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Let's Talk Skateboarding: An Ethnographic Investigation of Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Characteristics in the Skateboarding Community

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Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Characteristics in
The Skateboarding Community

Honors Thesis
Presented to the Honors College of Salisbury University
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Abstract

The means in which skateboarders communicate with each other can be appealing and even somewhat fascinating to those both within the community and outside of it. Through the combination of verbal and nonverbal messages, skaters are almost always communicating something to each other because, if they do not and communication breaks down, there is a high possibility for serious injury. By looking at how skateboarders communicate amongst themselves, I hoped to gain a new and unique perspective on skateboarding culture and dive into a field of study that is lacking in substantial scholarly research. In my preliminary research about skateboarding and skateboarding culture, only a handful of scholarly articles and studies came up. It is for this reason that this thesis took the shape of an ethnography, focusing on skateboarding and the communication between its participants. Initially, I engaged in participant observations at a local skatepark. To get a closer look, one-on-one interviews were conducted, to help get qualitative data on the subject. To select participants for these interviews, adults above the age of 18, who were local to the area and had a long history of skating, were interviewed. Interview questions regarded the community, verbal, and nonverbal communication of the skateboarding community. After analyzing the data, skateboarding verbal and non-verbal communication was split into several general topics: encouragements/congratulations, casual and small-talk, self-talk, traffic alerts, style, courtesies, and language. This study provides a foundation onto which future research can be conducted.
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Introduction

You slide the tail end of your board towards the metal coping of the quarterpipe, getting ready to drop in and start your run. You lock it in, shimmy the board closer to get a tighter seal against the cold metal, and look up. Scanning the park for hazards, you see your friend throw down his board and pump the ramps to get speed. Which way is he going? He was trying a tre on the hip earlier, could that be what he's doing? He's angled towards it, looking at the hip, so he must be going that direction. This is good, you can drop in and hit the rail on the other side of the park without being in his way. Wait, what if he bails, and his board goes shooting out, will that enter your lane? Nah, he's good enough that that probably won't happen. Alright, here you go.

You lean forward, your front wheels hit the concrete and you pump into the bank. You get your speed and angle yourself towards the flat-bar for a boardslide. Your friend pops and flips his board with the precision of a pro. He stomps it and starts to roll away, but a stray board comes out of nowhere, somewhere to your left, and he jumps off his board to avoid catching the stray board and falling forward. When he does this, he runs right into your lane. Before you can get to the rail, you divert your path to the right, narrowly avoiding your buddy and if you have enough time, you will try to pick up the stray board. You do, carving on the flat ground and rolling by the stray board with your hand open wide, grasping for the grip tape. You hand the board to the child running towards it, who's yelling "BOARD" too late for it to be helpful. He apologizes, as futile as that is, and you simply say, "No worries". What now? Head back to the quarterpipe and get ready to try again.
This storyline happens with each attempt, and the analysis and scanning of the situation happens in an experienced skaters mind within seconds. Otherwise, a skaters’ safety and the safety of nearby skaters is put in danger. It is because of this that the means in which skateboarders communicate with each other can be appealing and even somewhat fascinating to those both within the community and outside of it.

The story above describes only a small portion of what skaters experience when at the park. Because of the nature of skateboarding, there are almost an infinite number of different scenarios, such as the one described above, that could happen. Although skateboarding is already a dangerous activity, the skateboard community has organically developed a communication system to keep people safe. As such, skateboard collisions are rare, and when they do occur, they are often not as severe as they could be.

Communication is not only utilized for safety, however. Skateboarders communicating effectively with each other also allows the environment, such as the park or street spot, to work efficiently for the skaters. In other words, because of the communication between skateboarders, there is an efficient “flow” to the traffic in the environment. There is very rarely a moment at the park or a popular street spot, especially if it is full of skaters, that will not have individuals trying lines or tricks at any given moment. Effective communication also allows for the skateboarding community to feel “authentic” to the skaters, something that is a hallmark of skateboarding culture. This “authenticity” would not exist if it were not for the organically-grown “language” of skateboarding.

Just like any other language, learning the language of skateboarding takes time. Typically, this requires years of skating to understand both the language and the intricate,
unwritten rules of etiquette, both of which play an important role at the park. This thesis focused on examining both verbal and nonverbal communication characteristics of skaters in the Eastern Shore of Maryland region. A combination of observing skaters at the park and interviews with willing participants provided a clearer idea of the intricacies that allow the language of skateboarding to be learned and used effectively. While that goal was achieved, the analysis provided herein must be considered a first step, as the subject of both skateboarding and verbal/non-verbal communication behaviors are complex and intricate.

**Literature Review**

When the idea to study skateboarding first crossed my mind, I was simultaneously excited and unsure. How does one study skateboarding? This question began my search of what had already been published on the subject, and to my surprise, there was little academic research done on skateboarding, and even less on the communication in which skateboarders engage. I began my search with a broad focus, learning how other researchers looked at verbal and non-verbal communication in general, before looking directly for academic sources that involved skateboarding. Fischer (2018) investigated how language changes over time. Fischer explains that “Language gives all human action voice” (p. 190) and that “All living languages experience constant change” (p. 191). This speaks to skateboarding as well. Without the use of a language to describe skateboarding, skaters would have no common way to understand it and talk about it. It is through common language that groups around the world can feel connected to the same culture. Understanding that the language of skateboarding, just like any language, can change, could be the basis of a whole other study on its own. In addition to how language gives a
voice to action and the change it can experience, Fischer explains that human societies have throughout history “…judged others – that is, consciously or unconsciously assessed their place in human society” based on the language, dialects, and even choice of words (p. 190). This statement could, in essence, be written about skateboarding. It is extremely important in skateboarding culture to be authentic, to not be a “poser”. The common language of skateboarding helps tie skaters together. If one knows and uses the language correctly, they are considered “in the know” or, more simply put, a real (authentic) skateboarder.

Other studies have been completed analyzing cultures through their language. Andrew Ross and Damian Rivers (2018) examined how Hip Hop can be used as a tool to resist oppression, whatever that oppression may manifest itself as. They did this from a sociolinguistic perspective. This is where Ross and Rivers’ (2018) study crossed paths with mine. Explained early in the book, authenticity plays a large role in Hip Hop and the appreciation of it (p. 4). While this didn’t immediately relate to my idea of verbal and non-verbal behavior, upon later review it became clear that these two ideas, the notion of authenticity and the communication behaviors of this community, are inextricably linked. Just as authenticity in hip-hop, explained by Ross and Rivers (2018), is important to that culture, it is important to skateboarders and their culture. Questions that come to mind are “Are you a true skater if you don’t know the name of a certain trick? The name of a specific obstacle? A famous skate spot?” These questions translates to “Can you really be an authentic skateboarder if you don’t know/use the right slang or jargon or don’t understand the reference to important cultural references?” When speaking about staying “true to ones’ roots”, a parallel can be observed with popular skateboarding movies Lords
of Dogtown (Hardwicke, 2005) and mid-90s (Hill, 2018). In both movies, there’s worry that a character will “sell-out” and forget his roots, or rather his original skate crew and friends. It presents the question, “Are you really a true skateboarder if you are just doing it for money?”, similar to the characters in the movies that are looking to get sponsored and paid to skate. The correct use of language, both verbal and non-verbal can help bridge this gap and make skateboarders who aren’t sponsored or professional feeling a commonality with those that are making six-figure salaries for global companies like Adidas or Nike. Both skaters can do kickflips, and call them kickflips, while being in separate social and cultural contexts, one professional while the other is not. Both individuals can understand and use the same gestures and motions while skating at a park.

