

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF PUBLIC PARKS IN NORTHEAST OHIO

David Scott

Manager of Research and Program Evaluation, Cleveland
Metroparks, 4101 Fulton Parkway, Cleveland, OH 44144

Data from an in-park survey and a telephone survey were used to examine differences between men and women in their use of public parks in Northeast Ohio. Analysis of the surveys revealed that there were fundamental differences in the way men and women use parks, and the kinds of barriers that limited their use of parks.

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The last 15 years has witnessed a growing interest in gender issues as they relate to leisure and recreation behavior. Men and women have been found to differ in the meanings and definitions they assign to leisure (Iso-Ahola 1979; Kleiber & Crandall 1981; Henderson 1990), the amount of free time they have (Shaw 1985), the satisfaction they derive from leisure (Riddick 1985), the motives they have for leisure (Hirschman 1984), the benefits obtained from leisure (Tinsley et al., 1987), the continuity of leisure participation across time (Scott and Willit, 1989), and their rate of participation in different activities (Kelly 1980; Unkel 1981; Dargitz 1988).

Despite increased interest in gender issues, there is a dearth of research that deals specifically with whether men and women differ in their use of public parks in or near urban areas. Without such information, park managers and recreation leaders will be unable to provide services that cater to the special needs of both men and women. The purpose of this paper was to determine whether men and women differed in their use of public parks in Northeast Ohio.

Study Area & Methodology

Data for this paper come from two sources: (a) an in-park survey conducted at 12 Cleveland Metroparks reservations, and (b) a telephone survey conducted of residents of seven Northeast Ohio counties.

The in-park survey was conducted within Cleveland Metroparks, a regional park district in Northeast Ohio. Cleveland Metroparks consists of over 19,000 acres of land in 12 different reservations (parks). Facilities and features operated by the Park District include hiking, bridle, all purpose and fitness trails, golf courses, swimming beaches, nature centers, interpretive programs, picnic areas, play fields, wildlife sanctuaries, and boating and fishing areas.

Approximately 5,000 people were interviewed during the spring, summer, and fall of 1991 by trained interviewers. Interviews were conducted on random weekdays and weekends. Visitors were interviewed using a random selection process. Respondents were asked about the kinds of activities they pursued during their visit, how often they visited, how long they planned to visit, their mode of travel, how long it took them to travel to the reservation, the number of people and children in their party, their use of other Park District reservations, their attitudes toward recreational development, and their ratings of Park District facilities and services. Demographic characteristics of respondents were also acquired.

Data for the second study were drawn in October, 1991. Using random digit dialing, 1,054 people in Northeast Ohio were interviewed about their use of public parks in the greater Cleveland Metropolitan area. Only people 18 years and older

were interviewed. Respondents were asked how frequently they used public parks in Northeast Ohio. Non-users and infrequent users (individuals who used parks less than once a month) were asked questions about why they did not use public parks more often, and questions about whether different changes in park operations might result in their using parks more.

Chi-square tests were used to test whether women and men differed significantly in terms of their use of Cleveland Metroparks and parks in general.

Results: In-Park Survey

Rates of Cleveland Metroparks Visitation

A greater proportion of Cleveland Metroparks visitors are male (55%) than female (45%). While this difference may seem small, it is notable since women outnumber men in the region by about 6%. There was little variation in this general pattern by day of the week, time of day, and season of the year (Table 1). However, differences in visitation rates between the sexes increase dramatically with age. Only 36% of visitors between the ages of 65 to 74 were female; further, only 28% of visitors 75 years of age or older were female.

Table 1. Percentage of Park District visitors who are male and female - by temporal patterns.

		Women	Men	Chi-Square
Day of the Week				
Weekday	%	44.2	55.8	4.94*
Weekend	%	47.5	52.5	
Time of Day				
Morning	%	43.9	56.1	2.69
Afternoon	%	46.6	53.4	
Evening	%	46.0	54.0	
Season of the Year				
Spring	%	44.9	55.1	2.40
Summer	%	46.6	53.4	
Fall	%	44.0	56.0	

* p < .05

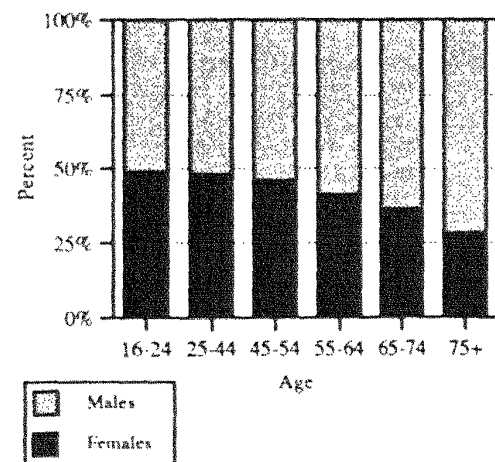


Figure 1. Sex by age differences in the use of Cleveland Metroparks.

