



More Than A Park: An Examination of the Impacts of Skateparks on the Personal Growth of Individuals

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Abstract

This study aimed to fill a necessary gap in the academic literature surrounding skateboarding. Within the short number of reports about skateboarding, very few address the importance of the space of skateboarding: skateparks. Most studies are written through a physiological or kinesiological perspective which limits the academic understanding of this specific subculture. The research conducted in this report is meant to address the lack of academic literature surrounding the physical space of public skateparks and their importance to both skateboarders and community members. The research questions used to guide this research were: What are the impacts that skateparks have on skateboarders and community members? Are people positively or negatively affected by skateparks? Do skateparks help foster growth in an individual or are they more akin to regression?

The study detailed in this report was conducted via surveys that were distributed online through various social media websites and also posted in and around seven different skateparks in Los Angeles County. The skateparks were selected based on their location within Los Angeles County. The web survey was made to supplement the physical survey with more responses in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings of this study indicate that skateparks provide social benefits to its users by providing a diversely rich space that is accessible to all people for one common activity. Users of skateparks overwhelmingly view the space as both positive and constructive. Although these parks positively benefit individuals, developing skateparks in communities remains as a grassroots operation largely due to the stigma surrounding skateparks which is upheld by planners and disgruntled community members. These perceptions are false and causing severe limitations of access to skaters because skateboarding is one of the fastest growing and largest sports for the youth of America.

Introduction

Skateboarding is an ever growing sport that welcomes people of all backgrounds and ages. Although skateboarding is increasing in popularity, the amount of skateparks across the country are not. City planners are not building more skateparks for their communities which causes issues of accessibility to many children, mainly children of color.¹ This matters because skateparks are not just recreational spaces. They are resources to the community because they provide a free, public space that any individual can use without restrictions- besides when the park is closed. Skateboarding's popularity among adolescents make it a perfect option for an extracurricular activity, but schools rarely motivate children to skateboard; they prefer if kids play more traditional sports such as soccer, baseball, football, and basketball. The difference is that skateboarding is not a team sport, however there is a far greater element of socializing within skateboarding than other established sports like golf. People at skateparks communicate with one another; whether it be for a trick tip, to ask for permission to move or apply skate-wax to an obstacle, or just to have a chat. This, coupled with the cultural, gender, and income diversity of skateparks, makes them great places for children to learn social skills and grow as people.

The aim of this research is to properly identify the social impacts of skateparks on communities by studying individuals who use and/or live nearby skateparks. Past research on skateboarding primarily focuses on studies of singular parks and are more centered around a physiological perspective of the activity. Regardless, these studies focus on the activity rather than the space. This research attempts to do the exact opposite by examining skateparks rather than skateboarding.

¹ LA84. 2018. *#PlayForAll- The Movement 2018 Biennial Magazine*. LA84.Org.

Background

Background History of Skateboarding

Skateboarding's origins can be traced back to Southern California in the 1950s.² The first models of skateboards were constructed independently by surfers who were looking for some action during low tidal periods. Slowly, "street surfing" started to gain popularity amongst surfers and more surfers began making their own skateboards. A decade later, in the 1960s, skateboarding became popular enough in Southern California that surfboard manufacturers started assembling their own skateboard to sell.³ These skateboards were much narrower than the ones used all over the world today, and their shapes resemble that of a surfboard. Skateboarding as a culture began to grow as skateboards themselves started to evolve. In 1972 the first polyurethane wheels were released by Frank Nasworthy under his company, Cadillac Wheels.⁴ Polyurethane wheels remain the standard material used for wheels because they greatly improved performance over previous wheels which tended to be made out of metal or clay. Soon thereafter, trucks designed specifically for skateboards were manufactured by several different companies. Both of these progressions led to the development of the banana board (it earned this name due to its signature yellow color) which was wider and more flexible than previous models.⁵

With skateboarding increasing in popularity, skaters were becoming more adventurous in the urban terrain. Seeing as skateparks did not exist at this time, skaters of the 70s would have to venture to vacant lots, pools, or reservoirs- prior to these advancements to the skateboard, skaters typically skated "freestyle" which is a style of skating that does not involve any obstacles. The team leading the skateboarding scene of the mid-70s was the Zephyr Team, more commonly known as the Z-Boys.⁶ Reigning from Venice, the original 13 members consisted of iconic skateboarders such as Tony Alva, Jay Adams, and Stacey Peralta. These three specifically are iconographic of the 70's skateboarding scene because of their raw talent and capabilities. They pushed the envelope as to what was possible to do on a

² Hawk, T. 1998, June 20. *skateboarding | History, Culture, Tricks, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

³ Foley, Z. 2020, September 2. *History of skateboarding: Notable events that took place*. Red Bull.

⁴ Hawk, T. 1998, June 20. *skateboarding | History, Culture, Tricks, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

⁵ Hawk, T. 1998, June 20. *skateboarding | History, Culture, Tricks, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

⁶ Foley, Z. 2020, September 2. *History of skateboarding: Notable events that took place*. Red Bull

skateboard in a similar way that Rodney Mullen had advanced freestyle skating a decade earlier. The Z-Boys, and Jay Adams in particular, are credited for creating “vert” skating by skating the walls of pools that had been emptied out by the Los Angeles drought of 1976. The creation of vert skating increased the popularity of skateboarding once again and large competitions were held where skaters could enter to win cash prizes and find sponsorships. Throughout its evolution, skateboarding has continued to grow thanks to the abilities of talented individuals; one such individual is Tony Hawk.

Tony Hawk was born on May 12, 1968 and is largely known for globalizing skateboarding. At the age of 12 he received his first sponsorship, Dogtown Skateboards, after winning multiple vert-style competitions. Two years later he rose to the professional ranks, and two years after that, at the age of 16, he was widely considered to be the greatest skateboarder of the world. When he turned 25 he had already competed in 103 professional competitions. Of which, he won 73 and earned second in 19. He was a legend as a child but his influence on the scene does not just end there. Although skateboarding continued to progress, the popularity sharply declined in the early 90s. “Street” skating, skating within an urban environment such as a city, was progressing dramatically due to figures like Gabriel Rodrigues and Mark Gonzales, also known as “The Gonz.” While this style of skateboarding is now the most popular throughout the world, the pioneers of this era were struggling to make ends meet due to low sales. The skateboarding scene, which had now become an industry, was at a low point that lasted the entire decade. Then, in the 1999 X-Games, Tony Hawk became the first person to ever perform a 900 degree spin on a skateboard. This was not just a monumental moment in skateboarding, but in all of athletics.⁷ Tony’s 900 rejuvenated the passion for skateboarding and, months later, the first installment of his gaming series was released, *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater*. The release of this game turned Tony Hawk into a superstar. It reached kids everywhere and many credit this game for getting them interested in skateboarding. Some of the top pros in the industry today aren’t ashamed to admit that they started skating because of the *Pro Skater* series. With all of his success, Tony Hawk has given back to the community by investing in local skate

⁷ Foley, Z. 2020, September 2. *History of skateboarding: Notable events that took place*. Red Bull

parks in underfunded neighborhoods through the Tony Hawk Foundation (now known as “The Skatepark Project”) in addition to donating product and money to charity.

