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WOMEN, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND THE URBAN OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF PROSPECT PARK, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

by

KIRA L. KRENICHYN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Dr. Setha Low (outside reader)

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

WOMEN, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND THE URBAN OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF PROSPECT PARK, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

by

Kira L. Krenichyn

Advisor: Dr. Susan Saegert

This dissertation addresses women's physical activities in Prospect Park, a 526-acre urban park bordering on several neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. Data include observations and semi-structured interviews with 41 women who regularly used the park. Interviewees described their use patterns, perceptions, and experiences of the park.

Prospect Park provided these women with opportunities for challenging and "smooth" workouts on its road, trails, hills, and stairs, in addition to support amenities, including drinking fountains and rest rooms. They also perceived the park as safer than surrounding streets in terms of traffic, but many expressed the sentiment that "cars should not be in the park." The park was moreover a place for experiencing nature, mental restoration, and carrying out meaningful activities on an everyday basis.

The park was also the setting for what might be described as an ethic of care, providing opportunities for physical activities with friends, acquaintances, and family members. These women described the park as "friendly," "neighborly," or

"neighborhoody," where strangers became familiar and comfortable. However, they also reported concerns regarding safety and fears related to "isolated" times and places in the park, parts of the park associated with black and Latino neighborhoods, and men or boys whom they believed to be from those neighborhoods or whose behavior they perceived as erratic or "weird." Some of these women deconstructed this "female jogger" discourse of vulnerability in their claims about confidence, physical ability, and refusal to relinquish the right to use public space. Black women's claims also reflected a more specific understanding of danger in the park or a sense of racial identity, but most interviewees were white.

Finally, women spoke about team sports in the park in terms of "women's space," which they envisioned as less aggressive and individualistic than men's and boys' "street style" of play. Their descriptions may have reflected a male privilege in sport as well as tensions regarding racial privileges to public space. I discuss all of these findings and their implications for park planning, theoretical conceptualizations of public space, and frameworks for understanding gender, space, and physical activity.

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I thank all of my friends and family for their emotional support and insightful comments, which are reflected throughout this work. I do not have the space to name all of them here, but I especially thank my parents, Kathy and Lane Krenichyn, who have supported and believed in me every step of the way since I took my first steps.

I thank all of my interview participants, who were so generous with their time, their thoughts, and their hospitality.

I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Michelle Fine and Dr. Cindi Katz, and to my outside readers, Dr. Roscoe Brown and Dr. Setha Low, for their feedback and their patience. I am especially grateful to Dr. Susan Saegert, whose years of mentorship have encouraged me to grow as a professional and as a person in many ways.

Finally, I am indebted to the City University of New York Writing Fellowship, The Sex Roles Student Research Award, and the David Spitz Dissertation Year Fellowship, all of which allowed me to complete this dissertation.

Dedication

For Daniel Krenichyn, and for all of those whose spirits are alive in these pages.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (continued)

List of Tables and Illustrations

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation explores women's physical activities in Prospect Park, an urban park of more than 500 acres, which borders on several, demographically diverse neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. Here, I document some of the ways the women used and perceived the park, including places that they found for physical activities in the park, patterns across time and space, constraints that they experienced, and ways that they negotiated those constraints. I further explore these women's uses and perceptions of the park in the context of current understandings of women's activities, drawing from the fields of psychology, geography, and leisure studies. Finally, I am interested in the ways that women's experiences reflect the construction of Prospect Park as a physical and social space.

I first became acquainted with Prospect Park in 1995, now more than eight years ago, when I moved to New York City to attend graduate school. I knew that I would miss the opportunities for running, hiking, and cycling that had always been easily accessible to me in other places where I had lived, mostly in upstate New York and New England. A friend lived in Brooklyn, near Prospect Park, where she ran or walked with her dog, and I began to join them every morning. Having an outdoor place to pursue activities was primary, but Prospect Park turned out to offer more than outdoor scenery and several miles of road, paths and trails; over time it also became a place for me to explore, watch animals and people, attend concerts, work, teach, and learn. It is mostly a place of positive emotion and experience, but not entirely. Sometimes there are distinct reminders

that it is an urban park, such as the trash spilling out of cans or the signs warning of rat poison. Occasionally it is a place for negotiating urban danger—shootings in the middle of the day, stories about rapes or warnings from police officers to stay out of the park's wooded areas.

Maybe above all, Prospect Park became, and still is, a social place for me. I began to see people there that I knew from other contexts, to meet new people, and to develop a social network around sports and fitness. During my time in graduate school, I also began racing a bicycle at the amateur level. I suddenly found opportunities in New York to renew an interest in competitive sports that had developed between the ages of about twelve and eighteen, but for which I had found few avenues in the time since graduating from high school. Much of my training and racing has taken place in the park, and I continue today to meet more people there who share my interests. However, many of these people are men, and although there are many women in the park, we seem to encounter some difficulties when we are physically active. We sometimes wonder if our shorts are too short or what it means when unfamiliar men approach us and seem friendly, we deal with unwanted remarks on the streets, and we still struggle for recognition and opportunities as competitive athletes. Because of my shared experiences with other women with whom I have spoken, in the park and outside of it, I developed an interest in this research project: an exploration of the meanings of physical activities for women, particularly physical activities in public spaces.

My research is first located within theory addressing the public-private separation of gender, which often conceives of women's roles within the private sphere. That is, in an ideal and traditional sense, women occupy the private physical sphere of the home,

where they are responsible for the care of others and the reproduction of cultural values. In a more real and modern sense, women occupy many roles outside of the home, but these roles are sometimes complicated by strains on time and energy due to their many responsibilities, perceived threats in public spaces, or challenges to their presence there, such as sexual harassment. All such restrictions might act as parameters around women's uses of public space, including physical activity.

Physical activity—by which I mean any type of leisure-time, recreational sport or fitness pursuit—may itself also be thought of within a public-private framework. Opportunities for women in sports and fitness have paralleled progressive movements and benchmarks in the public spheres of health, education, and politics. For example, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments Act mandated gender equity in distribution of public school resources and led specifically to dramatic increases in sports and fitness for girls and women in public schools. Although I never even heard of Title IX during my years in elementary and high school, it no doubt had a direct and significant affect on me—contributing toward a sense of physical capability and an appreciation of the challenges, frustrations, and camaraderie that go along with competitive sports.

Physical activity is also public in a more bodily sense, often involving displays of sensuality and movement not usually associated with everyday public behavior. The body sweats and grunts and makes mistakes, or it moves in refined and beautiful ways that attract others' attention and admiration. Clothing is often tighter and skimpier to allow freer movement (or in some cases, equipment creates bizarre-looking bulk), and the very nature of activity itself often requires utilizing places that accommodate the activity at hand—playing fields, pools and natural bodies of water, streets, courts, and gyms. When

a woman runs, jumps, kicks, stretches, bounces, and splashes in public places, she may be expressing herself in ways that do not often have an outlet but that may also provoke unwanted reactions from others, possibly leading to uncomfortable feelings for her.

Notions of gender-appropriateness have defined and constrained women's lives, but women have certainly always been active in work and play, indoors and outdoors, with all of the limitations and repercussions. Prospect Park itself was conceived with a clearly-defined set of middle-class values regarding leisure in mind, and at the time that it was designed, women were not expected to be in parks without male companions or child charges. However, women have long used parks to pursue their own leisure, sometimes alone or with other women, and today women are a visible presence among the bustle of activities in Prospect Park. They can be seen walking with dogs, jogging with baby strollers, playing softball with teammates or soccer among groups of men, fishing in concealing orthodox religious garb, or sunning themselves in almost nothing at all.

Prospect Park offers an important resource for women seeking physical activity, as well as an opportunity to explore gender at the intersection of the spheres of physical space and physical activity. What compels women to do what they do, and what do their activities mean to them? How does the park call out to them, what do they do once there, and where do they stake their claims? In the sections that follow, I review some issues relevant to women, physical activity, and urban outdoor spaces, to begin addressing those questions. The topics I address below include cultural constructions of women in sport, sport and leisure as a means for challenging gender stereotypes, physical activity as a health concern for women, and the role of the built environment as a resource for physical activity.

1.1 Historical and Cultural Constructs of Women and Physical Activity

Throughout the 19th century in the United States, the production of goods moved outside of the home, and the roles of men and women were likewise reorganized so that women took on the primarily reproductive roles of childbirth and child-rearing, responsibility for food, clothing, and shelter, and all other work necessary for the subsistence of day-to-day life. However, this notion of "separate spheres" was both ideal and ideological; the home as sanctuary from the public sphere of production was symbolic of middle-class wealth, and women were believed to embody its virtues of piety, purity, and submissiveness. "True womanhood" referred to unrealistic expectations of motherhood, domesticity, and fragility (see Laslett & Brenner, 1989). Women were presumed to belong in the home, but because they often entered the public sphere for a number of reasons, including paid work, they were subject to harassment, their movements were restricted, or their roles there were an extension of the sex-stereotyped roles of the private sphere, such as department store shopping, volunteering, and organizing charitable organizations. More recently, the gendered separation of public and private spheres translates into girls' socialization into acceptable or desirable behavior, women's primary responsibility for household work and childcare, harassment and fear of crime in public spaces, and overall restricted movement in public spaces (see Franck & Paxson, 1989).

The idealized separation of men and women into public and private spheres can also be seen throughout the history of women's involvement in physical activity in the United States. As early as the United States' establishment as a nation, gender parity in physical activity has been a concern (Park, 1982). Educators, social reformers, physicians,

and even popular periodicals condemned inactivity and advocated "physical culture" for the sake of health, beauty, reproductive functioning, and even moral constitution and self-restraint. Throughout the 1800's women and girls were encouraged to take part in walking, dancing, horseback riding, single-sex bathing, calisthenics, and housework. Opportunities continued to expand to other types of athletic activity, such as rowing, ice skating, archery, croquet, tennis, fencing, and a number of team sports. Women's colleges and female seminaries incorporated physical education into their curricula throughout the 19th century, and there are accounts of competitive sports like track and field, golf, baseball, and basketball taking place within and between women's colleges later in the century (see Hargreaves, 1994; Howell, 1982; Kenney, 1982; Park, 1982). The evolution of the bicycle into a mass-marketed commodity in the latter part of the 19th century is also often cited as an especially liberating development for women, because it encouraged physical activity and increased mobility, and it solidified changes in standards of dress that reformers had long been attempting to introduce—bloomers, short skirts, and knickerbockers replaced long skirts, hoops, corsets, and tight lacing (see Aronson, 1968; Hargreaves, 1994).

However, discourses about physical activity and the female body were also located within a set of concerns about women's societal roles and a belief in "true womanhood" (Squires, 1982). For all of the arguments in favor of exercise, there were counter-arguments that excessive physical activity would injure the female body or damage its reproductive functioning (see Hargreaves, 1994). For example, Patricia Vertinsky (1987) demonstrates that 19th century medical recommendations, and related aesthetics regarding the female form, were driven by the shift in women's idealized roles

from production to reproduction. Male medical practitioners advocated a slender, frail Victorian ideal until health reformers' (some of whom were women) criticisms threatened masculine control over the medical field; a more voluptuous figure, healthy diet, and light physical activity were later recommended as antidotes to childbirth, menstruation, and excessive intellectual activity; and toward the end of the century a muscular frame was believed to be a means toward sound childbirth and the fulfillment of an evolutionary imperative to breed fit children.

The debate on women and physical activity continues to surface in different forms today, for example in the interests in sex roles and other categorical comparisons of much twentieth century research on women in sport (see Hall, 1996; Lenskyj, 1987), or in the medicalization of the female body and over-emphasis on risks in relation to benefits of exercise (see Vertinsky, 1998). In my search for literature addressing women and girls in sports and fitness, I have come across recent research comparing sports-related variables by gender, such as self-efficacy or beliefs about success (e.g., Lirgg, Chase, George, & Ferguson, 1996; Newton & Duda, 1993), as well as medical research framing the female body as pathological, focusing for instance on the "female athlete triad" of amenorrhea, injuries, and disordered eating or exercise patterns (e.g., Beals, Brey, & Gonyou, 1999; Hobart & Smucker, 2000; Smith, 1996). One article even concerned itself with the morphology of the female breast, its degree of displacement (its bounciness, in another word) during exercise, and recommendations for athletic bras, all without any evidence of risk (Gehlsen & Stoner, 1987).

As women's physical activity became more prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, notions of propriety began to adjust themselves accordingly, but

ambivalence over appropriateness remained. While clothing was modified to suit physical activity, it often remained modest and concealing, or later in the century and through today, it accentuated the female form for the purposes of consumption and the heterosexual male gaze (see Hargreaves, 1994). Ambivalence could also be (and still is) seen in the public spectacle of sport. Early in the 20th century, for example, female athletes were often billed to the public as "Amazons," "freaks," or "tomboys" (Mrozek, 1987). Later, the All American Girls' Baseball League, recently made famous by the movie *A League of Their Own*, was started by Philip Wrigley during World War II to address a projected shortage of players in men's baseball, and then financed by local businessmen once the threat of shortage subsided and Wrigley backed out (Fidler, 1982). The league promoted women's baseball, not softball, and it was careful to avoid an image of "mannish" women, recruiting only women who conformed to the directors' ideals of femininity (Cahn, 1994). Teams had women as chaperones and enforced strict dress and conduct codes, players attended charm school and wore skirted uniforms, short "boyish" haircuts were prohibited, and media focused on players' roles as mothers and housewives (Cahn, 1994; Fidler, 1982; Gregorich, 1993; Pratt, 1993). In the same way, Mildred "Babe" Didrickson Zaharias, an exceptional all-around amateur athlete who excelled for nearly three decades, was plagued by media attention toward her muscular physique and her boisterous, "tomboy" persona. That attention subsided when she began wearing more feminine clothing and hairstyles, married a professional wrestler, settled on golf to capitalize on her extraordinary athletic talents, and finally succumbed to cancer (Cahn, 1994; Mrozek, 1987; Postman, 1999). Nor is such unwanted attention a thing of the past. Martina Navratilova has remarked to the press (e.g., Carillo & Deford, 1999) that the

media often cast her as the "bad guy," "dark," or "ugly," not only because of her aggressive playing style but also her butch appearance, and because she is a lesbian.

Sexuality is a persistent theme throughout women's participation in physical activity. On the one hand, moderate and supervised physical activity was once believed to provide a safe outlet for sexual energy and thus prevent undesirable sexual activity, particularly masturbation (Vertinsky, 1982). On the other hand, the unrestrained physicality of sport and fitness was confused with a lack of control over sexual impulses and sexual depravity (Mrozek, 1987). However, anxieties go deeper than confusion between the sexuality and the sensuality of physical activity. In the same way that their athletic ability threatens the masculinity of sport, any mention of women's desire toward other women (or any desire at all, for that matter) disrupts heteronormative assumptions about sexuality. Women who are athletic are less of a threat to these assumptions when their athletic performance is separated from their own sexual desire and veiled, however thinly, in reminders that they are still in fact "ladies" who are recipients but not agents, objects but not subjects, of desire. It is not difficult to connect, for example, yesterday's "Amazons" and "freaks" (a language also deployed by the All American Girls Baseball League when attempting to quiet concerns about its players' sexuality; see Cahn, 1994) to ongoing anxieties about lesbians and sports. Homophobia, which is closely tied to notions of "appropriate" femininity in sports, continues to be a problem in women's professional, collegiate, and grassroots leagues (see Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Lenskyj, 1987, 1994; Zipter, 1988).

1.2 Title IX and the Struggle for Equity

Although ambivalence over women's physical activity continued into the 20th century, significant opportunities became available, once again in the interest of gender equity. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, meant to guarantee equal provision of educational resources for both genders, has been directly responsible for tremendous gains. Reports tracking the progress of Title IX have shown dramatic increases in girls' and women's participation in high school and collegiate sports in the past thirty years. Participation statistics compiled by athletic federations show increases of 847% at the high school level and 411% at the college level for varsity athletes, between the 1971-72 and 2000-01 academic years (National Coalition for Girls and Women in Education, 2002). At the college level, the number of teams offered in all three NCAA divisions has steadily increased and is currently at an all-time high, with new programs still being added (Carpenter & Acosta, 2002). Surveys of women in white-collar jobs also found that women who came of age after Title IX's implementation participated more in school sports than older cohorts, and those women who participated in team sports were more likely to consider themselves athletes as adults (Sabo & Snyder, 1993). As all of these reports point out, simple increases in opportunity led very directly to increased involvement in sports, disproving the pre-Title IX argument that girls and women were not interested in sports—an argument that is sometimes still invoked, for example when schools have difficulties in providing programs.

Difficulties do still remain, in achieving equity itself and in addressing underlying sentiments toward Title IX and gender equity. The Women's Sports Foundation issued a "report card" on gender equity in 1997, after the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act of

1994 required schools to release participation data. Their survey of NCAA college and university presidents found that, in the 1995-96 academic year, numbers of female athletes were not proportionate to numbers of women as students, women received less money in athletic scholarships, schools spent less on recruiting female athletes, women's teams received less in operating expenditures, women were underrepresented as coaches, especially coaches of men's teams, and they received lower coaching salaries overall (Women's Sports Foundation, 1997). A twenty-five year longitudinal study (Carpenter & Acosta, 2002) has found that in fact, numbers of women as coaches and athletic administrators have decreased in colleges and universities, and the number of women as head coaches of women teams is at an all-time low. Another report (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 2002) states that, although overall participation rates have increased for both genders, female participation in intercollegiate NCAA sports today remains just below rates of male participation before Title IX.

Compliance is still an issue in many schools, and some popular conceptions even blame Title IX for disparities among sports for men and boys. Recently, the Department of Education appointed a Commission on Opportunity in Athletics, which proposed to alter Title IX compliance standards so that they are more lenient. Groups representing men's "minor" sports, particularly wrestling, applauded these proposals and believed that Title IX was responsible cuts in their programs. In fact, major sports like football continue to consume huge budgets and operate at deficit levels, while eliminating less prominent men's sports in the name of Title IX (Conniff, 2003). The proposed changes to Title IX standards were eventually defeated, but this recent battle showed that after 30 years, gender equity in athletics is still contested.

Most of these reports focus on NCAA member schools, but the issues they reflect certainly go beyond collegiate athletics. Title IX was created a specific time, when struggles for women's and civil rights could not be ignored, and was meant to help redress historic inequities in opportunity. Many gains have been made, but at times a backlash is clearly visible. That backlash may be understood as part of a much longer historical trend, in which physical activity itself has held many connotations regarding gender. As I discussed in the previous section, women's bodies have been the focus of intense political and professional discourses. Although similar debate sometimes takes place around male bodies in sport, women and girls are still seen as "special" with regard to physical activity; the current chapter in the Title IX story belies an underlying belief is that sport is a right for men and boys, not to be tampered with, while opportunities for girls and women remain a struggle.

1.3 Physical Activity in Women's Everyday Lives

A common thread throughout all of the above accounts of sport and leisure is a push toward putting women in their place, in a physical and a cultural sense, by valorizing all of the behaviors and aesthetics prescribed to woman as object of desire, nurturer, homemaker, and keeper of moral virtue. From early debates in the professionalized fields of medicine and education, through recent political legislation like Title IX and its corresponding discourse, to everyday opportunities for adult women, sport and leisure continue to be contested domains. Yet women are often a very visible presence in leisure spaces, and when opportunities open up, women quickly fill them, in spite of the push that they might feel away from such opportunities (such as messages that it would be selfish to have leisure time, or that women's sports programs take away

from men's) and the pull toward other demands in their lives (such as housework, child care, occupation, or a sense of obligation toward others).

Physical activity is again today gaining attention in the field of public health, for its potential to prevent problems that are associated with increasingly sedentary lifestyles, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, some types of cancer, anxiety, and depression (see Frank & Engelke, 2001). Science and medicine have also continued to focus on the specific health benefits of physical activity for women, from its immediate effect on heart rate recovery from mental stress (Jamieson et al., 1994) to lessened fatigue and overall improved quality of life during treatment for breast cancer (Schwartz, 1999). However, current professional discourses may have yet to treat the subject of physical activity for women fairly. Eyler et al.'s (1997) review of research dating back to the 1970's found that too few women were included in studies of the effects of physical activity on cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, and cancer, but some studies have indicated that physical activity reduces risks of these diseases for women. Studies of breast cancer showed that active women as a group are at decreased risk, but research on breast cancer and physical activity has had mixed results—some studies showed increased risk and others no association between activity and risk—probably due to methodological limitations. Research has shown more conclusively that physical activity reduces the risk of osteoporosis, is effective in treating depression, and enhances mood states for women.

The implications of physical activity for women's lives may even go beyond the physical effects associated with regular, vigorous activity. In a survey of white collar women by the Women's Sports Foundation (Sabo & Snyder, 1993), physical benefits,

such as good health and increased energy level, were by far the most commonly reported, but women also cited mental, personal, and social benefits. Interestingly, many women, particularly women of color and women at the executive level, also reported business-related benefits. Follow-up interviews with a subsample of the survey suggested that business-related benefits may have been related to sports and fitness, for example via tapping into business networks or accessing decision-making outside of the office, or indirectly by helping women to feel better emotionally and physically and to develop skills like setting objectives and working with others. However, the same women also reported that time constraints prevented them from participating in desired sports and fitness activities, and many felt that working men had more time for sports and fitness at the expense of available time for women (except for single women without children, who reported more time for leisure pursuits than married men with children). These women also reported more structural-level constraints, such as lack of co-worker or employer support, discrimination on racquetball courts and golf courses, and less spousal support for women of color than for white women.

1.4 Patriarchy of Leisure as Constraint

Physical activity has in many ways been gendered throughout industrialized societies. More than twenty years ago, Paul Willis wrote an essay arguing an ideology of sport based on, and perpetuating, assumptions of male strength and overall superiority:

> Sport and biological beliefs about gender difference combine into one of the few privileged areas where we seem to be dealing with unmediated "reality," where we know "what's what" without having to listen to the involved self-serving analysis of theorists, analysts, political groups, etc. Running faster, jumping higher, throwing further can be *seen* – not interpreted. "The natural" is one of the grounds of ideology because of its apparent autonomy from "biased" interpretation. (Willis, 1982: 117)

Willis argued that sport facilitated a "process of legitimation" of a patriarchical social order, meaning that sport is used at every opportunity to prove (heterosexual) male physical superiority, and thus all other types of superiority and privilege, as "natural." Since Willis' essay, many authors have shown that a great deal of energy goes into constructing and upholding what has been called a male hegemony or male preserve of sport, along with a corresponding hyperfemininity, hegemonic femininity, or the "apologetic" in women's sport (e.g., Cahn, 1994; Connell, 1990; Feder, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Kane, 1995; Kidd, 1990; Lenskyj, 1987; Lenskyj, 1994; Mrozek, 1987; Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Wachs, 2002; Whitson, 1990). Sport is thought of as a last refuge of modern-day masculinity, so traits related to gender are constructed and exaggerated for both men (hegemonic masculinity) and women (hegemonic femininity, hyperfemininity, or the female apologetic). Women's athletic feats have been obscured by focusing only on extraordinary examples, by suggesting that they are not in fact "real" women (e.g., sexually or genetically deviant), and through painstaking efforts to emphasize "feminine" and heterosexualized characteristics of prominent female athletes (e.g., provocative poses and elaborate costumes, attention toward hair and makeup, media focus on heterosexual markers like husbands and children). As Mary Jo Kane (1995) argues, the deliberate and artificial categorization of athletic performance into men's and women's sports, and the marginalization of women's accomplishments, uphold deeply held beliefs that any male body is capable of defeating any female body, at any time and in any type of competition. Kane's "oppositional binary" of sport will only be transformed into a true "continuum" with more everyday opportunities for women to demonstrate ability and further theoretical consideration of gender and sport.

Sport as a male preserve, or male hegemony, is also connected to what has been described as a patriarchy of leisure (Griffin et al., 1982). For many years, research has documented that women spend less time than men in leisure activities, and men's leisure has been seen as a natural right and a reward for their work, while women's work, both paid and unpaid, has not equally legitimized their right to leisure (see Wearing, 1998). A set of feminist studies (in Wimbush and Talbot, 1988) of women's leisure, conducted in Great Britain in the 1980's, began deconstructing leisure disparities and examined the ways that gender acted as its own structural constraint for women. For example, work and leisure were often less clearly delineated for women than for men, feelings such as guilt or tiredness interfered with women's leisure activities, and women were policed, by others' actions or by their own fear, in public places for leisure (see Deem, 1988). Women in these studies were more likely than men to focus their activities on their partners' interests and social networks at the expense of their own leisure, to bargain or seek permission for their leisure, or to compromise their leisure as a result of significant life-course events, such as courtship, marriage, having children, and retiring (Green & Hebron, 1988; Mason, 1988; Wimbush, 1988). Whatever freedoms these women found for leisure were "relative"—for example, young working-class women's friendships with one another (Griffiths, 1988) or older working-class women playing bingo (Dixey, 1988)—and were located within the structures, primarily gender, that defined their time and choices, and within what the authors describe as a men's world of leisure.

In the North America, Deborah Bialeschki, Karla Henderson, and their colleagues have explored both the "constraints" and "possibilities" of women's leisure for the past two decades (see Henderson et al., 1989; Henderson et al., 1999). Like their British

counterparts, they also believe that "learned gender roles, gendered power relations in society, and the material condition of women's lives all affect women's level and types of participation" (Henderson et al., 1999: 180). However, they also expand on the idea of structural barriers with their notion of a constraint; a constraint, rather than a barrier, suggests any way that leisure activity is negatively affected, by preventing participation altogether, reducing its frequency or duration, or influencing its quality. In other words, being a woman affects leisure participation but does not prevent it entirely, as the former notion of a barrier dictated.

In their more recent work, Bialeschki and Henderson characterize the constraints that have been identified in leisure research as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural, borrowing from Crawford, et al. (c.f. Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). Intrapersonal constraints for women might include self-consciousness and body image, a lack of skills, or a lack of a sense of entitlement; interpersonal constraints may include a lack of leisure partners or lack of approval and support from others; and structural constraints interfere most directly with leisure participation and include full-time child care or double-duty in and outside of the home for women in heterosexual partnerships, lack of economic resources, poor health and exhaustion, lack of opportunities geared toward or sensitive to women, and a fear of violence (Bialeschki & Henderson, 2000; Henderson et al., 1999).

Factors influencing leisure-time physical activity for women have recently been investigated at each of these levels. In 1996, the U. S. Surgeon General's Office reported that several surveys had found that, in general, people in the United States were not achieving recommended levels of physical activity of at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity, five times or more per week. Women of color and older

women were the groups most likely to be inactive (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). In a review of research on exercise participation through the 1970's and 1980's (King et al., 1992), most studies found lower levels of activity among women than men, but these studies also suggested some possibilities for women. Differences between men and women decreased with age, differences sometimes disappeared when light to moderate activities were included along with vigorous activities, women in one study were more likely to adopt moderate activity over one year, while men were more likely to adopt vigorous activity, and family participation and support were strong and consistent predictors of activity for women only.

More recent research has investigated women's everyday physical activity, particularly women of color over the age of 40. The U. S. Women's Determinants Study, conducted between 1996 and 1997, found that these women were more active than research previously indicated when other activities like occupational and household work were taken into account, but many women still did not meet criteria for regular physical activity, particularly African American and American Indian/Native Alaskan women, women living in rural versus urban areas, women aged 70 and older, and women with lower levels of education (Brownson et al., 2000; King et al., 2000; Wilcox et al., 2000). Other studies have also found that many women did not engage in any leisure-time physical activity and that women of color (which also includes Mexican American women), women over 40, and women with less education were least likely to achieve recommended levels (Ransdell & Wells, 1998), while women most likely to engage in recreational physical activity were young, white, college-educated, with no children at home, and with lower body mass index (Sternfeld et al., 1999). Interpersonal constraints

for the least physically-active women included lack of social support, cultural norms discouraging exercise beyond traditional or work-related activities, lack of facilities or programs, and care-giving responsibilities. Intrapersonal constraints included lack of energy, feeling tired, poor health, concerns about personal safety, and fears about heart attack or injury (Eyler et al., 1998; Eyler et al., 2002; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001; King et al., 2000; Wilbur et al., 2002; Wilcox et al., 2000). Although these women did also report some types of leisure time physical activity (Eyler et al., 1998), and social support in particular encouraged some types of activity (Eyler et al., 1999), so far in the research constraints are more prominent than possibilities.

1.5 Challenging Gender Constraints

Henderson and Bialeschki are also interested in the ways that women negotiate around constraints, challenge the conditions that create and maintain them, or find possibilities within what have been called constraints. However, as they point out, little research has yet addressed such possibilities (Henderson et al., 1999). For example, Henderson and Allen (1991) discuss Carol Gilligan's (1982) notion of an ethic of care as it poses both constraints and possibilities for women's leisure. An ethic of care, which overlaps the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural levels of constraints, dictates reducing harm to self and others and fostering relationships and connectedness throughout one's life. An ethic of care becomes a constraint for women when their caring for others supersedes their own leisure, when leisure does not allow escape from the work of their care-taking roles (e.g., on family vacations or in the preparation for holiday celebrations), or when they choose not to participate in competitive or aggressive activities that impede caring and intimacy. However, an ethic of care also poses

possibilities for women's leisure, because women often find meaning in leisure through its social aspects; leisure possibilities may be found in family relationships and friendships, community volunteering, or an emphasis on values of cooperation, connectedness, and nurturance for their potential to enhance the quality of life.

Another possibility within leisure is the possibility of challenging gender constructs of women as weak, passive, and incapable of controlling their bodies and minds, which are constructed as constantly fluctuating, out-of-control, and imperfect. The concept of "resistance" is often used in feminist research, which suggests that leisure may be a space in which women challenge traditional, mainstream ideas of what is feminine, expand their ideas of what they can accomplish, and ultimately change gender and power structures (see Shaw, 2001). Betsy Wearing has frequently employed the concept of resistance in her research on women and leisure (e.g., Wearing 1992; 1998; Wearing et al., 1994), arguing that leisure activities expose women to alternative discourses about femininity and provide new avenues toward identities. All-women's outdoor leisure organizations have been noted as opportunities for cooperation, encouragement, bonding and connection with others, freedom from imposed gender roles, problem-solving and self-sufficiency, learning new skills in a "safe place," and role-modeling between women (Pohl et al., 2000; Varpalotai, 1992; Yerkes & Miranda, 1985).

There are also some documented cases of women's sports organizations that have subverted a "male model" of sport and have implemented a more radical, feminist approach (see Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994). The most notable examples in sports are probably women's softball leagues, which often identify as lesbian leagues and which emphasize cooperation, safety, inclusiveness, fun, humor, and playful sexuality, over

authority, disparagement, elitism of skill, and winning at all costs. While participants sometimes simply see themselves as having a good time, these leagues have also consciously formulated their feminist approach to sport, for example carefully deliberating league rules in order to allow fairness (Birrell & Richter, 1987; Lenskyj, 1994; Zipter, 1988).

The body itself may also be a site for such resistance, for example when women challenge stereotypes of weakness and frailty through physical fitness activities. However, the study of sports and fitness as a cultural phenomenon also reveals the contradictions of a concept like resistance. As Bordo (1995) carefully demonstrates, and as Wearing (1998) herself acknowledges, women's apparent attempts to capture agency, which might include body sculpting, dieting, or radical alterations through cosmetic surgery and near-starvation, must also be read as the work of discourses that "constrain women to surveille their own bodies in order to normalize them" (Wearing, 1998: 107). M. Ann Hall (1996) also demonstrates nicely the tensions between power and resistance, in her discussion of aerobic dance and women's body building. Aerobics, and the fitness industry in general, represent a modern, from-the-inside-out commodification of femininity (similar to corsets or girdles), but at the same time offer a contradictory set of possibilities for women to experience joy, self-confidence, physical strength, and energy. While aerobics might then contain accidental discoveries or hidden possibilities within outward conformity to a regime of femininity, body building as a "gender-inappropriate" sport of strength and stamina also poses contradictions for women, who are careful to avoid an appearance of "excess" masculinity even as they pursue extremely muscular bodies.

1.6 Women, Physical Activity, and Public Spaces

My discussion in the above sections has progressed from historical and cultural constructs of gender and physical activity, to everyday constraints for women, to possibilities for challenging gender constructs through physical activity. In order for possibilities to become realities, however, there must be places for women to realize those possibilities. Outdoor public spaces are an important resource, first on a practical level because they are presumably accessible to everyone. They also afford a range of possible activities, which are important, because choice is a defining feature of leisure (see Henderson et al., 1989; 1999). At the same time there may also be many kinds of experiences for women in public spaces, from freedom to fear.

Academic literature and the mass media have now begun to characterize the current state of inactivity and related health problems in the U. S. as epidemic. Although it is difficult to compare physical activity levels across the past few decades, the incidence of obesity or being overweight is increasing, due to a complex of factors ranging from the availability and marketing of soft drinks and fast foods, to the increased use of televisions, computers, and automobiles (see French et al., 2001). In their review of research published from the 1970's through the early 1990's, King et al. (1992) found that only a few studies addressed the role of the built environment, but since then more research has attempted to flesh out the ways that the physical environment influences exercise, for example through the design of urban forms that encourage walking or bicycling over driving (see Frank & Engelke, 2001), aesthetic appeal, perceived safety, or access to facilities such as pools, parks, health clubs, and trails (see for example, Baker et al., 2000; French et al., 2001; Humpel et al., 2002). The recent interest in the physical

environment is part of an ecological approach toward intervention, to encourage "active living" or "active communities," for example by creating walking trails, promoting physical activity in schools and workplaces, encouraging use of stairs, and building community-based supports (see Baker et al., 2000; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001; Kreyling & Ketcham, 2001; Sallis et al., 1998).

Some research on factors influencing women's physical activity has been careful to consider physical environmental constraints and enablers for women. Environmental enablers in this research included the presence of hills, scenery, dogs, and others exercising outdoors (King et al., 2000), while not having enjoyable scenery and not seeing others exercising were particular constraints for rural women (Wilcox et al., 2000). Beautiful outdoor places were especially important for Native American women (Eyler et al., 1998). Walking was a preferred activity for many women (Eyler et al., 1998; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001), especially women with less education and lower income (Brownson et al., 2000). Women's recommendations included environmental supports such as safe places to walk, in addition to supports needed to help overcome structural constraints, such as access to indoor facilities and assistance with household and caregiving duties (Eyler et al., 2002).

Research on women's physical activity has also taken into account issues of safety. Numerous studies have focused on women's fear of violent interpersonal crime, especially sexual violence, which women experience acutely in public spaces (e.g., Day, 1999a; Day, 1999b; Gordon & Riger, 1991; Koskela, 1997; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1991; 1997; Valentine, 1989). However, the concept of outdoor safety is a complex one and has so far been an inconsistent predictor of women's physical

activity patterns. In the U. S. Women's Determinants Study, safety was measured through several variables, including interviewees' reports of crime, lack of safe places to exercise, and perceptions of safety while walking or jogging during the day, in addition to other features that might indicate physical safety, such as streetlights and sidewalks. Although these environmental features sometimes ranked high among reported potential barriers—for example, African American women reported lack of a safe place as the most frequent barrier—none of them were significant predictors of physical activity (King et al., 2000; Wilcox et al., 2000).

Further exploration also indicates that safety is a prominent concern for women, even if not always an outright barrier—a constraint rather, in the words of Bialeschki and Henderson (2000)—which affects physical activity in qualitative ways that may not be reflected through quantitative analyses. Whyte and Shaw's (1994) in-depth interviews with a small group of undergraduates in Ontario found that fear of crime sometimes prevented sports and leisure activities, but fear also modified the quality and nature of their experiences. Women reported ceasing, reducing, changing the location of, or finding partners for activities like walking, jogging, or swimming. They also reported that fear moderated their enjoyment of activities, because of anxiety, loss of spontaneity, and frustration over extensive planning. In Eyler et al.'s (1998) focus groups with minority women in California and Missouri, fear of interpersonal crime and fear of going out after dark were frequently-mentioned barriers to physical activity. In the Women's Cardiovascular Health Network Project, based at several sites in the South and Midwest, women consistently reported safety as a constraint, but different concerns emerged for women in urban and rural settings. Lack of sidewalks in their neighborhoods was a

concern for rural women, and while urban women had access to trails and parks, they avoided those places for fear of crime, such as drug dealing and shootings. All of those women feared certain environmental elements, no matter where they lived, such as harassment and unleashed dogs (Eyler et al., 2002; Wilbur et al., 2002).

