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# Edgework, Fun, and Identification in a Recreational Subculture: Street BMX Riders

**Abstract**   The sociological study of risk-taking behavior is a relatively recent development. Lyng (1990) and others have developed the field of edgework, or the "sociology of risk-taking." In this study, we examine a group of edgeworkers to understand the role of fun and identity in a group of BMX "freestyle" bicycle riders and conclude that these riders reject rational reasons, in the sense of the term envisioned by Weber, for riding in favor of choosing an activity that they report as fun, which leads to feelings such as self-actualization and fulfillment. Additionally, they are not concerned that others, outside of the subculture, recognize their status as participants, further suggesting that rationality played little into the calculation used to define success by this group.

**Keywords**   Sociology of Risk-Taking; Edgework; Identity; Fun; Recreational Subculture; Street BMX Riders

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In a modern rational world, it is understood that many of the actions taken in society, as individuals and in collective groups, are for gains of status, efficiency, or income (Ritzer 1999). These ideas can be traced to Weber (1958) and the "iron cage" that creates discontent as individuals may try to find alternatives to the day-to-day existence rationality creates. For some, this results in turning to the pursuit of leisure and/or sports pursuits. With this in mind, what motivates individuals to become involved in activities that engage the risk of physical harm and the need to acquire special skills to manage these risks? Additionally, what benefits accrue to those involved in risky pastimes?

To deal with these and related questions, Lyng (1990) developed the concept of edgework, the sociology of risk-taking. To better understand motivation and risk-taking, this project examines a group of "freestyle" BMX riders and looks at motivation and identity. That is, what motivates these participants and how important is their public identity, which can be a vehicle for status attainment, as BMX riders.

## Literature Review

Until relatively recently, risky behavior and risk-taking, in general, have been concepts that were considered more in the domain of psychology (Lyng and Snow 1986). It was thought that risk-taking was a highly individualistic act (Jung 1964). Thus, little structural or sociological research was conducted on the topic. In 1990, Stephen Lyng took a structural approach to voluntary risk-taking as he looked to society to understand why individuals partake in risk-taking activities. Edgework was the term that Lyng (1990) used to refer to the sociology of risk-taking. In doing so, he was able to identify societal forces that influenced risk-taking behavior and the benefits that accrue as a result of this behavior.

Edgework occurs when the individual voluntarily places her/himself in a high-risk situation, or partakes in a high-risk activity, in which the individual could experience serious, or even life-threatening, physical or mental harm if the situation or activity in which the individual participates is not navigated with a high level of skill (Lyng 1990). All activities that are considered edgework involve an obvious threat to one's mental or physical well-being, or "one's sense of ordered existence" (Lyng 1990:857).

Edgework can, at least in part, be a reaction to modern societal conditions such as rationalization, which refers to the notion of using science, empirical evidence, calculability, efficiency, and reason to understand and explain aspects of modern life (Weber 1958; Ritzer 2004). As Weber predicted, the increasing rationalization of the world leads to a mundane existence where each aspect of life can be explained, predicted, and readjusted for the sake of reason and profit. The disenchantment (Weber 1958) of life is many times referred to as the "iron cage" of rationality (Edles and Appelrouth 2010; Allan 2011). Edgework can be a reaction to these social constraints of modern society.

Edgeworkers attempt to escape the constraints of society by voluntarily partaking in risky activities (Laurendeau 2006). Edgework posits that, by participating in an intentionally risky activity, the

participant has the opportunity to solely determine the well-being of her/his life (Lyng 1990), a phenomenon that is increasingly rare in the progressively rationalized world (Ritzer 2004). This opportunity allows the individual to exceed the limits of society as the edgeworker is only concerned about her/his well-being, not what society tells her/him to do, and not what an occupation makes the individual create—a situation that is highly prized by the edgeworker (Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng 2001). However, edgeworkers are not interested in the types of activities that involve risk associated with a pure gamble as they are interested in utilizing their specialized skill(s) to navigate the edge (Lyng 1990). A complete gamble would not allow them to develop, perfect, and perform their skills.

