

Teens and improvised spaces; A study of appropriation of outdoor places

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Abstract

In contemporary cities, teenagers have been excluded from public open spaces through design and policy. This study examines design as a form of control that induces users' behavior in space through formal and informal rules. These rules limit acceptable actions that can be conducted in spaces. This study thus asks, "what can we learn from teens' use of open space? How can we facilitate creativity and freedom within the realm of designed space? It explores behavior through observations, interviews, and site drawings in three appropriated spaces in the Bay Area of California: a stairwell, a public plaza, and a convenience store parking lot. It includes the researcher's reflections about her interactions with the teens involved and the effect of her personal identity on the outcomes. The study hypothesizes that teens' reasons for appropriating these places include a combination of exclusion from open spaces by socially dominant groups and the users' need to express independence. This hypothesis was only partially supported by findings. Teenage users expressed feelings of belonging and ownership in these places and exhibited creative ways of using the built environment. This study demonstrates that the fields of design, planning, and policy can better serve this population by relaxing their control of users and of the built environment to allow for more creativity, freedom, and active appropriation.

Key Words: Sense of place, appropriation, public space, policy, urban planning, teenagers, design

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Introduction

This study examines how teenagers use urban open space, particularly teens' appropriation of space in ways outside the designer's and the municipality's intent for the space. The thesis examines three spaces in the Bay Area of California which exemplify this type of use. These spaces are: a parking lot used by teenagers to aggregate in large groups, a plaza regularly used to skateboard, and a stairwell used as a communal gathering area. Why do the teenagers who use these spaces choose to do so? How do they use these spaces? The study aims to gain a better understanding of these questions by observing teenagers in these spaces and by mapping their behavior patterns; then by interviewing teenagers who occupy these spaces and asking them about why they use these areas and how they view themselves and others who use these spaces. Drawings are presented instead of photography to preserve anonymity of the locations and the users. They effectively portray the feel of the places studied and of user interactions within them. I reflect on how my own identity influenced interactions with the teenagers and the outcomes of the research.

The thesis hypothesized that teenagers use these spaces because they are often excluded from overtly controlled open spaces and feel they have nowhere else to go. They may also use these spaces because they want to assert their sovereignty by refusing to use what others designed for them.

How teenagers appropriate spaces is important to study because design is a form of control, and when planners dictate uses of the landscape, they also dictate who can use it and when. Planning aims to be inclusionary and to consider everyone's needs in the built environment. So far, teenagers have often been excluded from planning processes, and urban design often aims to keep them out of spaces instead of creating environments which teenagers can effectively use with significant autonomy. Many studies have been conducted about the subject of teens' use of space, however, only few deal particularly with teenagers transgressively using spaces outside of design intent. In spite of previous studies, social perceptions of teens continue to perpetuate the myth that teenage behavior is dangerous. Teens continue to suffer from lack of adequate accommodation in their environment due to common perceptions. Studies show a disconnect between this group and their surroundings.

For the purpose of this paper, the term "teen" refers to a person between the ages of 13 and 19

passing through a physical and mental developmental stage into adulthood. The term "open space" refers to any outdoors area that can be accessed from the street and does not include a roof or closed walls. Such spaces can be privately or publicly owned. This essay frequently refers to the terms "place" and "place making". "Place" means different things to different people; it can refer to location, to an area where economic transactions occur, or a location with significant emotional and local value. According to Arefi (1999), the meanings of "place" shifted in recent years as places became increasingly manufactured and standardized. This paper uses the term as urban planners, architects, and designers generally use it, to describe people's attachment to a physical location. These disciplines strive for "sense of place" or in other words, a connection to a particular space, a space with identity.

Several notable themes relate to this subject which include: spatial organization in relation to power, teens' right to the streets, teen developmental needs and how these relate to risk taking and safety concerns, public open space and its privatization, and researcher's identity in relation to the study group.

Observing teens using spaces in ways not intended can help create better designs for them and to help us understand the function of such spaces. The case studies also exemplify active place making as teenagers strive to claim their own spaces in the city. This method can also be applied to design of spaces for other marginalized communities such as seniors and the disabled.

Background

Bay Area

This study takes place in the Bay Area in the state of California, located on the coast of the state and is composed of the San Francisco Bay and Peninsula. The Bay's weather pattern is characterized by mild rainless summers and mild winters in which the weather rarely drops below freezing. This makes the Bay ideal for year-round outdoor activity.

The Bay Area is composed of 9 counties inhabited by over 7 million people. The most predominant racial groups in the area are white (53 %), Asian, (23 %), and Hispanic (24%) according to the 2010 census. According to a paper by Alejandra Lopez (2001) which explores racial distribution, racial composition differs amongst Bay Area counties. For instance, Alameda

and Solano counties contain the largest percentage of African Americans (14.6 % for both) while the largest percentage of Latinos live in Santa Clara (11.9 %). The largest percentage of Asians resides in San Francisco county (30.7%). Overall, Bay Area counties are fairly diverse with less than 50 percent of the population identifying as white alone. On average for Bay Area counties, 6.4 percent more people under the age of 18 identify as mixed race (Lopez, 2001).

The median household income is \$75,000 per year (American Community Survey 2006-2010), much higher than California median household income of \$61,000 and the United States median household income of \$53,000 (Census 2010).

