

**NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS IN SASKATOON:
CONTRIBUTIONS TO PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE**

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ABSTRACT

The increase in the academic literature concerning the potential impacts that urban park systems can have over the life course of urban residents is beginning to be recognized by professionals in the fields of community quality of life studies, population health and in health geography. Typically urban spaces within Canada are designed to include a component of open space which can facilitate the recreation needs of residents. Within the City of Saskatoon neighbourhoods have such spaces in the form of neighbourhood parks, which are meant to facilitate passive or active recreation. Parks also provide open spaces of vegetation cover as opposed to the concrete and structural components of the city. Parks are meant to positively contribute to the resident's lives and to the neighbourhood in which they are located.

In community quality of life studies, open spaces, such as parks along with other neighbourhood attributes, are often used to gauge residents' perceptions of their immediate surroundings. The Saskatoon Quality of Life Project conducted by the Quality of Life Module at the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) conducted such a study in 2004 in which park spaces were related alongside other neighbourhood features such as transportation and social activities in order to capture resident's perceptions of their community quality of life.

The purpose of this study is to look at how residents of differing socio-economic status (SES) neighbourhoods (one high SES and one low SES) perceive their neighbourhood park spaces and if their perceptions affect their perceived quality of life. In order to capture residents perceptions of their neighbourhood parks, face-to-face interviews were conducted with residents. In addition to the resident interviews, interviews were conducted with key informants' as well as statistical analysis of secondary data from the 2004 Saskatoon Quality of Life Project was carried out. Results showed residents of different neighbourhood SES status shared common perceptions of their park spaces as well as how neighbourhood parks contributed to their quality of life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Urban residents are exposed to a limited amount of open spaces within a city. Open spaces, in the context of urban areas, are often managed within civic boundaries as park space either designed for passive and/or active recreation. From a population health perspective, studies have shown that conditions of the local environment, such as park spaces, can influence a resident's well-being (Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005; Frumkin, 2001). Well-being can, in turn, be captured via community quality of life studies (Pacione, 2003). To date, however, only limited research has been conducted on the relationship between parks and quality of life, and no research has yet to be conducted in the City of Saskatoon.

1.1 Parks in an urban setting

The tradition of having open spaces in an urban setting can be traced back to the squares and plazas found ancient Grecian and Roman cities (Marcus et al., 1998a). Squares and plazas served as meeting places for people and served the purpose of allowing people to gather to exchange ideas and build relationships (Chadwick, 1966). The tradition of having open spaces with vegetation cover can be attributed to the popularity of the Garden City movement and to the increasing awareness of public health professionals and civic officials regarding the role that natural landscapes play in mitigating pollutants in 19th century England (Nicol and Blake, 2000). The inclusion of 'natural areas'¹ in built-up urban areas allowed for residents to be exposed to nature, although nature in this sense was highly manicured and characterized by organized plantings. Open spaces were valued for their ability to allow residents to engage in social activities (e.g., promenading, or traveling in open carriages) and feel connected to nature (Cranz, 1982; Chadwick, 1966).

Within the North American context, there are four recognised phases of urban park development (Marcus et al., 1998b; Hayward and Weitzer, 1984; Cranz, 1982). The first is the pleasure ground (1850 to 1900), which was characterized by grand,

¹ Scholars and parks practitioners contest the concept of whether or not park spaces are natural settings (for further information on this debate see e.g., Gobster, 2001; Flores et al., 1998; Wilson, 1991).

expansive parks that civic officials commissioned as a means to include “idealized wilderness and pastoral landscapes” (Marcus et al., 1998b: 85) within the city. Examples of such parks include Central Park in New York, N.Y. and Parc du Mont-Royal, in Montreal, Q.C. Each of these parks covers hundreds of acres and provides a natural sanctuary within the urban landscape. The purpose of such parks is to provide residents with a space in which they could engage in the passive enjoyment of nature. Frederick Law Olmsted, chief landscape architect of Central Park (as well as Parc du Mont-Royal), described the purpose of Central Park: “to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country” (Olmsted, 1858, as cited by Tate, 2001: 148). Olmsted was before his time, observing during the late-19th century “experiencing and simply viewing nature reduces the stress of daily urban life” (Jackson, 2003a: 192). During this era, activities such as strolling, picnicking, and carriage rides were deemed suitable activities in park spaces (Tuason, 1997). Parks were seen as a respite from the congested urban world.

In contrast to the grand parks of the mid to late 1800s, parks developed in the early 1900s, the second historical era, focused on spaces in which children could engage in physical activity (Tuason, 1997). This period of park development is referred to as the reform park. Park spaces were often less than ten acres and were developed by social reformers as a means of providing safe recreation for inner-city children. Eventually such spaces were taken over and subsequently managed by civic authorities (Marcus et al., 1998b; Ellis and Nixon, 1986).

The third phase of park development, the recreation facility (1930 to 1965), was the incorporation of a park that housed multiple playing fields and specialized structures such as swimming pools or tennis courts. Parks of this era were typically designed to meet the needs of youth through the development of recreation that focused on specialized sports and organized league play (Marcus et al., 1998b, Cranz, 1982). This phase of park development was in contrast to the localized parks of the reform era due to the increase of public and private means of transportation within urban centres (Hayward and Weitzer, 1984; Cranz, 1982). Further, residents were thought to have more leisure time to engage in recreation activities due to the changing nature of residents’ occupations (Cranz, 1982).

The fourth stage of park development is the open space system (1965- present day). In this phase of park development, parks were set in contrast to the concrete and buildings of the surrounding settlement, and were developed to reflect open spaces therefore housing few playgrounds or sport fields. Often the parks adjoined each other and park-based activities depended upon the initiatives of the park users (i.e. open spaces may be designed with multiple use structures and fields) rather than design features (Cranz, 1982). This fourth phase of park development harkens back to the first phase of park development, with wide-open spaces, although the parks in this fourth phase were not centralized, but rather were distributed throughout the settlement.

Each phase of park development is reflected in Saskatoon's park system. For example, what is now known as Kinsmen Park was originally designed to be the central gathering spot for residents of the early settlement (phase one, see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Playgrounds of the social reform era can be found adjacent to schoolyards and within neighbourhood parks (phase two, see Figure 1.3). Playing fields, such as those found in Gordon Howe Park, Umea Vast and Nutana Kiwanis Park, and the swimming pools in the Riversdale and Mayfair neighbourhoods, are prime examples of the recreation era of parks (phase three, see Figure 1.4). And lastly, the chain of parks that run from 22nd Street northward to Circle Drive (Leif Erickson Park to Hudson Bay Park) reflect the inclusion of open spaces that serve multiple functions within the urban landscape (phase four, see Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.1: Kinsmen Park



Figure 1.2: Kinsmen Park



Figure 1.3: Playground in Wilson Park



Figure 1.4: Playing field found in Umea Vast



Figure 1.5: Open space concept of Pierre Radisson Park

1.2 Association between Urban Parks and Quality of Life Studies

Parks in an urban setting serve a multitude of purposes. Chiefly, park spaces offer urban residents an area where they can engage in either passive and/or active recreation². Residents can take advantage of the open space in order to carry out recreational activities, which may be the result of participating in an organized league, or may be the result of a desire to get outdoors either to carry out activities or to achieve a change of pace. Whatever the motivation for accessing and using park spaces, there is an association between engaging in activities that can result in “a sense of accomplishment, enjoyment of companionship, a feeling of relaxation, a condition of overall well-being” (Murphy et al., 1991: xi). These positive emotions can serve to reinforce the enjoyment and the meaningfulness of having such an open space in proximity to one’s household (Coen and Ross, 2006). Park spaces allow residents to create a place that can be used for exercise and for leisure, which are two important components in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. As such, park spaces are one component of the urban built-environment³ that may positively contribute to a resident’s well-being and overall quality of life (Araya et al., 2006; Coen and Ross, 2006; Chiesura, 2004).

² Passive recreation refers to: “open space activities conducted at walking speed or less, e.g. strolling, sitting, picnicking, or watching active sports” and active recreation refers to: “open space activities involving movement beyond walking which may be informal, e.g. jogging and cross-country skiing or may involve organized sports, e.g. soccer or softball in a league or other competitive framework” (City of Saskatoon 2002a; COS A10-017, 2-3).

³ There is no consensus on the definition of what constitutes the built-environment – one way the term can be defined as those components and structures (e.g. roadways, buildings, and spaces that reflect land-use policies) that represent human’s impact upon landscape (e.g., see Handy et al. 2002).

There are several methods of studying the well-being of populations. One approach is via community quality of life studies. Two reasons for carrying out quality of life research are:

- “to rate places according to their liveability or attractiveness”; and,
- “to analyze social phenomena in space, for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of factors which improve or decrease the quality of life living environments”

(Williams et al., 2001: 239)

Quality of life studies are meant to capture a “subjective assessment ...of a particular situation through the eyes of the community residents themselves, who share what matters to them and show where health lies in the context of their lives” (Green and Kreuter, 1999: 54). As Janzen (2003) writes, “most quality of life frameworks reflect the interdependence of social, health, economic, and environmental conditions, a perspective consistent with the increasingly popular concepts of sustainable development and population health”(2). Population health, as defined by Health Canada (2001), refers to:

...the health of a population as measured by health status indicators and as influenced by social, economic and physical environments, personal health practices, individual capacity and coping skills, human biology, early childhood development, and health services. As an approach, population health focuses on the interrelated conditions and factors that influence the health of populations over the life course, identifies systematic variations in their patterns of occurrence, and applies the resulting knowledge to develop and implement policies and actions to improve the health and well-being of those populations.

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/phdd/pdf/discussion_paper.pdf

Within a population health perspective, analyses of the socio-economic status (SES) of residents within civic boundaries can be used to identify neighbourhoods that share similar conditions (van Kamp et al., 2003; Pickett and Pearl, 2001), and the comparison of SES neighbourhood types (i.e., low, medium, high) has the potential to reveal differences between neighbourhoods within civic boundaries (CUISR, 2001a; Williams et al., 2001). Residents’ perceptions of their immediate environment can be influenced by many factors (e.g., housing types, access to park spaces and access to transportation networks) (Pickett and Pearl, 2001). The perceived quality of the neighbourhood features such as parks can influence residents’ perception of their overall well-being

(Ross et al., 2004; Geronimus, 2003; Handy et al., 2002; Dunn and Hayes, 2000). Given that parks are often identified as an important part of a resident's lived-experiences, it is important that they are studied as an integral part of community QOL studies (Coen and Ross, 2006; St.Leger, 2003; Green and Kreuter, 1999).

This emerging field of research, where community-based QOL studies are coupled with a population health perspective, is attempting to link structural components of the built-environment to residents' perceptions of health and well-being through the use of objective⁴ (i.e. income, other SES characteristics) and subjective⁵ indicators (e.g. perceived neighbourhood cleanliness). Even though parks and open spaces are acknowledged to be an important component of the urban landscape, there is little research that examines specific links between the presence of parks and perceived quality of life and/or the well-being of residents within urban areas.

1.3 Research Objectives

The historical development of urban park spaces is important to this research in that the tradition of the reform era playground movement (phase two) and the open space concept (phase four) is evident in the development of neighbourhood parks found within the sample frame used in this study. Although civic authorities in Saskatoon have recognized that certain neighbourhoods are deficient in park space in comparison to the citywide average (Coolican, 2006), there is a gap in the knowledge of how residents of different neighbourhoods view park space. To date there has not been a study of Saskatoon parks that links the concepts of quality of life and well-being with perceptions of park spaces.

Given the importance of urban park systems within the emerging field of population health, a study is warranted that examines the context of residents' perceptions of park spaces and the links that residents make between park spaces and their quality of life. The overall purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of residents of differing SES neighbourhoods with regards to their neighbourhood park

⁴ Objective indicators are "those measures that reflect people's objective circumstances in a given cultural or geographical unit. The hallmark of social indicators is that they are based on objective, quantitative statistics rather than on individuals' subjective perceptions of their social environment" (Diener and Suh, 1997: 192).

⁵ Subjective indicators typically "have a clear [personal] evaluative components" (Janzen, 2003:7).

spaces, and how these views affect their perceived quality of life. This purpose is guided by two research questions, namely:

- i) How do urban residents living in neighbourhoods of differing socio-economic status (SES) perceive their neighbourhood parks?
- ii) How do these perceptions affect their perceived quality of life?

To address these questions, this research will focus on two groups of urban residents (a high and low SES neighbourhood type) and their perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces in the city of Saskatoon. The high SES neighbourhood type in the sample frame is Briarwood, and the low SES neighbourhood type is Pleasant Hill⁶ (Figure 1.6).

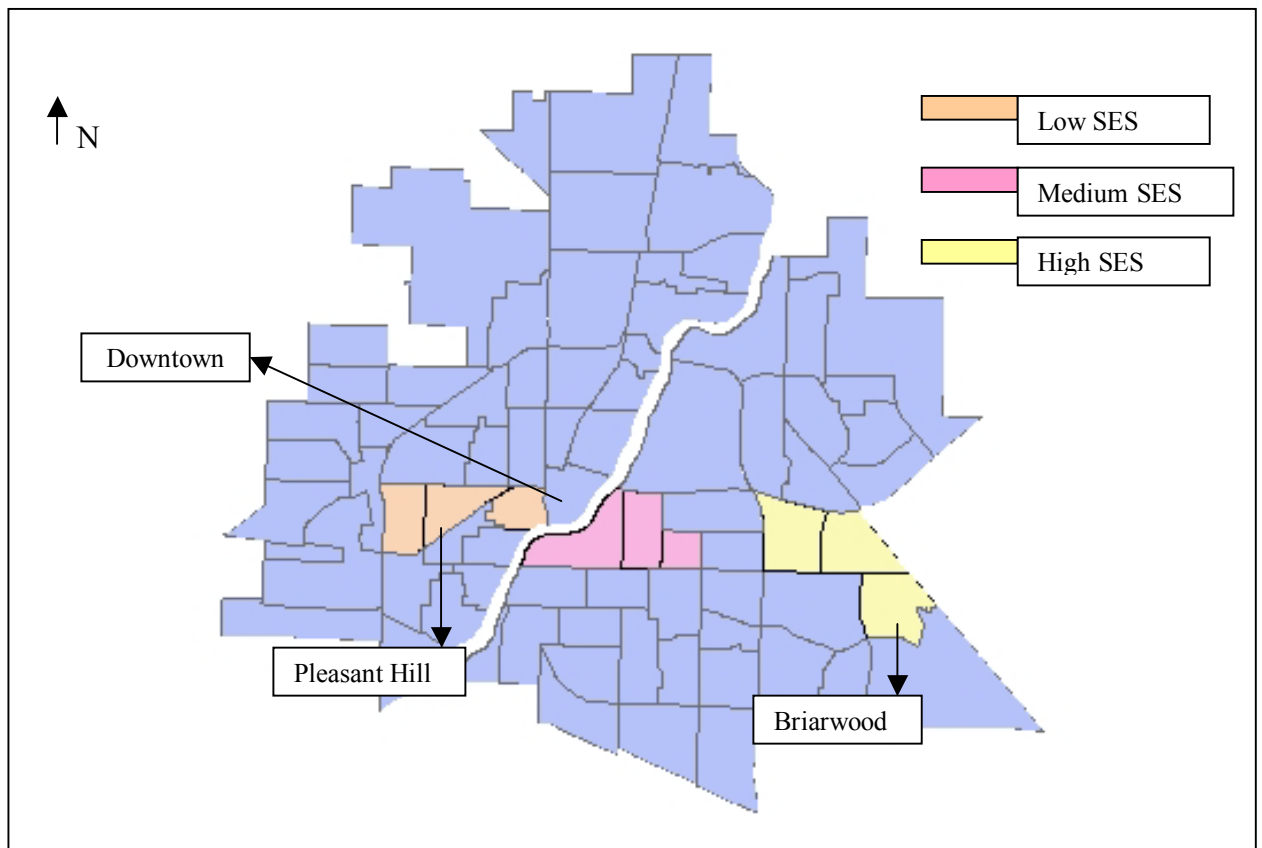


Figure 1.6: CUISR Saskatoon Quality of Life Sample Frame, 2004

1.4 Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology. A qualitative research methodology, in its broadest sense, can be defined as “multi-method in focus, involving

⁶ The designation of the SES neighbourhood types are based on the CUISR Saskatoon quality of life survey – for details on how neighbourhoods were selected see CUISR, 2001a or Williams et al. 2001.

an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 3). The focus of qualitative methodology is the opinions held by the participants as opposed to the measurable characteristics (i.e. weight, height) of the participants. As Creswell (1994: 4) states: “for the qualitative researcher the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation”. The use of qualitative methodology allows the researcher to delve into the meanings that residents construct about their lived experiences and how their experiences are related to topics such as quality of life. Explicitly qualitative approaches to research illustrate that the “experiences of individuals and the meaning of events and places cannot necessarily be generalised... [but can] constitute part of a multi-faceted and fluid reality. Qualitative geographical research tends to emphasise multiple meanings and interpretations rather than seeking to impose any one ‘dominant’ or ‘correct’ interpretation” (Winchester, 2000: 6). A qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research as the two research questions examine how individual residents view their neighbourhood park spaces and how their perceptions of park space are linked to their overall quality of life. The use of the qualitative methodology allows residents to express their individual views in order to capture experiences and interpretations of what roles neighbourhood park spaces play in an individual’s life.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant bodies of literature. Chapter 3 describes the research methods used. Chapter 4 presents the interview analyses and a discussion of the results. Chapter 5 provides a synopsis of the research and identifies areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses three bodies of literature related to the research questions: (1) population health, (2) quality of life (QOL) studies, and (3) urban parks. Although urban planning directly informs this research, the traditions of urban planning in relationship to urban open spaces (see e.g., Ward Thompson, 2002; Nicol and Blake, 2000; Hall, 1992; Nicholson-Lord, 1987) are not directly addressed in this chapter; rather urban planning issues are covered in the review of the current research in the field of population health, QOL studies, and the urban parks literature. The research is situated in the field of social geography. The underlying concepts of social geography are those theories that are based on how societies affect their environment and conversely how the environment affects societies (Johnston et al., 2000).

2.1 Population Health Approach

A population health approach understands that perceptions of health and well-being of populations are related to the populations perceptions of the determinants of health (e.g., access to education, working conditions, access to health services), and that these perceptions can be examined in the lived experiences of residents (Mustard, 2000; Frankish et al., 1999; Baum, 1998; Evans and Stoddart, 1994). The Public Health Agency of Canada, for example, defines population health as:

An approach to health that aims to improve the health of the entire population and to reduce health inequities among population groups. In order to reach these objectives, it looks at and acts upon the broad range of factors and conditions that have a strong influence on our health.

