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The Gendered Emotional Labor of Male Professional ‘Freesurfers’ Digital Media Work

Abstract

Male professional ‘freesurfers’ are paid to live an aspirational lifestyle and communicate this through media. In this article I argue that a ‘stoke imperative’ championed by the surf industry necessitates emotional labor. Stoke is surf vernacular for a clustering of feeling thrilled, joyful, pleased, happy, optimistic, excited, and satisfied. The surf industry manufactures and commodifies stoke to profit from it. Emotional labor is often assumed to be what women are ‘naturally’ predisposed to and ‘better at.’ While numerous studies argue that men have complex emotional lives, we still have some way to go to better understand how these play out through emotional labor, as men negotiate social, economic, spatial, cultural, and ecological contingencies. It is found that male professional freesurfers are competent at employing strategies for doing emotional labor when doing digital labor, such as micro-celebrity. However, this involves negotiating shifting but also conflicting expectations, traits, and values of masculinity. It is also found that digital media technologies direct a professional sport ‘technosoma’ that comes to be a material digital networking of emotional labor for profit. The article extends what is currently a small body of literature on how emotional labor is experienced and practiced in relation to masculinity in male-dominated industries as new economic and social conditions of possibility emerge. A clearer understanding of what is taking place hopefully helps to interrupt any smooth reproduction of inequities borne of gendered stereotypes in the sport industry and through digital labor, which is nested in the new economy.

Key words: emotional labor; digital media; micro-celebrity; surfing; gender; professional athlete; sport; masculinities; men.

Introduction

In November 2016, high-profile professional ‘freesurfer’ Dane Reynolds posted an intimate short film about his life entitled *Chapter 11*, signalling the end of a contract with a major surf company.¹ Chapter 11 is the bankruptcy code in the United States. Alongside the film he released a Declaration of Independence:

one thing to remember is that i have a heart and i have bones and muscle and skin and eyes and teeth. i have emotions. sometimes i act according to emotions. sometimes i think and make a conscious decision. i usually do that. in fact i usually think too much. sorta neurotic. i make mistakes, and i deal with them. i have fears and i have anxiety and i have insecurities.²

This film and the accompanying declaration sent shockwaves throughout the industry, as well as enthusiast networks. It is rare for male professional surfers to comment on the emotional dimensions of their work. While men express emotion when taking part in sport, this is still policed and corrected if they go ‘too far’ (Lilleaas 2007).³

A freedom from competition and surfing-as-sport is what puts the ‘free’ in ‘freesurfer.’ Professional freesurfers are often presented in opposition to competitive surfing with its institutional rules, measurements, and regulations (Booth 1995; Stranger 2011).⁴ These surfers are sponsored to inspire others to live a surfing lifestyle, as well as validate and endorse clothing and fashion items, hardware (such as surfboards, wetsuits, leashes, board bags), and whatever other goods or services they can pull into their orbit e.g. cars, tourism, real estate, food and beverages, technology, and more. Sponsorship equals financial payment as well as provision of goods and services from surfing and non-surfing businesses. Professional freesurfer profiles are orchestrated to fit niches and generate new ones because surfing is a patchwork of competing, even contradictory, forces and scenes (Stranger 2011). The surfers are expected to exhibit a trait, style, and personality to set them up and help the surf industry keep up with emerging trends and scenes.⁵ As one action sport website declares: ‘Have an Act.’⁶ Professional freesurfers are commodities. What is sold is their surf lifestyle in the hope consumers repeatedly consume the ‘proper’ goods and services to signify to other people that they are on a similar ‘aspirational journey.’ The action sport industry that these professional freesurfers are part of is a multibillion-dollar industry (Hough-Snee and Eastman

2017). Every part of surf culture is entangled with capitalism and commodification to some extent (Booth 1995; Lawler 2010).

Professional freesurfers are not really free at all. They are required to contribute to a surf industry complex that is aimed at ‘manufacturing stoke’ to perpetuate consumption and generate profits (*Manufacturing Stoke*, 2011). Stoke is surf vernacular for how, after an emotional and affective effort, a person may experience a state of being that is a clustering of feeling thrilled, joyful, pleased, happy, optimistic, excited, and satisfied. This aim is what I call the ‘stoke imperative.’ For instance, consider professional freesurfers Patrick, Dane, and Tanner Gudauskas who in 2015 started their ‘Positive Vibe Warriors Foundation’,⁷ in 2016 ran a ‘Stoke-O-Rama’ children’s surf contest with ‘no neggie vibes,’ and who are celebrated in the industry because their ‘stoke is contagious.’⁸ There is also the meteoric rise of the professional freesurfer Mason Ho, who is fêted as ‘Surfing’s Ambassador of Fun’ and as *Surfer Magazine* suggests: ‘Let life coach Mason Ho energize your stoke.’⁹ In 2017 the World Surf League has run a competition to seek out an ‘Ambassador of Stoke & Leisure.’¹⁰