The mission of the The Skatepark Project illustrates a communal need that is not addressed in the planning of public space.⁸ That need is the need for accessible skateparks and equipment. When designing recreational spaces, skateparks are often left out of the conversation. This is often the case because of the negative stigma associated with skateparks. However, the stigma surrounding the negative perception of skateparks is fiction rather than fact.⁹ Skateboarding is currently at an extremely high point in the public sphere, yet cities remain hesitant to adopt programs to develop skateparks. This means that many people will not have access to skateparks because there are so few, and the skateparks that do exist will become overcrowded because skaters will have no choice but to flock to these parks or the streets.

Skateboarding in Los Angeles

Los Angeles is an important place in skateboarding culture because the sport was born here and continues to progress out West. Skaters flock to California, specifically Los Angeles, because it is known for its countless, famous street spots. Not only are the spots here, but most of the biggest names in the industry, such as *Thrasher Magazine*, are based in California. Those who plan to make careers in skateboarding often move to Los Angeles in pursuit of this dream. This has led to an increase in popularity in the sport as professionals continue to push the envelope as to what is accomplishable on a skateboard. According to a survey conducted by the LA84 Foundation, 1 out of every 10 children between the ages of 6 and 17 in Los Angeles County knows how to skate and 70% of them are nonwhite.¹⁰ Due to historic racial segregation practices such as red lining, Los Angeles is comprised of ethnoburbs where black and brown communities remain underfunded. Skateparks act as great recreation areas where people of all backgrounds can meet for a singular passion; it’s a place where communities can

⁸ The Skatepark Project. 2020, July 2. *About*.

⁹ Wood, L. , Carter, M. and Martin, K. 2014. Dispelling Stereotypes... Skate Parks as a Setting for Pro-Social Behavior among Young People. *Current Urban Studies*, 2, 62-73.

¹⁰ LA84. 2018. *#PlayForAll- The Movement 2018 Biennial Magazine*. LA84.Org.

join together. The diversity of Los Angeles and skateboarding's popularity here make it the perfect candidate for this research.

Literature Review

This study focuses on three main topics that are explored in academic research related to skateparks. The first is the positive benefits they have on adolescent development. Next, is the negative perception of skateparks to the general public. Finally, is the importance of community involvement at the developmental stages of citing skateparks.

Skateparks as a Resource for Adolescent Development

Skateboarding is becoming one of the most popular sports around the world.¹¹ In 2016, the official Olympic Games announced that skateboarding would be introduced to the games in the summer of 2020, however that could not be accomplished due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.¹² The decision to include skateboarding at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics was an attempt to reclaim viewership as it has steadily decreased throughout the years. A case study done in Perth, Australia remarks that “Australian data indicate that youth participation in activities such as skateboarding, in-line skating, rollerblading and scootering is now close to exceeding participation in organised sports.”¹³

While it is clear that skateboarding is growing in popularity, cities are apprehensive to develop skateparks, largely because of public perception. This ignorance is harming communities because skateparks serve as public resources for adolescents. Here, kids can meet each other for the first time and create social ties that are imperative for their growth as people in a functioning society. The same Australian study mentions that community members often view adolescent “hang-out” spots as deviant, however they are crucial for adolescent development because these locations provide opportunities and safe spaces for the users. In any case, this study aims to connect skatepark usage with the personal growth of an individual. My research intends to expand on this research by surveying adults at multiple parks

¹¹ Paul Gilchrist & Belinda Wheaton. 2017. The social benefits of informal and lifestyle sports: a research agenda, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9:1, 1-10

¹² Olympic Games. 2020, August 7. *Margielyn Didal: Skating her way to Tokyo 2020*. International Olympic Committee.

¹³ Wood, L. , Carter, M. and Martin, K. 2014. Dispelling Stereotypes... Skate Parks as a Setting for Pro-Social Behavior among Young People. *Current Urban Studies*, 2, 62-73.

across Los Angeles county rather than solely studying the activity of a singular park. These case studies are very important to the growing body of scientific literature on skateboarding, but there needs to be other studies in different parts of the world so that we can truly understand the social impacts of skateboarding.

Negative Perceptions of Skateparks

Skateparks and skateboarders do not have a good track record when it comes to public perception: “adults tend to view skateboarding in a more negative and disapproving way, often equating it with public nuisance.”¹⁴ Skateboarders are mostly children, with the average age of 14 at the skatepark,¹⁵ yet they are viewed as delinquents or even criminals. Opponents of skateparks often describe them as unsafe in the sense that criminal or illegal activity is attracted to these spaces. In addition to crime, skateparks are also said to be too noisy and messy. While some or all of these negative behaviors may be exhibited at a single skatepark, they are not indicative of the space or average user.¹⁶

With that being said, this negative perception has caused many cities to develop other recreational facilities (baseball fields, basketball courts, soccer fields, etc.). However, cities like Portland, Oregon have implemented projects to develop skateparks throughout the city.¹⁷ The plan was developed by Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R) and an appointed advisory committee named the Skatepark Leadership Advisory Team (SLAT) following the Portland City Council’s decision to accept a recommendation to adopt a system to develop skateparks throughout the city in July of 2005. This project was selected because it falls in line with Portland Parks & Recreation’s goal to “develop and maintain excellent facilities and places for public recreation, building community through play.” Before the plan became viable in 2008, it first needed research to justify the development of skateparks. The teams created an extensive report that other cities may use to justify a skatepark system in their area. The researchers

¹⁴ Taylor, M. F., & Khan, U. 2011. Skate-park builds, teenaphobia and the adolescent need for hang-out spaces: The social utility and functionality of urban skate parks. *Journal of urban design*, 16(4), 489-510.

¹⁵ Taylor, M. F., & Khan, U. 2011. Skate-park builds, teenaphobia and the adolescent need for hang-out spaces: The social utility and functionality of urban skate parks. *Journal of urban design*, 16(4), 489-510.

¹⁶ Fiore, E., Heinicke, S., Ragel, B., & Weigel, L. 2005. *The Urban Grind: Skateparks-Neighborhood Perceptions and Planning Realities*.