The edge is the line between chaos and control. It is the goal of the edgeworker to approach that line or "edge" as closely as possible without crossing the line or falling off the edge (Mahaffy 2007). "In abstract terms, edgework is best understood as an approach to the boundary between order and disorder, form and formless" (Lyng 1990:858). During edgework activities, the participants put their body and/or mind at risk (Lyng 2005a). Such activities that put the individuals' bodily well-being at risk include skydiving (Laurendeau 2006), BASE (Buildings, Antennas, Spans [bridges], and Earth [cliffs]) jumping (Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng 2001), and, presumably, freestyle BMX. Some forms of edgework may focus on mental (McGovern and McGovern 2011) or financial risk (Smith 2005). The concept of edgework has been expanded to even include "virtual edgework" in the world of online gaming (Shay 2015). Some other examples of edgework involve spiritual/

religious activities (Bromley 2007) in the form of rituals (e.g., serpent handling and fire walking), academic work of some types (Sjoberg 2005), and illegal drug use (Reith 2005). The latter example reminds us that some forms can put the actor at risk of both mental and physical harm.

Edgework is a multi-faceted theory that contains many dimensions. Though not touched on in every piece of research in this area, these dimensions include serious leisure, identity, performance limits, skills, sensations, and escaping the mundane. For many people who participate in an edgework activity, it is far more than just leisure, it is "serious leisure" (Stebbins 2001; 2007). Serious leisure, as distinguished from casual leisure, requires a much higher level of devotion, development of skills and knowledge, as well as a systematic approach to the activity (Stebbins 2001; 2007). The rewards may be greater and more long-lasting.

The "edge" or boundary line is not static in two distinct ways: 1) what constitutes the "edge" for a given activity differs from person to person and 2) what constitutes the "edge" changes over time. Laurendeau (2006:584) explicitly notes that edgeworkers "explore the boundary where order ends and chaos begins, [but] they do so in different ways and to different degrees." Some edgeworkers explore the limits of their equipment or tools (Lyng 1990), which is the case with skydivers, as the type of canopy chosen can impact the degree of danger (Laurendeau 2006).

Activities that are out of the risk-takers' control are of no interest to the edgeworker (Lyng 1990)

as edgeworkers claim the experience produces a sense of self-realization, self-actualization, or self-determination (Lyng 1990; Kidder 2006a). The performance of the edgeworkers leaves them feeling more alive (Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng 2001), even though fear may be part of the experience (Milovanovic 2005). In this state of mind, the edgeworker's perception of time becomes distorted (Laurendeau 2006). Time may pass much slower or much faster than usual. For example, skydivers report that the 30 seconds of freefall feels like an eternity (Lyng and Snow 1986), while rock climbers say that hours pass like minutes (Robinson 2004). Time can be a subjective experience with similar activities generating varied experiences in relation to the perceptions of time passage (Flaherty 2000). "Greatly elevated levels of concentration" can generate distortions of time in both elongated and shortened perceptions of passed time (Flaherty 2000:71). Edgework generates these levels of intense concentration as required for success. However, non-edgework activities can also generate distortions of time (Fine 2012).

These sensations associated with edgework and intensity can lead to a type of "hyperreality" with reports of the experience as more real than everyday situations (Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng 2001) and perhaps ineffable (Buckley 2012). Edgework can produce in its participants an array of feelings that include a heightened sense of self, a sense of self-actualization, as well as a feeling of omnipotence (Lyng 1990).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) developed the concept of "flow" to explain the type of feeling that one might

experience when totally absorbed in an activity that fully encompasses an individual's mental and physical capacity. This feeling may border on euphoria as the skills of an individual are matched with successful completion of an important seemingly all encompassing task. Participants in serious leisure edgework who experience flow can find that success leads to feelings of empowerment and increased self-esteem (Gagné and Austin 2010).

A large proportion of actions in the U.S. become, or can become, about making money, whether it be the most obvious of actions like getting a job, or less likely actions such as riding a freestyle BMX bike. When actions become about making money, it distorts and destroys the initial action (Simmel 1978). Simmel argued that money is used to put an objective value on a subjective experience by measuring it in terms of money. In the U.S., rationality is an objective value (Ritzer 2004). Therefore, when a subjective experience is carried out with the intent to make it objectively meaningful, the action is thus transformed into something that has the intent to make money or advance one's position. It is no longer merely the subjective experiences that may include fun, joy, and love, which was what the initial action was performed for in the first place.

Boredom itself can play a role in explaining behaviors that violate the norms of society (Ferrell 2004). The iron cage of rationality (Weber 1958) can result in limits placed on subjective feelings, such as fun, that may not fit the strict definition of rationality. Edgework provides an avenue of escape, if temporary, for some.

