

# PUBLIC SPACE FOR THE PEOPLE

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## The Cultural Drivers of Public Space Use



Recommendations for Promoting Access to Public Space  
for People of Color in the Woodland Hills, Mt. Pleasant, and  
Buckeye Neighborhoods of Cleveland

An Exploratory Meta Investigation by:  
The Community Innovation Network

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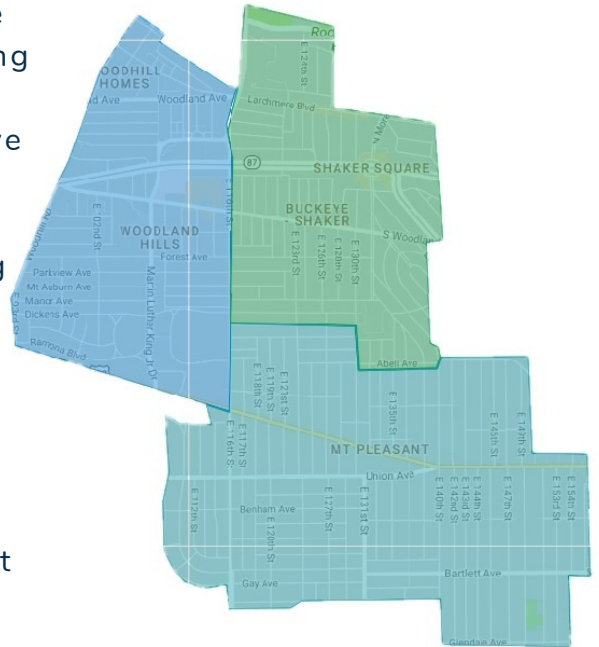
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# Introduction and Methodology

The Community Innovation Network worked with Saint Luke's Foundation to assist in defining the cultural significance of public spaces and greenspaces, focusing specifically on where residents in Woodland Hills, Mt. Pleasant, and Buckeye neighborhoods find meaning in places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate. This document provides an analysis of existing research, including quantitative data, a national scan of literature and existing initiatives, which together identify the cultural drivers, barriers, and desires of how people use parks across demographics. By synthesizing local and national data on public space usage, Saint Luke's will better be able to catalyze neighborhood revitalization through the design of culturally relevant and equitable public space.



## Research Questions

This report explores the following research questions:

1. What are the cultural drivers of how people use parks and places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate in similar places that are more majority Black or diverse (areas that are not yet receiving or on the cusp of starting to receive outside investment)?
2. What are barriers to why some demographic groups (e.g. girls and seniors, especially women) are not actively using places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate?
3. What do residents want (specific features, programs) regarding places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate?
4. How do we make recreational spaces more culturally relevant for people of color in promoting health and wellbeing and active living?

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# Methods

The following sources provided information and context to answer these research questions.

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## Analysis of Local Data

LAND Studio and Streetwyze conducted a local greenspace survey to explore park access and usage patterns in four Cleveland neighborhoods: Buckeye-Shaker, Woodland Hills, Mt. Pleasant, and Larchmere. A group of local high school students attended summer events around Cleveland and administered a 15-question survey, with 227 responses. Analysis of the original data file, held by St. Luke's Foundation, is referenced throughout this report.

## Review of Research Studies

Research from local, national, and international sources provide perspectives on parks, green spaces, urban design, and cultural differences about the use of open spaces. Four reports were utilized: a local market analysis of the Doan Brook Greenway conducted by LAND Studio; Sparking Change: Catalyzing the Social Impacts of Parks in Underserved Neighbourhoods, conducted by Park People and focusing on cities in the United States as well as Toronto; Why American Needs More City Parks and Open Space, prepared by the Trust for Public Land, which focuses on the need for and benefits of parks and urban green spaces; and the RAND Corporation's First National Study of Neighborhood Parks that focused on physical activity.

## Review of Academic Literature

This report analyzed eight national and eight international academic articles, including one dissertation. The national articles focused on historic inequalities in park use in the U.S, differences in park use patterns across racial and ethnic groups, importance of green spaces to build community, differences in access to parks and green spaces, benefits and uses of urban community gardens in diverse neighborhoods, and benefits and distribution of park use.

The international articles explored perspectives from Australia, China, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom on the use of public space as a struggle against forms of social control, the utilization of tools like Google Earth to map public space use, the relationship between green space usage and stress reduction, barriers to usage of urban space by different groups, diversity in interactions and usages of urban green space, differential access to public open space, and correlations with physical activity.

## Additional Media

Additional audio and video sources included a local panel talk and several podcast episodes. The panel talk, sponsored by the City Club of Cleveland, was entitled Is This Land My Land? Diversifying America's Parks. It outlined historical and current barriers to park access for people of color in the U.S.



Two podcast series involving parks were referenced in this report. The first, Episode 13 from the Parksify podcast, is entitled The social impacts of parks in underserved neighborhoods, and includes a discussion with a member of the organization Park People about their report. The episode details strategies communities have used to improve parks as well as the social impacts that blossom from communities working together to improve parks and the necessity of community involvement in park improvements.

The second series is from Justin Glanville's Sidewalk Watershed podcast. Three episodes were used. Episode 9, entitled Walk with a Cop, tells the story of neighbors walking the streets of their neighborhood with police as a way to overcome strained police/community relationships. Episode 11, entitled Bringing Yoga to 'Her Village', showcases youth learning preventative health measures in an underserved area. Episode 14, entitled Secret Stream, highlights the local Doan Brook watershed, the only green space in a densely urban area.

1. Though the research questions ask about usage of all public spaces to recreate, socialize, and contemplate, this report focuses heavily on parks. This is due to a combination of the available literature and the specific local datasets that were analyzed.
2. Public space inequities are not a widely-studied area outside of a small number of leaders and pioneers in the field. The work that has been done largely focuses on differences in park usage between cultural groups but public space in general is not as prominent in the literature.
3. There are several limitations to the Streetwyze dataset used to provide a local response to the research questions. Due to the small sample size, its statistical significance is negligible. It was also administered by residents and includes parks that are not included in the focus area of the research questions asked in this report. While both of these factors do not undermine the legitimacy of the research, they impact the ability of how the research can be applied. Though it does provide some illuminating and useful findings, not all of its data are pertinent.

## Limitations

Although this report includes an extensive scan of research to inform the answers to St. Luke's Foundation's research questions, three main limitations related to available research and content impacted the key sections of this report.

# Cultural Drivers: Spaces to Socialize, Recreate, and Contemplate

A national scan of public space and park usage yielded eight primary cultural drivers of how people in majority Black and diverse neighborhoods use parks and places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate. In addition, local data analyzed from the Streetwyze interviews contextualizes these cultural drivers specifically to local park usage among African Americans in Cleveland.



This section provides national and local insight into each of the eight cultural drivers.

**01. Being in Nature**

**02. Food**

**03. Fun**

**04. Physical Health**

**05. Protest**

**06. Relaxation and Mental Health**

**07. Safety**

**08. Social Connection**

## Eight Cultural Drivers

## 01 Being in Nature

Research shows spaces that encourage people to come together facilitate a sense of ownership, and serve as the backbone for stronger communities are often those spaces that incorporate elements of nature. Specifically, urban green spaces have a myriad of positive effects on resident and city health through ecosystem services such as air pollution filtration, shade, noise reduction, and food provision (Wolch et al., 2014). Even adding trees and green space around public housing developments improve resident perception of their environment (Coley et al., 1997).