This train of thought begged the question, what was the difference between jargon and slang? Are the skateboarding terms we use today such as kickflip or crooked grinds terms from an industry specific jargon, or slang terms used as such? On the BBC Learning English Radio show, “Ask About English” host Amos Paran was asked the main difference between these two terms, jargon and slang. Paran explained that an important aspect of both slang and jargon is that the usage or either, or both, identifies you as a member of a group. So the distinction between the two does not seem to have much of an effect on the usage by the skateboarding community, since both arrive at the same goal, identifying the user as a member of the skateboarding community.

Another angle that was explored during my research was Social Identity Theory, which Giles and Stohl (2017) investigated. Giles and Stohl (2017) studied how social identity fits into mainstream sport fandoms, “Having specific social identity (such as
practicing being a team fan) not only defines the self-concept, but also locates someone relative to other relevant people and other groups in society” (p. 153). While Giles and Stohl (2017) focused on established and organized sport fandoms, such as Red Sox fans, the same can be said about skateboarding. Skateboarders across the globe identify with that shared social identity of being skateboarders. This creates a commonality among people at a skate park or a popular skate spot. In addition, even the loyalty to the social identity fits into skateboarding as well. Being a “true skater” instead of a “poser” can be the difference between taking a fall or slam, getting back up and trying again, or giving up because you can’t take the fall again. Some of the authenticity of skateboarding can come from that shared experience of not giving up when the going gets tough. There is always a point at which a skater will give up, but the toughest skaters – the ones who take the most and hardest falls – can be heralded as die-hard skaters or really dedicated to their craft. It is the loyalty to the craft that makes a skater throw themselves down a flight of stairs try upon try, even if they slam every time. “True” skaters shared that common experience, and thus, a shared identity emerges.

Later on in their chapter, Giles and Stohl (2017) explore why at-risk youth can become intense fans of sports and strongly identify with their respective teams, (p. 154). This is what is seen in popular skateboarding movies such as Lords of Dogtown (Hardwicke, 2005) and mid-90s (Hill, 2018). These movies depict youth who feel lost and disconnected due to unfavorable living situations or community, and so they turn to skateboarding for that peer group and a clear personal identity. While this doesn’t perfectly mirror organized and national sports such as Giles and Stohl (2017) suggests, this theory certainly supports the feeling these movies were trying to portray.
Non-verbal communication can be extremely important when it comes to studying cultures and their communities, and skateboarding is no exception. Argyle (1972) explored non-verbal communication (NVC) in social interactions, breaking down the non-verbal communication he observed into 10 separate but related categories: Bodily contact, Proximity, Orientation, Appearance, Posture, Head-nods, Facial Expression, Gestures, Looking, and Non-verbal aspects of speech (Prosodic and Paralinguistic) (ps. 243-269). Whereas the main NVC signals that Argyle lays out were observed in what his paper wrote as social interactions, I believe that these aspects can be attributed to the discourse between skateboarders. So, while, the activity of skateboarding itself is not a perfect parallel to the social interactions Argyle observed and documented, when at a park, skateboarders are always interacting with each other, even if it isn’t the stereotypical face-to-face conversation. Due to the nature of this study, only a few of Argyle’s list of main signals will be examined, as the others could use separate of their own, such as appearance or non-verbal aspects of speech. I will be looking for bodily contact, proximity, orientation, posture, head-nods, facial expressions, gestures, and looking for the basis of my investigation into skater’s non-verbal behavior.

So far, the articles and books I reviewed focused on human communication in general, either verbal or non-verbal, in scope. But before engaging in my own ethnography of skateboarding, it was important to find and analyze what is already out there on the subject. Specifically, I looked for ethnographies done on skateboarding and if there had been any research done on skateboarder’s communication behaviors. While nothing fit that description perfectly, as is so often the case with qualitative research, I did find more than I was expecting on the culture as a whole.
Beal has published numerous pieces on skateboarding and the culture over her career as a scholar, but there are two that help explore the communication behaviors of the community. Beal and Weidman (2003) investigated the notion of authenticity in the skateboarding world, both on an individual and a commercial level, a concept that is integral to skateboarding culture. Beal (2013) later explored the skateboarding culture on a broader, more general sense, writing about everything from the history of skateboarding to how the industry works. But again, she wrote about the importance of authenticity in the skateboarding world, focusing more on the more public, commercial side of the culture. One chapter of her 2013 book *The Ultimate Guide to Skateboarding*, Beal explored how very specific language was used to promote certain brands authenticity to skateboarding. The skateboarding magazine *Thrasher* followed the anti-establishment, counter-culture mentality as evidenced by its motto, “Skate and Destroy” (ps. 20-21). The use of the word “destroy” is a reference to the opinion that skateboarding is damaging to the skaters and the world around them. On the other side of the spectrum, there’s the magazine *Transworld Skateboarding*. In order to separate itself from the anti-establishment nature that *Thrasher* was conveying, *Transworld* went the opposite direction and had the tagline “Skate and Create” (ps. 20-21). Beal revealed that Peralta, Vitello and Stecyk helped manufacture the ethos of antiestablishment cool in order to make skateboarding more widely accessible (ps. 20-21). Such actions as holding “pool jams” (p. 21) in local backyards helped establish a more local appearance to skateboarding than a corporate one. Along with this, Peralta asserted that street style was created by the industry to revitalize the market in the 80s, not by the skaters themselves (ps. 20-21). As skating in public places was more accessible than in parks or whatever
had been the norm, the resistance against skateboarding from business owners and pedestrians led to the movement of “Skateboarding is NOT a Crime”, becoming popular (ps. 20-21). While none of this directly talks about skater-to-skater verbal or non-verbal communication behaviors, it is important to understand the underlying values and pervasive ideas that have been engrained in the skateboarding world since its inception.

There are various other academic articles published on the subject of skateboarding culture and how it interacts with the world. Snyder (2011) looked at how professional street skateboarding can help provide skaters with careers outside of being a professional skateboarder, allowing more members of the community to stay connected even without the necessary skill of a professional. Dupont (2014) wrote about the informal hierarchy of the skateboarding world, and how one’s own personality and demography plays a part in these roles, such as commitment, subcultural capital, social capital, race, class, gender and status. Maier (2016) performed a transcultural anthropology of the soundscape that skateboarding provides to not only the public, but to the skaters themselves, ultimately concluding that the world responds sonically based on the speed, pressure, feeling and emphasis the skater rides with. Seifert & Hedderon (2010) explored the concept of intrinsic motivation and flow, and how each of these is present in the skateboarding world.

Backstrom (2002) studied skateboarding culture and the demographics of its members, saying that skateboarding is “undeniably connected to young people…” and that “to skate is to tell other people and convince yourself that you are lively, vigorous and vital, and that you have power, strength, speed, and action” (2002). Not only is there communication between skaters and members of the skateboarding community, but the
act of skateboarding can be, in itself, a form of communication, and a powerful one at that. As any skater could tell you, falling and “slamming” is part of the sport, and the older you get the less your body can take, and so skating is maybe a way member of the community stay connected with their youth, and prove to themselves that they are young and lively, as Backstrom suggests.

