

MTV: Sounds of a Generation

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Honors Thesis
Spring, 2005

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The creation and implementation of music television has completely revolutionized music from what it was once known as, to how it is now known. The following is a case study of Music Television's (MTV) formation, growth, and exactly how the channel got to where they are today. The study looks primarily at MTV's marketing and advertising campaigns through the years. From the conclusions of the study, a possible future advertising campaign is looked at. The thesis ends with a look at the campaign's actual print and television ads.

MTV started to be formed in the early 1980s, when a few men realized the potential in recording visuals to songs for promotional use. After much hard work and persistence, the formation of MTV reached its final stages. In the first few months of its existence, MTV already saw the positive impact it was having on records and record sales.

MTV was in motion. In this critical stage of the organization, early promotions were crucial in expressing the image MTV wanted to have. These promotions began first and foremost with the name, MTV. Once the name was chosen, a logo that exemplified the channel was next. Finally, the channel's first and quite possibly most famous campaign, "I Want My MTV," was created and adored by people both within and outside of MTV. All of the early promotions were vital in the success of MTV.

The campaigns of MTV's past have, in collection, been very successful and well received. Some campaigns looked at in detail include the "I Want My MTV," and, "MTV Elements," campaigns. Newer campaigns looked at include the, "Karen," and, "Watch and Learn" campaigns. As the campaigns progressed, they have gotten more and

more creative, with the, "Watch and Learn," campaign winning many national advertising awards.

MTV has done so well, in fact, that it has become a global force in the last 20 years, having channels in many foreign countries that are as big or bigger as MTV in America. The reasons for this expansion and success of keeping in touch with global youth for over 20 years is looked at in detail.

After looking at all of the research and past campaigns, some key characteristics that were present in many past campaigns were chosen to be used in the future campaigns for their ultimate success. Once these key characteristics were determined, an advertising plan was put into place of what a campaign could look like for MTV in the future. This campaign was put together based on the conclusions of the research previously gathered. The campaign includes a marketing plan, print ads, television ads, and alternative advertising.

MTV's amazing captivation of the teenage target market, as well as revolution of the music industry is something that was accomplished in large part by their innovative marketing and advertising campaigns and techniques. This thesis takes a look at just what MTV did; what they did right, what they could have done better, and what they might possibly do in the future.

“From the first time I saw a music video, I knew music wasn’t going to be the same; it certainly wasn’t for me.”

~Cyndi Lauper

Can you hear that? Music. It is what’s inside each and every one of us. Whether it be humming a song, tapping a rhythm on a desk, or simply listening to the rain drip onto the windowsill, music encompasses everything we do, everywhere we are. Music brings people together, brings cultures close, and all the while allows each of us to be an individual.

Like anything, music has progressed and evolved through time. Music is unique however, in the fact that it has no definite beginning or end, making the evolutionary possibilities endless. Music has gone through many drastic progressions including the invention of instrumentation, written music, the radio, and most recently computer recording. All of these evolutions allowed music to be heard and interpreted in ways that were previously unthinkable. For example, written music allowed people to carry traditions down through generations, and make music last longer than the length of time one could remember. Computer recording allowed the collaboration of many sounds that were previously unable to be gathered in one location.

With all of these progressions, it seems almost impossible that music could be heard in any other way. But, what if music could somehow be something other than just heard. What if music could in essence be brought to life? The story told in the music somehow played out for anyone to see. Somehow bring music from just being heard to

being seen. Of course there had been musicals and operas for many years, but nothing like what was about to formulate in the minds of a few businessmen.

The Formation of Music Television

Michael Nesmith was probably best known as a member of the 1960s band and made for television rock group, the Monkees. In the mid-sixties when the Monkees' group career had ended, Nesmith started on his solo career in Europe. In 1976, with the advice of his record distributor in Europe, Nesmith shot promotional video clips, 3-4 minutes in length for one of his songs, "Rio". In Europe at the time, there were other small promotional clips. In Australia, there were clips also, referred to as "pop clips." (McGrath 28) However, none of these were like the \$25,000 clip Nesmith made. "Rio", "had the look and feel of an old Busby Berkeley Hollywood musical." (McGrath 27)

Popularity of the song "Rio" grew rapidly across Europe and Australia. Nesmith loved what he was seeing so much in fact, that he put together a television show pilot that consisted entirely of these "pop clips." The pilot, *Popclips*, didn't go over as well as he wanted in Europe. However, Nesmith was led to John Lack of Warner Cable. When Nesmith showed Lack his pilot and told him about his idea for a video radio station, Lack loved the idea. Lack originally thought these clips could be played on Nickelodeon, a new kids channel and one of Warner AMEX Satellite Entertainment Company's (WASEC) other stations, along with The Movie Channel. However, the more

Lack thought about it, the more he liked the idea of an entire channel dedicated to playing rock and roll clips. (McGrath)

Lack gave the go ahead to Nesmith, who then created a stack of “pop clips” shows. In March, 1980, the show *Popclips* debuted on Nickelodeon. Although the show was off to a good start, there were a few small problems. The clips seemed to be a little too sexy to be being aired on the Nickelodeon channel, which catered to small children. Also, many of the clips were being introduced by comedians such as Howie Mandel. (McGrath 29) Although these comedians proved to be funny, they seemed to be taking away something from the video clips themselves. Lack suggested having real radio deejays introduce the clips. These deejays would actually know something about the music they were introducing, and therefore bring a lot more credibility to the videos.

With these main changes in place, the show aired again and proved much more successful. With the clips doing so well on Nickelodeon and other channels, WASEC decided in the spring of 1980 that it was time to start a channel dedicated to music. Evidence had been assembled that music programming television was liked and accepted through the trial runs on other stations. It has also been established that airing a music video could improve record sales, as well as overall popularity for the artist. Such was apparent with the 1975 video promotional clip for Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody* when it jumped into Britain’s “Top 5” after airing the video a single time on “Top of the Pops.” (McGrath 37) What made a rock and roll channel even more appealing in the early 1980s,

was coming from the support of rock and roll artists. Since the advent of rock and roll with Elvis in the 1950s, rock and roll had been a best seller, until the late 1970s when for the first time the revenue in the industry began declining from previous years. The music industry, especially those involved in rock and roll, were ready and willing to take on a new venture.

Just what were the positives when it came to this new venture. First of all, programming for cable television would be cheap to produce, much cheaper than any other television in the past. The other big positive was in the potential earnings through advertising on the station. In the early 1980s, teenagers had far more disposable income than any generation before them. At the same time, advertisers were having an extremely hard time trying to reach them. If this new channel could show advertisers a potential to reach this growing target market, advertisers would send their dollars in a heartbeat.

With this, Jack Schneider arranged a meeting with Warner chief executive officer Steve Ross, American Express Chief Executive Officer Jim Robinson, and the board of Warner AMEX. The meeting was set for the middle of January, 1981. (McGrath 42)

Schneider, Lack, Bob McGroarty, and Pittman led the presentation for the upcoming rock and roll channel. "Summoning up all the salesmanship and exuberance he had inside, Lack summarized the strategic reasons why the channel would work- the free videos from the record companies and the vast but untapped youth market." (McGrath 42)

Towards the end of the less than one hour presentation, McGroarty presented the business and financial plans. This is where he explained to Robinson and Ross that there would be about a \$25 million investment before the channel would turn a profit, predicted in its second year.

When the presentation was over, the presenters turned to Robinson and Ross to see how they felt about the idea. After all, if the two of them did not financially back the channel, if they weren't behind in, there would be no channel at all. After a short amount of silence, Robinson spoke up saying American Express was, "prepared to put up our share." Ross however, wasn't as easily persuaded. He asked many questions; how would the channel would acquire videos, would teenagers actually watch them over and over again, and are advertisers willing to put their money into something that seemed to be so risky. Finally, after all of the questions and doubts were answered, Ross said to Lack and the rest of the crew, "You know, last night I had a long talk with my daughter about this. And she said to me, 'Dad, this is going to be the hottest thing that ever happened. Kids need their own channel for rock and roll. You've got to be behind this thing.' So, we're in." (McGrath 43)

So that's how it all began. A few guys who loved rock and roll, a music industry that was in trouble, and ultimately Steve Ross's daughter, brought music to the world in a way never before known. And no one, not even any of them, knew the impact it would have on the future.

Early Promotions

First things first. This new channel needed a name. This couldn't be just any name, it had to be something special. Bob Pittman wanted this channel to be different in every way, to have a completely different attitude, and that started with the name. In fact, Pittman wanted both the name and the channel as a whole to, "poke a finger in the eye of television itself." (McGrath 48) TV-I was the original name chosen for the channel. However, it was found out soon after that the name was already trademarked by another company. The name was then switched from TV-I to TV-M, with the letter M standing for music. In a meeting one afternoon, Steve Casey, a programmer brought in to the station, started doodling TV-M on a notepad he had sitting in front of him. Something made him uneasy about how the letters were sitting together; it looked too fragmented. In order to make the name more attractive to the eye, he decided that the letter T needed to be moved to the middle of the other two letters. He never told the rest of his colleagues at the meeting why he felt this needed to be done, but by the end of the meeting it had been decided that the name of the new rock and roll channel would officially be MTV.

(McGrath 48)

WASEC's Bob Pittman was introduced to Fred Siebert in the spring of 1980. Siebert was introduced by Dale Pon, an advertising specialist who believed strongly that Pittman and Siebert would work well together. They began working together as on-air promotions for The Movie Channel, one of WASEC's other stations. Immediately, they

decided that they wanted to go against the grain of most other on-air promotions of television stations at the time. The other channels at the time had on-air promotions personnel who would simply promote programs on the station, trying to get viewers to tune in at a certain time or watch the premiere of a certain new show that was sure to be a hit. Instead, Pittman and Siebert wanted to inform viewers about the channel as a whole, much like radio advertising. With cable networks really just starting to flourish, most people didn't know much about what each channel stood for. Therefore, it was up to on-air promotions to let the viewers know about the channel they were tuning in to.

After working for The Movie Channel and getting the advertising up and running, Pittman and Siebert moved on to the development team for MTV. Siebert was now officially known as the Director of On-Air Promotion for MTV. More easily put, Siebert was in charge of giving MTV its attitude, and the right kind of attitude at that. He called it finding the beat of MTV.