¹⁷ Fiore, E., Heinicke, S., Ragel, B., & Weigel, L. 2005. *The Urban Grind: Skateparks-Neighborhood Perceptions and Planning Realities*.

found that skateparks are not as loud as baseball fields and can be compared to ambient noises that already exist in the urban setting. Not only are they not as loud as people may think, but the researchers also uncovered that skateparks reflect the crime levels of the neighborhoods that they are cited in rather than adding crime to a neighborhood.¹⁸ In addition, a different team of researchers found that skateparks are not as dangerous as they may seem to the general public because most of the injuries that occur are minor.¹⁹

These negative perceptions still exist despite all of the evidence that indicates otherwise.

Siting and Community Involvement

Negative perceptions can be quite dangerous when developing a new skatepark because almost all public skateparks are “the result of sustained, volunteer-led advocacy and fundraising campaigns.”²⁰ This means that public opposition can quickly shut down an entire project. The *Public Skatepark Development Guide* is a website that is funded by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Skaters For Public Skateparks, and the Tony Hawk Foundation. These organizations have created this website to encourage grassroots movements to build public skateparks across the nation. The site is used as a tool for community members, planners, and anyone else seeking to develop a public skatepark. They clearly put forward a practical guide for developing public skatepark projects in most cities. Developing skateparks is almost entirely grassroots so it’s the public who needs access to these tools. Whenever developing a skatepark, the project must maintain some secrecy in the very early stages of development. Before a site is proposed, the project must attain public support. It is even proposed in the guide that single locations should not be selected, but that a list of sites are proposed to the community to select from. The process is very slow and can take up to a year or more, however this is the only feasible way for people to create public skateparks in their communities.

¹⁸ Fiore, E., Heinicke, S., Ragel, B., & Weigel, L. 2005. *The Urban Grind: Skateparks-Neighborhood Perceptions and Planning Realities*.

¹⁹ Alex Dumas & Sophie Laforest. 2009. Skateparks as a health-resource: are they as dangerous as they look?, *Leisure Studies*, 28:1, 19-34.

²⁰ Tony Hawk Foundation. 2020. *Public Skatepark Development Guide*.

Returning to the 2008 *Skatepark System Plan* in Portland, we can see a growing trend that other researchers have touched upon. That is, that skateparks are often poorly sited because of the prevalent negative perceptions of skateparks. It's quite paradoxical that poor siting leads to the negative behaviors that communities do not want to see. For example, wedging a gated skatepark in a corner of a neighborhood to avoid visibility of deviant behaviors is what allows those behaviors to exist in the first place. The success, or failure, of a given skatepark is primarily based on adequate or poor siting, respectively.²¹ Simply, the 2008 *Skatepark System Plan* explains that visibility is a big factor in maintaining the safety of a park. Creating an easily visible skatepark allows for "natural surveillance" which reduces the probability of crime in the area. Although skateparks do not emit large amounts of sound, they still must be developed at least 200 feet away from residential areas, as to not burden those communities with added noise pollution. Other siting issues like trash, graffiti, and access can be solved by involving the public early in the process. Assisting communities with the development of skateparks, rather than just building one for them, creates a sense of stewardship over the skatepark. Skaters will make the conscious decision to keep their parks clean when they feel a sense of ownership. Establishing a positive relationship between the community and the park creates the stewardship that the parks need for their longevity.

Methods

This study will analyze skateparks for the impacts that they have on an individual's life by surveying users and non-users of skateparks throughout Los Angeles County. Users of skateparks may have more of a bias when answering survey questions about skateboarding, so it's important to also include non-users of the park. Non-users will also give us a better understanding of the general public's sentiments towards skateparks at a point in time where skateboarding continues to become more popular. Surveys will be used because they have been identified as the most effective method in collecting quantitative data. They are the most effective because of the low cost to produce surveys, they have the

²¹ Fiore, E., Heinicke, S., Ragel, B., & Weigel, L. 2005. *The Urban Grind: Skateparks-Neighborhood Perceptions and Planning Realities*.

ability to make generalizations over large populations, and it is the most accessible research design during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In addition, surveys are not a new mechanism for extracting data from skateparks. While these surveys exist, they are incredibly limited in their scope. Surveys in relation to skateparks are generally about specific skateparks or about issues surrounding skateparks as a whole. For example, the Goodpush Alliance launched a global survey earlier this year to assess the general accessibility of skateparks.²² While surveys like these are good in answering practical questions about skateparks, they do not address the impact that skateparks have on people's lives. This research aims to quantify the impact of skateparks on the lives of individuals in order to determine whether or not they are beneficial resources to the community. There are implications to the community for both outcomes; skateparks are either improving communities by providing people with a safe environment that can provide opportunities for adolescents, or they are damaging communities by increasing vandalism, theft, and other crimes. The results of this survey will attempt to measure the impact that skateparks have in Los Angeles.

Sample, Instrument, and Study Area

As mentioned previously, this study used surveys to collect data. Therefore, at least 100 total survey responses, over every medium used, were required to make meaningful generalizations. All respondents were intended to reside in the Los Angeles County area and included both users and non-users of skateparks. Human subjects were used for this research, therefore, the proper training was issued to maintain the appropriate ethical guidelines. Only subjects that were 18 years old or older were used in this survey to avoid the issues concerning parental consent; this also assisted with the overall research because older skaters, and people in general, likely have a more concrete opinion and understanding of the questions that they were asked due to their years of experience with skateboarding and, more generally, with life. It was also important to include adult skaters who are new to skateparks in the survey because their motive in doing so is less clear than that of children or people who have skated