Moore (2009), through her own ethnography of the skateboarding culture, suggests that understanding skateboarding culture can allow leaders, such as politicians, adults, and scholars to “communicate more effectively with the younger generation”. While these observations were made by Moore while watching a compilation of competition footage from over 15 years ago, many of these behaviors can still be seen in more recent skateboarding competitions, such as Street League or the X Games, or even at a local park. The inclusionary behavior that Moore observed can be assumed to be even more obvious when the prospect of prize money isn’t on the line, and it is just a bunch of friends skating together. All these findings are verbal and non-verbal behaviors that my study hopes to shed some direct light onto.

When I noticed a lack of academic sources on the world of communication in skateboarding, I turned to more anecdotal sources, as that was what was left after searching academically. In a Letter to the Editor of the Coloradoan (Beal and Weidman, 2003) now under the banner of the Windsor Beacon, the writer expressed their view on skateboarding communication: “Skaters have a completely different culture form the norms of the world’s society. We dress differently, we have our own language, use our own slang and live by our own rules. People feel threatened by foreign attitudes” (2003, p. 338)). This is the epitome of this thesis. There is a unique way that skateboarders
communicate, and there is a great chance that every skater, either consciously or unconsciously, know this very fact. It is another element of what makes skateboarding. In addition, while the letter writer wrote this section referring to “living by our own rules” (2003, p. 338) in a general sense, this can be said about skater’s communication. The rules of engagement for skaters is unique.

**Methodology**

When thinking about this topic, I only saw a single framework that would be effective in illustrating the kind of data I was hoping to receive: an ethnography. I have tweaked the general format of ethnographic studies to fit the skateboarding community. This framework is, in essence, bare bones, yet makes sure to cover all bases of a good ethnography. It is separated into two distinct areas of focus, which together, allow for a more complete picture of the topic than one might get if only one of these methods were executed.

After the initial topic idea was conceived, the first step of this ethnography framework is participant observation. Engaging in participant observation is an excellent way to not only get a more personal perspective on a community when compared to simple observations, but also allows the researcher to make personal connections with the community (Sands & Sands, 2002). This could be of great help if/when the researcher is seeking participants for qualitative interviews.

The second step of this ethnography framework was to conduct qualitative interviews with participants that are member of the community in question. It is at this point I was able to look at the preliminary data from the literature research and my
participant observation field notes to generate thought-provoking questions that would get the best results from the participants in their interviews. This is also the perfect moment for researchers to ask questions that have gone unanswered during their data collection up to that point.

**Participant Observations**

As Sands and Sands (2002) explain in their book *Sports Ethnography*, participant observations are the primary method for fieldwork data collections for ethnographies. Participant observations can be a complicated and intensive task, involving long-term commitment to establish relationships with the community of interest (2002). While this time commitment can be off-putting for potential researchers, I felt that it fit this project due to my already-established relationship with the local and greater skateboarding communities. With the most time-consuming step already completed, I was able to focus on developing my field notes.

While it was difficult due to external, environmental conditions, such as the heavy the local area had experienced, I was still able to visit the local skate park on four different days, at two to four hours at a time, for a total of 15 hours of observation. During these participant observation sessions, I split my time between skating and engaging with the other skaters at the park, and sitting and taking detailed field notes of verbal and non-verbal behaviors of the skaters at the park. If anyone was curious as to my activities, I explained the background of my research and what I was taking notes on, to be as transparent as I could, in case either parents or other skaters were suspicious of
someone taking notes at a skate park, which isn’t common practice. The synthesized field notes from these sessions are included in the following section.

**Qualitative Interviews**

While participant observation of the skateboarding community is helpful in getting an idea of how skateboarders communicate in public settings and how they market themselves to outsiders, ultimately it is up to the researcher to postulate and interpret the data to conclude something about that culture, which can introduce some of the researcher’s bias. To avoid this interpretation bias, the qualitative nature of the interview questions allowed the participants the chance to explain their answers in their own words.

The in-person qualitative interviews took place at a local university. The final sample was five local skateboarders. Subject selection for our subject pool was restricted to skaters who live in the local area, skate at the local skatepark, or shop at the local skate-shop. These limitations made it easier to know if they were avid enough skateboarders to provide enough data on the skateboarding community. While recruiting students of the university might yield a larger sample size, there was not a satisfactory way to assure the level of community engagement that this study required.

To contact my subject pool, I employed the help of two close contacts of mine, long time skateboarder and a local university reference librarian, and the owner of the local skate shop. They distributed flyers advertising skateboarding to participate. These flyers also offered a $10 reward gift card to the local skate shop.

As for communication and setting up a meeting, I communicated with each participant through my student email. I set up a designated folder in my email for study
participants to contact me through. This allowed me to be in contact with them on a virtual basis. This also allowed us to communicate on when the interviews would take place. These were not saved as personal contacts, but rather grouped together in a designated folder that was deleted at the end of the project. I conducted these interviews with the assistance of the recording function on my personal iPhone, to allow for later transcription. At the end of the study, the recordings were deleted. The goal of these personal, one-on-one, qualitative interviews with avid skaters and active members of the larger community was to get an insider perspective into this largely unstudied community. Qualitative responses were coded into content categories based on themes, regarding how they related to both verbal and non-verbal communication. Digital copies of the transcriptions were password protected on my personal hard drive, not a cloud software. The questions were split into 4 separate categories. The first of these categories were introductory questions to determine how many years the participants have skated, how old they were when they started, etc. The second category focused on community driven questions, such as their interactions with other skaters and what type of community media they consume. The third category of questions focused on verbal communication between themselves and other skaters. The fourth and final category were questions on the non-verbal communication they engaged in with other skaters. Appendix A is a full copy of the questions I asked my interview participants.

Results

From my 15 hours participating in the skateboarding community in the local area and my 5 qualitative interviews with members of the community, I have obtained a trove
of data regarding the characteristics of skateboarding communication, on both the verbal and non-verbal spectrum. In the following section, I’ve compiled my observations and field notes from my participant observations. In the section after that, my interview data has been compiled and organized by question topic.

Participant Observations

The following two sections are the findings of my participant observation sessions, all of which range from two to four hours in length, taken from visits to the park on four different days of the week during the months of March and April, to ensure that variety in participants at the park. The first section focuses on the observational data on verbal behavior, and the second examines the non-verbal data.

Verbal observational data.

During the participant observation sessions, I observed four types of verbal behaviors in use by the skaters at the park: encouragements/congratulations, causal and small talk, self-talk, and alerts.

The first of these categories, encouragements/congratulations, are verbal behaviors, words, and phrases that skaters used to encourage or congratulate a skater. Examples of this category that I observed were other skaters whistling, “woo-hooing”, and cheering for another skater if they landed a trick. If the skater did not land his or her trick, the same words, phrases, and verbal communication might still happen, but the context of them has change from congratulate to encouragement. One example, that was
extremely prevalent at the park was the phrase “Ehwoo!”, used as a quick way to signal
to another skater that they liked the trick that was being done or was impressed by it.

