

ASSESSING THE PARK VISITOR BEHAVIOR AT LOS OSOS SKATE PARK

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Kristen McClay

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ABSTRACT

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KRISTEN MCCLAY

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Skateboarding began in California over 50 years ago and has grown internationally. The purpose of this study was to assess the behavior of park visitors at Los Osos Skate Park. This park was fully supervised and this study can serve as a tool for park management. The researcher observed the skate park during operating hours throughout April 2011. The subjects of this study were park visitors actively skateboarding, or passively watching. The dominant demographic for skateboarders were adolescent males. This study found peak times were weekdays afterschool, adult park visitors display the most positive behavior, and middle school park visitors display the most negative behavior. This study also found that a supervised skate park may deter illegal behavior throughout park grounds. However, this study recommends that more observations be conducted both during and after operating hours, and the researcher should be unknown, all to ensure the most accurate observations.

Keywords: skate park management, skateboarding, skater behavior

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

Skateboarding began in the 1950's with the crude attachment of four roller-skate wheels onto a wooden plank (Beal, 1995). Innovative California surfers created skateboards in an attempt to mimic surfing in the ocean onto the streets (Cave, 2007). Skateboarding has progressed into a male dominated, global industry, and now takes place all over the world (Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005). However, the roots of the skateboarding industry still remain in California.

Most skaters have had to be creative with where they skate, whether it is illegally in downtown areas, bank parking lots, or even in drainage ditches. However, within the state of California, there are over 250 skate parks to provide skaters with a safe and legal place to skate (Thrasher Magazine, 2011). In San Luis Obispo County, California, there are eight skate parks. Seven of those parks are owned and operated by local parks and recreation agencies. Some of these agencies have chosen to hire park attendants to supervise the skate park, while others have chosen to forgo supervision and have the rules posted along with a skate at your own risk sign.

To provide staff supervision or allow self-governance has been an ongoing management debate for agencies operating skate parks around the country. Safety concerns, liability issues, vandalism, and criminal behavior are among the top issues that operating agencies take into consideration when managing skate parks (Gilligan, 2004).

Within San Luis Obispo County, three of the skate parks are unsupervised, and five are supervised with paid staff.

This study assesses the behavior of skate park visitors at the Los Osos skate park. This park is managed by San Luis Obispo County Parks and is fully supervised (San Luis Obispo County Parks, 2009). According to Hudley (2006), “direct observation has become one of the preeminent techniques for assessing behavior problems in children because it is the best, if not the only, way to capture peer interactions in the natural environment” (p. 74). Hudley (2006) further explains how observation provides valuable information about childhood aggression. Playground-based observations can be used to aide parents, teachers, and facilitators in dealing with problem behaviors (Leff & Lakin, 2005). The information collected can also be used for parks and recreation offices, and specifically, assist SLO County Parks with their management policies.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Elite, SPORTDiscus, ERIC, Hospitality and Tourism Complete. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: skateboarding culture and skate park management.

Skateboarding culture. Culture is defined as a complex blend of language, beliefs, customs, values, and traditions that are developed by a group of people and shared within the same environment (Zimbardo, Johnson, & Weber, 2006).

Skateboarding is more than an alternative sport; it is a creative form of self-expression that has created an entire culture around itself. According to Hunter (2001), skateboarding is “an extraordinarily rich social and stylistic area, which is constantly shifting and re-defining itself, drawing on new forces of influence and distinction” (p. 45). Skateboarding culture consists of the people within the sport, the stereotypes attached to those people, and fashion.

Skateboarding has become a global sport and typically appeals to a certain type of person. For example, the dominant demographic of skateboarders in Central Coast of California are young, white males between 10 to 21 years old (Goldenberg & Shooter, 2009). Skateboarding is a male dominated sport that “constantly experiments with new forms of masculinity” (Beal, 1995, p. 252). Borden (2006) explains how skaters, very similar to the homeless, “occupy urban space without economic activity” (as cited in Nemeth, 2006, p. 307). These skaters travel in packs, constantly changing their skate locations, to look for new challenges. Beal refers to these types of skateboarders as “nomads of the city” (p. 252).

