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## Skater girlhood and emphasized femininity: ‘you can’t land an ollie properly in heels’

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This study draws from interviews with 20 girls in British Columbia, Canada who participated to varying degrees in skateboarding culture. We found that skater girls saw themselves as participating in an ‘alternative’ girlhood. Becoming skater girls involved the work and play of producing themselves in relation to alternative images found among peers at school, at skate parks, online and in music videos. The alternative authority of skater girl discourse gave the girls room to manoeuvre within and against the culturally valued discourse of emphasized femininity. A subgroup of middle class skater girls, the ‘in-betweeners’, used skater girl discourse as a way of distancing themselves from the sexism evident in skater culture as well as emphasized femininity. They used one discourse against another and took advantage of contradictions within skater discourse to forge a positive identity for themselves.

### Introduction

What sociologist R. W. Connell has called ‘emphasized femininity’ is very much in evidence in North American high schools in the early twenty-first century. By ‘emphasized femininity’, Connell refers to the form of femininity, defined at ‘the level of mass social relations,’ that is based on women’s ‘compliance’ with their subordination to men and ‘oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men’ (1987, p. 183). Connell used the term ‘emphasized femininity’ to contrast with what he called ‘hegemonic masculinity,’ which is ‘constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities’ and ascendant over all of these (1987, p. 186). Emphasized femininity, as the earlier empirical work of Connell and his colleagues in Australia had shown, is the most culturally valued form of femininity, albeit not necessarily the most prevalent pattern among high school girls (Connell *et al.*, 1982).

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Similarly, and generalizing from her fieldwork in American middle schools, sociologist Barrie Thorne has argued:

Girls are pressured to make themselves 'attractive', to get a boyfriend, to define themselves and other girls in terms of their positions in the heterosexual market. Although boys also enter into this market, it is less defining of their status and presumed futures, and, given the structuring of heterosexuality, it is they who tend to have the upper hand. (1993, p. 170; see also Eder, 1995)

Nevertheless, some girls resist emphasized femininity, either wholly or in part. We heard girls in our study defining themselves as 'alternative' to that dominant form of femininity, for example through their participation in skateboarding and skateboarding culture (discussed later in the article). That skateboarding and emphasized femininity are in tension with each other is captured by Tori, a hardcore skater. Tori's friend and co-interviewee, Priscilla (aged 14), had just announced that her mother had a 'big problem' with the fact that her daughter preferred more androgynous, baggy clothes to dresses and skirts. Explained Priscilla, 'She'll go out and buy me shoes, but they'll have the heels on them. I cannot stand the heels'. Tori (aged 16) responded:

I can skate in a heel. I have done it, and it hurts. You can't land an ollie properly in heels, but I have done it.

An ollie, the basis of most other skateboarding tricks, consists of a girl smacking down the end of her board, moving her foot forward to bring the board up into the air, then landing with her feet equally apart in the middle of the board. The high-heeled shoe remains a common and powerful symbol of emphasized femininity. That Tori claimed to have skated in a heel possibly hints at a desire to be attractive to boys in conventional terms, in the emphasized vulnerability evoked by a girl wearing heels. At the same time, Tori noted the near impossibility of skating well (landing an ollie) while wearing heels. Tori's declaration that she had managed this particular feat of athleticism despite wearing heels speaks volumes about the physical and emotional energy that girls must invest in fashioning their identities.

The purpose of this article is to explore what it means to be a skater girl, particularly in relation to emphasized femininity. Skater girlhood can be seen as part of a larger category, alternative girlhood. By alternative girlhood, we mean the range of ways that girls consciously position themselves against what they perceive as the mainstream in general and against conventional forms of femininity in particular. Alternative girls in our wider study named themselves as 'alternative'. They engaged in a variety of activities (e.g., creating animé—Japanese-style animation—web sites featuring their own drawings and fictional writing), displayed styles (e.g., Goth) or expressed tastes (e.g., for punk music) that they perceived as avant-garde or linked to an underground or alternative culture.<sup>1</sup> Skater girlhood, in particular, is also part of the larger skateboarding culture. For the purpose of the analysis that follows, it is important to bear in mind that skater girlhood is always in the process of formation but never fully formed; that is, it is a site of negotiation infused, in turn, by other dynamic discourses such as punk rock, Goth and hip hop.<sup>2</sup>

How do girls come to be seen as skaters, particularly in and around school and among their same-age peers? What do girls say, do, wear, believe, value and know that allows them to see themselves and be seen by others as skaters? What do they not say, do and so on? These factors ‘combine’ in ways that ‘can get one recognized as a certain “kind of person”’ (Gee, 2001, p. 110)—that is, as a skater girl. These ways of being are what we mean by discourse. Claiming such a label, particularly one that, as we will show, is oppositional to emphasized femininity, is an example of what some feminist poststructuralists have theorized as agency (see Davies, 1991; Pomerantz *et al.*, 2003).

In answering these questions and exploring the skater girl discourse, we draw upon interviews with 20 girls recruited for the study because they identified to some degree with skater girlhood. The skater girls ranged in age from 13- to 16-years. At the time of the interview, two were 13, seven were 14, eight were 15, and three were 16. Eleven were White (European Canadian), four were Chinese Canadian, three were of mixed racial/ethnic identity, and two were Aboriginal. (In Canada the term ‘Aboriginal’ includes both First Nations peoples as well as the Métis, that is, persons of both Native and European ancestry.) Based on information the girls provided about their parents’ occupations and educational backgrounds and their current living arrangements, 15 came from middle class families and five from working class families. One identified as bisexual, and the other 19 implied or stated that they were heterosexual. Sixteen of the girls lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, and of those eight attended public school in an upper middle class neighborhood, six attended public schools in working class neighborhoods, one attended a private girls’ school and one attended a Catholic school. The remaining four attended public schools in suburbs of Vancouver. Eighteen of the girls had never left school, while two girls had each been out of school for a total of one year and were one grade behind as a result.

Pomerantz conducted the semi-structured, hour-long interviews. By design, most of the interviews were with pairs of friends, recruited in public places like community centres and skate parks or by personal referral. Sixteen of the girls were initially interviewed in pairs, while four girls were interviewed individually. In addition, Pomerantz did follow-up interviews with six girls, either in pairs or alone, for an overall total of 16 interviews. In a manner similar to that described by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), we encouraged participants to tell stories. Each of the 20 participants chose her pseudonym and received a complimentary movie pass.