1.7 Women in Urban Parks

Urban parks might be an important, possibly under-used, environmental resource for women. Urban women in the Women's Cardiovascular Health Network Project mentioned the need to address safety and police presence in urban parks (Wilbur, 2002), but little research seems to have paid attention to women's overall perceptions and uses of urban parks in the United States. In the past few decades, the parks and recreation field has only begun to show recognition that women constitute user groups, and a circular logic often assumes that there is no need to provide for their needs and interests, because women are not present, or they are not participating in a range of activities. When this research does discuss women in leisure and recreation, it seems to address members of the national parks and recreation field, or providers of wilderness adventure programs (e.g., Bialeschki, 1999; Henderson, 1995; Yerkes & Miranda, 1985). "Outdoors" in this literature refers to remote wilderness, guided tours, and adventure activities, but everyday outdoor environments like urban parks do not seem to be included.

Research on women's uses of urban parks in the U. S. seems to be sparse and has so far concluded that women are under-represented in parks, or that they restrict their park use to certain times and areas, because of concerns for safety and child-care roles. For example, in Carr et al.'s (1992) brief mention of women in New York City public spaces, women were only one-third of the users Bryant Park and were only found at its

fountain (prior to its re-construction, which was aimed at driving out unsavory users—see Harnick, 2000). In a study of public parks in Chicago, Hutchison (1994) observed that women's presence reflected child-care roles and appeared to be structured around concerns for personal safety. Women there were most often engaged in stationary activities, more often in (mostly Hispanic) neighborhood versus lakefront parks, during afternoons and evenings, and more likely to be in family or mixed social groups than alone or with other adult women. Another study (Westover, 1986) of urban and suburban parks in Illinois found that women were more likely than men to report avoiding parks or parts of parks because of safety concerns. There were no differences in men's and women's frequencies or durations of use in this study, but women were more likely to be in large groups or with young children under 13 and to use the park during the afternoon or for specific facilities such as the zoo, compared to men, friend groups, and couples, who used parks for activities like team sports and fishing.

I should also note that data from the two latter studies of women in urban parks are now more than 20 years old, and I have been unable to find any, more recent or in-depth studies of women in urban parks in the United States. However, there have been some recent studies of park use in Great Britain, which elaborate on the ways that women use and experience parks, with safety one issue among many. In the Woods Project (Burgess, 1998), discussion groups and site visits at two locations in Nottingham and London found that users believed that women and children were likely to be targets of crime in urban wooded areas, due to both physical and social dimensions. Physical dimensions included a sense of feeling enclosed or trapped, isolated, and vulnerable to others, all due to dense landscaping. However, social dimensions were more important

than physical ones; men and boys expressed concern for women's safety, and women feared attack in urban parks, which was reinforced by the presence of "maniacs, weirdos, nutters," and men drinking alcohol. Women also reported episodes of flashing, which provoked shock, outrage, and disgust, and for some women, cessation of park use. Women's perceptions also hinged on reports of episodes that took place in parks, such as the murder of one woman, which took on the proportion of "local myth."

Curson and Kitts (2000) three-year case studies of London parks presented a somewhat different picture of women in urban parks. Their research found that women under the age of 16 and over the age of 65 were slightly under-represented, compared to populations who lived near parks, but women between the ages of 25 and 44 were well-represented as park users. Surveys showed some differences between men and women in park uses and values. Women more often used parks for dog-walking and bringing children, more often observed or fed wildlife, and placed more value on "natural" aspects and social uses of parks, while men more often used parks for peace and quiet, exercise, sports, and short-cuts. A small but significant proportion of women were more concerned than men about safety in parks, but women and men had different reasons for safety concerns—for women, vulnerability to attack and dogs, and for men, speeding cyclists and vehicles. Women were also particularly interested in special activities and events, the lack of which they cited as a reason for not using parks.

The outdoor environment may hold many possibilities for women's physical activities, from scenery through social opportunities, but research on women's activities and the physical environment is relatively new. Safety in particular is a complex issue and not yet fully understood, and is probably best described as a constraint but not a

barrier. Research on women in urban parks, although not very extensive, also suggests that fear and safety may operate as parameters for use, but women also do use parks, especially in groups and with children, and they value parks for their opportunities for contact with others and with nature. Women may or may not be under-represented in parks, but the important question may not be whether they use parks—rather, how do they use and experience parks?

1.8 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

As I mentioned earlier, this dissertation explores the experiences of women who regularly use Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York, specifically for physical activities. Leisure time physical activity is an important part of women's lives, but one that is still not fully realized. While significant advances have been made, a lack of real opportunity continues today and is related to overarching beliefs about entitlement and ability, which sometimes act in subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, ways—from attitudes about what is "feminine" through the constraining demands of women's lives. The absence of much research on women's uses and experiences of urban public parks might even reflect an underlying belief that these are not places for women, but urban parks might in fact be very important places for women to realize a range of everyday experiences. Therefore, on a practical level, my interests here include documentation of the constraints and possibilities of this particular urban, outdoor space as a potential place for physical activity for women.

On a more theoretical level, I am also interested in the ways that gender is enacted through physical activity, and specifically through physical activity that takes place in public spaces. Gender is culturally constructed, and constructions of space intersect with

constructions of gender; as I discussed earlier in this chapter, notions about the private sphere correspond to what is "female," and the public sphere to what is "male." As an outdoor, urban space, Prospect Park is unarguably a place that is commonly conceived as "public," but what may be less obvious is the shared set of conceptions about spaces like the park that help to maintain the public-private dichotomy and its close connection to gender. If, for example, popular beliefs about danger in the park apply disproportionately to women, or if management entities continue to plan for park uses according to stereotypical gendered activities, then women may be less able to use or less comfortable in using the park in desired ways. Physical activities may further complicate this picture, because on the one hand they are still a contested set of activities for women, so women might face difficulties such as negative attitudes toward their presence in the park. On the other hand, opportunities in sports and fitness have grown rapidly in recent decades and have paved the way for women to use public spaces in more visible, if not more active, ways.

This research therefore seeks to understand the landscapes of women's physical activities in this urban park, how cultural constructs regarding gender, place, and activity are apparent in those landscapes, and how those constructs may be challenged. My guiding research questions are as follows:

How do women use the park and perceive it as a setting for physical activities? In other words, what sorts of environmental constraints and possibilities are afforded there? Answers to these questions will help to inform the growing body of research that is concerned with understanding the physical environment as it influences leisure time physical activity, particularly for women.

How do women conceive of the park as a physical and social space? How do they conceive of themselves and their bodies in relation to such a public, urban outdoor space? These conceptions are likely to converse with cultural constructions of gender and space, for example through ideas about women, danger, and safety in the park. I will explore some of the ways that women's conceptions of themselves and the park interact with those cultural constructions.

What sort of role do physical activities play in women's uses and perceptions of the park? Sports and fitness activities are particular ways of using space, and today's expanding opportunities for women might translate into revised conceptions of gender and space, both in the ways that public space is physically produced (e.g., places where women play sports or exercise) and in the ways that it is socially and culturally constructed (e.g., as a place that is appropriate for women).

Urban parks and other public spaces have often been conceived as places that are uninviting and inappropriate for women, and physical activity has likewise been constructed within notions about risk, propriety, and gender. These are not just popular conceptions; they have also influenced professional discourses about women, their bodies, their health, and their experiences of the public and private spheres. Ultimately women carry with them the burden of society's concerns about public places and public behavior. Even today, when a woman creates opportunities for physical activity and utilizes an available space like the park, for example if she chooses to go jogging alone in the park after dusk or before dawn, she confronts deeply-held beliefs about the female body, whether she intends or wants to confront those beliefs. It is important, then, to explore those beliefs and their meanings for women, for the immediate purpose of providing

opportunities for physical activity, and to contribute to longer-term and broader understandings of gender as it shapes everyday life.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

I have chosen Prospect Park as the site for my research because, judging by my many visits there over the past several years, it is apparently a significant space for many people, hosting many different activities, and therefore a place where women might find a range of opportunities for physical activities. At the same time, it is also a place where conflicts might arise among its many users, and it is a setting for local legends about urban dangers, so women may also confront and negotiate real risks associated with outdoor activity as well as the culturally-constructed beliefs about what women can and should do in relation to public spaces and physical activities. In addition to conducting observations across two summers in Prospect Park, I interviewed women who used the park regularly for a variety of physical activities. In this chapter I describe those interviews and observations, and I present a brief overview of Prospect Park's design, historical context, and current uses and significance.

2.1 Prospect Park: History, Users, and Uses

Prospect Park is a large, urban park of more than 500 acres, bordering on several, mostly residential but demographically diverse neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. There are only two other comparable large, green spaces in the borough of Brooklyn. One is The Green-Wood Cemetery near Prospect Park, which is not open to the general public except through guided tours. The other is Marine Park, a large park several miles from Prospect Park with a golf course, courts for other sports, a nature center, and walking

trails. Prospect Park might therefore be a very significant space for those who live in its immediate vicinity and beyond.

Although social characteristics of Brooklyn residents like race, ethnicity, language, and income range immensely, 2000 U.S. census data show a black-white distinction around the park that would later emerge in some of my interviews. Along the entire east side of the park, from Grand Army Plaza along Flatbush Avenue, Ocean Avenue, and Parkside Avenue (see Figure 2 for a map of Prospect Park), are some of the highest concentrations of black people in all of Brooklyn—more than 3,000 per census tract in many of the census tracts along that side of the park and beyond. To the west of the park is a corresponding high concentration of white people, particularly along Prospect Park West (more than 3,000 per census tract) but also along Prospect Park Southwest and in many of the blocks beyond the park to the west, where there are 1,000 to 3,000 white people per census tract. Generally, in neighborhoods where there are mostly black people, there are far fewer white people (between 0 and 500 per census tract), and in neighborhoods where there are mostly white people, there are far fewer black people (between 100 and 1,000 per census tract). The only exception is Prospect Heights, north of the park, which seems to have more of a mix of black and white than other areas. There is less of a distinction among Hispanic people, who live all around the park (between 100 and 1,000 per census tract). The smallest census group is Asians, who are between 0 and 500 in the census tracts immediately surrounding Prospect Park (www.ci.nyc.ny.us).

The best guesses of trained observers at selected entry points in the park between 1996 and 1997 roughly estimated that park users are primarily an even distribution of

black, Latino, and white users, with a total annual estimate of five million visitors to the park. Asian people also use the park, if only in small numbers (as well as others, based on my research, like Pacific Island and Middle Eastern people). Observations and interviews also indicated that park users came mostly from surrounding neighborhoods. However, black and Latino users—who were also more often working-class—tended to travel further to get to the park and valued the park more for social and cultural activities, such as picnics, sports, and music or dance, including a regularly-occurring drummers' circle made up mostly of West Indian and African men. White, middle-class users, on the other hand, were more likely to walk to the park and to value its presence for contact with and preservation of nature, although nature was one of the many shared values among different user groups (Taplin, 2002; Taplin et al., 1998).

The park was designed and its construction overseen in the 1860's by the landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvin Vaux, whose influences are still strongly felt throughout the city and, in the case of Olmsted, throughout the United States. The designers' primary intent was to capture and build upon nature within the city; they incorporated "stage sets" throughout the park for a variety of activities (Fein, 1986) while at the same time artfully creating an illusion of nature untouched by the hand of man (Spirn, 1995). Like Central Park, the nation's first of the "pleasure ground" parks, Prospect Park was meant to bestow both physical and spiritual benefits upon the masses. Moderate physical activity and proper "enjoyment"—rather than rowdy working-class play or displays of urban consumption, such as the sale of food and alcohol—were the ideals that planners envisioned. In spite of a distaste for vigorous activities, which had a working-class connotation, activities like cycling, baseball, and carriage racing soon

made their way into the pleasure ground parks, especially when middle-class users insisted on making them a part of their play (Cranz, 1982).

Olmsted's and Vaux's aesthetic influences were European, particularly the parks in England that Olmsted visited and wrote about, as well as the "rural" cemeteries that were becoming popular in the United States, including The Green-Wood Cemetery, which was built before Prospect Park. While striving for a distinctly American landscape, the designers incorporated three ideals of English landscape design to create a pastoral setting—the "picturesque" (rugged, wooded areas, i.e., the park's Ravine section), the "beautiful" (open, vast lawns, particularly the park's Long Meadow), and the "sublime" (sweeping views, found in different areas throughout the park). They retained the natural topography of the site that would become the park, which falls on the ridge left behind thousands of years ago by a glacier. Today one can still wander through the park and experience changes in scenery and elevation that cannot be found in many other places within the city. A water system, now fed by city water supplies, makes its way from the park's higher elevations and culminates in a lake that was also constructed on the site (Fein, 1986).

Prospect Park's design also reflected the growing public health movement of the 19th century, in which Olmsted was influential. In the context of industrial and technological advances, migration, and rapid growth of cities, urban planners and reformers were concerned with containing the spread of disease and preventing epidemics in cities. Olmsted embraced the popular, pre-microbiology theory blaming noxious gases from decaying organic matter, or miasma, for causing (rather than transmitting) diseases, and he incorporated the theory into his design. Trees would act as

a barrier to miasma, absorb excess moisture from the soil, and shade soil from the heat that might cause gases to erupt. According to public health theory and epidemiological data, Olmsted also advocated for sufficient living space in cities, to allow for proper circulation and diffusion of miasma, but urban dwellers might also be better able to resist disease with opportunities to visit parks, breathe fresh air, and steel their lungs against noxious gases (Szczygiel & Hewitt, 2000). In the planning stages, proponents of the eventual Prospect Park site argued that it fortuitously possessed the desired qualities for such a "rural" park (and in part because of the nearby location of a reservoir, which would be well-served by surrounding, uncontaminated land), including drainage and dry soil, light, and circulation of air. The wooded Ravine section in particular became a place for convalescence and healthy outdoor activities in the rapidly growing city of Brooklyn (Fein, 1986).

The park is now over 130 years old and has achieved historical landmark status with city and national commissions (Walmsley & Company, 1986). After a period of "decline" in the 1960's and 1970's, when many parks suffered disinvestments of public funds, physical decay, and negative public perceptions, Prospect Park is a well-utilized urban resource and a source of pride for the private groups and individuals that have invested in it (Graff, 1985). For this research, I have focused on the vigorous physical activities that take place in the park. Paved parking areas and roadways, especially the road that loops around the park's perimeter, and open lawns—Olmsted's and Vaux's "beautiful" element—are prominent locations for many informal physical activities, including soccer, running, cycling, and in-line skating (rollerblading). A set of seven ballfields, the first of which were added in 1959 (Fein, 1986), now occupy the

southwestern corner of the Long Meadow and are frequently occupied with baseball and softball games. However, athletic activities were never really part of the vision of the pleasure ground, and any kind of rowdy play has probably been contested throughout the history of the pleasure ground parks; as Graff (1985) comments, the Long Meadow in Prospect Park was "barbarously" fenced off for baseball under the authority of Robert Moses. The underlying sentiment seems to be that such activities belong in the smaller, neighborhood-scale reform era parks, which were built after pleasure ground parks and intended to contain structured and supervised play for working-class adults and children (Cranz, 1982).

My study also included the Parade Ground, a 40-acre parcel roughly at the southern tip of the park originally included in the park's design for the purpose of military exercises. Intended from the start to divert the kind of rough-and-tumble activity that would compromise the park's soil, grass, and vegetation, the Parade Ground continues to be the site of several athletic activities (Graff, 1985). It has recently been undergoing renovations and is currently home to a football field, soccer/multipurpose fields, and baseball/softball fields (see Prospect Park's website, www.prospectpark.org). There is also a Tennis Center at the Parade Ground, part of a system of courts operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation requiring an annual fee of $55, which grants use of tennis courts city-wide (I have not included the Tennis Center in my research, because of its semi-private nature; I wanted to look at public spaces that were free of cost and therefore presumably accessible to everyone). Finally, there is a playground at the Parade Ground's east side, which also includes a set of basketball courts. My research at the Parade Ground focused primarily on these basketball courts, where young women and

girls sometimes played basketball among the men and boys who were more predominant.

I have employed a qualitative approach in this research, because I am interested in not only documenting women's physical activities in Prospect Park but also in understanding the meanings of these activities in relation to current beliefs about gender, physical activity, and public space. It is important to articulate the constraints and possibilities for physical activity for women within the urban environment, but these constraints and possibilities also intersect with notions about what is possible, appropriate, or safe for women to do. Women themselves are likely to incorporate such notions into their everyday activities, perhaps by obeying behavioral proscriptions or by conceding opportunities for various reasons, or perhaps they disregard messages about what they cannot or should not do and find unexpected opportunities for themselves among the different social, physical, and temporal landscapes of the park. I have attempted to capture some of these complexities of women's experiences through ethnographic-style observations and in-depth interviews, which I describe below.

2.2 Observations

I conducted periodic observations in Prospect Park from June through August of 2000 and March through October of 2001. Altogether I conducted observations on 45 different occasions, 16 in 2000 and 29 in 2001. I used Spradley's (1980) guidelines for participant observation, to get a more formal picture (versus my previous anecdotal observations during my own use of the park) of patterns of activity there, such as parts of the park that people use more or less often, activities that take place in different parts of the park, variations across time (e.g., morning/midday/evening, weekday/weekend, seasonal variations), individual versus group activities, compositions of groups, and

particular patterns for women. Initially, during June of 2000, my observations consisted mostly of preliminary, broad descriptions of activities taking place throughout the park at varying times; I rode my bicycle or skated on my in-line skates to a selected location in the park and spent anywhere from ten minutes to one hour recording the type of activities that I observed and descriptions of the people engaged in those activities, including guesses about ages, ethnicities, and relationships of people to one another (e.g., parent-child). When finished, I moved on to do the same at another location until I had made my way through the park. The park is very large, and this was a challenging exercise, but I continued throughout the course of my observations to attempt to record any information that might give me a further sense of what goes on in the park, for example by making occasional notes after I had gone for a bike ride of my own, in addition to continuing to make note of as many activities as I could on each visit.

Over time my notes became more focused not only on the what, where, and when of my observations, but also on the how and why, as I began to look more closely and spend more time observing and recording narrative descriptions of events that interested me, such as a women's softball game, an informal "pick-up" game of mixed-gender soccer, volleyball, or football, or a running race. I also began to inquire about women's physical activities taking place in the park, by making phone calls, checking web sites, talking to friends and acquaintances, and once attending a meeting of the Prospect Park Track Club, so that I became better able to locate women in the park as time went on. Finally, as I became a more confident researcher, I spent more of my time in the park speaking to people there, like the teenage girls who played basketball at the Parade Ground or the women who gathered for pickup soccer games and softball practices in the

Long Meadow. I recorded those conversations as quickly and as accurately as I could. Some of the contacts that I made also led to more in-depth interviews, which I discuss further in the section below.

There were patterns that emerged across place, time, and activity. Weekdays during midday were the most quiet, when I would notice some mothers, and occasionally fathers, perhaps jogging, walking, or skating while pushing very small children in baby-jogger strollers, or with children who may have been between the ages of about 5 and 10 riding their bicycles. People might be sitting on benches at the park's perimeters—for example, older white folks near the entrance at Grand Army Plaza and black men of different ages near the entrance at Ocean and Parkside Avenues. Mothers and other caretakers played with children at the park's playgrounds, groups of children and counselors wearing day camp t-shirts would play on grassy areas or the parking lot at the 15th Street entrance, or single-sex groups of Jewish school children and their teachers probably from nearby yeshivas would occasionally find a spot for supervised recreation. People were sprinkled throughout the park sunbathing, reading, nature watching, listening to a radio, playing musical instruments, or looking as if they were meditating.

Weekday mornings were quite busy when the weather was warm, and evenings were even busier. These were the times when vehicles were permitted to use the park's perimeter road as a thoroughfare, and at the same time, many people used the road for their morning or evening workout, some of whom also used a dirt trail that has been worn from use, just inside of the road. Two of the road's wide outer lanes are designated for vehicles, with one narrower inner lane for bicycles and skaters and another for joggers and walkers, and only painted lines and stencils to indicate who belongs where (See

Figure 1). Traffic does not seem to obey the 30-mile-per-hour speed limit, and in fact the presence of vehicles in the park is an ongoing issue of contention, taken up in particular by the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives. There has been one recently documented incident to my knowledge, when a cyclist was killed by a car in the park (Arenson, 1997). There were many times when I made note of frightening-looking episodes of cars honking, cyclists darting through traffic to avoid slower-moving exercisers on foot and skates, angry yelling, and once or twice even a parent just barely preventing a child from heading into harm's way. There were also many times when I experienced frights of my own during workouts, or when I argued with others over proper safety and etiquette as many of simultaneously us jockeyed for positions on the road.[1] On any given evening at the height of the warm season, the park would become downright frenetic, even once the park employees had erected the barriers to direct traffic away from most of the roadway. All sorts of users would then fill the park—Little League players and their families, adults playing soccer, baseball, and softball, sometimes a running race, families out for fresh air, horseback riders, dog walkers, people watchers, and so on—until they were driven out by nightfall.

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[1] Car-free hours vary from season to season and year to year, depending in part on politics, but basically rules are more liberal toward traffic during the cold weather; during the warm weather traffic is permitted in the park only during rush hours, such as 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. However, traffic is always permitted on a small section between Parkside Avenue/Ocean Avenue and Lincoln Road/Ocean Avenue, presumably to allow access to the parking lot at Wollman Rink. Any vehicles that have entered during cars-permitted hours may also park at the lot near 15th Street/Bartel Pritchard Circle, for example to attend a Little League game, and then exit via Prospect Park Southwest/16th Street at any time.

FIGURE 1: THE PERIMETER ROAD THAT LOOPS AROUND PROSPECT PARK, ON A WEEKEND IN AUTUMN. (PHOTO BY AUTHOR)

Weekends were also very busy during warm weather, probably furthest at the active end of the spectrum. As early as 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. on a Saturday or Sunday there was often a bike race, and already other exercisers began to compete with these cyclists for use of the road. Sometimes this competition even resulted in a collision, and I have heard anectodally of one death as a result, when an older man on his way to the lake for some reason failed to obey warnings of an oncoming, high-speed group of cyclists. The park teemed with organized sports in the mornings and afternoons, again most notably soccer, baseball, and softball. As the day would wear on, the park also began to fill with picnickers, casual strollers, visitors to the lake, Wildlife Center, or Boathouse (recently renovated as the Audubon Center), and maybe a concert, parade, or festival. The road at this time had now become a gauntlet where children played, teenagers and adults buzzed remote-control cars, life-sized trolleys and occasional emergency vehicles passed through,

and exercisers of all sizes, types, and speeds spread themselves across, some still stubbornly trying to weave their way through at high speeds. At the entrances to the road, where the pavement is smooth and wide, adults and teenagers sometimes practiced in-line and roller-skating around a series of plastic orange cones, or occasionally they would set up goals and play "roller soccer." Any available space in the park might be used to play catch or Frisbee, pull together a game of touch football, set up a volleyball net, or practice martial arts or traditional folk dances.

2.3 Interviews

In the summer and fall of 2001, I conducted interviews with 41 women, who regularly used Prospect Park for a variety of physical activities, including walking or running, training for endurance events such as marathons and triathlons, or playing team sports such as softball, soccer, and basketball. Many also used other open spaces throughout the city, and they often made comparisons between Prospect Park and Central Park. A small subset of these women used Central Park more regularly than Prospect Park, and I included their interviews once I had sufficient numbers of women who used Prospect Park, so that I could hear some of their perspectives on New York City public spaces and physical activities. Some were interesting for particular reasons, such as a woman who regularly surfed at Rockaway Beach or another who continued long-distance cycling in and around the city well into her 50's. All of these Central Park users lived in Manhattan and responded to an interviewee-recruiting email, which I describe shortly.

2.3.1 Interview Participants

The first section of Table 1 summarizes my interview recruiting strategies. I began by enlisting a friend who ran in the park and an acquaintance who bicycled there, in order to conduct pilot interviews. I asked for their feedback on the interview instrument and made some changes accordingly. I also incorporated these pilot interviews into my analysis, as themes emerged there that corresponded to themes in other interviews. I next began recruiting interviewees in the park, during my summer 2001 observations, by approaching women, introducing myself, describing my research project, and giving them a flier which also described my research and included my contact information (see Appendix A). Two of these women were willing to be interviewed on-the-spot, one on a park bench at the Parade Ground and the other in her home, which was near the park. The rest offered emails or phone numbers so that I could contact them and arrange an interview place and time. I also contacted the president of the Prospect Park Track Club, which used the park for some of its organized events and whose members often met to train in the park together. I obtained the president's (who was a woman) permission to attend one of the club's monthly meetings, where I introduced myself and my research, which led to two interviews, one with a member who introduced herself to me, and another with the president herself. I obtained a total of seven interviews using this direct kind of recruitment strategy.

I also began to recruit interviewees less directly, by asking for referrals from acquaintances that I knew through my own physical activities or who otherwise might have had contacts with women who used the park, and through a "snowball" sampling strategy in which I asked the interviewees themselves for referrals. I recruited a total of

11 interviewees in this way.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

		Number of Women
Recruitment	Friend/acquaintance (pilot interviews)	2
	Met in park during observations	7
	Met at Prospect Park Track Club meeting	2
	Introduced through acquaintance/snowball sampling	11
	Prospect Park users who responded to email	13
	Central Park users who responded to email	6
Age	18-29	5
	30-39	21
	40-49	10
	50-59	3
	60-69	1
	70-79	0
	80-89	1
Race/ethnicity	White	31
	African American	5
	Filipina	2
	Latina-Asian American	1
	Jamaican	1
	Cuban	1
		Total number of interviews = 41

Finally, I sent an email describing my research and requesting participants to the president of a New York City gay, lesbian, and gay-friendly cycling club, about which I learned from a bike-racing acquaintance. The president forwarded my email to the cycling club and to its affiliated running club, and some of the women who received the message also forwarded it to others, including the members of a women's ice hockey team that practiced at Wollman Rink in Prospect Park. I received an overwhelming response from more than 40 women and ultimately arranged to interview 13 who used Prospect Park, many for team sports such as softball, basketball, and ice hockey, but also

for other activities like walking, jogging, and cycling. Many of the endurance athletes in this group also trained for special events, such as a marathon, triathlon, or AIDS-benefit ride. I also arranged interviews with six women from this group who primarily used Central Park, whom I mentioned above. Many of the women who responded to this email were lesbians, but not all of them were. I did not ask for this information, but many offered it during the course of the interview. For those who did not, I have not attempted to guess, and I only offer whatever descriptive information I have, such as "white, single, student/teacher/attorney" (see Appendix B).

Table 1 also summarizes ages and racial or ethnic background of my interviewees. Five of these women were aged 18 to 29; there was only one 18-year-old, and the rest were between the ages of 20 and 29. The largest age group included women between the ages of 30 and 39, which comprised 21 women. These two groups combined, a total of 26 women, represent the same cohort more likely to identify itself as athletes in the survey of white-collar women conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation (Sabo & Snyder, 1993) because of post-Title IX opportunities; some were age 10 or younger when Title IX was enacted, and some were not even born until after its enactment. Ten of my interviewees were between the ages of 40 and 49, three were between the ages of 50 and 59, one woman was 65, and one woman, who was 85, boasted that she was the oldest living National Figure Skating champion in the United States. This 40-plus group, a total of 15 women, is one of the groups that has been the focus of recent research (e.g., Brownson et al., 2000; King et al., 2000; Ransdell & Wells, 1998; Sternfeld et al., 1999; Wilcox et al., 2000), because it is likely that they do not meet recommended levels of physical activity, especially women of color in this age group. However, white women by

far made up the largest racial group among my interviewees; there were 31 (also in Table 1). The rest were African American (5), Filipina (2), one woman who described herself as Cuban, one who described herself as Latina and Asian-American, and one who described herself as Jamaican but found it uncomfortable to call herself "black," a descriptive category that, as she explained, is not used in Jamaica.

In Appendix B, I present more detailed profiles of each interviewee not included in Table 1. Many of them were professionals, such as attorneys, administrators, and teachers. Some were graduate students and freelance writers or photographers. Thirteen had children of varying ages, from pre-school through adult, and two also had grandchildren. Four of the women with children were partnered lesbians, where both partners agreed to be interviewed (i.e., two pairs of women). Only two women with school-aged children (both African-American) identified as full-time stay-at-home mothers, but they explained that they had other careers that were on hold at the moment; one was a fitness instructor and the other a landscape designer. Two of the African American women did not have white-collar jobs, one who was a security guard who had been laid off and was awaiting placement at a new job, and another who was 18, attending one of the City University of New York's community colleges, and looking for paid work. The 85-year-old woman had spent much of her adult life raising her children and continued to keep quite busy, attending church and jogging daily, and volunteering weekly for a phone-in radio program that assisted callers with a variety of issues from food stamps to parking tickets. In sum, most of the women gave the impression that they were very similar to me in background: in their 30's, white, from working-class or middle-class backgrounds, who were graduate students or who had freelance or full-time

professional careers.

2.3.2 Interview Procedures

My interviews were semi-structured, asking women a set of pre-determined questions but also allowing for exploration of topics that triggered a show of emotion or that related particularly to my research questions regarding the park as a place for exercise and as a site for the enactment of ideas about gender, physical activities, and public spaces. My interview design and implementation were influenced by Spradley's (1979) guidelines for the ethnographic interview and by Seidman's (1990) discussion of phenomenological interviewing. I began by asking women general, "grand tour" type questions about their recent physical activities and the park, and interviews progressed toward more phenomenological discussion of activities, that is the meanings of the park as a space, physical activities in general, and physical activities in the park in particular. Some interviews were less structured, as I allowed women to progress with their own narratives, which often touched upon many of my topics of interest without my probing often or even at all (see Quasthoff, 1997). A few women had also reviewed my interview flier in advance and considered the answers to the questions that it outlined, at least one of whom even jotted down answers. Specifically, the questions that I used to guide these interviews addressed current and past physical activities in the park and elsewhere, perceptions and patterns of use of the park, ways in which the park might accommodate women especially, and meanings of physical activity throughout the interviewee's life. At the end of the interview, I also asked for personal background information that had not already been offered and for referral information for other potential interviewees. The interview guide is included as Appendix C. I also provided interviewees with a copy of a

park map to facilitate discussion of specific places and activity patterns in the park.

Most interviews took place at interviewees' homes or workplace, or at a coffee shop or restaurant, and one woman who lived nearby came to my apartment for her interview. Two interviews took place in Prospect Park (including one at the Parade Ground), and one was in a small park in upper Manhattan, near the university where the interviewee was a student. There was no formal incentive for the interview, but I gave ten dollars to the college student who was not working. I tape-recorded all of the interviews, except for my interview with the 85-year-old woman, who spoke for about two-and-one-half hours but never directly assented when I asked her permission to turn on the tape recorder. I took notes during her interview and typed them up in more detail, attempting to capture her most prominent points, immediately after the interview. All other interviewees agreed to be recorded and signed formal consent forms approved by my university's Institutional Review Board, and I transcribed their interview tapes.

2.4 Analysis

My first level of analysis involved a content-based reading of observation notes and interview transcripts, in which I categorized themes that emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) regarding patterns of activities in the park, particularly ways that women used the park. However, I have also used a discourse analysis approach to further explore the meanings of themes, which entailed repeated, close readings of these texts for what they say between the lines, as women described and reconstructed their experiences. As Parker (1997) has explained, discourse analysis has a history as far back as the late 1970's, with Foucault's work on deconstruction of historical texts and present-day talk, in order to uncover the social, ideological, and political interests that those texts serve. Parker further

explains that mainstream psychology disagrees over a discourse analysis approach—what it is and whether it is useful or valued—and what is now called "discursive psychology" might look at texts within their contexts, for example from an approach of cultural relativism or plurality, but still evades issues of power and ideology. In this dissertation, and especially in my later chapters, I (hopefully) rely on a more critical approach to psychology, as I explore some of the ways that these interview narratives, and sometimes my observation notes, reflect both dominant discourses of gender and power, as well as deconstructions of those discourses.

2.4.1 Analysis of Observations

All notes on my observations were recorded in a narrative fashion, and I later read through them primarily for trends in the ways that spaces throughout the park are used, such as spaces that women occupied more frequently than others, the types of activities in which they engaged in those spaces, and social groupings in which those activities were located. For example, during the summer, several groups of men play informal or "pick-up" soccer games in fairly consistent locations throughout the Long Meadow and Nellie's Lawn, but I rarely observed women playing in any of these games. Occasionally, one or two women might be part of one of the games on the Long Meadow, but never were they part of the game on Nellie's Lawn during my observations (I seem to recall one woman playing there once, before I started conducting formal observations). This was a group of men who seemed to be mostly West Indian and, as I later learned, took their soccer quite seriously. Eventually, after some inquiry, I located a twice-weekly women's pick-up soccer game that took place on the Long Meadow.

There were times when a discourse analysis approach was appropriate in interpreting my observation field notes, when gender discourses seemed to jump right off of the page. For example, during my search for women playing soccer, one evening I arrived at the gathering place for the Nellie's Lawn soccer game as men were starting to assemble. I was wearing baggy shorts and a baseball cap, carrying a bike-messenger's bag full of my belongings, and walking my bike—in other words, probably looking as if I were hoping to play. One of the men swiftly, and I thought somewhat aggressively, told me that I could not play soccer with them and directed me toward a spot on the Long Meadow where there was already a "girl" playing. One or two of the other men said something, barely audibly, perhaps about allowing me to play (once in the past I had been invited to play there, but I construed the invitation as something more like flirtation). I interpreted this brief discourse as an indication that this might be a significant and valued space for a specific group of men, or perhaps there might be strong feelings about whether and when to allow "girls" to play, all juxtaposed with my own identity and feelings as woman, researcher, and sometimes-athlete.

2.4.2 Analysis of Interviews

In reading interview texts, I also employed both content and discourse analysis. Women's descriptions of their regular activities began to give a picture of the various ways in which women used the park, for example jogging or cycling early in the morning, sometimes during the day, and sometimes even past dusk in the evening. As I listened, their interviews also began to corroborate with one another regarding times and places for team sports, such as softball games and practices or pick-up basketball games, both in the park and beyond its borders. Interestingly, some of the lesbian women described a

network of other lesbians who lived near the park and who played sports—many played several sports, and many of their interviews as well as conversations with women in the park mentioned some of the same well-known women's sports leagues and regular, informal pick-up games throughout the city. Based on all of these interviews together with my observations, I have been able to map some prominent physical activities for women over spring, summer, and fall of 2001 (Figure 2).

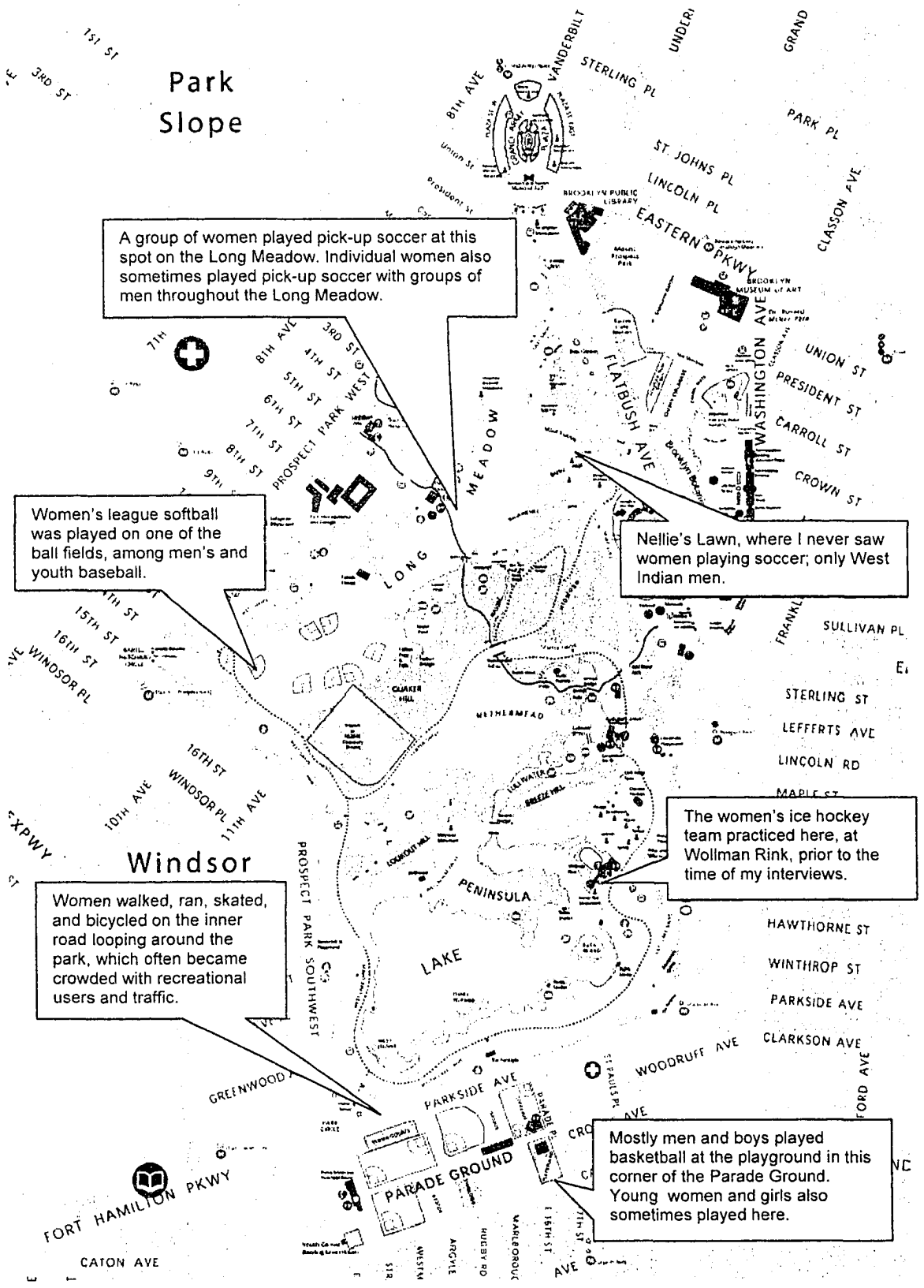

FIGURE 2: MAP OF PROSPECT PARK, WITH SOME OF THE MOST PROMINENT WOMEN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES DURING 2000 AND 2001. (SOURCE: WWW.PROSPECTPARK.ORG)

Again, a discourse analysis approach also allowed me to explore some of the deeper layers of significance in these interview narratives. For example, interview context, positioning, and multiple versions of the same phenomenon are important aspects of the narrative that may be lost in an analysis of content or even in a biographical narrative approach (Wilkinson, 2000), such as when one woman described the sense of vulnerability and "viciousness" she perceived when living in a racially-mixed neighborhood near the park. This woman mistakenly located the highly-publicized murder of a young, white, female social work student in this neighborhood, which I interpreted not only as an outcome of the media sensationalization of the murder, but also as a way for this interviewee to convey to me her feelings about being a white woman moving through spaces where she encountered members of other races. Women may also reflect dominant discourses throughout their interviews, but some may make "identity claims" about themselves that question those dominant discourses (Talbot et al., 1996). These kind of identity claims arose in some of my interviews, for instance when women echoed dominant discourses in their accounts of rapes and their own concerns about using the park, while at the same time many also questioned or dismissed such rape discourses and instead asserted that they were strong, capable, or alert to their surroundings. I discuss all of these issues of gender and discourse more fully in later chapters.