(Health Promotion Development Division, 2002)

A similar definition of population health is found in an article by Frankish et al. (1999, S71-72), in which they write: “population health suggests that lifestyle and health behaviours are inherently confounded with social, economic, cultural and environmental factors”. A study of urban populations from a population health approach would, therefore, be composed of varying conditions, factors or determinants found to affect (positively and negatively) the health of the population. This approach does not focus on

singular bio-medical health factors (e.g., incidence of hypertension), but does recognize that health determinants experienced in the everyday lives of populations affect health over the life course. Examples of such determinants that are used in a population health approach by organizations like Health Canada include: income and social status, social support networks, education, and physical environments, to name a few⁷. The factors that are researched in population health studies are recognized as being interrelated and important in their own right (Poland et al., 1998). A conceptualization of population health factors is found in the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU) rainbow (Figure 2.1). The layers of the rainbow are porous and as such the factors can permeate each layer. For example, an individual's health is not only influenced by their family history and biology but is also influenced by the community they reside in, the predominant culture of the society they live in, and wider global trends such as economic systems and ecosystem limits such as carrying capacity. As one moves from the individual's health to the outer layers of the rainbow the less control over phenomena in the rainbow the individual has.

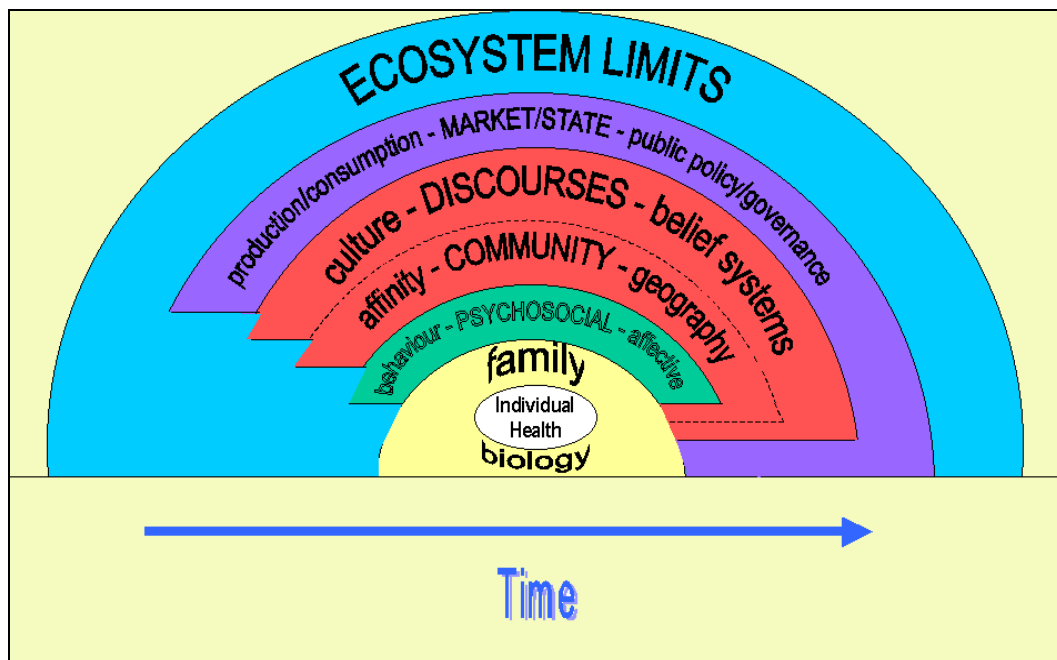


Figure 2.1: A model of population health

Source: SPHERU, 2002

⁷ For an overview of Health Canada's health determinants framework see: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/phdd/determinants/index.html>

2.1.1 Population Health in an Urban Setting

The study of urban areas and their links to people's health is not new. Dr. Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) is credited with one of the first comprehensive studies of how the social and built environment of a city influence the health of a population.⁸ In 1848, Virchow studied the link between people having adequate housing and access to quality foodstuffs to the level of the population's health (Schechter, 2003). So, why after 158 years are social scientists and public health officials only beginning to form a better picture of the links between built environments and the health of populations? As Richard Jackson (2003: 1382) points out: "we humans often assume that what is, had to be that way. In reality, virtually everything in our built environment is the way it is because someone designed it that way". In other words, the way in which the city is planned and developed has a confounding effect on other realms or spheres of resident's health and well-being over the life course.

The built environment is the realm in which urban populations conduct their everyday lives; hence, it is of consequence to the health of local populations. Both aforementioned population health models/frameworks are valuable in showing the linkages between the various determinants. Nevertheless, within the population health approach, certain determinants such as those found in the physical environment are often ill defined or are simply not fully analysed. As Eyles writes: "the [physical] environment is implicated in many health and illness concerns..." but the author subsequently cautions, "the relationships between the biophysical environment and human health are fraught with uncertainty and dissension" (Eyles, 1999: S31).

Within the field of population health studies, there is a growing recognition of the influence of the urban physical environment upon residents' health and well-being over their lifetimes (see e.g., Maller et al., 2005; Frumkin, 2003; Corburn, 2002; Macintyre et al., 2002). Within the emerging study of urban physical environments, from a population health perspective, more attention is being paid by researchers to specific parts of the built environment. Components of the physical environment that are typically accounted for in population health studies are: the level of particle

⁸ Virchow was commissioned by the Prussian government to study why there was an outbreak of typhus among weavers in Upper Silesia. Virchow concluded that rather than the causal agents of the disease outbreak being important it was the living conditions and the everyday environment of workers that was important (Schechter, 2003).

contaminants either in the air, water or soil (see e.g., Maantay, 2003; Vlahov and Galea, 2002); housing availability and housing quality (see e.g., Curtis et al., 2002; Dunn and Hayes, 2000); community design (see e.g., Dannenberg et al., 2003; Northridge et al., 2003) and; degree to which the community is a part of a connective transportation network (see e.g., Jackson , 2003a; Jackson, 2003b). However, there is a lack of studies that specifically addresses the influence of urban open spaces, more specifically parks, on residents' overall perceptions of health, well-being and QOL. Although parks are a part of the urban built environment, their presence is often seen as being an ubiquitous component of planning traditions, rather than a crucial component of the urban landscape that contributes to neighbourhood quality and, as such, to residents QOL (Green and Kreuter, 1999).

2.1.2 Conceptual Links between the Built Environments and Population Health

Typically, the built environment is defined as those components and structures that represent human impacts upon a landscape. The built environment, as approached from a population health approach, can provide significant insight to the health of a population (Frumkin, 2003; Macintyre et al., 2002; Macintyre et al., 1993). Richard Jackson (2003: 1382) writes about the importance of understanding the links between the built environment and population health:

One challenge is to better understand the broad impact of our built environment on health and then to build future communities that promote physical and mental health. We now realize that how we design the built environment may hold tremendous potential for addressing many of the nation's greatest current public health concerns.

Studying the built environment from a population health approach is exciting, as it allows the researcher to re-interpret the relationship between people and their built environment. As Wilkie and Roach wrote in their 2004 discussion paper *Green Among the Concrete: The Benefits of Urban Natural Capital*, park space and other 'natural' or 'open' areas benefit residents' and the economy as it "positively influences the health and well-being of western Canadians and indirectly affects health care costs by reducing the demand for health services" (6). To better understand the influence of the built environment on health and well-being, researchers have adopted community QOL

studies, which can be used to make comparisons at the inter-neighbourhood level within a city.

2.2 Quality of Life Studies and Population Health

Since the mid-1980s community-based QOL studies have been used by social scientists as a means to discover what factors in residents' daily lives influence their QOL, as well as allowing researchers to capture "how citizens rate the importance of different public programs and services" (Williams et al., 2005). The term QOL is used in many different professions, and often the term is used in a ubiquitous manner. Most researchers agree that to make a QOL study successful, the residents concerned must be engaged in the study in a meaningful way so that the data collected reflect the reality of their lived experiences. The composition of QOL studies is not standardized and is often tailored to inform local conditions (AHPRC, 2002). Both objective and subjective indicators are used in most community QOL studies (see e.g., Michalos and Zumbo, 2003; CUISR, 2001a; CUISR, 2001b). Examples of objective indicators are census-like questions pertaining to demographics, such as education attainment, level of income, and household characteristics such as home ownership or marital status. Subjective indicators are based upon an individual perception of, for example, resident's living conditions, position within society and outlook for the future. Within the spectrum of QOL studies, researchers often write about the merit of indicators given the scope and transferability of a particular study. QOL studies that analyze a specific community or a group of communities are often carried out in the context of population health studies (see e.g., CUISR, 2001a). An example of this reciprocal association between QOL studies and population health is given in the following passage:

The interconnectedness between quality of life and population health reflect a trend in the social sciences and in health research that is re-defining health as a product of the everyday events.

(National Workshop on Quality of Life Research (NWQOLR), 2002:4)

Research in QOL and population health can be used as a means to study many different areas, ranging from global systems of trade to intra-city perceptions of well-being over time. The temporal aspect of both terms is dependent on the study being conducted. Both terms (QOL and population health) share the common goals of better understanding how everyday lived experiences and how interrelated structures and

conditions influence a population's outlook on health and well-being. Even though there is little consensus amongst researchers on how to best approach such research, population health and QOL researchers both serve the purpose of moving away from the bio-medical model of health to a more holistic approach to health (Dunn and Hayes, 1999).

Researchers in both the fields of QOL and population health use varying indicators, which are used as a means to assess the influence of constructs (either physical, social or economic) found within communities (Frankish et al., 2002). One of the major criticisms of both the population health and community QOL studies is the lack of standardization in conducting such research (NWQOLR, 2002). However, before a standardized approach is agreed upon researchers have to come to a consensus regarding indicators used in such research (Frankish et al., 2002). The use of indicators is an important characteristic that QOL studies and population health research share. The debate surrounding the use of indicators demonstrates that both fields suffer from a lack of standardization. Regardless of the lack of standardization, research generated from both fields can be used for the generation of social policy initiatives as both fields examine the broad structures of society that influence populations.

Community QOL research is concerned with better understanding how elements of the built environment (e.g., transportation networks), the economic environment (e.g., employment rates) and the social environment (e.g., social networks and supports), found within a community, contribute to a community's well-being through the ways in which its residents perceive their opportunities and obstacles to a better life. QOL within the context of a community, is often "synonymous with [perceptions] of liveability" (Sun, 2005: 8). The purpose of community-based QOL research is "intended to refer to either the conditions of the environment in which people live ...or to some attribute of people of themselves" (Pacione, 2003: 19). Urban features such as parks are situated within a place-specific context, (namely, a neighbourhood setting). The neighbourhood setting (e.g., prevalence of crime, incivilities) influences how the urban feature (e.g., parks) are perceived by neighbourhood residents. Hence the parks reflect neighbourhood level trends. Whether or not the park is seen as being a positive or negative venue for an individual's health ultimately influences whether or not the park is accessed. Community QOL is seen as consisting primarily of the understandings and

meanings that individuals assign to community features that “either support or do not support [residents perceived] health” (Raphael et al., 2001: 180).

Within the realm of the built environment are park spaces – which can offer residents an opportunity to engage in passive or active recreation- that in turn can contribute to overall QOL. Even though such spaces are found throughout settlements of all sizes in Canada and the United States, the development and maintenance of such spaces cost a significant amount of civic monies⁹ and as such come under pressure when there are economic downturns or changes to transfer payments in governments. Even though park spaces provide social and recreational opportunities for residents, a park’s development, upkeep, and redevelopment are contingent on its value within the built environment. These values may be re-evaluated by civic authorities if it can be demonstrated that parks are seen as an important component of developing and encouraging healthy lifestyles for residents.

2.3 Park Spaces in an Urban Context

In contrast to the buildings and structures of the urban built environment, park spaces offer relief in terms of providing vegetation cover and respite from the concrete of the city. Open spaces such as parks have been included in the design of cities, whether in form of a plaza or square, or the more conventional park spaces covered with vegetation that are present in North American cities today. Parks can function as single use or multi-use venue and are typically designed to offer residents opportunities for passive and active recreation.

Researchers in the fields of geography, landscape architecture, urban planning, leisure sciences, and biology are just a few of the professionals who study park spaces. Often the park is seen as an element of nature within the city boundaries; nature in this context is planned, preserved and maintained according to the park’s purpose, together with the fiscal constraints of civic budgets (Wilkie and Roach, 2004; Walker, 2004; Geronimus, 2003). Given the diversity of disciplines using park spaces as a subject of study, there are various definitions of what constitutes a park space. The terminology that defines parks ranges from parks being synonymous with any open area within an urban setting (see e.g., Forsyth, 2003) to shared common attributes of vegetation cover

⁹ There is a body literature that deals with the cost of development and maintenance of park spaces in terms of civic expenditures see e.g., Francis, 2003; Gobster, 2001.

(see e.g., Niemela, 1999). These differences in definitions reflect the different traditions of discipline-specific knowledge. One of the most important commonalities of park space studies is the recognition that they encompass an area that is covered in vegetation and are influenced by the urban built-environment. One Dutch study conducted by Baycan-Levent et al., (2002) defined park spaces as consisting of:

Public and private open spaces in urban areas, primarily covered by vegetation, which are directly (e.g. active or passive recreation) or indirectly (e.g. positive influence on the urban environment) available for the users (3)

The Design Centre for American Urban Landscape, an institute that is involved in studying park spaces in an urban context, defines park space and aligned green spaces as “outdoor places with a significant amount of vegetation” (Bonsignore, 2003: 2). Some landscape architects also define park spaces as land with a significant amount of vegetative cover; typically there is an inclusion of what type of vegetation cover is examined, as well as accounting for how the park spaces ‘fits’ into the surrounding landscape (Gobster, 2001). Similarly, an urban ecologist’s perspective includes both the aesthetics of the type of vegetation and the volume of vegetation cover in order to account for the percentage of the total vegetation cover (Niemela, 1999). While the amount of continuous vegetation within park spaces is an important factor in determining the potential of park spaces to improve the local quality of the physical environment (e.g. acting as a carbon sink, absorb precipitation and mitigate the affects of urban heat islands), what is missing in studies that quantify the benefits of park spaces are the linkages between the social, leisure, and recreational functions that parks play within the urban environment which, in turn, influence QOL.

Researchers who address the social aspects of parks often view park spaces as open theatres that can encourage the development of social networks, encourage physical activity or serve as a respite from the hurried tempo of the city (Coen and Ross, 2006; Kuo et al., 1998; Hayward and Weitzer, 1984). The presence of green spaces is seen as contributing to a residents’ everyday life and well-being, and a space that can be representative of cultural dimensions within the community itself (Forsyth, 2003; Rodenburg et al., 2002). The social dimensions of park spaces can thus reflect the dynamics found within a neighbourhood. For example, does the park attract residents who engage in shared activities or does it simply attract residents who interact only by

acknowledging each other's presence? Hence, the design of, and access to, park spaces influence how residents view their neighbourhood (Chiesura, 2004; van Kemp et al., 2003; Ward Thompson, 2002; Gobster, 2001; Berg and Nycander, 1997; Solecki and Welch, 1995).

2.3.1 Parks and Quality of Life in Urban Settings

Research on the links between urban resident's park use and their perceptions of health/well-being is important, as the majority of humans live within urban settlements (Jackson, 2003a; Jackson, 2003b; Van Herzele and Wiedemann, 2003; Rodenburg et al., 2002). The effects of living in an urban environment on a population's health and well-being is an understudied research area, and is important not only because the majority of populations are found in urban areas, but because the influence of the urban built environment on the well-being of residents is largely unknown (Jackson, 2003b; Macintyre et al., 2002). As Forsyth (2003) points out: "there are significant areas where little or nothing is known about the human dimensions about green spaces" (2). One common element that most cities share is the presence of open spaces (parks being a predominant form of open space) that have been designed for the purpose of residents' enjoyment or broadly their overall QOL. What is underrepresented in the literature is park space studies that research urban residents' perceptions of well-being or overall QOL as related to the presence of park spaces. This gap in knowledge is significant because parks are a common component of the urban landscape. Authors Lloyd and Auld, (2002), found that the majority of community QOL studies, conducted to-date, measured leisure activity solely on the basis of a place-centred or conditions approach (e.g., frequency of visits to parks). Lloyd and Auld purport the community QOL studies should use an experience-based approach that encompasses both objective measurements of leisure (e.g., frequency of visits) and the subjective measurement of why leisure activities are undertaken (i.e., why does a participant engage in certain activities). Further research is needed to tease apart the objective and subjective meanings associated with park spaces in relationship to residents' QOL.

Various studies have linked the presence of park space to urban residents' physical and mental health (e.g., Araya et al., 2006; de Hollander and Staatsen, 2003; Pacione, 2003; Macintyre et al., 2002). The variety of landscapes contained within green

spaces can help facilitate the different needs of residents in an urban setting. Resident needs that can be potentially fulfilled by park use include: privacy, social interaction, contact with nature, and physical exercise (Ulrich and Addoms, 1981). All of these needs tie into the concept of health, well-being, or QOL. As such, parks can be seen as a “community asset” if the parks are found to contribute to the residents’ everyday lives (Hayward, 1989). As previously discussed, the population health approach takes into account the multiple determinants of well-being, and parks can be seen as an essential element in the urban landscape that influences a resident’s QOL.

2.4 Summary of the Literature Review

An advantage of conducting population health studies is that the contexts of the everyday lived experiences of populations are taken into account. The majority of Canadians live in urban areas and the urban built-environment, as such, exerts influence on people’s health and well-being. One method of capturing the perceived health and well-being of populations is to conduct community QOL research that examines components of the built-environment that influence people’s lived-experiences. Within the tradition of planning that has been carried on throughout Canada, one common feature of the urban built-environment is the presence of open spaces, which are managed as park spaces. However, few studies have examined urban parks and their potential contribution to the well-being of populations via a population health perspective. QOL studies have the potential to be used as a tool to discover this contribution, and to highlight the differences and commonalities of resident’s perceptions of park spaces, which may ultimately contribute to a residents’ overall well-being. Although the link between well-being and the presence of park space is intuitive, there are gaps in the current body of knowledge. Filling these gaps could potentially serve to inform the future planning of city park spaces.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This research explores how urban residents of differing socio-economic status (SES) neighbourhoods view their neighbourhood parks, and how these views affect their perceived QOL. The research is situated within the city of Saskatoon, and within two different SES neighbourhoods. In order to capture residents' perceptions of their park spaces, face-to-face interviews were conducted with two sets of residents, one set living in a "low" SES neighbourhood and the second set in a "high" SES neighbourhood. To provide context on the nature and planned role of parks in Saskatoon, face-to-face interviews were also conducted with volunteers and professionals who deal with Saskatoon city neighbourhood park planning and management. As a means to inform this research, a selection of park questions from the 2004 CUISR Saskatoon Quality of Life survey were extracted as a baseline to show how residents perceive their respective park systems.

To set the context for this research, this chapter begins with an overview of Saskatoon's park space, followed by a discussion of the research methods, information specific to the interview schedules, and techniques used for data analysis.

