

THE PUBLIC PARK AS LIMINAL SPACE:
A STUDY OF SPONTANEOUS AND INTENTIONAL BEHAVIOR
AND THE IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

by
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ABSTRACT

Public spaces, such as parks, provide a space and time that exists outside of the familiar. They are set apart from the everyday, thus providing opportunity for engagement in activities, exploration of behaviors, and interactions with others. They are temporal spaces - ones that are intentionally entered and left. I posit that parks are liminal spaces which provide opportunities – expected and the unexpected. Felix Rosch states that “it is in these liminal spaces that societal changes are being triggered and new collective identities can emerge” (Rosch 2017, 290).

The thesis strives to answer the question “how do we encourage cultural health and equity in a diverse and unequal world through the use of public space?” Furthermore, I begin to explore what this means for surrounding communities. Field documentation in Patterson Park (Baltimore, MD) provides current data to augment academic research. The data will be used to support academic research and conclusions. An historical overview of the intended purpose and actual use of public parks is included. Observing happenstance intersections, or avoidance, of park participants begins to inform and answer questions related to whether public parks fulfill their missions, hints to how they could adapt, and provide information about the impact on communities.

The Capstone Project serves to further my growth as an academic researcher and strengthen my skills in the application of theory. Extending my skills of being a thoughtful listener and ability to lean into silence is especially important for this project. I envision the outcomes of the Capstone Project to be considered for multiple types of public spaces. This is not an ethnographic report of Patterson Park. Instead, it uses data observed in Patterson Park

in partnership with conclusions drawn from academic research. The thesis may be used to inform future programming and approaches of engaging community. Academically, the research will support the development of the field of cultural sustainability by striving to build understanding within and among cultural groups in public spaces. The research will further support the study of whether public spaces, which provide opportunity for spontaneous and intentional intersection, ultimately fulfill their stated missions.

MAKING CONNECTIONS: LITERATURE REVIEW and FIELDSITE DATA

A Chapter from the Capstone Project entitled “The Public Park as Liminal Space: A Study of Spontaneous and Intentional Behavior and the Impact on Community”

The meaning and purpose of parks is complex. Boone et al states that “more than a recreation space, parks serve the critical function of providing public space and a right to the city” (Boone et al. 2009, 784). It is the intersection of multiple perspectives and behaviors, by park users who engage in shared spaces, that provide context for space and makes meaning. Jason Byrne and Jennifer Wolch state that parks are not “ideologically neutral spaces, nor are they physically homogeneous” (Byrne and Wolch 2009, 745). Low investigates ideas about the use and experience of public spaces as seen through different demographic lenses (Low 2013). My findings suggest that the park provides space and time for participants to make connections to self and others as well as to find meaning in their everyday. Volunteer and neighborhood resident, Jessica Markiewicz, described how the connections she made through volunteer work fulfills her: “None of my best friends still live in Baltimore...I didn’t have like a network of friends. And I started to volunteer in hopes that I would start meeting people that, um, had the same interests as me or like, you know, wanted to like this stuff and it just happens they are, like, 65. But, it’s ok, I really like spending time with them” (Markiewicz 2020). Connections, across similarities and differences, such as ones that Markiewicz made, produce meaning for self and others, in addition to opportunities to view space in different ways. Multiple perspectives, connections, and meaning making combine to strengthen space and relationships, thereby sustaining communities.

The Commons

The commons is a shared space, a collective, a space that incorporates the everyday life, it is cross-disciplinary, holistic, a sharing platform, and includes shared resources (Gilmore 2017; Holder and Flessas 2008; Hufford 2016; Parker and Schmidt 2017; Radywyl and Biggs 2013; Titon 2016). I purport that public parks are a type of commons – a space through which participants navigate while engaged in a multitude of activities. Participants in parks share resources, are involved in park governance, intersect with each other, and are on display. Jon Hawkes suggests that people “are happiest (and, in general, most productive) when we operate interdependently” (Hawkes 2001, 18). There are benefits that emerge as a result of being part of a commons and there are tensions that must be navigated due to shared and finite resources.

Identity is complex and fluid. Overtime, it may have many meanings and can be influenced by time and space (Alam 2016; Davalos 1996). The identities of those participating in the commons may be validated through their presence and interaction with resources and others. This is supported by Steph Lawler who proposes that identity is formed from relationships (Lawler 2014). However, the commons is not always a place of equality. There are tensions that exist in the commons that are constantly negotiated by participants. Questions of space, behavior, inclusion and exclusion, as well as the suppression of ideas that fall outside of the norm all present themselves during the course of a visit. Over time, new behaviors may become accepted and normalized. Concurrently, access may be prevented to those who do not follow what has become appropriate. Hawkes states “to name our shared



Figure 13 Summer Concert on Pagoda Hill. A mostly white audience, of different ages, face members of their group and do not position themselves to face the stage and band. Chairs, blankets, and wagons make up part of the expected equipment for the audience (August 2019).

values, to change them, to embrace or discard them and to apply them is culture at work” (Hawkes 2001, 7). Rituals involving pre-concert picnics on Pagoda Hill – including the marking of personal space, identifying what equipment to bring, and determining the types of food to serve – are examples of learned behavior through observation of group norms in the commons

(Figure 13). Participants at concerts, who do not follow the norms, resituate themselves outside of the venue space and under trees along the sides of the hill. In this manner, accepted behavior is reinforced while alternative behavior is displaced.

On a Sunday evening in August 2019, my husband joined me on a site visit to Patterson Park to listen to Cimarrón, a band from Bogota, Colombia and part of the park’s Summer Concert series. I recorded in my fieldnotes observed behavior and norms that were established during the stages of the concert:

In the 45 minutes before the concert and throughout the concert, the hill filled with people. Families with young children, young couples with no children, and middle-aged couples with no children. Some sat in family groups – or multiple families together – while others formed large groups of 10-20 people. Still others sat alone or in pairs. All brought a combination of blankets, chairs, food, and alcohol. It appeared that there was an air of celebration as wine bottles popped and people were re-connected after being apart over the summer. Connections were made among old acquaintances, not among new. A member of the Friends of Patterson Park association moved through the crowd of attendees stopping to say hello to the few people she knew (Millin 2019).

In contrast, I felt tension as my expectations and concert attending norms diverged with the behaviors that I observed on Pagoda Hill. My experience is reflected:

During the concert there was constant noise of talking, laughing, crying, dogs barking, yelling, and helicopters. The band had to compete with the audience. I could barely hear the music and lost all visual connection with the stage due to other attendees sitting in front. Children paid no attention to the music – elementary aged children played in an open area far to the side of the hill. They ran around with long sticks playing a made-up game with no apparent adult supervision. When they came back, occasionally to check with parents or grab food, they were flushed and sweating... Adults, too, did not pay attention to the band. They talked amongst themselves, backs to the stage in some instances... There appears to be a disconnect between the music and the audience. People continued to arrive for the concert or just the opportunity to be outside in a group setting. Space began to get tight and both people and dogs entered the area that I had identified as my space – as appeared to be the norm. No one commented when entering the space. Interaction remained within known groups and people did not attempt to interact across groups (Millin 2019).

Feelings of invisibility persisted for the duration of the site visit. As resources in the commons diminished, I experienced increased tensions and felt unsettled. The audience's activity overwhelmed my concert experience, resulting in a visceral disconnect. Since I did not know other audience members, and because I had not arrived as part of a larger group, I was an anomaly. I managed to replicate the accepted rituals of the concert picnic, yet I was not accepted within the commons. This experience reinforced questions about access, agency, and acceptance in the park for those that are new to the commons or who are not familiar with the established rituals. It also calls into question the role and behavior of established participants and how they might demonstrate privilege in the space.

Themes of limited resources and tensions, of how space is used, is demonstrated through examples of cultural activities and supports. As a result, some commons become more enduring than others. Access over multi-generations through the repetition of customs, rituals,

or behaviors serve as influencers of the vitality of the commons and of the rituals themselves. For example, Ukrainian immigrants have lived in Canton since the 1880s and an annual Ukrainian Festival is held each September as a celebration of their culture and heritage. Food, music, and dance are showcased throughout the two-day event. Originally held in the southwest section of Patterson Park, it was relocated to the grounds of St. Michael's the Archangel Ukrainian Catholic Church, directly across the street from the previous festival site, due to reported costs associated with park permits ("Ukrainian Festival" n.d.) which are purchased through Baltimore City Recreation & Parks. The Ukrainian community established their festival customs over a forty-year period and adapted to the new space with attendance remaining robust. In contrast, the Latinx community, more recently established participants in Patterson Park, have benefitted from intentional programs and advocacy provided by Friends of Patterson Park. As such, new activities have been introduced into the park over the past five years, resulting in enduring changes to the space. This is evident with bilingual signage in the east section of the park as well as festivals and athletic events that are ubiquitous to many Latinx cultures.

Through familiarity and acceptance, the commons transitions from space to place. It is a place in which participants practice social and cultural interactions producing a validation of identity. Park and participants each have identity and meaning. Furthermore, parks can be places that are empowering as well as exclusionary¹.

¹ Several researchers and practitioners influenced my thinking about the commons, application to public space, and meaning making for participants including: Gilmore 2017, Holder and Flessas 2008, Hufford 1999, 2016, Low 1994, Parker and Schmidt 2017, Radywyl and Biggs 2013, and Titon 2016.