General Patterns of Visitation

Men and women differed little in terms of how far away they live from a Park District reservation, mode of transportation to the reservation, and how long they stay while visiting (Table 1). In contrast, men and women differed significantly in terms of frequency of visitation, the number of children (under 14 years of age) accompanied by them, and the number of other Park District reservations they have visited in the last 12 months.

Men were more likely to be frequent visitors of the reservation they were visiting. If we define a regular visitor as someone who visits at least once a month, we observe that 66% of men fell in this category, compared to 56% of women.

Women are far more likely than men to visit in the company of small children. Nearly four out of ten women said they visited the reservation in the company of at least one child under 14 years of age. Only 22% of men said they were accompanied by at least one child. Women were more than twice as likely as men to visit with three or more children (15% to 7%).

Men were somewhat more likely than women to visit more Park District reservation in the last 12 months. Thirty-one percent of men said they had visited three or more other reservations, compared to 26% of women.

Table 2. General patterns of visitation at Cleveland Metroparks - by gender.

	Women %	Men %	Chi Square
Travel time to reservation			
Less than 15 minutes	58.4	60.1	
15-30 minutes	32.8	30.4	
More than 30 minutes	8.8	9.4	3.19
Frequency of visitation			
First-time visitor	12.8	9.1	
Less than once a month	31.1	25.3	
Once a month	12.9	14.0	
Once a week	20.5	23.6	
Almost daily	22.8	28.1	49.81***
Duration of visit			
Less than 1 hour	33.5	35.8	
1-2 hours	38.2	37.1	
2-3 hours	12.7	13.2	
2 hours or more	15.6	14.0	4.33
Mode of transportation			
Foot or bicycle	6.4	7.0	
Car or van	92.3	91.0	
Other	1.2	2.1	5.45
Number of children in group under 14 years of age			
Zero	61.9	78.0	
One or two	23.1	15.4	
Three or more	15.0	6.6	164.10***
Other Park District areas visited during the last 12 months			
Zero	30.9	28.5	
One or two	43.2	40.9	
Three or more	25.8	30.6	12.71***
Number of activities participated in during visit			
One	31.7	42.6	
Two	24.9	27.3	
Three	20.4	14.7	
Four or more	23.0	15.4	99.60***

*** p ≤ .001

Activity Patterns

Table 3 provides a rank ordering of participation rates for different activities pursued in Cleveland Metroparks. While the rank orderings are quite similar for men and women, there were, nevertheless, significant differences in participation rates between the sexes. Walking/hiking and picnicking were the most widely pursued activities in Cleveland Metroparks among both women and men. However, women reported participating in both of these activities at higher rates than men. About half of all women said

they walked or hiked, compared to 40% of men. One quarter of women reported picnicking compared to 16% of men. Significantly higher rates of participation were also reported among women in activities such as observing nature (14% to 11%), swimming (10% to 5%), and visiting a nature center (7% to 4%). In contrast, men reported participating in significantly higher rates in activities such as running/jogging (7% to 4%), bicycling (6% to 4%) and golf (4% to 2%).

Men and women differed not only in their rate of participation in different activities, but also in the number of activities they pursued during their visit (Table 2). In general, women reported participating in more activities during their visit than men. Fortythree percent of all men said they participated in only one activity during their visit, compared to only 32% of women.

Table 3. Rate of activity participation - by gender. ^a

	Women %	Men %	Chi Square
Walking/hiking	49.0	39.3	46.35***
Picnicking	25.2	15.8	66.01***
Play with children	16.7	7.1	108.03***
Observe nature	13.6	11.3	6.23**
Swimming	9.7	5.4	33.87***
Visit a nature center	7.2	4.4	16.52***
Fishing	4.7	9.5	42.06***
Running/jogging	4.2	7.4	21.58***
Bicycling	3.6	5.9	13.66***
Golf	1.8	4.1	20.79***

^a Percentages includes those who said they participated in activity on day of interview.

** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

Results: Telephone Survey

Use of Parks in Northeast Ohio

Respondents to the telephone survey were asked how frequently they used parks in Northeast Ohio. A breakdown of responses by gender--is provided in Table 4. Women were far more likely than men to be nonusers of parks in Northeast Ohio. More than 30% of women said they did not use parks, compared to 22% of men. Men, in contrast, were more likely to be regular users of parks, defined here as using parks at least once a month. Forty-seven percent of men said they use parks at least once a month, compared to 34% of women.

