Playful space invaders: skateboarding intersections and global flows

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To cite this article: Annika Hellman & Ylva Odenbring (2019): Playful space invaders: skateboarding intersections and global flows, World Leisure Journal, DOI: 10.1080/16078055.2019.1631881

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2019.1631881

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Published online: 18 Jun 2019.

Article views: 49

View Crossmark data
ABSTRACT
The current article links masculine leisure with bodily performances and playfulness connected to global neoliberal expressions of gender, class and ethnicity. This study draws from an analysis of a skateboard video of young white middle-class men skateboarding in an urban environment in one of Sweden’s greater metropolitan areas. An interview with the young man who created the video was also conducted. The analysis brings together lines of inquiry that concern young males’ playful use of urban space with the articulation of the visual culture of skateboarding as a homosocial, mainly white middle-class practice where bravery and risk-taking are essential articulations. We argue that the skateboarders articulate masculine subjectivity by a complex amalgam of playfulness, risk-taking, colonization of space and the visual style involved in their skateboarding. The construction and presentation of self in the skateboard video are integrated with the quest for individual identity, self-realization and meaning making that pertain to a global entrepreneurial mindset in which mainly white middle-class men are privileged.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 7 November 2018
Accepted 20 May 2019

KEYWORDS
Urban leisure; skateboard; masculinity; ethnicity; social class; risk-taking

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Introduction

There has been a tradition among skateboarders to resist dominant and idealized forms of middle-class white masculinity (Brayton, 2005; Dupont, 2014; Yochim, 2010). The dominant forms of masculinity have also been a part of how skateboarders themselves have created and defined their own form of outsider or marginalized masculinity (Atencio & Beal, 2011; Dupont, 2014; Haywood & Johansson, 2017). Additionally, within the skateboarding community there is an existing dominant hierarchy that involves inequalities. For instance, male skateboarders have often reinforced hegemonic dominance themselves, creating and maintaining boundaries against female skateboarders by limiting their access and their possibilities to enter the skateboarding scene. Skateboarding is not only a male-dominated activity; it is also an activity where female skateboarders are largely underrepresented in physical space (Atencio & Beal, 2011; Bäckström, 2013; Dupont, 2014). The male dominance within the skateboarding community has also created and maintained boundaries against female skateboarders (Bäckström, 2013; Dupont, 2014). Research on female skateboarders indicates that they use skateboarding to create a liberating space where they question and challenge traditional understandings of femininity; but at the same time their participation and performance are reinforced by gendered structures (Atencio & Beal, 2011; Bäckström, 2013). A recent Canadian study of professional women and non-binary skateboarders shows that all of them at some point had experienced and received comments about women’s legitimacy as skateboarders and their limitations in terms of risk and physical ability (Kerria, 2018). By using a variety of gender representations the skateboarders negotiated and created their belonging in the public space as skateboarders.

As an activity, skateboarding is often framed and understood in relation to traditional masculine characteristics, such as excitement and physical danger (Borden, 2019). Contemporary research reveals that skateboarding young men construct and express homosociality, intimacy and risk-taking through the activity (Hellman, 2016; Yochim, 2010). Masculinity is exercised by acting “cool” and performing an alternative and outsider masculinity (Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2009). Recently, skateboarding has become more pluralistic when it comes to race and religion, and can be described as a post-subculture, meaning an increased complexity and diversity within the skateboard culture (Borden, 2019).

Research also indicates that skateboarding videos strongly work to exclude non-heterosexual expression, while at the same time articulating a non-white masculinity in order to reject white middle-class identity norms (Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). It is possible for white middle-class males to move through public spaces and to rebel against the norms of conduct in such areas without risking recriminations or actually being accused of illegal activities. Skateboarding relies on references to a street culture, and to the “ghetto”, to create a distance from middle-class sensibilities (Brayton, 2005).

Previous studies show that although lifestyle sports can be considered beneficial regarding young people’s active leisure, there are also high rates of injuries, especially within skateboarding. Dumas and Laforest (2009) regards skate parks to be positive spaces for an
active and safe environment, while at the same time pointing out that the culture of skateboarding involves high risk and injuries as a symbolic capital for skateboarders. Holsgens’s (2019) study of Seoul-based skaters demonstrates how the architectural typology of the Korean skate park provides a place of stillness, closeness and tranquility. As a result, this makes skateboarding in Seoul a formalized skilled activity through the skaters’ outlined performative practice and evoked knowledge. This Holsgens argue, “provides a counterpoint to the understanding of lifestyle sports as risk-driven practices” (p. 15).

