

# **A WOMAN'S PLACE:**

Understanding perception and experience in public space  
through the lens of gender

*To all of my family, friends, teachers, and peers who have  
helped me make it this far. I would not be here without  
your continued support.*

**Thank you**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates ways in which perception of outdoor public spaces is influenced by gender. Often, studies of gender and fear in public space have been centered around perceptions and fears experienced almost exclusively by women. Such studies note that women experience higher than average levels of fear in outdoor public spaces, such as parks and streetscapes, despite not being at higher risk for physical attacks than men. How can better design of these spaces change this phenomenon?

The purpose of this study is to understand unique ways in which gender affects perceptions of public space and how designers of the built environment can create spaces that are perceived as safer and more accessible for women. In studies of perception, imagery, collages, photography, diagrams, and interviews have been used to understand differences in how many people—regardless of gender—perceive space. A framework for designing gender-equitable spaces emerges from this research, which emphasizes the importance of visibility, accessibility, and comfort in creating public spaces. The study of womens' perceptions of space has become more relevant as designers question the notion of men being used as the design standard, and as many different user groups are becoming more represented in the realm of architecture and urban design.

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# 01: INTRODUCTION

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

The research presented in this thesis generally looks at gender through a binary lens comparing the experiences of women and men. The existence of people outside of the stereotypical gender binary of 'feminine' women and 'masculine' men is relevant in the discussion of gender inequality, but for the sake of simplicity in this thesis research the issues and examples presented will be more in line with the common gender binary.

## THESIS STATEMENT

Accessibility is one of the most important concepts in public space architecture. Designers should aim to make spaces that can be used and shared by people of different ages, races, gender, and abilities. However, the majority of shared spaces are designed with the idea of the white man as the average user. The use by other groups is often treated as an additional hurdle to tackle, not as a part of standard. In particular, public outdoor spaces are not created with the ideas of safety and comfort for women at the forefront. Is there a way architects and designers of space can change this?

The study of fear in public space has generally centered around the fear many women have of assault by strangers in the night. Though this is a universal fear common among women and nonmen, it is also understood to be caused mainly by perceptions of spaces as being unsafe, rather than the actual likelihood of such an event happening. The perceptions of every individual come from many sources, such as past experiences and personal feelings, along with other outside sources such as media. Research such as Day's works have shown that women feel more unsafe in public outdoor spaces than men. Issues such as low visibility, physical inaccessibility, and lack of comfort feed into these perceptions of unsafe space, and actual statistics of crime do not greatly affect how spaces are perceived. Improving how a space is perceived improves the experience of the user and drives further use of that space. The creation of collages, diagrams, and other forms of imagery has facilitated a deeper understanding of the perceptions of myself and others.

This thesis aims to understand differences in how men and women perceive public spaces, with a specific emphasis on the perception of safety in outdoor public spaces, as well as how designers can alter how safe users feel in a space through a feminist design lens. This research culminates into a set of guidelines for gender equitable public space, with a redesign of an existing corridor in Detroit using a newfound understanding of individual perception.

For architects, perception is what drives experience and use of space. Studying perception through a gendered lens is valuable as designers aim to create more equitable spaces with the differing needs of many in mind. These and other findings can be used to create spaces which feel safer and more accessible, improving their likelihood of use.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Identity:** *The distinguishing qualities, beliefs, characteristics, etc. that make a person or group different from others.*

**Social Identity:** *A person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s).*

**Perception:** *The organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to understand the world around us. An ongoing, unconscious process where sensory information is used to construct one's own version of reality.*

**Intersectionality:** *The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group. An analytical framework of understanding how aspects of one's social identity combine to create unique experiences.*

**Public Space:** *Space that is generally open and intended to be used by the people, including privately owned spaces.*



## **02: GENDER ISSUES IN PUBLIC SPACE**

## CONTEXT

### THE DESIGNERS

It is commonly accepted that outdoor public spaces, such as parks and plazas, should be designed for the use of many different types of people. Architects and planners pride themselves on making spaces physically accessible and enjoyable by many bodies. However, the majority of the designers of space are able-bodied white men. In 2020, just 23.3% of members of the American Institute of Architects (the AIA) identified as women, and 16.4% of members identified as part of an “underrepresented racial or ethnic group,” though the numbers are slowly on the rise (“AIA Membership”). A 2022 survey by the Architects Registration Board in the United Kingdom found that less than 1% of its members reported having some kind of disability (“Equality”). This character is often thought of as the average user to design for, whether on a conscious or unconscious level, as these are the people making the majority of design decisions. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the profession of architecture, and has its roots in traditional western gender roles.

### PLAY AND SOCIALIZATION

Children usually become exposed to gender roles in some capacity early in life, whether it be from their family, peers, mentors, or media. This often results in developing behaviors that in some way maintain by these roles. For instance, young girls will learn that it is more acceptable to participate in activities that require less movement and make less noise, while young boys are encouraged to jump, run, climb, and yell (Boys 41). The way in which kids are socialized to play has continuous effects into adulthood. Adult women are still conditioned to take up as little space as possible in public and make minimal noise. Fears of ‘stranger danger’ instilled into children stay with women throughout life. As boys are encouraged to explore, learn, and even make mistakes, girls learn to entertain themselves within the safety of the home (Johansson 70). This cycle both reinforces and is reinforced by the stereotype of women being of the home and men being outside workers.

### MENS’ AND WOMENS’ SPACES

The adoption of stricter zoning laws in the mid-twentieth century created a rigid separation between commercial and residential areas. This system was based, in part, on the ideal disconnection between the home and work places; a disconnection which was enjoyed primarily by men. (Navarrete). Men were the breadwinners of the nuclear household, and a growing reliance on cars allowed families to move their homes to the suburbs with workers maintaining employment in the city. Women, on the other hand, were intended to be housewives and mothers, with no reason, to leave suburbia— So, why would the city be designed for them? (Boys, 37-38). As cities grew, parks and streets were designed for the working man. Even as women began entering the workforce and concessions were made at the level of the individual building (such as the addition of women’s restrooms), the design of outdoor public space did not see much change.

### VISIBLE WOMEN’S ISSUES

Initial studies of problems women commonly face in public space involved looking at what issues were the most regularly visible. This included the many hurdles that mothers of young children face, such as handling multiple children and strollers while navigating crowded paths and stairs, people who breastfeed in public and the degree of privacy they may want, young girls becoming excluded from playtime activities, and the fact that accessible public restrooms are often difficult to find in urban spaces—and women often end up waiting significantly longer to use restroom facilities than men (Huh) (see Figure 1.3). Women are more likely to be caretakers of children, the elderly, and people with disabilities who require assistance, so spaces that these caretakers frequent must also be accessible to these groups. Women are also more likely to rely on public transportation than men, creating a need for access to bus, train, and tram stations to facilitate use for these women. Fear of sexual harassment or assault, especially in urban public spaces, was the most prevalent

problem facing women. Questions asked were now; How do these issues affect perceptions of public space? How do they affect user retention? How are these problems experienced by different groups of women?

### RACE AND GENDER IN PUBLIC SPACE

Although discussion revolving around women’s fears in public space is not uncommon, particularly regarding issues of sexual assault, these discussions often minimize the role of race in women’s experiences of fear. Discussions regularly come from a purely ‘white’ perspective, or with ideas of the white perspective as the default (“Embassies” 307). Day discusses the link between experiences based on gender and those based on race. She has argued that white women’s fear of sexual assault has historically targeted men of color, painting them as “aggressive and hypersexualized in relation to ‘vulnerable’ white women” (“Embassies” 310). She goes on to say that white women in her study were not typically conscious of their race except in circumstances where they were the minority, and tied their racial identity more closely with their gender identity than women of color.

In the same study, there was evidence that women of color were more likely to separate their racial and gender

identities, i.e. have experiences as either a ‘black person’, a ‘woman’, or a ‘black woman’. Day continues that women of color did share white women’s fear of sexual assault in public, which is thought to originate in part from the historic sexualization and dominance of women of color by both white men and men of color. Racial harassment and crime against women of color often takes on a sexual nature, and is more likely to occur in privately owned public spaces, such as restaurants or shops. this creates an subconscious fear of these private public spaces. The same harassment and crime against men of color does not often involve a gendered dynamic, and generally takes place in open public spaces, such as parks and plazas. Again, this creates fears of open public spaces (“Embassies” 312-314)

In another study by Day, slightly over half of all men studied said they had been feared in public spaces, with over 75% of black and Hispanic men surveyed being aware of being feared in public spaces (“Being Feared” 574-575). Though several men were aware of being feared by women and other marginalized groups (people of color, the elderly, children, people with disabilities), many were not, and “several men seemed to find it strange to think that women would fear them in public spaces,” (575).

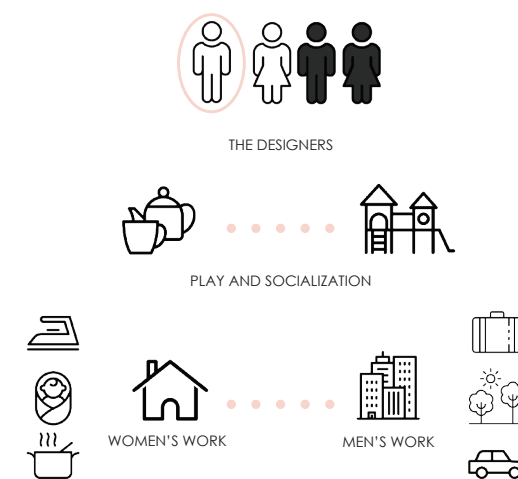


Fig. 2.1 – How Gender Roles Affect Spatial Design

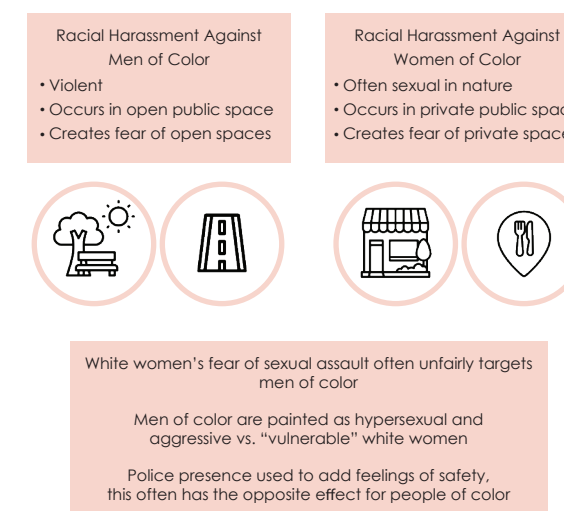


Fig. 2.2 – Gender and Racial Harassment



Fig. 2.3 – Women's Issues in Public Space

## PUBLIC IMAGERY

### ADVERTISEMENTS

The objectifying portrayal of women in media has been an issue on the feminist radar for decades. Common negative depictions involve the representation of women in an overly sexual manner, the depiction of women as objects or a commodity, or graphic imagery showing women as victims of violence. Over time, there has been an increase in the sexualization of women in public media, including in artwork and advertisements. Limited capability for individuals to avoid exposure to public media has drawn particular attention to this issue, and many wonder what the effects these portrayals have on users of the spaces they occupy, especially women. Rosewarne argues that sexualized portrayals of women in public advertising contribute to the social exclusion of women, fuel their perceptions of fear, limit access to public space, and amplify a hypermasculine dominance of the city (67). Other studies suggest these depictions have an effect on women's self-image and behavior. Further, despite growing pressure for advertisers to move away from stereotypical depictions of women, the issue of sexualization remain unchecked, especially in the U.S. (Santos).

It is argued that the right for women to access space in the same manner as men is threatened when women are fearful or offended in the public realm. This fear and offence come from an environment of hostile male sexuality that view women as objects or ornaments, and combine with women's fear of rape or sexual assault to hinder their ability to participate in shared spaces. Rosewarne writes, "... highly sexualised advertising imagery works to decorate public space in a way that imbues the outdoors with male concepts of sexuality... such an environment is exclusionary for women," (69-70).