The skater girls in our study participated to different degrees in skateboarding culture. We discerned three broad categories. The ‘hardcore’ or ‘serious skaters’, such as Tori, referred to themselves as skaters, frequented skate parks, had mastered a number of tricks, and knew how to assemble their own board. The ‘skaters’ (the biggest category), such as Priscilla, liked the ‘lifestyle’ but skated more infrequently, and they had usually mastered only the basics, although some knew a few tricks. The ‘skater affiliates’, such as Gracie, Sandy or Amanda (all aged 15), identified as, or were known as, skaters mainly because of their friendships with other skaters, an affinity for skater culture, or both.

Very little academic research or analysis has been done on skateboarding as a youth culture or (conceived more fluidly) as a ‘cultural practice of youth’ (Bucholtz, 2002,



p. 539). Exceptions include: Borden (2001), whose architectural history of skateboarding includes a chapter on skateboarding as a subculture; Willard (1998), who has theorized about (male) skateboarders' appropriation and understanding of public spaces; and Beal (1995, 1996), whose ethnography of 41 skaters (only four of whom were female) focused on constructions of masculinity within skateboarding as a non-traditional sport and as an oppositional subculture. We know of no other study—whether empirical, historical, or textual—that focuses on skater girls or girls within the male-dominated skateboarding youth culture.

Two high school-based ethnographies (both done in California) with gender as an analytic focus have identified 'skaters' as a social group without exploring their practices in any depth. Bettie (2003) noted some within-class antagonism among the White working class skaters, and her illustration of this mentioned only boys or was silent on the subject of gender (p. 127). Kelly (1993) found that girls who hung around boy skateboarders became known among their peers as skaters or 'skate betties' (slang for girl skaters, a term often used derisively by boy skaters), whether the girls themselves skated or not (p. 147; cf. Beal, 1995, p. 265).

We offer here, therefore, a more detailed descriptive analysis of how the girls came to be seen as skaters, and in the process, we point to the contradictions or tensions within skater girl discourse, such as emphasizing being one's self while adhering to the emerging norms of skater girlhood. We then discuss the difference social class made in how girls at different schools took up skater discourse and how one group of middle class girls, 'in-betweeners', defied easy labels to forge a positive identity for themselves. In their strategic play within and among discourses, we think we discerned an alternative girlhood in the process of gaining cultural definition.

### **Becoming skater girls**

The girls came to be seen—both by themselves as well as their friends and peers—as skaters by: expressing particular beliefs, values and feelings; using a skateboard and demonstrating technical knowledge about skateboarding; displaying physical risk-taking and enduring bodily pain; dressing in certain ways; using skater and other in-group slang; avoiding behavior associated with emphasized or dominant femininity; and engaging in activities closely allied with skater culture, such as listening to alternative or punk rock music. Because we know of no empirical studies of skater girls,<sup>3</sup> in this section we explore these facets of their identity construction in some depth. As will become clear, the ways girls came to be seen as skaters often meant an embrace of skater culture's masculine norms (cf. Leblanc, 1999, on punk girls).

#### *Fun, adventure, confidence and nonconformity*

According to the girls in our study, skateboarding symbolizes fun (acting 'loud and crazy'), adventure (meaning, in particular, a willingness to try new things or take a risk), confidence and nonconformity. They valued the image of skateboarding as fun and daring, and this image prompted them to try it. Having once tried skateboarding,

regardless of how much they actually practiced, most of the girls came to realize, as Zoey (aged 15) put it, 'Hey, we're the only girl skaters around here!' As they gained in skill at skating, they gained in confidence. Even when she felt her own sense of confidence wavering, Pete, aged 15, said that other kids at school saw her as confident 'because of the skateboarding thing'. At the same time, they became more aware of their nonconformity as girls within the male-dominated skater culture, which is already associated with other forms of rebellion (see Beal, 1995, 1996; Willard, 1998; Borden, 2001; Peralta, 2001).

Every skater girl participant said she valued being 'different'. Other words used to convey the value placed on nonconformity included: 'alternative', 'unique', not 'normal', 'weird', 'an original', 'freaky', 'creative', 'artistic' and 'standing out' from the crowd and what is considered 'trendy'.<sup>4</sup> Many different styles of skateboarding exist and all are accepted (Beal, 1996). Tori spoke for many of the girls interviewed when she stated, 'I feel it's more important to be who you are, and not what people want you to be'. More specifically, girls liked proving through their skateboarding that they were or could be physically strong and brave.

While all of the skater girls seemed to enjoy challenging dominant stereotypes associated with being a girl, they were more divided about skateboarding's more general image of rebellion. Among other things, skateboarding has been associated with nonconformity to: (a) prevailing mores against drug use (the 'pothead' stereotype); (b) prevailing mores supporting respect for private property (the 'punk' or 'hooligan' stereotype);<sup>5</sup> (c) the dominant work ethic (the 'slacker' stereotype); and (d) capitalist consumer culture (the 'laid back' and 'underground' stereotype). We return to this point later in the article.

#### *Technical knowledge: a board of her own*

'Believe it or not', explained Tori, '[skateboarding] is a hell of a lot harder than it looks'. Beginning skateboarders have to learn to balance and move forward before they can advance to even the most basic tricks. Most girls reported learning the basics in relatively private spaces, like driveways and streets near home. As some became more technically proficient, they ventured into public places, like skate parks, which brought them into contact with other skaters who were often older, better, and male. Because 'it's not too common' to be a girl skater, explained Grover (aged 15), 'the guys are like, "What are you doing?"' 'Like invading their space or something', added Onyx (aged 14). In a subsequent interview, Grover noted that she and her friend Zoey avoided the park when they practiced because the 'guys' there were 'rude' to them; these guys felt 'threatened ... because girls are doing *their* sport'.

Madeline (aged 16) reported a similar (in her words) 'intimidating' 'boy/girl issue' at the skate parks:

The guys don't think you're so good, and if there's a lot of people there, like I don't like to go, because you feel that you're getting in their way. I mean, even if you're trying to get better, if you can't do certain things, they'll automatically think that you're really bad.