These workers are expected by industry representatives and other enthusiasts to only express gratitude and have a positive attitude. There is little room for questioning how things are playing out for them or others in this occupational setting, as this may interrupt the generation and circulation of stoke. Nor should they challenge the status quo of surfing culture(s) more generally, which is brimming with sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, colonization, and violence (Hough-Snee and Eastman 2017). The response to a question or complaint by a professional freesurfer is to ‘stop whining’ or ‘get a reality check.’¹¹ As one respondent to Reynold’s film put it: ‘Really sorry to hear that surfing for millions of dollars and doing fuck all stressed you out to the point of having panic attacks ... Glad you found your safe place and your purple unicorns my precious little snowflake!’¹² The professional freesurfer’s job is referred to as ‘a privilege, not a right,’ which helps to ensure they stay ‘on message.’¹³

The purpose of this article is to argue that the stoke imperative necessitates that the male professional freesurfer does emotional labor. This involves circulating and validating a routinized happiness, aspiration, and optimism through careful management of emotional states and performances of strength, resilience, and vulnerability. The research participants repeatedly referred to the need to communicate stoke and be stoked. This is achieved by negotiating expectations of masculinity in the male-dominated action sport industry. The concentration of power in the industry remains primarily in the ‘bro network,’ despite women

working in the industry and challenging the status quo (Comer 2010).¹⁴ Emotional labor involves regulating and managing emotional states and expressions according to ‘feeling rules’ while in paid employment, so that consumers get a suitable experience (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Grandey 2000; Hochschild 1983).¹⁵ My interest was piqued because emotional labor has often been coded as ‘feminine’, as ‘women’s work,’ and it is assumed that women are naturally better at it (Guy and Newman 2004; Hochschild 1983). I wondered: how are male professional freesurfers undertaking emotional labor and what might this teach us about doing masculinity in the sport industry and through sport digital work in the new economy? The study focuses on the professional freesurfers’ media work, which, as with other action/lifestyle sport athletes, is a cornerstone of their profession (Dumont 2016; Snyder 2012). This digital media work includes going on photo shoots, ‘getting clips’ (making videos/short films), and posting to and engaging with fans and followers through social media.¹⁶

In this article I use Hochschild’s theoretical framework of emotional labor to undertake the analysis of the professional freesurfers’ work. Hochschild explains through her study of the airline industry that emotional labor involves ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value’ (1983, 7). Hochschild’s emphasis on the various forms of ‘acting’ people employ—which I detail in the analysis—to display ‘proper’ emotional expressions provides a way to identify when and how these men manage their emotions to provide a suitable and approved experience for consumers and others in their workplace. While I primarily employ the theoretical framework of Hochschild, the emphasis on acting does not account for how someone may display the fitting emotions for a circumstance without acting. So, I also refer in the analysis to Ashforth and Humphrey’s (1993) concept of ‘genuine emotional labor,’ which extends Hochschild’s model to accommodate such situations. The signifier ‘genuine’ does not mean that there are some essential true emotions, but that emotional expression can be spontaneous and synchronous with client expectation and organizational suitability (ibid.).

Hochschild (1983) points out that emotional labor is gendered. This state of affairs emerges from a longstanding sexual division of labor whereby men have been expected to take up roles that privilege rationality in public workplace and economic spheres, while women have been expected to adopt caring and nurturing roles in private and domestic spheres. This has contributed to constructing and reproducing a discourse about women having a ‘natural’

association with emotion, emotional intelligence, empathy, and people skills—even though they are not naturally predisposed to such (Taylor and Tyler 2000). When women are part of the workforce it has come to be that they are expected to do most of the emotional labor (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Taylor and Tyler 2000).¹⁷ This expectation has been linked to women experiencing higher levels of stress and burn out (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Guy and Newman 2004; Taylor and Tyler 2000). The gendered workplace organization reproduces a taken-for-grantedness that men are no good at, or are clueless about, emotional labor and a devaluing (e.g. through lower wages) of those who end up having to perform it.

The study is part of a need to better understand how men are adapting (or not) and the outcomes for men who are increasingly required to undertake emotional labor in male-dominated industries. New economic and social conditions are transforming men's doing and understanding of masculinities in the workplace as they confront new modes of self-formation through labor (Lupton 2006; McDowell 2002; Simpson 2004).¹⁸ Affluent Western economies have moved away from manufacturing and realigned to favour service and knowledge industries (Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). The 'new economy' prioritizes innovation, entrepreneurialism, mobility, flexibility, decentralized production, worker self-realization, communication networks, leisure time increasingly becoming labor time, and the creation of symbolic content, e.g. branding and marketing (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006; Fuchs 2014b; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008; McRobbie 2010). An increased demand for emotional intelligence, persuasiveness, empathy, and people skills that have been traditionally framed as 'feminine' has accompanied the growth of the new economy (McRobbie 2010; Warren 2016).

