfortable part, not him [stepfather] or my [white] stepbrothers. It was the way other people responded to us as a family (personal communication, 2018).

Person's anecdote reveals the complexity of this new racial formation, demonstrating that even with formations built on love (and protected by law), previous racial norms remained, which dominated and oppressively informed the lives of POC. To underscore the lasting impact of racial standards on the lives of POC, Person revealed that for her mother, the initial courtship created some tension. As an African American woman from the segregated US south, building a new life with a ‘white’ partner required time for processing due to powerful memories of racism in the 1940s and 1950s. As Person stated,

I don't give a f---k about color and nor does my mother. However, because of the era that she came from—growing up in Tennessee with the Jim Crow laws—in the beginning, she was uncomfortable with the

idea. For me, being born in Southern Cali [ornia], it's saturated. You are around white people all the time; you're just aware of race. So, when she met my stepdad I didn't care---it didn't matter then and doesn't matter now (personal communication, 2018)

Person's testimony reveals the delicate balance required of early interracial marriages, navigating the potential of modern racial formations that collide with earlier experiences of race and racism. Furthermore, Person's acknowledgment of the prominence of 'whiteness' in South California was paralleled in how other POC recognized race in their lives. In this case, Person demonstrated an already developed cognition regarding 'white' people, which explains why she remained untroubled by her stepfather's presence.

Whether warranted or not, these new relationships across racial boundaries offer examples of the unavoidable impact of race in the lives of participants and their communities. Examining these narratives from a CRT perspective affirms that, while the US remains racialized, new approaches intersected with old methods to combat racism and 'difference.' These mechanisms provided an array of strategies for POC who later become elite skaters, because they were familiar with racial politics that they drew upon and incorporated into their skate careers.

In conclusion, the examination of historical and contemporary narratives demonstrates not only the different strategies employed by participants to create safety from racism and discrimination but also how this knowledge was passed down within families. Each of these narratives exemplifies what Chong (2014) describes as "the changing nature of the demand for remedies for the racial problem" (p. 192) among POC whose actions collectively work to develop power and agency within a racialized US. As CRT posits, what remains individual for both participants and their families is how each chooses to

respond to the racial formations in their lives (Omi & Howard, 2014). When combined, these contexts demonstrate a continuing thread between the generations of POC remains—race and racism are salient components in the lives of participants of colour long before skateboarding enters their lives. Thus, their later actions in skateboarding, both consciously and unconsciously, reflect the influence of their families along with their own experiences operating within the broader racial formations of US culture.

Explorations of what social change could and should look like became a dynamic idea planted in the minds of the children of colour who witnessed and experienced racialized politics throughout their early non-skateboarding lives. The following section reveals how this seed developed and enabled each generation to chip away at racism and racialized formations through their interaction with the framework of skateboarding culture over time. The foundations were laid for them to read skateboarding in a more nuanced way than was previously considered possible (Atencio et al., 2009; Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010). Therefore, skateboarding became poised to assume a viable position as a site of contested racial politics experienced in multiple ways across generations.

4.3 Race, skateboarding and the local community

The introduction of skateboarding as a professional sport with an ‘informal’ culture (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2014) created the opportunity for the skateboard to transition from a personal toy into something new. As evidenced by participants, it became a multifaceted, functional vehicle with far-reaching ability to inform notions of racial identity, self-expression, power, community building and cultural norms within a racialized US. The voices of participants reveal the multiple strategies they and others used

to reinforce, reject or perpetuate previous notions of race and racialized norms presented by their community, and in broader popular culture. In addition, the identification of their strategies and the impacts as related to their adoption of skateboarding is examined. Essentially, this discussion brings to light the triumphs and tensions that influenced how participants understood and navigated racial stereotypes within their families and the local context before they began the transition to life as members of elite skateboarding teams.

4.3.1 Early initiations into skateboarding

Most of the participants (38 of the 47) discussed the theme of skateboarding as a tool for exploration, even at the first engagement. From these narratives, the act of skateboarding allowed them to identify and experience different areas within and beyond their neighbourhood. For many, this level of mobility brought about a feeling of freedom and power. This theme emerges from some of the oldest participants, from the late 1960s to mid-1970s, who come to skateboarding before there was a 'popular' skateboarding culture to adopt. For those 1970s era skaters, the artifact of the skateboard and skateboarding was novel. Each moment was something for them to enjoy individually and eventually collectively with other like-minded individuals. In some cases, the mutual pleasure extended beyond the confines of race, which would carry over into subsequent generations.

4.3.1.1 Introductions through family and local community

For young African American skater pro skater Marty Grimes (and his brother Clyde, RIP), surfing and skateboarding represented fun, leisure activities. However, these activities also allowed the Grimes brothers to see skateboarding particularly, and action sports broadly,

as an illustration of ‘Black Power’ and ‘Black freedom’ (Joseph, 2006; Van Deburg, 1992) early on, due to their exposure to these activities through Black people. When POC acted as the initial entry point to experiencing skateboarding culture, the informal nature of the sport allowed it to take on the traits and properties of communities of colour, as will be illustrated.

For several participants, skateboarding was initially a family affair. For the Grimes, it arrived imbued with the Pro-Black spirit of his godfather Rick Blocker, a celebrated figure in the 1960s African American community (Wheaton, 2013): “Rick Blocker—he’s the Godfather for Black people in surfing and skating. He showed us the way. We just carried it forward in our skating” (personal communication, 2018). Grimes and his cohort used that spirit of free movement to travel from their area in Los Angeles to explore the entire city, beyond the mobilities offered by public transport. In Grimes’ own words,

People don’t realize how perfect a scenario southern California is for skateboarding—all concrete, done smoothly, and—tons of it (laughing). We were skating everywhere; no boundaries. Anything that looked *possibly* good—you hit [skated]. Anything that looks *really* good, you *definitely* checked out. Just riding down the street, you would skate everything [use the natural obstacles] Not just part of it, *all* of it! Then gravitate to the things that you loved the most. It was all ours (personal communication, participant’s emphasis, 2018).

In the case of the Grimes family, skateboarding developed between the brothers, eventually growing to encompass a larger group of African Americans and other POC in mid-town LA. In this example, skateboarding took on the life of the community where it was enshrined. For this community, skateboarding acted as a site of freedom, community creation, and

social engagement. For these young SOC, skateboarding was defined through their black experiences, and *they* acted as the catalyst. As stated by Grimes,

I gravitated to skateboarding, and so did my brother, and he was a big influence in our neighborhood—mid-town Los Angeles. People watched what he did. There were [other] people around [skateboarding], I'm sure—but for the most part, in midtown or lower West Side. It was me, my brother, Jerry Miller, Greg Raschell, Chuck Askerny, his brother Earl, Carlos Wright, Carlos Walker, and Derrick Johnson. [And later] Bruce Thomas and Leo Felix. We all got the bug, and all skated doing our own thing, together. It wasn't till a little bit later that we ended up meeting the Dogtown [Z-boys], dudes (personal communication, 2018).

While this formation of skateboarding in the mid-1960s to early 1970s demonstrates a young collective of black skaters (two of whom became the first professional African American skaters), it is a reminder that in these early days skateboarding *was* local. The act of skateboarding was built, in this instance, through a predominantly black coalition solidifying a community and their cultural norms around an artifact. While Grimes and his brother would eventually become the first African American professional skaters, inspiring skaters all over the US (also see Chapter 6) as part of the legendary 'Dogtown/Z-Boys' crew (Borden, 2019), in those early days, the skateboard created solidarity among a principally African American community in a heavily racialized US. This narrative shows that during these participants' early days, skateboarding belonged to the practitioners. It was a self-generated leisure activity, and for many, this would carry over into the subsequent decades.

During the 1990s, pro skater Danny Montoya was growing up in a predominantly Hispanic/Latino skateboarding community. He earned his space among his brother and his friends seven years his senior, through his skating skills. Danny's ability to skate well and

keep up with his sibling and his peers created an opportunity to bond with family and community. According to Montoya,

I was a young cat—a little kid rolling with a crew seven years older. That’s a pretty substantial difference. I earned my place, and it [their influence] ended up going beyond skateboarding. We did everything together. This mixed [multiracial] crew shaped me as a person, and then I made my own [multiracial] crews (personal communication, 2018).

This narrative of Montoya’s initial journey mirrors similar anecdotes from other participants who, by proving their prowess in skateboarding, gained access to the community, and resources, rather than needing to strike out on their own. These early forays by SOC helped define how skateboarding acts as a site for individual identity and in the creation of community identity for SOC.

A decade later, in the 2000s, African American pro skater, Samariah Brevard, raised in a predominantly African American community in Riverside, California, recalled how skateboarding also entered her life through siblings and her community of colour. Brevard recalled how it seemed a natural activity for POC boys and girls:

I started skateboarding around age 13, so 11 years now. We lived in these (community) apartments, and I was playing basketball, and my brothers were skating out front. I stopped playing and just went over, tried it, and then thought, ‘I got to get one’! [Skateboarding] It wasn’t unusual; they just looked like they’re having fun doing it, and I thought it [skateboarding] was for me too. We all just started skating together (personal communication, 2018).

For Brevard, skateboarding operated as an extension of their family and community pastimes and identity as African Americans.

In contrast, some participants differentiated themselves from other family members through skateboarding. This is apparent in the narrative of African American pro skater

Rodney Smith. For Smith, the initial engagement with skateboarding was a precarious process,

[In 1976] My brother acquired a plastic skateboard, threw the board in the shed, and never touched it again. I walked by it for six months, until I got the guts up to pull it out (laughing). I didn't want him to know that I was using it. I would run home from school, get a couple of runs down the sidewalk, and then put it back. But one day, he caught me—I thought it was over for me. He asked if I could ride it, and I skate down to the bottom of the sidewalk. He said, “Wow, you *can* ride it—so you can have it.” That was my beginning. That made my life. That board meant everything to me before I owned it and that after! (personal communication, 2018)

This moment reflects the sentiment of several participants during the 1970s and 1980s, where sibling rivalry was superseded by proof of skill, which then granted access to the activity of skateboarding. According to pro skater Rodney Smith, some time would elapse before skateboarding would become a community-building device, but his solo outings earned him respect from his sibling and provided space for fun and exploration. In each of the previous examples, we see how the skateboard arrived via the family and took on the identity and norms of the local community and became a way to promote respect and cohesion among POC in ways previously not discussed in skateboarding literature. This adoption of identity speaks to ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990) and research in action sports on Black surfers by Wheaton (2013), which demonstrated that POC do have extensive histories in action sports (Jefferson, 2020) and these activities may even be part of a collective cultural identity. What has been missing until now is a more profound recognition of the broader social and cultural forces (racism, stereotypes in media) and how these influence the narratives surrounding the actual historical participation and lived experiences of participants.

4.3.1.2 *The skateboard as gift*

Another theme among SOC's initial encounters with skateboarding involves instances where the skateboard arrived as a gift without instructions. For 20% of participants, the endowment appears without a clear definition of what skateboarding might offer or potentially blossom into within their lives. Memories of those taking up skateboarding during the mid-1990s to 2000s era, revealed that many young POC received skateboards without knowledge of any earlier histories of POC in skateboarding culture. One example of this was pro skater Stevie Williams for whom skateboarding arrived without holding *any* intrinsic value as a culture, sport or *even* transportation—either to him or his African American community. In Williams' neighborhood, the skateboard was given freely—but its potential as a tool for exploration and community-building initially remained lost to the audience. According to Williams,

My cousin bought me my first skateboard. I had never seen any skateboarders in my life, no contests, I'd never seen SHIT! It was just something on TV, and my cousin just came home with a skateboard. Everybody on my block *had* a skateboard, but it was just riding it up and down the block. We didn't even know we could *do* tricks on a skateboard. You could probably take your skateboard to the store on some transportation shit, but it wasn't really—it wasn't *for*—anything! (laughing) (personal communication, 2018).

Williams' narrative represents the origin stories of participants who received no clear direction of what skateboarding could be in their lives. For these participants, it took years before skateboarding would manifest as an activity, and later a site of employment and culture.

4.3.2 Early beneficial relationships developed through skateboarding

This section outlines the relationships developed by SOC through their experiences within skateboarding. It also examines how SOC interpreted and responded to some of the negative responses to those relationships from local non-skateboarding communities of colour. The constructive effects of skateboarding for individual SOC and examples of the types of coalitions built through a shared love of skateboarding are also discussed. The chapter acknowledges instances of negativity directed towards participants from the 1980s-mid 1990s by non-skateboarding POC community members due to racialized narratives within the broader popular culture about who should engage in skateboarding. Both sets of narratives reveal that not only were participants aware of race; they quickly became conscious of how participating in skateboarding, with POC and non-POC, resulted in a crossing of racial boundaries. Their decision to cross the boundaries of cultural norms, to further engage with like-minded practitioners in this informal sport, thus became a political act, even if initially unintentional, during their formative days in skateboarding.

4.3.2.1 *Peggy Oki*

An example of some of the types of intra-racial and interracial experiences created through skateboarding during the 1970s (a highly segregated time in the US) comes through the stories of Peggy Oki, a member of the original Zephyr elite skateboarding team (the Z-Boys). Oki reflected on her position as one of two Asian Americans, and the only woman in their larger multiracial group (Borden, 2019). Considered monumental and depicted in popular media narratives of skateboarding (Kusz, 2007), the Zephyr team often receives credit as

one of the most enduring and influential groups from those in the skateboarding culture (Bolster & Gesmer, 2004). As a Skateboarding Hall of Fame (SHOF) member (an institution which honours pioneering skateboarders), Oki offered insight into the early racial politics behind their multiracial group in the 1970s:

We were an interracial family—Shogo and I were both Japanese. My family left Japan, escaping Hiroshima. We were all skating together from all these different backgrounds—Hispanic, Asian, white, mixed-racial backgrounds. We didn't think about our 'differences'—we were all just kids who loved skating together (personal communication, 2018).

As demonstrated by Oki, for the Zephyr team, the pursuit of fun and friendship fostered their initial bond through skateboarding. Their relationship would lead to engagement with other skaters of diverse backgrounds and set the tone for additional skaters.

Generations later, during the 2000s, this theme of organic, racial integration through skateboarding remains a common trend in the lives of other participants. Regardless of their level of awareness, this research indicates that current elite skateboarding groups continue to contribute to this legacy by building their nascent skateboarding squads in similar ways (see Chapters 6 and 7).

For example, African American pro skater Ishod Whair perceived his introduction to skateboarding culture through an interracial coalition as a natural extension of his life in the 2000s. Growing up in New Jersey, his local friends typified participants developing a diverse coalition through a love of skateboarding:

It was my friend Chris—he's Asian. My friend Dillon, he was white. Maurice, he's black. Those were the main people. All skating together all the time, mainly us four. [Other] people would come in and out of the squad over time—all just obsessed with skateboarding.

Whair also discussed his family supporting his interracial skateboarding collective:

My mom didn't think it was a bad thing. The kids that I skated with weren't 'bad kids.' We were just little 'skate-rats' just kind of trotting around the city together and learning from each other. When I was 15, my mom started letting me go [further] with them to Philadelphia and we would all discover new areas and people there too. (Personal communication, 2018).

Whair's positive experience in the 2000s builds upon the actions of earlier generations who were willing to engage with POC and non-POC because of a love of skateboarding, despite racial differences. Equally important is how his experiences connect to previous narratives, which demonstrated that the family remained an influential arbiter of early racial politics for POC. Participants with encouraging families, like Whair, gained the confidence and impetus to develop close, local interracial connections through skateboarding. This would eventually help the interracial collective gain new perspectives and knowledge bases from beyond their local neighbourhoods. In other instances, it is a shared racial background that creates an unlikely bond across generations.

4.3.2.2 *Christian Hosoi*

During the mid-to-late 1970s, Asian American skateboarding legend Shogo Kubo helped fledgling SOC, Christian Hosoi, in his earliest days despite their differences in skateboarding 'status.' According to participants, such mentoring was unique for the time. Kubo was already a champion in 1979, with no need to engage with other skaters due to his elite position, yet their shared racial background aided in the development of their rapport. While Kubo might have received mentorship at some point because of his emerging child-

prodigy status, for Christian Hosoi, it was even more awe-inspiring considering the status Kubo held. As his father Ivan Hosoi recalled,

It just so happened that Shogo [Kubo] was *the* guy. He could do it all his skating—with flair. Shogo had long hair, and Christian had long hair—both Japanese. Shogo said, ‘Wow, he’s a mini-me’ and Christian and Shogo both knew it (laughing). So, Shogo would talk to [mentor] Christian. Whereas he wouldn’t talk to anybody else [not on the Zephyr/Z-Boys team] (personal communication, 2018).

This comment is indicative of participants who experienced early mentoring within their local racial community due to a combination of potential prowess and shared racial background. While Shogo Kubo generously looked after fledgling skater Christian Hosoi, some accomplished SOC required more time to venture into the support and guidance of younger skaters.

4.3.2.3 Stevie Williams

For African American pro skater Stevie Williams (having received a skateboard with no instruction), imagining the skateboard as a site of community building occurred gradually and only after a family relocation from North Philadelphia to West Philadelphia. Considered an outlier by other participants, the SOC in his local area boycotted Williams’ early participation in the local skateboarding community. According to Williams, the rejection arose from a collective leeriness about engaging with him due to his well-known problematic exploits in the city. In Williams’ own opinion, their reasoning held merit,

I was doing all that [negative] shit in Philly, riding around the city from 7-9 years old. We might roll fifteen deeps from the same neighborhood, riding around on bikes going to different neighborhoods—getting in trouble, fighting, stealing, and then everybody would go back home (personal communication, 2018).

Due to fears that he would not focus on skateboarding, local SOC purposely excluded Williams from their travels into the broader skateboarding community and cultural hubs like Love Park in Philadelphia (Borden, 2003; Howell, 2005). According to Williams, “Terrance and Rahzul didn't want to take me to Lovepark and didn't want to be responsible for me—just causing trouble at age *ten* (laughing)!” (Personal communication, 2018). Williams' eventual admission into the skateboarding community required evidence of both an external and internal focus on skateboarding, rather than destructive behaviour. After developing and incorporating the new philosophy, Williams' perception of skateboarding and Love Park evolved. According to Williams,

When I finally went to Love Park, I thought, "Oh, I been here before. This [Love park] is where I used to fuck people up [fight] and dance and kick-it for a second". This time I saw it as, [differently] "I guess it's all just skater" and I thought, "I'm a skater, and I want to skate now," so that's when I started learning tricks. (Personal communication, 2018).

Once convinced of his earnestness about skateboarding, Williams recalled receiving more encouragement from other SOC. During this time, he also developed interracial coalitions with non-POC skaters. His narrative demonstrates how skateboarding can act as a venue for community building even under somewhat precarious initial circumstances. However, for some SOC, coalition building occurred nearly instantaneously, as demonstrated through the example of the next participant.

4.3.2.4 Stephanie Person

For some SOC, coalition building occurred almost instantaneously. In the case of African American pro skater Pearson, her narrative offers an example of participants building bridges across race *and* gender during the early 1980s in San Jose, California. Person's

coalition formed organically with the white owners of the skateshop, despite her lack of experience. Upon reflection, she also had no fear of 'white' people, at least partially due to her integrated family. According to Person,

I went to Gremic skateshop, owned by two 'white' brothers. Their sign said, "Don't be afraid to ask questions; if you don't ask, you will never know." They asked what board I wanted, and I didn't know. They asked if I knew Tony Hawk, which I didn't then (laughing). They told me about him and then offered me a Tony Hawk model, and that became my first skateboard. We got along great and I was never afraid to be with them or felt they were 'different' because they were 'white'. I was already used to 'white' people and felt comfortable. That carried on my whole career, especially when I moved to Europe later. I wasn't afraid to be the only 'black girl' there and I thrived (personal communication, 2018).

As revealed in this anecdote and other participants' narratives, willingness to engage in the act of skateboarding helped initiate membership in local skateboarding communities. Similar findings have been revealed in earlier scholarship on gender in skateboarding (e.g., Donnelly, 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2004). Person solidified her space among the mostly male skateboarding populace through after-school sessions at the skateshop and demonstrating her prowess alongside the boys and non-POC company owners who recognized her talent. According to Person,

I would keep up with all the guys and skated everything. The owner of the shop and everyone else thought I was amazing. Later, I organized the biggest amateur skateboarding contests in that area. People were blown away. I hadn't even been skating that long and it brought all the kids and some local pros together. (Personal communication, 2018).

Person's and other stories not only mark a place where interracial skateboarding coalitions formed but also highlight the circumstances in which such relationships emerged, which went on to provide a foundation for their future professions.

In summary, these formations demonstrated how POC developed relationships together and alongside 'white' people at a time when broader cultural politics arguably made their development more precarious. Thus, their development operated personally, and organically. As noted, while there are skateboarding contests and events, the informality of skateboarding culture (Beal, 1995) allowed alliances to develop locally and operate publicly, outside the hypermedia environment of sport in the mid-1990s and 2000s (Rinehart, 2000, 2007). With few exceptions, these early interracial coalitions occurred before the idea of 'post-racial' or 'colour-blind' politics was established (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012). They advanced when bouts with racism simply reflected the everyday life of POC in the US, particularly amid the multiple racial formations known to be active at that time in other sporting practices (Jefferson, 2020; Shropshire, 1996b; Wheaton, 2013). Thus, these integrations are personal, self-selected, and substantial. Arguably, POC and non-POC deciding to 'opt-in' to each other's lives made these occurrences noteworthy, even remarkable.

4.3.3 Navigating negative responses to skateboarding by POC

As demonstrated, these new relationships emerged first on the individual level. Personal interactions between POC and non-POC had the most significant impact on the way participants interpreted skateboarding as a site of new integrated racial formations. According to multiple participants, skateboarding provided a space for reflections on race along with an opportunity to think beyond their local communities, and to draw upon their own experiences and interpersonal relationships, which were typical of the culture, particularly up until the 2010s. This movement toward coalitions with the white 'other' also

meant that for communities of colour that did not typically engage with the non-POC 'other,' young skaters were challenging some of the norms and values of communities of colour. In many instances, within the scope of this research, it was the local non-skateboarding community that inadvertently created tension by misreading and misinterpreting the intentions of SOC. Furthermore, some parents were less than enthusiastic about their children's skateboarding involvement, thus demonstrating the difficulty of negotiating how to keep POC children 'safe' from racism while allowing them the freedom to pursue new activities.

The research reveals how some SOC were often forced to navigate the racial stereotypes and broader racial formations of the early to mid-1980s, with skateboarding seen as a place of the 'unknown,' or at least an activity with 'inconsequential' value to POC in sport and society more broadly. This is best illustrated through ruminations by African American pro skater Chris Pastras and Hispanic/Latino professional videographer Socrates Leal, on their experiences of interpretations by non-skateboarding POC.

4.3.3.1 Chris Pastras and Socrates Leal

Pastras' anecdotes from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s offer reflections on how communities did not see the efforts of SOC to pursue skateboarding professionally as strategic. In particular, the playful and leisure-based nature of skateboarding seemed insignificant in relation to the broader struggles and politics of POC in other popular 'serious' sports at that time, (i.e., baseball, American football, and basketball (e.g., Carrington, 2010; Early, 2000; Shropshire, 1996a). According to Pastras,

[Skateboarding] It was unproven; it was unknown territory. It's like before there was Tiger Woods in golf or before Venus and Serena Williams. At the time, everyone thinks, "Well, that's just going to force you to be white? And there's a fear there—that maybe your black culture will disappear, but now it's like Venus and Serena own fucking tennis! You think of tennis, and you think of—black people. Tennis is remade—but there's a [community] fear at first (personal communication, 2018).

Pastras clarifies his statement by employing an 'old man's' voice to represent previous generations of POC and their community sentiments towards action sports during the mid-to-late 1980s. Pastras explained,

Ah, you're becoming a windsurfer? See ya! We'll never see you again. Ain't no brothers windsurfing (laughing). I guess we won't see you at Thanksgiving (hysterical laughing). (Personal communication, 2018)

The disconnect between POC and skateboarding during the 1980s is also shown in an anecdote by Socrates Leal. In this instance, the connection of these communities to *all* action sports begins to signify 'difference' between POC and SOC. Hispanic/Latino videographer Socrates Leal reflected on this trend in the mid-1980s:

I was a sophomore in the '86-'87 school year, and I remember being made fun of by the [Hispanic/Latino] 'cholos' calling me 'surfer boy' and thinking 'are they, idiots? I have a skateboard in my hand—not a surfboard.' But to them, it was *all* the same. It was *all* blond, blue-haired 'white' dudes with surfboards. They'd say, "What up, man? Gnarly waves!", and I'm thinking, I'm NOT A SURFER! But whatever, I just ignored it. (Personal communication, 2018).

When unpacking both of these examples, the narratives and histories of POC in action sports and surfing locales (Jefferson, 2020; Wheaton, 2013) in some communities were on the decline. While there were rich histories of POC in these contexts, their popular media representations were limited, often due in part to systemic historical approaches to their removal (Jefferson, 2020). This allowed for racial stereotypes seen in the media

(Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2017) to be internalized as presented by the non-skateboarding POC, which as shown in research (Brown, Sellers, & Gomez, 2002; Ramasubramanian, 2011), is detrimental to communities of colour's perception of their identities in life and sport (Bruening, 2005). In this case, it caused POC not to think of themselves as part of action sport cultures, which reinforced stereotypes that kept them from enjoying leisure activities like surfing and skateboarding.

These notions became even more entrenched in sport and popular culture during the late 1990s and 2000s through Black sports icons such as Michael Jordan and other figures in the media (Andrews, 1996; Boyd & Shropshire, 2000). As this occurred, it created less room for engaging with, and the erasure of pre-existing narratives of, POC in action sports (Davis, 2015; Jefferson, 2020; Osmond et al., 2006; Wheaton, 2013). For participants skateboarding in the mid-1990s, once explicit racial stereotypes of what constituted 'Black identity' entered the popular discourse, it became more difficult for SOC to navigate the tropes about their own identities. Compounding this effect in the mid-1990s to 2000s, mass media events like ESPN's 'X-games,' MTV and traditional media, often inadvertently focused on particular representations of 'white' representatives or competitors in 'vertical' skateboarding like Tony Hawk (even though the popularity of vert within the skate community had waned since the early 1990s in favour of 'street' skating) (Borden, 2019; Yochim, 2010). Young 'white' child prodigies like Ryan Sheckler received considerable traditional media exposure, even while diverse skaters competently competed during the same events and excelled at skateboarding events organized by skaters (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). These representations made it arguably easier to attach a false narrative of

'whiteness' (Kusz, 2007) to skateboarding and action sports culture (for surfing see Davis, 2015; Jefferson, 2020; Osmond et al., 2006; Wheaton, 2013) and 'blackness' to more traditional US sports like basketball, baseball and football (Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Criblez, 2015; Early, 2000). This further aligned with narratives of racial stereotypes already perpetrated in the mainstream media.

As the urban black, hip hop aesthetic penetrated into traditional sports, it would transform into a dominant 'Black-male' narrative of both US sports *and* popular media culture (Andrews & Silk, 2010; Boyd, 2008; Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Maharaj, 1997). During the 1990s US popular media suggested everyone should 'be like Mike' [i.e., Michael Jordan] (Andrews, 1996; Andrews et al., 1998). Later, other more 'hip-hop' influenced basketball players like Alan Iverson and other POC (Boyd, 2003) emerged as Black sporting icons. Similarly, in the NFL, Black athletes like Deion 'Prime Time' Sanders represented new 'Black masculinity' in sport. In the case of Sanders, he would develop a 'machismo-driven' alter-ego in an effort to make himself more marketable (Oriard, 2010). This involved "being very outspoken, flashy and flamboyant publicly (in stark contrast to his real temperament)" (Oriard, 2010, p. 240). These representations of Black masculinities were commercially successful and propagated a particular type of culturally relevant 'urban-sporting' Blackness in popular media. In contrast, many participants noted that SOC's visibilities as 'urban' POC participating in skateboarding carried substantially less cultural clout than those involved in traditional sports. For some SOC, this translated into representing an 'alternative' form of 'black masculinity' (Majors, 2017), which was not always well received. Despite this, SOC

continued determinedly to work through these popular culture-driven racial politics and participate in skateboarding culture.

Illustrations of the ways this new 'black masculine identity' intersected with skateboarding culture reveal how deeply race and racial stereotypes plagued SOC during their initial entry into skateboarding. These popular cultural stereotypes threatened the activities of SOC. Though less vicious than other historical racial formations, they nonetheless reflect the ways such racial stereotypes are insidiously propelled by popular culture. As the next examples will show, these racialized notions can also take root in oppressed communities and be used to harm SOC in their pursuit of skateboarding.

4.3.3.2 *Stevie Williams*

African American professional skater company owner Stevie Williams describes the difficulty in navigating these racialized sporting stereotypes of African American males during the mid-1990s (Bruening, 2005; Hartmann, 2000; Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). In his experience, navigating racial formations from POC appeared often more difficult than learning the skills required for elite skateboarding. According to Williams,

That's harder than the tricks. You gotta get through that first; then you can learn some tricks (laughing)! Tricks ain't shit. First, you gotta get through the hood laughing at you—calling you a clown and corny. All these names, once you get past that then you good. Now you can do something on a skateboard (laughing) (personal communication, 2018).

Williams' anecdote verbalizes the stress put on SOC through communities of colour who devalued skateboarding as inconsequential or perceived it as acting 'white' (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). This tension is not limited to skateboarding or action sports and has been

discussed most prevalently in educational scholarship addressing how both African Americans and Latino/Hispanic Americans who study in communities of colour find it necessary to navigate these politics when pursuing excellence in their academic careers (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Cook & Ludwig, 2008; Harper, 2007). Bergin and Cooks (2002) argue that these stereotypes are more often less a hindrance than a superficial ‘annoyance’ to POC, who recognize them as an example of internalized racial stereotypes. This is also reflected in the experience of some participants in this research. The following quote from Williams outlines a reflection of the impact of adolescent voices from non-skateboarding POC and the way their judgments of his active participation in skateboarding breaking presupposed racial barriers:

They clowned me! [At school] Someone said, Oh yeah, I did see you downtown skateboarding with all those WHITE people, and everybody started dying. I was like ah, man. (laughing) It was hard. (laughing) But people in the hood are going to make fun of you no matter what because you grow up with them (laughing) everybody gets something (laughing) Oh you’re corny you’re a traitor—you’re white. It’s just that skateboarding was the ‘unknown.’ Now they all respect me and see I did something good for the ‘hood. (Personal communication, 2018)

Williams’ anecdote supports Neal-Barnett et al. (2010) suggestion that allegations of ‘whiteness’ or ‘acting white’ are part of the natural adolescence in communities of colour, which are only a problem when genuinely internalized by either party (p. 120). Williams and other participants often mentioned that this was a frustration that needed to be negotiated, but ultimately participants recognized it as an activity worth persisting with. Furthermore, many participants noted they recognized they were ‘breaking’ barriers, and part of the jabbing originated from youthful angst about the unknown. Neal-Barnett et al. (2010) has noted this as a common phenomenon of youth in education. POC in their youth often

accuse POC of ‘whiteness’ (p. 120), yet it ultimately has less to with the person the claim is directed at than the insecurities of other youthful POC.

4.3.3.3 *Kanteen Russell*

Some participants discussed their parent’s responses to skateboarding as a confusing mix of messages, at times supportive and at other times discouraging. As demonstrated through this story by pro skater, African American Kanteen Russell, and his father, Mr Russell, it was often a mix of both elements. The Russell family had moved to California from the east coast and found greater racial stability, but it did not stop the Russell parents from feeling that skateboarding culture might invite a new precarious racial politics. According to Kanteen Russell,

My parents were always good about me skating at home but cautious about me skating with ‘white kids’ exploring San Diego. They wanted me [to be] super cautious—they warned me that I was Black and ‘different’ than those kids (personal communication, 2018)

Kanteen Russell’s father elaborated on how skateboarding represented the ‘unknown’ and as a parent he had a greater responsibility in determining what might be ‘safe’ for his children. In his father’s words,

We saw so much racism during the Civil Rights movement. When Kanteen started skateboarding, you don’t have a reference—you might be discouraging. You don’t fear kids turning ‘white’; you are afraid ‘white’ people will ‘remind’ them ‘they’ are Black [cause harm]. Those ‘white’ skaters might yell at cops, but I reminded Kanteen HE can’t do that. It was scary, but Kanteen made lots of friends skateboarding (Personal communication, 2018).

As shown, through these anecdotes, it is often not the culture of skateboarding that causes racism or discrimination. Instead, sometimes the roadblocks occurred through POC

communities in ways that suggest that the real fear of 'whiteness' was shorthand for fearing 'change,' and concerns for their children's safety and wellbeing.

For each of the participants, there were experiences of having to negotiate and navigate one's 'blackness' or positioning as a person of colour among the underlying pressure of identity politics brought about by the histories of other POC. Despite the potential for negative experiences or exclusion and the pressures from family and community to discontinue participation in skateboarding from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, SOC found solace in relationships with mentors and role models within the skate culture who inspired them to continue.

4.4 Early influences of skaters of colour: Local mentors, role models, and cultural shifts

As participants in this research actively engaged in skateboarding, local mentors and other influential role models provided a strong foundation for their knowledge of skateboarding and helped them find confidence in their participation. An in-depth exploration of the data revealed variances in the ways participants engaged with, searched for, and understood role models generationally. This occurred in part due to broader US racial and popular culture narratives influencing the context of this complex process.

4.4.1.1 *Stevie Williams*

Ironically, although it was a community of colour who eventually supported Williams, his foray into skateboarding occurred when perceptions of African American identity and representations of 'blackness' became intertwined with hip-hop (Boyd, 1997; Lorenz &

Murray, 2014) and NBA stars like Michael Jordan (Andrews, 1996). These overarching popular cultural narratives represented a mid-1990s theme that disrupted SOC's interactions with communities outside of skateboarding. For Williams, this tension interfered with his perception of the potential in skateboarding to extend beyond his local mentors. According to Williams, the quest for knowledge of elite African American skaters prompted his early searches for elite African American role models in niche skateboarding media:

Rahzul always said other black people were skating and that there were Black pro skaters. The crew would come to my house and watch skate videos with me. I saw everybody else, Hispanic, Asian skaters, but I didn't see any Black skaters at first. It took a bit, but I eventually did (laughing) (personal communication, 2018).

Williams may not have seen other African American skaters during initial viewings of niche skateboarding media, but his anecdote reveals he did observe other SOC. While this is outlined in-depth in Chapter 6, during the 1990s, Williams was not alone in an earnest search for multiple representations of POC (see subsequent chapters), due to the lack of their prevalence in mainstream media representations. In roughly a decade, however, (in part due to broader cultural shifts and more accurate representations of the practitioners of the sport in popular media, (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017), these concerns would have a much lower level of importance for SOC. According to this research, some (roughly 10%) participants of colour who started skating in the 2000s were much less concerned with accurate representations of themselves and their community within niche skateboarding media, often looking beyond their local SOC for inspiration. Specific characterization of this

reveals itself through the narrative of a professional skater, Samaria Brevard, who began participating at an elite level during the mid-2000s.

4.4.1.2 *Samariah Brevard*

In contrast to Williams' experience, Brevard's interpretation of her early days in skateboarding was that it did not seem unusual for her African American family and close friends to be skateboarding; nor was she aware that skateboarding would ever appear out of reach of the African American community. Even her unique positionality as an African American female skater eluded her at a young age, signifying a shift in cultural norms, which was discussed by other male and female participants in this study. Brevard recollected that skateboarding was a family affair in her neighborhood, and the transition from her love of basketball to skateboarding seemed natural:

I just did whatever my brothers were doing. They skated, and so, I skated, and I kind of picked up everything pretty fast. I was just trying to keep up with Son and Trey. So, I don't know? I never really paid attention to it [her skill level] I just knew that I was skating, and I wanted to try to be as good as them (personal communication, 2018).

Though she may have been only trying to keep up, her family and friends provided early mentorship. Brevard is now a professional skateboarder, seeing positive representation both in niche media and in traditional media becoming known as the 'Serena Williams of her sport' (He, 2019), a nod to other African American females breaking new ground in sport, (Douglas, 2002; Schultz, 2005). While Stevie Williams searched for an African image similar to his own, Samaria felt no such need. Even with a push from her brothers to learn more skateboarding history, Brevard recalled that history did not seem critically important to her love or appreciation for skateboarding:

I was into it for a little bit, just because of what my brothers were showing me. But I don't know much about the history of street skateboarding and things like that. It just wasn't my thing—still isn't (laughing) (personal communication, 2018).

Brevard's reflection offers another example of how racial formations are fluid and context-specific (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Her response, however, also mirrors the reactions from other participants of colour (roughly 80%) from the 2000s. Skaters in this era mark a generational shift from the 1990s Black identity politics (Boyd, 1997, 2003) faced by Stevie Williams and his generation. Within previous periods, notably, the mid-1990s skateboarding received greater visibility in US popular culture. However, early mainstream depictions offered limited representations of POC in action sports such as skateboarding (Rinehart, 1998).

In contrast, by the 2000s, SOC grew up in a different context. Numerous action sports events became regularly televised; pop-culture programming, and most importantly, skateboarding, were planted *into* US popular culture, with less emphasis on its counter-culture roots and more on its multicultural and diverse representations. (Borden, 2019; Rinehart, 2007; Snyder, 2017). Thus, for skaters like Brevard and other participants from the 2000s, skateboarding appears more akin to the activity's early beginnings, in spirit belonging to all those interested in participating.

4.4.1.3 *Ishod Whair*

This perspective also applies to *Thrasher Magazine's* 2015 'Skater of the Year,' African American pro-skater Ishod Whair. Born just slightly earlier than Brevard, Whair was raised in an era when skateboarding was nearly ubiquitous. At this time, representations of SOC were widely present in popular media; *everyone* enjoyed playing Tony Hawk's *Pro Skater*

video game while taking social cues of inclusion from the now decade-old, global, ESPN X-Games. Other skate-specific media and personalities occupied the public zeitgeist (Rinehart, 1998).

Similarly to Brevard, Whair experienced skateboarding through local POC with less emphasis on African American history in skate media, and more focus on his local community while garnering family support. According to Whair,

I loved (African American Skater) Theotis Beasley, who I saw at contests [in media], and Bastien Salabanzi (World Champion French African skater from the Democratic Republic of Congo). I didn't have a lot of skate videos then, and all the iconic skate videos weren't available on the internet yet. We would play Tony Hawk's *Pro skater* most of the day, then fuck around on my homies ramp—having fun. I found something I liked to do, and my mom let me skate with my friends, and that was a blessing (personal communication, 2018).

As shown, the time, space, and cultural context mattered when POC developed initial interpretations of the informal skateboarding culture. Participants of colour experienced different levels of support as they began skateboarding, depending on their positionalities, eras, and how families and communities encouraged young people to think about race and racial formations and the contexts in which they occur.

4.5 Conclusion

Informed by CRT, this chapter demonstrates how race and racism were present in the lives of all SOC, but these experiences were seen, navigated, and negotiated differently depending on the racial, socio-cultural and generational context in which they grew up. It reveals how the initial encounter with skateboarding led to a process of engaging with the informal skateboarding culture and developing it into a site for the exploration of race and

racial politics through multiple configurations of interpersonal relationships. The disclosure of these racial formations and of skaters' attempts to navigate them renders the notions of race proposed in previous scholarship problematic, (Kusz, 2007; Leonard, 2008), particularly those using Williams and other SOC to discuss issues of race (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010) without including their voices.

While each participant is unique, the overarching theme to emerge is that within the US, it is impossible to remove racial formations from any positionality—it is omnipresent. Race and experiences with racial formations automatically constitute a facet of the skateboarding identity and narrative for POC. In investigating the complex racial formations experienced by participants, this chapter has outlined the major themes and initial racial formations of the participants and offered an overview of how race intersected with skateboarding in the early days and at the community level as they began skateboarding. Therefore, in its nascent form, the act of skateboarding was an act of the body politics of the practitioners and their creation of space. This runs contrary to previous research that has inadvertently framed skateboarding culture as an uncritical space of 'whiteness' (Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2007; Leonard, 2008). Nor does it seem to operate in a way that suggests 'racial politics' work in a perfunctory fashion (Brayton, 2005). Instead, this chapter provides a more nuanced discussion, demonstrating that elite skateboarding culture should undoubtedly be considered multifaceted and multicultural depending on the place and positionality of the participants. Clearly, the narratives of POC within this chapter show how race affected every aspect of participants' lives, with skateboarding being no exception. While there is truth in arguments that popular culture media presented skateboarding as

'white,' without seriously considering the experiences of POC, indicting the 'assumed whiteness' does not constitute 'ally-work' helpful to POC (Edwards, 2006). Instead, as posited by scholars critical of creating scholarship from this 'white-centred' perspective (Andersen, 2003; Frankenberg, 1993; King, 2005; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), it reifies the very racism it attempts to disrupt. The next chapter presents participants' experiences transitioning from their local skateboarding community into their new roles as elite skateboarders. In so doing, we see how they bring their early racial experiences into their professional lives while navigating race and power in elite skateboarding culture.

