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Women in Urban Parks

Galen Cranz

American urban parks were a nineteenth-century attempt to right the imbalances of industrialization and urbanization. Unlike their European predecessors, American public parks have been intimately linked with urban problems. Park advocates have offered various types and styles of parks at different times as ways to solve those social difficulties and redress those imbalances. Each model has had implications for women's place in public life. Because "women" as a category have not been perceived as an urban problem, park policymakers have used females primarily to help ameliorate other problems which disrupted social order, such as alcoholism, prostitution, psychological anonymity, loss of community, physical degeneration due to lack of exercise, disease, delinquency, and the absence of a shared civic order.

The deployment of women has changed with specific historical perceptions of what was wrong with society and the city. The pleasure ground (1850–1900) was an antidote to the ills of the rapidly industrializing city, visually and programmatically its antithesis, with a curving, picturesque landscape and emphasis on mental refreshment. The standards of order, for both the physical environment and social intercourse, would help set common values for the diverse population. Women played a key role in that scenario.

The reform park (1900–1930) accepted industrial life and attempted to rationalize it by siting the park near working-class tenements and by stressing physical exercise, supervision, and organization, while minimizing the significance of fine art and nature appreciation. Physical degeneration and juvenile delinquency were prominent urban issues which the playground would help solve. Focus on these problems diverted attention to boys more than to girls.

The recreation facility (1930–65) rested on the claim that recreation

had become a recognized municipal function necessary in its own right, independent of how much it contributed to the solution of urban problems. Standardization and efficiency were the watchwords of urban planners, who proceeded as if the city were a mechanical system which could be balanced by a proper distribution of the parts—parks, schools, hospitals, transit, housing, shopping centers, industrial sectors. In this unsentimental view females did not get as much treatment as a special class as they had before.

The open-space system (1965 to the present) returned to the belief that parks could be used to solve urban problems, particularly urban decay and riots. Making the city safe and attractive to middle-class women reemerged as a central concern.¹

Women in the Pleasure Garden (1850–1900)

Nineteenth-century reformers worried about density, pollution, lack of space, psychological stress, and the commercialization of culture of the newly industrialized city. They believed that the family could cushion the individual from many of these stresses, yet they feared that the family itself was being undermined by alcoholism, prostitution, and boardinghouse living. Women's central role in the family meant that urban reform and women were often linked explicitly. The park commissioners, not wanting to compete with the home as the proper mechanism of moral reform, underscored the important ways in which the park would help reinforce the family unit. Charles Eliot, park advocate and president of Harvard University, claimed that parks could promote "a high standard of family life" since "the pleasures men share with their wives and children are apt to be safer pleasures than those they take by themselves."²

If the home was the fortress of morality, why should the woman be brought into the public sphere at all? Park advocates thought that a respectable setting where a woman could appear in public with her husband would contribute to a family's sense of itself. By going out with his family in a public setting, a man would see himself as others saw him: the head of a family, wife on arm, children in tow, all in Sunday best. Reformers reasoned that he would experience this as pleasurable and resolve to make it the mainstay of his life.³

1. This analysis is based on three major U.S. cities—New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. It is part of a larger, forthcoming study of American urban parks. This typology is presently available in Galen Cranz, "The Changing Roles of Urban Parks: From Pleasure Garden to Open-Space System," *Landscape* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 9–18.

2. Charles Eliot, "Popular Utilization of Public Reservations," *American Park and Outdoor Art Association* 6 (July 1903): 14.

3. Women's presence would help stabilize the family and, conversely, the park would educate the entire family: "A park would educate him [the tired workman] and his family." Otherwise, "he and his" would be "educated into the ways of disease and vice . . ." (medical

Reformers were sure that women would set a tone which would demand high standards from everyone: "The respectable part of the community should establish a custom of behavior in the Park which will have a wholesome influence on all who resort to it. A large use of the Park by families, by good women and dutiful children, will accomplish this result. Nothing else will. No laws and no police force will do it."⁴

For a public setting to function in this way, it had to be a respectable setting for middle-class women, who were not supposed to go out alone. The literature is dotted with claims that the park must be made a safe resort for unprotected ladies, women, mothers, wives, and children. Since the park was for respectable women, prostitutes were automatically excluded from park life. In the 1880s the women of San Francisco petitioned the city to remove the prostitutes from a permanent city location to the relative isolation of St. Mary's Square, which was hidden by a row of business establishments. Respectability also dictated nonalcoholic refreshments, but the issue was touchy. Several ethnic traditions and the desire to attract people conflicted with temperance views. When ice skating became popular in New York City, and private farm ponds competed with Central Park, one of the advantages of Central Park was that it was a more orderly place, without the sale of intoxicating drink, so that women and girls could skate there alone with their friends "without fear of being annoyed by roughs."⁵ The spa in Central Park was originally (1862) designed as a place for women to drink mineral water after strolling through the park. Two years later, the Casino was opened as a "Ladies' Refreshment Salon," a "place of light refreshment for ladies and young children." In 1873 it was enlarged as a restaurant serving alcoholic drinks, which it remained until 1934.⁶ In the 1870s beer, wine, and cider were sold along with other refreshments to Central Park visitors, not at a socially dubious bar but, rather, at tables where men and women sat respectably together.⁷

Chicagoans found that their Retreat did not pay its own way, even though it was popular with women and children.⁸ San Francisco was slow

doctor quoted in Thomas E. Will, "Park and Playgrounds: A Symposium," *Arena* 10, no. 56 [July 1894]: 277).