Since the beginning, both positive and negative stereotypes have been associated with the skateboarding community. Skateboarding represents ideas of resistance and radicalism (Bäckström, 2007). The urban streets provide the platform for skaters to exercise not only their sport, but their resistance to spatial regulation (Vivoni, 2009). Street skaters often choose to skate in public spaces, like the smooth, marble steps of a downtown area. This is taken as a public display of radicalism and causes the non-skate community to view skateboarding as a public nuisance. Many cities have banned street skating and some towns, like Cape May, New Jersey, have tried to cite anyone carrying a

skateboard on city property (Németh, 2006). This negativity also feeds the idea that skaters use drugs, do not work and have no respect for private property (Kelly et al., 2005).

Yet positive stereotypes have emerged with the increased popularity of skateboarding. Children who are not interested in playing organized sports have a physical outlet for exercise with skateboarding (Shannon & Werner, 2008). Skateboarding gives kids a sense of freedom and helps build self-confidence. Skaters tend to be more self-confident and comfortable with themselves (Kelly et al., 2005). Skateboarding also sparks creativity, as skaters challenge themselves to approach ordinary architecture as endless skate possibilities (Bäckström, 2007). Typically, skaters do not want to cause problems or be a nuisance to society, they just want somewhere to do their sport (Shannon & Werner, 2008).

There are other key elements, such as fashion, that are key components of the skate culture. Hunter (2001) discovered that the “seemingly simple act of dressing the body represents something much more powerful to the skater” (p. 3). With younger skaters, fashion and style is a crucial element of being accepted within their skate community. Skate style and fashion reflect a sense of who a skater is and what they value. It encompasses their age, skate experience, skate style, the music they like, and the skaters they look up to. Other skaters appreciate and understand these codes of fashion, but outside the skate community, the fashion identity is lost (Hunter, 2001).

There are older skaters within the skate culture. With age comes a deeper relationship with skateboarding itself (Hunter, 2001). Many people take a break from skateboarding during some point in their life. However, they often return to the sport, but

with a different view. Adult skaters view the sport as a temporary escape from the rest of the world, a chance, for a few hours, to be a kid again (Hunter, 2001). The physical act of skateboarding arouses a sense of freedom (Bäckström, 2007).

Skate park management. Skateboarding has struggled to be recognized as a legitimate form of recreation for several decades (Rankin, 1997). In 2003, there were over 11 million skateboarders in the United States and that number has continued to grow (Shannon & Werner, 2008). Skateboarders have been continually challenged to find legal places to skate, even though every inch of concrete is a potential skate spot. In the last decade, skateboarders have started to attend city council meetings and file requests for skate parks, just as people do for new tennis courts or baseball fields. Skateboarders want city parks and recreation departments to build legal spaces for them to skate (Rankin). For those professional recreation agencies, there is more to building a skate spot than installing ramps on an old basketball court. They have to justify why a skate park is needed, address liability concerns, and decide how to manage the park.

Without skate park facilities, skateboarders are forced to ride in public spaces and areas that are not specifically designed for them. Skating in public spaces is considered to be a nuisance to citizens and has also become a constant enforcement issue for police (Rankin, 1997). Many of the traffic free areas that skaters want to ride in prohibit skateboarding, which forces skaters into streets and parking lots. These areas have numerous hazards that could be alleviated by a well-constructed skate park (SPS Staff, 2011).

According to Skaters for Public Skate parks, an average of nearly one person per week was killed while skateboarding in 2006. This totaled 42 skateboarding deaths. Of

these deaths, 40 occurred outside of skate parks and of those, 27 were attributed to motor vehicles. The youngest fatality was a seven year old and the oldest was 49 (SPS Staff, 2011). Parks and recreation providers have started to realize that skaters need a safe place to skate (Rankin, 1997). Bill Fowler, superintendent of Recreation and Human Services for Huntington Beach, CA stated “We are about providing safe opportunities for everyone, not just the ones who play a particular sport” (Rankin, p. 54). Building a skate park discourages kids from skating in the street and gives them a safer, traffic free alternative (Forsman & Erikson, 2001).