Victor Turner explores the idea that people are drawn together through shared, identifying traits – thus creating *communitas*². Even as the experience of shared traits works to strengthen relationships and coalesce individuals, it may occur at the cost of excluding those who fall outside the set of identified characteristics. The separation may be further defined by behavior that emerges over time as a result of group interaction and history. This may be true across race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic class as well as age and sexual orientation. It is seen in behavior in Patterson Park by observing who is using different spaces and who is absent. Two specific examples that stood out during the research period include age and race. The first, the apparent lack of use of Patterson Park by adolescents as compared to the frequent presence of parents with toddlers. The second, while participation in Patterson Park by Black participants appeared to shift after March 2020, observations in 2019 indicated that use of the park was infrequent despite nearby neighborhoods having a majority of Black residents. Setha Low notes that the use of power may be evident in the built space, as much as it is institutionalized through unspoken behaviors (Low 1994). Upon exploring patterns of use and looking at who is leveraging power, the question “who is absent from the park and why?” emerges. What influence do the commons have on participation as well as in creating opportunities for spontaneous and intentional behavior?

The historical founding and establishment of individual parks influences the ways they are perceived. This, in turn, informs who chooses to use and avoid the space. Central Park, a

² *Communitas*: Turner defines *communitas* as “the mutual confrontation of human beings stripped of status and role characteristics – people, ‘just as they are,’ getting through to each other” (Turner 1979, 470-471) and “unmediated communication... which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances” (Turner 1992a, 58-59).

premier example of 19th century parks, is located on the former site of several neighborhoods and in areas of New York City whose marginalized residents were forcibly removed so the park could be built (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992; Sevilla-Buitrago 2017; Taylor 1999). In contrast, most of the public parks in Baltimore – also established during the 19th century – were established on land that was given to the city by landowners. Prior to becoming public parks, the lands were estates and owned by “the wealthy elite” (Wells, Buckley, and Boone 2008, 154). Patterson Park, in 1827, was the first park established in Baltimore and was done so through this method of gifting (Almaguer 2006a; Baltimore City Recreation & Parks 2016; Boone et al. 2009). The landscape architecture firm, Olmstead Brothers, was hired in 1902 to develop an overall, cohesive plan for the network of Baltimore’s public parks. The system remains today and is currently undergoing a comprehensive review by Baltimore City Recreation & Parks (Baltimore City Recreation & Parks, n.d.).

Patterson Park’s complex history, including use as a public green space and serving as the site for military encampments, provides examples of adaptation, threat, and reinterpretation of the commons. Jane B. Holder and Tatiana Flessas state that the “commons have traditionally been defined by the threat of their enclosure” due to “invasion, dispossession, and other threats” (Holder and Flessas 2008, 305). Patterson Park has both visual and physical borders that serve to delineate the park space from the surrounding neighborhoods. Throughout Patterson Park’s history, there have been threats against, and in the park, as a result of wars, protests, and reputation. The negotiation of space, inclusion, and access to resources is repeated many times over. The history of the park provides necessary information to better understand access, park use, and inclusion – or exclusion. It also provides

explanations on perceptions of safety and representation. The tension in the commons appears to have resulted in perpetuating keeping some groups out of the park while simultaneously pulling other communities together.

Liminal

Parks provide a space and time that is set apart from the everyday, thus creating an occasion to engage in activities, practice behaviors, and interact with others that might not otherwise occur. They are temporal spaces that are intentionally entered and exited. I posit that parks are the site of liminal events, providing opportunities – expected and unexpected – which allow participants to try out the new or continue with the familiar, thus creating what I have identified as “tension filled moments,” in which anything can happen.

Felix Rosch describes liminality as an active and vibrant state. It is not a place of dormancy. Beyond the commonly accepted definition of liminality as being an in between, Rosch uses active language such as “exchanges,” “facilitate human transit from one place to another,” “human encounters,” and “precarious situation” (Rosch 2017, 288). Rosch furthers explores the topic of liminality through his discussion of outcomes. As a result of the active state of liminality, one is changed - “liminality may lead to the development of new frameworks, as it enables us to challenge the habitual” (Rosch 2017, 289). When applied to public spaces, such as a park where both strangers and familiar intersect, it results in potential. On each visit to the park, there are both the knowns and the unexpected.

I experienced liminality on several occasions in Patterson Park - making a place that was familiar become unfamiliar - resulting in unexpected moments, new feelings, and shifts in my

thinking. On a September 2019 site visit I recorded my observations and responses to a Mexican Independence Day Festival as compared to prior visits to Patterson Park:

I made multiple site visits during the summer 2019 for Cultural Documentation [graduate class] and never encountered a fence erected specifically for an event. In past visits, I felt that park visitors were – for the most part – welcome all over the park. This was the first time I did not feel welcome and actually felt excluded (Millin 2019).

My response to the fence was strong. I was not clear if the fence had been erected to keep people out of the festival grounds or to contain the activities within, as a way to prevent them from spilling into nearby spaces. My feelings of uncertainty produced a change in my behavior on the September 2019 visit - I did not document the event through photographs nor did I enter the festival itself. I remained outside. Reflecting on my response, through the lens that Rosch provides, helps to explain what I experienced. My framework for Patterson Park, a space that was familiar, had in a single moment been disrupted. I was challenged towards developing a new understanding. Martin Rudwick explains that movement through a liminal environment may produce a disconnect of “familiar features and taken-for-granted assumptions.” Instead, the person is “exposed to unfamiliar experiences which give access to a new and deeper understanding of the familiar world to which he later returns” (Rudwick 1996, 150).

Rosch states, “since liminal spaces often have mono-functional purposes, these spaces only gain identity through human engagement with each other” (Rosch 2017, 290). Due to the nature of the activities in public spaces, the definition of engagement may be extended to include that which exists between self and space. One could surmise that if public spaces - such as parks - are spaces in which liminality exists, the meaning of the space is continuously being altered by the people who occupy the space. Reflecting on my September 2019 site visit

further reveals that I had internalized assumptions about Patterson Park, the people who occupy the space, and behavior that is expected. Assumptions I carried with me, prior to observing the Festival, included a lack of temporary barriers in the park and participants feeling welcomed into various activities. The Mexican Independence Day Festival forced a re-



Figure 14 Zumba class at the Pulaski Monument on the SE corner of Patterson Park where the Mexican Independence Day Festival was held a month earlier (October 2019).

interpretation of the southeast corner of Patterson Park which I had previously observed to be a mostly open area used predominantly by participants walking dogs, running, young children riding bikes or being pushed in strollers, and engaged in Zumba class (see Figure 14).

Participants involved in these

activities are predominantly white adults in their mid-20s to early 40s. The meaning and identity of the space had been changed not just because of who occupied it, but the way in which it was occupied as demonstrated through music, clothing, food, and activities.

Furthermore, the fence was erected by Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks, not by the Mexican or Latinx community or by Friends of Patterson Park. The fence altered an understanding and interpretation about power and control of space. Not only might there be tension between participants and how they want to be in the space around the Pulaski Monument, but an added tension between various governing organizations further complicates the dynamics.

Observations in Patterson Park led me to conclude that physical space is not liminal. Instead, it is the movement, in and through space or time, that is liminal. Therefore, I propose that parks are a space in which liminality occurs. Liminality is experiential. Julia Thomas explores the ways that liminality produces unsettling and uncomfortable feelings (Thomas 2020) while Turner’s research focuses on rites of passage (Turner 1979; 1992a). These two hypotheses combine to create a robust understanding of liminality, therefore producing a richer understanding of space in which to practice behavior and meaning making as well as to build connections between self, park, and community.

Case Study: Ecuavóley



Figure 15 In Patterson Park, Ecuavóley is played on repurposed tennis courts. Players move a soccer ball back and forth while onlookers watch intently. Loud cheers, laughter, conversation, and music are familiar sounds (November 2020).

I observed the tension of male teenagers in their pacing and hovering along the fence during weekly gatherings of Ecuavóley³ on the repurposed tennis courts at the far eastern border of the Main Section of Patterson Park. They hoped to be noticed and invited into the

³ Ecuavóley is a form of volleyball played using a Mikasa ft-5 soccer ball. In a 2019 interview, Long shared that the game originates in Ecuador. Additional research states that “in the beginning, Ecuavóley was considered a sport for the lower class and specifically taxi drivers, but it has expanded since then” (Johannessen 2017). Among other rules, each team has three players, the net is positioned higher than the American volleyball net, and players can hold the ball up to one second. In Patterson Park, the net of the tennis court can be temporarily removed to provide designated space for Ecuavóley.

game that is played by adult men (see Figure 15). On a side court, four or five young children practice. The teenagers do not belong with either group. Instead, they are likely in the liminal space of – neither child nor adult – and the invitation to join the game is part of the rite to adulthood, to being accepted. The teenagers appear uncomfortable as they avoid eye contact with the adults while also hoping for a subtle nod to join in the game.