One of the first things Siebert needed to do in his newly appointed position, was to come up with a logo for MTV. With the help of Manhattan Design, hundreds of ideas hit the table and got the plans for the logo rolling. The final design was a large block M that looked as though it was made of bricks. The letters TV were spray painted at a slight diagonal across the right part of the M, giving it a look of graffiti. As soon as Siebert saw it, he fell in love with it. He knew this was the design MTV needed to have, the attitude it needed to show. "Not only did it look like nothing else on television, it also

unleashed a world of possibilities in Siebert's head." (McGrath 50) When Siebert took the logo he decided on back to the business people at WASEC, everyone, including Ogilvy and Mather, (WASEC's advertising agency) hated it. Ogilvy and Mather said that it broke every logo design guideline their agency had. Eventually however, Pittman and Siebert convinced them to keep the logo, arguing the design conveyed just the attitude they wanted MTV to have.

The next task was to announce the unveiling of a new channel, MTV, to the cable television industry. In order to do this, a tape would need to be shown in March at the Cable Television Administration and Marketing (CTAM) convention. The sales and marketing team at WASEC gave Siebert and Alan Goodman information on what they wanted the tape to include. The information seemed dull, and Siebert and Goodman didn't believe that the information alone would allow people to really see what the channel was all about. However, in order to make everyone at WASEC happy, the information needed to be in the tape. So, they first recorded all of the information. After that, they did everything they possibly could to make, "people feel the renegade spirit of the project-and to ignore the words." (McGrath 51) They had each sentence come out of a different speaker than the last, put the whole tape to music, and added various video clips, making it a multimedia spectacular. When the tape played at the convention, it shocked everyone. People weren't exactly sure what was going on, but when it was over everyone got up out of their seats and cheered.

By the spring of 1981, another decision needed to be made. Pop music had been divided into many subgroups. MTV needed to make a decision on which of these groups to follow, whether it be album oriented rock (AOR), punk rock, garage rock, or any of the other groups. AOR was decided upon for various reasons. These reasons included the key fact that most videos that were produced were made for AOR. Also, AOR was the music preferred by teenagers who lived in the suburbs and rural areas. In 1981, cable television had only made its popularity immense in these areas. This made it more likely that the teenagers in these areas would watch MTV over teenagers in urban areas, and made them the target market. (McGrath 52)

After the name was chosen, the logo approved, and the target market identified, it was time to start MTV's promotions. In order to achieve the rebellion the channel stood for, the promotions crew had to believe in and pursue how they could make MTV different from any other channel that had been on television up to this point. "That was the concert that energized all of them: Television will never be the same again. We're changing it." (McGrath 61) MTV's small budget actually helped them achieve their rebellious attitude. With their small budget, they decided to use as much public domain footage as they possibly could. This alone set their look apart from anything that was being done at the time and had ever previously been done. In essence, this was making fun of television of the past.

One of the most primitive and well-known television spots used public domain footage from NASA of Neil Armstrong landing on the moon and planting the American

flag into the moon's surface in 1969. Siebert contracted Buzz Potamkin, an animator from New York, and asked him to alter the footage of Armstrong for the MTV commercial spot. Potamkin agreed and was a vital engineer in the final product. The spot started by showing actual footage of the rocket blasting off from Earth, then landing on the moon and Neil Armstrong stepping off the rocket. The alteration came when Armstrong stuck the American flag into the moon's surface. The American flag had been replaced by a new flap with MTV's logo placed on it. Armstrong's speech, "that's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," was originally intended to be played immediately prior to the unveiling of the MTV flag. However, plans changes just two days before the commercial was set to air. A letter asking Neil Armstrong's permission for the use of his recorded voice on the commercial was sent out when the commercial was first being made. The letter stated that if Armstrong had any problems with his voice being used, to contact MTV, and if MTV were not contacted, they would assume that Armstrong was okay with the commercial. MTV received a response from Armstrong two days before launch, and had to work overnight in order to get the clip ready to be aired. Armstrong's voice was edited out and replaced by loud guitar music. The clip was used to introduce MTV to its existence. The clip began as a countdown, ready to launch. When the MTV flag had been planted and the commercial was over, the first ever music video aired on MTV, "Video Killed the Radio Star," by The Buggles.

(McGrath 61-63)

After the channel got up and running, there was one big thing that needed to be dealt with from a marketing standpoint. In order for MTV to play music videos for their audience, they had to continuously acquire new, exciting music videos to play and rotate. In order to get these new music videos, artists had to continue to produce music videos, which was no small task considering the immense time and money that go into each video. In order for the record companies to convince their artists to invest that effort, MTV needed to give them some kind of evidence or proof that playing videos actually help the artists and their label sell records and gain popularity. "Pittman knew that what would excite the record industry more than anything else were numbers" (McGrath 69) What Pittman knew he had to do was prove to the record companies that having their artists be shown on MTV would boost their record sales. If this could in fact be proved, the record industry would be more than willing to produce more music videos.

Before Pittman could tell the industry anything though, research needed to be conducted to see if this was actually true. So, just a few weeks after the launch of MTV, Tom Freston and John Sykes, MTV's chief of marketing and head of promotions respectively, were sent out to small cities around the United States that carried the channel. They were sent on a mission to find evidence that MTV was making a difference in the lives of teenagers in these cities, and especially when it came to record sales. Remembering the channel had only been on the air for a few weeks time, Pittman wasn't sure the two men would actually find any evidence. He thought it would take up to one year for any conclusive evidence to be obtained. However, Freston and Sykes found much of the kinds of information they were looking for.

Peaches Records, a small record store in Tulsa, Oklahoma, had fifteen copies of a Buggles album on their shelves for seven months before the launch of MTV. On the inaugural day of MTV, the first video played was, "Video Killed the Radio Star" by none other than the Buggles. The album copies at Peaches Records began to fly off of the shelves. Just three weeks after the song aired on MTV, all fifteen copies of the record were sold. Other record stores had similar stories. Radio stations told Freston and Sykes about teenagers calling the station and requesting songs that not only had the station never played before, but most of them had never even heard of. When the deejay asked the teenagers where they had heard of the song, they replied that they had just watched it on MTV. (McGrath 70)

This kind of response wasn't just happening in Tulsa . In Wichita, Syracuse, Des Moines, and other small cities, the same anecdotal evidence was popping up. All over the nation, teenagers were buying records and listening to music that they saw on MTV.

By 1982, MTV was making a much larger impact on record sales, even impacting record standings on music's Billboard charts. Two bands in particular took advantage of MTV's success of popularizing otherwise unpopular groups. The Stray Cats from Long Island were hardly ever played on the radio. Instead of giving up, they decided to make a visually stunning video in hopes of being played on MTV. They were put in the rotation in the summer of 1982. Their album and single kept moving up on

the charts and were selling well, despite not being played on the radio. In fact, the Stray Cats depended so much on the audience they had acquired through MTV that when they went on tour, they decided to only play in cities where MTV was being aired. All of their shows in those areas were sold out.

The second band, A Flock of Seagulls, epitomizes the effect MTV had on many bands that were struggling in the music industry. A Flock of Seagulls, a British dance rock band, wasn't very popular in their home country of England. Their music wasn't considered album rock and didn't fit in right with the Top 40 music genre. However, A Flock of Seagulls decided to make a unique and visually stimulating music video for their single, "I Ran." MTV really liked the video, and they decided to run it during the summer. After being run through the playlist for only a couple of weeks, the song began to be played on American radio stations. It was also starting to make an appearance on the music charts. The group continued to grow throughout the summer months. By the summer's end, A Flock of Seagulls' album made it to the Top 20, and their debut single, "I Ran" reached the Top 10 on the Billboard charts. (McGrath 85-87)

Like A Flock of Seagulls and the Stray Cats, many bands that were given only a small chance on the radio, or none at all, were led to the top of the charts through taking a chance with the production of innovative music videos in hopes of being played on the up and coming MTV.

This phenomenon did not only happen with small, off the radar artists. Larger artists greatly benefited from their videos being played on MTV also. In the 1980's, no one was larger than music legend Michael Jackson, and his breakout album, Thriller. Although MTV did not initially know if Jackson's musical style fit with the image of the station, when they saw the videos Jackson had made for "Billie Jean" and "Beat It" they realized that they could not pass up these extraordinary pieces. Thriller had sold more than two million albums prior to MTV's release of "Billie Jean," surely no small feat. Nevertheless, after "Billie Jean" was put in the rotation, Thriller albums flew out the door, selling eight hundred thousand albums each week. (McGrath 101) This evidence gave record labels, even those supporting big name artists, the proof they needed to continue to produce cutting edge videos. From the beginning of MTV through today, record labels and artists have benefited from producing music videos and playing them on the station.

The Past Campaigns

The initial promotions were set, and MTV had evidence that the artists whose videos appeared on the channel helped their record sales. They now had to look at their attitude, their style. This is where they truly wanted to be one of a kind. Ogilvy and Mather, the advertising agency at WASEC was not living up to the MTV spirit. In fact, their work was getting to be boring and run of the mill. Siebert and Pittman decided that they needed to find someone new. The only man they found creative enough to handle

their visions was none other than Dale Pon, the advertising specialist who introduced them years ago. In 1982, Pon quickly came up with an advertising idea, the copy of which follows:

“America is fast becoming a land of cable brats!
Who are these cable brats? They’re that incorrigible
generation out there and they’re taking over America.
They grew up with music. They grew up with television.
So, we put ‘em together-Rock and roll wasn’t enough
for them-now they want their MTV.” (McGrath 80)

Although Pon definitely seemed to be on the right track with his attitude, the “cable brats” vocabulary seemed to be a little off from MTV’s agenda. Distribution of the channel was growing, but it still was not reaching some of the major cities like New York City and Los Angeles. Dale Pon, along with George Lois, decided to alter the campaign to make it more agreeable for the teenage generation. The new tagline, “I want my MTV,” was born. Not only did this tagline bolt into the spotlight, but it continues to be used twenty years later as part of MTV’s ongoing promotions. One of the key messages in this tagline and the advertisement as a whole was the call to action. The campaign used numerous rock stars including Mick Jagger, Pete Townshend, David Bowie, Pat Benetar, and the Police. Each rock star proclaimed, “I want my MTV.” Then, at the end of each spot, teenagers were called to action, urged to call up their local cable stations and demand that they want their MTV. The other

trait that this first immense campaign held is the fact that the “I want my MTV” campaign was generated to reach one small target market. Up until this point, virtually every large firm’s marketing strategy by television had been to appeal to a vast mass market. MTV did not care about this mass audience; they cared about the youth of America. “It’s not their MTV, the ads told young people- it’s yours.” (McGrath 81) This innovative strategy is one that has carried on throughout many future campaigns. The other main theme carried out is the fearless attitude to continuously strive to try something that has never been done before. Some of these campaigns have been readily accepted, and others not so, but MTV is not a channel that has ever or will ever be known for doing something safe.

