
Definitions of Inclusive Practice



Parkour Practitioners come in all shapes and sizes

An inclusive practice is a practice that recognises diversity and makes sure everyone is able to access that practice and fully engage with it regardless of background or circumstance.

Inclusive practice is mostly focused on teaching. Inclusive teaching attempts to make your teaching equally address all of your students. Paying particular attention to the individual needs of each learner.

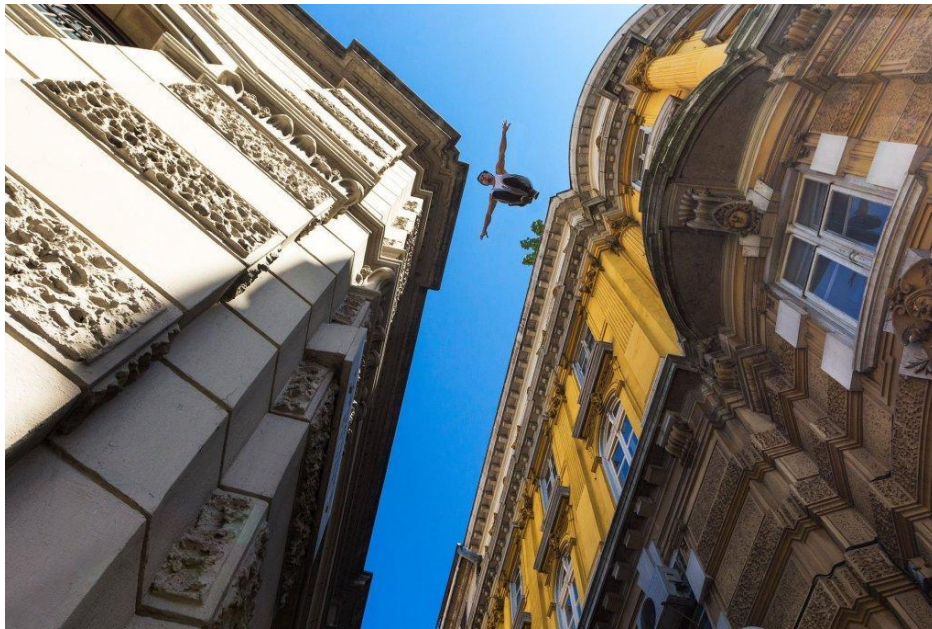
It's important not to make a strong value judgement about inclusivity. There is nothing inherently wrong about something that is not inclusive. We break ourselves up into groups. We tend to surround ourselves with like minded people. We join teams or societies that reflect our interests. You wouldn't expect someone with no interest in dance to join the local Ballet club.

I also want to define equality in a specific manner. For the purposes of this blog we will consider equality as simply meaning treating people the same. It doesn't tend to recognise diversity in that it provides a level playing field for all.

(In books and literature, equality and equity are often used interchangeably to mean an array of things. Don't expect everyone to use the same meanings when using the same words)

Parkour

Before we go any further, I'd also like to suggest a definition of Parkour. This is important as I find that we often all have very different, very personal, definitions of Parkour practice and it's important that we all agree on some basics.



Yamakasi – Williams Belle at Motion Tour

Parkour is a physical discipline based on human movement. Its practitioners challenge themselves to complete physical tasks normally made up of moves such as jumping, vaulting and swinging. It is rooted in a French practice known as L'Art Du Deplacement which was created by a group of young men in the suburbs of Paris.

I understand Parkour, Freerunning and ADD include a lot more than just this idea – but I'd not like to take too much for granted and continue with this very simple definition. Whatever word or values you use to describe your personal practice, we generally share a common goal. Which is to challenge ourselves and improve. Throughout this presentation, I will use Parkour as a general term referring to everyone's practice.

I love Parkour as it's practice is a great way to challenge yourself. Specifically helping you directly face your weaknesses. It teaches you to be honest with yourself. Which in turn feeds into your own goals for moving forward. It inspires us to improve and teaches us to value the process more than the outcome.

These ideas, while inspiring and amazing, are also relentlessly unforgiving. It is a somewhat brutal practice that effectively tells you "No, you are not good enough, and you will never be good enough. There will always be a bigger, harder and more difficult move. It never ends."

The Concrete treats us all the same. It doesn't care how we feel today, how strong we are, our gender, our advantages or disadvantages. It's just there. You test yourself against the environment, discover where you stand, and begin working on improving yourself.

Inclusive Practice

Parkour is clearly a practice that promotes equality. But simply treating everyone equally is not inclusive. As it ignores the various unique life experiences people have and their individual ability to engage with the practice.

An inclusive practice is one that transcends the various different barriers that separate us. We would see a community made up of people with wildly varying life experiences. With a low barrier to entry and a place where people with different cultural backgrounds interacted easily and naturally. Where no one felt excluded.

In practice, such a thing is nearly impossible. But it is an ideal to work towards rather than a set goal.



Why aren't there more badass Women in Parkour?

Lets try and determine where we are as a community. An easy test of inclusivity is to look at the make-up of the community and see if it reflects a varied background.

Even after over a decade of hard work by so many talented people, the Parkour community is still demonstrably dominated by young fit men. While I can't find any specific evidence for it – the likelihood is that it is dominated by young, fit, economically advantaged men. While the romanticised image of a poor young man bettering his life through his dedication to Parkour is inspiring – and certainly true, those with more money behind them, better facilities behind them and more opportunities presented to them are always more likely to succeed.

