



ACRO

Parks

A Public Health Solution for the City of
Baltimore

ACRO PARKS: Outdoor gyms as a Public Health Solution



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Executive Summary:

Self Esteem: Perception is Reality.

In the age of likes, follows, and shares, perception is indeed the new reality. Local governments and businesses are always looking to brand themselves to tourists and other opportunities for revenue. It is hard to make way amongst the abs and pretty girls of Instagram. People need to be uplifted and reconnected in order to shape and advertise their community. In cities plagued by drugs and unemployment, ordinary people fall victim to complex issues. Cities like Baltimore need a more fundamental effort to lift people out of addiction and unemployment. Outdoor gymnasiums are the marquee solution that will put a city like Baltimore back on the right path and advertise the city in a positive manner. Converting vacant public space into outdoor gyms can connect and unite the community. With simple equipment and fixtures, people can build Spartan bodies without costly dumbbells and exercise machines. Calisthenics is a rigorous fitness regimen of pull-ups, push-ups, squats, and dips fresh out of a scene from Full Metal Jacket. An Ancient military style workout, this can eliminate the use of gym memberships. In the end you have citizens with higher self-esteem and a city redefined and reconnected at a fraction of the price.

Introduction:

Physical fitness is now a functional part of American lifestyle. We attend gyms and pay fees to achieve the body and life that we want. However, costliness of attendance has made going to the gym expensive and often fruitless. Gym goers represent a small minority in American peoples. Cities like Baltimore have more access to drugs than they do to 24-hour gyms. Thus, it is no surprise to see many people, specifically adult black males, overdosing and doping up in city streets. The Spartans and the Crusaders had one thing in common aside from Hollywood movies. They both had to train for battle without the invention of weights and dumbbells. How did they do it? We are currently seeing a new breed of Spartans in New York City Calisthenic parks. Calisthenics is defined as body-weight strength training. A tool for military and gymnastic training, Calisthenics is a collection of movements, using only your bodyweight, to build muscle. An all-inclusive activity, calisthenics requires daily training which is heavily linked with high self-esteem and body image. In this paper we will discuss the previous approach to fitness and the issue of body image. I will present compelling findings of how to positively and efficiently attack this issue. The solution will be long-term effective and create new identity for struggling cities like Baltimore.

Previous Approaches:

Indoor gymnasiums, expensive cardio machines, and costly weight training stations are the standard for the typical fitness center. Stefano Dellavigna And Ulrike Malmendier (2006) explored the costly nature of American gym memberships in, *paying not to Go to the gym*. This journal explores the intersection of commercial gym memberships and their costly prices to attend. It appears our own desire to be in shape may not even be the real motivation behind joining a gym. The age-old phrase “your eyes are bigger than your stomach” holds true for fitness goals. Americans tend to “overestimate their future efficiency in pursuing

TABLE 4—DISTRIBUTION OF ATTENDANCE AND PRICE PER ATTENDANCE AT ENROLLMENT

	Sample: No subsidy, all clubs			
	First contract monthly, months 1–6 (monthly fee ≥ \$70)		First contract annual, year 1 (annual fee ≥ \$700)	
	Average attendance per month (1)	Price per attendance (2)	Average attendance per month (3)	Price per attendance (4)
Distribution of measures				
10th percentile	0.24	7.73	0.20	5.98
20th percentile	0.80	10.18	0.80	8.81
25th percentile	1.19	11.48	1.08	11.27
Median	3.50	21.89	3.46	19.63
75th percentile	6.50	63.75	6.08	63.06
90th percentile	9.72	121.73	10.86	113.85
95th percentile	11.78	201.10	13.16	294.51
	N = 866	N = 866	N = 145	N = 145

Figure 1: Cost of Attendance vs. Days Attended
(pg. 695, Dellavigna & Malmendier, 2006).

costly activities” (pg. 695, Dellavigna & Malmendier, 2006). A certain resolute “overconfidence (naiveté)”, takes over when consumers are about to make a big commitment, like a gym membership. Surprisingly, 17% of users enrolled in monthly contracts stay enrolled, compared to yearly prepaid customers. In Figure 1, the average cost of attendance per month is compared to actual times a person went into their gym. The results are staggering considering only 2 of the groups attended the gym more than 10 days out of the month. Those

groups were the 90th and 95th percentile, each paying \$121.73 and \$201.10 per month in gym related fees. It cost the median attendee \$20 per attendance. That is, they lost \$20 every time they went to the gym.