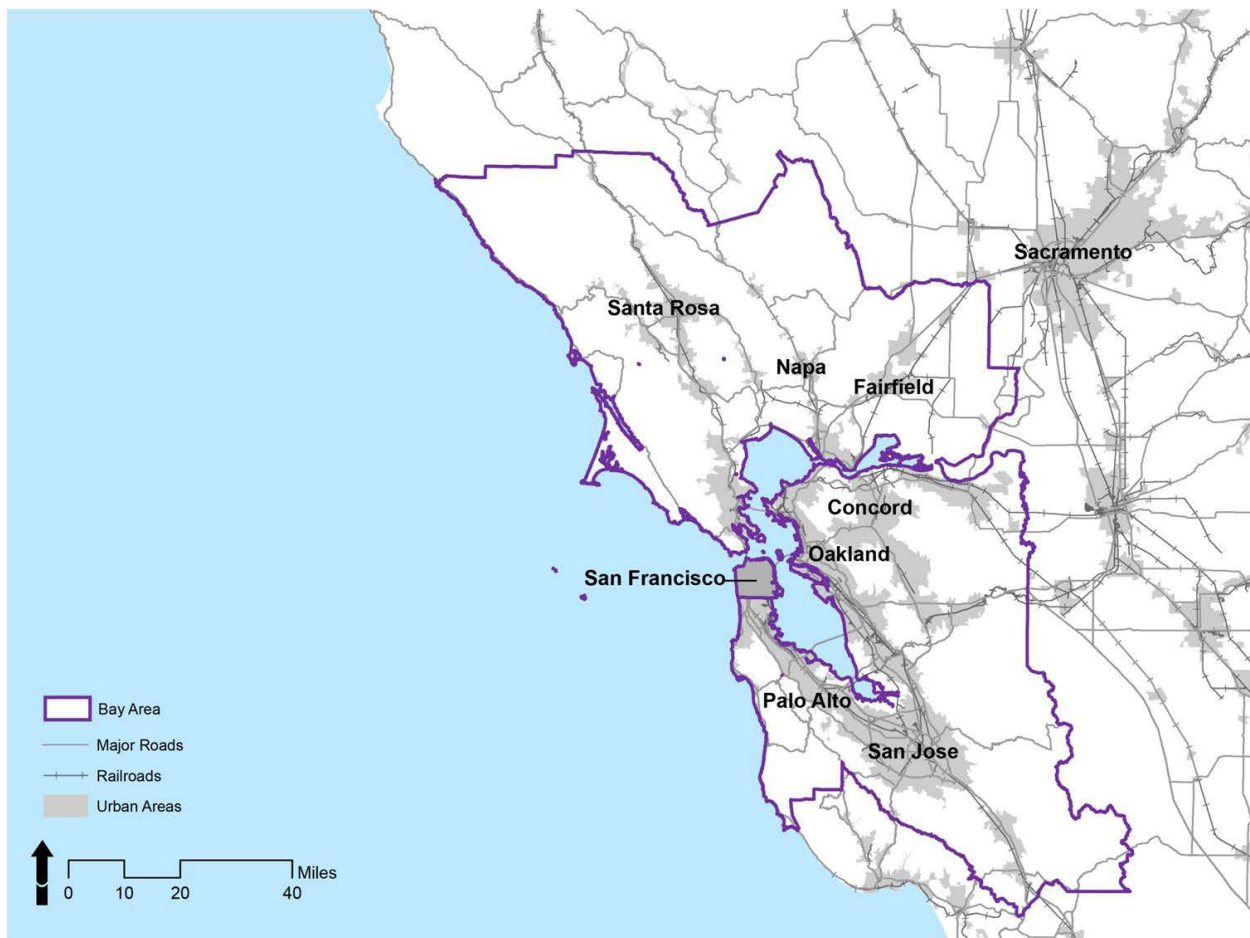


Figure A: Map of the Bay Area. Sources: Google Maps, Tiger.

Open space

Since this thesis examines teens' use of open space, it is important to define what this term means, particularly in an historical context. According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, open space can refer to an array of different types of places. It can refer to a swath of land or water that remained in a natural state, agriculture land, forest land, scenic land, and public parks. Basically, the term refers to any land that remains un-built. The Department of Environmental Conservation emphasizes that the definition of open space is contextual. This thesis examines behavior in the urban and suburban environments, most applicable here are small-scale open spaces such as vacant lots, small parks, and even bike lanes. In this context, open space refers to any space not covered by a roof or surrounded by walls (Stanley, 2012) These spaces are integral to urban quality of life because they shape the structure of the built environment. They provide opportunities for social interaction, movement, and recreation.

Historically, open spaces have not always been accessible to everyone. The United States generally follows English trends. In England, plazas and open spaces evolved in the 17th and 18th century as society began to value aspects of rural living in urban settlements. As societies shifted from feudalism to capitalism during the late 18th century, they converted these spaces into private parks which became highly privatized spaces highlighting class differences. During the same period, greening of urban open spaces became popular and design aimed to imitate the countryside (Laurence, 1993). Mass movement into cities in the 19th century increased awareness of the need for public parks, which were seen as the cure for urban ailments. The first parks to open to the public in England were the Royal Parks of London, Hyde Park, and Green Park (Taylor, 1995). In the United States, the Boston Common, founded in 1634, is considered as the first public park. It evolved from a common space for gathering and grazing into a stage for free speech and a designated public park (City of Boston, 2013).

Today, public open space continues to play an important role in the lives of those who live in the city. Certain groups especially depend on urban open space because they cannot afford access to private spaces due to proximity or budgetary constraints. Teens, along with other marginalized groups, frequently fall into

this category. However, due to many reasons further discussed below, teenagers have been excluded from both public and private open spaces.

Restrictive regulations

In the United States, many rules and regulations have been imposed to control teen use of open space. Most common are the loitering and curfew regulations. Certain activities, such as skateboarding are often also restricted. Municipalities in the Bay Area impose regulations on all of these activities. These regulations, along with their historical context are outlined below.

Teen curfew laws restrict the hours in which teens can be outside at night and are intended to protect teens from committing crimes and from being victims of crimes. They came about in the 1980's and 90's in response to rising juvenile crime rates, but their effectiveness is questionable (Owens, 2002). Similarly, loitering laws restrict where teenagers can gather. They have been implemented in high crime low-income neighborhoods as a crime preventive measure that allows increased control to law enforcement officials. Critics of curfew laws state that such laws break teens' constitutional freedoms. Arresting teens for activities that would not be crimes if conducted by adults creates distrust between non-troublesome teens and the police (Macallair and Males, 1998). Courts have upheld these laws as legitimate methods of preventing crime. However, the effectiveness of curfew as crime prevention has not been systematically tested (Sutphen and Ford, 2001).