4. Boston City Council, *Documents for the City of Boston for the Year 1890*, document 15, Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1890), p. 30.

5. "Central Park, Part Two," *Scribner's Monthly* 6, no. 5 (October 1873): 673-91.

6. William J. Tooley, "Concessions in New York City Parks," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of Revenue-producing Facilities for Governmental Parks, Recreation, and Zoological Parks* (Wheeling, W. Va.: American Institute of Park Executives, 1962), p. 22.

7. Charles Doell, "Origin and Development of Parks," *Parks and Recreation* 35, no. 11 (November 1952): 10.

8. *Report of the South Park Commissioners to the Board of County Commissioners of Cook County from December 1, 1876 to December 1, 1877* (Chicago, 1877), p. 5. In Chicago three

in establishing a similar place of refreshment. One commissioner blamed the failure of San Francisco's first Casino not on alcohol per se but on some of the "vice" which surrounded it; according to him, "The place became too common." In the new Casino alcohol would be part of an elegant scene—a symphony of music, clinking goblets, dazzling lights, gay women, gallant men, Tahoe trout in egg crumbs, and terrapin patés.⁹

Women's ideal role was not as a user of facilities for games and sports but as a stabilizing presence. Nevertheless, women, especially young women, were responsible for much of the burgeoning interest in athletics. They began to play lawn tennis, croquet, and basketball and to ride bicycles in the 1890s. When girls, wives, and mothers diverged from their passive function—as they did almost immediately—commentators responded with disbelief and disdain.

Despite women's demonstrated ability to learn to skate, when bicycles became popular in the late nineteenth century, one male instructor announced, "Bicycle riding is like swimming. It requires confidence and courage, and because they lack those qualities, the majority of women will never do either well."¹⁰ The *San Francisco Call* titillated its readers with mocking reports of women's activities: "The ladies have a new fad. They are learning to row on Stowe Lake, at Golden Gate Park. They have started gently with small biceps, and a wholesome fear of calloused places and blisters on their hands. They have progressed in skill aquatic, and have developed their muscle." The article was even more contemptuous of Chinese women, who did not ask "any instruction in rowing . . . such as the keeper of the boathouse imparts to the Caucasian ladies. Their idea appears to be to get afloat and then laugh as much as possible."¹¹

Despite such psychological ambivalence and denial, reporters noted in the same breath that women used Golden Gate Park's Stowe Lake more than men did.¹² Newspapers confirmed that women enjoyed active sports on their own without the company of men: "'You would be astonished,' said the guy in charge of boathouses and boats, 'what interest the ladies of this City are taking in boating. They come in the forenoon when the weather is clear and there is not much wind, and they have a glorious time.'"¹³ Numerous women had owned and been driving their

major park commissions existed until their consolidation in 1934. The South Park Commissioners reports are longer, published more regularly, and describe the philosophy of park service more fully than the reports of the Lincoln and West Park Commissioners. (Hereafter South Park report titles are shortened to *Annual Report for* [the year].)

9. *San Francisco Examiner* (November 2, 1900).

10. *San Francisco Call* (September 9, 1885).

11. "San Francisco Belles Gain Health and Muscle on Stowe Lake," *San Francisco Call* (October 11, 1896).

12. *Ibid.*

13. *San Francisco Call* (July 20, 1896).

own trotters and racers for some time, and at the end of the 1800s a woman won the sleigh race on the first snow for the magnum of champagne traditionally offered at Tavern on the Green in Central Park.¹⁴

The artistic images of women's role in public parks were slow to acknowledge the reality of their active sports life. Artists, like park planners, confirmed the ideal that women would be tied to the family and their men, while extending a calming presence on the public scene. A lithograph of New York's Harlem Lane speed track shows only men driving rigs; the only evidence of women is a sign at the Casino that says "Women's Entrance," for women on foot.¹⁵ Lithographs of skating in Central Park express the ideal of heterosexual civility. Men teach women to skate, but only men suffer the indignity of falling down. In the paintings, women are always linked with men on a one-to-one basis. In photographs of the same scene, the ideal is betrayed by reality: Women are in pairs teaching each other how to skate. Ideally, women are escorted by men, presumably their husbands, and learn from them; in practice women learned from each other and probably fell down, too. Similarly, the photographic evidence for Central Park shows that women fixed their own bicycles and equipment without men.¹⁶

Policymakers assumed that children's needs were satisfied by meeting the needs of their mothers and did not make distinctions between the needs of boys and girls until the next era. The needs of children and their caretakers before 1900 were best articulated in San Francisco in regard to the Children's Quarter. Senator William Sharon left a bequest to the Parks Department for large monumental entry gates to Golden Gate, but the commissioners convinced his heirs that the money would be more appropriately spent on something less showy and more in keeping with the social purposes and picturesque ideals of the park.

