

A BETTER CITY FOR HER

design safer public spaces for women
in the United States and China



Geruihan Xu

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A Better City for Her

Geruihan Xu

MLA Landscape Architecture, RISD



WOMEN OF THE WORLD UNITE
Women's liberation movement in Washington, DC, August 26, 1970.
Don Carl Steffen/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images, <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>

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By Geruihan Xu
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Approved by Masters Examination Committee:

Johanna Barthmaier-Payne, Department Head, Landscape Architecture

Emily Vogler, Primary Thesis Advisor

Claire Fellman, Thesis Committee

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ABSTRACT

Gender dynamics in public spaces are important issues to study. Here, I challenge the patriarchy in the built environment because it intensifies the oppressed status of women in modern cities. Listening to women's concerns is the first step of doing so. Meanwhile, I am aware that different socio-cultural backgrounds would affect women's attitudes, preferences, and other aspects of public spaces. Thus, the thesis will be discussed in the contexts of mainland China and the United States due to the limitation of my experience.

In this thesis, I want to find out what are the needs of women in public spaces and what kinds of spaces would make women feel safer and more comfortable. Therefore, this thesis first looked back on the different history of feminism movements in the United States and China; then summarized the critical issues that women face in public spaces in the two socio-cultural backgrounds; and proposed a series of design principles by increasing visibility to guide designers in designing safer public spaces for women. At last, a zine, which includes all the information briefly, is designed to distribute among designers to remind them to design for women in the future.

Ultimately, my goal is to help build an understanding of the current situation of women in public spaces, the necessity of addressing those needs and concerns, and how to design safer public spaces for women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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UP FROM UNDER WOMEN UNITE

Talking Points: A Brief Primer on Modern-Day Feminism, © HFS Collective
<https://www.savoirflair.com/fashion/351053/modern-feminism-fashion-decoded>

MANIFESTO

I envision a world with gender equity, where women's rights are not compromised. And I foresee a future where all the public spaces could support the needs and desires of women. Women would feel safe, welcomed, and comfortable stepping into the public spaces. I believe that we should design for all genders, not just design with one homogenization idea that unifying all human beings as men.

Gender inequity is always an ongoing social issue that needs to be addressed. Women have to compromise in this patriarchal society. In addition, patriarchy also exists in the built environment. It seems that public spaces that are meant to be universal are actually designed for men, the needs of women are neglected. And most of the time, women felt unsafe outside in public spaces. What's more, from a broader concept, the built environment is actually an output of patriarchal ideologies. For a very long time, the built environment is very brutal to the natural environment: the plants are trimmed for human aesthetic; the rivers are regulated for all kinds of purposes; the land is excavated to build buildings; even spaces are divided by

physical walls or fences. I think the entrenched man-centered idea is also a presence of the patriarchy. And we need to challenge the patriarchal idea first in order to reclaim the city for women.

What would a world where women's needs and desires are being met would look like? How would the cities in that world be different from those we are living in now? I hope the cities in the new world would be more friendly to women as we are really putting effort into creating better living spaces for all human beings which include women as a significant part.



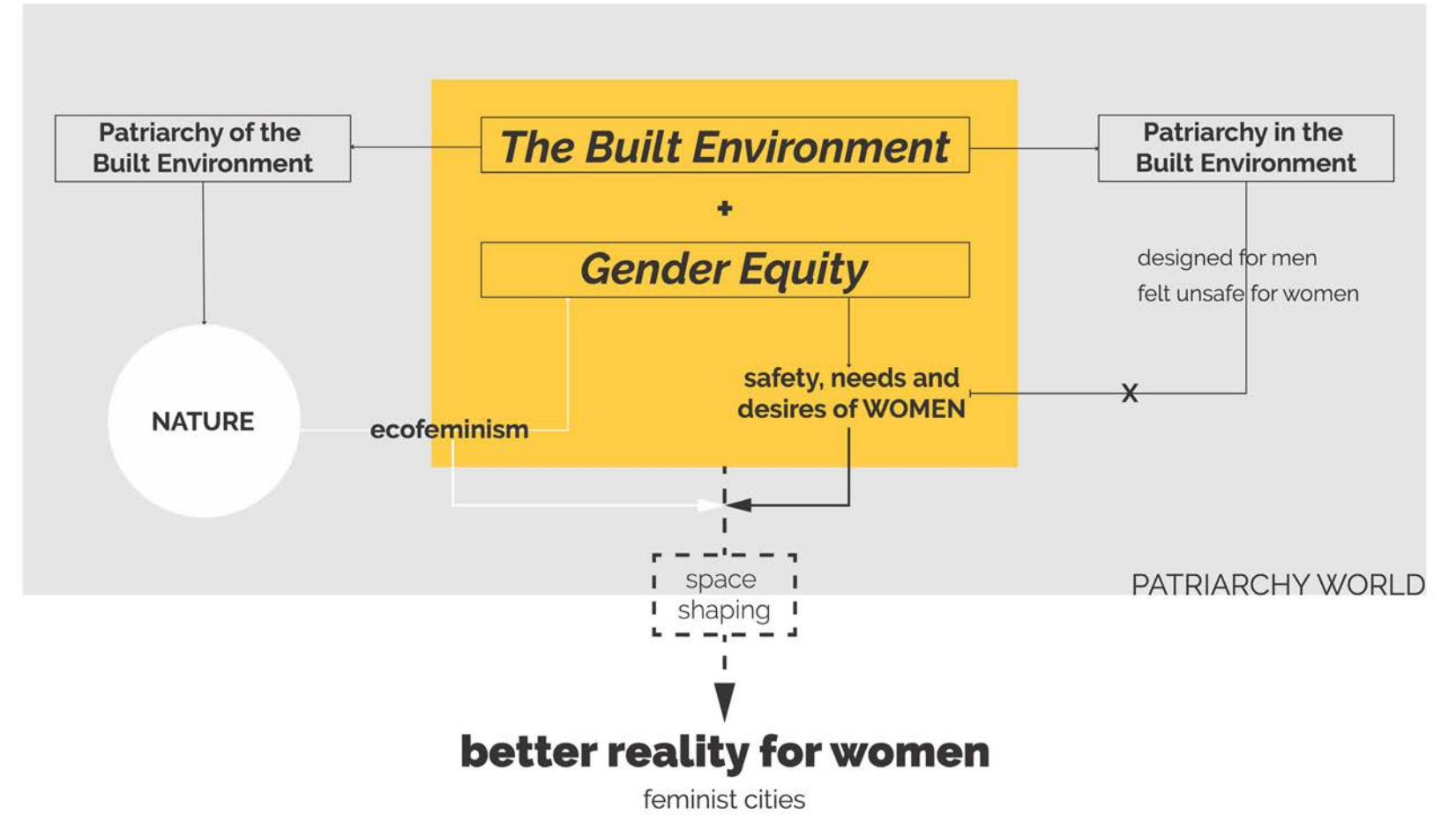
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

8 Reasons Why Mike Pence is a Nightmare for Women's Reproductive Rights.
©Kisha Bari, <https://awomensthing.org/blog/8-reasons-mike-pence-nightmare-womens-reproductive-rights/>

**01
INTRODUCTION**

THESIS QUESTIONS

- What are the issues that women face in the public realm and how do these issues vary in different cultures?
- What kinds of public spaces would women consider safe and feel comfortable spending time in?
- How can the design of public spaces help with the safety issues that concern women the most?
- How do we create spaces that empower women and serve their needs, concerns, values, and aspirations within public spaces?





WOMEN UNITE!

Women's Equality Day Is a Reminder That the Fight for Women's Rights Didn't End With the 19th Amendment, ©John Olson—The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images, <https://time.com/5883526/womens-equality-day-suffrage/>

CRITICAL LEXICON

“women”

- human who identify as female
- ***“girls”***: young women

“private space”

- private space is “the space of the individual household, indoors and outdoors... All other spaces, indoors and outdoors, privately or publicly owned, are referred to as ‘public’.”¹
- *synonym of private*: domestic

“public realm”

- the environment other than individual household, indoors and outdoors, physical and virtual, privately and publicly owned
- *antonyms*: private; domestic

“public space”

- a place that is generally open and accessible to people (Wikipedia)
- refer to physical locations
- *examples*: streets, parks, stores, museums, squares...

¹ Franck, Karen A. and Paxson, Lynn. Women and urban public space: Research, design and policy issues. In I. Altman and E. Zube (Eds) Public Spaces and Places. New York: Plenum, 1989: 121-146.

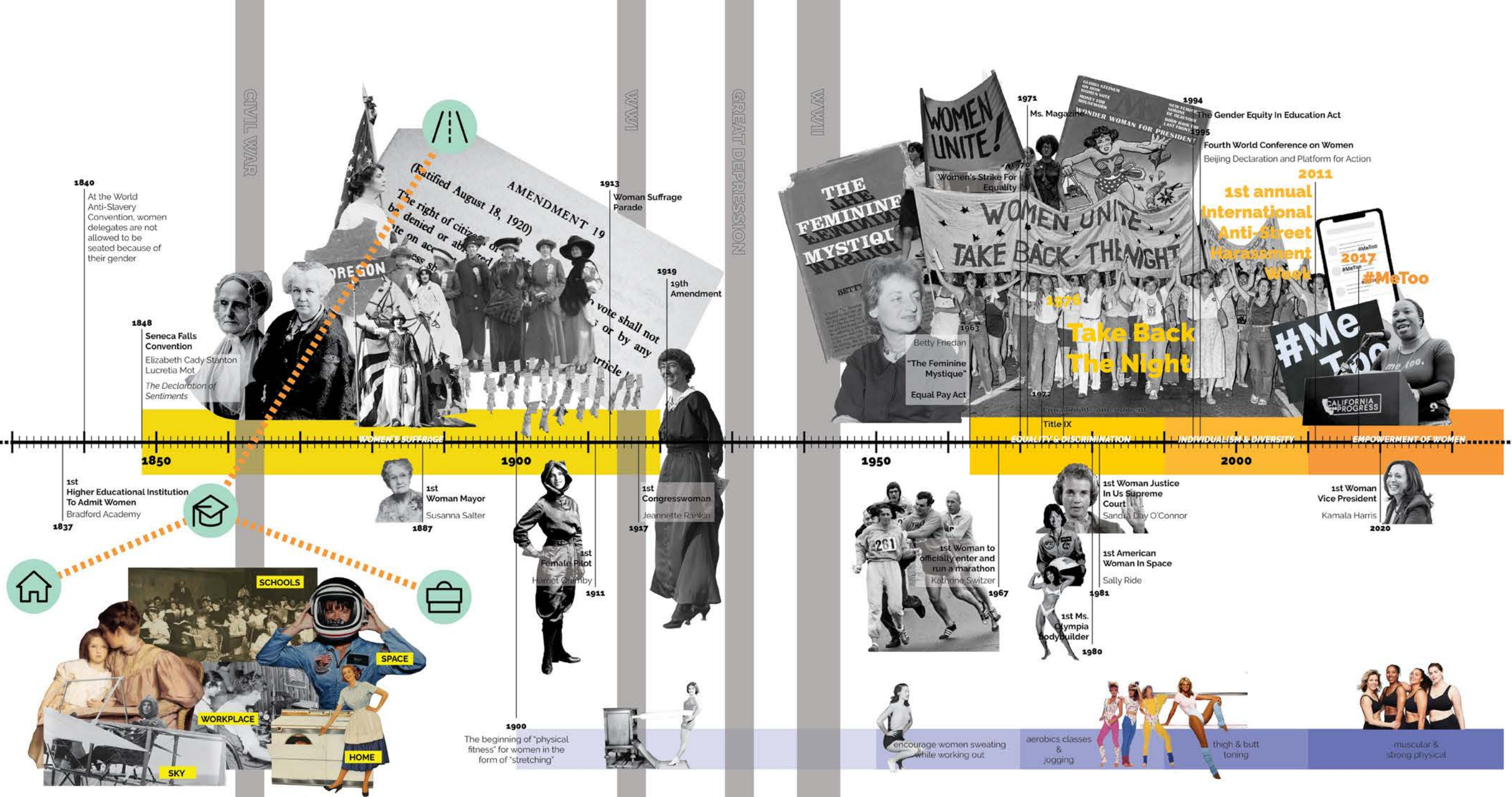


02
BACKGROUND

TIMELINE OF FEMINIST MOVEMENT
“the United States vs China”

THE FEMINIST HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

In the feminist history of the United States, protesting on the street is the primary approach for women fighting for their rights. For a very long time, the fights were focusing on women’s suffrage. The fights for women’s safety start around the 1970s with the movement of Take Back The Night which combats sexual violence and violence against women. And it evolves into the #MeToo movement on social media after the millennium.