Local research confirms this notion - a large driver of the use of parks and green spaces is the desire to be in nature. Fifty-six Streetwyze survey respondents reported using parks and green space for the purpose of being in nature. When asked what they like about parks, one White man aged between 46-55 said "big parks with a lot of open space and a lot of trees." A Black woman aged between 26-35 responded that she likes "quiet nature filled ones" and another Black woman aged between 46-55 responded, "Close to home and like the beauty of nature".

"I enjoy being in nature."

Responses to favorite activities to do in parks included: bird watching, enjoy nature, enjoying the outdoors, sight see, enjoy the weather, feed the ducks, "I love to hike," "I enjoy being in nature," relax and enjoy the nature, relax and observe the nature, and watch the sunset. Open areas, with natural elements (trees, animals, etc.) in particular are a design feature that facilitates the experience of being in nature.

## 02 Food

Food functions as a unifier and connects people across all walks of life. A study from the Netherlands found that one of the main uses for urban green spaces was for shared food activities like picnics and barbeques (Peters et al., 2010).

The local Cleveland Streetwyze dataset showed similar findings to the international data. Responses for favorite activities in parks included: BBQ, cooking, eating, and picnic. Design features that are conducive to food-related space usage include picnic tables, grills, patio and pavilion areas, and areas with rich soil for planting.

In addition to sharing meals, many urban green spaces incorporate community gardens. These provide an opportunity to increase food security and access to healthy food and produce (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). This is

particularly important in food desert areas such as Cleveland.

Urban gardens can also be models for community hubs of engagement and civic agriculture. Studies in low-income Latino communities have shown that community gardens can serve diverse community development functions such as places to register to vote, learn about food production, improve neighborhood safety and beautification, gather and socialize, and receive health education (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004).

## 03 Fun

Recreation, particularly for people of color, is an important necessity of life that has historically helped shape the building of communities throughout time. The importance of leisure in creativity, well-being, health, and energy means that it is imperative that leisure be accessible to all, particularly those who have been historically disallowed from it (Austin, 1997).

Studies of urban park usage indicate distinct differences in patterns of recreational behavior among Blacks and Whites in the US. White people are preferential to wilderness activities like hiking or camping, while Black people are preferential to more recreational activities like playing ball or picnicking (Gobster, 2002)

Local research confirms people value recreation in urban parks and green spaces. Seventy-nine respondents to the Streetwyze survey reported using the parks and green space for the purpose of recreation. Two mentioned they go to parks or green spaces to take photos, other respondents gave the reason of “Entertainment”, “Events” and “Music”. When asked which parks they like and why, one child said it “allows the boring things to go away.” Another said, “Cain Park because it’s fun.” Another said, “Can’t do what you usually do,” and another said about a child: “he likes parks because he likes to ride his bike.” Responses for fun activities to do in parks included: play, swing, poetry, splash parks, theater, events, have fun, and festivals. Design features that facilitate a fun experience include playgrounds, sports fields, spaces for recreation, and holding events.

In the Streetwyze dataset, Black women of all ages reported using parks for the purposes of having fun. Black young men between the ages of 10-18 and Black men between the ages of 36-55 reported using parks to have fun.

"allows boring things to go away."



## 04 Physical Health

Park proximity and physical activity are strongly linked. In both children and adults, access to parks and recreational spaces correlates with higher levels of physical activity. These higher physical activity levels have been linked to a variety of health benefits, including lowered obesity rates, and increased mood and self-esteem (Wolch et al., 2014). Other research shows physical activity is also protective against diseases such as depression, heart disease, Type II diabetes, and cancer, among others (Cohen et al., 2016).

Local stories highlight this as particularly important for underserved neighborhoods that lack access to healthy food options and face the added stressors of poverty, unsafe living conditions, and deteriorating built environments. For example, in Episode 11 of Cleveland's Watershed podcast, it was stated that around half of adults in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood have high blood pressure. Taking community yoga classes allowed them to be active and develop a healthy way to de-stress. The episode emphasized an importance on preventative and proactive health maintenance using what resources are available coupled with cultural relevance.

The data from the Streetwyze survey reinforced the use of public spaces for physical health. When asked why they use parks and green spaces, two people responded "Exercise", two responded "Walking", one with "Running" and another with "Football practice".

Taking community yoga classes allowed them to be active and develop a healthy way to de-stress.

Responses for favorite activities to do in parks related to physical health included: basketball, bike ride, circuit exercise, sports, cross country, exercise, hike, walk, line dance, play ball, soccer, swimming, and workout. Design that focuses on walkability such as adding in walking trails can make spaces more conducive to being used to improve physical health. The Doan Brook Greenway market analysis suggested projects to promote increased usage of hiking trails included clear signage and guide-led hikes.

Demographically, Black women and White men were the groups that most frequently mentioned using parks for the purposes of physical health.

## 05 Protest

During slavery, after the Civil War, and even during the Jim Crow era, African American utilization of open spaces for leisure has been confined through laws and policies because of the potential of “identity group formation and political mobilization” (Austin, 1997).

Despite this, public spaces and parks have become, and still very much so are, a primary gathering place to advocate socio-economic and racial equity through protest, both peaceful and violent. Urban parks such as Central Park in New York City, the Boston Common, and Berkeley’s Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park, to name a few, have been sites both present and past for protest and political demonstration.

Use of parks and spaces for protests is often conducted by groups marginalized by society, as an attempt to “reclaim” their spaces.

“Within the Black urban community, placemaking and therefore the production of public spaces is linked to day-to-day survival. But it is within the realm of day-to-day life, of daily survival, that Black urban communities create public spaces that allow them to develop self-definition or social identities that are linked to a politics of resistance.” (Haymes, 1995 as cited in Crutcher, 2001).

#Black Lives Matter

In Cleveland, parks and public spaces have been sites of racial tension and protest as well. After the shooting of Tamir Rice, Cudell Park was used as gathering spot for protestors following the acquittal of the officers involved. Public Square, as a prominent and central location in downtown Cleveland, is used by Black Lives Matter as a gathering place.

## 06 Relaxation and Mental Health

Mental health is important for everyone, but particularly important for people who have experienced trauma in historically and currently socially and economically excluded neighborhoods. Catharine Ward Thompson et. al. (2012) found that as access to public green space increased, self-reported and biometric stress levels decreased significantly for residents in socially excluded neighborhoods, indicating the positive impact that green space can have on mental health. Children have fewer behavioral problems, such as decreased attention deficit disorder symptoms, when they have more access to urban green spaces.

Green space access also correlates with psychological health, and adults who live near green spaces exhibit a buffer against stressful life events. Visiting green spaces can promote mental well-being and calm (Wolch et al., 2014).

These national trends carry into Cleveland neighborhoods as well. Ninety-two respondents of the Streetwyze survey reported using parks and green space for the purpose of relaxation. One respondent gave the reason of “Time to myself.” When asked why they like parks, one said to “relax the mind,” and another said of a child: “she likes all parks because it’s comforting.” Other responses for favorite thing to do at a park that fell within this driver include: enjoy, relax, escape, get time alone, listen to music, read, relax and chill, sit back and relax, and sit down chill and relax. The Streetwyze data found that one of the primary uses of parks for Black men and women was for relaxation and mental clarity. It was also mentioned by White men between the ages of 19-35.

Green space in particular is important for a reduction in risk for physical and mental illness.

Episode 14 of the Watershed podcast emphasized how critical urban parks are to healthy neighborhoods, as they act as a refuge and an oasis of quiet and calm. This episode focused on the Doan Brook, which is the only large green space in a 12-square mile radius of a dense urban area.