Equally prevalent at the park was causal and small talk between skaters. This was
observed occurring between skaters’ attempts or runs, while the skaters were catching
their breathing or “recharging”. This is like any other form of small talk, but typically
revolved around the skateboarding world. For example, there was consistent talk about
the new location the local skate shop was moving into, and how the construction was
going. Other examples of observed casual talk are exclamations such as “back me up” or
“back to back”, referring to skaters landing tricks consecutively, or “first try”, “this try”,
or “next try”. These refer to individuals landing their trick the first time they try it, their
current attempt, or the next try they attempt. The last example of small talk between
skaters that I observed was exclamations of amazement when one skater showed another
their footage of a trick they had landed, and the watching skater used some explicit words
to describe their excitement, almost in disbelief.

The third category of verbal communication behavior I observed was a large
amount of “self-talk”. Self-talk is the inner dialogue we as humans have, and it can either
be positive or negative (Morris, 2016). Per an article on Self-Talk from the online health
website Healthline, “self-talk is a powerful tool for increasing your self-confidence and
curbing negative emotions” (Morris, 2016). What was observed at the park is textbook
self-talk, but rather the skaters talking to themselves out loud. Skaters were constantly,
almost after each trick or attempt, talking out loud to themselves, about how their last
attempt went, how they can improve, and “hyping”, or encouraging, themselves up for
their next try. Other examples of self-talk were exasperations or exclamations that skaters
would use before, during, or directly after a trick was landed. Many skaters were engaging in this behavior between attempts, especially after failed attempts, to hype themselves up.

The last category of verbal behavior that was observed at the park were “alerts”. Skateboarding at the park while it is crowded can seem like chaos, but in fact it is very much a controlled chaos, in which every skater takes their time and takes turns being dangerous. For this reason, phrases and words that alert other skaters of a possible hazard have become commonplace. Examples are the widely used “BOARD!” to alert other skaters that there is a loose board that might get in your way, or “Heads up”, which, while not unique to skateboarding, is widely used to let skaters and by-standers know that they might be in an already-rolling skater’s way.

**Non-verbal observational data.**

Along with the four categories of verbal behavior I observed, there were an equal number of categories I observed for non-verbal communication between skaters: style, traffic etiquette, encouragements/congratulations, and courtesies.

The first of these categories, style, was evident from the very start of the participant observations. Every skater has their own way of doing things, on and off the board. The examples of style that was observed is almost uncountable, due to the fact that each skater has their unique style. Some skaters, while carving the various transitional sections of the park, such as the quarterpipes and ramps, would do so with outstretched arms for stability, while others were able to skate with their hands down by their sides. When a trick attempt is unsuccessful, some skaters jump back onto their board as quickly
as possible, to either get the board out of the way of others or to try the trick again sooner. Other skaters, after bailing, take their time getting their board, saving their energy for their next attempt. Sever skaters would skate around the park with what is called a "lazy style", hands in pockets, not much effort put into "pumping" around the obstacles, yet they still land sophisticated tricks. All of these examples are evidence that each skater at the park has a unique way of doing even the simplest things, which all communicate to the other skaters what their style is, and in turn, what kind of skater they are.

The second category of non-verbal observations refers to "traffic etiquette". While a skatepark to an outsider looks like a chaotic and dangerous mob of skaters riding too fast, a skatepark is much more like a lightly organized intersection. Despite numerous ways to skate the park theoretically, the skaters themselves seem to have established lanes or routes that are available to skate, otherwise, you might be too in the way of others. Skaters at the park congregate at seemingly specified locations within the park where they start their tricks, runs, or lines, all without establishing any written rules or specifics. The local park is a long and narrow park, which leads skaters to skate in two or three lanes that run parallel to the road it is located on. What this traffic etiquette does is keep all the skaters safe and riding in the same general directions, with each skater taking his turn to skate a particular obstacle. This etiquette is mainly done through non-verbal communication, as there are not "etiquette" rules set in stone, but rather unwritten rules that skaters collectively understand. One example of this communication is when two skaters who are riding towards each other point to the side they plan on passing each other on, so they do not have a head on collision. Another example of this traffic etiquette, or lack thereof, is the concept of "snaking". Snaking is the act of cutting in
front of someone who has waited their turn to try their trick or run. Snaking is what happens when the traffic etiquette at a park breaks down.

The third set of non-verbal communication that were observed are the counterparts to the verbal Encouragements/Congratulations. Due to the nature of the park, the noise level, the distance, etc., there might not be anyone close enough to encourage or congratulate a skater who either had a unsuccessful attempt, or a successful one. The most common message that was communicated non-verbally was the knocking of the board on the ground or metal copings. This wood-on-concrete or wood-on-metal sound is extremely loud, and therefore can be heard from across the park, even with headphones or earbuds in. Context is important for this gesture however; if a skater bails and is unsuccessful on an attempt, the clapping of the board generally is interpreted as “good try” or an acknowledgement of how difficult that particular maneuver is, both of which is to encourage the rider to get up and try it again. If the skater lands his or her trick, the clapping of the board is interpreted as “good job”, or an acknowledgement of how long it might have taken that skater to land the trick, both of which is to congratulate.

The last category of non-verbal communication that I observed at the park is what I refer to as “courtesies”. While I was at the park, skaters often didn’t land their attempts at tricks, and when these failures occurred, the skater’s board often went flying, far out of reach of the owner of the board. This could be an annoyance for other skaters, having to wait for the board to be out of their path, or worse, it could put other skaters in danger. In these instances, other skateboarders who were in the proximity of the loose board, would typically try and stop the board either with their foot or their hands. If the skater used
their foot, they would simply stop the board or kick it back to the skater who lost it. If the passing skater used their hands, they would typically turn around on their board and skate it back to the owner and hand it to them. This was not always the case. If a skater was riding by the loose board at too fast a speed, they might just carve around the loose board and continue with their attempt, allowing the skater who lost the board to run after it.

Another type of courtesy that I observed was in the queueing system that the skaters waiting to try their tricks stood in. Many times, skaters would look over at another skater who was waiting to try the same obstacle and motion for them to take their turn first. This motion was typically made with an open hand, waving the skater forward, or a nod of the head in the direction of the obstacle.

Qualitative Interview Data

Background of participants.

After introductions, I asked each interviewee, hereafter referred to as Participants 1-5, to give me some basic background on their skateboarding history, such as how long they have been skating, how old they were, and what got them into skating. The subject with the most years under their belt in the skating community was at 30 years, and the newest skater had only started a year ago. While this does skew the average years skated figure, 11.7 years skated, this shows that the participants I selected had a varied skateboarding career, experience-wise, which would also give me a variety of answers to my later verbal and non-verbal related questions.

The age at which the participants started skating was more consistent, however. The youngest starting age was just seven and a half years old, and the oldest was 27. This
range gave me an average age of 13.5 years old when they started skating, which suggests that the common cliché that my generation has about skating – that everyone skated in middle school because it was cool, but few stuck with it – might have some validity to it.

The spark that got each subject interested in skating was much more varied, however. Two of my participants picked up skating after their parents bought them boards as toys, and simply stuck with it. Other responses included a subject searching for a hobby, video games inspiring them, or simply a need for transportation around their hometown.

Community.

The next seven questions I asked each of my participants regarded the community of skateboarding, and their role in it. This included questions regarding their friendships in the community, their preferences on skating with or without others, their community media usage, and their opinions on the change in community media.

When asked about their close friendships in the community, the participants gave an estimate percentage of their friends that were also members of the skateboarding community. This ranged from 0% of their close friends being skaters, to 75%. The average was between 19 and 30% of close friends being part of the skateboarding community.