Similarly, loitering laws have been implemented by cities and towns to control unsavory public behaviors such as begging, drug dealing, and general nuisances. Supposedly, these laws allow enforcement officials to disperse unwanted groups and individuals from public spaces. Identifying individuals whose presence genuinely harms others requires enforcement officials' personal judgment. Critics of loitering laws say that minorities have been disproportionately targeted (Leipold, 2001).

In the Bay Area, teen curfew laws are common, but they differ from city to city. For instance, the city of San Jose prohibits minors under the age of 16 from being in public space between the 10:00 PM and 5:00

AM, and prohibits minors between the ages of 16 and 18 from being outside between 11:30 PM and 5:00 AM. These regulations are justified as youth protection measures and do involve some exceptions such as being in the company of a legal guardian or engaging as an employee or volunteer (San Jose, CA Code of Ordinance, Chapter 10.28). San Francisco also enacts curfew laws, and these only apply to minors under the age of 14 and strict hours are not listed in the provision (San Francisco, CA, Code of Ordinance Article 8 Section 539). In both of those cities, punishment is not strict and mainly entails notifying guardians. Some municipalities enforce stricter rules. For instance, Martinez charges minors under the age of 18 with a misdemeanor if caught in public spaces between 11:00 PM and 6:00 AM (Martinez, CA, Code of Ordinance 9.80.010, year). On the other end of the spectrum are cities like Santa Clara which do not have teen curfew regulations.

California law allows local governments to place restrictions on skateboarding and requires minors to wear a helmet. Because of this, regulations vary throughout the region. Many municipalities in the Bay Area, including the city housing one of the sites, have written restrictions into their municipal codes.

One example is San Francisco, which prohibits skateboarding on any street and sidewalk between 30 minutes prior to sunset and 30 minutes before sunrise. Laws also prohibit skateboarding in the vicinity of any public transportation stop. The city requires skateboarders using skate parks to wear helmets, knee pads, and elbow pads while they use the park (City and County of San Francisco, 2003). This is contrary to many municipalities who deal with skateboarding by labeling it as a hazardous activity in which those who participate assume safety responsibility. The City of San Jose has delineated skateboard prohibition zones which prohibit skateboarding unless a special temporary permit is obtained. Such a permit would allow the holder to install temporary skateboarding equipment (San Jose Municipal Code Chapter 13.21). Several other municipalities, such as Mill valley and Hayward, prohibit skateboarding on sidewalks.

Tobacco and marijuana laws

Smoking was one of the common activities observed in the case studies. The legal background of smoking weed and cigarettes is important to note because these are often a anti-socially sanctioned activities which can cause conflicts with authority figures. The prevalence of smoking in all three of the sites observed also raises interesting observations and questions in regards to appropriation of space and reasoning behind it.

Cigarettes, although legal, have many adverse effects on health. The list of regulations and restrictions placed on this substance is long and complicated. Existing restrictions range from places which ban smoking, to types of cigarettes allowed. In regards to minors, the law is clear. They may not possess, buy, or receive tobacco products or related paraphernalia. If minors are caught they face a fine and community service. Businesses and individuals who sell or give minors tobacco products are also subject to significant penalties. Additionally, smoking is illegal on school campuses (ChangeLab Solutions, 2012).

Possession, distribution, and growing of marijuana are illegal under the Controlled Substance Act (CSA) of 1970 which makes such activities criminal offenses. This act is congruent with California state laws which specify severity of punishment depending on amounts of the drug possessed and reasons for possessing it. In 1996, Californians passed the Compassionate Use Act which decriminalized cultivation and possession of marijuana for seriously ill persons who obtained a recommendation from a licensed physician. The act was meant to ensure that people who need marijuana for medical reasons can gain access to it without being criminalized as long as amounts possessed or grown are appropriate for the person's medical need. In 2004, Senate Bill 420, the Medical Marijuana Program Act (MMP) became law. This bill requires the California Department of Public Health to establish and maintain voluntary registry of patients. Patients register and receive a medical marijuana identification card. These cards are important because they protect cardholders from arrest (California Department of Justice, 2008).

The federal Controlled Substance Act may seem like it conflicts with California State laws. However, congress established that states' freedom to regulate

controlled substances as long as this does not conflict with CSA. The California laws do not conflict with CSA because they do not legalize medical marijuana, but instead exercise the State's powers to not punish certain marijuana offenses under state law (California Department of Justice, 2008).

Those under the age of 18 can apply as patients for the medical marijuana program, and may represent themselves if they are emancipated. However, if they are not emancipated minors, their legal guardians will be contacted (California Department of Public Health).

With all this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that teenagers I encountered during my research who are over 18 may be in possession of a medical marijuana card, and therefore exempt from arrest under California laws. However, this is unlikely.

Literature Review

Space and power

This thesis depends on the premise that a teen has a right to use open space, and sometimes in ways which may not be approved by authoritative figures. To make a case for teens' right to the city, this paper explores existing philosophical thought on the subjects of freedom and sovereignty and in regards to spatial organization. It is also important to gain an understanding of the mechanisms used by societies to define and exclude spatially. These include the laws and regulations outlined in the previous section.

Space is organized in terms of power hierarchy. Foucault's philosophy helps to explain the spatial organization of power and his way of thinking influences later thought regarding power and space. He states that sovereignty is exercised within territories. Discipline depends on the multidimensional nature of populations because, through differentiating between self and others, some groups can exert power over other groups. Security, discipline, and sovereignty are all manifested spatially and organized by social hierarchy. Since hierarchy is constructed socially, so are the spaces that define hierarchy. Discipline works through space (Foucault, 2004). This applies to teenagers because they have very little power of control. Due to their age, social seniority, status as minors, and lack of significant independent income, discipline is exerted on them in a variety of means. One of which can be exclusion from public spaces.