As women routinely view themselves being portrayed as sex objects, there is a fear that men will perceive them solely in this way and be incapable of separating this perception from reality. This portrayal also reinforces the

idea that women exist in the public in a purely sexual role for the benefit of the male gaze, which increases fears of sexual violence (Rosewarne 73).

"Modifying travel mode or route is a kind of simple, often-taken-for-granted decisions women make on a daily basis in direct response to their fears," writes Lauren Rosewarne. Women will regularly change their daily routes to work or school, avoid walking alone at night, or require the presence of a male companion to feel safe. Fear of crime happening in public causes women to change their behavior to not leave the home, relegating women to the private sphere (Rosewarne 75).

Regularly seeing only stereotypical images of women as sex objects can have a negative effect on one's self esteem, causing women to view themselves similarly or in another negative light. Men's perception of women can also be altered, or perceptions of appropriate behavior regarding women. Rosewarne describes an instance where female staff at a bar in Australia were "subjected to frequent sexual harassment 'inspired' by a television commercial... As journalist Patrick O'Neil in the *Herald Sun* explained, 'bartenders said leering drunks were sexually harassing them by making flirtatious requests up to 50 times a night,'" (72-73).

According to Santos, at least 25 countries, including the U.K., France, Finland, and Canada have some type of legislation restricting gender stereotypes in advertising. But there is still a way to go— In a 2016 report by Statista, 76% of respondents had seen advertising they considered offensive to women, 85% of them saw ads that portrayed women as dumb, helpless or incompetent, and 84% of female respondents felt offended by sexism in advertising. "But gender inequality is not a problem of media exclusively— it's a problem of our whole society. If it's on media is because it's on real life and it will be on media (and everywhere) until our society changes," (Santos).

### ART

Perceptions of sexist art in public space have similar effects when compared to advertising, though they can sometimes be more abstract. Throughout most of history, those most likely to create art that would be celebrated publicly, such as sculptures and murals, and those thought highly of enough to have art made of them displayed, have been rich, white men. These depictions by and of men often celebrate accomplishments by groups or individuals, or general positive attitudes. Many commemorative statues throughout the country depict the founding fathers and other historic men in triumph. Those that do less upbeat connotations are often memorials to idols or heroes, including war monuments and memorials, which still give humanity and honor to those depicted. Art regarding women does not exist at the same scale in a similar way.

Like in advertising, depictions of women in public art are often sexualized. Feminine figures are often seen in revealing clothing or compromising or suggestive positions. Art in outdoor public space depicting women of color is uncommon when compared to art depicting white women. Many representations of women of color are related to historic events, often tying them to slavery. These depictions reinforce negative connotations relating to both gender and race.



Fig. 2.4 – La Spigolatrice

### La Spigolatrice (The Gleaner), Stefano (2021)

La Spigolatrice is a sculpture portraying a figure of the famous poem *La Spigolatrice di Sapi* (The Gleaner of Sapi), written by Luigi Mercantini in 1857. At its unveiling in Sapi, Italy, many were shocked at the sexual nature of the figure, meant to be a young wheat harvester. Laura Boldrini, a deputy with the centre-left Democratic party, said the statue was an "offence to women and the history it should celebrate". Many, including several politicians, called for its removal, as they felt it did not respect the story of Mercantini's work about defying your oppressors and sexualized a historic figure for no reason (Giuffrida).



(Top, left to right): **Fig. 2.5** – American Apparel advertisement. **Fig. 2.6** – Electric company billboard. **Fig. 2.7** – Billboard for an internet company. (Bottom, left to right): **Fig. 2.8** – *Step of the Dance*, Detroit. **Fig. 2.9** – *The Spirit of Detroit*, Detroit. **Fig. 2.10** – *The Falconer*, New York City.

## **03: PERCEPTION AND IDENTITY**

## DEFINING CONCEPTS

### THE PERCEPTION PROCESS

Recall that perception in the context of this research is defined as the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to understand the world around us. It is an ongoing and often unconscious process where sensory information is used to mentally construct one's own version of reality (Schacter). There are three steps in the perception process: selection, organization, and interpretation.

There are constantly many different types of stimuli happening around us at any given moment, and our brains do not have the capacity to focus on it all at once. The decision of what stimuli to attend to begins the process of perception. It is usually an unconscious choice, but can also be intentional, often influenced by personal motives or impulses. Intense stimuli, such as bright lights, loud noises, or pungent smells can also influence what we select to mentally attend to.

After selecting what to center on, the next step is to organize our thoughts regarding this stimuli. This is another unconscious process where one mentally arranges the information just sorted in order to better understand it. The human brain is hard-wired to see patterns and sort things into organizational groups based on similarity. We also develop stereotypes to make sense of categories of objects or people.

The final step in the perception process is interpretation. This is superimposing this new information into the context of the rest of one's life in order to give it meaning. Interpretation asks, How does this all make sense? It is a subjective process, meaning different people can come to different conclusions based on the same stimuli. Interpretation is influenced by one's values, sense of self, identity, expectations, assumptions, and experiences. ("Introduction", Niosi).

### EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY

It is obvious that perception has a large effect on the experience of space. As one experiences the stimuli of a new space, there are an infinite number of ways they could select, organize, and interpret what they sense. As noted by Niosi and others, some of the main influences on the interpretation of stimuli are one's values, sense of self, identity, expectations, assumptions, and experiences. This research has chiefly focused on experience and identity. When designing around the idea of perception, architects and spatial designers attempt to create experiences, to influence perception, which facilitates use of spaces (see Fig. 3.1). Identity is not notably influenced by designers in these scenarios, but this research looks into the effects of identity on experience as well as perception.

### SOCIAL IDENTITY

Identity is defined as the distinguishing qualities, beliefs, characteristics, etc. that make a person or group different from others ("Identity"). Specifically, social identities refer to groups that are based on individual's physical, social, and mental characteristics. The most common social identity groups are nationality, race/ethnicity, religion, age, physical ability (or disability), gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class (McLeod, "Social"). Though the focus of this thesis is on relationships concerning gender, it is important to have an intersectional perspective which takes into account other factors of social identity, as one exists as all of these pieces of their self together at once. The role of race, for example, has been shown to be inextricably linked to one's experiences regarding their gender. These combined facets of identity all work together to influence perceptions in a given space. A person's identity can also give a glimpse of how they may perceive a space. For example, a devout Catholic may perceive a Cathedral to be an especially beautiful place. A young person may have more positive perceptions of a loud concert than an older person. How does gender affect one's perceptions in outdoor public space?

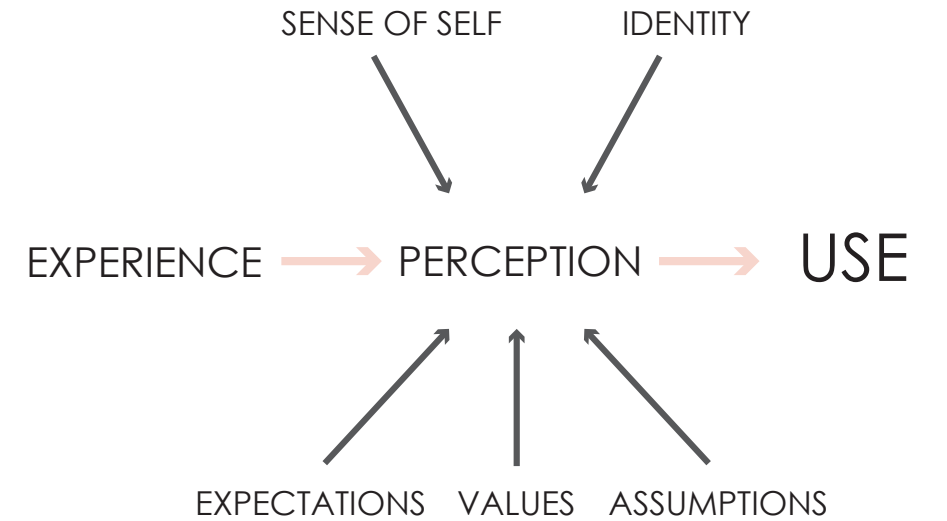


Fig. 3.1

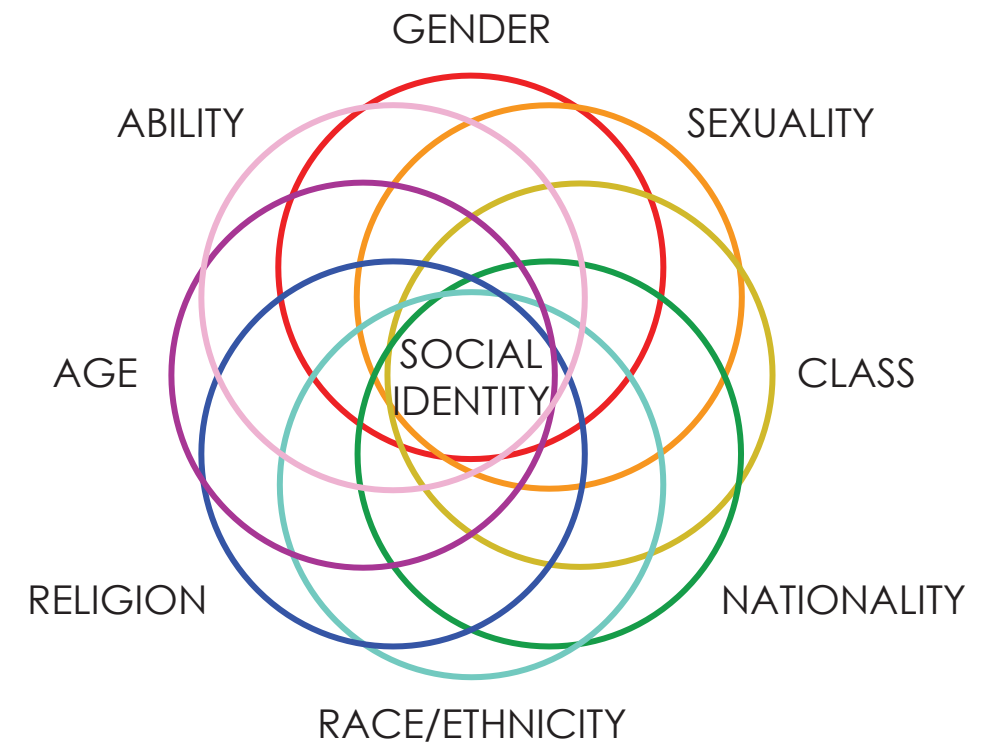


Fig. 3.2



Fig. 3.3 – Play: A Study of Individual Perception



## PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY AND FEAR

### FEAR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

The most common fear experienced by women navigating public space is the fear of sexual assault. This fear increases at night, for women who are alone, or in unfamiliar spaces. Even during daylight hours in spaces with little crime, women report higher average levels of fear than men ("Confrontation"). This introduces the concept of perceived and actual safety. Perceived safety is how safe one feels in a space, and it is often based more on images or ideas of potential threats over statistical risk. The feeling of fear is based heavily on one's perception, influenced by a range of outside factors such as reactions to violence, myths surrounding violence and crime, and the construction of social identities ("Confrontation"). Evidence actually points to a lack of relationship between crime rates and perceived safety (Navarrete).

### THE FEAR PARADOX

Statistically, men are actually more likely to be victims of physical assault in a public space than women in the same circumstances ("Confrontation"). So why is the fear of assault by men more present in women?

Some of the more apparent reasons for this disparity in fear have to do with biological and physical differences between men and women; men are usually larger and stronger than women ("Being Feared"). Men and women are also socialized to deal with confrontation in different ways, with men often being more physically confrontational than women, even in non-violent scenarios.

The media plays a large role in increasing fears of sexual assault in public space. Crime television shows such as *Law and Order: SVU* make instances of assault by strangers in the night seem much more common than they actually are. News media also skews perceptions of the frequency of these assaults by sensationalizing stories or replaying them.