When asked about their preferences on skating with or without others, 80% of the participants responded positively, they preferred skating in groups, but their reasoning for this varied. Whether it was for filming purposes, feeding off of each other’s energy, scheduling or crowd apprehension, these participants enjoyed skating with groups or
friends more than skating alone. Only one of the participants said that they did not, but this was for pragmatic purposes, because they only had the opportunity to skate after work, and so he had to skate with whoever was at the park already. This helped give context for the next question. When asked whether they thought a majority of skaters skated alone versus skated in groups, the participants unanimously agreed that it is more common for skaters to skate in groups, although their reasoning for this conclusion was just as varied, ranging from stereotypes of skaters being rejects of society so skaters find that in common with each other, to skating being a social event more than anything.

The next question I posed to the participants regarded membership in the community of skateboarding at large and membership in specific, usually regional, skate “crews”. Unsurprisingly, each skater expressed that they were indeed a member of the larger skateboarding community, but only one out of the five made it clear that they were part of at least one skate “crew”. This individual also expressed that they were in fact a member of several skate crews up and down the East Coast. Each participant made it clear however that they viewed skate crews less as a structured group and more as a group of friends who are regionally close and mainly skate together but might share some secondary interest together as well.

The eighth question that I asked each of the participants was their community media usage, broken down into four categories: social media and internet, skate videos, magazines, and video games. This is not an exhaustive list, as there are skateboarding movies, TV shows, and other such community media, but for time’s sake, I stuck with these four popular media. I asked each participant to estimate how time they spent consuming the different types of media, in hours per week. The four types of media
varied drastically, and a larger sample size would be needed to draw any significant conclusions about media usage change over time, but that wasn’t the purpose of these questions. The purpose of these questions was to gauge the participant’s engagement in the media produced by the community as a measure of how involved each of the participants were in the community. Below is a table with the relevant numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Media/Internet</th>
<th>Skate Videos</th>
<th>Magazines</th>
<th>Video Games</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0***</td>
<td>~1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0***</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>~7*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averages</td>
<td>10.4 H/W</td>
<td>21.8 H/W **</td>
<td>0 H/W</td>
<td>0.675 H/W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Participant did not make the exact number clear, as in “Daily, more than once a day” or “Less than 2 hours a week”. This forced me to make conservative assumptions on their behalf
** I view this average as highly suspect, due to an assumed unreasonable number of hours a week a participant spends with media playing in the background of their day
*** These participants still follow the magazine brands, but they do not consume print magazines, opting to view the magazines on their respective websites.

The ninth question regarding the community of skateboarding was to gauge if the participants had witnessed a change in the kinds of communication of the skateboarding community over their time in it. Three out of the five participants mentioned how magazines used to be the main connection between the world of skateboarding and the skateboarders themselves. Participant 2 described it as “Magazines were how you stayed connected to the skating world”. Now, two of those three participants also noted that the internet is now how skateboarders stay connected to the skateboarding world.

The last question posed to the participants about the community was about what factors might affect an individual’s ability to understand the community language of skateboarding. The participants answered this with one of two answers, either the skater’s
skill level or age. And while one of our participants, Participant 3, mentioned that maybe gender might affect a skaters ability to understand, one of our female subjects balanced that opinion out by saying the exact opposite, that being a female skater gives “them more chances and opportunities to communicate and learn” with the community language, due to the lack of female skaters in the scene. For this reason, this study will not be examining the role gender plays in a skaters’ ability to understand the language.

Verbal Communication.

All the participants in the qualitative interviews confirmed that they did communicate verbally with other skaters while they participated in the activity, whether that be at a park, on the streets, etc. However, each of them did distinguish different uses of verbal communication. Some replied that they use exclamations and verbal communication to make their presence known to other skaters while they are riding. Another participant specifically referenced that he makes the presence of their board known as well, presumably when the board is loose and is a danger to other skaters. Other examples of verbal communication the participants engaged in were usage of skateboard terminology with other skaters, introductions and greetings, encouragements and congratulatory phrases, and determining whose turn it was to skate a particular obstacle.

When asked if there were potential barriers to verbal communication while skating, the participants referenced language barriers, physical barriers, such as lack of proximity, earbuds blocking the chance for reciprocal communication, or disabilities, as all being possibilities. Age and experience level were referenced as well, as depending on a skaters age or experience at skateboarding, knowledge of some vital understanding of
skateboarding terminology and language may be lacking. Participant 5 is an avid “bowl” skater, meaning they skate primarily in empty pool-beds, which resemble a bowl. When asked this question, she explained a particularly interesting phrase, “First wall fall”, which means if a bowl skater bails on the first trick in their run, they can immediately get out of the bowl and try again, without having to wait their turn. While this is no more significant than any other phrase any of the participants gave as examples, it does show that there is a difference in the way skaters think about skateboarding and their attempts, based on their preferred style of skating. No other participant mentioned this type of philosophy, that skating was done in runs, and after a fall one might be given a second chance right away.

This led right into the question about the possible existence of “skateboarding jargon”. The participants unanimously agreed that there is such a thing as “skateboarding jargon”. When asked why, it was expressed that for skateboarders to be able to describe what they were doing on their boards, the jargon had to be created, but for the skaters. For Participant 5 specifically, it isn’t a second language or even a jargon, it rather is just part of their own repository of language.

Once it was clear that each of the participants agreed that there is a jargon to skateboarding, I was interested in the learning process for this jargon, and whether they saw themselves as “fluent” in this jargon. Participants 1, 2, and 4 saw themselves as fluent in skateboarding jargon, and Participants 3 and 5 saw themselves as semi-fluent. As to how each of them learned this jargon, immersion, and cultural exposure were the most given method. For example, Participant 2 explained that they picked up the jargon from hearing other people talk, and Participant 5 explained it as being from being around
other skaters, learning it in real time and in context. Other methods given were playing games of S.K.A.T.E. (a version of the popular basketball game H.O.R.S.E. with skateboard tricks) with other skaters and experiencing skateboarding media, such as magazine interviews and skate videos.

The next question was to determine how well each of the participants really knew skate terminology or jargon. When prompted with the list of categories and trick names, each knew what the terminology meant, but not many of the origins of the term or why it is used to mean what it does. But the kind of skateboarding they participated in (street, park, vert, bowl, etc.) changed some of their definitions, such as Participant 5, who is a bowl skater. Their definitions of frontside and backside represented that, referring to frontside as when you have “your front outside the bowl” and backside as “when you have your butt outside the bowl”. The other participants used a more generic version that could be applied to different styles, frontside meaning your front is facing towards the obstacle, and backside meaning your backside is facing the obstacle.

Non-verbal Communication.

Just as the participants said they engaged in verbal communication while skating, they also engaged in non-verbal communication with other skaters too. While every participant brought up a unique example of non-verbal communication they used, all five mentioned using hand signals for directional use, allowing other skaters to know where they were headed. Participants 1 and 4 also recalled using beckoning motions, to either try to get someone to move out of the way, or to move an object for the skater. Participants 2 and 3 also described a common sight at the park, skaters slapping their
boards against either the ground or a metal coping to either encourage the skater to try again or congratulate the skater for landing an impressive trick.