An example of this ability to continuously reinvent themselves was prominent in the “MTV Elements” campaign that was launched on April 3rd, 1996. The campaign’s mission was to look at the six ‘elements’ that comprise MTV. Judy McGrath, former TV president, said this about the campaign,

“MTV is greater than the sum of its parts,
and like a force of nature, has some indescribable,
quasi-scientific, magical chemistry. MTV
Elements is inspired by the periodic table of
elements and gives us the opportunity to create
our own vocabulary with words or elements that
evoke the essence of MTV” (J. McGrath)

marketing has been and continues to be in the venues and media selection they use to disperse their information. An example of this is shown through a marketing campaign put together by the Viral Factory in 2001. The Viral Factory was hired by MTV to produce a, "high-profile MTV Christmas Card" that would rise above all of the other Christmas noise on the market. (Viral Factory) Another main objective of this campaign was to get a greater number of people interested in the international MTV websites, in particular www.mtv.co.uk. Continuing with the campaigns in the past, high energy and high impact were both prominent throughout the Viral Factory campaign. Using the Internet to lead through a campaign was something very rarely done up to this point, and to do it in such a large fashion as shown by the numbers following, was an extremely large feat. The MPEG and QuickTime clips were based on a Christmas setting which also incorporating a non-western theme, helping to gain attention for www.mtv.co.uk and other international websites. Releasing the clip in more than one format also helped MTV and the Viral Factory in tracing the speed the marketing spread. The clip was downloaded by an estimated 30,000 people in just three weeks after its release. 280,585 people watched the QuickTime file and an astounding 6.6 million people watched the file on the MPEG format. What made this campaign so special and especially spectacular though, was the fact that the clip was passed on and spread from fans to millions of other fans all over the world. (Viral Factory)

Global Expansion

Global expansion has been and continues to be a large part of the mission of MTV. The focus is to get teenagers to love music on a different level. This is not limited to teenagers from any place in the world. In fact, the programming of MTV has brought many parts of the world closer together from a musical standpoint. Teenagers from Mississippi, France, and Australia all love the same music videos. Because of this phenomenon, MTV has made a distinct point throughout its existence to captivate teenagers from everywhere on the globe with its music videos and programming. Not only does this allow people in every country to come together, but it also allows people in all of these countries to share the ability to produce videos to be played on MTV. In 1987, just six years after its launch, MTV went global. That year MTV was broadcast to Europe and Australia. A year later in 1988, Spanish speaking syndication of MTV was broadcast. (Journal Sentinel) Through 1998, MTV had broadcast to eight International networks. The latest of which was MTV India, part of MTV Networks Asia. MTV Networks Asia is actually comprised of three different MTV networks, MTV India, MTV Mandarin, and MTV Asia. Through these three stations, MTV Networks Asia is broadcast to over 69 million homes. (MTV and Brand Equity) MTV also holds International Youth Marketing Forums and Award Ceremonies to celebrate youth marketing throughout the world. At a recent forum held in India in 1998, Sunil, General Manager of MTV India said, "MTV prides itself in not only being the cultural icon of youth, but also as an efficient and effective youth marketing partner." (MTV and Brand Equity)

Recent Advertising Campaigns

Recently, the advertising campaigns for MTV have proved once again to be unlike anything on any other station. Two of the bigger campaigns in the last few years are the "Watch and Learn" campaign and the "Karen" campaign.

"Watch and Learn" television spots completely go against the flashy, crazy nature that most MTV commercials are known for. This is one of the reasons they have stuck out so much and caused so much stir. The other reasons for the commotion are the simplistic nature of the spots, and comedy of bringing everyday occurrences to life. These spots were formed by "Instructoart" creator and master Matthew Vescovo. 'Instrucoart' features simple drawings in an illustrated guide-style book, a la airline in-flight manuals. These computer-made drawings illustrate seemingly obvious observations of everyday life." (Peskin) Vescovo pitched his idea for a series of animated shorts to MTV, and MTV liked the idea. So much in fact, that they allowed Vescovo to create, direct, and write the copy for each piece. (Editors) After the success of the initial spots, Vescovo was brought on to create three more commercials to be released during the 2004 MTV Video Music Awards. For these spots, Fad Animation was brought on to help with the animation work. MetaTechnik then designed all of the sound for the commercials. Metatechnik editors explained the spots as, "Continuing in the award-winning minimalist style of the previous 'Watch and Learn' spots, the new spots take a look at the complexities of opening car doors with remote keys ('Timed Entry'); 'Watching TV' features a mother and her adolescent son watching TV together. The

mom is unfazed as violence erupts on the screen, yet covers her son's eyes when a love scene ensues." (Editors) Three of the spots won a Gold for the TV and Cinema Crafts at the 83rd Annual Art Directors Club Awards in 2004. More than awards however, the "Watch and Learn" commercials caused a stir among MTV fans and non-fans alike. The commercials didn't say anything about what shows were coming up, or what the station had to offer. In fact, the only time MTV was even mentioned was in a small graphic shown at the end of the spot. What made these commercials work, were the fact that they were different, they were funny, and they fit the audience perfectly. Teenagers had not seen commercials before that so plainly stated the obvious, and they were excited to talk with their friends about what they had just seen. Of course, during the conversation, the teenagers were sure to ask where they saw the commercials, and MTV was brought into the talk. Through this unconventional style, MTV brought more and more viewers to the station, to see these new simplistic commercials that they couldn't find anyplace else.

With equal individuality, the "Karen" campaign has lasted over a year on MTV, and with each new commercial a new stir is present among the teen generation who watches. Karen commercials feature a dedicated teen fan named Karen who writes letters to MTV asking questions about shows or showing concerns about what is playing or what she feels needs to be playing. What makes the commercials so unique other than the extreme humor, is the fact that the viewer never sees Karen; they hear her talking and see her writing, they see her room and what is around her, but they never see her. This gives the viewer the illusion that it could be anyone, even themselves. Karen states obvious

questions and comments viewers have after watching programs like Real World and Road Rules, but makes the obviously funny. Karen has a way of articulating the thoughts of the viewer, and displaying them in a universal way. Karen also speaks in a monotone voice with little expression. Copy from one of the spots is as follows:

“Dear MTV,

Could we throw a big bash at my house?

We could have a karaoke jam session.

Grand prize winner gets a brand new chia pet.

Let’s talk, Karen.”

These commercials, possibly more so than the “Watch and Learn” spots, have generated an enormous response from fans. With the recent popularity of message boards, the “Karen” phenomena has had the ability to grow even further. A website message board on reality TV has an entire discussion board dedicated to the “Karen” commercials discussing which one people like best, which one is funniest, and just trying to get them all in order. People on the message board are incredibly intrigued by the Karen mystique, wanting to know who she is, where her voice comes from, and even where she gets the erasers she puts on her pencils. More people inquired as to where they could go to find the commercials online. The thing is, they aren’t online. In order to see the commercials, one must watch MTV. Below is an actual post on the discussion board. This post is typical of many posts on the board. (Reality TV)

Posted on 10-04-04 at 06:36 PM

“Has anyone seen the new Karen commercial about the Philly cheese steak where she wants MTV to post her recipe? I thought that one was hilarious. I think MTV should show more Karen commercials. Also I think that somewhere on their site they should have a place where you can watch them again. I just get a kick out of them.”

The post is just one small piece of the growing community of fans that watch MTV in hopes of seeing the latest campaign, or latest commercial within the campaign. MTV had advertised itself, in essence through its advertising of things completely unrelated to music.

In order to get this far, MTV has done a lot of things right. Quite possibly not because they were certain that these were the right things to do, but more because they felt it was right.

Competition

Although MTV was the first all-music channel, and continues to be the megaforce that drives music television, it has not come without critics and other channels trying to compete. “Now, in this particular age, there are 20 channels playing music

videos on television. There are endless channels programming for a young audience. On the computer you can get access to absolutely anything musical and otherwise.” (Graden 6)

6) Some of the most vivid competition for MTV has been VH1, also owned by Viacom, and newer stations such as FUSE. Yet, MTV stays on top of its competition. What keeps them ahead of any competition is that fact that MTV feels as though they are in a whole different playing field. The philosophy behind MTV is one that is always evolving, never getting old. This is the key difference between MTV and its competition, whether it be competition prior to MTV like Rolling Stone and rock radio, or competition of today like VH1. “Rolling Stone...let their audience grow old, and they grew old with them. MTV never grew old with it’s audience, and it remained very true to a specific demographic, young people, you know, pretty much between the ages of 12 and 34, or 18 and 24 more specifically.” (Herzog 2)

MTV has not grown old with its audience. It isn’t afraid to let go of people when they turn 30, and cycle in a new audience of 15 year olds. This is what sets them ahead of the competition. Not only does MTV not grow old with its audience, but it makes a key effort to become as young as their audience. “The implicit promise of MTV has always been that we see things honestly from your point of view. And we’re not trying to necessarily be adults who program to somebody who’s 19. But we’re trying to be a service that exists as an honest reflection of your world, and that’s our covenant.” (Graden 1)

MTV has set itself above the competition of radio and other “look-alike” channels by immersing itself in the teenage culture. The program and advertising creators of MTV don’t see themselves as finding out what teenagers like and then doing it; they are there to try to become part of what teenagers like. “To have any chance of having a

long-term relationship with this consumer, you have to immerse yourself in their reality, in their music, in their art, in the things that they read. I think only then could you ever create and develop other media they'd possibly be interested in...If you see it or approach it any other way, as an anonymous face with some target market, then I think you will fail." (Graden 3) This is a constant battle. Teenagers minds change as fast as one blinks. What is popular one day can be gone the next, and if as a channel that is teen-based you don't see that coming before it happens, you are gone like the fad. This is what MTV has been so good about. MTV knows what is going to happen before it happens. They never stop finding the right "line" for themselves. "There's a tendency to say, 'well we've found our line. Let's move on.' But you can't do that, because culture is always shifting. It's a non-stop discussion..." (Graden 6)

The Future Campaigns

One can come to some conclusions on what has been and would be considered a successful campaign for MTV, based on the campaigns in the past. There are many things that have gone into each successful MTV campaign. However, some of these characteristics have been much more vital to the success than others. The three main strategies many of the flourishing campaigns focused on were individuality, simplicity, and using alternative media avenues. Each successful campaign has used many if not all of these characteristics as keystones in their process.