3.1 Saskatoon Neighbourhood Parks

Within the City of Saskatoon, the distribution of park spaces is based on a hierarchy, as reflected by the City's Development Plan (A10-0017), 2002. There are major four types of park spaces within the City of Saskatoon. The following table contains the description and examples of each type (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Description of Park typology in Saskatoon, 2005

Park type	Purpose of park	Target users	Examples
Special use park	Each park responds to unique site circumstances and/or provides unique programming opportunities.	All residents of the city	Kinsmen Park, Forestry Farm Park, Diefenbaker Park
Multi-District Parks	These parks are designed for structured sports. Sports fields are suitable for international competitions and there are booking charges associated with using these fields.	Organized league play and hosting tournaments. All residents of the city.	Umea Park Complex, Cairns Ball Field, Gordon Howe Complex and Bowl, Kilburn Ball Diamonds
District Parks	Accommodate active and passive recreation, There is a charge to book and use sport fields in these parks	Four to five adjacent neighbourhoods. High school sport leagues may use the sport fields.	Nutana Kiwanis, Pierre Radisson Park
Neighbourhood parks	Centrally located within a neighbourhood, these parks are designed for families, young children. Any playing fields are free to users	Neighbourhood populations	Briarwood Neighbourhood, D.L. Hamilton, Fred Mendel, Wilson Park.

Source: City of Saskatoon, 2002a.

Figure 3.1 shows the amount of acres in each category of park spaces within the City of Saskatoon, 2004. Typically, special use parks are found on the perimeter of the city or in the downtown core. There is not a definite trend in the location of neighbourhood parks within a neighbourhood. Generally, the neighbourhood parks are located adjacent to neighbourhood schools. The total amount of park space in Saskatoon, (2004), was 2079.5 acres.

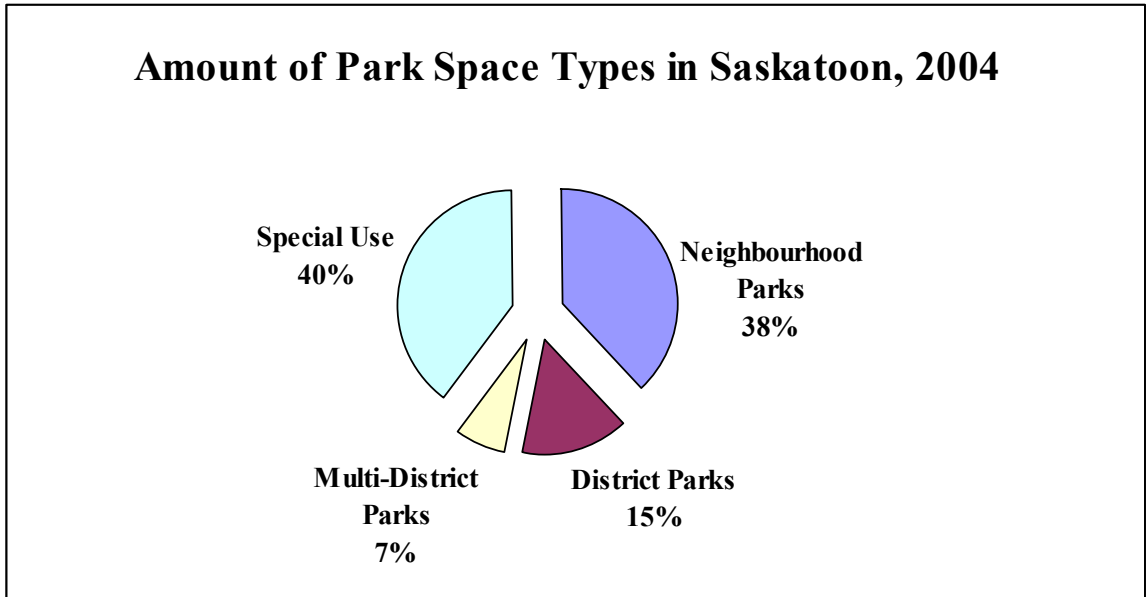


Figure 3.1: Amount of park spaces types found in Saskatoon, 2004.

Source: City of Saskatoon, 2003b

The focus of this research is on two differing SES neighbourhood types and their neighbourhood park spaces. Neighbourhood park spaces are the second largest category of park spaces in Saskatoon, and they are found in every city neighbourhood, with the exception of Downtown. Neighbourhood parks are designed to:

...serve the active and passive recreation needs of its catchments population of approximately five to eight thousand people. Sport fields accommodate intra-neighbourhood league play for youth 13 years of age and under. They are also intended for families, children of elementary school for informal use. Structures to accommodate active leisure programs are located in a neighbourhood core park (COS, 2002a: 4)¹⁰

Neighbourhood parks were chosen for this research because they are an ubiquitous feature of the built environment; that is, they are found throughout the urban landscape regardless of the age of the neighbourhood and thus are present in both neighbourhoods of the sample frame.

3.1.1 Sample Frame

The two neighbourhoods examined in this research are Pleasant Hill and Briarwood. These two neighbourhoods were chosen because they represent two extremes of the socioeconomic status spectrum within Saskatoon. (See Section 1.3 for map of the sample frame).

¹⁰ City of Saskatoon, (2002a) City File No. CK. 4205-1; Number A10-017.

3.1.2 Pleasant Hill Neighbourhood Socioeconomic Characteristics

Pleasant Hill is a low socioeconomic (SES) status neighbourhood¹¹. An overview of selected SES characteristics (as reported in the City of Saskatoon Neighbourhood Profiles,¹² 2003c) is in found in Table 3.2. Development in the neighbourhood started in 1907. The main era of development in Pleasant Hill was from 1930 to 1950. Pleasant Hill neighbourhood borders 22nd Street, which is the main east-west traffic corridor on the west side of the city. Total gross neighbourhood area is 288.09 acres.

Table 3.2: SES Profile of Pleasant Hill, 2003

SES Characteristics	Pleasant Hill	City of Saskatoon
Population	4,415	196,815
Average Family Income (\$)	26,753	62,451
Average Household Size	2.2	2.4
One Parent Households (%)	24	12
Vehicles/Resident	0.23	0.76
Homeownership (%)	25.5	62.2
Average Home Selling Price (\$)	54,107	126,514
Average Gross Rent (\$)	472	580
Average Owner's Major Payments (\$)	519	769
Dwelling units per acre	6.79	1.85

Source: City of Saskatoon, 2003c

3.1.2.1 Pleasant Hill Neighbourhood Parks

In the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood, there are five neighbourhood parks, totaling 19.15 acres, or 6.6% of the total neighbourhood area. There 230 people per acre of park space in the neighbourhood. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of park space within the neighbourhood. The distribution of park spaces reflects a traditional planning scheme in that park spaces are adjacent to schools (mirrors the reform era of park development), and the largest park space (Fred Mendel Park) is designed for one type of sport (akin to the recreation style of parks i.e., baseball). Table 3.3 describes the features and area of the Pleasant Hill Neighbourhood Parks and Figures 3.3 to 3.6 illustrates the features and layouts of neighbourhood parks in Pleasant Hill.

¹¹ Designated by the criteria used in the 2004 CUISR quality of life sample frame.

¹² See website: http://www.city.saskatoon.sk.ca/org/city_planning/index.asp

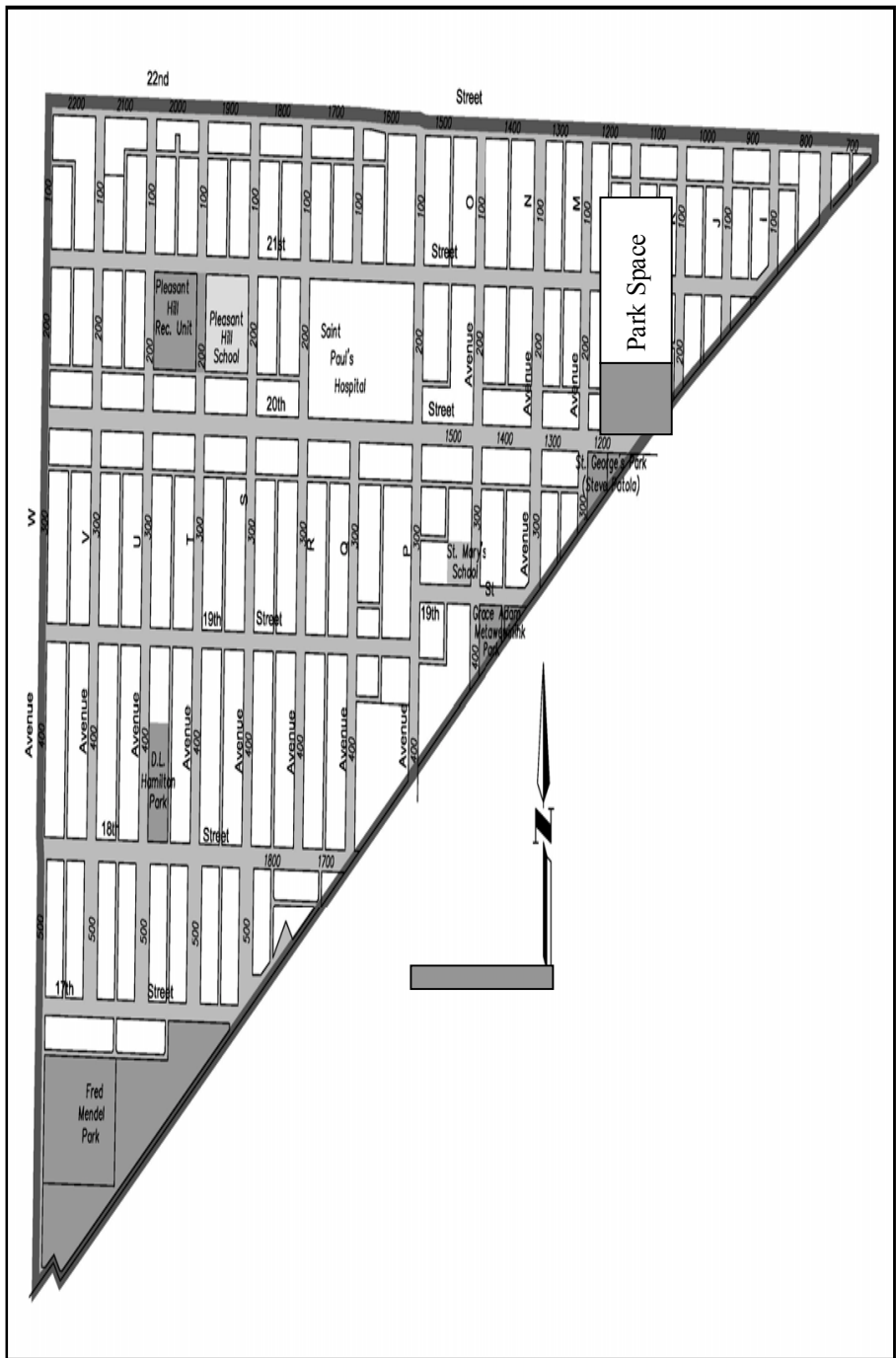


Figure 3.2: Map of Pleasant Hill
Source: City of Saskatoon, 2003c

Table 3.3: Features of Pleasant Hill Neighbourhood Parks

Name of Park	Area of Park (acres)	Features
D.L. Hamilton	1.36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground structure • Benches ,Picnic tables • Basketball Hoop
Fred Mendel	12.63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four baseball diamonds • Playground structure • Walking trail
Grace Adam Metawewinihk ¹³	1.29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches, Picnic tables, Barbeque stands • Basketball court • Playground
Pleasant Hill Park ¹⁴	2.94	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spray park • Playground structure • Benches
Steve Patola ¹⁵ (St. George's)	0.93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches • Horseshoe pits

Source: City of Saskatoon, Neighbourhood Profiles, 2003c



Figure 3.3: D.L Hamilton Park

¹⁴ This park consists of two areas: First the land adjacent to St. Mary School and across the street on the eastside of Ave O South.

¹⁴ Adjacent to Pleasant Hill School

¹⁵ Steve Patola or St. George's Park is considered to be one of the neighbourhood parks. Although its area is counted the total park space for the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood, access to the park is restricted to patrons of St. George's Seniors Citizens' Centre. The entrance to the park is via the centre and the park is surrounded by a chain-link fence. The Seniors Centre is responsible for the maintenance of the park (City of Saskatoon, 2002b)



Figure 3.4: Skaters in Grace Adams Metawewinihk Park



Figure 3.5: Playground structure in Fred Mendel Park



Figure 3.6: Playground structure in Grace Adams Metawewinihk Park

3.1.3 Briarwood Socioeconomic Characteristics

Briarwood is one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in Saskatoon and represents a high SES type.¹⁶ The initial phase of development in Briarwood occurred in the 1980's followed by the main phase of neighborhood development in the 1990's. As of 2006, there are lots still available in Briarwood. Briarwood is located approximately 6.5 kilometres from downtown Saskatoon. The total gross neighbourhood area is 419.93 acres. Table 3.4 is an overview of selected SES characteristics.

Table 3.4: SES Profile of Briarwood, 2003

SES Characteristics	Briarwood	City of Saskatoon
Population	1,685	196,815
Average Family Income (\$)	132,451	62,451
Average Household Size	3	2.4
One Parent Households (%)	4	12.4
Vehicles/Resident	1.13	0.76
Homeownership (%)	100	62.2
Average Home Selling Price (\$)	225,624	126,514
Average Gross Rent (\$)	n/a	580
Average Owner's Major Payments (\$)	1,234	769
Dwelling units per acre	1.33	1.85

Source: City of Saskatoon Neighbourhood Profiles, 2003a

3.1.3 Briarwood Neighbourhood Parks

Briarwood has a centralized neighbourhood park system. Adjoining the main neighborhood park is a linear park, which serves as a corridor that links different parts of the neighbourhood. Further, there is a storm water storage basin Briarwood Lake Park – or as the residents call it – “the lake”. The total amount of park space within Briarwood is 34.94 acres or 8.3% of the total neighbourhood area. There are 48.23 people per acre of neighbourhood park space in Briarwood (City of Saskatoon, 2003a). The map below illustrates the distribution of park space found within Briarwood (Figure 3.7) and Table 3.5 identifies the main features and area of the neighbourhood parks found in Briarwood. Various structures and activities in the park are depicted in Figures 3.8-3.12. One feature

¹⁶ Designated by the criteria used in the 2004 CUISR quality of life sample frame.



Figure 3.8: Playground Structure in Briarwood Neighbourhood Park



Figure 3.9: Picnic table in Briarwood Neighbourhood Park



Figure 3.10: Joggers in Briarwood Lake Park



Figure 3.11: A soccer league game in Briarwood Neighbourhood Park



Figure 3.12: One of the uses of the paths in Briarwood Neighbourhood Park



Figure 3.13: Lake Feature in Briarwood Lake Park

3.2 Research Methodology

Methods used in QOL, population health or park studies, can be quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, and each approach should be chosen to best fit the subject at hand (AHPRC, 2002). For example, a researcher at CUISR (Olfert, 2003) compared leisure policies associated with the City of Tucson to those associated with the City of Saskatoon based on quantitative data analysis for green spaces. The data collected represented patterns of use, presence of green space in comparison to developed land, and percentage of residences within a half-mile of a designated green space. The result of this research was the publication of the paper *Quality of Life Leisure Indicators* (Olfert, 2003). Quantitative data collected in the report captured snapshots of the number of the people who move through open/green spaces and the built-environment. However, while such measurements are needed, they neither account for *why* residents use (or do not use) green space, nor do they capture the purpose that the green space serves in everyday life. A positivistic approach to methodology could have been used in this research; however, the focus here is not on the measurement of phenomena, but rather the exploration of the ways in which residents of two neighbourhoods within Saskatoon view their park spaces.

Even though the use of qualitative methodologies are more common in the field of human geography, there are some geographers that prefer the “hard” science of statistical testing and use of inferential techniques in order to study a phenomena in an objective manner (see e.g., Williams, 2003; Winchester, 2000). Critics of qualitative methodology voice their hesitation of accepting qualitative research that is based on participant’s experiences because it is thought that such research does not meet the rigour of the positivistic approach.

3.3 Data collection

In order to accomplish the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1, face-to-face interviews were conducted and responses to a question asked in the 2004 CUISR Saskatoon quality of life telephone survey was analysed. First, there was the collection of primary data from face-to-face interviews with residents of a low SES neighbourhood type (Pleasant Hill) and a high SES neighbourhood type (Briarwood) in Saskatoon. In

total 21 residents were interviewed. These interviews were analysed using Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory (1998). In addition to the residents, a group of key informants was selected for face-to-face interviews in order to collect background information on policy issues, which affect Saskatoon's park system (n=12). The information derived from the key informant interviews helped to elucidate the tradition of park planning and responsibility for parks within the City of Saskatoon. The interviews of the key informants occurred during the same timeframe as the resident interviews. Second, analysis of secondary data from the 2004 CUISR Saskatoon quality of life telephone survey was undertaken. Specifically responses from residents' of Pleasant Hill and Briarwood were analysed in regards to their response to a question asked in the telephone survey regarding the condition of their neighbourhood parks.

3.3.1 Secondary data collection

The secondary data collected via the CUISR 2004 quality of life telephone survey served as the baseline information for this research with regards to the perceptions of participants in the larger CUISR Saskatoon quality of life survey (collected in January to June, 2004) (n=947). For the purposes of the baseline component, the responses are grouped by neighbourhood SES type. Specific to neighbourhood parks, one of the CUISR survey questions (F1.3ii) asked the telephone survey participants whether they were satisfied with their neighbourhood parks (Briarwood, n = 103; Pleasant Hill, n = 113).

3.3.2 Primary data collection

Primary data were collected from two sources: residents of the two neighbourhood types within the CUISR telephone sample frame (herein referred to as 'participants'), and key informants who were selected based on their professional or volunteer positions which involved park development or maintenance.

3.3.2.1 Resident face-to-face interviews

In the fall of 2004 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents of the neighbourhoods of Pleasant Hill (n=12) and Briarwood (n=9). In total, 14 females and 7 males were interviewed. The age of participants ranged approximately

from 30 to 75 years old. All interviews were conducted at a place of convenience for the participant: 77% of the interviews took place in participant's homes, whereas the remaining interviews took place at the CUISR community office (9%), in local cafés (9%) and on campus (5%). The setting of the interview is important because a familiar setting puts the participant at ease and because participants that may have mobility issues have the option to choose a setting that is appropriate for them. As Malcolm Williams (2003: 65) suggests, "the respondent [participant] should feel safe in (sic) environment and comfortable about doing the interview".

The interviews were conducted until responses from the participants of the same neighbourhood were repeated, thus reaching saturation. Saturation "refers to the point at which the currently held set of concepts seems reasonably able to describe and even predict the situation they seek to theorize" (David and Sutton, 2004: 80). The difference in the number of interviews conducted in Pleasant Hill versus Briarwood was due to booking interviews in advance of reaching the point of saturation; subsequently the previously booked interviews were held because the participants gave so generously of their time. The length of each interview varied from a minimum of twenty minutes to a maximum ninety minutes, which was to be expected given the composition of closed and open-ended interview questions. All interviews were taped and then transcribed by the researcher. The interview schedule received approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, University of Saskatchewan on July 13, 2004. (See Appendix A for Resident interview schedule).

