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#### Essay IV

In the city of Rancho Cucamonga there are more than twenty public parks that are completely open to the public. However, in this age when there are so many alternative means of entertainment in the household such as Netflix, Youtube, as well as all the devices such as game consoles, iphones, and tablets, how many people are going out of their way to go outside and get some exercise at the park? This is the question I asked myself back in January, and what I seek to answer.

The statistics regarding the overwhelming childhood obesity in the United States was the key factor as to why I have chosen to examine the usage of the public parks provided by the city of Rancho Cucamonga. There are two key reasons as to the obesity epidemic that is going through the country, those being that of poor diet, and that of lack of proper amount of exercise. The latter is what I am focusing on, given that there are more than twenty public parks in the city of Rancho Cucamonga all of which are completely open for the public to use, and are often times very plentiful in any area of the city. However the fact is that people are not as incentivised to be as active as they once were, in her article, “Potential Measures for Linking Park and Trail Systems to Public Health” Courtney L. Schultz mentions the poorer lifestyles of people these days after talking about the longer lifespan the human population has now vs say one hundred years ago, “A reduction in ailments once related to hard physical labor, poor nutrition, and unsanitary conditions, have been counterbalanced by higher stress and sedentary lifestyles.”

With new entertainment technologies that keep us inside on our couches rather than going outside for some physical activity there are more and more people who have become less active, that coupled with the poor dietary choices is resulting in the fact that Obesity will overtake smoking as the leading cause of death in this country. And there are also the facts that eating like this is the cause of 1 in every 3 kids born in 2000 will develop diabetes. However the natural counteractive is of course getting exercise, and in this case it would be at one of the many public parks. As to the importance of these public parks, the article “Measuring Public Satisfaction on Urban Parks (A Case Study: Sari City)” mentions the importance as well as the significance of these provided public parks, “Green space unlike the meaning that it may create in mind, it is not the only place that contains some trees and benches, but it is a symbol of cultural and social thoughts of a society and it is considered an important factor in urban space that it is considered by all people from the social, cultural, psychological aspects.” The importance of the parks are unparalleled in not only their housing of physical activity, but their psychological and social importance to a city as a whole.

The main parks that were frequented during the weekly basis that the data was taken in were: Victoria Park, Windrows Park, Vintage Park, Day Creek Park, Victoria Arbol Park, as well as Central Park. Most of these parks are located very close to public schools, so especially around the times of 230-3 they appear to be a hub for kids waiting to be picked up from school. The most notable parks that are in very close proximity to schools are: Vintage park, located next to Rancho Cucamonga High School. Windrows Park, next to Windrows elementary. Day Creek park located near Day Creek Intermediate. This allows them easy access, however it does inflate the traffic of the park at those times where the kids might not specifically be there to use the facilities. An effort to visit the park at around the same time was an effort to keep the data

centralized. The times that the parks were visited was in the afternoon mostly from the times of noon to about four or five in the afternoon, all in forty five to an hour increments. These increments were either shortened due to the lack of people, or elongated due to a larger population and/or flow of people entering the park.

The main idea of visiting the parks around this time was to be in the afternoon after schools got out or people had already gotten off work. The original idea that was in mind was that of seeing the amount of kids that were using the parks, from a standpoint of researching childhood obesity. However, after a few weeks the idea shifted to simply seeing how many people in general were using the public parks on a whole. This was due to the fact that oftentimes there would be adults on their own at the parks doing activity, and only sometimes they brought their kids. This lead me to realize that the kids could generally only attend the parks when the adult brought them. However that lead me to think about what would entice an adult to bring not only their kid to the park, but themselves to also partake in physical activity.

In the first weeks of the data collection, the weather was obviously inclimate, due to the rain and cold weather of January and February. There was surprisingly a bunch of rain the first months of the year for where the data was collected(southern California), good for the environment, however it proved to be a slight problem for the usage of the parks themselves. However the data changed once the weather had started to clear up and the hotter weather had come back. In the months of March and April there was a constant larger amount of people at these parks doing a more diverse amount of activities like walking dogs, playing basketball/softball, and just children using the playground.

These parks are of course being paid for by the tax dollars coming out of the paychecks of people who are not even using the parks to their full potential. As Nicholas Pitas states in his

journal “Attitude Strength and Structure Regarding Privatization of Local Public Park and Recreation Services.” He says, “Similar to other local governmental services, public park and recreation agencies have traditionally been funded by tax-based general funds, supplemented to a limited degree by revenue generated through concessions and user fees.” Meaning that if people are paying for them to be up, they may as well use them.