Taking a look back at the first campaign by MTV, the "I want my MTV"

campaign, one can see all of these characteristics. First of all, the individuality. "I want my MTV" was not only the first big campaign for MTV, but the first campaign of its kind. The ads were catchy, flashy, upbeat and in your face, unlike any other television advertisements at the time. This is the essence that MTV wanted their advertisements to have, a never before seen look. The advertisements also had a remarkably simple message, "I want my MTV." There was no long copy written across the screen, and the rock stars didn't go on for minutes about how much they liked MTV or why people should watch it. The message was simply, "I want my MTV." Rock stars wanted it, and so should you, the consumer, the teenager. The alternative media avenues weren't displayed as prominently with this initial campaign, however the call to action was very one-of-a-kind. For the first time, a channel was urging their viewers to call in. Not call in to the station, but rather call their local cable providers and demand that MTV be played in their viewing area. This avenue was revolutionary, especially considering once again that the target market was teenagers. The advertisements were urging teenagers to call the cable companies, something that was unthinkable up to this point.

When looking at each successful MTV campaign, these three characteristics of individuality, simplicity, and using alternative media avenues continue to be prominent. When MTV broke away from these characteristics, campaigns did not catch on as well with the audience. A good example of this was in the "MTV Elements" campaign. Although this campaign wasn't unsuccessful, it did not have the lasting appeal and roar that other MTV campaigns have had. The reason for this was the abstractness of the

campaign. The simplicity of one single message and congruence between the spots was lost in the “Elements” campaign. Giving each director the authority to create their own spot may have lead to the discontinuity of the entire campaign, leaving the audience without one simple message.

According to the evidence, MTV must continue what has worked for them in the past to make successful and memorable campaigns. Of course, “what has worked for them in the past” does not mean recreating things they have already created. This means carrying out the main strategies that have made them successful, while continuing to innovate and push the limits of advertising. Any future advertising campaign for MTV must continue to push those limits, while maintaining the strategies that MTV has carried out in the past.

Advertising Campaign- "Try This At Home"

Objective: To attract people age 14-25 to MTV through an innovative and creative advertising campaign.

Target: Men and Women, age 14-25

Media: Television advertising, print ads, billboards, and alternative media

Tactics:

Television advertising:

Ads placed on MTV and MTV2

4 ads, each with same main idea, but different stories

*Allowing four different ads to run with the same basic message will give unity throughout the campaign, but with enough variety to engage the viewer and keep them interested in what else could appear.

Concentrate on running between 3pm-10pm

Print advertising:

Magazines including:

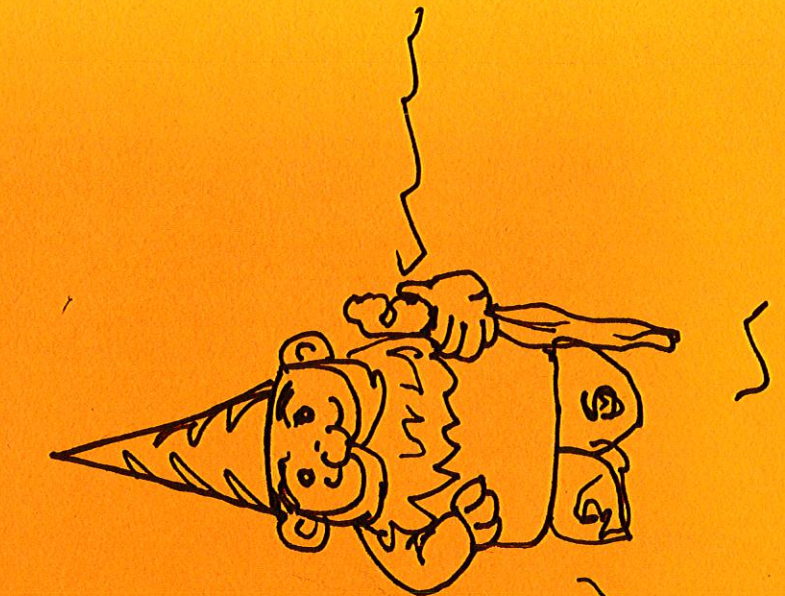
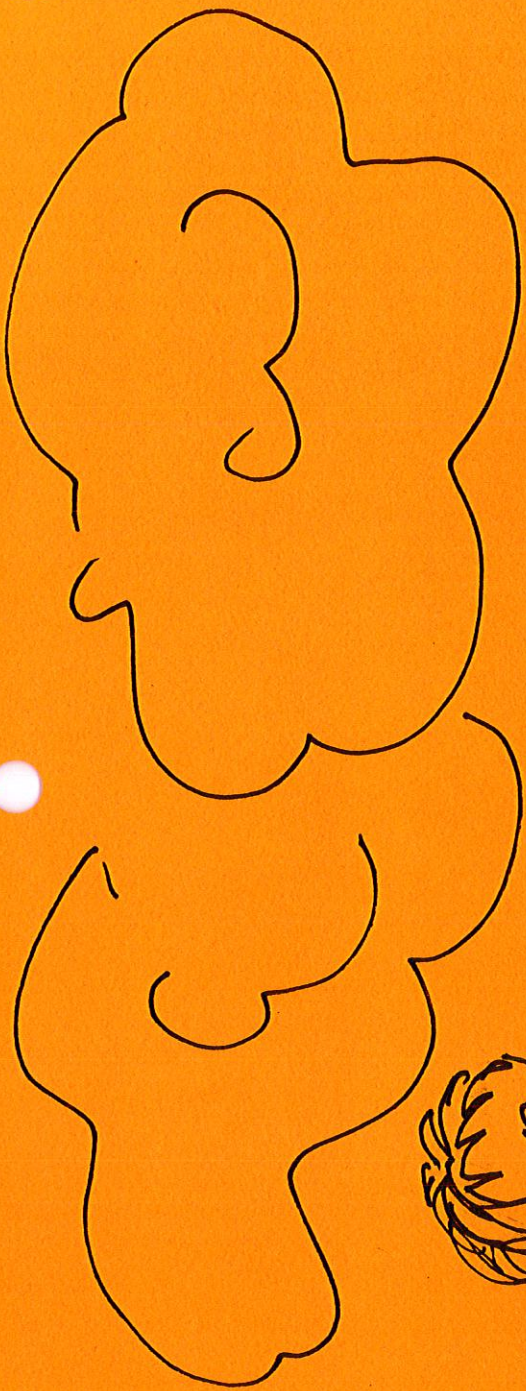
Seventeen Magazine- 1,100,000 subscribers, larger than any other competitor in the 12-17 year old female target range, 97.9% of the readers have accessed the Internet in the last 30 days. (Source: Seventeen Trendcasters Survey, March 2003 and Media Mertix 2004 Average)

ESPN Magazine- reach base of 1,850,000, target men age 18-34. (Source: <http://mediakit.espnmag.com>)

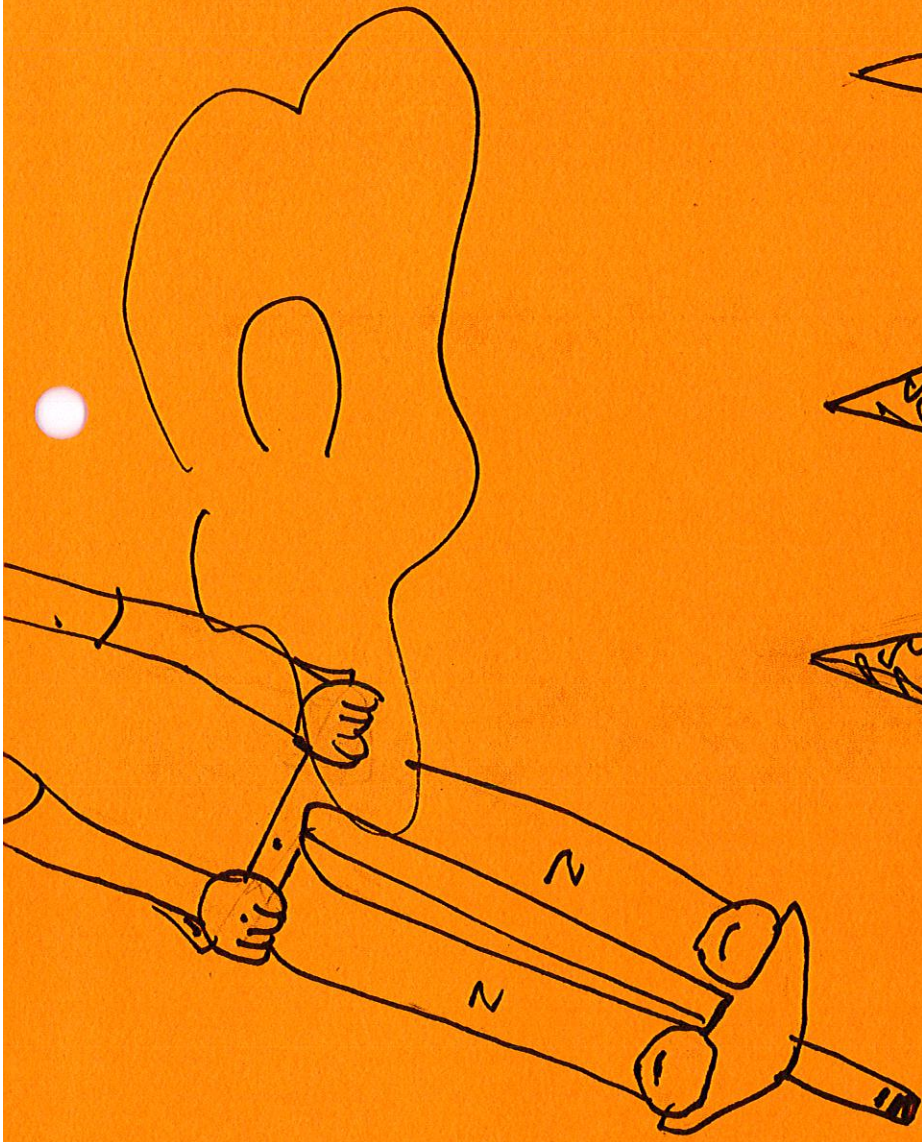
Entertainment Weekly Magazine- 41% male and 59% female readership, 9,947,000 circulation, target ages 18-34 (Source: http://www.ew.com/ew/advertising/media_kit/print/2005/audience.html)