At a personal level, mothers and aunts will warn young girls about the threat of strange men in the street, or encourage them to carry pepper spray as they leave for college. These warnings are not without reason; according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one out of every five women in the U.S. will be the victim of attempted rape. However, the vast majority of sexual assaults come from someone the victim already knows, and nearly half happen in the victim's own house ("Statistics"). This caricature of a man waiting in the shadows to abduct you from the street is highly unlikely, but it still prevents women from experiencing public spaces ("Better Safe").

### MEN'S PERCEPTIONS

Discussions regarding fear in public space have often dismissed men's feelings and experiences, or accepted them as the norm. As discussed, men are more likely to experience physical crimes in public space. Some of the main fears men experience in public space involve a loss of control. Day argues that spaces that challenge notions of masculine culture, such as control, competition, aggression, and physical strength, may generate fear ("Confrontation"). These ideal of masculinity are often more accessible to men of privilege, with less privileged men (including men of color, gay men, or poor men) reaping less of the benefits, meaning that individuals in these groups will have somewhat different perceptions of fear and safety. Generally, men have not self-reported high levels of fear in public spaces tied to their gender, but those that were found include fears of not being "in control" of a situation where a physical altercation may occur and fears of getting lost in an unfamiliar space. Many men also stated the importance of being "constantly aware of their surroundings" in order to feel safe ("Confrontation," "Being Feared").

Perceived safety and security are based more on **images** or **ideas** of potential threats than statistical risk

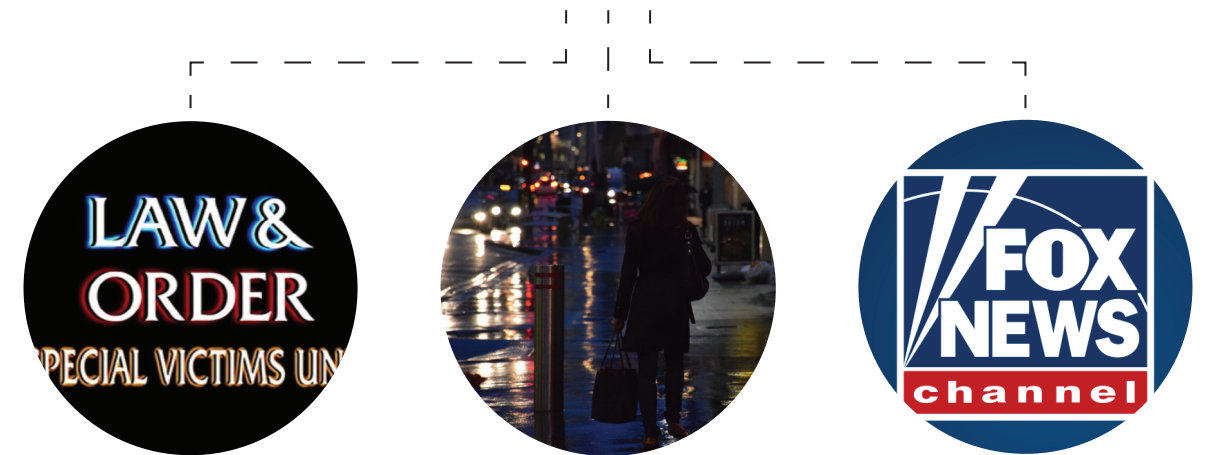


Fig. 3.4

Women report higher levels of fear walking alone at night than men, despite the fact that men are statistically more likely to be victims of violent crimes in the same scenario

This has been called the **Fear Paradox**

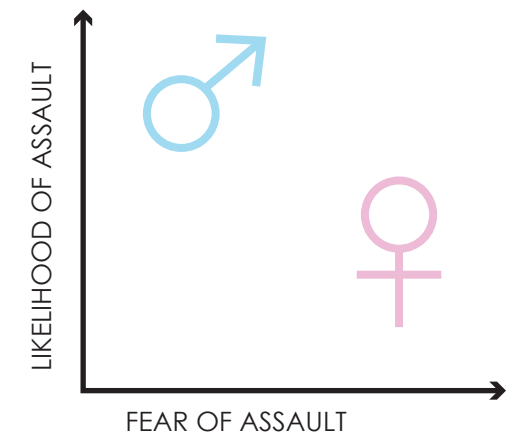


Fig. 3.5

## COLLAGE STUDIES

### BACKGROUND

Collage was used as a medium to easily represent varying spaces in order to study perceptions of space. Studies involved both participation of outside individuals and the author. These studies are subjective and done at a small scale (<20 outside participants), and are not necessarily indicative of the opinions of any one group. This method of participatory image-based research was based on methods used in Navarrete.

### PERCEPTION ANALYSIS

(See pg. 30-31).

This study was used to further understand how the gender of users in a space might affect others' perceptions of that space. Participants were shown photographic collages of public spaces in Detroit—one with all men users shown (left), one with all women users shown (middle), and one with a mix of men and women users (right). Participants were asked how they would feel in each space and to describe why they think they felt that way. Participants were not immediately alerted to what differentiated each image by the author.

Women participants were more likely to feel the most comfortable in spaces with at least some women. One woman (white, 21) suggested the race of the men in the image with only men might play a role in feeling uncomfortable. Women were also more conscious of the time of day the images portrayed, noting they would feel more unsafe in the night time scenario (bottom).

Men participants were actually somewhat likely to not notice the difference in the gender of people in each image, suggesting men are less likely to be aware of the apparent gender of other users in a public space. Overall, men did not have a notable preference for any one scenario.

### UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION

(See pg. 32-35)

A series of collages was created by the author as a method for understanding the perceptions of outdoor public space that they do and do not experience. This series was created using opinions and recounts from various studies, chiefly by Kristen Day (incl. "Being Feared," "Better Safe," and "Confrontation") and "Building Safer Public Spaces" (Navarrete). The author conducted a series of interviews with participants regarding experiences and perceptions of outdoor public space. These interviews gave insight into the perceptions of people of several different social identities.

*Woman Walking at Night* is representative of the common fear many women have of confronting men they do not know while walking alone at night. Several women report feeling small in comparison to men on the street, and also attempting to plan their walking routes ahead of time and crossing streets to avoid groups of people.

Day's study "Being Feared: Masculinity and Race in Public Space" has discussions of men, particularly men of color, being aware that women they do not know are afraid of them in public spaces. Accounts from literature research and interviews by the author recount similar thoughts from women. White women in particular have historically had a tendency painted men of color they do not know as more aggressive than they do white men ("Embassies"). These findings are represented in *How do White Women See Men of Color?*

*A Black Man's Perspective* is a combination of accounts given in interviews of black men. One man (22, black) described his experiences in downtown Detroit avoiding a group of older white women as he was afraid of confrontation when he was alone. Another man (21, black) recounted being followed by police officers while in public. He stated, "I feel like I always have to be looking out for someone"



(Top, left to right) Fig. 3.6 – All men collage 1. Fig. 3.7 – All women collage 1. Fig. 3.8 – Mixed collage .  
(Bottom, left to right) Fig. 3.9 – All men collage 2. Fig. 3.10 – All women collage 2. Fig. 3.11 – Mixed collage 2.



(Left to right) Fig. 3.12 – Woman Walking at Night. Fig. 3.13 – How do White Women see Men of Color?



Fig. 3.14 – A Black Man's Perspective

## **04: PUBLIC SPACE**

## DESIGNING PUBLIC SPACE

### WHAT IS PUBLIC SPACE?

Public space is space that is generally open and accessible to people. This includes parks, plazas, and streets. In the context of this thesis, it also includes spaces that are both owned by the public or some government entity, as well as spaces that are privately owned but still accessible to the general populace. The influence of design on the accessibility of public spaces by particular user groups is often taken for granted, especially by non-designers. But designers must ask, what makes people use a space? The study of how to make “good” public spaces is broad— it includes concepts of physical accessibility, safety, user comfort, and must also fit into the context of its specific site, being desired by locals who will most often encounter it and also follow the pertinent zoning laws. Many have studied how to create public spaces that will be frequently used for decades.

### LITERATURE FRAMEWORK

One of the most well-known figures to study human use in outdoor public spaces was William H. Whyte. His studies of human behavior in urban settings in the 1970s utilized direct observation of users to understand how space was used, with Whyte and his assistants wielding various cameras and notebooks to take notes on what they observed. His studies were published in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* in 1980. *The Social Life* discussed what Whyte and his assistants observed and how to use it to improve the design of public space to attract more users. This included the presence of people being one of the key elements to make spaces inviting, the importance of various types of seating, high visibility, nature, and triangulation— an external stimulus which provides a link between users to facilitate conversation.

Whyte was a mentor to Jane Jacobs, one of the earliest female figures in the field of urban planning. Jacobs was an activist who, particularly in the 1960s, advocated for localized grassroots movements to protect neighborhoods

from the rising popularity of “urban renewal” or “slum clearance”. As one of few women in the male-dominated field and a critic of male experts, Jacobs received backlash regularly. She also held no college degree or any formal training in planning, and was often referred to first as a housewife in attempts to belittle her work. Jacobs was particularly critical of New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, and is probably most well-known for her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Laurence).

*The Death and Life of Great American Cities* criticizes modernist urban planning of the 1950s, and advocates for walkable neighborhoods and mixed-use developments, especially to increase safety. Jacobs also discusses the advantages of using the presence of people as natural surveillance, ideally instead of police presence. She coins the term “eyes on the street” to refer to a constant presence of passersby to maintain public order. Jacobs claims that natural neighborhood surveillance requires a level of trust amongst residents built over time. Planning and design measures taken in attempts to increase safety, such as placing street lights, are criticized as ineffective without the presence of others people to provide a greater perception of protection.

Jan Gehl is currently one of the most well-known names in people-centered urban design, and credits Jacobs for his interest in the human scale in urban planning. His firm, Gehl Architects, focuses on reprogramming city spaces to be more inclined to the needs of the pedestrian and cyclist. His approach generally involves the documentation of a space, the implementation of gradual improvements, and the continued documentation of that space to continue improvements.

In 1971 Gehl published *Life Between Buildings*, which documents this approach and others. There is, again, a focus on the presence of people, not just as a feature of safety but also because humans are naturally drawn

to each other. Gehl discusses three types of outdoor activities; necessary activities, which must be completed regardless of the available physical framework, such as daily errands; optional activities, which includes activities one participates in if there is a desire to do so, such as taking a walk for fresh air; and social activities, which depend upon the presence of others in a social space, such as children playing or conversations. Optional activities are dependant on external conditions, such as the weather or available amenities. Social activities are most often the result of either necessary or optional activities, as people share space and talk or interact with each other. Gehl notes that planning cannot directly affect the quality or intensity of social interactions in public space, but it can create the possibility of it occurring at all.