Table 4. Frequency of park visitation in Northeast Ohio - by gender.

	Women %	Men %	Chi- Square
Never	30.7	22.2	
1-2 times per year	22.5	22.0	
Less than once a month	12.5	8.3	
Once a month	22.8	28.8	
Once a week or more	11.4	18.7	23.95***

*** p ≤ .001

Barriers to Park Visitation

A rank ordering of different constraints to park visitation--broken down by gender--is provided in Table 5. The percentages correspond to that fraction of nonusers and infrequent users who said a factor was very important in limiting their use of public parks in Northeast Ohio. While men and women differed significantly in the kinds of barriers they said that limited their use of parks, the rank orderings of these barriers was similar for both.

Table 5. Factors that limit people's use of public parks in Northeast Ohio - by gender. ^a

	Women %	Men %	Chi Square
Lack of time	46.8	41.3	1.65
Busy with other activities	40.6	41.4	0.04
Fear of crime	39.9	24.1	15.82***
Busy with family	39.2	26.7	9.95**
Pursue recreation elsewhere	26.0	25.6	0.12
Lack of information	20.2	24.9	1.79
No one with whom to go	20.0	6.3	21.11***
Parks are too far away	14.8	9.5	3.47
No way to get to parks	14.0	5.9	9.63**
Lack public transp. to parks	13.1	5.4	9.02**
Cost too much	7.7	2.8	5.72*

^a Percentages include individuals who said factor was very important in limiting their use of public parks.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Lack of time and being busy with other activities were the most important constraints cited by both women and men as limiting their use of parks. Over 40% of both women and men said these constraints were very important barriers to greater park use.

Fear of crime and family responsibilities were also cited by large numbers of both women and men, although more so for women than men. Four out of ten women said their use of parks was greatly limited by fear of crime or being too busy with family responsibilities. Only one-quarter of men said these constraints were very important in limiting their use of parks.

One-quarter of both women and men said they pursued recreation elsewhere. A large fraction of both women (20%) and men (25%) also said they lacked information about existing parks and park programs.

Significantly more women said lack of companionship was a very important barrier to park use. Twenty percent of women said they did not use parks more often because they did not have any one with whom to go. Only 6% of men cited this as a reason for not using parks more often.

Other constraints figured less prominently in limiting both men and women's use of parks. However, even among these items there were significant differences between the sexes. In particular, accessibility was more often cited as a problem by women than men. Fourteen percent of women said not having any way to get to parks was a very important barrier to greater park use, compared to only 6% of men. Thirteen percent of women said they lacked public transportation, compared to only 5% of men.

The effects of gender were found to interact with age in their effect on two of the constraints items: fear of crime (Figure 2) and lack of companionship (Figure 3). The importance of these constraints increased significantly with age for women, but remained relatively constant across the life span among men.

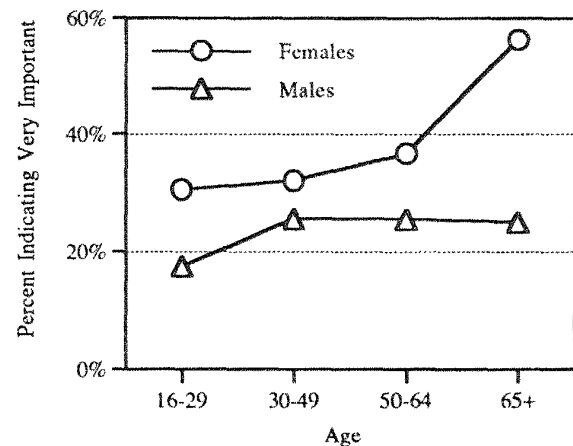


Figure 2. Percent citing fear of crime as a very important barrier to use of public parks - by gender and age.

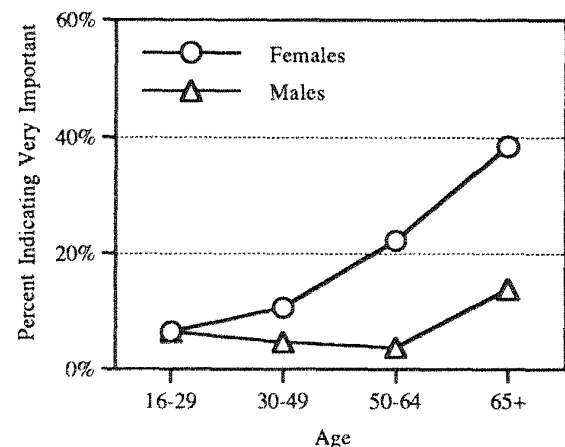


Figure 3. Percent citing lack of companionship as a very important barrier to use of public parks - by gender and age.