Sports Illustrated Magazine- median age is 38, however 8,458,000 subscribers age 18-34 (Source: MRI National Fall 2004 Fact Sheet)

Newspapers: College newspapers, both large and small universities







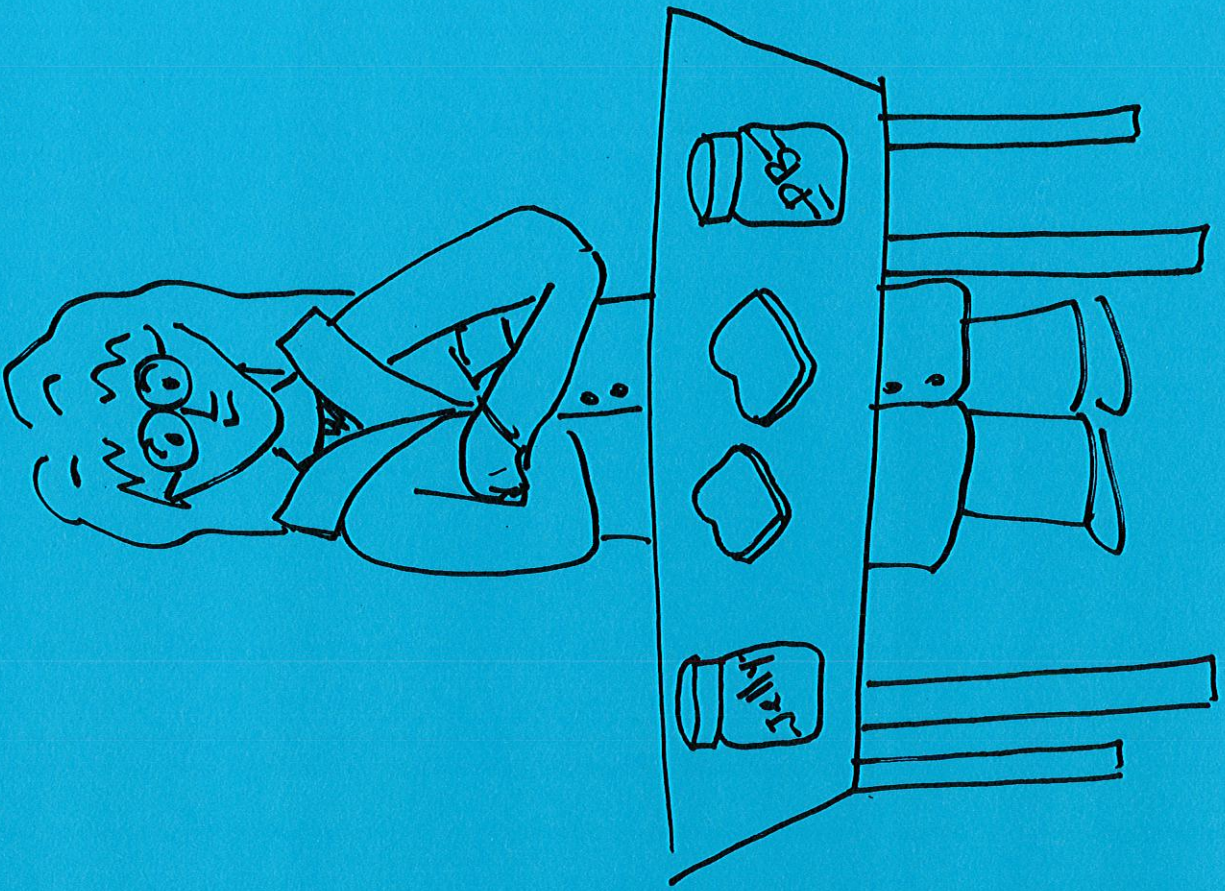
Commercial #2 The peanut butter and jelly sandwich milkshake : BLUE slides

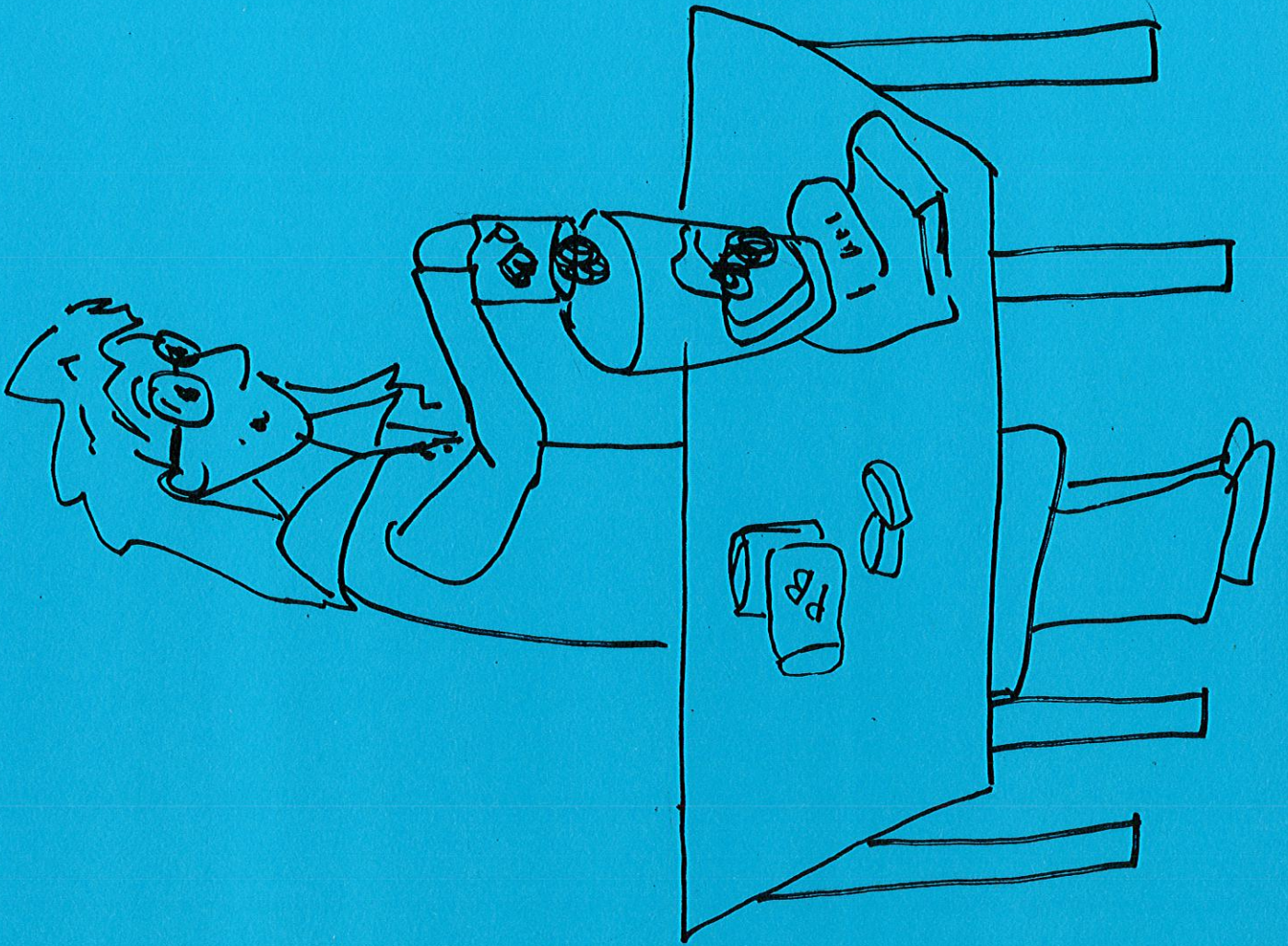
BLUE #1 In this scene, a girl is examining her carefully set up workstation of a jar of peanut butter, a glass of jelly, white bread, and a blender. She is wearing a white lab coat, goggles, and carries a clipboard.

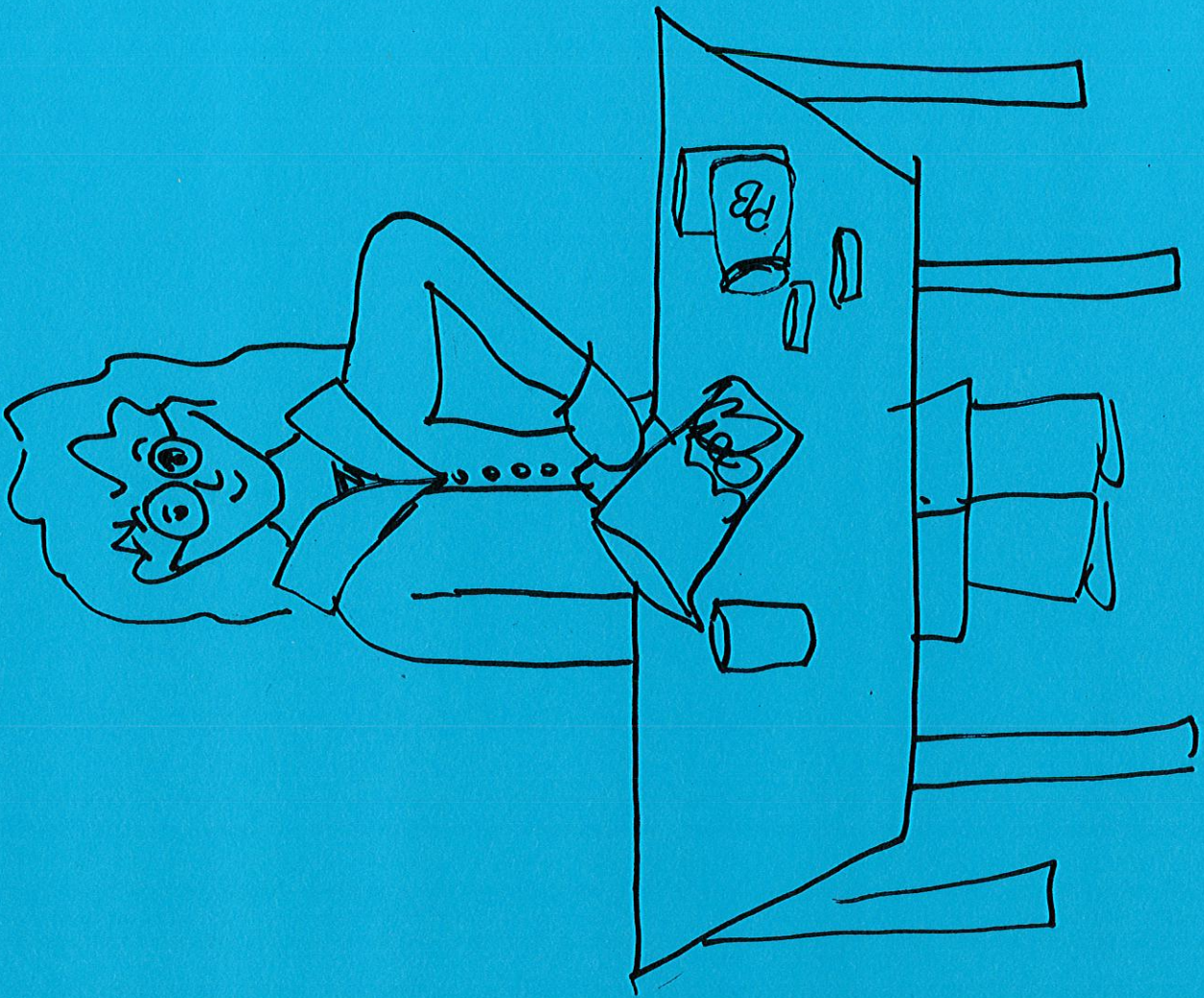
BLUE #2 In this scene, the girl takes all of her ingredients and pours them into the blender, careful to measure everything out precisely.