There is a constant shifting and re-organization of one's understanding, meaning, and positioning of self within liminality. People's connections and relationships are re-ordered numerous times. Furthermore, some individuals and groups may experience liminality in given situations, while others may not. The place of liminality calls to mind themes of power and agency. In Ecuavóley, power presents itself through gender as well as age. Only males were observed playing Ecuavóley while women and girls prepared food and watched the youngest children (see Figure 16). Power appears to reside with adults who either play Ecuavóley or sit on the sideline, offering words of wisdom about the game. In this example, there seems to be



Figure 16 Women, older men, and youth sit in the shade of temporarily hung tarps at the edge of the Ecuavóley game. They spend their time talking, watching the game, and managing the coolers and bags of food. The equipment is set-up and removed for each Ecuavóley event (November 2020).

several factors that combine to produce opportunities – it is true that “liminality is full of potency and potentiality” (Turner 1979, 466).

Tension extends beyond the invisible boundaries of Ecuavóley. It appears in the relationship between tennis

players, Ecuavóley players, and the residents of Patterson Park Neighborhood as well as in the history of the creation of the dog park, the Ecuavóley court, and the rehabilitated tennis courts. The Ecuavóley players play music at a loud volume, set out tables and chairs, and share food with each other as multigeneration families and friends come together to spend afternoons in the shared experience. From observations, participation in Ecuavóley is competitive as well as social.

Ecuavóley and the accompanying rituals have not always been fully part of the norms of the commons. Katie Long, Program Director at Friends of Patterson Park and park user, reflected on complaints about the music and noise “it really had some ethnocentric undertones, to me, because they weren’t complaining about the tennis players or, or other folks so it was like they are playing music, and it is loud, and stuff. But, after a while, and like a lot of efforts at community meetings and everything, I think most people really enjoy seeing Ecuavóley happen. They’re definitely a big part of the park and established, so much so that the park’s design had them in mind. Which is kind of cool. It is a fun story” (Long 2019).

Through the example provided by Ecuavóley, Long connected expectations of park use, the intersection of park users, single use and multiuse spaces, power, and changes in park use. She highlighted the ways in which behavior in the park impacts community relationships, as well as the work that is done to foster understanding between community users who appear different from each other.

What does liminality mean for parks more broadly and Patterson Park specifically?

From the [Case Study: Ecuavóley](#), it becomes evident that by entering space, participants

negotiate themselves in relationship to those around them. In addition, participants navigate their behavior because of, or in response to, physical structures, events, and programming.

There appears to be a negotiation between familiarity and difference.



Figure 17 Marital arts class on the basketball courts - masks on due to COVID-19 (July 2020).



Figure 18 My Trainer Guy Boot Camp – outdoors due to COVID-19, no masks due to updated health guidelines (September 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 on people provided opportunity to compare participant behavior before and after laws restricted movement and activity in parks. Walking, running, and spending time with one's dog in Patterson Park changed immediately as a result of new laws. In 2020 as compared to 2019, the maximum number of people allowed in the enclosed dog park was lowered and, concurrently, I observed an increased number of dogs, off leash in the open fields and on the tennis courts. The way in which participants spaced themselves on walking paths was altered as a result of the

mandated distances of six feet between non-household members. In spring 2020, walkers and runners intentionally stepped off paths and onto grass areas to avoid passing too closely to other participants. Space in the park was reimagined and repurposed as indoor activities moved outdoors. Marital arts classes were taught on the basketball courts (see Figure 17), athletic trainers held exercise classes on park stairs and under trees (see Figure 18), and the open fields in the Annex were used as the site for a Black Lives Matter youth demonstration.

Sharon Zukin states that “accepting diversity implies sharing public space – the streets, buses, parks, and schools – with people who visibly, and quite possibly vehemently, live lives you do not approve of” (Zukin 1995, viii). The tension produced by the introduction of music, activities, and gatherings by participants who look and sound different, as explored in the [Case Study: Ecuavóley](#), provides one example of how sharing space included working towards an acceptance of difference. As intersections and encounters between park participants occur during visits, unspoken forms of communication and demarcation of space evolves within public areas. I found myself wondering: Who has the right to use the park? What behaviors are acceptable? Who is missing? How does the story change over the life of the park as well as from day to day? Zukin’s research explores the ways in which the negotiation of “physical security, cultural identity, and social and geographical community” (Zukin 1995, 24) inform who occupies public space. Patterson Park has been reimagined over the course of its history as a result of changing values of park use, political pressures, neighborhood demographics, financial fluctuations, and community efforts. Overall, the infrastructure and space are relatively unchanged – it is what occurs inside the space that is liminal.

[Access](#)

Participants’ connection to space is influenced by access. For the purpose of the research, I explored access through two different, yet complimentary, perspectives. Access may be described as a participant’s relationship to a built space – how one engages with and in a physical environment. This may be exemplified through an examination of physical barriers and accommodations such benches, stairs, ramps, plant materials, and signage as well as how participants perceive them and make meaning. A second perspective of access is reflective of

experiences and feelings. It speaks to the question of whether individuals feel included and represented in space. When examining access through this lens, barriers and accommodations may be more subtle than the built environment. Instead, it speaks to an understanding of access in relationship to the meaning of objects and people, such as messages conveyed to specific demographic groups about the history of space, the infrastructure, and programming as well as how people treat each other.

While the structural realities within Patterson Park appear open and fluid, boundaries exist within the park that produce micro-communities. Some of the boundaries are a result of human built spaces, or infrastructure such as paths, fences, and stairs. Other examples are grounded within the social and super structures of specific activities or events. These boundaries become visible only when observations are made about who is participating, what people are wearing, identifying if there are financial costs to participating, and if there is a social cost to entering specific spaces. Low applies concepts of distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice⁴ when reflecting on what she identifies as fairness in space (S. Low 2013).

The Built Space

Close proximity to public spaces allows for spontaneous, or unplanned, visits by individuals living and working near public parks. Studies show that the ideal distance of a public

⁴ Low asks the following questions when discussing the three types of justice (S. Low 2013, 8):

- Distributive justice: “Is there equal public space for everyone? Is there a fair allocation of public space resources?”
- Procedural justice: “Is there a way to gain access to public space?...Is there a fair system for applying to use the park grounds for games or picnics?”
- Interactional justice: “Does the public space allow for all individuals to interact safely?...Are people treating each other in a way that promotes a sense of citizenship, equality, and social justice?”

park, from one's home, is no more than a quarter of a mile⁵ (Boone et al. 2009; Radywyl and Biggs 2013; Wells, Buckley, and Boone 2008). The ways that participants enter parks are important and park planners take into consideration infrastructure such as fencing, gates, pillars, street and sidewalk access, stairs, as well as signage, language, and word choice.



Figure 19 Stairs into Patterson Park used to navigate a steep hill along E. Baltimore Street (July 2019).

Patterson Park is located within six, densely packed, urban neighborhoods (see Map 1). The boundary of the park is clear as it is surrounded on all sides by sidewalks and streets. The changing topography of the park results in different methods of physical access. Some locations, specifically along the north-west

border, have steep, grass hills which make it challenging to enter at random sites, forcing the visitor to be directed to steep stairs (see Figure 19). Other boundaries are flat and at street



Figure 20 East entrance to Main Section on S. Linwood Avenue next to the dog park. An example of a utilitarian entrance (July 2019).

level. Participants in these locations enter along designated paths or simply by crossing grass areas (see Figure 11). Depending on the location, Patterson Park entrances include unmarked paths, historic pillars, and steps. The grander entrances (see Figure 7) are located in the oldest sections of the park and

⁵ As a comparison, a quarter mile is the distance of a typical track around an American football field.

closer to neighborhoods that have recently become gentrified, tend to have more white residents, and are financially better off. These locations are situated along the western side of the park which contains pastoral landscapes, meandering pathways, and vistas – all more typical of 19th century parks. The east side of the park is host to utilitarian entrances (see Figure 20). In addition, signs in this area focus on rules and are more often in both English and Spanish. Athletic facilities and most of the park programming are located in the east section.

Themes of physical access and accessibility, raised by Carol Hartke and Markiewicz, may be attributed to their role as Pagoda docents as well as through personal experiences. Hartke, in her 80s, described her main point of access to the park (Figure 19):

I have one accessible issue (chuckles). Because I live on Baltimore Street, almost to Montford Avenue, those steps need to have a railing. Those things are too steep to just be freehand. I will go up them, but I will not go down. And that is the only place in the park that I feel like that. But that one is - they are steep and there are 30 of them. You know, it is like woo - I've never seen anybody fall on them, but I keep thinking I don't know what keeps people upright... So, I usually go out the corner. I just avoid it anymore. I'll go up the steps, but that is the extent (Hartke 2020).

Markiewicz commented that the steep, winding staircase of the Pagoda - with multiple flights -



Figure 21 An example of a bench in Patterson Park. Located 15 feet off of the path and, on sunny days, in full sun. The benches are rarely used (October 2020).

is sometimes prohibitive for visitors.

Both Hartke and Markiewicz stated that access may be reflective of what activities a visitor is involved in as well as where in the park they spend their time. On site visits I noted the overall lack of benches in the park as well as bench placement – usually off the paths

and in full sun (see Figure 21). There were numerous occasions in which I was unable to find a bench to sit, take notes, make observations, or even rest for a moment. In addition, there are no public restrooms. Some of these concerns are addressed in the 2016 Master Plan and are being considered as part of future infrastructure changes.