Even though skateboarding is legally defined as a “hazardous activity” (Lee, 2003), when compared to other recreational activities, skateboarding has a smaller percentage of hospital-treated injuries. According to the National SAFE Kids Campaign, bicycling had the most hospital treated injuries (24%), followed by football (17%), baseball (10%), trampoline jumping (7%), and soccer (6%). Skateboarding only had 5% of the hospital treated sports injuries for kids, and in-line and roller skating only had 3% (National SAFE Kids Campaign, 2011).

Every skate park has different concerns and issues because every skate community is different. To ensure optimal park use, a skate park should be well designed and well managed (Gilligan, 2004). A skate park is typically an accurate reflection of the community in which it is located and the climate is most heavily influenced by the behavior of the skaters (SPS Staff, 2009).

Children experiment with a variety of behaviors to see what is accepted and what is not. Usually children learn and build from negative behaviors, especially when adults can correct the negativity at an early age (Wert, Bauman, & Nottis, 2010). When

children have the opportunity to build a positive, high quality relationship with an adult or mentor, the positive relationship increases overall positivity in the child's social abilities and overall positive behavior (O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011). However, without the presence of adult supervision, adolescents at a skate park can turn the park into a "wild west" type of community (SPS Staff, 2009).

Every skate park needs two things to help keep the park safe and well managed: a positive adult presence and a strong sense of ownership from the skaters. Some parks have paid employees to supervise, others have volunteers who help out, and some let the skaters simply police themselves (SPS Staff, 2009). For recreation providers, the services provided are only as good as the staff operating them. Whether a skate park chooses to have hired staff or volunteers, those people need to not only care about the park but the people within the park as well (Quigley, 2005).

The two main types of supervision within skate park management are supervised and unsupervised. The supervision policy should ideally be created before the park design is finished (Lee, 2003). However, this decision can be difficult because both types of supervision have positive and negative aspects, and even skaters are unsure on what type of supervision is best.

Supervised skate parks are clean, well maintained, and provide parents with the comfort of child supervision (SPS Staff, 2009). As a result, more parks departments are beginning to adopt a supervision policy. However, some skaters feel that supervision is an attempt to place further control over their free activities. They also argue that staffing a skate park creates a job that is not needed and actually increases the park's liability (Gilligan, 2004).

Unsupervised skate parks still have some forms of minimal supervision such as signs explaining the risks involved with skateboarding, required and recommended safety gear, and hours of operation. Many parks and recreation departments now have “limited liability laws” to allow use at your own risk parks (Gilligan, 2004, p. 65). Local skateboarders have a sense of pride and stewardship with their local skate parks. This type of relationship can work to build a skate culture, revitalize an area, and create a sense of ownership in something (Gilligan).

Summary. Over 11 million people in the United States skateboard and on the Central Coast of California, the majority of those skaters are young, white males. Skateboarding is a growing sport that has finally become recognized as a legitimate form of recreation. There is also an entire culture that revolves around skateboarding, from the skaters, stereotypes, and fashion. City and state ordinances make it illegal to skate in commercial areas and have forced skaters to be outlaws or skate in the streets. Parks and recreation departments around the country have started to realize that these skaters need a place to ride. Skate parks create liabilities issues and safety concerns for communities. The two types of management options are supervised and unsupervised, and an opinion on which type is best is yet to be determined.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the behavior of park visitors at Los Osos Skate Park.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the peak times for Los Osos Skate Park?
2. Do skate park visitors tend to have more positive or negative behavior at Los Osos Skate Park?
3. What age groups tend to have the most positive and most negative behavior?
4. Does having a skate park supervised deter illegal behavior throughout park grounds?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Passive and active skate park visitors were the subjects of this study.
2. The behaviors of park patrons in a supervised skate park were studied.
3. Data were collected and observations were made throughout April 2011, at Los Osos Skate Park during operating hours.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. The attendance numbers of park visitors varied day to day.
2. Weather may have influenced park attendance.
3. The presence of the researcher may have influenced park visitor behavior.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that park patrons would not act differently with the presence of the researcher.
2. It was assumed that the researcher had an understanding of what was acceptable behavior within a skate park.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Active participant. any person who is actively engaged in the allowed skating activities within Los Osos Skate Park