When asked if there were possible barriers to effective non-verbal communication, three of the five participants believed that there were: a lack of understanding because of age or experience level, or physical disabilities, such as being partially blind, like Participant 5 is. However, the remaining two participants believe that there weren’t significant barriers, because non-verbal cues were” common sense” and “universal”.

The eighteenth question reminded each of the participants of an example nonverbal communication behavior, the slapping of the board on the ground or copings and asked if they could explain what it meant to them and what role context played in their interpretations of the behavior. All five participants expressed that context does matter, at least for this non-verbal message. They all interpret it as encouragement, roughly translating it as “good shit”, “good job”, or that your trick was “super sweet”. Participant 4 made the distinction between context clear, saying that if you don’t land the trick, the slapping of the board is encouraging, and if you do land the trick, the slapping of the board is congratulatory in nature.

The next question asked the participants how they had learned the non-verbal communication they had all described, and what that process had been like. All five participants gave similar answers, albeit describing the process a little bit different. Whether they described it as “picking it up over time”, “picking it up from seeing others do it”, “emulating from skateboarding media”, or “hanging out at skate parks and observing others”, their descriptions are typical of cultural immersion.
This led me to ask if they had themselves created any motions or gestures of their own to non-verbal communicate with other skaters. Each of them described uncommon behavior, such as inside jokes, and atypical skateboarding references that they transferred to skateboarding, such as “Fortnite Dances” or “dabbing” used as celebrations. None of these examples were actually created by the participants, but since these specific behaviors are not popular in the region, it leaves the participants as the only ones engaging in them.

I next asked each participant about skateboarding “style”. Specifically, I asked questions like “What does ‘style’ refer to?”, “How do skaters present style?”, “Is style a conscious or unconscious behavior?”, and “What does their personal style communicate about them?” Participant 2 described is simply as “the way they skate”, Participant 4 described it as “the way in which tricks are executed”, and Participant 5 said style is “the way someone skates that’s unique to that skater”. This were expressed as either skating “fast and loose”, “slow and rigid”, “daredevil”, “smooth, fast, and making it look easy” (Participant 2), “really aggressive”, “fluid” (Participant 4) or like a “robot” (Participant 3). Regarding the nature of style, four of the five participants expressed that style is a mixture of both conscious and unconscious efforts. There are aspects of skateboarding, such as how high you pop your trick, that can be controlled and intentional, as Participant 4 explained, but you generally have a style of your own already that influences the rest of the trick. Participant 5 explained that you can pick up things from other skaters’ styles as well, however you can’t “choose” how you skate, but rather skateboarding and the tricks within the culture are all “learned differently depending on the person”. Interestingly, each of the skaters were not overall positive about their own style and what it portrays
about them, either saying their style was “kinda ugly”, “beginner”, or “trash”, or that they just liked to have fun and were not too serious.

The penultimate question posed to the participants asked if the trick pool of skaters communicated anything to the participant about that skater. All five participants agreed that the tricks that a skater attempts can communicate information about the skater to others. Participants 3, 4, and 5 agreed with each other, saying that it communicates the skill or experience level of the skater, or their comfortability and balance on the board. This is because, as Participant 3 explained, the “tricks they do define their skill level”. A skater trying a simple ollie, which is a foundational trick than almost all other tricks utilize, is most likely a newer skater with little experience. However, a skater trying a complicated flip trick, like a 360 kickflip, down a staircase is most likely a highly experienced skater. Participant 2 also believed that the tricks a skater does can let you know what that skaters learning process is.

Lastly, I asked each of the participants if a skater’s skateboard can communicate anything about the skater, to which I receive positive responses. Participant 1, who said that a skater’s board can say “a lot actually” about the skater, from “personal touches” and “griptape art”. You can also, based on the size of the board, see where they are on their “journey” in skateboarding, as typically the smaller the board, the younger the user, as it is easier to manipulate if you are smaller in stature. Other participants, Participants 2 and 3, explained that, based on how worn the board is, griptape or graphic, you can tell how much the skater values their board or what experience level they are at. Participant 4 explained that a board can say, “nearly everything” about the skater’s “personality” and “the kind of skater they are and want to be”. Lastly, Participant 5 explained that the board
also can point to parts of their style, such as what they like to skate, such as bowls, street, or vert skating, for example.

**Discussion**

The categories that I split the participant observation data into were subsequently backed up by the qualitative interview I held with my participants. For this reason, these categories will become the basis of this section, as I will discuss the connections between the observational data and the interview data that back the former up. These categories are Encouragements/Congratulations, Casual/Small talk, Self-talk, Traffic/Alerts, Style, and Courtesies. Adding onto that list will be Language, as the data gathered from the interviews touch on this extensively. In each of the subsequent sections, the respective data will be discussed and connections between them and how skateboarders communicate will be drawn.

**Encouragement/Congratulations**

Skateboarding, at its core, is a community activity, which is why since its inception, there has been a strong connection and mutual understanding that skateboarders have with each other, regardless of whether or not the skaters personally know one another. It is because of this connection that it becomes possible for skaters to get involved with each other’s practice and want to see each other succeed, whether that be landing a difficult and intricate trick, or even a simple one. This is evidenced by the existence of both verbal and non-verbal messages that express this encouragement and
congratulations. The slapping of the skateboard, in order to make a loud and far-reaching sound after a trick has been attempted or completed, speaks to the need to encourage or congratulate other skateboarders when they are practicing. This is similar to cheering on teammates in other sports, but the difference is in the teammate dynamic in skateboarding. While this sport is individual-based, other skaters can act as teammates, due to the mutual understanding of skateboarding and the difficulties associated with it. Because another skater possibly knows how hard a trick might be to complete, when they observe a skater attempting it, they can encourage, and then later congratulate, the skater. The skater who attempted or landed the trick also knows that this encouragement and congratulations comes from a sincere place, as they share the same knowledge of the trick and skateboarding.

While there is still regular cheering and clapping, the specific words and phrases used by skaters reflect a different dynamic between skaters. Instead of a possible spectator-sport player dynamic, in which a spectator might cheer on the sport player, the skater-skater dynamic comes from that shared understanding of the effort needed. This manifest itself in phrases such as “backing someone up”, meaning you will try to land your trick if the first skater lands there’s. This can encourage the first skater to land their trick, because they also want to see the encourager to land his trick. As skaters, they are on their own journeys, but because of this, they know how other skaters feel on their own journeys as well. The verbal communications and non-verbal gestures allow for this dynamic to prosper. This type of behavior and communication might also have a positive impact on the “community” fell of the skateboarding culture.
Casual/Small talk

Another important part of the community of skateboarding is, of course, the people who skate. Causal conversation and small talk allow skaters to connect with each other. Skaters sharing clips of each other skating, talking about the park, or conversing about tricks they want to try all allow the community of skateboarders, especially in smaller regions, to become close, and possibly branch out and become friends outside of skateboarding. Having skateboarding, and the mutual understanding of the culture and sport that come with it, skaters can communicate with each other as if they have been close friends, despite the possibility of them never having met.