Access to physical space and resources is an important consideration when studying participant use and meaning in parks. Observations of park use are confirmed through interviews. Participants access areas of the park closest to their homes, enter and leave the park by the closest route, and are dismayed when access is prevented due to structural realities or physical abilities. Similarly, Patterson Park programming is situated in locations that will most likely draw specific demographic groups – privileging some demographics over others.

Research shows that the neighborhoods around Patterson Park are racially and ethnically diverse. Park use, however, is not as diverse as the surrounding neighborhoods. For example, Black residents living primarily in McElderry Park and Patterson Park Neighborhood, do not access the park as frequently as white and Latinx residents. This may be due to several factors: they may reside outside of the preferred quarter mile distance to the park, it may be due to the steep topography of the park projecting the image of a barrier, or it may be reflective of a lack of programming that represents their values and interests. Overall, I found that programming in the northern region of Patterson Park is limited. In addition, the programming that exists may not be designed to support the interests and needs of potential and actual participants. In a 2019 interview with Long, she shared that the Virginia S. Baker Recreation Center, located on the north side, attracts larger numbers of Black participants than other locations in the park. However, the 2016 Patterson Park Master Plan reports that only



Figure 22 Virginia S. Baker Recreation Center - a windowless and underutilized building on the north side of the park. Used by Baltimore Recreation & Park, Friends of Patterson Park, and for community meetings (November 2020).

7% of total park users access the building and its offered programs (Baltimore City Recreation & Parks 2016, 116). The Recreation Center is windowless and has poor signage (see Figure 22). These traits among others, leads me to conclude that the building is visually unwelcoming. Historian Tim Almaguer reports that when the

Recreation Center was built in 1974, due to continued concerns of vandalism in the park at the time, “the new recreation center was built of solid brick with no windows” (Almaguer 2006, 107). Like the steep hill projecting the image of a barrier, the Recreation Center does the same through the solid walls and tightly closed doors.

The Inclusive Space

The availability of public spaces, such as a park, does not guarantee actual use of the space by prospective participants. Spaces must feel inviting, or inclusive, for people to be willing to access them. Participants must feel that they belong and their identities are celebrated. Low writes: “if people are not represented in urban parks, historic national sites and monuments, and more importantly if their histories are erased, they will not use the park” (S. Low 2013, 303). Institutional racial segregation has had a strong influence on the history of Baltimore. The built environment and policies of the city resulted in physically isolated neighborhoods as a result of the placement of highways, the creation of race-specific

neighborhoods through redlining, and public spaces that vary in quality of services and physical structures (Lanahan 2019; Pietila 2010; Rothstein 2017). Furthermore, Baltimore played a key role as a port city in the international and domestic slave trade, at one point serving as the primary site of trade for enslaved peoples along the East Coast. Subsequent to the Civil War, the installation of Confederate themed statues in the city serve as visual reminders of the division between Black and white communities. These factors inform the dynamics experienced today between the Black and white populations in Baltimore as well as speak to historic patterns of use of space.

While physical access to parks is high for residents of Baltimore, due to most residents living within the recommended one quarter mile of parks (Lanahan 2019; Pietila 2010; Rothstein 2017), the historic influences on park access reveals additional information. Baltimore parks were largely established on gifted land from wealthy, white landowners. Access and availability to fresh air environments and amenities were not equitable even as segregation was overturned in the 1950s. According to the 1952 U.S. Census Bureau, as quoted by Wells, Buckley, and Boone, beginning in the 1950s the white population within the city limits declined significantly from 723,655 to 205,982 while the Black population grew from 225,099 to 418,951 in the same 50-year period (Wells, Buckley, and Boone 2008, 167). As the white population moved to the surrounding counties, taking with them resources needed to maintain public spaces, the quality of facilities and resources deteriorated. Therefore, even as access to parks for the Black population increased, actual use decreased. This is reflective of Low's discourse on distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (S. Low 2013).

Data from interviews supports additional research on the history and meaning of Patterson Park for potential participants. Wells, Buckley, and Boone “use a historical approach to link shifting patterns of inequity with the dynamic processes that shaped them” (Wells, Buckley, and Boone 2008, 153) to begin to develop an explanation of environmental injustices. They consider the relationship between proximity and access to parks as well as illuminate “the history of a particular park as contested space” (Wells, Buckley, and Boone 2008, 153). In my interview with Hartke, she shared a poignant example told to her by “Butch,” then a white male in his 70’s, of an incident he witnessed as an eight-year-old boy in Patterson Park in the 1940s. Butch, who had grown up near Patterson Park, was with a group of white boys during Easter vacation “playing and a bunch of Black kids came across Baltimore Street, because they had been further north. And he said ‘policemen came up and chased them back out of the park. And I didn’t say anything, and I feel bad about it to this day’” (Hartke 2020). Hartke reflected that “there must have been a lot of that because people are clear, this was a white park back in the day” (Hartke 2020).

Demographics inform the experiences that participants have in a space and is, in part, reflective of feelings of representational access. Observed movement in Patterson Park indicate that patterns are indicative of race, ethnicity, and gender and reemphasizes spaces which are viewed as inclusive or exclusive. Incorporating an understanding of historical context, whether centuries old or more recent, is an important component to interpreting use patterns and fostering inclusion, access, and connections. Hawkes suggests that “without a sense of our past, we are adrift in an endless present” (Hawkes 2001, 30). Differences of use in

Patterson Park is evident in white, Latinx, and Black communities. History appears to inform use, and use may reinforce history.

During 2019 and 2020 site visits, I observed that white people represent the majority of users in Patterson Park followed by Latinx participants. White presenting participants could be more specifically identified by ethnicity and race if interviews had been conducted as the neighborhoods around Patterson Park include a high percentage of Eastern European immigrants of either first or subsequent generations. Observations reveal that white participants appear to spend time in all areas of Patterson Park and in most activities. As a result, I am led to conclude that this group's overall comfort level and feeling of belonging is higher than other demographic groups.

Latinx participants appear to limit their access to the eastern section of the park more often than other areas. Furthermore, according to a 2019 interview with Susie Creamer, Director of the Patterson Park Audubon Center, rarely do Latinx women move beyond the park perimeter⁶. Through conversations with Latinx women participating in the Patterson Park Audubon Center programming, Creamer identified that:

Latinas are very much a target of crime, they are thought to only to be carrying cash because they are undocumented presumably, right, this is the assumption - because they are undocumented. And they won't call the police because of the undocumented nature. And, so, they weren't going into the interior of the park, not because they didn't feel welcomed but because of safety concerns (Creamer 2019).

⁶ In 2020 I observed changing patterns of park use by Latinx participants of all genders. This observation was corroborated by interviews conducted during the same time period. While the east section remains more frequently accessed, Latinx participants appeared to be engaging in spaces further west as well.

As indicated in Creamer’s example, assumptions about gender, ethnicity, and citizenship influence park use by the Latinx community. In the Annex and eastern part of the Main Section of Patterson Park, Latinx participants appeared to feel welcomed, validated, and safe as indicated by their involvement in planned and spontaneous park activities such as Zumba, Ecuavóley, and walking with young children. In addition, in this section of Patterson Park, signs are bilingual and programming is advertised on social media platforms in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, the Patterson Park Audubon Center offers multigenerational programming in both languages. Friends of Patterson Park and the Patterson Park Audubon Center have worked intentionally, as a result of recommendations from the 2016 Patterson Park Master Plan, to create an environment in which Latinx community members feel seen and validated. Recognizing and celebrating difference, “the ways social class and ethnic groups use and value public sites is essential to making decisions that sustain cultural and social diversity” (S. Low 2013, 304).

In the early fall of 2020, during a period of relaxing health protocols for COVID-19,



Figure 23 Zumba at Pagoda Hill, a newer location during COVID-19, resulted in changed demographics of participants. In this class there is a combination of regular attendees as well as new members. At the top of the hill, park visitors sat watching the class. (September 2020).

Zumba classes resumed. The classes were relocated from the Pulaski Monument (see Figure 14) to the base of Pagoda Hill (see Figure 23). During separate interviews, the two instructors shared that while classes had previously been offered in the Pagoda Hill location it was not common. The recent decision

was made to increase visibility and draw new members. My observations, from a single class, is that the Pagoda Hill location appeared to draw a higher number of white participants and less Latinx and Black members than the Pulaski Monument location I observed in 2019. Stephanie Brown, instructor and neighborhood resident, stated that there are new members every week, but overall, the attendance has dropped since COVID-19 from 30-35 regular attendees to 15-25. The more western situated site may have inadvertently decreased attendance. The decrease may also be attributed to other factors such as general concerns regarding COVID-19 or the absence of concurrently run programming such as the youth soccer clinic. The move appears to have directly impacted participation by Latinx members.