Members of subcultures that are based on recreation may use equipment, unique language, and rituals to identify members (Kidder 2006b; Austin 2009), which can become, in a sense, totems for the subculture (Kidder 2006b). Messenger bicyclists have a type of respect and honor for their bicycles, which symbolizes their unique encompassing lifestyle (Kidder 2006a). Individual identity can, in part, be established by possessions (Belk 1988; Tharp 2007). Consumption of products and accompanying activity can also be a form of self-expression (Dant 1996; Austin 2009) as can participation in a "lifestyle" sport such as BMX riding (Corte 2013). Displaying identity may be utilized in status attainment, which can fit into a rational model of behavior.

Members of a serious leisure (Stebbins 2007) subculture involved in edgework (Lyng 1990) can develop strong collective and individual identities. Combining the communal aspects of these types of subcultures with identities based on material possessions (Austin 2009) suggests that identity and community can be multi-layered. Members of these types of groups not only develop a personal identity, but markers of the subculture can help them identify each other, as well as project an identity to other members (Kidder 2005). Participation in edgework can compound the sense of identity that is found in other types of subcultures.

## Methods

For this project, one of the researchers took advantage of his position within the local "freestyle" BMX community as a long time rider. He took on the role of "opportunistic complete participant" (Adler and Adler 1987). This role allowed the researcher to draw on his own experiences within the subculture, as well as to capitalize on his acceptance within the group.

This study was conducted within the local BMX community in Louisville, Kentucky. In the early 2000s, a large skatepark was opened near the downtown area. This provided a congregating area for local BMX riders and skateboarders. Resources, such as a local skatepark, can help to form and unite a group of BMX riders (Corte 2013). During that era, Louisville was somewhat of a hub for BMX activities with some high profile riders relocating to the area. The local BMX profile diminished somewhat, but still remained fairly active during this study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the local BMX community, which facilitated participants in expressing themselves using their own words, and helped the researcher to understand their environment, as well as permitted flexibility (Brenner, Brown, and Canter 1985; Maxwell 2012). Only long-term experienced riders were selected for interviews. This allowed for an understanding of riders who were considered "hardcore" riders and "serious leisure" participants (Stebbins 2001). However, there were no professional riders included in this project. That is, none received compensation for their riding skills. Interviews were conducted with 15 participants, until the point of saturation, and the interviews were transcribed to identify themes (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1994).

All of the respondents were male. It is not surprising that this BMX community is all male as participation in risk sports is, in many cases, a gendered experience (Laurendeau 2008). BMX is sometimes referred to as a "sport," with a realization that there are a variety of definitions of the term, some of which might not include riders who are not engaged in a competitive endeavor (Karen and Washington 2015). The sample members were experienced riders reporting an average of 10.8 years of experience, with a range of 3.5 to 15. As one might expect with this level of experience, the participants were adults with an average age of 24.8 years and a range of 19 to 31. All but one of the respondents had at least a high school diploma and eleven identified their race as white. The remaining four were non-white or mixed race.

## Results

### Riding BMX for Fun, Fulfillment, and Escape

Those who participate in voluntary risk-taking edgework are breaking the constraints of an increasingly rationalized world (Lyng 2005b). Respondents in this study were asked why they ride BMX, or what does BMX mean to them. Nearly all of them had a similar response: BMX is fun. In their view, fun and sharing time with friends is of utmost importance. Fine (2012) points out that time is a resource, termed "temporal capital," and spending time with fellow BMX riders suggests that riders are more than willing to expend this type of capital on time with their friends and their passion. For example, Bill (pseudonyms are used) said, "I just think it's all about having fun…It's nothing more than that."

Similarly, Todd responded:

Well, I've always loved to do it. I've always done it and it's fun, really. I mean, it's fun to get out, and, you know, the weather's nice—go out and meet up with your friends. Its riding, it feels good, I mean. If you don't ride BMX, it's kind of hard to explain…Why we do…cuz people see us wreck…"Why do you do that to yourself?!" It's just fun. Like it's just…it's hard to explain. It's like doing a sport, you know. Why do you do it?—It's fun!

As Ralph said:

It's so fun to…It's really just so fun to go ride like… riding like new spots…I feel like it makes riding so much more fun to go to new cities and ride handrails and, I don't know. Just riding with friends, as friends progress, it makes riding a lot more fun, too.