Also working today to improve the quality of public spaces is the Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit organization dedicated to people-oriented placemaking. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) works with communities to revitalize their spaces using eleven principles of placemaking, (Fig. 4.1) created based heavily off of the work of William H. Whyte and Jane Jacobs. They have also created a resource for how to make successful public spaces with four qualities: they have specific uses/activities, they are accessible, sociable, and comfortable (Fig. 4.2) (Minton). The PPS has worked on many spaces, such as ‘the Beach’ at Campus Martius in Detroit, the Flint Farmers’ Market, and Bryant Park in New York City,

**“The bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers.”**

—Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

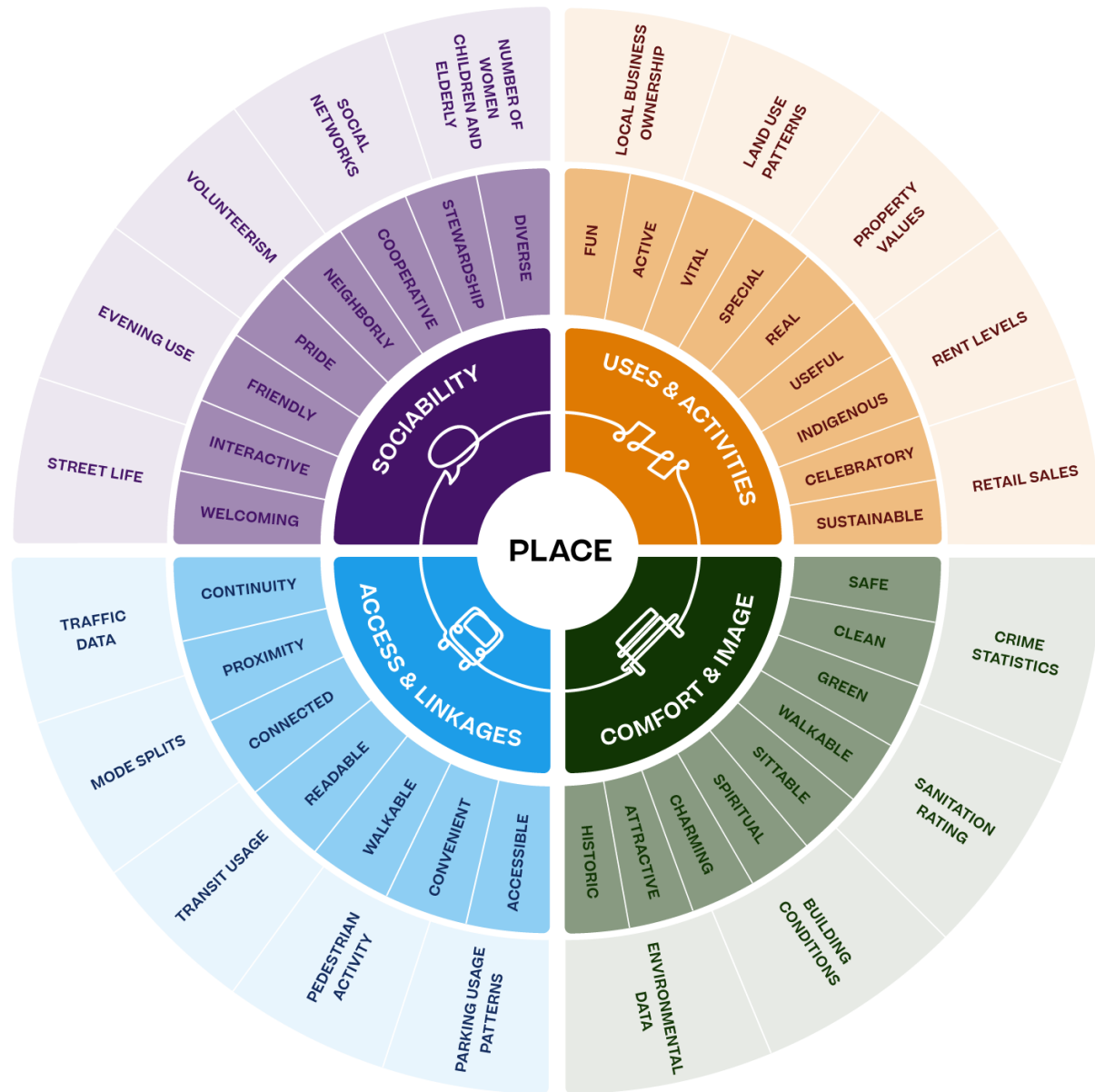


Fig. 4.1 – What Makes a Great Place? – Project for Public Spaces

## 11 Principles for Creating Great Community Places

1. The Community is the Expert
2. Create a Place, Not a Design
3. Look for Partners
4. You Can See a Lot Just By Observing
5. Have a Vision
6. Start with the Petunias: *Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper*
7. Triangulate
8. They Always Say “It Can’t Be Done”
9. Form Supports Function
10. Money Is Not the Issue
11. You Are Never Finished

Fig. 4.2 – Eleven Placemaking Principles – Project for Public Spaces



## SKETCH PROBLEM

### INTERVIEWS

As an additional method of study, a series of interviews were done with willing participants in the School of Architecture and Community Development. These interviews asked participants questions regarding their experiences in outdoor public space concerning gender and race, of themselves and those around them. They also asked participants about what they enjoy and do not enjoy in public spaces, and what aspects in an outdoor public space make them feel safe or unsafe. The audio recordings of these conversations became the basis for an experiential listening piece, *Understanding Individual Experiences with Gender and Race in Public Space* (see Fig. 4.3), and their answers helped to inform design decisions in the creation of spaces which increase perceptions of safety.

Participants varied in terms of race/ethnicity and gender. There was slight variation in age, with the majority of participants being between 19-24. All participants were adults with at least some college education. These factors will effect results to some degree, and it cannot be assumed that the answers given are reflective of any one group of people.

### GENDER AND RACE IN EXPERIENCE

Many women said they were highly aware of their gender and the gender presentation of those around them as they navigate public space alone, and took conscious steps to protect themselves from the possibility of physical assault by men (such as not taking certain routes) or protect themselves should it occur (such as carrying pepper spray). One woman (white, 22) said, "I feel safer in spaces with a higher percentage of women... statistically, men are more likely to cause situations I don't want to be in." Another woman (black, 19) said, "I try not to go out to the grocery store sometimes, or even to get gas by myself. I always have someone come with me, because when I'm by myself I think of all of the stories I've heard from women, and their experiences going out alone." These examples

of place avoidance detract from women's experiences in enjoying public space and result in innumerable missed opportunities.

Men, however, were less likely to be aware of their gender in public space, unless it was in relation to women. Men were more concerned for the potential safety of women they were near, with one man (white, 45) saying, "I'm more uncomfortable for the women that I'm with than I am for myself, because I would never leave them alone in a public space like a downtown area... because... you don't know any of these people, you don't know what to expect, you don't know why they're here..." acknowledging the greater perceived threat of danger against women. Most men were not aware of their gender while they navigated public space, but did say they would be more afraid of a group containing all men than a group of all women or a mix of men and women.

Race was a large factor in the experience of public space. Many nonwhite people expressed concern for their safety or comfort while navigating predominantly white spaces. One woman (Vietnamese-American, 22) expressed concern of recent increases race-based violence against eastern Asian people due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Black men in particular discussed measures taken to be perceived as less aggressive when they were near white people; "I am more reserved in a space where I don't see a lot of black people... I'm thinking more about what I'm saying or how I'm portraying myself... I think now at this point, it's unconscious. Growing up, it was a safety thing, because you don't want to give people a reason to point you out or look at you, but at this point it's second nature." (man, black, 22).

### FEATURES OF PUBLIC SPACE

The most common feature participants said increases their perceptions of safety in an outdoor public space is increased visibility. Participants described the ability to

see what is going on in the space around them as vital to feeling safe. This includes sightlines to other spaces, such as being able to see down a long street or through a crowded plaza. It also includes the presence of lighting at night. The appearance of a place's upkeep is important, with the presence of trash or graffiti tags decreasing feelings of safety. The concept of triangulation was discussed often (though not by that specific term, but as some other stimulus to attract people) as important to keep people in a space to protect each other.

The specific function of a space did not seem so important to participants, as long as there were programmatic elements available which could cater to a wide range of ages. "A lot of spaces only have stuff for kids. It would be nice to have something downtown for adults" (woman,

white, 24). Seating was a more requested element, but different types of seating were desired. One man (black, 23) said he enjoyed picnic tables to socialize with his friends, while another woman (black, 22) said she would like more chairs that can be moved and are not stuck to the ground. Elements of nature were regarded as a positive addition to space, with plants and water specified by multiple people. The scale of a space was discussed, with participants saying they do not feel safe in constricting spaces (such as alleys) but that very wide spaces are difficult to socialize in; "In open spaces you're more likely to say 'Hi' to people, but in closed spaces you're more likely to go in your shell" (man, black, 23). The presence of security personnel in outdoor public space was dividing, with white women being more likely to associated security personnel with safety while black men and women were less likely to.

**"Being a black person... I feel good within myself because I know who I am, when I'm going about my day... my question is, do [other people] know who they are, when they are looking at me?"**

*—man, black, 23*

**"As a woman, I think I need to be with someone... any person, male or female... I think I always want to be with someone"**

*—woman, white, 60*

## Understanding Individual Experiences with Gender and Race in Public Space

"One time my mom and I, we were shopping... we left Marshall's and we were going to Ulta. I noticed this man, he was walking in our direction, but he walked past us, but my mom and I noticed him- we didn't say anything, but we noticed him because he was walking kind of weird... he had his hands dug really deep in his pockets and he was kind of walking kind of fast paced, but we didn't think too much of it until we got to the Ulta store and they were closed. But we noticed that man who had passed us had turned around and he was following us. So without saying anything, me and my mom made a complete turn into another store, and we saw him look at us through the glass window, and me and my mom were like 'what was that? Like, we don't know what this guy's intentions were or why he was acting weird..."

**"Yeah, I would think, probably, as a woman, I would need to, and not necessarily be with a guy, you know, but any person, male or female..."**

"I would have to say I'm more uncomfortable for the women I'm with than myself because I would never, ever leave them in a downtown area... the reality is, you don't know these people, you don't know what to expect, you don't know where they're coming from."

**"I mean if two other males come over, like just in a threatening way, I'd be more scared than if two females came over."**

"I'm also a young woman, which means that I would likely be more of a target"

**"I'm always, you know, your daily is always telling you to be careful, walking around at night, or at least having someone with you to be safe"**

"In terms of gender? I think not... I think not at all [in public space]. Being a male, being a male, being in public space, it doesn't really affect me much. Being a black person, I feel good within myself, because I know who I am when I'm going through, you know? But my question is, do they know who they are, when they are looking at me?"

**"I think being Asian, especially with this... during these times, where the Coronavirus is happening, being a visible minority, being Asian, that makes me a target to discrimination, so I'm always aware of that mentally and just, physically preparing, or just, knowing that there has been situations happening, especially in cities, where incidents against visible minorities are happening... I tend to feel more comfortable with people who look like me, if that makes sense? Or people who, you know, come from a same background, even if they're not Asian, I feel like there's an unspoken connection with... you know, that they've probably experienced the same things as you, and it's just that unspoken relationship within that space."**

"Race, in terms of the public setting, it doesn't necessarily affect me either, but it makes me more aware, it brings out my sense of awareness"

**"Talking about like, racial diversity, I- because I'm a white person, I don't really think about it..."**

"Well I am more reserved in a space where I don't see a lot of black people. So.. yeah, I'm just thinking a lot more about what I'm saying or how I'm portraying myself"

Fig. 4.3 – Understanding Individual Experiences with Gender and Race in Public Space – Transcript of sketch problem

## **05: PRECEDENT STUDIES**

## PRECEDENT 01: MARKET SQUARE, PITTSBURGH, PA



Fig. 5.1.1 – Market Square, 1964



Fig. 5.1.2 – Market Square, 2010

Pittsburgh's Market Square sits at the center of a bustling business and cultural center of the city. It once housed the first Allegheny County Courthouse and the "Diamond Market", a covered market where Pittsburgh residents could come to eat, shop, and even roller skate. The Diamond Market was demolished in 1961, as it had become deteriorated and became an eyesore that blocked the existing Square. Soon, urban renewal plans levelled several historic central neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, scattering residents and users of the square to the suburbs and to public housing complexes on the edge of the city. Market Square became a hollow version of its former self, and was soon seen as a "problem area" full of crime.

The Project for Public Space began a planning process for Market Square in 2006, after numerous attempted reworkings of the site. Public placemaking workshops allowed locals to give input on what they wanted to see in a new central market. Eventually, several streets were closed off to create one continuous square, making the space for usable at its center rather than pushing activities to the corners to make room for traffic. Users emphasized the need for multiple uses- this led to physical changes, like a reading room run by the Carnegie Library, and programmatic ones, like a regular farmers market, concerts, yoga, and events facilitated by the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership all taking place through Market Square. Public input allowed Market Square to be revitalized with a focus on program and management overhaul while still adding necessary physical alterations, such as more trees, lighting, seating, and a connected space (Madden, "Market Square", Przybylek).