Historically, Black participants have not appeared to access Patterson Park at the same rate as white and Latinx participants. Observations of limited park access by Black participants is confirmed in the 2016 Patterson Park Master Plan. Research and interviews further confirm experiences of historic racial discrimination and prejudice, absence of programming, and a lack of overall representation of self in the park (Baltimore City Recreation & Parks 2016, 113).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, I observed what appears to be a change in park use by



Figure 24 Black Lives Matter mural on S. Linwood Street between the Annex and the Main Park. A designated Slow Street during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020).

some demographic groups, in particular Black participants. A range of awareness of the changes of park use by Black participants in 2020 was noted in interviews, including: “I think we certainly could do better in the African American community, to do more outreach and to get



Figure 25 Part of a Black Lives Matter art installation in Patterson Park along Eastern Avenue. The art faces Canton. Several Baltimore City Recreation & Parks employees (identified as white) began removing the displays without permission. Canton residents stopped the city employees through a combined effort of physical intervention and telephone calls. Several of the displays have subsequently been incorporated into the art collection at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture (September 2020).

more people to participate. I have seen that it's increased, but I think we could certainly do more" (Lankatilleke 2020), "there are more African Americans or African American couples in the park, but I hadn't thought about it" (Hartke 2020), and "a lot of Black people, a lot of I guess like Latino people, lots of white people (laughs)" (Markiewicz 2020). Prior to June 2020, I was not aware of programming that specifically reflected

values and interests of the Black community. Beginning in summer 2020, a Juneteenth Celebration and picnic were held, a "Black Lives Matter" street painting (see Figure 24) was completed overnight on S. Linwood Street – an identified Slow Street⁷, a Black Lives Matter art installation was erected along the Eastern Avenue border (see Figure 25), and a mural was painted on the side of a row house (see Figure 51). It is not clear if increased park use is a temporary response to COVID-19 and the racial justice movement or whether they are more permanent behavior shifts due to increased feelings of belonging due to intentional programming changes.

Site visits and interviews reveal little data and information regarding participants in Patterson Park who identify as Asian. This is reflective of demographic data from the

⁷ The purpose of the Slow Streets Program is to "support safe, essential physical activity by creating more space for social distancing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" ("Slow Streets Program" 2020).

surrounding neighborhoods which indicates that the percentage of residents who identify as Asian is low (see Table 1). Observations from site visits suggest that use of Patterson Park by Asian presenting participants may be limited to specific areas of the park such as the community garden, summer concerts, and walking paths. There is no known park programming that specifically targets this demographic group. Celebrations and events, such as the Lunar New Year and Diwali, that have become more commonly integrated in mainstream American venues elsewhere, remain absent. Markiewicz was the sole interviewee who spoke about Asian park visitors. She commented,

we had a ton of Asian people from Hopkins come in. Like on a, like a school – whatever...um. I think Hopkins actually probably, maybe not even necessarily the school but also the hospital like brings a lot of people through because it is kind of close. Um, and I've had a couple of people I've documented that they've mentioned that they're here for something from Hopkins (Markiewicz 2020).

Markiewicz appears to view any Asian participants in the park as one-time visitors and not members of the community.

Programming and intentional marketing directed towards specific demographic groups can be found on the Friends of Patterson Park website, social media platforms, and neighborhood listservs. These examples include limited programming directed to LGBTQ+ and Eastern European communities. Most programming is inclusive of multigenerational groups and includes festivals and performances. While Long and Creamer discussed additional efforts, by their respective organizations, to connect with the Latinx community via WhatsApp and word of mouth, it does not appear that this effort has been expanded to reach a larger array of demographic groups residing in the area.



Figure 26 Utz Turf Field, a permit-use only field that is locked when not in use. Mostly used by teams with membership from neighborhoods located away from Patterson Park (September 2019).



Figure 27 Open, multi-use fields make up the Annex. No permits are given for this space. It is the space most often used by Latinx males for pick-up soccer. In June 2020, it was the site of a Black Lives Matter youth rally (July 2020).

In an October 2019 interview, Long discussed that the demographic groups who use the various athletic fields in Patterson Park changes from one location to another as does the way the spaces are used (see [Case Study: Soccer in Patterson Park](#)). She spoke to various patterns of behavior that are reflective of access to field space. In one example, it is revealed that some field use requires permits, while others do not. This, in turn, yields information related to the demographics of groups using the different spaces. For example, the Utz Turf Field⁸ (see Figure 26) requires a paid permit that is accessed through the Baltimore City Recreation & Parks and not through the programming office of

Friends of Patterson Park, as is true for the majority of fields in the park. Observations reveal that participants on the Utz Turf Field tend to be white, young adults, and are majority male. In contrast, use of the Annex (see Figure 27) is unpermitted and is intended for open use. The grass fields are used predominantly by Latinx males for pick-up soccer games while the surrounding path is used by mostly white dog walkers and runners. Long reflected on the

⁸ The Utz Turf Field is the only non-grass field in Patterson Park. It is surrounded by a tall, metal fence and lit by stadium lighting. In addition, there are stands and a locker room area. It is maintained by Baltimore City Recreation & Parks.

inequality of access vis-à-vis permitting for activities as related to cost and navigating the political infrastructure. As discussed previously, the Ukrainian American community encountered similar obstacles with their annual festival prior to relocating the event to the free site on the grounds of St. Michael's the Archangel Ukrainian Catholic Church. Similar navigation may take place for the Mexican Independence Day Festival as well as other festivals and events. The differences in organization control as well as participant access provides additional examples of demographic composition of, and engagement by, members of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Through three different lenses - Director of Programming with Friends of Patterson Park, Highlandtown resident, and park user - Long revealed she spends a lot of time thinking about park use. In a 2020 blog she stated that urban green spaces “are a good opportunity for people from different backgrounds with different interests with different histories to come together in a shared space” (McAdory 2020). In my 2019 interview with Long, she reflected on the meaning and impact of single use and multiuse spaces as well as how the various uses of space produce tension resulting from the pressures of different groups (see [Case Study: Ecuavóley](#)).

Throughout her 2019 interview, Long mused how Friends of Patterson Park can be responsive to the diverse participants using Patterson Park, thereby navigating the commons. Past use of surveys and community forums provided opportunities for participants to give voice to their opinions and values. This information served to provide direction in decision making for Friends of Patterson Park, Patterson Park Audubon Center, and Baltimore City Recreation & Parks. That said, Long and Creamer acknowledged that not all voices have been heard,

specifically those of Black participants. The inequities of access and park use may speak to continued privileging of some groups over others.

In Patterson Park, access varies depending on location within the park. Naomi Klein states that communities should have the right to provide input and inform planning for spaces that they use (Klein 2001), which speaks to the meaning of the voices in the commons, and is further highlighted by Radywyl and Biggs (Radywyl and Biggs 2013, 165). Gathering community input for the 2016 Patterson Park Master Plan and subsequent work completed, are evidence of the recognition of importance placed on community voice. My concern, regarding access, is on who has historically been absent from the discussion, and by extension, the park as well as whether the lack of access influences the cultural vitality of their communities.

Connectivity

The presence of a shared public space within one's community provides opportunity for a "coming together" in unique ways. The coming together may not result in friendships, but it does produce – at minimum – an awareness of self in relation to others. Markiewicz spoke to seeing people regularly in the park who are running or doing push-ups, "like I know the people, even if I don't know the people" (Markiewicz 2020). The connection with others is an important part of Markiewicz's relationship to Patterson Park. The intersection of people in the park, either intentional or accidental, results in meaning making for participants in the space.

As discussed in the prior section, Patterson Park represents different meanings for different demographic groups. This is especially clear when observing the experiences of Black people in the park – be it specific events such as the one Butch observed in the 1940s or comments posted on neighborhood association social media platforms. This compares to

intentional programming in Patterson Park that celebrates members of the Latinx community. It appears that the Latinx community experiences a validation of identity in Patterson Park as well as meaning in spaces within the park due, in part, to the offered programming.

Throughout 2020, it appears that the Black community has found new meaning as seen in representations of self in art installations, the street mural, and intentional programming. As a result, Black park participants are using the park in higher numbers in family and social groups. Similar to the Latinx community, the Black community is identifying with the space in ways not previously experienced. The recent events confirm that park meaning has the potential to change over time and through history.

Meaning making is also present in the personal connections individuals have to the park that exist beyond racial, ethnic, gender, and other identifiers. Connectivity to place or person is termed place attachment by Andrea Armstrong and Richard C. Stedman, who state it “is an indicator of affective bonds that are shared between a person or groups of people and a particular setting” (Armstrong and Stedman 2019, 98). Connectivity assumes an initial attraction to place or person. It begs the question: What is the catalyst that results in the outcome of a potential participant initially accessing Patterson Park? Followed by the question: What makes the person return, or not? How are connections formed? Malindi Lankatilleke, Zumba instructor and park user, shared at the conclusion of her interview that Patterson Park is “a healing place” and “a refuge” (Lankatilleke 2020). She confided that the park transformed her life when she “was going through trauma.” Lankatilleke continued her story and described “having that space and meeting people” as well as “getting involved really helped us get through” (Lankatilleke 2020). For Lankatilleke, Patterson Park represents the site of personal

transformation after becoming a single mother in an unfamiliar city. Lankatilleke's transformation of self is an example liminality in the commons. In the park, she opened herself to new experiences and to meeting new people. The park, its people, and the programming combined to provide Lankatilleke a community that she had not recognized she needed. While Lankatilleke no longer lives in the immediate neighborhood, she continues to return to Patterson Park several times a week to teach Zumba as well as to give back by serving on the Friends of Patterson Park Board. In addition, she continues to enjoy the park as a participant. Lankatilleke's story is one of connections.