5 Taking the Stage: Navigating Racial Politics in the Transition into Elite Skateboarding

This chapter examines the impact of previous and current positionalities and understandings of race on the ability to navigate the transition from the local into the initial stages of entry into the skateboarding industry. To provide context, the informal path to professionalism is highlighted, along with the importance of gaining visibility to those pursuing careers as athletes and media content creators. In addition, multiple formal and informal pathways are identified in which SOC access positions of status within the broader skateboarding industry. This chapter concludes by examining opportunities for SOC to create coalitions with their peers within and across teams, and the effects of these relationships on opportunities to rise within the ranks of the elite skateboarding culture.

The chapter offers examples of the formal and informal mentorship experiences of SOC with both POC and 'white' mentors. The opportunities for intercultural exchange between POC and their white peers on tour together are also studied through participants' descriptions of these relationships and their impact. These stories reveal views of the broader community's perceptions of racial integration and how this overall experience affected them.

5.1 Sponsorship and the path to professionalism in skateboarding

For SOC, the process of transitioning from the local to the professional ranks needs to be contextualized with a brief overview of how an individual progresses from talented local skater to a representative for a skateboarding company. The process is similar to the ways

in which talented POC content creators (photographers, videographers) gain positions working for niche media outlets or skateboarding companies.

From the mid-1970s until roughly 2005 (correlated with the rise of social media), talented local skateboarders began their path towards elite skateboarding by gaining recognition from owners of community establishments as 'locals' or repeat customers/consumers at boutique shops (retailers specializing in skateboarding and surfing) or skateparks. These locations were often the first hub of skateboarding culture for promising local skaters. Proprietors could broker initial connections to the elite level skateboarding industry via their regular contact with skateboarding companies, media, and distributors (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). Once identified as possessing extraordinary prowess, or adequate prowess but an 'outstanding' work ethic or personality that complemented the local community in some way as determined by the owner/proprietor, local skaters might receive an invitation to join the skateboarding 'shop or park' elite local team. From there, those skaters became representatives for both the skateboarding culture and the skateboarding business, acting as ambassadors for both in any setting, which benefitted the local skateboarding ecosystem or celebrated the skate shop (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). This often took the form of skateboarding demonstrations to exhibit their prowess to the public. Later, generally through the combined effort of the skater and the business owner, contact would be made with skateboarding companies in the US (typically on the west coast) (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2019). In the past, this was often accomplished via video or 'sponsor me tapes' and more recently via social media (Snyder, 2017). Prospective sponsors look for skaters who fit the identity of their brand or who appear to display the

athletic ability of a successful skateboarder. When these attributes are witnessed, opportunities may be offered to advance careers, travel and become part of an elite team (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). Team members who receive exposure in niche skateboarding media are representatives for brands, and if they fulfill criteria set up by the brand, (e.g., developing influential niche media ‘video parts’ or through winning contests), they have the opportunity for a name-endorsed ‘pro’ skateboard and other peripheral products that represent their ‘signature’ models (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2003, 2019; Snyder, 2017; Wheaton, 2004). This process occurs without a definitive guide, because of the informal nature of skateboarding culture. Snyder (2017) offers an in-depth overview of the machinations of reaching professional status in skateboarding.

While some research has considered the structures and networks of professional skateboarding (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017), my focus is on understanding how POC live, feel, and navigate this transition. While some processes (skateboarding and or excelling in photography or videography) may be experienced in similar ways by non-POC, POC operate from a different perspective due to their racialized understanding of the world. Thus, this study shows that experiences of transitioning are substantially influenced by the range of events POC encounter across a broad spectrum of US race and racial formations (Omi & Howard, 2014). The notions of what a successful transition from the local to the elite might offer POC often carry a different set of pressures, values, and circumstances than those that apply to their white counterparts, as is often the case for POC in any situation (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). As outlined in the previous chapter, for some skaters, initial explorations in skateboarding elicited precarious racial politics. Some participants feared further reprisal

by openly announcing their transition into the elite skateboarding world through sponsorship. For example, 1990s African American pro skater Jeron Wilson's recollection points to an underlying tension in the perception of the 'value' of skateboarding to his peers at that time:

In high school, I definitely tried to hide that I was a skateboarder! Maybe because it wasn't cool? I didn't want people in my business, but it's not just that because I had a *reason* to talk about it! I'm actually doing it! My foot is already in the door [to turning pro], but I kept it quiet (personal communication, 2018).

As outlined in Chapter 4, the unspoken 'weight' or need to 'conform' to preconceived stereotypical notions of identity influenced the experiences of some SOC. How SOC navigate these personal and communal politics as they enter elite skateboarding and encounter new sets of politics and ideas about community offers a fertile area for examination from a CRT-driven perspective.

5.1.1 Rethinking race and racial formations

As described previously, there are multiple racial formations in the US (Omi & Howard, 2014), and by extension, there are numerous narratives relating to the introductions and careers of SOC transitioning onto elite skateboarding teams. The highly individual positionalities of SOC in this research (including those able to 'pass' for white, and the issues of gendered racial politics) become contributing factors to an underlying subtext that informs how SOC experience coalition-building early in their careers. As shown in Chapter 4, for many participants, their early local self-selections and integration experiences through local skateboarding laid the groundwork for building familiarity with new skaters (POC and/or non-POC) in an unforced, organic manner.

In contrast, traditional narratives in US sports offer decidedly fewer examples where POC and non-POC opt into each other's lives through participation in either amateur or elite sport. Instead, integration narratives commonly begin with examples of 'forced' or coercive integration into elite sports, such as African American Jackie Robinson nearly single-handedly integrating Major League Baseball (MLB) (Coakley, 2010; Early, 2000), or similar events in NBA basketball, (Boyd, 2003), or boxing (Carrington, 2008). The differences between these narratives of traditional and informal sport are worthy of further exploration to determine how their transitions might be distinguishable or relatable in other ways to POC's experiences of race in sport. Investigating how SOC experience racial politics during their first forays into elite skateboarding might offer new paradigms for improved race relations in sport. With this being the central purpose of CRT in sport (Hylton, 2009), this chapter focuses on exploring the experiences of POC to map out how participants obtain status, navigate racial politics, and pursue careers in various aspects of elite skateboarding culture.

5.2 The road to visibility

When exploring how SOC achieve their first steps towards professional levels of sport, the topic that emerged most frequently was gaining 'visibility.' Participants in this study defined this as being seen in the right place, by the right people, at the right time. Nearly all cited this factor, regardless of geographic location or generation (1970s-2005). As highlighted in detail by Snyder (2017), rising through the ranks in skateboarding is an inexact process that generally occurs via word of mouth and expressions of physical prowess captured on media, coupled with extraordinary 'luck' by being in the right place at the right time. One of the

most important of these factors is location and proximity to those in positions of power. From the 1970s-2000s, the skateboarding magazines, companies and industry were based primarily in California (Atencio et al., 2009; Snyder, 2017; Thorpe, 2014b), with the majority of US contests taking place in the western US states. This resulted in an advantage for skaters in California and/or near the US West Coast. Over time there has been relatively little change in this distribution of power, and the industry continues to bias the region and remains preferential to those with access to travel or the luxury of moving west to gain greater visibility in US skateboarding culture (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017).

5.2.1 Increasing visibility through location

An integral component of becoming 'visible' is being in the 'right place' in terms of geographic location. Participants noted that skaters needed to demonstrate their skills alongside other proficient skaters, and some took every opportunity available to insert themselves in skateboarding culture, by attending demonstrations, contests, or testing their mettle by skating in popular skateboarding locations. Performing and being present at these locations and social spheres represented the first steps towards gaining visibility and transitioning toward professionalism. Particularly for SOC, with only a nascent understanding of a then-fledgling skateboarding industry, 'the West' stood out as the most desirable location for skateboarding. In the minds of participants, the sport resided in the West, and this idea fueled a burning desire to relocate for those hoping to develop a bright future in elite skateboarding. For example, New Jersey-born African American skater Chris Pastras traveled to the west coast during his teens in the 1980s, on the hunch that he would

enjoy new terrain and possibly make an impression on company owners who could jumpstart his career. According to Pastras,

In '86, me and pro skater Mike Vallely and my friend Kevin, we drove cross-country [to California] with Mike at 17-18, Kevin 16 and me 14! My mom trusted Mike, but now it seems crazy. Three fucking teenage [interracial] kids driving cross country? Uncharted territory—even beyond race. Just as young skateboarders. [Back then] The industry was just so young, and it was all unproven. What was skateboarding? But we did it anyway—chasing the dream (personal communication, 2018).

This anecdote illustrates the desire to 'be seen' by the 'industry' and those with relative power within it, with the goal of being part of a likeminded enclave and near the photographers, companies and other highly proficient skaters who collectively make up the 'industry' (Atencio et al., 2009; Snyder, 2017; Thorpe, 2014b; Wheaton, 2013). While it is more clearly defined presently through mega-events like ESPN's 'X-Games' and other elite televised competitions, many participants, particularly those from the 1970-1990s, expressed uncertainty about what 'making it' or attaining an elite level success could mean. Despite such uncertainty, they still felt the need to gain visibility in the context of the western US.

An account by African American pro skateboarder Sal Barbier offered an example of this phenomenon. Similar to other SOC from humble backgrounds, Barbier wanted to skate alongside proficient competitors and to be "seen as someone skating well in California" (personal communication, 2018), without prior knowledge of exactly what that might generate. Although he was a 'sponsored' amateur skater, having won or placed in the top three in "about 30 contests around Mississippi, Alabama, Florida Texas" (personal communication, 2018), he was sponsored by a company that never moved from its regional

base to the larger national US stage. At the time this was satisfactory, but once the chance arose to compete in the ‘right’ location alongside the best competition, Barbier realized the importance of ‘place’ to cornering further opportunities for development. Barbier described his revelation,

I still wasn't thinking I was good or special; there wasn't anything to *do* with it [skateboarding]. [But] I thought ‘I can't be the only one doing it this much.’ I went to the Arizona 1988 amateur final contest, and all the best, popular [skaters] were there. I qualified for that [contest] and saw they all lived here [in California]. I started to think differently about where I was and what I was doing. A friend there told me how everything [in the industry] worked. He said, ‘You got to move out here. Stay with me in Huntington Beach, CA.’ That was the beginning. (Personal communication, 2018).

For Barbier, this chance opportunity represented the perfect location and timing. With the summer free after high school graduation, financial and social resources were available to him to venture out from the US South to “check out skateboarding and see if there was any [further] opportunity” (personal communication, 2018) available to him. Barbier noted his privileged position as a sponsored skater and relayed that not every skater SOC in the US might have the same support or access, due to elite skateboarding’s reliance on informal networks, rather than the more formal systems of traditional US sports. He reflected on how this inadvertently intersects with race and class in ways detrimental to young POC. In Barbier's opinion,

Basketball— [and other formal sports] they have scouts *looking* for talent everywhere. There is an incentive and structure in place. They get seen, handed off to a coach, and that coach hands him on to the next and so on. It’s not the same in skateboarding. So, Lil’ Johnny can be a ripper, but if he doesn’t have the resources to get past the local skatepark and no team ever goes through his town, nothing’s going to happen for him. [Not] Unless he can stick with skateboarding long

enough to get to California. That [access to resources] locks a lot of talented black kids out. That's not racism, but the system has biases (personal communication, 2018)

Barbier's statement reflects both the importance of visibility in skateboarding and how inherent biases in the use of informal networks can negatively affect POC who are not born in California, and lack financial and social ties to elite skateboarding.

While Barbier began his career in the late 1980s, the analysis reveals both the unintended bias and the need to become visible on the US West Coast continued for many SOC into the 1990s. Native Hawaiian female pro Jaime Reyes, for example, cited the importance of West Coast visibility to propelling one from the local to the elite level during the 1990s—arguably a more stable time for the skateboarding industry than the 1980s (though mainly for men) (Atencio et al., 2013; Beal, 1996; Beal & Wilson, 2004). For Reyes, a future in skateboarding involved moving to California to spend more time in the mainland US. In her opinion,

It was the next step. Before I went to San Francisco, I was skating in Hawaii and doing well, but the move to San Francisco helped me to get coverage and be seen (personal communication, 2018).

Both this and other narratives from non-Californian based research participants reveal how developing skateboarding prowess alone did not guarantee a pathway into elite level skateboarding.

Of the sample, 15 (32%) of the SOC originally resided outside of California. They provided anecdotes of skateboarding and community life from those regions. These participants also offered stories that outlined the process that informed any eventual migrations to and from California. The rest of the participants already resided in the state. For SOC, a career in skateboarding could only emerge in conjunction with their physical

placement in a location of value. Without travel, they might be locked out of opportunities to develop a pathway into elite level skateboarding.

5.2.1.1 Unpacking the subtext of racism in the movement toward the west

Thus far, this research supports assumptions about the importance of making the pilgrimage to the US west coast to gain visibility when pursuing careers in skateboarding (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017) and action sports more broadly (Thorpe, 2014b; Wheaton, 2013). For SOC, however, the path towards gaining ‘visibility’ on the West Coast often carried an additional subtext—in that moving west allowed some to escape the spectre of overt racism in their hometowns and offered the possibility of encountering better race relations in California.

In the minds of SOC, the ‘mythos’ of California and its more liberal attitudes, perpetuated via skateboarding media, as well as the public discourse surrounding California (Denzin, 2002), contributed to the idea that travelling to the ‘Golden State’ (California) offered potential for both a fresh skateboarding future and for open-minded attitudes regarding race. Less well known to non-West participants, California still operated with its own degree of historical racial politics in action sports like surfing (Wheaton, 2013) and in broader notions of racism. Participants living in Los Angeles, like Marty Grimes, felt the sting of California racism: “Racism was everywhere in the 1970s and is still here in different forms” (personal communication, 2018). SOC like Stacy Peralta also grew up through violent racial experiences, “There were race riots at school all the time” (personal communication, 2018). Nevertheless, California still symbolized untapped potential, as noted by African

American pro skater Stevie Williams, “You had to be in California if you were going to make it [in elite skateboarding]” (personal communication, 2018).

According to participants from the 1980s, particularly those from the mid-Atlantic and southeast regions of the US, race relations were a precarious situation for SOC. African American pro skater Sal Barbier offered an example showing the prevalence of racism as an ever-present threat in day-to-day life in Louisiana in the 1980s, and the hope of the West:

I thought, ‘God, it’s got to be rad to go to a place where people, just don’t think the way they think around here. The [California] difference seemed 100%—just the open-mindedness of people. Where I’m from—you always have to be on guard. Somebody would slip and drop an n-word. Or if someone [white] feels ‘pushed’ in a situation—maybe there’s a girl who likes me, and a [white] guy likes her too. He wants to offend me, [so] he asks, ‘what colour I am?’ in front of her. You’d have that dumb shit. When you’re older you speak up and handle it, but when you’re younger you are always on edge living there [in the Southern US] (personal communication, 2018).

Barbier’s story reinforces a sentiment expressed by multiple participants about the opaque racial formations encountered by SOC on the US East coast up to and including the late 1990s. African American pro skater Stevie Williams describes the discrimination he experienced from some ‘white’ sponsored skateboarders in his community in Philadelphia during the mid-1990s. Unable to effectively navigate the informal networks of the entrenched sponsored ‘white’ skaters, Williams sought respite in the West and the chance to engage with the POC and non-POC coalitions he viewed in niche media:

The local sponsored white skaters getting coverage in Philadelphia were trying to *not* let us have A CRUMB! Nothing. They told visiting photographers, ‘Don’t shoot photos of them. They ain’t nobody. They are just dirty, ghetto kids, and they aren’t gonna ‘make it’ [career wise]. I needed to go out West. I knew I could make it there. I saw white kids,

Black kids, Hispanics all in the magazines together—I knew it was different (personal communication, 2018).

These incidents vividly demonstrate why becoming visible or gaining status in the industry in California carried significant weight and appeal for SOC who experienced covert or overt racism in other states. As affirmed through this evidence, the unexamined subtext for SOC is *also* their racialized search for safety, power, and release from negative racial formations. These elements covertly intersect with their hopes for skateboarding achievement. California offered the hope of being recognized and valued by individuals in the industry who might acknowledge their skill and *welcome* their visibility.

5.3 Gaining membership of elite skateboarding teams

This section highlights the power and politics surrounding the recruitment and retention of SOC and characterizes the impact, experiences, and machinations involved as SOC became part of elite skateboarding teams. Within the professional development of SOC, power operated in multiple ways. From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, power typically resided with company and media owners (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). Conflicts between skaters and company owners during the early 1990s created multiple new power structures that would affect the development of skateboarding teams and the operation and ownership of skateboarding companies (Borden, 2019). Over time, these structural changes within the industry ultimately placed more power in the hands of skaters (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). For many respondents, this was when they began to understand and determine what success might look like, both then and in the future. The combined narrative of multiple SOC reveals the range of positive and negative racial formations as interpreted by the individuals across the decades.

The following examples draw from the 1970s to the mid-1990s to outline significant themes that illustrate the initiation and recruitment process and overarching US racial contexts for SOC over each decade.

5.3.1 Recalling the experiences of recruitment across the decades

The anecdotes provided in this section draw from several perspectives and positionalities, revealing the multiple ways in which my participants understood their recruitment process and interpreted their successes upon joining teams. This section also presents the most significant recruitment models used among the study participants, ranging from a top-down, company owner's vision-driven perspective to a relaxed, informal, deputized recruitment structure. It concludes with a company-first, asset-driven recruitment process. Some of these examples give voice to the underlying anxieties that often informed the presentation, self-worth and self-critique of POC when becoming part of sporting institutions over the decades (Boyd, 2003; Carrington, 2010). Others show how team inclusion came about as a result of a combination of trust, familiarity, and confidence in one's ability.

The first example comes from the recruitment of Guamanian-American female skater Kim Cespedes during the 1970s into the Hobie skateboard team. The Hobie company was one of a handful of prominent skateboarding manufacturers operating with an elite-level team and a business leader in the then-burgeoning skateboarding industry (Brooke, 1999). According to Cespedes, one of the few female pro skaters during the 1970s, earning entrance to this elite skateboarding team seemed unfathomable. Like most local unknowns,

Cespedes lacked connections to anyone within the skateboarding industry, even while living in Northern California. As she recalls, she was simply a talented young female skater. Though Cespedes never believed the opportunity to represent a company might happen, her display of skateboarding prowess at a California contest garnered the interest of Steve McCann, President of Hobie skateboards. Witnessing her skill, McCann sought to acquire her talents, having a plan in mind about where her expertise would fit within his current elite team. This process of 'discovery' reflects how SOC during the 1970s became visible during their participation in public contests. According to Cespedes,

I thought, 'That's never going to happen for me. I am not good enough to ride for Hobie', [pro skater] Greg Weaver rides for them! I'm just a kid. [But] I won the contest, and he said, 'I'm from Hobie skateboards. 'Here's a Hobie skateboard and T-shirt, can I sign you right now?' They sent a contract in the mail and my father knew I loved skateboarding, and it was a great opportunity for me as a young female from Guam. I signed, and my skateboarding career began. It was an honor to ride for Hobie. They had a plan and treated me well. It was really such an innocent time (personal communication, 2018)

Although noted as a time of innocence, Cespedes was far from naïve about the impact of racial formations in the US. For example, she had witnessed how sponsorships were primarily bestowed upon white female competitors with less skill:

I posted the fastest [race] times, but there was a lot of politics in it then. I didn't have long hair and blue eyes and looked like your typical Southern California girl. So, everybody tried to charge over me, but I would win, and that's what mattered most, not what I look like, my background, or where I live (personal communication, 2018).

Cespedes earned her place through her elite level skateboarding, but she remained aware of the broader racialized formation imposed upon her as a person of colour in the US. This narrative suggests a level of meritocracy operating in the 1970s skateboarding culture even

while larger racial politics attempted to undermine the visibility of women of colour during that era (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 2001; hooks, 2014). Her successful entry into an elite team thus represents a 'win' for her as an elite female skateboarder and more broadly for all women of colour in skateboarding. Cespedes' father instilled in her the notion that despite how people might treat her because of the colour of her skin, she could accomplish anything (see Chapter 4). Her accomplishment operates similarly to other narratives of elite POC in US sports (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Carrington, 2010; Shropshire, 1996a; Tyler-Eastman & Billings, 2001) where individual success also symbolically represents collective success for POC (discussed further in Chapter 6).

The next example documents how participants entered elite teams throughout the early and mid-1990s by displaying prowess and via proximity to those deputized by companies to watch for new talent. Current professional Asian American skater Kenny Anderson began his career in the early 1990s, honoured to receive free products from his mentor, an incredibly influential, 'white' professional skater, Brian Lotti. Anderson was initially tapped to receive free products, known as 'flowing' product to a skater, (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017) because of Lotti's awareness of Anderson's potential, due to their close proximity in Las Vegas, Nevada. In an anecdote, Anderson discussed how his first move toward gaining free products and joining the team came informally:

I remember specifically, [Lottie] came into the shop, and my friend Dave and I were sitting there. And we're both Asian and the two young ones skating well [on the shop team]. I don't know if it was a choice between us. But either way, he ended up talking to me and telling me about H-street [skateboards] and then started to 'flow' me [free] product (personal communication, 2018).

Anderson admitted that he never knew precisely why his colleague did not become part of the team, supporting earlier claims that access to elite teams in informal sporting culture, such as skateboarding, is not an exact science (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). Although both SOC were capable skateboarders, Anderson's compatriot did not turn professional. This story and others from participants reinforce how the informal nature of skateboarding and action sports created varying levels of access, which at times had less to do with racial politics and instead were more informed by contacts, individual politics and opportunities to develop meaningful relationships. As illustrated through this example, multiple participants explained that prominent skaters often acted as deputized agents of skateboarding companies who, by speaking on a skater's behalf, could provide access to elite teams and companies for young skaters of colour. The example also reveals a tacit competition for resources and shows how unspoken politics based on proximity and relationships can operate in ways that affect the selection process for SOC.

The manner in which some companies approach recruitment can be best described as viewing the athlete as a 'commodity' (Free & Hughson, 2006), which often devalues athletes and "capitaliz[es] on the symbolic fruits of their own labour" (Free & Hughson, 2006, p. 83). In these examples of successful skaters, their talent offered too much potential for a company not to attempt to acquire them, even when it could lead to problematic consequences (i.e., an elite team's inability to create a mutually beneficial environment for the skater and the company's future growth). Unlike the Cespedes example of a company president being directly responsible for recruiting a skater and having a vision for their

future, some SOC received contracts with no knowledge of where they would fit on elite teams and how they would be part of the future strategies of a company.

One such example is the recruitment narrative surrounding Latinx/Hispanic American and LGBTQA professional female skater Vanessa Torres. Torres entered contests and ‘earned her stripes’ in numerous events in mid- to late-1990s women’s skateboarding contests and events (Beal, 1996). Her ability at a young age to skate well in competitions (Beal & Wilson, 2004), with a signature style, earned her placement on the Element skateboard team, one of the largest skateboarding brands in the world. However, at that time, neither Torres nor the team necessarily knew what it might mean to have a new woman join their ranks. According to Torres,

I was the only female on an all-male team. [Element] were just ‘trying it out’ [female team members]. As a kid that’s me living the dream almost. I didn’t know this was going to be my future [and to fight for any control]! Element thought ‘She’s winning the all these contests’ and they saw potential in marketing. But I was always in ‘breach of contract’—I didn’t wear the Element clothes but there were *no* women’s sizes and I had my own style! It created huge tension and soured our relationship. Now Element has a huge women’s line, and I *know* it came about because of those fights. We couldn’t communicate and had different ideas about the future. You feel like you are on the team but don’t really have a proper place (personal communication, 2018).

This experience highlights the problematic theme encountered by a number of SOC, serving as a company-focused asset acquisition without the company and skater feeling as if they are in a reciprocal relationship beneficial to both in terms of their future progress. According to participants, this strategy seriously limited their experiences (in this case, a female of colour), preventing them from feeling an ‘authentic’ part of the team. Torres’ feelings of ‘difference’ are similar to sentiments expressed by POC male and female athletes

participating in US college sports on 'white' campuses (e.g., Bernhard, 2014; Edwards, 1969; Hartmann, 2000; Leonard, 2014; Sailes, 2017; Wiggins, 1994). The pronounced difference, however, is that in those more formal sports settings there is the potential for more culturally relevant role models and mentors (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013) and a clearer delineation of possible future plans and goals athletically, socially and scholastically (such as scholarships, educational goals, contests, Olympic events and professionalism) because of the prevalence of those sports (e.g., (e.g., Beamon & Bell, 2006; Bimper et al., 2013; Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005). Vanessa Torres' experience reminds us how quickly, even with access to an elite level team, due to the informal nature of skateboarding, a lack of clear direction can lead to the marginalization of POC in professional skateboarding.

These examples demonstrate the dominant themes of recruitment of participants in this research, the close relationships, reasoning, and reflections that informed the selection process for elite teams, and the effect of this experience upon skaters.

5.3.2 The importance of proximity to other POC

Participants all acknowledged that elite skateboarding carried hidden racial politics with the potential to produce more or less racism than they experienced in their daily lives. Despite this factor, SOC still joined elite teams, with individuals developing personal methods to navigate uncharted territories. In some instances, participants joined units that were built by SOC, and in others they were the first to join a team, with the latter option potentially a more precarious situation (depending on the participants). To increase understanding of

the broader impact of race during team recruitment, participants were asked whether proximity to other POC affected their decision to join teams and about their rationale for joining elite organizations, even if there was a possibility of not receiving direct mentorship by SOC.

In multiple instances, participants stated that while other POC on elite teams did offer a degree of safety, which had some influence on their decision to join elite teams, it was not the *only* deciding element. Other factors considered by SOC included benefits and compensation, the level of skill within the current roster, their perspective on available learning opportunities within the arrangement, and the ability to increase their name recognition, and contribute to an already elite group.

African American pro skater Sal Barbier reflected on the multiple factors that influenced his decision to join H-street skateboards in the late 1980s. Although Barbier grew under the tutelage of a white mentor, Mike Ternasky (who unfortunately passed away in a tragic accident, thus his voice is missing from this thesis) he acknowledged a sense of safety in knowing there were other SOC on the team before he arrived (including legendary African American, Ron Allen). Ternasky's plan, based on acquiring and mentoring the 'best' skateboarders, was comforting and supportive of involvement regarding the team and of his future. Barbier, like many other skaters in this research, reflected the belief that Ternasky's focus was not solely on diversity and identity politics. Barbier held the opinion that since skateboarding was less popular than traditional sports in the late 1980s, there was less pressure to 'integrate' skateboarding than there was in other US sports (perceived as more diverse) (Coakley, 2010; Hartmann, 2000; Hylton, 2009). His perspective suggests

that actions to create diversity developed through personal politics, rather than from a 'formal' sporting structure. Barbier noted that Ternasky's goal was to have the 'best' team possible and he was unafraid of mentoring and developing an integrated team during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which focused on the merits of each skater. According to Barbier,

H-Street [skateboards] had diversity, which I liked. Ron [Allen] was on that team and Steve Ortega, but they still focused on 'getting guys that are *good*.' And maybe not really looking much past that but [other SOC] like Alfonso Rawls was on. [Eventually] the team had almost everybody [elite], Trent Gaines, [African American Skater] and that also just meant a lot of guys [SOC] on their brand or 'sister' brands (personal communication, 2018)

This quote shows how the subtext of race in a skater of colour's conscious or subconscious examinations of their situations and environments integrates with levels of meritocracy in ways previously unacknowledged in discussions of race in skateboarding (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010). It also indicates that race and meritocracy operate as a significant underlying subtext for SOC during the decision-making process and their recruitments to elite skateboarding teams.

5.4 Moving beyond entrance: Informal sporting structures' effects on mentorship

This section examines the role of mentorship for POC in elite skateboarding and also discusses the experiences of elite producers of niche skateboarding media. Skateboarding has informal rather than formal sporting structures, which necessitates interpersonal relationships. I discuss the important role of mentors (POC and non-POC), who fluidly

contribute to both positive and problematic experiences of support and engagement, as SOC establish themselves in elite skateboarding.

To properly understand the mentoring relationship in skateboarding, and provide context and clarity to differences in mentorship among participants, requires an unpacking of the multiple ways the 'process' of mentoring is influenced by the informal nature of skateboarding culture (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017) and other action sports cultures like surfing and snowboarding (Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008; Ojala & Thorpe, 2015; Wheaton, 2004). As the following examples reveal, while there is ultimately a meritocracy in skateboarding culture, its informal nature creates both conditions of support and systems of exclusion because it is linked to the participants' broader cultural experiences with race and skateboarding culture. Each of these examples illustrates that within elite skateboarding culture, interpersonal relationships are paramount to POC's understanding and effective navigation of elite skateboarding culture. This is of critical importance because it recognizes that in the formal structure of more traditional, organized sport, there are arguably more formal 'parties' (such as leagues, commissioners, and chair-people), which in effect, allow those 'chosen' to pass through but lock others out. In other words, there is an identifiable 'system' in place, and more formal or 'visible' discriminatory systems may be addressed via structured solutions. Examples of this can be found in the boycotting of institutions, such as the Olympic Project for Human Rights, (OPHR) (Edwards, 1969) movement during the 1967 Olympics, or in the enactment of policy changes regarding gender such as Title IX in the US (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Gavora, 2002). When launching a formal assault on those institutions, it is arguably easier to 'see' where race

impacts decisions and how and from where racism might stem, thus creating a place to begin or launch a disruptive campaign. However, in an informal structure like skateboarding the informality means it can be difficult to identify problems (e.g., Donnelly, 2008; Hunter, 2016; Pomerantz et al., 2004; Rinehart, 2005; Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018b), and outcomes may vary. In this informal context, participants rely on interpersonal relationships, with mentors playing a key role. Therefore, even when SOC earn membership of a skateboarding team, they may have a difficult time navigating the informal structures and politics of the sponsored 'team', which can lead to variable results.

5.4.1 Mentorship individually defined and designed

Since the mid-1970s, skateboarding culture has fluctuated in its adherence to popular models of US organized sports (Borden, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011, 2014). In the 1970s, according to participants and media from that era, there was a push for the activity to present itself in an organized manner. Over time, skateboarding culture has offered varying rejections of a 'professional' model of sport (Borden, 2019). Skaters' relationships with contests or sponsors continue to evolve in a complex and subtle manner (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Rinehart, 2000), where skaters' faith in power and institutions is revoked (Beal, 1995) and reengaged (Beal et al., 2016; Borden, 2019; Cantin-Brault, 2015) at irregular intervals. With such a fluctuating relationship with institutions and centralized control, mentorships continue to remain an individualized concept. As in other action sports like surfing (Wheaton, 2013), and snowboarding (Ojala & Thorpe, 2015), one's rise to elite skateboarding occurs through a mostly unofficial process, and because of the informal

nature, different people and peer groups may act as dispensers of knowledge for new elite skaters.

In this research, the majority of participants agreed that operational knowledge of the skateboarding industry is often handed down in an informal manner by a few people within the industry who have the vision, time and opportunity to nurture a potentially promising skater (Snyder, 2017). It is only recently that coaches have begun to play a role in action sports cultures (Ojala & Thorpe, 2015; Thorpe & Dumont, 2018). Thus, mentorship for skateboarders moving into the elite level was found to have many configurations. Some skaters blossomed under mentors with a vision and strategy for the progress of their mentees. Others were mentored more informally, without a purposeful plan, but regarded the mentors as supportive, nonetheless. A handful of participants discussed grooming themselves and learning to navigate the responsibilities of performing and behaving 'professionally' (such as arriving on time, and giving autographs) through a trial and error process. A few outliers described an amorphous combination of all these factors, or had no mentoring at all and simply performed as required by their sponsors. On analyzing all the voices of this research, it appeared that it was most often a combination of each of these elements. This results from having only a limited group of people with professional experience available to teach young team members how to navigate the skateboarding industry. As indicated in the following examples, mentorships were also often affected by internal and external racial politics.

5.4.2 Models of mentorship: formal and informal training of SOC by non-POC

The first example draws upon a case that typifies participants whose mentors used a hands-on approach, incorporating a vision of both the skater in the future and of the direction of the company brand. Operating across racial lines, ‘white’ company owner Mike Ternasky mentored numerous SOC from the mid-1980s until his death in 1994. According to African American pro skater Sal Barbier, Ternasky exemplified a company owner who *wanted* to assume a more ‘formal’ or an ‘athlete and coach’ mentorship by becoming the team manager, instead of merely owning the team in a labour/owner relationship similar to that found in most formal US sports (Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Shropshire, 1996a). Barbier also notes that Ternasky crafted a strategy to support him and a few other skaters in an attempt to reinvent marketing and mentoring in skateboarding in the mid-1980s:

All other brands seemed to do it [the opposite way]—you heard of the guy [on the team], they've promoted him, and you've never *seen* him in a video. Ternasky was the opposite—he was more of a talent scout, [Envisioning] “These guys are terrific, so I'm gonna mentor them: Ray Simmonds, Jeff Petit, [African American] Ron Allen, Matt Hensley. I'll show everybody who *these* skaters are. It just seemed really diverse—a team with *all* types of people. When I joined H-street and Ternasky, that's when the endorsements and everything came along (personal communication, 2018).

Ternasky was an example of operating with a more formal strategy of mentorship in place, which occurred to varying degrees across the decades. He was also a ‘white’ mentor/company owner with a vision for what his team and company brand should represent; that is, diversity in approach and composition. To that end, he specifically focused on supporting the skaters in both their sport and their daily lives, building the H-Street skateboards ‘brand’ based on the individual ‘team members’ (at least initially) rather

than the team as an extension of the brand. This was a revolutionary concept during the mid-1980s (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017) (also discussed in depth in the following chapter).

The next example marks a common theme of a renowned older ‘white’ skater operating with a less hands-on and more informal approach, which produced benefits for SOC. As mentioned previously, ‘white’ skateboarding luminary Brian Lotti helped establish product ‘flow’ for young amateur Asian American Kenny Anderson in Nevada. In that respect, Lotti acted as an informal power broker between Anderson and elite skateboarding companies. When Lotti graduated to a new role as a professional skateboarder, he was granted the privilege of choosing an elite amateur to join the company. Selected by Lotti, Anderson obtained new status as a member of the elite amateur team. According to Anderson,

[Brian] Lotti said, ‘I’m gonna be pro on a new company, Planet Earth. Then asked *me* if I’d want to be part of the team! I was on Planet Earth for years [from amateur to professional] until switching to Chocolate [skateboards]. Lotti watched out for me and would always present me with options during my career. He never really told me what to do —just kind of made sure I was in the room whenever things [decisions] went down (personal communication, 2018).

Anderson’s narrative demonstrates how the informal nature of skateboarding culture allowed for an informal mentorship, which provided access to resources and assistance in decision-making for the SOC. When questioned, Anderson did not believe Lotti received any compensation for mentoring his protégé. In essence, Lotti’s status in the elite skateboarding culture created a space for the young Asian American Anderson, who was arguably buffered from outside racial politics. Thus Anderson’s place on the team was brokered through a ‘hands-off’ approach, which equated to efficient guidance into the structural institutions of

the skateboarding industry. Many participants experienced similar informal mentorship. In those instances, doors were opened by 'white' mentors and left open for SOC, who were able to walk through them with subtle direction from a respected skater. Other configurations of informal mentorships included support from more experienced SOC, artfully aiding the careers of other young SOC.

5.4.3 Experiences of mentorship by POC and informal coalitions

The next example discusses how for many participants, SOC's own experiences of racial discrimination and racial politics prompted them to mentor other skaters of colour informally. The significance of informal mentorship *between* SOC is revealed through the story told by the 1980s Asian American professional Jeff Hartsel. According to study respondents, Hartsel reared a new crop of young SOC, in the late-1980s-early 1990s, including African American Kareem Campbell, and Asian American Daniel Castillo. Hartsel's support granted them access to the team's resources, and he guided his young charges through the initial process of joining the well-regarded elite skateboarding team of World Industries (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). Some research participants believed it to be the role of older generations of SOC to provide access and informal guidance to young SOC, and Hartsel's actions of support represented this idea. Hartsel described his personal experiences of racism (from non-skaters) in his early life as the only Asian person in predominately white communities; living with a 'white' stepfather contributed to him vehemently opposing racism in any fashion in his own life. He stated, "My family told me not to be around other races, but I used to be discriminated against by 'white' people for being Asian—so I wasn't going to do that to anyone" (personal communication, 2018).

Hartsel's first-hand experiences with racism shaped his decisions to support other SOC, such when he took African American skater Campbell 'under his wing', offering him support during his neophyte stage:

I always just wanted to give everyone a chance—no prejudging anyone. When we met Kareem, I got him sponsored, and he was my dude [protégé]. The youth are the future! Kareem stood out from day one—just showed up one day to the ramp trying to get busy (laughing)! He said he was going to get sponsored and turn pro—and he didn't even have a bag of tricks yet (laughing)! But he progressed so fast, and I got him on the team and helped him where I could in the industry, and now he's a legend. That's the role of elders—to make way for the future (personal communication, 2018).

Hartsel chose to support SOC to combat the racism he experienced as a young person before he found a community in skateboarding. On the reciprocal end of this exchange, legendary pro skater Kareem Campbell discussed the importance of the mentorship he received from Hartsel:

Jeff [Hartsel] used to say from the 'Roots to the youths'—meaning we were the future. He looked out for *all* of us. He helped guide me from day one through the beginning of my career on the team. [He was] always open and supportive without pressure (personal communication, 2018).

Additionally, Campbell mentioned the concept of an interracial coalition of mentors, including Hartsel as well as Latino/Hispanic American Jessie Martinez, future skateboarding mogul of the late 1990s and 2000s, 'white' former pro skater Steve Rocco, and Rodney Mullen (Snyder, 2017). According to Campbell, the combination of Martinez, Hartsell, Rocco, and Mullen eventually blossomed into a collective mentoring approach, ultimately catapulting their World Industries team into becoming one of the most successful brands in skateboarding history (Snyder, 2017). Campbell states,

The thing is World Industries was built off creating 'family.' That was the whole key. I learned everything from Jeff, Jessie, [mentors of colour], Rodney, Steve [white mentors]—everybody. It was a *family*. I'm going to fuck with you; you fuck with me, there's no lost ground between us. Brotherly love. It was us against every other brand. Friendly competition—but competition (personal communication, 2018).

Hartsel and Campbell's exchange presents the rare opportunity to see both sides of the experience of the informal mentor and mentee of colour, while also offering insight into the intangibles of their notion of 'family' crossing racial boundaries and their experiences together. What these and other anecdotes from participants have shown is that expertise in mentorship did not necessarily fall positively or negatively along racial lines, and instead relied more heavily upon the individual situation. This research did reveal how mentors of colour can represent an important layer of support for SOC, who have already determined, strategized around, and lived through racialized formations throughout their lives in the US. The next section explores more deeply some of the experiences of mentorship, best categorized as problematic or absent. This begins to record the numerous variables that influenced how SOC felt during their early tenure in elite teams.

5.4.4 Problematic athletic mentorships by POC

In instances where mentors of colour were perceived as not supporting young SOC, the repercussions were detrimental not only from the lack of support but also from the hint of cultural 'betrayal' contained within that experience. This sentiment derives in part from a historical narrative of POC looking to each other for solidarity, safety, and often collective support, particularly in sports (Boyd, 2003; Carrington, 2010). When POC turn to each other for help in facing new challenges but do not receive it, this can create a form of internalized

dissonance and conflict, with participants feeling both respect for and distance from their mentor of colour simultaneously.

This difficult situation can be seen in the following example from the mid-1990s African American pro skater Oscar Jordan. Jordan respected the entrepreneurial skills and the representation and visibility of a pro SOC, who created his own company during the early 1980s. According to Jordan, “He was one of the first to create his own brand and run it like an independent artist, and I learned from and still respect that” (personal communication, 2018). In Jordan’s opinion, however, this pro skater’s strategy for running the company and commitment to mentoring Jordan did not operate in a respectful, reciprocal manner. There were severe limitations to both the vision and role of the team and mentorship. In Jordan’s opinion,

I think if you own a brand, people should see less of you and more of who you’re bringing up. You are partially responsible for bringing popularity to your team riders. You have to represent them, manage them, and give them direction. I wasn't getting that from him [company owner/team manager] at all, and I didn't feel like he [company owner/team manager] could do that... It was frustrating because I respected him as a skater [of colour] (personal communication, 2018)

Jordan noted that the lack of quality mentorship was not the only difficulty in his relationship with SOC. The fundamental component of elite ‘team’ status, receiving ‘free’ products, resulted in hassles for Jordan and his teammate. Jordan recalled the negativity of the experience,

He comes out with two boards—one board apiece! We had to *ask* for stickers, and he *counted* them out—one, two, three. Three each! ‘Wow, this is all we’re worth? We had to *buy* the third board from him to thank our friend who drove us. ‘Damn, this is kind-of janky [unworthy] sponsorship. I knew ‘white’ dudes selling boards from their bedrooms,

that would *give* me three boards. WTF, why do I want to go through all this with this, brother [African American]. I'm supposed to be representing him (personal communication, 2018).

Jordan's account offers an example of mentorship among POC gone awry, and it suggests the sense of racial betrayal felt by participants as they struggle to support and respect a fellow skater of colour. The relationship ended in disaster.