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Later in the interview, however, when asked if she had ever ‘stood up’ for herself ‘as a girl’, Madeline recounted a triumphant moment at the skate park:

This one guy came up to me. He’s like, ‘Oh, girls can’t skate’. I’m like, ‘What?!’ And like yeah, so I showed him like all my tricks, and he’s like, ‘Oh, wow, that’s pretty cool’.

Other skater girls reported that they were more watched or scrutinized and more quickly ‘judged’ than boys. ‘The image is that guys, they screw up or whatever, it doesn’t matter’, according to Kate (aged 15). ‘If girls do something really stupid and they fall or whatever, it’s like *oh, my God*, looked down upon’.

The most serious skaters in our study also took obvious pride in knowing how to assemble their own skateboard as well as maintain it. Several questioned the motives of girls who did not display technical competence or technical knowledge of skateboarding. ‘I actually go around and look for other skater chicks’, said Tori, ‘and it’s like really hard. I’ve found quite a few chicks who carry the boards [and] quite a few chicks who can’t use them’. In a similar vein, Madeline said, ‘I’ve seen a couple of girls that have skateboards that go to skater parks to look at guys. It kind of bugs me’. In short, skater girls drew on the technical competence symbolized by skateboarding to challenge the socially constructed feminine stereotypes of physical, mechanical and technical helplessness.

### The risks: ‘face plants’ and ‘road rash’

To get better at skateboarding necessarily involves physical risk-taking. As Michelle (aged 13) succinctly put it, ‘*Everybody falls*’. ‘First, you’ve got to get the balance’, explained Tori:

And then you’ve got to be fearless as shit, because 24/7 ... you’re riding along cement. When you fall, it hurts. It doesn’t just hurt a little bit—it hurts a lot. But in order to learn these tricks, you fall down a lot.

A number of skater girls speculated that the fear of falling and getting hurt was an important factor preventing more girls from taking up skateboarding. Indeed, some of the less serious skaters in our study admitted that they disliked falling. For example, Emily and Amanda (both aged 15 and interviewed together), said they ‘respected’ the ‘guy’ skaters as ‘more risk taking’. According to Amanda, ‘They don’t care if they get bruises and stuff. They’ll be like, “Yeah, cuts!”’ Emily added that she was ‘trying’ to develop the same attitude, ‘but most of the time when I fall, I’m like, “Oh, I don’t want to do it anymore!”’

Conversely, the girls who practiced skateboarding a lot reported being less afraid. Pete enjoyed the adrenaline ‘rush’, and Zoey added:

The first time I wiped out I was just like, ‘Whoa!’ I fell really hard, I was like, ‘Aahh’, kind of, and then I just wanted to do it again, because it was like, ‘Wow!’

Kate (aged 15) described her ‘face plant’ the first time she skateboarded:

She [Christine, aged 16, and co-interviewee] lives on a really, really steep hill. And I decided that I was going to go down it [laughs]. And it was really steep and [had] bumpy



spots and everything, and I didn't make it very far, and I jumped off the board, and I like slid on my hip and my eye and I got like a black eye and everything.

Later in the interview, Kate noted that Christine had 'freaked out' over Kate's accident, but 'I'm back on there still doing like weird stuff'. Like Kate, Lexi (aged 14) evinced stoicism about her inevitable injuries:

I'm not very good, but if I get scraped, I'm not going to whine and bitch about it. I'm just going to go, 'Oh, damn. OK'.

'Road rash' seemed to be a badge of honor for Tori and Priscilla, who were visibly scraped and bruised at the time of the interview. 'I've got permanent road rash scar on my hip', explained Tori.

You know when they're about to put traffic lights up, they put the counters on the road? I didn't see it. I thought it was a shadow, and I hit it. And I just went poof, flying, and I had road rash all down the side of my face.

The skater girls' toughness and relative lack of concern about bruises, scrapes and scars provide a sharp contrast with dominant images of femininity.

### **Skater style: casual, comfortable and not 'slutty'**

Across the 20 girls whom we interviewed, a fairly wide variety of styles and attitudes toward dress were in evidence. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the girls liked the casual, comfortable (baggy) look of skater clothes, and many were quick to contrast skater style with what they disliked: 'revealing', brand-name attire that they associated with a certain type of popular, 'boy-hunting' girl. As Zoey explained:

A lot of the skater clothes aren't slutty, so that's really cool. ... That really tight stuff—those can get really annoying after awhile, and you can't *do* anything on a board in it.

According to Grover, 'bun girls' (her group's name for girls who displayed an emphasized femininity) wear 'tanks tops four seasons a year. ... They base a lot upon their looks and what they think the guys will like'. 'They're not really their own person', added Onyx.

Some of the skater girls were clear that, through their style, they wanted to 'be their own person', to 'stand out' (e.g., by wearing all orange or safety pins as earrings) or to be 'funky' (e.g., by dying their hair blue or wearing an 'explosive shirt'). But they were equally clear that their primary purpose was not to attract the attention of boys, but rather to make a statement about their individuality and difference. In seeming protest of corporate consumerism, a number of skater girls said they shopped at Value Village and other second-hand clothing stores, and Tori said she designed her own clothes as a hobby. Pete noted about her friendship circle:

I think we're kind of the different, kind of alternate, creative group, because we're always making up our own clothes and trends.

Rather than 'making up' a trend of their own, skater girls Grenn and Lexi (both aged 14 and perhaps the most working class of the participants) asserted that they were



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following 'no fashion trend at all' and that this defined them as 'weird' in the eyes of their more affluent, 'preppy' peers.

Of course, in recent years the skater style has become popular, thus complicating the discussion of what is 'trendy' and increasing the cost of skater clothes. This development angered a number of the girls, particularly the most hardcore skaters. Kate and Christine spoke derisively of 'little posers' who wore skater clothes but did not really skate. Madeline said it 'bugged' her that some girls at her school bought expensive stuff that they did not really 'need'. For example, they wore skate shoes that 'aren't really great for skating; they're just kind of poser brands'. (Bettie, 2003, analyzes these types of competing 'claims to authenticity' as displaced class antagonism; see especially pp. 127.)

The increasing popularity of skater style affected the hardcore yet working class skater girls like Tori the most strongly.

It bugs me 'cause you see all these preppy little kids and they are going and buying skate shoes and skate clothing, which makes the price go up for people like us who depend on that. Like my shoes have the biggest ollie hole in them, like you have no idea!

