

Beyond the Board summary article. View full study below.

Source: <https://pullias.usc.edu/blog/groundbreaking-study-redefines-skateboarding-culture/>

A first-of-its-kind study of skateboarding culture reveals that skateboarding improves mental health, fosters community, and encourages diversity and resilience. The study, conducted by the Pullias Center for Higher Education at USC's Rossier School of Education and USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, also showed that gender and race do matter within the skateboarding community.

"Skateboarding is embedded in youth culture today," stated skateboarding legend Tony Hawk, whose Tony Hawk Foundation **funded the study**. "Until now, little attention has been directed towards truly understanding who skateboarders are, what they think, or why skateboarding becomes such an integral part of their identity. We at Tony Hawk Foundation are proud to have sponsored this work in order to highlight these young people."

The *Beyond the Board* study included a survey that targeted 13-25 years-olds and received over 5,000 responses including a significant number from skaters who identified as female and/or as a skater of color. Interviews were also conducted with 120 skaters and skate community stakeholders in seven cities across the US. The findings fly in the face of commonly-held misperceptions around skateboarding culture.

"Skateboarders are prone to being labeled by society as rebels, social deviants or rule-breakers," notes the Pullias Center's Dr. Zoë Corwin, the study's principal investigator. "Stereotyping masks an array of valuable skills obtained through skateboarding. The study aims to redefine what it means to be a skateboarder and highlight connections among skateboarding, education and career."

"Our research shows that through skateboarding, skaters develop the ability to communicate and build relationships with people from diverse backgrounds," highlights Neftalie Williams of USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, a scholar in race and skateboarding culture and also an expert in skate diplomacy who served as a researcher and co-author on this project. "Skaters are excellent critical thinkers and problem-solvers who view success from a more communal perspective. They bring that insight into other areas of their lives which is valuable to any university or organization." The study also explored how the skills that skaters have learned could be better understood by educators and community leaders in the same way that people understand the values of traditional sports.

Key findings from the study include:

Skateboarding improves mental health – The vast majority of skaters surveyed indicated they skateboard for fun and/or to relieve stress. This finding takes on great significance in light of teen suicide rates and the prevalence of depression.

Skateboarding and skateparks facilitate a sense of community among skaters – Skateboarders reported the value of connecting with people who share similar passions in skateparks, skate shops, and at skating events. Those encounters often facilitate intercultural communication and offer skaters the opportunity to interact with, and gain an increased understanding of, skaters of diverse racial, age and gender backgrounds.

Skateboarding encourages resilience – The nature of skateboarding requires skaters to learn on their own and develop their own strategies to succeed. Skaters frequently perform a trick hundreds of times over long periods before developing proficiency or experiencing reward for the efforts. Skaters in the study reported that they apply these lessons of resilience to their lives outside of skateboarding.

Gender and race matter – The study also showed that skaters of color felt a greater degree of safety from judgment within the skateboarding community than in nonskate contexts. Female skaters indicated they believe they are judged by their gender both in and out of skateboarding contexts.

Beyond the Board: Findings from the Field

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WHY THIS STUDY?

The narrative around skateboarding is changing. Educational and cultural institutions are beginning to engage with skateboarding in new ways. Skateboard-focused non-profits, after-school programs, and summer camps are rapidly developing. Skateboarding is at the forefront of style and taste-making in popular culture. With the 2020 Olympics on the horizon, we expect even greater attention directed toward skateboarding and skateboarders (skaters).

At the same time, skaters still thrive – and sometimes prefer to function – on the margins of mainstream society. Despite growing visibility and popularity, negative misconceptions regarding skateboarding persist. Unfavorable stereotypes affect resource allocation for skaters and impact the treatment they receive from non-skaters. Skaters are often not considered by municipalities, and educational and cultural institutions in the same manner as their other constituents.

This report centers skaters' perspectives with the intention of changing the way the broader community views skateboarding and the skateboarding community. Data highlight the value young people derive from skateboarding and the resources they believe would be helpful in their lives. The study is unique due to the: (1) focus on everyday skaters, (2) consideration of race and gender, (3) its national scope, and (4) the rigorous research methods employed.

The rapid incorporation of skateboarding into after-school programs and the steady expansion of skateparks across the United States carries a risk that resource allocation may occur without consultation and input from skaters. Poor planning (a byproduct of not fully understanding best practices, the target audience, and how skating interfaces with existing resources) has implications for the efficacy and longevity of new spaces and programs – and for ensuring equitable access and opportunities in skateboarding.

The Tony Hawk Foundation (THF) has supported the construction of over 600 skate parks in all 50 states in the U.S. This study was launched in partnership with the THF to determine what resources would be most helpful to support youth who skateboard. The findings below offer insights into the relationship between skateboarding, mental health, community, race, gender, and perceived skills. This report is offered for review in conjunction with the ***Beyond the Board: Skateboarding, Schools, and Society***¹ report that briefly outlines existing scholarship on skateboarding and offers a framework for understanding examples of skateboarding's integration in society.

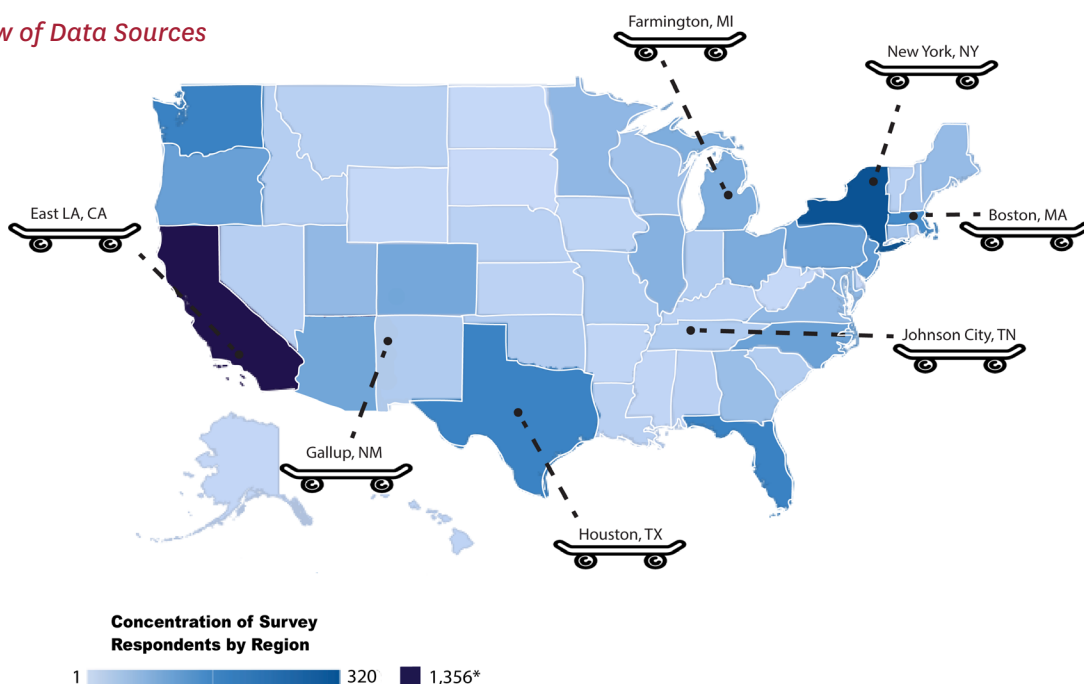
“The culture is real. Everything about skating is not just being on four wheels and a board... I didn’t just enter skating because it was fun. But once I seen that first Ollie – that pop off of the ground – I was just like, ‘Dude!’ How do you pop a board literally off the ground?”

– Native American male skateboarder (19) from New Mexico

WHERE DO THE DATA COME FROM?

Research design. The study utilized a multi-methods approach. In order to capture a broad snapshot of U.S. skaters at this moment in time, we administered a survey via social media and on-the-ground outreach. The research team concurrently collected in-depth data from a subset of skaters in seven different regions of the country (i.e. case studies). All facets of the research process – from design to data collection to analysis – were informed by a commitment to learning from skaters from diverse backgrounds and, relatedly, by the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Figure 1. Overview of Data Sources



Research questions. High-level research findings are outlined on pages 11-26; more in-depth analyses will be shared in subsequent publications. The following questions guided the study's research design data collection and data analysis:

- How does skateboarding identity affect the way skaters interact with each other? With schools? And, with society?
- What challenges do skaters face as individuals? As part of a skateboarding community? As part of a broader community?
- What resources or opportunities exist for and/or elude skaters from low-income and/or minoritized backgrounds?

Research team. We are a diverse team of researchers. One is an avid skater; one is mom and wife to skaters; another is a novice skater; and several have no skateboarding expertise. We self-identify as Thai-Chinese-American, Black-Creole, Mexican, Mexican-American, White and White/Jewish, and as male and female, queer and straight, with varied immigration statuses and stories. Some researchers offer extensive experience working in high schools and colleges; others are students at the University of Southern California. Some of us are adept at crunching numbers; others use qualitative techniques to craft stories. Our team is deeply committed to issues of equity and highly reflexive about our craft and analysis of the experiences of skaters navigating their social worlds. Understanding the breadth of diversity of the research team is significant because we bring a wide variety of perspectives to how we designed and conducted the study.

National Survey



Survey design. To our knowledge, this is the first national research survey of its kind. Two versions of the survey were administered. The project team developed the initial survey during the fall of 2018 and administered it from November 3, 2018 through January 1, 2019. The initial survey was slightly revised and the second survey was administered between May 22, 2019 and August 5, 2019.

During the process of developing the survey, the project team consulted the literature on youth and skateboarding, experts in the field, and a previous skate survey administered by the Harold Hunter Foundation. The initial survey was piloted with twenty high school students in Los Angeles, CA in order to ensure the content and structure of questions, language, and time to complete worked well for the target audience.