Adults. ages 23-over

Elementary age kids. ages 5-11 years old

High school youth. ages 15-18 years old

Middle school kids. ages 12-14 years old

Passive participant. any person who is in Los Osos Skate Park, but not actively engaged in a skating activity

Skater. any person who is actively engaged in the allowed skating activities (skateboarding, rollerblading, or rollerskating) within Los Osos Skate Park

Young adults. ages 19-22 years old, also known as college age

Young children. ages 0-4 years old

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to assess the behavior of park visitors at Los Osos Skate Park. This chapter includes a description of subjects studied, the instrument used, the procedures of the study, and the method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

The population of this study was skate park patrons at Los Osos Skate Park. The park visitors included both males and females and varied in age. Due to the observational nature of this study, the only demographic information recorded was an approximate age group for each participant. The age groups on the observation sheet were broken down into the following: young children, elementary, middle school, high school, college, and adults.

The sample size for this study was limited to the park participants' attendance during the time of observation. Included in the observation were both active and passive participants. Active participants were those who were actively skateboarding in the skate park. Passive participants consisted of park patrons who were physically present on park property but not skateboarding within the skate park.

Description of Instrument

The instrument used to collect observational data was a chart created by the researcher in Microsoft Excel. The chart was brought to each observation. At the top of

the instrument was a space for the time and date of observation, along with a section for recording positive and negative behaviors. Common negative behaviors listed in the top row were the following: foul language, littering, throwing board, fighting, breaking rules, alcohol consumption, and smoking. The positive behaviors listed in the lower half of the instrument were: encourages, shares, picks up trash, helpful, follows rules, and ignores trouble. Along the left side of the chart were groupings of estimated age groups to organize the park patrons. During each observation, the researcher took field observations on the active and passive participants, identifying different behaviors and noting unique situations. The field research form has been included as Appendix A.

In order to test the validity of the field research and ensure the most effective observation methods, the researcher conducted a pilot test. The purpose of the pilot test was to ensure field observation methods were effective in recording the behavior of park patrons. The researcher observed behavior from several locations within the skate park during one day. Once the pilot test was completed, the researcher reviewed the notes and results to finalize decisions regarding methods of data collection. Adjustments were made to ensure data was accurately recorded.

Because of the observational nature of the study, and based on guidelines posted by Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee, the study was determined to be exempt from the need for Human Subjects Approval.

Description of Procedures

Prior to conducting observations, the researcher created a schedule based upon the operating hours of the Los Osos Skate Park. Observation shifts were blocked off in two

hour increments and scheduled so that each hour of operation would be observed at least once during both a weekday and weekend day. For example, a Monday shift was from 12:00 p.m. (opening) to 2:00 p.m., Tuesday from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Wednesday from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (closing). The weekend had a similar schedule.

Observations were made from April 1 through April 18, 2011.

The researcher conducted a pilot test to determine the best possible locations within the skate park to conduct the observation discreetly. The pilot test provided the researcher with the best options for successful anonymous observation. The researcher chose to conduct the observations by being both an active and passive participant.

For each observation, the researcher dressed in comfortable clothes to skateboard in and brought a notebook with the instrument to mark common positive and negative behaviors. The day of week, time of observation, and total count of skaters present were recorded on each tally sheet and attached was an additional paper for notes and comments. The researcher also noted the behavior of passive park patrons who were on park property by walking around the grounds two times during each observation. This system was repeated for each observation.

While being an active participant, the researcher was able to observe behavior while skateboarding in the park. This type of observation allowed the researcher to observe behaviors that passive observation would miss, such as an altercation in the back of the park. The researcher would take frequent breaks from skating to take notes on the observation sheet, which was stored with the researcher's skate gear.

When the researcher observed as a passive participant, the researcher remained within the observation area of the park. If a park visitor questioned the researcher, the

researcher responded with a prepared response, “I am a student at Cal Poly, working on my senior project.” This was a prepared response in order to avoid deception, without revealing the cover of the researcher.