3.3.2.2 Resident sampling methods

In order to secure interviews with residents, two types of non-probability sampling were used (Denscombe, 1998). Residents who participated in the 2004 CUISR quality of life telephone survey were asked at the end of the CUISR survey if they would be interested in participating in other CUISR quality of life studies. From this list of self-identified participants, residents were contacted via telephone and asked by the researcher if they would be interested in participating in this particular research study. Two restrictions were placed on participants. First, the participants had to reside within the neighbourhood boundaries (as defined by the City of Saskatoon) of either Briarwood or Pleasant Hill. Second, the residents had to be the age of majority (18 years old).

Residents need not have had any knowledge of their neighbourhood parks nor was it required that they had used the parks. In order to obtain a clear picture of people's perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces both park users and non-users were sampled.

The second method of sampling was snowball sampling. Snowballing was used in the Briarwood neighbourhood once the list of self-identified CUISR participants was exhausted. Denscombe (1986:16) writes: "snowballing is an effective technique for building up a reasonable-sized sample, especially when used as part of a small-scale research project". Snowballing was particularly successful in Briarwood where participants freely named other potential participants. In Pleasant Hill, there was not the need to use a snowball sampling strategy, as the self-identified participants from the CUISR telephone survey were willing to participate in this research.

3.3.2.3 Resident interview schedule design

Face-to-face interviews were an ideal tool for this research as the strengths of interviewing fills gaps in knowledge due to research not being done on the topic, or the research that has been conducted does not serve to explain the entire phenomena (Dunn, 2000; Creswell, 1994). Further interviews account for personal behaviours and understandings of a phenomenon (Dunn, 2000) and uncover the range of opinions linked with a specific event or place (Dunn, 2000). The type of interview used was semi-structured. The use of this interview format was important because it allowed the researcher to raise a number of issues through open and closed-ended questions, yet allowed flexibility if the participant raised a topic that did not conform to the interview (Dunn, 2000).

The initial draft of the interview schedule was piloted with one English as a Second Language (ESL) student, a graduate student, and a hearing-impaired elderly person. The reason behind piloting the interview schedule was to ensure clarity and comprehension of the scope of the questions being asked of participants. After piloting the questionnaire, minor revisions were carried out, and the instrument was tested again before being applied in the research.

The face-to-face interviews were carried out with a combination of closed-ended (n=13) and open-ended questions (n=8). Ten out of the thirteen closed-ended questions

were asked at the beginning of the interview. The interview schedule was constructed like this for two reasons. First, responses to closed-ended questions tend to be straightforward and second, because of the relatively simplistic nature of the questions, the participant is put at ease with the interview process (David and Sutton, 2004). If the participants made additional comments in conjunction with responding to the closed-ended questions, the researcher took extensive field notes and reviewed the audio tape of the interview to verify the field notes. Once the field notes were verified, they were later incorporated into the interview transcript. During the administration of the closed-ended questions, the researcher and participant were able to communicate effectively and build a working relationship that was designed to put both the researcher and participant at ease before the personal open-ended questions were administered. Open-ended questions were designed to solicit participants' thoughts and perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces. Using open-ended questions gives the participants a stronger voice and say in the direction of the research (David and Sutton, 2004: 82). The stronger voice comes about because the opinions expressed (and not expressed) in the interviews become the focus of analysis, which ultimately leads to the generation of theory on participants' perceptions of neighbourhood park spaces. There is a danger of allowing the participants' opinions to dominate the discussion in regards to the research questions. To prevent this from happening during the research process, the participants' voices must be critically analysed in order to fully understand the meaning of what is being said.

There are disadvantages of conducting face-to-face interviews. First, face-to-face interviews require a time commitment that is often lengthier than other social research instruments. As a result, the number of participants involved may be influenced by the participants' schedules and their ability to schedule such non-typical tasks into their daily routine (see e.g., Williams, 2003). Second, even though the interviewee is made to feel comfortable in the environment in which they choose to be interviewed, the role of interviewee and interviewer is essentially a negotiated relationship that may be influenced by perceptions on both parts in terms of power, prestige or personal ability to contribute to the research (Silverman, 2001). However, notwithstanding these limitations, the benefits of face-to-face interviews far outweighed the costs in this

particular research, and proved to be well suited for capturing participants' perceptions of park spaces.

3.3.3.1 Key informant face-to-face interviews

A separate group of interviews took place with persons (key informants) who held either paid or volunteer positions that were related to park spaces in Saskatoon. The reason for conducting this group of interviews was to gather information from key informants who have institutional (either from local government or community-based organizations (CBO) positions) "inside" knowledge of the policies that influence the use and maintenance of neighbourhood parks. The key informants were selected on the basis of their associations with the neighbourhoods of Briarwood and Pleasant Hill. Interviews took place at a location of convenience to the key informants, which all but one interview took place at the key informant's offices.

3.3.3.2 Key informant sampling method

The initial key-formants were approached based on their professional positions. From these interviews, a number of key informants referred the researcher to others who had the desired qualifications. All key informants were contacted either by telephone or by email to see if they would be interested in this research project. The interview schedule for the key informants consisted of five open-ended questions, thereby allowing the key informants to express their opinions regarding park spaces and related policies (See Appendix B). In order to ensure the key informants professional or volunteer positions would not be compromised by their opinions expressed in the interview, their identities and position are not revealed in the analysis. The value of key informant data is that it reflects institutional policies and attitudes (i.e. funding of upgrades, and maintenance) that shape park spaces in Saskatoon.

3.4 Quantitative data analysis

For the quantitative data generated from the 2004 CUISR Saskatoon QOL survey, a chi-squared test was used to capture the findings from the neighbourhood park question for each of the two SES neighbourhood types. Respondents were classified based on their neighbourhood type and their rating of their neighbourhood parks. The initial telephone survey data were catalogued in SPSS files in which the sampled

neighbourhoods could be isolated and compiled. The use of the chi-squared test shows that the responses from respondents fit into the different categories (i.e. 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', 'fair', 'poor' or 'unsure') regarding the question specific to the conditions of park spaces (Diamond and Jefferies, 2001:183).

Regarding the findings from the participant interviews, descriptive statistics are used to highlight the responses from the closed-ended questions. The reason for presenting the data in this manner is that the data derived from the closed-ended questions is unambiguous and presentation of the data is straightforward. The amount of data gathered from the participants was not enough to warrant inferential statistical testing; thus percentage tables will serve the purpose of describing the results from the closed-end questions.

3.5 Qualitative data analysis of the SES participants interviews

One of the rationales for doing qualitative data analysis is to discover themes, which emerge from data. In order to make such discoveries, methods must be followed so that themes discovered are products of the data rather than a priori or expected findings from the researcher. The use of qualitative data analysis does not preclude the data from being systematically analysed – in fact taking a systematic approach ensures that data can be used to its fullest extent (Crang, 2003). The use of qualitative methods to analyze the face-to-face interviews means that the data must be subjected to both reliability and reflexivity if the findings are to be accepted by a scholarly audience (Sparkes, 2001). Reliability means that any other researcher should obtain similar results if the methods are replicated. Personal bias/attitudes and personal interpretation should not taint the findings. Reflexivity acknowledges that the data collected in the interviews are influenced by the researcher's presence and through his or her own personal bias or attitude toward park spaces. Within the context of this research, the investigator grew up in a neighbourhood that had a forest, hills, an elaborate playground, sport fields and riverbank access. These features influenced the type of activities that the investigator and her peers engaged in, and have had a lasting legacy. For example, when the investigator moved to a new city, one of the qualities desired in a residential area was access to park space that was appealing. During the process of doing analysis of the data, the investigator acknowledges that she has to be aware of any undue influences that

she has on the analytical processes as well as any influence that she may be having on the outcomes. In order to satisfy these caveats the research makes use of the grounded theory approach as espoused by Strauss and Corbin, 1998.

Strauss and Corbin have adapted the principles of the grounded theory approach, which was first developed in 1960's, by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Glaser and Strauss were sociologists who published the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967. Glaser and Strauss saw grounded theory (circa 1967) as an “attempt to derive theories from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories” (Babbie, 2001: 203), from data. Originally, the authors purported selecting a research subject without any preconceived notions of frameworks or knowledge of the body of literature related to the subject. The difference between the methods espoused in Glaser and Strauss’s 1967 book and Strauss and Corbin’s 1998, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Technique* (Second edition) is that Strauss and Corbin set out specific (yet flexible) procedures for coding which deviated from the 1967 book, which lacked such explicit protocols (Dey, 1999). Strauss and Corbin call for a series of rounds where the data are coded and, from these rounds of coding, theory develops or emerges. The crux of the Strauss and Corbin approach is that the three phases of coding procedures (open, axial, selective) allows the researcher to generate theory from data. The three phases of coding are outlined in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Three Phases of Grounded Theory by Strauss and Corbin, 1998.

Type of Coding	Object of Coding
Open Coding	Breaking down, comparing and categorizing data
Axial Coding	Makes or creates links between data categories
Selective Coding	Identification of core categories and their relationships

Adapted from: Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 1998.

Each open-ended question asked of participants in this research was subjected to this three-phased approach to coding. When the data are being coded the researcher must constantly question what is being presented in the data. From the coding process memos are generated, which serve as a platform for theory building and allow the relationships between categories to emerge from the data, rather than as a priori knowledge (David and Sutton, 2004; Dey, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). For example, one question posed to a research participant was as follows: “Why has there been a change in your perception of your neighbourhood parks?” The response was analysed as follows:

Open coding is first conducted to see whether the participant expressed their feelings in either positive or negative terms, or what the components of the feelings being expressed were. For example, the participant stated:

“The City has reworked the parks; they groomed it [the baseball diamond] with red shale so it is an improvement- other than that they haven’t done anything...”

The analysis, or *axial coding*, follows:

“The City has reworked the parks; they groomed it [the baseball diamond] with red shale so it is an improvement- other than that they haven’t done anything...”

- *The City*= people responsible for change
- *Reworked the parks*= action that caused the change
- *Groomed it*= action that fulfilled the change
- *Red shale*= composition of change
- *So it is an improvement*= the consequence of the change
- *An improvement*= positive tone

What remains is the participant’s thought that more changes are needed, but it is up to the city to initiate such changes. This participant’s comments are specific to a baseball diamond, but this passage can also be linked to other participants’ comments because the deficiencies in their respective neighbourhood parks are seen as a product of the City’s approach to park planning in 43% of the interviews. The interview transcripts codes were created in order to capture the apparent and nuanced meanings of the roles that neighbourhood parks play in the participant’s lives. The merging of the codes created three main categories of perceptions as follows:

- *Conditions* which affect park use
- *Actions and/or interactions* that happen when participants use their respective neighbourhood park spaces
- *Consequences or outcomes* of the use of park spaces or non-use of park spaces.

The conditions that affect park use include three subcategories, which are: influence of weather/season on use; structural components that influence use; and the components of vegetation cover and landscape design, flora and design considerations. The second category is the actions or inactions that are carried out or not carried out within the park spaces. This category’s subcategories include the types of activities that participants

engage in, how and when the space is accessed, and how participants interact with others in the parks. The third category is comprised of outcomes, which emerge when participants engage in a certain type of behaviour, the results of using the spaces, and the results of interaction.

3.6 Summary of Methodology

Secondary data collected from the 2004 CUISR Saskatoon QOL telephone surveys forms the baseline of residents' perceptions of the quality of their neighbourhood parks. The interview schedule used to capture participants' perceptions of their neighbourhood parks adopted a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. This combination of the telephone survey and face-to-face interviews allows the data to be analysed in different ways, which contributes to the further understanding of participants' perceptions of park spaces in Saskatoon. The key informant interview schedule employed only open-ended questions, which allowed the key informants to express their thoughts freely, and allowed them to expand the scope of the responses to the questions. Participant open-ended questions are analysed via grounded theory methodology as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), thereby allowing the responses from the open-ended questions to create theory once the coding rounds are complete.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

Neighbourhood park spaces, within the context of Saskatoon, were designed to facilitate active and passive recreation opportunities, contributing to an individual's sense of well-being and overall QOL. The link between park spaces and urban QOL is confirmed by recent studies in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and Turkey (e.g. see, Coen and Ross, 2006; Chiesura, 2004; Freestone and Nichols, 2004; Oguz, 2000). This chapter presents the results generated from analysis of the study interviews conducted with residents of Pleasant Hill (n = 12) and Briarwood (n = 9), herein referred to as "the participants". The baseline component of this research is a question from the CUISR QOL 2004 telephone survey in which residents of Briarwood (n=103) and Pleasant Hill (n=113) were asked to rate the conditions of parks, in their respective neighbourhoods, using a five-point likert scale. A chi square test revealed that residents had significantly different perceptions of neighbourhood park spaces ($X^2 = 12.873$, $p = 0.005$). In this thesis, however, it is suggested that even though perceptions of neighbourhood park spaces do vary both within and between SES neighbourhood types, the nuance meanings or roles that neighbourhood parks play in participants' lives are not necessarily specific to a particular SES neighbourhood types i.e., there are differences but they are not necessary a function of SES types.

The interviews conducted in this research present a snapshot of participants' perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces, and capture the opinions and use patterns of the participants who consider themselves park users and non-users in differing SES neighbourhoods. Analysis of the interviews reveals how park spaces are interpreted and incorporated into an individual's everyday life and how this is related to perceived QOL. The interviews were analysed via Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory method, using an inductive method of generating theory from data collected in the field via the examination of patterns that emerge during the coding rounds. In order to reveal patterns, interviews were analysed via three coding (open, axial, and selective) rounds in which the data were deconstructed and reconstructed according to the grounded theory method. The goal of the coding rounds is to uncover a

central category that encompasses all of the codes generated during the analysis of the interview transcripts.

The central category that emerged from the coding rounds for this research was the influence of park characteristics on participants' perceptions of their neighbourhood parks. Hence, the central category is designated as "park characteristics". Park characteristics encompass several different subcategories, which contribute to the participants' view of their neighbourhood park spaces. The function of the subcategories is to: i) show conditions that influence the central category; ii) explore the different ways in which the central category are described; iii) illustrate the phenomena that influence the use of neighbourhood park spaces. In turn, the subcategories are composed of smaller groups of codes (or themes) that share similar properties. Five subcategories emerged from the Pleasant Hill interview transcripts and four subcategories emerged from the Briarwood interviews (Table 4.1).

In the sections that follow the development and emergence of the central category and the relationship of the subcategories to the central category is explained. Then, attention turns to research participants' perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces in their respective SES type neighbourhood, followed by a discussion of the links participants made between their neighbourhood park systems and their perceived QOL. The chapter concludes with a summary of how participants from differing SES neighbourhood types perceive their neighbourhood park spaces.

4.1 Central category: Park Characteristics

The way in which participants view their neighbourhood park spaces, either in a positive or negative way, is a product of the participants' perception of park characteristics (e.g., features, facilities and conditions of) related to which are the neighbourhood level characteristics (i.e., age/era of development in the neighbourhood, housing type and density; crime rate; personal mobility) of the park setting. In addition, personal characteristics such as a participant's household composition or type of employment also influence an individual's perception of neighbourhood park spaces. In turn, neighbourhood park spaces themselves are products of the neighbourhoods in which they are situated (Coen and Ross, 2006; Ward Thompson, 2002; Burgess et al., 1988) in

that neighbourhood park spaces reflect planning regimes and social trends found within the locale.

Table 4.1: Subcategories of park characteristics in Pleasant Hill and Briarwood.¹⁷

Pleasant Hill			Briarwood		
Subcategory	Number of themes within subcategory	Examples of themes within subcategories	Subcategory	Number of themes within Subcategory	Examples of themes within subcategories
Features and facilities	8	- benches - sport fields - walking trails - picnic tables	Features and facilities	4	- age appropriate structures - walking trails - community centre
Conditions of neighbourhood park spaces	8	- grass - trees - maintenance - open space	Conditions of neighbourhood park spaces	4	- maintenance of adjacent lots - age of vegetation cover
Accessibility	5	-proximity -timing of access	Accessibility	2	- proximity
Safety	2	- perceived	Safety	1	- perceived
Programming	3	- children			

Included in the neighbourhood level characteristics are the participants' views regarding the ways in which the neighbourhood park spaces are used (or misused) by others in the neighbourhood. In addition, this research suggests that the way in which participants interpret personal and neighbourhood level phenomena determines whether they choose to access neighbourhood park spaces within their own neighbourhood. A schematic interpretation of the phenomena that influence neighbourhood park uses is depicted in Figure 4.1.

¹⁷ The listing is not exhaustive for the sub-categories; its purpose is to illustrate the themes found in the transcripts, which emerged as groupings and subsequently supported as more substantive categories.

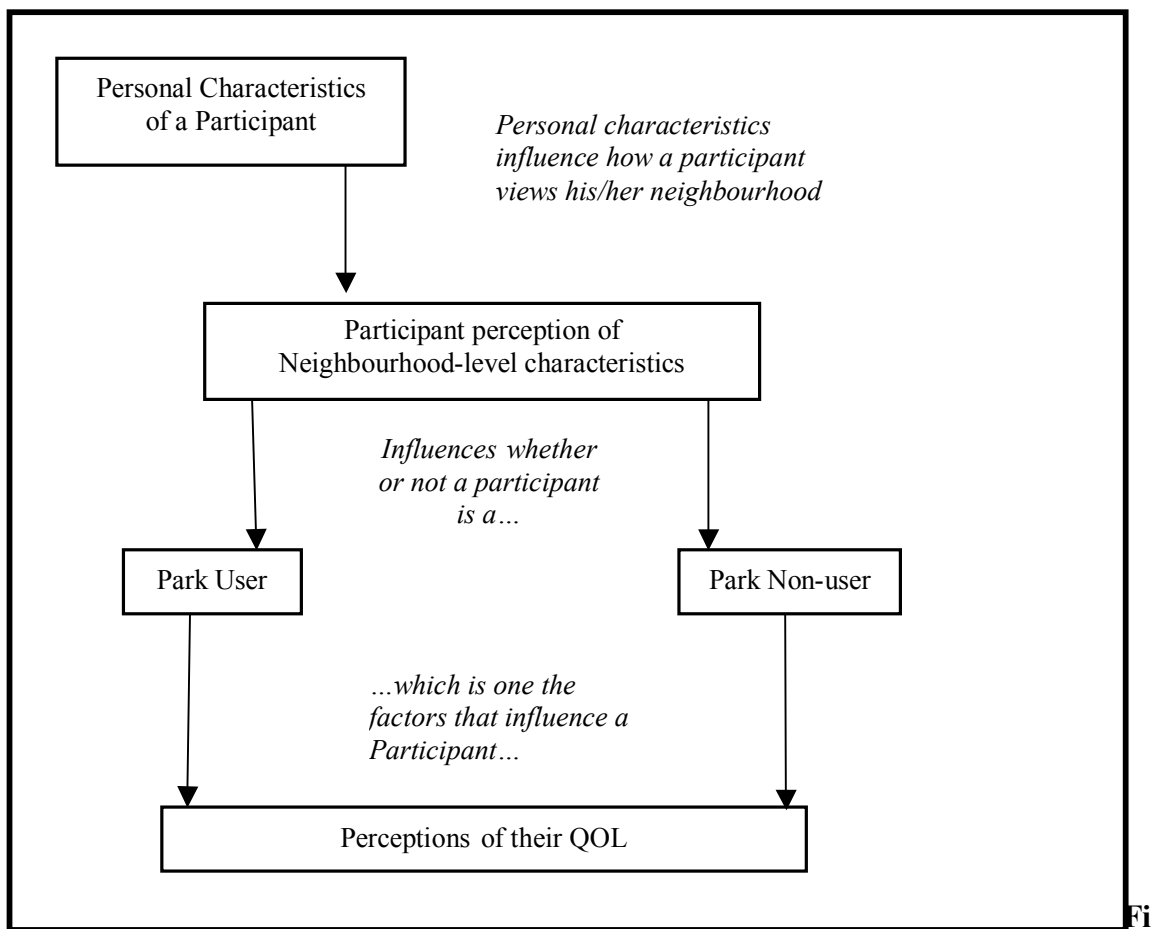


Figure 4.1: Overview of the phenomena that influence participant’s use of parks

Analysis of the interviews suggests that the use of neighbourhood park spaces does influence participants’ perception of QOL, as participants who use their neighbourhood park spaces view those spaces as a functional component of the neighbourhood allowing for recreational and social activities. Participants who use their neighbourhood parks typically reported multiple benefits (e.g., health, and social benefits) gained through neighbourhood park use. Park users across both neighbourhood types reported that they made more visitations to other kinds of outdoor recreation facilities as opposed to the non-park users. Those participants who did not use their neighbourhood park spaces expressed a negative perception of the neighbourhood park spaces found within their neighbourhoods, but conceded that not all park spaces in Saskatoon had similar negative factors associated with them. For example, a participant from the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood stated, “If [my child] wants

to go to the park we go to the other side of town.” *Interviewer: Why go there?*¹⁸ “They [the parks] seem to be well maintained and I have had good experiences there”.