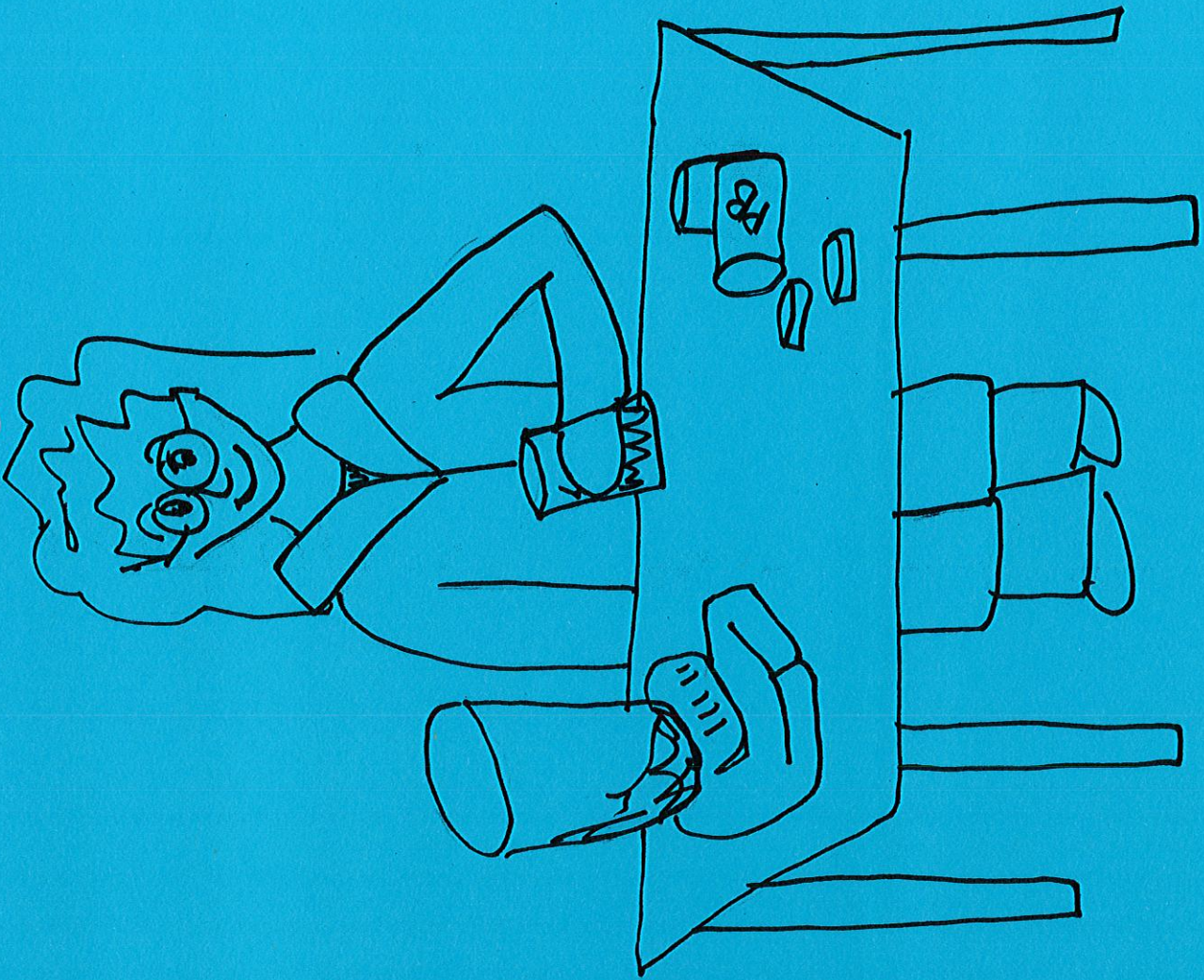
BLUE #3 During this scene, she finishes mixing the drink and pours it into a glass, looking at it delightfully.

BLUE #4 In this scene, the girl drinks the milkshake, impressed with herself. The voice comes on, "The peanut butter and jelly milkshake. Try this at home."









Commercial #3 Trading little brother for really cool jump rope : GREEN slides

GREEN #1 In this initial scene, a boy is outside of his house in his backyard. He looks over his fence to see his neighbor with a brand new extremely cool jump rope. This jump rope is unlike anything he has ever seen before and he knows he wants it.

GREEN #2 In this scene, the original boy tries to trade different things to the neighbor for the jump rope; his cell phone, computer, MP3 player, etc. The neighbor declines.

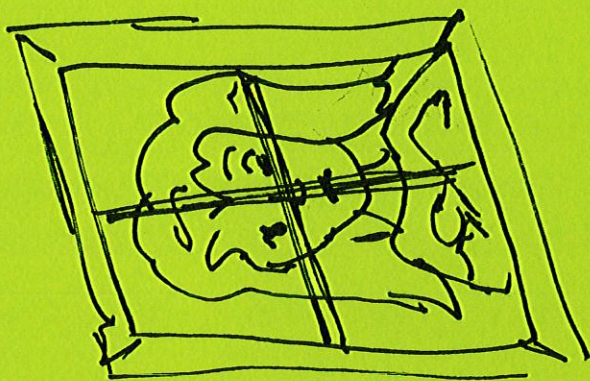
GREEN #3 In this scene, after much consideration, the boy decides he wants to trade his little brother. He shows the brother to the neighbor, the neighbor makes some calculations, and finally trades the boy.

GREEN #4 In this scene, the boy is shown jumping with his new jump rope, as his mom looks from the window as though she has lost his little brother. As it fades out, the voice comes on, "Trading little brother for really cool jump rope. Try this at home."









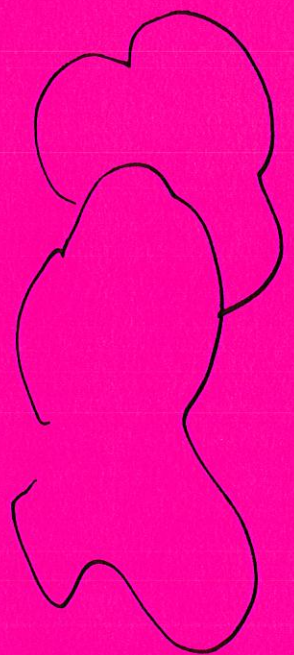
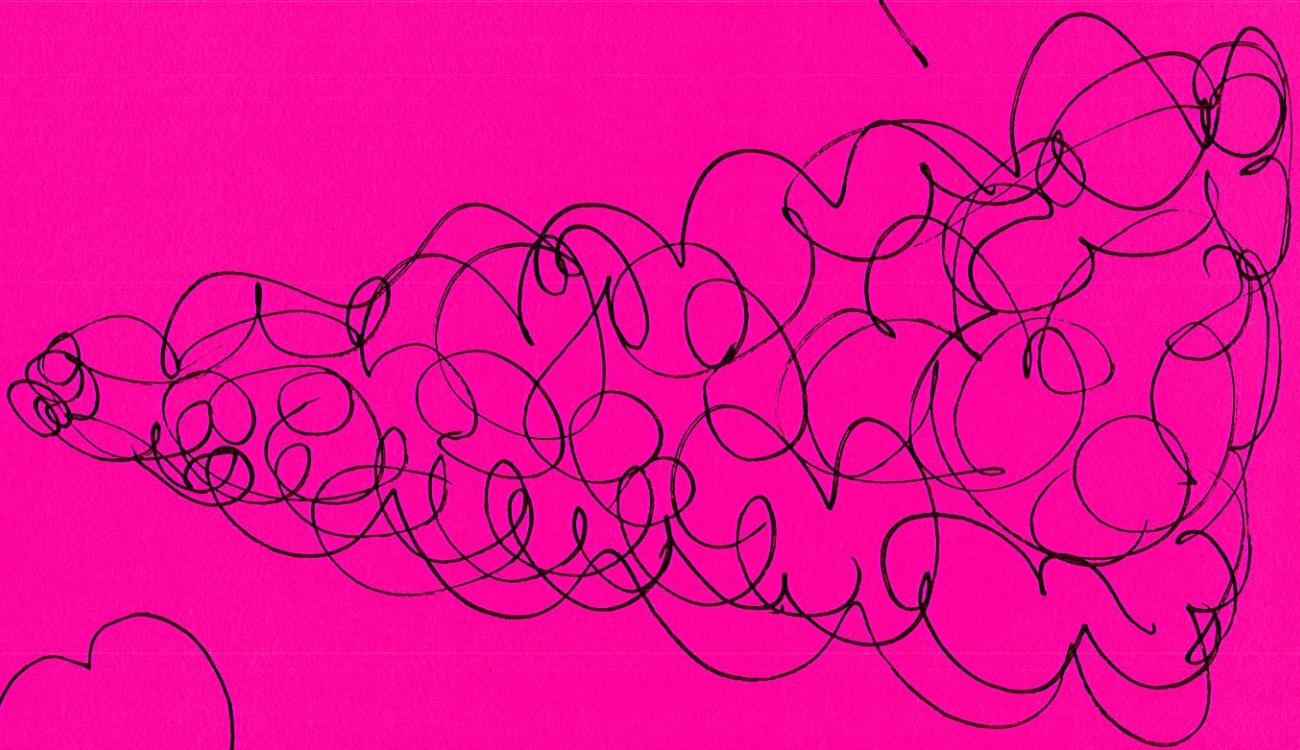
Commercial #4 Riding unicycle through 12 foot pile of foam : PINK slides

PINK #1 In this scene, one simply sees a large pile of bubble foam with a hose coming out of it as though it was just made. This pile sits on grass and next to it is a measuring stick measuring 12 feet in height.

