Beyond the Board:
Skateboarding, Schools, and Society

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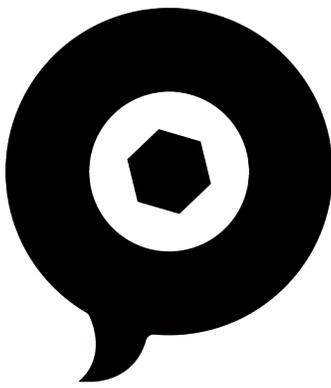
Skateboarding, widely popular and often misunderstood, occupies a unique space in US society. Despite skateboarding's popularity little is known about the effects of skateboarding on youth and their educational and career trajectories. In what follows, we outline the current landscape of skateboarding at this socio-historical moment in time—prior to skateboarding's debut in the 2020 Olympics. We also describe this study's approach to learning more about skateboarders in U.S. society.

This report is the first step in a multi-phase study funded by the Tony Hawk Foundation and conducted by researchers from the University of Southern California's (USC) Pullias Center for Higher Education and Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. The study explores how skateboarders between the ages of 13 and 25 viewed their skill sets and examined the implications skateboarding has on their education and careers. The study design centers on youth who are passionate about skateboarding—including skateboarders who integrated into thriving skateboard communities and those who might feel disenfranchised from the skateboard community or the community at large. By gaining a deeper understanding of the complexity of skateboard ecosystems, research findings aim to inform skateboarding scholarship and practice.

The audience for this white paper is broader than skateboarding and action sports communities. Our intention is to highlight the unique perspectives of skateboarders in ways that resonate with academic, policymaker, and practitioner audiences.

WHAT WE KNOW

Profile of Skateboarders in the United States

Skateboarding participation varies among gender, age, ethnicity, and geographic locations. A nation-wide skateboarding survey conducted by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA)[1] reports that according to 2017 survey data, there are slightly over 6.3 million skateboarders in the United States, the majority of whom are between the ages of 6-17 (approximately 3.4 million), with 1.3 million between the ages of 18-24 and 1.7 million over the age of 25.

Rates of participation in skateboarding have varied over the years. Figure 1 illustrates skateboarding trends captured by the Outdoor Foundation (2017)[2] between 2006 through 2017.

Figure 1. Changes in Skateboarding Participation from 2006 through 2017.

Number of participants in skateboarding in the United States from 2006 to 2017 (in millions)
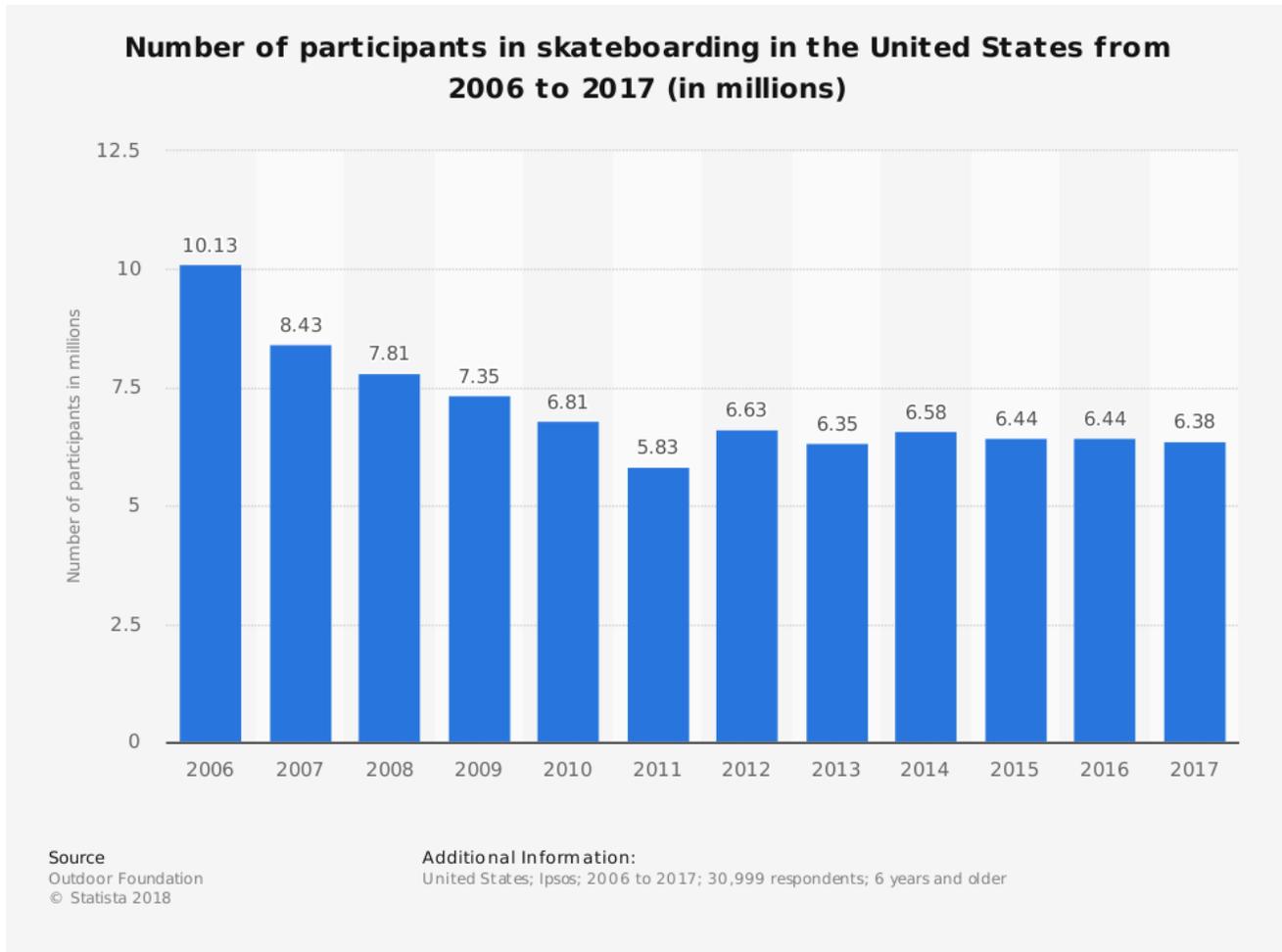
Types of skaters and frequency of participation