The Children's Quarter was a playground and building sited in the southeast corner of the park for ease of access and visual privacy. On the ground floor of the building children could buy snacks and wholesome refreshments adjacent to their playground. The second floor was reached by a ramp from the ground, which wrapped around the building and turned into a viewing gallery where coffee was served. Each child was supervised by her own parent or nurse; hence, the building, overlooking the playground, had to accommodate large numbers of adults. On the veranda they could be in the company of one another, drinking coffee, and yet have direct visual access to their charges.¹⁷

14. Martin Green, "Old-Timer Recalls Days When Race for That Magnum Counted," *New York Sun* (December 1933).

15. Currier and Ives, *Fast Trotters on Harlem Lane, New York*, lithograph.

16. "Central Park File—Photos and Lithos pre-1900," vertical files (New York: Museum of the City of New York).

17. The Children's Quarter must have become popular for women and their adult friends because when free days were instituted, the minutes specified that only children and their caretakers should be entertained free, not mothers and their friends (San Fran-

Inside the building were private rooms for nursing. A married couple lived in the peaked rooms of the third floor, available twenty-four hours a day for assistance.

The Sharon Building was just for mothers and their children, and this care to provide them with a safe and respectable environment had some unintended consequences. It kept fathers from taking a direct role in the care and supervision of their children. One indignant father complained to the editor of the *Examiner*: "That means that married men who have children at play in the ground must either get a lady to watch the little ones, or the man hides in the distance, or those men accompanying their wives may look at their family from the far road in order not to conflict with the Park Ordinance which reads, "This lawn reserved for ladies and children." This man suggested that the sign be altered to read, "This lawn reserved for children and their guardians." However, since his views were exceptional, no efforts were made to include men in the supervision of children until the reform park era.¹⁸

The initial rhetoric in favor of establishing parks within cities was built on boyhood images: The country boy had advantages that city youth also needed. Advocates would call upon adults to remember their own "boyhood" days, to remember why an urban park might be necessary.¹⁹ Yet the planners of the Children's Quarters recognized that little girls in particular would benefit, since they "never have an opportunity of running races with each other or playing with a skipping rope, or giving their muscles exercise, or their lungs a chance to expand, just for want of such a place as this."²⁰ This plan to meet the needs of girls must have been popular, because by 1893 newspapers took for granted that girls were the major users. For example, referring to swings, "Girls, as a matter of course, were in the largest majority here. . . ."²¹

Sex-role differentiation was never as pronounced in pleasure garden days as it was to become in the years after 1900. Croquet, rolling hoop, and blindman's bluff were thought to attract older girls, while a good ball ground would meet the needs of boys.²² Gymnastic equipment at the children's playground at the Sharon Building included a double

cisco Park Commission minutes, May 8, 1903 [McLaren Lodge, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco], p. 414).

18. *San Francisco Examiner* (August 22, 1893). The existence of a separate environment for children contradicted the idea of the family using the parks as a group. Most park systems simply offered benches for the exclusive use of women and children during the pleasure garden era. Consequently, the problem experienced by the father in Golden Gate Park usually did not arise.

19. One example of the boyhood language is in Alpheus Hyatt, "The Next Stage in the Development of Public Parks," *Atlantic Monthly* 67, no. 399 (1891): 215-24.

20. *San Francisco Call* (March 8, 1887).

21. *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 2, 1893).

22. San Francisco Park Commission, *Bi-Annual Report for 1872-73* (San Francisco, 1973).

slide, one for boys and the other for girls. Half of the horses on the carousel in Golden Gate Park had sidesaddles.

Women did use the parks as much as planned, even if more on their own and more actively than men envisaged. As early as 1871 in Central Park the proportion of women and girls estimated to have attended the park on any fine day was about 40 percent.²³ Today the passivity of the nineteenth-century female has been exaggerated. Looking back at nineteenth-century photographs, some commentators have assumed that because the women wore "ankle-length skirts and voluminous sleeves," both sexes strolled about in "quiet contemplation." Conversely, because many people now wear sports clothes, shorts, or blue jeans, we assume that this "means, of course, that they can be and are far more active in outdoor sports than their progenitors."²⁴ On the contrary, a nineteenth-century newspaper commented that Chicken Point—a vantage point for viewing the parade of carriages in Golden Gate Park—was filled with its usual "Sunday load of families and young couples," and "no question of sex hinders the observers there from reclining on the grass. . . ."²⁵