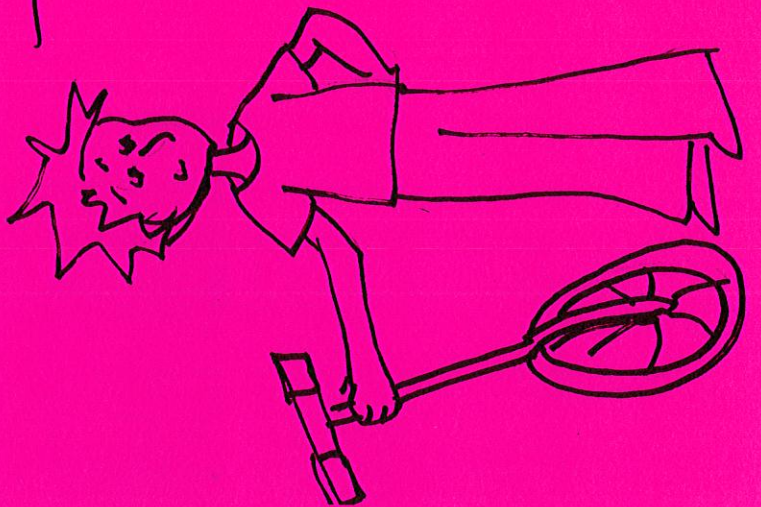
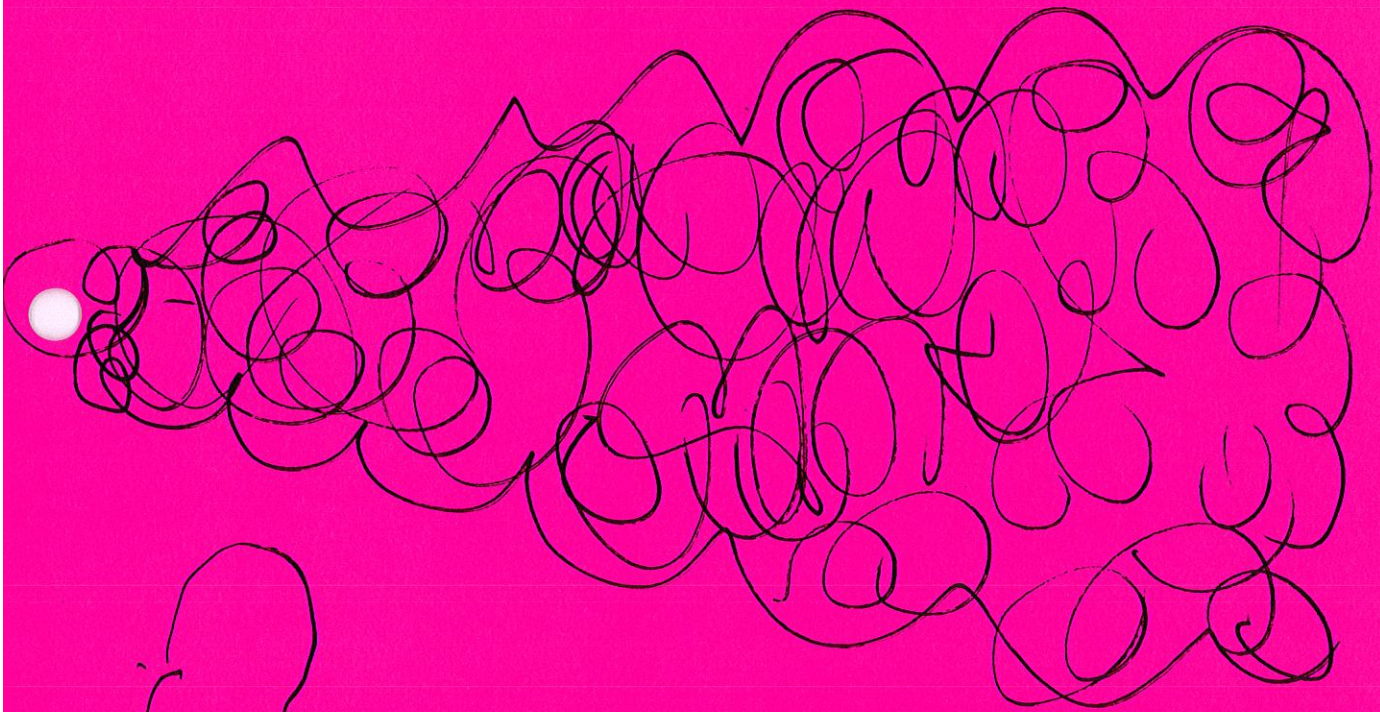
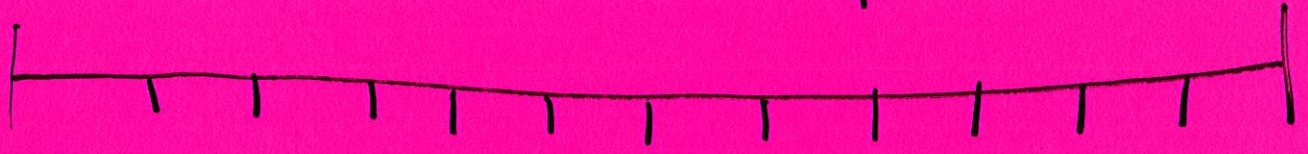
PINK #2 This scene shows a boy looking at the pile of foam in satisfaction. The boy is holding a shiny red unicycle.

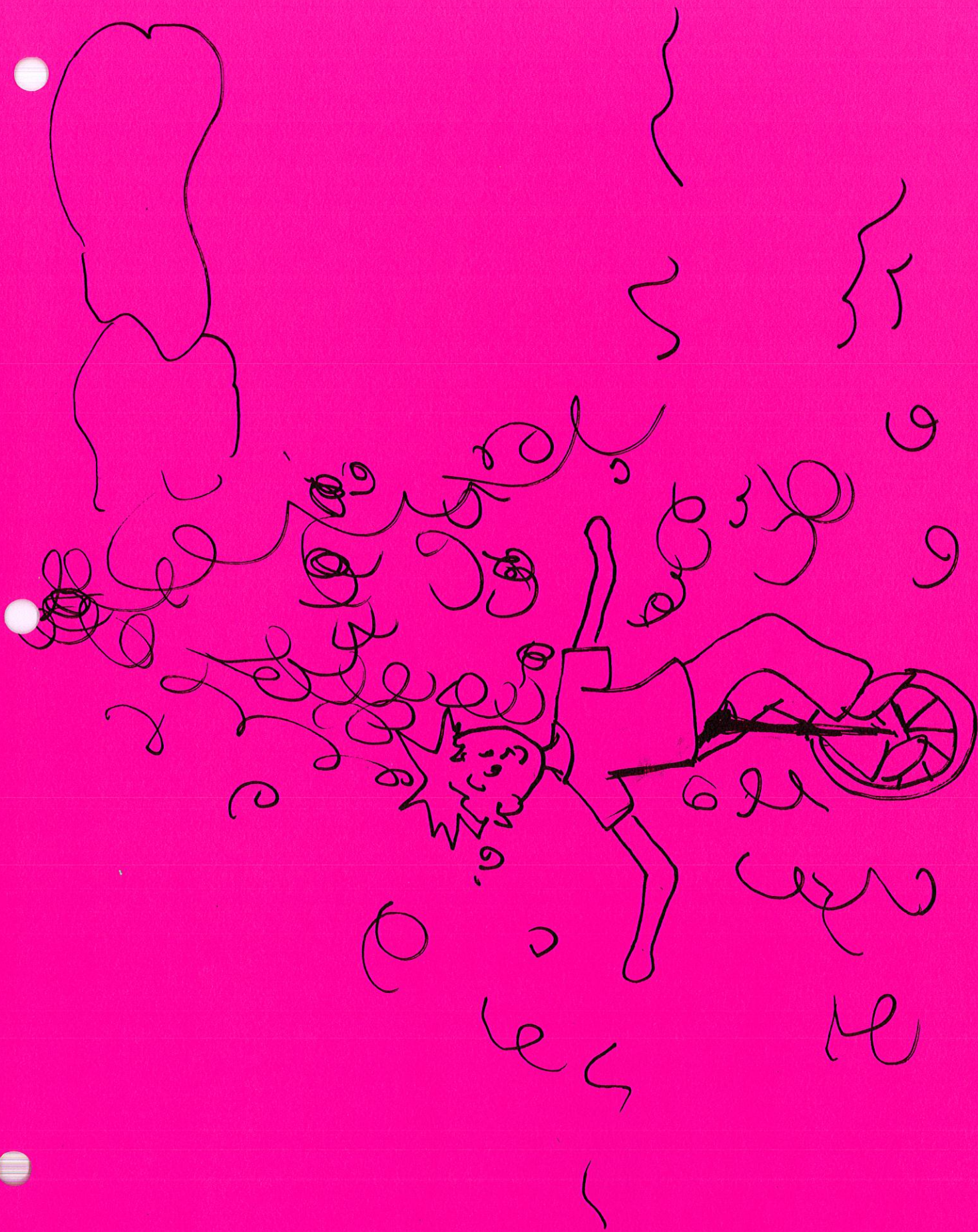
PINK #3 During this scene, the pile of foam is in view the whole time. All of a sudden, a flash of the boy goes through the foam, as though he had just sped through it on his unicycle.