2.5 Conclusions

Prospect Park was originally planned with intentions of inclusiveness and democracy, reflecting American ideals—a park that would not only provide respite from urban life but also be a place where people of different backgrounds would mix and

encounter different ways of life. While Olmsted favored cities for their role in the advancement of civilization, he also believed that parks were necessary not only as physical and spiritual antidotes to city life, but also as places "to restore to the alienated city inhabitants a sense of community and to the fragmented psyche a sense of wholeness" (Fisher, 1986: 103). More critical voices (e.g., Gandy, 2002) say that the large, pleasure ground parks were really meant for middle-class pleasure—pastoral landscapes without agriculture, where labor and laborers were rendered invisible, in their absence or through expectations of middle-class decorum—and that planners like Olmsted represented the interests of the social elite. However, others (e.g., Rosenzweig, 1979) argue that social control was but one scheme in a complex agenda, and in fact there were cases where the different working-class groups exerted their influence in city planning and made use of urban public parks for active play, hanging out, and drinking, and "expressed and preserved their distinct ethnic cultures." Indeed, public spaces are socially produced by the economic and political agendas of government agencies, but they are also constructed through a "complex culture-making process," through the everyday ways that people use, imagine, and struggle for representation in public spaces (Low, 2000).

Gender has also been obscured in the design and planning of urban parks since the time that Prospect Park was created. If pleasure ground parks were to offer antidotes from the ills of the industrialized city, then according to a separate spheres ideal, they should also be safe and respectable places for middle-class ladies, who would serve as a stabilizing moral presence and would only be in parks with their families or when accompanied by male chaperones (Cranz, 1982). Parks were designed accordingly—for

example, Central Park's Ladies Refreshment Salon, where "light refreshment" was served (Cranz, 1980) and Golden Gate Park's Children's Quarter, which was secluded by trees and fashioned with a terrace where women could socialize and watch over children (Schenker, 1996). Although women were frequently present in parks, often unescorted and often pursuing vigorous physical activities, gendered park planning continued well into the twentieth century, through segregated facilities or stereotyped activities, such as Easter Hat Parades for women or cooking classes for girls (Cranz, 1980). As I discussed in the previous chapter, research and planning in the United States still do not seem to have had women on the agenda very often, and when they have, the definition of parks seems to include primarily national parks in remote areas. It looks as if there is still little formal understanding of women's active uses of urban parks like Prospect Park.

According to one recent study (Taplin, 2002), people who use Prospect Park do so for a number of reasons, including contact with nature, social and cultural activities, and sports, although park management does not always agree that all of these uses are appropriate or should be the basis of planning decisions. Some of the cultural and sporting activities valued by park users were more particular to men, such as soccer games and the primarily West Indian and African drumming circle; women more often said in interviews that the park was beautiful, a place to meet friends, and a place for child care workers to come with children (Taplin et al., 1998). These responses are similar to recent surveys of park users in England, where women more often used parks with children and valued them more for "natural" and social aspects (Curson & Kitts, 2000) and to more outdated research on parks in Chicago and suburban Illinois, which found that women were more likely to be in parks with children and groups (Hutchison,

1994; Westover, 1986). However, as I argued in the previous chapter, parks are also likely to be an important location for physical activity for women, who have always sought opportunities for physical activity but whose leisure activities have not always been fully acknowledged. The possibilities in urban outdoor environments, particularly for women, have only recently been systematically documented. In the following chapters, I present documentation of some ways in which women used Prospect Park for physical activities, in the context of their narratives about gender, activity, and place.

CHAPTER THREE

EXERCISE, NEARBY NATURE, AND MEANINGFUL EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES

3.1 Physical Activity and the Built Environment

In this chapter I explore some of the ways that Prospect Park functioned as a place for physical activities in the descriptions of the women I interviewed. Physical activity is becoming a growing public health concern; the current numbers of people in the United States engaging in regular exercise are so small that our sedentary lifestyles and related health problems are now characterized as epidemic. The 19th century ideals that helped to conceive parks like Prospect Park did have in mind the restoration of body, mind, and spirit, with some idea that certain types of physical activity, such as walking, were beneficial to health. The recent interest in the built environment is concerned with its role in encouraging or discouraging enough accumulated, vigorous activity to grant health benefits. Some of this research and planning of "active communities" is concerned with the problems of urban planning, in particular the fact that modern urban forms foster automobile dependence. This set of literature thus recommends corrective approaches that would encourage more walking and bicycling over driving (see Frank & Engelke, 2001). Other issues range from the use of stairs within buildings; to perceived safety and access to pools, parks, health clubs, and trails; to supports in schools, workplaces, and communities (see Baker et al., 2000; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001; French et al., 2001; Humpel et al., 2002; Kreyling & Ketcham, 2001; Sallis et al., 1998).

Prospect Park is a built environment that is carefully produced by human policies and actions (Taplin, 2002), located in a densely populated urban environment—a space that already exists and invites physical activity for what might be defined as several, different communities. Many cities demand physical activity like walking as part of everyday activities, and in fact may be very "walkable" compared to suburban and rural areas, due to features like the grid pattern, public transportation, and mixed land uses. However, urban parks are also special places where people can escape everyday life and engage in a wide range of preferred leisure activities for their own sake. There are many ways in which leisure activity can restore and promote physical and emotional well-being, not only through vigorous activity alone, but also by allowing a sense of escape and restoration from those other activities that are perceived as stressful and taxing (e.g., Hartig et al., 1991; S. Kaplan 1995a; 1995b; Korpela et al., 2001; Ulrich et al., 1991). Leisure for women has also been conceptualized not only as a chance for "minute vacations" (Henderson et al., 1989) but even as a means toward transcending "imposed gender roles" (Yerkes & Miranda, 1985), learning new skills outside of those roles (Pohl et al., 2000; Varpalotai, 1992), and engaging in alternative discourses about gender (Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1992; 1998).

Some recent research has looked at physical environmental influences that are particularly important for women in encouraging physical activity. In one large-scale survey, factors such as hills, scenery, and the presence of others exercising increased the likelihood of physical activity (King et al., 2000). On the other hand, the absence of scenery and of others exercising in one's neighborhood were particular constraints for women in rural areas in that survey (Wilcox et al., 2002). In focus groups, women who

did not always necessarily identify themselves as regular exercisers stressed the importance of beautiful scenery and safe places to walk (Eyler et al., 1998; Eyler et al., 2002). Women also mentioned harassment and unleashed dogs as environmental features that discouraged exercise in all types of neighborhoods, from urban to rural (Eyler et al., 2002; Wilbur et al., 2002).

FIGURE 3: "NATURE" IN THE PARK - FEEDING BIRDS AT THE LAKE.
(PHOTO BY AUTHOR)

My interviews targeted women who regularly used a specific space, Prospect Park, and asked them to qualitatively describe what was constraining and enabling about this particular space. These women experienced the park as a place that afforded opportunities that they did not always find at home, in gymnasiums, or on the streets. These opportunities included more challenging and varied workouts than they might find elsewhere, whether they were training for a special event or simply staying in shape; experiencing nature for the sake of restoration and contemplation in a convenient, nearby setting; and at the same time feeling relatively safe, both physically and psychologically,

for example because traffic was less frequent and more predictable than on surrounding streets. Furthermore, they often experienced the park as more than just a set of opportunities for physical activity, but also a place where they experienced deep emotion and fulfilled desires to be active and outdoors throughout the course of everyday life.

3.2 A Place for Exercise

King et al. (2000) found an unexpected, positive relationship between the frequency of women's exercise and the presence of hills in their neighborhood, which the authors speculated was related to interesting scenery or perceived effort. Some of the women in my study said that they preferred the park over other outdoor areas in Brooklyn because its topographic contours offered a more varied or intense workout; they mentioned the presence of stairs and hills to climb when walking, jogging, or cycling, in order to "use different muscle combinations" or "strengthen the legs a little bit more than just walking on a straight [level] road." One woman contrasted walking in and around the park, which she "love[s] . . . more than anything else," to working out in the gym, which she described as "more of a lazy way of working out."

It was easier for these women to exercise efficiently in the park than on the streets nearby. Most of them used the park's inner, perimeter road to run, walk, skate, or cycle, where they could track their progress, because they knew the approximate distance of the perimeter loop (just under three-and-one-half miles). Some used the two transverse or "cut-off" roads connecting the outer roadway (Center Drive and Well House Drive/Hill Drive), as well as the walkway around the Long Meadow, to do shorter workouts or to add more distance before or after completing a loop around the perimeter road (see Figure 1). The park offered a more "smooth" and "continuous" workout than streets and

sidewalks, where activity was frequently interrupted as these women negotiated traffic, traffic signals, car doors opening suddenly, and other obstacles and hazards. Prospect Park also seemed safer and more "controlled" than the streets; although there was frequent traffic on the perimeter roadway, traffic there flowed in one direction and was more predictable than traffic on the streets. There were also "car-free" times when traffic was diverted from most of the park's road (other than a short stretch near the skating rink), which included midday, weekday evenings after rush hour, and weekends.

However, some women made efforts to avoid traffic in the park—for example, by using the path within the perimeter road or only using the park during car-free hours—and some felt simply that "cars should not be in the park." Some also described being frightened or unnerved by speeding cyclists, especially during bicycle races on weekend mornings, which caused at least one woman to avoid the park altogether at that time. Others described episodes of conflict with other park users, such as cyclists yelling at runners on the road, which to some degree these women seemed to accept as simply an aspect of urban life. One woman, for example, related a story about a man on a bicycle who repeatedly yelled and cursed at her and her friends as they were running. The man coincidentally turned out to be the father of her one of her daughter's after-school playmates, and she addressed the episodes by speaking with him directly, telling him that "no one deserves that." Another woman explained that she had difficulty weighing characteristics of the park that she loved against the chaos caused by so many users:

> . . . when you're running in Prospect Park, you have to worry about if there are cars on the road, you have to worry about the bike coming at you or the bike coming behind you, and you can hear the guy blowing his whistle or the runner that you can feel on your back and you're afraid . . . even though I use it as a place to [mentally] zone, you can't entirely zone, because you've gotta negotiate traffic. [In the gym] you don't ever have to worry about the pebble on the road,

> you've never gotta watch the road, you've never gotta worry about the car. If you have to pee, you could rush off to the bathroom. So the convenience of running inside...the atmosphere, for me, is more conducive. But the beauty of running outside; I'm torn all the time. I always feel guilty.

Some women also spoke about using the trails in the park for different reasons, primarily because using the trails eased the impact of running on their joints, compared to running on paved surfaces. One woman ran on the road when she had "time constraints" or felt "more tired," but she preferred the park's trails when she wanted a "hard workout." A few women said that they used the trails for mountain biking (in spite of signs warning against it and reprimands by park officials). One woman especially enjoyed the trails in the fall after it rained, because she would "get all dirty [and] feel like you worked hard for it." On the other hand, while some felt confident "exploring" inner, wooded areas on their own or with others, they also experienced a conflict between their desire to use the park's trails and their concerns regarding personal safety:

> And then I like to run in . . . 'cause just getting off the road, it's such a different experience . . . and it's amazing, it's just a few, you know, yards over, but it makes such a difference in your head. If I have the Walkman going, and it's a beautiful day, I'm grooving to somebody good . . . in the back of my head I'm going "I shouldn't do this," but I'm like "I don't care; this is beautiful."
>
> The scenery's nice, it's just, you know, if you didn't have to worry about your safety. It would be even nicer.

Finally, some of these women felt that the park was somehow physically familiar and "manageable," which encouraged them to use the park in spite of some perceptions of danger, and some exercised in the woods or at times when the park was less populated by other exercisers, such as dusk or after dark. These women explained that they felt that they could use the park comfortably and without excessive vigilance, depending on their own particular kind of intimacy with the park:

> I know where every curve is. I know where every, you know, bump in the road is. I know which . . . part of the park might be more dangerous than the other . . .I don't go jogging at night, for example. I can't move as fast . . . I do see people jogging at night. I wouldn't do that . . .

Although they could not always articulate all of their reasons for feeling that the park's geography was familiar and manageable, it might have been due to a both the layout of the park and the fact that they used the park often and over long periods of time, many years for some. One woman contrasted Prospect Park to Central Park and attributed the perceived difference to the size of each park, but she also explained that she became acquainted with Prospect Park after many visits:

> I like that it's smaller than Central Park. Central Park is too overwhelming for me. I'm scared of it. I can wrap my hands around Prospect Park; I feel like I know every inch of that park. It took me a long time to feel that way, and it was only through riding my bike. 'Cause I had initially only known the perimeter . . . and once I got on my bike . . . in '95, I think . . . I became familiar with the inside of the park . . .

Overall, these women found Prospect Park to be conducive to a range of physical activities because of its physical features, including hills, stairs, off-road trails, smooth surfaces, and an overall sense of relative safety compared to streets and sidewalks around the park. Interestingly, the paved road and areas near it—a bridle path and other, compacted "paths" that have been worn through repeated use—attract many of the park's users who walk, run, skate, or cycle, where they are able to carry out what these women described as "smooth" and "continuous" workouts. Some of these women also used the more interior, wooded, sections, which they described as beautiful and offering an especially challenging and satisfying workout. Although some expressed caution about exercising in those areas, others explained that they felt well-enough acquainted with the whole park that they felt safe and comfortable while using the park.

3.3 Bodily Comfort and Physiological Needs

Some of these women also spoke about the importance of using the park to train for special events, particularly marathons or triathlons. They felt that the park was, as one woman said, "really a fabulous place to train . . . it's always challenging, because of all the hills and that kind of thing." A park like Prospect Park is also important because—while it offers a challenging workout in an outdoor environment—it provides toilets and drinking fountains, which become more than just amenities when one is outdoors and physically active for several hours. For example, when jogging long distances:

> If you're running, let's say, a 26-miler, and you're an average runner, that's going to take you about five-plus hours. And so, in five hours, especially if you're training through the summer, you're gonna need to hydrate every 20 minutes or so. Well, imagine how much water you'd have to carry . . . it weighs a lot. So you don't want to carry it, number one because it weighs a lot, and it's just an inconvenience. So you definitely look toward public facilities for that kind of thing . . .

Some of the women in my interviews indicated that rest rooms and drinking fountains within parks were indispensable. As one woman believed, large parks in New York City are "essential" to long-distance runners, and without them "I don't think that there could really be as many . . . active runners, male and female alike . . ." In fact, she and some friends had once gone on a long run from Manhattan to a park in New Jersey, where they found that the park's drinking fountains were not working, leaving them "very parched," anxious about being far from home, and concerned about one runner who appeared to be suffering from dehydration or heat exhaustion. Another woman had a similar "run-in with dehydration" when she ran 18 miles on Long Island and expected water along her route but found none, because "I think of in Prospect Park, there are water fountains. . . . so I didn't carry any water, and I had no money on me."

Within the park there are also several sets of rest rooms, which in my experience are unlocked and in good working order during the daytime, and sometimes evenings as well. I have also noted portable toilets throughout the park during the warm season, but none of my interviewees mentioned those. Some found the park's rest room facilities to be necessary and convenient, but that perception depended on their specific uses of the park. Women who played softball found rest rooms to be lacking, probably because the women's softball field was a long walk from the nearest facilities at the Picnic House or the Bandshell (I have also noted that the entrance to the rest rooms at the Picnic House is locked in the evenings, before softball games even begin). Women who ran several miles throughout the park during the day were more likely to find them convenient. The woman below, who was 49 and training for marathons at the time of the interview, explained that indoor facilities were especially important to her:

> . . . . So we go a lot to Prospect Park, and we go a lot to Central Park, uh, only because those spaces have water and rest rooms, which are important when you get older. You have to go to the bathroom more often . . . some of the younger runners, they think nothing of going behind a bush and just going (laughs). For all of us who are older, we need a bathroom . . . your bladder starts going, so (laughs) it's age-related, definitely.

Another bodily need for these women was the perceived freedom to exercise in light, comfortable clothing when the weather was warm, but that sense of freedom that was sometimes compromised by harassment from others, or by anticipation of that sort of harassment. These women connected others' unwanted attention to their own appearance, and some believed that after they had reached middle age the unwanted attention had waned: "Once you start having gray in your hair, maybe men leave you alone." Some preferred what they described as "scanty" (and therefore sexually provocative) clothing, which drew unwanted attention from others on the streets in the form of "catcalls" and

"comments." However, the parks—again both Prospect Park and Central Park were mentioned—afforded an environment where women felt freer to dress comfortably and generally less susceptible to unwelcome remarks:

> You get those, you know, whatever kind of comments when you're on the street before you get to the park. Usually in the park, you don't have any, uh, because people are there to do their own thing, so, I guess you get the sexist comments when you're on the way to the park . . .
>
> I still don't get catcalled while I'm there [in the park] but I do every time I run in the street, by like fifteen people.
>
> . . . And I don't feel like I have to watch out for, um, people accosting you [in parks] or something like that. Especially if you're running in the summer, you're kind of like, wearing, sort of scanty sports gear, and you have a lot of these guys on the street, you know. So, I don't really like that . . . I don't feel like I want to be all covered up only because of that. So, I'd rather run in the park, where everybody is running the same way. I don't feel like I have to cover up when I'm in the park . . . because you know that other people are there for the same reason.

Many of these women agreed that the "morality" (as defined by others around them) regarding exercise and dress was more loosely defined in parks, compared to other outdoor places, because parks were places where people went to exercise. One woman even observed that ". . . only in Central Park, you'll see women wearing, um, little bra tops and stuff like that. And usually they run to the park in something else, and then take it off when they get to the park, 'cause it's, like, okay there." Another, however, disagreed that the parks offered this sort of refuge and believed that men would direct comments toward her if she looked "cute" while running, including "weird guys" in Prospect Park:

> I hate all that stuff, 'cause I'm thinking, you know, okay, I'm wearing shorts. And if it's really, really hot . . . I'll just be wearing a jogbra, but I tend not to go in there [the park] in just a jogbra unless I'm with somebody.

It is not surprising that one woman felt apprehensive about "weird" men in the park, since such social qualities, such as unwanted interactions or perceived differences, are more significant than physical features in women's fears of parks and public spaces in general (Burgess, 1998; Day, 1999b; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Valentine, 1989). It is interesting, however, that women in these interviews often felt that the social environment of the park was actually safe in this way—that is, because of the perceived freedom to exercise in comfortable clothes that would have been more likely to attract unwanted attention, mostly of a sexual nature, on the street. This perception was probably related to the presence of others who were also exercising; as one woman said, "other people are there for the same reason." The presence of others in the park was a frequent theme throughout these interviews, contributing to women's feelings of safety, and sometimes to their perceptions of danger in the park, which I discuss later chapters.

3.4 Nearby Nature

Scenery is also sometimes mentioned as an important feature of the environment related to physical activity for women (Eyler et al., 1998; King et al., 2000; Wilcox et al., 2000). The women whom I interviewed frequently spoke about qualities of the park related to nature, the outdoors, and greenery (although few mentioned animal life, besides some mention of ducks at the lake), which provided more than more than a visual and aesthetic experience; it also offered respite from their urban surroundings and opportunities for contemplation. Some were aware of the park's origin, specifically that Olmsted was its designer (but none mentioned Vaux), and some recounted some version of the tale that Olmsted preferred Prospect Park to Central Park or that Central Park was in fact the "blueprint" for Prospect Park. Many of these women described the park as

"beautiful," "pretty," "green" (or in the fall, many colors) and even some parts of the park as "astounding" and "spectacular." It is a place where the air is relatively fresh and cool in hot weather, compared to its urban surroundings, and it is sometimes quiet, depending on the specific location within the park or the time of day. The park reminded some women of rural, "pastoral," or suburban places in the northeastern United States where they grew up, or it was one of the few open expanses available nearby for women who grew up in the city or were raising children there. Some also compared their experiences of Prospect Park to those of Central park, preferring Prospect Park because, as one woman commented, Prospect Park seemed "less landscaped" and "more wild" than Central Park.

According to its original plan, Prospect Park poses an exclusive opportunity for its users to experience nature within an urban environment. Certainly such contact with nature is important to everyone, but in some previous research women more often mentioned nature as a valuable part of their visits to Prospect Park (Taplin et al., 1998) and parks in England (Curson & Kitts, 2000). Contact with nature in an otherwise hectic city seemed to be almost imperative for many of these women, for whom physical activity for fitness was at once an opportunity for fitness and for being outdoors. On its own, being outdoors was important—as one woman who had lived in New York City her entire life said, "We don't have a yard"—but exercising outdoors was also a chance to experience the park as nature, to feel "separated from the urban environment," and to escape the "cars [and] chaos of New York City." Some women explained the simple joy of having a place nearby where one could "pretend that you're not in the city" and take in different sights, sounds, and smells. Their comments were similar to previous interviews,

where park users valued the "sensory" experience of Prospect Park (Taplin, 2002):

> And I like running in there in all the different seasons, so you can watch the seasons change. I really feel a lot better about living in New York. Because I can go in there and actually watch the seasons change . . . from week to week. You go out there for a long run, and you see differences, like well now that tree is red, and wow, now that tree has like half of its leaves gone, and now that tree is covered in snow. I mean, it sounds kind of corny, but I really like that.
>
> The park is, you know, just being outside and being surrounded by trees. And the smell—you know, the greenery, and flowers when the flowers are in bloom, but even just grass. And trees. And, you know, seeing the breeze move the trees around, you know, all that stuff is so great, compared to being . . . in this urban setting that we're in most of the time. It's just so wonderful, you can actually kind of pretend that you're not in the city. It doesn't even really matter where you are. It's just a beautiful place.

A few women also described exercising in the park as particularly exhilarating, especially during inclement weather, at times when they might not ordinarily have been outside, or when few others were in the park:

> You know what I love about, um, Prospect Park, when you're actually [ice] skating? Um, it's only in the movies that you see stuff, you know how you drive out to the country, it's a cold winter night, and maybe not that cold, maybe it's getting a bit warm, so you get the mist on top of the lake? . . . It's like that on the ice [at Wollman Rink]. And then you get the stars . . . the ice, it's like this mist that's hovering over it. . . . So like, you're skating, skating hard, and then you just drop dead and . . . how many times can you actually do that in New York?
>
> [When the weather is inclement] there's no one in there. . . . When we had that hurricane a couple of years ago, I was even working and . . . we left early. It was a sort of, you know, a scam of a hurricane, nothing really happened. It was raining pretty hard, and I went out, and I ran. And there were like, maybe, five other people that I saw . . . it was so great. It was like, daring. Like, yeah, we can still run in this, you know, so what there's gonna be a hurricane . . . it was fun. It was a good head. And we'll go in snow storms . . . just my husband and I . . .

Some of these women expressed feelings that exercise in a gym or on the city streets was not as enjoyable or meaningful than in the park, not only because of the park's aesthetic qualities, but also because of its "therapeutic" and "spiritual" qualities.

Exercising in the park also allowed them to "zone out," contemplate, and organize their thoughts. They described a sense of "freedom" and a chance to achieve a meditative state, which they described in terms like "peace of mind" or "clearing out the cobwebs":

> . . . I don't know if this makes any sense, but I would come up here [to the park], and skating began for me as a sort of, um, a form of meditation almost (laughs). I mean, yes, I was exercising my body, but it was more of a mental thing and a therapeutic thing to me, than even a physical thing at the time. I mean, I've always been very physically active. So the skating part to me was sort of time that I was carving out for myself, as sort of allowing myself space to think. Because it's impossible in this city. So it was kind of a way for me to say, "Oh, well I can get a workout, and I can also get my sanity break at the same time."

Some believed that exercising outdoors was especially important for their mental health, to help relieve the everyday stressors of living in New York City and working in sedentary jobs, and to tap into a "mind-body connection" that is not fostered through an otherwise unhealthy lifestyle. Others had some more specific insights into the ways that they were able to find foster "mental health" and "sanity" by being physically active in the outdoors. In fact, Olmsted's landscape designs were meant to encourage the kind of fascination, richness, and escape from everyday stimuli that are responsible for restoration of mental capacities (see S. Kaplan, 1995a). These women observed that exercising in the park, and running in particular, allowed them to resolve an emotional problem or an intellectual concept (e.g., when taking a break from studying). One woman felt better able to think clearly and to sort out problems when running in the park, compared to swimming at an indoor pool at the YMCA, because running was more "automatic" and allowed her to "settle in" more than when she was swimming and counting laps. Another explained that running in provided "time for me . . . to be within myself," and running in the park once or twice a week helped her during an emotionally difficult time in her life:

> It did get me through a lot. . . . You'd be surprised at what . . . you can settle . . . within yourself . . . during a run. It's amazing . . . sometimes, like, I think back, and I say, "God" (laughs). . . . I probably looked like a jerk . . . you know how you talk to yourself?

However, some women described Prospect Park as lacking in terms of optimal wilderness experience. Many of them said that they chose to rent or own homes within walking, running, or cycling distance of the park (one woman said that she wished to live nearer to the park) and their comments suggested that the park's proximity to many densely-populated neighborhoods was also significant, that the "nearby" may have been as important as the "nature." The park was "locally and conveniently located" and allowed these women to feel "somewhat" separated from the urban environment and to "kind of pretend" that they had escaped the city, but they frequently distinguished the park from other, more remote outdoor settings like "the country." The park allowed them to incorporate outdoor exercise into daily routine—like "brushing my teeth" according to two women—but some contrasted this routine to more preferred activities, such as running on the beach or cycling through the suburban and rural areas outside of the city on the weekends. Some also complained that exercising in the park was especially "boring" during long, endurance activities.

For some women, the park's proximity may also be important because of economic or social ties to city and neighborhood. For example, one woman, who is Jewish and described herself as "unobserving Orthodox," left her Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhood for college but later returned to "get back on track" and have a family. She rode her bike regularly in Prospect Park, which was actually her "least favorite" place to do so, but it was still an important resource for her:

> When we were looking to buy a house, I sort of wanted to be close to the park. You know . . . I feel like it's the only place to go and be in the city, to be able to get away . . . and I'm sure I'll always be using it, you know, as long as I'm riding [a bicycle] that's gonna be the place to go.

Prospect Park is an important resource for residents of nearby neighborhoods who may have few other alternatives for outdoor activities (Taplin, et al., 1998). Many of the women in my interviews probably had the means to escape the city for vacations and weekends when they chose, so for them the park represented the most convenient opportunity for regular contact with nature. While it was not their only opportunity and often not their most preferred choice for outdoor activity, almost all of them described the park as an important place for regular physical activity. As they spoke, they often measured the park's pros and cons as they contributed to an overall leisure experience. Even those women who complained about the park's limited offerings found reasons to use it regularly; for example, the presence of others was "encouraging" and sometimes alleviated the monotony that some of these women described. Even though the park might not have been a favorite outdoor place, it was "as outdoorsy as we can get."

3.5 A Place for "Doing Something I Love to Do"

In these interviews, women spoke about sport and exercise as a natural part of their lives and a part of their identities as strong, healthy, and independent individuals. Whether it was pursued individually or as part of team, whether with everyday health and fitness or high-level competition as the goal, physical activity as they described it promoted feelings self-confidence, prevented illness and injury, relieved stress, and promoted mental health—an "anti-drug," as one young woman commented. Sports and exercise also helped some women to get through difficult transitional periods in their

lives, such as the end of a long-term relationship or the birth of a child with a disability, and some believed that they overcame eating disorders or tendencies toward disordered eating patterns through sports and exercise. Physical activity also seemed to hold particular importance later in the life course, as these women believed that it encouraged physical independence (e.g., lifting objects, mobility), moderated problems associated with aging (e.g., osteoporosis, hot flashes), and fostered positive self-image (e.g., "I don't look my age"). One woman, who was 85 years old and ran daily in the park, remarked that exercise was one way of enacting her philosophy of life: "Don't be a vegetable."

These women described physical activity as a natural and even "primitive" function of the human body, without which they felt "disconnected" from a part of themselves. Many recounted developing an early interest in physical activities or being a "tomboy" as a child; as one woman remarked, "I came out of my mother's womb with a ball in my hand." Others developed an interest later on, during adolescence or adulthood, and some fantasized about what they might have achieved if they had started sooner—a career as a professional athlete or a "great slapshot." However, athletic interests often required deliberate cultivation, as other demands such as school, work, family, and even competing identities (e.g., scholar, artist) created conflicts. I did not ask these women specifically how the park played a role in allowing them to nurture their athletic selves, but some of their responses suggested that having access to special places was necessary in the long-term development and everyday maintenance of skills, interests, and physical fitness. Some women explained that they found themselves able to "adapt" to their surroundings and acquire new interests, for example when they moved to New York City, or else they discovered places like schools, recreation centers, or the streets:

> . . . you know, when I grew up [in Brooklyn], you just kind of wandered outside, and you could make a basketball hoop and like shoot there, or you know, you just played any sport anywhere you could, you know, sort of find. You know, there wasn't a whole lot of green stuff around . . . you just kind of found a place to play.

As an outdoor place affording many, different types of activities, Prospect Park emerged as an important place for these women to "go out and play." As I discussed above, some chose to buy or rent homes close to the park, while others "fell in love" with the park after discovering it:

> And I'm from California, so . . . Prospect Park, that's why I fell in love with it right away. . . . I came from L.A. We don't have parks. I mean . . . we don't use them, or they're so few. So, and I grew up in a suburb. There was no park. There was Dearborn Park by me, but . . . there are tennis courts and a basketball court, that's about it. So you just don't run in the park. I would go to the beach and run, or I would run outside, on the street. So Prospect Park was like, this contained space . . . and it's beautiful. It's beautiful. I think it's a spectacular park. And so, it's always been a unique—it's so New York to me. . . .

While some described indoor places as having some special quality, like the "sanctuary" that one woman felt at the YMCA, none of them described privately-owned gyms or fitness centers as having the same kind of personal meaning. As one woman explained, " . . . the idea of going to a gym just seems so kind of, weirdly modern. . . . it's like a religious experience for me, to be outside enough." Lifting weights or running on a treadmill in a gym or fitness center mostly served the purpose of keeping fit, and these regular park users preferred exercising outdoors, which felt more like "really doing it." Being in the gym when the weather was inclement or when time was a constraint was described as something more like training for the real thing, where the real thing would often take place outdoors or through competitive team sports. The park also seemed somehow connected to the sense of freedom and independence that women described as part of a healthy lifestyle:

> . . . just, like, the ability to go out and exercise by yourself . . . whether it's in the woods [of the park] or even, you know, just running the loop . . . is just this independence. You can get away from everything. . . . The consequences of the ability to do that . . . it's rewarding.
>
> Bike riding is more part of, just life to me . . . more a part of me. I mean, it's relieving stress, but . . . I'm not thinking about it doing that, necessarily; I'm just listening to the music and doing something I love to do, without having to think about it. . . . just going around [the park] in circles, waiting for the next good song. . . .

Although these women were often physically active before they had discovered Prospect Park, and they would have probably otherwise found ways to be physically active, the park often allowed them to actualize a desire to be outdoors and to find a sense of enjoyment that other places did not always afford. Their comments bore similarity to some of the outcomes of women's wilderness experiences, such as independence, challenge, mental clarity, and freedom of movement (Pohl et al., 2000). Physical activity in general, and outdoor physical activity in particular, also had some of the more romantic meanings for these women that Henderson (1996) believes come through women's contact with the outdoors: spirituality, relationships with self and higher beings, and realization of biological connections with nature. However, the women I interviewed did not always mention freedom from "imposed gender roles," another important aspect of women's outdoor experiences (Yerkes & Miranda, 1985), as a defining feature of being in the park. Rather, they described their experiences of being physically active and being outdoors as the unfolding of something that felt very natural and deeply pleasurable.

3.6 Beyond Active Environments

Women use Prospect Park for a range of athletic activities, and their qualitative descriptions of their experiences inform the growing literature addressing exercise and the physical environment, particularly as it influences exercise for women. However, they also described the park as more than just an "active environment," as some of the current literature in the fields of both health and urban planning would describe it. There were some themes in these interviews that correspond to variables that other research has explored in relation to exercise, such as a sense of challenge, varying terrain, feelings of safety (e.g., physical safety with regard to traffic, freedom from harassment when wearing tight fitting or revealing clothes), and the availability of drinking fountains and rest rooms. The park also emerged as a place for contact with nature and the emotional experiences that go along with it, which were important components of physical activity for these women. As an open, outdoor space, Prospect Park allowed these women to be physically active in ways that sometimes felt more fulfilling than in other places, especially private, indoor gyms. That is, the park was not just a place with a set of physical characteristics adding up to so many minutes of vigorous activity; it was also a meaningful place.

Nature emerged as an important theme here, and these responses reflected some of the original intentions of Prospect Park's design, which went beyond aesthetics to include spiritual elevation, healthy recreation, and the restoration of mental capacities through escape from the urban environment (Fein, 1986). In recent decades, literature has again begun to consider the psychological effects of green environments, particularly the relief of everyday stressors and mental restoration (e.g., Hartig et al., 1991; S. Kaplan

1995a; 1995b; Korpela et al., 2001; Ulrich et al., 1991). A separate body of research explores the environmental determinants of exercise, but there are some gaps between these two areas of interest. First, some of the variables in research on exercise reflect an acknowledgement that environmental features like scenery and attractive outdoor places may be important (e.g., King et al., 2000), which by themselves have also been found to increase attention (Wells, 2000), reduce aggression (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001), and promote overall psychological well-being (R. Kaplan, 2001). However, the exercise research has only begun to connect environmental variables and has yet to develop an understanding of how they might work. On the other hand, the nature research has sometimes failed to consider the effects of physical activity that takes place in those settings, such as gardening or hiking (e.g., Hartig et al., 1991; also see Frumkin's 2001 review).

A small amount of research has begun to tease out some of the different effects of nature-like versus other types of settings for exercise, including increased intensity and duration, motivation, adherence to exercise programs, and improved mood states (see Larkin, 2000). One recent study in Sweden (Bodin & Hartig, 2003) found that runners rated a park as a more restorative environment than city streets and sidewalks, and there were large but not significant differences in attention and performance after running in each setting. The small sample size (12 runners) and other possible methodological issues may have interfered with findings, but this was perhaps the first study to compare a nature-like outdoor setting with other types of outdoor settings. In any case, my interviews suggest that future research could benefit from further exploration of both the physiological and psychological benefits of outdoor, nature-like settings, as these women

described what they perceived as challenging workouts and relaxed mental states within the park setting, compared to other indoor and outdoor settings.