The United States

For women in the United States, protesting is the way that they fight for their rights.

In the 19th century, some women in America recognized the inequality between men and women because they were not allowed to sit with men in an international conference. So they gathered together as a collective stepping into the public realm, taking up public spaces to express their voices and fight for their rights just like the women suffrage parade in 1913, when thousands of women from all over the country went into the streets to march in Washington DC. Through taking up the streets, they make sure their voices are heard, which leads to a big success in 1919 -- the 19th Amendment granted women's suffrage. In this case, taking up public spaces becomes the number one option for women in the United States to fight for their rights. Following women's suffrage, women in this country then began to fight for equal pay and fight against sexual harassment.

In the United States, the fights for women's safety in public spaces started around the 1970s with the "Take Back The Night" movement. The same as before, women go out into the streets, expressing their demands. And the fights continue until now in the form of the

#MeToo movement. Besides taking up physical public spaces, virtual public spaces are also the battleground for the feminist movement in response to the rapid development of technology.

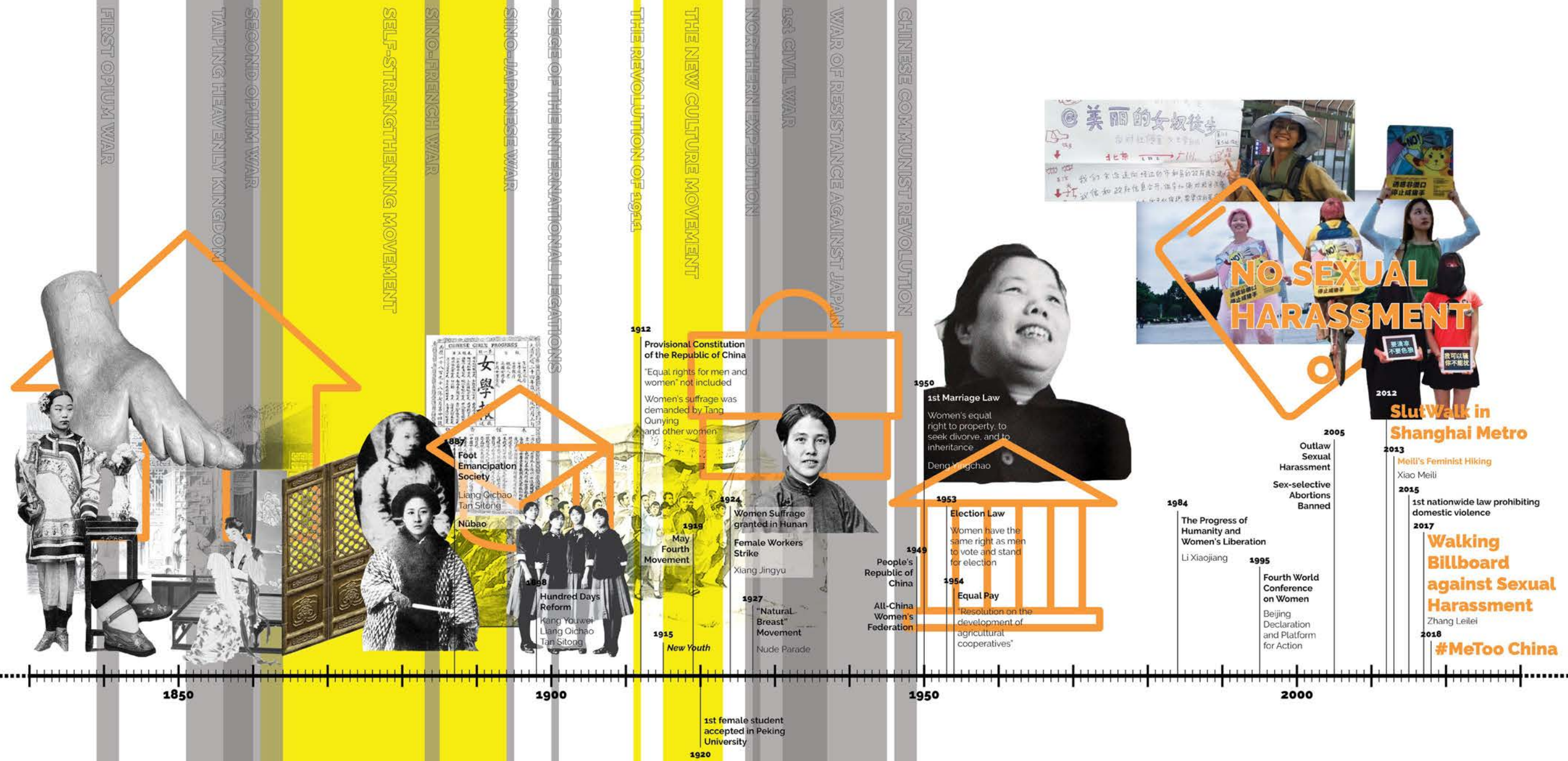
It's worth mentioning, starting in the 1970's, women gradually started to work out to develop more powerful physiques as they started demanding safety in public spaces.

China

While in China, things are a little bit different. In the 19th century, China was still a feudal society where women needed to bind their feet, staying in their room, could not go out freely. They were still trapped at home, while the country began to be invaded by Japan and Western countries. The fights for women's rights started by several men as they realized that women could be quite helpful to save the country. In the face of national distress, the movement of women liberation started as an important part of the "save the country" movement. At that time, the movement was in the form of literal writing written by activists, both men, and women. Then, it evolved into protesting on the streets. Women in China finally came out from their bedrooms to the public.

After the founding of new China in 1949, the feminist movements changed to individual efforts made by female leaders. Protesting on the streets, taking up public spaces are no longer the first option for women in China to fight for their rights. Instead, they counted on women who are the best in their fields to fight for them. And for a long time, the efforts were focused on ensuring women's rights through law-making. However, with the widespread use of social media, the feminist movement in China evolves again. Due to the

media coverage, some individual offline feminism movements aiming to express their demands arouse heated discussion. And women start to express their voices towards those movements and other social issues through social media. In this case, the discussion on social media becomes the major form of the feminist movement in China. After the Millenium, as more cases of sexual harassment in public spaces are reported, the fights for safer public spaces for women begin.



THE FEMINIST HISTORY OF CHINA
 While in China, the fights for women's rights are brought up because of the invasion of foreign countries, when women are first considered as people of the motherland instead of herself. Since the founding of New China, the fights focus on women's legal rights through constant the efforts of women representatives. Protesting on the street is no longer a primary choice. The fights demanding safer public spaces for women start in 2010s concerning the issue of sexual harassment in public transportation, which benefits from the wide use of social media.



In general, women's fighting for safer public spaces in both countries starts at a later time after women's suffrage and their basic rights are guaranteed. And their efforts both start by against sexual harassment which appears to be the biggest issue regarding women's safety in public spaces. The difference between the two countries is that American women still grasp their traditional approach of taking up the street while Chinese women have to find alternative ways to express their voices.

Due to the wide use of social media, virtual public spaces become the new battleground for women fighting for their rights. And the movement against sexual harassment is actively involved in our life nowadays which somehow defines the contemporary feminism movement.

However, the virtual public spaces are not that so different from the physical ones. They are still male-dominated spaces that were penetrated with the patriarchal minds. Women's voices sometimes are restricted to some extent in both countries. It seems it's a world where one's existence could be easily erased let alone their voices.

In this case, the alternative way would still be the traditional one — taking up the physical public spaces. But it is important to reclaim them in a subtle gesture through programming of public spaces to avoid backlash. So women can be empowered mentally and physically in those spaces, and then keep pushing the feminist movement forward. And I consider this as a shared mission of our female designers.



SHE WAS ONLY WALKING HOME

The movement of mourning on the death of Sarah Everard and fighting against the unsafe situation of women in public spaces. <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/in-the-news/sarah-everard-vigil-signs/>

In both countries, women gradually stepped out of their home, entering public spaces through their constant fighting.

She is no longer just one's wife or mother, she could be herself.

By fighting for her rights to get an education, she now has more access to school instead of studying at home;

By fighting for her suffrage, she now could take her stand and be able to make her own decisions on more occasions, even possibly become a decision-maker to some extent;

By fighting for her rights to work, she now can go to work as long as she wants, and expecting true equal pay in the future;

By fighting against sexual harassment, she expects she can walk in public spaces truly free without having to fear anything bad happening to her.

In broader context, designing safer public spaces for women is just the first step to create feminist cities because public spaces are where women fight for their rights.

A better city for her, refers to

not only...

safer public spaces against sexual harassment

but also...

provide spaces where women can advocate their rights safely and freely, and be empowered both physically and mentally.

As a female designer who wants to contribute to the feminist movement, I think it is necessary to raise the awareness of women's situation in public spaces, and to appeal all designers to design a better one for women.



Despite the gains made in recent decades in many parts of the world concerning gender equity, public space continues to fall short of ensuring women's personal, collective and safety needs and desires are being met. My goal is to challenge that and by doing so, reclaim the city for women.

— Thesis Statement

STAND UP FOR WOMEN

The most empowering feminist quotes from strong women, <https://www.panmacmillan.com/blogs/general/inspirational-feminist-strong-women-quotes>





SHE WAS JUST WALKING HOME

People mourn for Sarah Everard; Hold my Hand, and Don't Let Go. By Theodore Barrett-Marshall, <https://squonglemagazine.com/articles/hold-my-hand-and-dont-let-go> Image address: <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f3c2e779a42bb0f32477eba/5f3c2f00c4b8db4674de3cf0/604f36e9d5db3e46792454e2/1616849329561/DSC00501%2B%25281%2529.jpg?format=1500w>

03 CURRENT SITUATION

What are the issues that women face in public spaces?

We are talking about the specific issues women face in public spaces. Issues common to both men and women are not in the scope of this discussion since those usually are prioritized in most situations.

For example, the article “Why Public Spaces Fail”¹ lists several problems of public spaces, like “lack of places to sit”, “lack of gathering points”, “Paths that don’t go where people want to go”, “Domination of a space by vehicles”, etc. All of these are problems that concern both men and women. As for women, they have to deal with not only those problems but also some that most men would not experience or even notice.

Based on the statistics from STOP STREET HARASSMENT², women

¹ “Why Public Spaces Fail.” Project for Public Spaces, 2009. <https://www.pps.org/article/failedplacefeat>.

² “National Studies: 2019 RESEARCH ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT.” Stop Street Harassment, April 30, 2019. <https://stopstreetharassment.org/our-work/nationalstudy/>.

are the major victims of sexual harassment and assault. And it is the current situation everywhere in this world, no matter in China or in the United States.³ Therefore, this type of issue is what I mean by specific issues that women face because it concerns women more. From my perspective, I consider those issues to be the results of women’s chronic oppression in the patriarchal society. Women have long lost their voices and places in public spaces in the past, even though we are gradually reclaiming them. This is the reality that we are dealing with. In this world, women never truly own the freedom of enjoying their time in public spaces because of the existence of those issues.

