

Mack Holmes

I Am Not a Lawyer

Life is inherently risky. From the moment we are thrust into the world we are faced with harrowing dangers at every turn. Some of us, for god knows what reason, choose to make accidentally hurting ourselves a hobby and unfortunately public green spaces are apparently the number one theatre in the world for these performances. This way of life must be accounted for when planning recreational areas to a logical degree, but I regret to inform you that even when every safety measure is put into place some people will still manage to break a leg and blame it on the government. Thus, mitigation is key for these circumstances. But how much is too much? If the world was made of padded pillows and blankets making pillow forts would become tiring after a while. So the delicate balance must be obtained. But that is often far easier said than done.

Taking a look at the approach of the Little Rock Parks and Recreation Board, I notice some issues. The language it was written in was only semi-formal and included local slang such as “round here” along with some cheeky humour. This surprised me considering it is a governmental body and I would assume they would have a level of formality to stick to. This made me curious so I used my significant other’s WestLaw account to look up if anyone had ever sued Little Rock’s Parks and Recreation branch (apparently you can only find records if you are validated). I was not surprised to find that there had been no lawsuits recorded that I could find. If litigation had been pursued I am sure that their safety page would be required to straighten out and become very cut and dry. I still did enjoy the humour though.

Another thing I enjoyed about their website is that they encouraged the public to take an active part in park safety. Half of the page was dedicated to encouraging citizens to report their own findings on the matter and gave a helpful link. I think the psychology behind this is sound. Suggesting this encourages a community mindset which helps people to think more on ‘doing their part’, I.E. do not put yourself in danger and discourage others lest you be the subject of a safety report. This also emphasizes the board’s community first ideology. It shows how much they value a public mindset when it comes to safety and therefore is a trustworthy comrade in the fight against public dangers.

While the previous source used encouragement to promote safety, Balance Training Forum used an entirely different approach. This article was focused around the dangers of slacklining when improperly (and sometimes properly) done. Each point the article made about knots, tension, removal, and general engagement concerning slacklines was punctuated with a graphic video showing injuries stemming from whatever topic that paragraph talked about. This was a very effective approach designed to inspire fear and revulsion along with thoughts of “oh dear god I will never do this”. The inspiring message culminating from the whole article was akin to “yes this is a very fun hobby but it is very easy for things to go incredibly wrong”. Honestly there is not much I would have changed about their approach. It was short, effective, and to the point. If I had to point out qualms with it there were several claims and stories mentioned that did not have any citation or source. Generally it is not a good idea to make claims about injuries or life-altering incidences without offering at least a tad bit of proof so I would have liked for them to add it. Still, I found it all to be highly convincing and even though it showed plenty of warnings I honestly still would like to try it. I definitely would be a stickler about safety though which is truly the message they wanted to send.

Finally, the study called “How Important is Perception of Safety to Park-Use?” dealt with an entirely different connotation of safety. This study focused on the use of parks relative to public perception of safety. Relating this to the previous sources is not quite possible due to the fact they have almost no crossover in content besides they both deal with parks, so this source is going to get its own analysis.

What I found interesting about this study was the correlation between characteristics of the studied population and the perception of safety. The study did not use the rate of crimes committed or similar to discuss park safety exclusively; they also looked at people’s perception which is quite a different take. To be honest, it took me about half of the paper to realize there is a difference between the two. Findings included how if there was a greater variety of opportunities at these parks (various courts, organized activities, etc) then people were more likely to consider the park “safe” and would visit more often. This specific statistic interested me far more than others because of the implication. I’ve visited this issue in past critiques but it continues being relative to each study I read. Commonly low-income areas are more often

considered unsafe than higher-income areas. Of course this has correlation data to crime statistics but there seems to be few people willing to look for ways to change this. Having lower facility variety and number is going to be a common issue for parks in low-income areas because these facilities cost much more. Construction and upkeep are costly activities that exponentially grow with each park addition. In these low-income areas budget is a constraint on park offerings so the park will not be able to have a variety of offerings to residents. This creates a cycle of perception of safety that cannot solve itself.

Safe parks require budgets and budgets are few and far between for low-income areas because people do not see the utility in providing for these communities. Again, more money will flow into higher-income areas that they in turn will be able to push into their parks and create 'safer' areas that sharply contrast what is available to low-income areas. Being able to provide monetary flexibility to these low-income parks is going to drive use up and provide a community bonding area that residents will be able to enjoy and make use of. Of course, money is not infinite and there are many factors that go into what deciding factors impact decisions like this. But this is an important relationship to keep in mind when talking about inequality and effects park use has on communities.

Park safety is complex. There are so many situations that can have a dangerous outcome and so many factors that go into events that it is quite literally impossible to be able to plan around them. But ultimately park safety falls on everyone involved, not just the state but the civilians who have a stake as well. There is not one solution that fits all to the way people can use parks safely. Flexibility and experimenting is key along with self-accounting. Safety is a community issue and should be treated as such so everyone has the same ability to enjoy parks as everyone else.

Works Cited

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