Self-Talk

When attempting tricks, whether that be at a skatepark or in the streets, skaters typically engage in a form of self-talk in between attempts. As explained in the results section, Self-talk is the inner dialogue we humans use to guide us through our daily life. As it can be positive or negative, it can have a huge effect on us. For skaters, this self-talk takes the form of spoken words, to “hype” themselves up before, in between, and after tricks, in order to help us build the confidence needed to attempt a dangerous stunt such as a skateboarding trick. As the participant observation data showed, this was a common enough behavior to observe, as many skaters engaged in this form of self-talk in just the 15 hours I held participant observation sessions. While this is not exactly direct communication with other skateboarders, but rather with the skater themselves, this does still fall within the range of verbal communication, as skaters that are in proximity to the skater engaging in self-talk can hear and observe the behavior, and interpret messages
from it, such as how dedicated the skater is, or how frustrated he or she is on not landing the trick.

Traffic/Alerts

A skatepark can be a dangerous place, and from the outside looking in, can look like chaos. From a skateboarder’s perspective, it is, yes, dangerous, but is much more controlled than seen at first glance. This control comes from a set of unwritten rules, or park etiquette, that are set in place, and that likely vary slightly based on the region in which the park resides. A skatepark acts much like traffic, complete with lanes, riders, idlers, and obstacles. Without the rules in place, the park can become dangerous for any skater to try their trick, because there is a possibility, they might run into someone else and suffer a collision. Accompanying these rules is always both verbal and non-verbal communication. Like the example scenario from the introduction of this paper, there are many things to consider when skateboarding at a park, and these verbal and non-verbal messages allow for a safe and cohesive environment for skaters to practice. Regarding the verbal communication, alerting skaters or bystanders that are in your way, in the way of someone else, or in the path of a loose board, is important to maintain clear lanes and safety of those you are alerting. Regarding non-verbal communication, using hand signals to display directional and navigation to the skaters around allow for easy communication without the need for speech, which when riding can sometimes be difficult due to the noise a board can make.

An interesting conclusion that can be made about this system is how age and experience level play a role in its success. “Snaking” is the act of cutting another skater
off right before he tries his trick. This can come off as inconsiderate, but it comes down to the new skater wanting to skate right away, instead of getting a feel for the park and the skaters who are already there. In this aspect, it might suggest that the skaters at the park already, dictate the way new skaters should skate when they arrive. But as age and experience level increase, so does the understanding of these unwritten rules and etiquette, as was evidenced by the interviewees who had more experience or were older. These participants understood and were able to explain the important aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication that make this park etiquette system possible. This in turn reduces the instances of snaking.

Style

It is clear that from the moment one picks up a skateboard, step on it, or push around, non-verbal communication is happening. From the interviews with the participants, your skateboard style, which includes the skateboard itself, has the capacity to communicate many things, such as experience level, age, personality, how you learned, what kind of skater you are, and what kind of skater you want to be. This information may be as useful as verbal communication between skaters too, because much of a skateboarder’s style is unconscious and unintentional, as the participants explained. While some aspects of style can be tweaked and controlled, the rest is already in place as you learn how to skate. This means that style might be an unfettered way to get to know another skater, as it is mostly out of their control what they communicate.
Courtesies

As observed during my sessions at the park, it is common practice for skaters to try and pick up loose boards when possible, and hand them back to the skater who lost control of the board in the first place. This is either to keep the lanes safe for all other skaters, or to be polite and help the skater who might be struggling to land a trick. This gesture, the handing back of the board, might be a message of understanding, of encouragement as well, to get the skater back on his board faster so they can land the trick sooner. The other courtesy that I observed, the motioning the skaters would use while in the organic queue for attempting tricks, might be a way for skaters to indicate to others that they aren’t quite ready to attempt their trick yet, and so acknowledging this to other skaters allows them to “jump ahead” or “cut” the line the skaters naturally form. This would allow the skaters to use the park more efficiently, because there would be less downtime for that obstacle, and more attempts can be made if skaters don’t have to wait as long for their turn. Both courtesies are an attempt from the skater who is sending the messages to connect with the other skaters. This might be a way for skaters to extend themselves to one another and form a friendship or a comradery between themselves.

Language

I believe that skaters have a desire to share, which is why the concept of filming skateboarders showcasing their best tricks caught on in the skateboarding community. However, I think this desire is also at the basis of the language created for and used by the skateboarding community. In order to explain, and therefore share knowledge of stunts and “super sweet tricks” as Participant 5 put it, words had to come up with to
describe the actions being performed by skaters around the world. This common
language allows for the community of skateboarders, regardless of region, native
language, race, ethnicity, gender, and age to communicate and share with each other their
skateboarding accomplishments. This in turns has brought the community of
skateboarders even closer together.

Limitations and Future Research

Like with any other framework or methodology for research, there are positive
and negative aspects that are inherent. While large scale, quantitative surveys can yield
significant sample sizes, the individual data points may not be specific enough, or dive
deep into the issue being research. On the other side of the coin, qualitative methods such
as conducting interviews and engaging in participant observations, while able to illustrate
a deeper and maybe more impactful conclusion, usually is plagued by small sample size
and therefore is not always applicable to a larger community. Regarding this project’s
methodology, I believe there is an equal-balance of positives and negatives. The
skateboarding community is both incredibly individual, and community-driven, which
results in an unusual dichotomy. As a result of the two techniques I employed, the data
that was collected was both community-driven (via the participant observations and
media analysis) and individual-based (via interviews).

The conclusions that this paper outlines should become a foundation for future
research into the field of skateboarding and the communication within it. While by no
means an exhaustive study, I believe this project outlines areas that are significant to the
process of communication within the skateboarding community, and research into these
fields will only prove valuable for future generations of skaters.
A study of this magnitude was not easy to perform in just under a year. Originally, I was going to attempt a media analysis of popular skateboarding media, such as movies like *Lords of Dogtown* (2005) and *mid90s* (2018), skate videos that brands put out for promotion, and even online video content via social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube. It was quickly realized over the last three months of this project that including a media analysis, which easily could have been a project of its own, was unrealistic and not going to add enough to the final product to be worthwhile. Unfortunately, the time I had spent working on the media analysis, could have been applied elsewhere had this realization come to fruition sooner.

This study was only able to represent data from 15 hours of participant observation and utilize 5 interview participants. Participant observation alone for as study should be much more of a focus, which would mean longer and more sessions of participant observation. However, due to the timeline set for this study, that proved unfeasible and so 15 hours was selected. Regarding the interviews, ten invitations were sent out, with the relevant interview information which allowed each prospective interviewee to know what they were signing up for. Only five responded with times they were available to meet. As with any qualitative study, more subjects would have been beneficial from a data analysis point of view, but it might have been a blessing in disguise. Analyzing the data from the interviews and drawing my conclusions from it were only possible in the time frame I performed it in because of how few participants were involved. However, more participants would have allowed for greater confirmability of results, transferability, and even power in the data. If I were to have
data from 10 interviews, the time I would have needed to analyze that data would have been too much to handle within the given timeframe and resources.

Another limitation that this study suffered from was a lack of prior research done in the field. As is explained in the literature review, while there are ethnographies out there on skateboarding and its community, I was unable to find academic research into the communication characteristics of a sport like skateboarding, let alone skateboarding itself. That left me with a smattering of articles of skateboarding, language, and non-verbal communication. While this certainly made it harder to research and come up with my research questions, the lack of academic research out there already adds validity to the significance of this paper. This study can act as a basis or a foundation for future research into the field.