The initial survey featured 73 questions and offered a variety of response formats, including selected-response, five-level Likert scales, selected single-response categorical responses, select all that apply categorical responses, and open responses. The survey covered multiple topics including: demographics, perspectives on skateboarding, encounters with police, education, careers, acquired skills, life concerns, and skateboarding as an Olympic sport.

The second survey contained 81 questions. The primary change between the first and second survey was a separation of selected education-related questions in order to simplify some responses categories. In addition, the second survey asked demographic questions near the end of the survey to increase responses to skateboard-related questions.

Survey administration. The survey was administered through *Survey Monkey*, a cloud-based survey software program. The survey URL distribution channels were: (1) social media (i.e., Instagram and Twitter) hosted by the Pullias Center, THF, and other leaders within the skateboard community; (2) emails targeting skateboard-related non-profits and skateboard shops nationwide; and (3) postcards with a QR code linked to the survey distributed through skateboard shops and on-the-ground outreach.

Initial survey respondents had the option to enter a drawing for 12 Birdhouse skateboard decks. Respondents to the second survey had the option to enter drawings for six sets of Bones wheels and bearings or a \$300 gift card. To enter the survey, respondents provided a phone number.

The team endeavored to ensure respondents reflected a diversity of skateboarding community voices, in particular we sought to learn from skaters who identified as female and/or from historically minoritized backgrounds. One strategy entailed a collaboration with Tony Hawk, THF, and THF ambassadors on a video encouraging survey participation. Targeted outreach included female skaters and skaters of color. Additional awareness was developed through social media hashtags and outreach to social media users who might engage with the target audience. Several posted on our behalf.

The completion rate of the surveys was high, between 63% and 67%. Partially completed survey responses were included in the analysis. Respondents spent an average of 11 minutes taking the survey.

Despite stating that the survey targeted 13-25 year-olds, we received a large number of survey responses from skaters over 25. Respondents who reported being under 13 were not allowed to complete the survey. The findings in this report focus on the responses of 2,075 skaters in the target demographic.

Survey analysis. The analysis focused on respondents who identified as skaters between 13 and 25 years old. All responses within the age range received consideration, regardless of whether a respondent completed the survey. Additionally, the survey featured a request for respondents' zip code of residence. The zip code was matched to a freely available file to identify the state where the respondents resided, and a U.S. Department of Education file to identify the locale.

The quantitative data from the two surveys were merged and analyzed together. There were some differences in the wording of education questions. Common response categories harmonized these questions across the two instruments. Demographic information provided by respondents on their race/ethnicity and gender identification was used to create several groups within the data set. Inferential statistical tests, *t*-tests or Chi-Squared tests (as appropriate), were applied to determine if the reported differences between select groups' responses varied significantly.

An exploratory analysis was conducted comparing non-skaters with a matched sample of similar skateboarding respondents within the dataset. The matching process identified skaters who lived in similar locales (e.g. suburban, urban, rural), race/ethnicity, gender, and age.

"I really like how open and honest this survey was, and understanding of how most skateboarders are emotionally mature, that we do have worries and anxieties, and we come from different religious, racial, gender non-conforming, and sexual identity backgrounds. That we are worried about our futures and just want something in this world that is strong and pure in its own ways. Whatever this foundation is planning on doing I am excited and compelled to read up on more of it."

– Anonymous comment submitted in response to the final question on the national survey: *What would you like to share with the Tony Hawk Foundation about services you'd like to see in your skate community?*

Who took the survey? Of the 5,717 total survey respondents, 4,476 self-identified as skaters. Of all the skaters, 2,075 were under 26 years old (average age = 18.7 years old, *SD* = 3.78). This group is who we were interested in learning from in this round of analysis. In what follows, we share survey data about those 2,075 skaters only.

The majority of survey respondents self-identified as male (75%), straight (72%), and White (54%), with 43% of respondents identifying as a skater of color. Of the 43% of survey takers who identified as skaters of color, the largest group were skaters who identified as LatinX (36%). The second largest group of skaters of color identified as biracial or multiracial, (e.g., they checked more than one race/ethnicity answer response). We elected to use the term “skaters of African descent” to encompass skaters who identified as Black, African American or Afro-Caribbean. *Table 1* provides an overview of survey respondents of color.

Table 1. Snapshot of Survey Respondents of Color

Self-identified Race/Ethnicity	Count
LatinX (Hispanic/Latino/Spanish)	293 (36%)
Checked more than one race/ethnicity	270 (33%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	85 (11%)
Of African decent (Black, African-American, or Afro-Caribbean)	84 (10%)
Other	55 (7%)
Indian/Alaska Native	22 (3%)

Income level and location. The majority of respondents reported living with family (59%) and not receiving public assistance (63%). Of the survey respondents who reported their household income, we saw similar representation across all income levels. There was approximately equal representation of respondents across the full range of household incomes (e.g., 16% of respondents who provided income data reported household income below \$20,000 and 18% reported household income above \$80,000). Respondents’ geographic location was relatively evenly split between city, suburban, and rural locales.



Photo Credit: Miki Vuckovich

Skate activity. Overall, survey respondents reported they:

- were passionate or very passionate about skateboarding (95%)
- skated an average of 4.2 ($SD = 1.90$) days a week
- skated a variety of places, but predominantly street (50%) and park/ramp/vert/transition (36%)

Female-identified skaters and gender non-conforming skaters who took the survey reported skating less often than male-identified skaters (0.81 days and 0.95 days less, respectively; $p = 0.001$).

Education level and employment. Of respondents under 21 years old, 51% reported they were in middle or high school, 17% reported they were in college or trade school, and 32% reported they were not currently in school. Of respondents who were between 21 and 25 years old, 73% said they were not currently in school and 26% reported they were in college or a trade school. Seventy-eight percent of all respondents between 21 and 25 were currently employed. On page 26, we share selected findings about a small group of skaters between 18-25 years old who were not currently employed and not currently in school when they took the survey.

Due to an error in the administration of the second survey, we were not able to assess how many respondents attended or were currently in graduate school for the full sample. For the first group of respondents ($n = 1,405$), 8% of respondents 25 and under and 19% of respondents over 25 indicated they attended or were attending graduate school.

How did survey respondents feel about school? Respondents who were still in middle and high school reported, on average, positive feelings towards school (3.24 out of a 5 point scale, $SD = 1.10$). There were no significant differences by race/ethnicity when comparing skaters of color to White skaters. When assigning people who identify with multiple racial/ethnic groups into a single group, we saw that Latinx students reported more positivity, on average (3.52, $SD = 0.96$), towards school compared to other skaters of color (3.06, $SD = 1.10$) or White skaters (3.14, $SD = 1.12$; $p = 0.002$). With respect to gender, female-identified respondents reported liking school (3.41, $SD = 0.97$), on average, more than male-identified respondents (3.18, $SD = 1.12$, $p = 0.05$).

How did survey respondents view their future? In addition to asking about their current educational status, we asked respondents about their career aspirations. The majority of respondents (60%) indicated they had an ideal career they wanted to pursue. The top three most popular careers of interest were in: (1) the skateboarding industry, (2) arts and entertainment, and (3) education and health services.

We were also interested in examining if respondents understood how to transition from high school, college, or unemployment to their desired career. Sixty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they knew what educational steps they needed to take. Seventy percent agreed or strongly agreed they knew what work experience steps they needed to take. We do not have data to explore if knowing which steps to take translated into actual educational and career achievement.

Case Studies

“The skate shop is where you see the real skaters at. And whether or not they come all the time or they’ll come once every now and then, I feel like the home shop, the core shop is just their home to a huge community. It is the center point for the community and the city for sure, for skateboarding.”

– Bi/multiracial male skateboarder (22) from Massachusetts

Why case studies? Case studies allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of a particular “case.” Cases are often defined by events, activities, spaces, groups, institutions, or other factors. For this study, we defined “cases” as skateboard communities anchored by a skateboard shop. The skateboard shop owners we collaborated with were critical partners in ensuring we had access to skaters and helped us understand the landscape of their particular region. Case studies allowed the research team to be strategic about recruiting diverse voices to share their perspectives. Additionally, we were also able to spend time learning from non-skaters in each region about their perceptions of skaters and skateboarding. Case study data were collected primarily through interviews and secondarily through focus groups.

Who participated in the case studies? The focus of case study data collection revolved around skaters between the ages of 13-25. We chose our sites strategically in distinct parts of the country in order to connect with skaters from diverse backgrounds and in varied regional contexts. We are indebted to the young people who carved out time to share their perspectives and answer our questions. Each had rich insights to share. *Table 2* is a snapshot of the demographics of the skater case study participants by region.

Table 2. Snapshot of Skateboarder Case Study Participants

Location	East LA, CA	Gallup, NM	Boston, MA	Detroit, MI	Houston, TX	New York, NY	Johnson City, TN	TOTAL
Age	13-25 = 25 N > 26 = 0	13-25=16 N > 26= 4	13-25=17 N > 26= 0	13-25=11 N > 26= 2	13-25 = 2 N > 26 = 8	13-25 = 8 N > 26 = 1	13-25 = 6 N > 26 = 0	13-25 = 85 N > 26 = 15
Gender	M = 23 F = 2	M = 19 F = 1	M = 12 F = 5	M = 12 F = 1	M = 10 F = 0	M = 9 F = 0	M=6 F=0	M=91 F=9
Race/ Ethnicity	SOC = 23 White = 2	SOC= 20	SOC = 5 White = 12	SOC = 6 White = 7	SOC = 8 DTS = 2	SOC = 8 White = 1	SOC = 5 White = 1	SOC = 67 White = 31 DTS = 2

SOC= Skater of Color

DTS=Decline to State

Stakeholders. In addition to skaters, we interviewed a variety of adults who were in positions to support skateboarding in their cities. Stakeholder interview participants included: city and county parks and recreation officials, county government representatives, local elected officials, skateboard shop owners, skateboarding advocates, non-profit practitioners, and parents.