Women in the Reform Park (1900–1930)

Settlement-house workers wanted to bring wholesome recreational opportunities to the working class, especially to the "children and women of the wage-earning families," who had neither the time nor the money to travel to the outlying pleasure grounds. At the same time playground advocates wanted to insure that urban children got enough physical exercise in a safe setting, not the street. At the turn of the century, park and playground advocates successfully pressured for legislation to create the small park in the heart of the urban slum. The campaign for this new type of park was a part of the larger progressive era, and its purposes are succinctly summarized by the term, "reform" park. In New York its swings and sandheaps were well used during the summer heat, proving "to be godsend to the mothers of the tenement districts."²⁶ At the same time, child mortality was reduced.

Progressive park advocates also hoped to tackle the problems presented by the commercialization of culture and the unprecedented increase in leisure time. Wholesome sports would replace movies, dance halls, and saloons. Park advocates were happy to convert "by means of

23. C. E. Doell and G. B. Fitzgerald, "Origin and Development of Parks," *A Brief History of Parks and Recreation in the U.S.* (Chicago: Athletic Institute, 1954), p. 10.

24. Sidney N. Shurcliff, "Progress in Park Design during the Last Fifty Years," *Parks and Recreation* 31, no. 11 (November 1948): 623.

25. *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 30, 1894).

26. New York City, Department of Parks, *Report for 1903* (New York, 1904), p. 12.

tactful suggestion" a tired shopgirl's idea of amusement from a stuffy movie theater to a game of tennis.²⁷ Pleasure garden planners had excluded social dances from the parks. In the reform era, city fathers decided they had better accept the popularity of dances; so they sponsored and chaperoned them closely. The "open" public dance, defined as open to unattended girls or to anyone without qualification, was not permitted in the South Park field houses of Chicago. Only "natural groups," representing their "various strata" in society, were allowed to hold dances in the park field houses.²⁸

Park promoters hoped to use the park to assimilate immigrants, reduce nervousness, and fight delinquency. Park planners devoted disproportionate attention to boys in trying to thwart their delinquency. Without a "legitimate outlet" for the "instinct" to distinguish themselves or their groups, planners thought, boys and young men form gangs for "antisocial acts of which every large city is all too conscious," and "distinguish themselves in ways which fill the juvenile courts and even jails. . . ." ²⁹ The park departments all around the country took pride in the potential of the park movement to reduce juvenile delinquency. Since it was defined as a male problem, park administrators did not even collect statistics for girl offenders.³⁰

Both women and girls began to use the parks for active sports in the pleasure garden era. Thus their increasing participation after 1900 was not the dramatic reversal claimed by reform park theorists but an acceleration and rationalization of a previously established behavior. Eventually the reform park philosophy caught up with this reality by treating women as users in their own right, not primarily as instruments through which to influence men's behavior.

The relationship between the sexes changed dramatically. The pleasure garden emphasis on the family unit entailed both age and sex integration; in contrast, the reform model turned age and sex segregation into virtues. The family would no longer use the park, but its individual members would use it as their time schedules, set by the rhythms of their schooling or work, permitted. The park organizers divided the day into sections and offered programming appropriate to the schoolchildren who would come before and after class, the mothers who would bring toddlers in the late morning, the working men who might take

27. Edna E. Wilson (YMCA), "World-wide Recreation for Girls," *Park International* 1, no. 2 (September 1920): 126.

28. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1911*, p. 44.

29. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1919*, p. 37.

30. Nevertheless, two park experts said that even though there were no statistics for girls, they knew that the "parks have helped them." The kinds of deviance that girls might be guilty of were generally not crimes against other persons but crimes without victims, such as prostitution (F. L. Olmsted and John Nolen, "Experts' Report on Civic Center," *Preliminary Reports on the City Planning Commission of the City of Milwaukee* [Milwaukee: Phoenix Printing Co., 1911], pp. 19-24).

lunch breaks there, and working boys and girls who could visit in the evening after work and dinner.³¹ Each group was expected to use the park separately.

The theoretical justification was grounded in developmental theory: "The psychological, sociological, and physiological factors involved in the play interests of a group of sixteen-year-old boys differ from the interests of a group of seven-year-old boys, and the interests of a group of fourteen-year-old girls differ from both. Separate and distinct gymnasiums, therefore, with apparatus of the character, sizes, and heights adapted to these groups' interests were planned and installed."³² A biological rationale ("dominant interests") for this division of play dotted the park literature.