Methods of exerting power on individuals vary and change constantly. In postmodern society, power is often expressed through informal and decentralized means, which makes control subtle and difficult to spot (Fischer and Poland 1998). In their study examining the marginalization of smokers, Fischer and Poland (1998) describe methods of control used by societies to combat otherness. Their study also focuses on spatially exerted power and applies this process specifically to postmodern society. It contends that social powers of exclusion emerge as mechanisms of governance. The needs to reduce risk, danger, and disorder lead to individual sites actually embodying exclusion. Postmodern control and power forces are subtle in nature and, because they are informal, they are not under scrutiny by law. Policing of many types of spaces exists, but public spaces use governmental police, which places the groups who depend on publicly

owned spaces under higher scrutiny by governmental law.

Aside from direct policing, privately owned public spaces also emerged as a method of exclusion. Fischer and Poland (1998) highlight the increasing prevalence of privately owned public spaces. They state that privately owned public spaces market safety, and because they are private, have the power to exclude 'problem' individuals. Instead of dealing with social issues, spaces aim to exclude 'risky people' with mechanisms such as fences around parks and no benches near schools. Mahyar Arefi (1999) explores the process of loss of sense of place in the modern landscape due to globalization, standardization, and need for safety. Modern developed societies respond to these issues with the creation of manufactured spaces such as theme parks and malls. These places promise to deliver a safe, fun, and predictable environment at the expense of spontaneity, variety, and adventure. Manufactured spaces promote single uses and are exclusionary by nature.

These concepts can be directly applied to the experiences of teenagers in the urban landscape. In his book *Lanscapes of Betrayal, Landscapes of Joy* (2000), Herb Childress epitomizes the issue in one sentence: "teenagers have no resources to build anything for themselves, so they claim the leftovers in the planned landscape" (Childress, 2000). This echos Foucault's conviction that space is organized by spatial hierarchy yet it also illustrates the logic behind interviewing teenagers using space in ways outside of design intent.

Karen Malone (2002) combines the concepts of exclusion from public space, privatization, and policing and applies them to teens. Malone states that teens should be seen as a distinct social group with values different from that of the mainstream and from other social groups. Her study focuses on the street as a space for unstructured youth culture. It also deals with the postmodern landscape in which surveillance is prevalent. In western cities, the 'loiterer' is seen as a hindrance to the storefront views of the 'shopper'. Affluent countries regulate spaces according to 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' uses. Like Fischer and Poland, Malone addresses the issue of exclusion from space. Malone asserts that disorder and difference are important aspects that we must encounter because they open us up to the concept of otherness. People need this to learn how to deal with conflict. We need to

redefine public spaces as spaces with multiple sets of values for varied users with diverse needs.

These readings help to place the issue in a broader social context. Perhaps teens who act as a nuisance are not the real problem, but the real issue is actually defining a particular group as a nuisance in the first place. Instead of excluding such a group, it is necessary to understand their varied points of view and their needs and behaviors in the public and private realm. Most of all, it is important to recognize their right to use spaces in ways they deem fit. Malone's identification of teens as a social group is a step in giving them sovereignty. Their social stance and lack of social power makes them dependent on open space. However, the structure of the current urban and suburban landscape often deems their behavior as unacceptable.

Teen exclusion methods and effects

Not only are teenagers not accommodated for in public space, they are also actively excluded from open space through both design and policy. This group feels a lack of sense of belonging and lack of control in their environments, which can lead to depression and even fear of the outdoors.

Several studies explain methods used to exclude teens. Patsy Owens (2002) explains methods which include policies, such as curfew and skateboarding ordinances, and no loitering signage. As mentioned in the background section, curfew laws restrict when and how teenagers can use their environments.

Unaccommodating design practices evolved as a response to client desires and as a response to the legitimate need to create safe environments that discourage crime. According to Owens (2002), teens often use public spaces in ways different from other age groups. These findings are seconded in a study by Elizabeth Gearin and Chris Kahle (2006). They interviewed teenagers and adults and compared their responses in regards to use of space. Both studies found that teenagers like spaces they can use to gather in large groups with activities centered on socializing as compared to adults, who prefer specialized programming. According to Owens, these types of needs are rarely incorporated into park designs. In suburban communities, an overly designed landscape often

deprives teenagers from claiming spaces as their own.

Privatization of open space also acts as a method of exclusion. In regards to teens in particular, Karen Malone's article is very notable. Both the Owens and the Malone studies note that increased prevalence of privately owned public spaces, such as malls, and utilization of public space for commercial uses, such as cafes in parks, disenfranchise teens from open space by favoring consumers over citizens and creating formal and informal behavioral rules teenagers must abide by.

Teenagers need to form a connection with their environment and gain a sense of control over their surroundings. Literature suggests they feel disconnected. Suburban teens increasingly gravitate to homes on their spare time. Urban teens face the same challenges of exclusion and marginalization. Much research shows that teenagers do not have regular access to open space, but would like to strengthen their relationship with the environment. A study by David Driskell, Carly Fox, and Neema Kudva (2008) found that a teen's sense of belonging to a community is affected by space and place, which are also integral to the process of teen identity forming. The study explored active participation of teens in planning of projects that alter the environment and contribute to local communities. It focused on community building and urban spaces. A study by the Bay Area Open Space Council (2010) sought to explore adolescent use patterns of natural open space parks and to identify barriers to access for teens. The study found that this group did not spend much time outside, but would like the opportunity to do so. It went further to identify barriers, which included intimidation, lack of activities, and lack of transportation opportunities.

This sense of exclusion and lack of ownership also affects teens' mental health. A study by William Evans, Patsy Owens, and Shawn Marsh (2006) researched how teens' perceptions of control over their environments influenced their mental health. The researchers found that higher rates of depression are correlated with lack of sense of personal control. The study highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging and perceived ability to contribute to the environment as an important factor in adolescents' mental health.

Even spaces designed for teens are sometimes accompanied with exclusion. A study by Patsy Owens (2001) mentions that construction of skate parks is often coupled with the local community banning

skateboarding from certain areas or planning to ban skateboarding. Skate parks are seen both as a place for youth and as a way to control youth behavior.

Teenagers are commonly excluded from their environments due to spatial design, cultural fears about crime, lack of resources, and privatization of open space. This may have negative implications for this group's mental health in addition to being a social equity issue.