Method of Data Analysis

After observations were completed, the researcher reviewed the field notes and used the observations to attempt to answer research questions regarding skateboarder behaviors at Los Osos Skate Park. The researcher coded and analyzed the data to interpret the results through Microsoft Excel.

The question regarding peak park use times was answered by calculating the average number skaters during each hour and recording what hours have the highest attendance or participation. In order to answer what age groups have the most positive and most negative behavior, the researcher calculated the frequency and percentage for each type of behavior and age group. The researcher determined if the presence of supervision deters illegal behavior in the park by recording the actual number of illegal behavior conducted.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the behavior of park visitors at Los Osos Skate Park. The field research was conducted during the skate park's operating hours throughout April 2011. The researcher observed the skate park for a total of 38 hours, covering weekday and weekend shifts from April 1 through April 18. The observations recorded primarily qualitative data but also recorded minimal quantitative data. This chapter is divided into the following sections: peak times, negative behavior, positive behavior, and summary.

Peak Times

The study conducted used unobtrusive observations to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The only quantitative data collected was determining peak times for skate park users. This information was collected by documenting how many people were in the skate park during the set time for the observation. Each observation was blocked off in two hour periods and the researcher tallied park visitors throughout the observation period. The researcher noted whether each visitor was an active or passive participant in the appropriate time. No other demographic information was collected about the park visitor.

The following were average number of total park visitors during weekdays: 12:00-2:00 p.m. ($n = 7$), 2:00-4:00 p.m. ($n = 13$), and 4:00-6:00 p.m. ($n = 10$). Weekdays from 2:00-4:00 p.m. had the highest number of park visitors, with Monday being the

busiest shift. However, Wednesdays consistently had the most visitors throughout the entire day. There were more passive park visitors during 4:00-6:00 p.m. than other time blocks.

The following were the average number of park visitors during the weekend: 12:00-2:00 p.m. ($n = 6$), 2:00-4:00 p.m. ($n = 8$), and 4:00-6:00 p.m. ($n = 14$). Weekend evenings from 4:00-6:00 p.m. had the highest number of park visitors. There were no passive park visitors in the skate park on the observation weekends.

Negative Behavior

Primarily, the researcher was observing the positive and negative behavior of park visitors. Age group estimations were on the observation sheet to correspond with common positive and negative behaviors. Common negative behaviors listed on the observation sheet were: foul language, littering, throwing board, fighting, breaking rules, alcohol, and smoking.

Young children (ages 0-4 years old) did not display any negative behavior at the skate park. Elementary age kids, overall, displayed 23% of the negative behavior at the skate park. The most common negative behavior for elementary kids (ages 5-11 years old) was foul language (28%), breaking rules (28%), and fighting (22%). Primarily, the elementary kids' negative behavior was towards children similar in age. The researcher also noticed how their negative behavior was usually provoked and short lived.

Middle school kids (ages 12-14 years old) had excessively more negative behavior (67%) than any other age group at the skate park. The most common negative behavior for this group was breaking rules (47%), foul language (30%), and littering

(13%). Middle school kids repeatedly skated without the required safety gear, and would attempt to ride bicycles in the park. This age group also constantly used foul language, in both angry and casual conversation. Candy wrappers, soda cans, and chip bags from the middle school skaters were left all over the skate park, for the park monitor to eventually clean up. The park monitor would frequently remind the middle youth to pick up their trash, but they either did not listen, or would simply forget.

There were not many high school youth (ages 15-18 years old) at the skate park during observations, but the high school youth that were skating had minimal negative behavior (4%). Their most common negative behaviors were throwing their skateboards and breaking park rules. High school skaters would commonly throw their board out of frustration when not landing a trick after repeated tries. This negative behavior was not directed at anybody, but more so as an expression of anger and frustration with their skills. High school youth also broke park rules by not skating with the required safety gear.

Young adults (ages 19-22 years old) were similar to high school youth with negative behavior patterns (5%). Besides foul language, young adults did not want to wear the required safety gear when skateboarding.