Along those lines, there are several areas that could not be included in this study but should become the focus for studies in the future. One of these topics is the relationship between what gets a person to start skateboarding, and what makes that person serious about skateboarding. Each interview participant had a reason they started skateboarding, whether that be transportation in the case of Participant 5, or simply their mother brought home a toy for them, as was the case for Participants 2 and 4. But each of them also explained what made them serious, such as skate videos, or skating with friends. Finding this relationship and studying it might prove useful for the industry for growth, because if more first-time skaters can eventually become serious, that leads to better business for the industry and a growth in the community, two positive things for skateboarding as a whole.
Another conclusion that might also be fruitful to study is the traffic and park etiquette that I both observed and was told about in the interviews. For as complex as the system is, for it to be made up of unwritten rules that one learns through immersion, is amazing and worthy of more in-depth study. Doing this might lead to better written rules being set for parks, that might help educate the younger and less experienced skaters, advancing them through their skateboarding “journey” faster.

When interviewing Participant 5, they mentioned the phrase “first wall fall”, which is included in my results section. This phrase means that if a bowl or pool skater falls on their first trick in their run, which is typically multiple tricks in a row, than that skater has the opportunity to get out and try their run immediately, instead of waiting their turn. This difference in the way different styles of skateboarders think about their activity could be another area of future study. At the most basic level, they are performing the same activity, but the difference is street skaters might use all their energy and skill to perform one big, flashy trick at a time, whereas bowl and pool skaters might split their energy and skill along multiple tricks in a run. This a study of this dichotomy and its effect on the skater’s relationship and role within the skateboarding community might be interesting and yield significant results for newcomers to the sport looking for where they fit best.

Lastly, if I had had more time to analyze data, I think that showing clips of skateboarders performing stunts and tricks to the interview participants would have yielded some interesting data about style. As this study revels, there is a lot to style, but much of it is more show then tell, so to speak. The participants might have found it hard to explain style, as it comes across visually through non-verbal cues and behaviors.
LET'S TALK SKATEBOARDING

Showing clips of skaters perfuming tricks might allow the researcher to not only show different clips of the same trick, and therefore contrasting the two to find the difference, but allow the participant to explain that difference in a way only a skater knows how. This might lead to even more extensive study into skateboarding style and what skaters communicate through it.

Conclusion

It is my hope that after reading this study, both skateboarders and non-skateboarders alike can have a mutual understanding of the intricate and complex inner workings of the communication sphere in the skateboarding community. I suggest that the reader go back to the beginning and reread the example scenario included in the introduction. This a real-world scenario that has most certainly happened at a park somewhere. Without the communication behaviors that this paper outlines, skate parks, or even skating out on the street would be even more dangerous than skateboarding already is intrinsically. Through the verbal behaviors of encouraging and congratulating, causal and small talk, self-talk, language and terminology, and alerting, the skateboarding community and its culture would suffer greatly. Lack of these verbal communication behaviors would make it hard for there to be a cohesive culture of skateboarding, just as any other culture needs their language and verbal communication to function and thrive.

Similarly, skateboarding needs its non-verbal communication to foster the same community feel, while at the same time keeping skaters safe while performing possibly life-threatening stunts for their own enjoyment. Between a skater’s style, encouraging and congratulatory gestures, courtesies, and traffic patterns, the non-verbal behavior of
skaters is arguably just as important, if not more so, to the function of the skateboarding community. Without, every skater would be lost in the chaos of a skatepark and in more danger than they could handle. Along with that, the community would have a hard time feeling like a community, as travelling from region to region would expose a skater to many different sets of unwritten rules, which would appear naturally in the absence of one single set like explained earlier.

Ultimately, this study has provided the academic and skateboarding worlds with a foundation to study skateboarding communication in more depth, and leaves open the possibility for future research into areas I either missed or was unable to analyze. But as we skaters say, “I’ll get it next try”.
References


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Appendix A

Introduction

1. How many years have you skated?
2. When did you start skateboarding?
3. What got you into skateboarding?

Community Questions:

4. As a percentage, how many of your close acquaintances and friends would you consider to be skateboarders or members of the skateboarding community?
5. Do you skateboard with friends, or usually alone? Why? Why not?
6. Do you think it is more common for skaters to skate alone or in a group? Why so?
7. Do you consider yourself a member of the larger skateboarding community? A skate crew? If so, how do you define those terms?
8. Do you consume the following skateboarding community media, and for each type you use below, how many minutes or hours do you spend using or consuming it, on a weekly basis?
   a. social networking apps (Instagram pages, YouTube channels, etc.);
   b. team videos (Stay Gold, Brainwash, Hallelujah, Baker has a Deathwish, etc.);
   c. skateboarding magazines (Thrasher, Transworld Skateboarding, Skateboarder, Big Brother, etc.);
   d. skateboarding video games (Tony Hawk Series, EA Skate series, etc.)
9. How have you seen communication of the skateboarding community change over time? This can include any method of communication and media, such as videos, social media, magazines, or real-life interaction.
10. Does your think age, experience level, gender, or ethnicity can play a factor in understanding the “community language of skateboarding”?

Verbal related Questions:

11. Do you communicate verbally with other skaters while at the park, in the streets, etc. What kinds of words or phrases might you use at the park?
12. Are there any possible barriers that prevent efficient verbal communication between skateboarders?
13. Do you think skateboarding has skateboarding specific jargon? Jargon is a set of terms that have very specific meanings that typically only community or industry members understand. Why?
14. Following up on that question, how do you think you learned this jargon? Do you see yourself as fluent in skateboarding jargon?
15. I have a list of skateboarding specific terms. If it is okay with you, I will show you them and have you explain what they mean and the reasoning behind your definitions.
   a. Flip Tricks
      i. Kick, Heel, Variat, 360, Laser, Under, Finger, etc.
   b. Grab Tricks
      i. Melon, Christ Air, Airwalk, Frontside, etc.
   c. Orientation and style terms
      i. Frontside, Backside, Goofy, Regular, Fakie, Mongo, Park style, Street Style, Vert style, Freestyle, etc.
   d. Obstacles and Park language
      i. Hubba, Stair, Block, Ledge, Pyramid, Pole Jam, Roll-in, Coping, Flat-ground, etc.
   e. Grinds
      i. 50-50, 5-0, Crooked, Nose, Smith, Feeble, etc.
   f. Slides
      i. Nose, Tail, Lip, Board, Blunt
   g. Non-trick Motions
      i. Mall-Grab, Bombing a hill, Coffin, Skitch, Wheel-bite, Powerslide, Manuals, Rolling in, Roll away, Stick, Sketchy
   h. Exclamations and MISC
      i. Back you up, Next try, Game of SKATE, etc.

Non-Verbal related Questions:

16. Do you communicate non-verbally with other skaters while at the park, in the streets, etc.? Do you use gesture or motions? What kinds of gestures or motions do you use?
17. Are there any possible barriers that prevent efficient non-verbal communication between skateboarders?
18. One example that comes to mind when thinking about non-verbal gestures that skaters do is clacking their boards on copings or the ground. What do you interpret this action to mean? Does context matter for gestures like this?
19. Were you taught these motions, or pick up on them yourself?
20. Have you created your own gestures or motions to use to communicate?
21. What does “style” mean? How does a skater convey their “style”? Is it conscious or unconscious? What do you think your personal style communicates about you?
22. Do certain tricks tell you anything about a skater? Do the groups/difficulty of tricks they attempt/complete communicate anything to you about them?
23. What does an individual’s skateboard communicate or tell you about the skater?