“Kids are inside, they need to get out...There are bigger problems with being indoors, depression tied in with sitting. I don’t know how you address that. I have seen it lately – in the last ten years. It applies to adults too. Parks create a fun factor where, for anyone of any age, parks create a space for anyone to feel like a kid again. As technology downsizes the workforce, more idle adults will belly up to a bar, drugs, alcohol, or what-not. For health and wellness, it is critical for adults as well.”

- Skateboard Advocate from Houston

How did the research team analyze case study data? In order to make sense of the data, we started by each reading a subset of interviews. As we reviewed the transcriptions, we assigned “codes” (i.e., words that encapsulate concepts) to chunks of text in order to describe the content of various excerpts. We then shared our individual code lists with the full research team. After robust analytical discussions, we narrowed down a preliminary list of codes for the full data set.²

Developing a solid code list is an iterative process. Before engaging in the “second round of coding” (i.e., reading through every single interview and assigning codes), we needed to finalize the code list. The team spent significant time discussing ideas, reading theories to help us understand the data, and brainstorming how to organize the codes into a structured code list.

During this analytic phase, we drew heavily from Tara J. Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth framework.³ This sociological theory brings an assets-based approach to understanding data – and also allows for analysis of context and societal challenges, such as racism. The theory highlights six forms of capital used to better understand how students from marginalized communities navigate education: aspirational, linguistic, familial, resistant, social, and navigational capital. We integrated the existing data-driven code list with theory-driven codes informed by the Community Cultural Wealth theoretical framework and applied the codes to skaters’ navigation of society, including education and employment. Subsequently, the team read *all* of the skater and stakeholder transcripts and assigned codes using *Dedoose*, a Cloud-based qualitative data analysis tool that enabled our team to code collaboratively from remote locations.

Once data were coded, we reflected on themes that had surfaced and selected high-level findings to share in this report. Subsequent publications will highlight additional findings from the case studies.



Photo Credit: Maxim Moscolo

— WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US ABOUT SKATEBOARDERS? —

Skateboard parks do not exist in a vacuum. On the contrary, they are embedded in communities and affected by local, state, and federal policies and practices. Skaters traverse diverse physical landscapes and interact with other skaters and non-skaters in varying contexts. In this section, we present survey and case study data with the aim of describing when and where skaters feel safe, how skaters believe society perceives of them, and why those perceptions matter. The section is organized around four key themes:

1. Mental and physical health
2. Relationships and community
3. Race and gender
4. Skills

“Also, skateboarding, you can always ask your friends. Like, say if I’m struggling with a trick, I can ask one of my friends who knows how to do it. “Hey bro, can you teach me how to do this?” And it’s that same mentality, you can ask for help, like skateboarding and school, and whatever, in life... And you’re good, if you’re not scared to ask for help and you can learn a lot.”

- Black male skateboarder (17) from New York

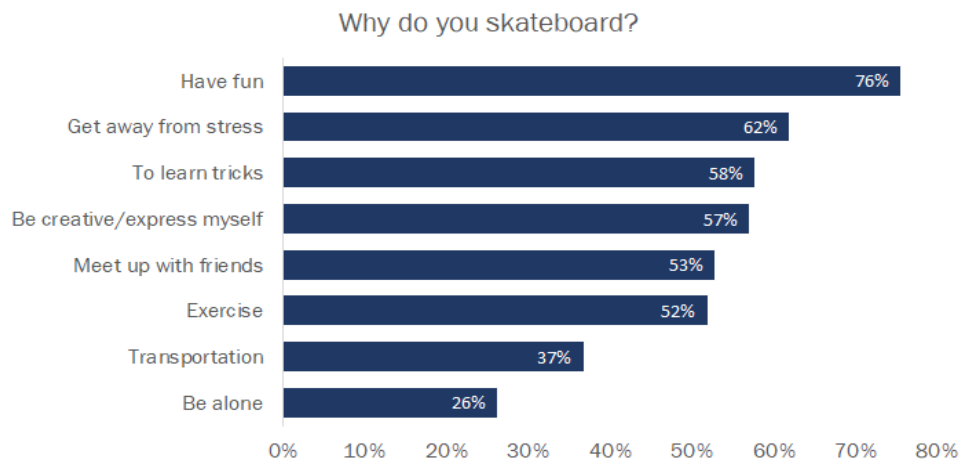
Mental and Physical Health

“Something like skateboarding can give you just as much as having a friend that does the same thing as you. It’s so weird how with skateboarding, it doesn’t matter where you are. You’re a skateboarder and I’m a skateboarder; we’re cool. I really don’t understand how that works. But that’s one of the blessings of skateboarding where it’s just neutral. It’s very loving for some reason.”

- Black male skater (19) from New York

When asked **Why do you skateboard?**, the top two reasons cited indicate a strong connection between skateboarding and mental well-being: to have fun (76%) and get away from stress (62%). The top three reasons for why respondents skateboard (see *Figure 2*) remained constant when considering variations in the average number of days per week people skateboard, race/ethnicity, and where respondents typically skateboard (e.g., street, park, etc.).

Figure 2. Reasons Why Respondents Skateboard



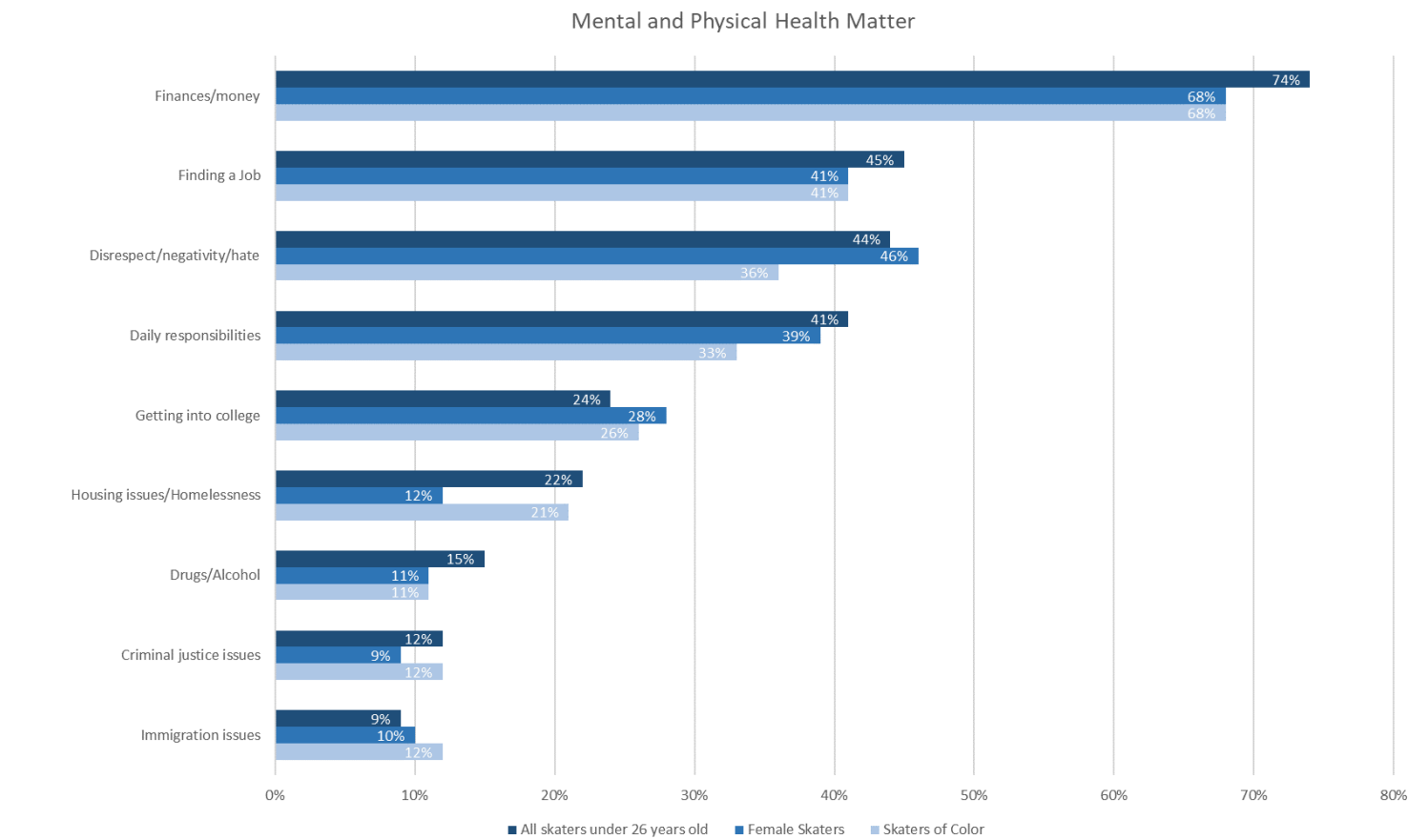
Why is having fun important? At first glance, the fact that skaters appreciate having fun might not seem like a significant finding. The finding takes on increased importance, however, when considered in conjunction with statistics about the challenges young people face in today’s society.