³ “Statistics - The Prevalence of Street Harassment.” Stop Street Harassment, December 19, 2016. <https://stopstreetharassment.org/resources/statistics/statistics-academic-studies/>.



NANJING ROAD, SHANGHAI

Unsplash, Hanny Naibaho, https://unsplash.com/photos/D7InODIWYK4?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=creditShareLink



MANHATTAN, NEW YORK

Unsplash, Fabien Bazanegue, https://unsplash.com/photos/fEdPmPFLhLw?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=creditShareLink



A SOLUTION FOR MANSREADING

Laila Laurel's chair provides a solution to manspreading, <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/07/24/laila-laurel-manspreading-chair-furniture-design/>

Based on the literature I have read, there are three main issues that women concerned about:

1. Unregulated Behaviors of Men

This includes from unconscious behaviors like “men-spreading”¹ to some intentional behaviors like harassment².

3. Invisibility

Women are not being seen when in danger and sometimes they even can't see the danger because of the design of the spaces.³

¹ James, Caitlin. “How Men Dominate Space; or, How to Take Our Space Back,” May 19, 2016. <https://honisoit.com/2016/05/how-men-dominate-space-or-how-to-take-our-space-back/>

² Thompson, Deborah M. “The Woman in the Street.” Reclaiming the Public Space from Sexual Harassment, 6 Yale J.L. & Feminism (1993). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol6/iss2/4>

³ Valentine, Gill. “Women's Fear and the Design of Public Space.” Built Environment (1978-) 16, no. 4 (1990): 288-303. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23286230>

3. The Gendered City⁴/Dominance of Men

Public spaces are not neutral, and they are the representation of men oppressing women. While gender inequality structures the city, the structure entitles men's privileges at the same time.⁵ Some field observation shows some plazas are actually occupied by men.⁶

⁴ Kneeshaw, Sally. “Gender Sensitive Public Space? Placemaking and Spatial Justice through the Perspective of Gender.” URBACT, June 24, 2019. <https://urbact.eu/gender-sensitive-public-space-placemaking-and-spatial-justice-through-perspective-gender>

⁵ Delaqua, Camilla Ghisleni e Victor. “How Can Gender Impact the Future of Urban Life?,” February 14, 2021. <https://www.archdaily.com/956585/how-can-gender-impact-the-future-of-urban-life>

⁶ Ortiz, Anna, Maria Dolors Garcia-Ramon, and Maria Prats. “Women's Use of Public Space and Sense of Place in the Raval (Barcelona).” GeoJournal 61, no. 3 (2004): 219-27. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41147936>

SURVEY

In order to have a better understanding of people’s viewpoints about gender dynamics in public spaces, and to know if my research actually captures most of the aspects regarding the issue of women’s safety. I conducted a survey¹ through Google Form, sending to the faculty and students in the Landscape Architecture department in our school, Rhode Island School of Design.

16 responses were received. There are 14 from women, and 2 from men. As for the socio-cultural backgrounds, there are 12 responders who are originally from China (including one from Hong Kong), 3 from the United States, and 1 from Uzbekistan. Those who are not originally from the United States almost all have experience in public spaces both in the United States and in their countries.

¹ Survey questions can be found in the appendixes

Women and Public Spaces

* Required

Do you feel safe in public spaces in the US? If you are not from the US, do you feel safe in public spaces in your country? What do you perceive to be the biggest difference between the two countries regarding how safe you feel in public spaces? *

Your answer

Do you feel comfortable spending time in public spaces? Or you prefer staying in your private spaces? Why? *

Your answer

Where do you consider to be the most comfortable and safest public space for you? And why is that? If you can't name one specific place, please describe what kind of spaces that would make you feel comfortable and safe? *

Your answer


What's your biggest concern except for safety in public spaces? Why? *

Your answer


Is there anything that you can think of that public spaces should include to support women but they don't? *

Your answer


Which space would you feel most comfortable spending time in alone? *



Option 1



Option 2



Option 3

Please explain the reason of your selection: *

Your answer

SURVEY SCREENSHOTS

This survey includes questions about socio-cultural backgrounds, and asking experiences in public spaces, as well as some images preference comparisons.



What are the issues that women face in the public spaces based on the responses from my survey?

- Safety from Harassment
- Shortage of Public Restrooms

As I mentioned before, harassment has been a prevalent issue that women face in public spaces all over the world. It makes women feel vulnerable, uncomfortable, and need to be constantly vigilant. That is one of the reasons that women can never truly enjoy spending time in public spaces.

Moreover, there are also some social aspects of patriarchy that result in women's extra needs for restrooms. Imagine a place without public restrooms, but a man is in need to go to one. What would he do? He probably would just need to find a spot where no one can see. But women can't do that because it is not safe for them and they would be ashamed of doing that, which are exactly the results of oppression from patriarchy. Thus, the shortage of public restrooms is also one of the reasons that women can't entirely enjoy public spaces.



PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

Street Harassment Around The World: What's Your Story?, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/04/06/473223402/street-harassment-around-the-world-what-s-your-story>



WOMEN QUEUE FOR PUBLIC RESTROOMS

Why women face longer toilet queues – and how we can achieve 'potty parity', <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2018/mar/21/why-women-face-longer-toilet-queues-and-how-we-can-achieve-potty-parity>



WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY

https://www.sohu.com/a/125002775_446445

How do those issues vary in different socio-cultural contexts?

Based on the my research and the questionnaires collected by asking:

“Do you feel safe in public spaces in the US? If you are not from the US, do you feel safe in public spaces in your country? What do you perceive to be the biggest difference between the two countries regarding how safe you feel in public spaces?”

SAFETY

United States:

- issues of guns (-)
- more homeless people(-)
- more verbal harassment (-)
- cultural diversity (+/-)*

*It helps for someone to be stand out less, but for others, it causes problems because of white supremacy, which is complicated.

China:

- more surveillance cameras in cities (+)
- more people on the street (+)
- more secretive unregulated behaviors (physical harassment, sneak shots) (-)

PUBLIC RESTROOM

United States:

- shortage of public restrooms generally
- not safe in public restrooms*

*public restrooms becomes the places for illegal behaviors

China:

- not satisfied with the equal area allocation of men's and women's*
- boys in the ladies' room
- sneak shots

*argues that it caused longer waiting time for women because women have greater needs for restrooms for biological reasons



TRANSPARENT PUBLIC RESTROOM IN JAPAN

Tokyo Now Has Transparent Public Toilets, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/19/world/asia/japan-transparent-toilets.html>

In general, in the United States, there is the issue of guns and more homeless people which makes people feel more vulnerable compared to China. And this affects everyone no matter what gender they are. Meanwhile, in China, there are more surveillance cameras and with more people on the street which makes women feel relatively safer. However, those pros can sometimes become cons. There are more secretive unregulated behaviors such as sneak shots, groping in crowds partially because of the existence of cameras and more people, which makes women in China feel vulnerable. While in the United States, women are more annoyed by verbal harassment.

As for the issue of public restrooms, the emphasis in the two countries is different too. In the United States, there is a shortage of public restrooms generally. Moreover, some of the public restrooms become places for illegal behaviors. While in China, public restrooms are everywhere in cities. However, women are not satisfied with the equal area allocation of men's and women's rooms because women normally spend more time than men. And more reports about sneak shots in ladies' rooms make women feel extremely vulnerable. More recently, women in China complain about boys being brought into the ladies' rooms because many cases are reported of boys crouching down to peep. In some places, urinals for boys are built in the ladies'

rooms, which further encroaches on women's space.

In order to address the needs of public restrooms in the United States, public restrooms should be considered as essentials when designing and constructing public spaces. And those public restrooms should have management teams to make sure it's clean and safe for women to use. As for the needs of Chinese women, we can propose more spaces for ladies' rooms. Having management teams to make sure no men can have access to the ladies' room. More importantly, building family restrooms is a critical approach for not only ensuring more spaces for women but also their safety.

How can the design of public spaces help with the safety issues that concern women the most?

- to design safer public spaces for women
- to encourage and appeal to the participation of female designers

First, we can design safer public spaces for women so that women can feel less vulnerable and enjoy their time in those public spaces. Second, we should encourage the participation of female designers because women can better understand women's needs, desires, and concerns. They would probably know if the space is safe instinctively when they are designing because they have experienced all kinds of insecurity by themselves since they were born. And if they can design safer public spaces for women, then the spaces are actually safer for everyone.



WILA WALK

Women in Landscape Architecture Walk, <https://www.aslaconference.com/special-events/women-in-landscape-architecture-walk/>

Before we know how to design safer public spaces, we have to know...

What kinds of public spaces would women consider safe and feel comfortable spending time in?

Based on the questionnaires collected by asking:

“Where do you consider to be the most comfortable and safest public space for you? And why is that? If you can’t name one specific place, please describe what kind of spaces that would make you feel comfortable and safe?”



WELL LIT

Women feel safer if the space is well lit because they can see what is around them.



OPEN SIGHT LINES

Women feel safer when their views are not restricted because they don’t have to worry if there is someone hiding or approaching them from a blindspot.



HAVE PEOPLE AROUND

Women would feel a lot safer if there are people around them because it creates natural surveillance.

in public realm, what makes women

vulnerable

invisibility

restricted views
not being seen
cannot see the danger
indifference/inability from witnesses

physical constraint

from clothes, outfits
from aesthetic abduction (bodyshaming)

unregulated behavior

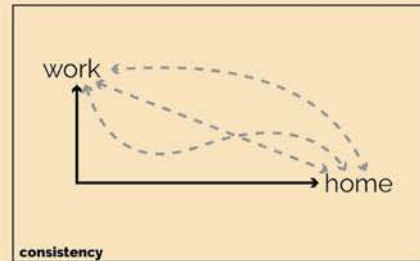
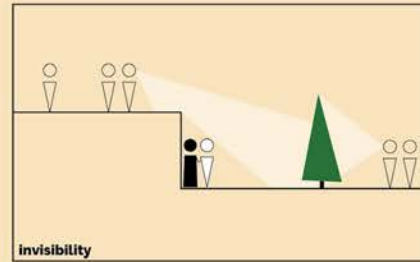
men's gazing
verbal harassment
menspreading

men are the authorities

law-making
law-enforcing

consistency

predictable pattern



safe

women in groups

familiar neighborhood

well-behaved people around

good lighting

open sight lines

Based on my research and my own experience, I think there are five aspects that would make women vulnerable in public spaces. First, invisibility, which means women's sightlines are restricted. Women cannot see the danger, then they can't respond to it in time. And they cannot be seen when in danger, so there would be no witnesses who can help them. Second, physical constraints from clothes, outfits, and even from aesthetic abduction of women's bodies all weaken their response to emergencies. They might be unable to run fast or break free from other's restraints. Third, the unregulated behaviors, which are not limited to illegal behaviors, but also include men's gazing, verbal harassment, and other inappropriate use of public spaces. It gives women an impression that the place is chaotic and sketchy. Fourth, males are the authorities. Because of the entrenching patriarchal ideologies, men can hardly empathy women's experiences even if they wanted to. They always see women as appendages of one man, either being someone's daughter, someone's wife, or someone's mother. These all would make the law-making and law-enforcing unneutral, which makes women feel vulnerable. Last but not least, the consistency. This would make women become easy targets of stalking, violence, and other bad things.

However, if women go out in groups, they will feel less vulnerable. If they are in their familiar neighborhood, they will also feel everything is under control. Having well-behaved people around would make women feel safer because they would consider they will have someone to count on when they face injustice treatment. Having open sightlines and good lighting at night is essential for women to feel safe in public places.