The SFIA differentiates between skateboarders based on the frequency of participation. Accordingly, a skateboarding participant is defined as anyone engaged in the sport more than one time per year. A core/frequent skateboarder is someone who skateboards more than 26 times a year, while a casual/occasional skateboarder is someone who skateboards between 1 and 25 times per year.[3] This distinction is important when examining how youth view the role skateboarding plays in their lives.

Locations

According to the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA)[4] and skateboarding scholar Iain Borden[5], the top international skateboarding cities are Barcelona, Berlin, Los Angeles, Guangzhou, San Francisco, Brasilia, Melbourn, Copenhagen, Moscow, and Mar Del Plata. Figure 2 illustrates where skateboarders are most commonly found in the United States.[6] Concentrations of skateboarders correlate with the U.S. population. For example, in rural fringe areas, there are fewer skateboarders. Weather also influences the number of skateboarders in a region and how frequently they are able to skateboard.

The Tony Hawk Foundation estimates there are roughly 3,500 skateparks in the United States. They also estimate these parks meet the needs of one-third of skateboarders in the country.[7] Skateparks are located both indoors and outdoors and are generally available for public use, although some do charge for access. Since the start of skatepark construction, roughly 40 years ago, skateparks have been uniquely designed to facilitate a wide range of riding experiences.

For example, some skateparks are designed with elements that skateboarders encounter within the the urban environment such as benches, handrails, and other elements based on urban architecture. Others skateparks are designed based on transition or ramp skating and include a range of structures based on different ramp sizes (quarter pipes, mini or small ramps , vertical and mega or colossal-sized), bowls (structures based on backyard pool configurations) and on occasion, full-pipes. Skate parks tend to serve as social gathering spaces for youth and often do not include the oversight of a fixed authority figure or coach. Consequently, skateparks provide a unique space for incubating social bonds.[8]

While the structure of skateparks creates social gathering opportunities for skateboarders, many skateboarders also spend significant time skateboarding in unstructured environments, such as on streets or in parking lots. These locations facilitate different types of skateboarding experiences and social interactions.

