

Documentary Film Analysis: Bra Boys

Guido Margiotta

University of Western States

COUN 6155

Dr. Moore

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Throughout this film review, there will be an overlook of the historical and cultural background that led to the context from which the Bra Boys emerged and an overlook of the social development of a youth community that came together, manifesting their needs and frustrations finding identity and opportunities within the surfing world.

The story takes place in Maroubra Beach (marou'bra- Bra Boys), a suburb with poor history located 14km southeast of Sydney. From the 1900s, as Sydney grew, the lower class was forced to live in this poor area among the prosecuted Aborigines. Decade after decade, the area grew to become a slum, which it was then reorganized with government housing. The area continued to be the choice to build a sewage plant, a firing range, and Australia's biggest jail. It is an area without many attractions that, in contrast to a healthy environment, had its young community grew up with domestic conflict, parental neglect, and drugs.

The Bra Boys is a beach tribe that emerged during the 90s and gained recognition as a gang centered on surf culture. The gang reached over a hundred members with youngsters of diverse ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds who were brought together by the beach and the surf to a space where they could find relatedness, competence, and autonomy. This youth community lived adverse childhood experiences and was left to the mercy of their own sake and its consequences. The film centers on the four Abberton brothers, whose story is an exemplary case of individuals who travel through a cultural process of social development and identity formation with the sport of surfing as their savior.

The Abberton brothers, Sunny, Jai, Koby, and Dakota, all shared the same mother. However, Sunny and Jai shared a different father than the two younger ones, Koby and Dakota. In the film, Koby expressed that his mother was a heroin user and his mother's boyfriend was a bank robber. He recalls arriving at his house at the scene of his mother shooting up heroin and

having to leave the house after her mother's boyfriend hit him with a baseball bat. With parents who were incapable of providing a stable and guided environment for their kids, the brothers found refuge with their grandmother, Mavis, who would then become one of the most important figures for their beach tribe. The story of the Abberton brothers was the story for most of the kids in the area.

It is common in the surfing world to become territorial about certain areas of the beach, as there are wave breaks that make it a better spot to surf than others. When people frequent a surf spot, they become the locals and claim the area of their own. The Bra Boys became territorial about their Maroubra beach because it was where they could do what they wanted to do: surf big waves, become great surfers, and express themselves. The social interaction of this group of kids would act as a safety valve for their troubled childhood while sharing their sense of belonging on the beach and the surf.

During the 90s gang activity was vigorous in Maroubra, and as the Bra Boys started facing the threats of the gangs from the area, it forced them to the conclusion that if they wanted to survive their rough society, they would have to stick together. As the crew grew bigger, their social interaction took further shape. They came up with a distinguished handshake, and shortly, they made their gang official by tattooing the motto "Bra Boys" and "My Brother's Keeper" on their chest or elsewhere.

The *Bra Boys' gang* social structure had an initiation phase for those who wanted to be part of it. The new individuals would have to prove themselves to the older members of the gang, and for that, it would take years. Members of the gang shared that the trust needed to be gained, and that would not come from one day to the other. From a sociological perspective, this shows the strength of their social structure and the accountability the members had for each other.

Perhaps such a level of accountability would be detrimental as they would adjust to deviant over-conformity and eventually protect their members and territory with violence.

Riding waves were the younger kids' bigger attractions, from which one can imagine they developed great admiration towards the older skillful figures. Sunny and other older members of the gang, who became known as surfers, acted as role models for the younger generation. Despite their athletic skills, most of the older kids who became leaders did not have clear guidance about which norms to follow; therefore, the gang came together to react to their adverse experiences and their consequences. This may have led to wrong interpretations of their individual' catharsis. They would test their boundaries in the streets, push their ideas on how to have fun towards deviant behavior, defend their territory from the threat of other territorial gangs resulting in street violence, and live in tension with the police that had long carried a troubled relationship with beach tribes.

Teenagers who became professionals could bring a change to their community. However, such a broken society that had found resiliency through surfing would constantly suffer the adverse consequences of their childhood experiences. The most unfortunate event reached levels of murder when in 2003, Jai Abberton shot in self-defense to Anthony Hines, as this last one was planning to rape Jai's girlfriend and then kill them both. The *Bra Boys* had the reputation of being "rowdy" but had not had the reputation of murdering people. Sunny and the other members were professional surfers, and this incident put, to the shortsighted, their surfing image in an unforgivable, controversial spot.

The Bra Boys' story can be seen tragically. Yet, when one looks at it in a closer manner and sees what these individuals have overcome, one will see the positive outcomes the surf culture provided. In essence, these kids needed and wanted to get away from their troubled

homes, and they did so. They would spend hours surfing waves in the ocean while they could have been in the streets of Sydney using drugs, smuggling, and committing other crimes. Their faith could have been of a shorter and more cruel reality.

However, their enchanted interest in surfing kept them away from that. Koby Abberton became one of the greatest surfers in history, inspiring the younger generation to follow such a path.

They shaped their values and actions to build pillars of respect, acknowledgment, and honor for their peers and reached consciousness for racial and environmental matters, with this last one strictly linked to their surfing passion.

It's safe to assume the physical activity of surfing, its sport, and its culture gave opportunities to gain not only financial but to increase their social capital. The surf culture is based on respecting the ocean and the peers, on sharing the waves, on protecting the beach, and on passing along the culture. Parents, schoolteachers, and supportive and united communities often teach these actions. For the Bra Boys, it was their brotherhood that taught them what was right and what was wrong through trial and error, and it was the surf culture that kept them capable of having a positive and sensitive judgment.

Reference

Abberton S., De Souza (Directors). (2007). *Bra Boys* (Film) Hopscotch Productions, Berkela Films.