The contribution of neighbourhood park spaces to participants’ QOL across both neighbourhood types was typically qualified as a place in which families could engage in recreation, or a place of relief from the buildings and roadways found within the neighbourhood itself. Again, the majority of participants (n=18, 86%) felt that having the park spaces within their neighbourhoods was of benefit to them and to others in the neighbourhood. The ways in which neighbourhood park spaces were perceived to contribute to neighbourhood QOL was the presence of open space covered with vegetation in contrast to the concrete of the city and the perceived (indirect) economic benefits of having parks situated in the neighbourhood vis-à-vis a space design for recreation that can be accessed without cost. Some of the perceived economic benefits include a no-cost opportunity to use the space for recreation and relatively higher property values for those houses adjacent to park spaces. Those participants who used their neighbourhood park spaces also stated that the benefits of having an accessible park nearby their residence might include physical, psychological, and social benefits for park users and their family members (see Figure 4.2). The interview results suggest that participants’ perceptions of their respective neighbourhood park spaces are similar across high and low SES neighbourhood types; the majority of participants in both neighbourhood types used their neighbourhood park spaces; and the use of their neighbourhood park spaces is linked to their QOL via the reported physical, psychological, and social benefits.

¹⁸ Text in italics in quotation passages refers to the interviewer.

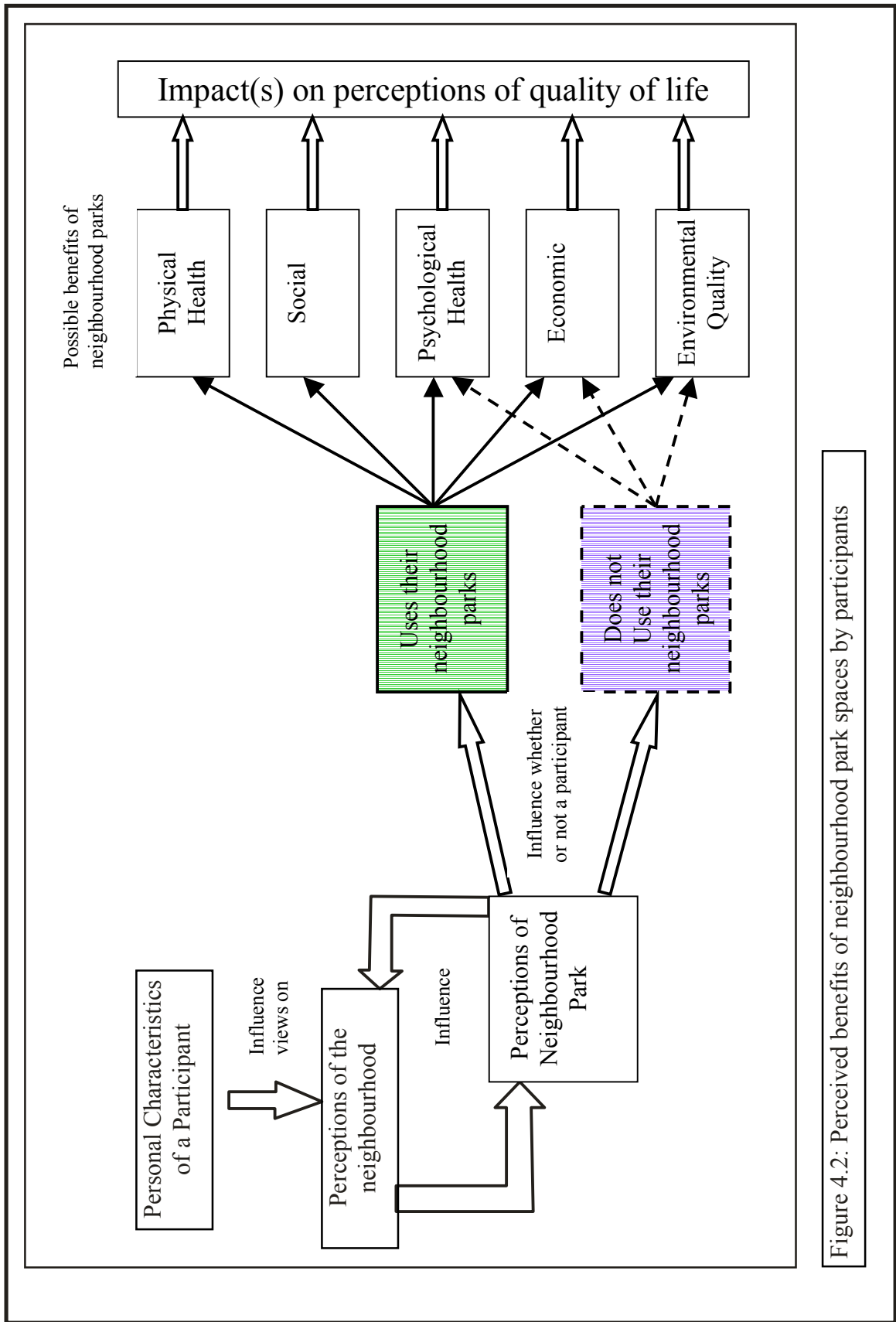


Figure 4.2: Perceived benefits of neighbourhood park spaces by participants

4.1.1 Subcategories of Park Characteristics

Participant characteristics influenced how the participant spoke of their park spaces. For example, one participant who had extensive education in the natural sciences and who had worked in leisure services had very precise and detailed accounts of the features, conditions, environmental, and safety components that create a functional park space. In contrast to this participant's detailed knowledge, the majority of participants across both SES neighbourhoods spoke with generally descriptive details in regards to their neighbourhood park spaces. The analysis of the interview transcripts did not reveal a single subcategory that was the most influential on the participants' perceptions; however, certain subcategories emerged with greater frequency than others.

Although park characteristics were the overarching theme that emerged from the analysis, the subcategories are those components that comprise a park space and, thus, are of value to the participant. For instance, the presence of park benches in neighbourhood park spaces for those participants with limited mobility meant the park space was perceived as a "functional" park space. The similarities of the subcategories found across both SES neighbourhood types highlight that: regardless of the age difference of Pleasant Hill and Briarwood between the neighbourhood park spaces, the park spaces were designed to serve the passive and active recreation needs of the residents in each respective neighbourhood; and participants see neighbourhood park spaces as a venue that reflects neighbourhood level characteristics. Examples of neighbourhood level characteristics found within both neighbourhood types were:

- parks as a space for social opportunities;
- park space in contrast to the buildings and roadways of the city;
- park usage may depend on the presence structural components; and
- park usage is influenced by perceived safety concerns.

Some components of the subcategories differed between neighbourhoods because participants from each SES neighbourhood reported specific or unique park characteristics that applied only to their respective neighbourhood park spaces (e.g., Briarwood participants commented on the lake; Pleasant Hill participants commented on the proximity of park spaces to schools and how this affects their park use). Although a number of subcategory components are similar across both neighbourhood types, each subcategory is discussed here in reference to the specific neighbourhood in order to

address the main research question: how do urban residents living in neighbourhoods of differing SES view their neighbourhood parks? The themes captured in each subcategory are those that emerged from the interview transcripts through the coding procedures as described in Chapter 3.

4.2 Pleasant Hill park characteristics and sub-categories

Six subcategories of park characteristics emerged from the coding rounds of interviews from the twelve Pleasant Hill participants, namely features and facilities, need for parks programming, condition of park spaces, accessibility issues, aesthetics of park spaces and safety within park spaces. Park perceptions of both park users and non-users are included in the results and subsequent discussion of the subcategories.

4.2.1 Features and facilities

Pleasant Hill participants who did not use their neighbourhood parks (n=2) cited two reasons for not accessing neighbourhood parks: first is the reported presence of illicit and/or the threatening behaviour of other park users, which is discussed further in Section 4.2.5 “Safety within Park Spaces”; second is the avoidance of socializing with others from the neighbourhood. One participant characterizes the residents of the neighbourhood as a negative influence on children. The participant goes on to explain why park spaces in Pleasant Hill are avoided, stating:

No, we do not use neighbourhood parks; we simply do not go because I do not want [my child] to associate with those kids. *Neighbourhood kids?* Yes and I do not want [the child] exposed to crime and drugs. I mean I have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time but I still feel uncomfortable exposing a child to such bad influences.

Even though this participant avoided the use of neighbourhood park spaces, other park spaces within the city are used so that the participant’s child had an opportunity to engage in recreational activities. Likewise, another participant stated that s/he does not access neighbourhood parks within Pleasant Hill but does go outside the neighbourhood to access park spaces. When asked why s/he did not access their own neighbourhood’s parks, s/he replied:

Well that was one of the things; the parks are not safe because of the gangs in them. *And did you feel unsafe regardless the time of day?* Yeah it was about the same because you never know when somebody is going to be there and when they aren't. So it is better to go other places.

There were more reported users of park spaces than non-users (10 versus 2), and those participants who routinely used their neighbourhood park spaces had a positive outlook, tempered with an acceptance of the presence of deviant behaviour¹⁹ and/or illicit activities (i.e., drug use and gang activity) that may be present within the park spaces during certain times of the day. Users adapted their routines of accessing park spaces so that they avoided contact with such persons engaging in illicit activities. Examples of this modification of behaviour are discussed further in Section 4.2.4.

There were a number of park features (e.g., lighting) and facilities (e.g., benches) that impeded or aided participants use of their neighbourhood park spaces. Tied to the features and facilities of the park spaces were the participants' perception that engaging in activities (whether it be active or passive) had benefits associated with their physical, mental or social well-being. For example, one participant commented that: "it's soothing looking out on the park and it I think most people who live on this street are really upbeat because of that. I think they feel calm in this space and they are very friendly". Other participants commented as follows:

[Parks] provide mental health. People in the community need breathing space. Beyond mental health, it provides opportunities for physical activity, calorie-burning exercise on some level usually. First mental, second physical health.

~

They are there [the parks] and their purpose is to keep people occupied in their leisure time and to keep them off the streets. They serve a good purpose.

~

Yeah I like the fresh air, getting out and I do get tense and depressed about my [child]...getting out there helps with that.

Those individuals that use their park spaces perceive parks as places in which participants could engage in active (physical) and passive activities (Figure 4.3). The park space provided participants a venue to be active, to relax and to enjoy being

¹⁹ (Naiman, 1997) defines deviance as a means in which the dominant society creates norms, which act as a control measure over a sector of population.

surrounded by trees and grass or engage in visiting with people in the parks. Informal visiting with others in the park was seen by one participant as a means to create an atmosphere of trust, which aids in the formation of social networks. The participant states:

I think parks are something that increases livability because it is a neutral setting. It's not like having somebody come into my house and being judged because you have to have everything so clean or whatever. In parks people are on even grounds and you have a chance to meet your neighbours and that.

When asked if the participants greeted strangers that they encounter in their neighbourhood parks 25% said that they always greeted strangers, whereas 58% that they sometimes greeted strangers and 17% of the participants said that they never engaged in greeting strangers. A neighbourhood park as a venue to meet with other residents from the neighbourhood is important because researchers found that “park-like public spaces encourage residents to leave the isolation of their apartments, socialize with one another, and form lasting ties” (Walker, 2004; 3)

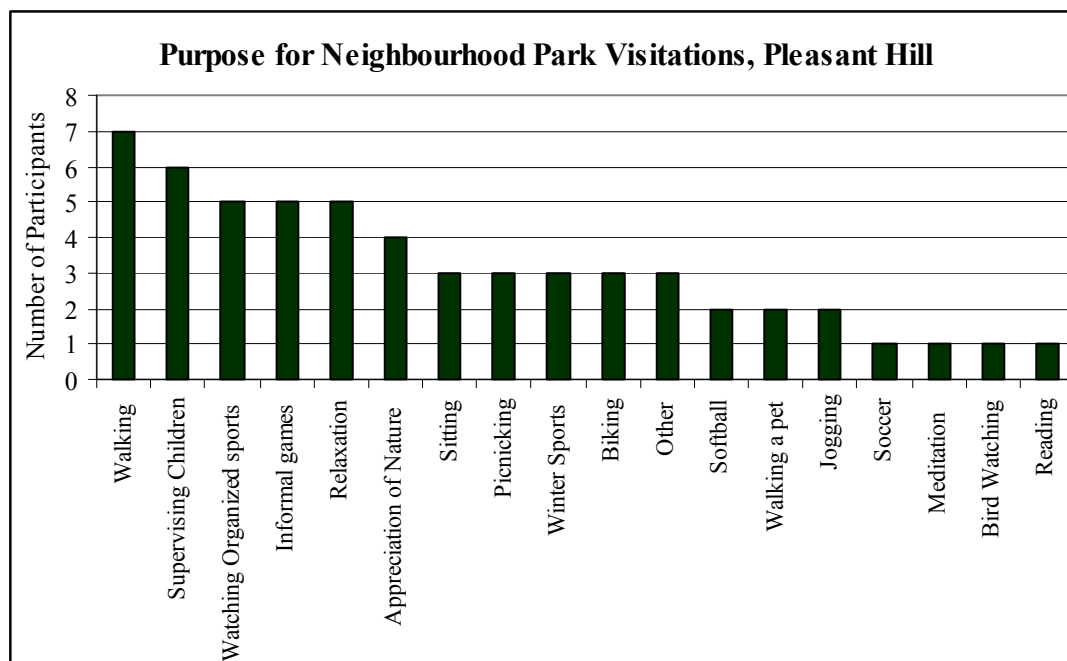


Figure 4.3: Pleasant Hill participant’s purpose for park visitations in at their neighbourhood parks

In terms of physical activities, walking was the most popular park activity reported by participants within Pleasant Hill (n=10 or, 83%). This is consistent with previous

studies that have shown walking to be one of the most common active recreation pastimes for adults (Freestone and Nicols, 2004). Related research in the fields of epidemiology (e.g., Corburn, 2002), urban planning (e.g., Northridge et al., 2001) and park design (e.g., Francis, 2003) further acknowledge that: i) walking generates a positive impact on resident's biophysical health; ii) walking also helps to restore cognitive abilities; and ii) the more that residents engage in activities in their neighbourhoods the more likely are those residents to feel a part of their neighbourhoods (Bedino et al., 2005; Henderson and Bialeschki, 2005; Ward Thompson, 2002; Greenhalgh and Warpole, 1995).

Within the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood, park spaces are used in different ways. For example, the relatively large Fred Mendel Park is used as a venue for walking (n=3) whereas the relatively smaller D.L. Hamilton and Pleasant Hill Parks were seen as a destination for walking (n=4), i.e., participants said that they would walk to the park then rest in the park and walk home again. The use of park facilities such as benches and picnic tables allowed participants with chronic health conditions (n=2) a respite from activity and an opportunity to rest. Such participants were reluctant to access those park spaces deficient in these facilities. For example, one participant stated:

I think seating is a big thing because I have arthritis in my leg if I walk someplace to read a book or sit and visit or whatever and walk back I can't do that if I have to stand all the time. I can't get up off the ground if I sit on the ground. I need help to get up. So, the lack of benches affects what park space I use. I think we have a lot of seniors too in our area that could use the park if there were more facilities like benches

Participants did note certain park spaces as being deficient in facilities (Pleasant Hill n = 2; Fred Mendel n = 4), thus influencing what park the participant would access. Examples of the deficiencies are poor quality playing fields, benches, sitting areas with shade cover and biking trails. Other park spaces, such as those adjacent to Pleasant Hill and St. Mary Elementary Schools, were accessed when school was dismissed because participants spoke of the perceived conflict between school and non-school users (see e.g., Naiman, 1997). Other active recreation activities that participants engaged in were informal games with others, and winter activities such as cross-country skiing.

One of the major structural components found in three of the five Pleasant Hill neighbourhood parks is ball diamonds. Yet only two out of the twelve participants²⁰ (17%) said that they used the diamonds – one of the two participants used the diamonds for informal use, and only one of the Pleasant Hill participants used the diamonds through organized league play. Although the focus of the park development has traditionally included ball diamonds, due in large part to the popularity of the sport in the 1960's through to the 1980's (Ellis and Nixon, 1986), a problem with such structures is that the space can only be used for a select number of sports (e.g. slow pitch, softball). Thus, relatively large amounts of park space are often designated for a specific use. As one Pleasant Hill participant states:

Smaller parks prohibit the use of the parks for either unorganized or organized sports because of the landscape features such as the small hills or knolls. Other structures such as soccer standards and ball diamonds impedes other sports, therefore pitches [sport fields] are for one sport only.

Although the presence of the ball diamonds do not impede activities such as walking, the structural components, for example backstops and playing fields, impede the use of the park for emerging sports such as ultimate Frisbee and disc golf. There was a participant who called for the “incorporation of unbiased pitches” (meaning a sport pitch which could accommodate multiple types of sports) in neighbourhood park spaces. The static nature of structural components, such as ball diamonds, points to a design feature of the park spaces that may not fulfill the current needs of the neighbourhood users. From the research, it was found that the majority of participants do not use the ball diamonds, yet the majority of participants did not call for their removal from the neighbourhood park spaces.