The U.S. is facing unprecedented rates of teen depression, suicide ideation, and death by suicide. In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveyed high school students regarding their mental health, specifically depression and suicide ideation.⁴ The national average of high school students experiencing depression symptoms almost every day for two or more weeks in a row was 31%. Research continues to show that the majority of U.S. teens (70%) reported that anxiety and depression is a “major problem” among their peers.⁵ The study also found that 17% of high school students reported suicide ideation in 2017.⁶ The overall suicide rate has increased by 30% since 2000, and has been steadily increasing by an average of 2% each year since 2006.⁷ For adolescents and youth between 15-24 years old, 2017 marked the highest rate of teen suicide since 2000.

Also important to note, according to a National Alliance for Youth Sports survey conducted in 2016, around 70% of youth in the U.S. stop playing organized sports by the age of 13 because “it’s just not fun anymore” (Miner, 2016).⁸ This shift away from organized sports at a critical developmental moment in teenagers’ lives is particularly concerning – and emphasizes the potential of skateboarding as a mechanism for adolescents and teenagers to stay active and find community.

What are skateboarders concerned about? We asked survey respondents about their top concerns and worries. Respondents could select multiple answer responses. *Figure 3* illustrates their highest rankings. Finances and employment featured as the top concerns across all groups. Female-identified skaters expressed a stronger magnitude of concerns and worries compared to other groups, regarding disrespect/negativity/hate, daily responsibilities, and getting into college. They expressed less concern around housing issues/homelessness.

Figure 3. Skateboarders’ Top Concerns



Relationships and Community

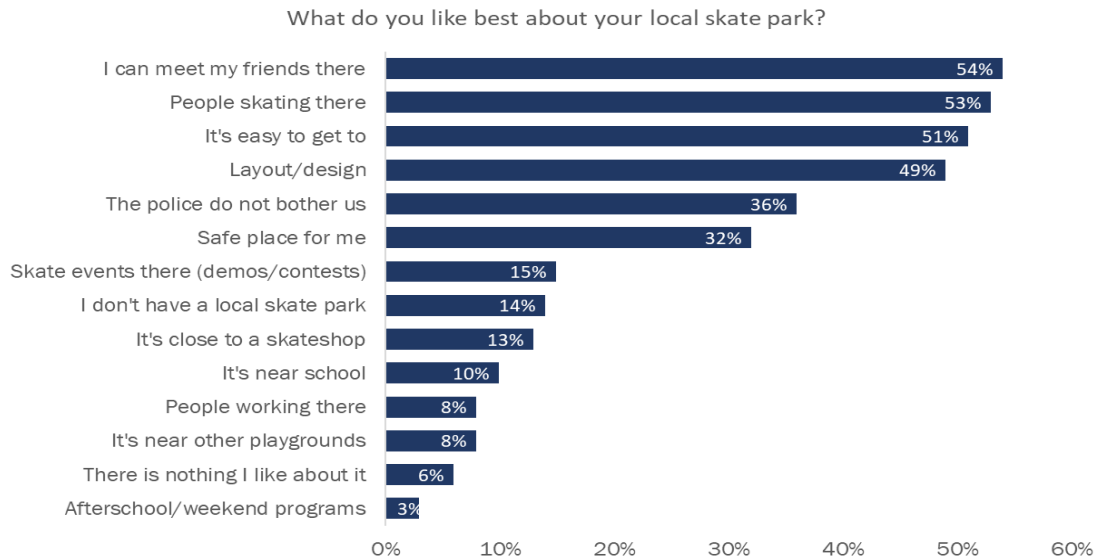
“[The skateboarding community] is totally different cause, you know, you got kids from suburbs, mostly white, and you know, you got the homies over in third ward or something like that, and you know, it’s just crazy how you can collide all these cultures and nobody’s really racist about shit. And if they are, you’re going to know real quick, or they’re going to find out that shit doesn’t fly around here.”

-Black male skateboarder (24) from Texas

Survey and case study data illustrated multiple ways skaters look out for each other and find a community within skateboarding circles. The salience of relationships emerged in response to the survey question: **What do you like best about your local skate park?** *Figure 4* shows the majority of respondents selected choices related to people, as opposed to physical elements.

This finding connects to mental health – when young people feel disenfranchised, skateboarding and skateparks provide a shared space to connect with others. Skaters appear to want to be helpful and uplift their fellow skaters.

Figure 4. Preferred Features of Skate Parks



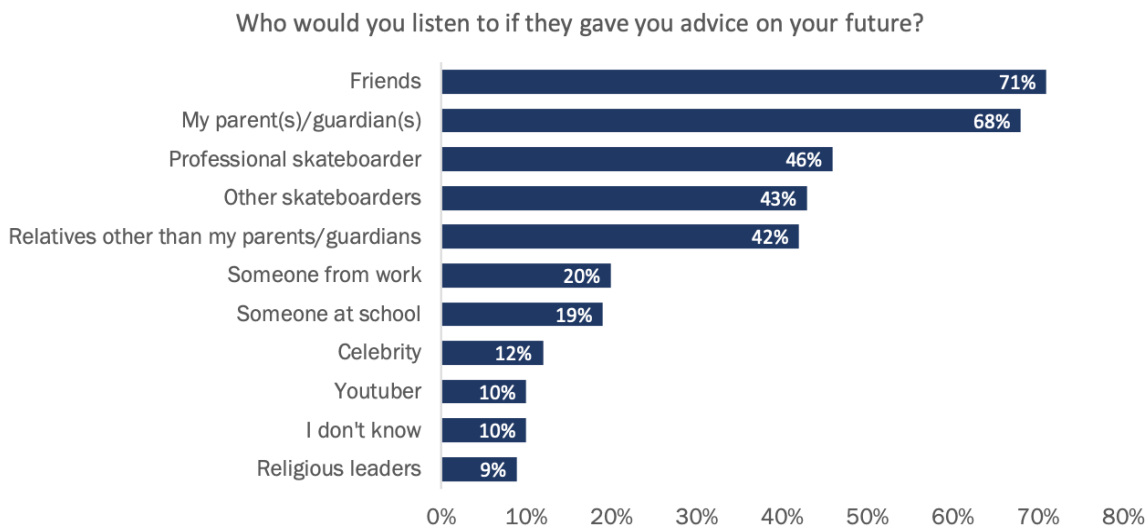
“Kids thrive in activities where they can have fun, when they feel safe, when they can find community connection with like-minded individuals. If pieces of those are missing, you can still have a local park or community center, but [kids] won’t thrive.”

- Director, City Parks & Recreation, Los Angeles

Advice. We were curious who skaters turn to for advice. A large percentage of respondents indicated they agreed (36%) or strongly agreed (52%) they have people in their lives they can turn to if they needed advice.

Figure 5 illustrates who skaters say they would listen to for advice about their future. Respondents could select more than one response. We posed this question in order to ascertain who might be well-positioned to offer information, guidance, or services to young skaters.

Figure 5. Potential Support System



Overall, survey respondents indicated they would listen to friends, family members, and other skaters' advice about their future. Despite the majority of survey respondents reporting currently being in school or employed, they were less likely to listen to someone at school or co-workers.

“But once I got out of school, I could escape to the skatepark, that’s where my real family was. I didn’t see friends that much in high school because I knew I had what really mattered outside of that.”

- White female skateboarder (19) from Massachusetts

In the case studies, multiple skaters (i.e., interview participants) likened their skate friends to family. Skaters found value in making sure other skaters felt welcome at skateparks. Specifically, if skaters noticed someone new, it was common standard to introduce themselves and their group of friends and to support efforts to learn a new skateboard trick. The kinship allowed new skaters to feel a sense of belonging and build on their intrinsic motivation to become better.

In many instances, spaces dedicated to skateboarding – such as skateparks, skate shops or skateboard programs – facilitated community. Our data show that skateshops often served as an anchor for a region’s skateboarding community. Skateboard-related non-profits created an avenue for respondents to informally develop friendships with other skaters – and more formally with mentors. Skateparks served as places for people of different races to interact with each other. Interactions were not colorblind – racism was called out when it existed – but most often, the skatepark provided a unique space for people from different backgrounds to connect. Female-identified skaters, in several instances, expressed a desire for spaces dedicated to supporting female skaters. Multi-generational interactions were also common and put skaters in a position to communicate with people from different age brackets.



Photo Credit: Zoë B. Corwin

Informal mentorship often occurred in skate parks, frequently between older and younger skaters. Skate shops served as key sites for mentoring, with skate shop owners playing a particularly salient role. In several regions, skate shop owners served as a catalyst for developing and sustaining the skate community. Skaters could easily identify why they respected another skater or mentor. The fact that skate shop owners cared for skaters and were dedicated to supporting young people beyond skateboarding was meaningful to skaters and led to reciprocity with skaters willing to help out and give back to the community.

“I’m a big fan of the early morning park session. I’m the only kid I know of my friends, I’ll get up on the weekends at like 6:30 am and I’ll go to the park for a couple of hours and just skate. At that hour it’s all people who are like 30 plus, so it was pretty weird just being the only kid at the park but I got used to it. Now, honestly, a lot of the people I know out in [my city] through skating are all twice my age.”

- White male skateboarder (16) from Massachusetts

“Is like all the people that doubt us, like any people that looks at us bad, like they’re going to be that, oh no, like they do drugs, they do all this, they tag on the walls at school, they jump in, they mess up the property. And we actually don’t, but because since we started coming in [to the skate shop], [the owner] told us don’t do drugs. That’s going to mess up your life. It can mess up your body, and like tagging, don’t tag. So we come here to tag [on the walls of the shop].”