Adults (ages 23 years old and over) had minimal negative behavior and besides young children, adults had the least amount of negative behavior (1%). During the observations, the only adult negative behavior was a board throwing incident. Again, this negative behavior was in response to dealing with self-frustration, and not aimed at another individual. There were usually as many adults as middle school youth at the

skate park, so this information was reflective of the attitudes of the entire population of the skate park.

Positive Behavior

In addition to the negative behavior observed, the positive behavior were also noted. The age groups remained the same. Common positive behaviors that were listed on the observation sheet were: encourages, shares, picks up trash, helpful, follows rules, and ignores trouble.

Young children followed rules and listened to their parents. They displayed 2% of the overall positive behavior at the skate park. Even though the younger children seemed to not be aware of what was going on in the park, they still tried to be helpful. The young children would chase runaway skateboards and help their friends get out of the skate areas. The young children presence seemed to influence other skaters' behavior in a positive way, and create a positive, fun environment in the park.

Even though the elementary kids displayed ample negative behavior, they also displayed a lot of positive behavior. The elementary age kids displayed 13% of the total positive behavior. They followed rules most of the time (65%), encouraged other skaters constantly (22%), and shared (9%). Often, the elementary kids would help the park monitor clean up messes, sweep, or run errands. This group would encourage skaters of all ages to push their limits with their skating abilities, and give them positive encouragement to try new things. If a skater was scared or nervous to try a new trick, this group would explain how scared they were when they first did the trick and offer pointers and advice. One elementary kid told a young adult who was hesitant about a new trick,

“At some point, ya gotta stop pickin’ your nose and just do it!” The comment made the young adult laugh and try the new trick. Elementary kids always shared their food and drinks with each other, and would also give their friends money if needed.

The middle school kids displayed some positive behavior (33% overall). This group usually had high positive energy and like the elementary kids, encouraged everybody to push the skating abilities. Common ways this group encouraged other skaters was by clapping, hooting, and tapping their skateboards on the pavement. They followed most rules (31%), would pick up their trash if asked to (14%), were always helpful (14%), and even shared their skate gear with others (10%). This group was highly social and made friends easily. Middle school kids preferred to play games and skate with other skaters, but it did not matter what age the other skaters were.

High school youth displayed 3% of the overall positive behavior, with the most common being following rules (60%), picking up trash (20%), and ignoring trouble (20%). The high school youth were usually very consistent with picking up their trash and also picking up other people’s trash. There were other teens that would walk by the skate park and yell comments to the skaters. However, the high school youth were very mature about ignoring the trouble makers and continuing to skate.

As the groups get older, they follow rules without as much hassle. The young adults displayed 11% of the positive behavior at the skate park. They were really consistent with wearing the required safety gear and following park rules without any arguments (63%). This group was also very helpful (21%), assisting the park monitor and also with other skaters. There was an injured possum that had fallen into a steep skate area and could not get out. A group of young adults were willing to try to remove

the animal, putting their own safety at risk. This group also helped the younger skaters and gave them lots of positive encouragement.

Adults displayed more positive behavior than any other age group (39%). The adults followed park rules with no problems (41%), encouraged everybody (29%), were helpful (19%), picked up trash (9%), and shared their gear (3%). The adults of the park were positive role models for the younger skaters at the park. The kids would ask the adult skaters for advice about tricks and gear, and the adults would give the kids attention and respect. The adults did not let the kids get away with breaking rules and causing trouble. For example, when an adult skater told a kid to stop doing something negative, they listened.

Summary

The data presented in this chapter explains the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the observational study. The research reveals that weekday afternoons from 2:00-4:00 p.m. have the highest number of park visitors. The behavior observations also revealed that middle school kids had the most negative behavior at the skate park. However, they also had lots of positive behavior. Adults, having the most positive behavior, served as positive role models for the younger skaters. A detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the behavior of park visitors at Los Osos Skate Park. This concluding chapter is divided into the following sections: summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary

This study was an examination of skater behavior in a fully supervised park and can be utilized as a tool for skate park management. The researcher observed the skate park during operating hours, as both an active and passive park visitor, in order to obtain a variety of behaviors.