If males and females or different age groups happened to use the park at the same time of day, they used different parts of it. The outdoor gymnastic equipment for men and women was located at opposite ends of the park, with a building or trees, shrubbery, and lawns in between. A fence enclosed the women's area and was in turn concealed by shrubbery.³³ (In accordance with today's preoccupation with safety, rather than propriety, this screen of shrubbery would have been eliminated and the area prominently lit in order to increase surveillance.) The designers and administrators of the reform park specified that every park should have a separate building for the toilet for men and for women and that each sex should have separate showers as well as separate gyms.³⁴ Elaborating the separate-benches theme were wide porches on field houses facing the park, with comfortable (but unpadded) wide-armed rocking chairs, again for the exclusive use of women accompanied by small children. This popular feature was called "mothers' corner."³⁵

Boys and girls were also segregated. The girls' section contained swings, seesaws, maypoles, basketball, volleyball, croquet, and tennis.

31. Gymnasium classes offered in the evening for married men and women were popular (Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1905*).

32. Gym Director's Report, in *ibid.*, p. 46. In 1905 and 1906, two years after the new philosophy was instated in Chicago, the number of references to women in the Chicago South Park Commission's annual reports increased. Both male and female instructors were specified, and the pronouns of reference did not rely on the universalistic "him" or "himself," but, rather, they were specified "his" or "her" or "himself" or "herself." Furthermore, park statisticians analyzed data on park users by sex in the reform park era (e.g., see New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1915*, p. 70, list of proposed tables).

33. Clarence Elmer Rainwater, *The Play Movement in the United States: A Study of Community Recreation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), p. 73. Almost invariably the children's play area was adjacent to women's spatial arrangements, reflecting the assumption that mothers, not fathers, would be primarily responsible for child care (see, e.g., Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1906*, pp. 24-25; and *ibid.* for 1916, pp. 64-65).

34. New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1901*, p. 13.

35. New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1904*, p. 19. Note the similarity to the Sharon Building's observation gallery.

Boys had facilities for basketball, baseball, handball, track and field, and an "apparatus frame" (today's monkey bars).³⁶ The spaces, the equipment, the games, and the rules of the games all reflected sex-role differentiation. For example, team games had special "girls' rules," and the "dashes" in which the girls were permitted to participate were shorter than those for boys.³⁷ An outdoor gymnasium was shared by boys and girls under ten years of age, but two separate ones were created for boys and girls over ten.³⁸ Generally, time and space were trade-offs. With separate gyms the department could accommodate both boys and girls simultaneously, whereas with only one they had to divide the day temporarily.³⁹

Park planners thought that segregation promoted safety (although today urban planners believe that only mixed use attracts enough people to public places to make them safe). For example, in the 1920s a recreation worker's survey of San Francisco's southside district discovered that a group of boys, loafers and loungers, had made a playground at a school their headquarters, thereby depriving girls of a place just for themselves where they could "play unsubjected to scrutiny and disturbance of hard balls." She recommended, among other things, that the loafers and loungers be prohibited and that a section of the playground be set aside for girls.⁴⁰ A recurrent specification in park reports and other literature throughout this entire era was that areas of a park, and especially benches, should be reserved exclusively for the "use of women and their children."⁴¹

The reform park contained public baths, initially a sanitation measure but immediately popular as recreation. Soon "provision was also made for their use by women during certain restricted periods."⁴² Generally, women had two days and nights each week, whereas boys and men had three days and nights.⁴³ The protective attitude toward girls

36. Rainwater, p. 105.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

38. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1908*, p. 115.

39. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1911*, p. 32.

40. C. H. Meeds, "Should Playgrounds Be Landscaped?" *Parks and Recreation* 7, no. 1 (September–October 1923): 74.

41. A small park might be divided by a fence, within which women and girls and little children would be allowed, while boys and men would be seated outside (New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1913*, p. 7). As late as 1922, the San Francisco Park Commission received a request for more benches in Huntington Square with signs to read, "These Benches and This Part of This Square Is Hereby Reserved for Ladies and Children." The motion passed (San Francisco Park Commission minutes, April 1922, p. 620). In 1926, the Department of Health similarly requested that a portion of Columbia Square be fenced or roped off for the use of women and children, and again the park commission complied. Only in the 1930s did this kind of protective segregation wane.

42. New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1904*, p. 19.

43. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1904*, p. 34; and *ibid.* for 1908, p. 119.

sometimes required that the municipality assume responsibility for escorting girls to the bathhouses for swimming.⁴⁴ On one of the few occasions where black children are mentioned, they, too, were segregated by sex.⁴⁵ Mixed bathing had been traditionally permitted on the beaches. In the 1920s, when mixed bathing was also allowed in pools, attendance increased.⁴⁶

Sexual segregation, sex-role stereotyping, and unequal treatment to the point of discrimination are closely linked. The theory for separating boys and girls assumed that they were different and at the same time guaranteed that treatment of the sexes would not be equal. In the early days, for example, before theorists assumed that girls would like to participate in athletic competitions, boys' playgrounds hosted city-wide athletic championships, whereas girls' playgrounds might accommodate a festival.⁴⁷ The boys often had a larger playground than the girls, and administrators allocated children's vegetable gardens unevenly.⁴⁸