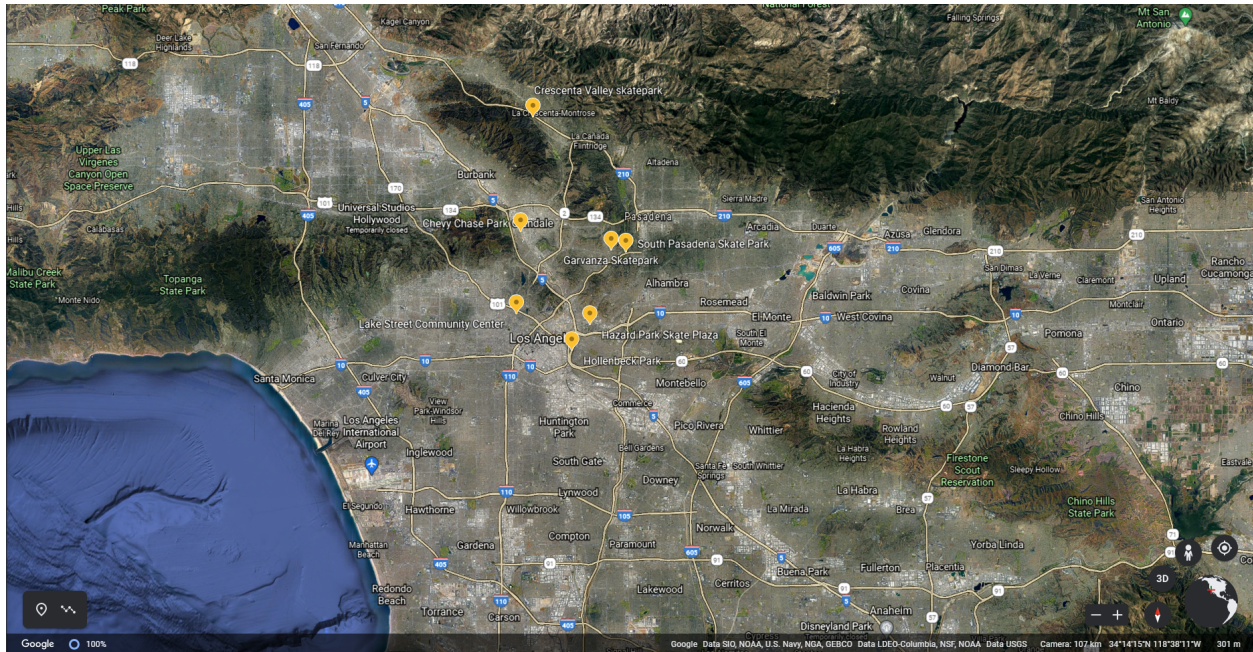
²² [Goodpush Team. 2020. August 25. Accessible Skateparks Survey – First Results! | Goodpush. GoodPush.](#)

for several years. Survey questions included: At what age did you start skateboarding? Roughly, how many times do you visit a skatepark in a month (if COVID-19 has impacted your response for this answer, please state how many times you would visit a skatepark before restrictions occurred)? Would you still skate if you did not live near or have access to a skatepark? Do you consider a skatepark a “safe space”?

Two separate, but identical, surveys were constructed on Qualtrics. Both surveys were made accessible via a QR code that could be scanned by any smartphone. Respondents were explained that their results would not be counted if they were under the age of 18 in the consent form that precedes the survey. In addition, there was a question that asks the respondent to write in their age, which serves as another means to deter underage-respondents. Once again, all of the respondents who indicated that they were under the age of 18 were excluded and their data was erased. It was decided to create two surveys to differentiate the different ways in which subjects will access the surveys: 1 code was posted in online forums on social media (i.e. FaceBook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit) and 1 code was posted in different skateparks around the Southern California area as well as the surrounding neighborhoods of those skateparks.

The skateparks identified for this study were Garvanza Skatepark, South Pasadena Skatepark, Crescenta Valley Skatepark, Chevy Chase Skatepark, Hollenbeck Skatepark, Diamond Skate Plaza, and Lake Street Skatepark. These parks were selected because they are located in three different cities within Los Angeles County: Los Angeles (Highland Park), Pasadena, Glendale (both Crescenta Valley and Chevy Chase Parks are located within Glendale), Boyle Heights, and Echo Park respectively. The logic was that a wider range of survey answers may occur by conducting research throughout the greater Los Angeles County area. Collecting survey results from a singular skatepark alone may have resulted in miniscule or skewed results. The most effective results were obtained by administering as many surveys as possible; assuming a low-normal survey response rate. To maximize response rates, I posted flyers that contained the survey QR code at the entrance of skateparks. Some skateparks, such as Chevy Chase, are

not directly fenced in, so the flyers were placed at the park's general entry way. In addition, several flyers were posted within the skateparks themselves and around the residential areas closest to the skatepark- flyers were posted within a 5 mile radius of the 7 skateparks. The map below reveals the locations of the skateparks used in this study:



As previously stated, both surveys were identical. Upon scanning the QR Code, the participant was met with a consent form that states that none of their identifying information would be released to the public and that the nature of the study is primarily academic. The first set of questions were used for demographics: age, ethnicity, gender, current city of residence, highest level of education, and estimation of income level. Next, they were asked questions designed to answer my research question such as: Do you skateboard? At what age did you start skateboarding? How many times do you visit a skatepark in a month (if COVID-19 has impacted your response for this answer, please state how many times you would visit a skatepark before restrictions occurred)? Would you still skate if you did not live near or have access to a skatepark? Do you consider a skatepark a safe space?

Some of these questions were answered with a response of “Yes” or “No,” while others required the subject to type in a number or name of a city/town (for their age, residency, monthly skatepark

visitation, etc.). Other questions asked the subject to choose between different scales or responses (income bracket, education level, etc.). At the end of the survey, respondents found an open-text box where they will have the opportunity to express any further thoughts they may have on the subject. The surveys were posted on December seventh and eighth, 2020, and remained open until January eighteenth, 2021.

Data/Findings

Overview

This study was conducted to determine the impacts that skateparks have on an individual's life in terms of social development. The study was formatted as a voluntary survey that was administered in two different ways: one form of accessibility was through a web link that was shared on various social media websites like Instagram and Twitter starting on January 7th at 2:00 P.M. PST. The second form was through scanning a physical QR code that was posted in and around seven skateparks in the Los Angeles County area. The images below are flyers that were placed at Crescenta Valley Skatepark and the final image comes from Chevy Skatepark:



These flyers were placed at all seven skateparks on December 11, 2020 starting at Crescenta Valley Skatepark at 8:50 A.M. The final flyers were placed at Garvanza Skatepark around 5:30 P.M. The strategy was to start at the furthest skatepark from me and my close friend and fellow skateboarder, Omtlanezi Lopez. We both live in Highland Park so we decided that the last park we visit should be the one closest

to us, that being Garvanza Skatepark. Both skatepark surveys, physical and web, were closed on January 23, 2021 at 5:00 P.M. Over the span of 43 days, the surveys aggregated 120 total responses over both mediums; 75 from the web and 45 from the physical copy.

Skater Participation

A cross examination of people who identify themselves as skateboarders shows that the majority of respondents are non-skaters. The figures below demonstrate that non-skaters answered the survey at higher rates than skaters both at skateparks and through the web. The skater to non-skater rate is about 2:5 meaning that skaters responded to the survey significantly less than non-skaters. This may be a result of not including other skatepark activities such as rollerblading, scooting, or BMXing. These people would not identify themselves as skateboarders but use the park in a similar way that skateboarders use it.