The study focuses on eleven professional freesurfers. They ride a variety of surfing equipment. The participants are white, male, and are from the United States, Europe, and Australia. The age range is 18 years old to 42 years old. Four of the surfers are elite well-known freesurfers sponsored by major corporations, both surfing and non-surfing. Three of the surfers are of moderate recognition. Four of the surfers are starting out and have low recognition.¹⁹ They are 'aspirational laborers' who hold out for future social and economic capital while being poorly remunerated, if at all (Duffy 2016). The men had some agency to speak about issues in the surf industry. Women who are professional surfers are in a much more precarious position.²⁰

Connection with the surfers came through personal contacts and speculative emailing. The study proceeded by using one-hour semi-structured interviews conducted through Skype and email.²¹ Five participants were interviewed twice. Six participants were interviewed three times. The interviewees' responses were transcribed and analyzed through interpretive-interactionism, which requires repeated engagement with the participants to identify critical incidents, epiphanies, and turning points to inspect what they mean and learn from them (Denzin 2001). This involves mapping key themes and referring them back to the interviewee for further discussion and 'mutual shaping' of interpretation. The interpretation of relevance and themes is not only determined by the research participant, as they too have certain biases and 'blind-spots' that need teasing out. As a white, male, heteronormative, lifelong surfer, and having worked in the surf industry—surfboard production, retail, and media—I bring to the research a partial insider's knowledge.²² To complement the interviews, I consulted the 'enthusiast media' to identify supporting and contradictory evidence (Fuller 2013). This enthusiast media includes websites, online forums, social media accounts, print magazines, films, and video clips.²³ The focus of this study is on men experiencing the nexus of masculinity and emotional labor while doing digital labor, rather than media representation.

Men, masculinity, and emotional labor

While numerous studies argue that men have complex emotional lives, we still have some way to go to better understand how these are manifested, directed, and experienced through different conditions of possibility: social, economic, spatial, cultural, and ecological (de Boise and Hearn 2017). In studies of men and emotional labor in nursing—an occupational setting where women make up most of the workforce—it has been found that some men find it challenging to affirm their masculinity through homosocial bonding (Evans 2004; Gray 2010).²⁴ This has led to some men worrying about being 'feminized,' as well as homophobic and sexist concerns about being assumed to be gay or effeminate (Evans 2004; Gray 2010). Such concerns mean that some men work hard to shore up their masculinity, which can involve avoiding emotional labor by emphasizing their technical skills and rationality (Lupton 2006; Simpson 2004). Anxieties about masculinity continue to make such industries less desirable for employment for many men (Nixon 2009). The occupation of male professional freesurfer is often referred to as a 'dream job' and the industry is male-dominated. However, as I will show, male professional freesurfers still work at preserving a particular masculinized occupational identity.

There is still little attention given to the gendered way men do emotional labor in male-dominated industries, especially the sport industry. Thurnell-Read and Parker's (2003) study of male firefighters in their male-dominated industry found they increasingly have to do emotional labor to manage relationships with colleagues, management, and the community. However, hegemonic masculine ideals of strength, and physical and technical competence, reinforce their masculine sense of self. Further, a workplace of risk and danger helps to ameliorate anxiety about any changes to their masculinized occupational identity. In the occupational setting of male professional surfers there is a privileging of those who surf dangerous waves, put their body 'on the line,' and 'go big' (high-risk manoeuvres). Some prioritize an aesthetic lifestyle, including surfing gentler and smaller waves. However, a hierarchy is in place that helps to reinforce a masculinized occupational identity. Warren and Gibson (2014) and Warren (2016) provide particularly helpful studies of the importance of emotions for men working in the male-dominated occupational setting of the surf industry. Both studies are about men making surfboards in artisanal independent workshops. A surfboard shaper's work is shown to be affective and emotional. However, they rarely have to employ emotional labor to suit consumer expectations. It is not expected, because the long-standing discourse of the technical 'manly craftsman' trumps any such expectation. This arrangement is different to professional freesurfers for whom emotional labor is an essential part of their job, including through their digital labor.

Action sport, media, and digital labor

Digital networked media technologies are now ubiquitous in sport, including social media (Filo et al. 2014; Hutchins 2011). Specialized enthusiast media has been shown to be central to the production and circulation of culture and feelings through action/lifestyle sports (Booth 2008; Ford and Brown 2006; Wheaton 2004). However, we are still in the early stages of understanding the role of digital media in regard to such fields (Thorpe 2016; Wheaton and Gilchrist 2013).