Figure 2. Concentrations of Skateboarders Across the United States

Regions
- (1.1M) Pacific and Middle Atlantic
- (0.9M) South Atlantic
- (0.7M) East North Central
- (0.6M) West South Central
- (0.4M) Mountain
- (0.3M) West North Central
- (0.2M) New England and East South Central
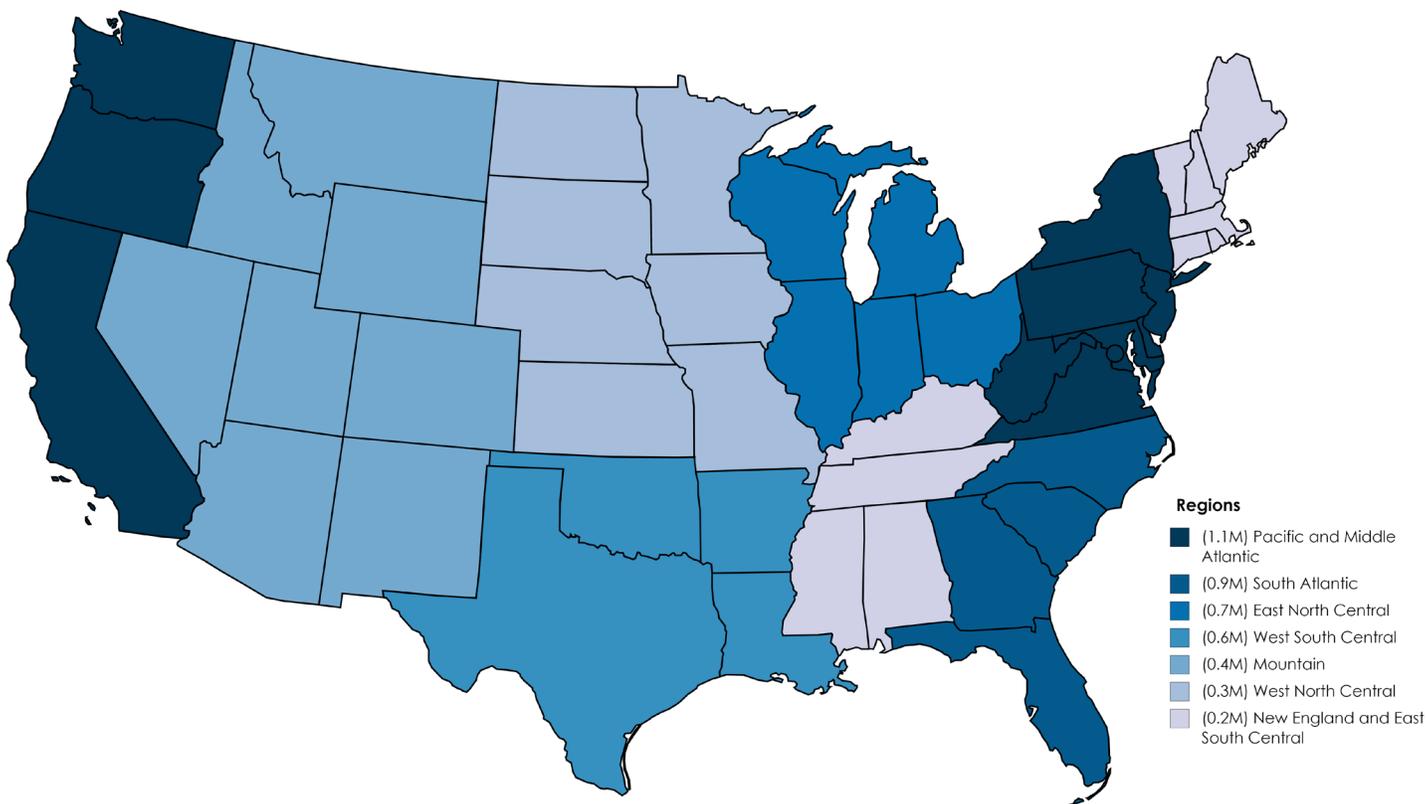
Gender

While the number of male and female participants varies from year to year, according to SFIA 2017 survey data, male participants accounted for roughly 4.6 million skateboarders, while female participation was noted at approximately 1.7 million. In that same report, SFIA highlighted that 77.8 percent of males and 22.2 percent of females who completed the survey identified as core/frequent (more than 26 times a year) skateboarders.

Race

In addition, the SFIA's *Single Sport Participation Report* provides valuable data on skateboarders by race. Of the roughly 6.3 million skateboarders in the U.S., the majority of skateboarders self-identified as White. Table 1 below illustrates how the racial demographics of skateboarders compare to the overall U.S. population.[9]

Table 1. Skateboarding Participation based on Race

U.S.Census Race Distribution				
Caucasian 62%	African American 12.3 %	Latino/a 17.3%	Asian/Pacific Islander 5.4%	Other 3%
Skateboarder Race Distribution (Self-Identified)				
Caucasian 76 %	African American 11 %	Latino/a 8 %	Asian/Pacific Islander 4%	Other 1%