In another situation, representing other participant's experiences, SOC might receive generous products from a mentor, yet (in their opinion) not receive enough direct mentorship to navigate their career in elite skateboarding adequately. A further example of this theme involving race *and* gender is found in an account by Asian American and LGBTQA 1990s professional SOC, Jaime Reyes. While sponsored by a company co-owned by a SOC and a team-manager of colour, Reyes felt she did not receive adequate direction and was shortchanged compared to the male SOC and non-SOC who received more in-depth guided support. According to Reyes, she essentially navigated elite skateboarding alone:

That's exactly it; no one told me anything. No plan for the future. I was just stoked to get free products and to travel. Period. I never thought about [career] progress. When Vans [shoes] started paying me, I thought, 'Wait a minute, shouldn't my board sponsor pay me too, so I'm not struggling when I *do* travel. I started seeing other people getting paid and started to figure it out, but no one tells you anything, and I wish someone did (personal communication, 2018).

Reyes's story, along with several other participants in this study, provides evidence of skaters who would have been both better served by and craved mentorship from SOC. Her experience is particularly relevant because, as a female skater of colour, she represented a consistently marginalized demographic in skateboarding culture then and now (Beal, 1996; Carr, 2017; Rinehart, 2005; Thorpe & Olive, 2016; Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018b). This also

demonstrates how the informal structure of skateboarding and its reliance on the interpersonal relationship may provide uneven results. For some, the informal structures of the skateboarding industry may provide SOC with tools and support from racism; for others, the lack of formal structure may stunt the growth of POC in other areas such as gender.

Another critical component emerging from these stories of SOC's mentorships concern those who received full support from the company, (i.e., product, advertisements, and full encouragement from legendary skaters), but became effectively paralyzed during their career because of the underlying effects of historical racism and negative racial formations. According to participants, in those instances, it was not the lack of support, but rather the internal dialogue and experiences with racism before skateboarding that interfered with their ability to feel fully included and understood.

Mid-1990s African American skater Jahmal Williams shared an experience during his early tenure in an elite superstar team known as T.V. (for 'white' pro skaters Ed Templeton and Mike Vallely). At the time Williams was a rising star under the tutelage of the prominent figures,

[Television] T.V., Templeton, and Vallely—that was rad. They opened a lot of doors for me. They brought me on tour, introduced me to the industry side of things, which I had a little taste of but not too much. They're giving me ads in the magazines, and they're sharpening me up. And to have two big pros like they took me under their wing, show me the ropes and take me on tour. It was a big deal for me (personal communication, 2018)

The insidiousness of the stressors of racism, both overt and covert (Coates & Morrison, 2011), affects how POC respond to being in public (Sigelman & Welch, 1994) and are reacted to in public spaces (Feagin, 1991; Jefferson, 2020) throughout their lives. In some instances

in sport, racial formations provide fuel for POC to succeed despite racial hardships (Carrington, 2010; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Edwards, 1969; Hartmann, 1996). In other cases, SOC were not adequately prepared for the spotlight, and the intersection with race, while learning to take care of themselves as young adults. Insight into this intersectional theme of power, preparedness, racial formations and the unspoken pressure for POC to be ‘credits to their race’ or ‘superhuman’ (Carrington, 2010) is evidenced through a statement by African American pro skater from the mid-1990s, Jahmal Williams:

I feel like at that time in my life and coming from the hood—I don't feel like I was ready for it. No one [of colour] gave me the heads up—like here's your opportunity. You worked really hard to get where you're at, so make the best of it. People would say ‘You're representing for all the kids that didn't make it out,’ and I would think ‘oh crap like you're right. I got to do my best, I got to represent.’ But [for POC], my mom never said this [skateboarding] is great—make sure you do this or that [make the most of it]. I wasn't really cultured for it [the position] too well (personal communication, 2018).

Jahmal Williams points to the underlying tensions in POC unable to be ‘simply human’ (Carrington, 2010) and experience life through their immediate perspective. Instead, POC carry the unspoken burden of representing themselves and their community when they are in the sporting spotlight (Carrington, 2010; Edwards, 1969; Sailes, 2017). Additionally, for some of the participants who experienced multilayered tensions during their mentorships, they were forced to navigate elite skateboarding politics while living through the subtext of previous racism in their lives. The feeling of carrying the scars of prior racism alongside representing the African American struggle for equality during the mid-1990s was expressed in another story from Williams, describing the shared experience of growing up as African American in predominantly ‘white’ Massachusetts:

Plus, *you* know—there is the underlying racism in Boston, and you grow up with that. And I'm a teenager, so I'm going through all the different things that teenagers go through while becoming a young man. You're questioning yourself, questioning your identity. Am I keeping it real—what is 'keeping it real'? To who and for what? It's a lot to deal with, and I didn't have a mentor for those thoughts (personal communication, 2018).

This comment reflects the theme of participants of colour situated in a high position early in their careers, (roughly 5% of participants) who faced multiple tensions. They would have benefited from a mentor of colour with experience to help them navigate broader racial politics, yet no one was available. Though outwardly making progress through elite skateboarding culture, they had no support in coping with or manoeuvring through their histories in negative racial formations. Through a lack of adequate dialogue, rather than a lack of material support, some participants were unable to express their struggles, or obtain help from someone who had undergone the same type of experience, similar to athletes of colour in other more institutionalized sports in the US (e.g., Bimper et al., 2013; Carrington, 2010; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Edwards, 1969). In those instances, for several participants, amazing collaborations ended unsatisfactorily and often without either party able to truly understand or acknowledge the issue until much later.

The examples in this chapter demonstrate how complex and subtle mentorship experiences are for elite SOC. While most participants' experiences were positive, the narratives reveal how broader US politics combined with the informal nature of skateboarding mentorships to influence SOC pursuing elite athletic careers.

While the number of skateboarders who become professional remains a minimum compared to the general population of skateboarders (less than 1%), the number of

skateboarders who become prominent media creators (photographers and videographers) is even smaller. The following section invites professional niche media creators of colour to identify the role that mentorship played in their careers. These relationships warrant separate examination from the experiences of SOC because niche media creators (such as photographers and videographers) act as a central factor responsible for determining the visibility of skaters. It follows that their mentorships eventually enhance the visibility of SOC over time. Additionally, the presence of POC as media creators within niche media dramatically contributes to visibility and anti-racist strategies in presenting new narratives of SOC.

5.4.5 Mentorship in non-athletic careers

According to this research, the position and number of mentors in niche skateboarding media has remained low since the 1970s until now (correlating predictably with the decline of physical publications and the advent of social media) with limited opportunities for media mentorship. Throughout skateboarding history, niche media largely remained in the hands of a select few individuals (e.g., editors) and media outlets within the culture (discussed in following chapters), often leading to bias in representations of gender, geography, and racial depictions (Beal, 1996; Rinehart, 2005; Snyder, 2017; Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018a). The availability of mentors for skateboarders seeking entrance to professional media creation has always been low. Interviews revealed that mentorship came about by accident for several prominent POC niche media creators. According to participants, the very haphazard and informal mentoring approach stems from skateboarding's DIY perspective (Wheaton, 2010). According to African American co-founder of *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine*,

Bryan Ridgeway, the magazine “started with a group of skaters who made bare-bones ‘Xerox-ed, black and white skate ‘zines to document the skating around them” (personal communication, 2018). With niche skateboarding media originating from these circumstances, direct mentorships and any other access naturally occurred haphazardly (see also chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of niche media production).

Experienced skater-turned-photographer, Latino/Hispanic American Chris Ortiz, is a crucial example of how this trend of informal mentorship in media transferred and transformed from non-POC mentorship to POC over time. Born in 1968 in Inglewood, a predominantly black neighbourhood in Los Angeles, Ortiz then transferred to the Inland Empire, a new residential development in greater Los Angeles, California, where he spent his formative years among racially diverse communities. During his teens, Ortiz grew up skating the “Badlands,” a concrete skatepark and area made famous by a post-‘Z-Boys’ prominent interracial skate collective in the 1980s. His experiences among POC and non-POC groups would later prove invaluable to his career, as a mentee and later mentor. Ortiz was a self-proclaimed “little Skate Rat, always with my camera on the side of me. Always trying to take a photo here or there” (personal communication, 2018). Ortiz originally photographed his friends; young, aspiring pros (many of colour) who began winning skate contests during the mid-1980s. Ortiz was in the right place at the right time when a famous photographer failed to show up to a skate contest in 1987. Stepping up to take the photos on the day was the beginnings of Ortiz’s ‘accidental mentorship’ with one of the most influential skateboarding publications, *Thrasher* magazine (Borden, 2019; Wheaton & Beal, 2003) and its prominent ‘white’ photo editor, MoFo. In Ortiz’s opinion, “*Thrasher* was the

‘king’ magazine—cream of the crop. MoFo was the photo editor, and he reached out to me for photos—it was a huge deal” (personal communication, 2018). This resulted in new fame and pressure. Ortiz recalled MoFo’s role as a mentor, offering a reliable, honest (and sometimes abrasive) but non-racialized critique of his work through mailed and phoned correspondence from *Thrasher Magazine*. In Ortiz’s recollection, MoFo’s critiques were a ‘mother’ [hyper-challenging] sometimes, ‘but he cared about helping me become better, and I did... over time (laughing)’ (personal communication, 2018).

Over the next few decades Ortiz would subsequently receive informal mentorships from other non-POC photographers, who were some of the best skateboarding photographers in the business, all of which helped him further improve his craft and set the stage for his future role as a mentor. From Ortiz’s perspective:

To this day, I have the utmost respect for MoFo, Grant Britain, and Bryce Kanights. Those three helped guide me and take me under their wing and made me the person I am right now. And what I’ve accomplished with others. (personal communication, 2018)

Ortiz also brought a unique perspective to *Thrasher* magazine as he transitioned to elite status in skateboarding culture. In particular, he came to the role having grown up in mixed neighborhoods and with deep understandings of race, racism, and equity:

I was raised mostly by my grandparents in mixed neighborhoods—that experience taught me we are all human beings. Support everyone and treat people the way you want to be treated (personal communication, 2018).

Ortiz’s background allowed him to navigate between various racial groups, and this would evolve into one of the signature components of his work—showcasing diverse skaters in his photography. While not the definitive focus of his total body of work, in retrospect, Ortiz

acknowledged that his attempts to showcase diversity in skateboarding were one of his strengths and aesthetics. Ortiz presented some of the earliest photos of future Skateboarding Hall of Famer, Latino/Hispanic Mark ‘the Gonz’ Gonzales. According to Ortiz, “Ah, man. I remember I shot some of Mark Gonzales's *first* photos and look who Mark is now today. He’s one of the greatest of the greats” (personal communication, 2018). Ortiz helped Gonzales gain some of his initial exposure in the skateboarding world, which supported the visibility of POC in niche media. Gonzales is universally heralded among the global skateboarding community, and number one on the *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine’s* ‘Top 30 most influential skaters of the all-time’ list (TWS, 2011).

Among research participants, Chris Ortiz’s photography and familiarity with people from a range of racial backgrounds and positionalities, along with his ability to unflinchingly travel anywhere to capture a photo, opened the doors for the careers of many SOC. According to legendary African American pro skater Campbell:

We [POC] loved Ortiz; he would shoot in any hood—anywhere, anytime. He hopped the fence to take photos in places where people get shot for wearing the wrong color. Ortiz was never scared, and most [white] photographers would never shoot in the ‘hood. Ortiz helped everyone get [magazine] coverage. He would meet you where you were at [literally and figuratively] (personal communication).

Ortiz would later be directly responsible for mentoring and creating space for other SOC behind the lens as well. In particular, he became an informal mentor for seminal videographers of colour African American Vern Laird and Asian American R.B. Umali. Over time, Ortiz eventually mentored videographers around the world with the rise of *411 Video Magazine*, a substantial niche media outlet during the 1990s. In his position as video editor,

Ortiz extended a hand to content creators of colour, allowing them to shine a light on their skills and the SOC within their skateboarding scenes. As he recalls,

Vern Laird was filming Philly and New York, R.B. Umali, in Texas, and they are submitting enough footage to do scene reports, and it all grew from there. I think we just kind of ran with the concept—cover skateboarding worldwide. Let's give a little bit of opportunity to more diverse people, show different metropolitan areas and stuff that wasn't [covered]. As a video magazine, we just looked at it as an opportunity to help out a lot of people (personal communication, 2018).

In support of Ortiz's perspective, and the theme of mentorship between persons of colour, the interview with African American videographer Vern Laird highlighted Ortiz's importance in helping him build his career, and for other SOC in media. According to Laird, when a significant videographer covering East Coast skateboarders departed to the west coast for better prospects, the departure opened the door for him to submit footage to *411 Video Magazine*. According to Laird, Ortiz was crucial in supporting him in this new role. In Laird's recollection of the hiring process,

Chris Ortiz was the direct boss back. He sent me to Europe, Japan, and all the East coast contest. I was mentored under him and ended up working for a west coast company [*411 magazine*] while on the east coast, which helps shine a light on the [diverse] skaters of the East coast. We all helped skaters who couldn't or didn't make the pilgrimage to California (personal communication, 2018).

The narratives of Ortiz and Laird reveal the way early POC working in media experienced a loosely structured and informal mentorship during the 1980s (sometimes from several people), until they accrued enough cultural capital within the skateboarding culture and industry. Established media producers like Ortiz supported the efforts of other POC through

their work in the field, and this developed productive mentorships and provided opportunities for other SOC to work behind the lens in media.

As illustrated, due to the informal nature of the skateboarding culture, there are numerous ways in which mentorships occur with varying results. Less stringent rules create less formalized outcomes, which create differences in experiences for POC in every situation regardless of whether they are mentored by POC or non-POC. Instead, the outcome has a greater relationship to the broader cultural politics, access, and similarities between participants, including how mentors and mentees interpret their respective roles. At times the interpersonal relationships are effective and at times they are not, but what is different from formalized sporting cultures is that there is not necessarily a recognized barrier in place between POC and non-POC. Thus their experiences are different from racialized experiences of POC in contemporary sport (Bimper et al., 2013; Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009; Shropshire, 1996a). Ultimately these examples demonstrate how the nature of skateboarding culture creates an inconsistency in mentoring, where relationships have both supported and detracted from SOC's ability to pursue elite skateboarding careers.

The next section explores where and in what ways SOC encounter racial politics in their everyday experiences as elite skaters. It highlights opportunities for POC to build positive relationships while also illuminating cultural forces that influence POC in complex ways as they continue to develop careers.

5.5 Experiencing race: Road trips, road rage, and road dogs

Elite skateboarders are expected to exhibit their proficiency in skateboarding on film, in demonstrations, contests, videos, and alongside other proficient skateboarders (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Snyder, 2017; Wheaton, 2004). Various configurations of these events help skateboarders earn professional skateboarding status. Discussing this journey to the professional ranks, research participants pointed to the central theme of creating spaces to find common ground and establish camaraderie among team members during their early sponsorship days. Traveling on tour together (often called “van life”), attending contests or demonstrations (Rinehart, 2000, 2007) were most often cited as providing the best opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships with other skaters. These spaces of interpersonal exchange offered SOC time to engage with other skaters across a broad spectrum of race and identities. From a CRT perspective, these interactions resulted in both positive and negative experiences, highly dependent on the situation, the personalities involved, and the skaters' personal histories of race and racism in the US.

5.5.1 Building bridges in the van

Time spent on tour presented a prime opportunity for SOC and non-SOC alike. Being on the road together allowed participants to view their responsibilities from the perspectives of their peers, as well as learn about each other; to ‘feel out’ each other’s backgrounds, discuss differences, and find similarities. In many instances, these experiences led to additional collaborative opportunities, notably when new teams formed to represent new brands. For many participants, this was a valuable time to think through their histories, unpack racial formations, and evaluate them as crucial to their professional and personal development.

In one example, African Americans, Oscar Jordan and Kanteen Russell discussed the importance of their 1990s van tour in creating space for a dialogue between their interracial coalition and ‘white’ counterparts, Matt Mumford and Chad Bartie. According to Russell,

The first road trips—up to SF was a total culture shock (laughing). We listened to Matt's music; more metal and rock. We listened to Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth—'90s hip hop groups. But by the time we got to SF, Matt was singing Mecca Don and the sweet—soul brother(laughing). On tour, cultural [exchange] happens. They ask questions we ask them. That whole drive was about us trying to understand each other—you learn how to respect each other. (personal communication, 2018).

Many skaters learned about life and racial politics alongside their POC and non-POC counterparts during their time on the road. The tours created different contexts and opportunities for skaters to navigate and engage with the ‘other’ (Said, 1978). Without those experiences, many participants noted they would never have developed relationships across racial lines, and this ‘intercultural’ exchange was a common theme.

While most experiences on the road concluded positively, a few participants found that going on tour revealed negative aspects of US racial politics. During an early solo outing on tour in the mid-1980s, African American skater, Ron Allen discussed first trips as the great unknown, where racism might rear its head. Allen described sometimes using a fake ‘British’ voice when organizing his bookings, to act as his own ‘white hype-man’ (a tactic gleaned from an Evil Knievel documentary) which led to some moments of surprise and worse:

A lot of times, skateshops did not know they are getting a black skater. The shop would be excited and waiting for me to come out. It wasn't until I was literally in the airport that people would say, ‘Oh, you're black?’ and I'd play it off and say ‘yeah’ and ignore it until they'd say, ‘Ok, well. We're cool with it; we just didn't know’ (laughing). But one

time in St. Louis, I'm not sure if they came, saw I was black and then left, but they never picked me up from my airport. Back then, if it were racist, you wouldn't know (personal communication, 2018).

Allen's story offers an example of how individual racism might impact the experiences of POC in skateboarding. For some, it is not covert racial politics that represent a threat to the careers of elite POC—it is an overt racist attack from a prominent white skater. According to one SOC, while on tour during the 1990s, this amateur skater experienced overt racist attacks from the team's much-revered 'white' pro skater from the 1980s. In his recollection,

I was in the van with the rest of the team, and everything was fine. Then when driving [the prominent white skater] would be playing punk rock music loud. I wouldn't really notice, but he would start staring at me in the rearview mirror, waiting for me to notice him and wait for me to listen to the music. The lyrics were all racist, and he got a big kick out of it, waiting to see whenever I noticed. He flexed his power whenever he could because was one of the brands only 'legends.' I just had to deal with it, and no one said anything because they didn't want to upset the 'legend' or lose their place on the team (personal communication, 2018).

While this is an exception to the majority of experiences, it highlights how life on tour can expose SOC to new forms of 'workplace' racism (Baker, 2004; Milloy, Killoh, Sangster, & Smith, 2014) and the pain generated by the complicity of others unwilling to speak up. Furthermore, for those at the early stages of their career, resisting or challenging racist behaviour from older professionals with entrenched power can be very difficult, forcing them to endure the abuse.

Other narratives allude to broader social conditions that manifest on the road. While SOC and non-SOC may have achieved harmony within the tour van, the appearance of their interracial coalitions offers the opportunity for misinterpretation by the non-skateboarding populaces. For example, African American pro skater, Chris Pastras, described how his

teammate, 'white' pro skater Mike Vallely's shaven head could cause tension in other POC at any given moment:

Sometimes it was crazy traveling with Mike Vallely. Me, Mike V., Felix [Arguelles] (Hispanic American), and (white) Ed Templeton went on a trip in the US South. Mike hops out the van, and all these brothers [African American] look at Mike and drop their jaws. "This mutha-fucking skinhead walking into my restaurant? They were ready to jump him! Then Felix and I hop out, and their jaws dropped more! Like, "Wait, what?" And we all walk in together, and they said "OH, OK. He's with you. We thought this Nazi skinhead was about to try to step foot in our place" That's how people thought then (personal communication, 2018).

Pastras' story shows that even for those who have formed interracial coalitions, underlying racial tensions might exist in the community at large. Historically, witnessing a 'white, skinhead-looking' person or the white 'unknown other' entering the public space of POC *was* cause for alarm (Jefferson, 2020). As uncovered through this narrative, the presence of POC alongside the 'white' threat was a contradiction requiring a hurried unpacking in order to de-escalate the situation from 'enemy' to possible 'ally.' From Pastras' description, the experience operated as a precarious but ultimately valuable teaching moment for all involved.

Another anecdote from life on the road demonstrates a powerful tenet of CRT, which is that POC may encounter and interpret racial formations through multiple lenses shaped by their personal experiences, which affect their understandings even within a similar set of circumstances (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Hylton, 2009). In other words, because of the prevalence of racism in the US, which operates with great complexity, everyone will understand, experience, and react to racism differently based on their positionality, personality, and personal history. On occasion, rather than any actions or constraints from

'white' people, a skater's own personal experiences with past racisms may create a racialized perspective resulting in pressure and self-exclusion detrimental to their career. Jahmal Williams was a highly respected skater on a high-profile skate team, but his childhood racialized experiences continued to shape his worldview. In his own words,

I'm growing up and trying to find my place in the world, and I'm finding myself at demos [on tour] where I'm like the only person of colour. So, one part of it you're blocking it out, like, it doesn't matter I'm alone. No one cares about race in skateboarding. But then again, you're hypersensitive to things that are going on around you, and just learning how the world is made up of all kinds of people good and bad (personal communication, 2018).

Williams stated that his upbringing profoundly influenced his sensitivity in the city of Boston, MA. The types of covert and overt racism he experienced in the purportedly 'liberal' city prompted a reluctance to go on tour in the US Southern states, where the possibility of experiencing racist actions might be more significant. Williams revealed the considerable tension this caused:

I'm thinking that every town we go to is going to be Klan-Ville (racist organization the Klu Klux Klan) or something like that, but it wasn't. Touring was really different for me to understand and learn to be comfortable with. Later, I realized not everywhere in the US was racist or like Boston's type of [unwritten] segregation. It all caused me a lot of tension and affected my career in skateboarding (personal communication, 2018).

Williams' difficulty navigating possible racist formations points to the prominent role race plays in the lives of SOC even under the best of conditions. While not every SOC felt the same as Williams, overall, this research reveals that for those who were the only SOC on tour, having no one with whom to discuss feelings made the tour experience challenging. Working through the racism of one's past and its impacts on personal perspectives in the

present connects to broader research in sport and race, where POC attempt to endure their complex racial histories during their early careers without support (Carrington, 2010; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Edwards, 1969; Hylton, 2009; Shropshire, 1996a). With racism ever-present in the US, there *is* a need to create safety and security for SOC even under the best circumstances. According to many participants, collective joy emerged from on-tour opportunities to establish security and support alongside other POC.

5.5.2 POC coalition-building beyond one's team

During this research, many POC noted that their proximity at public events helped SOC build camaraderie with other POC and often acted as a collective moment for these skaters to 'check-in' and 'compare notes' on one another's experience as elite amateurs. Jahmal Williams reflected on a tour in 1995 where he met other African American skaters, Kareem Campbell and Harold Hunter:

I met Harold Hunter and Kareem, but before then, I never met any people of colour [skateboarding]. They gave me a little inside knowledge, and we shared experiences [racism and business] like, 'Oh yeah, I dealt with that before, this is how I dealt with it.' I felt a kinship because we shared instantly, telling each other where we came from. 'Yeah, I grew up like this' and 'oh you too? No way'. Kareem told me he played basketball, and also knew about [difficult] street life, and so did Harold (personal communication, 2018).

Moments like this illustrate how collectively SOC found solidarity within skateboarding culture, even beyond the limits of their team. Williams further alludes to the previously discussed concept of 'passing' and the degree to which POC understand how racism can operate differently for darker-skinned POC (Hunter, 2005). His anecdote demonstrates how these concepts remain influential in the lives of POC (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Hobbs, 2014)

and their thinking regarding how racism might limit their rights and their ability to have access to power (Mallon, 2004; Smith, 1994). In Williams view,

With [African American] Kareem Campbell, I thought, “Wow! This dude is amazing on a skateboard, and on top of that, you hear [negative] stuff about being darker skin in the game, but Kareem was a really dark-skinned brother (laughing). And look at everything he built! It never hurt him in skateboarding, and that was inspiring to us all while we were on the road (personal communication, 2018).

Other SOC echoed the strength discovered and reinforced by SOC’s coalitions developed on the road. According to African American Sal Barbier, the bond between SOC happened naturally at events and during tours from the early-1990s:

Over time I started meeting other skaters of colour at contests and on, I became good friends with [African American skaters] Sean Sheffey, and Jovante Turner and that bond went beyond whatever team we all were on. I still talk to them both today (personal communication, 2018).

Events, contests, and tours became a way for SOC to engage with each other and express solidarity, both in their past lives and in their new lives as elite young skaters living through US racial formations on the road.

5.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter outlines the path to visibility and professionalism for SOC across the decades. In so doing, it provides insight into the importance of geography to sponsorship and the recruitment process and examines the role that race played when POC contemplated joining elite skateboarding teams. This chapter also identifies numerous examples of mentorships for early-career skaters, examining how race influences those experiences. Additionally, this research also examines how SOC engage with external, interpersonal, and internal dialogues regarding race while on tour. Ultimately this chapter

reveals the numerous ways in which SOC established themselves through perseverance, often enduring overt and covert forms of racism while establishing themselves as members of the skateboarding community. In the next chapter, I focus on the representations of POC in skateboarding media from 1975 to the 2000s. Beyond a critical reading of these images, the chapter also prioritizes the voices of SOC and how they made meaning of such visibilities across the decades.

6 Skateboarding Niche Media and the Power of Visibilities

This chapter presents an overview of the role niche media plays in contributing to the racial politics in elite skateboarding culture, and its impact on SOC from the 1970s-2000s. It is impossible to illustrate the subtleties of every element of the niche media during this period (spanning more than 30 years) and within the lives of the roughly fifty participants in this study. Therefore, the subsequent sections focus on mapping racial politics within niche media across the decades, highlighting key moments and experiences that participants viewed as essential to their understanding of elite skateboarding culture. As a foundation for understanding, I and present the specific methodology that informs this chapter. The remainder of the chapter consists of four main parts, discussing representations of POC in skateboarding niche magazines in four time periods: the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, respectively. This reveals some of the key influences in the changing representations of POC in niche media, including the rise of POC in positions of power. This historical and CRT-driven perspective addresses how elite SOC occupied space in the niche media and reinforced and/or challenged popular racial discourses, while simultaneously unpacking how SOC interpreted these narratives.

6.1 The significance of niche media

As outlined in Chapter 2, action sports scholars have examined the significance of niche media within cultural formations, including skateboarding (Atencio et al., 2009; Bäckström & Nairn, 2018; Borden, 2019; Donnelly, 2008; O'Connor, 2018; Rinehart, 2005; Wheaton,

2000; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Skateboarding magazines represent an example of 'niche media' or media created by members of a given community (in this case, skateboarders) mostly meant to be consumed and interpreted by other members of that community (Atencio et al., 2009; Borden, 2019). Niche media content operates with notions of shared ideas and practices, including 'assumed' common understandings by persons involved in the sport rather than by the layperson (Borden, 2003; Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). As such, niche media provide scholars a window into action sports cultures. Despite this window, discussion of race in skateboarding media remains limited (Atencio et al., 2013; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Kusz, 2007; Sueyoshi, 2015; Yochim, 2010). Those that have given niche skateboarding media attention have done so primarily through the lens of white participants or interpreted the presence and culture of POC as a form of 'tokenism,' with limited expressions of the self in comparison to their white counterparts. As discussed in Chapter 2, Yochim (2010), argues that "images of diversity in niche [skateboarding] videos can also be read as the type of tokenism that maintains the centrality of whiteness"(p. 102). The reasoning applied suggests that the presence of POC is not based on merit or earned status through skill or dedication. Even when Yochim (2010) research subjects "took issue with my (and other scholars) characterization of skateboarding as a white culture" and named a host of central figures in skateboarding culture and media, who were not 'white' and influenced the participants (2010, pp. 102-104), she could not see POC within niche media in a manner not linked to 'tokenism' or 'politically correct' ideologies in media. Brayton (2005) also argues,

Within skate media, whiteness speaks in many voices (as banal middle-class masculinity and also as the [anti]heroic white street skater), whereas “blackness” is reduced to a univocal expression of “thug resistance” (p. 368).

This type of analysis makes ‘whiteness’ the central focus of examination, implying that POC in media exist as monolithic stereotypes; as props to be adopted by ‘white’ skaters. Brayton (2005) further offers that niche media offer no real contestations of racial politics:

Multicultural interactions are stunted at the commodity level, allowing a fictionalized and distorted image of the other to stand in for real individuals. This, of course, limits any meaningful contribution to antiracist activism (p. 367)

Portraying niche media in this manner presents a scenario where POC have little to no agency and skateboarding media are unable to act as ‘contested spaces’ of racial politics (Hall, 2018).

Scholars interpret SOC in media as either perpetuating ‘urban’ racial stereotypes, or as culturally appropriated ‘pawns’ for accomplishing the capitalistic endeavours of multinational companies and ‘white’ audiences (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). Much of the prior research primarily placed POC in the media on the periphery, both collectively and individually (Atencio et al., 2013; Kusz, 2007; Yochim, 2010).

Previous investigations have not recognized the possibility of agency among SOC in niche media, nor how diverse audiences may interpret media created for and by POC in ways that may be understood differently when removed from a ‘white’ researcher’s perspective. As argued by King (2005), and discussed in Chapter 2, centring ‘whiteness’ as a pathway to create meaningful ‘race’ scholarship potentially obscures subjects of colour, and

reifies both white subjects *and* white researchers in ways problematic to creating anti-racist work.

6.2 Methodology

Among the participants in this study, the representation of POC in niche media played a key role in the ways they understood and made meaning of skateboarding culture across the decades. Content analysis of the most popular niche skateboarding magazines was used to gain an understanding of the participants' perspectives (as described in Chapter 3, p. 88-90). Although this analysis only constitutes a minor component of this section, it shows the changing positioning of POC across the decades and gives important contextual understanding of the interpretations and memories of participants.

As outlined in Chapter 3, (p. 88-90) the content analysis was based on analysis of covers, editorial photographs, and texts from four key US-based skateboarding magazines from the 1970s to 2005—*Skateboarder Magazine* (1975-1980), *Thrasher* magazine (1981-2004), *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine* (1983-2004) and *Big Brother* magazine (1992-2004). *Skateboarder* is noted as the 'Bible' or referential publication by participants), and *Thrasher Magazine* and *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine* both "carry the most currency amongst skateboarders" (Atencio et al., 2009, p. 7). The final magazine, *Big Brother*, has been critically examined by other scholars, but to date, discussions have focused on 'gender politics' rather than 'race' (Rinehart, 2005; Thorpe, 2006; Yochim, 2010). Despite important differences (which will be discussed), these four magazines share similar features, including a dedication to documenting skateboarding culture with content created by 'cultural insiders' for 'cultural insiders', akin to other action sports niche media (Thorpe, 2008;

Wheaton, 2003; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). While qualitative analysis of images and interviews is the primary focus of the chapter, a quantitative content analysis was also important in establishing the 'visibility' of SOC within historical and contemporary niche media.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of covers of sporting magazines (Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Lumpkin, 2007; Primm et al., 2007). Similarly, in this study, participants acknowledged the cover as the most coveted position in niche media; hence covers receive prominence in the analysis. As noted by African American professional skateboarder Kareem Campbell,

The cover is how you know you made it—the highest honor in skateboarding. You *are* skateboarding for that month. Everyone sees it. (personal communication, 2017).

Analysing images and text, therefore, offers insight into the cultural norms of skateboarding. Quantitative analysis of the covers reveals the visibilities of POC to denote whether they occupy space as a 'norm' (as many participants suggested) or as an 'outlier' in skateboarding media culture. However, 'visibility' alone does not guarantee safety from racism. In mainstream sporting magazines, various scholars have revealed how portrayals of African American and other POC athletes often reinforce notions of the 'wild-ethnic other,' 'subhuman,' 'exoticized' and with 'supernatural' abilities, while never allowing for representation of POC as simply 'human' (e.g., Carrington, 2010; Collins, 2009; Eagleman, 2011; Hylton, 2009; Regalado, 2002). These types of media portrayals reproduce broader racist ideologies and stereotypical narratives surrounding African Americans and other POC (Denzin, 2002; Hall, 2018), and therefore broader US racial politics are also considered in the following analysis.

6.3 The 1970s: Examining representations of POC in Skateboarder

The examination of niche media analysis in the 1970s consists of two sections. The first offers a quantitative analysis of the overall representations and percentages of POC in *Skateboarder* (1975-1980), followed by an explanation of how these findings intersect with the broader racial politics and visibilities of POC during the 1970s. The second section offers a more *qualitative* analysis of these patterns, followed by an overview of the media representations of this decade. In this research, participants emphasized the 1970s as a formative era that established the representations of POC, with subsequent decades more fluidly building upon this foundation. Therefore, analysis of this time period receives both a quantitative and qualitative exploration. The remaining decades, the 1980s-2000s, are examined through analysis focused on the voices of SOC and broader media trends.

6.3.1 Skateboarder Magazine: Quantitative trends

Quantitative analysis of *Skateboarder* magazine from 1975-1980 revealed skaters of colour featuring on between 33% and 40% of covers (see Appendix C). While this number is lower than white skaters, by comparison, contemporary research on traditional US media representations in the 2000s (Mastro, 2009) reveals that the percentage of POC represented across *all* forms of traditional US media ranged from 2% to roughly 19% at best. Thus, these skate niche media percentages were significant and worthy of further consideration. Furthermore, the content analysis revealed that the visibility of skateboarders of colour changed significantly over time. At the magazine's relaunch in 1975, *Skateboarder* featured no POC on any of the covers, although some SOC did receive interviews and photo editorials in the magazine. By 1980, when the magazine's production

ended, SOC had received many cover photos and feature interviews and also 'Photo Annual' covers, which mark the best pictures of the year. This suggests that SOC gained considerable status and visibility in skateboarding media. Examining these positive portrayals between the mid-1970s and 1980 from a CRT perspective, and taking into account the broader representations and lack of visibility of POC in traditional US media fields (Mastro, 2009), the depiction of SOC in niche media is a significant starting point from which to acknowledge the presence of POC in niche media since its inception. As I argue in this chapter, coverage of SOC established skateboarding media as a site of progressive politics within the new sport, contributing to the legacy of POC in skateboarding media. This was a considerable accomplishment for a US magazine operating shortly after the Civil Rights movement (Morris, 1986) and amid the broader racial/racist politics in the US during the 1970s.

With POC established as visible members of 'elite skateboarding,' the next section offers a qualitative analysis that provides evidence of the salience of race to the POC depicted in niche media, followed by examples of informal coalition-building efforts to encourage greater visibility of SOC.

6.3.2 Qualitative analysis of Skateboarder Magazine

Examination of *Skateboarder* covers from 1975-1980 reveals SOC were portrayed as highly skilled, elite individuals performing technically proficient skateboarding actions. The covers from the 1977 November and December issues of *Skateboarder* depict elite skateboarders' proficient athletic manoeuvres (Figure 6.1). Each wears clothing and protective gear typical of other elite skaters from the 1970s—meaning neither appears as an 'outlier' wearing

'extraordinary' markers, which paint the ethnic 'other' in an outwardly derogative manner. As seen (Figure 6.1), both skaters act as stewards for the culture via their recognized elite skill. Asian American Tom Inouye's image (left, Figure 6.1) (*Stair*, 1977, p. 1) also features his name prominently on the cover. 'White' skater, Greg Ayers (*Stair*, 1977, p. 1), (right, Figure 6.1), does not have his name mentioned on the cover. In this instance, we see both the images and accompanying text of a SOC receiving acknowledgment equal to and perhaps greater than both their white counterparts in niche media.

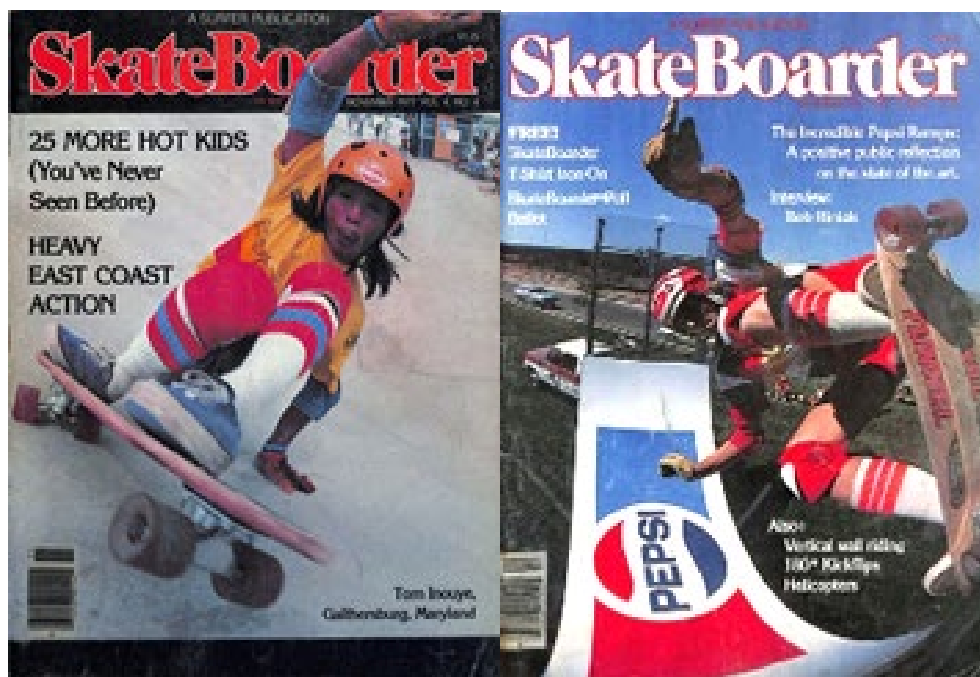


Figure 6-1 Tom Inouye and Greg Ayers

Across the five-year analysis of *Skateboarder* covers, it was apparent that SOC received similar portrayals to their white counterparts throughout the 1970s. The covers from September and October 1979 (see Figure 6.2) also illustrate the positively shared space and visibility of POC alongside their white counterparts. Both SOC Eddie Elguera (left,

Figure 6.2) and 'white' skater Per Viking (right, Figure 6.2) are shown executing elite manoeuvres with a high level of proficiency and wearing appropriate clothing and safety equipment for the type of skateboarding and the tricks accomplished. It is evident that SOC received positive coverage and media portrayals during the formative years of skateboarding media. Therefore we need to re-evaluate current notions of SOC as a 'new' phenomenon in niche media (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010) in order to reframe our questions, seeing these SOC as 'archetypes' rather than outliers in the history of niche skateboarding media.



Figure 6-2 Eddie Elguera and Per Viking

Careful readings of the captions describing SOC like Elguera featured on *Skateboarder* (see left, Figure 6.2) offer further evidence of a meritocracy within the

nascent skateboarding culture. While portrayals of athletes of colour in mainstream media often describe them as ‘superhumans’ or something other than ‘human’ (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009), Elguera’s caption suggests his cover derives not from a politically correct or ‘token’ display of diversity (Yochim, 2010), but from earned status due to his skateboarding expertise. According to *Skateboarder* magazine, “Eddie Elguera, a top-rated amateur, recently turned pro, has surged ahead in bowlriding competition due to an amazing command of ultramodern moves. [like the maneuver depicted, an] Aerial Bert” (*Six*, 1979, p. 5). Such representation and description of SOC as excellent, elite skateboarders was typical in this period and represented roughly 80%-85% of the descriptions of POC in *Skateboarder* magazine. In summary, the analysis of images and texts of *Skateboarder* from 1975-1980 suggests that SOC in the 1970s niche media represent POC as elite skateboarders without reinforcing broader US racial stereotypes (Denzin, 2002).

With POC established as visible members of the elite skateboarding community depicted in media, the next section offers a qualitative analysis that provides evidence of the salience of race for the POC depicted in niche media, followed by examples of informal coalition-building efforts to encourage greater visibility of POC. The subsequent section offers readings of these coalitions in niche media by other SOC. Before providing a summary of the broader racial politics behind POC depictions during the 1970s, I draw on examples of participants’ experiences with racial politics in the 1970s to provide context to the significance of these views in their lives.

6.3.2.1 The salience of race: the power and racial politics of the Z-Family

Racial politics as expressed during the 1970s in media is best illustrated by one of the most visible multicultural groups of the era—the ‘Z-Boys’ and the broader members of the ‘Z-Family.’ During the 1970s, the ‘Z-Boys’, and the ‘Z-family’ more broadly, pushed the levels of skateboarding prowess in *Skateboarder* (Bolster & Gesmer, 2004), and introduced one of the first interracial coalitions to the skateboarding readership. The diversity in their team allowed for numerous interpretations of racialized experiences and reflected the broader trends of racial politics that influenced media visibility during the 1970s. Their narrative clearly shows how the actions of a diverse influential group impacted media portrayals during this time and beyond. The team's multiracial representations and depictions as a collective of POC and non-POC skateboarders would ultimately influence generations of skaters (Borden, 2019; Brooke, 1999).