Get those teens off the streets and into institutions

Prevailing policy and design correlates with common perceptions about adolescence. These perceptions reflect the opinion that this age group must be occupied with structured activities at all times because otherwise, adolescents will become entangled in crime and will slip into a downwards cycle which will wreck their lives forever. The prevalence of this viewpoint is both supported by a body of literature and by my own experience studying after school services for youth in New York City's Upper West Side as a part of a community planning fellowship with Manhattan's Community Board 7. These views are problematic because they frame teenagers as a homogeneous group and offer institutionalized activities as the ultimate cure for youth behavior, which is assumed to be problematic in nature. Lynn Penton, a developmental psychologist who wrote extensively about teenage risk taking, clarifies that this assumption is a myth which impedes profound understanding of teenage behavior. Teens need to experiment to learn boundaries. They must learn to distinguish between healthy risk and risk that can cause serious harm (Penton, 1997). Teenage risk taking is not necessarily harmful and psychologically healthy teenagers are less likely to engage in risk taking behaviors causing serious consequences than their more troubled peers (Penton, 1997).

On the extreme side of existing literature which exemplifies perscription to this myth is the Newman et al. article (2000) which describes in detail how teens who do not attend supervised and structured activities after school between the hours of 3:00 PM and 8:00 PM "slide down a slope of delinquency and crime that threatens the rest of us." It describes these crimes as "serious and violent, including murders, rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults." The article

describes these hours as prime time for teens to smoke cigarettes, have sex, and abuse drugs. Although it claims to focus on low income families, it paints a frightening picture of teens from all backgrounds and portrays even normal experimental behavior as endangering the safety of entire societies.

A less extreme example of perceptions of teens is provided in Larson's 2001 article which explores the relationships between how teenagers spend their after school time and developmental tasks achieved. Although Larson explores many activities, including talking, chores, watching TV, and acknowledges that socializing plays a developmental role, his writing still shows a bias against free play and teenage socializing. He cites studies that show how increased hours of socializing lead to "problematic behavior" but fails to define problematic behavior. He concludes that structured, adult led, activities are more promising for development than unstructured free time.

Opinions of both community service providers and community leaders expressed during my research working as a fellow in Manhattan echoed the sentiment of the previous articles. Although not all providers felt that teens should not have free time, providing the teens with a save haven from the streets came up frequently, vehemently, and without question. Service providers felt that we must do whatever we can to keep the teenagers from roaming around unsupervised and in the open. Additionally, local complaints about teenagers socializing in areas such as playgrounds and bothering other users were not questioned as a function of this group's lack of accommodation in the built and social environment. None of the providers acknowledged that unstructured and unsupervised time is important for this age group. Only one of the five providers I interviewed acknowledged that teenagers cannot be forced to participate in after school activities and that flexibility and ability to create one's own schedule is important.

Unquestioning exclusion of an entire group of individuals from the streets and open spaces, which are the connective fabric of the built environment and a major mode of social interaction for all, presents both social equity issues and a missed opportunity to provide teenagers with outdoor spaces that support their developmental needs. The mere notion that their presence is problematic where other groups are welcomed exemplifies this issue. My interviews with teenagers show that they are aware of bias against them. One 17 year old boy stands out in particular

when he sarcastically answered my interview question about activities he participates in with “sex, drugs, and rock and roll”, perhaps assuming I hold certain judgements against him.

What teens want and need

Since open spaces are so important for teens, it is imperative to understand how this group views and uses existing open spaces and what they look for in open space. Literature on this topic is constantly expanding. Current research hints that teens and adults use open spaces in different ways. However, teens, like many other groups, seek safety and the feeling of belonging in their environments.

One way to frame the needs of teenagers is through the lens of human development. A yet unpublished study by Owens et al. explores why teenagers choose certain environments and how the built environment helps or hinders their personal development. Owens coined the phrase “developmental affordance”, which describes how people perceive their environment depending on their developmental stage. The study identifies four different developmental tasks that occur during adolescence: engaging in self reflection and internal growth, managing free time effectively, developing satisfying social relationships, and developing a sense of social responsibility. The study concludes that many of these tasks are supported by the built environment, such as learning to manage free time and developing satisfying relationships, but some are not, such as opportunities for self reflection and establishing a sense of social responsibility. (Owens et al. , unpublished).

In contrast with the Larson (2001) and the Newman et al. article (2001) the Owens unpublished study states that teenagers need to socialize with friends as a part of achieving their developmental goals of learning to manage free time and the need for independence for formation of identity. This correlates with Ponton’s book, (1997) that also mentions that teenagers need to be identified as separate individuals. Unstructured and unsupervised activities allow teens to experiment.

Several studies deal with how and why teenagers use open space. In her 1988 study, Patsy Owens aims to gain an understanding of what spaces teenagers use and why they use them by interviewing a group of suburban teenagers about their preferences.

Teenagers in this study favored natural spaces and undeveloped agricultural areas. The teens provided a variety of reasons for coming to their favorite places, which included to be alone, freedom, gathering, and lack of supervision while still feeling safe (Owens, 1988). In a study by Travlou et al. (2008), researchers found that teenagers are also highly territorial. Teens mapped both spaces they liked and disliked in Edinborough and Sacramento. Participants often cited areas they avoid due to another group’s presence, exhibiting territoriality.

Elizabeth Gearin and Chris Kahle (2006) also explored the ways teens perceive open space. Using focus groups, they interviewed teenagers about their perceptions of open space, their involvement in the planning process, and methods of obtaining youth input. They found that teens like places with variety of options centered on socializing. Teens also saw opportunities in improving underused spaces. The findings of this study proved similar to the findings of Owens’ (1988) study. Both highlight the needs of teenagers to have the options of conducting many types of activities in spaces, to be free of constant supervision, and teens interest in utilizing “found” spaces. It refers to areas adapted for use by a particular group. This term implies a sense of ownership and ingenuity that the above studies suggest is sought by teens. Both Owens (2002) and Gearin and Kahle (2006) hinted that teenagers are open-minded to using “found spaces.”