In summary, what women are actually demanding is visibility. What makes women feel safer in public spaces, no matter if they go out in groups, are in familiar neighborhoods, have well-behaved people around, have good lighting, or have open sightlines, visibility is critical.

What landscape design can do to potentially improve the issues raised in the category of "what makes women feel vulnerable in public spaces" is to focus on the questions of invisibility — to reduce restricted views through good design.



WOMEN TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

A march of "Take Back The Night" movement protesting sexual assault against women in 1979 in Lincoln, https://journalstar.com/women-take-back-the-night-march/image_6665e926-31ee-58f7-a42a-87a6b13957f8.html

04 METHODOLOGY

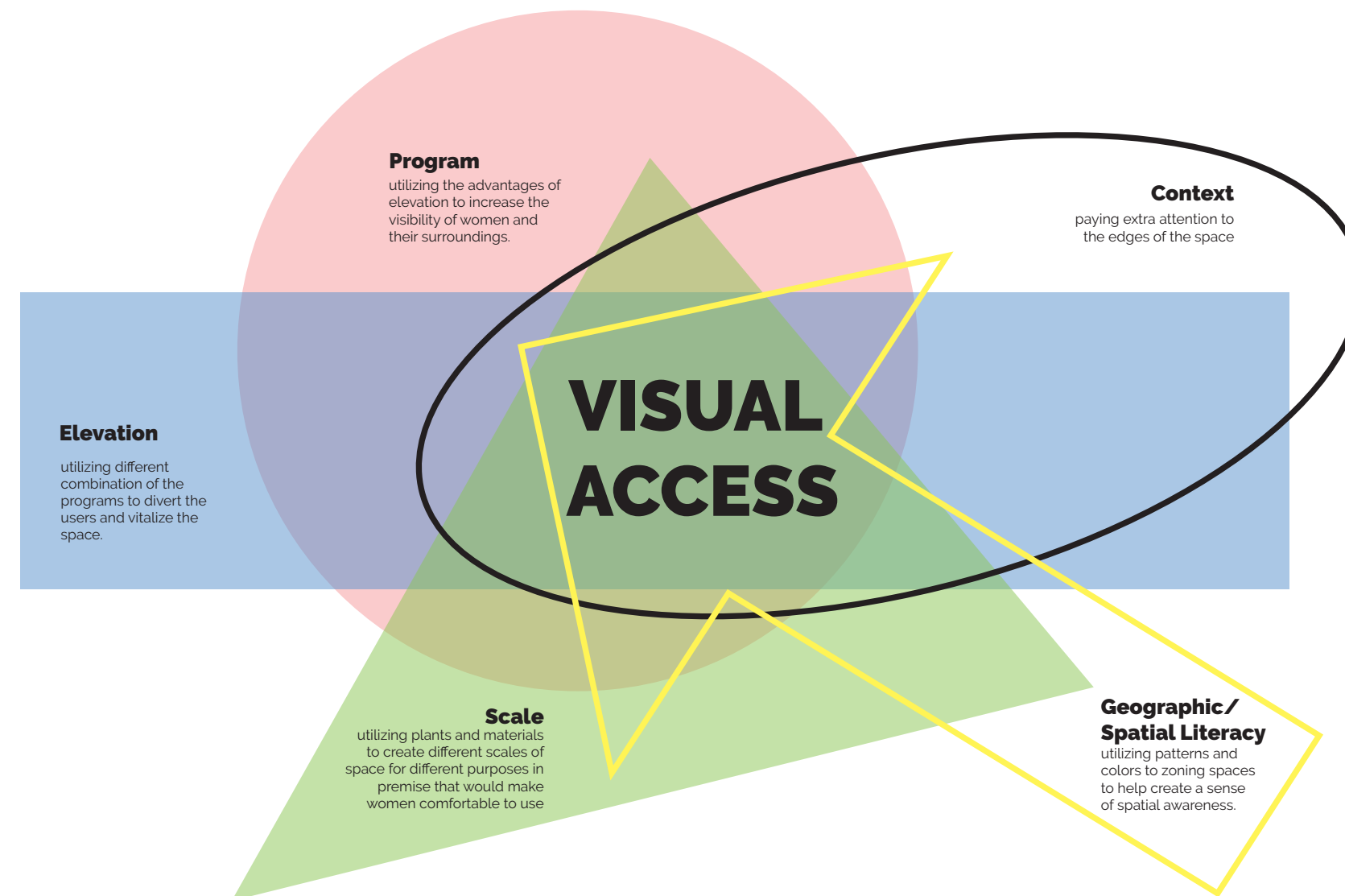
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

As a landscape designer, what can I design to increase visibility in order to bring safer public spaces to women?

Though there are a lot of precedent studies about designing safer public spaces, I want to propose my design principles, focusing on the visibility to address the safety issue.

There are five aspects to this work:

- **program development:** utilizing different combinations of the programs to divert users to different areas and vitalize the space.
- **elevation changes:** utilizing the advantages of high elevation to increase the visibility of women and their surroundings.
- **scale differentiation:** utilizing plants and materials to create different scales of space for different purposes on the premise that would make women more comfortable to use the areas.
- **geographical and spatial literacy keys:** utilizing patterns and colors to zone spaces to help create a sense of spatial awareness.
- **contextual awareness:** paying extra attention to the edges of the space so it feels safe.



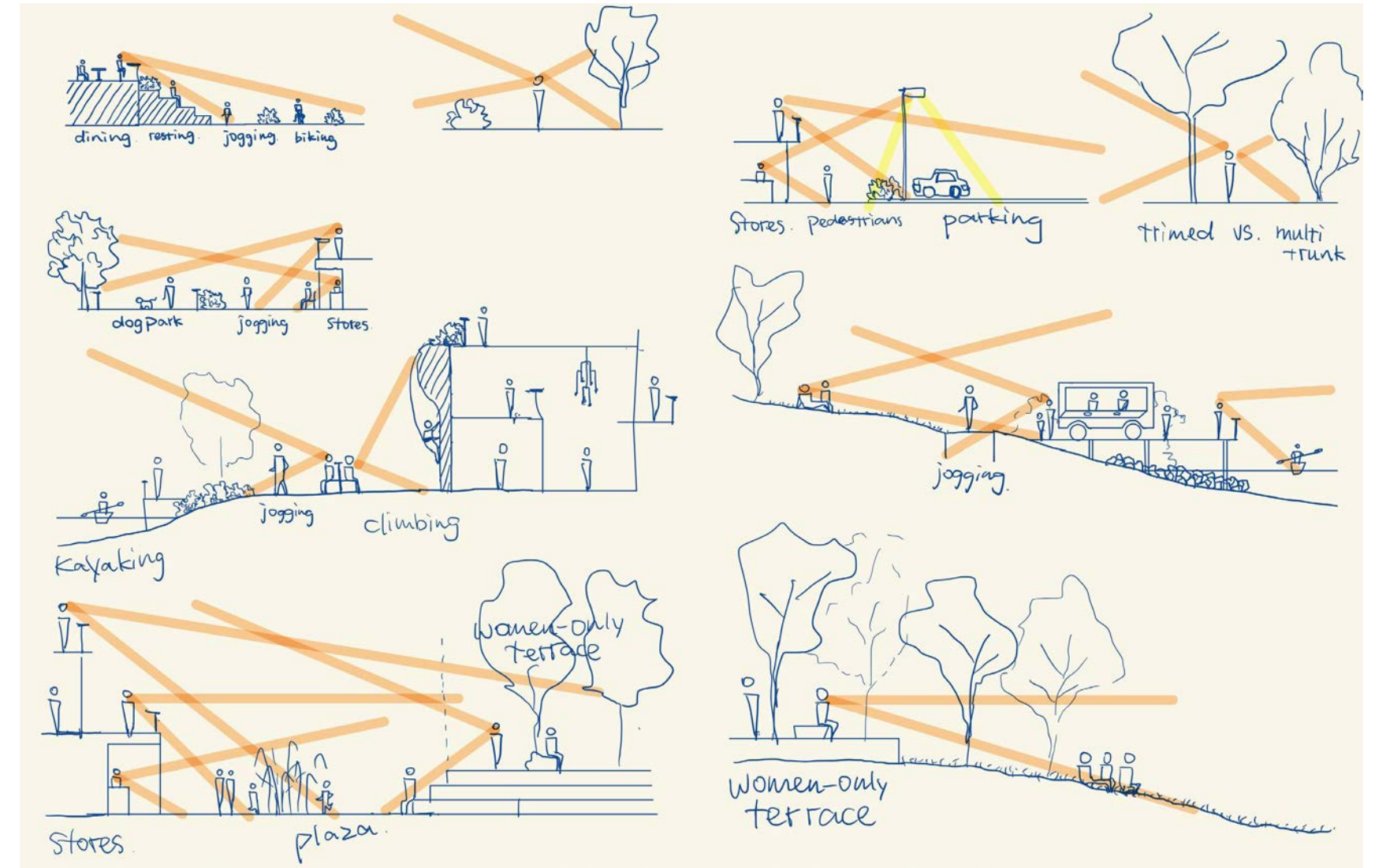
Developing programs is the key aspect in all. Other four aspects serve as assistants to it.

Proposing programs is not just for activating and vitalizing the space, but also for the purpose of raising awareness to the general public about women empowerment. Therefore, those programs should be selected. Only those women-oriented programs which help women build stronger physiques and minds can empower women and finally help them reclaim public spaces. Moreover, those programs are not limited to physical activities on site. There are virtual programs and platforms accompanying them to connect women in broader contexts, as social media plays an important role in our daily lives.

As for elevation manipulation, this aims to give women a less restricted view and decrease the possibility of the male gaze as well. Male gaze objectifies women sexually, which exacerbates the oppression to women. It hinders the process of women empowerment. Elevation changes can help decide the placement of programs, reduce blind spots, and create safer connections between programs.

Scale is important in designing comfortable elements for women to use on site. Meanwhile, scale matters when it comes to planting which is considered as a key component in landscape design. The scale differentiation influences how women feel about the spaces and the willingness of spending more time there. For instance, a relatively enclosed space can create privacy but can create a sense of insecurity at the same time. And insecurity is the last thing women want. Controlling the scale of spaces but also the scale of programs can help balance the needs of privacy and safeness.

Geographical and spatial literacy is an adding element that is designed to guide women from one place to another and create a sense of familiarity to the spaces. And contextual awareness helps designers choose the appropriate programs for women that can fit in to the surroundings and ensure vitality.

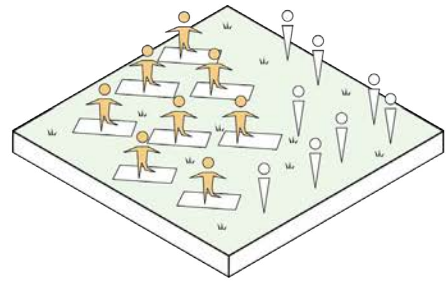


SPATIAL VARIANCE SKETCHES

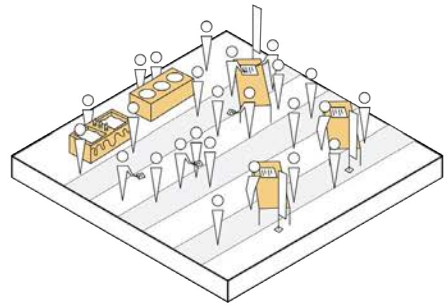
The sketches explore the possible combinations of programs and testing different elevation to achieve better visual access.