Analyzing the ways that parks serve as a resource begins with an understanding of the influence that access has for potential participants. Similar to Lankatilleke, all interviewees reported that Patterson Park is a positive asset to self and community. This is recorded through their stories and observations. Patterson Park provides opportunities to connect to the space as well as to other participants. There are both tangible and intangible benefits of the park. Interviewees identified Patterson Park as "a lifeline", "a draw," the reason they choose to live in the area, and is an explanation for why residents have not moved away from southeast Baltimore. The attraction of Patterson Park prevails over negative stereotypes and lived experiences in the surrounding neighborhoods. Patterson Park's reputation as a "dangerous park" with prostitutes and drug dealers continued to exist into the 1990s. When I moved to Baltimore in 2004, new acquaintances warned me about going to Patterson Park. In 2015, when friends heard I was taking one of my children for instrument lessons in Canton, I was reminded to "be careful." The warnings and concern were repeated a third time while conducting research for this project. These included making sure I left the park before dusk,

not to venture north of the park, and that I should bring my husband with me for protection.

Over the course of the research period, I was in Patterson Park at all times of the day and well past dusk – never did I feel danger or concern. This is emblematic of how the history and story of a place continues to inform current use and hold captive false perceptions, thus further isolating communities and people.

Embracing public parks as the commons – a space that incorporates the everyday life, a shared platform, and a place with shared resources – introduces the tension that is present within the space. Even though the interviewees have positive experiences in the park, there are examples of tension. My research supports theoretical claims that the commons is not a place of equality. Instead, it is the space in which behaviors are negotiated. Some of which become normalized over time while others are excluded, or marginalized. The quality of the connection and negotiation of place, and to others, results in contrasting feelings of inclusion and disconnect. In Patterson Park, it may be a determining factor for answering questions regarding access and use.

Self and Park

Research supports my findings that Patterson Park is viewed as an attribute for those who use and live near the park. My own experiences in the park, coupled with data from 100% of the interviewees, validates this conclusion. Maeve Royce, Canton resident, described the park as a “secret” (Royce 2019) while Brown, Zumba instructor and community member, stated that Patterson Park is “an escape...a magical space” as well as a place of “rejuvenation” (Brown 2020).



Figure 28 Two couples with infant enjoying a picnic near Butcher's Hill along the west border of the park. Picnics increased from 2019 to 2020 as restaurants were forced to close or limit service to carryout (September 2020).

In a 2019 interview, Creamer, reflected that the “park is an anchor in many ways...maybe they’re spokes of a wheel into these different neighborhoods and races, ethnicities, and socio-economic factors...” (Creamer 2019). Creamer’s description of the park speaks to the connectivity that it provides for residents

living in the surrounding neighborhoods. Volunteer and resident Markiewicz stated that people who “invest here [park], also invest in the community,” “people want to be part of it [Patterson Park],” and that “people’s routines include this place” (Markiewicz 2020). Picnics, workouts, pick-up soccer games, dog walking, bench sitting, and chalk drawings provide examples of the opportunities in the park for participants to connect to the space (see Figure 28). These activities are ones that individuals might engage in if they have a yard, driveway, or private space. Instead, they experiment in the commons – “Baltimore’s backyard” as frequently labeled in source materials as well as by participants.

Interviewees shared specific locations they identify as their favorite place, the space to which they feel most connected, in Patterson Park. In most instances, the locations are situated in the Main Section of Patterson Park. These locations appear to be the result of the relationship each person has to the park. For example, two volunteers who work as Pagoda docents identified the Pagoda as one of their primary anchors. Connection to Patterson Park is also correlated with where individuals live in relationship to the park. Individuals living to the



Figure 29 The White House, the former park Superintendent's House and current offices for Friends of Patterson Park, nestled in the original part of the park (July 2019).

east of the park, in Highlandtown and Patterson Park Neighborhood, connect most with sites on the east side as compared to those who live to the north of the park. Long-time resident and self-identified “parkie” (Hartke 2020), Hartke acknowledged she rarely goes to the Annex and passes the Pulaski Monument only when walking to her gym, located in Canton. Further analysis

indicates that the location through which individuals enter the park, and where the entrance paths lead, correlates with their park use. Lankatilleke, Zumba instructor and park user, reflected that she primarily accessed the eastern locations and resources of Patterson Park when she lived in Highlandtown – spending much of her time in the social sports leagues. Upon moving out of the area, Lankatilleke’s use of the park shifted to other locations such as the Pulaski Monument, Pagoda Hill, and inside the Recreation Center during the winter. The newer locations were likely influenced by teaching Zumba classes and other changes in her relationship to the park. Long lives in Highlandtown and works in the White House (see Figure 29) – the current headquarters for Friends of Patterson Park and previous park Superintendent’s House, thereby crossing the full width of the park to go to work each day. She identified most with the Extension⁹ as well as the Boat Lake, sledding, and playing tennis – locations and activities occurring in the eastern sections of the park and closer to her home.

⁹ The Extension is also referred to as the Annex or the Little Park. In this document, I refer to this separate part of the park as the Annex as it is the mostly commonly used term. Long uses the terms interchangeably.

Discussions of the meaning and importance of park anchors appears to produce feelings associated with calmness and positivity for each of the interviewees. They smile, as indicated by the crinkling of the corners of the eyes while wearing masks, or the settling of their voices when sharing a memory or feelings about their favorite locations.



Figure 30 The Bull Circle with Pagoda in the background. The bull's head was relocated from another location and embedded in the stone wall. A path circles a large grass area and a few benches are located out-of-site. While it was identified as a favorite location in the park, I did not see many visitors at this site.

Spending time discussing and learning about participants' favorite places, within the larger context of Patterson Park, was intentional. Having a favorite place deepens participants' connections to the park by developing personal meaning that transcends beyond a generic park experience. The park becomes, "my" park instead of "the" park.

Three interviewees identified the Bull Circle as one of their favorite locations (see Figure 30). This circle shaped grass area has part of a bull's head built into a wall at one end of the space. The connections interviewees have with the Bull highlight the intensity of the relationship they have with the park. It is evidenced through their expressed desires to help keep the park clean. Hartke demonstrated this by picking trash up en route to the interview as well as her expressed pride in the park. Markiewicz, too, highlighted her efforts to park maintenance. She enjoyed pointing out the flowers she planted around the Pagoda and shared her plans to clean the Boat Lake the next day. Markiewicz stated that when she walks in the park she thinks "oh, look, I did that" regarding the efforts she put forth so that "it looks cleaner and better" (Markiewicz 2020).

Upon further reflection, Markiewicz shared that if she was not helping, she would see the “bad parts” of living in the city such as crime¹⁰. Favorite places, engagement in activities, and having experiences in the park make the space part of self. It increases connectivity.

Data gathered from interviews and during site observations indicates an iterative pattern of park use by different demographic groups. This is especially true when overlaid on park history. Hartke stated that Patterson Park used to be known as a “White park” (Hartke 2020) and expressed her opinion that this history is why there is not a high percentage of current park users who are Black. Upon further inquiry, it appears that Hartke’s statements are grounded in Baltimore’s segregated past as well as reflective of first- and second-hand stories she provided during the interview. Recognizing that the historic use of Patterson Park was primarily by white participants, and that Black participants were not readily welcomed, begins to reveal an understanding of the lower number of Black park participants seen in Patterson Park today. Creamer, too, discussed divisions along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic identifiers both in the park as well as in the neighborhoods. In addition, she spoke of the built environments, such as roads, that “create barriers” making them an “obstacle to cross to get to the park” (Creamer 2019). Creamer reflected on the impact of redlining and systemic, structural racism in Baltimore on the current use of Patterson Park. As explored earlier, these patterns and beliefs are deeply engrained in Baltimore.

The experiences and feelings are, in part, reflective of representational access. When visitors do not feel represented, their histories have been erased, or there is systemic racism,

¹⁰ Throughout Markiewicz’s interview she touched on themes of race, “other”, and crime. This is explored later in the paper.

they are less likely to enter the space (Boone et al. 2009; Low 2013). Patterns of park use based on race, ethnicity, and gender were validated through site visits and interviews. The underlying perpetuated historical patterns impact the meaning and experience for potential and actual participants. It also provided momentum for change as is evident over the past four years.

Since 2016, in response to the Patterson Park Master Plan, intentional programming as well as materials in both English and Spanish were developed to strengthen the Latinx park user's experience as well as to increase the number of Latinx participants. All interviewees reported observing an increase in the number of Latinx participants in Patterson Park. While discussing who she sees using the park, Hartke remarked "We have a ton of Hispanic people who are very comfortable in the park" (Hartke 2020). The reflections of park use, overall, were made by a majority of white individuals during interviews and are projected onto the Latinx experience. This limitation serves to reemphasize the positionality of the voices of interviewees and should be considered in the analysis. Of the interview group, I conclude that Long and Creamer are best positioned to provide feedback of the Latinx park experience as a result of their direct work in program development and long-term efforts towards building rapport and relationships with the Latinx community. In 2019 interviews, Long and Creamer confirmed an increase in Latinx participants in their respective programs. Creamer was more restrained in her assessment noting that the Latinx community tends to use specific locations of the park (mostly on the east side) as well as remain near the periphery of the park due to concerns about safety. As stated previously, the relocation of Zumba from the Pulaski Monument to Pagoda Hill resulted in a decrease of Latinx participants to the west side for this particular program. At this stage in the research, it is not clear if there are residual shifts in park use by

Latinx participants. I conclude that most Latinx park users continue to more frequently use spaces on the east side of the park.