On one hand, the park programming reinforced stereotypes; on the other, it threatened them. The sheer fact of accommodating females, separate or not, suggested that women's needs for recreation were similar to males. Furthermore, the vigor with which females pursued activities must have laid many ideals about female passivity to rest. The varied reactions to female sport left a zigzag trail of pronouncements throughout park records. The prevailing cultural attitudes toward women's ultimate goals as wives and mothers meant that athletic activity for women and girls had to be justified in terms of motherhood. Chicago's *Annual Report for 1906* assured the public: "It is a biological law that 'kind begets kind'; hence the value and economy" of a "playground that assists in the preparation of the girls of the community for the best type of motherhood."⁴⁹ Even when the public record acknowledged that girls have a competitive spirit and might like to join in athletic contests, their tournaments still had to be held under special conditions because of the widespread opinion that respectable girls could not appear in public without supervision: "Girls are as much interested in athletic contests as are boys. It is improper, however, from a physical and social point of view, for girls to travel about the city for inter-institutional athletic con-

44. San Francisco Playground Commission minutes, June 6, 1923 (McLaren Lodge, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco).

45. The activities on playgrounds included "one colored group of boys and one colored group of girls are also served" (San Francisco Playground Commission minutes, January 23, 1924).

46. P. Horace, "Park Architecture: Bathing Establishments," *Park International* 1, no. 1 (July 1920): 25-34.

47. E.g., Report of the Bureau of Recreation in New York, pt. 1 (New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report of 1911*, p. 5).

48. E.g., at De Witt Clinton Playground in New York, 215 plots were allocated to girls, 243 for boys (New York City, Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1905*, p. 138).

49. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1906*, p. 47.

tests.”⁵⁰ A moderate position was that female competitions should be conducted like “a play party [rather] than a contest between rivals,” in order to avoid “the undesirable masculine tendencies so commonly seen in match games between girls’ teams.”⁵¹

Occasionally park planners recognized that girls needed more. The director of recreation in Chicago, immediately after World War I, said that the restricted programming for girls regarding athletics would have to be relaxed.⁵² In 1919 the San Francisco Playground Commission also began the expansion of its athletic programming for girls by hosting the first swimming meet for high school girls. Chicago girls were included in athletic tournaments in 1921.

The new emphasis on women did not mean that men were ignored. Men still petitioned commissioners for athletic fields for their sports, and, like others before him, President Teddy Roosevelt relied heavily upon masculine imagery (“liberal ideas, manly independence, and appeal on behalf of manly character in public and private life”)⁵³ in promoting park activities. The masculine symbolism of San Francisco’s McLaren Lodge, especially the commissioners’ meeting room, is thorough: handsome wood and leather-covered table, chairs, and walls, all decorated with metal studs.

Women in the Recreation Facility (1930–65)

The paternalistic concern with working-class women and girls declined, just as the emphasis on class disappeared generally throughout this era. Although administrators made no special claim to meet the needs of the working class, they differentiated the target population of women into types—“junior girls, adult women, and industrial women.” This categorization had been in effect since the reform era and continued well into the 1950s.⁵⁴ Industrial recreation organized employees into leagues of softball players, tennis, table tennis, basketball, folk dancing, golf, field days and picnics, and indoor bowling. The San Francisco Recreation Commission hinted only obliquely that it met the needs of lower-middle-class clerical workers in the caption under a photograph of two women who “left their clattering typewriters to join other downtown workers in enjoying a touch of spring at St. Mary’s Square.”⁵⁵

50. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1907*, p. 69.

51. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1906*, pp. 50–52.

52. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1918*, pp. 67–69.

53. San Francisco Park Commission minutes, May 8, 1903, p. 419.

54. E.g., San Francisco Park and Recreation Department, *Annual Report for 1950* (San Francisco, 1951).

55. San Francisco Park Commission minutes, March 14, 1947.

Sex-role segregation, although still practiced, began to wane in the era of the recreation facility. The practice of designing special sections of the park, playground, or beach for females dwindled.⁵⁶ Planners included more types of females in more types of activities. Special classes for women's activities continued into the mid-thirties, but segregation reached its limits. Park departments concluded that "co-recreation parties had greater appeal than when segregation of the sexes is enforced."⁵⁷ The pragmatic impetus toward sexual integration was that park departments wanted to increase their attendance figures, but ideology was soon hot on the trail. The emphasis in the 1950s was on family togetherness and the idea that "Mom, Pop, and the kids must do things as a group,"⁵⁸ a return by a different route to pleasure garden attitudes toward the family. In direct opposition to reform park ideology, the recreation theorists said that a recreation program should be directed to "keeping the family together instead of separating it into skill and age groups."⁵⁹