The Buckeye, Woodhill, and Mt. Pleasant neighborhoods are all a part of the same watershed, and therefore the health of their shared Doan Brook reflects the overall area’s health. Many who live in the area are not even aware of the Doan Brook’s presence, and therefore it is important to promote the availability of this large green space.

Green space in particular is important for a reduction in risk for physical and mental illness.

Public open space plays an important role in fostering mental health, and healing from trauma. Episode 11 of Cleveland’s Watershed podcast stated that in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood, one in five residents report mental health problems such as depression. The episode told the story of a local yoga teacher bringing the benefits of serenity, calm, control, and discipline to this neighborhood. In addition, children of color in the neighborhood were excited to take yoga 10 classes from someone who looked like them. The key finding from this example emphasizes the importance of inclusive programming, taught by local community residents. Public open spaces facilitate these opportunities and allow for group gatherings to learn and to heal.

## 07 Safety

An often-considered factor in accessibility of parks and public spaces is whether they feel safe and welcoming. Safety appears to be both a draw to these spaces and a deterrent for others. Literature surveying residents of low-income neighborhoods has shown that many residents, even if they have access to a park, do not perceive it as a safe place to go and therefore do not utilize it. Factors that can negatively impact perception of safety in park use, drawn from an international literature review, included the presence of groups of teenagers, homeless people, dangerous trash such as syringes or glass, car and cycling traffic, and secluded areas (McCormack et al., 2010). The way safety functions as a barrier to participation will be addressed further in the next section.

Many respondents to the Streetwyze survey cited topics of safety in considering use of public spaces. One responded with “Police.” When asked why they like parks, one said “a place to feel safe.” This driver is very related to the first driver of Relaxation and Mental Clarity. In order for people to relax and clear their minds, they need to also feel safe in that space. For some, parks and green spaces may feel more safe than where they live or work, offering an escape. For others, parks and green spaces may hold negative memories of past trauma, or be perceived to be unsafe places for a number of reasons, including social interaction, personal experience, and overt racism.

Ensuring equitable use of public space is directly connected to ensuring that people of color are safe from the structural racism of police violence.

It is important to note here the cultural complexity of what safety may mean to different people. For some, police presence may indicate safety, but for others it may indicate trauma.

Episode 9 of Cleveland’s Watershed podcast discusses the strained relationship between police and low-income communities of color. When 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by a police officer in a public park outside of a recreation center in 2014, the relationship between police, communities of color, and public space was further exacerbated in Cleveland. Ensuring equitable use of public space is directly connected to ensuring that people of color are safe from the structural racism of police violence. In the Streetwyze dataset, safety was a much higher concern for the Black respondents than it was for the White respondents, who did not mention it at all.



Designing a space to feel safe means including features such as lighting. It also means ensuring that the space is clean and free of trash and graffiti, for instance. Including fences around playground areas can increase feelings of safety. Increasing visibility around the space can also make it feel safer. The inclusion of safety officers can help some residents feel that the space is more secure, but for others this can make the space even less safe because of history of racialized interactions with law enforcement.

## 08 Social Connection

Social connection is so important to mental health and it also carries repercussions for social, economic, civic, and political outcomes. In a Toronto study titled *Catalyzing the Social Impacts of Parks in Underserved Neighborhoods*, the authors connect the driver of social connection to other important drivers and positive outcomes:

“The social connections created in well-used parks have also been tied to positive well-being and are an ‘especially valuable asset’ for the health of people living on lower incomes. Social connections can positively affect mental and physical health by creating supportive environments for activity and reducing stress, while social isolation can result in negative health outcomes, including depression. One study found that parks that were

more social also ones where people engaged in more physical activity, leading them to conclude that targeting opportunities to create a better social environment in a park can be an important way to increase physical activity levels as well” (Park People, 2017).

Additional research corroborates with this sentiment, finding that urban parks increase feelings of both safety and belonging (Wolch et al., 2014).

There are also racial and cultural differences in social patterns of park usage, with people of color tending to utilize parks in larger groups including extended family visits. People of color also tend to participate in more passive, social activities when utilizing parks.

For example, Latinos were often found watching organized sports and Asians were often found participating in organized festivals or parties (Gobster, 2002).

Seventy-seven respondents of the Streetwyze survey reported using parks and green space for the purpose of socialization. Two respondents gave their reason for using parks as “family” or “grandkids.” When asked which parks they like and why, one respondent said it’s “a way of connecting with people. Invisible connection.”

Favorite activities to do within parks related to social connection included: conversation, socialize, play cards, fellowship, getting small events together, hang out, hangout with friends, hangout with family, play with friends and siblings, talk, socializing, sit and talk with friends, meet up with friends, laugh, play with kids, take my grandkids to play, recreation for kids through the church, and spend time with grandkids. Design features that bring people together include benches, tables, chairs, playgrounds, and picnic areas.

Demographically, the Streetwyze data corroborates national literature, finding Black respondents were much more likely to report that they used parks for the purpose of social connection. Black women in particular more heavily utilized parks for social connection compared to Black men.

“a way of connecting with people. Invisible connection”



# Equity

This section explores why some demographic groups are or are not actively using places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate different than other demographic groups, focusing more specifically on the differences in use by women of color, especially young girls and seniors. The RAND Corporation's national study of neighborhood parks informed the development of this research area, as they found that women and seniors were underrepresented among park users (Cohen et al., 2016). The data from the Cleveland Streetwyze survey corroborates that time spent in parks as well as the presence of parks near where respondents live or work does differ at least qualitatively by factors such as race, income, gender, and education level.

An analysis of national literature and local information identifies five barriers to equity in parks:



01. Access
  02. Amenities, Infrastructure, and Design Features
  03. Investment
  04. Programming
  05. Safety
- Five Barriers**

# 01 Access

Historical development of public parks in communities has contributed to a gap in access to public spaces between Black and White communities. Historically with federal policies that denied Blacks the opportunity to new suburban developments, Black communities have been relegated to dense urban areas, which often lack community parks (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). Wolch, Byrne, & Newell (2014) discuss in their extensive literature review how the location of parks and public space in the U.S. disproportionately benefits White and higher-income residents. Within a one-mile park radius, park use drops by 20% for every 10% increase in household poverty levels.

The intersection between race and transportation creates another barrier for access to parks and green spaces. A survey of Chicago's Lincoln Park found that non-white visitors to the park had longer transit times to get there and lived in neighborhoods more distant to the park (Gobster, 2002). When mapping access to parks, methods used in the past have not taken into account any barrier to travel or mobility, which is a noted oversight (Nicholls, 2001).

In addition, even if one has access physically to a park or green space, signage and lack of information about park facilities are barriers to usage of the space. For example, signage such as 'soccer prohibited' demonstrate what is classified as inappropriate ways to use the park space, and may discourage some potential users (Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

Access can also be impaired by one's level of ability, and building equitable spaces necessitates being mindful of access for those with disabilities. Historically, disability could act as a factor of exclusion from urban public spaces (Madge, 1997). Locally and more recently, Cleveland's Streetwyze dataset found that people with a disability were about 15% more likely to use parks and green space when compared to people without a disability, indicating that disability was not a significant barrier to park and green space use in this particular sample. More research is needed to ensure that new parks and urban green spaces continue to be accessible to those with disabilities.

It is important to examine any potential barriers to access by **income level**, as **socioeconomic status** and **racism** are often intertwined. Although the results from the Streetwyze data do not draw from a sample size large enough to adequately compare with national research, some variations are evident.