What we do know is that athletes are increasingly expected to work on their self-presentation through social media to build personal brands and audiences (Boyle and Haynes 2014; Filo et al. 2014).²⁵ Self-presentation, following Goffman (1959), refers to dramaturgical practices that involve managing the impression of ourselves when we interact with other people; which can now be a form of self-branding (Khamis et al. 2017; Lair et al. 2005; Marwick 2013). Self-branding is gendered (Banet-Weiser 2012, 2015). A number of feminist scholars are now

drawing attention to gendered emotional work through digital labor, finding that women devote considerable emotional effort to creating content and participating online (paid and unpaid), which is converted to profits that they are often not the beneficiaries of (Arcy 2016; Banet-Weiser 2012, 2015; Duffy 2016; Jarrett 2014). There has been an intensification of inequalities. Toffoletti and Thorpe (forthcoming) find that for women athletes this process may be fraught with tensions and ambiguities, as they reproduce hegemonic gendered social expectations to be ‘successful,’ but also challenge them. However, we know little about how men carry out and experience gendered emotional labor through sport digital labor, or how what they do contributes to those inequalities. Gregory J. Snyder and Guillaume Dumont have specifically paid attention to the media work of male professional athletes in the male-dominated action sport industry. Snyder (2012) argued that male professional skateboarders undertake media work to broadcast expertise, gain a following, and appeal to sponsors. These findings are consistent with those of Dumont in his study of the digital labor of male professional climbers (2016, 2017a). The findings of Dumont and Snyder are also accurate for professional freesurfers. I extend this body of work by providing knowledge about how male professional action sport athletes use digital labor and how the emotional labor that it involves is gendered.

The male professional freesurfer: networking the stoke imperative

Blake is an older elite professional freesurfer who has a profile as an organic rural surfer who rides a wide range of contemporary, experimental, and ‘retro’ (nostalgic) equipment. He explains, ‘I wanted to walk away from contests [...] I wanted to be as free as possible.’ Some surfers do not refer to surfing as a sport through their media work but prefer to represent their lifestyle through recreational, artistic, and even spiritual signifiers (Ford and Brown 2006; Stranger 2011). They view any professional and commercial imperatives with surfing as ‘prostitution.’²⁶ Others couldn’t care less. Blake was reflective about the dialectic of freesurfers and competition surfers:

In one sense the division between freesurfer and competition surfer feels trivial to me, and just a marketing strategy for surf companies [...] the idea of free surfing can be very contrived and manipulated to a point where the heartfelt joy for surfing in a way that has no boundaries is covered over and almost lost. I see plenty of kids who ‘free surf’ and seem riddled with anxiety, borderline depression, and a lack of joy.

Blake has demonstrated concern through the media about exploitation by the surf industry on multiple levels, including colonization, environmental damage, as well as labor conditions. He explains that ‘this is an internal struggle [...] How these feelings are dealt with differs from person to person.’ Blake can speak out because his longevity in a highly competitive industry equates to having ‘earned respect.’ How Blake manages his feelings about the tension between exhibiting stoke and his activism involves emotional labor. His ‘activism’ is undertaken in a non-confrontational manner to invoke conviviality rather than anger. The stoke imperative remains largely intact. Blake has been obliged to and did display stoke in the media while endorsing companies which have exploitative features. To do so, he practiced ‘surface acting.’ Hochschild (1983) explains that this is the overt display of a pre-planned emotional appearance. The emotions are not actually felt—they are faked by way of facial expressions (e.g. a smile), tone of voice, and bodily gestures. The expressed emotions are not congruent with how the person is feeling at the time.

Cameron is an aspirational laborer and feels obliged ‘to be stoked.’ His act is like that of Blake’s, albeit he is only 19. Cameron is an ex-competitive surfer. He explains:

Cameron: Trying to make it as a professional surfer can make you lose all the love you have for it [surfing]. It has led to some health problems [...] I’ve sometimes been depressed and put on weight.

Interviewer: Do you just mean competition surfing?

Cameron: Both.

Cameron’s disposition is gentle and sensitive. He is still competitive, which complicates how he negotiates the stoke imperative:

Sometimes I fake it and congratulate someone on a good wave. But if I think they just got the shot [photo] of the trip I’m actually pissed off at myself for not surfing well [...] I’m competitive.