PROGRAM

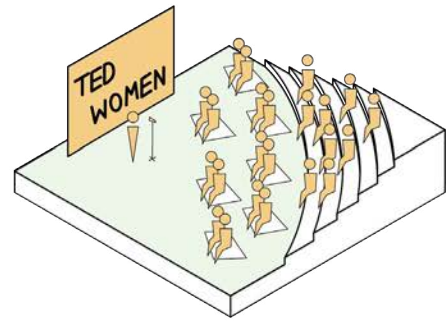
introducing appropriate programs to activate vacant lots, help women reclaim the spaces, and create a sense of belonging.



propose programs that could help women become more physically strengthened and encourage them get involved



propose programs that attract women, and create communities that women feel safe and comfortable to be in



propose pop up events in less open space to ensure the space could be constantly occupied

PROGRAM
in the United States

AMPLIFY
There is a solid foundation for women in the US to express themselves through protesting. It is important to amplify their voices through providing women-supportive spaces where they can gather and communicate as major users.



PROGRAM
in China

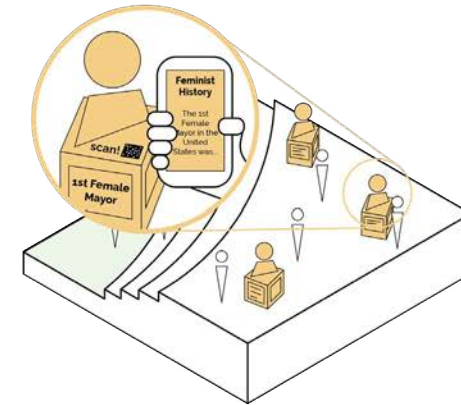


EVOKE

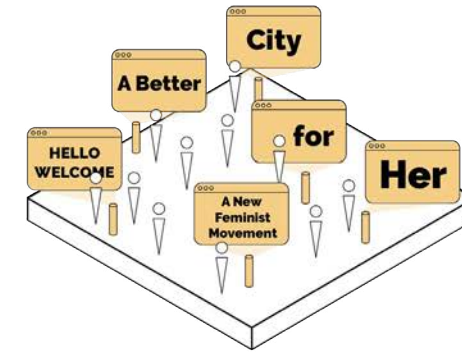
For women in China, incorporating the idea of women empowerment into some “instagramable” elements which attract girls and young women would help them awaken, think more about their current situation, and empower themselves! In short, it is to make instagramable to educational.

PROGRAM through social media

incorporating social media elements in site design to help advocate mental empowerment and connect women’s communities in a broader context



provide some elements in the site design so women can build their knowledge by learning about the history of feminism and reflect on that through social media



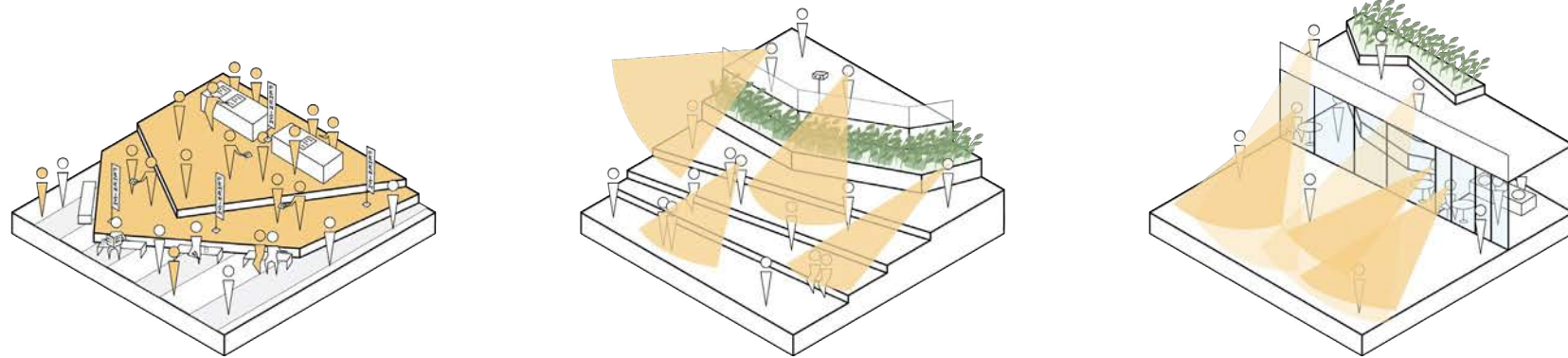
build a local and a global network of active feminists and provide interactive elements in the site design so that women can connect with like-minded women through social media



create a platform to organize local and global events that advocate for women, changing the patriarchal mindset of not only designers but also the public to further achieve the goal of reclaiming the city for women

Elevation

utilizing the advantages of elevation to avoid blindspots, create surveillance from people and make women feel comfortable



propose male dominant spaces at a lower elevation, so that women can choose freely from spaces to spaces without worrying about the possible man's gazing

propose a hierarchy of levels of elevation to create natural surveillance from people

propose clear windows to the stores at ground level near space with few people such as parking lots to make women feel the space is under surveillance as well

Scale

controlling the scale of design that suitable for women can help them feel comfortable to spend more time in public spaces

CHINA

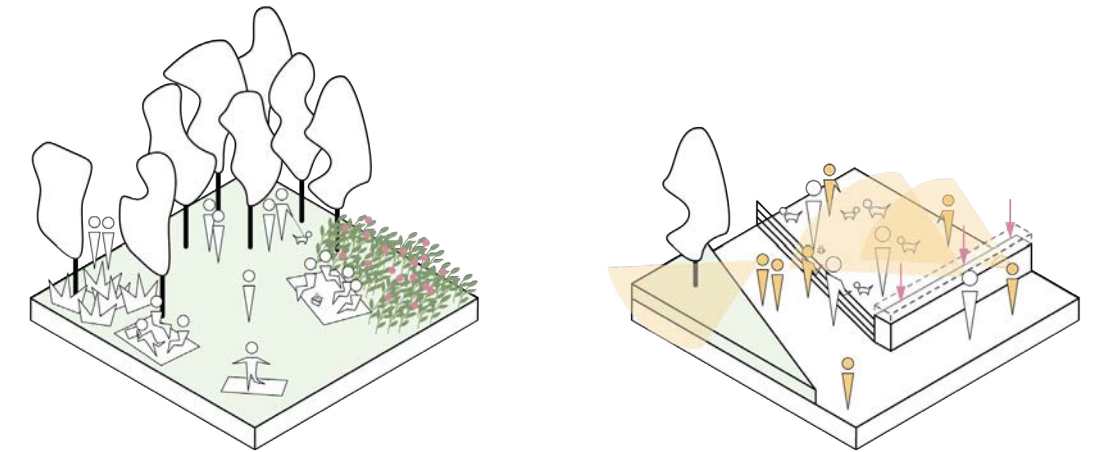
The average height of women in China is 5' 2". (men: 5' 7")

USA

The average height of women in the United States is 5' 3.5". (men: 5' 9")

- White non-Hispanic: 5' 5"
- African American: 5' 4.5"
- Hispanic American: 5' 2.5"
- Asian American: 5' 2.5"
- Mexican American: 5' 2.5"

(data from Wikipedia)

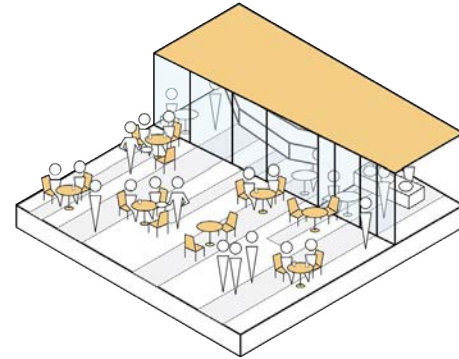
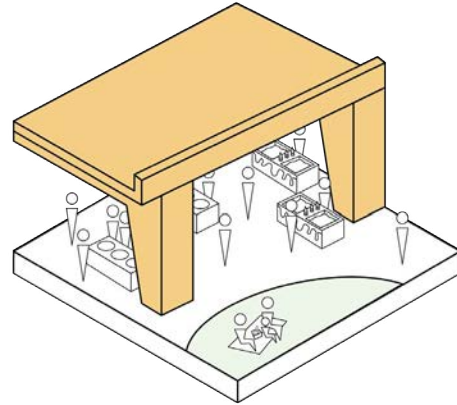


balance the openness and enclosure to create spaces that meet the functional and safety needs of women

be aware of the dimension of the female body and adjust the scale of design elements

Context

paying extra attention to the edges of spaces can help choose the compatible combination of design elements and ensure full use of proposed programs

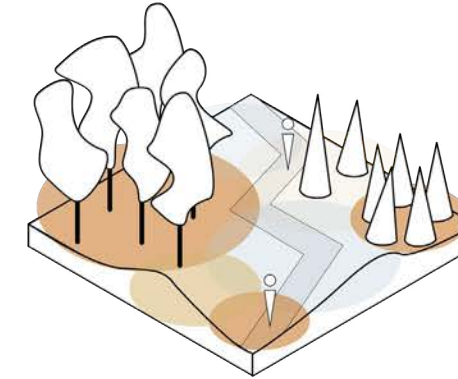


identify the structural elements of the context and adjust the other principles to avoid creating blindspots

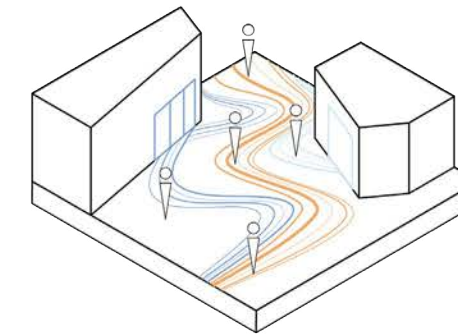
analyse the functional elements of the context to propose the appropriate programs that suits women's needs

Geographic and Spatial Literacy

adding guiding elements that provide navigation to help women locate where they are and plan for optimal routes that would make them feel safer and more comfortable especially in emergency.



design a visual system (color/icon/etc.) to show the degrees of safety in different spaces



design a visual language (patterns/signs/etc.) to guide women from one place to another, especially to those public infrastructures (restrooms, police stations etc.)

TESTING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

In order to further develop the five aspects principles, I attempt to apply them to rethinking the downtown Providence neighborhood surrounding Kennedy Plaza where I found it to be relatively unsafe.