Often credited as key influencers in the movement of skateboarding from ‘sidewalk-surfing’ to the highly popular outdoor ‘pool-skating’ era from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s (Bolster & Gesmer, 2004; Borden, 2019; Brooke, 1999), analysis of *Skateboarder* showed the extensive coverage the ‘Z-family’ received during the 1970s. Three consecutive issues of *Skateboarder* in 1976 depicted members of the multiracial ‘Z-boys’ team; Tony Alva, Jay Adams, and Stacy Peralta. Alva and Peralta (both Hispanic/Latino Americans) not only featured on the covers, but were also among the few 1970s era skaters to receive two covers and two full interviews during the life of the magazine. The analysis of articles during the mid-1970s shows that the narrative surrounding the Zephyr team portrayed them as

the 'future' of 'modern' skateboarding, and thus their presence had significant influence on the nascent skateboarding community.

Discussions with members of this influential group revealed that even at a young age, they recognized that the diversity of their team flew in the face of previous norms of the 1970s skateboarding culture and the broader racial politics of the era. Hispanic/Latino pro-skater, Stacy Peralta, offered reflections regarding the 'Z-Boys' as arguably being the most diverse team in skateboarding, and their influence in helping usher skateboarding away from its early 1960s, largely 'white' portrayal in media into something more multicultural and inclusive:

To the best of my knowledge, the Zephyr team was the most ethnically diverse team in skateboarding at the time. We had Shogo Kubo—Japanese. We had Tony Alva—[bi-racial] Hispanic. Peggy Oki—Japanese, Paul Constantinou— French. The rest is probably a predominantly Caucasian or 'white,' mix, and I'm Hispanic and Scots-Irish, and Jeff Ho is Chinese—brought together through a love of surfing and skateboarding. People saw us all together in all the magazines [*Skateboarder* and others]. We also won a lot of the contests, so we earned it [coverage] together (personal communication, 2018).

While externally, this group represented a multiracial team that dominated competitions and received extensive media coverage in *Skateboarder*, internally the group also was keenly aware of the larger racial politics of the 1970s. Members drew from their own intimate knowledge of racial disparity (discussed in Chapter 3), which contributed to their collective attempts to disrupt it through media. 'Z-Boys' team photographer and contributor to *Skateboarder* magazine, Iranian American Glen E. Friedman, attributed the importance of race to the group, even as teens, to their exposure to the violent times of the 1960s US Civil Rights Movement (Morris, 1986). Their racial diversity and awareness of race

created a gateway to new relationships with SOC like African American skaters Marty and Clyde Grimes, which resulted in photos of the brothers appearing on the pages of *Skateboarder*. Friedman recalled those early experiences,

We all came out of seeing race riots in the city and our schools. Race was so real then; things could get bloody and dangerous—quick. I didn't even tell everyone my racial background back then—people from the Middle East were discriminated against, too. You just wanted to find people you could be *chill* [safe] with no matter what their background. That's what happened with the Z-Boys—everyone made skating the focus. I understood racism, and I gravitated to Marty Grimes and Clyde [Grimes]. They were skating well, and I wanted to capture that on film [for *Skateboarder*], and it evolved [to Marty as a 'Z-Boy'] (personal communication, 2018).

Friedman's anecdote highlights the group's awareness of racism and evidences how their experience drove an agenda of engaging with other SOC. 'Z-Boy' Peralta also described the personal and political impact of seeing Grimes' coalition of Black skaters in the 1970s and the admiration that would develop for them from the 'Z-boys.' As Peralta explained,

Back then, the best spots were kept secret. You didn't want to risk someone who couldn't skate well at the session because if they got hurt, someone called for help, which ruined that spot because the adults would get rid of it. When Marty [Grimes] and his crew would show at those spots ripping, [skating well], I would be in awe of those guys. Their amount of tenacity and love of skateboarding had to be incredible for them to even *think* about skateboarding in neighborhoods where if they got caught by 'white' people and police officers trespassing—for them it could be in REAL trouble (personal communication, 2018).

Peralta's anecdote acknowledges the broader racial politics of the era while highlighting Grimes and other Black skaters as pioneers. From this perspective, combined with the salience of race to the group, it seems logical that the diverse 'Z-Family' would use their collective voice to aid the visibility of other POC in niche media.

6.3.3 Coalition building: interpreting, developing and creating visibilities for POC

A visible example of late 1970s coalition building is seen first through the media narratives involving the 'Z-boys' and African American Marty Grimes in *Skateboarder* magazine. As the first African American pro skaters, brothers Marty and Clyde Grimes represented a milestone in skateboarding culture and niche media. African American pro-skater and co-founder of Shut and Zoo York skateboards, Rodney Smith, drew inspiration directly from Marty Grimes' image and relationship with the 'Z-Boys' depicted in *Skateboarder*. Despite living on the East Coast of the US, experiencing different racial politics than Grimes in California (see also Chapter 1.), the images still influenced his understanding of race in skateboarding culture. In Smith's words,

He was the only professional black *skateboarder* we ever knew that had a pro model! He was our motivation! You would see him in the magazine [during the late 1970s. You would see him skating with the crew, [Z-Boys], and you could see he was highly accepted! I was also inspired by Stacy Peralta's support of the debut of [Latino/Hispanic pro] Ray 'Bones' Rodriguez in the magazines. I knew if they could make it in the magazine [*Skateboarder* magazine] I could make it [in elite skateboarding] too (personal communication, 2018).

Smith's statement suggests that *Skateboarder's* depictions of Grimes and the 'Z-Boys' as a collective, as well as Latino/Hispanic Ray 'Bones' Rodriguez, as the protégé of Z-boy Peralta, were crucial to African American Smith's understanding of the potential for elite skateboarding to be seen as a site where he might be accepted. The visibilities of POC such as Grimes as elite skaters *and* the visible connections between other SOC and non-POC at locations together in *Skateboarder* was both compelling and inspiring for Smith. Smith's reflection on the notion of the 'acceptance' of Black bodies in the emerging skate culture is

significant from a CRT perspective. For many participants, seeing examples of positive race relations and interracial collectives in the niche media of the late 1970s allowed for the hope of racial progress even when their local reality might offer none.

One example of this collective 'acceptance' actualized is illustrated in African American Marty Grimes' 'Who's Hot' feature in *Skateboarder* (a column showcasing future talent) (*Stair*, 1978, p. 107). African Americans made up roughly 11% of the US population (Gibson & Jung, 2002) but were not featured prominently in *Skateboarder* until the arrival of Grimes. In the feature, numerous photos depicted Grimes as an elite skateboarder; i.e., performing tricks with a high degree of skill and difficulty. Equally important to this context is that there are also multiple members of the 'Z-Boys' who take the opportunity to praise Grimes, which is a substantial achievement for race relations in media in the late 1970s. The collective statements together equate to a new racial formation which now *includes* African Americans. According to the text,

He was the first hot Black skater I had ever seen; now he's even hotter. He's one of the hottest black skaters anywhere (Alva). A radical Goofy foot in the pools; a body torque specialist. He gets in the most radical situations and makes it [i.e., amazing dexterity]. He's hot-he's insane [talented](Peralta). Marty is super-hot. I don't know how he has stayed out of the public view for so long (Adams) (*Skateboarder Magazine*, 1977, p.107).

While the language of the team reveals the youthful voice of the 1970s, they openly praise African American Grimes, and their enthusiasm and support are reflective of their broader racial politics and experiences with discrimination. The text demonstrates that a multiracial coalition like the 'Z-Boys' offered supportive commentary in an effort to highlight other SOC and support their positive portrayals in niche media. Furthermore, pro skater Adams seems

to suggest the explicit racial politics (or discrimination) in early niche media by questioning Grimes' lack of exposure thus far (addressed shortly). These narratives suggest the marginalized place of African Americans among elite skateboarders at that time and signals desire for greater racial equity in niche media—spearheaded by the best skaters of the late 1970s era.

During our discussions, Grimes reflected on the importance of the 'Z-Boys' coalition and emphasized earning his 'visibility' through his prowess rather than 'tokenism.' Grimes was not unappreciative, however, of the support of the 'Z-Boys.' He considered his representation alongside his 'white' counterparts as positive and viewed his visibility in all editorials as a continuation of the progress of African Americans in sport and media. It was also a source of pride among the collective of African American skaters he began skateboarding with (discussed in Chapter 4):

I mean Jay Adams [of the Z-boys]—Lord, love him. Thank you so much for leaving the backdoor open. But when we got there, we kicked it in. That's how you do it. And that's the only way you can do it or else you're not going to be accepted. You try to do it as nice as possible, but you have to take charge of the time that you have been given. We did. And, man, it was really fun, and we had a good time (personal communication, 2017).

Grimes' statement alludes to racial politics, noting that POC often must 'break barriers' or 'needed to work twice as hard' (personal communication, 2018) generally to gain recognition during the racist America of the 1970s. Grimes' anecdote reveals that the support and kinship from the 'Z-boys' were appreciated. Grimes' subsequent membership of the 'Z-Boys' team developed *because* of his abilities and his exposure in niche media reflected the merits of his excellent skateboarding. The coalition that formed between

Grimes and the 'Z-boys' was a bold statement of constructive racial politics, which would have a positive influence on future skating generations.

It is also important to note that, in the informal culture of skateboarding, subtle individual actions could also cause people in positions of power to reexamine their unintended biases. As illustrated, while SOC were featured prominently in the magazine commentary or articles, until Grimes, images of African Americans were largely absent from the media. Another member of the 'Z-family', photographer of colour Glen E. Friedman, expanded the circle of SOC who received coverage in niche media in the 1970s. While not wanting to place the impetus for change solely upon himself, Friedman reflected on how his first photos of Grimes acted as an entry point for 'white' photographers' decision to later 'see' and spotlight elite level African American skateboarding in the 1970s. Friedman recollected,

No one shot photos of African American skaters until I shot Marty Grimes [and others]. After that, then it seemed 'OK' for other [white] white photographers to do it! It's lame, but it happened. There is a great pic of Marty in *Skateboarder* magazines [taken by a white photographer], and I am in the background of that pic—but before that he *never* shot any pics of Marty or any other Black skaters—so it's funny how that happens. After Marty other Black skaters began showing up [regularly] in the magazine. I also definitely think Marty and Shogo [Kubo] (Japanese American skater) should have gotten 'covers'! They were skating better than other people who did have covers, [POC and non-POC], but people [editors] always have their favorites. I wasn't in charge of *Skateboarder*. I just did what I could to help [diversity] (personal communication, 2018).

Friedman's story reveals how people in power may hold implicit biases, which ultimately led to the exclusion of some POC. This anecdote also reveals the sustained efforts by POC

that were necessary to circumvent prior prejudices, which excluded African American elite skateboarders from niche media publications.

These revelations from members of the 'Z-Family' were similar to the stories of other POC in my interviews who were fully aware of racial politics during this formative stage of skateboarding media and culture. Furthermore, their stories demonstrate that for some POC, attaining 'visibility' required several critical factors, including elite prowess *and* interpersonal relationships. All these elements needed to align to help develop an environment that would enable *all* POC to become recognized by the broader skateboarding media during the 1970s and beyond.

In summary, this analysis reveals the importance of *Skateboarder* magazine's depictions of SOC as active, highly proficient, elite-level skateboarders in the 1970s. Photos of POC helped spark the interest of other SOC in the US and planted a seed of racial interconnectivity. This occurred during the difficult time of an emerging US post-Civil Rights movement. According to participants, media images and mainly positive portrayals validated the skateboarding lives of SOC throughout the US and established a media narrative that included POC as 'natural' parts of skateboarding culture.

Early niche media featured SOC as highly skilled and respected members of the skateboarding culture. These findings contrast with previous research (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). While in some specific contexts SOC may seem to be denoted as 'different' (and in some examples excluded from niche media), the visibility of many elite SOC arguably brings race to the fore and importantly poses the question of how visibility is acquired; a question largely ignored by previous scholars. As these interviews with those

who skated in that era revealed, the cross-racial coalitions were seen as a strategy to navigate racial politics in early skateboarding media. Overall, this section highlights the multipronged approach that attempted to increase the racial diversity portrayed in the 1970s media outlet, *Skateboarder* magazine.

The next section illustrates the continued evolution of the power of POC, demonstrating how niche media continued to operate as a contested space during the 1980s.

6.4 The 1980s: new media, new positions, and new terrain

Skateboarding in the 1980s continued to be informed and influenced by meaningful informal relationships, which helped to increase the visibility of SOC in niche media. New themes emerged during this period, however, including POC as founders of niche media, POC in more significant positions of power within media, and POC led-commercial strategies employed by the media. Additionally, skateboarding's transition from 'vertical-style' (ramp skating) to 'street-style' (skating in urban areas) (Borden, 2003, 2019) placed SOC at the forefront of elite skateboarding and increased visibilities in the niche media. While there are many individual stories from the 1980s that deserve to be told, this section offers a selection of narratives from POC that highlight the increased presence of POC both behind the scenes and in front of the camera. It begins with an overview of the new niche media publications of the 1980s and offers examples that illustrate the trends of this decade.

6.4.1 The historical context for the creation of new niche media

While *Skateboarder* magazine dominated during the 1970s, the publication had largely become defunct by 1981, due in part to a downturn in skateboarding popularity, and the closing of skateboarding parks (Borden, 2003; Snyder, 2017). In response to these trends, *Skateboarder* began openly embracing other sports (such as horseback riding), leading to a decline in sales among its primary audience of ‘hard-core’ skaters. This provided an opportunity for new publications that would fill the gap; *Thrasher* magazine and *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine* (TWS). Founded in 1981 and 1983, respectively, each had a slightly different philosophy. Founded by Hispanic/Latino Argentinian immigrant Fausto Vitello, *Thrasher* embodied the motto of ‘skate and destroy’—meaning ‘aggressively’ pushing the limits of skateboarding in every arena, while *Transworld Skateboarding* (TWS) offered an alternative response in its ethos of ‘skate and create.’ Each magazine provided different visions of what narratives might inspire skaters, with TWS more wary of adverse reactions to skateboarding by the non-skating populace (Cozens, 1983). Despite their differences, both publications created space for POC to experience a greater degree of power in the niche media, build coalitions, and exert influence upon media narratives of race in the 1980s.

6.4.1.1 POC as creators of new media: The case of Bryan Ridgeway

One example marking the change in power for POC during the 1980s is evidenced through the narrative of African American Bryan Ridgeway. As a co-founding member of *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine* (TWS) and the team manager for Tracker Trucks (a leading

skateboarding manufacturer), Bryan occupied a formative and visible spot at *TWS*, actively developing opportunities for POC on the page and beyond. Ridgeway recollected the implementation of an agenda to expand the representations of male and female SOC in *TWS*. In his opinion, these efforts supported the diversity he perceived in *Skateboarder* magazine in the 1970s:

I'd seen all these crazy, exotic names, [in *Skateboarder*] I just never saw enough of the skaters! So, *now* if I see some Asian American skaters, If I see some brothas—I can do something about it. I want to see everybody in the magazine [TWS] and on my teams. I *said* skating was inclusive [to people], and now that's more of what I wanted to see. I want ladies, freestylers, slalom; I want every aspect of it! (personal communication, 2017).

Ridgeway's racial politics and concerns for portraying multiple aspects of diversity in niche media become apparent through this quote. Most importantly, as a co-founder of *TWS*, he could make certain that his agenda of diversity would become an integral part of the narrative of *TWS*, and thereby be exported into the broader skateboarding culture. An example of this racial politics manifested in the premier issue of *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine (TWS)* (TWS, 1983, p. 1) which featured elite SOC colour Hispanic/Latino and Asian American, Steve Caballero (Figure 6.3), on the cover.

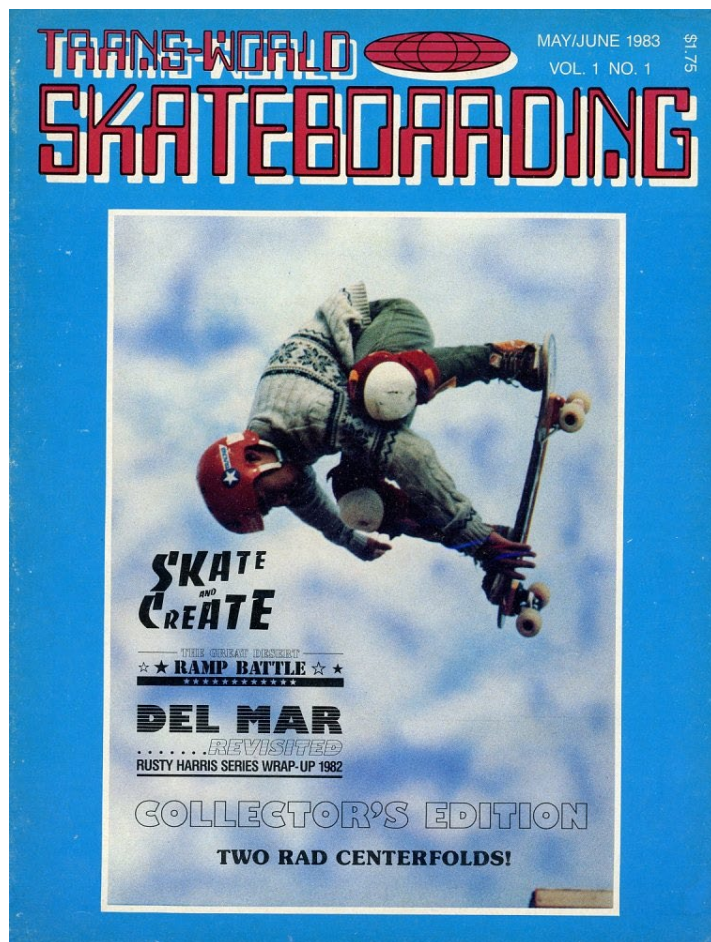


Figure 6-3 Steve Caballero, TWS Magazine 1983

My discussion with the editor revealed that Caballero's place on the cover occurred as a result of meritocracy, not 'tokenism' (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). As Ridgeway stated, "Stevie [Caballero] earned that cover. He was the man at the time. He was winning all the contests!" (personal communication, 2018). Within the magazine, the story focused on the contest surrounding the captured image, and discussed how young Caballero defeated other contestants by displaying exceptional technical prowess. The *TWS* article noted, "Stevie put on a clinic for all ramp riders and clearly did the highest, cleanest tricks of the day and made it look easy" (p. 12). The story comments on

Caballero's 'prowess' without mentioning race or essentialized racial 'difference' (Omi & Howard, 2014), such as 'superhuman ability' (Carrington, 2010); only exceptional skill. The judges of the contest awarded Caballero the highest honours. From the perspective of both Ridgeway and the magazine staff, Caballero's cover resulted from his superb skill in skateboarding, showing that meritocracy could operate alongside an agenda of progressive racial politics driven by POC allowing skateboarding media to appropriately challenge dominant US racial politics.

The representations of SOC found in *TWS* during the 1980s are overwhelmingly positive. More importantly, throughout the decade, the depictions of skaters like Caballero extended the range of 'types' of representative images of POC. Critical to the discussion of POC, from a historical perspective, is that these representations depicted POC as 'normal' human beings, experiencing life in multiple situations (Carrington, 2010), even when capable of extraordinary skateboarding feats. Examinations of numerous media images from *TWS* revealed POC not only as athletic but also as 'relaxed,' 'silly,' and 'cool,' marking a trend in niche media. Each depiction appears imbued with an expression of the skater's personal 'style' or 'aesthetic,' which in some instances changed across the decades as they aged while continuing to perform at an elite level. The SOC are also depicted both alone and alongside 'white' teammates in ads, photos and textual editorials.

Not surprisingly, these prominent images of SOC depicting them in various aspects of life engaged young SOC across the US. One participant influenced by the multiple types of depictions of POC was Asian American pro skater Spencer Fujimoto. Fujimoto reflected

on the importance of seeing skaters like Caballero's individual 'style' as well as his athletic ability in the pages of niche media as an influence in his life:

[In the magazine photo] Cab, [Caballero] looked so cool with the fucking [hair] braids and the beads on his braids (laughing)! I was a huge Caballero fan—one of the greatest skaters! Steve Caballero was the first pro I ever saw in person in my life—a huge influence (personal communication, 2018).

Fujimoto's anecdote highlights the recognition of visible aesthetics and elements of 'style' that inspired SOC within the 1980s, even beyond witnessing a skater's athletic prowess in the 1980s niche media.

Another critical component of Ridgeway's influence and legacy as a POC creator of new media was his visibility, which extended beyond the boardroom; an essential element when viewed from a CRT perspective. The analysis shows that Ridgeway's portraits accompanied his *Transworld Skateboarding* column (1983, p. 27), thus publicly connecting him as a POC founder and content creator at *TWS*. This high-level placement of an African American beyond elite athlete status did not escape the readers of *TWS*:

Brothas [African Americans] would call me and say 'Hey, man, I never knew there was a 'brother' there,' etc. You're such an inspiration'. Well, if that was the case, I knew I wanted to continue to build that [at *Transworld*] (personal communication, 2017).

Ridgeway's story also reveals the often-unspoken importance of POC in positions of power in elite skateboarding media and culture in this era. Ridgeway operated not as a 'silent' partner but as one of the 'faces' of the magazine and as a POC who attained a power position, even when POC were missing from the broader landscape of media in the 1980s (Boyd & Shropshire, 2000; Shropshire, 1996a).

Before joining TWS, Ridgeway developed his expertise in creating local ‘zines (informal free magazines) documenting the progression of skateboarding during the lean years of the early 1980s. As he recalled,

We all had these skate zines at the time, and our group was the mid-Atlantic [ocean US] region. When *Thrasher* came out, they published our address so that we could get out to more people. It created this entire network of zines around the country, which we sent to [skateboarding] companies, too—but we didn't realize we were unique. They were studying our stuff quietly. Letting it grow organically. The companies saw us as a crazy group doing exactly what we wanted. A year and a half later, they started the Transworld [Skateboarding Magazine] (TWS) mission and recruited Gary S. Davis, me, Lance [Mountains], and Neil [Blender] and Grant Britain—a bunch of ‘zine guys (laughing) (personal communication, 2018)

Ridgeway’s early adoption of a DIY perspective (Beal, 1995) in self-published ‘zines’ allowed him to establish his credentials and move into a professional position. Ridgeway’s narrative suggests that a merit-based ideology operated in elite skateboarding culture during this early 1980s period. Ridgeway’s story is tremendously significant. The installation of POC in critical positions in media remains a primary objective in current efforts to establish diversity in the contemporary, traditional media in the US and is a vital component in support of POC representations (Shohat & Stam, 2014). Ridgeway’s deep understanding of racial politics (see also Chapter 4) acts as a model for creating agendas to influence the representation of POC in media. While Ridgeway, as a founder of a niche media publication, is an exceptional example, other SOC contributed to the visibility of POC in media by placing SOC in advertisements, and through fields like photography. The next section illustrates how 1980s documentarians of skateboarding gained power to influence media content and create opportunities for other SOC in media.

6.4.2 POC as arbiters of taste in niche media

In the 1980s, SOC gained a foothold in elite skateboarding media through the efforts of POC in positions of leadership and influence. For example, photographer of colour Glen E. Friedman combined his racial politics and unique power as a senior photographer at *Thrasher* in collaboration with *Thrasher* owner Latino/Hispanic Fausto Vitello's anarchic, inclusive, skater-driven agenda. According to participants, Vitello's experience of fleeing persecution in Argentina (at age nine) during the 'Revolution Libertadora' (Brennan & Rougier, 2009; Di Tella & Dornbusch, 1989), and learning English through US television, contributed to his skater-focused DIY attitude, which resulted in the desire to create a more 'edgy' media outlet. One member of the *Thrasher* staff described the magazine's ethos:

Vitello hated that *Skateboarder* was always trying to make skateboarding a 'sport,'—trying to project a clean image. Fausto's Norcal skaters were never in *Skateboarder* anyways, so he figured he could do his own magazine. Vitello just had a 'fuck the rules' and DIY- [do it yourself] mindset, in business and life. There's good things and bad things about that 'aggressive' attitude, but at the time, it created a magazine that focused on skateboarding that could unite everyone, when there was no [media] link between everyone (personal communication, 2018).

Friedman seized on this new mindset of inclusiveness and renegade spirit. Keenly aware of racial politics, he advocated for SOC at *Thrasher*. One of those efforts led to African American skater Chuck Treece being on the cover of *Thrasher* Magazine and credited inside (Figure 6.4).

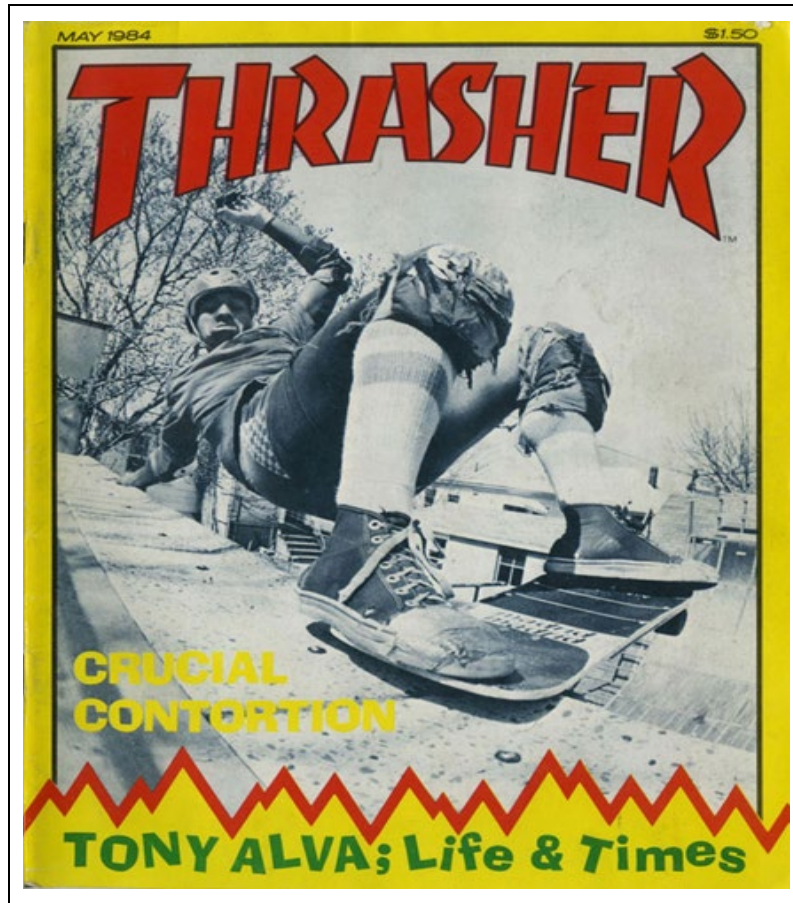


Figure 6-4 Chuck Treece pictured, *Thrasher Magazine*, 1984

During this period, skateboarding media acted in a manner ‘for skaters and by skaters’ before being thrust into modern mainstream visibility in the 1990s (Borden, 2019; Rinehart, 2000, 2007). In Figure 6.4, the *Thrasher* cover depicts the expertly skilled skater Chuck Treece representing the raw power and tenacity of East Coast skateboarding culture and African Americans in skateboarding. In the 1980s, *Thrasher’s* ‘fanzine’ origins unified grassroots skateboarding scenes across the US, rendering Treece’s cover critical to historical understandings of race in skateboarding niche media. Notably, Treece’s depiction occurred before a time of intense political correctness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), and prior to academic discussion of corporate ‘multiculturalism’ in skateboarding (Atencio et al., 2013).

Treece's visibility remains a watershed moment in skateboarding history for African Americans. As such, it is important to explore the levels of racial politics involved in arriving at the cover photo, which speaks to larger racialized themes of the era. First, as a photographer of colour, Glen E. Friedman set a precedent, creating a critical moment for African American visibility in niche media, as 'natural' components of the modern skateboarding story of all skaters surviving together during the 1980s. Furthermore, Friedman's own personal beliefs evidenced in creating the Chuck Treece cover photo spoke to both his awareness of race and a dedication to diversity in skateboarding media. In Friedman's account,

I sent the photo in with the words 'cover' on it and the layout to the editor of *Thrasher*, Kevin Thatcher. [Treece's prowess] was [and represented] the personification of that trick—a layback tailslide done the way it was *supposed* to be done [with power and style]. Thatcher *knew* it looked good. In that instance, it was not about just trying to break racial barriers and stereotypes; it was about picking the best skate photo and running with that. It just also happened to be that it was the first black skater on the cover (personal communication, 2018, speaker's emphasis).

As suggested in Friedman's description of the moment, a merit-based agenda within niche media was coming to fruition. From his perspective, the photo was a personification of the skateboarding manoeuvre, with the added element of the performance being demonstrated using a POC. I questioned Friedman about his awareness of the impact Treece's cover might have on African American skaters and POC more broadly. Friedman answered affirmatively:

Yes. I knew it was a big thing, and I *was* thinking about it, but I'm a child of the '60s, so I was always aware of race. The thing is the photo '*deserved*' to be the cover. That's why I sent it in (personal communication, 2018, speaker's emphasis).

Friedman's argument suggests that regardless of the broader US racial tensions and stereotypes represented in popular media during the early 1980s (Denzin, 2002; Shropshire, 1996a) in skateboarding media, the photo representing the best of skateboarding should take the top spot as the cover. This is a practice arguably still in place at *Thrasher*. The analysis of *Thrasher* magazine from the 1980s onward illustrates that from the first issue, SOC are portrayed as elite-level skaters on par or better than their white counterparts, which has continued throughout the magazine's history.

These images created a ripple effect for African Americans and other SOC. African American pro skater and company owner Ron Allen pointed directly to the importance of Chuck Treece on the cover and the impact of the previous generation's African American steward, Marty Grimes, for all African Americans and POC:

When I saw Chuck Treece on the cover of *Thrasher*—[such] a big, big thing for me. As a black skateboarder, to see the cover of *Thrasher* and there's a black person on it. Wow! [The impact] of his photos and Marty Grimes in the first magazines! I would run to my parents and showed them every time. MOM! Here's *another* black person riding a skateboard, we [black people] are doing this! (personal communication, 2018).

Allen underscores the importance of visibility to African American skateboarders and POC more broadly due to the lack of general knowledge of the new sport for parents of SOC in the 1980s. The early devotees of a sport where its potential for achievement and recognition are generally unknown must often educate their community regarding the *value* of the endeavour. This anecdote, along with others from participants, illustrates how visibility in niche media allowed POC to envision skateboarding as their own. The next

section provides an example of the racial politics behind some of the most important representations of POC in advertising in the 1980s niche media.

6.4.3 Racial politics and skate advertisements

Media editorials are the realm of the editorial staff and are likely to be imbued with staff politics, but advertisements are the lifeblood of all magazines and most often reflect the values of the company's paying for magazine space. During the 1980s, commercial media endeavours featuring elite skateboarders (Borden, 2019) played a crucial role in improving the visibility of SOC alongside white counterparts in items featuring elite skateboarders. This 'normalized' the appearance of SOC and brought meritocracy to the fore in niche media. One example of this appears in the efforts of company co-owner Stacy Peralta, who managed a concerted effort to showcase African Americans in niche media like *TWS* and *Thrasher*. In the discussion of his reasoning for this undertaking, Peralta reflected, "There had always been a heavy Latino/Hispanic presence in skateboarding—just not enough African Americans" (personal communication, 2018). After witnessing the demise of the 'Z-Boys' at the end of the 1970s, Peralta hoped to exercise a positive influence on the team he owned in the 1980s and beyond: the 'Bones Brigade' (Borden, 2019). He recognized there were few African American professionals represented in skateboarding media:

[African American] Marty Grimes had already come and gone. That group already finished—they were done by the early '80s because skateboarding died. There was no money to be a 'pro' anymore. People had to really want to do it [skateboard], and I wanted to reward those who stuck with it (personal communication, 2018).

Peralta's focus on race manifested in positive representations of Steve Steadham, the first African American member of Peralta's 'Bones Brigade,' one of the most respected teams in

skateboarding during the 1980s (Borden, 2003). During an interview, Peralta stressed the importance of maintaining an African American presence on the team and in the media, while recognizing the merits of Steadham's skateboarding prowess, and his place as a trailblazer in the 1980s. Peralta also highlighted his understanding of the 'invisible' level of complication Black skaters faced in transitioning skateboarding as a new activity to some African American communities. In Peralta's words,

I picked up Steve Steadham for three reasons. Number one, he was a *really* good skateboarder. Number two, you could see he's serious about this. And he's got to be serious because he's black and the experience might be harder for him. I also knew it was really important to sponsor black kids and to have a black presence on the team because there were very few, and people need to see themselves [in media]. (personal communication, Peralta's emphasis, 2018).

Peralta's team helped promote the idea of natural cohesion between SOC alongside their white counterparts. This is evidenced through advertising and images such as this view of Steve Steadham's vertical skateboarding expertise in (Figure 6.5) on display alongside 'white' teammate pro Mike McGill to promote the 'Bones Brigade.'



Figure 6-5 Steve Steadham and Mike McGill

Peralta therefore supported and affirmed SOC, which had an impact on SOC reading and viewing skateboarding media. According to African American professional skateboarder, John ‘the Man’ Reeves; “Steve Steadham! He was part of the Bones Brigade, and that was a cool thing. I knew that was really something [Black skateboarding prowess]—he was awesome” (personal communication, 2018). From a CRT perspective, Reeves’ anecdote again provides additional testimony as to the importance of positive visual representation of POC in the media (Carrington, 2010; Hall, Slack, & Grossberg, 2016; McKinley, Masto, & Warber, 2014). Peralta’s notion of actively cultivating POC, and placing them in ads, editorial, and other media as representative of his company, serves as evidence of

concerted efforts to solidify African American as key elite athletes in niche media during the early 1980s.

In summary, skateboarding media operated as a contested space during the 1980s. POC visibilities increased through new roles in the creation of additional media, POC in leadership positions in the media, and unique commercial activism through niche media. In the following section, the analysis reveals the 1990s as a turning point, where SOC become the dominant drivers of elite skateboarding media, marking a significant change from the prior decades.

6.5 The 1990s: The rise of 'urban' skateboarding

The examination of skateboarding niche media throughout the 1990s showed a substantial increase in the visibility of POC during this era. This increase was due to newly expanded access and the arrival of media narratives operating on multiple levels. First, skateboarding continued to shift away from 'suburban' skateboarding in the pools and parks of the 1980s in favour of 'urban' skateboarding (Borden, 2003; Howell, 2005), which created greater access for SOC and more opportunities to become part of elite skateboarding culture. Secondly, niche media offered narratives that portrayed urban areas as central hubs of skateboarding culture, while also emphasizing stories of informal, positive mentorship and diverse skateboarding 'communities' developing in city centres among promising elite talents and supportive older skaters. Third, the rise of original media publications, like *Big Brother Magazine*, presented an anarchic, LA, urban hip-hop perspective. Additionally, the 1990s reflected a surge in POC as cultural icons outside of skateboarding, such as the NBA

(also see Chapter 7), which provided additional levels of connectivity and inspiration for SOC.

6.5.1 A new skate-able landscape: the city

The rise of POC representations in the 1990s coincided with a shift in skateboarding media to use the urban environment as the ‘future’ or best environment for progressive skateboarding. During this era, skateboarding transitioned rapidly from ‘vertical-style’ (skating ramps or set spaces) skateboarding to ‘street-style’ skateboarding (Atencio et al., 2013; Borden, 2003, 2019; Howell, 2005; Snyder, 2017), using the ‘street’ or ‘urban’ natural landscape. Recalling this period, Latino/Hispanic company owner Peralta noted: “We [the company owners] almost killed skateboarding. We turned it into an elite space with all the [vert] ramps. Luckily, skaters took it back to the streets” (personal communication, 2018). As street skating became the accepted narrative within niche media, some of the dominant images representing this change depicted POC. Evidence of the city as a ‘new’ skate-able landscape appears in the cover photos from a September 1990 issue of *Transworld Skateboarding* and a July 1989 *Thrasher* magazine featuring African American pro skater Ron Allen (see Figure 6.6), demonstrating elite skateboarding and the change of direction to the urban environment. Allen adapts to the urban landscape by skateboarding in open schoolyards and the natural ‘bank’ or asphalt ‘slope’ represented on the *TWS* cover (Figure 6.6, left) and Allen skating a pedestrian handrail on the *Thrasher* cover (Figure 6.6, right).



Figure 6-6 African American pro-Ron Allen

The 1989 *Thrasher* cover featured in Figure 6.6, (right) also reinforces the ‘city’ as the centre of skateboarding culture through the claim in a featured article: “San Francisco- The steepest, loudest, meanest, fastest, weirdest, gnarliest, coolest, punkest skatetown on the whole damn planet” (Kanights, 1989, p. 1), which by featuring Allen presented African Americans as part of the progressive new street movement.

The popularity of street skating was a boon to SOC and skaters in general. African American pro skater and company owner Sal Barbier discussed how the previous decade’s focus on ‘vert skating’ had privileged those with resources, thus limiting and short-circuiting access and greater participation from SOC. In Barbier’s opinion,

It was cool. It wasn’t like there were a lot of brothers [African Americans] on the vert [ramp] companies before. It was limited, and that has to do with access. You needed access to a ramp, and if you were where I was

from, how are you going to get a ramp in your backyard? Not many people even had backyards! Then you have to get the wood for ramps! (laughing) Street skating—it just created more access for everyone, but especially Black and Latino skaters. Now they have a greater chance to get seen and noticed [in the magazine] (personal communication, 2018).

During the 1990s, the focus on street skateboarding made it easier for many POC to skate, regardless of their socio-economic status. The transition to street profoundly affected the number of POC who become elite skaters and gained visibility in niche media. The analysis revealed that POC reached levels of between 50%-80% of the coverage across niche media during the 1990s (see Appendix F, detailing 1992). In just one example, the covers of the 1993 and 1998 TWS photo annuals (Figure 6.7), featured African American Chris Pastras and Asian American Eric Koston skating in ‘street style’ with extraordinary prowess and at elite levels in the urban spaces of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Pastras, depicted on the left, (Figure 6.7), uses the obstacle of the ‘sand’ gaps created through a break in cement across the boardwalk, while Koston uses a natural cement handrail for his maneuver (right, Figure 6.7).



Figure 6-7 Skaters of colour, Chris Pastras and Eric Koston

As the urban narrative developed during the 1990s, ‘urban’ became the dominant storyline for skateboarding culture, and the ‘urban’ elements of hip-hop and other cultural styles born in the city also began to gain value in skateboarding culture. This transition contributed to a shift of power to elite urban skateboarders, who became the creators of cultural capital in skateboarding at this time. In this sense, street skateboarding created a more democratic space not only for SOC but for all skaters.

6.5.2 Diversity as the new ‘normal’

The ascent of SOC developed in conjunction with growth in the number of elite photographers of colour in niche media outlets *TWS* and *Thrasher*. Several of these photographers discussed how easily their relationships developed with elite SOC because of their similar backgrounds and influences. For example, prominent African American

photographer 'Atiba' Jefferson recalled how his racial background, age, and broader cultural influences allowed him to gain access to SOC, who represented some of the greatest skaters of the mid-1990s. In turn, Jefferson's photos generated visibility for other SOC. Atiba reflected,

I think it was different shooting with me for them [pro SOC] because I was young and Black, too. We were all into the same thing—Hip-Hop music, the NBA, going out, so the time hanging out between shoots and driving to spots was fun. They didn't have to stress [or face awkwardness] (personal communication, 2018).

Atiba's anecdote highlights the importance of informal racial relationships. He also discussed the value of similarity in age in fostering a supportive environment in which POC could thrive during the 1990s. He recalled,

We were also closer in age; I was in my 20s and half the age of the other [white] photographers at the time. That made it easier to skate and shoot pics together all the time, and they just happen to be the best skaters. [African American] Kareem Campbell introduced me to everyone—all the greats. I ended up shooting covers with them, too (personal communication, 2018).

The demand for elite photographers of colour increased, which in turn improved the visibilities of POC, and boosted cultural capital for both parties, as evidenced through 1990s niche media.

6.5.3 The narrative of multicultural communities

During the 1990s, another trend in media narratives emerged—the importance of developing multicultural relationships through informal 'community' or deep friendships through urban skateboarding. Hispanic/Latino videographer Socrates Leal played a seminal role in documenting this narrative. In Leal's reflection,

By '91, everything was 'urban' culture and 'hip-hop' in skateboarding. It wasn't just Black or Hispanic skaters either. Urban culture *was* skateboarding culture for everyone. This created more bridges between skaters. The magazines would show all the skaters in LA, DC, Boston, New York, SF skating together. That's why everybody was moving there (personal communication, 2018).

Socrates' comments reflect a trend discovered in the analysis of niche media during the mid-1990s. Instead of promoting cities solely as a 'landscape' to extract the 'skate-able' resources (i.e., the early 1990s narrative), by the mid-1990s, niche media encouraged the benefits of engaging with other skaters from disparate backgrounds *while* skating the city. In effect, such media portrayals advanced the idea of all skaters enjoying all elements of city life together. One example of this narrative can be seen in a candid photo (Figure 6.8) from the mid-1990s drawn from *Thrasher* magazine (Yelland, 1997, p. 12). Offering a slice of the skate lifestyle in San Francisco, the image depicted a group of young mostly males and one female in a collective of multiracial and multiethnic elite skateboarders during their formative years.