Another gap lies in understanding the more everyday aspects of being in nature-like settings, as much of the research on being in nature (versus viewing greenery) has focused on rehabilitative programs or structured/supervised trips where goal-setting, bonding with others, and vacationing are also a part of the experience (see Frumkin, 2001). Stephen Kaplan (1995b) suggests that urban forests are important for mental restoration, because they are located within urban environments and thus easily accessible, and people may be unlikely to take the time to reach more remote wilderness settings. People also perceive urban parks as part of the fabric of the city, not separate from it (Burgess et al., 1988). A place like a park allows one to feel a sense of "being away" on an everyday basis. In my interviews, women's descriptions of Prospect Park ranged along a continuum of urban and wilderness environments, to put it simply—more prosaic than some preferred outdoor environments, such as a beach or the country, but more restorative than other possible settings for exercise in the city, including streets and sidewalks. For some, it did not matter that the park was located within an urban environment, and even circling around the paved perimeter road satisfied a desire to experience nature while exercising. Some even described the park as "astounding" or "spectacular," or they recounted moments that stood out as particularly exhilarating, such as when they exercised in the park during cold or rainy weather. Many said that it was simply more enjoyable to exercise in the park than indoors or on the streets, and some even described exercise in the park as more than just physical activity, but also a spiritual and meditative experience as well.

Research on women's outdoor experiences in particular also seems to be missing some of the more everyday aspects. Some research has emphasized the potential for outdoor, wilderness adventure experiences to empower women by engaging them in problem-solving and skill acquisition, particularly when these experiences take place in women-only groups (e.g., Varpolatai, 1992; Yerkes & Miranda, 1985). However, as Pohl et al. (2000) argue, "empowerment" may be too narrow a framework for women's experiences of the outdoors, which also include possibilities for self-esteem, authority, independence, and freedom of body and mind. Likewise, women's leisure experiences more generally—not just those that involve vigorous physical activities or remote outdoor settings—are sometimes placed within a framework of "resistance" to structural constraints, occurring via alternative discourses about gender (e.g., Wearing, 1992; 1998). But again, the idea of resistance does not seem to capture everything that my interviews said about outdoor physical activities for these women, who described feelings like pleasure and enjoyment, meditation, release of stress, independence, and the pursuit of activities that made them feel stronger and more whole than they felt when they were sedentary. Many of these feelings certainly have some connections to ideas like empowerment and resistance, which these women sometimes made during the course of their interviews, but physical activity seemed to be located within a broader set of experiences for them.

This chapter has addressed primarily practical concerns regarding environmental influences on women's physical activities, but these narratives also reveal the phenomenological nature of women's everyday activities, as expressed in themes relating to freedom, spirituality, escape, and pursuing activities that fulfill a number of desires.

Prospect Park is not just a convenient setting for physical activities; it is also the location for a rich and complex set of experiences, within a densely-populated urban environment. For example, feelings of safety, familiarity, and manageability were aspects of the park that women found inviting, but on the other hand, conflicts with other users and with traffic often demanded negotiation. At the same time, more culturally-constructed ideas about urban danger sometimes played a powerful role in these women's experiences, even as they went about their regular activities in the park (I discuss women's fears and their significance further in Chapter Five). The many and varied types of experiences described so far begin to suggest that simple conceptions of women's experiences of space are narrow theoretical viewpoints at best—one of which is based on the idealized separation of gender into the public and private spheres. At worst, they are serious omissions that may perpetuate gender constructs, for example by leading to insufficient resources for women in public spaces or by reinforcing ideas that women do not use or do not enjoy public spaces.

Another component to these women's experiences of Prospect Park, which I have not discussed in this chapter, was the set of social relationships that was realized there. These women often found the park to be a socially intimate place and their activities there to be enriched by the presence of others, whether because the park was a place for bringing family, meeting friends, or encountering strangers by chance. This was not an entirely surprising finding, since it reflected much of my own experience, but I did not expect many other women to find the park to be so familiar and welcoming. My own expectations may have been influenced by public-private spheres ideal, which neglects the role of relationships as a positive aspect of public spaces for women. In the next

chapter, I look at these relationships, which are also part of the many aspects to women's experiences of physical activities in Prospect Park.

CHAPTER FOUR[2]

ENRICHMENT AND SUPPORT THROUGH AN ETHIC OF CARE

4.1 Women in Public Space

Women's participation in public life has often been described in terms of a separate spheres ideal, whereby women were expected to, but often did not, remain in the home and embody the virtues associated with the private sphere, such as piety, morality, and nurturance (see Franck & Paxson, 1989; Laslett & Brenner, 1989). Everyday life is shaped by this separate spheres ideal, from the design of "feminine" suburbs (Appleton, 1995; Hayden, 1980; Saegert, 1980; Wekerle, 1980), to the policing of women's behavior when in public places, especially when their purposes there do not seem to conform to norms of "appropriate" behavior (see Deem, 1988; Franck & Paxson, 1989; Wearing, 1998). Another component of the separate spheres model is fear of crime, especially sexual violence, in public, outdoor places, which has dictated much of women's everyday lives, as well as academic discourse regarding women and public space (e.g., Day, 1999a; 1999b; Gordon & Riger, 1991; Koskela, 1997; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1991; 2000).

Fear and perceptions of personal safety have also been the subjects of research on women and physical activity, but this research has not always found that fear prevents women from engaging in leisure time physical activity outside of their homes (e.g., King

[2] A version of this chapter, entitled "Women and Physical Activity in an Urban Park: Enrichment and Support Through an Ethic of Care," is in press with the Journal of Environmental Psychology.

et al., 2000; Wilcox et al., 2000). In some qualitative studies (Eyler et al., 1998; Eyler et al., 2002) women report that concerns for safety prevent them from exercising, and urban women are particularly concerned about their safety in places like parks and trails (Wilbur et al., 2002). However, other research has found that fear acts more like a constraint than a barrier; some women said that even if fear did not prevent them entirely from participating in leisure activities, it did affect the quality of those leisure experiences (Bialeschki & Henderson, 2000; Whyte & Shaw, 1994).

Kristen Day (2000) has argued that a separate spheres model for research and theory does not fully explain the strong presence of women in public space, nor does it account for their full range of experiences there. In her interviews of middle-class women of mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds in Orange County, California, care-taking and care-giving frequently emerged in relation to women's experiences of public space. Their narratives reflected Carol Gilligan's (1982) notion of an ethic of care, where women view identity and development as matters of preserving relationships, solidifying attachments, avoiding harm, and practicing care. In Day's interviews, women's relationships and emphasis on caring accounted for constraints in their experiences of public space, because they placed others' interests first, had limited time and resources due to care-taking roles (which are either unpaid or when professionalized, undervalued), and encountered public policy and design based on care-taking roles and "repressive or restrictive care-giving from others" (Day, 2000: p. 109). However, an ethic of care also helps to understand the possibilities, as well as the constraints (Henderson & Allen, 1991), that may exist for women in public places, through "practicing and receiving care, and for sustaining relationships with friends, family, strangers, and public spaces" (Day, 2000: p.

110).

In this chapter, I look at relationships and caring among friends, family, acquaintances, and strangers in order to further understand women's experiences of physical activities in Prospect Park. In my interviews, themes emerged regarding caring and sustaining relationships, not only for the sake of caring and relationships alone, but also for the possibilities that they posed for outdoor leisure activities. These women valued opportunities to interact with others at different levels of intimacy, such as quality time with family or brief contacts with strangers. Their interactions also helped to support physical activities in a number of ways: through enrichment of activities and relationships themselves, actual or perceived safety, social networking to form teams or informal groups, emotional support, and encouragement.

4.2 Relationships with Friends: Companionship and Enrichment

First, companionship emerged as an important aspect of sports and exercise, and Prospect Park often afforded a nearby and "uplifting" place to meet with friends. For example, one woman (Lucinda) was 49 and divorced at the time of her interview, and both of her children no longer lived with her. She had recently joined a running club that trains together for marathons, which allowed her to actualize several interests at once, including relationships with friends:

> And . . . it's so difficult to socialize in New York, and, um, it's [the running club is] sort of a way of putting a lot of little things together. One of them is to socialize with other people in one's age group. New York is a very young town, so for someone who's in their forties and fifties and still active, is difficult. So it's a place to go to meet other women that are at your pace, that are like-minded . . . I've found a lot of friendships in, in these running groups . . .

Lucinda's comments also suggested another way that the company of friends is important to exercising in New York City public places. Belonging to a running group also made the overall experience more enjoyable, because the group made an effort to "run in many different places . . . throughout the city." These places included Prospect Park as well as other New York City parks, which she would not have visited if it were not for the group:

> So that's one thing I like also about it, is because . . . I've gone to other boroughs that I normally wouldn't go. I've, uh, gone to many different places that I wouldn't normally have gone on my own. But because you're meeting with a group, then you'll go there, which is great . . . some people know these little tiny out-of-the-way places, and it's wonderful. I really like it . . . we go everywhere.

Joining others to exercise may tap into possibilities for using public space that might not always exist for individual women, by "enhancing well-being in public space" (Day, 2000: 104). For women who lived nearby, Prospect Park was a "natural" and convenient place to meet with friends, exercise partners, teams, clubs, or informal groups, where they could "stay in close contact with one another" even if they did not all stay together—for example, if some were running or cycling faster than others. Some of the women in my interviews also explained that they preferred to meet with friends for exercise in Prospect Park to help stave boredom and/or physical discomfort. Lynn, a 36-year-old professor who lives near the park, said:

> I really like to roller blade with a friend, uh, on a smooth path. It is not much fun to go alone and just feel like you're doing laps or something for exercise. That doesn't interest me very much. I don't do it very much . . . but to go out with a friend. I like to do sports socially, even if it's just like, going out with one friend, and we're chatting and going around the park. You know. That's just as important . . . that's more fun for me than sitting in my house and having coffee and chatting . . . let's be outside, let's be doing something physical, let's be enjoying one another's company.

Lynn preferred to exercise with others because she felt that it enriched her experience of physical activity while in the park, and the company of others helped to detract her attention away from "what hurts, what's hard, that I'm breathing heavily, and things like that." It was also a more enjoyable way for her to experience the relationship itself, compared to "sitting in my house and having coffee and chatting." She further explained that the park itself presented enjoyable opportunities for these activities; at one time, she and a friend used to meet and walk through the park, spending up to one-and-a-half hours hiking on the park's trails. The friend lived near Lynn, so they could have easily arranged another activity, but the two "really enjoyed going out, you know, walking, exploring, and visiting."

Related to companionship and well-being in public space is a sense of safety, which women sometimes described as a motivation for meeting with friends and acquaintances in the park, particularly if they believed that their patterns of park use increased their vulnerability. Some of these women met with others in the park early in the morning, often before daylight, to jog or bike. Companionship made the experience more pleasurable, but being with others was also insurance against potential danger or mishap. One woman, an avid cyclist, met with acquaintances at six o'clock on weekday mornings:

> Yeah, I like having the company. I don't like being in the park alone. It's boring, and especially at that hour in them morning, when it's dark I don't feel that safe. Mechanically, if something happens with the bike or something happens with me, at least I know that I have, uh, people that are around.

Safety frequently frames women's presence in and experiences of public places, both in academic literature and in women's everyday experience. Safety was a concern that arose many times in these interviews, but these women also talked about the many

ways in which they were able to carry out and enjoy activities in public spaces in the absence of fear or anxiety about personal safety. They enjoyed the company of friends, for its own sake as well as the sense of safety that came with it.

4.3 Relationships with Family: Negotiating Conflicting Roles and Interests

Public parks have historically been planned with stereotypical care-taking roles for women in mind—mothers' and nannies' caring for children, as well as chaperonage for middle-class women in particular—but this kind of planning contradicts the real ways that women use public places like parks (Cranz, 1980; Schenker, 1996). In Day's (2000) interviews, women's preferences for public places were sometimes guided by "desire to maintain relationships, and to exercise and experience caring" (p. 113), which sometimes meant that they ceded their own interests because the public places that they used were not intended for both parents and children. Usually, the mothers whom I interviewed jogged, walked, or biked regularly without their families, preferring to keep their sports and fitness activities separate from activities with their children. Caring for school-aged children in particular seemed to conflict with women's own preferences and goals. Women with school-aged children described patterns of getting up very early in the morning to meet with friends in the park, or exercising alone or with others—friends, acquaintances, and in one case, a personal trainer—during the day, while children were at

FIGURE 4: FAMILIES IN THE LONG MEADOW. (PHOTO BY AUTHOR.)

school or summer day camp.

When they engaged in activities with younger children, such as in-line skating or cycling, they described these activities as being more for the children's enjoyment, or else the enjoyment was derived from "being with the family" and not from activities that the women themselves preferred. For example, Pam, a 41-year-old stay-at-home mother of two daughters, jogged twice weekly with neighbors who were also mothers in their forties. The women met at 6:30 a.m. to "gab and just have a good time running" and to jog at a slow pace, which was important to Pam, because as she said, "those runs I can count on." She also jogged with her husband on Saturdays, which offered her a more physically challenging workout—her longest run of the week—as well as the opportunity for sustaining relationship:

> Those are fun. We talk, or sometimes not talk. He always runs ahead, and I say, 'wait for me,' 'cause he's really tall (laughs). And we argue, and we laugh, and we talk about the kids.

On the weekends, Pam also sought opportunities in the park to combine family togetherness with exercise, but she described those occasions as less focused on her own physical fitness desires than her other workouts:

> Sometimes it's fun on a Sunday run. My husband . . . goes to Eastern Athletic Club [after running one lap in the park] . . . so he'll take his stuff and go swimming . . . and we'll take my 7-year-old daughter, and she'll be on her bike, and we'll run while she bikes. Those are fun, 'cause we get to stop at the lake, and see the ducks, we have to stop at every water fountain . . . you can't go out there saying 'I'm gonna have a fabulous run.' That's not what it's about . . . it's about getting some exercise and really being with the family.

Attempting to involve adults and children of different ages in the same activity certainly entails conflicting interests. It must be difficult for women to find ways to satisfy all of those interests, and at the same time engage in activities that they find

enjoyable and challenging. These women may have been lucky or resourceful enough to find spaces and times for exercising alone or with other adults, and most left parenting and family activities for other times. Younger children were simply not always interested in outdoor activities, so some of these women chose physical activities with other adults over time spent with their children. However, this sometimes posed potential for conflict, as one woman explained:

> . . . and I know that maybe I'm not the perfect mother at times, 'cause I'm out on a Saturday or a Sunday racing or whatever, but . . . I've sort of accepted it of myself and not feel as guilty about it as I probably should . . . it's a selfish thing, but I try to say it's the only selfish thing I do.

On the other hand, these women did mention some occasions when they successfully combined their own interests with those of other family members, and the park sometimes offered possibilities to do so. Jenny, a 29-year-old single mother, told me that she skated in the park with her younger son, who was very skilled on roller blades and took on the task of teaching Jenny how to use them. She described this as a mutually enjoyable experience of receiving care from others:

> Yeah, he tries to teach me . . . he stays with me. All the way up the, um, two little ones that's back there [in the other room] with them, usually if we're roller blading and all, they go with us . . . they make a circle around me, and try to keep it together . . . if they see me go down [the hill] here, they're like, you know, 'Make a turn, just turn! That's all, just turn, you can stop yourself.'

Women also sometimes described bringing teenaged or older pre-teen children with them to the park, which brought with it a sense of safety in the same way that the company of adults did. I met Jenny when she was walking with her 14-year-old daughter in the middle of a hot summer day, a time when the park is typically quiet and sparsely populated. When I interviewed Jenny later, she told me that her daughter's company that day had allowed her more freedom to roam through the park than she ordinarily would:

> See, we like, you know taking a little detour . . . you have to worry about your safety sometimes. 'Cause you never know who's hiding in some of them bushes and all that. So I'd rather [have] somebody with me.

Similarly, Lynn, the woman described above who enjoyed in-line skating and hiking with friends, went mountain biking on the park's trails with her son and his friend when they were 10 or 11 years old. She would not have ridden on the trails alone:

> There are certain times and places I feel comfortable using the trails. And . . . it's not universal. Um, I don't think I've ever ridden my bike on the trails alone, so I ride the trails with someone else. Even if it's the kids . . . I do subscribe to one of those 'safety in numbers' things.

However, mothers' wishes for companionship may conflict with older children's interests, such as a desire to be alone and to individuate from parents and peers (Larson, 1997). Lynn's son, who was 14 years old at the time of the interview, had abandoned activities with his mother in favor of other activities like skateboarding with friends. Jenny succeeded in getting her daughter to walk with her only the one time that I met them, and although she was concerned about her daughter's weight and physical activity patterns, she said that she "got it outta my head" that her daughter would walk with her outdoors (the two sometimes did aerobics together in the apartment). Lynn's son, who was 14 at the time of the interview, had also abandoned activities with his mother in favor of other activities like skateboarding with friends. Lynn had other companions and continued to use the park, but without her daughter's chaperonage Jenny's use of the park was limited to its outer roadways rather than inner trails or walkways, or else she would walk on the streets outside of the park.

In my interviews, I asked women only about their patterns of using the park—what activities, when, where in the park, and with whom—but interviews did not directly ask about resolving conflicting interests among family members. Those women who

incidentally talked about their families suggested a range of possibilities, including feeling safe, learning new skills, having fun, and exploring with children, as well as conflicting interests among family members. However, relationships with friends, teammates, and others outside of the family were more supportive of women's physical activities in the park, particularly when their goals were challenge and fitness.

4.4 Relationships with Strangers: Familiarity and Community

If fear is a constraint that moderates women's experiences of leisure rather than a barrier that prevents leisure activities altogether (Henderson et al., 1989;1999), then the presence of others may encourage feelings of safety and participation in outdoor activities (Burgess, 1998; Heckscher, 1997). Jane Jacobs (1961) noted the importance of what she called "intricacy" in the park design and use, by which she meant that diverse structural uses bordering parks—including businesses, residences, and institutions like schools and churches—as well as a diverse group of users, would encourage a vital space that was inhabited and lively throughout the day. Prospect Park is bordered mostly by residences, with commercial uses located primarily at its main entrances, and it may fulfill Jacobs' vision of intricacy. My field notes document varying uses throughout the day when the weather was favorable, such as vigorous exercise and commuting to/from work (including automobile traffic, which some women credited as a factor in perceived personal safety) in the mornings and evenings; fishing, picnicking, strolling, sitting on benches, or playing with children during the middle of the day; organized sports in the evenings; and a variety of uses on weekends.

In my interviews, women frequently described Prospect Park as "friendly," "neighborhoody," or "neighborly," embodying a feeling of "community." Some of them

valued the park's diversity and opportunities for interacting with others whom they ordinarily might not meet, because the park is "a natural part of our community that we've lived in for a long time." The sense of familiarity among strangers enhanced and supported their experiences in the park in a number of ways; like family and friends, relationships with strangers offered companionship, enjoyment, and safety. Interactions in the park also presented opportunities for spontaneous play in a way that other relationships did not seem to, perhaps because the park afforded a place where women could seek out or coincidentally meet others with similar interests.

These women frequented the park regularly enough that they encountered others "who only know you from the park," who became familiar while still often remaining anonymous. Even at a distant level of acquaintance, strangers in the park played an important role for the women interviewed; seeing others regularly, and knowing that many others used the park for reasons similar to theirs, these women felt that the park was a safe and predictable place. Many described very brief, casual encounters, such as a quick smile and a "hello" when they passed other joggers whom they saw regularly, which were enough to foster a sense of familiarity if not intimacy. Two of the women saw certain other runners so often that they had coined nicknames for them, like "Happy Man" and "Forrest Gump," again suggesting a sense of familiarity (not to mention amusement). While these women did not know others by their real names or see them in other settings, interactions with them were an important part of their experience of exercising in the park:

> . . . these people are not people that I—if they're dressed in their [everyday] clothes I probably don't recognize some of them, but they're people that just saw their fellow runners and they cared. . . . I never had coffee with one of them, we've never stopped and really had any long conversation. . . . It's just a very

short, 'Hello, how are you doing?' as you're running or walking past each other.

Some women also commented that they valued the sense of diversity in the park, which reflected the surrounding "community." A few felt that racial and ethnic differences were less significant in the park, where people gathered for common purposes, than they might have been elsewhere, which also seemed to relate to a sense of comfort for these women. Overall, others became familiar not only because these women saw them regularly and at the same time of day, but also because they were engaged in the same or similar activities, which may have superceded perceptions of difference and encouraged feelings of safety:

> . . . because you know that there are other people there running, like you. You always feel like, if something happens to you, they'll come to your rescue...you twist an ankle or something, you know that somebody's going to stop and help you, so safety is . . . a factor.

> You know, you just keep yourself—everyone watches out for each other, especially when we're running or . . . walking, and I know who's out at what time, they know me, I know them, so—.

Sometimes this regular contact also led to more permanent affiliations founded on common interests, which was a pleasant surprise for some women who initially used the park only for solitary fitness activities:

> Oh! I should tell you this. . . . I met [another interviewee] through the park. I was running, and I—she's one of those people that I see every—I did meet a friend, god, see! I would run every day, and she happened to . . . drop her child off, and I happened to see her running, and you, we'd say hello, and . . . finally she said to me, "You look like a person that I would wanna know." And we stopped and we talked, and we ran, and she said, you know, "Let's run together," . . . and we started to, you know, make dates where we'd run.

All of the interactions among strangers in the park, who sometimes became acquaintances or even close friends, also related to athletic activity in more direct ways: by encouraging women to learn new skills or to join new athletic activities. For example, some women received pointers from others whom they met or saw regularly in the park. Others noted that spontaneous, temporary, pick-up teams formed easily because of the parks "neighborhood" atmosphere, as one woman explained:

> Oh, I've hooked up with the crazy Ultimate [Frisbee] players. . . . Sometimes you get recruited if they don't have enough people (laughs). I was just sitting on the sidelines, just watching after doing a couple of loops around the park, maybe stretching or whatever. And they'll, they'll call you over, say 'hey!' . . . Pickup sports . . . it's good for that sort of thing.

The ease of interaction in the park might also contribute to more stable, long-term affiliations for women's sports teams, such as flag football and soccer. Lynn, who played indoor ice hockey at the park's rink and skated on the park road in addition to hiking and biking there, told me that she looked out for potential recruits for her ice hockey team among women in the park. Likewise, a woman whom she had never met once approached her and invited her to play flag football with a group of other women, which Lynn attributed to characteristics of the park as a public space:

> . . . Prospect Park is kind of intimate. I mean, isn't that your experience as well, that it feels kind of neighborhoody, and . . . you say 'hi' when you run by somebody, that kind of stuff? It's . . . more like a small town than a big city. . . . People are sort of familiar. You know, when I ran, I knew the six or eight people that I was always gonna pass . . . running in the other direction or something. Um, I have a friend who's, you know, part of that bike pack [in the park]. So I recognize a bunch of those people on the bikes . . . there's a familiarity. Uh, and I think people find it easy to, you know, approach.

According to these women's descriptions, contact with strangers enriched the experience of sports and fitness in the park through the relationships themselves, which

were sometimes described as an unexpected outcome of what at first was intended to be a solitary activity. Strangers also sometimes helped to expand opportunities for sports and fitness activities, through advice on physical fitness training or invitations to play organized sports. Closely related to these kinds of relationships is the concept of social support, without which women might not exercise at all or might discontinue physical activity when they encounter constraints like injury or fear.

4.5 Receiving Care: Social Support

Research most often emphasizes the roles of family and friends in providing social support for physical activity, especially for women (e.g., Sallis et al., 1992; Eyler et al.,1998; Eyler et al., 1999; Taylor et al, 1999), but the women in my interviews sometimes found that others whom they met in the park also encouraged them to exercise and in some cases even helped them to continue when they otherwise might not have. For some women, the simple presence of others in the park doing physical activities was a motivator in itself. One woman commented that having others nearby who were engaged in similar activities while she jogged in the park helped her to feel "supported," by which she probably meant emotional support, or an overall sense of well-being and absence of negative emotion (Taylor, 1999). She explained that the presence of other women in particular, such as the women's softball league, helped her to feel safer than she might if they were not there. She also cited another example:

> I think . . . having more women out there, you feel safer. . . . One time I was running late at night [in the park], and there was this woman on roller blades, and she . . . kept coming back to me. . . . At first she didn't say anything, and then she eventually told me that she was kind of watching out for me. Which was . . . really nice.

Other women commented on the importance of the general presence of other women in the park, which fostered feelings of emotional well-being and safety. I also mentioned in the previous chapter that women felt more comfortable wearing tight-fitting or revealing workout clothes when they were in parks, rather than on streets, because they believed that they were less likely to be harassed by others in parks. One reason for this may be that in Central Park and Prospect Park there is a norm that women exercise in public. Because of this norm, there may be less unwanted behavior from others. The woman below compared her experiences in New York City parks to other places:

> And when I run in parks and places . . . particularly when I was in London, well generally people don't exercise there at all, but women really don't exercise there. So when I would run, I would get all sorts of stares.

Frequently, women also illustrated their points in these interviews through comparisons between Prospect Park in Brooklyn and Central Park in Manhattan, which is partially bounded by neighborhoods that they perceived as more affluent than those in Brooklyn (with the exception of Harlem at the northern end of Central Park, which women perceived as dangerous). One woman, quoted below, felt that she might have been embarrassed and discouraged if she began running in Central Park, where others appeared to have achieved a higher level of physical fitness and made more of a show of it. In Prospect Park, she felt comfortable exercising among others whom she felt were more like herself:

> I would say the one way in which I'm less comfortable in, in Central Park than in Prospect Park is, there are a lot of people in Prospect Park who are not in shape who are just . . . middle-aged and flabby and like, you know, plodding around the . . . park. . . . Central Park is a little bit more, sort of like, 'I have my fabulous body, and I'm running around in my bra . . . if Central Park had been like the park that I started running in, I might have been a little more . . . embarrassed . . .

Another woman, Karen, described a dramatic example of finding support among other joggers in Prospect Park, who helped her to overcome a period of "depression" and a physical injury, encouraging her to continue running when she might not have without their contact. She explained that she had come to New York City from Jamaica at the age of 16, then left New York for Boston when she was 19. It was not until four years prior to her interview, when she was in her mid-forties and married with two daughters, that she returned to New York because her husband was offered a job here. When she and her family moved to Brooklyn, Karen "got into a depression" and stopped exercising regularly; she missed her favorite running routes in Boston and "hated" Prospect Park, where other runners "had no manners." However, after six months she began running in the park again and "approached it differently" because she realized that she "needed to heal." She would drop off her daughter at school and run in the park at the same time every day, at mid-morning, and she began to feel the sense of familiarity described by other women, as she encountered "people that were familiar, and their faces were familiar."

At that point, Karen says, she began to feel good about being in New York for the first time, and the park became a place for her to find "relaxation." However, after about a year she again had to stop running in the park because of a hip injury, and she did not return for another two months. When she began running again, she met a man whom she had seen regularly before her injury:

> And I remember when I finally came back . . . and he saw me, and he stopped, and he said, 'I haven't seen you for so long'—you know, and I think I had laid off for, like two months—'what happened?' You know, so I said, 'Well, you know, I had a hip problem.' He saw that I was running slower and I was walking-running . . . he said, um, 'I've gone through that, you know, you will

> definitely heal. Don't worry, right now you probably think you'll never run again, but you will.'

The man introduced himself, and Karen said, the interaction "sort of took me back." After they parted, she continued running some more, and was surprised to have another, similar interaction:

> And then I saw somebody else, and they said, 'Hey, we haven't seen you for a while,' you know? So somebody else had noticed! And I said, 'Oh, you know, I'm recovering from an injury.' They said, 'Well, great to have you back.' So these people, you know, so I had realized, it just made me . . . the park, for me, Kira, was . . . so it was a healing, you know it helped me sort of—sort of healed me in terms of my depression, that it sort of brought me back.

Exercise and meditation were a part of Karen's overall approach to feeling better, but she was also "touched" by the attention she received after her absence from the park. The support she described encouraged her to begin "healing" from emotional pain, and it may have also played a role in helping her to appraise her physical abilities and to continue exercising as she healed from her injury. Other women in these interviews suggested ways, albeit less dramatic, that brief interactions or even the simple presence of others in the park served to support their physical activities, by helping them to feel safe and comfortable and by reinforcing a sense that women belong in public spaces.

4.6 Care, Relationships, and Exercise in the Park

In this chapter I have used Day's (2000) suggested framework of an ethic of care for understanding women's experiences of public space, drawing on my interviews where women spoke about caring and relationships as they interacted with experiences of public space and of physical activity. Relationships themselves were nurtured through and sometimes grew out of these experiences, and at the same time relationships with

others—whether existing relationships with family and friends or new relationships that were discovered in the park—helped to support and sustain physical activities. Caring for self and receiving care from others were also themes throughout, as women spoke about the park as a place where they could carve time and space for leisure physical activity and where they discovered others who provided care and social support. The themes that emerged around caring and relationships can be summarized as follows:

4.5.1 Family

Women's frequent care-giving roles, an ethic of care, and a lack of a sense of entitlement are among the documented constraints on women's leisure (Henderson et al., 1989; Henderson & Allen, 1991). These women sometimes found ways to combine physical activities in the park with quality family time, but they described these occasions as being more for the purpose of spending time with family, rather than engaging in vigorous exercise. More often, when they wanted to engage in physical activity for its own sake, women exercised alone or with other adults—friends, training partners, or husbands—which sometimes led them comment that they did not always feel like "the perfect mother." While conflict and guilt were sometimes mentioned, they were not prominent themes, so I would not conclude that these feelings were defining features of women's experiences of exercise. Furthermore, care-taking did not figure prominently as a constraint, probably because most of the women with children were white-collar professionals and/or in dual-earning partnerships with husbands or partners.[3] These women were fortunate enough to carve spaces and times for themselves, and they had the

[3] There were some exceptions: for example, one woman (Jenny) was a single mother and worked as a security guard, but she was between jobs at the time of the interview and exercised during the day.

choice to engage in leisure-time activities with children separately from their own activities. When they did include children, they described a range of possibilities from conflict through mutual enjoyment.

4.5.2 Companionship

Sports and exercise with friends allowed women to combine several interests at once, specifically physical fitness, spending time with others, exploring outdoor urban areas, and in one case contributing to charitable organizations. These descriptions of companionship reflect other findings of the importance of social networks and support from family and friends in helping women to get started with and continue exercise (Eyler et al., 1998; Eyler et al., 1999). These interviews also add richness to the concept of "social support," which is often a composite variable that is measured as it relates to frequency and adherence to exercise programs (e.g., Sallis et al., 1992). For these women, the company of friends helped to buffer negative experiences like boredom and physical discomfort, and at the same time it enriched the friendships themselves; one woman explained that she could have easily sat and talked at home with a friend but that going for a walk in the park was more enjoyable. The company of others also enabled women to more fully enjoy and explore urban parks, which they might not have done on their own because of concerns about venturing into unknown areas of the park or using the park at less-frequented times.

4.5.3 Friendly Space

Women frequently described the park as "friendly," "neighborhoody," or "neighborly," calling to mind the "unpersonal/bounded" or "friend-like" relationships of

public space that Lofland (1989) has described, which occur in all sorts of public places, such as laundromats, restaurants, stores, and public buses. As Lofland argues, these relationships are important for democracy, tolerance, leisure, and safety in public places. In my interviews, women also expressed that they valued the park's diversity or "community" and the sense of familiarity, caring, and safety bred by encountering others regularly. In this way the park may also be similar to the "neutral zones" that Day describes in an earlier (1999a) article, where white women felt safe and comfortable but did not necessarily seek out diversity. Many of the women in my interviews, most of whom were white, valued contact with strangers for the sense of comfort, caring, and familiarity that came with it, and diversity may have happened to be an incidental and pleasant consequence recognized after the fact. These relationships also sometimes began to extend beyond unpersonal/bounded brief encounters, as women would stop and talk, form relationships based on mutual interests (e.g., sports and fitness) and common circumstances (e.g., children of the same age), or use the park's social networks to form more permanent affiliations like teams or groups for pickup sports. Thus, the park functioned not only as a democratic public space but also, more specifically, as a place where women found practical supports for physical activities.

4.5.4 Emotional Support

Research has explored a range of dimensions and paths by which social support encourages exercise for girls and women, from role modeling and friendship (Taylor et al., 1999) to tangible supports like child care (Cody & Lee, 1999). The women in these interviews seemed to be talking about emotional support—a sense of well-being while exercising in the park because of the presence of others doing similar activities or through

interactions with others whom they met there. Their comments also suggested a process by which they took stock of others in the park and of their likelihood of feeling safe and comfortable there. A number of behaviors on the part of others have been found to police women's activities in public places, either limiting their presence in public spaces or shaping their behavior and the specific places they use for leisure activities (see Franck & Paxson, 1989; Wearing, 1998; Woodward & Green, 1988). However, these women described Prospect Park as a place where they often felt safe and where others' presence lent toward feelings that that they could go about their own activities without risk of harm, harassment, or embarrassment. This sense of safety often depended on others' engaging in similar activities—"other people there running, like you"—perhaps suggesting a more general social similarity for these women.

Finally, in the case of one woman, interactions with others in the park helped to encourage physical activity in the wake of both emotional distress and a sports-related injury. The specific functions of social support in recovery from sports injuries are still not clear, but some recent qualitative research has found that others can play an important role by reassuring the injured person that she will recover and return to previous activities and by providing clear information about when and how to return to those activities (Bianco, 2001). As with other research on social support, this research has emphasized social networks like friends, family, and medical practitioners, but this woman described finding this type of support incidentally among the friend-like relationships in the park. Likewise, the encouragement and sense of well-being that many of these women described suggests possibilities for various types of social support for physical activities in public places.

4.5.5 Safety

The theme of safety in these interviews cuts across women's descriptions of interactions with friends, family, and strangers. Many of these women were fairly assured of their personal safety in the park, but some concerns did exist for them, so they met with friends and acquaintances in the park as added insurance against crime or mishap. The park was also a place where women saw others regularly, and they came to develop relationships with strangers whose presence also added to perceptions of safety and well-being, even though sometimes those relationships were nothing more than a smile or quick "hello." Some women also mentioned that being accompanied by teenagers or older pre-teen children helped them to feel safer, but this seemed to conflict with their children's interests. Overall, the sense of safety that they described suggests the possibilities in public space that Day (2000) emphasizes, which may arise from relationships with friends, families, strangers, and places themselves.

The sense of safety among others in the park might also help to explain contradictory findings in recent studies on exercise and the outdoor environment, which have found in some cases that perceived safety is not a significant factor for women (King et al., 2000; Wilcox et al., 2000) but in other cases that fear is a barrier to exercise (Eyler et al., 1998). Women in one study (Whyte & Shaw, 1994) reported that fear led to changes in leisure activity patterns as well as anxiety in public spaces and frustrations over extensive planning (e.g., meeting with others). However, for the women in this study, safety was sometimes an adjunct to the companionship that they enjoyed as part of physical activities in public spaces. Leisure activities are most meaningful when they allow opportunities for social interaction and feelings of connection (Henderson & Allen,

1991; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997), and these women valued the park for its ability to foster relationships while supporting a variety of physical activities. Prospect Park is a well-utilized resource for outdoor activity in a densely-populated urban area, and these women have found that the patterns of activity throughout time and space in the park (e.g., many early-morning exercisers and traffic on the outer roadway) help them to also feel safe and supported.

The experiences discussed here relate to a specific aspect of Gilligan's (1982) ethic of care—the importance of interconnecting relationship networks, such as family, friendships, marriage and romantic partnerships, community, and neighborhood—as they arose in discussions of everyday activities in a specific public space. On a practical level, the concept of relationship informs research on physical activity and the environment, which has attracted growing interest because of connections between physical inactivity and recent increases in obesity and other, related health concerns in the United States (Sallis et al., 1998; French et al., 2001; Frank & Engelke, 2001; Humpel et al., 2002). The simple presence of others exercising is one feature of the physical environment that has been found to impact women's physical activities (King et al., 2000), and the current study suggests that having others nearby is important for a number of reasons, such as social support for physical activity and perceived safety in general. For these women, physical activity was also more enjoyable when it involved relationships with others, not only close friends and family but also strangers and acquaintances, and they valued public space for its ability to foster these relationships while offering an outdoor space that supported a variety of physical activities.

On a theoretical level, the data from these interviews speaks to the possibility of applying the ethic of care theory toward understanding women's experiences of public spaces. A separate spheres framework is useful for theorizing women's experiences of public space, but it is certainly not sufficient. Applying the ethic of care theory—where "care" is not only a moral abstraction but also a set of activities that are intertwined with the difficulties and joys of everyday life—provides better insight into the social fabric of women's lives and the ways that it carries over into multiple contexts, including a setting like a public park. However, an ethic of care framework is also probably not completely sufficient as a way of fully understanding women's experiences of leisure and public space. As these interviews also suggested, sometimes constraints will occur that do not relate to relationships or caring (e.g., time constraints due to work, school, or other interests), and sometimes possibilities will arise outside of relationships and caring (e.g., nature or physical challenge).