A second initiative of the 2016 Master Plan was to increase the number of McElderry Park residents using Patterson Park. An early stage of the plan included bringing Patterson Park programming to Ellwood Park, a small park located three blocks north of Patterson Park and just two blocks east of McElderry Park and described by Lankatilleke as “not in good shape” (Lankatilleke 2020). The programming - Zumba, tennis, and soccer - was designed to be short term and to serve as an introduction to the activities and resources that are available Patterson Park. The neighborhood consists of predominantly Black residents who are from a lower socioeconomic status, receive less education, and experience higher rates of violence as compared to the rest of the neighborhoods around Patterson Park and across most of Baltimore. Brown, Zumba instructor and park user, believes that residents from McElderry Park do not feel welcome in Patterson Park. Brown and Lankatilleke, along with other interviewees, shared observations of the historic absence of Black participants in Patterson Park and their desire to support change. Brown and Lankatilleke participated in the Ellwood Park initiative and shared their experiences during their interviews. Lankatilleke reflected that,

It started very slowly, but it started to get that neighborhood more engaged in getting outside and doing, you know, doing something and sort of reaching the kids in that neighborhood. Um, so I think some of those folks, on the north side of the park, are now coming to Patterson Park as well because they know there’s more, there’s those kinds of activities here. So, it was sort of like a reaching out. Um, and I think if COVID didn’t happen I think we would have continued that programming in those smaller parks and neighborhoods that are more distressed and that just need more access (Lankatilleke 2020).

The 2016 Master Plan surveyed neighborhood residents with the goal of identifying their connections to Patterson Park. The majority of survey respondents lived in Patterson Park

Neighborhood (200) followed by Butcher's Hill (113) and Canton (99). Of the 843 completed surveys, 18 McElderry Park residents participated (Baltimore City Recreation & Parks 2016, 108) indicating less feedback and engagement from this community. I suggest that the lack of responses translates as not having representation in park planning.

The impact of COVID-19 and increased social awareness of anti-racist work in 2020 resulted in two simultaneous outcomes. There has been a voluntarily, self-initiated increase in Black participants in Patterson Park along with new program initiatives, sponsored by Friends of Patterson Park, directed towards potential Black participants. As a result, it appears that the overall participation rate of Black park attendees increased since March 2020. The way in which Patterson Park is being presented, and viewed, was altered by a combination of forced behavior changes due to COVID-19 and human rights activities. The connection to and meaning of space shifted. The success that Friends of Patterson Park and Patterson Park Audubon Center have with intentional programming for the Latinx community could be applied to other demographic groups, such as the Black community. The intentionality with which Friends of Patterson Park brought to the efforts exemplifies the positive impact that representation has on potential members. I suggest that the impact of programming and arts installations, through the two organizations, should continue to influence patterns of use and connection in the park.

Self and Others

In addition to experiencing physical connections to public spaces – green space, infrastructure, activities – and the meaning that results from engagement with and in space;



Figure 31 Five distinct social groups maintaining physical distance in the Main Fields during COVID. Groups faced inward and appeared to be combinations of friends, couples, families, and included a birthday party complete with party hats and presents. (May 2020)



Figure 32 Solitary runner passing the Boat Lake (June 2020).

there too, exists connections between self and others. Regardless of whether participants use the park alone or in groups, one begins to identify connections that are formed in the park. As a whole, participants reported using the park most frequently with others. In most cases, they never use the park alone. Five of the seven participants interviewed shared examples of the ways their use of Patterson Park, and their friends' use of the park, resulted in new friendships and acquaintances (see Figure 31). My site observations are in contrast with data gathered from interviews. I observed frequent examples of participants using the park in solitary activities such as dog walking and running (see Figure 32). Royce, Canton resident, shared that her relationship to the park is almost exclusively when she is alone. Furthermore, when in groups, it appeared that participants remained within familiar groups and projected messages of their desire to remain insular by wearing ear buds, talking on cellular telephones, and sitting in closed circles. Each person's relationship to the park and others appears to exist on a continuum over time. Once engaged in activities, the social connection to others becomes finite as the group stabilizes. The social sports leagues provide one example. Once teams are formed, the membership does not tend to vary, and teams



Figure 33 Soccer social league team members, identifiable by their matching shirts, arrive together for a game. (October 2019)

remain intact for years (see Figure 33).

Juxtaposed are those activities that are intentionally designed to be porous and, therefore, result in on-going new connections.

This is the case for nature programs sponsored by the Patterson Park Audubon Center. Intentionally

or not, some programs offer a combination of

experiences such as Zumba. These draw regular participants as well as new members.

Lankatilleke was excited to talk about her long time Zumba participants. She shared:

people have made friends just by coming to the class and mingling together. They have formed their own friend groups... Makes me happy because I know that they met here...It is the best part of my week (Lankatilleke 2020).

Later in the interview, Lankatilleke shared examples of new members spontaneously joining her classes or dancing from a distance. The day I interviewed Lankatilleke, two women participated in Zumba for the first time. A young son excitedly translating between Spanish and English for his mother and another woman while asking Lankatilleke questions about the class - all while we were in the midst of the interview.

A differentiation in participation exists between programs sponsored by park organizations, as noted, and those that I describe as being informal and initiated by park users. Observations and interviews suggest that these activities are perceived to be closed to outsiders. Ecuavóley and pick-up basketball are examples of activities that are familiar events in Patterson Park, but have unspoken, invisible barriers that prevent outsiders from engaging



Figure 34 A pick-up basketball game. This activity is perceived as not open to everyone. (August 2019)



Figure 35 Social group playing frisbee. This activity is a closed activity and not open to everyone. (May 2020)

(see Figures 15, 16, and 34). Two interviewees indicated this was due to gender differences while one spoke indirectly about racial and ethnic differences posing as barriers to the activities. Other activities initiated by park users are social groups which tend to engage in private activities such as picnicking and playing frisbee (see Figures 28, 31, and 35).

While participants reported that the park provides opportunities for new friendships to form, and for pre-existing relationships to grow, there also appears to be unspoken boundaries and limits, whether real or imagined.

Markiewicz is especially sensitive to feelings of being an outsider. She revealed her beliefs that participation in some activities is associated to race or ethnicity. Markiewicz specifically described her observations that basketball is played by Black people and “a bunch of Latino people come and play what looks like volleyball¹¹ and I’ve even seen their pet chickens that they’ve brought with them” (Markiewicz 2020). While Markiewicz was quick to note that she would not engage in these activities because she does not play those particular sports, there was a pronounced emphasis – captured through Markiewicz’s struggle to find words, shifting of her body, and breaking eye contact – that relocated the focus onto race and gender more so

¹¹ Ecuavóley

than the activity itself. This is a tension that other interview subjects hinted at, but did not fully express. There appears to be a pattern of racial and ethnic divisions in activities. A larger and more diverse interview sample would be needed to explore this theme further and to hear perspectives from different constituencies.

Developing an understanding of the ways in which participants connect to others is intertwined with an understanding of how they connect to the park itself. I observed that participants are drawn to specific sites in Patterson Park based on where they live as well as where activities are situated. In some instances, activities, locations, and demographics merge.

Five of the seven interviewees shared that their social network is a result of connections made in the park. Hartke stated that the park is “a huge community” (Hartke 2020) and she is unable to go to the park without seeing people she knows. Lankatilleke, for many years, had similar experiences. She shared that she made “instant friends” (Lankatilleke 2020) through the programs in which she became involved. Five of the interviewees, through examples, discussed the ways in which park programming provides opportunities for strangers to meet each other.



Figure 36 The East Playground on a summer evening drawing multiple families, different race and ethnic participants, and an opportunity for interactions (August 2019).

The playgrounds (see Figure 36), dog park (see Figure 37), athletic leagues, Pagoda tours, and nature-based activities are additional examples of the ways in which activities provide opportunities to meet strangers through shared interests. In this way, there is an established connection to



Figure 37 The dog park during COVID-19. While distancing became the norm during the pandemic, the dog park tended to be a place of social interaction as dog owners spontaneously engaged with each other as a result of the dogs' interactions (May 2020).

the activity that opens opportunities for further relationship building. As stated previously, Zumba appears to be one of the more successful programs for bringing strangers, of similar and different demographic backgrounds, together in a shared activity. Lankatilleke reminisced about watching toddlers and families grow

over her ten-year tenure as a Zumba instructor. In addition, she shared examples of friendships that were formed through Zumba that have continued outside of the park.

Observations of activities that appear to be segregated along demographic identifiers is validated in interviews. Markiewicz's understanding of Ecuavóley and basketball is a personal example from one park participant. Long's earlier example, that the Recreation Center tends to attract Black identifying participants from McElderry Park, is another. While my observation that yoga – a predominantly white, female activity situated close to Butcher's Hill, a majority white, gentrified neighborhood – is a third example. There is a tension that exists between site, activity, and participant. This tension results in reinforced group identity and connections. Patterns of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomics - observed across four soccer programs in Patterson Park – provides a rich study of the invisible boundaries and barriers in the park that results in both a strengthening of connections within a single group while also producing disconnections between demographically different groups.