Figure 6-8 The Young EMB San Francisco Crew

Numerous participants from the mid-1990s era discussed their depictions as members of a young skateboarding collective dubbed the ‘EMB crew’ in niche media, (from San Francisco’s Embarcadero area), as highly influential in promoting the benefits of a diverse ‘urban’ community. Photos of these elite skaters in more casual situations together offered a moment for skaters to view a new slice of the skateboarding ‘experience’—beyond elite skateboarding. Instead of a group of individuals, the media presented these ‘crews’ as emerging skateboarding ‘communities’ that operated multiculturally, and across ethnicities (at times including gender) and generations. This media formation influenced skaters across the US to create ‘urban’ crews specific to their locale. Cities like New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco were afforded multiple opportunities over the years to have their communities documented in niche media as they rose up the ranks of elite skateboarding culture. Asian American pro skater Spencer Fujimoto recalled the freedom

of those times to focus on skateboarding *and* building community across backgrounds, as depicted (Figure 9). According to Fujimoto,

Embarcadero [EMB] was popping, [with amazing skateboarding] We just all grew up there. You would get photos in the magazine, but really, we were also just clowning around and being kids too. EMB (Embarcadero) became so popular [through the magazines]. Kids used to fly in from all over (personal communication, 2018).

The intentional representation of multiculturalism among these San Francisco crew members together set the tone for the 1990s. This became a powerful image promoting multicultural coalitions as the ‘new normal’ for men and for the limited number of elite ‘urban’ street skating females, such as Asian American pioneer pro skater Jamie Reyes (discussed in detail in Chapter 7). Reyes featured on the cover of *Thrasher* in April 1994 and was regularly depicted as a member of the elite level’s groups in San Francisco (and later New York), with her status earned through her highly proficient skateboarding. These positive media portrayals prompted many skaters in the US to move westward to California (as discussed in Chapter 4) in hope of finding a home among the ‘progressive multiculturalism’ depicted in niche media.

6.5.4 New media and ‘negative urbanism’

Although the 1990s niche media provides evidence of the positive benefits of the ‘urban’ skateboarding lifestyle, analysis also indicated a trend in ‘celebrations’ of ‘negative’ urban images, which coincided with the rising influence of gritty depictions of the city lifestyle in popular culture media (Denzin, 2002). One example illustrating this trend appeared in the media for elite skateboarding company Underworld Element (UE) (Figure 6.9). The image featured POC and non-POC in a ‘faux’ correctional facility photo, celebrating the

'Underworld' or 'criminal' portion of the UE name. Examination of the text aligns with this 'criminal' element issuing a warning to the purchaser of UE products:

Parental Advisory [Underworld Element]. Urban terrorists opposed to the system. Our manufacturer and distributor do not condone or endorse the content of this company, which they find violent, sexist, racist, and generally indecent (Craig, 2009).

Such use of arguably 'negative' material also appeared in images that marked the rise of a complicated urban voice in traditional media (Denzin, 2002; Entman, 1990). Despite the intended objective to present POC and non-POC skaters as 'urban' and unified, the producer of the content reflected on presenting skateboarding as anything but positive during the 1990s.

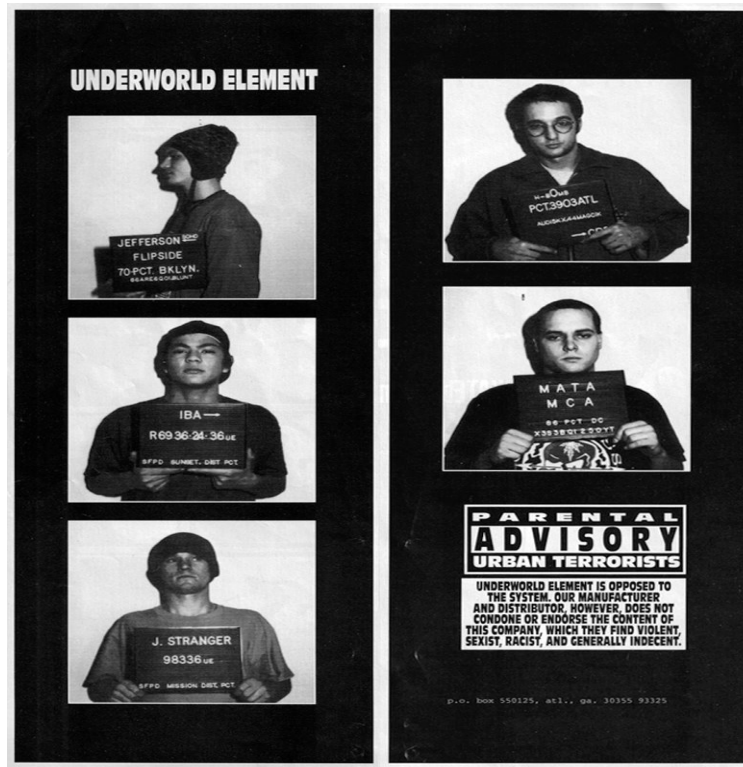


Figure 6-9 The Underworld Element

Jewish American skater Johnnie Schillereff discussed the role mid-1990s media played in representing a grittier image of skateboarding. Schillereff pointed to some ‘negatives’ in the urban trend, as well as the move away from it. This echoed other US popular culture media narratives regarding race and metropolitan life (Denzin, 2002), which sometimes operated problematically. He cited this as the reason his and other companies eventually changed direction. He reflected,

At the time of that [UE] ad, I had a real mugshot [from crime], and I’m not proud of that or the energy we put out in the media then. It took my friend getting killed in the ‘street’ life to make me change direction and create positivity through Element and our ads and team (personal communication, 2018).

One of the most controversial media producers marking the trend of ‘negative-urbanism’ was the 1990s magazine, *Big Brother*.

Often criticized for blatant sexism (Rinehart, 2005; Yochim, 2010) and glorifying a patriarchal skate culture (Thorpe, 2007), *Big Brother* magazine offered an LA-based, youth-driven, urban, tongue in cheek, anti-establishment perspective. In the magazine’s early days, it often depicted elite SOC on its covers and in the magazine’s pages. Although *Big Brother* did not feature a robust staff of colour, analysis shows that between the 1990s and 2000s, *Big Brother* reflected some of the highest percentages of covers featuring skateboarders of colour (83%) (see Appendix F). An analysis of covers during 1992 revealed that ten of the twelve featured POC. By the close of the decade, however, *Big Brother*’s themes and representation of POC moved from depicting athletic prowess to presenting skaters in racist and problematic ways. The ‘Yellow Issue’ (Brother & Satchek, 1998) focused on elite Asian American skaters and included several racialized representations. For example, a pro skater was depicted skating in a traditional Asian straw hat and using Asian ‘style’ lettering for the publication. The issue’s content is particularly problematic as it was the first time *any* magazine focused solely on Asian American elite skaters. Asian American pro skater Spencer Fujimoto recalled the controversial issue,

At least then there were enough Asian skaters to fill that issue; now, we are on the decline again in the media. It goes in waves, and I want to see other Asian American skaters, and I don’t think we get the same coverage anymore. I’m seeing Asian kids on Instagram ripping, but I’m not seeing them in the magazines (personal communication, 2018).

Many participants of colour discussed the tension and legacy of that issue and the magazine overall, which became defunct in the 2000s due to changes in ownership, poor circulation,

and increased concern over the content. In summary, these examples are representative of a significant trend in the mid-late 1990s of injecting problematic depictions of SOC into the skateboarding media.

By the end of the 1990s, another new narrative emerged in media that cleaved various types of skateboarding into distinct styles, billing them as ‘incompatible’ in ways that largely broke down along racial lines. This was a trend from the early 2000s.

6.6 The 2000s: The culture war

In the 2000s, the overall portrayals of POC remained primarily positive in niche skateboarding media. During this period, however, the rise of the ‘rural, punk rock,’ a ‘suburban white’ element of skateboarding, competed against the urban narrative and created tension. According to legendary Hispanic/Latino videographer Socrates Leal, such divisions in skateboarding have been a recurring element of the niche media. In his words,

Skateboarding always goes through waves. Sometimes it’s dominated by the hip-hop, aesthetic—then that phases out, and it will be dominated by a rock aesthetic. It seems to be going back to hip-hop now, so it’s actually going back the other way, but it’s always like that, extreme in its representation (personal communication, 2018).

Leal’s analysis reflected the views of many participants. During this era, there was a clear breakdown into two ‘camps’ of skateboarding styles, which alternately dominated the media images of the 2000s. One ‘camp’, often referred to in niche media as ‘Fresh,’ represented progressive, technical skateboarding with clothing styles and music styles often based on urban areas. The other was commonly referred to as ‘Hesh,’ meaning ‘hessian,’ or a ‘rural,’ more ‘daredevil’ or ‘old school’ type of skateboarding. Most often, the clothing style and music were ‘punk’, ‘alt-rock’ or US ‘country’ music. While other scholars have

examined portrayals of race in skateboarding media during this era (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010), the analysis presented here is a more refined reading of media portrayals of a ‘culture war’ rather than a conflict focused on race.

6.6.1 Investigating the tension

Evidence of the ‘culture war’ in niche media begins with an examination of the implications of the ‘Hesh vs. Fresh’ niche media cover produced by *Thrasher* magazine near the start of the 2000s (Figure 6.10), which attempted to acknowledge two specific types of popular elite skateboarding.



Figure 6-10 Wade Speyer and Daewon Song

In this instance, ‘Fresh’ means hip-hop and urban-inspired and appears embodied by Asian American technical skateboarding legend, Daewon Song, featured on the right (Figure 6.10).

Song is depicted wearing a t-shirt featuring a popular 'technical' skateboarding brand's iconography. This shirt identifies Song as a 'technical' or 'highly progressive' elite skateboarder from a city or urban environment. The 'Hesh' or 'hessian' style of skateboarding is characterized by 'white' professional skater Wade Speyer, featured on the left (Figure 6.10). He represented a type of 'old-school' skating of pools and backyard ramps (popular in the 1970s and 1980s). Speyer is depicted in a flannel shirt and trucker hat to delineate his more 'rural' or 'white' pastoral aesthetic. Unlike the 1990s, where media portrayed everyone together in urban areas, this narrative in the 2000s defined two distinct 'camps' of skateboarding as symbolically oppositional, and skaters adopted the aesthetic 'style' or 'uniform' associated with their choice of skateboarding terrain regardless of race. In a rarity for a *Thrasher Magazine* cover, which recognized all elite skateboarding styles, neither elite skater is depicted skateboarding.

In the early 2000s, legendary skaters like Song and other urban skaters experienced a trend of malignment in media, not explicitly for 'race,' but the 'type' of technical skateboarding (often performed in the schoolyards of Los Angeles), and their 'hip-hop' influenced 'urban' style of dress. While both types of skaters received coverage in media publications, some 'white' skaters' representations offered a return to a more 'classic rock', with a nostalgic nod to the 'white' 'punk/alt-rock' aesthetic of the 1980s. In one example of this trend, a cover of *Transworld Skateboarding* from the 2000s (TWS, May 2000) featured 'white' skater, Al Partanen, skating above the 'punk-rock' classic symbolism of 'anarchy'—an inverted pentagram sprayed in graffiti in an open pool. During the prior decade, the

performance of this manoeuvre arguably is unlikely to have warranted a cover photo, because it was a style of skateboarding more akin to the 1980s.

According to a discussion with Hispanic/Latino Socrates Leal, renunciation of the 'urban' approach operated cyclically. In Leal's opinion, skateboarding suffers when it becomes 'predictable' and stale. Thus rather than interpreting this as a denial of 'multiculturalism' (Kusz, 2007), the rebuke against the 'urban' represented a natural change in trends. During the content analysis of the 2000s, niche media still reflected both new 'white' skaters and new SOC, and both appeared capable of performing or representing each 'style.' Yet, upon inspection, the types of skateboarding depicted often broke down along racial lines (though not exclusively). POC were less likely to be represented skating 'pools' and 'rural' areas than their 'white' counterparts, which created a sense of difference. POC and non-POC, however, were each more likely to *both* represent skateboarding in urban areas, in line with the 1990s urban 'community' theme. While there was a rise in the 'white' aesthetic, some skateboarders used this opportunity to search for the best of both worlds, as outlined in the next example, which uncovers a philosophy of coalition building.

6.6.2 Rebuilding bridges through niche media

In the 2000s, some niche media presented both 'white' skaters and SOC together on unified teams. For example, in the niche media created by Arcade skateboards, co-owned by Asian American skateboarder, Jason Rogers, cross-cultural alliances were made visible. As Rogers comments:

I wanted to have a team and videos that showed we could all get along. Something for everyone, fresh and technical skating by white and black

skaters—Joey [Brizinski] and Malcolm [Watson] and big burly skating by [African American skater] SAD and Haley (personal communication, 2018).

Rogers' team both reflected and attempted to embody various popular skateboarding aesthetics. Other 2000s niche media analysed during this research showed an active movement to keep skateboarders from separating themselves solely based on skateboarding style. The skateboarding brand The Firm offered two images, both featuring young 'white' and non-white skaters in a 'punk' aesthetic and a 'hip-hop/urban' aesthetic and some in a combination of both, with text reading "These are skaters" (Thrasher, 2007, p. 24). Another image of young skaters, both white and non-white, represented lower economic status without a fashion aesthetic, with the words "And these are skaters" (Thrasher, 2007, p. 24) above them. Both of these examples demonstrate a 'cultural' division in niche media and serve as an attempt at unification.

6.6.3 A return to a compatible community

By the mid-2000s and until the 2010s, niche media primarily did away with a narrative of separation according to a 'style' of skateboarding, instead promoting a combination of both concepts of 'technical' skating and 'gnarly' skating. Examining 2010s niche media revealed that the differing types of skateboarders and skateboarding 'styles' can work together with respect for one another. One of the best examples appears in a *Thrasher* feature, 'Zero and DGK's 'Fresh 'till Death' in which the iconography, text, and media exemplifies the unification of skateboarding factions (Thrasher, 2010, p. 18). The narrative marks a clear departure from the previous notion of 'Fresh versus Hesh', encompassing both ideals. The iconography designed to represent the union results in a visual amalgam of the two 'styles'

of skateboarding, using 'skull' imagery to represent 'hesh' and 'rural' skateboarding but wearing a backward baseball cap, with the tongue out and eyes rolled in defiance of the typical skull and crossbones aesthetic. This playful take represented the iconography of both urban street skating legend, African-American Stevie Williams' mixed-race team of 'technical' skaters from DGK, and 'white' Alabama-based pro skater, Jamie Thomas' Zero skateboards team of mostly 'white' 'daredevil' skaters in a show of solidarity. As discussed by Williams,

That tour showed everyone that it's *all* skateboarding, no matter what style. We can be from different places but have the same love. Fuck the labels in the mags ('fresh vs. hesh'), we brought it all together (personal communication, 2018).

These tours and niche media served as overt efforts to challenge purported style divisions (such as race and culture) both through niche media and physical actualizations on tour together. Their work spawned the current trend of companies with many different media aesthetics working together on tour in disparate communities. The 'Fresh 'till Death' media and tour provided evidence of how skateboarding niche media during the 2000s acted as a site of reflexive change in skateboarding and highlighted the importance of cross-cultural alliances, networks, and relationships to participants.

6.7 Conclusion

The examples in this chapter run contrary to the current literature on race in skateboarding culture, which have primarily framed POC in niche media as outliers (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). Instead, as evidenced throughout this chapter, when approached from a CRT perspective, it becomes apparent that niche media operated as a

contested space with POC fluidly depicted as mainstays in skateboarding across the history of modern skateboarding media. Even within moments of disjuncture in skateboarding culture, this chapter demonstrates that the narrative within skateboarding media never reflected a space where 'white' men would "seek refuge from women and people of colour ... [or] multiculturalism" (Kusz, 2007, p. 68). Instead, SOC continually earned membership and established territory within elite skateboarding media alongside their white counterparts. As shown in multiple examples, participants contributed to the positive representations of POC in niche media on numerous levels, in so doing contributing to the broader narrative of US struggles for equity within race, sport, and media. In summary, this chapter identifies the various representations, racial politics, and strategies employed by POC to gain ground in niche media, which inspired SOC from the mid-1970s onward to seize upon niche media as a contested space for the representations of POC. Examining these patterns across time revealed the momentum that has continued to build as more POC as skaters, photographers, videographers, journalists and editors worked together, in alliance with non-POC, to carve out spaces for themselves and the next generation. In the next and final empirical chapter, I investigate how POC contribute directly to social change in skateboarding culture in ways previously unexamined.

7 Skaters of Colour as Agents of Change

This chapter reveals the strategies, successes, and struggles of POC in their individual and collective attempts to add their voices and perspectives to elite skateboarding culture across the decades from the 1970s to the present. The chapter highlights how POC seized upon opportunities to develop new narratives in skateboarding and to present skateboarding publicly through their lens as POC. The chapter shows how POC individually and collectively craft new arenas for the music, art and cultural aesthetic of POC to be seen as a part of skateboarding culture. Specifically, the chapter investigates how POC used the DIY perspective of skateboarding culture (Beal, 1995) along with elements of historical strategies of resistance of African Americans and POC through music, art and aesthetics, and ownership, to ultimately act as agents of change through their actions in skateboarding.

7.1 In search of agency: The politics of skaters of colour

Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, many elite SOC began to feel constricted; unable to satisfactorily represent themselves in niche media, skateboarding discourses, and public demonstrations. While SOC acted as ‘athletes’ representing companies, they lacked creative outlets to explore their ideas regarding skateboarding, its history, and future representation. The existing power structures in skateboarding placed these types of decisions in the hands of select company owners – mostly white – rather than with members of their elite skateboarding teams (Borden, 2019). Skateboarders' lack of agency was a by-product of the established norm of power held by company owners, coupled with skater’s initial excitement at being part of an elite team. This combination obscured SOC’s

initial concerns for their representations and individual agency within niche media. African American Skater, John ‘the Man’ Reeves, offers insight into this power dynamic. Detailing his experience transitioning into elite skateboarding in the late 1980s and early 1990s alongside his teammate, Asian American Kien Lieu, he reflected:

In the old days, we would skate all day with someone following you filming your video part. You didn’t know what was going to be in the video versus what wasn’t. It was up to the owners, and they would just put some crazy music that we didn’t even know over our skating, but we weren’t mad, we were just happy to be a part of it. It was a dream to be sponsored, and you’re young, so you aren’t thinking about what is representing you back then (personal communication, 2018).

This youthful disregard for specifics was a dominant theme among participants’ narratives about the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s. The power of representation (save for a select few SOC) resided in the hands of a few elite skateboarding ‘white’ male company owners (Borden, 2019), seemingly reflecting traditional sports power dynamics (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009). Company owners were rarely interested in passing power down to SOC, or any skaters more generally. This created tensions that resulted in instances of resistance, where SOC attempted to develop strategies to obtain more power and agency on both the individual and collective level within the industry; this led to challenges to the power structures. Even when older company owners expressed openness towards the ideas of younger elite skaters, their lack of common ground (e.g., differences in age, race, socioeconomic background or a combination of these factors) often proved too large an obstacle for the parties to make a meaningful connection.

7.1.1 Lack of connection between POC and white owners

In an example demonstrating the absence of rapport between skaters and company owners in the early 1990s, African American pro skater (and later company-owner) Chris Pastras discussed the awkward first meetings with potential partner Brad Dorfman, owner of Vision Skateboards. A behemoth in skateboarding, Vision Skateboards occupied a central position as one of the largest of five major skateboarding companies who dominated the global skateboarding landscape during the popularity of vertical skateboarding in the 1980s (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). However, from the early 1990s onward, a new wave of skaters departed these companies, in order to start their own, smaller, more nimble ‘street’ skating-focused companies (Borden, 2019; O’Connor, 2018). These skater-owned companies provided unique opportunities for POC and non-POC to claim power in skateboarding through both representation and ownership. This shift in the business paradigm to the skater-owned company left the former giants near financial ruin. According to Pastras, ‘white’ company owner Dorfman recognized the need for an injection of youthful energy into his failing company and distribution house. Dorfman and Pastras, however, could not develop a satisfying rapport, leading Dorfman to reject Pastras’ ideas to build a new skateboarding brand focused mainly on the African American iconography of Blues, Jazz and Soul music. While not necessarily rejected solely on the grounds of race, ‘white’ company owner Dorfman lacked the insight to ascertain the commercial viability of a decidedly African American, jazz-inspired, iconographic-driven skateboarding brand. Pastras recalled the disconnect between the two,

Brad [Dorfman] was a sweet guy with a lot of success at Vision and had [he] met me when I was 30, I probably could've helped him [with Vision]. But I was an 18-year-old kid, thinking this dude's old and he's got a ponytail (laughing)! He doesn't know what the fuck I'm talking about [blues and jazz] He can't see the potential or the vision I had for a new company (personal communication, 2018).

Pastras' comment highlights some of the personal racial and generational tensions faced by POC engaging white owners with new ideas about representations and seeking to add their voices, experiences, and images to elite skateboarding culture. Fed up with skateboarding contracts that hired them as 'athletes' but without providing space for their creative input into the companies' vision, Pastras was not alone in either his attempt for more significant agency, or in his frustration when attempting to work with established 'white' company owners. SOC during this generation required different, more significant avenues and partnerships, which reflected and supported their unique experiences as SOC in the US. While Pastras' example demonstrates a personal tension across racial and generational lines during the early 1990s, the next case highlights the pressure that was collectively building in SOC looking for a change in the narratives, representations and experiences of POC in skateboarding, particularly for African Americans.

7.1.2 Collective dissatisfaction with narratives of POC

By the mid-1990s, African American skaters had amassed almost two decades of influence through skateboarding excellence. To honour this legacy, a group of prominent African Americans in the skateboarding industry created a working group to acknowledge and promote the historic collective contributions of African American skaters to skateboarding, lest those histories escape inclusion in popular discourse. Their efforts coincided with

skateboarding's exponential growth among a much younger demographic during the mid-1990s (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). These SOC hoped to acknowledge the histories of POC in skateboarding, as a set of unique experiences in the 1990s. This took place prior to the 2009 founding of skateboarding's current cultural institution, the Skateboarding Hall of Fame. This group of prominent African Americans would meet at regular intervals to discuss how best to present and preserve their collective history. According to African American Alysha Owerka-Moore,

I wanted to make a documentary since 1996. [Elite black skaters] Sal Masekela, Atiba and Ako, Damon Morris, Mirko Magnum, Aly Asha, Sal Barbier, and others, used to get together at this Café. We would make lists of every Black pro [professional skateboarder] and amateur that we could think of starting from Marti Grimes until 1996. We knew there were more than we could think of, but we wanted to start somewhere. We felt we needed to acknowledge those who came before us and our progress making skateboarding popular (personal communication, 2018).

Owerka-Moore's statement illustrates that even in the mid-1990s, POC saw the need to have their voices and their collective histories reflected in skateboarding culture in a way perceived as valuable to them. Owerka-Moore also discussed the group's feeling of conflict in finding the best way to reconcile the tension between the positivity and acceptance they felt the majority of the time through their status as elite skaters and artists, and the need to collectively voice the negative experiences encountered during their time in skateboarding as a whole. Furthermore, the group pondered the relatability of their mission to their 'white' counterparts, who might not understand why the collective history of African American might be relevant to POC or consider how the 'everyday' experiences of racism in skateboarding could connect to racism more broadly in the US. A member of the

working group, X-Games announcer Sal Masekela, offered his experience with racism when eventually fired by the ‘white’ company owner of a prominent skate/surf shop in Southern California. Despite performing well, Masekela recalled,

The owner didn’t think I ‘looked the part of a skater and surfer’ — meaning ‘white’. He’d comment about ‘my look’ in front of the [white] staff and say I seemed ‘out of place in [California Beach town]’ all the time.” (personal communication, 2018).

Masekela’s recollection reveals the racial ‘microaggression’ or “brief everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to People of Color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273) in the workplace. In this example, it became overt discrimination when he lost his position due to racial bias. Other scholars have also used CRT to unpack how ‘microaggressions’ negatively impact POC in the workplace (e.g., Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; Holder et al., 2015; Louis et al., 2016; Pitcan et al., 2018). This example also points to Anderson (2015) critique of the way any ‘white’ individual has the power to label spaces as ‘white,’ and use that label to discriminate against POC. Once Masekela became successful hosting the ESPN X-Games, this same shop owner attempted to befriend him. Masekela recalled,

Once I became famous, he acted like he forgot that I ever worked for him before and that I should endorse their shop on TV—despite the way he treated me! (personal communication, 2018).

This anecdote again reveals how everyday racism exists. As Masekela gained acceptance in sport media culture, this reversal of acceptance and expectation that he should ‘forget’ past transgressions, a process has been noted in CRT research more widely (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; Sue et al., 2009). There is an expectation that now that Masekela is a ‘star’,

he has become something greater than 'Black' or a 'credit' to his race, which is a common racial microaggression used by 'whites' to denote the racial 'difference' of POC (Sue et al., 2009). To the business owner in this example, Masekela had proven that he could now 'fit in' with 'white' people, and therefore because of this 'privilege', the owner felt Masekela should do his part to help the white owner.

Masekela's story also emphasized the working group's need to connect their experiences to the broader struggles of POC in sports and society in the hope they might inspire other POC in areas beyond skateboarding. [For similar aims among African American surfers see the Black Surfing Association, (Wheaton, 2010)]. Owerka-Moore reflected upon the group's need to acknowledge both their individual and collective experiences:

We were all conscious about our different experience with skateboarding growing up as Black skaters. People always asked, us all 'did you ever get heat from the 'hood growing up?' But it depends on where people were located. Some like Kareem (Campbell) did have issues [from black people] growing up in Brooklyn. We wanted something that showed our range of experiences, but it never got done. Partly due to everyone already being 'famous' and working in skateboarding and having to make that the top priority (personal communication, 2018).

From a CRT perspective, this anecdote aligns with similar narratives of POC in other action sports (Wheaton, 2010) and traditional sports (Bernhard, 2014; Carrington, 2010; Lanctot, 2011; Martin, 2014), searching for ways to make their truth visible. These SOC were aware of their individual lives in skateboarding and how their stories contributed to the overarching history of POC in sport and movements towards racial progress. What they lacked, however, was the capacity to express themselves in ways that acknowledged their experiences in a more public manner both in and outside of skateboarding culture. While

this is just one example of POC creating coalitions in elite skateboarding, the collaboration is highly significant, building upon a previously unconnected group of POC brought together by their need to create community *and* address issues of race and racism. Eventually, both their desires and other SOC's experiences would develop into a need to create multiple strategies to build agency for themselves and to contribute to new avenues for POC in skateboarding.

The following section provides an analysis of the strategies employed by SOC to control their representations in music, skateboarding media, culture, and public events, and gain more power in elite skateboarding culture. These efforts represent the culmination of years of individual and collective labour on the part of SOC interested in seeing their identities reflected in skateboarding culture. One of the first efforts was the use of music as a site of resistance, both publicly and in niche media representation.

7.2 Music as a form of racial politics in skateboarding

Historically, music has often operated as a tool for resistance. The first drums used in North America by African slaves wrested from their homelands helped disparate Africans form musical bonds and a sense of early community and resistance (Maultsby, 2000; Price, 2013). Price (2013) argued that the drum was the critical element that sparked the initial kinship, supporting Southern (1997) argument that for the stolen populace “[musical] cultures shared enough features to constitute an identifiable heritage for Africans in the New World”(Price, 2013, p. 233). The drums often clandestinely sounded for insurrection and covert conclaves under the nose of white slave owners (Fisher, 2013). This continued until the communication became understood and banned, as early as 1676, through the Virginia

state proclamation “prohibiting the assemblage of Negroes by Drumbeat” (Fisher, 2013, p. 6). Later in African American history, the advent of jazz (in the late 1890s) as a connection to Africa (Berry, 1988; Burnim & Maultsby, 2015) and then ‘Be-bop’ as a musical style within the world of jazz, actively operated as an artistic tool for resistance by black musicians (Jones, 1999; Ongiri, 2009; Wilson, 1999). The new, highly complex musical form separated POC and their playing style from ‘white’ copycat musicians who initially impersonated early black musical ideas to great commercial success without adequately compensating the originators of the music (e.g., Davis & Troupe, 1990; Greene, 1998; Jones, 1999; Porter, 2002). The musical style and the Black US ‘Jazz Ambassadors’ (Fosler-Lussier, 2012) who performed it would also evolve into another tool of resistance against Nazi Germany during WWII (McDonough, 2001), and the Cold War (Davenport, 2010). Jazz and blues in all their forms continued to mark progress and African American struggle and growth in the US during the Civil Rights movement. Music as both a site and tool for resistance remains intrinsically linked to broader social changes by POC (Monson, 2007; Schneider, 2002). Most recently, rap and hip-hop music emerged as a connective tissue between African Americans’ experiences of the past and the future in the US (Burnim & Maultsby, 2015; Morgan & Bennett, 2011). Carrying on in the African American tradition of operating from the ‘street’ level and giving light to the pride and plight of POC, (Jones, 1999) hip-hop emerged with songs like “The Message’ (originally credited to Melle Mel, and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five), which signalled the struggles of those living in the demolished, abandoned borough of the Bronx, New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Alridge, 2005; Chang, 2007). Hip-hop continues to act as the voice of POC in the US (Bonnette-Bailey & Brown,

2019; P. H. Collins, 2006; Forman & Neal, 2012; Rose, 1994) and globally (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2008). The sounds reflect hip-hop legend Chuck D's prophetic statement citing hip-hop as the 'CNN of the Black community' (Gladney, 1995, p. 291), meaning that whatever experience POC are having, it is reflected in hip-hop music.

In line with this, scholars have also discussed hip hop music (and hip-hop culture more broadly) and its effect as a site of resistance in sports organizations such as the National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Hockey League (NHL) (Boyd, 1997, 2002, 2008; Lorenz & Murray, 2014). For instance, Boyd (2008) and other scholars discuss how influential African American NBA basketball player Allen Iverson's love of hip-hop culture and 'streetwear' style forced 'white' NBA team owners to formally impose a dress code. Punishments for appearing too 'hip hop' or too 'un-sportsman-like' (often a 'code word' for Black) (Cunningham, 2009) in 'celebratory' dances emerged in the NFL and NBA, and often acted as coded messages for 'whiteness' and covert racism (McDonald & Togliola, 2010). Deciphering the racism in these coded channels speaks to the importance of using CRT to un-code the false narrative of 'colour-blindness' in sports and reveals that not all athletes are treated the same. As noted through CRT, it is the 'invisibility' and 'nebulousness' of 'whiteness' that acts as a norm, setting the standards by which all POC must adhere. These were efforts by owners to stamp out the personal expression and representations of POC playing in these elite sports. The same owners, however, employ and celebrate the 'athleticism' and labour of the black body, but wish for none of the signifiers demonstrating that body's history or origin in the US (Cunningham, 2009).

With this extensive history of African Americans and POC using music as a site of and tool for resistance, it appears logical that hip-hop—the first major Black musical form to emerge after the civil rights movement, (Alridge, 2005; Morgan & Bennett, 2011)—would also appear as a tool for resistance in skateboarding culture. The use of hip-hop in skateboarding represents one of the first ways SOC demonstrated agency and contributed to change in skateboarding culture by advocating for the musical representation that best reflected their voice in niche skateboarding videos. Advocating for their voices in representations, and the struggles and strategies employed by POC to regain control over their portrayals are important for examining social change from a CRT-driven perspective. While previous scholarship has examined the prominence of hip-hop music and culture in skateboarding in the 2000s, much of the discussion considered it a by-product of the contemporary commercial rise of hip-hop as a dominant global musical narrative (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010). However, the interviews conducted in this research reveal a different story, with hip-hop music central to a larger, subtler narrative of racial politics and power. Interviews demonstrated how hip-hop entered the cultural zeitgeist of skateboarding, with multiple participants highlighting grassroots efforts to develop strategies to integrate hip-hop, beginning in the mid-1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s. Their efforts allowed SOC to both regain a higher degree of control over their representation in the media and to create space for their cultural backgrounds, which opened the door for African American music styles to enter the musical vocabulary of skateboarding culture.

The first stage of this process of change in skateboarding culture begins with the efforts of SOC, who pushed against the cultural norms of other musical styles like 'rock' and 'punk-rock,' both of which were the dominant soundtrack of 1980s skateboarding niche videos and skateboarding contests (Borden, 2019; Malott & Peña, 2004). During my interview with African American professional skateboarder Sal Barbier, he recalled the various battles faced by SOC attempting to use 'rap' and 'hip-hop' music to reflect their sensibilities in niche media. In one example, Barbier recalled requesting a particular song for his section of a niche media skateboarding video. The company painstakingly cut out the 'rap' section from the song Barbier requested and instead inserted the limited 'rock' intro-portion of the song. Barbier offered his perspective on this insensitive action;

Skateboarding companies weren't really using rap music in any of the videos. I wanted to use [rapper] ICE-T, and that was the first time I'd asked for that. I'd never cared about what the company used before. Not only did they not use the ICE-T, but they also used the *intro* to the ICE-T song, which was [punk-rock] Jell-O Biafra! So, they cut my rap out of the song, and out of the video. I mean come on, they put in the *intro*, so that [was] on purpose and hurtful (personal communication, 2018).

This anecdote demonstrates the dismay felt by Barbier in his inability to control his image and representation in niche media, while also illuminating the struggle for power taking place between SOC and 'white' company owners in the late 1980s. However, within a few years, Barbier was able to choose the songs for his part in the seminal skateboarding niche video *Questionable* by Plan B skateboards (Markus, 1992a), "I fought for it, but when *Questionable* came out, I was skating to [hip-hop acts] DeL, Casual and the Hieroglyphics" (personal communication, 2018). Participants cited the 1992 '*Questionable*' video by Plan B skateboards as highly influential to SOC and non-SOC, and a critical moment where

representations of POC included hip-hop music and hip-hop aesthetic in niche skateboarding media. This act influenced many others, as outlined in the next section.

Other SOC challenged 'white' company owners to gain control of their representation through music, though under different circumstances during the early 1990s. Legendary Hispanic/Latino video editor Socrates Leal recalled making the World Industries niche skateboarding film, 1992's *Love Child*, (Markus, 1992b), which featured a soundtrack of 'classic' African American Motown music and rock and roll. Unlike the previous example, this situation was less acrimonious. However, it did involve a similar flashpoint regarding which music should represent a group of technically progressive street skateboarders, who listened to hip-hop and were part of skateboarding's first predominately POC team. Leal reflected on the politics of race and power during the making of the niche media video, *Love Child*,

It was fun and games listening to oldies on the trip, but for the video release, the team wanted hip-hop. But Rocco and Spike coaxed them saying, "Guys, it will look so good if you skate to these [classic rock and Motown] oldies. Ultimately the team agreed, and they were *right*—the video is a classic now. But going forward the team insisted it should be *their* call on what music represented them—and that was hip-hop. From 1993 on, hip-hop became the soundtrack for everyone black or white, and it stayed that way for years (personal communication, 2018).

Leal's example shows the struggles for cultural change through music and niche media, which occurred over just a few short years. From a CRT perspective, these examples demonstrate the efforts of SOC advocating for themselves and their struggles against the dominant norms of 'white' company owners. Their individual and collective efforts were

ultimately successful in creating change through musical representations in media that more accurately reflected the lives of POC.

7.2.1 Disseminating hip-hop music into the public sphere of elite amateur and pro contests

The previous examples focus on individual representations within niche skateboarding media. The next demonstrate how SOC's advocacy for musical representation extended into larger skateboarding public cultural spaces like elite skateboarding contests, which over time, created a more hospitable environment for SOC. In these instances, multiple SOC fought to represent and express themselves through their skating and music in the skateboarding public sphere.

For example, during the amateur contests on the east coast of the US, during the mid-late 1980s, the multicultural skateboarding team of SHUT Skateboards approached every amateur contest and demonstration as a potential battleground they could use to change the musical standards of skateboarding culture at that time. The SHUT team unapologetically upset the status quo by inserting their musical soundtracks—early rap records recorded from the radio by underground DJs—into skateboarding. Winning top placement in every contest and presenting an NYC hip-hop-inspired artistic aesthetic, they offered a stark contrast to the dominant rock themes in California. As recalled by African American SHUT Skates team rider Chris Pastras,

We brought the city [New York/New Jersey] vibe. We always had the radio! We show up and "Boom" our radio goes on –playing KRS-One, Public Enemy BLARING over whatever silly noise they might be playing at the contest—Agent Orange [punk] or some New Wave Music. Fuck that!

We're playing mixtapes from DJ Red alert made from recording the Saturday night radio mix in NYC (personal communication, 2018)

The multiracial and multicultural team's love for hip-hop aided in developing hip-hop as a central part of skateboarding decades before its emergence as a dominant theme in popular skateboarding culture (Atencio et al., 2013; Beal et al., 2016; Yochim, 2010). The SHUT Skateboards' impact did not go unnoticed by other SOC, particularly as these elite skaters made their way westward toward California. African American pro, Sal Barbier recalled the experience,

I saw all those guys at the 1988 amateur final contest in Arizona, and I remember thinking, these guys are rad. Their clothing was different and not silly, California, fluorescent style—they wore clean white T's and Levi's. They had innovative tricks, and their music was different. They were just hipper than the west coast, and everyone could see that even I wanted to ride for them (personal communication, 2018).

From this example, we see the influence of the SHUT skateboards aesthetic and how it offered a new urban-focused perspective on skateboarding in the late 1980s.

While the Shut team and other SOC thrust the music of POC into the elite amateur contest circuit, others would lay the foundation in elite professional contests. By 1992-1993, African American skaters like Barbier, Kareem Campbell, and Sean Sheffey would extend their influence beyond their niche media video representation by injecting rap music and hip-hop culture into the professional contest arena. 'Rock' and 'punk-rock' had operated as the default soundtrack and could be heard at all elite professional skateboarding contests during the 1980s (Malott & Peña, 2004). However, participants discussed the 'staleness' of the music and its inability to capture the new energy emanating from street skateboarding. African American skater Barbier recalled,

I was listening to Metallica [rock band] every night when they debuted (laughing), but you heard it at every skate contest—every demo! When that music dropped off—rap was the new thing, DEL, Native tongues, etc., but contests were still playing—the same music. I pushed back against the announcers, 'You got to take that off dude, you need to put rap on for me.' I started bringing my own tapes—a big disruption back then (personal communication, 2018).

These types of small individual acts of resistance would evolve into a groundswell, as noted by Barbier,

Everyone started protesting and bringing their music. 'If he's not skating to it, I'm not doing it either.' It was shocking back then to the contest organizers (laughing). People overlook that stuff, but I remember before it was a 'standard' thing. Pushing back also got a lot more comforting, with [Sean] Sheffey and Jovante [Turner] and more around—there was strength in numbers. Rap music became part of the natural soundtrack over time (personal communication, 2018).

Through these passages, we see the importance of the first individual actions, which over time collectively built to a critical mass of vocal and proactive SOC that helped others find their footing and use music as a form of resistance, ultimately creating change in the aesthetics and tastes in skateboarding culture. In this instance, as posted by Gladney (1995), Rose (1994), and Alridge (2005) hip-hop music became both a 'voice' and 'glue' between SOC. African American pro skater Kareem Campbell also recalled this musical resistance among SOC and attested to the power of the collective groundswell of SOC. Reflecting on the growing power of SOC in skateboarding, Campbell noted,

We pushed them [contest organizers] on everything—from the music [hip-hop] in the beginning to the design of the course. We would boycott the contests if they didn't respond. Steve Rocco [World Industries co-founder] always backed us [preventing penalization], and with so many skaters [and brands] under our belt [World], we could shut anything down, so they had to deal with us and our demands (personal communication, 2018).

From a CRT perspective focused on how individual actions contribute to meaningful change in the lives of POC, Campbell's and Barbier's anecdotes mark a clear delineation of SOC transitioning from no power to demonstrating significant agency and control. They (along with others) did this by developing their sphere of influence in a way that introduced hip-hop as the music of POC and deserving of respect from the broader elite skateboarding culture. In comparison to both the NFL and NBA (Boyd, 2008; Cunningham, 2009; Lorenz & Murray, 2014), which as noted above, clamped down on POC, SOC's resistance should be seen as a significant successful effort towards the transformation of sport. In the next section, I build upon this discussion by examining how SOC advocated for greater creative control over their public representations via skateboard graphics, which also became a site of racial politics connecting back to essential notions of the function of art, commercialism, and representation within African American and POC communities.