Care might also be the flip side of fear, which was also often a part of these women's experiences. As Day (2000) demonstrates, an ethic of care also sometimes goes hand-in-hand with the separate spheres ideology that dictates women do not belong in public places. That ideology implies, for example, that women must be cared for because they are delicate or vulnerable—even if that means women watching out for one another—or their care-taking duties mean that they are vigilant toward danger when in public places, particularly where children are concerned. I have focused here on the ways that women experienced relationships and incidentally found pleasure and a sense of well-being among their relationships with others in the park. However, the relationships that they described were not always without conflict. As I have already mentioned, the

crowded conditions on the park's road sometimes led to physical dangers and aggressive interactions, such as those between cyclists and runners. As I will discuss later, conflict also sometimes occurred around activities on playing fields and courts, and that conflict had undertones of difference based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

I do not mean to imply that these women never experienced fear, sexual harassment, or frightening episodes; they also reported that these experiences were sometimes a part of their overall use of the park. Their descriptions suggest a specific nature to the relationships that they perceived as supportive and caring—a delicate balance between care and fear. They regarded most of the "regular" strangers they encountered as trustworthy, but a few were familiar for their erratic or bizarre characteristics, which created caution based on familiarity instead of trust. If the presence of others "running like you" was a source of comfort, then indicators that others are not "like you" might also become occasions for distrust. Supportive and caring relationships broke down for these women when a young man was riding a bicycle in the wrong direction, or perhaps when he was wearing the wrong pair of running shoes or simply sporting the wrong "look."

Men and boys, particularly men and boys of color, were most likely to trigger suspicion or fear, so that women's perceptions of race and ethnicity were the most powerful indicators of difference. The set of relationships that constituted a welcoming environment did not include those who are perceived as other—in these women's narratives and in many of our common discourses. As I discuss in the following chapters, the belief that public spaces are inappropriate and dangerous for women also depends on perceptions of black and Latino males as dangerous and uncontrollable.

Chapter Five

THE FEMALE JOGGER MYTH: CONSTRUCTIONS & DECONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER, RACE, AND SPACE

Female joggers beware—If you choose to enter the park without a partner, you will be like Bambi in hunting season, ENDANGERED. If you insist on defying the odds, then train to become Rambolina and be ready to defend yourself. After dark! Be smart! Stay out of the park! (Guardian Angels leaflet, MacLean, 1995)

The instances that have happened to women joggers in the park, I mean when did you ever hear about a man jogger getting murdered? A man who's been drinking maybe, or somebody wants to mug somebody who's walking, but there's never a jogger. There's never an athlete . . . (White woman, age 58, interviewee)

5.1 Public Displays of Athleticism

The first quote above comes from a leaflet distributed in Central Park in 1995 by the Guardian Angels, after a woman jogging in a wooded section of the park was murdered (MacLean, 1995). Its tone illustrates the myth around the "female jogger," a myth that has become particularly powerful since 1989, when another woman was raped, beaten, and left for dead, surviving and leaving a legacy of fear and racism in New York's parks and other public places for years to come (hooks, 1990). Until recently, when the woman published a book and began to appear publicly, she was known only as the Central Park Jogger, and the name came to signify not just an individual but a whole set of understandings of the urban landscape, the place of women there, and the dangers posed by "wild" others.

The second quote comes from an interview with a 58-year-old white woman who lives in an affluent Manhattan neighborhood. She has lived in New York City for over 30 years and is quite physically active, now frequenting Central Park for cycling and skating, and in the past for jogging. Her comment pivots on another hinge of the rhetoric about women, safety, and public space—that the threat of danger may lie not only in where a woman is, but also in what she is doing there. When there is talk about a woman being victimized in a place like Central Park, whether that talk is proliferated through mass media or otherwise, it is likely that the woman in the story was jogging, walking, or engaging in some other behavior likely to be construed as frivolous. But if the story is about a man who has been victimized, he is more likely to have been doing something else, like drinking, or he has been mugged rather than raped. The moral of the story is that it is irrational for a man to drink alcohol at night in a public park, or to flaunt his material wealth for others to steal, but for a woman it is irrational to jog alone in a public park, and it is most irrational to jog alone in the early morning or late evening hours—even if that is the only time when a woman who works long hours may be able to exercise, which was the case with the first Central Park Jogger.

In this chapter, I examine the female jogger myth as it informed women's ideas about danger in the park and larger constructs of gender, race, and space—constructs which are frequently a part of our everyday discourses. Those constructs appeared in my conversations with women when they spoke about using Prospect Park and Central Park (which was also frequently mentioned as a place of danger) for individual, often solitary, fitness activities. On the one hand, a dominant discourse might suggest that women are entitled and encouraged to participate in activities for the sake of their health and well-

being, and furthermore that public parks are a likely place for them to do so. For example, the current popularity of running, a sport in which women have been well-represented, has contributed to renewed use and upkeep of urban public parks after years of neglect and disinvestment (Kort, 1988). Yet on the other hand, a competing dominant discourse suggests prospects of danger, rational thinking, and appropriate behavior must all dictate a woman's actions and movements. The Victorian separate spheres ideal continues to influence constructions of gender and space, but as they actively use public spaces, women may challenge that ideal or create conflicts in ways of thinking about gender and space, for themselves and perhaps for others.

In this chapter I also continue to explore ways in which women used Prospect Park, in spite of messages about propriety or safety in public places. Nearly twenty years ago, Lyn Lofland (1984) challenged some of the assumptions held dear in feminist research and practice, which suggest that women more than men prefer intimate relationships over the impersonal relationships "out in public" and that women are excluded from or in danger in public places. These assumptions have produced valuable research, but as I have shown in the previous two chapters, women also use public places in a number of ways, and these uses require formulating a more inclusive framework for understanding women in public space. Such a framework should account for women's positive experiences of public space (Day, 2000), as I discussed in the previous chapter, where women found familiarity and support among others in the park. An inclusive framework would also help to understand what it means when women transgress beyond what is believed to be private, appropriate, and safe, when they venture into spaces where they do not always feel a sense of familiarity, safety, or support (Koskela, 1997).

Thus, the first set of discourses that I examine here includes the widely-circulated media stories, words of mouth, and more private talk (with friends, family, and self), which tell women to be careful of their personal safety when they engage in activities in public places (Valentine, 1989). I also look at the discourses that women related in their interview narratives, as they made sense of the dominant discourses, reflected on how those dominant discourses contributed to their experiences, and began to make their own "identity claims" (Talbot et al., 1996).

5.2 Ground Rules

When I spoke with women about their fitness activities in New York's public parks, they described specific geographical and temporal patterns for their movement—a set of rules that varied slightly from interview to interview but also had some general patterns. Prospect Park and Central Park are both encircled by perimeter roadways within park boundaries, and both roads are often well-populated and open to the view of others there. Women frequently spoke about running, cycling, or skating on those roads, but many were cautious about being anywhere in the parks at times during the day when it might have been dark or less populated, such as early morning or late evening. Some women who ran would forego a workout if it was too close to dusk, or they would avoid the park altogether and stick to the streets if dark was approaching. If they found themselves in the park as dark fell, or when it was unexpectedly under-used because of conditions like gray and wet weather, they picked up the pace, joined others who looked "safe," or turned around and headed back toward home. Early mornings, although often still dark, were also often described as less threatening than evenings. As some women explained, it was sometimes dark when they began running in the park at 6:00 or 6:30

a.m., but as long as there was "just even a little bit of light" they felt relatively safe, with the presence of other early morning exercisers, commuters, traffic, and the guarantee that it would soon be full daylight.

A school principal, who started work early and was very disciplined about her fitness, ran four days a week at 4:30 in the morning, when it was completely dark. She lived near Prospect Park and would run on the sidewalk alongside one edge of the park, avoiding going into the park itself. Even at this early hour, there were other people running, as well as many women walking, who had all come to know one another and watch out for one another, so as she explained, "It's fine. You get used to the people . . . and you get to know who's out there, and whatever." She further expressed her fear of being close to the park so early in the morning and the sense of safety on the streets among others, compared to the park itself:

> Because if something happened, you've got the buildings across the street, and you're on the street . . . I mean, you could be dragged, but you're still on the street. And to me, that to me is a sense of security, being on the street. Or on a sidewalk, as opposed to being in the park.

As long as it was not too early or too late, mornings and evenings presented a window of opportunity when the park was filled with others who were exercising, while midday during the week was a time when the park sometimes seemed "creepy" because there were fewer exercisers. Many park users were probably at work during this time—or they may have sought shelter from the heat during summertime—but some of my interviewees exercised in the park at midday on weekdays. However, they expressed caution about being in the park then, again because they felt alone, isolated, and defenseless in case something should happen. Without the familiarity of others whom

they saw regularly, some of these women were uncertain about even being on the roadway. Even police and park rangers were not a reliable source of security; while some women commented that they thought police presence had increased in recent years, others believed that "there aren't enough police out there" at crucial times, such as 4:30 in the morning, or that police were present in the park only "every so often" and were "usually talking with each other." Some women also pointed out the "double-edged" nature of police presence in the park, whose might be just as unpredictable and unmonitored as anyone else's when few others are nearby:

> And the experience of being there, for the people who use it. It also feels like, you know, the cops could really, just as the rapist, you know, chooses the park because it's secluded, the cop can sort of maybe act more inappropriately than he should, because nobody's around . . . like harass somebody more. . . . It's just . . . more of a free space, right? In the middle of the . . . city. For everybody, I guess.

Another unwritten rule that many women followed was to avoid interior sections of the park where they might be concealed from others, such as the transverse roads and wooded sections (See Figure 5). Fear of crime in more concealed sections has been a concern since the parks were constructed in the mid-19th century, a concern that was initially addressed by enforcing after-dark curfews and later by removing the offending greenery (Heckscher, 1977). As I mentioned earlier, some of these women liked to "explore" the "ins and outs" of the wooded areas or the fountains, gardens, and fields located further within the park, but many hesitated to venture to these places alone. Several mentioned "scenery" as a unique and attractive aspect of the park, but their desire for attractive places conflicted with concerns for safety. The words that they used indicated both a taste for adventure and at the same time a wariness of areas in the park where one might encounter wilderness.

FIGURE 5: STEPS LEADING TO LOOKOUT HILL, OFF OF WELL HOUSE DRIVE, ONE OF THE "ISOLATED" AREAS THAT WOMEN AVOIDED OUT OF FEAR. (PHOTO BY AUTHOR)

In both the built environment and "natural" environments, women are more afraid in areas where they feel enclosed or entrapped and isolated from others, with little perceived opportunity for escape, and where they believe that potential assailants might attack them by surprise (Burgess, 1998; Day, 1999b; Valentine, 1989). Many women in these interviews would hike or jog "off the beaten path" only if they were with others, fearing that they would be vulnerable to sudden attack when alone and isolated:

> And you know, I was with [my husband], it wasn't like I was alone, even, that I had this kind of sense of, feeling just very isolated, you know, and vulnerable . . . just kind of in the middle of the park, nobody would hear anything kind of feeling, you know . . . if somebody wanted to mug us or whatever . . . like it gives you this kind of anxious feeling, like does something go on here that I don't know?

All of these women were laying out a general rule: avoid danger by staying visible to others and by staying where others are visible to you. In following this rule, they used the park during daylight or near-daylight, preferred the more populated areas

even during daylight hours, or made sure that they were accompanied by someone else if venturing into areas that were likely to be secluded. Fear has specific spatial and temporal components, but the connections between space, time, and gender becomes clearer when women talk about exactly what it is that they fear, as I discuss below.

5.3 Female Joggers and Other Irrational People

When women talk about the ways that they experience their bodies, they sometimes access the language that is most available to them (Carney, 2000), which may be a language of danger and vulnerability, particularly vulnerability to sexual assault (Marcus, 1992). Relying on this language, the women whose conversations I am reporting may have heard "I told you so" before even walking out the door. When I pressed them about the specific natures of their fears—what they thought might happen to them—some responded "rape" right away. Sometimes they would say "assault" or "attack," and when I asked them to clarify, they would specify "rape" or "mugging." A few mentioned bicycle theft in particular, because "now there's something that someone can take from you," but the possibility of theft also seemed to carry with it more options: pedal faster, or give up the bike and walk away with your life. Rape, however, is constructed as a terrible and inevitable outcome once confronted with a potential attack (Marcus, 1992). As one woman summed up, "Well basically you have to worry about rape in that park."

They explained that bad things may happen to men, but as women they believed that they had to be extra cautious. Felicia, the woman quoted at the beginning of this chapter, observed that when one hears news of an attack in the park, a woman might be

jogging, but never a man. I interpreted her comment as a critique of common perceptions about women and appropriate activities in the park, because Felicia was the only woman of those who used Central Park who confidently asserted that she was not afraid when riding her bike alone at the northern end of the park, at what was referred to as "Harlem Hill." She also used a nearby, wooded transverse road, where she noted that there is "always" a police officer stationed because of the Central Park Jogger rape.[1]

However, Felicia also echoed some of the dominant discourses about women in public spaces, when she explained that she was less confident about riding alone along a popular route for cyclists outside of the city, where traffic is a concern:

> I've even done it by myself, which is not a good idea. You know, to ride from here to, to Piermont and home. I think guys do it a little easier than girls, but. And probably if something were to happen, it's better if you're not by yourself. . . It's the same thing, like the female jogger in the park way back then . . . there's some things you probably shouldn't do.

She explained that her main concern was physical injury, but still "guys do it a little easier than girls," whether "it" is a bicycle ride outside of the city or a solitary car trip across country. I asked her to explain further why men might be less concerned about doing these things alone:

> I don't think they worry about their safety so much, like their personal safety . . . we [women] have the one thing to get hurt, we have the other thing that somebody might just decide, you know—. They [potential attackers] don't know how old I am. They see a woman. And hopefully they don't know whether it's a man or a woman, but—.

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[1] Other women mentioned that a police officer is permanently stationed at this area and at a kiosk at one of the park entrances, both of which seemed to serve as both a reminder of the Central Park Jogger episode and of their own safety. However, there are no similar, permanent police kiosks in Prospect Park.

Phrases like "personal safety" in these conversations seemed to refer to the possibility of sexual assault, which women were sometimes hesitant to verbalize at first, both in my interviews and in other research (Day, 1999b). "Why tempt fate?" another woman said, sounding very indignant. "I see women do it all the time." (She was, in fact, referring to women who used an area that she avoided, one of the transverse roads in Prospect Park, where I have frequently done my own workouts and my observations for this research). When I asked her, "And is it different for women?" she responded:

> Yeah, because, I mean to me, the fear of being raped is just—you know, it's just an additional kind of—issue. Well, I guess men can be raped, but I don't think they go around conscientiously, you know thinking about it the way that we do.

Yet another woman expressed a similar thought when I asked her if she had any concerns about the park:

> Yes, I do . . . there are certain areas that I would love to explore, Kira, during the daytime. And I run, I don't run very, very early . . . I just run on the running path. But you know, there's areas . . . there is areas that you can cut through. That's really quite, uh, pretty. But I'm concerned that, you know, as a woman, uh, maybe for a male too—I wouldn't want to get mugged, or you know, raped. So there's times that when, if I'm not with a friend, I would not venture out in the middle of the park. There's too, um, isolated areas.

These women translated stories about "things that have happened" into their thoughts and patterns of movement—where they go, when, and with whom. Through these stories and the ways that they are interpreted on an everyday level, the park became the physical locus for a discourse about rape—if not the entire park itself, at least the more "isolated areas."

5.4 Experiences of Harassment and Violence

Rachel Pain (1991) argues that women fear sexual violence in public more than in the private sphere, even though they are at greater risk of assault in the home. Their fear is based less in reality and more in social control (e.g., Madriz, 1997), as the rhetoric of danger challenges full participation in public life. However, Pain (1991; 1999) further argues that it is not only rhetoric that suggests physical and sexual violence, but also the actual occurrence of unwelcome behavior, namely sexual harassment, which contests women's presence in public spaces like the workplace.

In the 19th century, when the production of goods moved outside of the home and bourgeois ideals dictated that women should stay in the private sphere, their presence in public for work or pleasure provoked sexual harassment (see Franck & Paxson, 1989). Today, when women engage in leisure activities—when a woman sips drinks at a bar alone, throws a ball, or goes running—it is as if they have agreed to participate in the interplay that may or may not be called harassment, one of the ways in which a separate spheres ideal is still enforced. According to Gardner (1989), these "street remarks" are breaches in ordinary public etiquette and are occasioned only by a few causes, one of which is behavior that is out of role. Women's very presence in a public place is out of role, so street remarks constitute a reprimand—a form of social control over their behavior.

The women I interviewed cited a range of unwanted behaviors, which men might consider innocent advances (Goffman, 1977), such as whistles or comments like "hey mama!" and "shake your thing!" Even though these behaviors might have seemed innocuous to the perpetrators, women experienced them as incursions that made them

feel "annoyed," as if their sense of freedom and peace were "invaded." Above all, they expressed anger:

> About a month ago, it was really, really hot. And I was supposed to be doing a [training] run, and I had worn all of my workout clothes, and all I had left are a pair of shorts that a friend of mine calls my "hoochie mama" shorts. Um, because they're fairly high cut. And I looked at 'em and I said, "It's three o'clock in the afternoon. Nobody's gonna mess with me." So I put them on, and I went out for a run, and a whole bunch of kids were hanging around, right around here. And I went running by, and they all started going, "Oo, baby, shake your thing, blah blah blah!" I was like, you know, you don't have to look at me at all. You don't have to pay any attention, but because I'm wearing shorts that are like, an inch shorter than what I normally wear, all of a sudden everybody thinks they can say whatever they want, you know?

Gardner (1989) argues that women are faced with a dilemma when men offer street remarks, because the remarks are demonstrations of power and privilege but disguised as compliments. Women might feel some obligation to respond, but if they do they are ratifying the breach in etiquette and thus introducing the possibility of further unwelcome or even aggressive behavior. Rather than respond, women in Gardner's interviews and observations most often used a variety of strategies to ignore or avoid street remarks before they occurred. In my conversations, women were uncertain of the best ways to respond to the men who made these remarks, and often they did not respond beyond gestures like "the evil look." Some feared drawing more attention to themselves or engaging in confrontation:

> I wish I was the kind of person who would talk back to those people, but I don't, I just ignore it. I'm a wimp. I don't like to get into it with people.

Other times, depending on the nature of the talk, someone might rise to the challenge. One woman reported receiving affronts to her physical ability itself, such as "How far you goin' honey, two blocks?" In response to those remarks:

> I would say something like "Ah, Jack, you couldn't even keep up with me if you tried." Or I would say something about, "Come on, I'll race you five miles." You know, I mean, it would depend on what they said. Knowing damn well that . . . I could beat them five miles.

In this woman's case, others had cautioned her against engaging others, but after nearly 20 years of running in the city she felt that she knew how to play the game of banter, even if she would have preferred to simply be left alone. Other women in my interviews came closer to perceived physical danger, like the woman above who attracted unwanted attention when wearing short shorts; she told me that on another occasion, comments of "hey baby" quickly escalated to angry yells of "dyke!" when her running partner spat at the men who had started the exchange.

Often these women said in their interviews that street remarks were just that; they occurred on the streets, while the parks were more likely to be places where they felt safe from harassment. However, there were a few times in the parks sexual danger arose without warning, as it did for a friend of mine as she was walking her dog in Prospect Park, hoping to "relax and enjoy the park." Instead she encountered a man masturbating near a wooded path, close to the well-traveled perimeter road:

> Actually, I could only see his butt. And . . . I yelled at him, I said, "You fucking asshole!" . . . He just kept going. . . . And then three men came by as I had already passed him, and I noticed that he had pulled up his pants for them.

In Burgess' (1998) focus groups with park users in England, flashing was a frequent occurrence that men trivialized, but women reacted with shock, outrage, and disgust, and some women stopped going to parks as a result of flashing. For my friend, this experience of another's body too close to hers was "disturbing" and "invasive," but she has continued to use the park since. Another woman experienced a more directly

aggressive act while running in Central Park, and she explained the subsequent impact that it had on her conceptualization of park spaces in general:

> But I guess that influences my opinion of the park, 'cause when I run alone, that's when I get nervous, 'cause I was running alone in Central Park, and these little kids came up to me, and one of 'em yanked my shorts down. It was awful. . . . And then I was like crying, and these people came over. It was weird, 'cause it was just like, this moment. It wasn't even a not-crowded day. It was like, light out, there were people in the park.

Whether it was outright aggression or veiled as more playful behavior, it was difficult for women to dismiss any of the range of behaviors described here. These episodes made women feel annoyed, disturbed, angry, and scared, and these feelings affected their perceptions of space, their bodies, and the ways that they should in turn behave. What was going on here was a policing of women's bodies, which may be even more prevalent when women are being physically active. In our conversations, women often attributed unwelcome remarks and gazes to their appearance, specifically the clothes that they wore, but in fact harassment and aggression are in part a contestation of women's right to engage in a range of behaviors, whether leisure or paid/unpaid work, in public places. Their brushes with danger also happened at times and in places where it was not expected, during the daytime and with others nearby, in spite of the fears expressed in these interviews that danger lurked in the dark and in unpopulated areas. This contradiction makes sense if thought of in terms of social control; while an internalized terror keeps women from dark and lonely places, actual occurrences of verbal and sometimes physical aggression reminds them that they might not even belong in places that they though were safe.

5.5 Constructions of Gender, Race, and Space

The case of the Central Park jogger, a frequent reference point for these women, is an illustration of the "interlocking" dependencies of space, gender, and race on one another; white women in public spaces are constructed as vulnerable to black men, who are in turn constructed as wild and savage (Ruddick, 1996). When women spoke about the qualities of the park that added up to fear and danger, they described physical and topographical features, such as trees, hills, and openness/visibility. However, social qualities of space are more important than physical ones in explaining why fear is felt more strongly in some places over others (Burgess, 1998; Day, 1999b; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Pain, 2000). These narratives also evoked a social geography of parks, one in which places themselves were not only strange and "spooky;" strangers might also "lurk" in those places or be "coming out of the woodwork." In addition to rules about time and space, others in the park were to be avoided if they seemed "weird," "creepy," or "crazy." Furthermore, specific places within the parks were also racially coded and thus perceived as especially threatening. Some of the women who were white spoke quite openly to me, also a white woman, about their thoughts and feelings about black and Latino men and boys in those parts of Prospect Park and Central Park, which were usually also associated with neighborhoods that are identified as black or Latino.

White women sometimes use place names as a proxy for talking about people of other races who occupy those places (Day, 1999a). In my interviews with white women, the "east side" of Prospect Park (bordering the neighborhood of Flatbush) and the "north end" of Central Park (bordering Harlem) were described as particularly dangerous places. Many women also cited "Harlem Hill" in the northern section of Central Park—actually

called The Great Hill according to the Department of Parks and Recreation's descriptive plaque—as a dangerous area. One woman believed that "tragic" things have happened in Central Park's northern section, where people have been "hauled off into the bushes and killed." Likewise, women sometimes described others' behavior in the eastern section of Prospect Park as generally more wild and erratic, where careless youth zig-zagged on their bicycles, "trying to cut you off," and "guys . . . just sit there and make comments." Another defining feature that contributed to fear of men and boys in this part of the park was that they were apparently not engaged in legitimate athletic activities:

> We've had people do weird stuff on bikes, too, like people who are not like cyclists as you would think of cyclists, but just some guy out there on a bike, will follow you . . . sometimes they'll follow you when you're running, too, which is really scary.

One white woman explained to me her reasons for being cautious near one of the hills in Prospect Park, where she has heard that joggers have been attacked, and which is also connected to "that side of the park" where "it's not as nice." As she further explained, she offered a description of a neighborhood on "that side" of the park, where she rented an apartment with a friend but left after two months because she felt isolated and threatened. The apartment was in a large home on a broad avenue, which she describes as being divided into well-off people in large homes guarded by fences and dogs on one side, and poorer people's homes and bodegas on the other. Again she described sharp social and spatial delineations:

> Nobody could come visit us. We were on the D [subway] train. Most of my friends are on the F line—Carroll Gardens, Red Hook, this side . . . the park is divided. This side [where her former apartment was] is Crown Heights, Bed Stuy, it was on that side. This side [where she now lives] is Park Slope, you know, Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn Heights . . . it's a big division there.

Her description reflected white women's discussions of "outposts" in another study—spaces where white women felt unwelcome and that they avoided for essentialist reasons, such as a perceived hostility toward white people (Day, 1999a). Significantly, this woman also confused the neighborhood where she briefly lived with another neighborhood that had become known for the media-sensationalized murder of Amy Watkins, a young, white social work student who was stabbed by two black men. She concluded, "It was that intense there . . . that kind of viciousness," which to some degree she believed "transfers to the park."

Another white woman told me about a few occasions when she was jogging in Prospect Park and the park seemed "desolate," so she turned back when she reached the area "closer to Flatbush and some of the neighborhoods" to return to the "yuppie area." Her reasons for feeling uncomfortable included qualities of the physical environment, such as the density of trees and physical access to the streets outside of the park, but she also confessed that "the race thing" influenced her use of the park:

> I'd find that when I was running, like the nice, white—you know, white runners, would make eye contact and smile. And like the people who were either walking who were nonwhite, would either not look at you, or the people who were running sometimes would nod and smile and sometimes would make a point of not looking at you. Or maybe I wasn't looking at them, I don't know. But I always felt that.

When I asked her who the people were who avoided eye contact, she recalled that they looked black and Latino. However, when she encountered black people, and some men who looked Mexican, who were "clearly training"—in other words, doing the same thing that she was doing—they were more likely to seem friendly and nice. These comments jibe with the theme in my interviews that having a common purpose when in the parks breaks down social barriers; as I discussed earlier, women felt safe among

others who were in the park "running like you." However, like the comment above about the men on bikes who did not really seem to be cyclists, descriptions of appearance and behavior also informed an overall construction of difference within the different spaces of the park.

Even when they acknowledge race constructs, white women may not be aware of all of the ways that power and privilege are systemically produced around skin color, and they instead experience race as their own vulnerability to men of color (Day, 1999a). In addition to concerns about "isolated" places, white women here also mentioned concerns about "tensions" in the park among people belonging to different "cultures" or occupying different spatial "zones." For example, one white woman mentioned barbecues as an occasion for potential racial tensions, which might have referred to the tension that she felt rather than potential tensions among other users. On the other hand, A Jamaican woman told me that she liked jogging in the park while families were barbecuing, because the noises, smells, and crowds felt to her like a festival. (Previous research by Taplin et al. [1998] found that people of color were more likely to barbecue in Prospect Park than white people, but white park users complained about the smells, noise, and litter left behind.)

Black women in my interviews seemed to have slightly different understandings of danger and its localities than white women did. Some of them also mentioned rape as a concern in the park, in addition to bicycle theft or mugging. One black woman (Pam), who lived on "this" side of the park in the Park Slope neighborhood, also felt more fearful if she found herself in the park as it was growing dark and where she was "farthest from home." However, her anxiety was not necessarily related to the men and boys who

populated that area of the park, but as she said, "I get the most nervous . . . because I'm so far."

Another black woman (Jenny), who did in fact live on "that" side of the park, in a public housing complex, had perhaps the most specific and detailed set of ground rules of my interviewees. She walked in the park during midday—a time when many women felt that the park was isolated and potentially dangerous—but only felt free to "wander" if she was accompanied by her daughter. Like many other women, she was also concerned about "other people's situations" (such as the story of a woman who had been hit in the head with a brick) or about "wild" teenagers in the park "trying to play tough guys," but she was more specific than other women in her description of these boys. Her information came from her step-son, who went to the park with his friends during the day but left around five o'clock in the evening, when some young men who they believed to be gang members began to come into the park. Based on this information, Jenny avoided the park altogether after about five o'clock. Jenny was also the only interviewee to offer specific information about bike theft in the park; she had heard that some young people from her neighborhood had stolen bikes from people in Prospect Park, and her 14-year-old daughter supplied the name of the adult who would buy the bikes and move the stolen parts through the informal economy. Jenny and her children seemed to possess a richer "street literacy" (Cahill, 2000) regarding danger and safety than many interviewees, which in this case had been passed upward from a younger generation to inform Jenny's movements throughout the park and its surrounding streets.

5.6 Deconstructing the Myth

In my interviews, women were sure enough of their fears to construct specific and sometimes elaborate patterns and rules for their own behavior in the parks, but they were less sure about their reasons why. A few knew firsthand of someone who had been raped or mugged. Those incidents curtailed their own activities for a few weeks at most, after which they would ease back into their previous routines. More often they would cite incidents further removed from themselves, about which they heard through the news media or local folklore—"biker lore," as one woman called it. Their sources of information were similar to those in Valentine's (1989) research, which included media reports, discussions of those reports with others, "vicarious victimization," rumors, and warnings from others. However, these women also sometimes made statements revealing that they were aware of the mythic qualities of some of the more sensational stories, which was also noted with regard to discourses about public spaces in Britain (Burgess, 1998; Valentine, 1992). As they were describing their day-to-day uses of public space and their accompanying concerns, these women sometimes made remarks indicating that they were unsure whether their fears were realistic and warranted. Maybe, they suggested, they were in fact "totally paranoid" or indulging a "neurosis."

There were also some women who simply disregarded the folklore and media sensationalism, exhibiting the "boldness" that Koskela (1997) has documented in women's uses of public space. Some offered a critique of the contradictions in common beliefs about public space, like the following:

> You know, you're taught as a girl and as a woman that you know, you have to be careful. You have to watch out for yourself, and things like that. And then you read the crime statistics, and really . . . the perpetrators are normally people you know. Random violence does happen, but it's really very occasional . . . it's much

> more rare. And the people you need to fear . . . if it's likely that if something's going to happen, it's gonna be from someone you know. So, it's like, "Oh, so why am I walking around scared all the time?"

Kathy, the president the Prospect Park Track Club used the term "frozen evaluation," which she borrowed from the field of communications to explain others' perception that the parks are inherently dangerous. She explained that frozen evaluation means that people develop stereotypes about places like the subway or parks, in the same way that they do about other people, and these stereotypes remain frozen in time after particularly frightening or dramatic events. To illustrate, she told me a story about one night when she was running in the park: two men, who were also running, told her as they passed that she should not be running alone. Yet the men must not have sincerely believed what they said, because they continued to run past her as they said it and did not offer to accompany her. In her words, they were offering a "social comment," perhaps fulfilling what they thought was an obligation to point out what is commonly accepted to be risky behavior.

Pam, whom I mentioned above, pointed out to me on a map places in the park where she liked to run, which included transverse roads and trails. She explained that sometimes she ran alone on the trails, but she also had concerns because of others' cautions against going into those areas. When I told her that other women were timid or avoided those areas entirely, she reflected on her own sense of self and her internal dialogues about being cautious. Her deconstruction of the danger discourse centered around her African American racial identity, as well as a weighing of the odds of danger against a desire to explore:

Pam: . . . I guess also, I think being, um, African American . . . I'm not as afraid sometimes. . . . Maybe that's it, I don't know.

Kira: Um, say more about that.

Pam: I don't know. . . . Although, you know, Karen's [another interviewee, who is Jamaican] very cautious, like she would never do it. I just feel like . . . everybody goes, "Oh, you shouldn't do it, you shouldn't do it." But if I'm in a groove, and it's beautiful out, I say, "Forget it." I might take the chance. . . .

Kira: But you do it alone, too, you said?

Pam: Yeah, yeah.

Kira: And then sometimes you have that little voice in your head?

Pam: Oh yeah, it goes, "No." . . . that's what I'm saying, there's something saying "no." I'm like, aw, but it's beautiful, and who's gonna attack me? (laughs) No one's gonna attack me.

Kira: Um, well, what do you think that has to do with the fact that you're African American? An attitude? Or something that you think, people will look at you and say—

Pam: Yeah, "She's cool." I don't know. It's like, ah, what are you going to attack? . . . I don't have any money. I usually think that people are, you know, looking for money or something. But it's so gorgeous. . . .

Some of the women who defied popular beliefs acknowledged in some way that they were resisting dominant discourses of gender and space. My friend who told the story of the man masturbating also explained that she started jogging in the woods in Prospect Park years ago, simply because she wanted to get physically fit, and she wanted to get away from the "cars and the chaos" of the city. Over the years, running in the wooded areas began to reinforce a sense of independence for her, and she felt like a

"pioneer" exploring unknown territory. Other women talked about a similar sense of self, which they connected to being strong-willed, aware of and confident in their surroundings, and physically strong and athletic (on the other hand, being small in stature might make one feel more vulnerable, according to one woman's comments). One woman sometimes walked home through a wooded section of the park after soccer practice, although she had felt nervous about her safety at times. But she wanted to continue to walk that way, as she explained:

> 'Cause I could take 'em . . . 'cause it's just, I'm stubborn. I'm really stubborn. It's like, there's no other way to get home. I'm not gonna go the long way. You know, damn it, I should feel safe, and I'm sick of—you know, it's like, I'm just stubborn. . . . I'm sick of being scared! . . . and that's when I get into the 'I'll take 'em' mode, you know? . . . This is my space, damn it, and I can walk through this park. . .

Another woman made similar comments, connecting her own sense of confidence and ownership of space:

> . . . I've never had a uh, experience where I felt personally threatened . . . that I felt my safety personally threatened. And um, so that's probably some of it right there . . . and that . . . I feel like I can fight back. I know I don't have self-defense classes and skills, but I mean I'm a, you know, I'm a [physically] fit person, I feel like I could run away, I feel like I could stand up to someone and you know, just say, you know, leave me alone, you know, get out of here, just sort of very, you know, assertive about it. . . . I guess I just figure that I'm not gonna . . . this is what I wanna do, and it's my park, and I'm not gonna let someone else intimidate me, you know?

Some described their activities as falling within an acceptable level or "calculated" risk, based on well-understood statistics and careful weighing of the possible outcomes. These women seemed to value their independence and strength, and they resisted messages telling them what they should do. Listening to those messages would have interfered with activities that were important and with a strong overall sense of self.

For example, a woman who rode her bike in Prospect Park after dark (the same woman who described sharp racial and class delineations in and around the park) explained that riding her bike is important to her, and she rode in the park at night because it was sometimes the only available time. However, it also made her proud "not to bow to her fear." She struggled with herself over the sense of risk but ultimately felt that it was worth it:

> On the other hand, I'm thinking, you fucking idiot. You could have gotten yourself killed. You know, it's kind of stupid. Is that worth the dare? But I think, overall, I think it is. You know, I think it's part of who I am, part of my character, part of where I draw my strength from . . . I think it gives you a trust in yourself. And I think that's why I dare myself, to do things like that. Um, to take those calculated risks, 'cause at the end, I can trust myself that much more.

Once again, the women quoted here described difficulties in separating the "real" dangers from the myths, but some concluded that whatever the risks actually are, they were willing to take them. It was important for them to have time and space for leisure physical activity, which sometimes meant being in the park at night or exploring less populated parts of the park. Defying the danger lore, some of them developed a sense of individualism and inner strength, which interestingly came from the very location of the park itself within a discursive space (see Teather, 1999), where the park is construed as dangerous and thus often avoided, by both men and women. Because women's bodies are constructed as being particularly vulnerable, women who did not want to believe this myth were aware that they were in a place where they were not supposed to belong. Some responded to that awareness by asserting even more strongly a sense that they did somehow control their surroundings—that "this is my space, damn it."

5.7 Reflections on Space and Discourse

In this chapter I have addressed the discursive nature of space, as it relates to gender, public places, and leisure-time physical activities. Discourses of danger and fear surround women, in frightening accounts of violent events, in others' cautions, in the harassment, verbal interchanges, and aggression experienced in public places, and in their own internalized dialogues about risk and public space. Men might also be cautious and fear victimization, and women may also fear property crime such as theft and mugging, but as my conversations confirmed, women believe that they have an added layer of fear, specifically that of rape, which is potentially present throughout public places. When moving through public space, they decode the behavior, appearance, and location of others, looking for signs of good or bad intentions.

The women I interviewed frequently used parks in very active ways, but many also avoided forbidden places and activities, constructed elaborate patterns for their activities, and sometimes questioned the rationality of their own behavior. In Koskela's (1997) interviews in Helsinki and other Finnish cities, women felt a sense of ownership over public space and exhibited what she calls "boldness," which included reasoning with fears, directly confronting fears, and taking pride in social and spatial skills. Koskela concluded that their boldness arose in part from the gender equity in Scandinavian culture, but I would argue that her findings are based not only in culture but also in the discourse of research. As Koskela herself notes, the academic discourse sometimes unintentionally constructs women as vulnerable and fearful more often than they really are, so her findings may have reflected what has not yet been said very often in the literature—that women are not as often afraid in public places as we might think.