While other riders may have not used the word "fun," their responses elicit the idea of fun. Luke noted, "There's nothing else that makes me happy," in reference to why he rides BMX. This confirms the explanation that many edgeworkers participate because, as they explain if prodded, it is done for fun (Lyng 2008).

While most of the sample agreed the reason why they ride BMX was for fun, several of the respondents seemed to imply that riding BMX for fun was in fact the "right" reason to ride BMX. As this quote from Matt demonstrated:

As long as you're having fun and pushing yourself, you're doing everything right. It doesn't matter how

good you are, I could see someone trying to learn a feeble and I'll be trying to learn something harder, but I get just as stoked seeing them trying that as I do for myself trying whatever I'm doing.

Matt is making the case that one should only ride BMX for fun, but one should also be pushing oneself. What also makes this statement interesting is how Matt does not take into consideration the skill level of someone who is having fun. The trick he mentioned, "feeble"—short for feeble grind—is one of the most basic tricks in BMX in which a rider may "grind" or slide a part (such as a peg) of the bicycle on an obstacle (such as a concrete wall). However, other respondents do take into consideration the skill of a rider when it comes to fun.

Where Matt finds the least skilled riders of BMX doing it for the "right" reason, others find, arguably the most skilled form of riding, contest/competitive riding, to be done for the "wrong" reason. Contest riding is a commodified form of BMX riding with corporate sponsorship and riders who are capable of making a living competing. Past research, by Edwards and Corte (2009), suggests that as BMX riders become professional, the pressure to perform increases and the competitive nature that develops may actually deter friendships within the community of participants. Many riders refer to professional and/or commodified riding as "mainstream" riding. John explains his views:

From what I grew up learning about…it just…all that stuff [competitive/contest riding] kind of takes away from what it originally was. Which I feel it should still be—go have fun. If you can do those tricks…and are

having fun, I mean, awesome for you. But, I just feel like they dedicate their life to trying to be like that [a contest rider], instead of more or less going out with friends and everything and having a good time.

Here, Todd speaks about mainstream BMX and fun:

I think it's getting a lot more serious, I would think. It's getting more competitive versus just going out and having fun. Well, at least in the mainstream. I think it's the competition, and the riding is just getting so crazy these days…I don't even try to keep up with them, I just do my own thing…the competition is pretty high versus kind of just having fun with it.

Bob voiced similar sentiment:

That's where, you know, when I started riding, it was, you know, just something you do with your buddies to have fun and, you know, there wasn't really any real goals of getting, you know, blowing up and getting sponsored by Nike and, you know, Starburst, whatever…I don't know…the culture…it seems like it's getting more mainstream.

From these quotes it is clear that the participants have a very distinct idea of fun, as far as riding BMX is concerned. They are not riding for rational (Weber 1958) reasons and not with the intent of winning a contest, or with the intent to be the best. They ride with only the intent to please oneself or the subculture in which one identifies, for no other reason than to have fun, as they define the term. As one rider stated, "If you don't have fun with it, then, you know, it's not worth doing really." This notion of fun does not simply mean

it is light-hearted feel-good fun. These riders push themselves (serious leisure) and sometimes take risks (edgework) all in the name of fun. Yet, when these riders push themselves, they do so for reasons that fall within their subcultural ideology of fun, which means they do it not for money or status outside the group, but because it feels good.

While some contest riders probably consider it fun, this sample seems to have trouble believing that would be the case if they were engaged in contest riding. The participants in our study consider contest riders as doing it for the wrong reason, as money can distort the reasons why people do things. That is, rationality, making money, for these participants, is not only shunned, but viewed as the "wrong" reason for participating.

Mainstream BMX riding in the form of contest and competition has made freestyle BMX rational: it has made it about training (calculability), winning (status), being the best (efficiency), and making money (rationality). The sample in this study is hesitant to embrace this mainstream form of BMX riding because money then becomes seen as the standard by which BMX can be measured, not the subjective experiences of fun and love.

Commensuration, as envisioned by Espeland and Stevens (1998), allows for a common comparison metric across differing qualities. In many cases, financial gain or consideration is recognized to be a common metric for the measurement and allocation of resources such as time, energy, and commitment. These riders have consciously chosen to express opposition to commodification of BMX. In

this view, money does not destroy things so much as serve as a symbol of things a culture wishes to place no subjective value on, only monetary value, which can be less meaningful in subjective experiences or activities.