In the weeks of January to early to mid March there were many weeks where the rain had made the parks not an ideal usage of time given the wet weather. So that should be taken into account when looking at the data from the first few months of the year. There were many weeks during this time where there were almost no people at the parks at all. And the only people passing through were the occasional dog walkers or runners. Rarely were there any people using the playground or basketball half courts. However, again this can be attributed to the water that was covering all the structures. This being taken into account, on any days that the weather was clear, there was generally more people at the parks, perhaps as a relief that the weather had cleared up for a day.

Once the weather cleared up, there was a large uptick in the amount of people who were seen visiting the parks. And this is something that had been predicted to have happened, however it was nice to see it come true. There was of course more people but the parks had been more populated in the weeks leading up to the better climate, but there was a more dense population in that there was more group activity rather than the singular person or odd couple of people using the parks. For example, on Saturday mornings there were sometimes t-ball games held at Vintage park where the park would be full of people watching the games and supporting, occasionally using the park grill areas to barbeque. It was on these days that I found Vintage park the most heavily occupied. This was allowed by the fact that the park has many diverse options

in what the people using it are able to do. What I am talking about is that there are two softball diamonds both of which are able to be used simultaneously. As well as well as the aforementioned grills. On top of those things there is of course the playground area where the children who are not playing on the softball diamonds can spend their time during the duration of their stay at the park.

The purpose having been shifted to the study of how many people were making use of the public parks that had been provided by the city. These parks that have been provided by the city of Rancho Cucamonga are well kept and completely open to the public. They are over twenty public parks and they are located just about everywhere, and in some cases they are within 1 mile between each other. There are three parks all along Victoria Park Ln alone. This lead to my hypothesis on what could entice the population to use the parks, rather than staying inside not taking advantage of the public parks.

The main differences between the visitation is of course the size, but also the diversity in the different structures within the park and the opportunities that those structures allow. For example, two of the larger parks, those being Day Creek Park and Victoria Arbors park are both of course large, but they are also diverse in the amount of things to do within them. Day creek has not only one softball diamond, but two as well as those diamonds having stadium lights allowing for use at night. Those are of course on top of the tennis courts and recreational areas. Another area in which parks are enticing to adults rather than just children are the parks that have a sheltered picnic area allowing for more diverse activities like cook outs for example. The disparity between the population using the parks generally came down to what the park had to offer other than simply a playground.

As well as parks having provisions for recreational activities, the overall quality of the parks is also a big drawpoint for the parks themselves. The good thing about the parks that I have visited is that all of them are kept in fine condition. So the fact is that the visitation is really dependant on if that particular park has enough to do to entice more people to go to it. For example I found that the most used parts of every park were the basketball courts. The usage of these parts of the park were the most often used, and not only the most used, they had the most diversity in the people using them. Unlike the playground area, where generally speaking there were only kids of elementary school age, those who were using the basketball courts ranged from elementary school kids to elderly men. As well as the age differences, the differences in the demographics were the widest in the basketball courts, in that there were of course all ages using them, but there were men, women, people of different ethnicities, black, white, hispanic and asian.

In the research that I had conducted visiting these parks, is that the main attractions to the parks were often times not the playgrounds for the children, but the different sports facilities found within the park. For example, the only park that housed any tennis courts was Day Creek park. And as this was the case, there would often always be people using the courts, because the only other options would be to go to a school rather than an open public park.

An idea I had to make the parks more appealing during poor weather would appear to already be starting to happen in some parts. With the RC Sports center providing a shelter over the basketball courts allowing usage of the courts in all types of weather. As well as providing more shelter over the various parks, the data discovered that the parks that were larger not only in size, but in diversity were more heavily populated. Such as the parks that had a basketball

court, a softball field, a playground area etc. Were more densely populated because there were more options within the park that facilitated more things that could be done at the park.

In the beginning of the data collection, the idea was to study the amount of kids visiting the parks and partaking in any physical activity rather than sitting at home playing video games all day. However, there was a myriad of reasons that prompted me to switch the approach to that of just the uses in general. A few being that: kids won't usually go to a park on their own, those who do go to the parks were usually adults who were on their own, this caused me to think of how parks could be made more appealing to everyone. This I believe is to make the parks large and diverse in that activities they can provide, like having softball diamonds, basketball courts, other sports facilities as well as large playgrounds and most importantly/hopefully measures to combat the elements and in cases the heat in the summer months. This being a shelter over the facilities or the entirety of the park itself. This is a high ask however, it would result in a larger population using the parks.

## Works Cited

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## Essay IV Poem

Today you find most people inside  
There was a time where everyone was always outside  
But new technology has pushed all that aside  
Making the days spent on the couch amplified  
All these public parks waiting to be used,  
Rather, we rely on Youtube to remain amused  
Children leaving the playgrounds unused  
You are free to look around  
And you will see what I have found  
An empty playground