Figure 2: Kevin Mezu (2020) captures empty Space in Owings Mills Maryland Baltimore County

Kyle Hunter, Ju Nyeong Park, Sean T. Allen, Patrick Chaulk, Taeko Frost, Brian W. Weir and Susan G. Sherman (2018) examined the correlation between vacant public space, and drug injection in Baltimore, MD. The academic



Figure 3: Kevin Mezu (2020) shows vacant space in Baltimore county.

paper titled, “Safe and unsafe spaces”, the vacant properties and bland public space are not

Table 3
Factors associated with non-fatal overdose (past 12-months) among PWID; Baltimore, Maryland (N = 283).

	uOR	(95% CI)	p-value	aOR	95% CI	p-value
Injection location (most-used last 30 days)						
Private (own home/someone else's)	REF	—	—	—	—	—
Semi-public (public bathroom, abandoned house, public transit)	2.76	(1.60–4.74)	< 0.001	2.31	1.29–4.12	0.005
Public (street, park, stairwell)	3.44	1.43–8.32	0.006	3.32	1.28–8.53	0.013
Race/ethnicity						
Non-Hispanic White	REF	—	—	—	—	—
Non-Hispanic Black	0.58	0.34–0.99	0.047	0.55	0.27–1.13	0.103
Hispanic, multiracial, or other race/ethnicity	1.38	0.58–3.39	0.463	2.79	1.01–7.69	0.048
Age	0.91	0.73–1.22	0.360	1.22	0.91–1.64	0.180
Bupe/Suboxone use in the last 6 months	3.63	2.06–6.40	< 0.001	3.20	1.74–5.90	0.000
Injection by others in the last 30 days	2.41	1.45–4.02	0.001	2.13	1.23–3.69	0.007
Client/Non-client status of Baltimore NEP						
Non-client	REF	—	—	—	—	—
Client	3.02	1.59–5.74	0.001	2.98	1.47–6.04	0.002
Gender						
Male	REF	—	—	—	—	—
Female	0.88	0.52–1.50	0.635	—	—	—
Housing Status						
Own or rent house/apartment	REF	—	—	—	—	—
Family or friend's house/apartment	1.37	0.71–2.66	0.350	—	—	—
Homeless	3.11	1.70–5.71	< 0.001	—	—	—

Figure 4: The places people consume drugs in Baltimore, and user demographics (pg. 30, Hunter et. al, 2018).

only uninspiring to the people, but an open invitation to inject lethal drugs. In 2016 the number of fatal overdoses in Baltimore alone rose by 76% from 393 in 2015 to 694 in 2016 (pg. 26, Hunter et. al, 2018). Below, Figure 4 represents some of this data. Among those overdoses, 69% were male, and more than half, 55%, were African American. The paper outlined how in Baltimore a concoction of abandoned vacant public space and very liberal drug economy, equates to people using public settings in Baltimore as a place to take and share drugs. Most of the arrest and incarceration related to drug usage, is due to public injections. According to the paper, “research in other cities that found PWID who injected publicly are at increased risk for arrest and using riskier injection practices because of fear of interruption or arrest” (pg. 30, Hunter et. al, 2018). According to findings, black males in Baltimore who inject drugs in public spaces, are more likely to be arrested, or simply overdose. The vacant and useless public space in Baltimore, has become a drug den for those who are at risk or already addicted to harmful substances. Previous approaches, and critics may propose that a monthly gym fee is superior to free outdoor gyms, and that Baltimore city does not have a problem with public space. As we can see, a monthly gym membership is a liability in

the modern age and will cost more money to attend than to stay home and not go at all. The solution is very simple. Eliminate the useless public spaces, and you eliminate negative byproducts such as drug injection, loitering, and arrests. Outdoor gyms would kill two birds with one stone eliminating idle public space and allowing alternatives to overpriced gym fees.