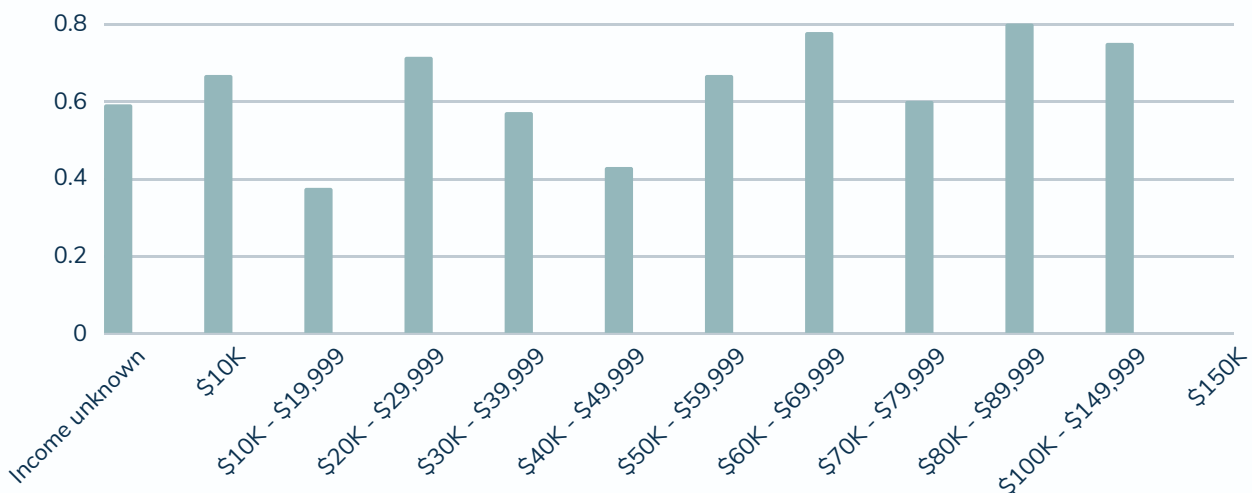
- 
1. Income Level
  2. Socioeconomic status
  3. Educational Level



## Access: Income Level

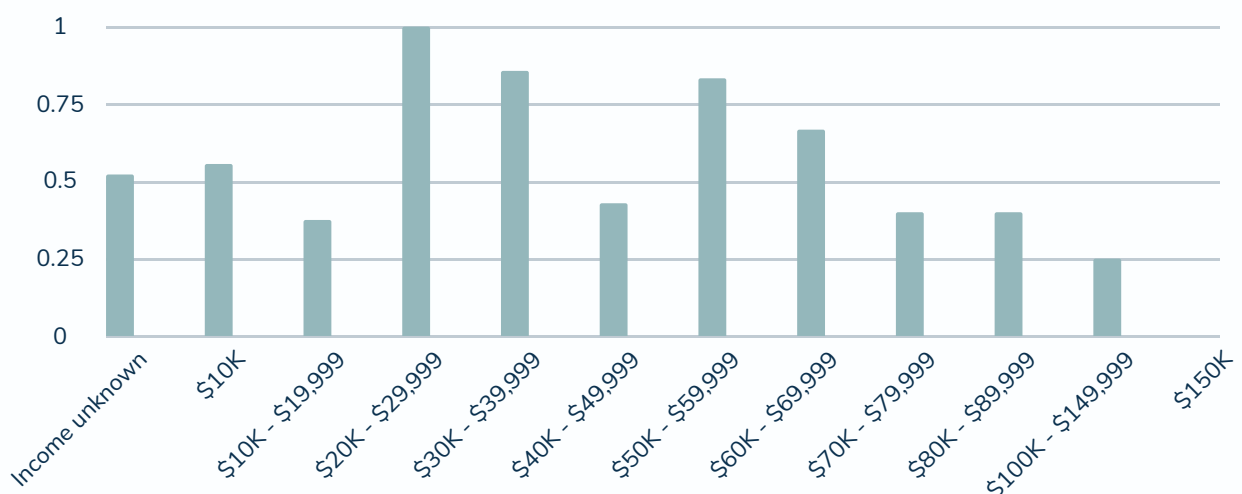
The graph below illustrates these differences between low and high-income households locally through responses provided in the Streetwyze survey. People making \$80,000 - \$89,999 or \$100,000 - \$149,999 are most likely to spend time in parks. People making \$150,000+ (n=3), followed by \$10,000 - \$19,999, then \$40,000 - \$49,999 are least likely.

Percent that Spend Time in Parks/Green Space by Income



The Streetwyze survey also indicated income groups most likely to live or work near a park/green space are people making \$20,000 - \$39,999, followed by people making \$50,000 - \$59,999. The people who are least likely to spend time in parks or green spaces are again people making \$150,000+ (n=3), followed by people making \$10,000 - \$19,999, then people making \$40,000 - \$49,999.