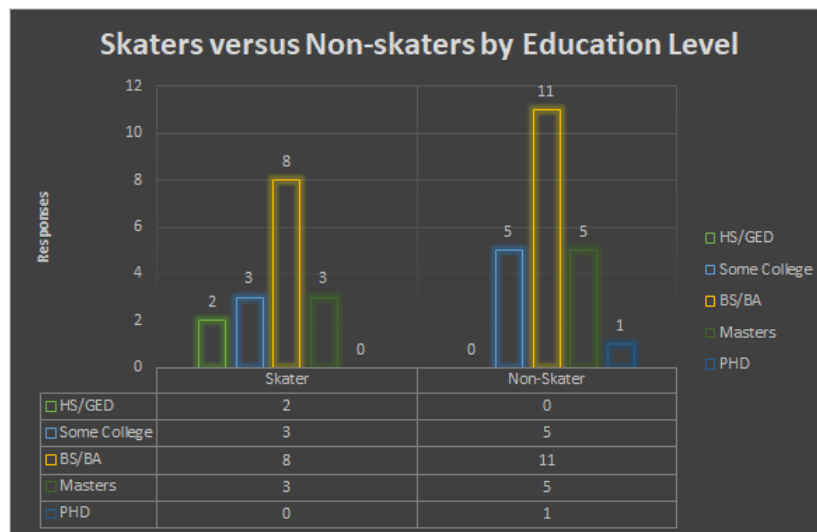


Figure A (Physical)

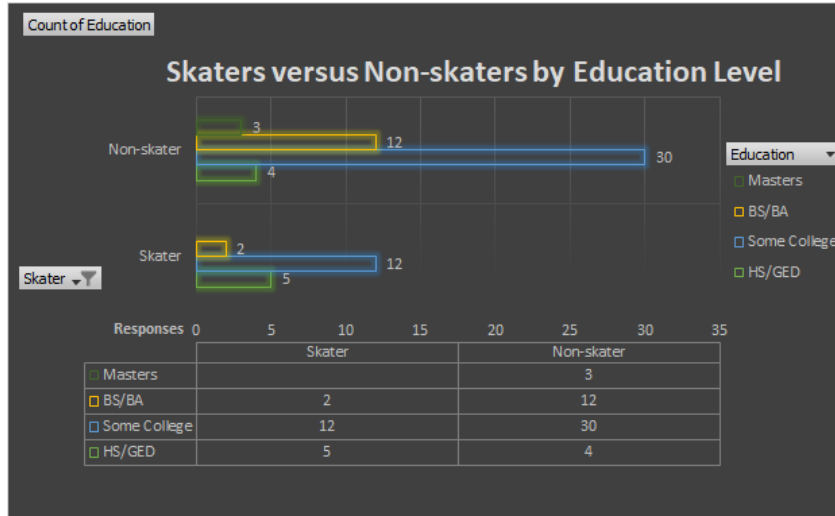


Figure B (Web)

In addition to the skater-response rate, a gender cross examination reveals that the majority of the survey respondents self-identify as male. See Figure C and D below:

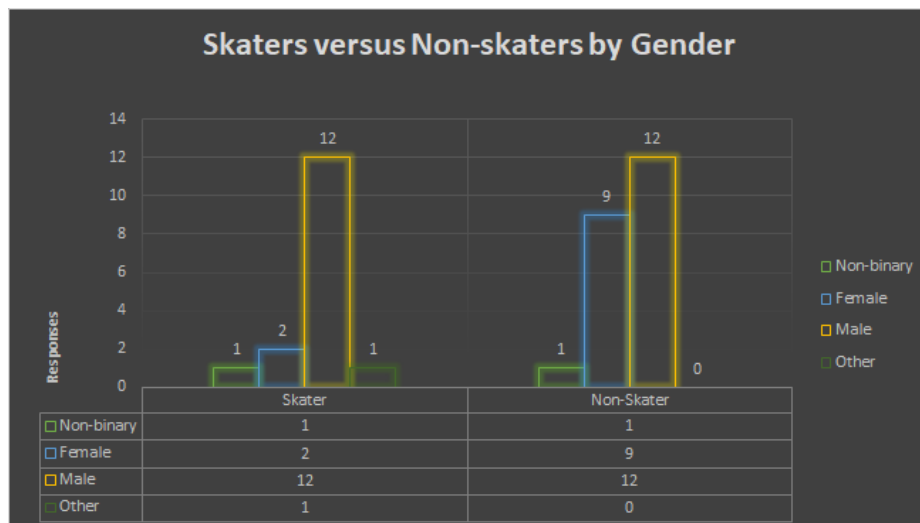


Figure C (Physical)

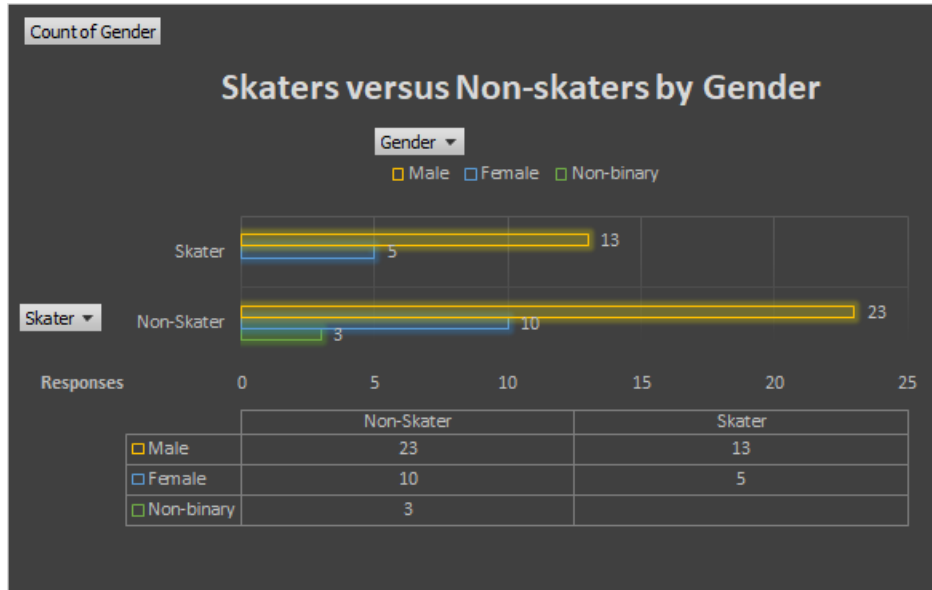


Figure D (Web)