7.3 Skateboard graphics as a site of agency and resistance

Examination of skateboarding graphics as a political action for POC first requires a turn towards the historical role of art in African American communities' struggle for justice, visibility and equality in the US. During the Harlem renaissance, 1920s art moved to the fore as an expression of a mix of modernism, a growing black middle class, and mixed patronage (Boyd, 2019; Kaplan, 2013; Wall, 1995; Watson, 1995). These elements all operated concurrently, exploring the potential 'new' role of African Americans and the subsequent politics of creating art, living through life and understanding the world as 'African Americans' or as 'Americans' (Baker Jr., 2013; Carroll, 2005; Hutchinson, 1995). The expressed duality of this experience is commonly referred to as 'the Veil,' as eloquently

presented in *The Souls of Black Folks* by Du Bois (2007), suggesting that for African Americans, our perspective is *always* influenced by our complicated history of arrival in the US. Other historic arts efforts like the Black Art Movement (BAM) (Gladney, 1995; Smith, 1991) acted as new sites of resistance, although art mainly focused on removing the ‘white’ narrative and ‘classically’ taught aesthetic through the production of Black art that promoted a new ‘Black Aesthetic’ during the 1960s and 1970s (Fuller, 1971; Neal, 1968). The works and theory that formed the ‘Black Art Movement,’ during this era acted as important sites where ‘white’ “hegemonic processes were contested” (Robinson, 2005, p. 20), and operated as a companion to the ‘Black Power’ or pro-African American movement of the 1960-1970s (Phelps, 2012; Smethurst, 2006). Although the boundaries of the ‘Black Aesthetic’ (Gayle, 1971) remained fluidly interpreted by each artist (male or female) (Phelps, 2012), the overall movement in all its forms (art, music, novels, poetry, theater, etc.) addressed issues of racism and discrimination head-on through collaborative ideologies (L. G. Collins, 2006; Morgan, 2019; Robinson, 2005), which loosely defined the role of the Black Artist to be ‘service’ to the Black community, and the general progression of the rights and visibility of POC (P. H. Collins, 2006; Smith, 1991). As described by Larry Neal (1968),

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community [...] it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. [...] relate broadly to the Afro-American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood [...] [and] the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms. [...] there are in fact and spirit two Americas — one black, one white. The Black artist [...] primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people[...] to develop a “black

aesthetic.”[...] [...]the cultural values inherent in western history must either be radicalized or destroyed [...] (p. 1).

Neal’s description points to the power of the arts during the BAM to act as a tool and site of activist response to oppression by the dominant ‘white’ culture. More recently, the manifestation of the politics of hip-hop connects the Black Arts Movement of the past to the music, representation, and politics of the present (Gladney, 1995; Phelps, 2012). At the other end of the spectrum, the multiple expressions of the Afro-Futurism Art movement (Anderson & Jones, 2015; Eshun, 2003; Womack, 2013) explore imagined futures, merging the politics of the entire African American experience, offering visions, such as in the work of artist Sun-Ra (Bould, 2007) or Overton Lloyd (Wright, 2013), or in apocalyptic futures for POC (van Veen, 2018). In all these movements, African Americans and POC more broadly continue to seize upon any available spaces or media in which to give voice to the Black perspective operating within a white-dominated culture.

Beyond the discussion of Black art as resistance or ‘a tool for liberation’ (Doss, 1999) lies another question crucial to the understanding of Black Art—must Black art always be in service of the struggle? (Gladney, 1995). In other words, can black artists be seen solely as ‘artists’ first and be allowed by black and white society to create art inspired by their humanity without always referentially connecting to the marginalized status of African Americans in the US? For some in the discussion, like Addison Gayle (1971), author of the *‘The Black Aesthetic,’* focusing on works during the Black Art Movement (BAM), the answer is no. Gayle’s position is that Black politics are inescapable in the creation of ‘Black art’ and “the prevalence of anger in the experience of Black Americans makes it clear that Black art cannot be divorced from this reality (Gladney, 1995, pp. 291-292). However, this interacts

in complex ways with other interpretations by artists and scholars unpacking what it means to be true to themselves and their blackness (Dhondy, 2019), who address a history of oppression and representation as the 'other' (Cureau, 1977), but are also free to interpret the world as they see fit and to dream of commercial success.

These questions intrinsically link back to, and are part of, the dialogue for SOC developing board graphics for themselves that concern their personal experiences with racial politics. In its purest form, a skateboard deck without a graphic is indeed a blank canvas. All professional-grade skateboards in their raw form, without graphics, are produced in 7-ply veneers commonly referred to as 'blanks' (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017), remaining that way until graced by an image, art or statement from a company artist or imagery from a professional skateboarder. The following section focuses on the processes and politics involved when African Americans and other POC receive signature pro-model skateboards. What is the story behind the 'blank canvas' of a skateboard, which contains the potential to continue the line of the Black Art Movement (Gayle, 1971), a form of resistance in both a personal item and a publicly commoditized and commercial product? Multiple narratives surround this process, and the following examples reveal the politics behind the choices, strategies and struggles of SOC.

7.3.1 Exploring the political in signature designs

For many participants turning pro, earning a signature skateboard offered the opportunity to reflect their cultural identities or personal politics in meaningful ways. Beginning primarily in the 1990s, many participants concluded that while the company owners are

accountable for running the company, the skater as 'athletes' and individuals should be responsible for, and have input into, the type of representations and depictions on their 'signature' products. From a CRT perspective, this strategy effectively takes some power out of the hands of 'white' company owners and their notions of what will 'sell' in the skateboarding marketplace, and places some power into the hands of POC. As argued by scholars in action sports concerning gendered power (Thorpe, 2005), and race in traditional sport (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Boyd, 2003; Carrington, 2010; Shropshire, 1996a), often the first steps for establishing agency involve developing negotiated instances of personal power, even when initially constrained by the limitations of a gendered, racialized, heteronormative, hierarchical, capitalist US system. Thus, similar to the changes in the soundtracks of skateboarding culture, small individual acts planted the seeds for greater power for POC in the future.

During the initial stage of agency for POC, while skaters may not have owned the company, their salaries and royalties were interconnected with the sales of their 'signature' products, which ultimately contributes to all skaters' cultural cachet over time (Borden, 2019). Thus, the ability to represent oneself as an individual in the commercial marketplace marks a significant first step towards determining that the Black or POC aesthetic may have value. For many SOC, advocating for their views on personal representations and imagery was their first challenge of the power held by 'white' company owners. While this may seem a small concession, viewing these struggles from a different sporting context, such as traditional US team sports like the NBA, NFL, or NHL, offers perspective. Within those sports, an athlete's differentiation occurs mainly through numbers and names on a

company-owned and designed ‘uniform,’ which offers limited avenues for originality and individualism within that pre-developed model. Therefore, the ability to create a ‘signature’ product using one’s own vision is a significant accomplishment and a marker of growing agency and influence. In some instances, such actions prompted concern and retaliation from company owners, thus reflecting power dynamics between ‘white’ company owners and athletes of colour in other popular sports (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2010). Skaters ‘turning pro’ and the issuance of a ‘signature’ model skateboard demonstrate the culmination of a lifetime of effort by a young skater, earning them status and power in elite skateboarding (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). Examining this process in detail offers us the chance to see how racial politics are expressed and suppressed over time in skateboarding.

In 1989, not only were African American skater Barbier’s ideas for his signature board graphic denied, but like other SOC during that era, his signature model featured a graphic determined by the company with none of his input:

I didn’t want the graphic they gave me. I wanted the LA Kings logo, and I knocked-off [copied] it to use for my board graphic. Instead, it ended up as a small top graphic in pink, and the company used what they wanted—which didn’t represent me. I was living in L.A. and highly influenced by urban culture, and that’s what I liked and that created tension (personal communication, 2018).

Barbier’s experience reveals the challenges faced by SOC during the late 1980s. This often stemmed from difficulty developing connections with company artists due to disparate backgrounds. Barbier recalled,

The brand didn’t have anything that represented me! Their staff artist didn’t create images I was comfortable using. So, I had to knock things off [copy] back then to get anywhere near closer to my vision (personal communication, 2018).

Barbier's experience provides an example of the uneven nature of power dynamics between SOC and 'white' company owners during the late 1980s. Eventually, just as SOC created strategies to integrate hip-hop into their musical representations, Barbier would develop board graphics representing him in the way he wanted: "Over time I got to correct what was wrong in my imagery in the past through different artists, and gear it towards my African American perspective" (personal communication, 2018). Barbier's story also reveals how a skateboarder's choice of board graphics can represent an internal struggle for power that is mostly unknown to the consumer. The early 1990s provided the first opportunities for many SOC to begin to negotiate their private racial politics by harnessing the potential power of board graphics to act as an avenue to address broader issues of race, representation, and politics through skateboarding.

Another example of the potential of the signature skateboard graphic as a political statement can be seen in the origin of African American pro skater Chris 'Dune' Pastras' first signature board graphic. Pastras recalled the importance of ensuring his initial board graphic reflected his identity as African American. The result would be the seminal 'Dune Baby' graphic, depicting an illustration of an African American child (see Appendix G). Pastras believed his graphic was a political tool, which pushed against previous skateboarding imagery and was a matter of personal pride:

At that time [1990], there were black skaters with 'white' characters for [their] board graphics. I couldn't understand it. So that was the inspiration behind my 'Dune Baby' graphic—openly putting a black character on *my* skateboard. I thought, why aren't we represented? And the graphic wasn't necessarily meant to be that racially charged, [against anyone else] it was just, "I'm a black skater, why *not* have a black character on my board?" (personal communication, 2018)

Through Pastras' comment, we witness how a skateboard graphic represented his individual ability to wield power to create an artifact that reflected a political agenda focused on power, self-representation and identity politics. In the case of this graphic, while well-received by his sponsors and the skateboarding public, it caused controversy in some areas of the US, as recalled by Pastras:

The graphic was simple and powerful, but it was controversial at the time. Not within our company, but for kids in the south. Kids would write me letters saying they couldn't wear the T-Shirt with my graphic, to school because [racist] teachers would make them take it off. It was great that they fought to wear it in support of me (personal communication, 2018).

With this simple but effective means of communicating racial identity, Pastras was able to extend the conversation about racial politics and create allies, marking a 1990s trend to demonstrate personal politics through the creation of signature board graphics.

Other skaters from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds took inspiration from such strategies. For example, Iranian American Salman Agah also used his first signature pro model in the 1990s as an opportunity to subtly address racial politics and racist tropes through satire. With this action, Agah attempted to join a broader discussion of race in skateboarding and wrestle power away from racialized images by claiming them for himself:

In the early 90s, a lot of skateboarding graphics had a political message—some loud and some subtle. For my board, I used the stripes from my trademark 'polo' shirt in homage to Hispanic/Latino skater Mark Gonzales. And I'd heard racist people say, 'Middle eastern people are all 'Camel Jockeys,' and use that stereotype. So, I took power back by using a camel instead of the Izod alligator, and it was a subtle, satirical way for us to push back against racist stereotypes (personal communication, 2018).

As a famous skater during that era, Agah used his signature board graphic to acknowledge racism and to foreground racial stereotypes prevalent in US media. He noted particularly the 'Hanging Klansman' graphic created by his sponsor, Real Skateboards, depicting a Klu Klux Klansman hanging from a tree by a noose (1991), which remains one of the most universally heralded political graphics in skateboarding (Cliver, 2006). The Hanging Klansman graphic affected many SOC color like Agah and was influential in seeing board graphics as a site for racial and political commentary:

The Hanging Klansman image is a *profound* graphic, especially as Jim's [Thiebaud's] first board graphic. People are usually nervous about their first board graphic, and Jim took his first graphic to make a statement to all of skateboarding about racism. It showed what was important to him and inspired me [Agah] (personal communication, 2018).

These examples highlight the first way SOC begin to develop political agency and provide a connection to broader efforts of POC in the discussion of race and sport (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2010; Shropshire, 1996b). These first efforts help set a precedent for generations of SOC, who would exercise their agency in multiple ways even when less overtly political.

For example, mid-1990s pro skater, native Hawaiian Jamie Reyes, took advantage of the precedent, issuing graphics that refuted prior sexist imagery in board graphics (Rinehart, 2005). She worked with her team's owner and artist to project her voice through her signature board graphics. Sponsored by one of the only female-owned and art-directed brands in skateboarding history, Rookie Skateboards, Reyes heaped praise upon the seminal New York company and all her board graphics during that period. However, a central personal accomplishment derives from her advocating for a 'signature' board graphic that was profoundly close to her heart; it depicted 'Hawaiian-themed' imagery and

a story told in her native Hawaiian dialect. Reyes believes it was an expression of her power and paid homage to her Hawaiian heritage publicly:

[The Hawaiian] graphic is my favorite, and it is on display in the Smithsonian Gallery. I always wanted a Hawaiian themed graphic—to show who I was and where I was born. Hawaiian imagery allowed me to represent my roots while living in New York City. It even has a story in the [native] ‘pigeon’ language of Hawaii (personal communication, 2018).

A key element of CRT is creating and demonstrating one’s voice, (Bell, 2018; Delgado et al., 2012; Martinez, 2014) and for SOC during the 1990s communicating their politics to intended audiences needed delivery in a meaningful manner and in line with their personalities. Critical thinking is itself a political act, and many skaters strategized how to operate in ways that created impact. This is illustrated in an anecdote by African American skater John Reeves, who recalled that while not politically ‘militant’— meaning not every single board graphic needed to reflect his black identity—he reserved the right to inject the politics of his Black identity:

When I turned pro, I could have whatever graphic I liked, but generally, I let the company design my graphics and focused on skating. But when I wanted to, I created board graphics that represented my identity as a Black man and signaled to the larger collective struggle, like my ‘Uptown Saturday Night’ graphic, based on [hip-hop group] Camp-Lo and Marvin Gaye record, which we [Black people] all know. I would put out graphics when I wanted to say something special (personal communication, 2018.)

In 1998, Asian American skater Kenny Anderson’s first board graphics provided the opportunity to proudly connect to his Asian American heritage at the height of a youthful cartoon-based aesthetic in skateboarding. Anderson recalled, “I told them I wanted a *Japanese* cartoon to represent me, so people know who I am” (personal communication,

2018). Furthermore, as Anderson described, a positive and working relationship with an art department could develop if artists and company owners were willing to listen to their skaters, leading to input from both sides.

Each of the presented cases shows how multiple SOC embedded their personal racial and cultural politics in their signature board graphics. Collectively, their actions contributed to broader narratives of athletes of colour exercising and developing power while advocating for greater control in sport (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2010).

7.4 Navigating new spaces for racial politics: the design of the skateboarding shoe

Another critical avenue that POC skaters used to speak to racial issues was footwear design and new signature products. While there are scholarly examinations of footwear in traditional sport (e.g., Andrews, 1996; Andrews et al., 1998; Boyd, 2003) among others, and as ‘technology’ in skateboarding footwear (Turner, 2015), this section reveals skateboarding footwear as a site of racial politics. In the mid-1990s to early 2000s, shoes represented both lucrative business (Snyder, 2017) and the opportunity for SOC to gain status and greater control. While there are numerous examples of footwear designed by SOC, this passage investigates footwear as a site of agency using three key examples provided by participants to show the power dynamics that connect skateboarding to broader US cultural themes of race.

7.4.1.1 The Sal 23 skateboarding sneaker

In 1992, pro skater Sal Barbier became the first African American skateboarder with a pro model signature endorsed shoe—the ‘Sal 23’ produced by Etnies, a prominent skateboarding footwear manufacturer. The ‘Sal 23’ is considered a transformative shoe and is regarded as one of the top-selling skate shoes of all time (Bengtson, 2013). As recalled by African American pro, John Reeves, “The Sal ‘23’ came out, and it changed everything! *Everyone* wore that shoe, and Sal set an example that we [black skaters] could design” (personal communication, 2018). During our interview, Barbier reflected on the origin and impact of the ‘Sal 23’ and how it continues to live on in re-issues,

My first shoe was all my design from the ground up, built specifically for street skateboarding. *The ‘23’ is still one their best-selling shoes*, and it's been reissued across both brands Etnies and Es' and is part of the new relaunch for the entire Es' brand [a division of Etnies] *and is getting reissued, again* (personal communication, 2018).

The new platform of footwear allowed SOC to directly acknowledge broader popular culture contexts, which informed the salience of race in their lives. Like the artists of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), Barbier seized the opportunity to create a product that connected directly back to an icon of the Black community. Inscribed with the athletic number ‘23’, Barbier’s shoe referenced the athletic number of Michael Jordan from the NBA’s Chicago Bulls, well known in US popular culture (Andrews, 1996; Andrews et al., 1998; Boyd, 2003). Barbier added that design element as an overt celebration of Black prowess and the rise to prominence of black athletes in popular US sports like basketball. During the interview with Barbier, he recalled a limited number of ‘Black’ icons in popular culture during the early 1990s. Barbier affixed these numerals as a direct political act of resistance. In his opinion,

the action subverted a popular notion of ‘whites’ attempting to remove Michael Jordan’s ‘Blackness,’ a theme depicted in the popular US media through Black filmmaker Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (Denzin, 2002). In a pivotal scene in the movie, a racist Italian protagonist is faced by actor Lee, who questions, ‘if his hatred of Black people is so great, why are his favorite icons all Black?’—to which he answers that ‘those’ Black people are something ‘different’ or ‘better’ than Black.

In conversation, Barbier offered that these same exclusionary narratives take place in the rhetoric surrounding African American athlete Michael Jordan, thereby reducing his ‘Blackness’ to ‘equate’ his greatness. As posited in scholarship by Andrews (1996), reducing Jordan’s ‘Blackness’ in the minds of ‘white’ Americans increased Jordan’s marketability to a white public and the signifiers of Jordan’s ‘Blackness’ were a popular topic among public discourse and scholarship alike (Andrews, 1996; Boyd, 2003; Boyd & Shropshire, 2000). Regardless of this fact, Michael Jordan remained a Black icon to Barbier and other African American audiences, albeit with some exceptions over his personal conduct. For the purpose of this discourse, however, in the early 1990s, Jordan’s prowess and visibility represented one of the few universally known Black sports icons. According to Barbier, using the ‘23’ allowed him to subtly pushback against racist stereotypes and popular racist discourses:

The ‘23’ number represented a new ‘Black’ icon when there weren’t many. It was an answer to ‘white’ people trying to take away ‘Blackness’ [from POC]. People would say, Oh, Jordan, he’s not ‘*black*’ he’s something else. He confused ‘white’ people and forced them to deal with their racist stereotypes—the ‘23’ was just a reminder of Black success, and from a design aesthetic, it was cool, so it was a winning combination. (personal communication, 2018).

This example, like many others from participants, illuminates how underlying racial politics informed the lives of SOC and became an active component in their opportunities to design. This first act of agency and signalling to broader racial discourses would be incorporated into designs by other SOC in subsequent decades, with the “Sal 23” design eventually being heralded both within and outside of skateboarding culture (Bengtson, 2013). CRT prompts scholars to unpack the small, individual efforts where the voices and perspectives of POC resonate. Unpacking this political act further, when situated in the context of ‘Black Power’ (e.g., Hill & Rabig, 2012; Joseph, 2006; Van Deburg, 1992) and the ‘Black Arts Movement’ (BAM) (e.g., Gayle, 1971; Morgan, 2019; Phelps, 2012; Smith, 1991), Barbier selected the available canvas, (a shoe) and covertly imbued it with the ‘Black’ aesthetic, unseparated from the ‘Black’ community’, in recognition of the shared struggle (Gayle, 1971). Barbier’s narrative illustrates the rise of a person of colour acting as an artist or ‘creative’ in the early 1990s in the skateboarding industry. The significance of these efforts is substantial because it provides a place for POC to imagine themselves beyond the labour force, as new members of the ‘creative class’ of artists, designers and innovative ideas people (Florida, 2004). Barbier therefore contributed towards social change and a broad range of new experiences for POC in skateboarding.

The previous illustration reveals a strategy of racial politics covertly operating from the ‘inside-out’, creating an iconic product within the constraints of the skateboarding industry and inspiring other POC while engaging in a complex dialogue of resistance with Black history. The next example provides evidence of operating from the ‘outside-in’, developing power outside the skateboarding industry in order to demonstrate an

alternative model of opportunities for audiences of colour both inside and outside of skateboarding. While this use of influence and social capital seems commonplace now, grounding these examples in the past historical narratives of African Americans and POC consistently lacking in resources helps us to better understand the important roles played by POC in the skateboarding industry.

7.4.1.2 The Stevie Williams Signature DGK x Reebok Shoe

During the 2000s, skaters of colour seeking to engage with racial politics in meaningful ways often looked for new opportunities to operate outside of the skateboarding industry. African American pro skater Stevie Williams used this strategy in the mid-2000s. He recalled feeling stifled by his footwear sponsor DC Shoes due to their inability (or choice) not to actively engage with African Americans and broader audiences of colour beyond skateboarding. Unable to bridge this gap, Williams broke ties with DC shoes (the largest skateboarding footwear company at the time) and, at risk to himself and his reputation, developed a partnership with Reebok shoes, a brand not traditionally associated with skateboarding. When Williams' deal was announced, it was considered controversial in skateboarding and many perceived him as 'selling out' (Atencio et al., 2013).

The discussion with Williams for this research offered a different perspective. Williams interpreted the switch to Reebok as a crucial component of a broader strategy to raise awareness of African Americans in skateboarding, and his first step towards supporting future SOC through more relatable messaging towards communities of colour. Williams believed in an active dialogue with African Americans and POC who shared his background, and thought that there should be both grassroots and more extensive

outreach campaigns to under-represented communities in skateboarding, particularly those raised in less favourable or harsh circumstances like his upbringing in North Philadelphia:

I left DC shoes for Reebok because I thought Reebok would allow me to push the [skateboarding] culture forward by [virtue of] being an African American skater—presenting it to the masses. Letting people that didn't know—that Black kids skated. I thought I could be an inspiration to Black kids. I didn't believe DC was pushing the envelope [with POC]. Not to say they weren't doing a good job in skateboarding [culture], but as far as outside of skateboarding, I thought they could do more [outreach], so that was my main intention. Everything we did with Reebok operated from there (personal communication, 2018).

Williams demonstrates how footwear and design offered a new avenue for SOC to not only speak to the current community of skateboarders through their artistic vision but to hopefully inspire non-skating POC. According to Williams, he hoped to act as a symbol of Black excellence as an athlete and designer in an unexplored realm for many POC: skateboarding. Examined on a macro-level from a CRT-driven and Black Art perspective, Williams successfully bridged the gap between his non-skateboarding African American community and the skateboarding culture. Williams' power and influence with skateboarding culture thus enabled him to operate outside of the restrictive skateboarding industry in order to encode both his racial and social politics within his artistic vision. In so doing he continued to challenge racial politics and create change by speaking directly to *both* the communities significant to him.

7.4.1.3 Tensions to POC power in design

The previous narratives highlight the unique opportunities that POC created to make racial statements through their signature footwear products. As illustrated in these examples,

however, there is power in ownership, and like other US sporting contexts, some owners' decisions limited the agency of POC wanting to operate beyond the individual level. This tension serves as a reminder that skateboarding is also a 'contested space' in sports and popular culture (Hall, 1998), which intersects the power of athletes of colour and business (Andrews et al., 1998; Harrison, 2000; Leonard, 2006; Shropshire, 1996b). For example, some SOC discussed feeling a lack of control when unable to add additional SOC to the team due to an owner's directive:

I don't have anything against who they chose, but when I came on, I wanted to bring more [African American skaters] to the team. I wasn't short on ideas, I had a different concept than they did, but I didn't win out (personal communication, 2018).

Comments such as these demonstrate how an SOC's power could be limited in using footwear for a racialized agenda. In another instance, an elite SOC discussed feeling coerced at points during their career:

You asked if I ever felt 'forced' to go along with anything within the skateboarding industry. Well, I didn't want to ride for [prominent footwear company], but my design [was used] to *launch* the brand! This also meant I would make less money due to a lower royalty. I didn't want to be on an unproven [company], and creatively I didn't design the other shoes in the line, so there was a disconnect there (personal communication, 2018).

SOC still encountered limits to their power, but overall, this section shows how despite lacking absolute control, there were multiple instances over decades where SOC used strategies to speak to broader issues of race and demonstrate agency via their signature lines in footwear. These examples also illustrate the struggles by POC to hold creative control over all aspects of their signature products, representations, and identity. To create

more significant equity for POC, many SOC opted to found their own companies—a significant step in controlling their image and creations.

7.5 POC-led skateboarding companies: changing the game

The next section unpacks the effects of the early 1990s trend towards ‘skater-owned’ companies, (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017) and the DIY ethos in skateboarding (Beal, 1995; O’Connor, 2018). Before beginning the analysis, the importance of ownership to the African American community receives attention, followed by an outline of how SOC sought multiple ways to represent themselves and their politics, which evolved into the ultimate expression of all ideas of freedom, identity and reclamation of power for POC historically: business ownership.

7.5.1 Historical racial politics of ownership

Moving beyond athlete or musician or skilled labourer to ‘ownership’ of oneself and ones’ work remains a crucial tenet of the struggle for full equality among African Americans in the US (Hill & Rabig, 2012; Walker, 2009). Although from a philosophical sense, ‘ownership’ is a construct (Retsinas & Belsky, 2002) similar to the construct of ‘race’ (Omi & Howard, 2014), these concepts have real-world repercussions for the people oppressed by these ‘constructed’ notions in America. The historical narrative of African Americans has shown how involuntary servitude and literal ownership of shackled Black bodies become one of the first salient concepts binding Black life in the US (Franklin, 1956; Roediger, 2019). Thus in broad and brief terms, for African Americans, the fight for ‘ownership’ began as a struggle for their minds and bodies apart from the ‘white master’ (Franklin, 1956; Yancy, 2016). Thus,

the relationship to 'ownership' for African Americans stems from a detailed knowledge of a literal understanding of the complex 'ownership' and 'freedom' experience, and the myriad of generational battles to undo and deconstruct its impact on Black lives in the US (e.g., Gaskin, Headen Jr, & White-Means, 2004; Hill & Rabig, 2012; Ongiri, 2009; Yancy, 2016). Initially, with slavery abolished, the struggle moved to 'ownership' of the land 'share cropped' by the same African American former slave hands, consistently cheated out of the fruits of their labour, with the majority stake delivered to the 'white landowner' during the 'Reconstruction' era onward in the US (Blackmon, 2009; Kolchin, 2003). This coincided with the struggle for African Americans to 'own' their vote and not have it stolen away by 'whites' erecting barriers around the voting booth (Franklin, 1956; Grofman & Davidson, 2011). This led to broader collective action by POC (Chong, 2014) in the broader struggle for Civil Rights—literally fighting to 'own' a stakeholder position under the US Constitution (Persily, 2007). The knowledge of 'ownership' continues within the current struggle to undo years of racial discrimination (Morris, 1986). This system deters African Americans from owning cars and homes, and getting educations and jobs (Coates & Morrison, 2011) in a racialized structure designed to thwart any aspect of POC ownership in the former 'master's' land. Thus progress comes slowly and is intimately understood by POC operating under the context of a capitalist system not designed by the formerly subjugated (Williams, 2014).

In 'the arts' more broadly, African Americans relive the experience of control over the Black body and mind in the struggle to retain ownership of their creations and labour. For example, in the music industry, even heralded jazz figure Miles Davis resigned from his label of 30 years because it refused to give him ownership of his creations (Davis & Troupe,

1990). Pioneering musician Prince's battle to own the 'Master' recording tapes of his own creations resulted in one of the most bitter public battles between a music artist and a record label (Touré, 2013). This struggle for proprietorship resulted in the Artist scrawling the word 'slave' on his face during public appearances, and changing his name to an unpronounceable symbol in protest at the tradition of 'white' record labels owning the intellectual property of Black artists (Greene, 1998; Hawkins, 2017; Hines, 2005) while freely incorporating it into contracts for 'white' artists, such as David Bowie. In this way, Prince brought the struggle for ownership over 'black intellectualism' (Vats, 2019) into the 1990s-2000s. Prince's public battle for ownership resulted in the discovery of ingenious new models of creating Black commerce by capitalizing on the newly founded internet (Vats, 2019) in ways that are now commonly adopted by all artists (Vats, 2019).

In sports too, scholars pay special attention to the complex racial politics of 'white owners' and their history of power over African American players (e.g., Boyd, 2008; Edwards, 1969; Leonard, 2012; McDonald & Togliola, 2010; Shropshire, 1996a). One important example of this can be seen in the politics of US professional baseball. The exclusion of African Americans and other POC from US Major Leagues Baseball (MLB) ranks arrived in 1890 through a 'Gentleman's Agreement' between 'white' owners who decided to bar Black players from playing with 'white' players in a professional capacity (Heaphy, 2003). Despite this obstacle, the indomitable spirit of African Americans prompted the development of the 'Black or POC-owned' set of businesses known as the 'Negro Leagues' (Burgos Jr, 2011; Lanctot, 2011). This ingenuity in the face of adversity provided a way for African Americans and other POC to own both their labour and the league, while also

developing smaller cottage industry 'Black-owned' businesses (Nelson & Aaron, 2008). Major League Baseball's integration, however, caused the collective of 'Black-owned' businesses to disappear nearly overnight. While the integration of the MLB remains historically situated as a milestone in US racial politics in sport for players, currently there are no majority-share owned MLB teams (and only a handful of POC with a minority stake in NBA). Likewise, positions in administration remain scarce (Bryant, 2002; Shropshire, 1996a).

This example illustrates that Black people's ownership of their labour and ideas remains a central focus of what it means to be Black and successful. In many sports in the US, Black collegiate athletes operate as the labour force for 'colleges' (Hawkins, 2013), who historically paid little to no attention to the needs of African Americans and their scholarly or cultural needs while earning accolades for their university (Edwards, 1969; Van Rheenen, 2013). Most recently, NFL player Colin Kaepernick's kneeling silent protest and its representation in the media (Rorke & Copeland, 2017) led to the subsequent punishment of losing his job in the NFL. His actions and the groundswell of support and controversy by others helped re-establish sport as a contemporary site of resistance for POC (Intravia, Piquero, & Piquero, 2018). There are, however, few 'alternative' leagues or other options for these athletes; thus, POC like Kaepernick operate under constraint. These examples, along with others, remind us that Black bodies in sport rarely exist beyond the role of labourers—highly paid labourers, but labourers none the less, with limited access to ownership and their own agency to create structural change or develop networks more hospitable for other POC over time.

With this broad overview of African Americans' relationship to ownership in sport and beyond, and its elusiveness in the lives of POC, the idea that a pathway to ownership was available for examination in skateboarding culture within roughly the first 20 years of its history deserves acknowledgment as a significant occurrence. The concept that SOC own, co-own or art-direct brands in a sport under 60 years old is a significant finding and offers valuable insights into skateboarding as an exceptional site of discovery for racial politics. This path developed from the DIY aspect (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2016; Thorpe, 2011) in the informal culture, which allows skateboarding to extend the norms of the traditional sports models in beneficial ways. That informality allows 'the athlete' to also become 'the owner' in ways not generally permitted in most traditional sports (Thorpe, 2011)

7.5.2 The pathway to ownership in elite skateboarding

According to participants, their experiences as POC living through racism gave them the opportunity to see company ownership as a new platform to gain status, address issues of race and racism in skateboarding, and contribute to broader issues of race and the progress of POC. As elite skaters already demonstrating a degree of agency, creating companies represented a leap of faith, and leaving the safety of established brands could result in potential loss of status, pay, or both. From their perspective, however, developing a company also offered the opportunity to bring their voice to the fore and reflect their personalities and ideologies, while encouraging other SOC and perhaps also contributing to new narratives of POC in sport.

African American pro skater Kanteen Russell's story encapsulates the dilemma faced by SOC looking to add their distinct voice to skateboarding during the mid-1990s. Both Kanteen Russell and African American Oscar Jordan were asked to join a famous elite-level company but declined the offer. Instead, they drew inspiration from the DIY aesthetic of their former mentor, Steve Steadham, the first prominent African American company owner of the 1980s. Opting against the safe route of the well-respected 'white' company-owner, they created Shaft Wood Skateboards (a nod to 'John Shaft', a popular figure in African American film history (Denzin, 2002). Russell reflected on the underlying racial and business politics that prompted their actions,

[Skate company owner] is a great guy and [skate company] is a great team, but in skateboarding people base who they put on their companies on who gets along with everybody [the team] and fits the image they're trying to promote. I couldn't see myself on [skate company]—they didn't need us. And it was a predominately white company, in my opinion. They didn't have any minorities on their team. We wanted to have something with a little bit of an edge for people who related to [African American] skaters like us (personal communication, 2018).

Russell and Jordan's sentiments serve as an example of SOC who took advantage of the DIY perspective of skateboarding and chose to use their cultural status to re-frame skateboarding culture in *their* image and offer new cultural perspectives.

Study participants noted several companies owned by SOC that acted as blueprints for other SOC, which are discussed in the following section. These companies, along with many others, represent a sample of the SOC whose careers placed them in the role of cultural intermediaries, acting as agents of change through their contributions to the skateboarding identity.

7.5.2.1 Stereo Skateboards

In 1992, African American professional Skateboarder Chris Pastras co-founded Stereo Skateboards with 'white' professional skater and actor Jason Lee. Through their company, Pastras and Lee attempted to add a new aesthetic to skateboarding focused on a specific African American and Americana perspective. According to Pastras, their strategy involved placing the African American jazz and blues imagery and iconography directly into skateboarding. Their shared vision offered a form of resistance to the dominant narrative of skateboarding imagery of the early-1990s, focused on shock value, as recalled by Pastras:

We wanted to do a retro-based company, and at that time, everything was kind of 'shock value' or gnarly imagery. Stereo [skateboards] was so different. It was life-altering [to the market] in a certain way because the graphics and the whole vibe was—that different! I feel like Stereo's helped to introduce kids to Americana, Soul and Jazz culture, in a way that skateboarding may not have stumbled on it before us. And that's always been part of that mission statement (personal communication, 2018)

According to Pastras, it was a concerted effort, built in part on Pastras' early childhood experiences and Lee's with Americana connections,

My dad was a jazz musician and a professor, and that was the background music of my childhood. But I didn't know what it would mean to me. When Jason Lee and I started traveling, we shared a bond in music through Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash and roots stuff which led us to blues, and then jazz, and it all just came flowing out. (personal communication, 2018)

During my interview with Pastras, he reflected on their legacy as one of the brands owned by a POC who contributed to social change in skateboarding by implementing decidedly African American perspectives into their work,

I've enjoyed injecting African American music [and culture] into skate culture. A lot of skaters have said, "You know what? I never knew anything about jazz music, until I saw your [Stereo Skateboards produced] video 'A Visual Sound,' or 'Tincan Folklore.' You and Jason Lee introduced me to Blues and Jazz via Stereo [skateboards] (personal communication, 2018).

While that story focuses on a musical perspective, Stereo skateboards also helped skateboarders to develop an interest in both film and photography. Stereo's liberal use of the celebrated photography of the Jazz inspired records alongside their vintage filming aesthetic inspired many SOC and skaters more broadly to think beyond modern technology when creating their distinct voice in skateboarding,

Skaters have said, "Because of Stereo, I went to art school. Or I started shooting Super-8 [film] because of you and Jason Lee's photography. Even now, tons of people that are getting into film photography directly because of Jason [Lee's] influence. I mean it's surreal and awe-inspiring. You realize what an impact you can have if you use it correctly (personal communication, 2018).

This example represents Stereo's strategy of presenting one type of African American ideas and culture as a highly visible 'alternative' to the dominant skateboarding narrative. From the mid-1990s on, many SOC also offered other new ideas and perspectives of POC and their lives in the US.

7.5.2.2 *American Dream Skateboards*

Another 'alternative' perspective began in 1995 when African Americans Ron Allen and Alysha Owerka-Moore set up their company, American Dream Skateboards. According to Owerka-Moore, they specifically wanted to address racial stereotypes, and use the company to bring the topic of race to the forefront of discussion in skateboarding. The brand used 'Black Power' imagery, such as the image of Tommy Smith and John Carlos from

the 1968 Olympics, and the black-gloved fist (Edwards, 1969). Graphics also depicted controversial US topics such as the racial background of Jesus Christ (Siker, 2007) examined via their depiction of a 'Black Jesus Christ' board graphic for their African American skater Jahmal Williams.

In my discussions with Owerka-Moore, their strategy, in his own words, was to use a 'pro-Black' and 'pro-POC' narrative, offering another alternative concept of 'Blackness,' and a return to 'Black radicalism' and 'Black activism' in sport (Edwards, 1969) through skateboarding. Owerka-Moore believed activism had quieted in the public discourse and American Dream attempted to offer an 'alternative' range of expressions and representations for POC through their imagery and diverse team. Owerka-Moore's vision was part of a concerted effort to move beyond the dominant discourses in popular media (Denzin, 2002) which began to dictate what 'blackness' consisted of and who performed it correctly (Andrews, 1996; Boyd, 2003) in US sport and popular culture in the 1990s. According to Owerka-More, American Dream was designed to connect to the historical struggles of POC:

American Dream was a predominantly a POC-produced skateboarding company, hyper-political in all the graphics—like the Black Panthers. We introduced the Black Jesus board, which was a controversial concept at the time. We openly celebrated the fact that Ron Allen and I were the [African American] owners with the graphics and media [Asian Americans] Spencer Fujimoto, and Brian Cheung was also on the team, which was very diverse. The company focus was on being intellectual, black, and positive, as opposed to some of the [popular culture] negative stereotypes of 'blackness' (personal communication, 2018).

From the discussion with Owerka-Moore, representations of the 'intellectual Black' and the 'emotionally intelligent Black,' as well as positive images of other racial backgrounds, were

missing from many mainstream representations in popular media and culture (Carrington, 2010; Denzin, 2002; Jackson, 2006). American Dream offered a form of resistance operating through skateboarding culture. Co-founder, African American pro skater Ron Allen, also added that he “studied and researched a lot of Black History to bring that element to the company correctly” (personal communication, 2018). Allen’s impetus also came from his experiences travelling around the world and he sensed that skateboarding culture, and its DIY ethos (Borden, 2019) was not reaching the inner-city and youth who might be best served by it. Allen noted in our discussion, “[The skateboard] is an inexpensive item, which can get them rolling positively” (personal communication, 2018). Allen’s intuition resulted in American Dream:

We thought of the inner-city kid and how skateboarding did not reach out to them, which we thought was prejudiced—not racist, but prejudiced. Like, ‘Oh, you thought they didn't have enough money,’ or they wouldn’t be interested? I know parents want to make sure that their kids a positive direction in life. We thought, “Let's build off that instead of building off middle-class kids who might not care about [the history] of what we make. The inner cities—nobody talked to them, the Black, Chinese, or Spanish kids. We thought the industry was missing out on kids who could benefit from skateboarding, and that’s how we operated (personal communication, 2018).

The ‘voice’ and strategy of these African American skaters served to unite POC, from similar backgrounds. Their initial grassroots efforts on tour and the mentoring of communities of colour are still used by Allen to support non-profit skate organizations and outreach.

Reflecting on their impact, Allen offered this perspective:

Through our outreach, ads, and graphics, and of course, we wax poetic on ourselves as we get older—but I do believe through American Dream we said ‘Everybody is welcome—we’re all here. Everybody is included,

so come into skateboarding'. And we are one of the few companies trying to do that (personal communication, 2018)

From the 1990s onward, numerous SOC focused on owning and presenting their visions of skateboarding in a manner that placed their racial and multiple cultural identities in the foreground. Another example of a highly regarded racially and culturally driven company was Dynasty skateboards, which offered an Asian American perspective.

7.5.2.3 *Dynasty Skateboards*

Dynasty skateboards was initially founded by Asian American Kien Liu, with a predominantly Asian American pro team featuring Satva Leung, Spencer Fujimoto, and African American John Reeves, along with other multicultural amateur skateboarders. African American John Reeves spoke of the politics behind the company, and the proudly Asian American founder,

[Regarding] Kien Lieu owning Dynasty—he was the creative force behind it. The [board] graphics, they were the graphics he wanted. He made the team that he wanted, and he named the brand, 'Dynasty Skateboards.' He wanted it all to be Asian influenced, and it reflected what he loved, kung-fu, DJ'ing. He [Kien Lieu] provided the foundation for the creative stuff, and he made it all (personal communication, 2018).

Asian American pro skater Spencer Fujimoto also confirmed the Dynasty project's racial politics—a company spearheaded by Asian American Kien Lieu's focus on adding greater diversity to skateboarding culture via Asian-inspired iconography and design:

Dynasty—totally his concept. Kien Lieu was into Taoism, Bruce Lee, and metaphysical thinking. Kung Fu, DJ'ing—that was his thing, B-Boy'ing [breakdancing] that was his *shit!* And you know, I'm all for it—cause that's my shit, too (laughing). We were all excited to bring a full team with an Asian perspective to skateboarding (personal communication, 2018).

The next group of examples together illustrate how multiple SOC introduced a Latino/Hispanic perspective, in the mid-1990s, a new African American perspective in the early 2000s, and a global female SOC-driven narrative in the 2010s, which all contributed to social change through skateboarding.

7.5.2.4 Neighborhood Skateboards, DGK Skateboards, and Meow Skateboards

Armando Barajas and Julio De La Cruz were elite skaters with a prominent skateboarding company, who departed in order to form their own brand, Hispanic/Latino-driven Neighborhood skateboards. The duo actively engaged with and took inspiration from the LA Chicano culture and focused on speaking to and inspiring others from a similar background through their media and grassroots efforts. Although creating their own company meant potentially reaching a smaller group of skaters and lower earnings, partner African American Bryan Ridgeway discussed the importance of relaying their racial and cultural identity through the media to the duo, and their desire for outreach to their intended audience: those who understood LA Chicano culture.

Julio and Armando didn't feel they were listened to at (another skateboard company). They wanted to represent themselves and their culture the way they saw fit. They came to me with their ideas based on Hispanic/Latino culture in LA, and they knew what they wanted to represent [in skateboarding] and who they wanted to reach. They liked Low-Rider culture, the [Catholic] cherub, and Old English letterings. They did all the design and imagery, and the music for the videos they wanted to make. I helped with production, but the ideas were theirs (personal communication, 2018).