Skateboarding is transforming from a subcultural activity into a mainstream popular sport that is to be included in the Olympic Games for the first time in 2020. As a new skateboard park with mandatory helmet use opened in Hong Kong, researcher O’Connor (2016) investigated the helmet as a site of conflict within the skateboardings port. From the organizers’ perspective, wearing helmets is about safety and liability; but from the skateboarders’ point of view, it is a question of the participants’ control over their own sport. The choice of whether or not to use a helmet is thus a representation of control and authenticity; where skateboarding is associated with improvization, creativity and freedom. A study of an indoor skatepark showed that certain rules, norms and expectations concerning “civilised” behaviour were inforced (Turner, 2013). These expectations included wearing a helmet and waiting one’s turn. The skateboarders themselves, however, expressed disappointment about the skateboard park and the rules surrounding it. As a result, several of the skaters decided not to continue skating there.

To summarize, the research field of alternative leisure sports creates the opportunity to investigate participants’ existing gender norms. Furthermore, skateboarding has been a territory in which masculinity and ethnic stereotypes have been confirmed as well as challenged historically (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Borden, 2019; Brayton, 2005; Dinces, 2011; Yochim, 2010). Nevertheless, there is still a lack of studies that address the intersections between gender, ethnicity and social class (cf. Bäckström, 2013). Moreover, skateboarding is linked to global innovative entrepreneurial discourses since it is commercially driven (Snyder, 2012). This means that skateboarding is both about a subversive identity and at the same time about gaining profit; in other words, it is about young people’s dreams of earning a living through skateboarding and avoiding “boring” traditional academic careers (Dinces, 2011; Hellman, 2016; Snyder, 2012).

It is against this background that the current study aims to investigate how a group of mainly white, middle-class young men construct and negotiate masculinity, social class and ethnicity through their skateboarding in urban spaces. It does so by analysing a video recorded by a young male skateboarder. Furthermore, the study aims to explore how the video producer himself reflects on issues connected to masculinity, ethnicity and social class. It is also of interest to explore the complexity of a subversive masculinity associated with spatiality and playfulness that is connected to a global entrepreneurial discourse. The aim is addressed by the following research questions:

(1) How are masculinity, ethnicity and social class constructed and negotiated in the young men’s interaction in the skateboard video?
(2) How are masculinity, ethnicity and social class constructed and negotiated according to the video producer?
(3) In what ways are the intersections of the young male skateboarders’ masculinity, ethnicity and class linked to global entrepreneurialism?
Intersections of gender, ethnicity and social class

Intersectional perspectives concern feminist and postcolonial theories (Molina, De los Reyes, & Mulinari, 2003). Gender, class background and ethnicity are central aspects in the opportunities and difficulties that young people face in their everyday lives. Additionally, intersectional perspectives are used here to analyse and deepen the understanding of informal hierarchies that create and reproduce inequalities. Furthermore, we understand intersectional perspectives as being interconnected to a global neoliberal hegemony which entails values of individual liberty and innovative entrepreneurship in free markets (Harvey, 2006).

According to Skeggs (2004), gender, class and ethnicity are not only classifications and social positions, but "an amalgam of features of a culture that are read onto bodies as personal dispositions which themselves have been generated through systems of inscription in the first place" (Skeggs, 2004, p. 1). In other words, the complex interplay between gender, ethnicity, social class and other hierarchical structures are visible in an everyday context. An intersectional approach also investigates how power structures are linked together in a larger context and at the macro level (Yuval-Davies, 2005). In exploring these complex links, we take up the concepts of intersectionality, visual culture and, more specifically, homosociality, class, ethnicity and risk-taking. The concepts help us to explain and discuss the ways that masculinity is linked to certain privileges, to creativity and to a global entrepreneurial masculinity in skateboarding. Using an intersectional approach in this research study meant investigating masculinity and white middleclass subjectivity specifically, since the skateboarding group was a rather homogenous group.