Fig. 5.1.3 – Diamond Market, 1960s



Fig. 5.1.4 – Nicholas Coffee, 1980s



Fig. 5.1.5 – Nicholas Coffee, present day



Fig. 5.1.6 – Tables and chairs in Market Square



Fig. 5.1.7 – Yoga in the Square



Fig. 5.1.8 – Saturday Night Market, 2019

## PRECEDENT 02: SUNDANCE SQUARE PLAZA, FORT WORTH, TX



Fig. 5.2.1 – Sundance Square, BEFORE



Fig. 5.2.2 – Sundance Square, AFTER

Sundance Square is a privately owned district of downtown Fort Worth, Texas, that hosts commercial, residential, retail, and entertainment amenities. A master plan for the area was created in the 1980s, which included a public plaza. Two parking lots were set aside for events, which were put together by Sundance Square Management for over 25 years: movie nights, farmers markets, yoga, professional boxing matches, and events for the Superbowl were just a handful. This created a hub of activity and place attachment to the space. Soon locals wanted to attract even more groups of people throughout the day/week/year by providing seating, interactive attractions for kids, and various events and programs.

The Sundance Square Plaza opened in 2013. The street between the two parking lots was closed, and two buildings were erected which bookended the new plaza. A special events pavilion was also constructed, which holds public restrooms. Its doors and windows fold to convert the space into indoor or outdoor. South of the pavilion, there are four 32-foot tall umbrellas which are illuminated with LEDs at night to light up the space, and there is also a jet fountain level with the pavement, a convertible stage, and ample seating. The plaza was connected to streets in a way that is visually obvious to pedestrians approaching that they were nearing some kind of special destination. By creating attachment to the space and understanding the wants and needs of users, the owners of the plaza created a space which reinvigorated the downtown area (Madden, "Sundance Square").



Fig. 5.2.3 – Lighted Umbrellas at night



Fig. 5.2.4 – Summer splash pad

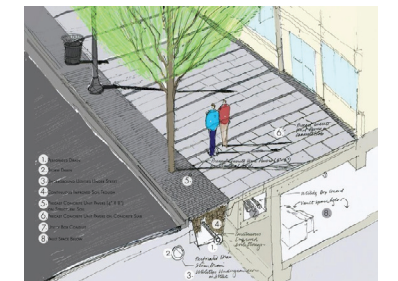


Fig. 5.2.5 – Streetscape improvements

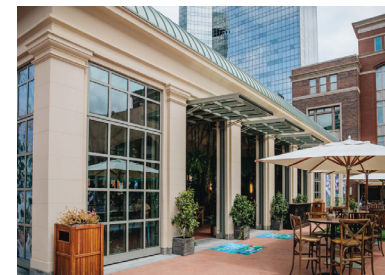


Fig. 5.2.6 – Sundance Pavilion



Fig. 5.2.7 – Umbrellas as shading devices



Fig. 5.2.8 – Program study (before redesign)

## PRECEDENT 03: BELL STREET PARK, SEATTLE, WA



Fig. 5.3.1 – Bell Street BEFORE



Fig. 5.3.2 – Bell Street AFTER

Belltown is the most densely populated neighborhood in Seattle. It features a mix of residences, businesses, and public service buildings. As residential growth expanded, the community felt it did not have enough open space to maintain an active street life. Throughout 2008-2009, the City of Seattle and a Citizen's Advisory Committee approved funding to create Bell Street Park. Seattle's Parks and Recreation Department worked with the City Department of Transportation to transform Bell Street into a shared community space for pedestrians and cars alike. Community members of Belltown played an active role in the design of the new street, especially in presenting benefits and drawbacks of the shared street concept, which they were very supportive of.

The vision of Bell Street Park was centered around five design cues: *Reclaim*, *Elevate*, *Grid*, *Twist*, and *Meander*. This involved *reclaiming* the street for flexible use, *elevating* it into one continuous surface, establishing a human-scale *grid* of 4'x4' blocks, *twisting* this grid to indicate diagonal movement and emphasize storefronts and street amenities, and encouraging users to *meander* with an offset travel lane and differing paving materials along the street. The final program includes a 10' center lane with a 4' wide flex space on either side. The main travel lane shifts side-to-side, and there are texture changes to slow traffic. Texture and material changes also delineate space for seating and planters. Bell Street Park has acted as an inspiration for similar neighborhood improvements throughout the city (Holmes, "Bell Street Park").



Fig. 5.3.3 – Bell Street as a circulation path



Fig. 5.3.4 – Bell Street as a destination



Fig. 5.3.5 – Protected seating



Fig. 5.3.6 – Plan for Bell Street Park



Fig. 5.3.7 – Community events



Fig. 5.3.8 – Room for pedestrians and cyclists

## PRECEDENT 04: ACADEMY STREET, CARY, NC



Fig. 5.4.1 – Academy Street revitalized



Fig. 5.4.2 – New crosswalks on Academy

As a part of a larger plan to make the streets of downtown of Cary more pedestrian friendly, city officials chose to turn Academy street into a central "festival street" for events made for locals and visitors alike to enjoy. Improved crosswalks and streetlights were added, as well as changing signal patterns. Existing plazas were updated to create a cohesive aesthetic, and several types of street furniture were added, along with pieces of public art. One of the main goals for the street as a thoroughfare was to be accessible for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. The plan for Academy Street involved extensive public outreach from the city as well as the main firm on the project, Clark Nexsen. The city of Cary also completed maintenance underneath the street at this time, including improving water, sewer, and electrical lines.

Academy Street received the 2018 Great Main Street in the Making Award from the American Planning Association North Carolina Chapter for demonstrating qualities of an ideal main street as a "vibrant, distinct destination that promotes organic gathering, street music, and economic development". Its "outdoor rooms" created by differing pavements and intermittent seating create a sense of place and provide unique gathering and resting spaces. Academy Street is a representative example of the goals for the continued redevelopment of downtown Cary ("Transforming").



Fig. 5.4.3 – Programming at all levels



Fig. 5.4.4 – Group seating



Fig. 5.4.5 – New crosswalks and streetlights



Fig. 5.4.6 – Academy Street events



Fig. 5.4.7 – Street lights at night



Fig. 5.4.8 – Improved community plaza

## PRECEDENT 05: RESTORATIVE GROUND, NEW YORK, NY



Fig. 5.5.1 – Restorative Ground conceptual rendering

Restorative Ground is a research and design proposal created by Bryony Roberts with WIP Studio. It focuses on the question, "How can public space better serve the needs of neurodiverse populations of all ages and backgrounds?" The installation is unique to its specific site as it works with the existing trees and streetscape. Its overall wedge shape creates a gradual connection between the elevated sidewalk to the street. Though it is one cohesive piece, formal and material changes loosely separate it into three "zones" in order to serve people of varying ages, abilities, and desires—one for focused activities, one for active engagement, and one for relaxing. The construction itself is also divided into an 8 foot x 8 foot system containing 33 modules, allowing for variety in height while maintaining cohesion.

This installation was also the winner of the Care for Hudson Square competition in 2020, a recovery initiative aimed at restoring the Hudson Square neighborhood in New York in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This proposal encouraged designers to submit plans for an interactive street installation with the goal of reinvigorating the space (Ponce, "Restorative").

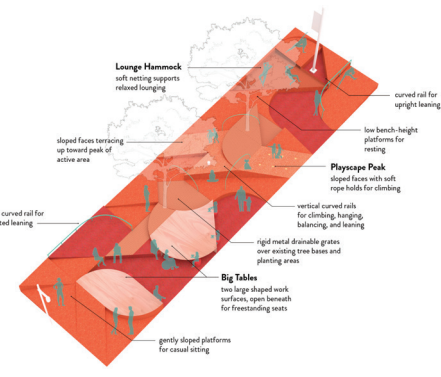


Fig. 5.5.2 – Installation program



Fig. 5.5.3 – Diagram showing three different zones



Fig. 5.5.4 – Photo of installation, for all ages

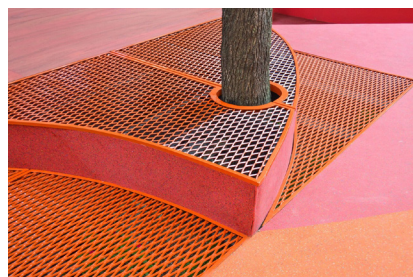


Fig. 5.5.5 – Close photo showing materials



Fig. 5.5.6 – High activity level

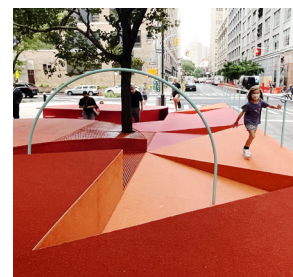


Fig. 5.5.7 – Showing an urban context

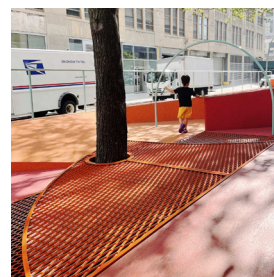


Fig. 5.5.8 – Photo of installation

## PRECEDENT 06: CITY THREAD, CHATTANOOGA, TN



Fig. 5.6.1 – City Thread

City Thread is an installation that aims to connect users with both specific public programming and informal hangout space. Its single gesture weaves its way through the alley in which it sits, created varying conditions, such as lounging and sitting spaces, mini-stages, spaces for movie screenings, and urban "rooms", reinforced by painted graphics throughout the alley. Creators of City Thread wanted it to act as a piece of urban and social infrastructure, rather than just a piece of art. By giving it the ability to have programmed space while not giving one concrete use, users of City Thread can interpret the space in many unique ways, meaning it can remain active even as needs change. The piece consists of 500 feet of simple steel tubing.

City Thread was the winner of the Passageways 2.0 international design competition to turn a formerly neglected alley in Chattanooga into a vibrant pedestrian space. This competition focused on creating a permanent installation in the city that focused on the urban fabric that exists between buildings in relation to the overall community context. The activation of this alley has increased business at surrounding retail establishments and pedestrian use ("City Thread", "City Thread/Sports").

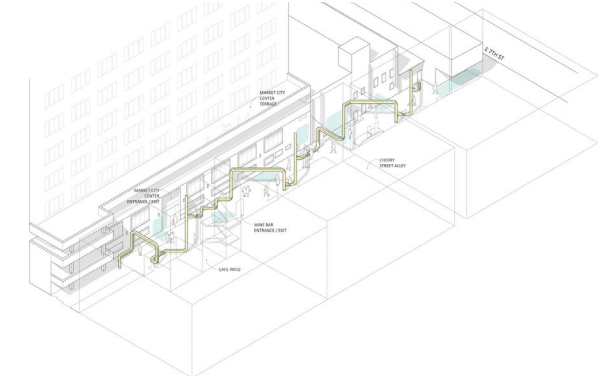


Fig. 5.6.2 – Access points



Fig. 5.6.3 – In use

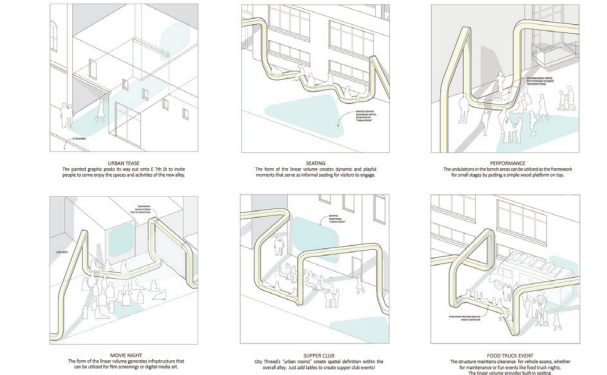


Fig. 5.6.4 – Programming features



Fig. 5.6.5 – All ages use



Fig. 5.6.6 – A place to rest

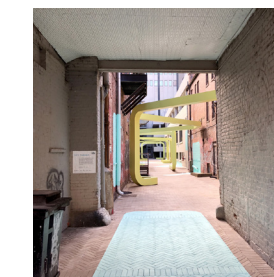


Fig. 5.6.7 – Teasing entrance

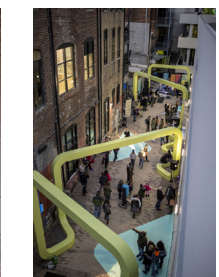


Fig. 5.6.8, Fig. 5.6.9 – Community gathering space

## **06: A FEMINIST DESIGN FRAMEWORK**

## GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-EQUITABLE PUBLIC SPACE

This research has led to the creation of a set of Guidelines for Gender-Equitable Public Space. This is a collection of ideal design strategies for designing public outdoor space using a feminist lens to increase perceptions of safety. Three key themes that were identified as being most important in creating gender-equitable space involved aspects of visibility, function, and comfort— these are the three themes which guide this framework.