Skatepark as a Safe Space

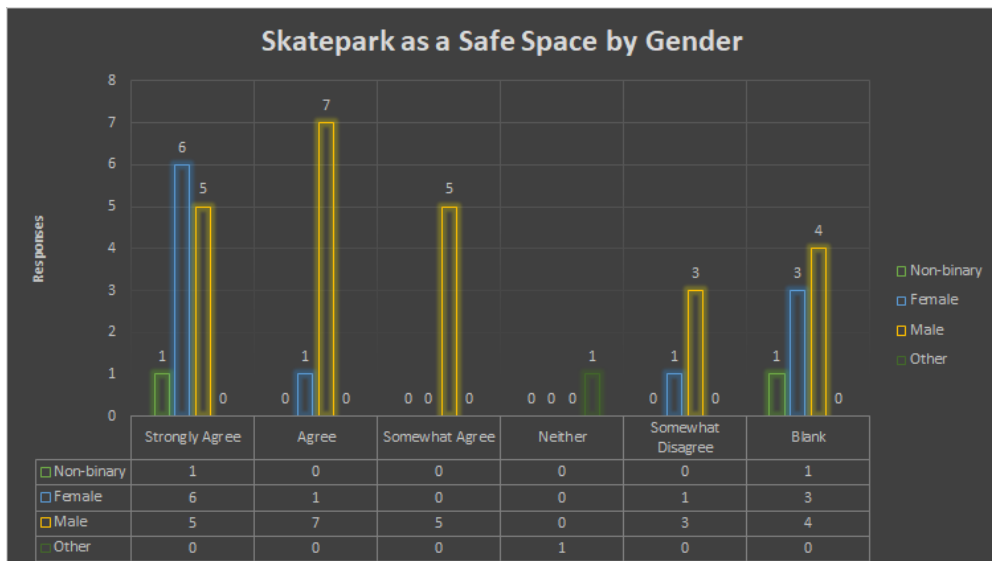


Figure E (Physical)

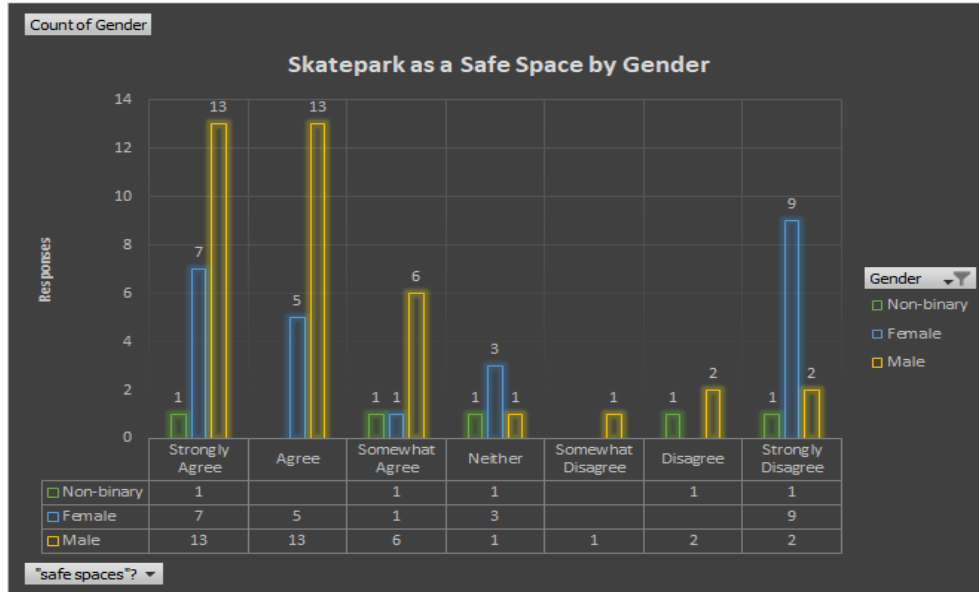


Figure F (Web)

Figures E and F display the ways in which the various genders perceive skateparks as safe spaces. Men overwhelmingly agree that skateparks act as safe spaces while women reported more of a variance with their perception of skateparks as safe spaces. Figure F illustrates that a large number of women actually strongly disagree with the notion of a skatepark acting as a safe space.

The final question of the survey was left as an optional space where respondents could express their remaining thoughts about skateparks. The words most used in the 27 comments left across both survey methods were “great,” “safe,” and “good for kids.”

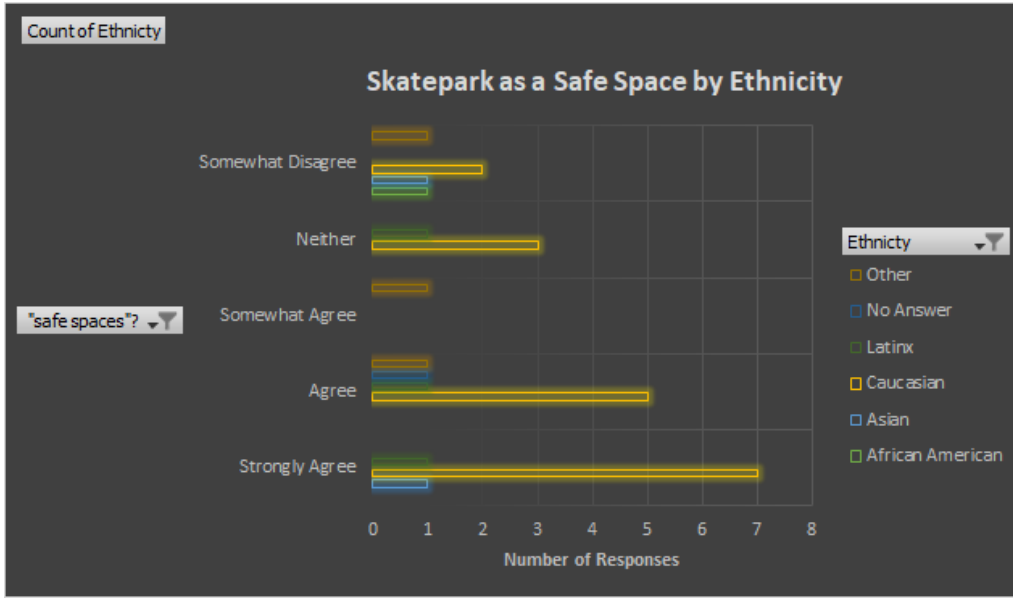


Figure G (Physical)