Percent of Each Income Group that Lives or Works Near a Park/Green Space

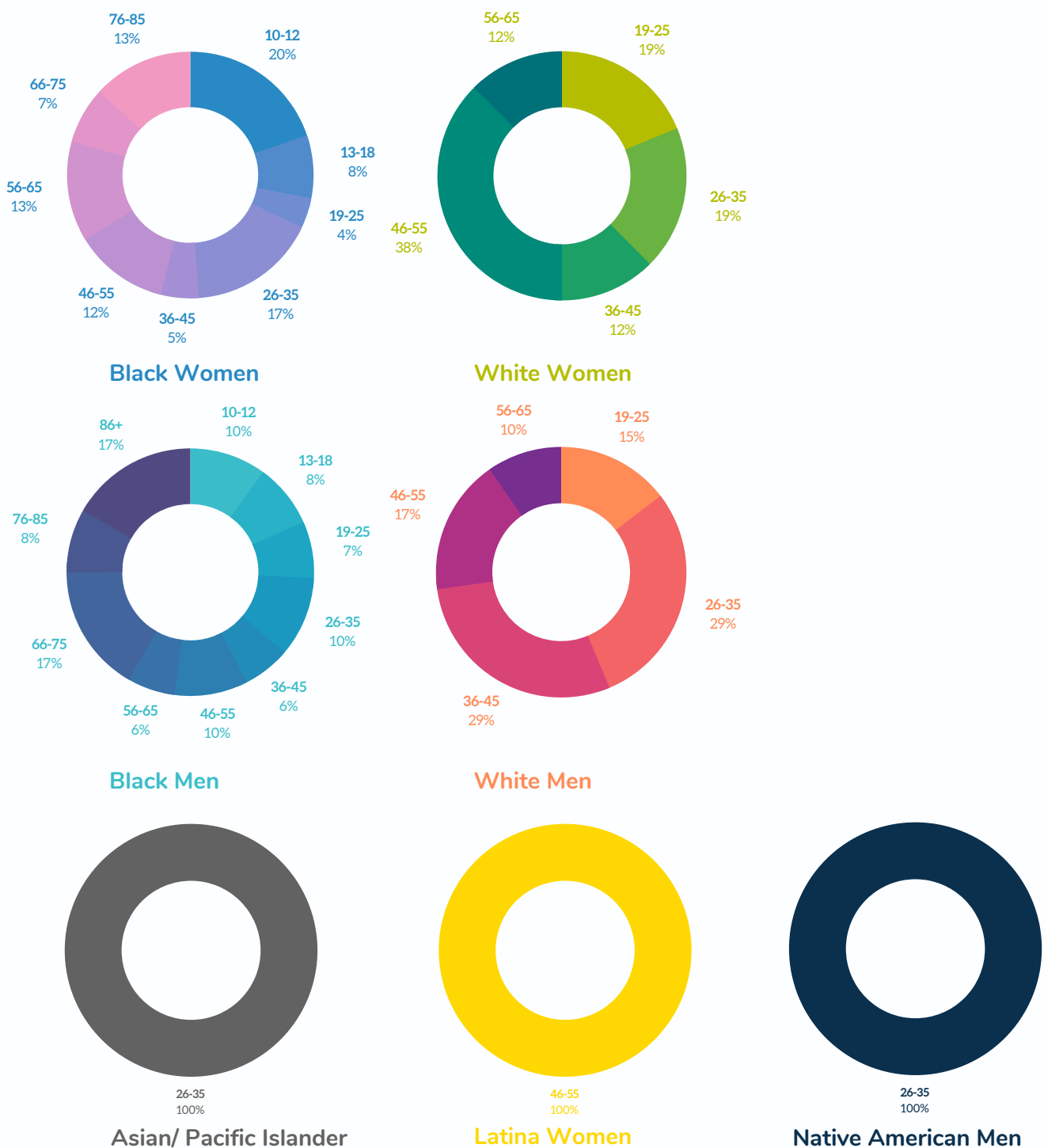


Please note, no one in the sample reported making between \$90K and \$99,999.

## Access: Socioeconomic Status

The following graph, also from the Streetwyze survey, illustrates how the presence of parks or green space near where each respondent lives varies different races, genders, and age groups. Demographic groups with the lowest access to parks and green space are Black women ages 19-25, and 36-45.

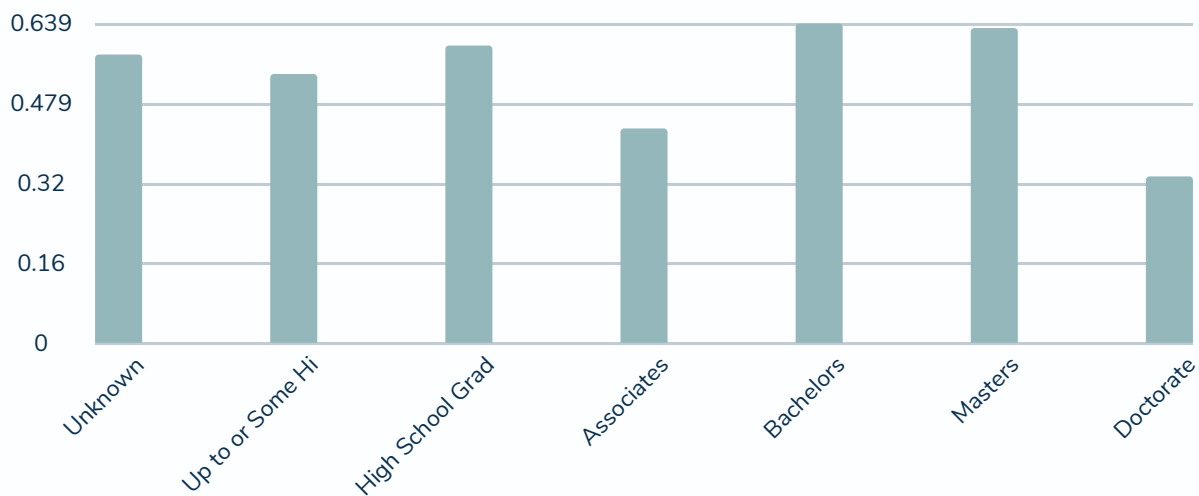
Percent of Each Demographic Group that Lives or Works Near a Park/Green Space



## Access: Educational Level

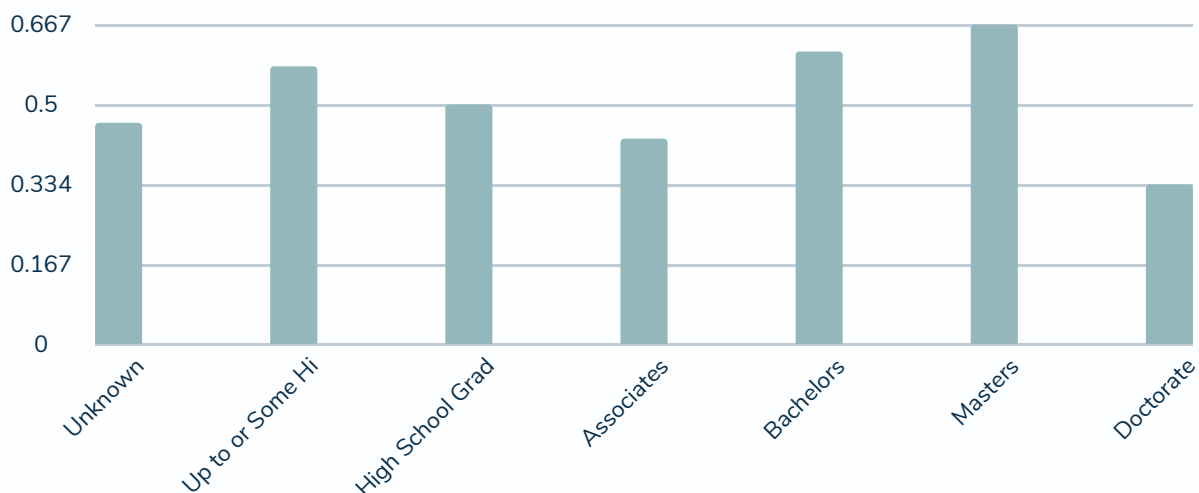
Those most likely to spend time in parks and green spaces are those with a Bachelors or Masters degree, followed next by High school graduates. Those least likely to spend time in parks or green spaces are those with Doctorate degrees (n = 3), followed by people with Associates degrees.

### Percent that Spends Time in Parks/Green Spaces by Education Level



Looking at who has access to parks and green space by education, those most likely to live/work near a park or green space are those with a Masters or Bachelor’s degree, followed next by those with up to or some high school. Those least likely to live/work near a park or green space are doctoral students (n=3), followed next by those with associates degrees.

### Percent of Each Income Group that Lives or Works Near a Park/Green Space



In looking at the intersection of different demographics of the survey respondents, the analysis showed:

1. Black respondents were more likely to make less than \$20,000 (26.8%) compared to White respondents (7.7%).
2. Women are also more likely to make less than \$20,000 (24.1%) compared to men (17.2%). 86% of White respondents have an associate's degree or higher, compared to 57% of Black respondents. 59% of women have an associate's degree or higher, compared to 75% of men.

## 02 Amenities, Infrastructure, and Design Features

National research shows that park use increases with variables such as park size, presence of sports fields, wooded areas and trails, and higher number of features/amenities (McCormack et al., 2010). Conversely, lack of maintenance, cleanliness of play surfaces, and restrooms, and equipment strongly deters park usage. For parents who bring their children to parks, having outdated, age-inappropriate or boring equipment was another deterrent of park use. Graffiti and vandalism also stop people from going to parks (McCormack et al., 2010). These additional barriers to park access are important to consider in neighborhoods that have high crime rates and begin with a lack of parks.

Environmental health is also a factor in attractiveness of parks. For example, parks that had air quality issues such as smog were less likely to be used (McCormack et al., 2010). The RAND corporation study found that parks in lower income communities were more likely to have litter present (Cohen et al., 2016).