The nature of this framework as focusing on improving perceptions of safety in outdoor public space for a marginalized group and taking notes from generally well-designed public space means that its strategies are able to improve space for many other people, and it is not limited to creating spaces which *only* improve experiences for women. This increases the utility of the framework and allows it be more easily implemented in spaces that focus on multiple user groups.



### VISIBILITY

- SIGHTLINES:** Sightlines promote feelings of safety by increasing visibility of the space around and limiting claustrophobia. They are one of the most important aspects in increasing perceptions of safety.
- LIGHTS:** Lights increase visibility and allow spaces to be accessed at night, when women feel most vulnerable outside. They also give direction and can be used to indicate points of interest.
- CLEANLINESS:** Spaces that are well- maintained (free of litter, debris, graffiti) feel inhabited and cared for. People feel less vulnerable here. Unkept spaces are associated with crime and feelings of anxiousness.
- TRIANGULATION:** Triangulation involves providing some external stimulus which gives incentive for people to use a space and communicate with one another. Women especially feel safer and more comfortable in inhabited spaces, as people act as pseudo-surveillance, letting others know they are seen in a space, and deterring “undesirables”.



### FUNCTION

- PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY:** Spaces designed for the abilities of all bodies also become accessible to caretakers, the elderly, and children, increasing likelihood they will use a space.
- INTER-GENERATIONAL USES:** Spaces should be designed with the wants and needs of girls and adult women of all ages in mind. Women are also more likely to care for children and the elderly, and need the spaces they use to be fully accessible to them.
- MULTI-USE SPACES:** Places with multiple uses promote sociability and increase the amount and diversity of people likely to use a space, increasing community surveillance.
- PROGRAM:** Spaces with defined programs let users know what to expect to experience in a space, easing anxieties about the space.
- PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Women are more likely to rely on public transport to get around. Access to these systems when possible increases the likelihood of them using a space.






### COMFORT

- CUSTOMIZATION:** The ability to change or personalize a space creates place attachment. Furnishings should also be designed to fit multiple body types.
- PLACES OF PAUSE:** Women are more likely to travel in circular paths and on foot/bike/public transport. It is important for them to have enjoyable places to rest. A place to sit increases user comfort in a space and also the likelihood of user retention. Seating should exist in different forms and be in high visibility areas.
- NATURE:** The presence of greenery, sunlight, shade, and water creates calming effects. Natural elements can also be used in place of hard barriers.
- SCALE:** Places that feel too large or too tight can create feelings of anxiety and decrease visibility. Structures that exist at a human scale are more welcoming.
- PEDESTRIAN PROTECTION:** Pedestrians should be protected from vehicles, and there should be high visibility between them. Speed limits should be lower in areas with many people.



FRAMEWORK IN USE

-  **VISIBILITY**
-  **FUNCTION**
-  **COMFORT**

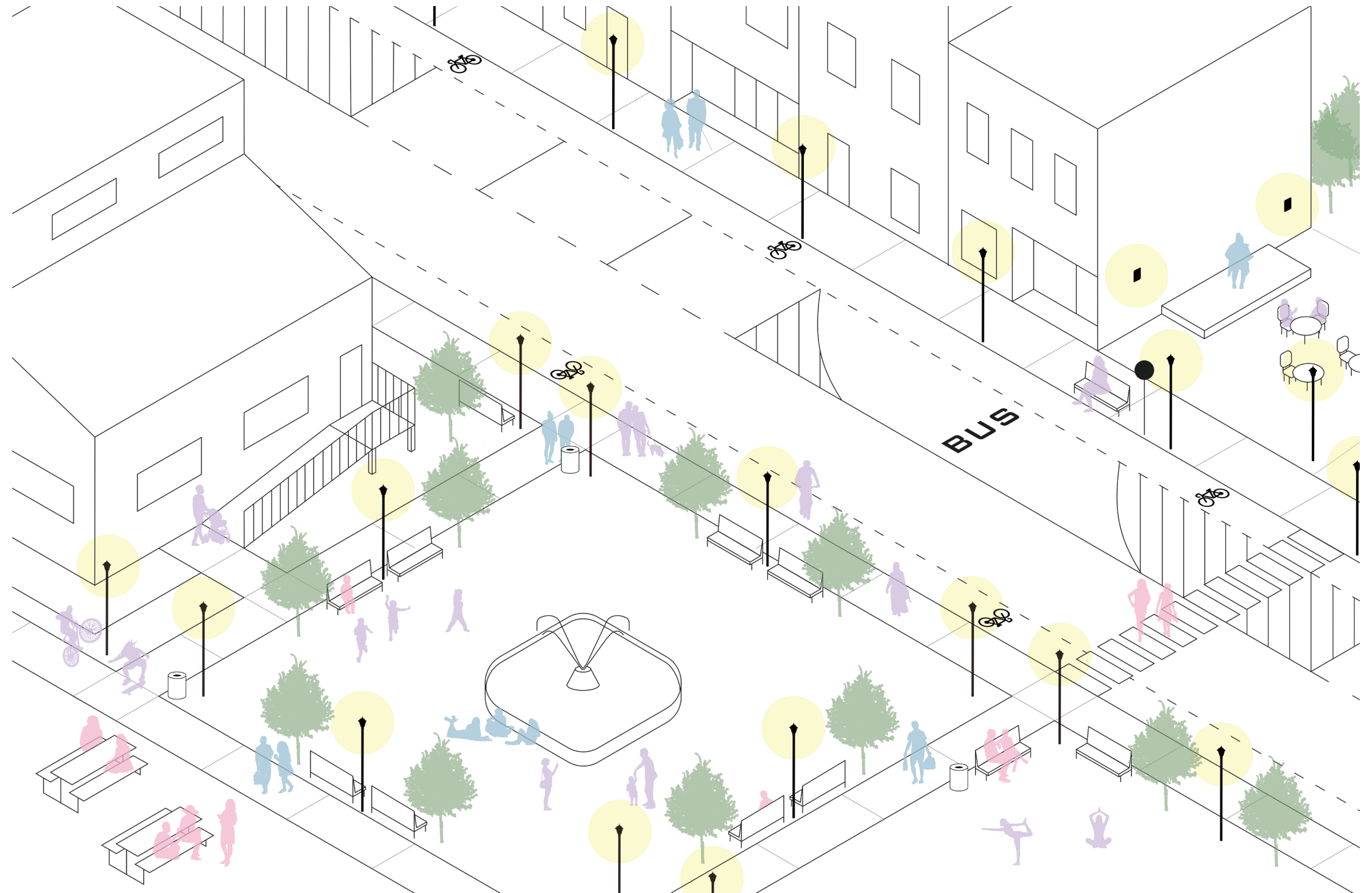


Fig. 6.1 – Guidelines for Gender-Equitable Public Space conceptual use

## **07: MICHIGAN AVE. DESIGN INTERVENTION**

**SITE ANALYSIS**

Using the created framework for gender-equitable space, a proposal for the revitalization of Michigan Ave. was created. This corridor, located between 14th Street and Rosa Parks Blvd. in Corktown, Detroit, was chosen based on its proximity to the ongoing Michigan Central Station development as well as both residential and commercial spaces. Just to the east of this stretch is an already well-designed, busy commercial corridor, which this block will act as an extension of.

Spaces of note along the street have been studied to understand possible design strategies viable for this space. These include spaces that can increase or decrease feelings of safety, and other spaces that can be improved upon to further increase perceptions of safety. Impressions by the author and others who have experienced the site are given related to each space. These spaces and feelings felt in each space inform future design decisions for the corridor.

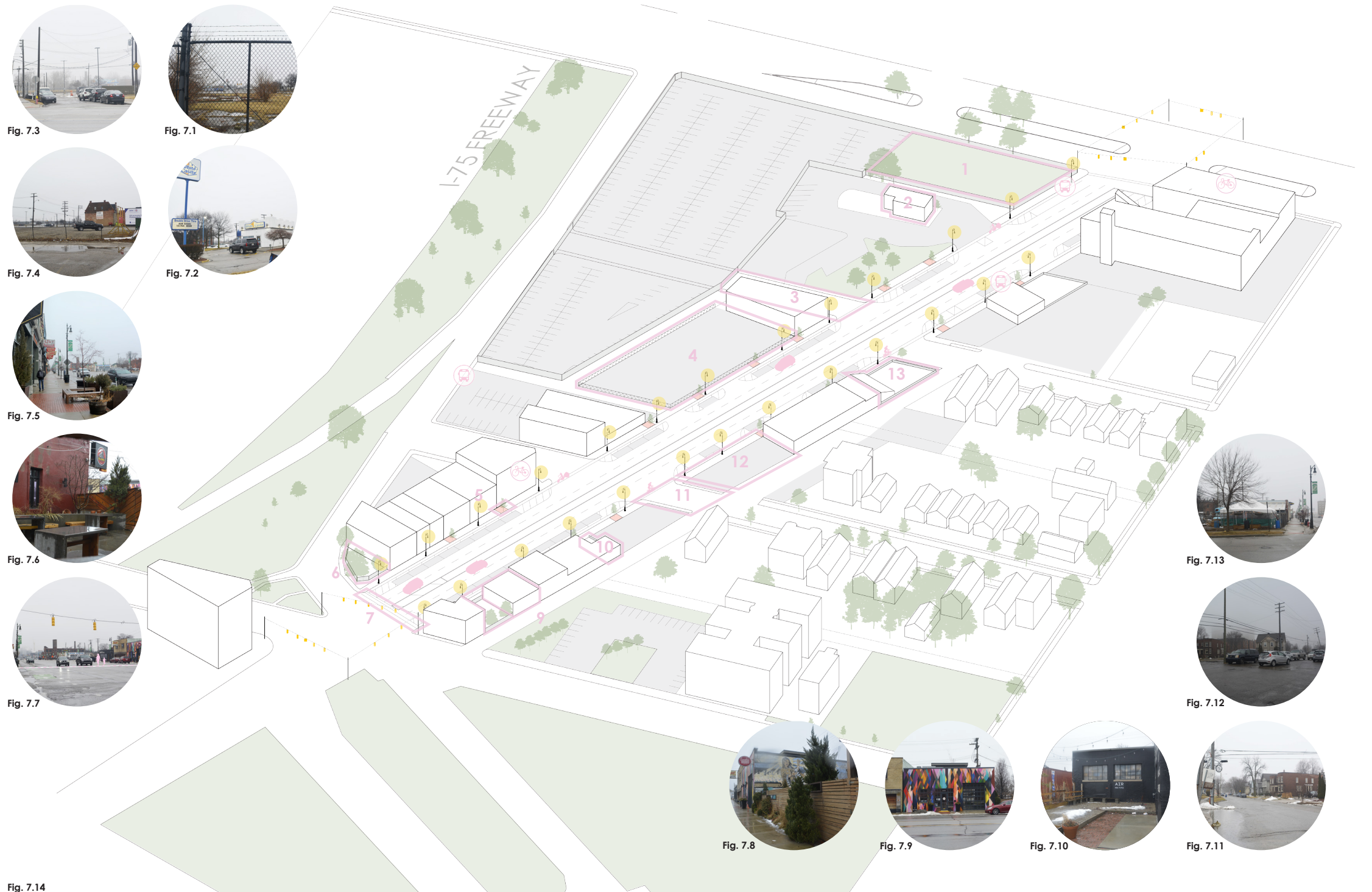


Fig. 7.3

Fig. 7.1

Fig. 7.4

Fig. 7.2

Fig. 7.5

Fig. 7.6

Fig. 7.7

Fig. 7.13

Fig. 7.12

Fig. 7.8

Fig. 7.9

Fig. 7.10

Fig. 7.11

Fig. 7.1-7.13 – Photographic analysis of Michigan Ave. corridor (see pg. 48-51)

Fig. 7.14 – Illustrative analysis of Michigan Ave. corridor

Fig. 7.14



**Fig. 7.1. Gated lot at the north corner of Michigan Ave. and Rosa Parks Blvd.:** The tall gate with barbed wire increase perceptions of crime. The landscaping is not maintained, there are no lights, and it decreases sightlines for turning the corner on foot, adding to feelings of unease.