From this example, SOC attempted to reach an intended audience, from a similar cultural perspective, regardless of whether their viewpoint might be understood or appreciated by the dominant group in skateboarding.

Decades later, in the 2000s, African American pro skater, and founder of DGK Skateboards, Stevie Williams espoused a similar sentiment of reaching an intended audience through shared cultural heritage. In the 2000s, Williams also drew upon his experiences in the urban area of North Philadelphia and offered his unapologetic urban perspective on skateboarding, through DGK skateboards:

My dad told me never to forget where I came from, and I address kids through the way they live in the 'hood—their experiences. That's how I grew up, and I try to speak in the language and images we all understand. They live a different life than kids in the suburbs. If other people don't understand DGK—it's cool. Black kids know I grew up just like them and I just try to show them that they can make it in skateboarding—another way out the 'hood (personal communication, 2018)

Williams' retelling highlights another instance of a concerted strategy by POC to engage specific audiences of colour, through iconography and a 'voice' created through similar experiences. A more recent example of this approach to engage SOC is found in stories from female-led, LGBTQ, and women of colour-founded company, Meow Skateboards.

Created in 2012, and operating with a collective approach, Meow skateboards celebrates the racial and ethnic diversity among their female-led team. Meow also democratically allows all of their team-riders to contribute art to the company, providing greater control over skater's representations (for snowboarding see (Thorpe, 2011). The company was co-founded by legendary female pro SOC, Latinx/Hispanic Vanessa Torres, and Amy Caron, alongside Lisa Whitaker, the founder of the Girls Skate Alliance network. Meow's approach allows the voices of POC and non-POC to come to the fore. In Torres' initial foray into professional skateboarding, she experienced a lack of control over her

image and representation. Feminist scholars of action sports have noted this as a negative consequence of the gendered power dynamics in informal sporting cultures (Wheaton, 2016), like skateboarding. According to Torres,

My first board wasn't my [idea] it was like a landscape, and it just said my name across it "Vanessa," and I mean I loved it because I was 16 and I thought—OMG, this is amazing—that skateboarding had taken me this far. But I was only 16, and there were a lot of issues because it wasn't just my [signature] boards. I was under contract for apparel, so I had to wear their clothes and was always in breach of contract because they weren't designing or thinking about a young woman's needs (personal communication, 2018).

For Torres, the joy of turning pro, coupled with losing the ability to express herself through her clothing choices, proved tumultuous. Thus, Torres saw Meow skateboards as a natural progression for herself and the best platform to give voice to women more broadly,

Meow is so important to me. It made complete sense to get on board with these women. I have been in skateboarding since I was 17, and every chain of events led me here. For women, the progress has been so slow, and it almost feels non-existent at times. With Meow—we started a company to build a foundation and give women and young girls a platform. Not based on your sex, your gender, just a place to come-a community. It would be a safe space. And so, I was so adamant about becoming part of Meow and starting a company starting from the ground up (personal communication, 2018)

Through co-founding Meow, Torres created the opportunity afforded to other male SOC—to speak to their audience through their voice based on their past experiences as POC and as women in skateboarding. Torres and her compatriots created a new, more diverse model of skateboarding designed to address the multiple and intersectional power inequalities present in skateboarding. Meow provided a new outlet where women (who are still

underrepresented) are in control of their images, graphics, and representation in the media (for similar observations in snowboarding, see (Thorpe, 2011).

Using a CRT perspective in sport (Carrington, 2010; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Hylton, 2009, 2010) to examine how POC demonstrate their agency, this section provides clear evidence of POC moving beyond elite athlete status to develop companies and become the 'owners' of those entities. It is the power in 'ownership' that creates the opportunity to support a less restrained SOC racial and cultural agenda. In so doing, they have added to the collective voices of POC in skateboarding and provided the crucial element of ownership to the experiences of POC, thereby marking them as agents of change.

The following section outlines 'alternative' models of ownership, which also contributed to greater inclusivity and acted as inspirations for SOC. These new models offered multiple ways in which POC might create portfolios that further supported the advancement of POC in skateboarding culture.

7.5.3 The introduction of new models of ownership and representation

Participants noted that during the 1990s, African American Kareem Campbell created new paradigms of ownership and agency, as well as influencing and mentoring numerous SOC both publicly and privately. Latino/Hispanic photographer Chris Ortiz noted that Campbell operated at an elite level while leveraging his prowess and influence across multiple media and business platforms. Ortiz reflected:

Kareem Campbell is like 'Natas' and 'Gonz' [legendary skaters]; top of the top. Kareem created and owned brands and operated across platforms. The first skater of colour to start a shoe brand with influence around the world, and a leading footwear brand in the skate industry. On the business side, he helped a lot of people's lifestyle—making sure they were paid what they were worth and taken care of in ways that hadn't happened before, a true innovator (personal communication, 2018)

Ortiz and other's comments demonstrate Campbell's legacy as the first African American (and POC more broadly) as a founder and owner of multiple brands and responsible for creating more significant equity in pay for pro skaters.

What makes Campbell's ownership model unique, and a milestone for POC, is that he retained a 'signature' model and salary as an elite level athlete from his sponsor, the influential skateboarding brand World Industries (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017), while owning and operating a separate company, Menace Skateboards. Menace contained a different roster of predominantly SOC whom Campbell mentored, with global distribution duties and overheads secured by World Industries. This was an incredible development for the time. With this new business model, a pro skater (POC or otherwise) could receive a paycheck *and* multi-layered support from their sponsor, while retaining an ownership stake and creative control over a separate entity *without* giving up the benefits of their current stability to support their creative endeavour. Before this model, SOC could not experience this level of freedom without putting themselves at risk in a new venture, as demonstrated by other narratives from SOC.

To put this into context as a milestone for POC in the US sporting context, it is akin to Michael Jordan playing for the Chicago Bulls while also owning the LA Lakers and picking the roster. Campbell used his freedom of choice to create Menace skateboards (named

partly in homage to African American LA film *Menace to Society* (Denzin, 2002)). *Menace* featured a similar decidedly gritty LA-inspired skateboarding aesthetic, which was new to skateboarding at that time. Hispanic/Latino photographer Chris Ortiz discussed Campbell's role in creating a platform for underrepresented communities through *Menace* and later his brand *City Stars*:

Kareem started the movement of the 'street' world [aesthetic]. He put skaters from the 'hood on his team and in the magazines. That hadn't happened before and that LA city life wasn't on display. We took skate photos in areas where people got shot, but that's where the [team] guys lived. Kareem took them underneath his wing, and they're still some of the most respected, the OG [*Menace*] crew for what they brought to skateboarding during that era (personal communication, 2018).

This account and others from participants reveal Campbell's role in making 'street' and an 'urban-aesthetic' popular. These narratives reveal the impact and popularity of the urban aesthetic earlier than previously noted in the current literature (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010).

Campbell also became the first African American to contribute to the first publicly traded skateboarding company, World Industries. The popularity of World Industries and Kareem's brands eventually led to a multi-million dollar sale (Borden, 2019; Snyder, 2017). The former World Industries CEO discussed the sale during an interview with *Jenkem* magazine in 2014,

They gave us an offer of 29 million dollars for 70% of the company. So we end up doing it, and after all the negotiations, loans, contracts, earn-outs, and employment contracts, we ended up with millions in our bank accounts in October of 1998 (Michina, 2014).

Though this comment demonstrates the money generated from the popularity of the World Industries and Axion, Campbell declined payment from the deal. During our interview, Campbell recalled that the decision to retain control of City Stars and Axion footwear was due in part to his perspective on ownership as a POC:

I was first offered one million and then two million to sell Axion and City Stars, but those brands were born from my blood sweat and tears, as a pro skater. Those were my [handpicked] teams. I was still a pro skater, and I couldn't just throw it away for money. They were part of my legacy, so I went to court to retain control of my brands (personal communication, 2018).

With this action in defiance of the sale, Campbell contributed to the legacy of SOC by resisting power even in the face of economic pressure. Campbell's retelling serves as an example of the importance of ownership and control to many SOC. Participants believed that this public dispute provided a learning opportunity for all SOC. During our discussion, Campbell reflected on his role in creating new avenues for POC in skateboarding:

If anything, maybe, I setup a blueprint, because I let people know that they could be themselves. It's not even necessarily about changing things to be orientated towards 'hip-hop,' or 'street.' It was about adding any new element—letting people know they can do it their way, and it can be accepted, in every avenue (personal communication, 2018).

From Campbell's viewpoint, his actions and progression provided a model for POC and non-POC alike to see skateboarding as a site to create agency and cultural change through their actions. All of the participants in this study felt Campbell's multiple contributions added to the legacy of SOC and provided opportunities to highlight the multifaceted lives of POC connected through skateboarding.

7.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates how POC not only fought for but succeeded in gaining a substantial level of control over their representations, visibility and positioning in multiple ways within the skateboarding industry, including developing the ultimate vehicle for their creative agency; their own companies. The creation of space for POC and their narratives within the unique area of skateboarding remains remarkable, considering these same elements continue to elude POC in more traditional sport in the US (regardless of their salaries). In traditional sporting cultures, the voices and perspectives of POC remain constrained in overt and covert ways through the power levers of 'white' ownership. As demonstrated in the discussion of the Black Arts movement, the ultimate goal (and responsibility) of the 'Black' and POC-driven aesthetic in art is to demonstrate that POC both *exist* and have a *right* to live and thrive beyond the constraints of the minds of a 'white' dominant culture. All the efforts of POC in this chapter demonstrate their agency, their voice and perspective in ways that contribute to their imagined communities through skateboarding culture. Not only are there examples showcasing the ways POC subverted popular notions and stereotypes of POC, but they also created artifacts that could speak through the language and aspects of the visual representations of historic POC. My selected examples are reflective of many more that reveal multiple examples of SOC who contributed to social change in skateboarding culture as cultural intermediaries. This chapter establishes clear evidence of the 'masked' and oppressed voices of POC, who demonstrated their agency and developed multiple platforms to give 'voice' to Black people and other POC more broadly. Although schools of thought differ on whether 'Black art'

should be in service of the 'struggle' (Neal, 1968), a work for 'humanity' (Phelps, 2012; Smith, 1991) or the individually expressive voice (Gladney, 1995), all of these stories demonstrate aspects of each. Together they show POC effectively operating, thriving and contributing to skateboarding culture as skaters, artists, owners and POC who are reflexive, responsive and responsible to their diverse communities.

8 Conclusions: Reading the Lines

In skateboarding, the phrase 'a line' represents the movements, actions, and physical approach a skater uses to engage with space, structure, or a component of a given area in front of them. Depending on mindset and skill level, the elements before a skater represent obstacles or opportunities to display deftness or ineptitude. In skateboarding culture, skateboarders 'read' the lines performed by others, attempting to put themselves in the position of the skater as they witness their navigation of space. The 'lines' expressed at any point offer insight into how an individual explores the world and creates strategies to address changes within the moment and the scene before them. An 'inspiring line' is one that not only engages the obstacles and opportunities but reminds the reader/viewer/fellow skater of new possibilities beyond previous expectations. The individual and collective narratives of POC in elite skateboarding shared in this thesis similarly defy expectations and offer stories of alternative approaches used by POC while navigating the obstacles and opportunities within skateboarding culture, which amount to historical lines throughout the decades in skateboarding.

This project identifies the multiple strategies or 'lines' developed by POC as they navigated the obstacles and opportunities presented through elite skateboarding culture. Through interviews and analysis of generations of SOC, this thesis has presented stories of how skateboarding became a vessel for fun, expression, and community building in their lives. Each reflected upon the impact of race and racism on their lives and their attempts to defeat

subtle and explicit racist ideologies and create space for themselves and others in the US at various stages during their careers. Ultimately the thesis reveals how skateboarding created opportunities for POC to express themselves and their individual and collective identities in ways that ultimately created change in skateboarding culture. In this final, concluding chapter, the purpose of the thesis is outlined, as well as the original contributions to the literature on race in skateboarding. Following this, reflections on the methodological challenges, benefits, and responsibilities of the research are offered. The thesis concludes by discussing the limitations of the research, future directions for further scholarship and final thoughts regarding the project's outcomes.

8.1 The origins and goals of the thesis

The origin of this thesis was deeply grounded in my own introduction to skateboarding, experienced as a site of collective effort and community struggle — a specific moment of crisis among disparate groups that prompted the birth of an emerging local skateboarding community. Guided by my varied experiences of race in skateboarding culture, as an African American male with multiple positions within the US skateboarding industry, and armed with Critical Race Theory (CRT), this project sought to answer a primary question: What are the experiences of African Americans and People of Colour in elite skateboarding culture in the United States? This thesis also aimed to answer the following secondary questions: What strategies were developed individually and collectively by SOC to support one another and navigate racial power? In what ways might SOC have acted as agents of change in skateboarding culture?

In seeking to answer the proposed questions, the thesis creates a new space for the voices of POC in the literature on race in skateboarding. In so doing, it attempts to provide a context for their stories, images, and representations, so that they might be understood through their interpretations. Building on the question, “Can the black athlete speak?” (Carrington, 2010, p. 10) this research brings skateboarding into the broader discussion of race and sport. It further extends the argument by allowing multiple POC from various positionalities ‘to speak’ rather than be spoken of. As this thesis clearly illustrates, POC do ‘speak’ when offered a safe opportunity and an empathetic ear. The use of CRT in this project placed the voices of POC at the forefront of the investigation, as proposed for all CRT-guided research, allowing them to define their own experiences and understandings (Brooks et al., 2017; Delgado et al., 2012). Their voices offered a wealth of experiences that allow deeper understanding of how thoroughly race and racism operated as a salient part of their lives before skateboarding and continued to be a critical lens through which they gauged their experiences in elite skateboarding culture.

Those stories revealed that SOC operated under a ‘web of racism’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Collins, 2009), and each participant sought multiple ways to develop personal agency over time. During interviews, participants took the opportunity to reflect on their interpretations of their actions, media representations, and positive and negative experiences while developing influence within elite skateboarding culture. Taking inspiration from CRT, these narratives were placed in dialogue with each other, and with the wider literature (on sport, race, and Black experiences in other contexts) to identify broader trends and highlight the multiple ways in which racism influences their lives, both

past and present. In so doing, this project identified multiple examples of the individual and collective strategies created by POC to confront and disrupt racial power relations and forms of racism. Furthermore, this research offers evidence of the struggles, successes, and stalemates that provide a 'roadmap' of how change occurred for POC in elite skateboarding culture, as well as the lived experiences of those involved in this cultural shift.

8.2 CRT as theory and methodology

Throughout this research, I drew upon CRT and the work of other scholars interested in anti-racist agendas (e.g., Brooks et al., 2017; Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009; Solorzano et al., 2000). Brooks et al. (2017) provided an important definition of the CRT framework, which underpinned this project:

We define CRT in sport as a theoretical and analytical framework that contextualizes US sport (and beyond) in racism[...] challenges the ways race and racism impact sport structures, practices, experiences, and discourses, yet it has liberatory potential (pp. 5-6)

This thesis extended the discussion and definition of CRT in sport proposed by Brooks et al. (2017) and others into skateboarding culture. In broad terms, the use of a CRT-driven approach should achieve the purpose proposed by Hylton (2010):

[CRT]posits that race or racism act as the central focus to any question because we live in a racist society; the research openly provides challenges to dominant ideas of objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity in so doing it critiques the structures and power relations and truths accepted by white structures rather than specific 'white' people; it creates work which functionally places 'social justice and transformation at the center of research created, research which makes the voices of people marginalized in research the central focus, and the utilization of CRT operates in ways which are challenge former ways of knowing and interrogates dogmas and orthodoxies (p. 339)

All these tenets of CRT were incorporated into this project's objectives, methodology, analysis, and representational style. Importantly, this research decentralized 'whiteness' in skateboarding and placed the voices of POC and their historical narratives at the forefront of the project. It then challenged previous norms of scholarship that addressed race through the centralizing of 'whiteness' as the unreflexive 'norm' to understand the world. Too much of this earlier research offered 'white' voices to 'speak' for the experiences of POC or interpret their actions without making them part of the research (e.g., Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2007; Yochim, 2010). By placing the voices of SOC at the centre, this research reveals that skateboarding has been a continuous site of struggle and success, a 'contested space' (Hall, 2018) for POC from the mid-1970s onward.

Through the lives of participants and CRT analysis, new knowledge was created, which has challenged previous scholarship that suggested POC are 'tokens' in skateboarding culture and skateboarding media (Yochim, 2010), or that POC successes operate 'unaware' of the broader struggles of POC in the US (Atencio et al., 2013). As noted by participants in this research, these readings inadvertently placed POC as the 'other' and outside of skateboarding culture, rather than as elite SOC who have earned their place as cultural intermediaries.

CRT, as theory and methodology, guided the research method of conducting interviews with 40 male and seven female SOC, and undertaking media analysis. The multiple participants and positionalities allowed mapping of a full range of experiences of SOC in accordance with CRT (Brooks et al., 2017; Hylton, 2010), which demonstrates that the lives of POC are not monolithic. Exploring the stories of POC before they began

skateboarding enabled a deeper understanding of the level of change that later occurred in the lives of participants. When research uses CRT in sport in this manner, it can offer crucial insights and perspectives that may be missed by other methods. According to Brooks et al. (2017),

...people of color are validated in and of themselves, no longer invisible or unimportant or part of the culture of a subgroup. Moreover, the experiences of people of color are given within a context, a historical understanding of racism, sexism, homophobia, and its accompanying effects. Thus, individual and community experiences occur and are studied as part of living with racism as a structural antecedent that shapes, recapitulates, and justifies the relational dynamics [...] that maintain people of color as inherently different and deviant (p. 8).

Similarly, this thesis centres participants' lives and understandings of race, enabling understanding of how elite skateboarding culture acted as a site of exploration that challenged and/or supported previous norms, expectations, and stereotypes. Collectively the participants' stories form a 'counter-narrative' to highlight how POC experience race in elite skateboarding. In this approach, I borrowed from other scholars who use interviews as a recognized component of CRT-driven processes to provide context to the struggles and successes that mark the experiences of POC (Brooks et al., 2017; Harper, 2009; Solorzano et al., 2000).

CRT also guided the analysis of niche media by creating a framework that proposes we ask participants how they interpret their lives and their representations. This differs from those who read the physical body and its representation as 'texts' and draw conclusions from those texts without the voices of POC (Atencio et al., 2013; Yochim, 2010). This research incorporated SOC (the intended audience) who read those images and

representations and unpacked the meanings they drew from SOC in media. In this research, questions relating to representations included the SOC depicted in those representations and explored the level of agency experienced in the creation of those media narratives.

Additionally, CRT aided this research through its criticism of 'colour-blind' approaches to discussions of racism in sport (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2009, 2010). These presuppose that non-POC and POC lives operate similarly and within a meritocracy; that is, with the same and equal access to fulfillment in life (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado et al., 2012). This research operated with an understanding that the 'colour-blind' perspective obscures the historic wrongdoings to POC and leaves unacknowledged the deeply systematic ways in which race affects the lives of POC. In sum, the design and analysis elements of this project reflect my understanding of CRT, which acknowledges that racism is a fundamental component of the lives of POC. Therefore in order to pursue the project's goal of creating future anti-racist agendas (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2010), it needed to be researched through the narratives of multiple SOC. In this project, CRT allowed the research to contribute significant interrogations of racial politics, suggesting that these types of questions have value and are significant. Beyond this, these questions and analyses addressed the previously overlooked and silenced ways in which racism affected participants and their communities. As evidenced in this thesis, these experiences in skateboarding guided participants' perceptions of power, freedom and agency in their careers. Brooks et al. (2017) extend Bernal (2002) support of the importance of the experiences of POC by applying them to sport, arguing that these are "relevant, and

necessary to understanding, analyzing, and theorizing about sport and racial subordination”
(p. 5)

Developing and applying a CRT approach was not an easy task, and there were members of the skateboarding community outside of the participant sample who questioned the necessity of applying a CRT perspective. In so doing, their arguments were similar to common critiques of CRT (Hylton, 2009, 2010). Some feared the pursuit of an understanding of racial politics might place too much emphasis on racial injustices of the ‘past’, capable of igniting a new tension when we are supposedly ‘beyond race.’ Others implied that because ‘we’ (skaters) all share the same love for skateboarding, it was unnecessary to understand the individual lives of POC. In the spirit of CRT, however, this research allowed POC to speak for themselves, which contributes to the knowledge of how experiences of race differed across participants and periods. Furthermore, it revealed that the experiences of POC operated across a spectrum in ways that were not necessarily the same as for all other POC. This research heeded CRT calls for unpacking how race is ‘real’ in participants’ lives and allowed them to guide the narrative in ways that revealed how *they* feel they were affected (or not) in ways that are unacknowledged in a ‘colourblind’ approach or perspectives that place ‘whiteness’ at the centre of the research.

8.3 Key research findings

This thesis provides a multidimensional perspective of the various ways in which POC encounter and engage with racism and racial formations throughout their lives. In Chapter 4, the first section showed how family and early life experiences were central to the way participants understood notions of race and racial politics. A broad range of anti-racist

strategies were passed down to participants via their families and communities. The chapter also offered examples of SOC introductions to skateboarding, illuminating how the informality of the culture made each engagement unique. However, the analysis uncovered a common thread across the decades. Most participants' first encounters with and early experiences of skateboarding were informed by their racial backgrounds. The approach of examining participants' experiences across a broad period of time (mid-1970s to 2010) revealed how skateboarding culture was and continues to be reflective of the broader localized racial politics of their local community. The research showed, however, that those localized racial politics could be transformed through individual POC's capacity to build bridges and coalitions, which often results in new racial formations. As illustrated, this process created tension, camaraderie, and coalitions between POC and non-POC across a broad spectrum of people and positionalities from the 1970s to the 2010s. This finding offers a more nuanced historical narrative, illustrating skateboarding culture as a 'contested space' (Hall, 2018) with positive and negative possibilities. It also contrasts with previous scholarship, which frames skateboarding as a largely 'white space' with limited response and reaction to communities of colour (Atencio et al., 2013; Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2007; Yochim, 2010). When viewed through the lens of CRT, it becomes apparent that the informal nature of skateboarding created the opportunity to challenge or adhere to the broader pressures of racialized norms, offering the prospect for empowerment.

Chapter 5 illustrated that in the informal skateboarding culture, all aspiring professionals needed to be seen by members of the elite skateboarding industry and developed different strategies to achieve this. Subsequently, the research suggests that for

non-California-based POC, the transition to the West Coast often carried an additional subtext; the hope of escape to ‘Southern California,’ which was imagined as racially ‘harmonious.’ The research participants revealed the salience of race and power, and how SOC dreamed of greater racial equity in their future. This chapter further provided evidence of the importance of mentors, because of the sport’s informal culture. Successful mentorship was often tied to all parties’ individual thoughts on race and interracial relationships, which consciously and subconsciously underscored their ability to find ways to relate to each other. Broadly, this chapter showed the complications, compromises, and capabilities that existed when joining and remaining part of an elite skateboarding team. Furthermore, it highlighted how the power dynamics among members operated fluidly in both supportive and debilitating ways.

Chapter 6 incorporated a qualitative and quantitative media analysis to examine the presence of POC in skateboarding niche media, focused on magazines. This analysis identified POC as regularly featured on the covers of niche media from the mid-1970s to the present day. This research offers a significant contribution to the skateboarding literature and presents an alternative perspective to the literature that suggests SOC are modern “tokens” (Yochim, 2010, p. 102). Regardless of whether white readers noticed the visibility of SOC, CRT and research on race suggest that POC may interpret media differently from their white counterparts in significant ways (e.g., Boyd, 2003; Carrington, 2010; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). The positive media portrayals of SOC as members of elite skateboarding culture both individually and collectively alongside ‘white’ elite skaters were revealed as tremendously significant for SOC across generations. For many, it offered the

impetus for pursuing their careers in elite skateboarding and imparted the notion that elite skateboarding might offer a more accepting space for POC. Following this, the chapter illustrated the struggles and strategies SOC used to create spaces for themselves through niche media and showed how those efforts engaged broader politics and stereotypes in skateboarding culture across the decades. Importantly, it highlighted how POC became founders of niche media and media influencers, as well as showing the concerted media campaigns to feature more POC. The rise of the 'urban' aesthetic, and the 'Black icon' in popular culture, were shown to create new moments of solidarity and difficulties for SOC.

Chapter 7, the fourth and final empirical chapter, detailed the dynamic shifts in power that occurred across the decades, leading to SOC becoming agents of change. The exploration outlined the transition of power from 'white' company owners to SOC who grew discontent with their role as athletes with limited input about their representations. The chapter illustrated how SOC acknowledged and harnessed their growing value as influencers and seized upon opportunities to control their representations. This progression towards increased agency of SOC was then examined through CRT and explored in relation to previous historical attempts by POC to gain power and control over their portrayals in art, music, and design. The increasingly significant cultural influence eventually led to other, more overt efforts to create a more hospitable, responsive environment for other SOC. The culmination of these efforts, in the final analysis, illustrates the impact of SOC, who emerged as new arbiters of power as owners of companies in the skateboarding industry.

8.4 Synthesizing the contributions: power, race, and agency

The thesis contributes to our understanding of power by first revealing the multiple levels of subjugation experienced by POC and their communities and how they understood their lives as shaped and constrained by racism. With this frame, the thesis offers various examples of how participants' introductions to skateboarding became a new 'site' of politics, where each positionality offered various degrees of opportunity to confront local stereotypes and cultural norms. For many SOC, one of the critical strategies to combat racialized experiences involved moving to California, the hub of the skateboarding industry, to be closer to the source of power. Even for those uncertain of the outcome of the journey, the concept of 'California' still tempted SOC to seek greater access to the power structures of the industry and the opportunity to advance in elite skateboarding. The stories of SOC's process of recruitment to elite teams also showed how access to power was deeply intertwined with informal practices and relationships within skateboarding culture (similar to other action sports (Wheaton, 2013)). Having a mentor to aid SOC in navigating those informal practices, either covertly or overtly, generally correlated with SOC's descriptions of their experience as an elite amateur as positive or negative. This was regardless of whether the mentor was POC or non-POC, though SOC often felt a stronger connection and sense of kinship with other SOC.

As SOC transitioned into elite skateboarding status, the thesis identified the complicated journey towards developing a level of power in elite skateboarding culture. In so doing, this research drew upon participants' anecdotes to identify the key moments at which they began to see and understand their growing power within elite skateboarding.

The study also revealed how SOC recognized that there was power in their visibility and the growing ranks of SOC over time. Together, the four chapters show that power was not just 'given' and that POC across generations, and different geographic spaces, sought to make themselves and their voices heard, often developing strategies with non-POC to address issues and problems of power and influence. When placing those actions in accordance with CRT and the importance of SOC's successes in elite skateboarding culture, returning to the propositions of CRT is useful.

CRT posits that racism and unequal access to power is part of the everyday lives of POC; "the usual way society does business" in the US (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 7). These claims are clearly illustrated in these narratives of SOC. Most importantly, the racisms in the US are built into the *structures* of life (Bell, 2018; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Thus, when examining the struggles of SOC to make themselves heard, their achievements are substantial. Understanding the role of power, through its effect on racial formations in their lives, revealed SOC's struggles and advancements being navigated within a system *designed* to disenfranchise them. As posted by Delgado et al. (2012), in the US, "racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (psychically), [...] there is often little incentive to eradicate it" (p. 8). The SOC interviewed in this research operated within similar power relationships. 'White' company owners dictated the norms of elite skateboarding culture and only changed in response to radical efforts by SOC to redistribute power. Thus, when SOC developed strategies that were successful, those advancements were significant and impactful. Those collective actions created a foundation and inspiration for subsequent generations of SOC. Examining strategies and change over

time, this thesis reveals how subsequent generations were able to build upon the work of previous generations, creating stronger coalitions and exerting power and influence on skateboarding culture. Ultimately, gaining momentum over time, such efforts created change, with POC achieving status and power in their roles as cultural intermediaries. Those cultural intermediaries of colour played key roles in defining elite skateboarding culture. Some narratives of SOC also offer new insights into the possibilities of models of ownership by POC in sports, in ways still not commonplace in more traditional, organized sports (Carrington, 2010; Sailes, 2017).

8.4.1 Race, racism, agency and activism

This thesis most significantly contributes to the literature on race by allowing SOC to make clear that they understand race and racism as central parts of their lives, and that their lives operate within a racialized context throughout their careers. This thesis provided space for SOC's experiences of race and racism to be understood longitudinally. This method allows us to move away from readings of POC as 'dupes' to corporations with 'neoliberal agendas' (Atencio et al. (2013) in their readings of skateboarding media featuring elite SOC. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrated that these POC were not duped, but in fact, navigated race and racial politics through their careers publicly and privately.

The CRT-driven approach applied here assumed that SOC are individuals with a history and a context within a racialized US, opting to engage with rather than theorize 'over' their bodies. More importantly, it offered space for SOC to reflect on their experiences as POC and consequently allows us to see how their interpretations may differ

from researchers' theoretical postulations on how race is experienced, strategized, and understood by POC. Therefore, research that does not acknowledge this, or suggests that POC operate unaware of racial politics or as 'dupes', appears problematic to thoughtful discussion of anti-racist strategies.

Another significant contribution to the literature generated by this research is the ability to see how POC understand their opportunities to advocate for themselves and demonstrate agency. This thesis reveals that from the 1970s onward, SOC drew upon their own unique experiences of race to inform how they interpreted and operated within elite skateboarding culture. While participants were initially excited to earn their place in elite skateboarding culture, throughout the chapters, we see how SOC fought to make their voices heard and created multiple and different expressions of an anti-racist agenda.

The experiences of these SOC revealed instances where they were successful in creating change. Some who were rebuffed by 'white' company owners were motivated to forge their own alliances, companies and visibilities. This prompted an evolution that placed power in the hands of skaters, rather than the brands (Borden, 2019). The change allowed SOC to add their voices to multiple aspects of skateboarding culture creatively. This research design, with a focus on multiple voices, made it clear that not every SOC felt and operated in the same manner. In stepping back for a broader perspective, however, we can clearly see how individual actions converged with collective efforts, which created numerous micro and macro 'ecosystems' (mentoring POC, developing media, creating their own companies), which conclusively supported the advancement of POC in elite skateboarding culture, with momentum building across the decades. The strategies,

however, changed in different periods and contexts, and between SOC with different positionalities within the culture and industry.

8.5 Race, skateboarding and reflexivity

Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) speak of the need for more significant reflexivity in race-based research. Along with other scholars, they problematize researchers who situate POC as objects of theoretical discussion, without deep consideration of the researcher's positionalities and the effect it may have on their readings of, and responses to, racial politics (Carrington, 2008, 2010; Crenshaw, 1997; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). The process of producing this thesis created multiple moments of reflection and tension, and the need to ascertain the best ways to be responsible and responsive to participants' experiences. My positionality within this project was always understood through my personal experiences as an African American male navigating the process of conducting these interviews in elite skateboarding culture. During this research, I experienced multiple and shifting positionalities, in which I was both an 'insider and outsider' (see Wheaton, 2002; Carrington, 2008). In my efforts to navigate between my various communities and identities, I experienced similar tensions to those discussed by other critical race scholars (Carrington, 2008; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). At times this was very difficult to do, as I was involved in multiple public and policy forums surrounding skateboarding culture where these narratives might be useful in addressing past issues of racism and could inform future discussions (Williams, 2017, 2019). In those instances, there was a constant struggle to remain faithful to the narratives of participants as tools for creating change and to be aware that these participants are still part of the elite skateboarding culture, which could affect

them in a range of ways. With such considerations always at the fore, I acted as a considerate researcher, reflective of presenting their stories in ways that did not harm participants' current lives or careers. This approach also operated in conjunction with CRT and my personal experiences: the stories of POC still operate in an actively unsafe and racialized US. Thus, both these stories *and* the people themselves must always be protected.

Reflexivity during this project also involved coming to terms with the notion that not every story would be a perfect tale of racial harmony. The narratives revealed the complex nature of race, and not only of the 'white oppressor' curtailing the justice and the experiences of POC. In several instances, there were communities of colour that hindered the progress of SOC due to prevailing racial stereotypes relating to who should participate in skateboarding. Telling these types of stories was personally difficult as a person of colour. When examining the past, there is always a hope that POC would support others in any instance. As CRT posits, however, every person understands race in relationship to their own perspective and positionality, and some anecdotes offered mistreatments of POC by POC. Still, it was essential to provide those narratives in the thesis as well, in the hope of contributing to future change by highlighting issues of racial injustices regardless of where the struggle originated. Such struggles were also reflected in my own identity as a POC and a skateboarder in other ways, which caused some tensions requiring ongoing reflection throughout this project.

Coming into this project, I had a great fondness and passion for skateboarding, created by my personal experiences. As a critical scholar, however, listening to the stories

of participants, working with their voices and their lived experiences, elite skateboarding culture revealed itself as often fraught with issues of race and racism. As a researcher using CRT and engaging with critical scholarship on race and sport (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009; Sailes, 2017), I grappled with the notion, commonly held by many skateboarders, that skateboarding culture operated in a 'colour-blind' field, where 'everyone' had the chance to succeed. Clearly, this is not the case, and the notion of a 'colour-blind' community is as problematic to skateboarding culture as it is in other areas of life.

Furthermore, engaging in the rhetoric of being a 'colour-blind' sporting culture arguably undoes the decades of work by POC to gain status within the sport and industry. This revelation created tension between my positionality as a critical researcher and as an 'insider' in skateboarding culture, who is supportive of skateboarding and who uses skateboarding as a tool for diplomacy. With a critical distance away from the hub of skateboarding industry, however, and working on this thesis in New Zealand, I was able to (partially) emotionally detach myself and to understand that the culture of skateboarding carried all the stigmas and difficulties of the US dominant culture. Within that context, the successes of SOC grew even more critical. Their narratives are important and should not be lost in 'colour-blind' rhetoric, which may devalue these experiences. Making visible their stories and successes, other POC must be able to see SOC lives as part of a continuous arc of narratives in the broader context of ongoing struggles for POC in the US.

Nevertheless, at times I struggled with how to tell these stories in a way that did not seem either too optimistic or too pessimistic. This problem describes a primary dilemma encountered during this research. A black man telling the stories of POC is always further

scrutinized for 'validity' and 'objectivity' in ways that differ from those applied to non-POC researchers (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012). In some instances, this is warranted; other scholars have shown there can be unforeseen pressures and biases, which are part of the challenges faced when researching a racial community of which one is a member (Carrington, 2008; Serrant-Green, 2002). As a researcher of colour, I am also keenly aware that literature regarding the lives of POC regularly places them within narratives that paint the lives of POC as 'helpless' or unable to have agency in their lives (Brooks et al., 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This notion weighed heavily, and this thesis openly engaged those tensions. It was often difficult to strike the right balance of stories that revealed negative experiences of POC and their counterparts in positive stories, as has been discussed by other scholars (Bryant, 2020). As a POC doing this research, this was critically important. While I may not have found the perfect combination, nevertheless, I took on the difficult task of creating a balanced 'tone' of struggle and success across multiple participants. All of their stories were impactful, even those not included in the final text, because they were developed through a philosophy of 'inclusion' between the participants and myself. While not all participants are included in these pages, each of their voices has informed the overarching narratives presented.

This thesis is not solely the 'Black' experience as a matter of choice. The sample was not one of convenience. Arguably, focusing solely on the experiences of Black SOC might have been a more straightforward project. It might have kept me closer to an 'insider' perspective, rather than a continually revolving position. However, I felt strongly that to do this work justice required complex navigation of the multiple racial, gendered, sexual, and

generational groups, of which I was not always an insider. It was no easy task, and there are many ways in which to grow from this experience. Nevertheless, in the act of solidarity, this thesis created space for the voices of multiple POC to be placed within an academic narrative, thus allowing them to be part of, and to define, the conversation about them. The thesis acts as written testimony of how SOC from a range of social, cultural and racial positionalities in the US are constrained through racial politics. Even those who could 'pass' for 'white' intimately understood how racism could ravage their lives and those of their loved ones. Therefore, I attempted to place the reader within those lives, to more readily understand that efforts toward creating, finding and producing agency were 'real' and not solely theoretical. Race is 'real', and so are the struggles and triumphs, all of which need to be heard if the end goal is pursuing an anti-racist agenda.

There was also another key component of reflection during this thesis: who are these 'racists'? As certainly as the stories of POC are real, so are those of non-POC. They are not merely theoretical 'whites' or 'racists.' The power-wielding 'white' owners mentioned in the thesis were often my friends. They are not academics with the same tools to make sense of the world. They are human beings attempting to work through the context of 'race' from the other side. How was I to discuss them critically, reflexively, and even empathetically in this thesis? Another argument for the use of CRT arises here. CRT does not treat all 'whites' as 'racists'—instead, it asks that we critique the actions of individuals (Hylton, 2010), and use that context to support POC, which is how I navigated this tension within the thesis.

For example, many of these ‘white’ owners posed the same question to me during the research: “We have done a better job than other sports, right?” To which the answer, broadly, is a tentative ‘sometimes’. Engaging with CRT in dialogue with feminist scholarship on reflexivity helped me navigate the tensions, uncertainties, and even backlash, to produce this treatise. The more nuanced answer to their question is that racialized power still exists in the skateboarding culture, and they did and do wield it. Sometimes this worked well for POC, and at times it did not. It is important to reiterate that the stories in this thesis are of those who have not only survived, but also thrived, within the industry. Inevitably, there are many others who were unable to navigate the racial tensions and inequalities, and their stories are still deserving of being told. As the participants in this study did reveal, inherent bias, microaggressions and overt discrimination did occur and continue today. Their situation, however, is not unique and CRT provides space between the ‘oppressor’ and the ‘oppressed’ for work that allows for critical growth between the two parties. Elite skateboarding culture exists within the racialized power structures of US culture (Bimper, 2015; Carrington, 2013). This is what makes the progress of POC so compelling; these ‘white owners’ are still far from fully comprehending the racialized realities that POC live in. Nevertheless, change *did* occur, and this change came about as a result of the individual and collective efforts of SOC who refused to be marginalized, silenced or made invisible.

As this thesis revealed, within a relatively short time (the 1970s to the 2000s), spurred by the actions of radical individuals and collectives, POC demanded change and made their voices heard and their bodies seen. The examples of agency and power created by POC in skateboarding deserve to be seen with other narratives of POC in sport in the US.

Furthermore, they should be told in a way that is responsible and responsive to the communities of colour involved. I believe the reciprocal manner in which this research was created accomplished this task.

8.6 Research limitations and future directions

Qualitative research always has a number of limitations in scope and scale, and there are several limitations to this research, which I hope to engage with in future endeavours. To begin, I could not create space for all the voices of SOC I had access to within the limited space of this thesis. As Dworkin (2012) discusses, determining the right number of interviews is always difficult. It is also well recognized that it can be difficult to develop strategies to interpret such rich and multi-layered data, and to determine saturation point during interviews (Alsaawi, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). During this research, the task seemed even more daunting when coupled with the use of CRT and the need to remain reflective and responsive to all the voices within this project. I felt a personal responsibility to each of the participants and their stories, not only because we shared backgrounds as POC and as skateboarders, but also because I recognized the trust they had placed in me in gifting stories so rarely told before. I recognized my unique position as a researcher collecting the stories of elite athletes of colour, who do not often have the freedom to discuss the topic of race candidly without repercussions (Bryant, 2020). Thus, the ability to speak on race was cathartic for participants, and in my own life. It did also place an additional responsibility upon me to use those stories carefully and to ensure their time and energies contributed to greater understanding and change. As POC are commonly under-researched in ways that include their voices (Brooks et al., 2017; Carrington, 2010), it was

difficult not to include them all in this work. While weaving their narratives in line with the most significant themes allowed for the representation of many experiences, it did not always allow for every facet of participants' experience. However, this thesis did not use a 'life story' method (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984; Douglas & Carless, 2014), and I had to let go of some of my sense of responsibility to represent every aspect of their lives and to focus instead on the key themes across the interviews.

In the future, I could address this by applying a more intersectional approach, which would allow me to draw from the multiple positionalities of these participants and place new work in conversation with that literature (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Dawson, 2017; Gilio-Whitaker, 2017; Withycombe, 2011). Working in a more intersectional manner would also allow for a more in-depth examination of the gendered experiences among the participants of colour. Prior research on race and sport has clearly demonstrated that women experience race differently than their male counterparts (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; McPherson, 2000; Willing & Shearer, 2015). As an African American male, conducting this research with women of colour, there were undoubtedly ways in which I was either unable to address issues or develop lines of questioning that might have been more accessible to a woman researcher of colour. For example, I was able to connect as an 'insider' with formerly poor, Black male participants through shared experiences of overt racism and being 'stopped and frisked' (Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007; White & Fradella, 2016) or 'driving while Black' (Harris, 1999; Tomaskovic-Devey, Mason, & Zingraff, 2004). While I could discuss some of the intricacies of racial politics with women of colour, I did not always have the same type of 'insider'

anecdotes to address the ways women of colour might experience racism and sexism simultaneously. To mitigate this, I made room for participants to speak to issues they felt were not covered in the interview. Of course, this is not the same as operating from the same positionality, and in some cases, I continued to follow up afterward with these women in an effort to gain additional insights. Although our rapport was still deeply engaging, in the future women POC researchers would surely be able to add more depth and subtlety in this area.