- Latino skateboarder (16) from California

One respondent explained how a skate shop owner warned skaters to avoid negative behaviors and drugs. The skate shop even provided a space for skaters to practice graffiti – so that they did not do so on the street. In other instances, skate shops created opportunities for skaters. In one example, a skate shop owner gave a skater an opportunity to do an internship at his shop involving photography and historical documentation; another created an opportunity for a skater to complete a school project in the shop; another recognized that the youth frequenting his shop needed financial help and created opportunities for them to raise money by selling chocolates; and another often repurposed skate equipment for youth who could not afford to buy new gear. At the same time, skate shop owners shared how challenging it is to run a small business given a changing retail market.

Race and Gender

Both survey and case study interview data point to the fact that skaters of color and female-identified skaters experience skateboarding differently from White and male-identified skaters. According to survey results, race does not appear to play a major role *within* the skate community, but since skate parks are embedded in social contexts, it is important to understand that larger social forces – such as racism, sexism and high rates of unemployment – affect skaters’ well-being, in particular for skaters from minoritized backgrounds and skaters who identify as female.

When it comes to overall interactions with non-skaters, the majority of respondents reported the most salient part of their identity that affects how others view them is their skateboarder identity (38%), followed by their gender (16%), racial identity (10%), and another identity (other - 10%). The majority of responses to the “Other” response category referred to individual characteristics, such as “my personality.”

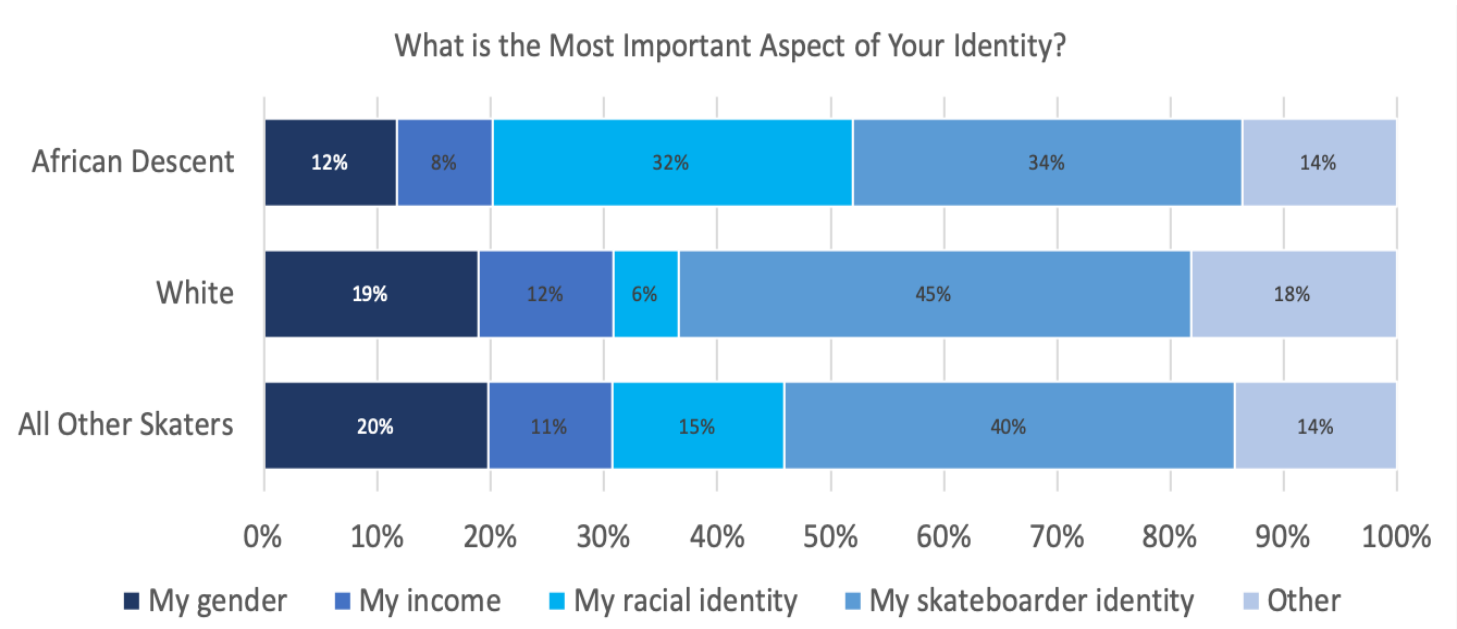
We also asked respondents about their perceptions of how others treat them as skaters (riding or holding a skateboard). Roughly equal numbers of respondents reported non-skaters treat them somewhat positively (19%) or somewhat negatively (18%). The majority of respondents reported that the way non-skaters treat them didn’t affect them (41%). When we delved deeper into this finding by race/ethnicity and gender, however, a different pattern emerged.

“The group of us skateboarding – we were diverse culture-wise, Italian, Spanish, black, white, me, I’m Pakistani and British, all types. We were all diverse, it didn’t even matter, none of that mattered. We just spoke the same language of street brothers. It was more of this bond we developed from each other’s pain. It was kind of very deep in a way.”

-White male skateboarder (19) from New York

Race/Ethnicity. Second to their skateboarder identity, skaters of color reported their racial identity is the next most salient identity when interacting with non-skaters. Specifically, those who identified as skaters of African descent (compared to all other skaters of color) were more likely to identify their racial identity as a salient facet of their identity, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. How Skateboarders Make Sense of Their Identities



When considering racial identity within the skateboarding community, respondents who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander or of African descent said their race affected how other skaters treated them (compared to White skaters, $p = 0.05$).

Descriptions of the importance of race in the skate community varied according to interview data. In one instance a black skater emphasized race doesn’t matter within skate community. In another, a black skater explained that race plays a role in how he experiences the skate park. The vast majority of case study participants – regardless of their race and/or gender – valued navigating multicultural spaces while skating. They appreciated being able to seamlessly interact with people with similar interests.

“Oh, well, yeah. I mean, I’m half White, half black. And growing up black was kind of hard. And that’s weird to say, but I went to a couple private schools when I was younger – and the kids there weren’t too likely to have black people as friends. And that scarred me a lot growing up because most of my friends were White. And I mean, I guess I could say even in the black community, I didn’t really fit in because I was just different. I was like a skateboarder and into Indie and Rock music. I mean, I liked Rap music too, but it was just like I guess I listened to so many different types of music that people thought I was weird, you know?”

- Biracial male skateboarder (23) from Houston

Gender. Female-identified skaters reported their gender identity is more salient when interacting with others in comparison to male-identified skaters (who ranked “skateboarder identity” as most salient), see *Figure 7*. The number of people who reported their gender identity as “other” was too small to analyze. Consequently we can not report which identities were most salient to that group.

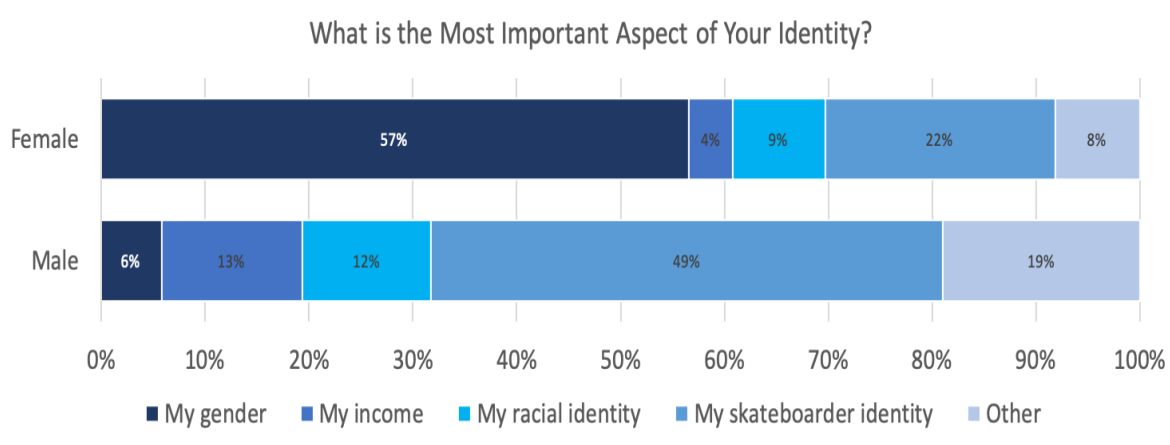


Photo Credit: Neftalie Williams

“To other people, skateboarding’s like a gender-based sport, but to like me and everybody else here, it doesn’t really seem like it, because there’s other girl skaters around here and like everybody’s really accepting of them.”