Early Scholarship on Skateboarding

In this next section, we offer a condensed version of the literature which informs this research study. While the origins of skateboarding are said to be sometime in the 1950s,[10] the academic scholarship focused on skateboarding arrives over four decades later. Preliminary academic research focused on whether the skateboarding "subculture" represented post-modern sport, or rather an alternative or oppositional approach to the team and performance-based narrative which dominated U.S. sports.[11] This first foray into understanding what skateboarding might be promptly shifted towards examinations of who might be left out of this activity. Early scholarship focused on defining skateboarders' core-values and revealed difficulties in attaining gender-parity.[12] Much of early skateboarding scholarship focused on women and young girls' representations and investigations into the of lives of women involved and interested in skateboarding culture.[13]

As the popularity of skateboarding grew exponentially in the U.S., envisioning skateboarding solely through the lens of "subculture theory" became problematic. While both local practitioners and the industry insiders who formed the skateboarding cottage-shed industry (largely those with a history and physical connection to the culture) still claimed to adhere to skateboarding's

individual ethos and D-I-Y [Do It Yourself] aesthetic,[14] the lure of skateboarding's lucrative youth market eventually evoked the attention of mass media.[15] Fear of missing out on the popular youth demographic enticed mainstream sporting culture and mass media to attempt to incorporate skateboarding into an "extreme" category of sport.[16] These sports (e.g., BMX, snowboarding, motocross, parkour, surfing, etc.) are now more popularly referred to as "action sports"[17] or "lifestyle sports"[18] by some scholars.

The creation of mega-events, such as the X Games by ESPN, stemmed directly from strategies to capitalize on the popularity of action sports.[19] This approach attempted to make skateboarding fit into the mold of traditional sports viewership. Mainstream sports media attempted to create heroes and rivals artifically. Traditional media outlets often presented exaggerated narratives of "quests for X Games gold medals" to insert a mainstream sports narrative atop skateboarding's more nuanced approach towards cooperative competition to create an easily digestible media product.[20] Rinehart (2000) was particularly aware of how the interests of mainstream sports media might negatively impact or consume an activity largely based on a DIY individual perspective. During the interim, Borden[21] provided a new lens for understanding the consumption of skateboarding, offering the first academic analysis focused on the manner skateboarders consume urban space and the politics of their use of the city. Ocean Howell[22] rebuffed Borden's focus on a one-way exchange between skateboarders and the city, offering that mega-events like X-Games thrive on cities and spaces skateboarders popularize. This ongoing discussion about skateboarding's "alternative" ethos and trajectory continue to be both parallel and perpendicular to traditional sports narratives.[23] This tension is particularly evident in skateboarders' push back against inclusion in the Olympics due to sentiments that these mega-events are not in line with skateboarding culture[24] and how an Olympic sport narrative may interfere with, or run counter to, skateboarding's history of diversity.[25]

While competitions are frequently an element of skateboarding culture, these congregations largely emphasize the event for the sake of growing community rather than simply "crowning" a victor. For example, the *Thrasher* "Skater of the Year" title is one of the most coveted in skateboarding culture. The Skater of the Year coronation represents the accolades of a skateboarder's output of excellence in technical prowess but also celebrates what a skateboarder's individuality adds to the fabric of skateboarding culture.

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Photo credit: Neftalie Williams

Where this Study Fits into Existing Research

The *Beyond the Board* study is designed to contribute to the body of literature which focuses on understanding the way young people understand and incorporate skateboarding culture into their daily lives and future plans[26]—and how they build their identity around skateboarding culture.[27]

The research operates from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective,[28] which compels researchers to center the stories of people of color. As such, the study prioritizes the perspectives of skateboarders from historically marginalized communities—with regards to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Previous skateboarding scholarship largely focused on the voices of white male participants and did not include a large sample of people of color.[29] Other studies incorporating race relied on "readings" of race and racial formations[30] through the eyes of white scholars interpreting skateboarding culture. These scholarly works have inadvertently privileged a white-world view by focusing on limited niche media representations,[31] popular media portrayals *(Lords of Dogtown*, and the *Z-Boys* documentary)*,[32] and through video games media designed for popular consumption,[33] without examining the nuanced history of people of color in skateboarding[34].

Relatedly, we have approached the study from an assets-based perspective. To be sure, there are problematic elements of skateboarding culture—and many skateboarders face challenges while seeking education and employment. The study's research design, however, draws from and builds onto the concept of cultural funds of knowledge[35] and consequently highlights the cultural practices and routines that skateboarders incorporate into their lives, inside and outside of skateboarding.