The growth of professionalism and commodification in BMX riding has allowed a few riders to make a living in riding, but even professionals may acknowledge that this takes it to a new level as they "are no longer only professional athletes, but also entertainers" (Edwards and Corte 2009:124), suggesting that they suffer some degradation in the joy of the activity. However, the riders in their study also tended to point out that they began riding when making a living as a BMX competitor was not possible, suggesting that they were originally attracted to the activity for other reasons than sponsorship and income.

Resistance to commodification among BMX riders is a complex issue as some may resist it, while others may view it as an opportunity to advance their riding (Edwards and Corte 2010). However, this sample of BMX riders, which does not include any professional riders, still highly values BMX, and to use money to measure it degrades the activity that is about more than money. This quote from Tony explicitly demonstrates this point:

…just the entire nature of the BMX world and the BMX market itself is too similar to any other job or any other market. It's all about money…[more] than it ever has been in recent years…and I think that it degrades BMX to the core as what it even means to be a BMX rider. To people who can remember the

"golden era" when BMX was less popular...You only really rode because you loved it; you had a passion for it. I think the way the entire industry is ran now degrades it to the core.

Sport can serve as respite from routine life (Segrave 2000), and BMX is no exception as a rather common theme that emerged in relation to why they ride BMX was that it more or less helped them escape the troubles or stresses of everyday life. This is consistent with the ideas of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) and self-fulfillment found in edgework (Lyng 1990). For example, Jeb said: "BMX...gives me something to do to get away from school or work. It's an outlet for me. Anything that's hectic that's going on I can ride and kind of forget about it for a little bit…" The term "outlet" and/or "stress-reliever" were the two most frequently used terms when describing how they would escape unpleasant times of their life through riding their BMX bike. When you step onto your bike, everything else disappears, it is only you (and possibly your BMX riding friends), your bike, and whatever you decide to ride. It is almost like therapy, as this quote points out, "If you don't ride for long time, you can feel it, emotionally, it sucks" (Tyrone).

**BMX Identity**

Status attainment can be part of a "rational" approach to decision-making and activity selection (Weber 1958). Identity can be part of this status attainment. Consumer culture, as it has developed in the U.S., ties a great deal of identity with consumption rather than production of products (Featherstone 1991).

Individual social construction of self can be deeply wedded with brand loyalty (Adorno 1991; Featherstone 1991). Communities of collective identity develop based on brand loyalty and consumption of particular products (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Maffesoli 1996). Past research has demonstrated that recreational groups have equipment, clothing, and other markers to confer and distinguish membership and identity for members of the group (Kidder 2006b; Austin 2009). However, riders in this study seem to be unconcerned with their identity as BMX riders in terms of the general public. That is, their concern with identity seems to be focused only on members of the subculture.

Perhaps silencing of identity may be a form of resistance and/or a method of dealing with commodification of their sport. With the exception of one participant, letting it be known to the non-riding public that they ride BMX was unimportant. However, nearly the entire sample had BMX paraphernalia in the form of t-shirts, shoes, and other articles of clothing that would clearly identify them as BMX riders, but only to other BMX riders.

Here is a typical response to the question, "Is there anything you do to communicate to others, even those you don't know, that you ride? [For example,] wear t-shirts; pictures on social media sites, etc." As Clarence explains:

Still wearing plenty of clothing, still wear...BMX shoes and shirts, even when I'm not riding, I've got some on now [referring to his shoes]...social media, I still try to have pictures up and like…I like post up pictures or whatever or videos that I saw that I liked

or "like" somebody else's video or...anything else like that.

When asked, if it was important for others to know that they ride BMX, most responses were fairly similar to this: "I wouldn't say it's important, you know. It's not going to affect them—I don't see like knowing whether I do or not…" (Jeb). It should be noted that while the riders say it is not important, the question—not important to whom—should be asked. Responses suggest that letting it be known they ride BMX to the general public is unimportant, but taking a closer look at several answers, reveals something more. Consider this quote from Ralph:

Yeah, I definitely wear like BMX shirts. I actually don't have like very many BMX shirts. I may have like...think I have like an Act Like You Know [a BMX crew from another state] shirt, a couple Skavenger [BMX company] shirts. I wear like a lot of Word [the local BMX group] stuff, too...feel like if anybody sees that does ride and they know about Word, "Well, he probably rides or something like that."