Like the women in Koskela's interviews, some of these women also offered alternative discourses, sometimes refuting outright the behavioral proscriptions. They asserted that they were tough, physically capable, able to negotiate their surroundings, or unwilling to relent to what they thought were arbitrary prohibitions. However, the question sometimes lingered: can I really take care of myself, or am I just being stupid? As Koskela observed, when women talk about being unafraid, their talk is often seen as taboo and indecent, and that taboo may be powerful enough to cause these women to question their own sense of boldness and ownership of space. I have also encountered resistance to the idea that women are not always afraid in the park, when colleagues and fellow conference participants have insisted on victimization statistics or asked where danger was located in my interviews (I thought I had located it clearly within a discourse). I believe that the biological and geographical realities for which they were searching take on equally important social and psychological realities in the discourses that occur around gender and space (Pain, 2000). For these women, danger was a tangible concept responsible for spatial and temporal patterns of use, but a strong sense of ownership (of one's body and surroundings) also allowed some adjustment in constructs of danger and safety. Sometimes, however, there was cognitive dissonance created by these two competing ways of understanding one's surroundings; am I being "paranoid" in my fears, or am I being "stupid" by ignoring them?

A concept like boldness also assumes aloneness, but women do not always feel alone in public spaces, even if they are not actually accompanied by friends or family. In Chapter Four, I discussed the many ways in which these women felt safe and comfortable in the park. They often did not even speak in terms of boldness or confidence in those

cases, because they were with others when they went to the park, or because they encountered strangers in the park who seemed familiar and helpful. They did not have to feel bold, because they were in a safe-feeling environment. In this chapter, I discussed ways that these women determined when others were not safe. Their fear had spatial distributions, not just because of the physical qualities of certain parts of the park, such as rolling hills, greenery, and other obstructions to visibility, but also because of social qualities. Certain parts of the park were also racially coded, associated with "the neighborhoods" or different "cultures," and likely to be places where women might encounter others who they believed were not to be trusted. Those others were always men and boys, usually men and boys of color but sometimes men who were simply "weird" or "crazy." When they were engaged in what were perceived to be legitimate athletic activities—riding their bikes in straight lines and in the accepted direction, or running because they were apparently training for competition or for fitness—a similarity was implied and may have reduced some of the perceived social distance. However, as one woman pointed out, such perceptions were subjective judgments, and "just because they're dressed in running clothes doesn't make them okay."

For women of color, fear may be more complicated and less predictable than the fears that white women report. Other studies (Burgess, 1998; Day, 1999a; Scraton & Watson, 1998) have found that women of color fear racism in public spaces and identify "no-go" areas where racism might be encountered, in addition to the fears that all women experience. In my interviews, white women were cautious about places in and around the park where they might encounter men of color who did not appear to be engaged in legitimate behavior—an "interlocking" discourse of race and gender. Black women also

expressed fears, related to rape as well as theft and gangs. Jenny and Pam understood danger in the context of specific patterns of crime, which some white women did also, but Jenny was the only one who seemed privy to very specific information about gangs and bicycle theft in the park. Pam asserted a sense of confidence and boldness that some of the white women did, related not only to her understanding of risk but also to her African American identity.

The freedoms that women sought in this public space were sometimes challenged by experiences of harassment, feelings of fear, and overarching discourses of danger, all of which helped to construct the park as a potentially dangerous place. In that construction process, women are cast as potential targets of danger in a way that seemed imperative, and it was that imperative that these women resisted most stubbornly. They were less likely to question constructs of race that existed in their own and others' conceptions of the park and its environs, even though constructions of women as vulnerable so closely intersected with constructions of men of color as dangerous. Perhaps these women were unlikely to recognize race in these conversations because their social positioning in relation to the park as a space was most strongly anchored to their identities as women. Middle-class women of color in Day's (1999a) research feared crime in outdoor, public places where they encountered poor people of color, which is reflected in Jenny's mention of gang members in the park.

However, being a white woman is also very much about racial identity, and white people tend to see their own race as invisible until confronted with situations where they are forced to acknowledge it, for example when they are the minority (see Day 1999a, Ruddick 1996). Prospect Park is a space that has strong associations with the

neighborhoods around it, a cultural symbol representing the tensions of the "white" gentrified neighborhoods and the "black" neighborhoods that hang delicately on the edge of have-not status and displacement. The white women that I interviewed, when venturing into the park, might have hoped that their whiteness would remain invisible so that they would not have to confront those tensions. Prospect Park was the location for so many joyful experiences, an utter contradiction to the very deep tensions of race and class also embodied there. A few of these women began to show some recognition of those tensions, but that recognition ultimately translated into a sense of vulnerability. The associations among race, gender, and fear were so powerful as to be invisible themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

"NO MEN PASS THIS POINT": CREATING SPACES FOR WOMEN'S SPORTS

> I recorded some notes in the ladies' locker room (as it is labeled) in the field house. I had to use the bathroom, and a sign posted near the entrance to the locker room really caught my attention. It was hand-printed in magic marker on plain white paper and read:
> NO MEN PASS THIS POINT . . .
> "You know who you are"!! (field notes, August 16, 2000)

6.1 Passing Boundaries

The excerpt from my field notes above refers to my experience one day at the Parade Ground, when I took a break from observations to use the rest room at the field house there. The sign warning men not to "pass this point" was taped on the wall near the entrance to the women's locker room, and it caught my attention for a few reasons. First, I was not surprised to see it there, because I had already begun to feel self-conscious even before I found the locker room. As I approached, men and boys seemed to be teeming into, out of, and around the building, some of whom where teenagers, others who were younger. They had gathered for football practice, and some were weighing themselves on a scale that someone had placed at the top of the steps leading into the building. Other than two women staffing the office inside, I was the only woman, and I got the uncomfortable feeling that I did not belong. Another reason that I made note of the sign was that it reminded me of some of my own experiences with early-morning bicycle races, where most of the competitors were men, who had at times freely entered the women's rest rooms. At those times, when some bodies had apparently decided that there

were not enough women to justify a women's room, I found that my privacy was confined only to the space of a stall. The presence of men there made me feel angry and uncomfortable, but I also wondered what it was that might have allowed them to feel that it was okay to use a women'a rest room, an act that would probably not have gone unpunished under other circumstances. Perhaps it was a sense of physical necessity, or perhaps it was also a belief that this particular athletic event belonged more to men than to women, which entitled them somehow to behave in ways that they ordinarily would not behave.

What also captured my interest was the symbolic importance suggested by the informal injunction, "No men pass this point." It suggested to me the significance of gender boundaries, the freedom that some may feel to cross those boundaries, and the threats that others might perceive when they do. What was going on here—who had penned that sign, and why? Were men and boys dominating available athletic spaces, in this case the locker room, as it had appeared when I entered the building? Were women struggling to claim spaces of their own? Perhaps it reflected a struggle with interpersonal and structural constraints (see Bialeschki & Henderson, 2000; Henderson et al., 1989; 1999), such as conflicts with others in the park, overall attitudes regarding women in sports, or a lack of opportunities on athletic fields, where permits are required for teams to play. On the other hand, as I thought about it, "No men pass this point" also suggested the importance of women-only spaces for athletic activities, which have sometimes been called "safe spaces" (e.g., Varpalotai, 1992), and which are important because they allow women to comfortably participate in activities and learn new skills. Women-only activities might also challenge a "male model" of sport, where the emphasis is on

aggression, elitism of skill, and winning at all costs, all of which translate into an overall superiority of men via dominance over others (see Birrell & Richter, 1987; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Lenskyj, 1994; Zipter, 1988). Women's participation in physical and athletic activities might even have broader implications for women and for gendered power structures (see Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1998). In other words, as women overcome constraints on their activities, they may also challenge some of those constraints, such as inequities in sports and gender stereotypes.

However, if spaces throughout the park were often occupied by men and boys—or if men and boys seemed to dominate space through other means, such as yelling or playing rough—then women would also need to find possibilities among or within that set of constraints. Constraints like gender discrimination or limited access to facilities are persistent, and while they do not necessarily prevent participation in activities altogether, they might affect the experience of leisure. A woman might decide to participate in a game of soccer or basketball otherwise made up of men, but she might feel self-conscious about her abilities or her body (on the other hand, she might also feel positive emotion if she plays well and proves to herself that she is capable of competing among the "stronger" sex). So my questions were, to what degree did constraints on women's physical activities arise in the park, and how did these women deal with them?

Furthermore, the kinds of physical activities that I am exploring here have not always been constructed as appropriate activities for women, and especially not appropriate in "public" places where others may see them or where women might encounter greater potential physical harm. In recent decades, such negative conceptions have changed dramatically, but there are still ways that women's—and girls'—activities

are challenged on the real playing fields and in the cultural landscape. Therefore, I am also asking here, how do physical activities themselves play into the construction of gendered spaces—both actual places where women are, and the less visible social spaces identified as being for women or for men? I focus mainly on team sports in this chapter, because the park and other public spaces so often include greater numbers of men playing team sports, but I also discuss fitness activities on the roadway, where women also sometimes perceived men to dominate through rude or dangerous behavior.

6.2 The Roadway: Bullies and Flirts

As I have already discussed, the park was often a well-used space when the weather was warm, which contributed to feelings of safety and comfort but also set the stage for conflicts. The road looping around the park became especially crowded and sometimes dangerous, with potential for serious mishap, particularly on evenings and weekends in the summertime. Women's descriptions of their experiences confirmed what I had experienced on my own and documented during my observations: even when traffic is prohibited, the road can be difficult to navigate as children, dogs, and stray balls dart among joggers, skaters, and cyclists, some of whom are also inexperienced and behave erratically. Some women avoided the park road on weekends for the sake of physical safety, and some stayed away on weekend mornings, when they had witnessed "nasty accidents" involving bicycle races and recreational runners. Others also described conflicts with speeding cyclists at any given time, which sometimes had a gendered component in these narratives:

> And the only people are men, that yell at you. Women don't yell. Women say, ''scuse me, biker coming' (in an exaggerated, demure voice). Men go, 'Errr, get out of the way.' I mean, it's different, and you respond differently. You know, when they curse at me, I yell back, 'Oh, you slow down!'

> [During a bicycle race] . . . we were riding along, and we were in the rec lane [for running, skating, and cycling]. We knew that there were people coming up behind us and that we were passing through the finish line area, so we pulled over to the left, you know within the rec lane area. And this guy with a bullhorn, said, "Clear the road! Pull over! Clear the road!" . . . I hate to say that he was being, like, a complete chauvinist about it, but I wonder if we were guys—

Women also sometimes enjoyed going fast on skates, skis, and bicycles, for the feeling of "adrenaline" and "freedom" that accompanied speed, but they also avoided "unnecessary risks" and took it upon themselves to bear "the burden of safety." They explained that they were concerned with reducing both the likelihood of harm to themselves and to others:

> It gives you just an incredible feeling of freedom. And lack of constraint. And I don't say that in the sense that I don't care about anyone else—you know, I'm mindful that there are other people and safety concerns involved with going fast, but once . . . you've gotten used to that, you have those things down, right?

I did not interview men formally, but when I have spoken to them as we ride our bicycles together in the park, some of them have explained that they yell at others as they pass for the sake of safety (some men, of course, do not yell at all, and I have come across one or two women who have also yelled at others in the name of safety). My interviews with these women suggest that they indeed wanted to avoid physical harm, but they were also concerned with preserving others' emotional well-being. I argued in Chapter Four that an ethic of care framed women's physical activities in the park, where they could be among others and incorporate relationships as a part of their leisure experiences. As the quote below suggests, empathy for others was also important:

> Especially being a woman, and you're the only woman in the group, and they're yelling at a woman. So I feel . . . a little empathy for her or something, you know? She's out for her run in the morning, and to have ten guys slamming past her on a bike screaming and yelling, and it doesn't really make her day. She's there the same reason we're there.

These women also felt that men sometimes demonstrated an assumption of physical strength and skills, which compelled them to occupy space by attempting to show that they were faster or stronger than women. When riding a bike past a man, for example, "it's immediately a race." One woman, who was six feet tall and perceived herself as a very capable athlete, encountered what she called "the male ego challenge," whether lifting weights in the gym or riding her bike in the park:

> Once of a sudden you have three bikes . . . three guys with their bikes, you know, like gluing to your rear wheel, until you get to the hill so they can pass you. And they don't ask about it, if they can just like you know, suck onto your rear wheel. Um, they just come in and just do that. Or so many times, like if I was doing speed training, I would once of a sudden have like, you know, like three of the . . . guys or the whole group trying to chase me . . . even in if they're pouring their lungs out, just like "I have to get past."

Men also felt free to give unsolicited assistance and advice in the park, for example when women were riding expensive-looking racing bicycles. Offering help or advice presumes that the advice-giver possesses greater skill and knowledge than the receiver, which was especially insulting to women who had years of experience, but getting angry would have meant that "you'd be mad all the time." Sometimes these women forgave men's breaches of etiquette or even welcomed them:

> And then sometimes it's fun, sometimes it's all right. But . . . if I had people I rode with regularly, I would be annoyed by it. 'Cause I wouldn't like the company, 'cause I would, I'd have the company elsewhere. You know what I'm saying. But I don't have people I ride with regularly, so I welcome the companionship, 'cause I hardly ever get it. . . .

Other times they expressed anger over the way they were treated by "condescending mother fuckers," as one woman in particular expressed throughout her interview:

> Mostly I just get disturbed when people, like, try to flirt with me and tell me that I need to do this or do that, or—it's like, you know, I've been training and racing for . . . like fifteen years, and I don't really need you to . . . give me advice on nutrition, honey.

When skating, cycling, or running on the park road, women observed that men yelled, cursed, flirted, raced past women, or offered unsolicited advice, and they believed that these behaviors might have been directed toward women in particular. Men thus appeared at times to be bullying, inappropriately flirtatious, or condescending. However, what unfolded was not necessarily a men-versus-women competition for space, but perhaps different ways of experiencing one's body among others when the park was at its most crowded. We can only guess what men were experiencing, but behaviors like yelling and racing may have seemed like perfectly appropriate ways to "play" with others in the park, and flirting or offering advice may likewise seem like friendly conversation in the course of that play. Throughout their lives, sport encourages men to equate masculinity with aggression and dominance (e.g., Connell, 1990; Sabo & Panepinto, 1990). Becoming a man means learning to use the body in "forceful and space-occupying ways" (Connell quoted in Whitson, 1990), and perhaps that translated into the behaviors described here. Simple numbers of men on fast bikes speeding past may have also contributed to women's heightened awareness of their own bodies; I have noticed that men often own and ride the fastest bicycles, and they often form themselves into fast, large, and imposing groups. For a woman, this might seem especially imposing, frightening, or frustrating.

An important point, however: women in these interviews often felt confident in their own skills and physicality (which was part of the reason why some felt so annoyed when they were offered advice), but they may not have felt that it was comfortable or appropriate to assert that confidence through aggression toward others. Feelings about physical and verbal aggression—and their relationship to sport and competition—often emerged as a source of conflict in interviews when women spoke about participating in formalized team sports, where there was also a relationship to gender.

6.3 Unprogrammed Fields: "Woman's Space"

Soccer is an interesting anthropological phenomenon in Prospect Park, interesting enough to attract the attention of the New York Times, as a "multiethnic" sport (Bahrampour, 1999). As I described in Chapter Two, several groups of men played informal or "pick-up" soccer games throughout the park's fields when the weather was warm and dry enough. The locations and types of group for each game were fairly predictable. For example, a section of the Long Meadow near the ball fields frequently hosted Spanish-speaking men who appeared to be from Central or South America (I never asked any of them where they are from or how they would describe their backgrounds). If one were to walk from there all the way across the Long Meadow, across the road, and over to Nellie's Lawn on a warm weeknight around 7:30, she would most likely find another group of men, mostly dark-skinned, who speak in accents that sound West Indian and call each other names like "Jamaica." As a ten-year-old girl who was watching her father play explained to me one evening, the two teams playing there represented the Caribbean islands of Grenada and Trinidad-Tobago.

What was more interesting to me is that these groups are usually all men, as the New York Times article also observed:

> On mild days, girlfriends and wives sometimes watch. But a smattering of women also play. They are not called by their country; most are from the United States, where girls growing up have more opportunities for soccer. (Bahrampour, 1999: 9)

With the exception of a bi-weekly women's pick-up game, which I discuss further below, I noted only an occasional woman playing among the otherwise all-men's games, but never more than one woman at a time. Women were rarely, if ever, present in the games among the Spanish-speaking or West Indian men. When I have noted a mixed gender group playing soccer, which I have only documented twice in my field notes but have also observed less formally on many occasions, the configuration was one woman playing among a group of men who appear to be of mixed ages and ethnic backgrounds. These groups tended to play at locations other than the two I described above, in different sections of the Long Meadow (See Figure 6). As the New York Times article pointed out, some North American women who are now young adults have grown up with opportunities to play soccer, and North American men may have likewise had opportunities to regard girls and women as worthy opponents.

FIGURE 6: WOMEN AND MEN PLAYING PICK-UP SOCCER ON THE LONG MEADOW. (PHOTO BY AUTHOR)

As I pursued soccer-playing women during the course of my observations, I began to understand that physical ability may play a role in choosing where one plays, and different groups in the park represented different levels of ability, at least symbolically. One evening, I spoke to one of the men who was about to play soccer on Nellie's Lawn, where Trinidad and Tobago competed against Grenada. He invited me to join them and offered to teach me to play, but I interpreted his behavior as flirtatious, became self-conscious, and left (as soccer goes, I am a beginner at best). At the same location the following summer, my presence was not as well-received:

> One of the men on my side of the street saw me standing with my bike and in my baggy shorts, watching the field and perhaps looking like I was ready to play. He yelled at me that I couldn't play there because this game was too rough (I can't remember if he used that word—I'm paraphrasing from memory). He pointed to a game nearby, on the Long Meadow, saying that I should go over there to play. I explained that I didn't want to play, but that I was looking for women who played so that I could interview them. . . . He said that there was a girl playing over there. Some of the other men who were sitting on the ground eyed me—I felt like I was being checked out, whether as a sexual prospect or as an athlete I don't know—and I think one of them may have said that I could play. (field notes, July 23, 2001)

In fact, I did locate the "girl" who was playing soccer on the Long Meadow, who was not a girl but a woman. I mistook her for a young man at first, because of her lean, muscular build and cropped-short hair, until she stopped playing and sat down on the lawn. I spoke with her briefly while she rested, and she told me that she had been playing pick-up games with men for about two weeks, which she enjoyed because "they keep you running." Another woman, Megan, who played soccer with men in the park, elaborated on her experiences during an interview. She had played on teams since she was a child, played on a women's league at the time of her interview, and was confident in her own skills, but she had reservations about playing a pick-up game otherwise made up of men.

She played with one of these groups about once a month and sought a group that was not playing a "really, really intense" game, but even then she sometimes felt uncomfortable:

> The thing is . . . that's probably the reason why I don't play more often with them, you know. Because, um, when I go play, I'm usually the only woman. And, um . . . I think they get kind of, um. I mean, they have loads of feelings about a woman playing, first of all. And I get like a lot of—like I feel more like a woman when I . . . I feel kind of exposed or something . . . Sometimes guys show off, and it just makes it kind of uncomfortable for me, and I think it makes it uncomfortable for them. So I don't—I feel that it's their space, and I don't wanna go there.

While Megan often chose to stay away from soccer games with men, she regularly played pick-up soccer with a group of women who played on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings in the park. The group comprised women who played on an amateur league—the New York Metropolitan Women's Soccer League—who lived near the park and who wanted to play when the league was not in session. The group also welcomed women who were non-league players; one of these women asked me if I wanted to play one evening as I watched and took notes. As another player explained, they rarely had difficulties securing their preferred spot near the Picnic House on the Long Meadow, because the game was "sort of a long tradition," and "people who are long-time users sort of know that that's, like, the girls' soccer area."

Megan also believed that the women's pick-up soccer game would not have had such a solid tradition without a sense of "community" or "family." She explained that many of the players were lesbians, who are "the best organizers [and] the best community-builders." At any given time, one woman took responsibility for organizing every game using a mass email list, which generated "like fifty emails" inquiring about each game. However, once on the field, Megan sometimes felt a need to protect the "safe space" or "woman's space" of the game. Such a space encompassed not only the physical

space that they occupied but also the ethos regarding the sports that they played there, which was more "collective" and less "aggressive" than games she played with men.

Creating a woman's space may have led to questions of whether and when to allow men play. Megan also explained that the group sometimes allowed a man or boy to play, but at those times she worried that he might then "impose his game on us." She also sometimes felt that others' remarks were disparaging, possibly even challenging the legitimacy of a women-only game:

> There was this one guy, he was a Latino fellow, and he was probably . . . younger twenties. And he came to play with us [women] one evening, and he . . . came over with his ball, and he was like, "Oh yeah, you know, I'm just interested in playing a low-level game. So do you mind if I play with you guys?"

An inclusive, supportive, and cooperative philosophy of play is sometimes a deliberately cultivated characteristic of women's organized sports (see Hall, 1996; Henderson & Allen, 1991). This young man may have sincerely hoped to find an opportunity to play in a friendlier setting than other games in the park may have offered, but Megan ultimately felt that his presence violated the group's carefully-created "woman's space." When I was observing the women's game, a teenaged boy also asked if he could play, but one of the women turned him away and explained that the team's numbers were already even—another one of the group's careful ways of attempting to ensure fair play. Megan's main distinction among players was by gender, as she described cooperation among women, while men exhibited a corresponding tendency to "show off" but she also implied an interlocking relationship between gender and race or ethnicity in her descriptions of men, who were Latino/South American or Asian. My observations and experiences with different groups playing pick-up soccer on the park's fields also suggested such a relationship, which became even clearer on basketball courts.

6.4 Basketball Courts: Style and Skill

The question of allowing young men to join a women's pick-up game also arose in discussions of basketball on public courts in neighborhoods surrounding the park, where it seemed that boys and young men may have been very serious about developing their skills but not always ready to play with bigger, more experienced men. One woman who played basketball on outdoor courts (Ginni) commented that she was, like Megan, also concerned about respect from boys when playing:

> . . . I've been out there shootin' around with maybe one or two other people, and we've had like young boys come and say, "Hey, can we play with you, can we play some pick-up?" And sometimes we'll say, "Yeah, you know, you can join," and other times we'll be like, "Nah, we just wanna play by ourselves." But . . . they're serious about it, and they're good, and they know the game, and it's just like, you know, kids in general, some of them are really well-mannered, and you know, really respectful, and then other kids are just . . . little brats . . .

At the Parade Ground's basketball courts, I began to notice connections among age, size, skill, gender, and perhaps even a sense of physical and emotional toughness associated with playing sports. Black men and boys primarily used the courts there, and I often noted that age- and size-similar groups seemed to occupy each of the hoops—for instance, adult men playing a game at one, younger men and/or teenaged boys playing their own game at another, and younger boys practicing shots at another. I never saw adult women who appeared to be much over the age of 18 playing there (although they may have been present, often caring for children), but I sometimes observed teenaged girls practicing or playing a game with boys their own age or younger. These young women seemed self-possessed and confident in their physical abilities; as one 15-old-girl explained to me, they might think of themselves as "tomboy" or "diesel" (physically strong), play on a team at school, defeat boys on outdoor courts, or as this girl boasted,

even fight like a boy. On another occasion, I was surprised to find that one of these young women seemed warm and friendly when I spoke to her; I thought she seemed hard and tough as I watched her play and heard her curse among the boys, and I only realized that she was a girl when others pointed her out to me. Like the woman at the soccer fields, I had initially thought she was a boy because of her baggy clothes and the bandana covering her hair.

In contrast to this projected confidence and toughness, another young woman (Tamika), who had some experience playing with a high school team, described self-doubt throughout her interview, which moderated her readiness to play on public outdoor courts:

> I don't, I don't think I'm really behind, slacking like . . . but I just wanna be better, but I don't put enough time into going to the park, because of shyness. I get like—okay, when I first came to this park [today], there was guys on, it was . . . every court was full . . . so I was like, okay, I'll just sit on the side, watch these guys play. Then I sat on a bench next to this girl, and she was like, um, "You came here to play basketball?" I was like, "Yeah." She said, "Well, there's a court over there; you could go play over there." I . . . got like this kind of shock in me, like, oh gosh, is everybody looking? But I'm actually getting better now, because usually I wouldn't—if a lot of people was in the park, I wouldn't sit down and wait for a court. I would go back home.

Tamika also told me that at one time she hid her basketball in her gym bag until arriving at the courts, because she did not want the neighborhood guys to see that she was learning to play for fear they might harass her, or their reaction to her might be, "you can't play basketball." She did not immediately attribute her lack of confidence to the presence of men and boys; her most immediate concerns were experience and skills, which she began to develop "late" (her last year in high school). However, as our conversation continued, she revealed an equation where playing outdoor "street ball" equals playing with men and boys. Street ball involved a different style of play and set of

risks, compared with being indoors and playing organized ball with girls only:

> It's a whole 'nother, like, vibe. From being, like, out on the court, to being with a team, full of girls. It's more comfortable 'cause you [are] all girls, playing against girls. So it's like a, like a family, but you're all the same. You know? And . . . you know one another. When you come outside it's just you playing. Arguing, cursin', fightin', you never know what might happen. It's hard to explain, but I really prefer to play with girls, than play with guys. And to be on a team. I like to play organized basketball. I will play street ball, but I prefer to play organized ball . . .

Tamika's descriptions of her own self-consciousness reflected the "safe space" or "woman's space" of Megan's comments above. It was a physical space for women only, but also a psychic space that felt like "family," where skills could be developed but where one also may not have had to feel as defensive or tough as a men's game might require. Such a safe space might be found among other women, but not necessarily; Tamika also described an uncomfortable clique-like atmosphere among young women at her college gymnasium, and she felt most confident at a co-ed youth program directed by a former professional basketball player (appropriately dubbed, "School of Skillz").

These young black women implied that if they wanted to play basketball on outdoor courts, they may have needed to adopt the same "cool pose" that black men and boys assume as an expression of creativity and resilience (Majors, 1990). White women in my interviews, on the other hand, talked about encounters with black men and boys in terms of "tension," like the tension described in relation to individual fitness activities and discussed in the previous chapter. Again, the tension may have been because of these women's own sense of vulnerability, perhaps because young men of color are perceived as aggressive and dangerous when they are in public places (Males, 1996; St. John & Herald-Moore, 1995; Waters, 1996). Ginni, quoted above, mentioned feeling "bullied" and "intimidated" when she was alone on outdoor basketball courts in her racially-mixed

neighborhood, but she was not sure whether she should attribute her perceptions entirely to others' behavior or to her own emotional state as well:

> When I play by myself over at . . . St. Mark's [playground] . . . I think it was just one time, where I was playing by myself, and this group of guys came over, and they you know, basically like . . . forced me off the court. I might have been just getting a little tired, and it was . . . almost time for me to go, but then I was just like, you know, I just wanna, you know play here, and I don't wanna have to deal with all their bad mouthing . . .

Ginni and others did not always explicitly acknowledge when they were talking about constructs of race, but race was sometimes indicated with code words like "stereotype," "culture," or "neighborhood." Other times women in these interviews expressed directly their feelings about race and gender as they related to their experiences of physical activities in public spaces. For example, Ginni and some friends, one of whom was also an interviewee, found gym space that they could rent cheaply and reserve for playing basketball when the weather grew colder and the days grew shorter, a rare find in New York City. The gym was in one of the recreation centers run by the city's Department of Parks and recreation, but it was difficult to access by public transportation, separated from the nearest subway stop by a wide thoroughfare and industrial land uses, and close to a large public housing development with a reputation as a dangerous place. Ginni explained that when she and her friends, all women, used the gym at the recreation center, they sometimes encountered teenaged boys whom she believed were residents of the housing project, or possibly a nearby group home. The women's arrival sometimes brought difficulties:

> And, uh, there's a group of guys that, you know, show up. And they're sometimes very resistant to getting off for us. And, like, we will say . . . "Hey, the court is ours, you know seven o'clock, you know, time for you guys to get off." And they just like, totally ignore us. So, oftentimes we end up going out to the guys who, you know, work there, the managers of the gym, and saying "Hey, you know, the

> guys are giving us a hard time." And . . . the managers walk in, and then they get off the court.

In a separate interview, Ginni's friend Sheila also described "tension" with the same group of boys, but she also identified race and class as an additional factor:

> Yeah, we have it reserved. And it's, there's always a little bit of funny tension, 'cause I, it's like these white girls coming in and kicking off these guys . . . in the 'hood. . . . Sometimes we'll start [playing] half-court 'cause we don't have enough people, and then some guys will be playing on the other half. Then we've got enough, so we want to go full court, and we have to try to get them off the court. And once or twice it's gotten a little sticky . . . and also on occasion, we need extra people and there'll be guys there, and we let them join in. But they, they're style of play is so different, it's like you know, just show off and . . . we play as a team, and you know, score as a team. And these guys just, you know, it's all, if they get the ball . . . It's like street style of play . . .

Street style playing may have accentuated the differences that these women perceived between themselves and boys and men of color in public spaces, and those differences in turn sometimes intersected with attempts to create spaces for women's sports. Some of the young black women here might have conformed to a street style of play, which they associated with men and boys; white women equated street style play not only with masculinity but also with race, ethnicity, and class. In my interviews, many women expressed a desire for spaces where they could develop physical fitness or skills without embarrassment or frustration and at the same time find challenge and competition. In their descriptions of others who disrupted their sense of space, they revealed the most salient constructs of difference: often gender, and sometimes race or ethnicity as well. In the section below, I further discuss ways that this important sense of space was established, for two formalized team sports in Prospect Park—ice hockey and softball. In these cases, challenges to a sense of space came from others who happened to be in the same or nearby spaces, and sometimes from other women as well.

6.5 League Sports: Owning Space

Throughout my time spent in the park and interviewing women, I heard about many opportunities for women to play organized sports throughout New York City public spaces. Women told me about several programs, leagues, and pick-up games that occurred regularly throughout the city, often on public courts and fields. In addition to the activities discussed above, these included a relatively new ice hockey team that had gotten its start on the skating rink in Prospect Park, and the Prospect Park Women's Softball League, so well-established that women in my interviews did not have any memory of its beginnings.

The ice hockey team's coach recruited women—in 1994, according to these interviews—on behalf of an organization devoted to developing the sport of ice hockey. The team held the same name as the organization, the Brooklyn Blades. Some of the women were beginners and did not even know how to skate, so the coach nurtured them through the basics and into league play. At the time of the interviews, two squads (the "A" and "B" teams) traveled to play other teams in the New York City area and to a tournament in Canada at the end of the season. The coach also procured Wollman Rink in Prospect Park for practices and clinics (the team since began practicing and playing at a regulation indoor hockey rink in Coney Island). Wollman Rink is an outdoor skating rink, as these women described it "not a real hockey rink," but it afforded an important alternative to other, more expensive venues like those at Chelsea Piers, a private, multi-sports complex housed in renovated industrial buildings on Manhattan's waterfront. The rink at Prospect Park offered "cheap ice" and plenty of practice time, without which the team may have never existed:

> I tell you what, though, because of Prospect Park . . . the Brooklyn Blades is the best women's ice hockey deal in town. Because you get all that practice ice. . . . And you can also play through the women's clinics, and through the guys' clinics if you want to go to that ice. So some of that ice was valuable to me, especially in the beginning . . . you could just come onto that ice, take a half of it while . . . the men's clinic was going on, and the women's. And we would just set up our own drills. And it was [through] those repetitive things, that I finally got that kind of practice in . . .

There was a trade-off; the women often had to practice at night, as late as 11:30 p.m., outdoors and "in total darkness, it could be minus 28 degrees . . ." Some women described being outdoors at night and in the cold as a thrilling experience, but as one woman explained, women's hockey is given lowest priority in the designation of scheduled ice time—an indication of "where women's sports fall in the hierarchy:"

> The women always get the worst ice, can't get the ice . . . the first people served is, general skate makes the most money . . . Then there's like, the figure skating group, and they get the seven and eight o'clock . . . slots in the evening, and . . . it's also a bias against hockey. The speed skaters get the seven-thirty slot. You know, it's like, hockey, "Oh, the hell with you people, you can all skate at midnight, and you know, not to worry."

This woman's comment suggests that the "hierarchy" may have privileged different types of sports, not necessarily men over women, but she and others also seemed to feel that adult women were not given sufficient recognition as legitimate athletes. Open recreational sessions were granted the most convenient times because they brought in the most revenues, figure skating and speed skating were next in line, men's hockey was next, but women's hockey was "at the low end of the totem pole."

Other women in these interviews expressed a similar sense of resentment or frustration, and some seemed particularly aware that boys younger than them received greater privileges when it came to sports. For example, women who played softball mentioned Little League as a group with whom they regularly competed for space when

they needed to practice ("Little League" may have also referred to other organizations sponsoring baseball for boys and young men in the park, but Little League is the most prominent). For some women, negotiating with others for space in a crowded park was "never anything bitter or . . . filled with tension," but others felt a lack of respect at times, like the lack of respect described by other women who played basketball and soccer. One softball player noted that boys sometimes displayed that lack of respect when they encountered "strong" women playing ball:

> You know, they're just like, "Hey, you're playing on our field!" . . . You know, just sort of like, the sense of entitlement. . . . It's like, "Your mother is 15 years younger than me, boy . . . pull some respect into your voice, really quickly, right now." . . . I can't believe, like I just look at them, like, "Do you have any idea who you're talking to?"

Others also noted some difficulties when playing games on the field where the league held its permit, usually "interference" in their outfield. Sometimes this happened when Spanish-speaking men were playing soccer nearby, and their ball wandered into the outfield. Other times, there might be a man "walking slowly through the outfield" or people who "kind of walk across the grass with their baby stroller." When reflecting on the meaning of these episodes, some women found them "infuriating," because the message seemed to be "oh, it's just a women's game; what's the big deal"—particularly when several players wore identical uniforms and some were of large build. Others attributed the behavior to a crowded park and a simple failure to understand where the outfield was; boundaries were not clearly marked on any of the ballfields, and pick-up soccer often coexisted on the Long Meadow with baseball and softball. Again, as with the park's road, these women were not always sure how to interpret other's behavior, but some were very sensitive to intrusions onto the space surrounding them, whether it was

deliberate or accidental.

On the other hand, many women who played softball agreed that the park was a "supportive" place for the softball league. During the late spring and summer, the ballfields in the park's Long Meadow were almost constantly occupied during evenings and weekends by leagues for children, youth, and young men. The Prospect Park Women's Softball League held a permit for weeknights for one of the fields, closest to the entrance at 15th Street/Bartel Pritchard Square. These women, who had played on the Prospect Park Women's Softball League from one to thirteen seasons, estimated that the league is somewhere between 20 and 25 years old. Some joined not only out of an interest in the sport but also to be outdoors, be with friends, or meet other women; the league was one of their social networks. As one woman said, ". . . the biggest draw was . . . a social thing, a way to meet women, and secondly it was something athletic." These women also felt that the league had an identity as primarily a lesbian league, an identity which would definitely be recognized by women "in the lesbian community" but may not always be obvious to outsiders. The softball league in particular and team sports in general were spaces where some of these women felt comfortable because they were among other women like themselves; as one woman commented, team sports are "another way we buck the trend."

Except for one woman who lived in Manhattan, softball players made connections in their interviews between a lesbian community in the Park Slope neighborhood and the proximity of the park to that neighborhood. A subset of that community included women who played many sports, and the park was a "meeting place" where one was likely to see friends and acquaintances. Their comments reflected what Rothenberg (1995) found in

her interviews with lesbian women in Park Slope: a sense of lesbian community and a spatial identity in Park Slope as a place where lesbians live and where they felt safe and comfortable. Katie Ringer has also found that lesbian women living in Park Slope frequently mention Prospect Park as a safe place (personal communication, June 2003). Like the women in Rothenberg's interviews, these women also estimated the league to be at least 95% lesbian women. The league welcomed straight women, but a straight woman who played on the league would have to be especially "cool" and "can't be the least bit homophobic." One woman described the "fortuitous" constellation of geography, community, and sports:

> So can I just say one more general thing about the league? . . . It's an incredibly great, organized way for women to play sports in a serious way. And the fact that it's in Prospect Park, I think is important, too . . . I think it would be different if it were in Central Park, or in another place. And, uh, I think they kind of maybe go together . . . I think the fact that there's a surrounding community of . . . lesbians and women who are, like, pro-women. And that they use the park a lot, and that it feels like a more supportive place . . . and that includes women athletes, I mean, it goes together. I mean, I'm trying to make a connection that, I might be stretching it . . .

She was probably not "stretching" the connection between the softball league and the nearby community of lesbian women. Zipter's (1988) journalistic account and Cahn's (1994) oral histories have clearly shown that softball leagues have long provided important social networks for lesbian women, some of whom might have only a passing interest in the sport itself. Softball has a long history as a sport for women, but one where "mannish" attributes are valued (Fidler, 1982), so it has been tacitly understood for years that many lesbian women play on softball leagues. As one woman in these interviews remarked, "In the working-class community where I grew up, that [softball] was a code word for 'dyke.' . . ." In these interviews, Prospect Park also emerged as an important

place for this kind of network, where lesbians "ruled" and felt a sense of ownership. The partner of one softball player explained:

> I think it's a sense of owning the space. It's not just about, like, you know, a bunch of big girls around, it's a sense that, like, people are owning, that they have a right to be there, and they have a right to be who they are there.