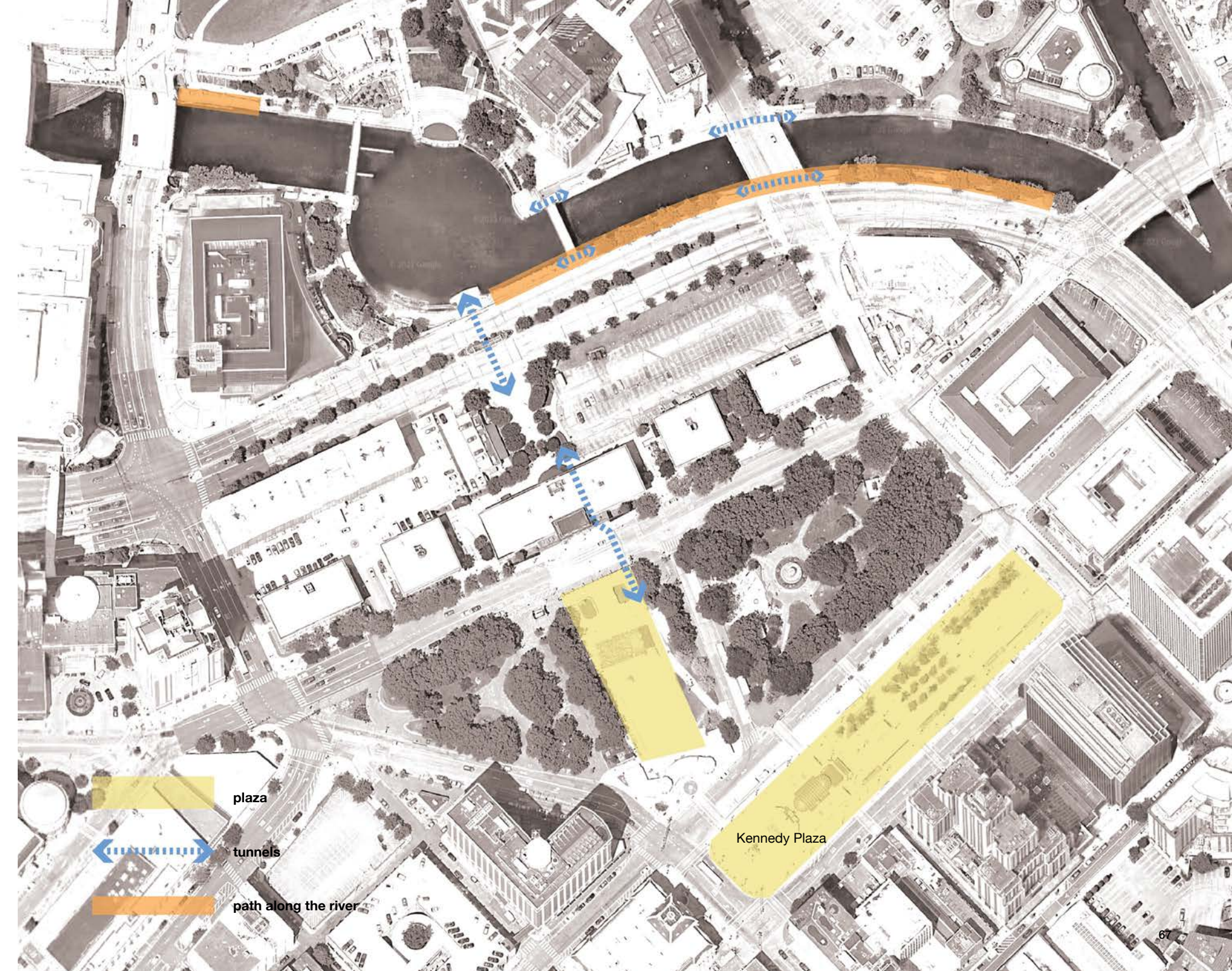
As shown on the map, there are some places I called out which either makes me feel extremely vulnerable or relatively okay but not that comfortable.

Extremely Vulnerable:

- tunnels
- path along the river

Okay But Not Comfortable:

- transit plazas



path along the river



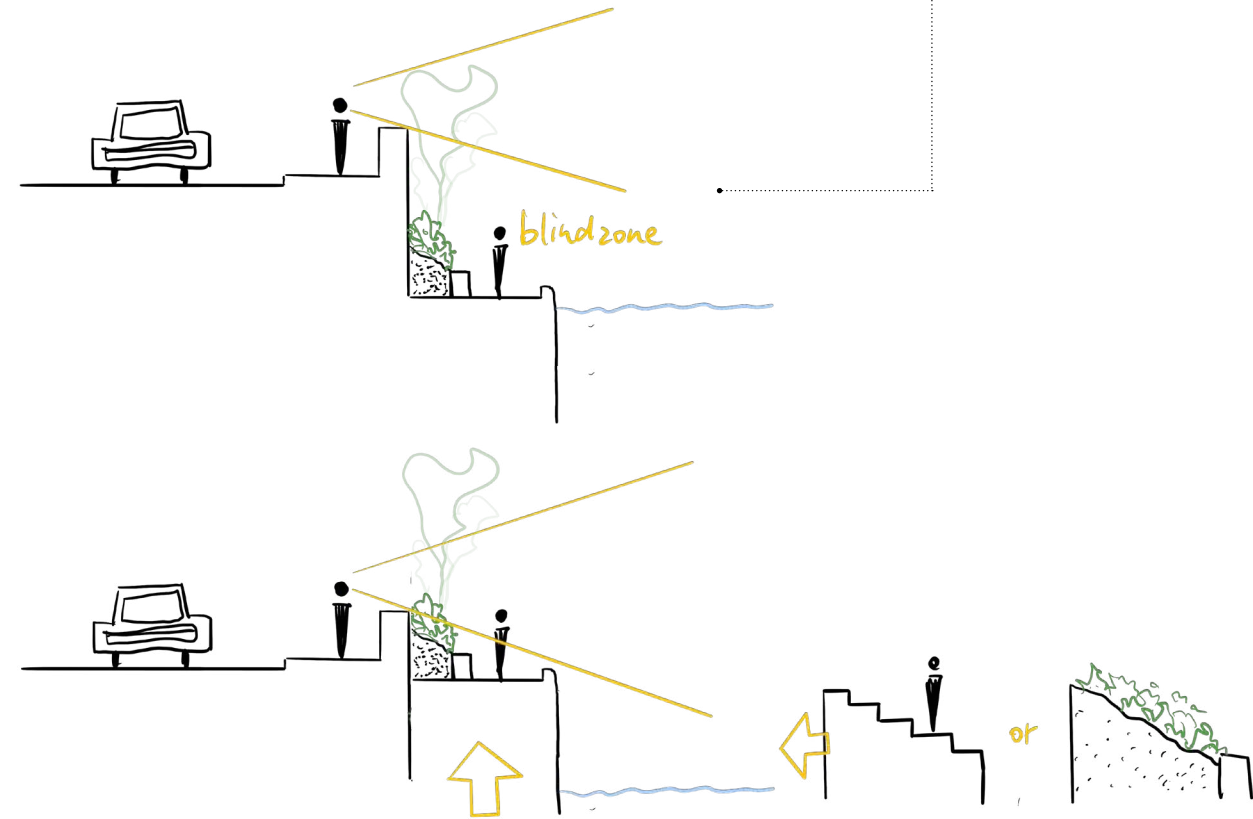
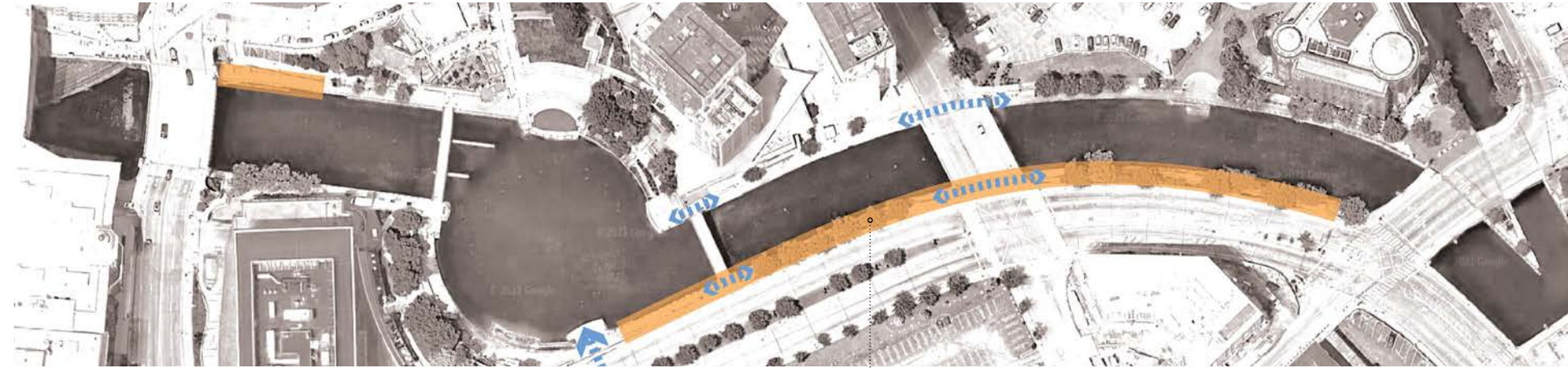
The path along the river is a narrow path that is at least 10 feet below the road and with a tall wall at one side and the Providence river by the other side. The path then becomes a blind zone which makes me feel extremely unsafe because no one would see it if anything ever happens here.

To improve this situation, we could elevate the path until people on the road could see what's happening on the path. Meanwhile, adding a buffer between the river and the path can avoid the high elevation difference in between.

Principle applied:

ELEVATION

- propose a hierarchy of levels of elevation to create natural surveillance from people



tunnels type I



The type I tunnels are those that are relatively wide and connect the spaces which are separated by two major roads.

To make the tunnels safer, we could introduce daily programs to activate the spaces and clear windows for the stores and restaurants next to it to ensure natural surveillance from people.

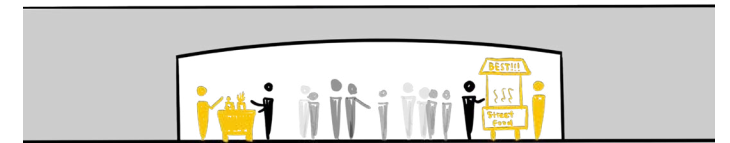
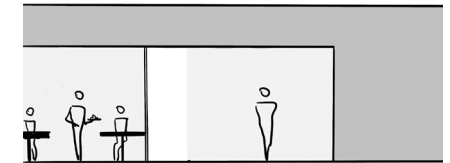
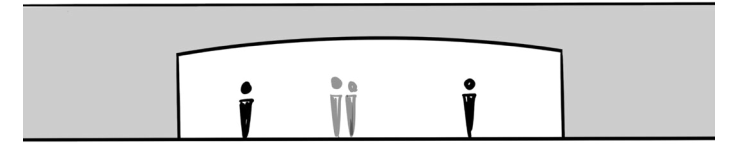
Principle applied:

PROGRAM

- propose pop up events in less open space to ensure the space could be constantly occupied.

ELEVATION

- propose clear windows to the stores at ground level near space with few people such as parking lots to make people feel the space is under surveillance as well



tunnels type II



However, there are also some tunnels that make me feel extremely dangerous. They are the type II tunnels along the river under the bridges, which are extremely narrow and enclosed.

For those tunnels, there is nothing much we could do unless we remove the bridges on the top, or we have to just close the tunnels. Though the same as type I tunnels which both are leftover spaces under the bridges or buildings, the reasons that make them different types are their context and scale.