Researching the visual

The study takes its point of departure from a case study involving a full-length skateboard video and an interview with an 18-year-old boy named Wilhelm, who created the video. The video is 38 min long and was filmed and edited by Wilhelm during his leisure time, one year before the interview was conducted. The video features eleven of Wilhelm’s skateboarding friends, and each skater is shown for three minutes. The skateboarders in the video are all white males and about 18–19 years of age. The video was filmed on different locations in Stockholm, the capital city of Sweden. Visually, the skateboard video blurs traditional film genres such as documentary, staged drama, comedy and artistic expression.

This article draws on a critical visual methodology that carefully analyses visual images as representations. Images are considered articulations of cultural practices where meaning and conflicts are negotiated and social subjects produced (Rose, 2001/2016). Moreover, “visual imagery is never innocent; it is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges” (Rose, 2001/2016, p. 23). The social context of images involves the economic and political processes in which cultural production is embedded. The mobilization of media images and a variety of urban lifestyles has become part of daily life, reflecting “the cultural logic of late capitalism” (Harvey, 1990, p. 63). Contemporary cultural practices are intertwined with the production, distribution and economics of visual images and the political and gendered subjectivities linked to their making. In this research, it means that the production of a skateboard video, where young men are skateboarding in public urban spaces, is connected to intersections of subjectivity
and a particular embodied view. In other words, the video camera is not registering reality objectively; instead, the situated knowledge and view of the photographer are represented and articulated as part of a cultural practice (Rose, 2001/2016). Furthermore, the image of skateboarding as an oppositional subculture has been constructed through the history of skateboard films and videos, where the commercialization of skateboarding is founded on a narrative of the subcultural, authentic and anti-authoritarian entrepreneur (Dinces, 2011; Hellman, 2016; Wheaton & Beal, 2003; Yochim, 2010). The visual culture of skateboarding, involving photographing, filming and editing photos and videos, as well as the distribution of these visual materials in social media, was important to Wilhelm and his skateboarding friends. Hoping for a chance to be discovered and find a career in the skateboarding subculture, they frequently documented their skateboarding visually and distributed the material in social media.

The research methods include analysis of Wilhelm’s skateboarding video and excerpts from an interview with him. We have focused on meaning making in the relation between scenes in the video and excerpts from the interview, and how knowledge and subjectivity are constructed in the empirical material. We deepen our analysis by directing our attention to what is taken for granted and the contradictions and complexities in the material (Rose, 2001/2016). Screenshots from the skateboarding video are presented along with excerpts in three categories: the brotherhood of skateboarding, challenging white middle-class normativity, and the body at risk. These categories are a result of identifying key themes in the video and the interview.

The brotherhood of skateboarding

When we talk about skateboarding, Wilhelm accentuates how much he enjoys being with his skateboard friends, and the strong relationship that exists between peers in the group:

Like, no one is like superficial to one another, skateboard is a chill thing that everyone does, so it’s easy to get along and stuff. And, well... it’s like... you get a lot of friends, a lot of companionship in this thing, and that’s also why you want to do it, because it’s so... it’s so social... a social thing to do.

The feeling of skating and, in particular, the social aspects are the main reasons why Wilhelm skates. He describes the companionship and the physical closeness that he experiences in the skateboarding group:

Yeah, well you get close with one another, we kind of lie around on the ground and, well, when you are skating the streets and you fall, then you just lie on the ground and everybody is rolling around, you know, you’re kind of all over each other. It’s really physical, and, you know, if anyone nails a trick or something, you just hug them or give them high-five... because you get really happy, and stoked and inspired to skate yourself, when you see someone doing a great trick, well you..., skateboarders are really physical with one another. And that’s kind of, it’s part of the companionship. Because, it’s like awesome...