Being "who they are" also means being able to freely express sexuality and desire toward other women, as freely as heterosexual couples do in public places. Displays of sexual desire between women challenge assumptions that public space is heterosexual space, where only heterosexual displays of desire are acceptable (see Bell et al., 1994; Duncan, 1996; Munt; 1995; Valentine, 1996). According to these women, the park was a place where such assumptions were challenged: "Women can be with their girlfriends . . . there's a certain tolerance, because of the neighborhood . . . women can be with each other." I also noted that women appeared to be comfortable enough to show affection toward other women during softball games one evening when I attended a softball game:

> I introduced myself to members of both teams after the game. There was a woman who was sitting on the grass not too far from me, near [one team's] side. After the game ended, she joined the team and put her arms around one of the players who must have been her girlfriend. She was very cuddly and started to get silly as I was gathering contact information from someone nearby—she was reading my information sheet out loud and finding a lot of "double entendres" in what I had written (e.g., "Where do you go and what do you do there?"). Also, she thought the sports metaphor was apparently very sexy. I told her she had a dirty mind. But again, I thought it was interesting that she felt comfortable enough to behave the way she was in that context. (field notes, August 16, 2001)

Although they sometimes contended with interruptions from others, overall these women seemed to agree that "it works out okay" for women's softball, and difficulties were in fact "isolated incidents." The softball league and ice hockey team were also both able to secure physical spaces for women to play sports, which were important for developing skills and learning the basics of the game, and an important element of

"women's space." The geographical coincidence of a lesbian community lent a strong sense of ownership over space in the case of the softball league, but even with such a strong physical and social connection to space, there was still room for doubt about how secure that connection might be. Certain episodes stood out in these women's minds—when others crossed what these women perceived as the boundaries of their space, when they had to wait their turn after a boys' game, or when they had to contend with offhanded comments from young boys—because of the significance that those episodes held. Few of these women were willing to make the claim, with total certainty, that their rights to space for sports were being challenged, but many of them raised questions about those rights. Perhaps those questions alone indicate that women today remain uncertain about their uncontested rights to occupy public spaces for organized athletic activities.

6.6 Spaces for Women's Sports

Many of the women whose interviews I cited here were members of a post-Title IX generation—women in their teens, twenties, or thirties who described early opportunities to play sports, learn skills, and gain confidence. Some of the women here who were around the age of 40—the oldest women quoted in this chapter was 42—said that they did not have many opportunities in school or beyond to participate in formalized sports, but they experienced a late-blooming interest in physical fitness or in a particular sport. What many had in common was an interest in finding spaces to be with others, usually other women, get some exercise, and feel good about themselves. Some were happy to have learned new skills as adults, and others wanted to continue to practice and perfect skills that they may have begun to develop many years earlier. Having times and places where other women were there for the same reasons meant that they could pursue

those desires with little sense of risk, such as the risk of embarrassment or injury. However, there also seemed to be a deeper significance to women-only spaces for sports, which were not only important for developing skills within an emotionally safe space.

"Space" here did not always mean simply physical or geographical place, although that type of space was important. The park and other public athletic facilities provided important places for sports, which are often in high demand in New York City, but having a place for activities was a necessary but not sufficient condition. First, there was also bodily space, as these women described a sense of awareness of themselves among loud, fast, aggressive men, for example, when exercising on the road or playing pick-up soccer with a group of men on the Long Meadow. Some past research (e.g., Hart, 1978; Thorne, 1993; Whitson, 1990) has found that men and boys more often develop a strong sense of their bodies and develop mastery of their surroundings compared to women and girls, which they assert through aggression and projected toughness. This assertion may have felt dangerous or uncomfortable for some women, especially if they had to contend with "arguing," "cursing," "fighting," and "bad-mouthing." Many of these women did express feelings of control and confidence, but they were still often uncomfortable in the presence of men playing the same sport, where they felt "exposed" or "more like a woman." They also sometimes perceived men and boys as condescending and disrespectful, echoing a notion of hegemonic masculinities in sport, where aggression, violence, and dominance over others are understood as "proof" of male superiority (e.g., Sabo & Panepinto; Whitson, 1990).

These women also did not find it acceptable to show dominance over others around them. Instead, their sense of bodily and environmental competence may have also

included an understanding of the ways that others used the space around them—a sense of "empathy" as one woman put it. As Henderson and Allen (1991) have suggested, and as I discussed in Chapter Four, an ethic of care may inform women's leisure as much as the activities themselves. For these women, feelings of speed, flow, and excitement did not need to mean frightening, angering, or possibly injuring others. They believed that if they maintained a geographical and physical space that included only women, then they would also what has been described as a feminine ethos of sport, which emphasizes values such as cooperation, collective decision-making, safety, inclusiveness, and enjoyment (Birrell & Richter, 1987; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Lenskyj, 1994; Zipter, 1998). Because these women equated a feminine ethos with the presence of women only, and because the public spaces they used by definition invited others to join them, they sometimes faced the question of what to do when boys and young men wished to play. Their desires to maintain ownership over small, exclusive women's spaces conflicted with an ethos of inclusiveness and a concern about preserving the well-being of others.

My first reading of many of these interviews led me to believe that women encountered contested spaces, where men consciously or unconsciously used verbal and physical force to put women in their places. Men are not necessarily trying to dominate space in that way, but women are very aware of men's presence, which may reflect an awareness of the historical realities of the public-private separation of gender. Perhaps women perceive gender differences most acutely when those differences remind them that being male has always meant being privileged. If it feels natural for men to yell, curse, or show off their skills, then for women it might feel like a challenge.

Privilege is also connected to race and ethnicity as well as gender, and racial constructs once again emerged as defining features of difference around which space was constructed. The differences between men's and women's play were sometimes described in terms of showing off or "street" style—incidentally suggesting a publicness of male activities—which also implied a style belonging to men and boys of color. Their "cool pose" may have been expressions of resilience and a strategy for claiming their own spaces.

Some of these white women were evasive in admitting associations with race—for example, one woman explained that the boys she encountered on the basketball courts were sometimes disrespectful, just like "kids in general," but she did not state exactly how those kids might be different from "kids in general." Others attributed their descriptions very openly to black boys or Latino men, just as some women did in speaking about their fears when running or cycling alone in the park. With team sports, these narratives of space shifted here, however, so that they center more on privilege and entitlement than on danger and vulnerability. Alone, one woman might feel frightened or might worry about protecting her body, but as a group women worry about protecting their rights to space. Some women were offended that boys would yell comments to them about playing on their field, or that a young man might suggest that women are not playing the same game as men, reflecting an understanding of gender differences constructed around physical activities. Some had additional insights into the ways that these interactions might also relate to race, ethnicity, and culture—perhaps a simple language barrier between English-speaking women and Spanish-speaking men occupying nearby spaces, a Latino man's display of machismo, or a deeper set of tensions between

white women seeking out their own space and a group of boys who may have felt a challenge to their turf. These women tried to remain sensitive to those tensions, but neither could they escape all of the cultural and historical associations that are loaded into gender and race.

Utlimately, questions of gender, race, and space are about questions of privilege and rights to space, even if women don't recognize that when their sense of space is also so powerfully connected to race and danger. Just like the discourse of white women, black men, and danger could serve to disguise the tensions of white privilege, most concretely seen in gentrification, so do the tensions that women sometimes felt on playing fields and basketball courts. Who could finally claim rights to space, white women who have not always had the privilege to roam public spaces freely or to engage in sports and fitness activities without contestation? Or black and brown men whose very lives might end up endangered if they cross the line that women perceive between "style" and "danger?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

PARK USE AND USERS: ACCOMMODATION, OWNERSHIP, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

In this dissertation I have explored some of the ways that Prospect Park functioned as a setting for sports and physical activity, for a group of women who regularly used the park. Their descriptions address one of my initial research interests, that of documenting women's uses and perceptions of an urban park in order to further inform our understanding of urban outdoor spaces as potential places for physical activitiy.The park afforded opportunities for a variety of physical activities, offering possibilities for uninterrupted workouts (e.g., a continuous loop around the park on foot, bicycle, or skates) varied terrain (e.g., hills and stairs), aesthetic appeal (e.g., greenery), psychological comfort (e.g., to exercise in "scanty" or tight-fitting clothing), support facilities for any activity (specifically drinking fountains and rest rooms), and athletic facilities for specific sports (softball on designated fields, soccer on any available lawn space, ice hockey at Wollman Rink in colder weather, and basketball at the Parade Ground courts). These women used the park in many ways, from walking for fitness to training for a marathon or Iron Man triathlon, learning to play organized sports that they might not have dreamed of as girls, getting into rough competition with other women on the ice or with young men and boys on the outdoor courts. They sometimes used the park early in the morning or late in the evening, when it was dark or isolated, or at times when it was so crowded that conflict arose among its many users.

The park was also more than just an active environment with a set of physical affordances directing human behavior, as these women described significant emotional and social experiences of activity and place. Nature in the park was significant not only in an aesthetic sense, but also in psychological and spiritual ways, reflecting the park designers' original intentions of contemplation and mental restoration. The park was a nearby place for these women to experience nature in this way, and to engage in activities that they enjoyed, on an everyday level. It was also a place to experience social relations, sometimes in unexpected ways. These women often went to the park with friends and family, or they met with friends or acquaintances there, and this companionship was an important part of their experience of exercise and being in the park in ways that felt richer and more enjoyable than being alone. However, these women also encountered strangers there who began to seem familiar, friendly, and encouraging, further enriching the experience of physical activity in the park. While at times encounters with strangers—specifically men and boys of color or men who seemed "weird"—reinforced a discourse of danger and fear, these feelings also coexisted with feelings of confidence and ownership. Opportunities to explore the park and learn its intricacies led some women to feel emboldened and to question the myth of danger in "their" park. Finally, a sense of ownership also emerged around group sports for women, coinciding with a sense of neighborhood and community, and the park provided physical spaces for women to participate in competitive sports, a prerequisite for learning, support, and cooperation.

An acquaintance recently asked me what I had discovered in my research—was the park half-full or half-empty? I would say that the park is more than half-full for this group of women, many of whom used the park almost daily—some even two or three

times a day at times, for example to attend special events or children's baseball and soccer games—and who could not imagine life in the city without the park. Many, however, also discussed concerns, often relating to the many meanings of "safety." Their descriptions also sometimes suggested conflict between actual and intended park uses. For example, some women used the park after dark, but many women and men alike do not use the park after dark because it seems dangerous. Would more people use the park after dark if it were better-lit? This seems to be an important question, since in New York City there are many free-time hours that are dark but might be spent outdoors; in some months, the sun sets as early as 4:30 in the afternoon.

I have so far mostly discussed ways that women occupied and experienced space in the park, but I have less often addressed other levels at which space was created in the park—for example, through administrative decisions, or through informal social interactions that occurred there. In the sections that follow, I discuss some of the difficulties mentioned in these interviews as they relate to administrative decisions regarding the park, which do not always reflect the interests of park users. These difficulties raise possibilities for some concrete design applications, but they also raise questions about the social relations that might be reflected in management decisions. For example, ignoring the interests of all park users or potential park users might also mean alienating groups who are already marginalized, whether such alienation is deliberate or not. Therefore, in the last section of this chapter, I reflect on some of the implications of the current park administration as they relate to interactions among park users, the park as a public space, and its function in exposing or concealing some of the social inequalities among its users.

7.1 How Well Does the Park Accommodate Active Uses?

The ideals out of which pleasure grounds were born included physical health and psychic restoration, but conceived activities were to fall within the bounds of proper "enjoyment." Activities like walking and skating were acceptable from the start, but activities like baseball, bicycling, and horse-racing were begrudgingly included later in the nineteenth century; ideals of nineteenth century policy-making also included control over working-class masses and their behavior, and certain sports and games were seen as decidedly working-class. Planners worried that excessive use would destroy carefully-constructed "nature" in parks, and some park commissioners in U. S. cities attempted to prevent heavy use by introducing the notorious "Keep off the Grass" signs (Cranz, 1982).

Today, while on the one the hand urban planning profession has an interest in developing environments that encourage physical activity, at the same time there is also an interest in preservation and restoration of environments that have been heavily impacted by human use and neglected by public agencies. In Prospect Park, the administration—the Prospect Park Alliance, a "partnership" among city government, private interest groups, and community representatives—is particularly concerned with reversing the effects of repeated, active human uses. Soccer players trample the lawns, mountain bikers erode trails, walkers and runners repeatedly use "desire lines" and compact the soil into solid paths where grass no longer grows (Taplin, 2002; Taplin et al., 1998). While the Parade Ground has traditionally been meant to accommodate athletic activities and has recently been undergoing renovations, the park itself seems to receive a more ambivalent response to adult active recreation. There are ball fields in the Long Meadow, for example, but they are the only formal athletic facility in the park itself, and

as one woman pointed out, there are no bleachers for spectators.

Distinctions between "active" and "passive" forms of recreation, which were historically laden with class values, continue to reflect a bias toward certain uses and user groups over others. For example, the Alliance sees walking as a "passive" use, which also happens to be a more common use for white and more educated park users, compared to people of color and less educated people who use the park. Walking may also coincide with what park management believes to be appropriate ways to use the park—staying on designated paths and appreciating, but not interfering with, "nature" (Taplin, 2002). Such bias might restrict the kinds of physical activity that were the focus of my study. These women did not say that they had to cease or alter their activities because of planning or design problems, but their responses indicate some ways that the park might be even more amenable to active uses.

7.1.1 Support Amenities

Amenities such as rest rooms and drinking fountains are among the environmental "indicators" that might encourage physical activity (see Baker et al., 2000), but their presence is only a prerequisite. According to my interviews, the park receives mixed grades on such amenities. The availability of drinking fountains and rest rooms were positive points for some women who ran in the park, but some women who played softball remarked that rest rooms were not available. As I discussed in Chapter Three, their comments indicated that rest rooms were not convenient to the ball fields, even though there are several rest rooms throughout the park. Nor are any of the portable toilets that are placed throughout the park, and one woman commented that "most of the time they're pretty bad." I have also noted that some rest rooms were sometimes locked

early in the evening, probably at the end of the workday for park employees but also at the same time that many park users are just getting into the park. More recently, while using the park in the evenings, I have noticed that one of my favorite rest rooms stays open later, but park employees still lock it before dark and before many of us have left the park. In previous interviews (Taplin et al., 1998), other Prospect Park users also complained that rest rooms were too dirty, too far away, too few, or not open long enough, and some wanted more and improved rest rooms.

One woman who was from Manhattan also mentioned that there were no locker rooms available after ice hockey practice, which meant that she and her teammates had to change clothes in the rest rooms at the ice skating center, or in the open area of the building where male staff where sometimes present. In fact, there are no locker rooms in the park, other than those at the Parade Ground, again reflecting an assumption that adults do not recreate in the park in very active ways, or that when they do, they are close to home and will not need to clean themselves or change clothes in the park. This may be even more of an issue for people of color, who are more likely to travel further to get to the park and to use it for activities like sports (Taplin et al., 1998). I often noted during my observations that black men and women (who were probably African American and Caribbean) drove to the park and parked their vehicles at the ice skating center's parking lot while they ran or walked around the park, but I did not get the chance to ask any of them how well the park's facilities suited them (e.g., do those who arrive in the morning then need to change to go to work?). I have also noted less formally that one or two acquaintances park at the lot and exercise before driving directly to work. Some of these acquaintances also identify with the Orthodox Jewish community, which as I understand

also requires some discretion and secrecy—for example, parking one's car at the end of the block if driving on a weekend, or for women, not allowing others to see one wearing pants or shorts rather than a skirt, which again might require places to change clothes. Further research and planning should continue to address ways that people use the park and particular supports that they need for those uses.

7.1.2 Safety on the Park Road

The women I interviewed generally felt that traffic safety in the park was relatively better than on surrounding streets, but difficulties arose because of the presence of traffic at certain times, which were also times when there were many recreational park users on the road walking, jogging, skating, and cycling. At times when traffic is permitted on the park road (rush hours in the warmer months, throughout the day in colder months), there is little to discourage motorized vehicles from using the road as a thoroughfare. The 30-mile-per-hour speed limit is the same as on surrounding streets, and the road is owned and maintained by the Department of Transportation, not the Department of Parks and Recreation. The road in the park hosts a dangerous set of "incompatible uses" (Transportation Alternatives, 1998).

The advocacy group Transportation Alternatives has battled to change the policy to one that completely prohibits vehicles in New York City parks but so far has met only short-term goals, such as a recent extension of car-free hours during the winter of 2003 (see www.transalt.org/campaigns/brooklyn/prospark.html). Even when vehicles continue to share the park road with recreational users, more measures might be taken to increase safety. A Transportation Alternatives (1998) report found that high percentages of vehicles in the park exceeded the speed limit, at an average speed of 40 miles per hour

and up to 65 miles per hour in one case, that they ran red lights as often as every two minutes, and that they frequently crossed the painted lines into the recreational lane as they sped along the winding loop. The report also stated that there were more than 100 collisions on the park road between 1995 and 1998, one of which resulted in a cyclist's death, which I mentioned earlier. Recommendations included better barriers to prevent vehicles from entering the park during car-free hours, better enforcement of moving violations, wider and better-maintained recreational lanes, and physical barriers between the recreational lanes and motor vehicle lanes. However, the report concluded simply what one of my interviewees articulated: that "cars should not be in the park" (see www.transalt.org/campaigns/brooklyn/dangerousbydesign.pdf).

My interviewees also complained that bicyclists often traveled too fast on the park road and did not slow down for others, that bike races in the park were particularly dangerous, and that in general crowds on the road were dangerous and difficult to negotiate. The presence of traffic in the park most likely exacerbates this type of conflict among recreational users, since traffic means that they have to share a narrow pair of recreation lanes, but even without traffic the road becomes chaotic. Park users gravitate toward the road, with many different intended uses, but there is no clear indication of "appropriate" uses or how different users are expected to cohabitate. The Prospect Park Alliance explains "Safety and Rules" on its website but in my experience seldom, maybe never, offers any safety education on the ground (I am only aware of one event in the park, which no longer exists, called the "Triple Challenge"—a skating, running, and cycling race that was promoted in the name of safety awareness but was really just a competition with trophies and prizes). It would be up to parents to log online and learn

that children should not play on the road during a weekend picnic, because cyclists and skaters still use the road, or because they might in fact encounter a trolley, park vehicle, or emergency vehicle, even when the road is "closed." For bicyclists and speed skaters, the park is the only space for miles where they might go fast for as long as they wish without stopping, and I doubt that many have read and internalized the rule that "pedestrians always have the right of way."

7.1.3 Lighting and Visibility

Feelings of safety in the park also related to a sense of visibility, which was easily afforded in the daytime by open areas like the road and the Long Meadow. At night, visibility might be provided by artificial lighting, but the park was not consistently lit at all times or in all places. One of the women I interviewed wished for lights at the ball fields, because softball games sometimes extended into nightfall. A few women also used the park road at night, to run, bicycle, or walk home from events or practices/games (one woman had also walked through the wooded Ravine section once or twice after dark). Being in the park after dark was more likely to happen in the wintertime, when "it's dark, often, by the time you get out there." Some women noted, as I also have when using the park after dark, that sections of street lights on the road are sometimes extinguished, which might discourage people from using the park after dark and which contributes to perceptions of danger and to actual risk (e.g., collision with a car, stepping or riding into a pothole) for those who do. While some of these women took pride in their ability to overcome personal fears or to resist popular discourses of danger, the fact is also that they used the park at night out of a sense of necessity; the park is an important outdoor resource, and sometimes park users are only able to use it in the early mornings or late

evenings. Kathy, the president of the Prospect Park Track Club, related to me that she had personally attempted to address the lighting problem but became frustrated with the "confusing bureaucracy" of park administration—particularly the park road, which is managed by the Department of Transportation. She felt that "it should not be left up to a volunteer organization to alert somebody" and that administrative entities should pay more attention to safety issues, because "feeling safe in the park is what really encourages use of it, especially in the off hours."

Visibility is a general issue of concern, not only for the women I interviewed who used Prospect Park, but for park users historically and today (Burgess, 1998; Burgess et al., 1998; Curson & Kitts, 2000; Heckscher, 1977). Women are worried about being victimized by men, but men are also uncertain about their safety in thickly wooded areas of Prospect Park (Taplin, 2002; Taplin et al., 1998). However, the Prospect Park Alliance's "Woodlands Campaign" privileges unrestrained growth of trees and shrubs over users' preferences for open areas where they feel that they are visible to others. Even pruning some of the undergrowth might create a more inviting human environment, but the Alliance takes a hands-off approach (Taplin, 2002). The Alliance was formed to redress cuts in city funding to parks services, one of which was vegetation maintenance, but they have ironically allowed over-growth without proper tending. Since conducting these interviews, I have noticed a recently-opened paved path through the Quaker Hill section of the park, connecting the Long Meadow to Center Drive and the Nethermead. The path is wide enough for two or people to walk side-by-side and cuts diagonally through the woods, compared to some of the park's narrower, winding trails. I often see people using this path, and I even noticed someone there at dusk as I hurried through

Center Drive on my bike. I do not know if people use this path more often than other, less open-feeling paths through the woods, but clearly they are using it. Small changes in the physical landscape might lead to big changes in the way that a space is used.

In any outdoor place, open and well-lit spaces where one is visible to others and where there is a sense of surveillance might encourage feelings of safety, especially if those spaces also attract many users (e.g., Harnik, 2003; Trench & Jones, 1995). Better lighting, for example, might promote feelings of safety and more park use after dark. On the other hand, better lighting might only accommodate those park users who already use the park when it is dark. As Koskela and Pain (2000) argue, efforts to "design out fear" in the built environment only address the most immediate and visible correlates of fear; fear is deeply entrenched in social relations and processes, and design solutions wrongly assume that environmental stimuli determine violence. In their research, women in Helsinki expressed preferences for areas that were open and well-lit, but women in Edinburgh said that they would still avoid poorly-lit places even if they had better lighting, because they avoided those places for other reasons as well. In Prospect Park, lighting and openness might increase use and thus encourage feelings of safety, but only if in fact darkness and enclosure are primary deterrents to park use. As these interviews suggested, perceived safety is connected to the presence of others in the park, especially when those others were engaged in similar activities and when they seemed friendly and familiar.

7.1.4 Surveillance and Emergency Response

A final set of safety issues involved ways of responding to emergencies and dangerous or unwanted behaviors in the park. The Prospect Park Track Club, which had a member on the Prospect Park Alliance's Safety Committee, was encouraging a grid system, modeled after one already used in Central Park and that would allow 911 callers to state their location to a dispatcher according to numbers placed on lampposts in the park. Kathy, the Track Club's president, believed that the Alliance was about to implement the grid system at the time of her interview in the fall of 2001, but at the time that I am writing this chapter, in the summer of 2003, still no grid system exists (Kathy also noted that there were emergency call boxes on some of the lampposts on the park, which I had not noticed even after years of using the park). In fact, one evening recently when I was in the park, a woman on roller blades had fallen, and another woman called 911 for an ambulance. As the first woman lay on the ground, the caller repeatedly tried to explain to the dispatcher where we were in the park, but she became frustrated and handed the phone to a couple who had stopped to help. Luckily, the woman who had fallen seemed embarrassed but not injured.

Women in my interviews also sometimes felt that police and park rangers—who are needed to "to keep everything under control"—were not a strong presence in the park or were not reliable, because they were not paying attention when they were present. Some women were even critical of the presence of police, who are often men, and who might harass women or otherwise take advantage of their position of authority at isolated times and places in the park. In my experience, police are also inconsistent about enforcing some of the rules (for example, an officer stopped my boyfriend and me one

week while riding our bicycles in the wrong direction, but the following week another officer told my boyfriend that their sergeant had instructed them to no longer stop cyclists riding in the wrong direction), or they enforce rules in ways that are inconsistent with other expectations (auxiliary police twice told friends and me to ride our bicycles in the recreation lane at times when traffic was not in the park, which conflicts with both the Alliance's formal expectations and with informal norms).

In other studies (Burgess et al., 1988; Valentine, 1989), any type of formal surveillance—for example, police, security guards, store managers, or park keepers and gardeners—fostered feelings of safety, responded to minor emergencies and behavior problems, and "fulfilled the vital symbolic role in removing the ambiguity of ownership in public spaces" (Burgess et al., 1988: 466). In urban parks in the United States, public funding for park staffing has declined in recent decades and has been replaced by "free" labor, specifically women required to work through the welfare-to-work Work Experience Program (Harnik, 2000). Given the ambivalent nature of police and maintenance staff in the park, their presence might only be a partial solution to problems of safety and ownership in the park. Again, the women I interviewed most often expressed feelings of safety and ownership because of the presence of others and because of a sense of neighborhood or community in the park, suggesting that "ownership" has other origins as well. However, questions still remain about the experience of the park for those who might experience feelings of marginalization—the men and boys whose behavior police (often young men of color themselves) are meant to monitor, for example, or the women who have replaced paid park employees through welfare-to-work programs. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss questions of ownership and representation in

Prospect Park, which extend beyond issues of park use and into broader questions about the nature of public space.

7.2 Who "Owns" the Park?

In a market sense, Prospect Park is owned by the Department of Parks and Recreation (and the Department of Transportation, in the case of the park's road) and the corporate entities and private individuals who contribute money to the Prospect Park Alliance, whose staff and board of directors then decide how to administer that money. The Alliance, begun in 1987 at a time when the park was in physical "decline" (Graff, 1985), takes credit for "transforming" the park and for drafting a blueprint for other organizations also "trying to rescue their public spaces from years of budget cuts and neglect" (Prospect Park Alliance, 2002 Annual Report). I do not doubt that the Prospect Park Alliance has played a role in revitalizing the park in both a physical and social sense, renewing spaces in the park and attracting increased numbers of users (now more than six million users, according to Prospect Park website—see www.prospectpark.org, under "General Info"). Many of those users agree that the park is a remarkable place—aesthetically beautiful, psychologically restorative, and socially alive—in contrast to the Prospect Park of a few decades ago, which some people have told me that they did not dare to even enter.

No doubt, either, that similar alliances—including the Central Park Conservancy—have stepped in to "rescue" public spaces across New York City and the United States, spaces that were also abandoned by the state not so long ago. As Harnik (2000) optimistically states, "entrepreneurship can bring results." However, the privatization of these spaces has not escaped academic critique, as private interests

"Disneyfy" them and create places of consumption and entertainment, where place histories are distilled, and where anyone who is not a member of the leisure class exists at the margins at best. Slaves do not appear in Colonial Williamsburg (Boyer, 1992), and Disney workers move about underground when they are not serving customers (Sorkin, 1992). People who have been displaced from their homes are kept under tight control and surveillance in parks and plazas, and violence erupts when their presence there becomes too much of a threat to the boundaries between public and private (Mitchell, 1995; Smith, 1992). The bright façades of these spaces of today reflect centuries of exclusion from and oppression in public places and serve more recent socioeconomic trends (Berman, 1986). The sight of anyone who is homeless, poor, or working-class might give consumers pause and might slow down the rapid consumption of goods, leisure time, and space itself. When public spaces are "cleaned up," the results reflect the surrounding place's imagined role in the global economy, which also directly contributes to the local economy through property values, local businesses, or tourism (Low, 2000).

Prospect Park is a space that signifies the current age of capitalism, even if not a place where capitalist consumption always occurs. Accordingly, the Alliance might be said to represent the interests of the Brooklyn real estate market, which certainly benefits from a beautiful, 526-acre park. The park's concerts and cultural events, which often include West Indian and Latin themes, seem to be examples of the "controlled spectacle" of today's public spaces, where a false sense of diversity replaces unmediated social interaction and masks the absence of political discourses (Mitchell, 1995). Attendance at Celebrate Brooklyn!, the park's summer concert series, dwarfs the small gathering of union members outside of the park who have recently been protesting concert stage

worker's wages. The park's website even boasts that it annually hosts the all-African American UniverSoul Circus and the Brooklyn Gay and Lesbian Pride event. Taking credit for these events may also be acts of appropriation meant to lend an air of tolerance and diversity, really little more than lip service; the circus sets up its big top in the skating rink parking lot, where attendees are ushered in and out amid other park users, and the pride event happens to take place just outside of the park but not within its borders, at least not that I have ever seen. The regular African drumming circle, which started informally but is now a formally-sanctioned park activity, might also be seen as such an appropriation. In contrast, any other gathering of 25 people or more in Prospect Park (and in all city parks) requires a written permit, precluding any type of spontaneous gathering and limiting planned gatherings to those that are formally approved (see www.prospectpark.org, under "Event Planning").

On the other hand, public spaces continue to hold the potential to be politically subversive, especially when they remain publicly-owned and managed, as in the case of New York City's community gardens (Eizenberg, 2002). In today's increasingly-privatized outdoor spaces, people do not always behave according to the expectations that park management entities have laid out, and the powers that be seem to tolerate some level of infraction. For example, Mitchell (1995) reports that homeless people and activists continued to occupy People's Park in Berkeley, even after the city and University of California violently wrested formal control of part of the park for university volleyball courts. Montagnet (2002) also found that users in an in-progress, privately-funded New York City Park appropriated spaces for unsanctioned behaviors, including two homeless individuals who lived in the park, although they were discreet about their

homelessness (e.g., not sleeping on benches, maintaining clean and well-kept appearances). Low (2000) has observed that spatial appropriation often leads to restrictions on use—a space is closed for construction, refurbished to invite different uses of space, and policed more closely once it is opened—but "undesirable" users such as teenagers, gay men, prostitutes, and petty criminals, continue to inhabit the space. Perhaps spaces where these kinds of challenges to notions of a legitimate public are becoming more constrained in number and in possibilities for causing real trouble, or perhaps they only represent small "slippages" in acceptable public behavior (Butler, 1993). Or perhaps as long as spaces are public in some sense, they can be sites of resistance, and that is why such small pieces of land become so violently contested.

If those who "own" Prospect Park in an official sense—those with the authority to dictate who uses the park, when they use it, and what they do there—if those entities "allow" and even encourage a vibrant display of music, food, drag costumes, and skin colors, then maybe that display will detract from who and what are not present in the park. The Alliance carefully deliberates its range of acceptable uses, many of which in turn dictate who its users will be. For example, signs posted throughout the park prohibit mountain biking anywhere but on paved areas, but the people who ride mountain bikes off-road tend to be young men of color (Taplin, 2002). Decisions about park management, which in this case have not demonstrated much of an understanding of community participation, seem authoritative and discriminatory. Planning decisions become the basis for exclusion, because there are direct relations among the design of a space, the ways people use it, and who those users are. While a prominent finding in Taplin's research was that young black men were a target of the no-mountain biking rule, some of

the women in my research simply dismissed the rule as arbitrary and unimportant, or else they received more than one first-time warning for riding on the trails. They (and I also sometimes) violated the rule, but as white women they were probably not as visible as young men whose presence in public is already seen as problematic.

Furthermore, when one really looks around the park, there is a marked absence of some people. Where are the homeless people, for example? There are some, in and around the park, in my experience particularly women who stay in a nearby shelter and who periodically ask for money outside of nearby coffee shops and restaurants (but only small amounts of money, not more than fifty cents at a time, or a dollar in exchange for a typed poem), or men who spend time on benches outside of the park and keep their belongings in shopping carts. When I lived closer to the park I occasionally saw tents pitched there, but not more than one or two at a time, and one might judge from the park's appearance that New York had successfully housed every single one of its residents. In fact, one of my interviewees told me that she was quite shaken when she overheard a park administrative employee on the subway, who said that people lived in the park and used drugs there. I was, in turn, surprised to hear that my interviewee had not known that fact until overhearing the park employee; when I lived near the park, I had sometimes seen encampments from my apartment or encountered others sleeping in the park when I was jogging or walking "off the beaten path."

And where are the people with disabilities? I can only think of one person I have regularly seen in the park who does not appear to be fully able-bodied. That one person is a man who, I have heard, lost use of his arm in a bicycle-vehicle collision and who now seems to bike or skate when traffic is not in the park. Furthermore, I have not noted any

particular accommodations for anyone with a disability. It might be argued that the paved paths in the park would accommodate wheelchairs, but I have not spoken to anyone with a disability who would be able to comment. It is not just a matter of who is encouraged or discouraged from using the park as a resource; a park may also a representative space reflecting predominant notions of who constitutes a legitimate public (Mitchell, 1995) and what constitutes a desirable image of "culture" (Low, 2000). The sense of community and neighborhood expressed by my interviewees probably encompassed diverse races, ethnicities, and sexualities, but their responses could have been different if the park forced its users to confront the more "deviant" members of society and the harsh inequities that they represent (Berman, 1986).

But Prospect Park, like all public spaces where people may gather with some degree of freedom, shows potential to foster some kinds of public discourse, if not the more overtly political discourses that sometimes occur in public spaces. On the one hand, the land within the park's boundaries at the moment may be off-limits to more flagrant challenges to the status quo, such as encampments for the otherwise-homeless, rallies, riots, or impromptu soapbox speeches. The park has in many ways been sanitized of reminders of poverty or unrest, providing a bucolic backyard for its middle-class neighbors, as well as carnivalesque opportunities (in an overall safe and familiar environment) for the more adventurous among them. On the other hand, the park really is an important civic resource for all of its users, no matter what their race, ethnicity, gender, or economic means (Taplin, 2002; Taplin et al., 1998). It is a space that attracts people from many, different "communities," eroding some of the boundaries of neighborhood, race, and class; although park users identify different "sides" of the park in a social sense,

at least they all come together in one physically discrete place where they have opportunities to mix with one another (see Lofland, 1989). As I believe Berman (1986) is saying, the social and psychological "healing" that might occur in public spaces is just as important to modern democracy as any other type of political discourse. Coming face-to-face with "people radically different from ourselves"—for Berman, the urban poor in particular—allows opportunities to confront difference, even experience conflict, and begin integrating everyone into a broader, more inclusive public. Prospect Park is well-used by people from some very different walks of life, who cannot help at times but to come face-to-face with one another, true to one of its original purposes—"to restore to the alienated city inhabitants a sense of community" (Fisher, 1986: 103).

For the women in my research, feelings of ownership sometimes implied a taking-back of public space from a deviant element of society. As one woman said, ". . . if thugs win . . . where do civilized people go?" Their experiences of being female (and white) in public spaces often revolved around a sense of vulnerability to those "thugs," and sometimes their interactions with young men in the park seemed to have confirmed their notions about differences—for example, when white women in their 30's and 40's played basketball with black teenaged boys, whose "street style" of play had no place in their game. However, the physical space of the park itself, and the common interests in sports and fitness of many of its users, might facilitate some of Berman's "healing." These women did at least make efforts to include boys who really wanted to play, and at least one woman felt that those boys were sometimes "respectful." Approaching these women might also have been a difficult gesture for some of those boys of color, who do sense others' fear and prejudice in public spaces (Waters, 1996), including Prospect Park

(Taplin, 2002). Many women also talked about meeting others—people with whom they might not have ordinarily spoken because of social distance—receiving sports and fitness advice from them, just getting to know them, or reaching out to one another after September 11th. Perhaps the conflicts that sometimes ensued were not even such a bad thing, if they gave everyone involved some opportunity to think about other ways of seeing things, like the woman who carefully explained to me the reasons that it was difficult to play basketball with boys from the projects. She did not seem at all concerned, like some women, that I would think she was imposing "stereotypes" on those boys, as she tried to make sense of her interactions with them and the distances between them.

I am not sure how fully the park has reached potential to be a truly public space. Maybe "the truth lies in the middle," and the park is no more private than it is public (Montagnet, 2002). The park is socially produced by influential entities who have economic and ideological sway, which in turn relates to ways that the park is experienced and imagined by its users, but that relationship may be "dialogic rather than dialectic" (Low, 2000: 131), reflecting an ongoing, interactive process of construction. Private market interests have a heavy hand in the physical and behavioral landscaping of the park, but a fairly representative public converges there and uses the park in diverse and creative ways. Lesbian softball and African drumming are probably two niches that would have not been envisioned by park officials, yet there they are. (Now the question is, how to encourage interaction among lesbian softball players and African drummers?) The Alliance has literally encouraged a separation among the two different activities, with the thickly wooded sections of the park and even fences, which do nothing to lessen fear, misunderstanding, or feelings of alienation. Likewise, the refusal to simply ban cars from

the park, and the narrow space for recreational uses on the road, might be said to encourage conflict among users there. However, I also do believe that spaces like the park, particularly as they are culturally-constructed spaces, are always evolving. Olmstedian values and practices have left an enduring mark, which comes with its own constraints and possibilities. Hopefully, those possibilities will continue to include a truly diverse range of activities, not only for the sake of those activities alone but also for the human interactions that go with them.