Skateboarding began in California over 50 years ago and has grown into an international sport. Today, local parks and recreation departments can offer skate parks to the public as a safe alternative to skating on the streets. However, management of skate facilities has been an ongoing issue for parks and recreation departments because of the dangerous nature of the sport and the culture that surrounds it. On the Central Coast of California, most skaters are young, white males who have acquired both positive and negative stereotypes for the skate community. Common positive stereotypes are: skateboarding increases confidence and creativity. Common negative stereotypes are: skaters use drugs, do not work, and have no respect for private property.

Observations were conducted at Los Osos Skate Park throughout April 2011. This skate facility is locally managed by San Luis Obispo County Parks. The subjects of

the study were both active and passive park visitors. The direct observation method allowed the researcher to have unobtrusive observations of subjects in their natural setting. The researcher was able to determine peak times for the park and the average behaviors of subjects.

Research revealed that weekday afternoons from 2:00-4:00 p.m. had the highest number of park visitors. Concerning subject behavior, most of the positive behavior came from the adults. Those adults also seemed to serve as role models for the younger skaters, displaying common behaviors such as following the rules and encouraging skaters. Middle school kids also had high levels of positive behavior, like picking up trash and being helpful. However, they also had an equal amount of negative behavior and displayed more negative behavior than the other park visitors. Their most common negative behaviors were breaking rules and using foul language.

Discussion

This section will explain how the research questions and reviewed literature relate to the actual findings of the study. The researcher's conclusions and recommendations from this study directly follow this section at the end of the chapter.

The first research question examined the number of park visitors during operating hours to determine peak use times. Observations determined that weekdays after school were the busiest shifts. Observations also showed that Mondays had the highest number of park visitors.

The skate park does not charge admission on school days but does charge a \$2.00 admission fee on weekends and holidays. The majority of park visitors were school

children who do not get out of school until 2:30 p.m. Most children do not have their own source of money and the researcher concluded that the admission fee is related to the decrease in the number of park visitors. The researcher also observed that once school was over, the number of park visitors would dramatically increase. This observation led to the conclusion that school days were directly related to the number of park visitors.

The second and third research questions examined the behavior of park visitors to determine who had the most positive and negative behavior. Observations revealed adults displayed more positive behavior than other park visitors. The adult park visitors followed rules without any problems, helped the young skaters with new tricks, and encouraged them. The younger skaters seemed to view the adults as positive role models and seemed to enjoy skateboarding with them. The researcher concluded that adult park visitors consistently have more positive behavior than other park visitors.

Observations also revealed that middle school kids displayed lots of positive behavior. However, they also had more negative behavior than any other group of park visitors. The middle school kids consistently broke park rules, such as not wearing the required safety gear and eating inside of the park. They also very rarely picked up their trash, and would leave their gear all over the park. Middle school kids' attitudes ranged greatly on an hourly basis. The researcher determined that even though middle school kids had lots of positive behavior, they still had more negative behavior than any other group of park visitors.

The final research question addressed the issue of illegal behavior in a supervised park. The public is still able to access park grounds surrounding the skate park when the skate park is closed. Observations were only conducted during the skate park's operating

hours. Throughout the observations, the researcher did not notice any illegal behavior except for possibly underage cigarette smoking. However, many frequent park visitors know that the researcher also worked for the park agency and this may have deterred their illegal behavior. This observation helped to support the conclusion though, that having a supervised skate park actually does deter illegal behavior since no illegal behavior was ever discovered.

The findings from research were directly reflected in the observations, through both the skate culture and skate park management. According to Bäckström (2007), skaters are teenage boys who like to push the limits of authority figures and their skating ability. Many of those teenage skaters quit the sport for years but return to skating again, as mature adults. These mature adult skaters then serve as positive figures in the younger skaters' lives. Hunter's (2007) research was directly reflected in the observations at Los Osos and also reinforced many of the stereotypes about skateboarding.