- Native American female skateboarder (19) from New Mexico

Figure 7. How Male-and-Female-Identified Skateboarders Make Sense of their Identities



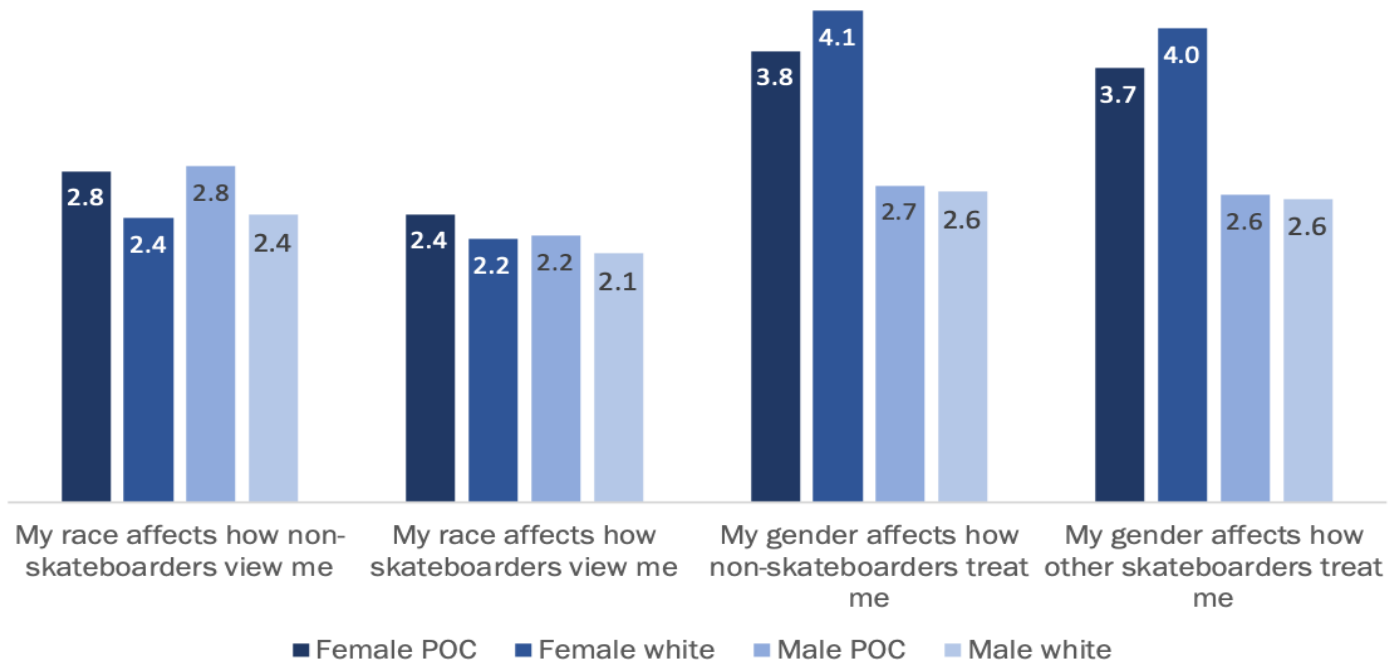
“I would like to see my community cultivate love, acceptance, and appreciation for anyone who skateboards without regard of sex, race, religion, style, sponsorship, and especially sexual orientation. Toxic masculinity has ruined skateparks for me.”

- Survey response to last question (see p. 6)

Intersectional identities. In order to explore the intersection of racial identity, gender identity and skateboarder identity, we asked respondents to state if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (scale of 1 - 5, 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”):

- My racial identity affects how other SKATEBOARDERS treat me.
- My racial identity affects how NON-SKATERS treat me.
- My gender identity affects how other SKATEBOARDERS treat me.
- My gender identity affects how NON-SKATERS treat me.

Figure 8. How Skateboarders Make Sense of their Intersectional Identities



Interpreting the above *Figure 8*:

- The first set of bars (to the far left) reflect respondents reporting the magnitude of how their race affects how non-skaters viewed them. As previously mentioned, skaters of color reported race is more salient when interacting with non-skaters ($p = 0.001$), compared to White skaters. There was no difference between male and female skaters of color, nor between White male and female skaters.
- In the second set of bars, we found that female respondents who also identify as skaters of color view their race as the most salient when interacting with other skaters compared to male skaters of color and White male and female skaters ($p = 0.05$).
- In the third & fourth sets of bars, we see all female skaters stated that their gender affects how other skaters and non-skaters viewed them (compared to all male skaters, $p = 0.001$). Specifically, White female skaters were more likely to identify their gender identity as most salient when interacting with non-skaters and skaters (compared to other female skaters of color, $p = 0.01$).

This finding is important because it shows a clear difference in how skaters of color and female skaters experience the world. When seeking to understand skateboarders and/or develop programs for skateboarding communities, it is critical to consider how race and gender factor into policies and practices.

Skills

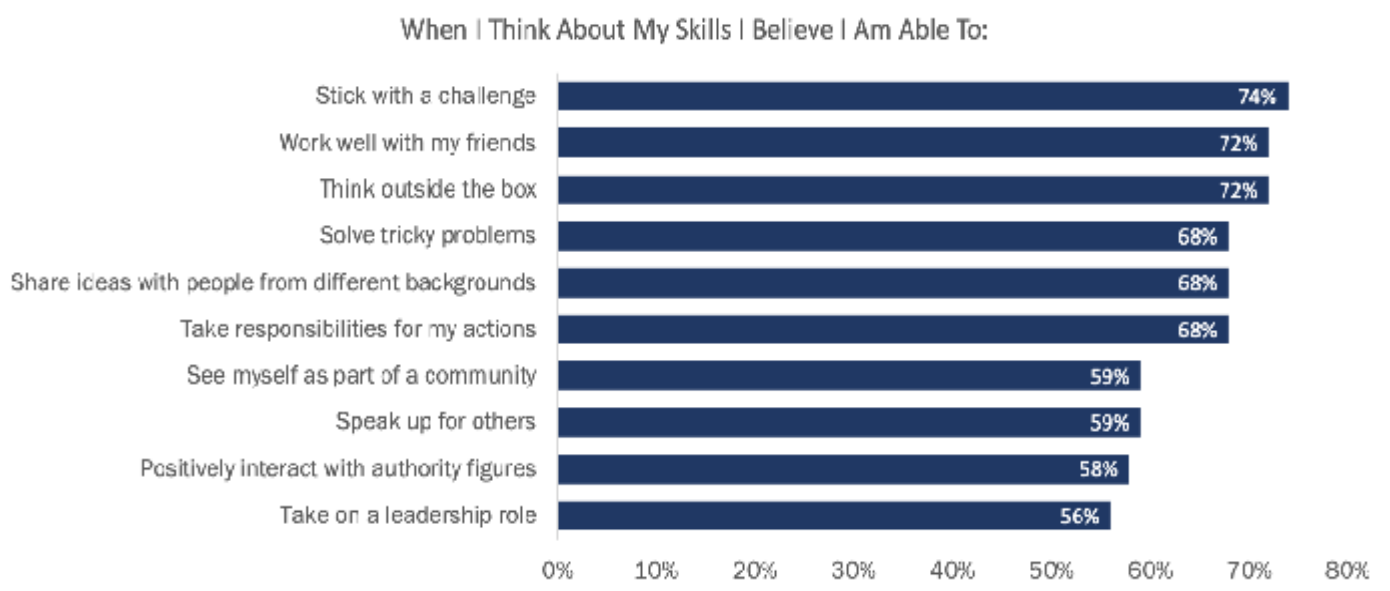
Case study data provided a nuanced portrait of the skills skateboarders believed they learn from skateboarding. The skills outlined below are informed by Yosso’s theoretical framework.⁹ They are not exhaustive. Rather they provide a high-level snapshot of how skaters understand the skills and competencies they have learned – formally and informally – from the act of skateboarding and from being a part of the skateboarding community. Needless to say, the stories and insights gathered do not easily fit into the confines of a report; extended discussion of lessons learned through the case studies will follow in subsequent publications. Below we describe 21st century skills, social and emotional, communication skills and navigational skills.

“I’ve learned how to work with other people through those people that I’ve met. Like I feel like I can have a different dialogue with certain people, you know, that I’ve met through skateboarding in a weird way, because there’s different – like within the cultures – there’s different styles, you know. There’s different styles of skateboarding. So I feel like I’ve learned to fit in with a lot of different groups of people, you know, outside of skateboarding as well. So I feel like that definitely works and helps me out a lot”

- Black Male Skater (18) from Michigan

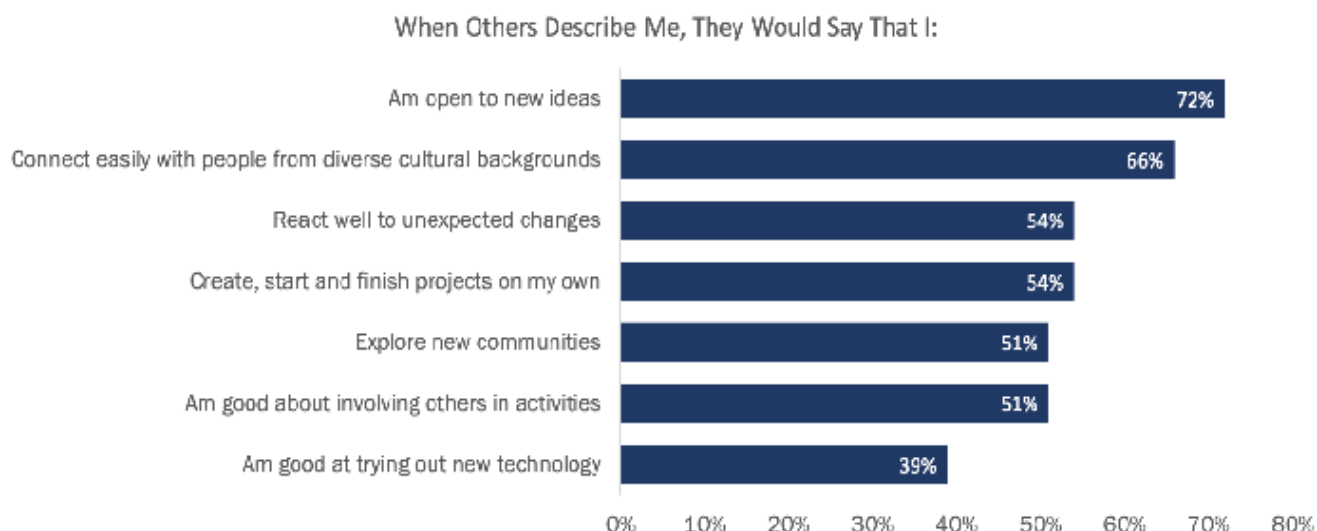
21st century skills. When asked to select from a list of ten 21st Century skills they believe they possess, a high percentage of respondents chose: sticking with a challenge, working well with friends, and thinking outside the box (see *Figure 9*). The least selected response for 21st Century skills was: “Taking on a leadership role” (56%). Given the historical representation of skateboarding as D-I-Y (do-it-yourself), anti-authoritarian, and collectivist, this is not a surprising finding. However, it does suggest an opportunity to explore how the skills skaters report they have relate to qualities associated with leadership.