The study is also informed by social capital theory[36] in order to analyze how skateboarders access resources and who they rely on for support in various facets of their lives, not solely skateboarding. Various forms of capital have exchange value in our society—economic, human, social, cultural, among others. The value of capital is dependent on context and actors. The study is designed to tease out the elements of *skate capital* that skateboarders believe have value in their lives. Understanding this concept will be helpful to programs seeking to capitalize on skateboarders' interests and strengths when developing programs to support skateboarding youth.

Finally, the study responds to an active call made by scholar Rinehart[37] for "insider" scholarship, meaning creating scholarship which is born from an insider perspective of someone within the culture (in this case skater-scholar Neftalie Williams) to help accurately translate the nuances to those without access to the culture.

Manifestations of Skateboarding in Society

While skateboarding equipment and hardware are fairly consistent across contexts (i.e., deck, trucks, wheels, grip), the supporting resources that propel skateboarding forward as an accessible, empowering, and sustainable activity have evolved over time and differ according to context.

A key goal of this study is to understand the ways skateboarders navigate broader society. In the section that follows, we provide a snapshot of current organizations, businesses, cultural events, and creative projects that embed principles of skateboarding into existing social structures and institutions. We aim to provide a mechanism for thinking about how skateboarding and skateboarders interface with society.

Skateboarding for physical and mental health.
General aerobic exercise has been shown as an effective treatment for medical (e.g., diabetes, low back pain) and psychiatric conditions (e.g., depression).[38] Capitalizing on these principles of exercise therapy, skateboarding is used formally and informally by individuals, groups, and organizations for physical, mental, and socio-cultural healing.

Anecdotes and stories about skating as life-saving are common among professional, amateur, and casual skateboarders, emphasizing themes such as the cultivation of curiosity, play, focus on self-set goals, and empowerment through incremental forward progress without (and sometimes in spite of) encouragement from adult authority figures. In a conversation about skateboarding as emotional therapy, Pete Whitley and Alec Beck[39] discuss the constant presence of "failure" in skateboarding, such that it eventually becomes a non-issue, blending into the motivation to continue to move forward. Other instances of skateboarding as a healing force are spearheaded by individuals, such as veteran Blair Benefield, whose journey across New Zealand raised awareness of PTSD and depression.[40] DGK's *Saved by Skateboarding* initiative epitomizes channeling skateboarding for good—as does the outreach in East L.A. by the *Garage Board Shop*.[41]

For some, skateboarding can take on a more formal role in physical and mental healing. Organizations, such as *A.skate Foundation*,[42] use skateboarding as "a form of Occupational Therapy focusing on vestibular, proprioceptive, and motor skills as

well as social and behavioral therapy." Canada's Hull Services finds that skateboarding is an accessible activity that supports the Neurosequential Model framework of working with at-risk children and healing trauma-related challenges.[43]

For others, skateboarding is a means to promote socio-cultural healing and connection within communities. In many instances, societal shunning and historical segregation have taken its toll on America's indigenous cultures, manifesting in disproportionate rates of suicide.[44] For the Oglala Lakota of the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, skateboarding not only connects the youth to Native cultural values of mind, body, and spiritual health, but the presence of a world-class skatepark is a recognized and legitimized space for Native and non-Native skateboarders to come together. The skatepark is viewed as an important component to their community's response to teen suicide.[45]

Skateboarding as a vehicle for skill-building.
Dedicated resources to promote skateboarding as a skilled activity involve programming and maintaining spaces to develop, explore, practice, and advance in the mechanics of individual skateboarding.

Camp Woodward,[46] established in 1970, offers four sleepaway camps with a focus on action sports and has been recognized as one of the first spaces offering specific programming on skateboarding. At Woodward, youth have access to an immersive experience with specialized instruction and space for all levels of skateboard progression as well as opportunities to build social capital by navigating new relationships with other youth campers, adult staff, and visiting professional skateboarders. Since then, other options have emerged to provide opportunities for skills development, notably Skate Camp hosted by the *Visalia YMCA*[47] established in the mid-1980s and Michigan's *PLUS Skate Camp* that has been operating for the past 19 years. The 2000s saw a proliferation of hundreds of local and specialized skateboard camps, and in the past ten years, digital photography and videography have emerged as popular co-existing programming.

Skateboarding competitions for showcasing skills.
Competitions serve to showcase and provide "objective" evaluations of talent. While no official accreditation organization currently exists to regulate skateboard programming quality or set benchmarks for professional levels of skills, national skateboard competitions have evolved to legitimize skateboarding as a highly skilled activity. As previously mentioned, in 1995, the first *X Games* were held to recognize objectively skilled performance in skateboarding complete with medals and prizes.[48] Since then, additional competitions have been recognized or developed to serve as qualifiers for the X Games and the upcoming Olympics. For example, since 2010, *Street League Skateboarding*[49] has been critical in establishing partnerships with other organizations to move towards a global qualification system for major skateboard competitions. The annual *EXPOSURE* women's benefit event[50] is one of the largest professional and amateur competitions that is female-centric and overtly gender-inclusive, providing a pathway for national and international recognition of skateboarding skills. Inclusion of skateboarding in the 2020 Olympics also serves to increase and support awareness of skateboarding as a specialized physical skill with at least one defined pathway to professional status.