**Fig 7.2. Fast food restaurant:** Building is set back from the street, decreasing accessibility. This Setback and the parking lot add blind spots. Structure does not match the human-scale of the rest of the buildings on the block. It is designed for car infrastructure instead of pedestrian/bike.



**Fig. 7.3. Vermont St. dead end:** Vermont Street dead-ends into a gated parking lot, with a building to the west. This creates claustrophobia and lack of alternative routes. The building acts as a blind corner for those walking on Michigan Ave. in front of Vermont.



**Fig 7.4. Parking lot next to barber shop:** This parking lot is always almost empty, and has very little lighting. Several of the lights do not work. This lot sits in front of another, larger, unlit parking lot, creating a large swath of paving with low visibility. There is a mural on the adjacent building that changes regularly.



**Fig 7.5. Sidewalk seating:** Some restaurants and businesses have placed seating around the trees on the sidewalks. This creates a place to pause and rest while walking. There are plants or trash bins placed nearby, and there is a tactile change where trees are planted.



**Fig 7.6. Seating at Slows BBQ:** Seating at Slows is fenced in, with cutouts giving a small visual hint to what is happening behind. The fence turns the corner gradually, creating less of a blind corner, but trees along the fence obscure views.



**Fig 7.7. Crosswalk near 14th St./Vernor Hwy.:** Three streets cross here, creating a busy intersection. There is almost no pedestrian protection along the wide street, and cars along Michigan Ave. move fast. Cars also sit in pedestrian crosswalks.



**Fig 7.8. Outside Mercury Burger and Bar outdoor seating:** Seating for Mercury is obscured by a fence with some small visual openings, creating a sense of curiosity about the space. There are plants within and also along the sidewalk. There is a mural on an adjacent building visible from the street.



**Fig 7.9. Mural facade:** The facade for a pizza restaurant and gallery/retail space is covered in a colorful mural. The garage door and large windows let people walking by look inside.



**Fig 7.10. Bike shop patio:** The Metropolis Cycle Bike Shop has a small outdoor space for seating and working on bikes. This acts as a place of pause between the building and sidewalk while entering or leaving. There are benches and a pump for bike tires.



**Fig 7.11. Wabash Street:** Wabash and Vermont access residential zones to the south of Michigan Ave. There are issues of noise for the homes nearest to the avenue, and there is little lighting.



**Fig 7.12. Auto shop parking lot:** This lot is always filled with cars, and is not maintained, with litter around the space. There is no lighting for the large space other than the regular streetlights, which leave it mostly dark.



**Fig 7.13. Ima Noodle Shop seating:** Seating here is protected by a chain-link fence. There is a covered awning and tent, creating little connection to the street. There is also trash and debris visible from the street.



(Top, left to right): **Fig. 7.15** – Michigan Avenue sections. **Fig. 7.16** – Michigan Avenue site map. (Bottom, left to right): **Fig. 7.17** – Satellite view of site. **Fig. 7.18** – Zoning map of site. **Fig. 7.19** – Site callout showing Michigan Central Station. **Fig. 7.20** – Figure ground map of site.

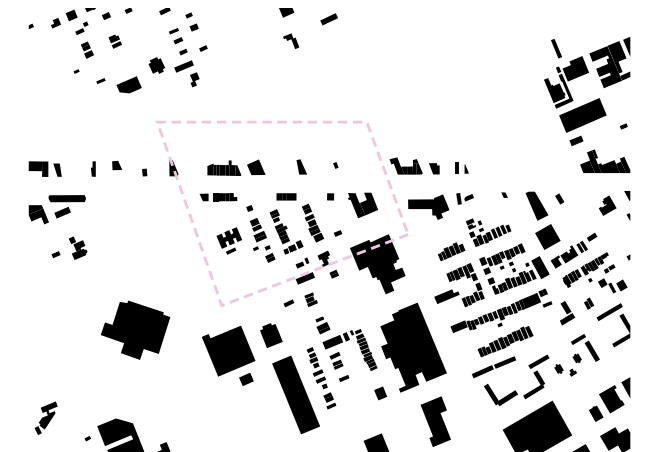
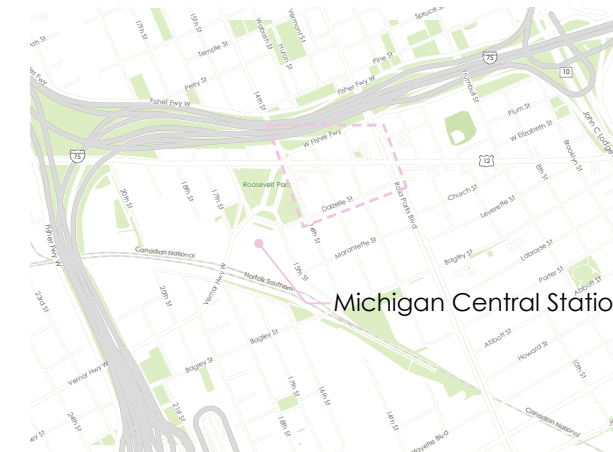
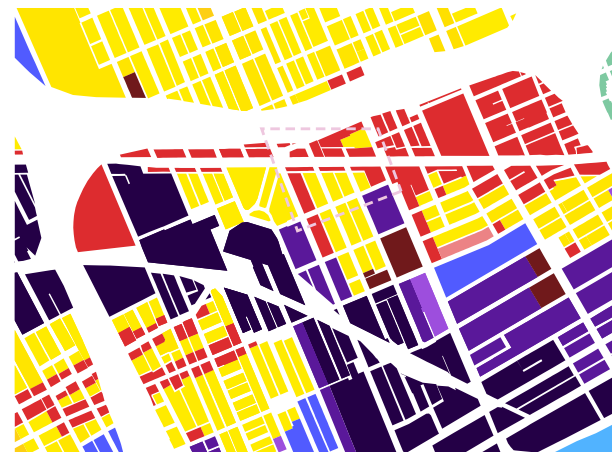
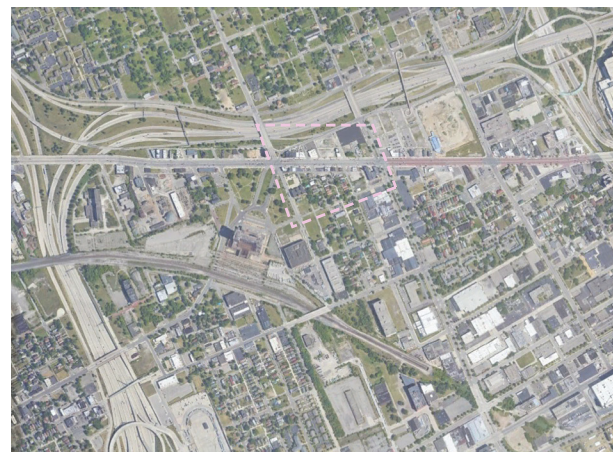




Fig. 7.22



Fig. 7.23



Fig. 7.24



Fig. 7.25

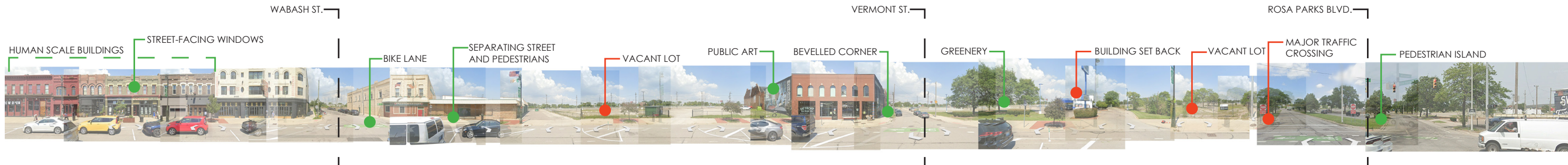


Fig. 7.26

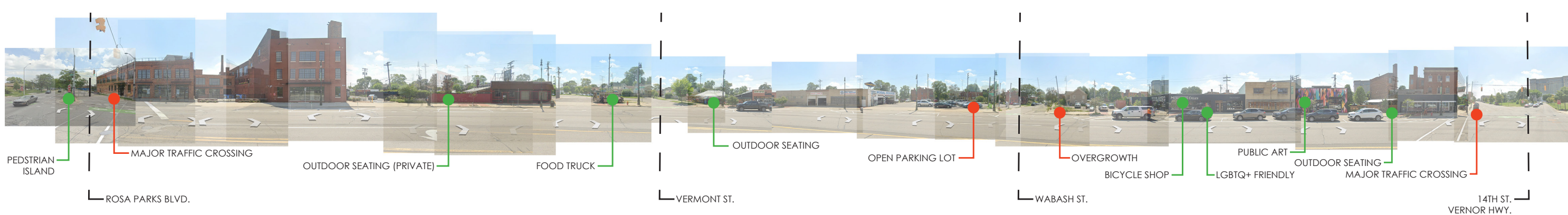


Fig. 7.27

W-E STREET VIEW



E-W STREET VIEW



(Top, left to right): Fig. 7.21 – The Pedestrian Experience. Fig. 7.22-7.27 – Walking the Michigan Ave. Corridor. Photographic analysis

(Bottom): Fig. 7.28 – Michigan Avenue corridor street elevations

## DESIGN INTERVENTION

In line with the given framework for gender-equitable public space, new aspects of the Michigan Ave. corridor aim to improve perceptions of visibility, function, and comfort.

Placement of lighting in existing parking lots create feelings of accessibility in otherwise hidden spaces. Permeable fencing creates a barrier between places of pause and streets or alleys while still maintaining sightlines. Several lots have been reprogrammed to attract more people.

The parking lot next to the barber shop is transformed into a shared community space with a stage against the mural wall and a sculpture space, intended for physical interaction for children and adults. The presence of people in the middle of the block in a visible space will make both community members and visitors feel safer. Pop-up markets are located to the east of the barber shop which have the ability to be used year-round. Across Michigan Ave., set back from the street behind a restaurant is a space for food truck and other vendors. This program has the capacity for a wide variety of options, making it more accessible to several groups.

Traffic calming measures, such as the addition of a crosswalk in the middle of the block, raising crosswalks with tactile change, and raised medians are implemented. The dead end Vermont st. has been turned into a pedestrian-only walkway with access to the pop-up market, removing unsafe traffic and leaving room for physical activity. A park is now located on the north corner of Michigan Ave. and Rosa Parks Blvd., giving a place for users to wonder, sit in the shade, or just observe their surroundings, with another small park next to the bike shop.