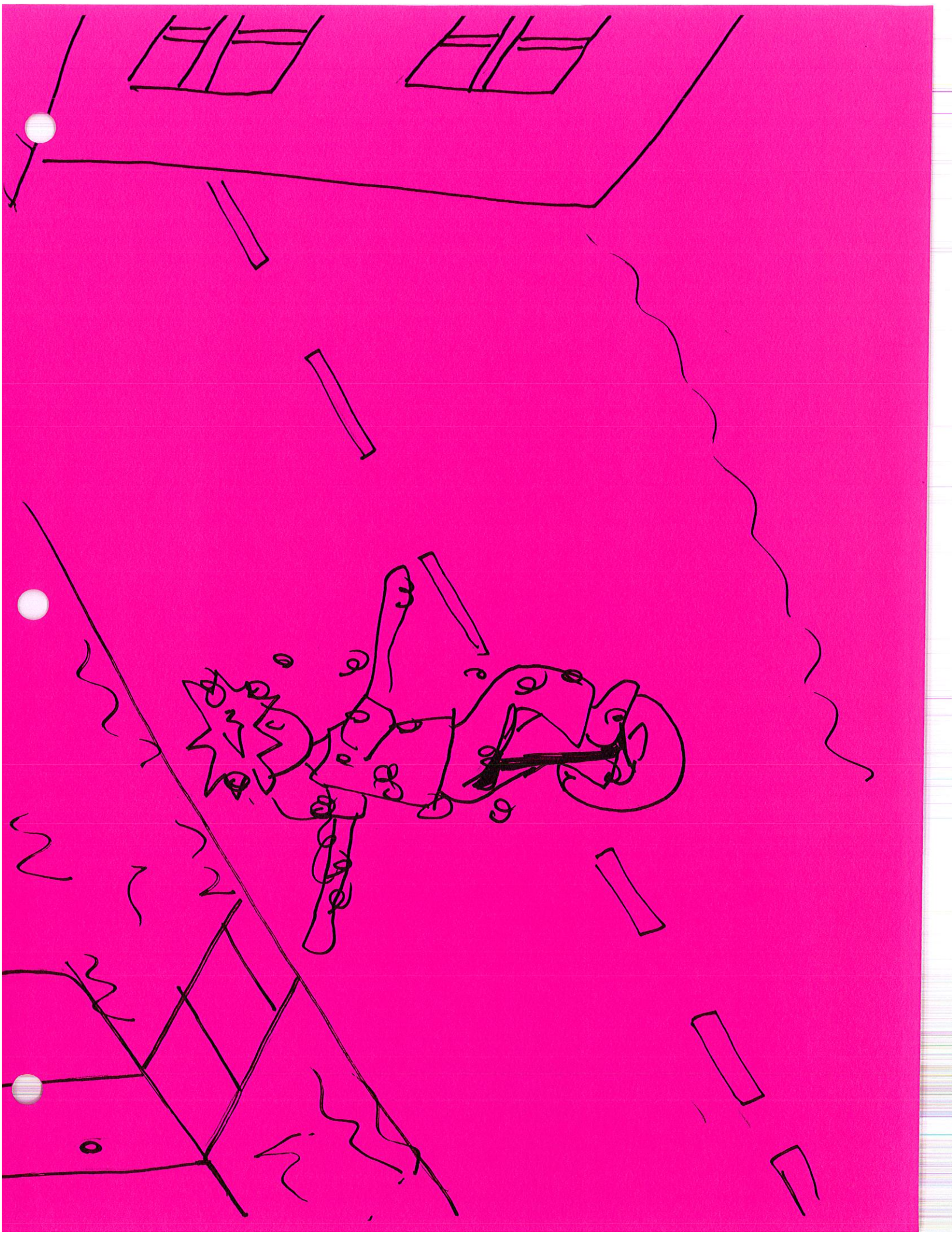
PINK #4 In this scene, the boy is riding on his unicycle down his neighborhood street with bubbles flying off of him. He is incredibly happy about what he has just accomplished. The voice comes on, "Riding unicycle through 12 foot pile of foam. Try this at home."



12
feet







PRINT ADS:

Each of the four print ads display a “Try This at Home” event. The print ads are simplistic in style, but allow enough creativity for the reader to want to know exactly what they are referring to. This will draw the reader to watch MTV to see the commercials, or at least go to mtv.com to see if they can find out more about the ads. The ads have the ability to be simultaneously funny and intriguing.

Each ad has a majority of one color in the background, red for the jump rope ad and so on. The left side and bottom edges are cut about two inches in and have a gray background. This is where the tagline “Try This at Home -MTV” is displayed. Each ad has one picture relevant to the commercial in the background and in the foreground the slogan for each commercial/ad.

TRY THIS

pogo stick

GNOME JUMPING



AT HOME

-MTV

TRY THIS



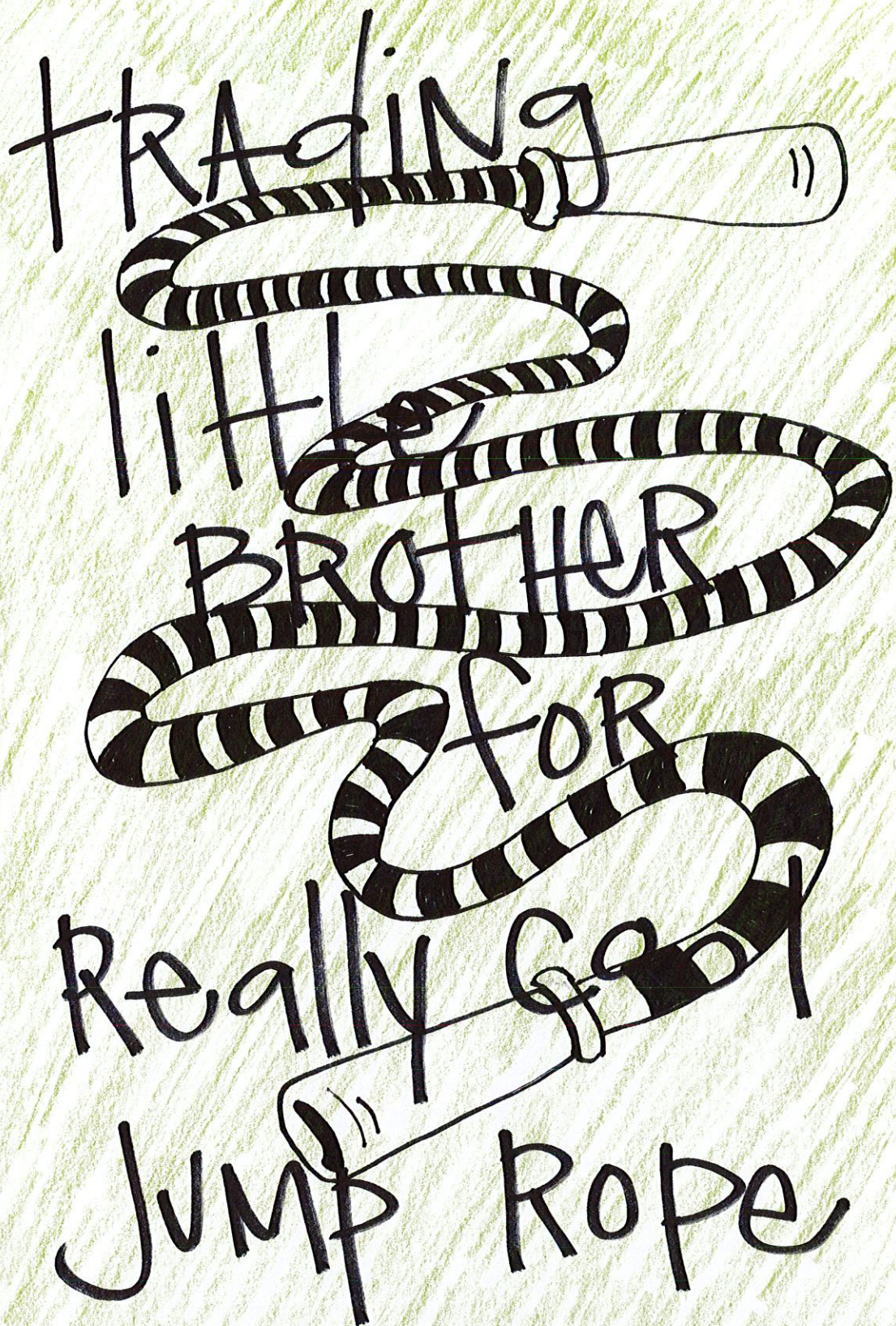
AT HOME -MTV

TRY

THIS

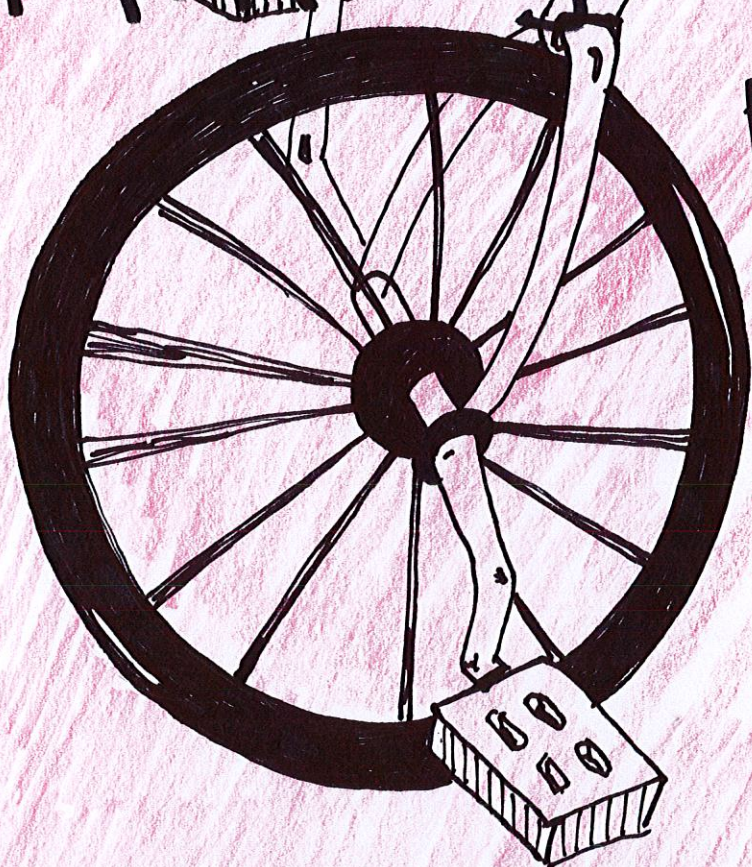
AT HOME

-MTV



TRY
THIS

RIDING
UNICYCLE
THROUGH



12 foot
pile
of
FOAM

AT HOME - MTV

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