Cameron also employs surface acting. It is used to manage how others view him so they keep working with him. He told me how this ‘faking it’ can make him feel ‘inauthentic.’ For anything other than a stoked/grateful disposition to be communicated in person and through the media could lead to his authenticity being questioned by those he works alongside and

determine his suitability for the role, as well as being questioned by fans and followers. Cameron manages his emotional expression both in person and via the media to avoid giving the 'wrong' impression. Any presentation of self is both authentic and carefully edited offline and online (Marwick 2013). There is a need for Cameron to *perform* authenticity (including stoke) well by skilfully manipulating cultural signs (which include body language). Authenticity is socially-produced and only ever signification (Baudrillard 1983). Wheaton and Beal (2003) explain how authenticity has been central to lifestyle/action sports. They argue that 'authentic membership status is influenced by factors including commitment, attitude, gender, class, and race' (173). Given this, Cameron has to demonstrate an appropriate and consistent arrangement that authenticates his act, but stubborn normative values about masculinity complicate the performance. Authenticity is not outdated for many enthusiasts, however, there is a heightened awareness of its contrivance. Being able to skilfully negotiate and play with the signs and symbols of authenticity is arguably a key marker of status.

Cameron's disposition and deference means some fellow male surfers refer to him as an 'opinionless pussy,' which can 'make you feel like shit, if you let it get to you.' Traditionally 'feminine' associations are pejorative. The self-representation and deference required to meet the stoke imperative through emotional labor do not neatly jibe with how some male surfers hang onto hegemonic 'masculine' traits, such as assertiveness. While Cameron is adapting to new workplace demands he must confront resistance. There are conflicting demands from multiple men, and he turns to other men to validate his masculinity.²⁷

Oliver is a professional freesurfer whose authenticity is never questioned. He travels the world to bodyboard. There has been far less opportunity for Oliver to get sponsorship as bodyboarding has less corporate backing. Bodyboarding is not taken as seriously as other modes of surfing, even though it demands considerable skill and the cohort who undertake it at the elite levels have pushed risk-taking to the extreme as a spectacular rendering of the self to break through the sponsorship barriers. This risk-taking was not enough for Oliver to make a mark so he developed innovative media skills.

Oliver undertakes what Senft (2008, 2013) calls 'micro-celebrity' through a Vimeo account.²⁸ This is a style 'of online performance in which people employ webcams, video, audio, blogs, and social networking sites to 'amp up' their popularity among readers, viewers, and those to whom they are linked online' (2008, 25). Oliver has profited from using an action camera.

These are robust, waterproof, lightweight cameras that can be attached to equipment or his body to shoot footage. Oliver employs higher frame rates to enable a slowing down of footage to generate appealing and engaging aesthetics. He edits and uploads footage to the internet using a smartphone app. As Oliver said, without a hint of humility, ‘I’m now one of the best at using the camera. I got into it early to broaden my skills [...] The camera got me attention.’ The audience get to partake in an emotional and affective experience of surfing, such as when Oliver takes saltwater selfies to share his stoke. Surf media is, above all else, meant to be affective and emotional (Booth 2008). Oliver insists on *moving* the audience, on them ‘getting a sense of what I’m feeling’—joy, fear, excitement, concern, anger, and so on. It is an example of networked affect that involves the circulation and connectivity of intensity, sensation, and value (Hillis et al. 2015).

What Oliver’s entanglement with media technologies highlights is that micro-celebrity (and athlete engagement with media more broadly) is not only representational. As Senft (2015) argues, the selfie is attention-grabbing whereby one touches and is touched by others. Fans and followers (as well as other audiences) are affectively and emotionally moved. There is also haptic interaction with media technologies, such as fingers pinching screens to zoom in and out (Parisi et al. 2017). Micro-celebrity involves human-machine collaboration (Senft 2015).

Digital media technologies do not only augment sport communication. They facilitate and initiate communication, sport and sporting practices, how sport labor is done and felt, what is valued or not in sport, and what is presented or not through sport. Digital media technologies are now pervasive among surfers with surfing space, identities, phenomenology, and philosophies entwined with and orientated by such (Evers 2016; Olive 2015). Oliver’s surfing phenomenology and emotional labor is enabled and directed by the action camera. Where Oliver surfs is directed by algorithms that synthesize waves, wind, atmospheric pressure, and bathymetry data to provide animated wave forecast charts. As professional freesurfer Alex Gray said: ‘I live my life off the figment of a computer’s imagination.’²⁹ Oliver spoke about holding the camera this way, that way, pointed here, pointed there. Particularly popular was gripping the camera in his mouth to get point-of-view footage, using his neck as a ‘tripod’. How he surfs a wave is geared toward getting new camera angles. A new surfing ‘technosoma’ emerges that alters not only his sense perceptions and corporeal experiences, but also those of his fans and followers (Richardson 2005). The networking is stoke inducing.

As Kittler (1999, 2017) argues, we are a product of technologies and their capabilities. This contests McLuhan's (1964) argument that media are extensions of man. The importance of this description of Oliver's technosoma is that it indicates how gendered emotional labor and digital labor is both representational *and material*.

