

## **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.