Tori went on to explain that she used to be able to replace her shoes for \$30, but now the 'cheapest shoe' cost her \$120. Pointing to her skate shoe, she explained:

This piece in here gets thrashed the most because when you ollie, it rubs up against your board. So you want nice plastic in here and you want the lips to be up high, and in order to get that, you have to pay [a lot].

To recap, girls participated in skater culture by wearing the casual, comfortable clothes that allowed them to move with ease on their skateboards. Their dress contrasted sharply with the attire favored by a certain type of popular girl across a number of different school settings: tight, expensive designer jeans or skirts, 'really tight tank tops' and lots of makeup. As Zoey declared, her friendship group was 'totally the opposite' of girls who dress 'sexy' to 'attract guys', and her co-interviewee, Pete, agreed:

Dressing sexy kind of, in my perspective, attracts the wrong type of guys for me. I'm not into those guys ... that are attracted to sex appeal only [and not the brain].

At the same time, some skater girls expressed concern that skater style had become a 'cool' commodity.

One way for girls to expand the meaning of femininity is to use the resources of what has been a male-dominated youth culture to make those norms and values their own. So far, we have seen that through skateboarding girls appropriated the traditionally masculine traits of physical strength and bravery, technical competence, physical risk-taking and stoicism, as well as non-sexualized androgyny (read: masculine dress style). Another way that skater girls defined an alternative femininity was against other girls and women whom they perceived as embodying emphasized femininity. They did this through in-group language, by avoiding behavior they associated with dominant femininity, and by participating in the politics of distinction (or rejection of an undiscerning mainstream culture; see Thornton, 1995) that characterizes skater culture.

*Skater and in-group slang*

Using skater slang was another way girls came to be seen as skaters. Some used jargon to describe the skateboard or skateboarding tricks. Others used slang associated with hip hop or skater culture more generally. Different groups of friends developed inside jokes, invented funny names for each other, and made up words that were, as Gracie (aged 15) put it, 'fun and fun to use'. Their speech enacted fun, a value seen to be at the heart of skateboarding and skater culture.

Nowhere was this more evident than among the self-named 'Park friends', which included Gracie, Sandy, Zoey, Pete, Onyx and Grover. They created the term 'snorkomdorfs' (later variations included 's-and-dorf' and 'snork-and-dork') as a fun word to call each other, and they contrasted it with their term for the girls at their schools whom they perceived as ultra-feminine, 'the bun girls'. At one time, those girls liked to wear their hair in a bun, and although that fad had since passed, the Park friends continued to use the term 'bun girls' to refer to the more 'ditzzy' girls. Snorkomdorf, according to Pete and Zoey, meant 'dorky and corny' and 'weird'. Grover noted that 'it replaces using ... swear words and mean words that could actually be hurtful'. Onyx agreed, adding, 'Yeah, we make fun of each other for fun, too'. By contrast, they said the bun girls, particularly 'bun girls with attitude', were 'mean to each other'. 'They'll swear at each other, and it's almost like they have no respect for each other'.

By using terms like 'snorkomdorf' the Park friends could also gauge the reactions of outsiders to their use of slang and decide whether they would 'want to make friends' with them. Explained Grover:

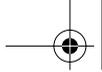
If they're kind of like, 'Snorkomdorf? What do you mean?!', [then we assume] they're kind of more close minded to things and less likely to just let loose and just have fun, you know?

The Park friends also created the word 'glutty' (meaning 'guy slut') to voice their critique of the sexual double standard and the term 'skank monkey'<sup>6</sup> ('the male equivalent of a bun girl') to extend their critique of the superficiality of the popular crowd at school. Grover elaborated:

... [skank monkeys] think they're so great, and they care so much about their looks, and everything has to be *perfect*.

*Disassociation from emphasized femininity*

The girls in the skater study, without exception, said they tried to avoid behavior they associated with a certain type, referred to, variously, as 'bun girls', 'ditzzy girls', 'teeny boppers', 'preppy girls', 'girly girls' and 'poppy girls'. The various names highlighted different types of behavior generally frowned upon by the skater girls: flirting with boys, spending too much time and money making themselves 'pretty', 'living their life for a guy' (as Pete put it), worrying about what the cool or popular kids thought, being hurtful as they tried to achieve or maintain social standing and listening to pop music. As has been documented in studies of other youth cultures, the skater girls



constructed a homogeneous mainstream group against which they positioned themselves in order to further define their own sense of self (see Thornton, 1995; Leblanc, 1999; Hodgkinson, 2002; Bettie, 2003).

### *Skater 'culture' or 'lifestyle'*

Another way that girls in our study came to be seen as skaters was by engaging in activities closely allied with skater culture. Madeline, from a White, middle class family, provided an interesting map of skater culture at her large, urban high school, located in a working class, multiethnic neighborhood:

There's [three] different kinds of groups. ... There's more like the hip hop group, and there's like the Goth, and there's people kind of in the middle, who aren't ... all bugged out [bugged out means they wear really, really big pants and they listen to hip hop music] and people who aren't total Goth. ... I'm kind of in the middle of both of them. ... I have friends that are Goth and I have friends that are really into hip hop and stuff like that.

Madeline's group, the middle group, was into 'punk' and wore 'hoodies' and pants.

Although it is difficult to generalize about the participants, most girls identified with alternative rock, punk or metal music—music that is loud, edgy, irreverent and often rebellious or anti-corporate. As Jessica (a 13-year-old skater affiliate) noted, pop stars sing mainly about 'love and relationships', whereas alternative bands write songs that 'have meaning' and are 'worth hearing'. The lyrics are 'about them growing up or them having trouble with friends, not liking school or dropping out'. Two girls, Tori and Grenn, had been in, or planned to form, punk rock groups, and the band names indicate the tone of critique ('Gadfly') and rebellion ('Normal', so named because 'We're all the opposite of normal'). Grenn had a poster of singer-songwriter Avril Lavigne, a self-described 'skater punk', prominently displayed in her bedroom. Notwithstanding disputes about Lavigne's authenticity as a skater, her themes—such as the importance of being oneself amidst the pressures to conform—certainly echo what many skater girls said in their interviews. (Lavigne has publicly criticized pop singer Britney Spears for 'using sex to sell music'; see Halpin, 2003, p. 103.)