New Findings:

The utility and abounding opportunity that is an outdoor gym, is a reservoir of potential just waiting to be tapped. New findings and research in calisthenics, body weight exercise, and mental health are just a few reasons one should anticipate a local outdoor gym. In Tomecka Malgorzata's (2017) article *Calisthenics: From Prisons to Stadiums*, the idea of “convict conditioning” may be the kick we all need to get in shape. Malgorzata outlines the role of fitness in today's culture. The modern person is seen to be “cool” if he is fit. There is a sort of blurred line between professional sport and the amateur scene that gives average users the idea that they too can achieve a beautiful physique. And the truth is, they might not be so crazy to think this. Malgorzata outlines how calisthenics is right there in between sporty

coolness and wellness activity. With all the hype around calisthenics, is it worth all that it's selling? Body weight exercise is as old as modern civilization. "Calisthenics survived the fall of ancient civilizations. It is necessary to



Figure 5: Jim Hindman, Founder of Jiffy Lube and youth reform program that teaches Calisthenics in Owings Mills, Maryland.

indicate, that such a kind of training was used in the middle east.... the crusades, and when training squires to become knights" (pg. 95, Malgorzata, 2017). Calisthenics is best described in the way German gymnasts were taught strength training, "which was a playground where, there were various facilities like: a horizontal bar, parallel bars, a vaulting horse and a balance beam" (pg. 96, Malgorzata, 2017). Malgorzata says on calisthenics that, "prolific archers of Henry V are so strong, that they are able to uproot trees" (pg. 96, Malgorzata, 2017). It is pure body weight exercise designed for agility, stamina, and strength. These attributes were the essence of great soldiers. Janet Novak's (1994) article for Forbes magazine, Schools for scoundrels, explains how calisthenic training could make soldiers out of our distracted young males of today. Novak's article speaks about Jim Hindman and his scholastic reform program. Jim Hindman, a former college football player, US Marine and founder CEO of Jiffy Lube set out to reform the struggling youth. He and his YSI

(Youth structure International) started in Owings Mills, Maryland. Starting in 1993 with Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School, Hindman worked to reform juvenile delinquents in Baltimore. The activities were meant to be rigorous and technical, to reform these men who were facing serious charges such as murder and robbery, as



Figure 6: Sean Gunby (2019) captures 53-yr.-old "Red", a loyal patron to Wingate Park. He works out 7 days a week.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp3KL>

well as those who were headed for that pathway. One of those activities aimed at social reform, calisthenics. Hindman's idea was ingenious however proved costly. "With Maryland's Hickey school as its largest contract, Hindman predicts YSI will net \$1.9 million, or 35 cents a share...revenues of \$34 million in fiscal 1994" (para. 7, Novak, 1994). Hindman's plans are meant for reform and are meant to directly focus



Figure 7: Wingate Park from a distance
<https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/wingat>

on individuals. However, our friends over in

New York city may already be ahead of schedule and doing so for a lot cheaper of a price!

place you can see a young man in the prime of his physical form, do 100 pull-ups with a 45 plate on his back, and a 62-year-old woman doing 400 consecutive sit-ups. The secret

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics and body image of the study group and the distribution of WHOQOL-BREF (TR) sub-parameters according to these characteristics.