The RAND Corporation study found that girls were much less likely to utilize parks and greenspaces for sports activities and that male teens were much more likely than female teens to utilize parks at all (Cohen et al, 2016). Another study found that specific to adolescent girls, there is evidence that they utilize parks more for physical activity when there are sports facilities, paths, trees providing shade, dog signage, and playgrounds (McCormack et al., 2010).

When asked which parks they did not like, many respondents from the Streetwyze dataset indicated that dirty or messy parks were a deterrent for them. They also cited broken equipment as something they did not like to see.

## 03 Investment

Cohen et al. (2016) stated that parks in high-poverty neighborhoods are often smaller and are used less than those in more affluent areas. Research indicates park usage increases with each additional acre added (Cohen et al., 2016).



Parks that are marketed with signs, posters, or banners are utilized more than parks without such advertising, showing that investment in parks does make a difference in perception and usage (Cohen et al., 2016).

In 2013 in 100 of the largest cities in the United States, the average per-capita expenditure per year was only \$73 (Cohen et al., 2016). This leaves much room for improvement when it comes to investing in urban green spaces, which have clear benefit on resident health and well-being.

When asked which parks they did not like, several respondents from the Streetwyze dataset indicated that they did not like small parks. A Black woman said she did not like neglected parks, and an older Black man said he did not like non-maintained parks.

## 04 Programming

Wolch, Byrne, & Newell (2014) note that dense, low-income, and largely Black and brown communities lack access to public recreational programming.

In the RAND corporation study, conducted in urban communities, it was observed that over half of the parks surveyed had no programming going on at all during the survey period. Researchers recommend more supervised activities to draw park usage in these communities (Cohen et al., 2016).

Many Streetwyze respondents surveyed mentioned that more community programming would cause them to use parks more than they currently did, as well as more activities for kids and festivals.

## 05 Safety

As noted in the Cultural Drivers section above, safety is a crucial factor when considering park and public space usage. In national and international literature, women and girls in particular noted that safe places to socialize in supportive environments were very important to them. Safety is so important that it can override proximity to parks as a deterrent from using the park (McCormack et al., 2010).

Park users in high-poverty areas are also four times as likely to perceive the park they are visiting as unsafe (Cohen et al., 2016). The intersections of race and gender play a significant role on safety; in Fairmont Park in Philadelphia findings showed women of color were particularly vulnerable to attacks and women generally experienced more victimization from violent crimes (Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

Psychological safety must be mentioned as well, particularly when considering racially equitable design of parks and public spaces. Data from visitors to Chicago's Lincoln Park show that

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many African American park visitors perceive that other park users, staff, and police often racially profile them and behave prejudicially (Gobster, 2002).

This is especially important when considering the racialized history of park design. Park construction often pushed out people of color, and parks had rules that either segregated people of color explicitly or implicitly through dress codes and codes of conduct. In some states, Black people were not allowed to use public parks at all. Racial divides have carried over to the modern era. Large public parks are often located in predominantly White areas, which may prevent Black families from feeling comfortable using them for fear of hostility (Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

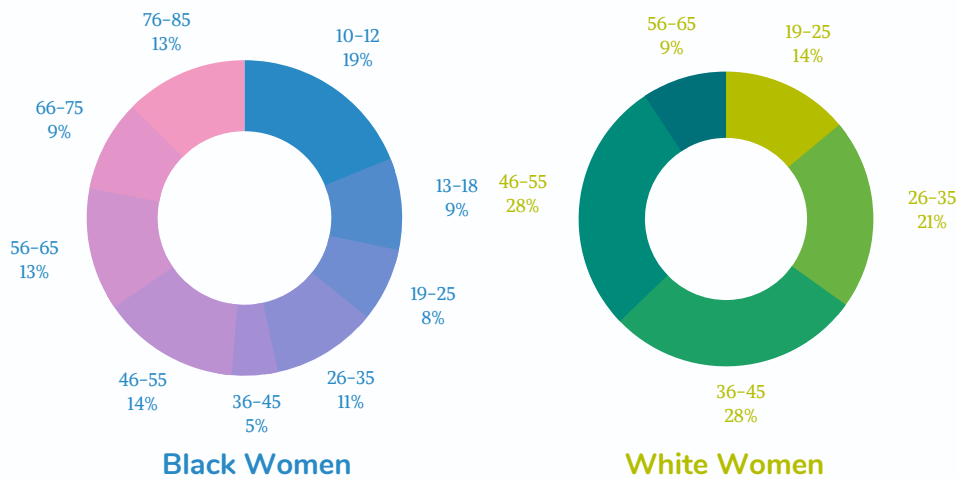
In Episode 14 of Cleveland's Watershed podcast, Dudley Edmonson, an African American nature lover, photographer, and advocate, discussed equity around public parks and green spaces. He explained that for many African Americans, there is an ingrained tendency to assume that any public open space is not theirs. There is often a fear that they will be seen as trespassing by the presumed White property owner. In order to welcome people of color to public open and green spaces, Dudley Edmonson stressed the importance of making it obvious that the green space is a park free for anyone to use. That means having diverse staff in the parks so that people of color see that it is a space for them to use as well.

In a City Club of Cleveland talk entitled *Is This Land My Land? Diversifying America's Parks*, Dudley Edmonson talked about the cultural distance for African Americans between wilderness and urban spaces. Whitney Long-Jones of the YMCA of Greater Cleveland talked about the country's history of slavery and Jim Crow as part of African American cultural unease around outdoor spaces. Many African American youth lack familiarity and exposure to green spaces growing up. There is a cultural transmission of fear and stories from grandparents of finding friends and relatives who had been lynched in the woods. African Americans also express instances of racial profiling that has occurred in nature, adding to their feeling of being unwelcome in these spaces. Dudley Edmonson expressed that African Americans often visit parks and green spaces in groups because of the added safety factor in numbers. Staff of parks should therefore be culturally aware and competent so as not to unconsciously push out people of color who may use green spaces in different ways than White visitors.