Research about skate park management was consistent with the observations as well. SPS Staff's (2009) research found parks that are managed by local parks and recreation departments tend to be safe, clean environments. The Los Osos Skate Park is managed by San Luis Obispo County Parks and proved to be both safe and clean. The park is a well-designed and well-built concrete facility. Skaters treated the park with respect because the park was cared for, and because they truly enjoy the facility. This created a positive environment to be in because everybody was happy to be there and having fun.

The researcher noticed the relationship the regular park visitors had with each other. Everybody was friendly, encouraging, and liked to push their limits. Pushing

these limits also came in the form of some negative behavior from the younger skaters. Research showed that children push the limits to see what they can get away with, and can actually learn from those behaviors when corrected (Wert, Bauman, & Nottis, 2010). Having a supervised skate park allowed most of the negative behavior to be stopped or averted, and taught the kids how to act. The adult skaters also helped in correcting the children's negative behavior, which made the kids respect the adult skaters.

There were several limitations for this study: attendance numbers would vary on a daily basis, the weather influenced park attendance, and the actual presence of the researcher may have influenced behavior. The varying numbers of park attendance was a major limitation in determining actual peak times. The researcher discovered that many of the park visitors were at the skate park because they were on spring break. Many of the surrounding school districts had different dates for spring break, and several were during the time of observation. These numbers may have skewed the peak times for park attendance on weekdays. The skate park also was not charging admission on those spring break days, which further limited the validity of the study. In order to obtain more accurate counts of peak use, research should be conducted for a longer span of time, with few school holidays.

Another limitation of the study was the weather. The park is not open when there is rain, and park use decreases dramatically if the weather is too hot or cold. Throughout the study, the weather was sunny and temperate moderate. Numerous days, many skaters commented that it was too nice of a day to be inside and was "perfect weather for skating." Los Osos is known for heavy fog and chilly, damp air temperatures. The

duration of the study was consistently perfect sunny weather, which encouraged more people to skate when, normally, they would be inside staying warm.

The final limitation was the actual presence of the researcher influencing park visitor behavior. The researcher has been an employee of San Luis Obispo County Parks for several years, works and skates at the skate park, and is a female. All of these factors may have influenced or altered behavior from the park visitors. The researcher is well-known throughout the skate community and is friends with many of the skaters. Because skateboarding is a male dominated sport, most of the park visitors were also male. The presence of a college age female may have influenced park visitor behavior; even though they did not know the female was conducting research.

This study examined the behavior of park visitors at Los Osos Skate Park to obtain a better understanding of managing a public skate park. In order to properly manage a facility, management needs to know who their patrons are, when they use the facility, and how they behave at the facility. Although research showed that there are several different management options with public skate parks, nobody can decide which option is best. Los Osos Skate Park is a fully supervised facility and it is determined supervision is a contributing factor of the park's cleanliness and safety. However, policies, training, and staffing may differ if parks departments knew what the actual needs, wants, and issues of their specific park were. It is recommended that each skate park facility obtain a full understanding of their own skate population to determine their park's management needs.

This study has shown that most of the skaters display positive behavior at the park and the negative behavior middle school kids display are common adolescence issues, not

criminal activity. The presence of a park supervisor may be directly related to this because of the lack of illegal behavior during skate park operating hours. However, it is recommended for more research to be conducted to determine a direct relation of park supervision and illegal behavior.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Peak times for the Los Osos Skate Park are weekdays from 2:00-4:00 p.m. with Mondays being the busiest weekday.
2. Los Osos Park visitors overall display more positive behavior.
3. Adult park visitors display the most positive behavior and serve as positive role models for younger skaters, where as middle school kids have some positive behavior but display more negative behavior than any other age group.
4. Park supervision at Los Osos Skate Parks deters illegal behavior throughout park grounds during skate park operating hours.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. More observations should be conducted, during a time period where there are minimal school holidays, to determine accurate peak times.
2. Additional observers should conduct observations to ensure the presence of the observer does not influence behavior.

3. Observers should be generally unknown to the park visitors to ensure park visitor behavior is not influenced.
4. Observations should also be conducted after skate park operating hours to accurately determine if the presence of park supervision deters illegal behavior throughout the park.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