The second most common activity carried out in the park spaces by Pleasant Hill participants was supervision of young children using the park (n = 6). Given the design and components of the neighbourhood parks in Saskatoon (refer to Section 3.1), it is reasonable to assume that one of the primary uses of neighbourhood parks is for children's activity. This is important for a number of reasons. First is the concept of parks as playgrounds and that children who engage in public park activities tend to have

²⁰ The estimated age group for these participants is 35-50 years; out of the remaining nine participants from Pleasant Hill seven participants would be fall into age group 30-50 and the remaining two participants are 65+

better coping skills (i.e., better concentration and adaptation mechanisms) (Cohen et al., 2003), as opposed to those children who are not exposed to play situations (Veitch et al., 2006). Second, researchers have demonstrated in studies of access to park and green spaces that caregivers were much more likely to access green spaces in close proximity to their residence; hence making localized park spaces, which incorporate age appropriate play structures and spaces designed for children, an important component of the urban landscape (Francis, 2003; Baum and Palmer, 2002; Cranz, 1982). That being said, specific comments about the play structures (e.g., age or design) were absent from participants in Pleasant Hill; perhaps implying that the needs of the children's play habits is met with current park infrastructure. It would be interesting to pursue park research with a study of children's perceptions of neighbourhood parks, as they seem to be one of the major users of the park spaces. One comment made in 45% of the Pleasant Hill interviews was the need for park spaces because of the amount of residential apartment units in the neighbourhood²¹. For example, one participant noted:

...there are a lot of apartments around here and which the kids are confined in so they have more energy ...so the parks allow them to run it off without doing any damage because they don't get to run in the apartment.

4.2.2 Programming

The issue of park programming emerged exclusively from interviews with participants from Pleasant Hill. Several participants (n = 5, or 42%) of participants called for the supervision of children playing in the park spaces. The idea of programming is to ensure supervision and engagement of children and youth in non-illicit activities based in the neighbourhood park spaces. During the summer season, the City of Saskatoon runs a playground program, which is heralded as a positive initiative because of the role of supervision. As one participant states in regards to the summertime playground program:

... that's why some of the parks get used as much as they do because there is organization like a safe environment for their kids to play in. And that park [Pleasant Hill] cleans right out after a certain time after those programs shut down because you know it's because the kids are not safe there.

²¹ 7.4 dwellings per acre (City of Saskatoon, 2002b)

Programming directed at adults was also suggested by participants (n = 3). The idea was that an informal league of pick-up ball games would facilitate the use of the ball fields and allow residents to get to know one another in an informal setting. The responsibility for programming was seen by participants to be a role of the City and of the Pleasant Hill Community Association. The community association does receive funding for programming; however, the focus of the programming is on indoor activities that run during the school year rather than outdoor activities during the summer months.

4.2.3 Conditions of Park Spaces in Pleasant Hill

The major cause for concern regarding the condition of the park spaces in Pleasant Hill was the amount of debris (e.g., litter, drug paraphernalia, and used condoms) found within the neighbourhood park spaces. In relation to debris, participants responded in one of two ways: first being a diminished sense of enjoyment of park spaces when the debris problem is perceived to be particularly bad (n = 8). This situation is described by one participant as follows:

I see things happening in the parks like you find needles, condoms, those types of things, and that detracts from the enjoyment of the park.

The second response is to exert some type of ownership over the park space by cleaning up the debris (n = 3); in other words, trying to control behaviour of other park users through modification of the park. Participants who carried out this behaviour expressed a sense of ownership and pride in maintaining the park spaces. For example, one participant stated:

I make a conscious effort when I am walking that I will have several bags with me and pick up trash. *Oh really so you don't feel any threat of picking up trash?* Nope it makes the park look better.... I also go especially in spring by the tracks and just pick up [after the people] so it's a little more attractive.

The acceptance of illicit activity within park spaces is common; however, some participants chose not to let such activity affect their perceptions of the park space. One participant, for example, demonstrated a sense of ownership of the park space through actions of regulating the space by monitoring and site clean up. As one participant commented:

I know at certain times there have been people doing drugs out along the tree line by the tracks ... [I] try to keep that area relatively clean and I think we have been rather successful.

Success in this instance is the prevention of the reoccurrence of the problem. Although drug paraphernalia was commonly cited as being present in park spaces (n = 7), participants did not call for more safe needle deposit boxes within the neighbourhood as a means to help curb the discarding of needles in park spaces.

The condition of the parks' grass cover was another area of concern for some participants (n = 3). As one participant observed: "the grass seems quiet worn down and it is not kept up". The quality of grass cover is a product of the age and the type of grasses present, coupled with the amount of foot traffic that takes place in neighbourhood park spaces (Francis, 2003). The amount of foot traffic is an important factor in the quality of turf. The amount of foot traffic that the grass is exposed to in certain Pleasant Hill parks is great because of the demand for what the park provides (that is a venue for children to play) far exceeds the amount of suitable play areas that are located within the neighbourhood. The condition of the grasses also affects the types of sports played in the park spaces. One participant commented "...the grass is not well kept from what I can see. So for sports ... the grass is no good and it's not very appealing in general, compared to other parks".



Figure 4.4: Grass Conditions in Pleasant Hill Park

This particular participant sees the problem as being a product of the lack of civic investment in the core neighbourhoods. The participant goes on to say that "...generally I am not impressed with the effort that the city has put in with the parks in Pleasant Hill in general. Maybe it was good to start with I don't know. It's a little short

on effort I think”. The notion that the city does not invest enough resources in maintaining neighbourhood park spaces appears, according to the respondents, to be evidenced by the poor condition of the grass and, in general, the diversity of vegetation cover (e.g., lack of trees and/or diversity in plant species) and overall differences in the physical quality of parks in the Westside versus the Eastside of Saskatoon. One participant stated:

I don't think it [the park contributes to the liveability of the neighbourhood] in this neighbourhood. *Why?* I don't think they are well enough used due to poor lighting and gangs. I work all over the city and I see parks like in Briarwood and Erindale all those types of areas. *And you see a marked difference?* Oh yeah, big difference between Eastside and Westside. At least out here there is.

Notwithstanding these concerns, 63% of participants in Pleasant Hill expressed appreciation of having a space within their urban landscape that was open and in relief to the concrete structures of the surrounding built environment. Proximity of parks to households seemed to play a role in the comments as two of the participants who lived closest to their respective parks commented on the parks as “being an extension of my backyard” and one of the participants, when asked what the benefit of having a kitchen that is facing the park, stated:

Oh yes, the view is a bonus. I never realized how good it felt [to look out over the park] until we went to neighbourhoods that was a lot more confined and you just did not look out. And in the change of the seasons, the trees are beautiful. The frost on the trees in the winter is very nice to look at.

The important component of the aesthetics of the park spaces was expressed by participants in terms of the “open space” that parks provide. When asked how the park spaces in Pleasant Hill contribute to the livability to the neighbourhood participants made the following responses

First, it [park spaces] gives you more freedom. A freedom of where there is a space where there is no one else because the park is not a crowded park and you can walk several blocks without meeting anybody. You know it kind of clears your head.

~

Yeah. Just having them present, I feel mentally healthier to know that there is open space.

~

I would say just the feeling of space. ... Openness yeah and the restfulness of large trees, well cut grass, it's just—it almost has a sort of country feeling. *And it's nice that you can get that in an urban centre?* I think so.

The notion that aesthetically pleasing open space has a psychological benefit to residents is not a new concept. There is a body of literature in environmental psychology (e.g., see Korpela and Ylen, 2006; Garling, 1998; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) in terms of how certain settings affect an individual's ability to recover or restore their restorative attention²². The setting for such a place, however, is typically thought to be of greatest benefit if geographically removed from the individual's everyday setting and if the individual is in such a place for an extended period; thus making such settings perhaps difficult to access for many due to time or financial constraints. Investigation of the impact of open space in an urban setting as a restorative environment is lacking; this is an important area to explore because of the proximity and availability of individuals to access civic park spaces that may provide similar results to those gained from an extended journey away from home.

4.2.4 Accessibility issues in Pleasant Hill

Accessibility issues include what time of day participants use the neighbourhood park spaces and seasonality of use. Accessibility issues also include participants' access to neighbourhood parks and the barriers (both physical and policy-related) to access. Seasonality seems to have a strong influence on what time of year participants access neighbourhood parks spaces. Only 17% of participants (n = 2) reported use of their neighbourhood park spaces during the winter season; whereas 83% (n = 10) of participants reported use during the summer. 75% of participants reported use of their neighbourhood parks in the spring; during the fall, 33% of participants reported using park spaces. Although it makes sense that most people would not seek to pursue outdoor activities at minus 20°C, it would be interesting to explore what type of recreation activities are carried out during the months of October to April.

²² Restorative environment as outlined by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) has four tenets: i) is the withdrawal from an everyday setting (such as the city of residence); ii) is connectedness and scope which provides the person with a sense of being within the new (away) setting; iii) is the presence of fascination in the new surrounding so that involuntary attention is used as opposed to directed attention; and, iv) some type of action and compatibility results from the person being in the new setting.

44% of the participants accessed neighbourhood park spaces primarily after 5pm, due to engagement in nine-to-five employment. 38% of participants said that they accessed the park spaces between 11am and 5pm; 13% typically accessed the park spaces before 11am, and the remaining 5% stated no preferred time. The timing of when neighbourhood residents access park spaces has an importance for design considerations. For example, because the marked shorter day length of fall and the first half of winter, there may be a need to install more lighting features. In addition, design features such as ice rinks or tobogganing hills may increase the use of neighbourhood parks. One of the most important design features in an urban park is the relationship between the vegetation cover and the safety of the park user. Typically, park vegetation has to be designed so that the park user is not put at risk of encountering illicit activity.

92% of participants (n = 11) said they walked to their neighbourhood parks. There have been many studies that advocate the need for local or neighbourhood-based leisure facilities (see e.g., Freestone and Nichols, 2004; Leyden, 2003; Micolás and Zumbo, 2003; Handy et al., 2002; Greenhalgh and Worpole, 1995). The proximity to the neighbourhood parks influenced which parks the participants accessed. For example, approximately 66% of participants in the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood said that they did not access Fred Mendel Park because of the distance to the park from their respective residence.

There are two additional types of accessibility barriers in Pleasant Hill parks as reported by participants. First is the issue of two of the neighbourhood parks adjoining elementary schools. The second is the issue of a private park space within the neighbourhood. The parks that adjoin the schools are thought to be off-limits during school hours because of the possible perception of deviant behaviour (i.e., a mature male/female in the proximity of children). While society perceives park spaces as affording the opportunity for adults to interact with children, there is a tension created when the school-adjacent park space is the only park space within walking distance and/or has certain features (e.g., benches) which allow the participant to use the park. The second accessibility issue is a unique case of a private park space included in the neighbourhood park inventory of the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood. The City of Saskatoon owns the land that comprises Steve Patola Park (a.k.a. St. George's Park), but the adjacent seniors centre (St. George's Senior Citizen's Centre) controls access to the

park via their building. Steve Patola Park is only accessible if a person is a member of the adjacent Senior citizen's centre. Other residents of the neighbourhood are not allowed to use the site by virtue of the chain-linked fence, which surrounds the park (Figure 4.4). As one participant commented:

I see Steve Patola Park and it doesn't seem accessible like- it's a lovely park and it would be a nice place to go, I think, to sit but with the fence around it doesn't seem accessible it's like just for the seniors... You never see anybody in there using it [the park]. It's a beautiful park like it's the nicest one in the neighbourhood and its well taken care of whereas some of the other ones they aren't taken care of as good.

In terms of accessibility issues, Pleasant Hill participants encounter barriers to accessing park spaces given the time of day that they want to use the park space and the ability to access all the civically funded neighbourhood park spaces within Pleasant Hill.



Figure 4.5: Steve Patola Park (View from 20th Street West)



Figure 4.6: Steve Patola Park (View from Ave M South)

4.2.5 Safety concerns within park spaces in Pleasant Hill

Participants report avoiding the park spaces during certain hours because of the perceived threat of illicit activities known to take place in their neighbourhood parks. Participants acknowledge the risks in one of three ways: first, there were those participants who conceded that there was illicit activity, but used the park spaces when they considered the parks safe. As one-participant states: “In the daytime as an adult I feel very safe in Mendel Park”. When this participant was asked about going to the park at nighttime their response was: “Well I think its just common sense I don’t go out alone at night in a park and that is in any park”. Similarly, others stated:

Well I feel free to move around in the park without danger. Now I am not a fool I wouldn’t be wandering out there at midnight because I know at certain times there have been people doing drugs ... [but] we try to keep that relatively clear and I think we have been rather successful.

~

There is an almost unwritten rule in the park; that is the kids can use the park safely in the daytime and as soon as supper hits you have to take your kids home because that’s when the gangs come out.

~

I think [parks] make neighbours neighbours. By that, I mean that two people can live up the same block or in the same area and not know each other and you become very isolated which can make you feel less than secure. I think if you have a chance to meet people and get to know them they become your neighbours and there is a feeling of well-being. I don’t

know if protection is the right word but you know there is a feeling of having somebody out there that will stand up for you...

Although the above participants (n = 3) do use their neighbourhood park spaces, they have to modify their daily routines in order to do so. The age of the participants strongly affects the individual's ability to use the park in the daytime, as most individuals aged 19-65 are engaged in some sort of employment that occurs during 9:00 am to 6:00 pm thus effectively limiting the time that can be spent in the park relatively free from the threat of illicit activities. The preceding participant quotation illustrates the importance of forming social networks within the neighbourhood, which can in turn create a sense of belonging and security. Neighbourhood parks in this participant's case facilitated the social networking.

Second, other participants conceded that the perception of safety is a product of the individual's experience. The following passages illustrate this:

I feel a bit apprehensive to go to the parks in the evening especially on my own just because I do not know a lot of people in the area. *Was visiting parks at night a typical thing that you used to do?* Not common but I would feel comfortable going for a walk after dark. Now I am not and it has to do with lighting but also it has to do with my own comfort level because I am not as sure with the area; so as my comfort increases that may change.

~

For whatever reason I am not all that comfortable and if it starts to get dark I head for home. *Do you feel comfortable walking through the streets of your neighbourhood?* It may not be well grounded but no, I do not since I have moved there I have been walking a lot less.

~

I am hearing stories about people in the park doing drugs and stuff at night so I hesitate to go [to the park] after dark. I usually go with my dog just because I don't feel safe.

~

Having some trees [in the parks] is good but too many trees especially at night are bad [because] you never know who is hiding.

Third were those participants (n = 2) who stated that they never felt safe in the parks and therefore did not use their neighbourhood park spaces. Examples of how such participants characterized the parks found within Pleasant Hill were discussed previously in Section 4.2.1. Both of the participants in this category are self-identified as non-users of neighbourhood parks in Pleasant Hill.

In all participant interviews, participants had resigned themselves to the fact that illicit activities were commonplace in the neighbourhood and the parks in Pleasant Hill (with the exception of Steve Patola Park). One caveat to the discussion around safety issues is that none of the participants shared personal experiences of witnessing illicit activity or spoke of recent occurrences of assaults or gang activities. The two participants who spoke of taking a proactive approach to their parks spaces (i.e., picking up debris and/or being a part of citizen's patrol groups) tended to express less concern about the potential for threatening behaviour and more about affecting positive change through action which curbs or prevents others activities. When participants were asked how the park could better serve their needs, four out of the twelve participants said that the parks needed better lighting - not for their own personal use at night, but as a means to curb illicit activities. In summary, the perceived threat from illicit activity is strong in the neighbourhood parks of Pleasant Hill and participants called for structural amendments (e.g., lighting and suitable vegetation cover) to park spaces in order to increase the perceived level of safety.

4.2.6 Overview of the Pleasant Hill Participant's perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces

All of the participants from Pleasant Hill said that they used some sort of park space within the City of Saskatoon within the past year. 83% of participants said that they accessed neighbourhood park spaces within Pleasant Hill, and 70% of these participants said that they used the park spaces on a regular basis in the spring and summer and less frequently in the fall and winter. The participants associated the neighbourhood park spaces with many different active and passive recreation activities. These activities all have some sort of benefit to the participants as it is unlikely that the participants would carry out such activities simply for the sake of doing so. Participants made associations between activities carried out in their neighbourhood park spaces and the contributions of such activities to their lives. Perceptions of neighbourhood parks were strongly associated with neighbourhood characteristics such as the presence of gangs, needles, condoms and other forms of debris. Even though the participants who used their neighbourhood parks in Pleasant Hill acknowledge that the neighbourhood park spaces are venues for illicit activities such as prostitution and drug-use, the participants avoided such activities through accessing the parks during certain times of

the day. Neighbourhood park spaces were perceived to have benefits to the residents of Pleasant Hill by being a space where people can use the space to engage in positive behaviours that benefit individual physical and mental health.

4.3 Park characteristics subcategories found in Briarwood

Four sub-categories emerged from the coding rounds of the interview transcriptions from the nine Briarwood participants. The sub-categories are features and facilities, condition of park spaces, accessibility issues, and safety concerns within the park spaces. For the purpose of this research, the main park in Briarwood will be referred to as Briarwood Park; the park surrounding the pond will be referred as the pond park; and the park linking the two will be referred to as the linear park (see Figure 3.7 for map of Briarwood).

4.3.1 Features and facilities in Briarwood neighbourhood park spaces

Due to the relatively young age of the neighbourhood park spaces in Briarwood,²³ the consensus from the Briarwood participants was that the park spaces are getting better with time due to the maturing plant cover and the development of features such as playgrounds and benches. There was much enthusiasm expressed by those participants who had young children (six and under) in their households regarding the spray park that was slated to begin development in spring of 2005. A unique feature in the Briarwood neighbourhood, when compared to Pleasant Hill, is that there are no schools. Adjacent to Briarwood Park, there are empty lots where the two school divisions in Saskatoon were slated to build their respective schools²⁴. Participants in Briarwood commonly held the perception that Briarwood Park is much larger than it actually is due to the empty school lots bordering the park. It would be interesting to see the reaction of Briarwood residents when the said lots are developed.

Age appropriate park features are an important element in Briarwood Park for the participants. For example, one participant commented that: “I think it is has a really nice playground for kids. It is age appropriate for my kids” and “they [parks] are good

²³ The main era of development of the neighbourhood occurred after 1991 and is still on going on the eastern and southeast boundary of the neighbourhood. In addition, through out the neighbourhood there are vacant lots.

²⁴ The school lots were designated as such by the City of Saskatoon during the development of the Briarwood neighbourhood; subsequently the school boards decided against building schools in the neighbourhood. The school lots have been turned over to a private developer.

for the community and obviously benefit my young family”. In contrast, one participant commented that “if my kids were younger I would have taken them to the park but they are too old”; another participant stated that even though their younger child enjoys the park’s playground structure, the participant’s older child was “bored” in the park and the participant thought that the park would better suit the family’s needs if there were play structures designed for older children (e.g., ages 10+), as well as for younger children. Another participant commented on the lack of features in the park for teens and wondered, “Why wouldn’t [the developers and planners] use the fill from excavating [housing sites] so that you could sort of build up a hill [for the kids to snowboard on]”. The call for age appropriate features by the participants highlights an important aspect in the features found in the neighbourhood parks within Saskatoon. The features are designed to suit the needs of families and young children. When one of the key informants interviewed during this research was asked about the definition of “families”, s/he conceded that the focus of development is on families who have young children, ages eight and under. As the demographics of the neighbourhood shift, however, it would be interesting to revisit the participants to see if this shift affects the participant’s perspectives on the park features and on the neighbourhood parks in general.