When Oliver is doing surfing micro-celebrity while interfaced with media technologies, there is an orientation toward genuine emotional labor while in the sea and on a wave (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). This involves his affective-emotional state spontaneously synchronizing with that of fans and followers to elicit stoke. The fans' and followers' evaluation of his stoked authenticity proceeds through their own affective-emotional scripts; for many this is packed with their own surfing experiences and cultural signs (Tomkins 1987). Oliver's surfing, emotional, and digital labor virtuosity proves particularly effective at ensuring stoke is contagious.

In contrast to Oliver, Freddie mentioned situations which necessitated deep acting to service the stoke imperative. This is where a person works at summoning up the appropriate emotions (e.g. through listening to music, watching clips, recalling past events) to 'put them in the suitable mood' (Humphrey et al. 2015, 751). For instance, Freddie gets anxious when he has to paddle out into risky surfing conditions:

Freddie: I'll put on a brave face and act excited because the filmer is there along with the rest of the crew. It's part of my reputation [to surf dangerous waves]. People think you don't get scared, but of course you do. It'd be stupid not to. After a while you begin to believe you can do it and start to actually be excited and get into it [...] enjoy it. I guess that's what comes through [in the footage] [...] my excitement and not the fear.

Interviewer: Why not walk away or do you worry about what people will think?

Freddie: I do sometimes worry over what people will think and others are doing. You need people to think you're relevant. If I stop being relevant bye-bye sponsorship.

Freddie's deep acting validates him in front of the other male workers and wider expectations of masculinity e.g. courage and risk-taking. Co-working and sharing resources is a central feature of the project-based media work. For Freddie the co-working was almost exclusively homosocial.

Freddie's deep acting is also informed by an insecurity and anxiety about his replaceability. Project-based work is precarious, a common feature of the new economy (Gill and Pratt 2008). He is aware that he is expected to embody a masculinized courage, toughness, and doggedly churn out project after project if he is to remain a valued part of the industry 'boys' club.' If Freddie 'fails,' as he explained it, 'there's no time to be miserable, I have to pull myself together and get on with [...] the next project.' This is congruent with what Boltanski and Chiapello point out is the 'new spirit of capitalism,' which involves life being 'conceived as a series of projects' (2006, 169). Resourcefulness and self-motivation are celebrated (Lair et al. 2005). To be 'always on' makes it challenging to balance work and other parts of his life, since all aspects, including the most intimate, become part of the personal brand (Hearn 2011a; Khamis et al. 2017).

The requirement to 'stay on the radar' through an endless procession of projects fostered an anxiety among a number of the research participants about injury. Injuries included concussion, spinal damage, blown out knees and shoulders, whiplash, blood infections, and tropical diseases. Tom explained that each injury is an 'emotional rollercoaster.' His injury work necessitated surface acting. Tom explained how disclosing his private life on his Instagram account during his recovery can help him stay connected with fans and followers, as they become privy to usually inaccessible parts of his life.³⁰ However, Tom went on to clarify that he does not show 'too much' emotion or vulnerability:

People don't want to see that.

Interviewer: What about the sponsors?

Especially them. They have to see your mental toughness [...] That you're manning up and got your shit together [...] Injuries make you think about things, where you're at, and not to take things for granted [...] Hopefully, this inspires others.

An appropriate masculine portrayal of a stoked, thankful, and resilient selfhood is expected by Tom to bring in masculine respect. When injured, Tom uses hashtags such as #inspire #goodvibes #energize #staystrong #staystoked on his Instagram account. These are signifiers of emotional labor and an affective stitching together of aspiration and inspiration to appeal to and motivate fans. The point is that there is an embodying of affirmative affects in what Fuller and Jeffrey (2017) refer to as an enthusiastic masculinity, rather than the embodying of

the diminishing affects of a denigrated masculine disposition. According to Fuller and Jeffrey, there emerges an aspirational labor whereby respect is attained by embodying and reproducing the appropriate aspirational mixture of affects and emotions.

Online engagement with fans and followers is now crucial for professional surfer careers. Those who grow networks provide the best returns (Abidin 2014; Marwick 2013, 2015). Professional male surfers are increasingly expected to be ‘social media influencers [...] crafting an authentic ‘personal brand’ via social networks, which can subsequently be used by companies and advertisers for consumer outreach’ (Marshall & Redmond 2015, 194). Dumont (2017b), drawing on Baym’s concept of ‘relational labor’ (an extension of emotional labor), argues that this requires action sport athletes to manage fans’ feelings when they interact online, with the goal being to instrumentalize social networks (e.g. for monetary gain). It is not simply the number of followers that matters for sponsors but rather an intimacy of engagement that can generate value. Intimacy equates to more sharing of data as fans and followers express their opinions and feelings about products and services, including rating, ranking, and providing feedback (Hearn 2011b; Khamis et al. 2017). Algorithms now collate and evaluate sentiment-as-data to inform and direct consumer knowledge, marketing, and product development (Marshall and Redmond 2015).³¹ Given how normative gender values police what the male professional freesurfers experience and do, anyone who does not successfully manage (or challenges) gendered emotional labor may see their market value plunge.