### **Constraints of male-dominated gender relations within skater culture**

Skater culture, with its emphasis on individual self-expression and nonconformity, afforded skater girls room to develop a critique of, and distance from, emphasized femininity. Yet the male-dominated gender relations within skater culture seemed also to constrain them. Because our study is based mainly on interviews, we have to rely primarily on the girls' descriptions of their relations with skater boys. The spirit of cooperation and participation (versus competition) that is felt by (mainly male) skaters to distinguish their activity from traditional sports (see Beal, 1995, 1996) was in some evidence. A number of skater girls in our study mentioned first learning to skateboard from boys or men, often family members or friends. The younger brother of one of Grover's girlfriends taught her. Gouge learned from her cousin's boyfriend.



Emily learned from, and was encouraged by, skater boys at her school. Michelle followed her older brother into skating. Madeline practiced at skater parks with her male cousin.

Nevertheless, as was described earlier, skater girls reported feeling scrutinized and judged more quickly and harshly by some skater boys. As well, some skater boys used technical language and superior mechanical knowledge as an exclusionary strategy to mystify skateboarding and make girls feel less than true skaters. Skater girls regularly had to confront sexist assumptions about girls being unable to skate or as not having (or 'choosing' not to have) what it takes to skate. Skater girls were ignored, accused of merely wanting to boy-watch, insulted, and otherwise made to feel like outsiders in male-dominated skate parks. (In another paper, we provide a detailed analysis of one such skate park incident and how the girls successfully challenged the boys' dominance; see Pomerantz *et al.*, 2003).

These examples are corroborated in Beal's (1996) ethnographic study of a group of young male skateboarders in Colorado. Beal found that while the boys created an alternative (more cooperative) masculinity, it was still defined by 'differentiating and elevating themselves from females and femininity', thus maintaining 'the privilege of masculinity' (p. 204; cf. Borden, 2001, pp. 143–149, for instances of sexism and homophobia in various skater publications and practices).

Feminist scholars dating back to McRobbie and Garber (1976) have critiqued youth culture studies and school-based ethnographies for focusing either on the experiences and identities of boys or analyzing 'youth' where the implicit referent is still mainly male.

Within the context of such male-focused and male-generated subculture theory and research, girls who participate in youth subcultures have been described as passive, ancillary, sexual and 'less resistant' than their male peers. (Leblanc, 1999, p. 67)

Recently, however, researchers have begun to address more adequately the role of girls in youth cultures. The studies most relevant to our inquiry focus on girls and the construction of femininities within male-dominated youth cultures. Given that skater culture has some of its roots in punk, Leblanc's study of punk girls' resistance within this subculture is especially pertinent. Based on participant observation and 40 interviews with punk girls in several Canadian and American cities, Leblanc shows that the punk subculture is indeed coded as masculine. Being tough, cool, rebellious and aggressive—traits associated with adolescent masculinity—are highly valued. She argues that this culture provides punk girls (many of whom become punks at the onset of puberty) with the resources to develop a critique of traditional femininity and an opportunity to construct an alternative 'form of self-presentation' (p. 142), which, in turn, enables them 'to retain a strong sense of self' (1999, p. 13; see also Roman, 1988).

Bettie's (2003) ethnography of Grade 12 girls in a small town school in California describes two forms of what she calls 'dissident' femininity among the 'hard-living' working class White girls. These girls belonged to a social group known variously as the smokers, the punk or grunge rockers and White trash. The first form of dissident

femininity, reminiscent of the style of Leblanc's punk girls, rejected traditional femininity outright by dressing in a more masculine style and avoiding 'girly stuff' (p. 133). The second form rejected 'school-sanctioned femininity' by exaggerating traditionally feminine ways of dressing and acting; the highly sexualized result was intended to shock school authorities (p. 133). Mendoza-Denton's (1996) study of Latina gang girls demonstrated how the capacity for violence, whether implied or carried out, was part of how they constructed a non-dominant (dissident, to use Bettie's term) form of femininity.

Thus, like other recent feminist work on male-dominated youth cultures, we have highlighted skater girls' active negotiations with skater boys and their appropriation of certain male norms to enlarge their sense of who they can be. Their negotiations, however, are also constrained by the masculinist subculture. The subculture, in turn, is mediated by social class-inflected hierarchical peer groups that form in and around schools.

#### **Skateboarding and school popularity: the difference social class makes**

The alternative femininity that skater girls constructed took on somewhat different forms, when viewed within the specific terrain of schools and school-based peer groups. In Canada (as in the US and other wealthy English-speaking nations, but apparently not in countries such as France, China, Japan or Mexico; see Kipnis, 2001) peer groups and student subcultures abound. School practices like formal and informal streaming and sponsorship of school-based extracurricular activities encourage the reproduction of societal hierarchies by class, race and gender within the school setting (see Eckert, 1989; Eder *et al.*, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Kipnis, 2001; Bettie, 2003; Bettis & Adams, 2003).

Typical of the schools that skater girls in our study attended, high-status peer groups engaged in activities like cheerleading and school-sponsored team sports. Girls without the money, the cultural capital, or both—that is, working class students—found it particularly difficult to engage in these extracurricular activities and join the ranks of the dominant status groups in school. Across class differences, skater girls tended to reject the symbolic meanings of the Popular (in the sense of ruling) crowd.

Nevertheless, the meanings attached to the wider skater peer group in each school were beyond the control of individual skater girls, and they had to negotiate the ensuing dilemmas and tensions. Based on girls' descriptions of the various social groups at their respective schools and which groups were 'Popular' (i.e., dominant),<sup>7</sup> we inferred that the skater group (made up mainly of boys in each school) was sometimes considered popular and sometimes non-mainstream (even part of the so-called 'loser' group). Brief descriptions of the social scene at two contrasting schools (one upper middle class, the other working class) illustrate the difference that social class appeared to make in how girls took up skater discourse and thus constructed an alternative femininity.

With the exception of Grover, the Park friends attended Midtown Secondary School, located in an upper middle class neighborhood of Vancouver. Asians (primarily of



Chinese origin) made up the majority of students. Midtown had a sizeable number of students who spoke English as an additional language, having emigrated primarily from China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Eastern Europe. Pete, Onyx and Sandy were all Chinese-Canadian, while Gracie was White and Zoey was Aboriginal and White. Emily (White) and Amanda (Chinese-Canadian) also attended Midtown and were acquaintances of the Park friends. Despite the varied racial backgrounds of the skater girls we interviewed from Midtown (all from middle class families), they noted, as Emily put it, that 'most of the skaters are Caucasians, and they pretty much hang out together'. Furthermore, skaters made up part of the Popular crowd at Midtown. Among 'the cool people in school', according to Gracie, were four White male skateboarders who played in a punk band. They hung out in the school cafeteria with their 'groupies', who were both White and Asian.