- IMPROVE VISIBILITY
- IMPROVE FUNCTION
- IMPROVE COMFORT

Fig. 7.29 – Illustrative analysis of Michigan Ave. design intervention

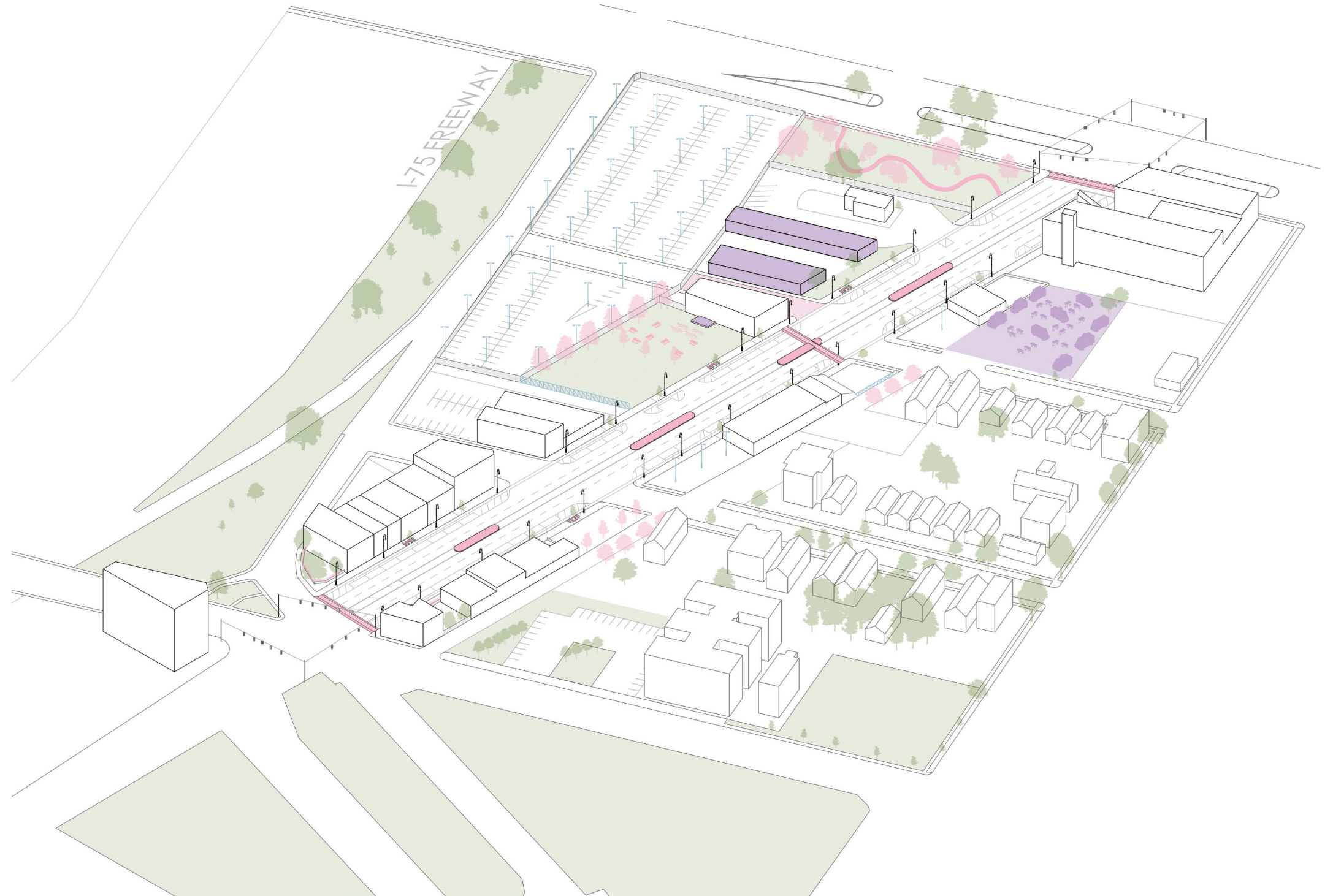






Fig. 7.30 – 1. Seating for Slows BBQ



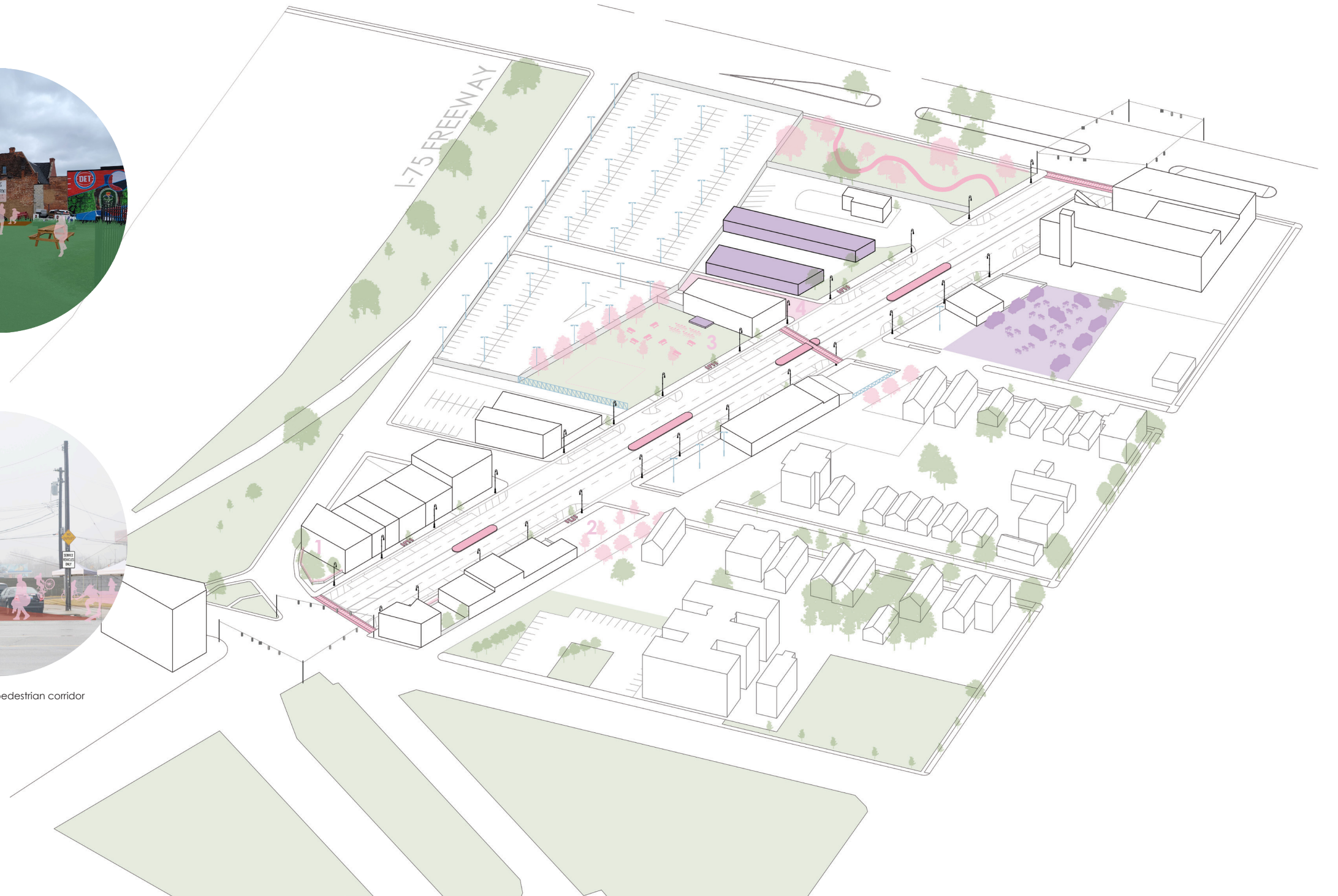
Fig. 7.32 – 3. Artist's Park



Fig. 7.31 – 2. Bike shop park



Fig. 7.33 – 4. Vermont Street pedestrian corridor





**Fig 7.30 Seating for Slows BBQ:** Fencing surrounding the outdoor seating is lowered so that passers-by may look over it to the seating and also around the corner. Plantings are added to soften the edge. Present plant beds on the street corner are cleaned up, and benches are added to create a connection between to public walkway and private seating



**Fig 7.32 Artist's Park:** The private parking lot adjacent to the barber shop on Michigan Ave. is converted into a larger park focused on the arts. The large mural wall is expanded and used as a backdrop for a stage. Chairs and picnic tables are available. An interactive sculpture is added for users to climb, sit, walk, or play on. This site is also in close proximity to the pedestrian street.



**Fig 7.31 Bike Shop Park:** The empty gravel lot next to the bike shop becomes a small pocket of usable and more welcoming green space. Its proximity to residential zones makes it a prime spot for local people to stop as they are shopping or eating in the area. The bike shop's patio is expanded with and additional seating is added. This tangible connection local businesses aims to create stronger relationships with nearby residents and visitors.



**Fig 7.33 Vermont Street Pedestrian Corridor:** The dead end of Vermont St. is blocked off from regular vehicle traffic and becomes a pedestrian-centric walkway adjacent to the pop-up markets. This becomes a space of circulation and activity. Planters are used as barricade separating the space from traffic along with tactile material changes, using a brick that is scaled down to a pedestrian level.

## **08: CONCLUSION**

## DISCUSSION

This thesis is just a small portion of the area of research concerning the effects of gender on perceptions of spaces. It is important to reiterate that the feminist design framework created with the findings of this research is not limited to only increasing perceptions of safety for women, but rather with the specific needs of women present at its conception, and the design strategies used have beneficial aspects for many different groups of people. Further, because women are a highly nuanced and diverse group, the opinions, experiences, and perceptions presented here will not be reflective of every individual. Despite this, the research presented still gives evidence that increasing aspects of visibility, function, and comfort increase perceptions of safety in outdoor public space for women in general. It also reinforces studies which have suggested that imagery present in public spaces which is sexualizing, objectifying, or otherwise sexist toward women has a negative effect on women's perceptions of that space.

The research process of this work has highlighted the importance of intersectionality in understanding social groups, particularly studying gender and race. The effect of race on one's gender experience is massive, and it is paramount to center the experiences of women of color in the continuing discussions of gender inequality.

In creating or improving a public space, one of the most important parts of design is listening to the voices of those who will use it. This is one of the eleven principles for good public space design put forth by the Project for Public Spaces. In knowing this, it is important for architects and planners to listen to the voices of women, who make up approximately half of users of public spaces. It is also important to listen to local community members. Community engagement is key in the just design of spaces. Due to the constraints of this thesis project, this was not explored as in depth as the author would have liked it to be. It will still be said that the strategies suggested by this research should be paired with expertise from the

community one is designing for, as they are the experts on what will work in their neighborhood.

The strategies given are created intentionally to be specific enough to create results but also vague enough that they may be interpreted as needed in public outdoor spaces universally, such as parks, plazas, and streetscapes, as the need for gender equality in planning and design is universal. As research like this continues, more spaces will be created which can be equally enjoyed by many different types of users.

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# FIGURES



## 02: GENDER ISSUES IN PUBLIC SPACE

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## 03: PERCEPTION AND IDENTITY

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- 3.5 Created by author, based on work by Day "Confrontation"
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## 04: PUBLIC SPACE

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- 5.6.3 Ibid
- 5.6.4 Ibid

- 5.6.5 Ibid
- 5.6.6 Ibid
- 5.6.7 Ibid
- 5.6.8 "City Thread / Sports." *ArchDaily*, ArchDaily, [www.archdaily.com/910948/city-thread-sports](http://www.archdaily.com/910948/city-thread-sports).
- 5.6.9 Ibid

## 06: GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-EQUITABLE SPACE

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- 6.1 Created by author

## 07: MICHIGAN AVENUE DESIGN INTERVENTION

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- 7.1 Photograph by author
- 7.2 Ibid
- 7.3 Ibid
- 7.4 Ibid
- 7.5 Ibid
- 7.6 Ibid
- 7.7 Ibid
- 7.8 Ibid
- 7.9 Ibid
- 7.10 Ibid
- 7.11 Ibid
- 7.12 Ibid
- 7.13 Ibid
- 7.14 Ibid
- 7.15 Created by author
- 7.16 Ibid
- 7.17 Satellite image via Google Earth
- 7.18 Created by author
- 7.19 Ibid
- 7.20 Ibid
- 7.21 Photograph by author
- 7.22 Ibid
- 7.23 Ibid

- 7.24** Ibid
- 7.25** Ibid
- 7.26** Ibid
- 7.27** Ibid
- 7.28** Created by author, images via Google Street View
- 7.29** Created by author
- 7.30** Ibid
- 7.31** Ibid
- 7.32** Ibid
- 7.33** Ibid

