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<center>Critique # 3: What is considered an acceptable risk?</center>

There is no avoiding at least *some* risk in public urban green spaces. They are not designed to be risky places—in fact, quite the contrary. They are intended to be egalitarian places of peace, activity, aesthetic beauty, recreation, and leisure, not *risky*. Unfortunately, as best as a city, county, neighborhood group, or the like try to keep public spaces as safe as possible, issues inevitably arise. In the broadest sense, urban green space risk could be lumped into two categories: risk from objects and risk from people. Risk from objects is inherent to parks. As places of recreation and activity, there are many objects that could endanger the safety of life and property. For instance, playground equipment is not inherently risk-free, but it is enjoyed by tens of thousands of children any given year without incident. However, many people (the author of this review included) can remember collecting bumps, bruises, and scrapes. There are trees that, no matter how well pruned and maintained, are still subject to tear outs and uprooting, putting any unfortunate vehicle or passerby in peril. There are even projectiles, such as Frisbee golf discs, flying around that could hit unsuspecting park goers in the face in that very painful but fortunate upper lip space between the front teeth and the nose (the author of this review also remembers this vividly).

Then there's risk from people. Depending on the city, neighborhood, or block you grew up on, parks were either seen by your community as a valuable resource or as a magnet for crime. They were either safe places or dangerous ones to be avoided. In spite of this, even if parks were perceived as safe in your community, their very nature can be conducive to

interpersonal crimes such as theft and assault. Remote areas of parks or poor design—such as thick bushes around paths or placed at corners—can make green spaces less safe. Perhaps more importantly, it can make people *feel* less safe. While parks will never be completely risk-free from dangerous objects or people, there are ways to mitigate risk, which is the subject of the references being reviewed here.

The first article (Lapham et al., 2016) is a random survey study of four cities—Columbus, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Chapel Hill/Durham, North Carolina—that attempts to quantify the importance of safety perception and park use. By surveying residents who lived near the cities' respective 24 parks that were subjected to this study, the surveyors were able to conclude that park use was negatively influenced by perception of safety in 11% of participants. This number is quite significant. Hypothetically, if this were the United States average, then over 35 million people would feel at risk from people in their own neighborhood parks.

This is not the most interesting information that they gleaned though. What they also found is that park use has everything to do with the facilities at the park. Simply put, parks with more diverse and a greater number of facilities are used more. This could be used as cause to invest in parks facilities for communities and diversify how we think of park use. Conceiving of parks more as community centers could be a tremendous boon to communities. I'm reminded of libraries, particularly their role in 21st century society. They are no longer just places to rent books. Residents can use libraries for internet access, printing, and resume help. Younger children can participate in after school programs and use it as a place to feel safe. It is very much

a community-centered resource that now reaches far beyond just books. The same could be said for parks offering diverse facilities. This data shows that if it is built, it is used.

Lastly, there is one aspect of the study I have to protest, and that is the use of the body mass index (BMI) metric. BMI is an outdated and scientifically fraudulent metric, and its use in scientific literature should be discontinued. It fails to measure what it is attempting to measure, and I would argue what it is attempting to measure is irrelevant as well as racially biased. While my thoughts on this particular aspect are quite strong, I still think this is a good study, particularly as it pertains to evidence for park facilities use. I would love to see this article rewritten in "plain speak." Survey studies are very laden with statistics and this could be a valuable resource for lobbying communities for park investment.

The second resource addresses one of the many threats from objects, and that is slacklines. Slacklines are one of the newest fad activities that can be seen in any given park on a summer afternoon. Users ratchet a strap to two trees, create enough tension to walk across the strap, and use the line for recreation and balance training. This resource, located on the Balance Training Forum, centers around slackline safety, as well as discusses (and shows in gruesome detail) some of the injuries that can result from faulty slacklines or improper setup. I have commented on similarly designed resources before in a previous review, but what I really like about this resource is it is meant to be digested by a 21st century person. Equal parts text and video, the page is interactive. It also tells a complete story on safety, beginning with how to properly backup a slackline and ending with a product called slackline crash pads that would be particularly useful for the safety conscious. In between these videos, there are several videos of people getting seriously hurt by slacklines. I cannot think of a more effective method to

demonstrate to novice users the danger they are putting themselves in if they do not set up their equipment properly.

I know this is a fuddy-duddy position to take, but if I were a city park manager, I would likely seek to ban slacklines in public parks after viewing this page. If the exercise here is to mitigate risk and determine what is acceptable and unacceptable, well this activity falls safely in the latter category. It is the definition of eliminating an unacceptable (and unnecessary) risk. I am all for people willingly placing themselves—and only themselves—in danger, but not on park property. Not to mention, slacklines could very easily violate the "only themselves" portion, placing other park users at risk. Any inexperienced slackliner or child could seriously injure themselves if a slackliner allowed them on their rig or left it unattended for any amount of time. The worst of it all, there are several videos on this resource showing slacklines turning into terrifying and potentially lethal projectiles, with one unlucky person receiving a large wound and broken leg.

The potential to affect park trees alone would be enough for me to ban slacklines in public trees. I am curious to know whether research has been done on trees regarding this subject. While I have no backing to support my claim, it would be reasonable to suggest that long-term use of two well-positioned trees as slackline posts could have some effect on their health. The amount of horizontal tension being exerted is tremendous, and damage to bark and cambial tissue by a careless user could be detrimental to health. Trees are an expensive resource to maintain, and their health and well-being is not worth allowing park goers to perform a hazardous activity that potentially places other park users at risk.

The third resource is the Safety Management System (SMS) produced by the Little Rock, Arkansas Parks and Recreation district. The SMS is a policy that has been assembled to put safety in the parks system at the forefront. It allows park employees, from the highest ranking to the lowest, to keep the park system safe and accountable for all users. The webpage explains to residents the purpose of this page as well as the resource. Below that, there is a link to access the SMS manual that has been produced by this department. What the SMS manual does is lay out exactly what the system is, what it does, and how it should be implemented in the event of a hazard or emergency.

The two coolest things this manual does is: 1) Creates a system for any park employee to follow, and 2) Takes safety out of a context that is often nebulous and quantifies it. This resource is remarkably thorough. The first section discusses prevention methodology, which dissects all stages at which risk can be mitigated. Following this, there are diagrams explaining just how park officials can asses the safety of their given event or situation, including a dichotomous diagram, hazard probability and severity category tables, and the risk assessment matrix. What using a system such as this does is attempt to remove human subjectivity when determining the risk of certain hazards. There are real, concrete ways to determine whether something is an acceptable or unacceptable risk.

A system such as this could be used to evaluate risk from people and risk from objects. While evaluating a park's risk from people might be a bit more difficult to apply, it could still be used during the design process in order to keep park users feeling as safe as possible. In terms of risk from objects, the SMS would be very applicable. For instance, it could be used to evaluate the risk of new recreational activities that pop up in parks, such as slacklines. It allows officials

to assign values to the hazard severity and probability of activities such as slacklines and

determine from there whether they are acceptable.