Zoey argued that the skateboarders (particularly in the younger grades) made fun of people because of how they dressed and said mean things like 'Why are you hanging out with her?' It bothered Zoey that she herself was identified as a skater at school, when some skaters had the 'attitude' that 'if you're not a skater, you can't hang out with them'. The group she most admired in the school, though, was a group of older skaters (in Grades 11 and 12):

They're like the ideal kind of people. They're nice to everybody, and you don't have to be a skateboarder to hang around with them, and they're lots of fun.

Thus, in an upper middle class school where skaters formed part of the ruling crowd, to be a nonconformist, 'laid back', fun-loving skater girl posed a dilemma: how to be true to one's own sense of self while participating in the social-interactive work that results in claiming, or being assigned, a particular label? We return to a discussion of Zoey's resolution later in the article.

The social scene described by Grenn and Lexi (both White and working class) at Birch Community Secondary School contrasted in some important ways with the one at Midtown. Their school, they said, was predominantly White and located in a town divided down the middle by class. According to Grenn, 'There's this side [where we are], and then there's this side over there. *Those* are the rich people'. Their school was ruled by 'snobby preps,' who had 'blonde hair,' wore 'lots of makeup', and were 'very slim', almost 'anorexic'. Preps were often described as 'rich', and they followed 'the trends' and wore 'good clothes'. In this school, skaters were far from Popular, and, in fact, some were considered 'losers' by their peers. (Besides Lexi and Grenn, the small group of skater girls at Birch were either 'into drugs', had left school, or both.)

Relations between the preps and non-preps, including the skaters, were antagonistic. Explained Grenn:

They [the preps] don't agree with the way I look. They don't agree with the way I act. They just don't agree with my music. They don't agree with like anything about me, right?

When asked why the preps gave her such a hard time, Lexi explained, 'Because I *don't dress* like *they do* [in tight clothes]'. Both girls had been challenged to physical fights by preps who did not like how they looked.



At first it seemed a bit odd that Grenn, despite her skating ability, seemed eager to point out that she was ‘not athletic’. Later in the interview, when asked if she was ‘into other sports’, Grenn insisted, ‘No, I *hate sports!* Skateboarding is not a sport!’ Although there is no doubt that skateboarding requires physical strength, balance and agility, to call it a ‘sport’ seemed to associate it in Grenn’s mind with the much-hated preps, who traditionally have used organized sports (and cheerleading) as a route to social status within the school (see Eder *et al.*, 1995; Merten, 1997; Bettis & Adams, 2003). Eckert (1989) has shown how ‘clique’ membership, while not entirely determined by class, displays ‘a polarization of attitudes towards class characteristics’, and group categories—like the jocks and the preps on one hand, and the ‘burnouts’ or ‘losers’ on the other—can be seen as ‘adolescent embodiments of the middle and working class, respectively’ (pp. 4, 5). Grenn and Lexi’s anger at the preps can thus be seen as a displacement of class antagonism (see Bettie, 2003). For them, skater girlhood expressed a rejection of the school’s role in privileging certain students (the preps and the jocks).

Like Grenn and Lexi, Tori’s roots were solidly working class, and she spent her early teenage years in a high school similar to Birch. In a passionate statement in support of the ‘underground culture’ of skating and against ‘preppy culture’, Tori evinced at least a partial class consciousness:

I don’t want to be a part of that [preppy culture], because you see the way people treat each other. You see the way things are stacked up. Like, it’s all about what you have and what you don’t have [by way of material goods] that makes you who you are.

By contrast, skaters ‘don’t expect anything from you—except you’. Thus, working class girls took up skater girl discourse in a more oppositional way in school, while middle class girls, as we will show in the next section, were more likely to combine skater discourse with other discourses, taking advantage of contradictions within and among discourses to create more subject positions for themselves in school.

### **‘In-betweeners’: ‘carving’ and ‘grinding’<sup>8</sup> within and among discourses**

Tori spoke of ‘skater culture’ with a more oppositional, working class inflection than most. Perhaps in solidarity with male skaters, Tori resisted her friend Priscilla’s attempts to generalize about, and criticize, male behavior. For example, in response to Priscilla’s complaint about being propositioned by older men and being ‘gawked at’, Tori replied, ‘Chicks are as bad as guys for sitting there and turning people into meat [sexual objects]’. At one level, Tori can be seen as rejecting an essentialist view of gender identity, yet at another level, she can be seen as blocking an exploration of gender and enforced heterosexuality as structuring processes. Drawing on a fierce individualism evident in skater discourse generally, Tori argued that guy skaters ‘don’t mean to discriminate’ against girls, but there are just not many girls willing to endure the physical pain involved in learning to skateboard. She did not report feeling ‘intimidated’ by guys, the way other skater girls did. Tori drew an analogy between her experience as one of the few girl skaters and being ‘the only chick in this power



mechanics class'. She took obvious delight in being the first one to assemble her car engine, despite teasing from the boys ('In their face'). Not surprisingly, then, Tori did not identify with what she saw as the more 'extreme' strand of feminism that she equated with the impossible goal of 'equality' for 'everybody'. She did 'believe' in the strand that she felt encouraged girls to take 'pride in who you are and what you are'.

Skateboarding has long been male dominated, and the culture that has sprung up around it has not been immune to patriarchal influences. Our impression is that the more hardcore skater girls like Tori seem to identify with skater culture, the less likely they are to perceive sexism operating at anything but an individual level. We do not think it a coincidence that Tori was the lone girl in the skater study to refer to herself (without irony) as a 'skater chick'. Complementary explanations of Tori's downplaying of sexism are suggested by the ethnographic work of Leblanc and Bettie. Like the punk girls in Leblanc's study, Tori may have internalized the 'masculinist' norms of skater culture, colluding with these norms rather than resisting them, for fear of being expelled from the skateboarding subculture (1999, chapter 4). Like some of the White, working class girls in Bettie's study, Tori may have perceived skater boys (however patriarchal some may have appeared to others) as allies:

... against adults and peers at school who are oppressively judgmental and adults at home who are unaffectionate at best and abusive at worst. (Bettie, 2002, p. 113)

By contrast, other girls (in our study at least, all middle to upper middle class) appeared to use skater girl discourse as a way of distancing themselves from the sexism evident in skater culture as well as emphasized femininity. These girls deployed skater discourse to counter the potentially stigmatizing or limiting effects of other discourses (and vice versa) as well as to name an alternative, potentially more powerful way of being. Appropriating some skater terms, we argue that these girls 'carved' among multiple discourses and 'grinded' (exploited contradictions) within discourses. Following terminology suggested by Zoey, we call this set of carving and grinding girls 'in-betweeners'.