Likewise, Bob comments:

I mean, yeah, I wear, you know...like BMX company, you know, clothes and stuff like t-shirts…somebody could notice, I guess, if they were into BMX, that you were running like some Etnies [BMX shoe company]...Aaron Ross shoes or something. But, most people don't know that.

In both responses, the participants acknowledge that other BMX riders would recognize the sym-

bols as something that represents BMX. In fact, 7 out of the 15 riders stated that they wore a brand that is associated with BMX. Meaning that if other BMX riders saw the brand or symbol, they would most likely think that they rode BMX, too. The participants are unconcerned if non-riders know that they ride, but the riders in the sample are making it known to other riders that they are BMX riders, too. As this quote from John shows, "I wear Shitluck t-shirts, I think that's the only BMX ones I have…if they were a fellow rider, then they would know that I'm a rider."

These riders seem to be exhibiting a form of in-group and out-group boundary distinction (Tajfel 1982), but with the realization that only other members of their group will realize the boundary distinction. This reaffirms previous research concerning the importance of equipment and clothing as identifying markers in other subcultures such as motorcyclists (Austin 2009) and bicycle messengers (Kidder 2005).

In addition to clothing and other material markers of the subculture, it is common for participants in serious leisure to develop norms, practices, performance standards, and moral principles distinctive to the group (Stebbins 2001), which also delineates in-group and out-group boundaries. Edwards and Corte (2010), in their work on BMX riders, refer to "movement commercialization" as a focus on creating equipment and, oftentimes, products that are used by participants in these type of lifestyle sports, which adds another dimension to both identity, commodification, and boundary establishment.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The participants of this study unanimously said that they rode freestyle BMX for fun, either directly or indirectly referencing the notion of fun. No one in the study explicitly defined fun; by analyzing the responses a rough definition can be created for fun. To BMX riders in this sample, to have fun riding one's bike means to do it because you love it and because it makes you happy, and for no other reason. They do not ride to get sponsored or to win a contest. To put it in terms of Weber (1958), they ride BMX because it is irrational.

### Rationalization and Fun

Objective meaningful actions are actions that are done for the specific purpose of making money and/or increasing one's advantage in a situation (Weber 1958). Therefore, the subjective experiences or actions that lead to sensation are deemed unnecessary and irrational because those actions do not lead to making money or increasing one's advantageous position (Marcuse 1964).

All of the participants in this study stated in some manner, whether it be why they ride or what riding means to them, that BMX is fun or about having fun. They aim to have no ultimate rational goal, only to have fun when they ride their BMX bike. Fun and having fun is a highly subjective experience, and in most cases having fun is not rational in the Weberian sense; meaning that having fun will not lead to making money or advancing one's position. Therefore, the participants of this study ride BMX for reasons other than it being objective-

ly meaningful. They ride BMX because it produces subjective sensations of fun, love, and joy. Importantly, this implies that this sample values the subjective experiences riding BMX produces more than it values objective value in the form of money and rationality when it comes to their passion.

It should be noted that this form of fun does not imply that these riders are not committed to improving their skills and pushing themselves to improve (Stebbins 2001). The stated goal is to have fun in whatever form that may present itself. It is not a hidden fact that the culture industry supplies amusement, but it can remove the fun as the activity is commodified (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). The riders in this study seem to have a method of accommodation to keep fun in their sport. It is not clear if riders who are a larger part of the culture industry, professional riders, would report the same central emphasis on unmitigated fun as their reason to ride. As a contrast, Edwards and Corte (2010) found that a portion of BMX riders embrace commodification or commercialization in their study, which included some professional riders.

The role of fun in edgework has been documented in both legal (Kidder 2006a) and illegal activities (Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng 2001). This research emphasizes the important aspect of this very subjective and somewhat nebulous concept with almost universal support in a group that is mixed in its reaction to commodification. At the least, these BMX riders have serious reservations about the impact of commodification on their sport. Commodification, or mainstreaming as

the BMX riders refer to it, increasingly dominates our sport and recreational pursuits (Sewart 1987; Austin, Gagné, and Orend 2010; Krier and Swart 2014). The argument has been made that Western capitalist society has shifted to consumption as an organizing principle, rather than production (Featherstone 1991), and consumption is a complex idea involving not only tangible products, but also ideas (Baudrillard 1994; 1998). It is a process tied to a number of individual and collective issues including class (Pugh 2009), identity (Wheaton 2000), ideology (Micheletti 2003), and brand identification (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The importance of consumption, recreation, and sport in culture points to the importance of understanding the process of accommodation and resistance in important social groups (Austin, Gagné, and Orend 2010) and how it may impact fun, fulfillment, or enjoyment in a recreational pursuit (Rosenbaum 2013).