Case Study: Soccer in Patterson Park

Patterson Park hosts four unique types of soccer groups. The level of institutional support and funding varies between each example. In addition, the demographics of participants and observers is separated by race, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic identifiers. Furthermore, each of the soccer groups is situated in separate areas of the park which appears to further impact who joins the activity and who opts out. This Case Study provides examples of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (S. Low 2013). Within each type of soccer there are intended and unintended exclusions yielding a richer understanding of access, connection, representation, and use of public spaces.

The Annex: Young adult Latinx males play pick-up soccer in the Annex, where permit-free fields are available for open use and are free of cost (see Figure 27). Participants speak in Spanish, use shirts or found objects to mark the goals, and spray paint the grass to mark the sidelines or penalty box. On occasion, I observed younger children and women sitting under the trees that surround the rectangle space of the Annex to watch the game. The soccer players do not wear uniforms nor are they part of official park programming. My observations indicate while there is a consistent, core membership of this group it remains porous with different combinations of participants each time they play. Other park visitors walk and run on the path surrounding the fields. While they seem to be aware of the game, they do not stop to watch or ask to join. When I stopped to watch, my presence was acknowledged with smiles and head nods. My behavior was not part of the norm.



Figure 38 Free Youth Soccer Clinic sponsored by Friends of Patterson Park. Volunteer coaches teach young children the fundamentals of soccer in the southeast section of the park (October 2019).

Free Youth Soccer Clinics: Prior to COVID-19, Friends of Patterson Park offered free youth soccer clinics several times a week. The clinics were located in an open grass area next to the Main Fields and just east of the Pulaski Monument (see Figure 38). The clinics were held concurrently with Zumba classes that were taught by Lankatileke and Brown, such

that parents could participate in Zumba while their children were engaged in the soccer program. The free clinics provided access to those who would otherwise be unable to afford the activity. The clinics attracted young children who appeared to be between five and 12 years old. In this group, soccer coaches wore identifying t-shirts while the children wore name tags. The boys and girls appeared to be Black, white, and Latinx – both English and Spanish were spoken. Brown explained that “while the younger kids played soccer, parents could also get their exercise in by joining with the Zumba – so we had a lot of people join that way” (Brown 2020). According to Long, and from my observations, this group appeared to be fairly transient – with some members attending all clinics and others attending on a limited basis. Pairing the youth soccer clinic with Zumba is an example of the intentionality of responsive programming that met the needs of participants. My presence, sitting in between Zumba and the youth soccer clinic, went unnoticed as there were individuals and small groups scattered through the grass space.

Adult Social Sports League: The adult social sports league is sponsored through Friends of Patterson Park. Games are held on the Main Fields and individuals pay a small fee to participate. This league draws young adults from neighborhoods around Patterson Park – mostly from Highlandtown, Canton, and Butcher’s Hill. On site visits I observed community members walking from Canton and Highlandtown into the park, wearing matching shirts of different colors that identified team membership (see Figure 33). While the league appears to attract mostly white players, there is some racial and ethnic diversity. In addition, there is more gender diversity than in the other adult soccer groups. The adult social sports league is the program that Lankatileke joined when she first moved to the area a dozen years ago, and that served as a foundation to developing her social network. Friends of Patterson Park offers other adult social sports leagues such as softball and broomball. Through interviews, I learned that once teams are formed, they remain intact with little change in membership. While I did not observe the social soccer league in play during 2020, I observed several softball games and practices. Softball had been cleared as a safe sport during the pandemic. Except for a few friends, the activity does not appear to draw the attention of other park participants.



Figure 39 Utz Turf Field soccer game in process with more teams arriving. The field, one of the more highly maintained and secure sites in the park, attracts teams from the Greater Baltimore area. (October 2019)

Utz Turf Field League: Highly competitive soccer teams play on the Utz Turf field which is coordinated through Baltimore City Recreation & Parks (see Figure 39). Long stated that participants come from across the Greater Baltimore Area to play in the league. Observations of participants arriving

in cars parked on S. Linwood Avenue, the closest street to the field, reinforce Long's comment that members do not live locally. This is the most expensive soccer program in Patterson Park as reflected by hired officials and players wearing full uniforms. It is also the most structured form of soccer in the park with playoffs and tournaments. Through direct observation, the teams appeared to be composed of majority white male players. The field is surrounded by a tall fence and access is limited (see Figure 26). In March 2020, the league suspended play as a result of restrictions imposed due to COVID-19. Play resumed by the end of the summer. No fans were observed sitting on the bleachers or watching through the fence. My presence was an anomaly.

A comparison of the four types of soccer groups in Patterson Park highlights prior points made of who belongs and who is missing with regards to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. It serves to connect themes of "fairness in public space" and types of justice as described by Low. In 2019 fieldnotes, I reflected:

I start thinking about the types of soccer that I observed on this field visit: 1) the pick-up soccer in the East Section¹² which appears to be generated purely by park visitors, 2) the free youth soccer clinic organized by Friends of Patterson Park with the structure of coaches, water, equipment, and a more formal form of communication to announce the activity, and 3) the two different types of adult soccer play with referees, matching t-shirts, and use of the turf field (sponsors unknown). I wonder about the separation of race/ethnicity as well as socioeconomic divides. I think about the impact that this has in the park and between the groups. I think about where everyone lives and if they live in the neighborhoods around the park (Millin 2019).

A year after I recorded my reflections, I continue to think about the segregation between activities and groups as well as to reflect on feelings of acceptance and belonging. On the surface, the different soccer programs appear to provide fair opportunities in Patterson Park for

¹² The Annex

all to play. Yet, players located in the Annex do not play in the Main Section, and vice versa. The space and resources are not the same. Over half of the interviewees stated that they do not feel comfortable joining park activities because the activities do not appear to be open to everyone. It appears there is a division of who is engaged in each activity – be it programming or volunteering. And, as is presented in the Case Study, the separation may be further heightened to the extent that even within a single activity it be further sub-divided into separate demographic groups with little to no overlap. Thus, while there may be strengthening of community within specific groups, it minimizes opportunities to develop interpersonal relations by connecting across differences.

The observed absence of teens and youth in the park was supported in interviews. I found the absence to be significant as my experiences are that parks tend to be spaces in which to practice developing independence and social dynamics for this age group. Interviewees shared that teens are either directly dissuaded from using the park by police or indirectly through neighborhood association social media posts which report behavior by teens that is



Figure 40 Typical park path during the early months of COVID-19 with pedestrians, dog walkers, and bike riders. About 50% of park visitors wear masks and there is some effort to maintain physically distancing (May 2020).

perceived to be disruptive. It will be additive to the research findings to interview teenagers to better understand their experiences firsthand. Over the course of the 16-month documentation period, there has been no noticeable increase of park use by youth and teens. This is striking during the pandemic, a

period of decreased indoor programming and disruption of formal education in schools. It is an area that additional research and inquiry is necessary to understand meaning and absence.

Since Spring 2020, I observed a shift in the way participants connect with each other in Patterson Park. Prior to COVID-19, beyond the summer concert series, I occasionally observed park users relaxing on blankets in the grass. During the pandemic, I frequently observed individuals, couples, families, and groups socializing, sharing meals, and celebrating important events including birthday parties and baby showers. Through the summer and fall of 2020, the number of picnics increased and became more elaborate – including table decorations, chairs, and aromatic foods (see Figure 41). Family groups appeared multi-generational and included



Figure 41 Large gathering to celebrate a baby shower at the Pagoda Hill during COVID-19. In this large group, no one is wearing a mask (September 2020).



Figure 42 Example of chalk drawings along a path near the West Playground. Abandoned electric rental scooter left behind (May 2020).

extended relatives or friends. In some instances, I observed arrivals and departures by car instead of the more familiar backpacks and wagons. Markiewicz wistfully wondered “how many of them realize that this is really awesome, and they don’t have to go to a bar or people’s house. Like, carry out [food] and come here” (Markiewicz 2020). Additional observations included an increased number of families walking together on the wide promenade paths (see Figure 50), teaching young children to ride bikes on the otherwise deserted tennis courts, and making chalk



Figure 43 The off-limits East Playground being used as an outdoor gym by two adult park users (May 2020).

drawings (see Figure 42). In 2020, Long provided further examples of families bringing inflatable pools, sprinklers, and bikes to the park for their young children. Even though the two playgrounds were officially closed for use, participants reimagined the park to meet their needs. Playgrounds were used as outdoor gyms

and places to lounge (see Figure 43). All 2020 interviews and observations validate findings of an overall shift, and increase, in park use.

Having a space in which to connect with others is a significant draw for Patterson Park. My observations indicate that most interactions between participants are with people who already know each other. Interviewees confirmed this observation, but also referenced instances of strangers meeting and developing friendships. In my removed role of participant-observer, I could easily have missed the stranger-to-stranger introductions. These moments appear to take place within planned programming and not through happenstance occurrences. Programming is a voluntary event and participants choose to opt-in to engage in the experiences. Markiewicz has been intentional about developing her social network through volunteer commitments in the park. She self-defined her volunteer time as social time. In contrast, Royce chose to use the park primarily for solitary exercise such as walking and has little involvement in programming nor a desire to augment her social experiences by meeting new people in Patterson Park. Connecting to park and others remains unique for each participant.

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