Zoey said she and the Park friends at Midtown moved 'in between' the 'studying group' and the skateboarders. This was how they attempted to resolve the dilemma of avoiding the 'mean' set of popular skaters, while remaining distinct from the 'nice' students who focused more exclusively on academics, yet who got labeled as 'geeks' by the popular crowd. Zoey acknowledged that as skater girls, she and her friends were 'respected'. They could be seen as fun loving and open-minded, yet, because they were girls and good students, they avoided the stereotypes associated with boy skaters, that is, as 'into drugs', 'punk' and 'tough'.

In addition, the Park friends (subconsciously?) seized on a contradiction within skater discourse in a way that seemed to generate goodwill among their peers toward them. Skater culture tends to deride pop music and mass consumerism, while simultaneously valuing individuality and authenticity. The Park friends felt relatively free to select what they liked from mainstream or popular culture, and they turned their eclectic taste (in music, clothing style) into a mark of their individuality. Zoey, for example, said:



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There's some pop music that we like and we're not—like around skaters—we can tell them that we don't really care, even if they don't think that's cool.

Added Pete, 'Yeah, like I'm not afraid to say that I like N'Sync [a popular boy vocal group]'. They made it clear that they were not necessarily, as Sandy put it, 'trying to be rebellious' or 'anti-mainstream', although Pete said she did 'rebel' against 'close-mindedness'.

We find evidence in the story of Pete's planned, public pratfall that the Park friends' strategy had proved successful. Pete had decided to run for Grade 10 representative to the student council against a popular 'bun girl' (also Chinese-Canadian). 'It was only the two of us', explained Pete, 'so I thought, "I want to beat her"'. In order to underscore her promise to be 'fun', Pete planned to trip 'purposely' on the way to the podium to give her campaign speech. 'I even practiced tripping' ahead of time. Picking up the story, Zoey said, 'And so she [Pete] trips, she falls, and got up and said, "Supah star" [super star]', in imitation of a character that Molly Shannon developed in a recurring *Saturday night live* skit. 'Everyone was hooting', said Pete. 'Especially us in the back', added Zoey. Through such actions, these skater girls, who partially identified with the 'studying group' at their school, avoided the label of 'geek' (and related labels such as 'nerd', 'brain' and 'keener'). Pete and her friends took pleasure in the fact that Pete got voted onto student council.

The Park friends were, by no means, the only examples of in-betweeners. Madeline (White and middle class), a serious skater attending an inner-city school, mentioned:

I know so many people from different groups [academic students, French Immersion students, the Asian 'fashionable group' and the skaters] that I can basically go in to any group and ... hang around.

Being a skater girl helped to offset the 'smart student' stigma of having received the top academic achievement award at her school for two years running.

Sara (aged 14, White and middle class), a skater affiliate, said her friends called her 'the chameleon', because she had the ability to move easily between different groups at school:

I can just hang out with the poppy people and be really ditzy and like 'ah hah hah', and then I can hang out with the intellectual people and be very like deep and 'blah blah blah', and hang out with the skaters and be a moron. ... I like breaking out of myself and just exploring the different characteristics of myself, and so that's how it helps me to go from group to group, right?

Developing the discursive repertoire to recognize and enact several distinct ways of being, based on interaction with others in particular contexts, no doubt depends on a certain material privilege (i.e., economic and cultural resources from home) yet may also suggest some important lessons for rethinking girls' agency and power (see Pomerantz *et al.*, 2003, for a related discussion). More ethnographic research is needed on girls who perceive an ability to move successfully between social groups at school.<sup>9</sup>



## Conclusion

Collectively, the 20 girls in our skater study attended nine different high schools in Vancouver and its environs. Without exception, the girls attending each of these schools identified a discourse of femininity that we have called, following Connell (1987), emphasized femininity. Viewed as a discourse, there is no expectation that the concept of femininity 'define[s] a determinate and unitary phenomenon'; rather, femininity as discourse focuses our analytic attention on the 'ongoing, evolving, unfolding social organization of the actual practices of actual individuals' (Smith, 1988, pp. 37, 38). At this particular moment, in a particular locale, certain girls (known variously as the 'bun girls', the 'poppy girls', the 'preppy girls' or the 'girly girls') were seen to spend their time shopping for fashionable, sexy clothing; applying makeup; flirting with boys; and talking about fashion and popular music. While the skater girls certainly articulated these as stereotypes of emphasized femininity, there appeared to be some truth to the stereotypes, judging from the interviews in our wider study with self-described 'Popular' girls (see Currie *et al.*, 2003) and other empirical work (Eder, 1995; Merten, 1997; Bettis & Adams, 2003). These activities helped to organize the popular girls' lives, shape their friendships with each other, inform their individual and group identities, and influence their relations with other girls as well as boys, both inside and outside of school.

Against this, we found that skater girls saw themselves as participating in an 'alternative' girlhood, an alternative that was, in some sense, oppositional to emphasized femininity. Becoming skater girls involved the work and play of producing themselves in relation to alternative images found, for example, among peers at school, at skate parks, on the streets, in songs and music videos, in skater magazines (online and in print) and so on. The alternative authority of skater girl discourse gave the girls in our study room to maneuver within and against the culturally valued discourse of emphasized femininity.

Skater girlhood, as we have shown, is not without its contradictions or tensions: expressing one's unique personal style while adhering to particular group norms; disavowing fashion and popularity even as skateboarding itself was becoming more expensive and 'trendy'; and valuing an easygoing demeanor while distancing oneself from 'posers.' We also found that social class made a difference in how girls at different schools took up skater discourse. Working class girls in class-divided schools resonated to the anti-mainstream, yet fiercely individualist messages of hardcore skater culture, which may have made them less receptive to feminist discourses that emphasize institutional-level gender inequality. In contrast, middle class girls in a variety of schools, particularly a group we have called the 'in-betweeners', appeared to engage in skater girl discourse as a way of gaining distance from both the sexism evident in skater culture and emphasized femininity.