We see this in every aspect of society. Those from rich countries have countless advantages we don't even consider. There is enough disposable income for people to pay for Parkour classes. The coaches can make enough money to survive teaching 70-80 hours a month. Which gives them time to keep up their own training. They don't need a second job. They don't need to worry about hunger and housing or war and conflict when training. Privilege exists. It shouldn't be a source of stigma. Rather an accepted factor as we try to understand why our sport is dominated by the privileged.

Setting privilege aside, Parkour culture appeals to a reasonably specific type of person. The 'Parkour Boy' is sometimes considered a joke, but they

account for a large swathe of many communities. They tend not to engage well with traditional sports. They often have geeky hobbies and interests and they tend to gravitate towards a philosophy of life that is very personal to them. Shunning conventional wisdom and looking for an authentic and unique life experience. This experience they often find through parkour training.

On top of that, there's a significant body of evidence that men and women interact with public space in a very different way. Women regularly don't feel safe in public spaces. At risk of objectification, leering, cat calling and even groping and assault. It is unsurprising that a sport that grew up in the streets would be less accessible to women than men.

I want to reinforce that the community is not to blame for its lack of inclusiveness. We shouldn't stigmatise privilege or societal factors beyond our control. We simply need to try and understand it so that we can decide what, if anything, we should do about it.

Because, as you will find in the next chapter. There is no need to become more inclusive if you don't want to. If you are happy with your community, your friends and your life, then you should not feel guilty. If you want to only train with those willing to walk your path then you should.

An inclusive practice is a practice that recognises diversity and makes sure everyone is able to access that practice and fully engage with it regardless of background or circumstance.

But, as we saw in the first chapter. Parkour seems to be a practice that promotes equality. Which we define as treating everyone the same. In general, that isn't seen as a negative. Being inclusive is not a requirement and it's important we don't attach stigma towards groups that are not inherently inclusive.

This naturally leads on to a very important question: Why should we strive to disrupt our existing community and practice in order to make Parkour more inclusive and accessible?



Photo by: Matej Snopek – Motion Tour 5

It is by no means a given that we should disrupt the status quo and what we have built in order to appeal to more people. We aren't required to. And we should take a moment to ask ourselves not only, why do we want to appeal to more people, but what about Parkour is unique and deserving of being spread to many other people?

For me, inclusivity boils down to a simple goal: I wish to help as many people as possible lead happier and healthier lifestyles. I think Parkour is a powerful tool whose teachings can help many people better themselves. By exposing people to some of the teachings of Parkour I think we can help improve a lot of lives.

In order to do this, we need to be able to present Parkour, or something like Parkour, in as inclusive a manner as possible. To do that, we need to understand how we go about creating an inclusive practice.

But, a more inclusive Parkour Practice must, by virtue of appealing to more people, compromise something.

Personally, I feel that the main loss we see in the drive to make our art more accessible is a loss of the unique experience. We replace a personal journey of discovery with a slightly safer, more sanitised version of the same thing. One of the unique aspects of Parkour is the very personal journey we each

travel on. It explains the very diverse approach different countries and cultures have to their parkour practice.



If everyone does the same thing, is it still Parkour?

Parkour participants tend to be those attracted to their own unique, personal paths. It can be considered a lifestyle sport. Therefore the unique experience could be considered to be a very fundamental aspect of Parkour and its practice.

Within a classroom environment it makes sense that we will, to an extent, sanitise that practice. As we are consciously removing the mistakes we, and others have made in their own journeys, we provide a more standardised pathway – with fewer errors and mistakes colouring the journey we can bring the quality of their movement practice forward quickly and efficiently. We try to make them fitter, happier and healthier. But in exchange we certainly lose the individual journey.

This will fundamentally alter the start of someone's parkour training. My first experience of Parkour was going out to meet a group of strangers on the dark streets of Edinburgh in the middle of winter. In future, the first few years of someone's parkour practice is most likely to occur in a class or a gym.

If we imagine the journey through movement of the original parkour practitioners, we can think of their journey as an exploration of what was possible. A curved line slowly heading upwards towards more impressive feats and abilities. Some discoveries made them healthier and stronger, many more were mistakes or led to injury. Learning from these experiences, they found a healthy practice that made them strong and in doing so they explored a wide range of potential human movements.



The 2nd generation of practitioners learnt from them. Avoiding their mistakes, they were able to progress their training faster and push themselves beyond what their teachers were capable of. But in doing so, they found their own pitfalls. Our 3rd generation of practitioners are progressing even further, avoiding so many mistakes they eventually find themselves on their own personal journey, exploring a range of movement unimaginable to the first generation.

As each athlete learns from the previous generation, moving past them into new territory, they then begin their own unique practice coloured by mistakes and discoveries of their own. While you may consider the mistakes to be a negative, you could also consider them part of a more personal experience.

We'd therefore expect the future pathway into Parkour to be through coaching. The coaching should be inclusive and introduce many of the principles of Parkour. This coaching practice should try and engage as many people from different backgrounds as possible. Some of them will go on to become incredible athletes and forge their own unique experiences. Others will enjoy the exercise but focus on other aspects of their lives.

This model is encouraging. Because this doesn't really change our practice. It's just that the Parkour journey starts after some groundwork has been done in building strong, healthy movement that allows the next generation to miss many of the pitfalls we fell into. Discovering how to optimise this coaching practice to make it most useful to most people will be the focus of the 4th chapter.

And it also leaves open the possibility for people to reject the coaching pathway and still engage with Parkour. Making their own mistakes might mean they develop slower, but perhaps they are more interested in the journey than the destination. And maybe they'll discover a whole new path none of us had even considered before.