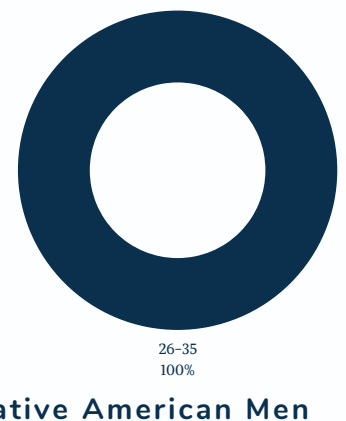
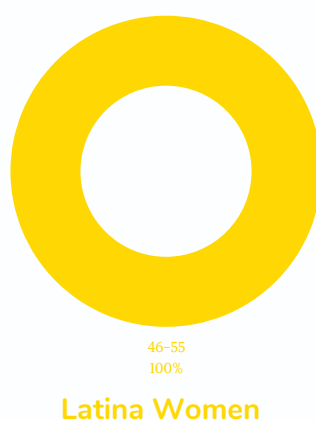
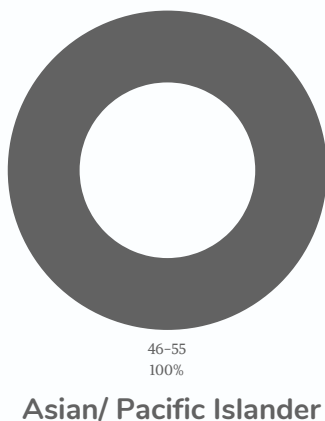
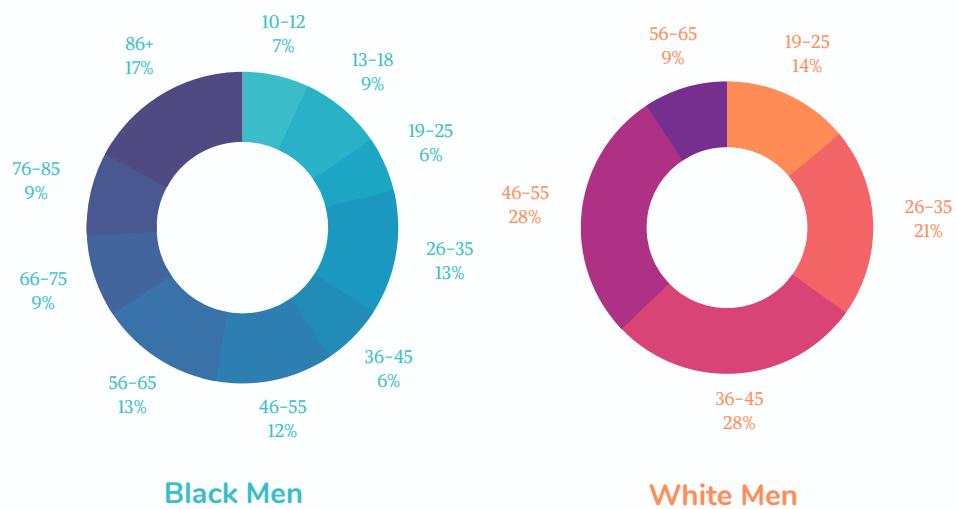
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# Conclusions about Equitable Access to Parks and Greenspaces

% of Each Demographic Group that Spends Time in Parks/Green Space  
 Percent of Each Demographic Group that Lives or Works Near a Park/Green Space



The demographics of local park use were tabulated from the Streetwyze survey, and are illustrated in following graph. Although this particular dataset does not support the difference in usage strongly (likely due to sample size), it does illustrate some disparities in park use between Black women (ages 19-55) and White women and men in the same age ranges.



This data in total is counter to the research topic about why Black girls and seniors do not actively use public space. While the qualitative data we explored before indicated that these groups are more concerned about safety when compared to other demographic groups, this data does not indicate that they are less likely to spend time in parks. This data does show however that there is a racial gap in park use for Black women 19-55, and Black men 19-25 and 36-55, as well as a gender gap for Black boys and young men 10-12, 19-25, and Black women 26-45. The data indicates that it is these groups, not necessarily young Black girls and seniors, who are actually less likely to use parks and green space.

Several respondents to the Streetwyze survey mentioned that they did not like dangerous parks. One Black teenager, when asked which parks he didn't like, responded "Kenneth Johnson because it's dangerous". Several older Black women mentioned safety concerns such as gangs and the need for police protection of children against violence. Other respondents said they would be more likely to visit parks if there was more protection and peace/nonviolence.

The research team believes this finding is likely due to the limitations of the Streetwyze data, and cannot be used to draw conclusions about local or regional disparities in park use. Clearly, factors that may serve as barriers to access of park space cannot be examined in isolation, but must be studied intersectionally and holistically. The barriers outlined above work together to disproportionately impact those already marginalized on account of factors such as race, gender, and income.



# Aspirations

This section explores what communities of color desire (specific features, programs) in places to socialize, recreate, and contemplate. National and local research illuminate five specific categories that respondents look for in features of culturally relevant parks and urban green spaces.



01. Amenities
02. Community
03. Physical Activity
04. Recreational Programming
05. Safety

## Five Desires



## 01 Amenities

A study in Chicago's Lincoln Park found that African American park users sampled look for more highly developed and heavily maintained facilities with open and manicured landscaping (Gobster, 2002). Other research confirms this notion, finding that African Americans preferred well-maintained park environments with more built amenities (Payne et al., 2002). Similarly, Asians and Latinos/Latinas sampled had a greater preference for scenic and natural attributes in parks (Gobster, 2002).

These features include seating, picnic tables, water fountains, signage, restrooms, and places with shade (McCormack et al., 2010). More specifically, accessible restrooms and trash cans were the two factors most likely to cause park users to perceive an increase in the quality of a park (Cohen et al. 2016). In addition, one young woman from the Streetwyze survey mentioned that free Wi-Fi would be nice to see in parks. More research on the desire for Wi-Fi in these settings among younger generations is needed to definitively name this as a desired amenity.

## 02 Community

Several reviews have concluded that communities of color often desire environments conducive to social interaction and gathering (Gobster, 2002).

Neighborhoods with urban green spaces, and in particular community

gardens evidence more close-knit bonds, and an increased sense of stewardship (Sherer, 2003).

When asked what they wanted to see in parks, several respondents to the Streetwyze survey mentioned community bonding, particularly young Black males aged 19-25. When respondents who did not spend much time in parks were asked what would make them spend more time in parks, they noted more desire for family or community events, and opportunities to connect with each other and create strong bonds.

## 03 Physical Activity

In a study in Los Angeles, California, out of the top five suggestions for improving parks, three were related to physical activity: 39% of respondents wanted more adult sports, 38% of respondents wanted both more and better walking paths, and 37% of respondents wanted more youth sports (Cohen et al., 2007).

In the Streetwyze survey, respondents of all ages indicated a value of physical activity. Young Black boys aged 10-12 and Black teen girls aged 13-18 mentioned team-oriented highly interactive physical activities such as paintball. Black teen girls also mentioned other amenities conducive to recreational opportunities like bikes, a running track, and a swimming pool. Black teen boys aged 13-18 desired places to play sports like football or basketball.

Young Black women aged 19-25 wanted to see coordinated physical activities like 5k runs or one mile walks, while young Black men aged 19-25 wanted to see more recreational spaces such as sports fields. Black women aged 26 and over wanted to see sports, yoga, and places for physical activities like walking and exercise.

## 04 Recreational Programming

In the same study mentioned above in the Physical Activity section, conducted in Los Angeles, the top suggestion for improving parks was to add more park events and fairs, with 48% of respondents mentioning their desire for these types of events (Cohen et al., 2007). The RAND Corporation's First National Study of Neighborhood Parks also illustrated a need for more programming in parks. Locally, responses from the Streetwyze data confirms this aspiration for more programming in parks and green spaces:

- Black girls ages 10-12 wanted to see carnivals, concerts, festivals, horses, and other fun things.
  - Black boys ages 10-12 wanted to see carnivals and fun.
  - Black teen girls ages 13-18 also wanted to see entertainment such as movie nights, carnivals, concerts, and food trucks.
  - Black teen boys ages 13-18 wanted to see food trucks and picnic areas.
- Black young women ages 19-25 wanted to see more fun things like concerts, festivals, food trucks and parades.

- Black young men ages 19-25 wanted to see festivals, music, and picnics.
- Black women 26+ wanted to see free activities and events, music concerts, festivals, places for relaxation, as well as programming for seniors and kids.

When respondents who reported that they don't spend much time in parks or green space were asked if there was anything that would make them interested in going, they express similar requests for fun activities and programming.

## 05 Safety

Safety is consistently one of the largest drivers of public space usage, and shows up in the national and local research. As mentioned above in the Equity section under the safety barrier, it is important to consider historic trauma and negative experiences with wilderness settings when thinking about African American park use and comfort. Research has shown that African Americans prefer park spaces that are not dense and overgrown with plants as well as spaces that are not confined (Payne et al., 2002). Many Streetwyze respondents mentioned concerns around safety and violence in parks and public spaces.