Figure 9: Skateboarders’ Self-identified Skills



When asked how others might describe them, a high percentage of respondents chose: open to new ideas, connect easily with people from diverse backgrounds, and create, start and finish new projects (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Skateboarders' Skills Perceived by Others



These positive attributes are important to note. For one, they offer insight into the positive ways skateboarders view themselves. Secondly, they stand in contrast to negative stereotypes we documented through case study interviews. For example, skaters are aware of how the non-skate community associates skateboarding with crime (i.e. damaging public property, loitering, tolerant of illicit drugs, unnecessary loud noises, vandalism) or, viewed as child's play (i.e. a waste of time, prioritizing playing with a toy over education or employment).

"I guess if you don't want people skating on your property or making fun out of your property, just build more places or just give us more spots and opportunities to actually do what we like to do. Because I mean, the biggest thing is that people don't realize that we're not doing no bad. Like we're not on the streets, we ain't selling drugs, we ain't out here shooting and we ain't out here robbing and stealing. We're out here having fun, making videos, just talking, enjoying ourselves, enjoying the days that we live, like you know what I'm saying?"

- Black Male Skateboarder (19) from Michigan

A small portion of survey takers in the target population identified as non-skaters. To better understand any differences between skaters and non-skaters on the skills listed in Figures 9 and 10, we took a closer look at a subsample of 342 respondents in a matched-pair analysis. We found that skaters were more likely to say they stick with a challenge compared to non-skaters ($p = 0.05$). While this difference is not vast (2.2%), it suggests the benefits of further research into the unique skills developed as a result of skateboarding.

Since filming, editing and consuming skate-related media are important facets of skate culture – and also are connected to potential education and career opportunities – we asked respondents to weigh in on their digital skills as well. Skaters demonstrated the highest efficacy in using the web to figure out how to do new things (84%), followed by endorsement of their skills in separating fact from fake information (68%), and getting help from people when they don't understand something (68%).

Communication skills. Case study participants articulated various ways skateboarding helped them communicate in diverse settings. Communication skills included the ability to build and maintain relationships with a wide range of people (i.e., from different age brackets, racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic backgrounds), codeswitching, storytelling, and counterstorytelling. Case study participants also reflected on their ability to read nonverbal cues from other skateboarders – including the ability to figure out if someone skated based on their clothing. Identifying and managing their own and others’ emotions added to skaters’ ability to communicate.



Photo Credit: Neftalie Williams

Visual and digital mediums stood out as popular and impactful ways skaters communicated within and beyond the skate community. Artistic expression included designing skateboards and skate apparel to photographing other skaters, to savvy use of online platforms, to creating street art.

Social and emotional skills. Skaters shared numerous instances of skills they employed to maintain their well-being, often connecting those skills to lessons learned through skateboarding. They spoke in great detail about perseverance and how they actively stuck with challenges, resilience and how they quickly recovered from setbacks, fearlessness including confidence and ability to deal with pain, and patience and their ability to delay gratification.

“And skateboarding taught me how to manage my anger, because whenever you get mad and you try to skate, it does not work. At all.”

- Black Male Skater (25) from Texas

Case study participants expressed clear aspirations and goals (small and large, concrete and abstract), were motivated to achieve those goals, and understood that they would have to strive for those goals in light of personal, institutional, and social challenges. Across case study sites, young people exhibited self-awareness, understanding the strength and confidence they needed to keep pursuing their aspirations as well as recognition of the spatial and societal constraints they might have to confront.¹⁰

“But I just really respect the fact that it’s taught me that things aren’t going to happen first try, and if they do, it’s a rare occurrence. What really determines the difference between you and the next person is your willingness to suffer through the necessity of the process in order for you to reach a goal. I’ve found it to be a very poetic representation of life.”

- White male skateboarder (24) from Michigan

“I learned that skateboarding can be difficult at times. Like let’s say someone is barely starting out, you know, trying to skate, you need to know that you’re going to get hurt. It’s not just going to be, oh, it’s that like you’re going to scrape a piece of your skin or something. You’re going to break bones. You’re going to like get head injuries. Like that’s part of skating, right? If you want to learn, you need to commit. If you’re going to commit, you’re going to fall sometimes, but you’ve got to get back up and try again.”

- Latinx male skateboarder (14) from California



Photo Credit: Zoë Corwin

“There is one thing that I’m not going to lie, before skateboarding I was kind of like scared to do things. And then when I started skateboarding it kind of brought this like confidence out of me, like when I started ollieing different types of stairs or like when I would do a new trick it would get me like happy. And now I know it would help me in other like topics, like on my job. Like you know, I knew I could get the job. Like I was young, but I knew like if I kept pushing, they would give me the job, and that’s what I did. I mean, like I never stopped. Like I’m not scared of like taking risks anymore, because once you’re in skateboarding, (laughs) you take big risks, and you take big hits and falls, but that actually builds you stronger.”

- Latinx male skateboarder (13) from California

Navigational skills. We documented skaters employing a wide range of skills to navigate formal and informal spaces, such as schools, places of employment, parks, and other physical spaces. They learned how to prevent confrontations with law enforcement by avoiding certain areas, cleaning up skate parks on their own accord, putting pressure on other skaters to respect community norms in skate parks, and forming relationships with police officers and representatives from the city parks and recreation departments. Conversely, we also heard of many instances when interview participants or other members of the skate community struggled to successfully communicate or interact with each other, nonskaters and/or in skate and community spaces.

When skating in communities (i.e., not in designated skateparks), skaters explained how they negotiated the road with drivers and assessed the safety of a neighborhood – including if a community does not value skaters or if racism is prevalent. In some instances, skaters had to be strategic when bringing skateboards to school; in others, skating was supported by school personnel. Skaters knew which teachers would not mind if they stored their boards in their classrooms, and which teachers would hassle them.

“You learn to be more observant when you’re a skateboarder, because when you’re pushing through traffic you have to be aware of the cars, and even little pebbles on the ground that you can barely see. Those can take you out, so you got to be really aware and practice on the ground. Like when you’re skating through, say a certain neighborhood, it might not be as safe as other neighborhoods.”

- Black, male skateboarder (age) from New York



Critical consciousness. A large number of case study participants, especially those from minoritized backgrounds, articulated ways they recognized and resisted the dominant culture. In most cases, discussions of resistance or critical consciousness involved racism and racial justice; in other instances, skaters expressed concerns and strategies about confronting sexism and social institutions that devalued skateboarding. The young people we interviewed chronicled a range of racism and sexism from blatant acts to more subtle racial and gender microaggressions.

“I think that just me being just African American already, just having to go through a lot of social scrutiny already, it’s taught me how to persevere. So, me even just stepping on a skateboard, it just gave me more passion, more love, more drive to actually just want to go through with anything that I wanted to do in life. So, whether that means go to college, whether that’s me trying a trick, whether that’s me just going through the everyday ins and outs of life. That’s just me, I feel like who I am as a person is just ... I feel like I’m an embodiment of perseverance.”

- Black male skateboarder (22) from Texas

Critical consciousness took on several forms when dealing with intersecting identities. Participants of color and female-identified skaters were conscious of how they are perceived in different spaces and employed community building and compartmentalization, including actively seeking out positive connections or disregarding negative discourse. Skaters often expressed ways they thought outside of the box and were creative in problem solving. Several respondents talked about their D-I-Y ethic where they were empowered to complete tasks without the help of sanctioned experts.

“It’s hard because I want [our organization] to be not only a safe place for girls to be able to skate and learn how to skate and make friends, but I want it to be part of that bridge that connects that gap between men and women. I definitely have allies, you know, especially the people who have been involved or my closest friends that are guys, because I try to incorporate men when I have my events. I want them to be involved, but at the same time, I have to be very particular with who I pick because I don’t ever want there to be a situation where some girl feels uncomfortable or something happens at one of my events, you know? That concerns me. I have a public Instagram where I have all these girls that we try to just promote and give a little extra credit too, but at the same time I’m possibly creating a place where guys can go and creep on. That’s another huge concern I have, but I have to also hope that girls are smart enough to take what these guys are saying with a grain of salt and maybe not accept certain messages that they’re getting from people because at the same time, at some point, that’s not in my hands, you know? But yeah, I get concerned for sure.”

- White female skateboarder and skateboard advocate (27) from Massachusetts

Skaters spoke to the importance of inclusivity and diversity in skate communities. They explained that a common love of the activity often forces people to see everyone as a community member.

Data Spotlight: Skaters who are under- or unemployed

One of the key goals of the study was to determine what resources would be useful to young men and women who are passionate about skateboarding and would like to pursue careers as professional skateboarders or in a field connected to skateboarding – but who thus far, have not been successful in realizing those aspirations. We were particularly interested in learning from this group due to the possibility they could benefit from guidance about careers or further education. Below we share a few highlights about a small group of survey respondents who are “still figuring it out.”

STILL FIGURING IT OUT (SFIO)

SFIO skaters are a sub-group of about 100 skaters from the survey sample between the ages of 18 and 25 years old who are not currently in school or employed. Compared to the overall sample, this group skewed more male (91% vs 75%) and older (average age is 21 vs 18.6 years old).

SFIO skaters were equally likely as other skaters to report that they know what their ideal career is and what work experience steps they need to take to work in their desired career. However, SFIO skaters, compared to all other skaters, were significantly less confident in knowing what educational steps to take to achieve their ideal career ($p = 0.005$). This suggests an opportunity to broaden educational guidance and support for this group of skaters.