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, the fluid and complex nature of urban outdoor spaces also have implications for the ways in which women might use and perceive such spaces. The park is both a physical place affording a number of emotional and sensory experiences, and it is a social space where relationships are interwoven at every level. We might tend to think about relationships in public spaces more often in a negative light, for example in terms of fear, danger, retreat, social disorder, or competition for access to spaces. Those kinds of ideas certainly influenced the ways that women thought about their own presence in the park, but their interviews also clearly demonstrated much more complexity to their experiences and their constructions of the park as a space. They viewed the park as a place where they belonged, even as they received messages that it might be a dangerous place. It was also a place where they encountered others on a number of different terms, from conflict and distrust, to support and encouragement, to the simple joy of being among a diverse and lively group of people. Their descriptions of the park as a dynamic space may inform not only understandings of relationships public spaces, but also understandings of public space specifically in terms of gender, which I discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN URBAN OUTDOOR SPACES

In this chapter I take a final look at the ways in which these women conceptualized the park as a physical and social space and the ways that they conceptualized themselves and their bodies within that space. In particular, I explore some implications of their experiences for current understandings of gender and space. In Chapter One, I introduced the concept of a separate spheres ideal, which gained particular currency during the rapid industrialization of the 19th century, and which has since influenced the ways that space is conceived, for example in the design of "feminine" suburbs in the United States (Appleton, 1995; Saegert, 1980) and even "women's quarters" in parks (Cranz, 1980; Schenker, 1996). Policies regarding welfare, housing, housework, transportation, and child care reify the separation of women's work into the private sphere and favor private-market answers to the work of social reproduction (see Garber & Turner, 1985; Hayden, 1980; Katz, 1998; 2001; Laslett & Brenner, 1989; Wekerle, 1980). The separation of public and private spheres continues to hold powerful ideological sway, and women's experiences of public spaces often remind them that they might not belong there, for example when they are harassed, when feel a heightened fear of victimization, or when their roles as care-givers or household managers restrict their uses of public spaces (see Franck & Paxson, 1989). Fear and victimization in public help to keep women in their place (Day, 1999b; Gardner, 1989; Madriz, 1997; Pain,

1991;1997).

However, as I have argued here, a separate spheres ideal as a theoretical framework—particularly as it manifests through women's fear and vulnerability—provides only a partial understanding of women's experiences of being in public. If differences among people such as race and class are obscured in public spaces—both in the real ways that people are encouraged to use them and in idealized notions—then so is gender. Popularly-held ideas about a place like Prospect Park construct it as a place that is often inappropriate for women, or even as undesirable—why would a woman even want to go into a park at night? These popular ideas make their way into academic discourses, so that it may not only be "taboo" for women to make claims of ownership over public spaces, for example that they are not afraid to be outside alone at night (Koskela, 1997). It might also be taboo for scholars to take those claims seriously.

The problem is not that women's concerns and difficulties related to the idealized public-private separation are not real, but that an overemphasis on woman-as-private also privileges man-as-public. Men might share many of the same concerns (such as lighting and visibility), but those concerns will not be addressed if they are simply viewed as an essential part of femaleness. Likewise, women use public spaces in many ways, but all of those uses might not be accommodated if they are not acknowledged. These interviews suggested that a space like an urban park, with all of its physical and social qualities, offers rich set of experiences, only some of which reinforce the public-private separation of gender as a framework for understanding women's experiences of public spaces. Many of the experiences described here suggest a need for broadening that understanding.

8.1 How Do We Conceptualize Gender and Space?

I owe much of my thinking to Kristen Day's (2000) article, which pointed out that the separate spheres ideal has provided a prominent framework, in the absence of any other formal framework, for research on women and public space over the past few decades. Day proposed an ethic of care framework as a more comprehensive one for understanding women's uses and perceptions of public spaces, including negative experiences (e.g., caring for children may lead to fear of strangers, caring for strangers may relate to a willingness to be socially open and thus vulnerable). An ethic of care was also proposed by Henderson and Allen (1991) as a way of understanding women's leisure experiences. Day's article prompted me to frame some of my data in terms of relationships, caring, and receiving care, as I presented in Chapter Four. However, I went on to say in Chapter Five that the park was often shrouded by a myth of danger, where women were constructed as particularly vulnerable, thus reinforcing the idea that a public park is not a place for women. These women did not easily swallow the idea that they were vulnerable to attack, but that idea often stayed with them, even as they displayed their own "boldness" in the ways that they used the park (for some of them, alone, at night, or in more secluded areas), and in the defiant ways that some of them spoke about the park and the determination that it was "their" park. The strangers in the park who sometimes seemed familiar, friendly, and caring might also become unpredictable and volatile, depending on place, time, and perceptions of difference.

I have reached a point of disconnect here, between the ways that women perceive/describe the presence of their own bodies in the park and the ways that they actually move through it. There is also a disconnect somewhere between the ways that

women use and experience all public spaces, and the academic discourse emphasizing fear and victimization. This is an extremely important discourse, and it has had a strong influence on this research, but it does not fully explain everything that emerged here. Even a concept like boldness is somewhat narrow and fails to capture the full richness of the experiences that were described here, only explaining ways that women cope with actual or perceived danger in public spaces. Thus boldness still falls within a separate spheres framework, because it assumes that there are real or perceived dangers that require women to be bold. Applying the ethic of care theory—where "care" is intertwined with the difficulties and joys of everyday life—provides another starting point toward understanding women's lives and the ways that relationships exist in multiple contexts, including a setting like a public park. However, an ethic of care framework is also probably not sufficient as a way of fully understanding experiences of public space. Sometimes constraints will occur that do not relate to relationships or caring (e.g., time constraints due to work, school, or other interests), and sometimes possibilities will arise outside of relationships and caring (e.g., nature or physical challenge).

In addition to Day's ethic of care article, I have come across other pieces that debate the extent to which a public-private framework might be applied to women's lives in general and their experiences of urban public space in particular. In a brief essay written nearly twenty years ago, Lyn Lofland (1984) challenged two assumptions that feminists "take as gospel"—that women prefer intimate relationships over the more segmented and impersonal ones that occur in public, and that women are excluded from or endangered in public places. Lofland offered a few examples—in her personal experiences, in her own research, and in others'—where women expressed the joy that

they felt among diverse and anonymous others in urban public places, and she called for more research to balance the "distortion" of the reality of women's experiences. Franck and Paxson (1989) soon retorted, however, that the fact that "women still do not have the same 'freedom of the street' as men do *is* significant" (p. 122) and that a concept of separate public and private spheres is indeed an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding women and urban public space.

At the same time that they interrogated the public-private dichotomy and its impacts (psychological, environmental, economic, and political), feminists began to query possibilities for disrupting that dichotomy and dissociating it from gender (e.g, Garber & Turner, 1995; Hayden, 1980; Massey, 1994; Saegert, 1985; Saegert & Winkel, 1980; Wekerle, 1980; Wilson, 1991). The focus of research often continues to be on restrictions like fear and risk, but other possibilities arise. Deem (1996), for example, suggests that risk in public spaces might be a desired component of leisure, tourism in particular, for women. Even Day's (1999a) exploration of women's experiences of race and fear in public places, in Orange County, California's post-suburban landscape, revealed possibilities for women to feel safe and comfortable, but also to find risk and excitement in diverse and remote-feeling places—although for women of color, the experience of public space was more likely to be complicated by racism. In the UK, Scraton and Watson's (1998) research called the public-private dichotomy into question, as women's perceptions of the city of Leeds were complex and were related to work, motherhood, age, and racial identity (racism was again a concern, this time for Asian women). Bondi (1998), on the other hand, concluded that the gentrification occurring in Edinburgh neighborhoods did little to disentangle or dismantle the public-private

dichotomy, and the liberation that did occur for women (e.g., feeling safe in public, buying property, access to work and career) was dependent on middle-class status. Social theory further suggests that lesbian women's styles of expression, including a range of styles and simple expressions of desire, challenge public spaces as gendered, and implicitly heterosexual, spaces (Bell et al., 1994; Valentine, 1996).

Most of these authors seem to agree that notions of public and private have in fact had a powerful influence, but problems arise when this becomes the predominant or only lens for viewing gender. A separate spheres ideal reflects a middle-class ideology and thus ignores many women's experiences (and assumes likenesses among all middle-class women), it is historical and thus does not account for change, and it emphasizes restrictions and does not always account for the freedoms that women experience. This last point is most applicable to urban public space in particular, which has the potential to be "a place of liberation" for women (Wilson, 1991). The urban environment, while oppressive in many ways, might also be a place where women feel freer to lead different lifestyles, or where they find cultural, social, and career opportunities, especially in comparison to lower-density suburbs, where they are isolated from many of those possibilities (Garber & Turner, 1995; Saegert, 1985; Saegert & Winkel, 1980). Perhaps that is why, Wilson seems to imply, "women have become an irruption in the city, a symptom of disorder, and a problem: the Sphinx in the city" (p. 9).

8.2 What Role do Physical Activities Play?

Space and activity intersect, and I suggested early on that physical activity is in some ways a subset of public life. People usually engage in physical activities in public places, and women's participation in physical activity has the potential to help them

become healthier, stronger, more empowered, and arguably more capable of participating in some parts of the public sphere—for example, through the connections between sport and career reported by the Women's Sports Foundation (Sabo & Snyder, 1993). Some of the women I interviewed in fact believed that a sense of physical capability enabled them to use some spaces more confidently, including the park, or on the other hand that being small or looking feminine might invite more unwanted attention or feelings of vulnerability. Their responses actually reflected Pohl et al.'s (2000) suggested framework for research on women and wilderness get-away experiences: self-esteem based on an intersection of self-sufficiency and mental clarity; authority stemming from connections with other, assertiveness, and self-reflection; freedom of mind, body, and movement, and freedom from societal constraints, and independence that comes from relying on oneself and on supportive relationships from others.

Popular ways of viewing physically active women have fluctuated historically, with some parallels between opportunities in athletics and larger social movements, such as Title IX. Title IX resonated for some of these women, who had grown up with opportunities and continued to pursue interests that they had developed when younger. Others, including some who were too old to have benefited directly from Title IX while growing up, were lucky to have opportunities in other contexts when younger, such as family or community. Still others might have discovered completely new strengths and skills later in life, by taking classes or learning from friends, family, and acquaintances. As adults, the park became one of the places where they continued to seek experiences of challenge, learning, fun, and social connection. The park was also an important place for team sports, which require the playing fields and courts that can be so rare—and

rarefied—in New York City.

However, the park may have also offered reminders that sports and fitness are in some way a function of privilege, and that privilege has not yet been fully granted to women; even young boys sometimes seemed to be granted rights to playing fields before adult women. With so many men and boys at play, the park set the stage for what sometimes felt like a struggle to some women, even if they were not always sure of the exact nature of that struggle. Was it a matter of language barrier, cultural difference, or some other simple misunderstanding, for example when others wandered onto a softball game, or when a men's soccer game strayed into the outfield? Were women being overly-sensitive to off-handed remarks about women and women's activities, or did some men and boys really carry such a sense of entitlement that they felt no inhibitions making disparaging or arrogant remarks? No matter what the meaning of these collisions with others' space, many women felt that it was important to preserve the spaces that they had worked hard to establish, which unfortunately sometimes compromised the ethos of inclusiveness and collectivity that was ideally a part of those spaces.

Playing fields and public basketball courts in and around the park also posed occasions for women to consider social dynamics in addition to those that take place around gender. This was especially clear when some of these white, middle-class women encountered young men of color whose aggrandized "street style" seemed so incompatible with cooperative women's play. The "tension" that these women mentioned may have been more than a tension between styles of play associated with gender, but perhaps also a tension in knowing that they were competing for resources with others who have also been denied opportunities—not just opportunities to play sports. These

women claimed spaces for themselves in places that are accessible to a presumed public, and they demanded "respect" for what they claimed as theirs, but a few pointed out that what they claimed as theirs also overlapped with places that were just as precious to others. These were not just spaces for getting exercise and practicing skills; they were also spaces for finding joy in one's body and in interactions with others, for escaping stressors of everyday life, maybe even for imagining other possibilities (Fine et al., 1998). But ownership over these spaces was also tenuous, and as women sought and found places of their own, it also sometimes meant that they may have nudged others out of the way.

8.3 Issues of Race, Ethnicity, and Class

As these interviews demonstrated, we often cannot talk about gender without talking about other social constructs, such as race, class, and ethnicity. A feminist theoretical perspective on leisure is relatively recent and has so far been from the point of view of ". . . Western, white, middle-class, intellectual feminism which seeks a better deal for educated women and ignores the experiences of women who do not fit into this category" (Wearing, 1998: 173). This theoretical "center" also includes women who are heterosexual and able-bodied (Watson & Scraton, 2001), and leisure may have very different meanings for women who are at the margins. Likewise, women's experiences of space may also relate to a number of factors such as age, class, race, physical ability, or sexuality.

Among women in the United States, race in particular is a significant construct relating to physical activity. To begin with, women in the United States are less likely to

engage in leisure time physical activity when they are older, less educated, have lower incomes, or belong to minority groups. In recent studies looking at physical activity in several urban and rural areas throughout the United States, women cited a range of constraints such as lack of social support, cultural norms discouraging exercise as leisure, lack of facilities and programs, lack of time and energy, health concerns, concerns for personal safety, and care-giving responsibilities toward others (Eyler et al., 1998; Eyler et al., 2002; King et al., 2000; Wilbur et al., 2002; Wilcox et al., 2000). Before they might even be able to think about the urban outdoor environment as a resource, they would first need to have other resources in place, such as child care, supportive groups for exercise, and transportation (Wilbur et al., 2002). It seemed that many of the women in my research already had many of those resources. While women with children might have had to negotiate a bit, they were able to find time for themselves to exercise in the park, and transportation might not have been an issue because their homes were near the park. Furthermore, the current social landscape of Prospect Park, which so many women found supportive, might be the result of private investment and recent demographic trends, but parks and trails in other urban areas are not always as inviting to women (Wilbur et al., 2002).

As I discussed in Chapter Two, many of the women whom I recruited for this research turned out to be similar to me in some ways: white, in their 30's, from middle-class or working-class backgrounds, and in some sort of white-collar or upwardly mobile career track. I made efforts to recruit all sorts of women but often found it difficult, and I was particularly disappointed not to speak more at length with some of the women I saw frequently in the park, specifically black women, Latina women, and Orthodox Jewish

women. I did not even see one woman in the park who did not appear to be fully-able bodied. I was, however, pleased to speak to quite a few women who potentially represented different points of view from one another: lesbian women who eagerly responded to my email requests, women older than the Title IX cohort, and in particular one very delightful 85-year-old woman who ran or walked in the park every day. It was interesting, too, how similar many of these women were in their joys and concerns regarding physical activity in the urban outdoor environment.

However, their joys and concerns are not necessarily representative of other women's. There were few women of color in my interviews, and most of the women of color I did interview were referrals, besides two black women whom I recruited in the park. The women who were referrals seemed to be more middle-class, either from middle-class backgrounds or through social mobility, while the two women in the park were more working-class (a security guard and a student at the city's public university). If I had interviewed more women of color who were directly recruited from the park, I might have heard a somewhat different story, because of their intersecting identities based on gender, race, and class. The few interviews with black women here also suggested that slightly different understandings of risk and danger, for example related to theft or gangs, as well as other possibilities, such as feeling comfortable in areas where black and Latino families had barbecues.

In addition to very deep philosophical and epistemological issues of researching leisure among diverse groups of women, there are practical and methodological issues as well. Race and racism are difficult to talk about, because they may act in subtle ways, they may not be a part of every woman's experience, or racial identity may in fact have a

positive influence (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001; Watson & Scraton, 2001). There may also sometimes be more differences within groups of women than there are between them because of other structural variables like class, religion, disability, and so on (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001). Many women have multiple, intersecting identities, and there may be times when the researcher is in fact an "insider" because of shared experiences by virtue of gender (Watson & Scraton, 2001). Conversely, there may be times when sharing traits that define "race" does not in fact bridge the distance between interviewer and interviewee (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001). In my research, I was the only interviewer and could only do my best at enlisting women who were willing to be interviewed, listening well once they had agreed, and re-telling their stories as honestly as possible.

On the other hand, the women I interviewed told some stories that revealed quite a bit about gender and race in public spaces. As white women, many of them echoed discourses that rely on an "interlocking" dependency of gender and race in notions of appropriate behaviors and roles in public places (Ruddick, 1996). White women are constructed as vulnerable in outdoor, public places, especially when they are alone, in places that are hidden or isolated, or at night. Their biggest fear is sexual assault, but they are not afraid of being assaulted by just anyone; they are most afraid of men and boys of color, which for these women also translated into fears of neighborhoods or sections of the park that they identified as black or Latino. They further looked for other cues of malicious intent, such as clothing or athletic equipment (e.g., expensive versus inexpensive sneakers or bicycles), which may have also been indicators of class, so that men who were running or cycling in a way that appeared to be legitimate were less likely to trigger fear. All of these strategies were reinforced by messages that women heard

from others and from the media, and perhaps reinforced by any encounters with men who harassed them or who were simply behaving in ways that seemed erratic.

Furthermore, racial anxieties that focus on the park may originate from or signify more than the park's proximity to neighborhoods so strongly identified as "white" or "black." Prospect Park is a particular public space that has social significance, including an association with gentrification and privatization. On the one hand is an ideal that as a public place, Prospect Park welcomes all walks of life, but on the other hand (as I discussed in Chapter 7), the park as a representational space may include images—even showcases—of diversity that actually conform to middle-class ideals. Transgressions of those ideals are likely to be punished or to lead to policies that limit unwanted behaviors. Acts of extreme violence suggest behavior that cannot be controlled, and the anxieties over such unpredictability are embodied in the interlocking relationship between gender and race. In Prospect Park—or Central Park—acts of violence where men of color victimize white women (or men—one story about Prospect Park is of a white, male teacher who was murdered by a group of black boys who wanted to steal his bicycle) are "seen to compromise the freedom of middle-class families to move without fear throughout the city" (Ruddick, 1996: 146). The presence of white, middle-class women and poor, working-class black men of color together in public places provoke hysterical reactions, which is what these women felt and described vis-à-vis their experiences of being in the park.

In their discussions of danger when alone in the park, these women did not deconstruct what one called "the race thing" in the same way that they resisted the notion that they were vulnerable in the park because they were women. The race thing in fact is

related to systemic power and privilege in the United States, and these women may have been most aware of the implications of danger discourses on their own experiences. For some, anger and a refusal to relinquish desired activities reflected their positioning as women, but they were perhaps less aware of their positioning as white women and the deeply-rooted relationships that are at the heart of their fears. Men and boys of color can adopt a threatening or simply cool posture—even young boys were adept at harassment and the stylized pose—which may lead women to retreat or to experience emotional discomfort. Their play on gender and race, however, was what led to anger and frustration for these women, because it translated into the policing of their own bodies. Their preferences for "populated" places and wishes for increased surveillance suggested that they might invoke white, middle-class privilege in order to claim ownership over the park, so that they would no longer have to worry about being vulnerable as women.

8.4 Conclusions

This research tells us that women do not simply experience urban, outdoor, public spaces as hostile or unwelcoming. The idea of an ethic of care offers an additional dimension of understanding to the more common separate spheres framework, but simply viewing these experiences in terms of care is not enough, either. These women's descriptions suggest a specific aspect of Gilligan's ethic of care—the concern with preserving a network of relations that includes not only the immediate face-to-face relationships in women's everyday lives but also the less immediate social relations "on whose continuation they all depend" (Gilligan, 1982:30). A critique of Gilligan's work has been that it essentializes women as more caring and more concerned with emotional attachments than men (see Kroeger-Mappes, 1994). Perhaps a better use of her theory as

it applies to public space would be to consider the ways that relationships, and sometimes care, exist in places that are not usually associated with intimate relationships. Relationships simply do exist everywhere, and at every level, in a place like Prospect Park, even when people are not directly face-to-face; the park is also symbolic of, and produced by, structural relations of gender, race, and class. All of these relationships are sometimes a part of what is problematic about the space, and they are a part of what is liberating or enriching about the space. "Life in the public realm is thoroughly social" (Lofland, 1989: 457).

Relationships in and around the park helped women to feel safe and "supported" while engaging in physical activities there. Once again, the safety and support offered by relationships in the park shed light on some of the ways that women might use public spaces in spite of messages regarding fear and danger, but a fine line also exists between safety and vulnerability. Explanations of safety and support only address one aspect of this set of experiences and thus only go so far beyond the separate spheres framework. These women were not speaking about safety and support alone; relationships were part of the richness of experience of the park, and probably other public spaces, and that richness has implications for the public-private separation of space and its associations with gender. A "trichotomous distinction," while still not a fully accurate depiction, offers a fuller picture, where a realm of interpersonal networks and "community" blur the separation of the public and private realms (Lofland, 1989). This would mean that, as these women often said, places that are typically thought of as "public," anonymous, and unforgiving—also associated with the "male" qualities of reason and objectivity—can in fact be intimate and emotional places. For lesbian women, "gender" may have even more

complicated meanings, and the park was again a place where oppressive gender ideologies might break down and where strength in numbers, diversity, and tolerance allowed freedom to express themselves and engage in enjoyable activities.

Relationships also played a part in answering a question that came up for me in doing this research: what did it mean that women described so much conflict and distrust on the one hand, and so much understanding and familiarity on the other? Relationships are complicated in this way, and maybe the park is not much different. As these women sought their desired experiences in the park, they also sometimes had difficulties because the park is such a public place where so many people might come together. That sort of publicness most directly threatened their desires when it lent to perceived threats of danger. With team sports, issues of fear and safety instead sometimes became a contest, real or imagined, over rights and entitlement to space. Although issues of danger, respect, and rights to space had such powerful connections to race, I do not believe that these women's understandings of race and relationships in park were always completely one-dimensional. While they spoke about fear and danger, they also spoke about neighborhood and community in the park. On the one hand, they were concerned about "tensions" among groups of people as they affected their own sense of safety, ownership, and entitlement, but on the other hand, they suggested that tensions might break down in the park with a bit of effort at understanding what those tensions are about.

I have employed a phenomenological approach to this work in order to explore all of the ways that these women experienced the park, and I have also used a discursive approach to attempt to further understand the descriptions of their interactions there. Each described a range of experiences of the park, from playing Frisbee with complete

strangers to fleeing the perceived "viciousness" of the "other" side of the park on a gray and lonely day, from friendly chats with familiar others to feelings of "tension" among unfamiliar and chaotic sights, sounds, and activities. Their experiences were a mix of positive and negative, but for all of these women the park was an important resource, and some had many connections with the park that went beyond physical activity. Their experiences might also have been very different if they were describing physical activities in a different setting, such as a gym, fitness center, home, or other outdoor environment. Likewise, being physically active is a specific way of using a park, compared to other possible activities, such as picnicking, reading a book, or visiting one of its attractions.

Prospect Park is a physical space and a social space, and many physical and social qualities were woven into the experiences that these women described there: the various opportunities that the park offered for physical activity and challenge, the joy of "playing" outdoors, the beauty and emotional release associated with "nature," feelings of fear and vulnerability, perceptions of physical strength and confidence, and collectivity among other women like themselves, as well as with friends, family, and strangers. These women were using the park in very active ways, not just occupying space there but creating space as well. They have made it a "woman's space," and they have demonstrated the potential for such a space to evolve, even with all of the challenges of gender, race, and class. Their stories suggest that constructs of gender and space are not as solid as I had thought at the outset, that human activities are fluid enough to seep through those constructs and perhaps, over time, erode them.

APPENDIX A: FLIER USED TO RECRUIT INTERVIEWEES

-Brooklyn Women in Sports-

I am a graduate student conducting research on the athletic activities of Brooklyn women. I am particularly interested in activities in public parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities. I am currently interviewing women who "play" in Prospect Park and the Parade Grounds.

Some of the things that I want to know are:

- √ Where are the places that you go, and what do you do there?
- √ Who are you with--friends, families, teammates, or alone?
- √ Are outdoor athletic activities different for women and men? For different women?
- √ How did you get into your favorite activities, and how do they fit into your life?
- √ What are your fears and difficulties?
- √ What are your special experiences?
- √ What do sports/fitness say about you?

Whether you jog, rollerblade, play tennis, pickup soccer, or league softball, whether you are a fierce team competitor, a Sunday stroller, or a rugged individualist who trains in the most grueling New York City heat or the deepest winter freeze...I want to hear from you.

Interviews will take approximately one hour. I will come to your home, arrange a convenient meeting place for you, or join you in your sport.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Trish, 47	Met in the park during observations	White, married with one school-aged child, writer/professor	Cycles in park; fitness classes at dance studio; few opportunities for physical activities growing up
Marlene, 35	Met in the park during observations	White, single, engaged to be married, graduate student	In-line skates in park and on streets; was an airplane pilot as a teenager, swam and rode horses throughout childhood and adolescence
Jenny, 29	Met in the park during observations	African American, single mother of two school-aged children, security guard	Walks in park, on Eastern Parkway, on streets and across Brooklyn Bridge; does calisthenics in apartment with her daughter; occasional in-line skating with son
Diane, 36	Met in the park, introduced by a mutual bike-riding acquaintance	White, single with boyfriend, works in music copyright administration	In-line skates in park; Afro-Brazilian dance and aerobics indoors; in-line skates, hikes, and rock-climbs with boyfriend in Catskill Mountains; formerly ran competitively
Tamika, 18	Met in the park (Parade Grounds basketball courts) during observations	African American, college undergraduate, single, recently moved out of mother's home	Plays basketball at Parade Grounds and other public courts, on indoor courts at college campus; formerly played for high school basketball team; learned some skills through youth program run by former pro basketball player
Peggy, 85	Met in park during observations	White, widowed with adult children and grandchildren, volunteers for a nonprofit agency	Began running at age 70 and now runs in park daily; uses gymnastics rings at fitness center; former national-champion figure skater
Megan, 28	Met in park during observations	White, single lesbian, graphic designer	Has played soccer for 20 years and currently plays pick-up soccer games with women in the park and on amateur soccer league; formerly played on school teams; also plays tennis, softball, basketball, and lacrosse, hikes, and skates

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES (CONTINUED)

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Maria, 53	Met at Prospect Park Track Club meeting	White, single, private elementary school principal	Runs and cycles in park; swims, lifts weights, and fitness classes at YMCA; always a "tomboy" and played on high school and college basketball teams; teaches swimming and lifeguard training, receiving certification in personal training
Kathy, 65	Met at Prospect Park Track Club meeting	White, has adult children and grandchildren, about to retire from local gas company	Runs in park; began running in her 40's; ran her first marathon at age 58 and has since completed 10 marathons; also swims; president of the Prospect Park Track Club
Laura, 40	Referred by a mutual bike-riding acquaintance	White, married with two school-aged children, attorney, describes self as "unobserving Orthodox" Jewish	Cycles in park; formerly played tennis and ran, completed some marathons; also currently swims, lifts weights, does yoga and fitness cycling indoors
Sheryl, 38	Referred by her husband, who is a bike-riding acquaintance	African American, married, self-employed massage and physical therapist, co-authored two books with husband about weight lifting	Runs and cycles in park, lifts weights in gym; began power lifting competitively at age 32, achieved two national and two world championships; completed one New York City marathon
Karen, 47	Referred by Sheryl	Jamaican, married with two school-aged children, fitness instructor and stay-at-home mother	Runs in Prospect Park; lifts weights in gym; began running at age 24, aerobics and weight-lifting at health club at age 30, then became fitness instructor
Pam, 41	Referred by Karen	African American, married with two school-aged children, landscape designer and stay-at-home mother	Runs in Prospect Park; some indoor fitness activities (e.g., toning); skates in park and skis with family in wintertime; began running in mid-30's
Lucille, 31 (pilot interview)	An acquaintance, whom I approached because I knew she used the park	White, married, graduate student	Cycles regularly and walks occasionally in Prospect Park; formerly lived in Manhattan and ran in Central Park; swam competitively and did triathlons in high school and college

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES (CONTINUED)

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Donna, 36	Referred by Lucille	White, single, graduate student	Runs and cycles in Prospect Park and Central Park; not very active until college when she began running, swimming, weight lifting; competed in marathons and triathlons in 20's
Allison, 33	Referred by Donna	White, single/divorced, graduate student	Cycles in Prospect Park; ran in park when she lived closer but now uses treadmill at YMCA; also snowboards, plays coed professional league softball, tennis; active since childhood
Tina, 27	Referred by a friend's sister	White, single, photographer	Plays volleyball and catch with friends in Prospect Park; does gymnastics and dance in studios; was a "tomboy" and played girls' softball, informal outdoor team sports with boys
Maya, 42	Referred by a fellow graduate student	White, single lesbian, administrative assistant	Plays women's league softball in Prospect Park; occasionally cycles, plays Frisbee or touch football in park; active as a child and teenager but no opportunities for sports in school
Kristie, 33 (pilot interview)	A friend with whom I have frequented the park for years	White, single, graduate student	Runs and hikes in Prospect Park
Missy, 41	Responded to email sent to local gay & lesbian-friendly cycling/running club	African American, lesbian with partner, attorney	Played women's league softball in Prospect Park for 5 or 6 seasons; also played several seasons of advanced women's league softball; currently plays basketball, played from elementary school through college
Lucinda, 49	Responded to above email	Cuban-American, single/divorced with teenage children, self-employed accountant	Runs in Prospect Park and other New York City parks; does marathons for charity; was always very active in dance, gymnastics, team sports

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES (CONTINUED)

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Sue, 30's	Responded to above email	White, single, freelance writer	Cycles in Prospect Park; does T'ai Chi, sometimes in park; explored her surroundings by bicycle as a child; played softball in high school and as an adult on coed bar league and professional league
Teresa, 49	Responded to above email	White, teaches physical education to special needs children	Cycles and runs in Prospect Park; played women's league softball there about three years ago; played team sports from elementary school through college; ran marathon in early 30's
Ginni, 42	Responded to above email	White, single lesbian, teaches reproductive health at a city college	Cycles, walks, and plays women's league softball in Prospect Park; plays basketball on YMCA league and in adult classes, pick-up games on outdoor courts and Department of Parks and Recreation gym; also hikes, kayaks, and cycles outside of city; few opportunities for physical activities growing up
Sheila, 36	Responded to above email	White, single lesbian, administrator for city foster care agency	Plays women's league softball in Prospect Park; used to run in park; plays basketball on YMCA league and in adult classes, pick-up games on outdoor courts and Department of Parks and Recreation gym; played team sports for many years
Lisa, 30	Responded to above email (Ginny, Sheila, and Lisa are also friends)	White, single lesbian, attorney	Plays women's league softball in Prospect Park; played league soccer in elementary school and softball through college; began cycling three years ago and recently completed multi-day AIDS benefit ride
Rachel, 35	Responded to above email	White, single lesbian, architect	Cycles in Central Park and occasionally Prospect Park; walks in city; hikes and cycles outside of city; hiked and played catch with father when younger

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES (CONTINUED)

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Felicia, 58	Responded to above email	White, married with two adult children, freelance costume designer	Cycles and in-line skates (formerly ran) in Central Park; lifts weights; recently began competitive downhill skiing; one of few athletic/outdoorsy girls as a child, played tennis, baseball, ice skating, hiking
Alice, 55	Responded to above email	White, lesbian, teacher	Runs in Central park; began running in mid- to late-thirties for fitness and then competition, ran in marathons; physically active "tomboy" as a child but became inactive and overweight around puberty
Stella, 31	Responded to above email	White, single, graduate student	Cycles and in-line skates in Central Park; competed in triathlons internationally in teens and early twenties; competitive swimmer and runner in high school and college; played boys' Little League until puberty
Joan, 40	Responded to above email	White, lesbian with partner and preschool-aged daughter, attorney	Currently plays league softball and pick-up women's soccer games in park; plays indoor league basketball in wintertime; formerly played advanced amateur league softball and women's league flag football; team sports have always been "like home"
Elaine, 28	Joan's partner, who participated in interview with Joan	White, lesbian with partner, attorney	Runs and cycles in park; also swims and does self-defense; swam and played field hockey, softball, and lacrosse until puberty, then started doing aerobics and running in college
Anna, 31	Responded to email, also Joan & Elaine's roommate (Joan's former partner), participated in same interview	White, single lesbian with preschool-aged daughter, copy editor	Runs and plays women's league softball in park; also swims; recently completed triathlon; played tennis with family as a teen

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES (CONTINUED)

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Cass, 32	Responded to above email	White, lesbian with partner, television documentary producer	Runs and cycles in Prospect Park; lifts weights; began running in college and recently began competing in triathlons
Ellen, 31	Cass's partner, participated in interview with Cassie	White, lesbian with partner, consultant	Cycles in Prospect Park; lifts weights; is from Germany and formerly an amateur mountain bike racer
Mildred, 39	Responded to above email	White, lesbian with partner, attorney	Cycles in Central Park; formerly a lifeguard and currently belongs to a swim team; surfs at Rockaway Beach; played boys' and men's baseball from elementary school through law school
Gladys, 31	Responded to above email	Latina & Asian-American, social worker	In-line skates and cycles in Central Park; works out in Department of Parks and Recreation gym; completed multi-day AIDS benefit ride
Jewel, 30	Responded to email and forwarded it to ice hockey teammates	Filipina-Canadian, single lesbian, software developer/systems analyst	Plays women's league ice hockey, practices at Wollman rink in Prospect Park; played on women's softball league in park for one season; also hikes, cycles, runs, in-line skates, plays flag football; "born a jock" and always played many sports
Milagro, 38	Responded to forwarded email	Filipina-Canadian, single, producer for sports video production company	Plays women's league ice hockey, practices at Wollman rink; also plays ice hockey with men's leagues; some in-line skating and competitive tennis; track and field, tennis in high school
Lynn, 36	Responded to forwarded email	White, lesbian with partner and teenaged son, art professor	Hikes and in-line skates in Prospect Park; played on women's league softball in park for one season; plays on women's league ice hockey, and practices at Wollman Rink; very active "tomboy" who played boys' Little League and other team sports as a child but stopped in high school

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES (CONTINUED)

Name/Age	How Recruited	Other Biographical	Physical Activities
Brianna, 36	Lynn's partner, interviewed separately	White, lesbian with partner and teenaged son, freelance writer	Runs regularly and occasionally bikes on trails in Prospect Park; plays women's league ice hockey, practices and participates in clinics at Wollman Rink; began running with international running group at age 13

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Questions for Women Who Use the Park for Physical Activities Summer 2001

A. Interview Information

Interviewee name:
Date:
Time:
Location:

B. Patterns of Use

1. First, can you describe your typical sports and fitness activities in Prospect Park? Let's start with your activities over the past year. Can you tell me:

a) What do you do there (probe for fitness, competitive sports, formal vs. pick-up, etc.)?

b) How often and when (probe for number of times per week/month/year, times of day, seasons)?

c) With whom (alone, with children, partner/spouse, pet, teammates, friends)?

d) How has any of this changed over time?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

C. Perceptions of the Park

**Have copies of maps available to facilitate discussion of spaces, sketch activities, etc.*

2. a. How would you say the park compares to other places for similar activities (e.g., a gym or the streets)?

b. What do you like best about the park?

c. Would you be able to do _____ in the same way without a space like the park?

3. a. Are there any particular areas of the park that you use often or exclusively? If so where?

b. What has led you to use those areas over others?

4. a. Are there any areas that you tend to avoid? If so, where?

b.What are your reasons for avoiding those areas?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

5. a. Do you have any other concerns about using the park, and if so what are they? How have you addressed these?

b. Have others expressed any fears or concerns? How have you addressed these?

6. a. Are there any particularly frustrating or troubling experiences you have had when doing these activities in the park, or any particular negative aspects of the park?

D. Athletic Programming

7. a. Are you aware of any athletic programs in the park that are inviting to women? Have you participated in any? Why or why not?

b. Are there any aspects of the park that make it more enjoyable or accessible for women (e.g., more police, lighting)?

8. a. If you train, instruct or coach, have you done anything in particular to encourage or accomodate women (e.g., scheduling, different equipment, different events)? Has this been successful?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

b. How do you think the park works as a place for the activities that you teach or coach?

9. In general, have you experienced any changes in opportunities for sports and fitness activities?

E. Athletic Activity and Gender

10. If you haven't already, could you talk about what has led to your athletic activities now?

11 a. What are some of the reasons you do sports/exercise?

b. Have these activities changed the way you feel about yourself? The way others feel about you?

c. What does it mean to you to be a woman who _____ (activities described)?

12. Is there anything else about you that we have not talked about that you feel is relevant to your participation in sports/physical activities?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

F. Personal Background

If the following information has not yet been offered, ask:

16. Where do you live?

17. What is your occupation?

18. How old are you?

19. How would you describe your race or ethnic background?

20. Would you be willing to participate in a group interview at a later date with some of the other women whom I interview?

21. Do you know of anyone else whom I should interview?

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