Considering the ideas presented concerning escape, a clear connection can be made to the concept of edgework. One reason edgeworkers partake in risky behavior is because it allows them to escape the constraints of society (Lyng 2012) and experience the benefits of mastering a task and entering a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Using the concepts of edgework, serious leisure, and flow, an explanation of why BMX riders ride their bikes becomes clear: as their sport becomes increasingly rationalized in the form of contests, corporate sponsors, and becomes part of mainstream or popular culture, they turn to riding their BMX bikes with no expressed interest in contest riding. A BMX rider turns to a risk-taking

activity in which he can escape the troubles of life, which have been intensified by the increasing rationalization of society.

The BMX rider attempts to reject rationality not only in a tangible form (i.e., street riding), but they reject rationalization ideologically by making how and why they ride BMX all about fun. They aim to have no ultimate rational goal—only to have fun. Additionally, this very notion is, in fact, a rejection of the rationality they see in other forms of BMX riding, and society as a whole. This also explains why many of the riders said people did not understand their form of riding.

### Inconsistencies in the Desire to Communicate a BMX Identity

As noted in the results section, the vast majority of each of the riders in this study said that it was unimportant if non-riders knew that he was a BMX rider. However, a number of respondents said that other BMX riders would recognize the brands or symbols as associated with BMX; meaning that it is important to let others within their subculture know that they ride BMX. This is an interesting result for several reasons.

An interesting dynamic arises: the riders are rejecting rationalization through street riding and making riding about fun. However, they appear to be unconcerned about making their rejection explicit by letting everyone know they ride BMX, which on the surface appears to reject the commodified image of the sport. What could cause the need for a quiet rejection—a rejection that only you and

your subculture are aware of—rather than a more public type of rejection?

A possible explanation is the average age of the riders and tenure of riding. This being the case, it is most likely that this group of adult riders have been through a lot of experiences with and without their BMX bike and due to their BMX bike. They are older now and may feel no need to make it known to the world that they ride or are rebellious.

People in the sample do many other things than just ride BMX; they play basketball, have respectable careers, and go to school. To solely identify as a BMX rider would be incomplete, as even dedicated sport participants can have multiple identities (Mekolichick 2002). They know what they love, and they see what is happening to the activity they love: it is being taken over by the mainstream and turned into a commodity. Now, it is difficult to distinguish between an "authentic" rider and the individual who does it for the image, because so many of the signals of authenticity have been made available to less-dedicated riders through the commodification process. Yet, the true test comes during interaction. They see what the mainstream does when individuals are loud about rebellion as capitalism turns it into a commodity (Goodman 2001), damages it by attempting to measure it in terms of money (Zelizer 1994), and sells it to the masses in a commodified form (Austin, Gagné, and Orend 2010). So what do they do? They keep quiet. They do not make it known that they ride BMX because the average non-riding person may turn around and try to act like him, or worse yet, try to sell his image. In an attempt to save their sport,

and keep it how they want it, they remain inexplicit about their rejection except amongst themselves. It is a quiet rejection, and quite possibly a type of rejection that is difficult to turn into another product (Goodman 2001) because others are not privy to it. Therefore, it is more difficult to commodify and, ultimately, ruin it. This quiet rejection may help to preserve BMX, as these participants view it.

The ambivalence towards mainstream (commodified) riding and hiding their identity from members of their out-group may be to preserve the authenticity of the sport; however, it could be confounded by other forces. For example, these riders may realize the slim chances of becoming a professional rider and utilize cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962) to deal with their personal and collective situation. In their study of BMX riders, which included some professional riders, Edwards and Corte (2009) found riders to be much more mixed in their reaction to the commodification or commercialization of the sport. This suggests that professionalization may impact upon how individuals and/or communities of riders interpret the changes in their sport.

Additionally, hiding their identity from the non-riding general public could be a status preservation act within their particular subculture. Status, as someone rejecting the concept of mainstream riding, might suffer if their fellow riders view them as riding for the "wrong" reason, status outside the group. Future research examining the interplay of commodification and resistance in serious leisure and/or edgework is warranted to assist in understanding these issues in dedicated sport or recreational communities.

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