Features that are known to increase the safety of green spaces are: increased lighting, security officer presence, trimming plants to ensure that there are lines of sight, and having activities in areas that have been previously unused (Gobster, 2002).

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# Recommendations for Cultural Relevancy

This section explores how to make spaces to socialize, recreate, and contemplate more culturally relevant for people of color in promoting health, wellbeing, and active living. Relevancy in park and green space design was heavily studied in the Toronto report, *Catalyzing the Social Impacts of Parks in Underserved Neighborhoods* (2017). Based on this report and other research, we have identified the following four recommendations:



01. Community Empowerment and Ownership
02. Design for Users, by Users
03. Inclusive Programming
04. Investment and Infrastructure

## Four Recommendations



# 01

## Community Empowerment and Ownership

There are a number of recommendations that can be made towards the study of equitable use of parks and green spaces, as well as towards the fostering of more equitably used parks and green spaces through community empowerment and ownership. In terms of recommendations of the design and planning of culturally relevant parks and public spaces, we are hesitant to draw conclusions from the Streetwyze data alone, as it may not be representative of the residents of Woodland Hills, Mt. Pleasant, and Buckeye.

A review of additional literature and other reports about equitable park use and park planning yields more sound data and strategies for building community empowerment and ownership through public spaces. Catalyzing the Social Impacts of Parks in Underserved Neighborhoods outlines a number of specific strategies that can be employed to design and ensure an equitable, inclusive, beneficial park for the residents of a given neighborhood.

Many of the strategies the Toronto report recommends fall under the umbrella of fostering the change to come from the community, community-led planning, and capacity building to encourage community decision-making and community ownership of the parks. The importance of community stewardship and ownership starting

from the design, planning, or even research stage, is something we cannot stress enough.

Specific strategies from this study include:

1. Pair park improvements with community engagement sessions that ignite conversations about ongoing community involvement.
2. Make small strategic investments that will have a larger impact, like community celebrations, neighborhood barbeques, park clean-ups, and tree plantings.
3. Focus on capacity building and ensure groups are community-led, playing a supportive partnership role with community groups, while ensuring there are multiple ways for residents to engage.
4. Plan for group sustainability by focusing on structure and leadership, including identifying core volunteer groups and one-time opportunities, and having clear roles, responsibilities and decision-making protocol.
5. Use parks to ignite economic development, through positioning the space to support “start-up” entrepreneurs, opportunities through programming or pop-ups, like markets, where people can develop and showcase their skills, and pairing pop-up cafes or market stalls with other programming, like food markets or sports.
6. Design of a space must not only incorporate community voice, but be built upon community authority, as only the residents of a community know what would serve their community best.

## 02 Design for Users, by Users

Design that is informed by national research about the groups that are trying to be served in concert with local input by residents will yield the best chances for spaces that are open and accessible for the communities they are intended to serve.

In addition, public spaces intended to serve communities of color should have staff and leadership that are culturally competent and as diverse as the people that are trying to be drawn into the space. Design and programming must be built to the needs of potential users.

Building on this finding, Kabisch and Haase (2014) discuss how urban green spaces often do not meet the specific needs of the demographic groups who will be using them so it is important to survey residents for their specific interests, beyond relying on design values or end-goals.

Springer (2011) discusses the tensions between freedom and social control inherent to public space, and emphasize the importance of establishing radical freedom and equality in public spaces, from planning and design to daily use. Lastly, Wolch et. al. (2014) suggest strategies such as creating parks in vacant urban property, or even in outdated transportation infrastructure. They also suggest interventions that are “just green enough” (241) to avoid gentrification. Such strategies include environmental clean-ups of industry waste/damage that benefit the health and well-being of residents.

Wolch et al. also caution against increasing walking and cycling behavior in a neighborhood that has high levels of air pollution without concurrent strategies to mitigate this pollution. Echoing this recommendation, research also stresses the importance of participatory collaboration and design that emanates from residents.

Our region has the opportunity to be on the leading edge of progressive change advancing participatory development; the City of Cleveland could draw from models such as the racial equity impact assessment conducted by the Park and Recreation Board in Minneapolis, in concert with state advocacy group Voices for Racial Justice. They engaged citizens through listening sessions, roundtables, questionnaires, public hearings, and interviews (Greenspan & Mason, 2017).

## 03 Inclusive Programming

A national study found that parks could benefit from additional recreational programming, especially senior and adult-specific programming. They found that increased park use can be jumpstarted by 48% for each additional supervised activity added, and by a staggering 62% simply by adding on-site marketing (Cohen et al., 2016). In looking at the local data gathered on the desires and aspirations for these spaces, this sentiment is largely shared among the population surveyed.



The Catalyzing the Social Impacts of Parks in Underserved Neighborhoods findings listed two primary goals for social impacts on parks related to inclusive programming:

1. Reduce social isolation and create more inclusive communities through including fun, meaningful, and targeted programming that represent the community and their wishes, and creating opportunities for people to connect over meals.
2. Provide a place for diverse communities and people to gather through recognition of multiple histories through active engagement, recognizing and addressing barriers to participation, and creating partnerships that leverage the unique strengths of surrounding communities.

## 04 Investment and Infrastructure

As evidenced by national literature and local Cleveland data, there is much room for improvement when it comes to investing in parks and public spaces in communities of color. McCormack et al. (2010) recommend that facilities undergo regular maintenance and upgrades to ensure that they are safe and relevant. The barriers to access and usage, combined with the desires for safety and basic amenities in parks and public spaces outlined throughout this report echo this sentiment.

An important consideration for equity of access to different populations is prioritizing both access to parking and access to public transportation, since often times people of color have further distance to travel to well-maintained public green spaces.

Other recommendations include having seating to accommodate large groups and improving ease of access for obtaining permits for group festivals (Gobster, 2002).

There are also recommendations specific to the Doan Brook Greenway that cuts through two of the three target neighborhoods. LAND Studio conducted a stakeholder/organizational market analysis of the potential of the Doan Brook Greenway, stating explicitly: “this was not intended to be a planning exercise, or community outreach campaign.” Their analysis identified issues with water quality, as well as the challenge that though there are multiple potentially interested organizational stakeholders, these stakeholders have rather different interests and connections between initiatives or interests are not clear. The report finds that “neighborhoods do not all have equal access or invitation to use.” One relevant finding of the report was that access and awareness of the greenway was not equal, and an interesting finding was that homeowners along the greenway do not benefit equally from their proximity to the green space. This indicates there may be opportunities to improve equitable use of parks through promotion or events targeting at reaching audiences that are less aware or do not feel as welcome, as well as investments to design that may benefit Black homeowners along the less developed portions of the greenway. This report gives us more of an organizational or marketing perspective which is interesting. It is important to still ground the focus and specific strategies of a park design/redesign project in the desires and decisions of the community surrounding a given park.

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# Conclusion

The prioritization of meaningful, intentional design of public spaces to socialize, recreate, and contemplate cannot be underscored enough. It is clear from research internationally, nationally, and locally that having urban green spaces bolsters the health of a community, ties the residents together with a sense of shared ownership, and can serve as a place for those of all ages to find solace from the stress of their daily lives. By integrating the research about aspirations, desires, and best practices, development can be informed by the residents whose lives it will impact the most. The commitment to racial equity, community empowerment, participatory design, and investment in disinvested communities is sorely needed from the City of Cleveland. We hope this report will serve as a catalyst for building spaces for all that benefit and beautify our city.

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