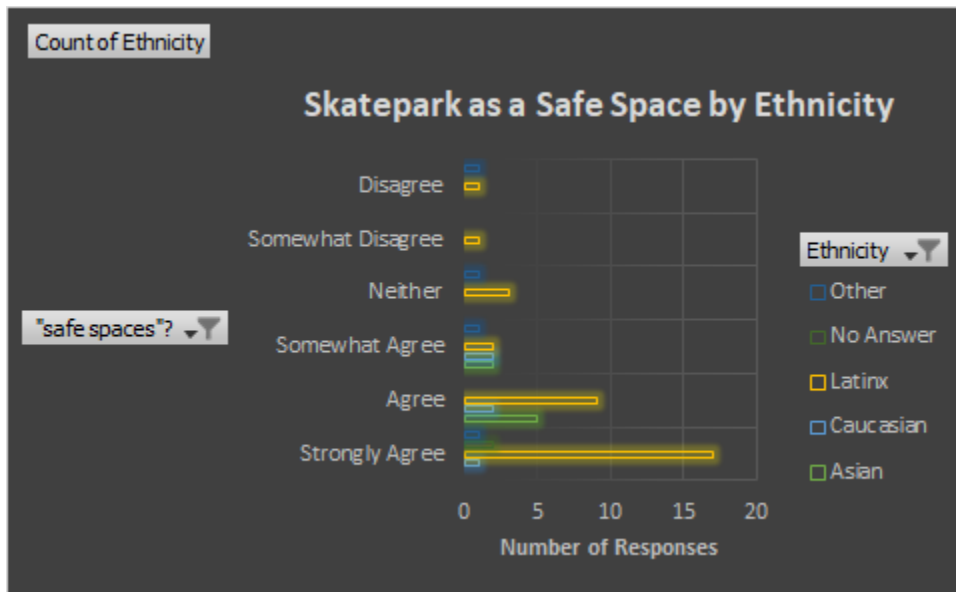


Figure H (Web)

Figures G and H highlight the different ways that people perceive skateparks based on their reported ethnicity. For the physical survey, Caucasians were the group that reported feeling the most safe at skateparks. Similarly, for the web survey, this demographic only reported that they agree with the idea of skateparks acting as safe spaces; not a single person in this demographic reported that they disagree with skateparks acting as safe spaces.

Analysis

I was completely surprised that the majority of respondents did not identify themselves as skateboarders. This was shocking because the survey revolves around the skater's domain, the skatepark. The survey was meant to attract skaters and non-skaters alike and it did just that, however the survey did not reach as many skateboarders as I would have hoped for. This may be attributed to complications experienced with the actual distribution of the physical surveys. Diamond Skate Plaza located in Hazard Park in Boyle Heights yielded absolutely no results while parks like Crescenta Valley had a large amount of support (see *Figure G* below). While at Diamond Skate Plaza, I was unable to post up the minimum seven flyers that I planned to post here because I ran out of tape after posting two flyers outside of the plaza. Had I placed flyers within the actual plaza, I might have been able to see better, or any, results. There were still 2 parks left so I could not afford to return to the park. In addition, I contracted the coronavirus one week after I posted the flyers so I could not return to the parks to add more flyers and to check on the preexisting ones out of safety for myself and others.

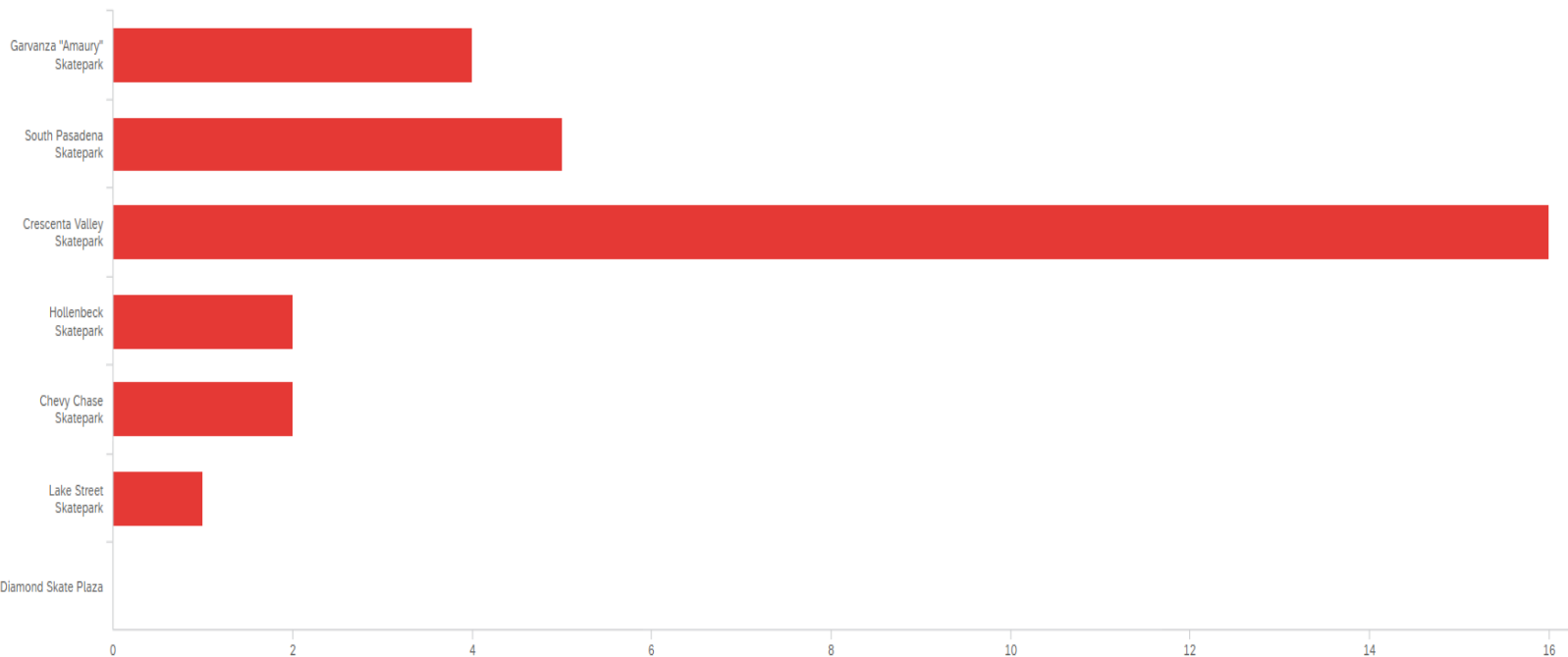


Figure G

Ultimately, it took about 2 weeks for the physical QR code surveys to gain some traction. The thought behind this was that repeated exposure to the flyers would eventually peak the interests of the parks' local skaters which would lead them into taking the survey. I can see two major improvements that would likely yield more results coming from the physical QR code. The first is returning to the skateparks to add more flyers or to replace missing flyers. The second improvement would be increasing the time that the survey was made available. As I mentioned previously, the physical survey benefitted from time so it's fair to assume that this would produce more responses.