Here, Wilhelm express the ways that homosocial tactility and bonding is the very point of skateboarding. Homosociality is a concept that defines social relations between persons of the same sex. It also describes the mechanisms and dynamics of masculinity as a privileged and dominant position, through the identification and bonding between men (Sedgwick, 1985). However, there are more inclusive forms of homosocial relations that are...
based on intimacy and emotional closeness (Anderson, 2009/2012). Homosociality, expressed as physical closeness and brotherhood, is here understood as a crucial aspect of skateboard masculinity, as we see in Wilhelm’s statements. He emphasizes the feeling of togetherness between the skateboarders, all of whom are male. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on physical experiences, positive emotions and bodily closeness between the skateboarders, which could be understood as a form of play. According to Kehily and Nayak (1997), play is a significant part of strengthening and unifying young male peer-group cultures. In other words, bonding between the skating guys can be considered a pleasurable and playful form of togetherness that permits the demonstration of physical closeness and bodily contact, seemingly without fear of homophobia, while at the same time they are acting out heterosexual masculinity. Homosociality is depicted here as a parallel process of sensitive and intimate friendship between men and at the same time as part of the very structure that consolidates masculine hegemony. Physical tactility and emotional intimacy are described explicitly by Wilhelm and may indicate a temporal space in which homophobia is diminished (see also McCormack & Anderson, 2010). The homosociality depicted thus demonstrates an inclusive masculinity that allows young men to be intimate and physically close. On the one hand, this very strong bonding process is part of a structure that strengthens the hegemony of men. On the other hand, the playfulness of the skateboarders makes it possible to conceive of a masculinity that is dislocated from the heterosexual matrix and moves to a very temporal and local space where masculinity is unstable and fluid.

The skateboard video contains many scenes depicting the young male skateboarders sitting around together. Special forms of handshakes are used, such as the so-called bro-fist and high-five. The masculinity demonstrated in these pictures is neither hegemonic nor subordinate but situated somewhere in between these two poles. It is an expression of resistance to the competitive sport masculinity, but at the same time it has attributes of an alternative, outsider masculinity Figures 1–4.

Being together as a group and exchanging greetings like the high-five and bro-fist are frequently depicted in the video and are here analysed as a culture of brotherhood in skating. The key visual signs of skateboarding brotherhood and bonding are depicted as

Figure 1. The skateboard group hanging around together, taking turns at skateboarding.
Figure 2. After succeeding with a trick, physical expressions of joy like hugging are common in the video.

Figure 3. High-five.

Figure 4. Group hug.
informal and relaxed social relations as well as gestures of encouragement and support for each other. Emotional and physical expressions of play and hugging are acted out in the video and are also expressed as crucial aspects of skateboarding in the interview with Wilhelm. Signs of domination or competition are almost absent in these film sequences; it is an inclusive homosociality that is visible here. At the same time, the affectionate gestures depicted are culturally accepted as “manly” in a broader sports context (Anderson, 2009/2012). There is a tension between the way intimacy and sensitivity are depicted in the young men’s interaction and the homosocial expressions that are part of a masculine structure, where male bonding is also about empowerment in relation to “others”, mainly women and non-white persons.

**Challenging white middle-class normativity**

Although there are many signs of brotherhood and male intimacy in the young men’s interaction, there are also signs of aggression, depicted as intertextual references to hip-hop style in popular culture (Dinces, 2012). When Wilhelm comments on the style of skateboarding in the video, he talks about a visual culture that can be identified as somewhat aggressive and intimidating for non-skaters. He attempts to explain:

> Yes, I know, one might think, well some skaters look like a little bit … dangerous, or not dangerous, but … but it’s like a style kind of, it’s a lot about … Well, style in skateboarding, it’s like, it’s … uh, an incomprehensible thing if you don’t skate.

The visual culture is depicted by clothing, hoodies and garments that hide the face. Also, the skateboarding acts, such as skating on park benches, and bringing damages to public spaces, are important to the visual culture expressed in the skateboarding video. Wilhelm continues by emphasizing how the media manipulates the view of skateboarding as something bad, in a sense illegal or connected to vandalism. At the same time, Wilhelm explains that skateboarders draw upon this imagery by distributing skateboard videos and photographs in social media, documenting vandalism and aggressive acts such as throwing the skateboard or hitting it against a wall after failing a skating trick. He states, somewhat ambiguously:

> … there are prejudices about skateboarding, I mean sometimes skaters destroy their own reputation themselves. It’s much about vandalising and posting things like that in social media. It’s kind of stupid, really, but in a way, the whole skating thing is about vandalising, like in parks and public places … But it’s not necessarily a negative thing, because, like, a park bench that is never being used anyway might be a little worn by skating on it, but at least it has some purpose then …

Skateboarding in public spaces means colonizing those spaces, actually giving meaning to more or less abandoned milieus, and at the same time causing wear and tear in, and vandalizing public spaces.