Our study of skater girlhood is exploratory and our findings tentative. Nevertheless, we detected in the narratives of the skater girls, particularly the 'in-betweeners', the capacity (at least implicitly) to recognize multiple, competing discourses, including the dominant discourse of emphasized femininity. They provided examples of carving



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among these multiple discourses, playing one off against another, as well as of grinding or finding, and using to their advantage, contradictions within any one discourse. The skater girls were exercising agency, in the sense developed by Bronwyn Davies:

Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is the freedom to recognise multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. (1991, p. 51)

To the extent that skater girlhood is in opposition to emphasized femininity, we find within it at least an implicit critique of the form of femininity 'oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men' (Connell, 1987, p. 183). In this vein, educators might work with young people to promote what Davies (1997) has called:

Critical social literacy, [which] involves the development of a playful ability to move between and amongst discourses, to move in and out of them, to mix them, to break their spell when necessary. (p. 29)

We leave the last word to Sara, the 14-year-old skater affiliate, who bemoaned the 'many' unspoken 'rules' to being a girl today.

That's why I like being alternative, because you can break so many more rules. If you hang out with the cliques and the mainstreamers and the pop kids, there's so many more rules that you have to follow. And if you don't follow [them] ... you're no longer cool, and they start rumors about you.



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### Notes

1. *Alternative culture* is an umbrella term for various non-mainstream styles (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 56). In the realm of music, the term *alternative* is used to signify difference from (or refusal to conform to) the mainstream in a wide variety of genres (e.g., rock, country, rap, folk). Alternative bands bend the rules, either from inside or outside of a musical tradition; they sometimes fuse together elements of different categories of music. They do not cater to mainstream sensibilities. Because major corporate recording companies want to market their artists to as wide an audience as possible, alternative musicians are more often represented by independent ('indie') labels.
2. The various youth cultures (punk, Goth, hip hop) that cross-fertilize with skater culture should not be seen as clearly bounded and distinctive from one another. With this caveat in mind, punk refers to a genre of rock music and an antiauthoritarian subculture that has been associated with White working class youth in Great Britain. It dates to the mid-1970s and such British bands as the Sex Pistols and the Clash. Style-wise, punk is associated with shaved heads and spiked haircuts, dog collars (spiked leather necklaces), piercing and military attire (e.g.,



heavy boots and leather jackets). A DIY ('do it yourself'), anti-mass culture ethic and aesthetic also characterize the subculture (see Leblanc, 1999).

Goth is an offshoot of punk, associated with the darker themes of punk music developed by Siouxsie and the Banshees in the late 1970s. Fashion-wise, goths commonly display black hair and clothes; horror-style makeup (white facial foundation, black eyeliner, and dark lipstick for both women and men); and symbols of death (e.g., crucifixes). Subcultural themes include 'horror, death, misery and gender ambiguity' (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 61).

Hip hop names the culture surrounding rap music, including break dancing, graffiti-spraying, and disc-jockeying. Hip hop is linked with urban Black youth culture in the US and messages of rebellion and alienation. Fashion-wise, hip hop has been associated with baggy jeans, gold jewelry, baseball caps, and certain designer brands like Tommy Hilfiger (see Rose, 1994; Spiegler, 1996; Kitwana, 2002).

- AQ1
3. In a recent review of research on youth cultures, Bucholtz (2002) remarks that 'ethnographic research on many aspects of youth cultural practice is often surprisingly scarce' (p. 526).
  4. Further evidence that skateboarding is coded as 'creative': The City of Vancouver recently legalized skateboarding on city streets in an effort to cultivate innovation. A city planner noted, 'If we want to attract the creative people, we have to accept that they are somewhat on the edge and want to do different things' (quoted in Anderson, 2003).
  5. Architects in downtown Vancouver have begun to design buildings and public spaces to discourage skateboarders from 'trespassing' and to 'protect property and landscaping'. One property manager noted, 'It's a constant battle. This building's on a web site as one of the recommended places to skateboard' (Bellett, 2003, p. G2).
  6. According to the High Definition Dictionary, 'skank' means a promiscuous person, especially one who transmits sexual diseases, as well as an undesirable, irresponsible or dishonest person or freeloader. See [www/hdd.rox.com](http://www/hdd.rox.com).
  7. The girls in the skater study used the word 'popular' to mean both someone who was widely liked by her or his peers as well as a member of the 'ruling' group. We capitalize the word Popular to indicate the latter meaning.
- AQ2
8. 'Carving' means to make a long, curving arc while skateboarding; 'grinding' refers to skateboarding tricks where the hanger/s of the truck (the part of the skateboard that connects the deck with the wheels and allows the board to turn) grind along the edge of an obstacle.
  9. Bettie (2003) noted, in her ethnography of working class girls in a small town high school in California, that 'Many students who believed they were unusual in their ability to cross groups were in fact not as widely accepted as they thought by the groups they crossed into' (p. 110).

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superscript	λ /	2 y
subscript	λ /	2 /
hyphen	λ /	/-
short or long rule	λ /	/ <sup>en</sup> / or / <sup>em</sup> /
oblique	λ /	⊙
Wrong typeface or size	encircle	wf
Change to: roman (upright)	encircle	(rom)
italic	<u>underline</u>	(ital)
capital letters	<u>underline three times</u>	(caps)
small capitals	<u>underline twice</u>	(s.c)
bold type	<u>wavy underline</u>	(bold)
lower case letters	encircle	(l.c)
Greek letters	encircle	(gk) adding Greek letter
Delete and close up	copy	∩
Reduce space	in / copy	less #
Close up space	in copy	∩
Insert space	in copy	#
Make space in line equal	∟	eq #
Insert space between lines	) ————— (	
Reduce space between lines	( ————— )	
New paragraph	[	(para)
Run on, no new paragraph	2	(run on)
Transpose letters or words	∟	∟
Transpose lines	=====	
Take character to next line	∟	(take over)
Take character to previous line	∟	(take back)
Raise text on page	⌌	(raise)
Lower text on page	⌌	(lower)
Check vertical alignment		
Check horizontal alignment	=====	=====



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