Skateboarding is a white-male dominated sport and this can be seen by simply examining the results of both surveys. In all cross examinations, this group consistently reported feeling safe at the skatepark. I found the results of the web survey to be very illuminating because those who reported feeling unsafe at the skatepark were largely women and LGBTQ+ which is consistent with the other studies conducted about skateboarding.²³

Although the skateboarding industry preaches inclusivity and diversity, the reality is that this idea of diversity does not truly exist in skateboarding. If it did exist, there would not be a large number of people who feel unsafe using these spaces. In any field, the minority should not be ignored as they bring up many issues that, if addressed, could improve the field for everyone. Skateboarding has the potential to become the diverse sport that it preaches it is, if it can become more accessible to people of all backgrounds. Not just those who can afford skateboards or have easy access to good skateparks. I say "good" here because some skateparks are developed without the input of the community or actual skateboarders and the result is a park that is under-utilized because it's either too hard or too awkward to skate. Practically all skateparks are created through public efforts, therefore, the wealthier areas of a city tend to have better parks that were actually developed with the community. Skateboarding is a growing sport that many children participate in therefore we should attempt to create fully funded parks for the residents of those communities. People are overwhelmingly in favor of skateparks therefore it should be

²³ Wood, L. , Carter, M. and Martin, K. 2014. Dispelling Stereotypes... Skate Parks as a Setting for Pro-Social Behavior among Young People. *Current Urban Studies*, 2, 62-73.

accessible to all those who want to participate in it. This can start to change if skateboarding was allowed and encouraged at schools as a pastime. A small change like this can spark the change needed to destigmatize the criminality of skateboarding.

Policy Recommendations

To begin this reformative change, we must first develop a comprehensive plan for siting and developing skateparks. Creating this plan will standardize the procedures for creating skateparks which will make it easier for communities to construct a local skatepark. As it currently stands, the Department of Recreation of Parks of Los Angeles does not have a method for creating skateparks in the same way that they create public parks. This is counterintuitive because local trends indicate that skateboarding is the number one sport for the children of Los Angeles.²⁴ There needs to be adequate space to accommodate all new and existing skaters, otherwise skateboarders will turn towards street skating. The increasing integration of anti-skate architecture and design to the LA landscape does not solve the underlying problem of inadequate space for skateboarding. This type of architecture only encourages skateboarders to either skate a different street spot, destroy the skate-stoppers, or to skate the spot anyway which has only become more dangerous as a result of this new design. Regardless, the issue of vandalism is only spread throughout the county rather than being fully addressed.

The only way to address this issue is to face it, rather than discouraging the activity and punishing those who choose to do it. This may be accomplished by taking a similar approach that the city of Portland utilized in 2005.²⁵ They created a model for both siting and developing skateparks after deeply analyzing several existing skateparks in the city. This model was imperative to earning public support because the researchers (Fiore, Heinicke, Ragel, and Weigel) clearly indicated the most common negative perceptions of skateparks and explained why these perceptions are largely misconceptions that the general public has. These perceptions include: noise pollution, increase in crime, and increase in trash production. All three of these perceptions were shown to be false in reality when the researchers observed the parks in

²⁴ LA84. 2018. *#PlayForAll- The Movement 2018 Biennial Magazine*. LA84.Org.

²⁵ Fiore, E., Heinicke, S., Ragel, B., & Weigel, L. 2005. *The Urban Grind: Skateparks-Neighborhood Perceptions and Planning Realities*.

Portland for their research. Creating a similar model, except specific to Los Angeles, will ensure that there is an actual means for the city to develop skateparks. People who currently want a skatepark to be built in their neighborhood must bear the entire burden of development. It's up to the individual to earn the support of their community, however this isn't always enough. Projects that have enormous support in the form of petitions can still be shot down by the City Council or local government. That's why third-party organizations such as The Skatepark Project, formerly named the "Tony Hawk Foundation," aim to assist the public in the process of creating skateparks in their communities by providing grants exclusively for skateparks.²⁶

This comprehensive plan should include existing players to the industry because they already have experience with skatepark construction. For example, the City of Los Angeles could contract development firms, such as California Skateparks, to construct these parks. California Skateparks has been operational since 1998 and the last park they made in Los Angeles was the El Sereno skatepark in 2019. Not only should this plan include existing industry players, but it must also include the community's input during the siting and development phases. These parks are meant to be for the community, therefore they must be included within the conversation.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine the social impacts that skateparks have on an individual's life. To conduct this study, 2 surveys were conducted on Qualtrics: one survey was distributed through online forums such as Instagram and Twitter and the other was posted in and around seven skateparks throughout Los Angeles County. These surveys were available to the public from December 7, 2020 to January 18, 2021.

It was very interesting to see the amount of non-skaters who accessed the survey. They ended up outnumbering the people who identified themselves as skateboarders in both the web and physical surveys. Although I was looking to mainly get the perspective of skateboarders and non-skateboarders, I failed to address the different action sports that can be practiced at a skatepark such as rollerblading,

²⁶ The Skatepark Project. 2020, July 2. *About*.

BMXing, or scooting. People from all of these categories use the skatepark in a similar fashion to the skateboarders, so it would have been a good decision to add an answer that reads “I am not a skateboarder, but I participate in other activities at the skatepark such as BMXing, scooting, rollerblading, etc.” Although they are not skateboarders, they are equally reliant on the public space and are very often the minority at the skatepark. Places like Garvanza Skatepark have special times dedicated for people who BMX so that they do not conflict with the skaters. Moreover, parks like Crescenta Valley skatepark completely outlaw BMXing but are fine with all other activities. Therefore, these minority sub-groups may experience the same issues that skateboarding experiences, but to a greater extent. If a skater doesn’t have a place to go skate, then the person who rides BMX will surely not have a place to do that activity. The issue of space is exacerbated once examined through this perspective.

In all cases, users of the skatepark are overwhelmingly supportive of the space. They feel that the skatepark allows them to meet new people and form positive relationships with others and their environment. People who use the skatepark utilize the space throughout many stages of their lives therefore they are hugely influenced by the other people who use the space, as well as by the events that transpire there. The importance of the skatepark as a public space for a diverse range of people is greatly overlooked. This is a place where people of all genders, incomes, and cultures can meet to engage in the same activity. In this way, the skatepark serves as a melting pot that breaks barriers for the sake of a common interest. Like other aspects of our society, it’s not a perfect space and not all groups feel the most comfortable or safe. In spite of this discomfort, these people still return to the skatepark or simply look for a new one. The importance with this activity is that people do not simply walk away from it after a bad experience. They continue to engage with the activity and the space; not because they have to but because they choose to. Allowing skateboarding culture to expand by creating new skateparks and allowing for easier access to these parks and equipment can only bring more diversity to the space. Diversity allows for inclusivity to reach even the most remote areas of our country. It would be ignorant to disregard the importance of skateparks as public spaces when planning recreational sites for any given community.

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