In summary, the analysis showed that the experiences of racialized 'difference' for women SOC were often experienced differently generationally. Some women SOC noted feeling marginalization based less on their status as a POC, but rather as women in skateboarding (see also Wheaton, 2013 in surfing). Others felt doubly troubled, which operated fluidly within specific contexts. Though not the focus of this thesis, future exploration could focus specifically on the experiences of navigating this double marginalization of women of colour in the sport, culture, and industry of skateboarding. Thus, this thesis offers a starting point to the topic of those differences, which future scholars could address, as they deserve their own more in-depth intersectional feminist exploration (hooks, 2014).

Applying an intersectional approach would also allow future scholars to build from this thesis and explore in greater detail how the sexual orientation of participants intersects with their experiences of race. While this research placed race at the forefront of investigation, it drew from participants across multiple positionalities, with several interviews conducted with those who are vocal advocates for LGBTQA communities. Placing

their discussions in context with other voices in the LGBTQA sphere could undoubtedly help give voice to a further marginalized (but growing in prominence) community in skateboarding culture (Mendelevich, 2019; Roy, 2016). Although not addressed within the body of the thesis, I attempted to create space for those discussions in other public forums and events (Williams, 2016, 2017). These limitations in gender and omission of hetero/sexuality were felt very profoundly during this thesis, particularly because of the valuable contributions women of colour offered this thesis, and because these self-identifying women are integral parts of elite skateboarding culture. I hope that as the many new women of colour, who are also part of these intersecting identities, gain prominence, future scholars can illuminate the narratives of these women well beyond the scope of this study.

At the beginning of this project, I understood that a shift in elite skateboarding culture was occurring, mainly due to its newfound space in the Olympics in Tokyo 2020, and then postponed to 2021. Early in the process, an essential question was posed by a colleague: 'What impact might the formal culture and structures of the Olympics have on future narratives of race in skateboarding?' This question is a fascinating topic for future explorations, particularly considering the Olympic narrative ties to 'neoliberal' ideas of sport as an 'equalizer' where the winner is the winner because they have earned it (Birrell, 1989). Furthermore, the Olympic adherence to a 'colour-blind' approach runs contrary to CRT approaches to sport (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2010). As CRT posits, scholars should critically engage with institutions that intend not to place particular emphasis on the historical struggles of POC to obtain power and visibility within inherently racist institutions (Bell,

2018; Delgado et al., 2012). Formal spaces like the Olympics are reluctant to engage with questions of athlete activism, racialized pasts, and to create new access to power for those not of the sporting elite (e.g., Edwards, 1969; King, 2007; Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018b). Some have suggested that recent efforts by the IOC to respond to some of these social issues may be mere performances of organizational change rather than revision of their underpinning assumptions (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2019). Therefore, it remains to be seen how current and future SOC may be impacted by the new levels of ‘formality’, institutionalization and radically new structures of skateboarding as an Olympic sport. This is a topic worthy of future exploration, and one that I will be observing closely over the following months and years. The POC who helped skateboarding grow to become an Olympic sport may be omitted from future ‘colour-blind’ narratives, or they may benefit from the new visibilities offered by the Olympic platform. Therefore, this thesis offers a celebration of the narratives of POC’s struggles for racial equality in elite skateboarding *before* arguably the crucial moment of change in the structures, cultures and ideologies of skateboarding. Moreover, this thesis attempted to create a first step, so that more questions about skateboarding’s role in diplomacy, education, and social justice issues might be understood as stemming from the past efforts of POC.

8.7 Final Thoughts

In this thesis, the voices and experiences of POC illuminate the way race intersected with the informal politics of elite skateboarding culture. Importantly, this thesis firmly plants the ‘human’ voices, histories, contexts, and *names* of POC within the scholarship on race and skateboarding, so that they cannot be forgotten. Informed by CRT, the thesis was structured

in four main parts, firstly locating the racial politics and strategies of SOC firmly in participants' childhoods, where family and community played a key role. The subsequent chapters then followed their introduction to the industry and their various strategies for navigating racial power relations. The combined narratives within the research clearly demonstrated that POC were always a part of elite skateboarding. Further, this investigation revealed that individually and collectively, SOC fought for a future that included their visions and voices. Strikingly, while SOC radically engaged in battles for power, visibility, and representation with 'white' owners (and at times their communities of colour), many operated well beyond their own self-interest. Drawing upon early lessons from childhood, numerous SOC mentored and developed opportunities for other SOC to contribute to and develop agency and, in some cases, ownership within the fabric of skateboarding culture. These unique advances occurred while SOC still operated under the web of oppressions facing POC in US society more broadly. However, through these individual and collective actions, SOC ultimately shifted the ground for other elite skateboarders and recreational participants alike.

These experiences of SOC offer an 'alternative' history of skateboarding (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) equally as important as that of their non-POC counterparts. Ultimately, this research showed that the lives of SOC are worthy of exploration, examination, and celebration, both now and in the future. The next generation of skaters and scholars of colour will undoubtedly encounter racialized experiences in skateboarding and sport. But, as they seek to make sense of it all, my hope is that this thesis offers a gateway to their past and a point of connection to future anti-racist strategies, which was previously missing from

the literature on skateboarding culture. New research will need to continue to monitor all the stories of the next generation of POC, as they enter the skateboarding industry and become cultural intermediaries. Any such research will need to consider the racial contexts in which they have grown up, and the racial realities of being a young POC in the US in the 2020s and beyond.

Epilogue:

Sitting in the rays of an early sunrise, during the first days of summer in New Zealand, this episode as a teller of tales ends, but my responsibility to the narratives of my community does not. The scope has expanded since the days with 'Lil Markus' and my first experience of collective action, but my work will always reflect the old ways of the neighbourhood and my promise to tell the stories people need to hear.

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Appendix A: Participant consent form and information sheet

Consent Form for Participants (Over 18s)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Te Kura Toi Tangata



THE UNIVERSITY OF

WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Project Title: *Colour in the Lines: Understanding the power, politics and lived experiences of African Americans and U.S. ethnic minorities in skateboarding culture*

I, the undersigned, have read the **Information Sheet for Participants** for this research project and have had the details and nature of the project explained to me. My questions about the project have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw myself and my data from the project at any time prior to approving my transcript, or to decline to answer individual questions in the project. I agree to provide data to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the **Information Sheet** and recognise that while my data will be documented under a pseudonym, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

I understand that the data I provide will be used in the completion of a doctoral thesis and may also be used in other scholarly publications that will be publicly available as well as conference presentations.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the **Information Sheet** as (tick one):

Fully Anonymous

Partially Anonymous

Identified

Email Address: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principle Researcher:

Neftalie Williams

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Information Sheet for Participants (Over 18s)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Te Kura Toi Tangata



Project Title: Colour in the Lines: Understanding the power, politics and lived experiences of African Americans and U.S. ethnic minorities in skateboarding culture

Overview

Hello, my name is Nefelie Williams and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Waikato in New Zealand in the Faculty of Education. My doctoral thesis examines the growth and importance of African Americans and U.S. ethnic minorities in skateboarding, and the role of the media in influencing their experiences. Additionally, I explore how the African-American and U.S. ethnic minority presence and participation influences previous conceptions of what it means to be a skateboarder, and how skateboarding cultural practices function to negotiate these meanings and expand participation for future generations both in the US and the global skateboarding culture.

Invitation

I would like to extend an open invitation to you to participate in this research project. Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you may decline to participate. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. Your decision to participate or decline will not result in any rewards or detriments to you.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified because you fit a specific demographic within the African American and U.S. minority skateboarding community that has been recognised as a valuable voice for inclusion.

What will I have to do and how long will it take?

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to partake in one interview session inquiring about your experience in skateboarding culture. The time commitment for the interview process generally takes between 60 to 90 minutes. The principal researcher will be the interviewer, and if you agree to participate, we will later further discuss the date, time and location for the interview session.

The interviews for this project will be audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim, or word for word. There will also be the opportunity for an additional 60-90 minutes to approve, review or amend the transcription of our interview together.

What are the risks involved with my participation?

During the interview, you will be asked to recall information about your experiences within skateboarding culture. These discussion topics are unlikely to cause any anxiety to you. Additionally

you can be assured that participation, non-participation, withdrawal or any information you provide will not affect your relationship with any matters involving future participation or projects with the principal researcher.

What are the benefits involved with my participation?

It is a reasonable expectation that reflection upon your time and experiences in skateboarding culture will be an enlightening experience, however, we cannot guarantee that you will personally experience any benefits from participating in this research study. In the future, you and others may benefit from the collective information shared by this study upon its completion.

What will happen to the information collected?

The responses from your interview will be used to help write the thesis for this research project and may also be used in additional journal articles, other scholarly publications or as part of conference presentations. The completed thesis will be hosted on the University of Waikato Research Commons and made publicly available on their website. Conference presentations or journal articles will also be available based on the subscription protocols of the specific publisher.

As per the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008) guidelines, all information collected during the research project – including consent forms – must be kept for at least five years to allow for academic examination, challenge and/or peer review. This information will be stored in a secure location as per the regulations under section 9(4)(a).

As a participant, you will own your own raw data collected during the interview process and the principal researcher will own the thesis and any other scholarly publications.

Participant Acknowledgement/Privacy

You have the option of personally deciding how your data is identified:

1. Fully Anonymous – A pseudonym will be assigned to you and used when referring to your data with no other information.
2. Partially Anonymous – A pseudonym in conjunction with demographic descriptors (e.g. gender, race, age, training experience, location).
3. Identified – Recognised via your first or full name along with demographic descriptors as mentioned above.

If you choose to be Fully Anonymous, none of your data will not be recognised by name in text or analysis. If Partially Anonymous, your identity will be safeguarded via the use of a pseudonym and/or age, race, gender or location as is pertinent to the research. Collected data will all be coded to ensure privacy from persons outside of the research team.

As the researcher, I reserve the right to decide to increase your anonymity for the purposes of the academic research.

Confidentiality

While every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed. The skateboarding community of colour within the skateboarding industry is relatively small and it may be possible for people to discover your identity based on your remarks and other potentially identifiable data (age, gender, race, location, etc.).

Withdrawal Procedure

If you decide to participate in this research project, you may withdraw yourself and all your data without consequence at any stage, for any reason without consequence up until the approval of your transcript. Once your transcript has been approved, you will no longer be able to withdraw your participation or data from the project. If you wish to withdraw, you may discuss this with the principal researcher directly or use the contact details provided below.

Research Results

As a participant, you will receive a digital copy of the final manuscript delivered after the completion and submission of the research project. This will be sent directly to the contact email address you provide on the consent form.

Dispute Process

If a dispute arises during your participation, please contact the principal researcher first to address the concern. If the dispute cannot be resolved, you may then feel free to contact the research supervisor at the University of Waikato, whose details are listed below.

Declaration to participants

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any specific line of questioning, and to withdraw from the study at any time up until you approve your transcript.
- Ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation with the principal researcher.
- Be given access to the completed manuscript when it is concluded.

Further Inquiries or Concerns

If you have any questions, concerns or comment about this research project, please contact the principal researcher using the details below:

Principal Researcher:

Nefelie Williams
(+64) 027 96 5643, +1(310) 962-5643
nsw11@students.waikato.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Dr Holly Thorpe
Associate Professor Te Oranga,
School of Human Development and Movement Studies Faculty of Education University of Waikato
hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz
Thank you for your interest and taking the time to read this full information sheet while considering your participation in this research project.

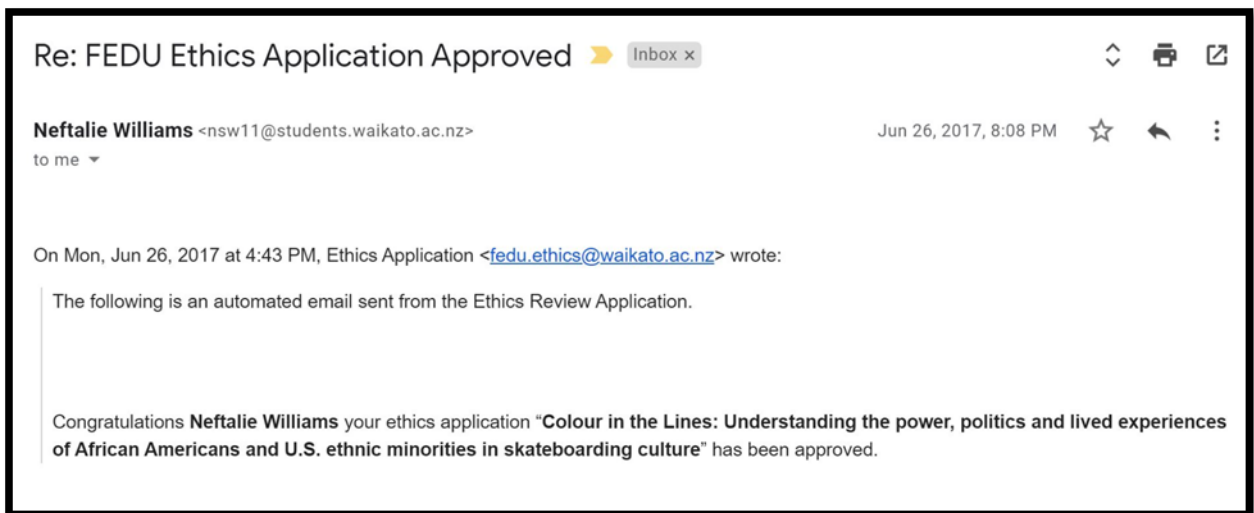
Appendix B

(i) Research questions

1. Participant's name, age, occupation, birthplace, self-identify? What was their community like?
2. How and who first exposed you to skateboarding and what was your immediate reaction?
3. When did you realize you had above average ability or an affinity for an aspect of skate culture? How did your family, friends and community feel about your participation in skateboarding culture? What did they know about skateboarding? How did this affect you? (then/now)
4. How and by whom were you mentored? Were they from the same racial/ethnic background?
5. How open and inclusive did skateboarding seem for you in the beginning/now?
6. In your opinion, who and what factor(s) contributed to the increased visibility of POC in skateboarding? How have they been recognized or not recognized?
7. What was/is your perception of the way traditional sports represent POC vs. the news? How is that similar or different than the way people of color where/are represented in skateboarding media? Why might this be?
8. What other elements of skateboarding culture became important to you and why? Who/what is/are those activities normally associated with/to?
9. In what ways do you believe your personal identity is informed by your race/ethnicity? Informed by skateboarding culture? How do you feel that intermingling is perceived by the skateboarding community versus the non-skateboarding community? What factors might affect this?
10. In your opinion what is the public's perception of skateboarding culture and its diversity? What factors might contribute to this? Are there barriers to minority participation? How diverse do you think skateboarding was/is? What might influence this process?
11. In your opinion have African Americans and POC contributed to skateboarding culture? Do you feel these contributions have been recognized?
12. Where would you locate the experience of POC in skateboarding in relation to other racial experiences in traditional sports?
13. How much access and opportunity do you believe POC have to create their own personal 'brand' or create and own their own companies? Is this similar/different to the trajectory of POC in traditional sports? In your opinion what contributes to this?
14. What do you believe is the core DNA in skateboarding culture? Who and/or what infused them within skateboarding culture? How is that story told?

15. What could non-skateboarding African Americans and POC in the U.S. learn from skateboarding?
16. During your professional career were you aware of any instances where you felt or saw anyone hindered by people's perception of race or racial politics within the skateboarding industry? If so, could you provide me with some examples?
17. Were you ever pressured to 'present 'yourself or others differently because of people's perceptions of ethnicity? If so, how did this make you feel?
18. Did you develop any strategies to help overcome/challenge any negative racial perceptions around you or anyone you knew? How did others respond to these strategies? Did they work?
19. In what ways do you think POC may have contributed to the growth of global skateboarding? Why do you think so, and what are some examples that you have seen or experienced?
20. How do you personally want to be remembered for your contributions to the history of POC in skateboarding culture?

Appendix B (ii): Ethics Approval



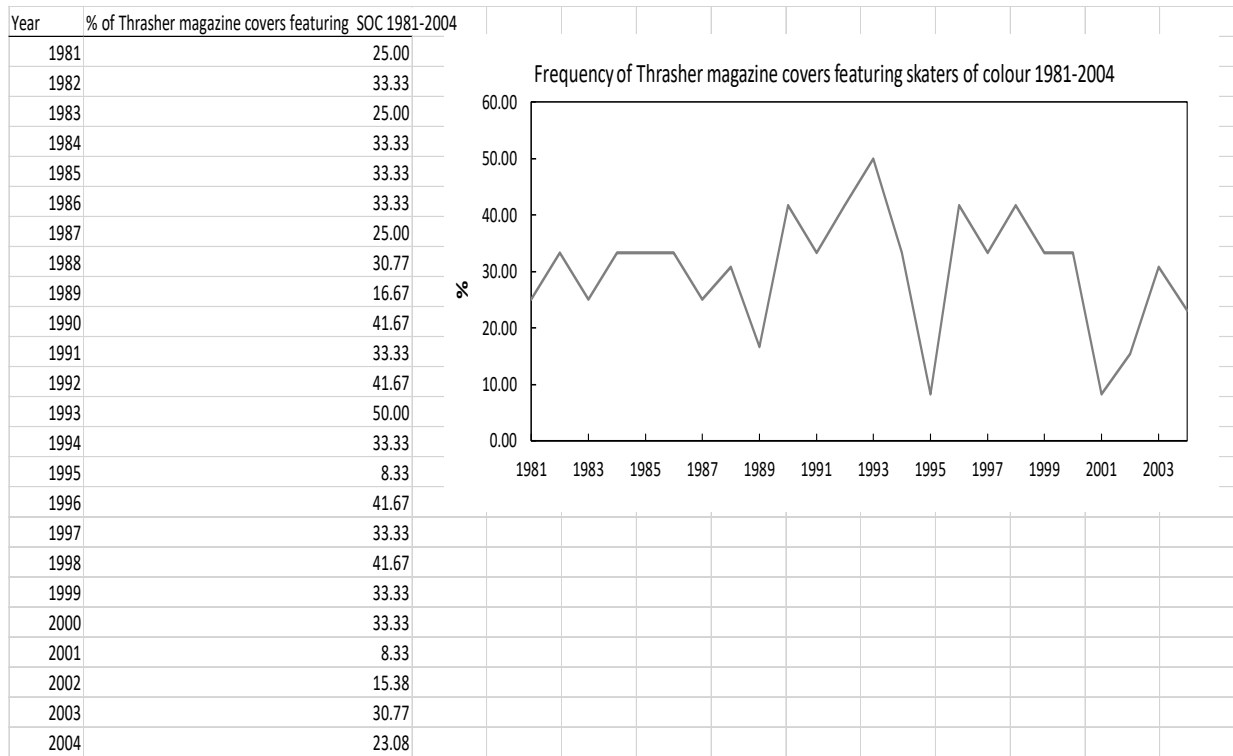
Appendix C: Skateboarder Magazine Covers featuring POC

Table 2: *Skateboarder Magazine covers featuring SOC 1975-1979*

Year	# of issues per year	# of cover featuring POC	% of covers featuring POC
1975	6	2	0%
1976	6	2	33%
1977	12	4	33%
1978	12	2	16%
1979	13	5	38%

Appendix D: Frequency of Thrasher magazine covers featuring SOC

Table 3: Frequency of Thrasher magazine covers featuring SOC 1981-2004



Appendix E: Thrasher Magazine racial breakdown 1981- 2004

Table 4: *Thrasher magazine covers, racial breakdown 1981-2004*

Month	Year	Person on cover	Race/Ethnicity	photographer name
Jan	1981	Artwork	N/A	Kevin Thatcher
Feb	1981	Chris Stople	white	Kevin Thatcher
Mar	1981	Chris Miller	white	Jim Goodrich
Apr	1981	Alan Losi	white	Rich Rose
May	1981	Duane Peters, Steve Caballero	Latino /Hispanic, white	Kevin Thatcher
June	1981	Mike Smith	white	Kevin Thatcher
July	1981	Mike Pust	white	MoFo
Aug	1981	Roger Hickey, John Hutson	white, white	Caselli
Sept	1981	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic	Kevin Thatcher
Oct	1981	Paco Prieto, John Hutson, Tony Hawk	Latino/Hispanic, white, white	Marechael, MoFo
Nov	1981	Artwork	N/A	N/A
Dec	1981	Steve Rocco	white	Stecyk
Jan	1982	Mike Smith	white	MoFo
Feb	1982	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic	MoFo
Mar	1982	Duane Peters	white	Kevin Thatcher
Apr	1982	Street Scott	white	MoFo
May	1982	Stacy Peralta	Latino/Hispanic	Stecyk
June	1982	Stacy Peralta	Latino/Hispanic	Stecyk

July	1982	Micke Alba	Latino/Hispanic	Glen E. Friedman
Aug	1982	Jay Adams	white	Stecyk
Sept	1982	Per Welinder	white	MoFo
Oct	1982	Rodney Mullen	white	MoFo
Nov	1982	John Hutson, Terry Orr	white, white	Ethridge
Dec	1982	Tom Groholski	white	Groholski
Jan	1983	Lance Mountain	white	Glen E. Friedman
Feb	1983	Bob Denike	white	Ethridge
Mar	1983	Billy Ruff	white	Kevin Thatcher
Apr	1983	Micke Alba	Latino/Hispanic	Glen E. Friedman
May	1983	Gary Davis	white	Ramsay
June	1983	Andy Kessler	Foreign Born -Greek	Bocxe
July	1983	Jay Alabamy	white	Glen E. Friedman
Aug	1983	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic	MoFo
Sept	1983	Mike McGill, Craig Johnson, John Gibson, Jay Cabler, anon.	white	Schmitt, Newton
Oct	1983	Puker, Pat Clarke	white	Glen E. Friedman
Nov	1983	Rob Roskopp	white	sweeper
Dec	1983	Big Steve	white	MoFo
Jan	1984	Rodney Mullen	white	Glen E. Friedman
Feb	1984	Monty Nolder	white	Newton
Mar	1984	Mondo	white	Ethridge
Apr	1984	Bryce Kanights	white	Ethridge
May	1984	Chuck Treece	Black/African American	Glen E. Friedman

June	1984	Mark Rogowski	white	Kevin Thatcher
July	1984	Tommy Guerrero	Latino/Hispanic	Kevin Thatcher
Aug	1984	Christian Hosoi	Asian American	MoFo
Sept	1984	Natas Kaupus	white	Stecyk
Oct	1984	Bob Denike, Neil Blender	white	Fuitt, MoFo
Nov	1984	Mark Gonzales	Latino/Hispanic	MoFo
Dec	1984	Artwork	N/A	Chris Buchinsky
Jan	1985	Jeff Phillips	white	MoFo
Feb	1985	Neil Blender	white	MoFo
Mar	1985	Neil Blender, Billy Ruff	white, white	MoFo
Apr	1985	Christian Hosoi	Asian American	MoFo
May	1985	John Gibson	white	Kevin Thatcher
June	1985	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic	MoFo
July	1985	Chris Miller	white	MoFo
Aug	1985	Lester Kasai	Asian American	MoFo
Sept	1985	Lance Mountain	white	MoFo
Oct	1985	Bruno Peeters	white	MoFo
Nov	1985	Christian Hosoi	Asian American	Tkacheff
Dec	1985	Dave Hackett	white	Walkover
Jan	1986	Claus Grabke	white-Foreign born	Rouse
Feb	1986	Alan Losi	white	MoFo
Mar	1986	Natas Kaupus	white	Baboot
Apr	1986	Tommy Guerrero	Latino/Hispanic	Kevin Thatcher
May	1986	Lester Kasai	Asian American	MoFo

June	1986	Glen Danzig	white	Burns
July	1986	Jesse Martinez	Latino/Hispanic	Keenan
Aug	1986	Mike Vallely	white	MoFo
Sept	1986	Mark Gonzales	Latino/Hispanic	MoFo
Oct	1986	Tony Hawk	white	MoFo
Nov	1986	Tony Hawk	white	MoFo
Dec	1986	Chris Miller	white	MoFo
Jan	1987	Jim Thiebaud	white	MoFo
Feb	1987	Chris Doherty	white	MoFo
Mar	1987	Jeff Phillips	white	MoFo
Apr	1987	Brian Brannon	white	Bryce Kanights
May	1987	Mike Muir	white	MoFo
June	1987	Steve Alba	Latino/Hispanic	Kennan
July	1987	Mark Rogowski	white	MoFo
Aug	1987	Tony Hawk	white	Kevin Thatcher
Sept	1987	Artwork	white	Pushead
Oct	1987	Christian Hosoi	Asian American	MoFo
Nov	1987	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic & Asian	MoFo
Dec	1987	Eddie Reategui	Latino/Hispanic	Steve Keenan
Jan	1988	Eric Dressen	white	Chuck Katz
Feb	1988	Tony Vitello	white	Stecyk
Mar	1988	Scott Oster	Asian American	Chuck Katz
Apr	1988	Steve Alba	Latino/Hispanic	Steve Keenan
May	1988	Rob Roskopp	white	Bryce Kanights

June	1988	Christian Hosoi	Asian American	Blanchard
July	1988	John Dettman, Luke Ogden, Danny Sargent	white, white, white	Bryce Kanights
Aug	1988	Artwork	white	Robert Williams
Sept	1988	Sam Esmoer	white	MoFo
Oct	1988	Dave Hackett	white	Chuck Katz
Nov	1988	Bod Boyle	white-Foreign born	Bryce Kanights
Dec	1988	Lance Mountain	white	Luke Ogden
Special Issue	1988	Tony Alva	Latino/Hispanic	Bryce Kanights
Jan	1989	Jay Adams	white	Luke Hudson
Feb	1989	Vladimir Morozov	white	Boyd
Mar	1989	Robby Olhisher	white	Starr
Apr	1989	Brian Brannon	white	Kevin Thatcher
May	1989	Chris Miller	white	MoFo
June	1989	John Hutson	white	Caselli
July	1989	Ron Allen	Black/African American	Bryce Kanights
Aug	1989	Cara- Beth Burnside	white	Cavalheiro
Sept	1989	Danny Sargent	white	Kevin Thatcher
Oct	1989	Jeremy Henderson	white	Bill Thompson
Nov	1989	Scott Oster	Asian American	Van Dusen
Dec	1989	Jeff Kendall	white	Oscarson
Jan	1990	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic & Asian	MoFo
Feb	1990	George Nagai, Mike Ranquet	Asian American, white	Starr, Miller
Mar	1990	Marc Hollander	white	Starr

Apr	1990	Karma Tsocheff	white	Van Dusen
May	1990	Frankie Hill	white	MoFo
June	1990	Butch Sterbins	Asian American	MoFo
July	1990	Tim Galvin	white	Kevin Thatcher
Aug	1990	Bob Pereyra	Portuguese American	Katz
Sept	1990	Aaron Deeter	white	MoFo
Oct	1990	Brennand Schoeffel	white	Bryce Kanights
Nov	1990	Henry Sanchez	Latino/Hispanic	Kevin Thatcher
Dec	1990	Omar Hassan	Middle East/Yemen	Starr
Jan	1991	Tony Hawk	white	Starr
Feb	1991	Ed Templeton	white	Starr
Mar	1991	Artwork	white	Robert Williams
Apr	1991	Artwork	white	Van Dusen
May	1991	Pep Williams	Black/African American	Block
June	1991	John Guzzi	white	MoFo
July	1991	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic & Asian	MoFo
Aug	1991	Eddie Reategui, Christian Fletcher	Latino/Hispanic, white	Needham, Swegles
Sept	1991	Brandon Chapman	white	Starr
Oct	1991	Ray Barbee	Black/African American	Sleeper
Nov	1991	Eric Dressen	white	Sleeper
Dec	1991	Danny Way	white	Chris Ortiz
Jan	1992	Wade Speyer	white	Bryce Kanights
Feb	1992	Eric Britton	Black/African American	Block

Mar	1992	Chet Thomas	white	Xeno
Apr	1992	Ronnie Bertino	white	Lance Dawes
May	1992	Tom Knox, John Montesi	white, white	Sleeper, Kevin Thatcher
June	1992	Pat Duffy	white	Bryce Kanights
July	1992	Ice-T, Remy Stratton	Black/African American, White	Wiederhorn, Ortiz
Aug	1992	Sean Sheffey	Black/African American	Chris Ortiz
Sept	1992	Jovante Turner	Black/African American	Bryce Kanights
Oct	1992	Daniel Powell	white	Chris Ortiz
Nov	1992	Alfonso Rawls	Black/African American	Chris Ortiz
Dec	1992	Mike Carrol	white	Bryce Kanights
Jan	1993	Tim Brauch	white	Bryce Kanights
Feb	1993	Jeff Pang	Asian American	Chris Ortiz
Mar	1993	Rick Ibaseta	Asian American	Bryce Kanights
Apr	1993	John Cardiel	white	Bryce Kanights
May	1993	Julien Stranger	white	Bryce Kanights
June	1993	Mark Gonzales	Latino/Hispanic	Bryce Kanights
July	1993	Henry Sanchez	Latino/Hispanic	Bryce Kanights
Aug	1993	Joe Sirro, Jason Adams, Justin Ortiz	white, white, Latino/Hispanic	Dolinsky, Bryce Kanights, Chris Ortiz
Sept	1993	Karma Tsocheff	white	Dolinsky
Oct	1993	Artwork	white	Jimbo
Nov	1993	Rick Howard	white-Foreign born	Bryce Kanights
Dec	1993	Eric Koston	Asian-American	Jodi Morris

Jan	1994	Carl Shipman	white-Foreign born	Bryce Kanights
Feb	1994	Salman Agah	Iranian American	Madeo
Mar	1994	Jason Adams	white	Bryce Kanights
April	1994	Jaime Reyes	Asian-American	Starr
May	1994	Artwork portrait	Latino/Hispanic	Mark Gonzales
June	1994	Mike Frazier	white	Bryce Kanights
July	1994	Jaya Bonderov	white	Martineau
Aug	1994	Matt Pailes	white	Butler
Sept	1994	Andy Roy	white	Sedway
Oct	1994	Bob Burnquist	Latino/Hispanic	Left-1
Nov	1994	Alan Peterson	white	Bryce Kanights
Dec	1994	Wade Speyer	white	Bryce Kanights
Jan	1995	Mike Conway	white	Martineau
Feb	1995	Fred Gall	white	Morf
Mar	1995	Mike Carroll	white	Bryce Kanights
Apr	1995	Artwork	white	Sean McKnight
May	1995	Max Schaaf	white	Callan
June	1995	Ethan Fowler	white	Morf
July	1995	CR Stecyk	white	Stecyk
Aug	1995	Phil Shao	Asian American	Bryce Kanights
Sept	1995	Moses Itkonen	white-Foreign born	Serfas
Oct	1995	Chad Muska	white	Lance Dalgert
Nov	1995	Quim Cardona	white	Morf
Dec	1995	Mike Bouchard	white	Ryan Gee

Jan	1996	Salman A., Rod M., Ray B., Duane P, Mike Carrol, Tom G., Tony H.	Iran. Am., 2-white, Latin/Hisp., AF. Am., white	B. K., Dlager, Ogden
Feb	1996	Justin Strubing	white	Luke Ogden
Mar	1996	Ron Whaley	white	Bryce Kanights
Apr	1996	Artwork	none	Mark Desalvo
May	1996	Coco Santiago	Latino/Hispanic	Bryce Kanights
June	1996	Karma Tsocheff	white	Bryce Kanights
July	1996	Phil Shao	Asian American	Luke Ogden
Aug	1996	Eric Dressen	white	Bruce Hazelton
Sept	1996	Jonathan Bohannon	Asian American	Gomez Bueno
Oct	1996	Mark Hubbard	white	Luke Ogden
Nov	1996	Mike York	white	Luke Ogden
Dec	1996	Sean Sheffey	Black/African American	Luke Ogden
Jan	1997	Danny Gonzales	Latino/Hispanic	Morf
Feb	1997	Scott Johnston	white	Luke Ogden
Mar	1997	Eric Koston	Asian-American	Luke Ogden
Apr	1997	Mark Gonzales	Latino/Hispanic	Morf
May	1997	Quim Cardona	white	Morf
June	1997	Chico Brenes	Latino/Hispanic	Luke Ogden
July	1997	Wade Speyer	white	Luke Ogden
Aug	1997	Bobby Puleo	white	Luke Ogden
Sept	1997	Danny Way	white	Luke Ogden
Oct	1997	Keith Hufnagel	white	Morf
Nov	1997	Jeremy Wray	white	Sturt

Dec	1997	Brian Anderson	white	Morf
Jan	1998	Artwork	Latino/Hispanic	Pushead
Feb	1998	Pat Duffy	white	Luke Ogden
Mar	1998	Peter Hewitt	white	Luke Ogden
Apr	1998	Bob Burnquist	Latino, Hispanic	Luke Ogden
May	1998	Willy Santos	Asian American	Burnett
June	1998	Mike Carroll	white	Morf
July	1998	Ethan Fowler	white	Morf
Aug	1998	Bam Margera	white	Luke Ogden
Sept	1998	Marc Johnson	white	Morf
Oct	1998	Wade Speyer, Daewon Song	white, Asian American	Luke Ogden
Nov	1998	John Cardiel	white	Morf
Dec	1998	Cairo Foster	Asian American	Luke Ogden
Jan	1999	Richard Mulder	Latino/Hispanic	Burnett
Feb	1999	Geoff Rowley	white-Foreign born	Sturt
Mar	1999	Rick Howard	white-Foreign born	Ogden
Apr	1999	Andrew Reynolds	white	Diggs
May	1999	Jerry Hsu	Asian American	Morf
June	1999	Jeff Lenoce	White	Stewart
July	1999	Marcus McBride	Black/African American	Luke Ogden
Aug	1999	Jamie Thomas	white	Burnett
Sept	1999	Royce Nelson	white	Ogden
Oct	1999	Kerry Getz	white	Burnett
Nov	1999	Richard Paez	Latino/Hispanic	Freitas

Dec	1999	Mark Scott	white	Luke Ogden
Jan	2000	Steve Caballero	Latino/Hispanic & Asian	Thatcher
Feb	2000	Erik Ellington	white	Burnett
Mar	2000	Paul Macnau	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Apr	2000	Brian Anderson	white	Luke Ogden, Morf
May	2000	Reese Forbes	white	Luke Ogden
June	2000	Dennis Busenitz	white	Luke Ogden
July	2000	Arto Saari	white-Foreign born	Sturt
Aug	2000	Toan Nguyen	Asian American	Burnett
Sept	2000	Jim Greco	white	Luke Ogden
Oct	2000	Cairo Foster	Asian American	Luke Ogden
Nov	2000	Jason Dill	white	Lance Dawes
Dec	2000	Erik Koston	Asian American	Burnett
Jan	2001	Artwork /everyone	N/A	Luke Ogden
Feb	2001	Steve Olson	white	Burnett
Mar	2001	Dan Drehobl	white	Luke Ogden
Apr	2001	Geoff Rowley	white	Sturt
May	2001	Elias Bingham	white	Luke Ogden
June	2001	Alan Peterson	white	Luke Ogden
July	2001	Stevie Williams	Black/African American	Woods
Aug	2001	Wes Lott	white	Burnett
Sept	2001	Geoff Rowley	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Oct	2001	Matt Field	white	Morf
Nov	2001	Mark Appleyard	white-Foreign born	Burnett

Dec	2001	Steve Bailey	white	Burnett
Jan	2002	Jon Allie	white	Burnett
Feb	2002	Ryan Johnson	white	Burnett
Mar	2002	Bastien Salabanzi	Black/Foreign born African	Burnett
Apr	2002	Arto Saari	white-Foreign born	Burnett
May	2002	Jason Adams	white	Burnett
June	2002	Darrell Stanton	Black/African American	Morf
July	2002	Jaime Thomas	white	Burnett
Aug	2002	Tom Penny	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Sept	2002	Alan Peterson	white	Ogden
Oct	2002	Jerry Smythe	white	Vitello
Nov	2002	Dustin Dollin	white-Foreign born	Ogden
Dec	2002	Andrew Reynolds	white	Ogden
Special Issue	2002	Josh Harmony	white	Skip Pommier
Jan	2003	Billy Marks	white	Burnett
Feb	2003	Ryan Smith	white	Burnett
Mar	2003	Mark Appleyard	white-Foreign born	Ogden
Apr	2003	Bryan Herman	white	Burnett
May	2003	Tony Trujillo	Latino/Hispanic	Luke Ogden
June	2003	Heath Kirchart	white	Skip Pommier
July	2003	John Rattray	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Aug	2003	Tom Penny	white-Foreign born	Joe Krolick
Sept	2003	Mark Gonzales	Latino/Hispanic	Morf

Oct	2003	Darren Navarrete	Latino/Hispanic	Luke Ogden
Nov	2003	Rick McCrank, Lance Mountain	white-Foreign born, white	Morf
Dec	2003	Bastien Salabanzi	Black/Foreign born African	Burnett
Spec. Issue	2003	John Cardiel	white	Morf
Jan	2004	Tony Trujillo	Latino/Hispanic	Morf
Feb	2004	Josh Harmony	white	Burnett
Mar	2004	Matt Mumford	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Apr	2004	Mark Appleyard	white-Foreign born	Burnett
May	2004	Chris Dobstaff	Asian American	Scurich
June	2004	Corey Duffel	white	Burnett
July	2004	Ernie Torres	Latino/Hispanic	Burnett
Aug	2004	Jamie Thomas	white	Shigeo
Sept	2004	Geoff Rowley	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Oct	2004	Austin Stephens	white	Burnett
Nov	2004	Chad Bartie	white-Foreign born	Burnett
Dec	2004	Tommy Sandoval	white	Shigeo
Spec Issue	2004	Tommy Sandoval	white	Burnett

Appendix F: Magazine covers featuring SOC 1992

Table 5 : Skateboarding magazine covers TWS, Thrasher, Big Brother featuring SOC comparison in 1992

Month/Issue	Year	Magazine	Skaters on the cover	Race/Ethnicity of	
Dec	1991	Transworld	Christian Hosoi	Asian-American	
Jan	1992	Transworld	Alan Peterson	white	
Feb	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Jeremy Klein	white	60% total POC
Mar	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Bucky Lasek	white	
Apr	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Mario Rubalcaba	Latino/Hispanic	
May	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Willy Santos	Asian-American	
June	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Matt Hensley	white	
July	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Kien Lieu	Asian-American	
Aug	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Kareem Campbell	African-American	
Sept	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Frank Hirata	Asian-American	
Oct	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Brian Lotti	white	
Nov	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Brian Howard	white	
Dec	1992	Transworld Skate Magazine	Damian Carbajal	Latino/Hispanic	
special issue	1991	Transworld Skate Magazine	Mark Gonzales, Omar Hassan	Latino/Hispanic, Iranian American	
Dec	1991	Thrasher magazine	Danny Way	white	38% total POC
Jan	1992	Thrasher magazine	Wade Speyer	white	
Feb	1992	Thrasher magazine	Eric Britton	Black/African-American	
Mar	1992	Thrasher magazine	Chet Thomas	white	
Apr	1992	Thrasher magazine	Ronnie Bertino	white	
May	1992	Thrasher magazine	Tom Knox, John Montessi	white	
June	1992	Thrasher magazine	Pat Duffy	white	
July	1992	Thrasher magazine	Remy Stratton, Ice-T	white, Black/African-American	
Aug	1992	Thrasher magazine	Sean Sheffey	Black/African-American	
Sept	1992	Thrasher magazine	Jovante Turner	Black/African-American	
Oct	1992	Thrasher magazine	Daniel Powell	white	
Nov	1992	Thrasher magazine	Alfonso Rawls	Black/African-American	
Dec	1992	Thrasher magazine	Mike Carrol	white	
Special issue					
Jan	1992	Big Brother magazine	Shiloh Greathouse	Black/African-American	77% total POC
Feb	1992	Big Brother magazine	Daniel Castillo	Asian-American	
Mar	1992	Big Brother magazine	Daewon Song	Asian-American	
Apr	1992	Big Brother magazine	Rick Howard	white-Foreign Born	
May	1992	Big Brother magazine	Jason Acuna	Latino/Hispanic	
June	1992	Big Brother magazine	Tim Gavin	Asian-American	
July	1992	Big Brother magazine	Salman Agah, Gabriel Rodrigu	Middle Eastern/Arab, Latino/Hispanic	
Aug	1992	Big Brother magazine	Tim Gavin	Asian-American	
Sept	1992	Big Brother magazine	Rosa	Latina/Hispanic	
Oct	1992	Big Brother magazine	Not applicable	not applicable	
Nov	1992	Big Brother magazine	Paulo Diaz	Latino/Hispanic	
Dec	1992	Big Brother magazine	Adrian Lopez	Latino/Hispanic	
Jan	1993	Big Brother magazine	Kris Markovich	white	
		56% of all magazines feature SOC			

Appendix G: Skateboarding graphics as a site of resistance



Figure 11-1 C. Pastras- 'Dune Baby', J. Williams- Self Portrait, S. Fujimoto-Dynasty, SHUT Posse



Figure 11-2 J. Thiebaud 'Hanging Klansmen', J. Williams 'M. Garvey, B. Jesus & M.L.K'