In addition to the playground and the proposed spray park development, there are three major structural features found within the Briarwood Park: a ball diamond, a soccer field, and a basketball court. Two of the nine participants said that they have used the ball diamond for informal games with their family members; only one participant reported to have used the basketball court (for rollerblading); three of the participants mentioned that they had used the soccer pitch. The presence of the playing fields is a source of tension for some of the participants interviewed. For example, one participant stated:

The soccer field brings in people from other neighbourhoods, which sometimes is a minus. I, mean it is like the city designed the park so that other neighbourhoods benefit from our park [spaces].

The above participant resented people from other neighbourhoods using Briarwood Park for league play because in her/his opinion the park space was meeting the needs of others rather than meeting the needs of her/his family due to the lack of age appropriate features. However, one of the purposes of the neighbourhood parks in Saskatoon is to

accommodate intra-neighbourhood league play for children aged 13 and under. Whereas soccer is the most popular sport for children under 13, there are t-ball and softball leagues for young children; however, the Briarwood Community Association does not participate in ball leagues. When a civic official was asked why the ball diamond was built in Briarwood Park, given that the park is relatively new and the sports related to the diamond are declining in numbers, the official replied that it was keeping with civic policy regarding neighbourhood park features. As with the Pleasant Hill case, the notion of static structures and changing park use and neighbourhood demographics are at issue.

Even though the neighbourhood park spaces in Briarwood are appreciated, there is not a strong sense of ownership over the park space emanating from the Briarwood participants. For example, in contrast to Pleasant Hill, the participants did not express any notions of ownership through taking action to prevent other park users behaviour; related to this is that only two participants expressed their thoughts in terms of the neighbourhood park spaces as “their own” or as “my park”, as some participants did in Pleasant Hill. The park spaces in Briarwood are perceived as a venue for “visiting”, “meeting other parents”, “physical activity” and as a “magnet... fun and peaceful and beautiful” component for the community. The pond park and Briarwood Park are used for Community Association celebrations. For example, a summer barbeque and a winter carnival serve as a means to bring the neighbourhood residents together. These activities typically occur in the parks due to the lack of school infrastructure adjacent to and within the neighbourhood (i.e., there is not a gymnasium where people can gather). On several occasions the participants commented on the social realm of visiting and getting to know your neighbour in the park spaces in Briarwood. For example:

Neighbourhood parks are really important because I think they become a hub for the community and I think they are an awesome release for the children.

~

It is a great place to go when you are new to the neighbourhood. *Do you find that you can network with other parents at the playground?* Yes.

~

Oh yes, I would say the parks add to the neighbourhood due to the fact that we often have our Community Association events in the parks. Either they are held along the lake or over on that ball courts; so I would say yes it kind of a gathering place even without any buildings.

~
I think the park also provides a spot for Moms to get to know each other and talk about things – being a mother can be a very lonely thing. Well it obviously increases opportunities for socializing and interaction with meeting neighbours and meeting new residents.

~
In a social sense, it [having a neighbourhood park] helps to build community.

~
You know it gives another outlet for the kids and something else to do for yourself and it's a place to meet other people. It is a great place to go when you are new to the neighbourhood.

There was only one non park-user amongst the participants interviewed in Briarwood. The reasons given for being a non-user was that the participant felt that other park users were disrespectful and that because of the participant's work schedule s/he could not access the park spaces during the daytime. On the occasions when the participant did access the neighbourhood park spaces after dark, the participant expressed concerns over personal safety due to the lack of lighting along the walking paths and the presence of gangs of teenagers. Overall, however, Briarwood participants reflected a positive outlook on the neighbourhood park spaces.

The various types of activities that participants used their park spaces for is shown in Figure 4.7

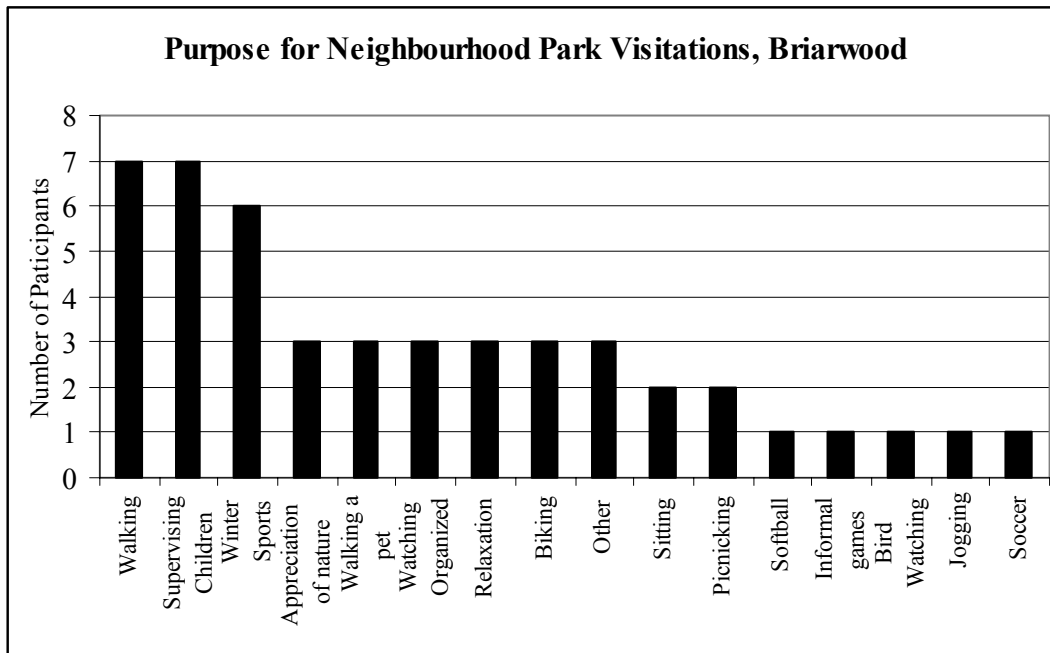


Figure 4.7: Briarwood participants purpose for park visitations in at their neighbourhood parks

The two most common activities are typical of what is found Pleasant Hill. Supervising children at play is not a surprising activity given that five of the nine participants had young children in their households. Again, household demographics/characteristics influence how participants interpret their neighbourhood park spaces.

4.3.2 Conditions of park spaces in Briarwood

The neighbourhood parks found in Briarwood were developed from 1995 to present. Participants commented that the park spaces have “gotten better because the landscaping is maturing”; and that, “I [a participant] am drawn to the park for its amenities and the great job the city has done with developing it”. The relatively young age of the plant cover and design features, influence the participants’ perceptions of their park spaces. For example, the following passage is taken from a participant who had a positive opinion about the changes in the neighbourhood park spaces from the time when s/he moved to the neighbourhood to present:

I think they have done a good job with landscaping and providing some variation in the landscape like those little hills and knolls here and there. Some of the raised areas for shrubs and trees are much appreciated because when we first got here it was all totally flat.

The concept of alternating the landscape by the incorporation of design features such as the hills and knolls, allows an idealized landscape to be created even though the naturally occurring landscape (i.e., before the housing developments occurred) would be very different. A participant who jogs in the neighbourhood park spaces commented:

I feel because they [the Parks department] made the landscape curvy it is good because it is more like nature when you run on path that is winding it is a distraction from the urban environment. I am busy so time is a concern but when I get out I think I need to do this every day because I enjoy being in the park so much.

The notion of neighbourhood parks representing nature is a contested idea in the literature, and some researchers contend that parks are simply a means to symbolically represent an idealized form of nature; an area that is controlled via landscape design and in the sense that the park serves a purpose and the purpose or most basic function of the park is to facilitate activities. Moreover, through the facilitation of activities, park users actions and behaviours are somewhat controlled by designed features.²⁵ As a participant in Briarwood stated:

I think the other thing that the park does is that it [provides] green spaces; granted that it is all cultivated monoculture but you know they [park designers] are beginning to get more of a variety of plants in and so that has been appreciated.

The purpose of the design of the Briarwood parks is to meet the needs of the targeted user groups – in the case of neighbourhood parks – families with children, inter-neighbourhood league for ages 13 and under, and for the informal recreational use of others (including teens and adults). In addition, having a space within the parks that are left to nature (i.e., no regular mowing or watering) or turned back into native plant covers may not suit the needs of park users. As one-participant states:

I think what bugs me is going through the dead disgusting, flat area before you get to the park²⁶. I don't know what they are planning to do there. That whole space is gross. With little kids and the pets you can't walk through there without getting scratched or poked or whatever. It is a nice shortcut so maybe they could develop paths or something so you don't have to walk around.

²⁵ For a review of park practices that control behaviours see e.g.,: Francis, 2003; Rodenburg et al., 2002; Cranz, 1984.

²⁶ This area of the neighbourhood is a part of the undeveloped school lots and is covered with naturally occurring vegetation cover that would typically occur on any disturbed site in the region.

In other words, in order for the park to be functional for this participant the park must not be challenging in terms of access or in terms of negative impacts on the experience so that nature should not get in the way of enjoyment.

The idea of open spaces is associated with the parks spaces found in Briarwood. Participants spoke of the need for open spaces because the lot size of their residential property or the design of the gated community in which they live is not accommodating to the different types of activities that they wish to carry out with their children. As one participant stated: “nowadays you can’t even get a decent sized backyard; we can’t even play catch in our backyard with our children” thus, this participant likens the park space as an “extension of their backyard even though the two spaces are not joined”. A participant who lives in a gated community within Briarwood commented, “the grandkids make too much noise to have them running around in the compound” therefore, the participant uses Briarwood Park as a venue to engage in activities with their grandchildren rather than using their shared property.

One participant spoke of the value they put on having a view of the park from his/her kitchen window. The participant spoke of the desire to be in the park but due to their role in the household as a caregiver they could not go to the park on a regular basis. The participant sums up their appreciation of the park by stating:

Right now, all I can do is to look at the park through my kitchen window, which is nice because it is enjoyable to look at the trees and the kids playing in the park. It makes you feel like you belong even though you are not actively participating in activities.

Other participants commented

Driving by the park makes me want to be there. I very much enjoy myself going to the park just to be out of the house, get out of the buildings for the day. Like to me, I almost long to go there just to gain balance in my day I guess.

~

I think it nice to see the grass and trees instead of concrete.

One unique feature of the park space in Briarwood, when compared to Pleasant Hill, is the presence of a storm water lake, which serves as one the focal points of the neighbourhood. The lake is essentially a storm water-holding developed on a previously existing seasonal slough (Figures 4.8 and 4.9). The features of the park include a shale pathway that runs on the west side of the pond, and various benches along the grass

adjoining the walkway. Three participants commented that it would be nice if the pathway went around the pond. However, the properties that back directly onto to pond's shoreline are amongst the most expensive real estate in Saskatoon²⁷; a completed pathway is not likely in the future.



Figure 4.8: Briarwood Lake Park



Figure 4.9: “Waterfall” emptying into Briarwood Lake Park

Two participants talked about how having the pond added a valuable dimension to the neighbourhood in that the water attracts waterfowl and songbirds. Only one participant from Briarwood actively uses the pond in the summer months (for boating). The focus of the actual use of the water surface is in the winter months when the Briarwood Community Association clears the ice off for a skating surface; however contrary the warning signs posted in the park. The community association's disregard of the warning signs posted in the park had one participant stating that:

²⁷ Prices according to Saskatoon Real Estate Board, 2006.

They [the community association] have the skating on the lake which is bad because there are signs up around the lake saying to stay off and out of the water at all times of the year. Yet [they] scrape off the ice so I do not know (*sounds flustered*). I mean when my kids were younger and other kids were skating on the lake I would say [to my kids] I do not think it has been cold enough long enough. The lake is a nice place to have a skating area but it would seem to me that building a safe rink in the [main] park would be a better choice.

Skating on the lake was the third most popular activity that participants engaged in the park. No other participant voiced concerns over the disregard of the authority of Saskatoon Protective Services. The winter use of the pond is an interesting case of Saskatoon Protective Services condoning the actions of the community association through not enforcing their posted policies. A participant who had previously lived in neighbourhood with a lake they described as “functional” made some interesting comments regarding their perceptions of the pond in Briarwood. The participant labelled the pond as “eye candy” and that:

In this neighbourhood, they [participant’s kids] do not understand why we have a lake here with a lot of rocks around it and they cannot do anything in the lake. So they get their sand time in the park but you cannot build sandcastles at the main [Briarwood] park because there is no water to make the sand wet. So, it has been an adjustment to this kind of park.

The participant equates the lack of functionality (i.e., ability to swim in the lake, or access to on-site non-motorized vessels) with the pond space as not contributing to the utility of park spaces in Briarwood.

Restorative environments literature includes various studies that confirm the tendency of individual’s preference for looking at water for its’ calming properties on the human mind (e.g., see Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). No one in the Briarwood participant group commented on this quality being a part of their park experience. Another component that was not commented on by participants was the lack of plant cover along the shoreline. The lack of naturally occurring plant cover around the pond can be linked back to the maintaining the park landscape in a prescribed manner versus a naturally occurring manner.

4.3.3 Accessibility issues in Briarwood

Participants in Briarwood identified three overarching issues related to the accessibility of their park spaces. First, participants stated there were issues within their household (i.e., people who had infants in their care or had an infirmed household member) that prevented the participants from using the Briarwood park spaces. Second, there is the issue of when a park could be accessed given the participant's work schedule. For example, those who worked during the day stated that they hesitated to use the park spaces at night because of the perceived threat of "gangs" (participant's words) in Briarwood Park. The participant who raised this concern stated, "I do not know why in this day and age with safety concern the way they are that anybody would build a park without installing proper lighting - it should be a high priority in this day and age". Third are the issues of accessibility and the proximity of neighbourhood park spaces to the participant's residence. For example:

One of the reasons why we bought this house because we are so close to the park, we have children, and we have great access to it. *Do you feel that it adds value to your house?* Very much so.

~

Proximity to the park is good for resale values property values and I get a sense of well-being you know being near to a green space [because] you know that you are not surrounded by development and concrete.

~

[The park] gives us a nice view and increases resale values; it also brings neighbours together and it allows people to get exercise when they want without having to travel any great distance

Parks literature confirms that the proximity of park spaces to an individual's residence influences the frequency of park visitations. For example, Coen and Ross, 2006; Giles-Corti and Donovan, 2002; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995 discuss the need for localized open spaces. Open spaces that are within walking distance are thought to provide an opportunity for residents to access passive and active recreation opportunities without having to extensively planning or travelling in order to gain some benefit vis-à-vis (whether it be physical or mental health) the land-use regime of the urban/suburban area. The largest park in the neighbourhood (Briarwood Park) is centrally located and allows for relatively easy access for all residents in the neighbourhood, thus contributing to the overall ease of accessing the park space. Forsyth (2003:5) comments that "for daily use

[of park spaces] distance matters”. Similarly, authors Van Herzele and Wiedemann (2003) found that the distance of one’s resident to a particular park space had a positive influence on the frequency of visits to a park by individuals. Participants in Briarwood did not speak about distance from their residences to their neighbourhood parks preventing them from using their neighbourhood parks; 82% of participants did comment that living close to a park meant that they visited the park spaces often. Overall distance to neighbourhood park spaces within Briarwood was not a limiting factor in the frequency of neighbourhood park visitations. 75% of participants said that they went to their neighbourhood park spaces an average of three times per week, and the seasonal decline in park usage during the winter months was less in comparison to Pleasant Hill; 85% of participants said that they used the pond area for skating.

4.3.5 Safety concerns within park spaces in Briarwood

In comparison to the tone of the Pleasant Hill participants, the majority (n = 7) of Briarwood participants spoke of their park spaces as being safe and secure. There were two notable exceptions, both of which speak to the changes in the perceptions of Briarwood park spaces after dark.

Well for example, I am very cautious about using both of the parks when it is dark. And I have seen gangs in the park; one can only assume that there would be activity that would not be pleasant. I have seen the police in the neighbourhood at night moving around so they are obviously chasing them.

~

My perception of safety in the park has gotten worse because of the activity of the older kids. I am not as trusting anymore I wouldn’t use the park after dark because a neighbour had a bad incident. A young guy followed her one night, so we stay out of the parks at night. So in the evenings we stay on the lighted sidewalks. *Is there any a CA watch program?* No, there was talk about it. *Do you think it is because the youth in the neighbourhood do not have enough to do?* They are bored and too much money absolutely.

The idea that the people who are causing the problems are members of the neighbourhood is confirmed by people who deal with civic-based programming and Protective Services for the neighbourhood. Again, the park is not meeting the needs of either group because of the lack of co-existence within the park space.

4.3.6 Overview of Briarwood Participant's perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces

All but one of the participants who reside in Briarwood used their neighbourhood parks. The main purpose of accessing and using the park spaces was to allow children residing in their household a venue for recreation, and the benefits of using such a venue is three-fold: first it allows their children to engage in recreational activities (often with the children's peers); second the park is a venue away from the household; and third, since the neighbourhood parks are found in proximity to their households, the participants are able to engage in walking to the park which increases the amount of exercise the participants engage in. Another benefit of accessing the park space is that informal social networks can develop between persons who may not reside in proximity to each other. Activities carried out in the neighbourhood park spaces were similar to those carried out in Pleasant Hill (e.g., walking and supervision of children), as were the perceived benefits (Table 4.) with the exception of those Briarwood residents who listed skating as a typical park activity. Participants made no mention of debris in Briarwood parks (e.g., needles and condoms), which cause safety concerns.

In Briarwood there was reporting of threatening behaviour of fellow park users, however, the majority of participants stated that they feel safe within their neighbourhood parks. A note of caution has to be said in that the majority of participants accessed the parks in Briarwood during daylight, because given their employment status they could, whereas those who accessed the park spaces at night time had varying opinions on their perceived safety within the park. Overall, participants in Briarwood spoke of the neighbourhood park spaces as being an important component of the neighbourhood due to the amenities and landscaping found within the neighbourhood park spaces in Briarwood.

4.4 Synthesis of neighbourhood park perceptions found across both SES neighbourhood types

Participants across both SES neighbourhood types held similar perceptions of their respective neighbourhood parks. If the participants' perceptions of the park spaces were positive then the participants made a link between using the park and a positive impact on their physical and/or psychological health and/or social networking. If the

participants held a negative perception of their respective neighbourhood parks, they conceded that there were other park spaces within Saskatoon that they accessed and benefited from. The non-park users reasons given for not using neighbourhood parks included the presence of illicit activities or the lack of safety features such as lighting.

Across both SES neighbourhoods, participants who used their neighbourhood park spaces described their neighbourhood parks in terms of the structural or the functional aspects that the park served in their life. In addition, the participants described their neighbourhood parks as a product of neighbourhood-level characteristics (e.g., demographics and age of development). It was common that participants made a positive association between their use of their neighbourhood parks and their QOL. The positive associations stemmed from the physical and/or mental health benefit that was associated with accessing the park spaces within the neighbourhoods. Through accessing and using their neighbourhood park spaces participants stated that they benefited because the park offered them a venue in which they, and others, could engage in active and/or passive recreational activities, which the participants positively linked to their physical and/or mental health.