One of the consequences of age and sex segregation of the reform era had been that mothers were no longer the only supervisors of their children. Once beyond the toddler stage, children played together under the supervision of a trained leader. This separation of parenthood from supervision led logically to the possibility of the park services' providing day care. In San Francisco in 1926 a representative of the Golden Gate Kindergarten Association asked the playground commission to consider the purchase of property near Mission Playground which their group could use for a nursery kindergarten to take care of small children whose mothers had to work during the morning. In the afternoon it would be used by the playground department. The commissioners balked at this suggestion of providing day care: "The consensus of opinion was that the matter be held in abeyance."⁶⁰ In 1943, the recreation commission requested funds from the Lanham Act for day care after school hours from three to seven in the evening.⁶¹ The service lasted only a year. In the 1950s the idea was implicitly rejected through the emphasis on family togetherness.⁶²

The philosophy behind the recreation facility deemphasized sex-

56. The last example of a special area for women and children on a San Francisco beach was mentioned in May 1934 in the minutes of the San Francisco Park Commission.

57. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1939*, p. 150.

58. Charles A. Boucher, "Family Recreation: Foe of Juvenile Delinquency," *Recreation* 50, no. 2 (February 1957): 46.

59. Ben Solomon, "Preventive Recreation," *Recreation* 44, no. 10 (March 1951): 566.

60. San Francisco Playground Commission minutes, December 29, 1926.

61. San Francisco Recreation Commission minutes, January 7, 1943 (McLaren Lodge, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco).

62. Ideology notwithstanding, parents never again could be counted on for full-time supervision.

role segregation for girls. A woman professional in the National Recreational Association described all-girls programming as a stepping-stone to sexually integrated recreation:

The scene has changed greatly since the early '30s, when there was so much discussion of "girls' " athletics, boys' rules versus girls' rules, and the fight against exploitation. Now we know that no recreation program is complete unless it carries a carefully planned program for the girls themselves—a program which will give them social confidence and personality development, so that they are ready to share activities with boys. They need to be brought into things in such a natural way that they are ready for the next step—co-recreation activities.⁶³

As females became less distinctive and less in need of protection, the literature no longer insisted that women should not go out alone in public. But apparently objective conditions did not change, for complaints regarding "offenses against women" became more frequent.⁶⁴ The protective attitude toward girls took longer to erode than it did toward adult women. One impact on recruitment to local parks was that girls typically traveled a shorter distance than boys to attend a park.⁶⁵

Despite the decrease in sexual segregation, sex-role stereotyping did not decline. By the end of the war, public relations stunts had reached a peak and programming a nadir, epitomized by Chicago's "Easter hat parade." Women were invited to craft groups in the field houses, where they learned to design and make their own Easter hats.⁶⁶ The public relations division turned this into a media event. In order to combat the image of women as workers, as they had been during World War II, park publicity introduced photographs of women in sexually alluring poses.

Sex-role stereotyping was perpetuated through children's activities. Toys for building and construction were most popular among the boys, whereas toys for mimic housekeeping were the most used by the girls.⁶⁷ Park programmers recommended that cooking be offered during vacations for those recalcitrant girls who did not enjoy the subject and re-

63. Helen M. Doncey, "In the Field: Helen M. Doncey," *Recreation* 42, no. 11 (February 1949): 517.

64. San Francisco Park Commission minutes, November 6–7, 1941.

65. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1939*, p. 151. Since then, observers have linked the increase in offenses to a decline in public order. I believe that abuse against women has been constant over time despite changes in rate. In a hierarchical, anonymous, sexist society, one alternative to high rates of offenses against women is to keep unaccompanied women off the streets. The preferred solution would be simultaneously to resocialize both sexes and restructure social relations to remove females from the status of victim.

66. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1947*, p. 18.

67. Chicago South Park Commission, *Annual Report for 1938*, p. 147.

garded it as "hard work or a bore," so that it would be perceived as recreation and they could benefit from the surreptitious instruction.⁶⁸

Women in the Open-Space System (1965 to the Present)

The central goal of the open-space system was to help revitalize the inner city visually, economically, and socially. The new attitude toward open space was that it was valuable wherever found. Planners abandoned previous standards regarding size, shape, topography, and location. Consequently, park departments picked sites as small as a lot for both the adult "vest pocket" park and the children's totlot and adventure playground. Designers believed that the value of all unbuilt space—streets, sidewalks, plazas, parks, and playgrounds—would be enhanced if linked together into a network. Accordingly, street tree planting, street furniture, and attention to surfaces would help make streets and other open spaces seem continuous. Programming reinforced the idea by organizing events ("happenings") which moved from one place to another in and through the streets.

Implicitly, the goal of central-city revitalization focused on middle-class users—the businessmen and women on their lunch breaks from downtown offices—and the upper-middle-class suburban shoppers being courted back to the central business district.⁶⁹ Thus the needs of middle-class women for a safe and attractive urban environment have directed park planning for adults. Paley Park in New York City is an example of an environment designed for the relief of the shopper and white-collar worker: It is tucked between two buildings and the sheet of falling water at its back muffles traffic noise.