At times, the skateboard video works to reinforce the media images and stereotypes of African Americans as aggressive and products of a ghetto culture (Yochim, 2010). This style is represented in the skateboard video by visual signs of “being bad”, which can be associated with informal, illegal activities, such as trespassing in order to record a new trick (Snyder, 2017). Four images are selected from the skateboard video that represent
scenes romanticizing hip-hop culture, which can also be understood as cultural phenomena of resisting adult rules and norms.

Some examples of a playful flirtation with illegal and aggressive expressions in the video include imitating surveillance camera footage, wearing a balaclava that hides the face, smashing the skateboard repeatedly into the ground after failing a trick, and hanging out in parks, smoking and skating on cars. It seems that these visual expressions in Wilhelm’s video are associated with resisting white middle-class norms and expectations. In Figure 5, the skateboarding group gathered in a parking area, while one person, whose face is hidden by a hoodie, is skateboarding on a car. Figure 6 depicts two police officers entering the public space outside a shopping mall where Wilhelm and his friends were skateboarding. As the police arrive, Wilhelm and his friends rapidly leave the space. In Figure 7, a person in the video is wearing a balaclava. The sequence is only five seconds long, and a filter has been added to the video that suggests video footage from a surveillance camera, from what might be associated with the events of a robbery. At the same time, the person is fooling around with the balaclava in front of the camera, suggesting that the robbery scene is not to be taken seriously. Finally, in Figure 8, a skateboarder is skating in an urban setting of concrete and graffiti, wearing a cap and a hoodie that hide his identity. These signs can be analysed as articulations of roughness and a component of an urban street culture. Figures 5 and 8 seem to have been filmed in urban environments in public spaces that are passages in the city where many people pass through every day. In the skateboarding video, there are articulations of resistance towards adult white masculinity and the normative or polite use of and behaviour in public spaces (Yochim, 2010). In this way, a subversive masculinity is depicted in the video stills that, furthermore, are connected to leisure, play and spatiality.

The influence of the visual culture found in hip-hop music videos is commonplace in skateboard films in general (Brayton, 2005). As an example, the greeting rituals are inspired by popular cultural images of the hip-hop style and can be considered a soft version of the so called gangsta aesthetics, frequently represented in popular culture (Dinces, 2012). It is a visual culture that is recurrent in skateboard films and videos, where angry white males attempt to refuse whiteness (Brayton, 2005). In Wilhelm’s skateboarding video, there are attributes and acts that may be interpreted as more than merely using public spaces for a purpose. The video also entails aggressive expressions, although

![Figure 5](image-url). Skating on a car in a parking area.
depicted in a playful and sometimes humorous manner. Irony, playfulness and humour are important ingredients that soften the aggressiveness depicted. The skateboard video entails many sequences where white middle-class values and norms seem to be rejected. Instead, visual signs of a romanticized fantasy of “being bad” pervade the video, seemingly

Figure 6. Police arrive and the skaters leave the site.

Figure 7. Wearing a balaclava to hide the face.

Figure 8. Skating in a graffiti-painted space.
as a way of resisting middle-class norms such as completing a higher education and entering a respected profession, having a family, taking on a mortgage to buy a house, et cetera. The images from Wilhelm’s skateboard video can be understood as appropriating the authenticity from the Afro-American culture in order to replace middle-class whiteness with a white anti-hero masculinity (Brayton, 2005; Yochim, 2010). Nonetheless, skating also involves athletic skills and bodily risk-taking, which leads us to the final key theme of the analysis.

**Risk-taking and bravery**

Risk-taking is part of the masculine construction that involves bravery, which in turn involves mastering one’s fears, enduring pain and risking physical injuries without fear. Risk and risk-taking are seen here as constitutive of masculine subject positioning and as something contextual and culturally situated in boys’ everyday life negotiations (Connell, 2005). The aggressiveness depicted in the skateboard video is thus about dealing with one’s vulnerability, the risk of losing face, as skateboarding is practised in public places and in the skateboard group. To fall in “cool ways” and to endure pain can also be seen as important ingredients of a skating style, especially since skateboarders, according to Wilhelm, often document their skating visually and distribute photographs and videos through social media.