The positive experience of the park is associated with four factors: i) presence of age appropriate structures and facilities; ii) the ease of accessing neighbourhood park spaces; iii) the ability to access the neighbourhood parks spaces during a time of day when participants feel comfortable; iv) the appreciation of the neighbourhood park space in relief to the other components of the urban built environment. There was a strong connection between the perception of the park spaces and the age structure of the participants' households. Those participants with young children who either live in their household or who frequently visit their households speak in positive terms regarding the neighbourhood park spaces because the recreational needs of the children are met through the structural components of the parks found within their respective neighbourhoods. Whereas those participants who had older children (ages 12+) or wanted to use the park for a specific type of recreation (e.g., rollerblading) stated that their neighbourhood park spaces did not meet their needs and as a result, other parks spaces within Saskatoon were accessed.

The ease of access influences which park spaces are accessed within the neighbourhood and the frequency of park use. The ease of access strongly affected two

groups: those with infants and toddlers, and those participants who suffered from a physical or health condition which prevent them from walking long distances. The participants with small children enjoyed easy access to the parks as their residences were within a couple of blocks of their neighbourhood parks and there were trails that facilitated the movement of infants in a stroller. In the case of those participants who had some sort of restricted mobility or health condition, their choice of parks was based on their ability to walk to the park and the park having appropriate structural components to facilitate the use of the park (e.g., benches and/or picnic tables).

A third factor that influenced people's perceptions was the time of day in which they could access the park space. The majority of participants accessed their respective neighbourhood park spaces during daylight hours. The avoidance of park spaces in the night time was universal across both SES neighbourhoods due to the perceived threat associated with neighbourhood parks after dark. Within both neighbourhood types there was a strong association made between the times that one could access the park space and the hours in which it was better not to use the park spaces. This perception was because there were people congregating, who made the participants feel uneasy, or there was a lack of lighting within the park spaces. For example, if there were youth congregating in the park space then participants perceived the park spaces as a venue for illicit or potentially harmful activities. The parks in and of themselves were not the cause of said activities. It has to be restated that the safety issues raised by participants were perceived safety issues rather than first hand experiences. Even though the safety issues are perceived, they are important because the fear of crime speaks to neighbourhood-level characteristics, which influence a participant's QOL (see Pain, 2000).

The fourth factor that contributed to the positive perception of the neighbourhood park spaces found across both SES neighbourhood types was the appreciation of open spaces covered with vegetation, as opposed to concrete and buildings of urban landscape. The open spaces had a strong association with aiding restorative attention of participants. In addition, the open spaces allowed the participants to be in contact with a form of nature not found elsewhere. The reasons given for an increased QOL by the participants was the open space found within parks in contrast to the buildings of the surrounding landscape, and the park as venue for social and physical activities, which

increased the participants' sense of belonging and further increased the value of having the parks within their respective neighbourhoods. The idea of the park as an essential part of the neighbourhood fabric/component was found across both neighbourhood types. Neighbourhood parks were linked to participants' quality life through various associations, which include:

- a venue for physical activity
- a venue to restore balance in one's day through relaxation
- a venue to engage in social activities
- a venue for people of the neighbourhood to positively occupy their time
- economic value through increased property values for lots adjacent to park spaces

Again, participants made a link between their ability to engage in activities that require little advanced preparation and that are free of charge. Neighbourhood park spaces are seen as important venues that offer participants a means to engage in activity, which ultimately enhances the participants' QOL. Perceptions (whether they are positive or negative) are a function of roles that the neighbourhood park spaces fulfill in the participants' everyday lived experiences.

In terms of other park spaces accessed, participants from both neighbourhood types said that they used other parks spaces outside of their neighbourhood in order to view different scenery (e.g., the riverbank) or because of the facilities found within other types of park spaces (e.g., pools or specific types of sport fields). The frequency of accessing other park spaces within the city was similar across both neighbourhood types. The study participants see neighbourhood park spaces as a resource for households within the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood park spaces offer a venue for physical activities as well as an opportunity for neighbours to socialize. Participants view the neighbourhood park as one of the crucial components of neighbourhoods that have the ability to enhance their QOL. Within the respective park spaces, across both SES neighbourhood types, neighbourhood-level characteristics were reflected in the park via the vegetation cover, and the structural components, and as such, if the neighbourhood parks spaces met the needs of the participants, they were thus accessed and valued.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The objective of this research was to explore the perceptions that residents of differing SES neighbourhood types held in regards to their neighbourhood park spaces and if residents made a link between access to neighbourhood park spaces and their QOL. The research is influenced by the concept of health/well-being emulating from everyday lived experiences as told from a population health perspective, and how built environment features such as the presence of neighbourhood parks and their related features contribute to neighbourhood liveability.

The concept of health from a population health perspective is not a new concept. In fact the notion that the built environment, that is, one's social networks and one's place in society, influences health, was used by Virchow (mid-1800s) in Prussia and Chadwick (late-1800s) in England to account for the differences in population health status within their respective societies. During the 1800's, public health departments in Prussia and England began to work closely with city planning departments in order to alleviate epidemics, and their partnership served to improve the living and working conditions of their respective societies. In the early 1900's the working relationship between health and planning departments began to breakdown as each discipline became more specialized (Hall, 1992). Green spaces within cities and towns were seen by health reformers such as Chadwick as a means to provide residents with a respite from the urban environment which surrounded them. Therefore, green spaces or parks were increasingly incorporated in the planning of cities in England and North America.

The central tenet of the earliest phase of urban park development (1880-1900) within the North American context was that parks within a city could provide residents with an opportunity for rest and relaxation, which otherwise they might not have been able to obtain elsewhere. The second phase of urban park development (1900-1945) within the North American context was the reform park, which represented a space within the urban setting that was specifically designed for the recreation needs of children from the inner cities. In conjunction with the reform era parks providing a space designed for children to engage in recreational activities, park spaces of this era also provided recreation for youth and adults so that all people could be in good health through recreational use of the park if they were called upon to serve their country.

Subsequently, the next phase of park development (1945-1965) mirrored the increased in the amount of leisure time people had and their ability to transport themselves to a destination park, hence parks became more specialised and further apart.

The current phase of park development (1960-) is to build parks that facilitate a number of functions with a minimal amount of structural components, thus park spaces are meant to serve the needs of the many. Throughout the changing phases of park development, there has always been the idea that park spaces could be beneficial to urban residents in terms of positively impacting park users' mental and physical health. Because park spaces are so prevalent in urban settings, residents of cities may take advantage of accessing civic park spaces in order to increase or maintain their health. There have been few studies of urban park spaces from a population health perspective. No studies have operationalized a measurement, which captures both the potential benefits from a biomedical and/or socio-economic viewpoint. To date, the focus of the population health studies has been based on anecdotal evidence (e.g., see Coen and Ross, 2006; Cummins et al., 2005; Macintyre et al., 2005).

Research within QOL studies has shown that through the use of neighbourhood indicators, researchers can assess the current status of a program or service and its delivery, as well as monitoring how a policy or program is impacting a population (Kingsley, 1998). Park conditions are but one of the many components that comprise neighbourhood level indicators. And as such, neighbourhood parks are influenced by other neighbourhood characteristics and how individuals perceive the neighbourhood parks and its positive or negative contribution to the individual's QOL.

In order to better understand participants' views of neighbourhood parks, two research questions were posed:

- iii) How do urban residents living in neighbourhoods of differing socio-economic status (SES) view their neighbourhood parks?
- iv) How do these views affect their perceived quality of life?

To answer the questions two neighbourhoods from the CUISR Saskatoon quality of life survey, 2004, sample frame were selected for study based on their SES standing. A low SES and a high SES neighbourhood were selected in order to capture the perceptions of participants from different spectrums of neighbourhood types within

Saskatoon. The focus of the research was exploratory, allowing participants to express their perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces.

5.1.1 Perceptions of neighbourhood park spaces

The function or roles that the neighbourhood park spaces played in the participants' lives were similar across SES neighbourhood types. First, neighbourhood park spaces facilitated recreational activity. The participants saw this type of activity as being important for the maintenance of their health. Neighbourhood parks were also seen as being a venue for their children to engage in recreational activities. Second, the neighbourhood park spaces provided relief to the urban built environment in that the park spaces are covered with vegetation rather than concrete. In addition, the open spaces of the neighbourhood parks gave participants a sense of relaxation. Participants from both neighbourhoods spoke rarely, if at all, about their neighbourhood park spaces contributing to improved air quality. And only one of the twenty-one participants spoke about the importance of the interaction between humans and other animal species within neighbourhood park spaces.

Across both SES neighbourhood types participants' perceptions of their respective neighbourhood parks were strongly linked to the composition of their households. Those participants who had young children (2-5 years old) in their households or had young children visit their households spoke of the playground equipment found within neighbourhood parks as meeting the needs of their children. However, participants who had children in an older age group spoke of the recreational needs of the older children and were only partially or not satisfied at all by the structural components of their respective neighbourhood spaces.

The perceptions of neighbourhood park spaces also differed across SES neighbourhood type in terms of the level of social activity. In Briarwood, participants saw their neighbourhood park spaces as contributing to their social network (i.e., getting to know others in the neighbourhood and socializing outside their home) whereas in Pleasant Hill there was little talk of the neighbourhood park spaces as being a place to socialize. Many of the Pleasant Hill participants spoke of connection between accessing their neighbourhood park spaces and the resulting "clearing of one's mind". Although a couple of Briarwood participants spoke of mental or psychological value of having

neighbourhood park spaces the topic was raised more often in the context of the Pleasant Hill interviews. In contrast to Briarwood participant's those who lived in Pleasant Hill spoke in regards to the park space as their own, and an extension of my backyard. Participants in Pleasant Hill also spoke a great deal about safety issues (e.g., gang activity and used needles). The participants in Pleasant Hill valued their time spent in the neighbourhood park spaces enough to modify the time of day that they accessed their neighbourhood park spaces in light of their safety concerns.

Within the fields of urban studies, social geography and epidemiology, there is growing acceptance that the modified version of nature found in urban park spaces is increasingly important because, throughout the world, the majority of humans are living in urban or suburban areas.²⁸ Thus, the day-to-day contact with unaltered landscapes and with naturally occurring vegetation cover is not realistic for the majority of humans. Frumkin (2001: 234) writes, "perhaps we as a species [may] find tranquility in certain natural environments- a soothing, restorative, and even healing sense. If so, contact with nature might be an important component of well-being." He continues on to say that even though contact with nature is thought to be therapeutic when people are engaged in structured experiences (e.g., an organized wilderness trip, such as camping in a remote location), there is a need for defining and operationalizing "the more general contact with nature" (pg. 238).

5.1.2 Neighbourhood park spaces and links to quality of life

Participants across both neighbourhood types spoke of park spaces as contributing to their QOL. Neighbourhood park spaces contributed to the participants' QOL via the recreational activities (for increased physical health); via a change of scenery (mental/psychological health); via the formation and maintenance of social networks (belonging and mental/psychological health) as well as providing perceived economic benefits in terms of land values. It is impossible to untangle neighbourhood park spaces and their contribution to participants' QOL within the scope of this study. The contribution of neighbourhood parks to participant's QOL is related to how the participants view neighbourhood-level characteristics such as crime rates, and other residents. Household demographics strongly influenced the usage patterns of

²⁸ Currently, in Canada, 80% of our population is considered urban (Draper and Reed, 2005). The World health organization (WHO) estimates by 2030 the percentage will be 60% (United Nations, 2002).

participants. Those participants with young children either residing in the household or visiting the household accessed their neighbourhood parks frequently and those participants saw the park spaces as not contributing to their own QOL but their children's QOL. In addition three participants saw park spaces as contributing to their QOL over their lifetime. A single question in a QOL survey does not capture adequately the nuanced contributions that neighbourhood park spaces make to the participants' QOL, nor can a neighbourhood park be removed from neighbourhood-level characteristics and the residents who use the park spaces. However, neighbourhood park spaces do serve a purpose; but the purpose is dependent on the person who accesses the park, what they expect to gain from using the park, and if their needs are met by using the park.

5.2 Research contributions and directions

This research is a step toward understanding how neighbourhood park spaces are used and the links residents make between the uses of their parks and their QOL. Although the research cannot be extrapolated to a larger population, the research serves to illustrate the varied perceptions of neighbourhood park users and non-users and how these perceptions influence usage patterns. The research also illustrates the neighbourhood-level characteristics that may influence a participant's QOL. Participants perceptions of their neighbourhood park spaces and the meanings that such spaces have in the lives of participants cannot be captured in a single question on a QOL survey. There are a myriad of nuanced meanings regarding park spaces and each meaning is couched within a specific neighbourhood context and within a specific time within a life course. Realizing what participants need or desire in their park systems in order to fulfill their needs for recreation and socializing is the first step in gaining a better understanding of how the neighbourhood parks contribute to participants perceptions of their QOL. In 2005 the City of Saskatoon dedicated over 5.4 million dollars to the maintenance of park spaces in the city in the future it is hoped that the city will think about how the parks are perceived by park users and non-users and how parks can be designed to meet the needs of all the citizens of Saskatoon.

5.3 Research limitations

The two factors that limited this research were time and money. Time was a limiting factor in that one researcher could only do so much within a timeframe. Money was a factor in relation to the type of survey instrument used as well as in the compensation given to participants for donating their time. Although this research was generously supported by CUISR, the research could have had a different structure and scope if a multidisciplinary team with a multi-year timeline carried out the research into neighbourhood parks in Saskatoon.

5.4 Future research

Park spaces are a product of multiple disciplines. An urban planner sets aside the land in the early stages of the development of a neighbourhood and a landscape architect designs the structural and vegetation components. In addition, after the design and development of the park, researchers such as geographers, sociologists, biologists, and now health practitioners study the impacts to and the significance of the park space to the residents. Given that any park is a result of multiple disciplines and can be interpreted by multiple disciplines, there is a need to develop a comprehensive research tool(s) that can the ability to uncover the complex relationship of park space to health and to neighbourhood-level characteristics in order to capture the breadth of the potential benefits of accessing local park spaces.

This research was limited in both time and space and as such, there is a need for a multi-disciplinary approach, and a longitudinal study of park use in Saskatoon, that follows children to adulthood, in order to uncover how childhood experiences in park spaces influence park use in later years. In addition, such an inquiry may serve to illustrate how the aging processes influences an individual's interpretation of park landscapes as well as how such landscapes are used to benefit an individual's health.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SES PARTICIPANTS

SES resident interview schedule

Interview preamble

Neighbourhood parks refer to the green spaces that serve the active and passive recreational needs of all residents in a neighbourhood. Most neighbourhood parks are centrally located in the neighbourhood. They are free for all to use and principally intended for informal or recreational use. The name of your neighbourhood park is:

Fred Mendel Park, Pleasant Hill Rec Unit, Steve Patola, Grace Adam Metawewinhk, DL
Hamilton

Briarwood Lake Park, Briarwood Neighbourhood Park

Other: _____

- 1) On average, how many times do you use your neighbourhood park?
- Every day
 - A few times each week
 - A few times each month
 - A few times each season
 - A few times each year
 - Not sure
 - Never
 - Refused to answer

If the resident answered g for question one go to question nine

- 2) What prevents you from using your neighbourhood park?
- safety concerns from excessive litter
 - safety concerns resulting from illicit or gang related activity
 - lack of appropriate facilities within park space
 - preference of alternative park space
 - lack of accessible trails, benches, playgrounds
 - Other: (list) _____
 - Not sure
 - Not Applicable
 - Refused to answer

- 3) Do you use the park on Weekdays?
- Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
 - Not sure
 - Never
 - Refused to answer

- 4) Do you use the park on Weekends?
- Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
 - Not sure
 - Never
 - Refused to answer

- 5) a) What time of day do you typically use the park? (Circle all that apply)

- a. Before 8 am
- b. Between 8 am, and 11 am
- c. After 11 am, before 5pm
- d. After 5 pm
- e. Not sure
 - f. Never uses the park
 - g. Refused to answer

b) Which seasons do you use the park: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall (Circle all that apply)

c) Does your use of the neighbourhood park change with the seasons?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure
- d. Never uses the park
- e. Refused to answer

d)

i) What season do you most often use the park?

ii) What season do you spend the least time in the park? _____

6) What activities do you engage in at the park? (circle as many as apply)

- a. Appreciation of nature
- b. Soccer
- c. Jogging
- d. Walking
- e. Walking a pet
- f. Sitting
- g. Painting/ Photography
- h. Mediation
- i. Watching children participate in organized sports
- j. Bird Watching
- k. Supervising children while they play
- l. Relaxation
- m. Reading
- n. Informal games with others in your age group
- o. Picnicking
- p. Cross Country Skiing/ Other Winter Sports
- q. Biking
- r. Softball/ Baseball
- s. Other _____
- t. Not sure
- u. Refused to answer

6a) From question six, please rank the top three activities you engage in

1. _____

- 2. _____
- 3. _____

7) Do you typically go to the park with another person?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure
- d) Refused to answer

1. If "yes" – who do you go with?

- a. Family Member who lives with you
- b. Family Member who does not live with you
- c. Neighbour
- d. Other _____

8) When you go to the park do you engage in greeting people you may not know?

- b. Always
- c. Almost Always
- d. Sometimes
- e. Almost Sometimes
- f. Never
- g. Not sure
- h. Refused to answer

9) How adequately does your neighbourhood park meet your needs?

...excellent...very good...good...fair...poor...Unsure ...Refused
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10) a. Between 2001 and 2004 has your perception of your neighbourhood parks changed?

...Gotten better ...Remained the same...Gotten Worse ...No change ...Unsure
 ...Refused... Not a resident in 2001
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

b. Why has there been a change in your perception?

Open-Ended Questions

- 11) What are your feelings about your neighbourhood park?
- 12) How does your attitude towards the park affect the way you use the park?
- 13) Do you have a sense of increased well-being/ health through using the park?
- 14) In what ways does a park contribute to the liveability of the neighbourhood?
- 15) What are the perceived benefits of having a park in your neighbourhood?
- 16) How could your park serve your needs more effectively?

17) Are there any other park spaces (within your neighbourhood or elsewhere in the city) that you routinely access?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not Sure
- d. Refused to answer

I .Name of other park spaces (top three)

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

II. Why do you go to these parks rather than your neighbourhood park?

iv. Better facilities

v. Nicer scenery

vi. For Safety reasons

vii. Other _____

18) Are there any other comments you would like to make on your neighbourhood park spaces, issues of well-being and quality of life?

Demographic Information: Children under 12 in household? _____

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

Key Informant Interview

- 1) From the viewpoint of your professional/volunteer position- how do you see neighbourhood park spaces as contributing to the neighbourhood?
- 2) What activities do park spaces facilitate at the neighbourhood level?
 - a. And within the wider context of the city?
- 3) Thinking about the entire urban park system within Saskatoon:
 - a. What do you see as the park systems advantages?
 - b. And what do you see as its deficiencies?
- 4) How and in what ways do you think neighbourhood park space in Pleasant Hill compares to neighbourhood park space found in Briarwood?