The concern for riot control in the late 1960s meant that ghetto youth were also a target population for the park department. Cultural programming was updated to include elements of popular and hip culture—rock concerts, be-ins, experiential celebrations, dancemobiles. Keeping swimming pools open at night was credited with having directly helped keep New York City "cool" while other cities erupted in riot. Planners seldom needed to explain that "ghetto youth" were black adolescent males; girls' recreational needs have not been enunciated clearly in this era. Women's athletic needs have been acknowledged by maintaining separate programs in volleyball, basketball, and softball, while adding belly dancing and yoga classes. Nevertheless, park programming has remained predominantly male oriented.

68. "Recreation in U.S. Office of Education," *Recreation* 40, no. 11 (February 1947): 616–17). The same article noted that interscholastic and intercollegiate sports were still not recommended for high school girls and college women, who should have, instead, an intramural organization emphasizing mass participation.

69. John V. Lindsay, "Parks and Recreation," mimeographed (New York, 1965).

Summary and Directions for the Future

The plans made for women's use of the parks involve them primarily as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. Park leaders have used women to help solve contemporary urban problems. They designed females' roles in parks to help protect and stabilize the family, to improve the physical fitness of the working-class population, to keep up morale during the Depression, to keep recreational and other municipal agencies running during the world wars, and to keep cash flowing through the department stores of the central business districts. Seldom have women advocated the kind of service they wanted for themselves in their own interests. In the absence of a mandate from female users to female park promoters, women park commissioners, philanthropists, volunteers, professionals, and staff have fit into the organizational apparatus established by their male counterparts and have seldom acted as advocates on behalf of a female constituency. Because women citizens allowed themselves to be passive regarding their recreational needs, they have not been a ready and logical constituency for female policymakers. Conversely, the female leaders have not made an effort to stimulate women's awareness of urban parks as a potential agency for meeting women's needs in cities.

Because women have not constituted a "social problem," few people, including women themselves, have realized that they might have distinctive urban needs. Yet their need for mental stimulation, both educational and entertaining, has not always been overlooked by park designers. Frederick Law Olmsted, the nation's first professional park designer (beginning with Central Park in 1853), said that cities were more attractive than the countryside, especially to women, because of the cultural advantages—schools, libraries, music, and fine art: "The greatest wealth can hardly command as much of these in the country as the poorest work-girl is offered . . . in Boston at the mere cost of a walk for a short distance over a good, firm, clean pathway, lighted at night and made interesting to her by shop fronts and a variety of people passing."⁷⁰ More recently, in *The City Is the Frontier*, Charles Abrams has emphasized the potential advantages of urban life, especially for single females looking for mates, as well as for mothers needing child-care support.⁷¹ His recommendations fly in the face of the patriarchal controls that established strong prohibitions against prostitution, dances, and unchaperoned trysting places in parks. Most recently, feminists have begun to write and confer about the issue of women's need of cities and how women must come to see urban planning issues as women's issues.⁷²

70. F. L. Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," *Journal of Social Sciences: Containing the Transactions of the American Association*, no. 3 (1871), p. 6.

71. Charles Abrams, *The City Is the Frontier* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

72. E.g., conference on Planning for a Nonsexist Society, University of California, Los

Nothing in the definition or practice of park service suggests that the women's movement could not turn around the old image of women as unathletic and make full use of the athletic facilities that are partially neglected during fiscal crises. Existing facilities are currently overcrowded by women of all ages who increasingly understand the value of exercise for their appearance, physical health, and mental well-being, especially since most of their jobs are sedentary. They should organize to demand better and more extensive hours for swimming pools and gymnasiums, for example. Parks could be turned to the purposes of the human potential movement, since so many women are struggling with self-actualization and fulfillment. Compatible with this direction, parks could become holistic health centers and sense centers with saunas and whirlpools.

Community gardens, so popular with both sexes during both world wars, should be reestablished. Vegetable and flower gardening offers activities which people of all ages have enjoyed. Such gardens are also educational for children. When park departments have issued permits for allotment gardens, the demand has always been greater than the spaces allocated.

One of the most pressing needs of this society is for a rational process for raising children. Parks could become a setting for private and governmental experimentation with different types and styles of day-care centers. Parks are an ideal site for this activity because they are near neighborhoods but not within them, so that the noise of such centers would not disturb local residents. The architecture is there, the landscape is there; what is needed is money for staffing and the attitude that child rearing is a social, not only an individual or a family, function.

The role of women in public places is still as problematic as it was in the nineteenth century. In trying to change the status of women in the social structure, we must not overlook the function of the physical environment in reinforcing the desired social changes.

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Angeles, Spring 1979; Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Paterson, David Morley, eds., *New Space for Women* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980); Gerda Wekerle and David Popenoe, chairpersons, "Spatial Inequality in American Life: Consequences for Women" (paper session at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, August 1978); Gerda Wekerle, "Review Essay: Women in the Urban Environment" (this volume, pp. S188-S214).