Even though teenagers need to experiment and to be independent, studies show they also seek safety. This need is explored in the Gearin and Kahle (2006), Owens (1998), and the Owens unpublished study. The Gearin and Kahle (2006) talks about safety and cleanliness as desired aspects of open space. Owens (1998) mentions that teenagers sometimes feel threatened by presence of other groups which can be composed of unfamiliar teenagers.

The above studies all explore ways in which teenagers use open spaces. Often, uses are not defined by type of specific activity, but by more general terms such as gathering and reflecting. All of the studies highlight the ways in which teenagers use and see spaces differently from the way adults see and perceive them.

Methods of research

The readings highlighted a variety of different research methods which can be utilized for research of appropriated spaces and viable critiques. Some of the papers specifically address research with teens while others cover research methods in general. Common research methods include interest groups, behavioral studies, surveys, and in one case, shadowing of teenagers.

The studies that used focus groups include the Travlou et al. 2008 Study, which also examined place mapping, and the 2006 Gearin and Kahle study. The Travlou study stated that the school atmosphere might not be ideal for conducting focus groups with teens because of the social hierarchy structure already in existence in school institutions, but school might be the best place to capture a variety of individuals. Similarly, Gearin and Kahle recommended creating an informal atmosphere for the interviews so teens can feel freer to provide true opinions.

Another interesting method discussed in the readings is place mapping, which refers to the practice of letting study participants draw maps of their environments or mark already existing maps. Travlou et al. (2008) discuss this practice in detail and provide place mapping as a method for understanding spaces through the eyes of teenagers. This study also notes the limitations of conducting place mapping in a high school setting because of hierarchy structures in place between teenagers and authority figures and even amongst the teens themselves.

One of the studies used surveys as the primary form of data collection—Evans et al. (2006). Researchers interviewed 8th graders in several schools about their mental health and their favorite places. This method is useful for collecting large samples of data.

Behavioral mapping is another viable method of data collection; it refers to creating maps of the study location and marking people's locations and behaviors on them. Most notable is William Whyte's famous documentary, "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" (1988) in which researchers documented use through mapping, but also using time lapse photography. They discovered overt spatial use patterns. Articles covered several methods of behavioral analysis. Given and Leckie (2003) utilized behavior tallies of usage of public libraries. The researchers observed usage in

particular library spaces and counted types of users and behaviors. In a similar study, Cosco et al. (2010) mapped the behaviors of preschoolers during their recess breaks. Here, the researchers marked base maps with symbols to simultaneously create a tally and a spatial configuration of uses.

Herb Childress took an entirely different approach to learn about how place shapes teenagers' lives. After collecting surveys and interviews in a California high school, he realized he needs to know the teens, not just merely to know about them. So, he shadowed 11 high school students for the duration of a weekend each. The teens took him into their homes and their rooms, showed him their regular haunts, and shared with him their outlooks on life. Through this method, he fostered relationships with them. Although this type of research is beyond the scope of this thesis, it emphasizes that people are the central focus of qualitative research (Childress, 2000).

For this thesis, behavioral mapping and interviews were chosen as the most appropriate methods for answering the research questions. Behavioral mapping allowed me to observe spatial use patterns in the three chosen spaces by creating maps of users as done by William Whyte (1988). Subsequent interviews with the teenagers who used these sites answered many of the questions in regards to why the teens chose to use these spaces.

Researcher and subject relationships

While conducting the behavioral mapping and interviews, I realized that my perceived identity, and particularly my gender, greatly influenced the outcome of the research, particularly of the interviews. Upon further inquiry, I learned this is a common concern of qualitative research. Several researchers address their relationship with the subjects, but this discussion is often separate from writings about the research itself.

Particularly applicable to this thesis is the relationship of the female researcher to the subjects and the power dynamics that come into play in these situations. Laura Adams (1999) grappled with power dynamics while she conducted her research in Uzbekistan. There, she often felt she had to forfeit her feminist persona to gain trust and information from informants. She learned that in such a patriarchal society, her gender allowed her to be seen as

harmless and non-threatening. Similarly, Mazzei and O'Brian (2009) state that a researcher can deploy gender to establish rapport with informants. Their study describes two female researchers in two very different situations. One conducted research at an American hotel housekeeping department and another in Mexican Parliament groups. Both researchers used their gender in different situations to help them build relationships and to gain information.

An older study by Warren and Rasmussen (1977) examined how gender and sexuality influenced relationships between the researcher and the subjects. This study examined how sex appeal can influence research from both a male and a female perspective. It uses researcher experiences in many different scenarios in which being male or female can cause ease or difficulty in data collection. For instance, female subjects can feel threatened by a sexually provocative female researcher while this can aid a female researcher in gaining more information from male subjects.

Herb Childress discusses his own identity and how it influences interactions with the teens he shadowed throughout his book. He mentions having to abandon his status as an adult to participate or observe the teens. For instance, in one section, he describes his own identity influencing his affinity towards the "geeks". He mentions needing to break the role of unbiased researcher in certain situations and in other situations repaying the teens for allowing him into their personal lives by helping them with certain tasks such as teaching them how to drive in stick shift.

All of these studies describe extensive research which requires a prolonged period of qualitative data collection. Although interactions with teenagers for this thesis were more constrained, the interactions between researcher and subject depended on involved identities and personalities. Personal perceptions influenced my comfort level in regards to approaching groups for interviews and may have influenced certain teens to agree to interact with me. Such perceptions may have also influenced the tone of interaction between us.

Research Design

Questions

Why do some teenagers use open spaces for purposes other than designated uses? Particularly, do they intend to break formal and informal rules? What can we learn from observing them in these spaces and how can we apply this to design more teenage-friendly spaces?

Independent variable: Behavior in outdoor areas where teenagers currently gather.

Dependent variable: Their reasons for coming to this place.

Methodology and Process

Initially, I intended to conduct research in New York City, but the subject matter of this thesis, particularly the age group involved and their unsupervised activities, necessitated requests for waivers of parental consent and waivers of written consent from individuals. The process of approvals from the Institutional Review Board meant that interviews could not be conducted with the teens until January, when temperatures in New York City are too low for anyone to gather outside. So, I moved the location of the study to the Bay Area in California, where weather remains amenable to outdoor activity year round.