Skateboarding is sometimes considered an extreme sport and performance art as in the TV channel ESPN’s yearly action sport event X Games (Sweeny, 2008). Although skateboarding and other alternative sports are understood as challenging the stereotypical jock or hegemonic masculinity in a sport context, alternative sports are still mainly male-dominated and founded on enduring pain and embracing risk (Kidder, 2013). Skateboarding is now officially considered a sport and will make its Olympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games. This is a controversial decision within the skateboarding community (O’Connor, 2016). Wilhelm stresses that skateboarding is not about sport, and that he rather enjoys watching videos of someone’s efforts to learn a skate trick. He explains:

> It’s very much like … anger and stuff can happen very easily in skateboarding. But when you pull the trick off and it’s been really hard and difficult, and you, like, perform, it’s just the best feeling ever. And when you have got it captured on video it’s so incredible, much better. So, that’s what people want. Not just that you did a perfect line [a series of tricks], one wants to see how much you struggled for it, it’s really fun to watch.

The issue of risk is highly present in the skateboard video. Skating takes place in many different urban locations and on a variety of material surfaces. Screenshots from the video show both successful skateboarding tricks and the skateboarders failing and falling, sometimes in a manner that appears dangerous and painful. The video stills presented below depict the physical performances and corporal risks of injury as a prominent articulation in skateboarding. Risk and risk-taking can be considered part of a wider masculine discourse, in which mastering fear is closely connected to the cultural notions of bravery and heroism (Mellström & Ericson, 2014).

In Figures 9–11, the skateboarders challenge their skills and abilities while at the same time risking bodily injury. In Figure 12, the skateboarder is only a few centimetres away from a busy highway. Masculine risk-taking is associated with playfulness as well as
Figure 9. The film features many high jumps in seemingly dangerous locations.

Figure 10. This section of the film shows a person falling four times, and then succeeding to skateboard on the rail.

Figure 11. Falling on his head without a helmet.
evoking risk as in power and danger; it defies adult codes and exposes the body to risk. Corporal risk is produced by performing advanced and physically difficult skateboarding tricks at high velocity. Here, the articulations are about bravery and taking the risk of bodily injury, which are connected to the excitement of accomplishment and expanding one’s skills (Bäckström, 2005, 2013; Connell, 2005; Kidder, 2013). The analysis of risk-taking consists of a network of visual signs in the skate video, which involves high jumps, balancing acts, high speed, endurance of pain, vulnerability, aggression and bravery, all of which are signs of a physical practice that puts the body at risk. The skateboarding body becomes a site where the meaning of being male in a contemporary context is tested, challenged and renegotiated. This occurs in a continuum of playfulness, risk-taking and the pleasure of exceeding one’s physical abilities.

**Intersections in skateboarding – discussions**

An intersectional perspective has been used in this research to analyse and deepen the understanding of informal hierarchies that create and reproduce inequalities at a local level as well as in a larger societal context. The analysis brings together lines of inquiry that concern young males’ playful use of urban space with the articulation of the visual culture of skateboarding as a homosocial, mainly white middle-class practice where bravery and risk-taking are essential articulations. We argue that one way in which the skateboarders articulate masculine subjectivity is by a complex amalgam of playfulness, risk-taking, colonization of space and the visual style involved in their skateboarding. The skateboarders in the current study are testing, defining and redefining the meaning, limits and excesses of white, middle-class masculinity through bodily performances – their bodies function as a site for a communicative construction and elaboration of masculinity, class and ethnicity. In our analyses, this is expressed by Wilhelm and depicted in the skateboarding video first as a gendered issue, through bodily intimacy and brotherhood among skaters. Second, the visual culture of skateboarding is expressed as resisting white middle-class norms and appropriating a hip-hop culture style through visual signs of “being bad”. It entails a subversive masculinity associated with a certain way of dressing, moving and acting that might be considered somewhat aggressive, resisting white middle-class norms. Finally, the skateboarders’ bodies function as a site for masculinity, class and ethnicity.
ethnicity by the act of risk-taking – skateboarding in dangerous locations and risking falls when performing high jumps et cetera.