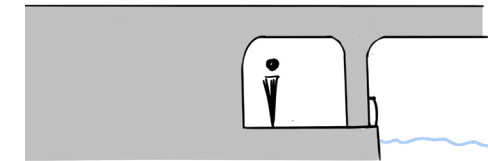
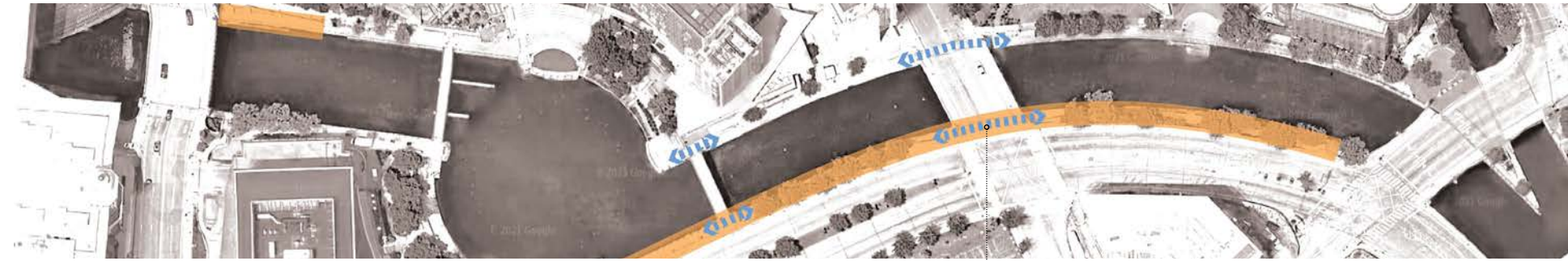
Principle applied:

CONTEXT

- identify the structural elements of the context and adjust the other principles to avoid creating blindspots

SCALE

- balance the openness and enclosure to create spaces that meet the functional and safety needs of women



Maybe you will have some brilliant ideas. But I can't think of any...

plazas



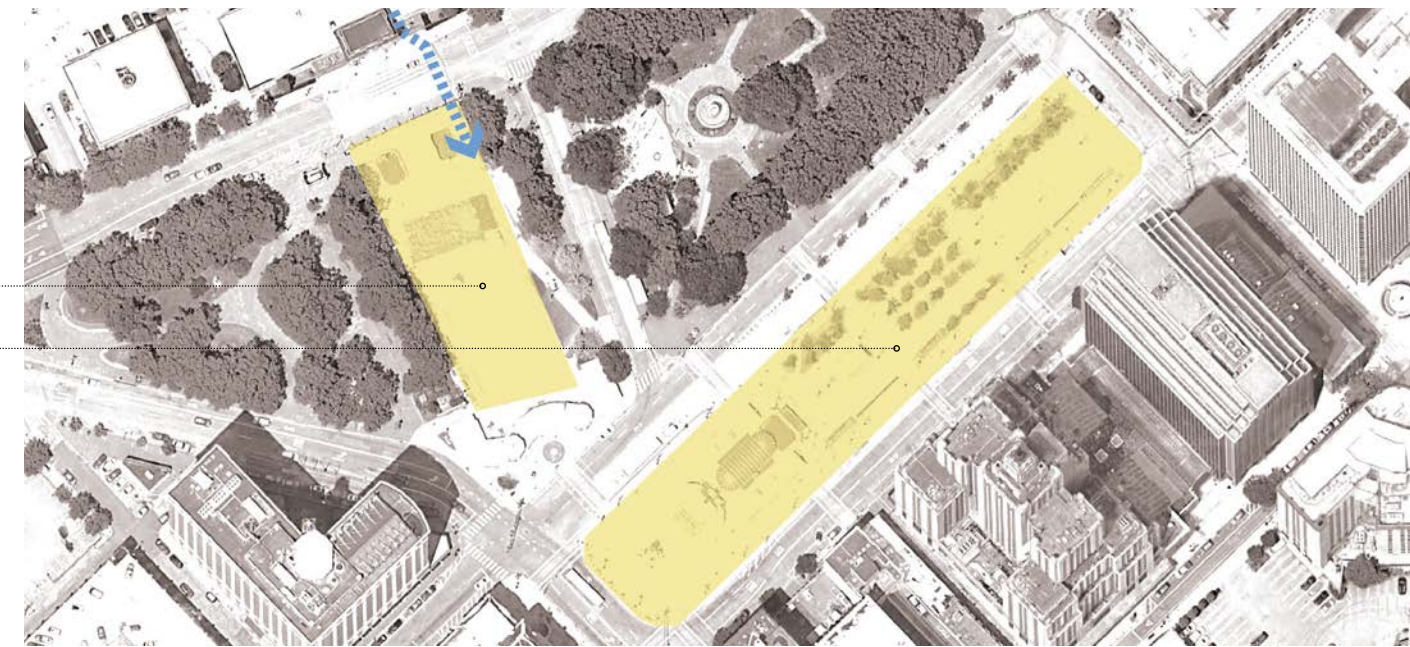
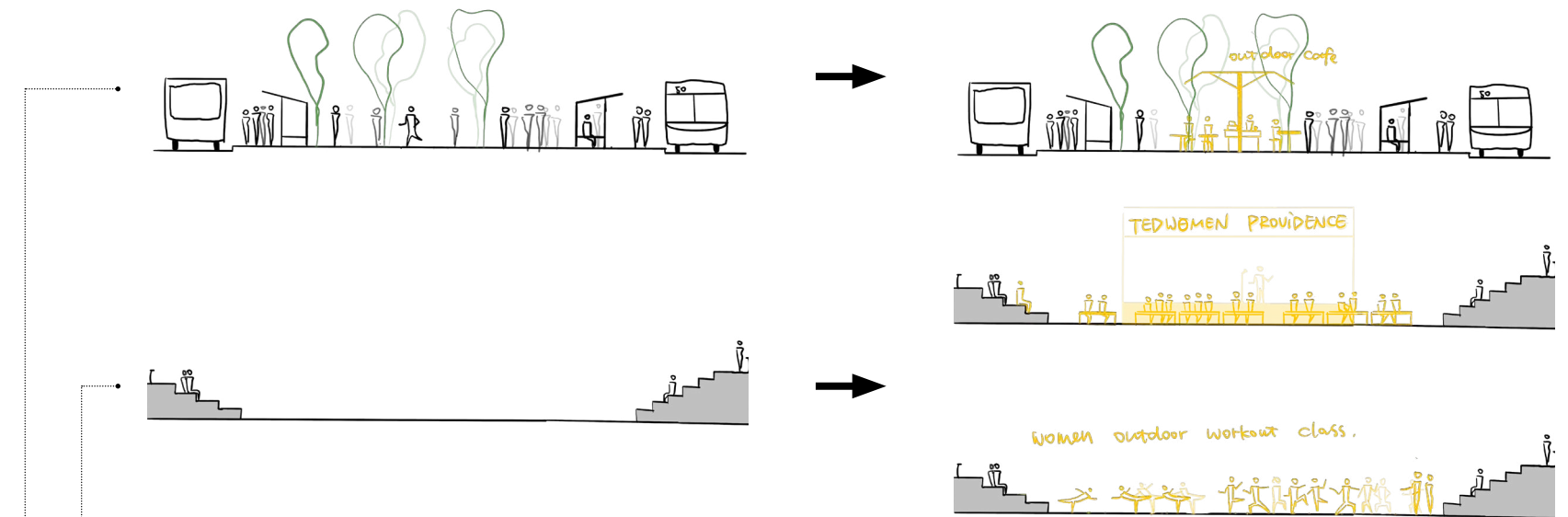
In this neighborhood, the Kennedy Plaza is a bus transit center with a large flow of people. I felt less unsafe than those places I mentioned earlier, but honestly not very comfortable. Also, the plaza next to it, which provides spaces for the ice rink in winter, is wide open but with barely any people there.

For the two plazas, in order to let women occupy, we could propose some programs for women to make them comfortable spending time there. Building a sense of belonging here for women is important.

Principle applied:

PROGRAM

- propose programs that could help women become more physically strengthened and encourage them get involved
- propose programs that attract women, and create communities that women feel safe and comfortable to be in.



UNSAFE IS MY DEFAULT EXISTENCE

The “She Was Just Walking Home” movement, mourning the death of Sarah Everard and fighting against the unsafe situation of women in public spaces. <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/in-the-news/sarah-everard-vigil-signs/>

reflection on the principle testing

Based on the quick principle test at downtown Providence, we can see that there are indeed some improvements we could make to create safer public spaces for women by applying the Program and Elevation principles. And the principles of Scale and Context assist the design of programs and elevation. The two aspects would make a huge difference in some cases.

Meanwhile, simply a site design is not enough. Creating a safer public space for women requires effective management and other social strategies to complement. We should certainly be aware of the limitations of site design as it cannot fix everything. Nevertheless, we should always put all our efforts into it to do better in order to provide a solid foundation for future women’s empowerment.



RESEARCH DIAGRAM

To design safer public spaces for women means to increase visibility through site design by applying the principles in five aspects -- Program, Elevation, Scale, Context, and Spatial Literacy.

In a word, the purpose of this research is to raise awareness of “women deserve better cities”. More specifically, under the field of landscape architecture, it is to design safer public spaces for women. As mentioned before, a better city for women means not only a city with safer public spaces but also one that provides spaces where women can advocate their rights safely and freely, and be empowered both physically and mentally.

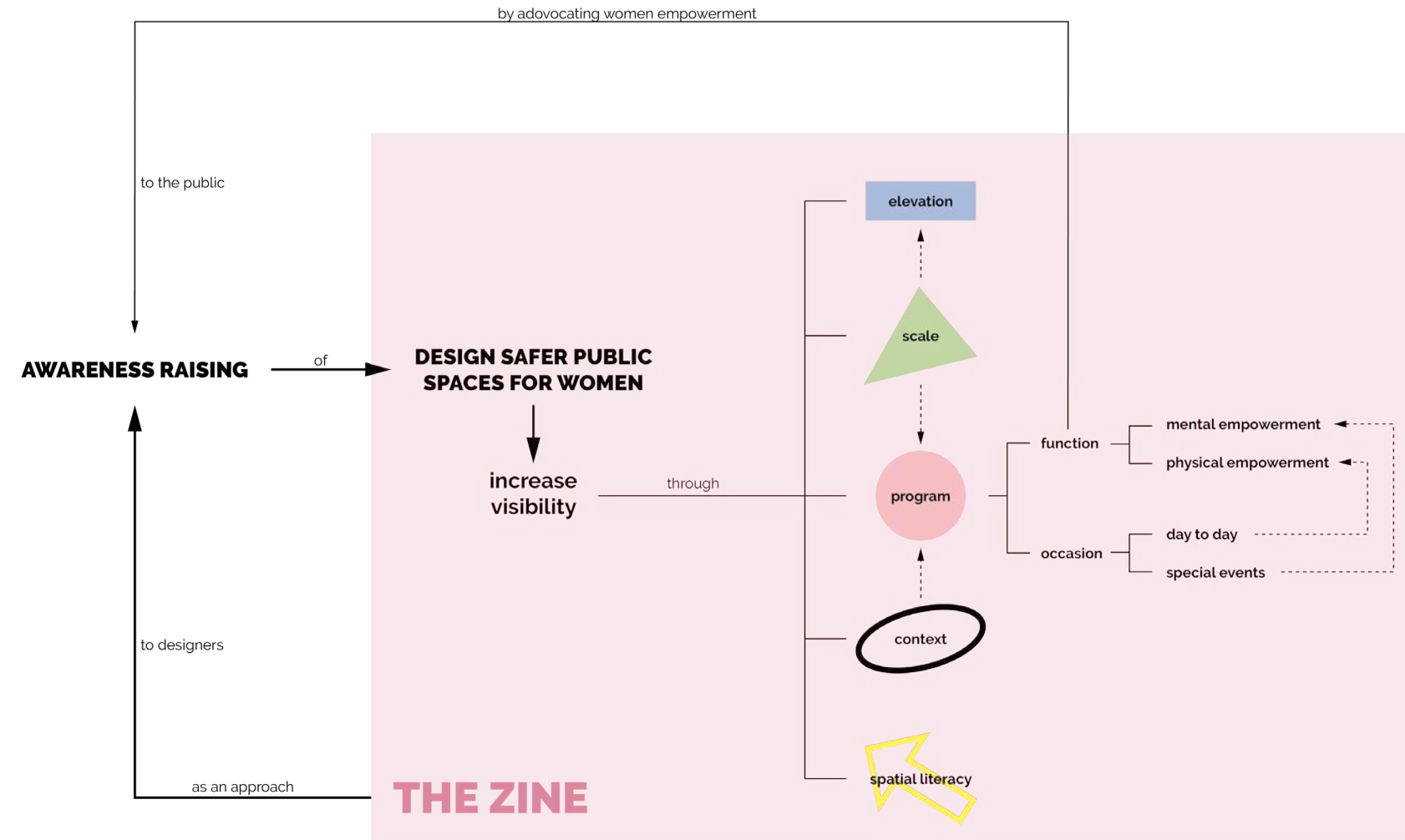
In this case, there are two major audience:

- the designers
- the public

First, I appeal to the designers to design safer public spaces for women by proposing a series of principles. Second, one key point in the principles is to advocate for the empowerment of women to the general public. I believe that this can create a positive feedback system for women fighting for their rights and reclaiming the city.