The methodology of research for this thesis included several phases.

1. Gathering of secondary sources for a literature review.
2. Pilot study of teens in New York City
3. Observations of teens in chosen spaces in California.
4. Interviews with teens in these spaces.
5. Analysis of collected data.
6. Representation of observed behaviors via drawings.
7. Interpretation of data.

Phase Descriptions

1. Phase one included reading related studies and books to gain an understanding of the subject and background information. It also included comparing and evaluating these sources in writing to show how they relate to the research. Subjects included: open space, teenagers use of outdoor space, residual open spaces, privately owned public spaces, freedom, urban design, and authority. Secondary sources helped to inform me of teen behaviors and use patterns that teenagers might exhibit, but the most substantial portion of this thesis comes from primary information collected through site visits and interviews.
2. For phase two, I looked for teenagers in New York City spaces. The purpose of this phase was to gain a better understanding of what types of spaces teenagers in New York City utilized to help develop a methodology for finding such places in the Bay Area. I started by looking for teens in recreational spaces such as parks and playgrounds with no success. Additionally, I tried recommendations from locals which included playgrounds after dark and a local courtyard. This also yielded no success. Realizing the temporal nature of daily life, I decided to wait for the teens immediately after school and observe their behavior. This proved to be an effective method because the large concentrations of teens filled the streets in the vicinity of the school as they walked to their next destinations in large groups. I could see where they stopped and gathered.

Popular spaces amongst the teens in New York varied in nature, but they were all spaces not designated for social gathering. The most popular was a large sidewalk in front of a local McDonalds, the teens conversed there in large groups as they ate. Police officers and McDonalds employees watched the teens as they leaned against the storefront windows and crowded the sidewalks. Several times police and employees told the teens to move elsewhere, the teens dispersed but returned minutes later. I also observed them walk to the nearest subway stop avoiding the adjacent courtyard, but lingering at street corners and sitting on bollards and chatting. I found teens sitting on stairwells and crowding together on street benches. Once finding the teens in these locations after school, I returned to the same locations during different hours to evaluate usage.

3. Phase three consisted of finding three sites in the Bay Area in California and conducting behavioral mapping. This proved to be a larger challenge than expected due to my time constraints and apparent differences between use patterns in the Bay Area and New York City. I allotted two weeks to find spaces, map spaces, and interview teens. It was also a challenge due to lower population densities in the Bay Area than in New York City. Many of the teens drove cars or had been picked up after school. Additionally, the tight fabric of single residential houses bordering suburban schools provided no obvious spaces for gathering. Where I did find teens, they often only aggregated in groups of two or three, not enough to conduct behavioral mapping.

I then tried urban settings and started with the assumption that teens will choose to aggregate in similar spaces as in New York City. So, I sought McDonalds restaurants located in urban settings and near a courtyard or a wide sidewalk. There, I found many homeless people, adults, and possibly some inebriated individuals. Not a single teen gathered in these spaces after school; additionally, teens did not aggregate in street corners as they did in New York City. Short conversations with teens after school revealed they visit the local park, coffee shops, and local skate parks. Since this research requires improvised gathering spaces, none of these places qualified for the study.

After almost a week of searching for

improvised gathering spaces with mixed success, I found three acceptable spaces where large enough groups of teens gathered. The numbers of teens using in these spaces did not compare to the magnitudes of teens found in New York City gathering spaces, but all three spaces seemed to be popular amongst teenagers. The first space is a stairwell connected, the second is a concrete plaza, and the third is a convenience store parking lot. Further descriptions of each place are included in the case study section of this report.

Once finding the spaces, I conducted behavioral mapping. I visited each space three to four times during different hours and days of the week to glean spatial use patterns. I drew quick diagrams of each location and mapped gender, age, group size, and activities in each space using diagrams, symbols, and quick notes. Figure B is an example of one map created during field research.

All three spaces I mapped are highly visible and public. Which shows that teens like to be visible and included. It also highlights one of the possible limitations of the research, private or hidden improvised spaces might be fulfilling an important functions, but they are more difficult to find partially due to their hidden nature, but also due to lower frequency of visits, and to the exclusivity of the users. For instance, a friend who is also a Bay Area skateboarder informed me of a hill in a residential neighborhood that skateboarders utilize. Even though I visited it 3-4 times on sunny days, I could not find any skateboarders there. The hill serves the function of a skateboarding slope only during particular days and only for particular individuals. Since I am not a member of a knowledgeable skateboarding group, I did not gain access to the hill when it became a skateboarding attraction.

4. Phase four consisted of interviews. Once visiting each site 3 times, I returned once again to conduct interviews. I only interviewed teens while they actively used the sites. I did not collect names or signatures of participants to protect their identities. Approximately half of the teens I approached were willing to be interviewed, this amounted to interviews with approximately 30 individuals. Sometimes I interviewed one person at a time and sometimes larger groups

of teens all together. Interviews lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. I sat with interviewees on sidewalk edges and stairwells and waited for them as they completed skateboard maneuvers on plaza seat walls. They smoked cigarettes and joints, ate hotdogs, and laughed with their friends as they answered my questions. Sometimes they answered with suspicion, sometimes with sarcasm, but many answered my questions with what seemed like candid honesty. I interviewed them on their turf in the absence of formal structure and authority. No table existed between us to separate interviewer and interviewee. I did this with the hope of facilitating natural discussion and openness. I asked them the following questions:

- How old are you?
- How often do you come here and during what times of the day?
- Why do you come here?
- Where are you coming from?

- How do you get here?
- What types of activities do you engage in when you come here?
- Why don't you use a formal space designed for this use (ex. plaza for sitting, skate park for skating...)
- What aspects of this space do you particularly like or dislike?
- How do others around you who are not with you react to your presence here?
- How do you view yourself in this space?
- How do you view others in this space?
- Do you think authoritative figures (parents, police, teachers) would approve of these activities or of you being here?
- If no, does this influence your behavior? How?
- What spaces are your favorites for everyday use?
- What would you like to see incorporated into this neighborhood?