SFIO skaters expressed interest in working in different industries than other skaters. For example, they are more likely to say they want to work in the skateboard industry compared to all other skaters in the sample (47% vs 30%, $p = 0.10$). This suggests an area where the skate industry might focus attention with regards to mentorship, recruitment, and career development.

“I think one of the things that I like about skateboarding is its bluntness. [Skateboarding] doesn’t really care about your feelings. You’re going to have days where you can’t land anything, and you’re going to freak out, and things aren’t going to be sweet. But I think that kind of readies you for life because that’s very much what you deal with. Shit doesn’t work out sometimes, and you kind of have to either figure it out or figure out a way to step back from it. Sometimes you get your ass kicked, and you feel better about it afterwards because it’s a better teacher than someone sugarcoating it for you, I guess”.

- White male skateboarder (24) from Michigan

REFLECTIONS

Over the year, we delved into what it means to identify as a skater in the United States. Through the survey and over one hundred interviews, we learned that skater identity often involves a cyclical consideration between a skater's individual identity and their connection to a community of skaters. Skateboarding takes place in social spaces and skaters continually negotiate different facets of their identity in relation to their social circumstances. Below we offer brief reflections related to the key themes that emerged from the data as they relate to individuals and community.

Skateboarding has the potential to impact mental health and community positively.

Survey and case study data clearly illustrated that people skateboard because it is fun and relieves stress. Case studies also documented severe challenges facing skate youth across the country, from negative stereotyping related to skateboarding to poverty to racism and sexism. Understood in conjunction with research on mental health challenges facing youth in the U.S., our research team found the finding on skateboarding leading to joy and relief to be particularly compelling. This has also been a topic that has grown at conferences like *Pushing Boarders*.¹¹

We also found that skaters strongly valued relationships formed through skateboarding and that the primary reason skaters go to the skate park is to meet up with friends. When relationships are formed and cultivated in safe places, like the skate park and around other skaters, the potential exists for fostering friendships. Study data show that skateboarding plays a significant role in skaters developing more complex networks of friends and allies including intergenerational and cross-cultural relationships. This is important because young people may not have many places in which to develop camaraderie. Hence, the skatepark offers skateboarders an opportunity to grow as individuals, but just as importantly, to connect with others – and in some cases, build a collective. Skate shops – especially independent ones – appear to play critical roles in fostering community, even as they struggle to sustain their businesses given online shopping and the prevalence of mega-stores.

Race Matters.

It can be easy to misinterpret the nuances of race/ethnicity and how people experience racism given the individualistic and collectivist practices of skateboarding. From a Critical Race Theory¹² perspective, taking on a colorblind approach (i.e., race doesn't matter) is problematic for adults or organizations. The notion of not "seeing" race is often code for not "seeing" how racism is perpetuated or impacts the lives of people of color in very genuine ways.

We have attempted to show that race is a powerful factor in the lives of skaters of color, and we feel strongly that the topic deserves further examination. Our analysis also suggests there are several ways to read these racial politics in participants' lives, and that context plays a significant role in how skaters navigate the social world.

When skaters of color within the data set say "race doesn't matter in skateboarding" or "everyone is the same at the skate park," they are not necessarily suggesting that race does not matter at all. Instead, these comments deserve interpretation as race operating less saliently in that particular context. The data appear to demonstrate that the way skaters of color experience race may be much less dangerous or debilitating in skateboarding contexts than in other circumstances – another finding we find particularly compelling. While many participants emphasized skateboarding is a safe, colorblind arena, this rhetoric requires removal from the dialogue of organizations looking to discuss diversity in skateboarding culture. Even if collectively skateboarders are not concerned with race, that approach does not equate to an anti-racist agenda. Organizations involved in the discussion of what skateboarding is capable of accomplishing among its diverse

participants will more fully align themselves with movements towards racial justice and social change.

Non-skaters of color within an organization should adopt a new framework that prominently discusses understanding differences among skaters. They should then emphasize how skateboarding provides an opportunity to build bridges between people without erasing their racial background, gender affiliation, or other facets of their identity.

Gender matters.

Survey and case study findings show that people who identify as female experience gender as a significant part of their identity inside and outside of skateboarding spaces. At this point, we are not able to offer insights related to skaters who identify as gender non-conforming due to a limited sample. Similar to race/ethnicity, in order to create a more hospitable environment for female-identified skaters to thrive, the skate community needs to understand that female-identified skaters experience skate spaces differently to people who identify as male. Fortunately, several efforts are underway to ensure gender equity in skateboarding, including in the research sphere and through non-profits such as *Skate Like A Girl* and *Skateistan*.¹³ We strongly advocate for continued and expanded attention to issues of gender and sexual orientation in skateboarding.

Skate skills exist, but are not clearly understood.

Skaters described a variety of skills and competencies connected to skateboarding – including the ability to navigate social institutions, develop resilience and perseverance, build community, communicate with others, and express artistic prowess, among many other skills. Society struggles to articulate the clear connections between the skills demonstrated in skate contexts and other contexts. The difficulty for skaters is the lack of recognition of their skills by the broader society. Where do skate skills come in handy? What resources (tangible and intangible) can they be exchanged for? This has implications for skaters' education and career trajectories.

Skills and social connections obtained through skateboarding appear to have “exchange value.” For example, we learned of skaters receiving mentorship on school-related matters, support on class projects, and assistance on completing homework through skateboarding connections. Other participants described how skate-related connections lead to internships and job opportunities. In one instance, a non-profit brokered the opportunity for a respondent to attend a summer camp which lead to the creation of new relationships.

The theme of skate skills strongly connects to the finding about relationships and community. Skaters modeled behaviors about appropriate ways to treat and connect with others in skate spaces and skate shop owners provided examples of how to conduct business in the skateboarding business world. Several case study participants talked about intergenerational knowledge where older skaters not only taught tricks and the value of skateboarding to younger (or newer) skaters, but also life lessons, such as how to be a better person or citizen. Several respondents expressed a desire to give back to other skaters, share advice, and/or mentor younger or less experienced skaters. In one instance, a respondent saw value in promoting a younger skater's art work.

At the same time, however, even when skaters acknowledged a desire to pursue career opportunities in related fields, it was often unclear how to cultivate those opportunities. One respondent shared that professors and industry contacts could broker those connections. It is also unclear how skate skills interface with K-12 and higher education - another area ripe for further inquiry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What types of resources and support are skateboarders seeking?

At the end of the national survey, we asked respondents, ***What would you like to share with the Tony Hawk Foundation about services you'd like to see in your skate community?*** We received over 1,900 written responses that explicitly mentioned the need for services and/or resources. We coded a subsample of responses ($n = 1,050$) and found the top three requested services and/or resources were: more skate parks (52%), skate-centric events (13%), and education and employment opportunities (10%). The following services/resources were also mentioned several times in the comments: support for the skateboard community, skate equipment, support for existing skate businesses, connection to non-skate community, and youth advocacy.

We also asked respondents, ***Thinking about your future, if free training workshops were offered in your community, which 3 topics would interest you?*** Respondents could select more than one response and/or contribute their own response. The top three selected responses were: (1) filmmaking/photography (62%), (2) music/audio production (36%), and (3) apparel (clothing) design (35%). It is noteworthy that these three fields are intertwined with the skateboarding industry, namely the creative production of skate-related media and products, and culture. These fields are also populated with large numbers of freelance, independent contractors and/or self-employed specialists. Given that these topics are already represented in post secondary education, an opportunity exists for these fields to make direct outreach to potential future contributors from the skate community who already exhibit soft skills – creativity, independence, ability to work well with others, to name a few – and often times, self-taught technical skills associated with success in these fields.

Finally, a key message shared by skaters through the survey and case study interviews was to involve skaters in decision making.



Photo Credit: Saved by Skateboarding

Recommendations to skateboarding and educational organizations seeking to better support skateboarding youth:

Broker partnerships with key stakeholders.

Think creatively about individuals and organizations who might be able to bolster skateboarding initiatives. Thriving informal skateboarding spaces often develop organically. But great things can also happen when a deliberate and intentional partnership between a variety of stakeholders such as non-profits, private sector, local government, and schools are sought and nurtured. We found that robust skateboarding spaces can be found in a variety of locales, such as on school campuses where students participate in after-school skateboarding programming provided by a non-profit; a public skatepark with skateboarding programming supported by a non-profit or public funds; a skate shop where professional skateboarders lead physical education classes at the local high school while students receive physical education credit. When possible, engage key stakeholders to help develop and sustain consistent programming and full (academic and social) support for skateboarders.

Embrace fun and creativity.

Recognize that the decline of formal, organized sports in the U.S. is often connected to stress from participation. Skateboarding attracts diverse participants and audiences –often at a critical developmental moment– and can serve as an entry point to meaningful conversations, mentorships, and opportunities.

Address diversity, equity, and inclusion using a critical lens.

Acknowledge the differing experiences of skaters by paying attention to how race, gender and sexual orientation affect individuals' experiences in a collectivist space. Avoid “colorblind” approaches and language. Promote inclusion with language and actions that acknowledge and validate the differences of individuals, but also uphold how skateboarding may offer a starting point to building an organic collective among young people from diverse backgrounds.

Broker educational and career opportunities.

Assist skaters in finding paid internships according to their interests and skills. Draw connections between skills developed through skateboarding and specific educational and job skills. Work with youth on resumes, understanding their skills, and networking. Encourage skaters to explore and incorporate skateboarding into academic assignments and college applications.

Center skateboarders in decision making.

Actively reach out to skaters in the local community for input on design of parks and programs. Consider creating a youth Community Advisory Board, including skaters, when considering youth-centered programming.

ENDNOTES

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