Skateboarding in education.

Historically, there was no space for skateboarding in education. However, as its popularity grew, forward-thinking educators, schools, and districts began to see paths for integration. The first wave of skateboarding in the K-12 space has been utilized as a credit-earning alternative to Physical Education. Formal organizations, such as Skate Pass,[51] established in 2006, have gained popularity for their ability to provide equipment and to facilitate in-school and after-school skateboard programs. The *National Scholastic Skateboarding League*[52] (NSSL), started in 2010, was one of the only school-sanctioned, non-profit organizations dedicated to middle and high school skateboarding teams in southern California.[53] The NSSL provided legitimacy for schools and teams to secure funding, and also absorbed the liability attached to many non-traditional action sports. While the organization dissolved in 2016, high school skateboarding teams continue to draw interest. For example, *San Pasqual High School* in California recently launched a skateboarding team supported by the federally-funded ASSET grant.[54] The first high school built around a functional skatepark, *Bryggeriets Gymnasium*, located in Malmö, Sweden, has offered students a traditional curriculum, in addition to programs on skateboarding, serial drawing, free art, and photography/film since 2006.[55] International programs, such as *Skateistan*,[56] use skateboarding as the hook to engage youth and bring them into safe spaces for learning. In the U.S., articulated curriculum for STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics) education utilizing skateboarding is currently available[57] and a variety of agencies administer skate-based programming with varying frequencies, intensities, goals, and results.

Photo credit: Tony Hawk Foundation

In postsecondary education, integrations of skateboarding go beyond the physical activity. In support of higher education, the *College Skateboarding Educational Foundation* (CSEF)[58] provides academic scholarships to skateboarders pursuing college/ university or institutional training. The University of Southern California regularly offers a course called *Skateboarding and Action Sports in Business, Media and Culture*. And, in 2018, Pushing Boarders,[59] the first skateboarding-focused academic conference was held in the United Kingdom, addressing topics such as the history of skateboarding in academia and race and gender in skateboarding.

Skateboarding for employment.

Employment opportunities in the skateboarding industry have moved beyond being a "professional" skateboarder and owning a skateboard production company or skateboard shop. While these opportunities comprise the core of the skateboarding industry, due to the highly competitive nature of the small field, not everyone can be a professional skateboarder—and few are willing/able to take the financial risk of opening a business. Despite the advancement of organizations built to recognize skateboarding as a skilled activity, codified regulations for compensation of skateboarding at a professional level are non-existent. Being a "professional" skateboarder is financially sustained through a combination of product and organizational sponsorships. Health insurance and job security are benefits that few skateboarders receive, and many who want to work in skateboarding find employment in other peripheral industries.

The breadth of jobs in the skateboarding industry is more apparent and accessible than ever before. For example, skateboard-specific jobs include team manager, product development (i.e., handling production of boards/wheels to meet team requirements), or working at one of the many formal skateboard camps and programs. And, while there's no specific blueprint for gaining

Photo credit: Tony Hawk Foundation

entry into the skateboard industry,[60] with many industry insiders citing the importance of social capital (i.e., who you know), interested people can often find opportunities to transfer skills in photography, filmmaking, graphic design, marketing, sales, and business to work with national, local, and small-scale skateboard-specific companies or apparel/footwear companies with a skateboard division (e.g., Nike, Adidas). Beyond working for someone else, skateboarding still maintains a DIY and entrepreneurial attitude towards hard goods, soft goods, and associated cultural products (e.g., videos), with social media making it easier than ever to bypass traditional channels of exposure.

Additionally, *Malakye.com*[61] is an action sports, employment-oriented website, connecting potential employees and businesses. The site offers a legitimized inventory of available employment opportunities and access to companies interested in candidates with extensive knowledge in skateboarding. Not only can anyone look at the variety of available positions, but they can also seek guidance on relevant educational or experiential paths to become competitive candidates for the future. Other skateboard-related employment niches (e.g., *The Skate Exchange*)[62] are emerging and include skate tourism in the form of guided skateboard tours domestically and internationally.

Skateboarding and the nonprofit sector.