In order to achieve the goal of reclaiming the city for women, I have designed a zine to be circulated among designers who are the key participants in this system. The zine includes the background

outlining women’s situation in both the United States and China, and the detailed principles I have proposed.



THE ZINE

“A Better City for Her: design principles of designing safer public spaces in the United States and China”

The zine aims to raise awareness of our designers working to design for women whose needs and concerns are neglected. It consists of a series of principles to guide designers in designing safer public spaces through increasing visibility. By considering those principles, designers should be able to design relatively safer public spaces for women.

The principles are discussed based on two different socio-cultural backgrounds — the United States and China. Designers can adjust their designs depending on the location of their projects.

Ideally, the zine should be distributed to public spaces designers or landscape firms to remind them of the importance of designing safer public spaces for women, and actually, start doing it when they are designing.

I hope this can be a starting point for having more designers design feminist public spaces which not only ensure women’s safety, but also empower women, and backup her to fight for her rights. Perhaps, it could become a new feminist movement in design field to help women reclaim the cities.



PARADE FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Women took up the streets to protest for their legal rights to vote, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2020/08/19/suffrage-movement-race-women-represented-ron.cnn>

CRITICAL REFLECTION

Only site design is not enough for reclaiming cities for women. “A Better City for Her” needs the efforts of both designers and the public.

We, designers, try our best to design safer public spaces for women. However, as mentioned before, it requires future effective management and other social strategies to complement strong designs. The physical and mental empowerment of women is needed to help women themselves unite and reclaim their rights which is not limited to just the true freedom of using public spaces.

Meanwhile, the most important thing is that we all change our mindset, recognize the current situation of women in public spaces, know her needs, desires, and aspirations, and finally help to change the status quo. Only then can we truly start to build a better city for her.





APPENDICES

THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

What Would the World Look Like if Every Woman Stands Up for Herself, <https://medium.com/@feministaapvttd/what-would-the-world-look-like-if-every-woman-stands-up-for-herself-3b98276dfac>

READING RESPONSE

“The Three-body Problem”¹

What are the parallels of the critique from the novel and your critique of contemporary society?

¹ Liu, Cixin, and Ken Liu. *The Three-Body Problem*. New York: TOR, A Tom Doherty Associates Book, 2016.

After reading the novel, I was stunned by the world described in the novel. First of all, the description of human nature and morality in this novel seems very real and reasonable to me, especially the attitude of people towards escaping to the universe. Assume we can build a spaceship that can escape into space and only a few people can get on it, if thinking about the evils of human nature, it's very likely that the spaceship will be destroyed by people who can't get on it. In the novel, there is a Dark Forest Theory, in which there are two important theorems: first, resources are limited; second, civilization has the need for unlimited expansion. On the earth's scale, the earth's resources are limited, and human development is indeed expanding indefinitely. Of course, I believe in the self-regulation ability of nature. When human beings expand to a certain extent, there will be some disasters that would greatly reduce the population. But humans are smart. For the use of finite resources, we have economics, a discipline that talks about how to use finite resources efficiently. One of the important premises in economic assumptions is “people are rational”. In the context of rational people, all human beings are self-interested. But what we find in our daily lives is that we are also altruistic. And that altruism arises because of morality. Because of the existence of morality, our human world gradually becomes

warmer. And we began to pay attention to equity. In economics, efficiency and equity are counterbalanced. If you want efficiency, you have to sacrifice equity; if you want equity, you have to sacrifice efficiency. Efficiency and equity need to be in a state of balance so that the society will run smoothly. It is against human nature to achieve absolute fairness, but it is also cruel to achieve absolute efficiency. To be honest, I don't know how to strike a balance between efficiency and equity. Perhaps, for poor areas, efficiency is the first priority, but for rich places, there is no end to the pursuit of equity. Efficiency aside, one of the things that I really care about in contemporary society is gender equity. But this is not mentioned a lot in the novel. But in the Deterrence Era, the society the author constructed is a “feminine” society. In the author's view, masculine traits are aggressive and conquering, which are the result of harsh living conditions in the past. According to evolution, the fittest survive. In harsh living conditions, only the strong survive. As the world becomes more peaceful, life becomes less difficult and the qualities needed to cope with the harsh environment begin to deteriorate. When all traits start to look the same, the definition of male and female begins to blur, in addition to biological differences. As in our contemporary society, gender identity is self-determined.

So, we can't decide which things to do or not to do based on a person's gender. That is, these are personal choices of one person, which should not be judged by gender. There shouldn't be certain things that a gender should or shouldn't do.

COLLAGES

“Surrogacy”

SURROGACY IN IDEAL

From my point of view, the ideal situation that surrogacy would work well is that people have free wills to choose whether to help those who can't have children on their own. Their will is pure, out of genuine desire to help others. But I don't think this can be ever achieved because of our human nature and ethics.



THE MORAL BLACKMAIL IN SURROGACY

Most surrogates are actually being morally blackmailed. I don't think there are any women who are really enjoying surrogating. Many are forced by life. They want to live a better life and surrogating can provide this. In the surrogacy center, surrogates would be well taken care of and they would have their salaries. But sometimes they are actually being persuaded to do this. Imagine a poor family, they can't make enough money to support their family for some reason. There is a chance that the women would be told by their family members that you can make money to support our family. By doing this, perhaps we can have enough food and our kids don't have to starve anymore. The woman might consent but this is never a real consent. There is no true free will.

Also, one unique situation is that surrogates are granted glory and society starts to promote this. Surrogate becomes the most honorable profession. The society educates women since they are little girls that it's their responsibility to give birth and if they have a chance to help those who can't, they will be honored.



THE DARK TIME OF SURROGACY

The worst scenario is that people start to abduct and traffick women. They are treated as tools. It seems to be far away from our life. But unfortunately, it is happening somewhere right now.



SURVEY QUESTIONS

IMAGES SOURCES:

1. <https://cdn.britannica.com/71/189171-050-B4A7DA05/Central-Park-New-York-City.jpg>
2. <https://www.newyorkbyrail.com/local-guide/central-park-nyc/>
3. <http://www.sammyandthecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/P1090362.jpg>
4. <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/playmates-arch-central-park-steve-rosenbach.html>
5. <https://www.centralparknyc.org/locations/billy-johnson-playground>
6. <http://sammyandthecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Gapstow-Bridge-614x461.jpg>
7. https://assets.centralparknyc.org/media/images/locations/_2475x1151_crop_center-center_none/Azalea_Walk_DSC_3947.jpg?mtime=20200822125747&focal=none&mtime=20201216181404
8. <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/b4/ef/89/b4ef89154edc1a55067552490a5980ca.jpg>
9. <https://www.centralpark.com/downloads/1177/download/cherry-blossom-tree-s-in-bloom.jpg?cb=f91a2ca51b07905dc337da9c01a986e8&w=640&h=>

1. What country are you from?
2. Do you think your culture is friendly to women? What is the relationship between men and women in your culture? Are men and women considered equal? Please provide an example if it is helpful to explain your point.
3. What is the attitude towards women for most people in your country?
4. Do you feel safe in public spaces in the US? If you are not from the US, do you feel safe in public spaces in your country? What do you perceive to be the biggest difference between the two countries regarding how safe you feel in public spaces?
5. Do you feel comfortable spending time in public spaces? Or do you prefer staying in your private spaces? Why?
6. Where do you consider to be the most comfortable and safest public space for you? And why is that? If you can't name one specific place, please describe what kind of spaces that would

make you feel comfortable and safe?

7. What's your biggest concern except for safety in public spaces? Why?
8. Is there anything that you can think of that public spaces should include to support women but they don't?
9. Which space would you feel most comfortable spending time in alone? Why?

Group 1:



Group 2:



Group 3:



10. As a designer, have you taken gender safety issues into consideration when you are designing?
11. If the answer is yes, please provide an example to explain how you have taken gender safety issues into consideration when you are designing?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Delaqua, Camilla Ghisleni e Victor. “How Can Gender Impact the Future of Urban Life?,” February 14, 2021. <https://www.archdaily.com/956585/how-can-gender-impact-the-future-of-urban-life>

The article argues that public spaces are not neutral, and they are the representation of men oppressing women. The author suggests women’s fear should be taken into consideration in urban planning. Moreover, it’s important to be aware that, while gender inequality structures the city, the structure entitles men’s privileges at the same time.

Franck, Karen A. and Paxson, Lynn. Women and urban public space: Research, design and policy issues. In I. Altman and E. Zube (Eds) Public Spaces and Places. New York: Plenum, 1989: 121-146.

This is a theoretical study on women and public space. It starts with terminology, also historical overviews and contemporary context of the issues about women and public space, and then proposes a framework for studying women’s use of public space. The study provides a future guide for theoretical study on women’s use of public space.

Harrouk, Christele. “What Can Cities Imagined by Women Look Like? The Case of Barcelona.” ArchDaily. ArchDaily, December 25, 2019. <https://www.archdaily.com/927948/how-can-cities-imagined-by-women-look-like-the-case-of-barcelona>

This article comes up with 6 design strategies to make the city more friendly to women.

James, Caitlin. “How Men Dominate Space; or, How to Take Our Space Back,” May 19, 2016. <https://honisoit.com/2016/05/how-men-dominate-space-or-how-to-take-our-space-back/>

This article starts by talking about “manspreading” which is considered as an unconscious behavior by men. The author suggests that this is affirmed by society through education and norms. The article criticizes the default entitlement of men and appeals to women to defend their own space in the public sphere.

Kneeshaw, Sally. “Gender Sensitive Public Space? Placemaking and Spatial Justice through the Perspective of Gender.” URBACT, June 24, 2019. <https://urbact.eu/gender-sensitive-public-space-placemaking-and-spatial-justice-through-perspective-gender>

This article summarizes the first URBACT Gender Equal Cities workshop in Stockholm that women should participate in the design process of public space to achieve a better gender equal city.

Newman, Oscar. Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design. 1972.

This book introduces the defensible space theory that how urban design could help reduce criminality. It comes up with four key factors that make a space defensible: territoriality, surveillance, image, and milieu.

Ortiz, Anna, Maria Dolors Garcia-Ramon, and Maria Prats. “Women’s Use of Public Space and Sense of Place in the Raval (Barcelona).” GeoJournal 61, no. 3 (2004): 219-27. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41147936>

This article talks about women’s perception and use of public space, and sense of place in El Raval through field observations and interviews with women in different socio-cultural backgrounds. It concludes that socio-cultural background would have an influence on their perception and the sense of place, and some children’s facilities would help women appropriate public space.

Thompson, Deborah M. “The Woman in the Street:” Reclaiming the Public Space from Sexual Harassment, 6 Yale J.L. & Feminism (1993). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol6/iss2/4>

This article gives definition of street harassment and how it affects women from a wide range of aspects. And the article proposes some legal remedies to potentially alleviate the problem.

Valentine, Gill. "Women's Fear and the Design of Public Space." *Built Environment* (1978-) 16, no. 4 (1990): 288-303. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23286230>

This paper addresses the relationship between design and the safety issues of women in the public space. It criticizes the design of public space from an environmental and social perspective by listing plenty of comments from women on when they feel safe and when they feel vulnerable. And this paper summarizes the safety factors and design strategies that should be considered by designers and planners.

Valentine, Gill. "The Geography of Women's Fear." *Area* 21, no. 4 (1989): 385-90. Accessed February 23, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20000063>

This paper points out that women's fear towards men affects how women use public spaces. And their use of public spaces is actually how patriarchy presents spatially.

Wang, Zheng. *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.

This book tells the feminist history in China in early 20th century through interviews with five women talking about their experiences at that time.