Conclusions and Implications

Men and women differed markedly in their use of Cleveland Metroparks and the factors contributing to non-use of parks in general. Data presented here raise a number of research questions and issues for individuals involved in the delivery of park services in Northeast Ohio.

a. Managers and park employees historically have looked at their services in terms of a "field of dreams" mentality: "If you build it they will come!" Frequently visitors do come but, as these data indicate, park visitors who do come tend to be disproportionately male. Moreover, differences in visitation rates between the sexes increase with age, with older men visiting at a far higher rate than older women. These results suggest that managers must tear away at some of their taken-for-granted understandings and seek to discern what role gender plays in people's use of public parks.

- b. To a large extent, the way men and women use parks mirror their roles in everyday life. Women were much more likely than men to visit in the company of children. As a result, women were more likely to engage in activities that can be described as other-directed or, more simply, family-oriented. As evidence, we observed women reporting higher rates of picnicking and playing with children. Women also reported participating in higher rates of swimming and visiting a nature center--activities typically done within a family context. Men, in contrast, were more likely to engage in self-directed activities (fishing, golf, running or jogging). These differences in park visitation styles resemble styles of camping identified by Burch (1965) nearly 30 years ago. He pointed out that when men and women go camping together, their respective activities tended to reflect a traditional division of labor, with men engaging in "dramatic roles" and women engaging in more ordinary or practical ones.
- c. Given the fact that men and women have distinct styles of park visitation, we may need to reexamine some of our theories and ideas about outdoor recreation behavior. Much of what we know about recreation specialization, for example, may be based on the experiences of men rather than women. Indeed, it could be that specialization occurs more among men than women. This study does provide some evidence for this, as men pursued significantly fewer activities during their visit than women. More systematic research is needed to test this proposition, however, and to test whether other theories (e.g., crowding) are gender neutral or gender specific.
- d. Women's use of parks becomes increasingly problematic with age. This appears to be linked to a greater need for safety among women. While women were more likely than men to say they did not use parks because of fear of crime and not having anyone to go with, these tendencies increased dramatically among women as they aged. To better serve an older female population, park districts must be sensitive to their interests and their need to pursue such interests in a safe environment. Special programming, such as walking clubs, may help solve this problem. Programs such as these provide a safe and supportive social context for pursuing such activities.
- e. Given that the data presented here are cross-sectional, we simply can not generalize findings to future generations of men and women. Only longitudinal data can do this. Moreover, these data do not consider the vast variability among men, on the one hand, and women, on the other (cf. Henderson, et al. 1989). Future research must explore this variability. One such example may be exploring differences in park visitation among African-American women, Hispanic women, and white women. Differences in park use among these three groups may also be explored in terms of age or life-cycle considerations.

Literature Cited

- Burch, W. R., Jr. 1965. The play world of camping: Research into the social meaning of outdoor recreation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 70:604-612.
- Dargitz, R. E. 1988. Angling activity of urban youth: Factors associated with fishing in a metropolitan context. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 20:192-207.
- Henderson, K. A. 1990. The meaning of leisure for women: An integrative review of the research. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 22: 228-243.
- Henderson, K. A.; M. D. Bialeschki; S. M. Shaw and V. J. Freysinger. 1989. *A leisure of one's own: A feminist perspective on women's leisure*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- IsoAhola, S. 1979. Basic dimensions of definitions of leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 11:28-39.
- Kelly, J. R. 1980. Outdoor recreation participation: A comparative analysis. *Leisure Sciences*, 3:129-154.
- Kleiber, D. A. and R. Crandall. 1981. Leisure and work ethics and locus of control. *Leisure Sciences*, 4:477-485.
- Riddick, C. C. 1985. Life satisfaction determinants of older men and females. *Leisure Sciences*, 8:47-63.
- Scott, D., and F. K. Willits. 1989. Adolescent and adult leisure patterns: A 37-year followup study. *Leisure Sciences*, 11:323-335.
- Shaw, S. 1985. Gender and leisure: Inequality in the distribution of leisure time. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 17:266-282.
- Tinsley, H. E. A.; S. L. Colbs; J. D. Teaff and N. Kaufman. 1987. The relationship of age, gender, health and economic status to the psychological benefits older persons report from participation in leisure activities. *Leisure Sciences*, 9:53-65.
- Tinsley, H. E. A., and R. A. Kass. 1978. Leisure activities and need satisfaction: A replication and extension. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 10:191-202.
- Unkel, M. B. 1981. Physical recreation participation of females and males during the adult life cycle. *Leisure Sciences*, 4:1-27.