As suggested by our analysis, skateboarding is a distinctly masculinized activity which involves resisting white middle-class values and articulating an alternative masculinity. Previous research demonstrates that this is a common feature in other high-risk alternative leisure activities such as snowboarding, parkour and windsurfing. These alternative leisure activities are individualistic, leaderless and often non-competitive and anti-authoritarian (Kidder, 2013). Yet, as suggested by previous studies, involvement in high-risk sport activities such as skateboarding is not only linked to “edgework” (i.e. exposing oneself to risks and danger), but it also involves and creates a sense of freedom of expression and experience of brotherhood among the skateboarders (Turner, 2013). To many skateboarders skateboarding is not only about the practice and exercise of skateboarding, it is equally important to be part of a certain social and cultural context and community (Borden, 2019; Dinces, 2012; Hellmann, 2016). The homosocial, playful and ironic aspects expressed in the skateboard video can be seen as renegotiation and a deterritorialisation of the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity. Through male bodily intimacy and playfulness, the skateboarding guys in this study create a space where they can temporarily escape the pressures of a heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, although alternative leisure activities and participation often include intimate relations within the community, there is a class dimension to these experiences. In other words, acting as “outsiders” works to exclude persons who do not know the subcultural codes of dressing, acting and moving. In this research, the skateboarding group preserved their positions as young white men from middle-class backgrounds.

Furthermore, the skateboarding video actively works to exclude non-heterosexual expressions of masculinity at the same time as it uses the visual culture of non-white masculinity to uphold the power of white masculinity (see also Yochim, 2010). In the skateboarding video, this is articulated as being street-smart and cool, an essential feature of the video. By adopting the visual signs of black culture, the skateboarders are legitimizing an authentic expression of cultural subordination. It means that, in the skateboard video, black culture is expressed as a style and a visual culture, disregarding the power relations involved in racial questions and without critiquing ethnic inequalities. It seems possible for the young men in our study to “consume” different skateboarding personas as a free choice of style. The power of being a white male in this context involves the freedom of expressing black culture while at the same time ignoring racial inequalities and enjoying the privilege of not being considered a real threat by the police and the public.

There are entrepreneurial aspects of skateboarding, in that many skateboarders invest their time trying to make a career not only in skateboarding itself, but also filming, photographing, designing skateboards or other skating equipment, and working for skateboard magazines or in a skateboard stores. The so-called authenticity and the products that are marketed through different alternative youth subcultures have become a billion-dollar industry, not least the marketing and sales of different sneakers (Atencio & Beal, 2011). It can be understood as part of the desire to resist white middle-class values about choosing a stable and “boring” career and instead turn to skateboarding as a cool, playful and risky career. This also reflects a neo-liberal ideal about entrepreneurial individualism, consumer creativity and market trends. The entrepreneurial businessman is ruthless, individualistic, creative and prepared to take risks in order to succeed (Connell, 2005).
to say, the global businessman is also white, urban and male, which in turn means enjoying
the taken-for-granted privileges of self-confidence and a sense of the right to enter and
colonize public spaces. In our analysis, this is visible in the skateboard video mainly in
the way that the skateboarders act, dress and conduct themselves as a group in urban
spaces. Additionally, the consumption of and freedom to choose – even to appropriate –
black visual culture, is here considered an effect of a neoliberalist economic practice
that values maximization of entrepreneurial freedom, individual liberty and free-market
trade (Harvey, 2006). Neoliberalism has become a taken-for-granted way of thinking,
and this is reflected in our analysis of young skateboarders’ lifestyle choices, visual
culture, ways of thinking and passions. The consequences of this neoliberal logic and
passion are increased social inequalities and, at the same time, entrepreneurial risk and
innovation. For the skateboarding males in this study, it seems that the intersections of
masculinity, ethnicity and class are constructed by creating an image – a sign system of
clothes (appropriating black hip-hop culture), ways of moving and acting (for example,
risk-taking) – that is articulated by the body and the urban space in the skateboard video.

The right to be a playful space invader seems like a privilege that the skateboarders in
our study take for granted, without regard to whether their actions are excluding or dis-
turbing to “others” in the city, and without running any real risks of being harassed or
arrested by the police. They have the privilege of rebelling without fear of violent recrimi-
nations. The construction and presentation of self in the skateboard video are integrated
with the quest for individual identity, self-realization and meaning making that pertains to
a global entrepreneurial mindset.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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