Characteristics		Number	%	Body Image Score (Mean \pm SD)	WHOQOL-BREF (TR) parameters (Mean \pm SD)				
					Physical domain	Psychological domain	Social domain	Environmental domain	CS environmental domain
Gender	Male	286	44	157,4 \pm 23,2***	15,8 \pm 2,7**	14,9 \pm 2,8***	15,3 \pm 3,2**	14,9 \pm 2,5***	14,1 \pm 4,0
	Female	364	56	147,9 \pm 23,8	15,1 \pm 2,8	14,1 \pm 2,7	14,5 \pm 3,0	14,1 \pm 2,5	13,6 \pm 4,3
Marital status	Single/widowed	411	63,2	153,1 \pm 23,8	15,7 \pm 2,7**	14,6 \pm 2,8	15,0 \pm 3,2	14,7 \pm 2,6*	13,6 \pm 4,2
	Married	239	36,8	150,4 \pm 24,3	15,0 \pm 2,8	14,4 \pm 2,5	14,6 \pm 2,9	14,1 \pm 2,3	14,2 \pm 4,1
Education	Primary school or less	119	18,3	146,1 \pm 24,5**	14,8 \pm 3,3*	13,8 \pm 2,7**	14,5 \pm 3,1	13,9 \pm 2,6**	13,4 \pm 4,3
	High school or above	531	81,7	153,5 \pm 23,7	15,6 \pm 2,6	14,7 \pm 2,7	14,9 \pm 3,1	14,6 \pm 2,4	13,9 \pm 4,2
Occupational status	Working	338	52	156,1 \pm 24,0***	15,5 \pm 2,8	14,8 \pm 2,7**	14,9 \pm 3,3	14,6 \pm 2,5	14,3 \pm 4,1**
	Not working	312	48	147,8 \pm 23,3	15,4 \pm 2,7	14,2 \pm 2,7	14,8 \pm 2,9	14,4 \pm 2,5	13,4 \pm 4,3
Economic perception	Good or very good	85	13,0	160,9 \pm 24,1***	16,4 \pm 2,4***	15,7 \pm 3,0***	15,6 \pm 3,1*	16,2 \pm 2,3***	15,0 \pm 3,8**
	Moderate or worse	565	87	150,8 \pm 23,7	15,3 \pm 2,8	14,3 \pm 2,7	14,7 \pm 3,1	14,2 \pm 2,4	13,7 \pm 4,2
Income balance	Income > Expenses	170	26,2	157,2 \pm 23,6***	16,1 \pm 2,6***	15,4 \pm 2,7***	15,2 \pm 2,9***	15,7 \pm 2,3***	14,8 \pm 4,1***
	Income = Expenses	389	59,8	152,0 \pm 23,2	15,4 \pm 2,6	14,4 \pm 2,5	15,0 \pm 3,1	14,3 \pm 2,3	13,9 \pm 4,1
	Income < Expenses	91	14	143,3 \pm 25,4	14,4 \pm 3,3	13,1 \pm 3,1	13,5 \pm 3,1	13,1 \pm 2,6	11,9 \pm 4,1
Total		650	100	152,1 \pm 24,0	15,4 \pm 2,8	14,5 \pm 2,7	14,8 \pm 3,1	14,5 \pm 2,5	13,8 \pm 4,2

Figure 8: Body image score table (pg. 9, Nayir et al., 2019).

According Leslie Davis and James Thomas (2019) “Their New York Gym? It's the Great Outdoors”, the calisthenics of New York City is more like a music festival than a jail cell training routine. “As calisthenics has grown in popularity, parks like Wingate have become pilgrimage sites, attracting visitors from around the world - what Gleason's Gym is in boxing” (pg. 2. Davis & Thomas, 2019). Outdoor gyms, in NYC, allow for family inclusion. Children and adults roam freely and train together. It can be the “sporty cool” thing for young folks, but also the daily routine and fountain of youth for community patriarchs and matriarchs. That is the beauty of this practice. As Thomas and Davis stated, Wingate park has competitions for 23-year old's, and even senior citizens. It is the only

formula? Calisthenics taps into the single greatest mental health aspect of fitness, Body Image. The publication *Does Body Image Affect Quality of Life? A Population Based Study* explores several age groups and gives them a body image score to determine what habits lead to better self-image. Figure 8 discusses the Body image score.

The study tested a myriad of factors including alcoholism, sleep, smoking, and most importantly exercise. The results were conclusive across many age groups, body image was highest in men and women who had a regular consistent workout program over a long period of time (pg. 9, Nayir et al., 2019).

Conclusion:

Developing park space for Calisthenic training, is **the** solution for cities like Baltimore. With extreme gym prices and dejected drug addicts in the street, we are at an all-time low in self-image. People are forgetting to attend the gym for fear of criticism from aggressive gym goers and trainers. Addicts are shameless and offensive with their public use of needles and syringes on street corners. Imagine driving

from the highway into downtown and you view the city street. Instead of drug addicted heroin addicts, and gang affiliated young men, you see people of all ages with the bodies like a Spartan warrior. You see a senior citizen running around, just as youthful as they were in the glory days. Most of the equipment necessary for body weight training is already in our surroundings. Poles, benches, parallel bars, and boxes can be fashioned from spare parts and seldom require a professional to help. This initiative should spark an attitude shift. One that says, "I can do it!" and encourage accountability. With sincere intentions, I hope that we may collectively reach a better self-image as a community and grow stronger as individuals.

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