From its inception, skateboarding has thrived on a grassroots DIY ethos, which is also the case for skateboarding nonprofits and foundations. Since the early 2000s, the *Tony Hawk Foundation*[63] and the *Street League Skateboarding Foundation*[64] (formally associated with the Rob Dyrdek Foundation) have been dedicated to making skateboarding more accessible across the U.S. by facilitating and advocating for the building of safe physical spaces for skating. Many of those parks then foster the creation of localized skateboarding non-profits that leverage skateboarders' self-representation on a local level.

Innoskate, a partnership between the Smithsonian's Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation and leaders in the skateboarding world, is dedicated to research and programming designed to explore the link between skateboarding, creativity, and innovation.[65] The LA84 Foundation's *Skateboarding Non-Profit Summit*[66], held in 2016, brought together multiple skateboarding NGOs, such as *Stoked*[67] and *Next Up Foundation*,[68] to discuss "the rise of diversity in the skateboarding populace and how skateboarding represents a new way to empower minoritized and underserved communities."

Other skateboarding-related nonprofits recognize social, cultural, and health benefits for youth. As one example, the *Harold Hunter Foundation*'s mission[69] is to "use skateboarding as a vehicle to provide underserved youth with valuable life experiences that nurture individual creativity, resourcefulness, and the development of life skills." Internationally, *Skateistan* serves youth (ages 5-17) "with a focus on girls, children living with a disability, and children from low-income backgrounds" and believes that "positive social change happens when children are educated on how to take care of themselves and their communities."[70]

Skateboarding for cultural diplomacy and youth advocacy.

Skateboarders and skateboarding advocates are increasingly using their voice for civic and political engagement. One of this study's lead researchers, Neftalie Williams, has traveled extensively in the capacity of a cultural diplomat, using skateboarding as a tool to connect with other cultures.[71] In an official capacity with the U.S. State Department, skateboarding was used as a bridge to help young Syrian refugees transition to their new home country. The University of Southern California now offers

a class focused on skateboarding as a tool for social change, community building, civic engagement, and public diplomacy. Another organization, *Cuba Skate*, builds bridges between Cuban and U.S. youth. The 2020 Olympics hold the potential to bolster skateboarding as a cultural diplomatic tool.

The *Tony Hawk Foundation*'s approach to advocating for and funding skateparks in communities across the U.S. is contingent on youth advocacy.[72] Skateboarders approach the Foundation with an application to build a skate park in their community and become responsible for brokering support from community leaders and business advocates. During the process, the youth learn how to advocate for their needs in formal and informal settings.

Skateboarding as vehicle for storytelling.

Skateboarding is now roughly 60 years old.[73] Throughout that time, art, visual media, and documentaries have been vital to skateboarding's cultural narrative. While many of these cultural artifacts were made by skateboarders for skateboarders, notable representations of the evolution of skateboarding history and culture, such as Stacy Peralta's *Dogtown* and *Z-Boys*[74] have captivated and educated mainstream audiences. More recently, we've seen a proliferation of outward facing, cultural reflections on skateboarding.

Skateboarding partnerships with cultural institutions, such as *Finding a Line* at the Kennedy Center and *The Nation Skate* at Los Angeles' Ford Theater, brought skateboarding into traditional theater spaces and garnered attention from theater-goers who most likely had never ridden a skateboard. These events offered the audience the opportunity to take in films, art, music, discussions, and an exhibition all revolving around skateboarding.

Photo credit: Tony Hawk Foundation

Although Jonah Hill's *Mid90s*[75] fictional film saw limited release in the U.S. and Canada, the portrayal of skateboarding culture as complex and life-altering is one that resonated with both skateboarders and non-skateboarders who saw themselves in the characters. Bing Liu's award-winning, Oscar-nominated documentary, *Minding the Gap*,[76] explores issues of abuse, racism, and financial insecurity through a personal lens of two friendships over twelve years. Within the film, skateboarding happens to be the activity that brings them all together and allows for a close relationship, opening up the door for a deeper reflection on society. Other notable films or series that face the mainstream audiences include: Viceland's *Post-Radical*,[77] an exploration and reflection on skateboarding subcultures; Crystal Moselle's *Skate Kitchen*,[78] a fictional film following an all-girl skateboard crew in New York City; and Charlie Samuel's *Virgin Blacktop,*[79] a coming-of-age story, filmed over the course of decades about a group of friends who remain connected through their love of skateboarding.

Beyond major films and theatre-style events, informal storytelling has become an integral component of skateboard culture. By posting videos—often with soundtracks—on various social media platforms, skateboarders craft and promote their own stories without relying on external media agencies or being concerned about the scrutiny of anyone but their peers.

WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

Overview of the study

The last decade has seen an increase in attention paid to skateboarding in scholarly circles as well as film, media, and public policy. Historically, research on skateboarding has focused on investigations of commercialization, identity and representational politics, and spatial politics.[80] This study is designed to better understand how individuals are impacted by skateboarding and how communities across the U.S. interact with skateboarders. Anchored in the perspectives of skateboarding youth themselves, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- How does skateboarding identity affect the way skateboarders think about their educational and career pathways?
- How do other identities (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) intersect with skateboard identity?
- What skills do skateboarders believe they obtain through skateboarding and skateboard culture?
- What are potential ways to convert skate capital into educational and career opportunities?
- What challenges do skateboarders face as individuals? As part of a skateboard community? And as part of a larger community?
- What resources or opportunities elude low-income youth skateboarders? And skateboarders from minoritized backgrounds?

The study is intended to ascertain what youth believe they gain from skateboarding, as well as identify the challenges skateboarders face in their educational and career pathways. We hope that findings enrich the way that schools, nonprofits, industry, and communities better serve their skateboarding constituents.

Photo credit: Eric Lindberg

Study Design

The *Beyond the Board* study is designed to capture a snapshot of skateboarders across the U.S. as well as collect in-depth stories of skateboarding youth in distinct regions of the country. The study involves four phases:

Phase I: National Survey of Skateboard Youth - Round 1

To outline the unique skills, mindsets, and approaches of skateboarders and to ascertain the challenges they face beyond skateboarding, we administered a survey to skateboarders across the U.S. between October and December, 2018. A team of researchers and evaluators developed survey questions to respond to the overarching research questions guiding the study; questions were informed by critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory. Survey questions were vetted by experts from the field of skateboarding and piloted with high school and college students who skateboard.

We relied on social media and directed outreach to nonprofits serving skateboarders to disseminate the survey. Dissemination partners included: the Tony Hawk Foundation, Thrasher Magazine, Element Skateboards, among others.

The respondent pool was self-selecting. In other words, a respondent chose to begin and interact with the survey. Consequently, we recognize the responses are not generalizable to the entire skateboard population in the U.S. Of 3,124 initial survey respondents, 1,237 fit into the study's target population: skateboarders between 13-25.

The survey will enable the research team to provide an initial description of skateboarders in 2018 and determine the sorts of "wraparound" services they need. Importantly, responses to the survey inform the second phase of the study: regional case studies.

Phase II: Comparative case studies

To add nuance to survey data and statistical analyses, the second phase of the research design involves comparative case studies in five distinct locations. Case studies highlight the lives of skateboarders experience beyond skateboarding. Besides documenting the positive ways skateboarding and skateboard culture impact youth, we also explore the challenges youth face in moving toward adulthood, and the types of services that might improve their educational and career options.

Case studies include interviews of 100 skateboarders (across groups and identities). Additionally, we interviewed skateboard shop owners and representatives from law enforcement, school districts, city council, and parks and recreation in each region in order to build a sense of the unique skateboard ecosystems in each area. Analysis of case studies will highlight similarities and differences across geographic regions.

Phase III: National Survey of Skateboard Youth – Round 2

Building upon lessons learned through the first administration of the survey and the case studies, we will disseminate a revised survey to a national audience during the spring of 2019. To the extent possible, a comparison group of non-skateboarders also will also be surveyed in each case study region to gauge the differences between the two groups.

Phase IV: Dissemination of findings

We will be sharing findings with a broad range of stakeholders at the culmination of each research phase. In the meantime, to stay updated with study progress, please follow us at:

⊡ @uscskatestudy
🌐 pullias.usc.edu/skate
✉ pullias@usc.edu

Endnotes

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About the Tony Hawk Foundation

A charitable, non-profit organization, the Tony Hawk Foundation was established in 2002 by its namesake, professional skateboarder Tony Hawk. THF promotes and provides advocacy training and funds for high-quality public skateparks in low-income areas throughout the United States and to international programs that enrich the lives of youth through skateboarding. Domestically, the Foundation's Skatepark Grant program has awarded over $7.9-million to 611 communities in all 50 States. The Foundation focuses on working with local officials and grassroots, community-based organizations that plan to hire designers and contractors with strong experience designing and building skateparks.

About the Pullias Center for Higher Education

One of the world's leading research centers on higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education advances innovative, scalable solutions to improving educational opportunities for students from historically marginalized communities. The mission of the Pullias Center is to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political and economic issues.