Conclusion

The intention here has not been to paint these men as victims. They do, after all, surf for a living. Rather, the goal has been to reveal how male professional freesurfers do gendered emotional labor as they service the stoke imperative during digital labor. In fact, they are particularly competent at doing emotional labor, even though claims have been made that it is women who are predisposed to such. It was found that hegemonic expectations and values of masculinity nurture particularly gendered experiences of managing emotional states and expressions in this occupational setting. However, there are multiple tensions and contradictions, such as men appearing fearless and being enthusiastic while at the same time experiencing heightened vulnerability and anxieties due to their employment in the new economy. Some concerns about being ‘feminized’ by doing emotional labor emerged. This was countered by celebrating an aspirational and enthusiastic masculinity despite challenges

faced, hence underscoring resilience and strength. The nexus of the male professional athlete, digital labor, and emotional labor has been shown to function as a site of critical appraisal for consumer fans, industry representatives, and the athletes themselves to assess feelings, experiences, and validity in relation to masculinity. A surprising outcome of the research was how the energies of media technologies presence, facilitate, and direct a technosoma that is interfaced with a material digital networking of gendered emotional labor. The article extends what is currently a small body of literature on how emotional labor is experienced and practiced in relation to masculinity in male-dominated industries as new economic and social conditions of possibility emerge. A clearer understanding of what is taking place helps to interrupt any smooth reproduction of inequities borne of gendered stereotypes in the sport industry and through digital labor, which is nested in the new economy. It is not enough to state that men are doing insufficient emotional labor at work and in the home. It is necessary to recognize and understand how men are currently doing emotional labor, so that we can work toward a more ethical distribution and evaluation of the activity both at work and in the home—as well as remuneration and appreciation for all those having to do it, given the current demands of the new economy and interfacing of labor with new technologies.

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¹ As of November 22, 2016, *STAB Magazine* listed on its website ‘Watch: Chapter 11, The New Feature Film By Dane Reynolds,’ <http://stabmag.com/stabcinema/watch-chapter-11-the-new-feature-film-by-dane-reynolds/>

² As of December 21, 2011, *The Inertia* listed on its website ‘Dane Reynolds’s Declaration of Independence,’ <http://www.theinertia.com/surf/dane-reynolds-declaration-of-independence/>

³ That said, some scholars are arguing that there has been an emergence of ‘inclusive masculinities’ in sport settings, whereby men are discarding with such emotional policing (cf. Anderson 2008). That argument is outside the scope of this article.

⁴ See the film *Blue Horizons*. 2004. DVD. Directed by J. McCoy. Written by J. McCoy.

⁵ The term ‘action sports’ is an industry-driven term. It is used to describe participation in activities such as skateboarding, snowboarding, climbing, BMX, parkour, kite-surfing, and more. Enthusiasts outside the industry and those emphasizing recreation tend to use the term ‘lifestyle.’ This latter arrangement lends itself to the

term 'lifestyle sport,' as championed by Wheaton (2004). I proceed with the term 'action sport' here unless I am referring to both industry and recreation.

⁶ As of April 22, 2002, GrindTV listed on its website 'Ten Commandments of Pro Surfing Sponsorship,' <http://www.grindtv.com/surf/the-ten-commandments-of-pro-surfing-sponsorship/#0TI7WOqfmeek0kmE.99>

⁷ As of March 18, 2016, Magicseaweed listed on its website 'Positive Vibrations with the Gudauskas Brothers,' <http://magicseaweed.com/news/positive-vibrations-with-the-gudauskas-brothers/8810/>

⁸ As of July 22, 2016, *Surfer Magazine* listed on its website 'What's a Stoke-O-Rama?' <http://www.surfer.com/surfing-magazine-archive/surfing-news/g-bros-stoke-o-rama-back/#WelbR7IPJT0iOdOb.99>

⁹ As of No Date, *Surfer Magazine* listed on the Facebook feed 'Let life coach Mason Ho energize your stoke with a breakdown of his favorite sticks laying around his backyard,' <https://www.facebook.com/surfer/videos/10155259815453856/>

¹⁰ As of September 7, 2017 World Surf League listed on their website 'The WSL Wants You as Our Ambassador of Stoke and Leisure.' <http://www.worldsurfleague.com/posts/270312/the-wsl-wants-you-as-our-ambassador-of-stoke-and-leisure>

¹¹ Hoy, Matt. 'Still at the airport.' Instagram. August 4, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXYhSy1h68k/?hl=en&taken-by=hoy666>

¹² As of No Date, *STAB Magazine* listed on its website 'Watch: Chapter 11, The New Feature Film by Dane Reynolds,' <http://stabmag.com/stabcinema/watch-chapter-11-the-new-feature-film-by-dane-reynolds/>

¹³ As of May 22, 2016, Coastalwatch listed on its website 'The Unsponsored Surfer,' <http://www.coastalwatch.com/surfing/17032/sean-doherty-on-the-unsponsored-surfer>

¹⁴ As of No Date, Girl Surf Network listed on its website 'Boss ladies of the Industry,' <http://girlsurfnetwork.com/boss-ladies-of-the-surf-industry-part-1/>

¹⁵ I employ here a sociology of emotions paradigm. In this paradigm, affect is a preconscious or unconscious form of biological sensation and emotion is the conscious attention to and evaluation of this according to cultural and social discourses (Wetherall 2012). Affect and emotion are co-dependant and mutually-shaping.

¹⁶ Social media refers to online platforms through which users can create and publish content. It may facilitate social networking. Social network sites afford the online creation and maintenance of public or semi-public profiles and relationships with other users (boyd and Ellison 2007, 211). For ease of reference I use the term 'social media' throughout this article, as due to media convergences it affords all the activities and so has come to popularly be used to refer to both forms (Fuchs 2014a).

¹⁷ The understanding of gender in this article is through the paradigm of corporeal feminism.

¹⁸ There are 'multiple mutating masculinities' (Watson 2015). This is a post-Deleuzian paradigm, which is much more dynamic than the dominant critical masculinities paradigm stemming from the work of R. W. Connell (1995).

¹⁹ I do not provide any more detail (e.g. company names) because anyone with a knowledge of the industry would be able to determine who some of the participants are. Anonymity would be threatened. Pseudonyms are used to anonymize participants.

²⁰ Evidence of this can be seen in the responses to ex-professional surfer Cori Schumacher, who was framed as bitter whingeing 'butch-lesbo' 'feminazi' when she spoke out about structural inequalities (e.g. gender, sponsorship, and labor rights). See the comments section of *Surfer Magazine*:

<http://forum.surfer.com/forum/ubbthreads.php?ubb=showflat&Number=2082216>; also see the podcast Everything is Always Terrible: <https://vimeo.com/145680310>; <https://soundcloud.com/eachrit/everything-is-always-terrible-episode-seven-w-guest-cori-schumacher>;

²¹ Informed consent was gathered from all participants following ethics clearance by the University Research Ethics Committee.

²² I have not been a professional freesurfer, hence the word 'partial.' Insider knowledge has benefits and limitations. My gender and surfing history helped me build rapport, gain access, and provided me with a familiarity with frames of reference for interpretation. On the other hand, some nuances are likely lost as I overlook them as 'common sense.' The perspective here is provisional, situated, and partial.

²³ This media is a body of data in and of itself and is worthy of textual analysis, however that is not the focus of this study.

²⁴ Homosociality involves a reproduction of heteronormativity by orientating any relationship and desire between men through a third 'object' or activity, often involving sexually objectifying women or playing/being fans of sport (Sedgwick 1985).

²⁵ Gendered self-presentation has always been a popular research topic in the studies of digital social norms on social networking applications (boyd and Ellison 2007).

²⁶ See the interview with high-profile and celebrated professional freesurfer David Rastovich in *Three Stones from the Sun: Into the Mind of David Rastovich*. 2016. Produced by *Desillusion Magazine* and Billabong. Directed by S. Zanella. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/144459572>

²⁷ Some male professional surfers and marketing teams latch onto the tension between traditional hegemonic expectations of masculinity and what is interpreted by some male surfers, both within the industry and as fans and followers, as 'feminization.' The tension is exploited by performing a hyper-masculinized rebellion as part of their act. This 'rebellion', though, is not presented as an angry backlash but rather as playful, fun, and ironic. The irony helps to reinforce traditional norms of masculinity in a post-feminist era (Smith 2005). For example, see the profile of professional freesurfer Mikey Wright in his clip 'Mongrel Mike,' where he is represented through an excess of rock and roll and working-class masculinity signs. Fans and followers revel in and have fun with the contrivance of this 'authentic masculinity' to 'get amped to go surfing' (stoked). The process affirms particular gendered dispositions, yet interestingly also involves an acknowledgment that they are not fixed and require reproduction and reaffirmation to remain powerful.

²⁸ Vimeo is a video hosting site which markets itself as for filmmakers, animators, and other creatives. See www.vimeo.com

²⁹ See Alex Gray, *Tracking the Muse in Africa*, 2017, directed by Mike McNulty:

http://www.surflinetv.com/surflinetv/featured-clips/exclusive-alex-gray-tracking-the-muse-in-africa_146381

³⁰ Instagram is a social networking site where users post photos and construct a personal profile. It is popular for self-branding.

³¹ See an example of real-time athlete social media analytics of MVPindex at: <https://mvpindex.com/>