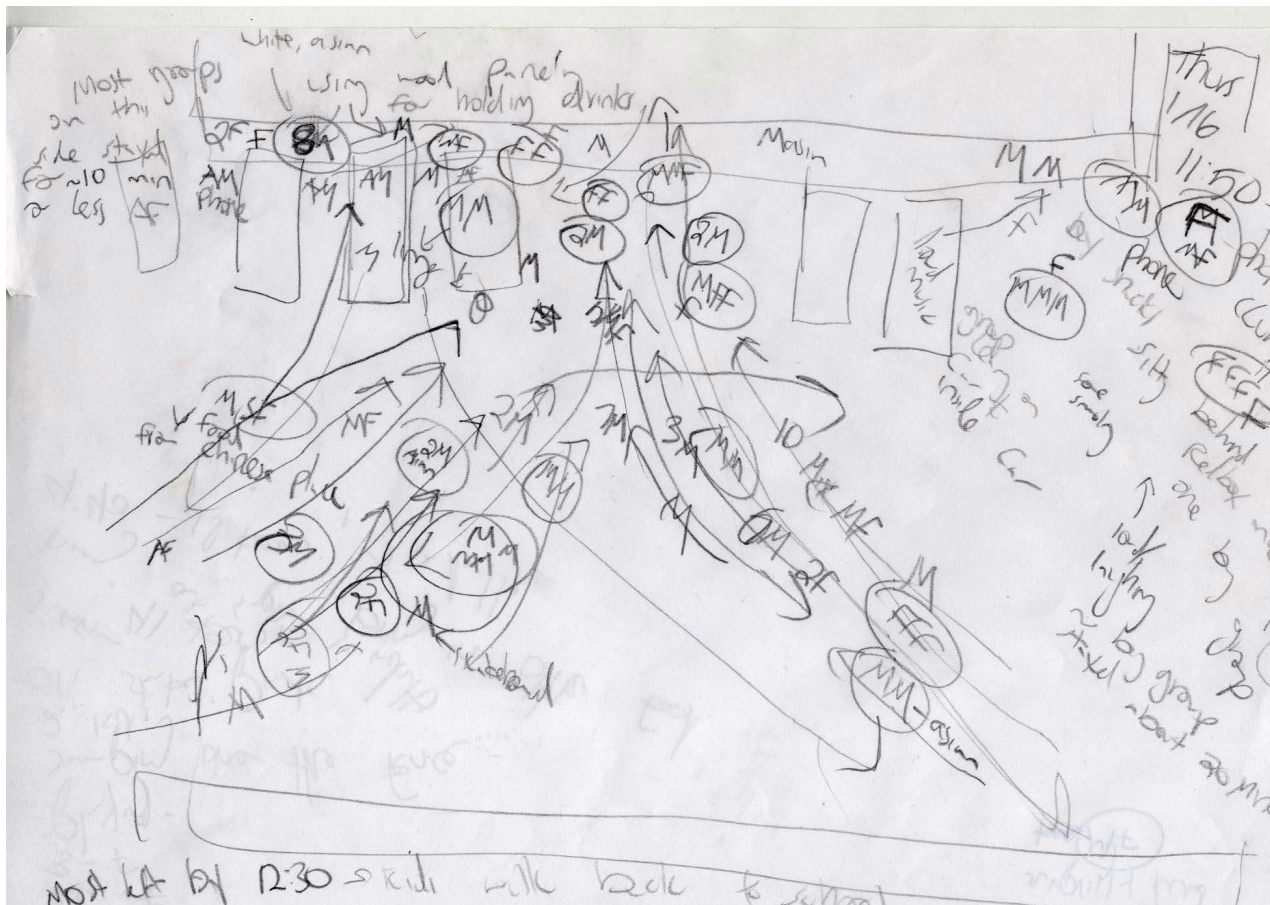


Figure B: Behavioral mapping on site.

Relationship of Researcher to subjects

At first, I intended to observe spatial behavior as “detached researcher”; an observer who documents behavior but is removed from it. My presence would not be important and I would have no immediate connection with those using the space. I would approach them as an outsider. However, as soon as I began mapping behaviors, I realized this notion of being an unbiased and removed observer is impossible to achieve. My own identity influenced the outcomes and process of this research as did the spaces documented and the people interviewed. I am documenting the teens' experiences in those spaces that I chose. I am documenting their reactions to me and my own reactions to them. Identifying personal involvement and bias in this research makes the process of data collection extremely personal in nature. While as researchers we are taught to aim for an unbiased perspective, I argue that identifying and embracing my perspective provides a clearer picture of human behaviors in these locations and adds another layer of insight to this thesis. It reveals some pertinent methodological questions which can be applied to further research.

I describe the teens in many sections of this thesis; their ages, behaviors, their tone of voice, etc. Since they are interacting with me. I must also briefly describe myself and my relationship to these spaces and individuals. I am a 25 year old female of Middle Eastern ethnicity and of average height and slim proportions. I spent the majority of my childhood and my entire adolescence in the Bay area. The age difference between myself and the teens ranges between 11 to 6 years apart and I am of the same generation as all of the teens who are 15 and older. Like the majority of the teens, I am a student. My family and I moved to California from Israel when I was eight years old. I still retain a slight accent which serves to identify me as an immigrant upon first impression. Maybe my ethnicity and immigrant status may have helped the teens who do not identify with mainstream culture relate with me during interviews, thus, making me seem more approachable.

My perceptions of the spaces and the teens decided the spaces I mapped, the times I visited, and the individuals I interviewed. Growing up in the Bay area enabled me to utilize personal geographic knowledge

5. Phase five consisted of mapping aggregated data. I created diagrammatic maps of all three locations. These maps are not created to scale nor do they include street names or distinguishing characteristics. I do not mention the names of the places I used or any landmarks around the sites. I transferred behavioral analysis data onto a spatial database in ArcGIS in which I documented attributes such as: gender, age range, activities, and group size. I also documented adults using the sites. Each dot on the map represents one person mapped. This process enabled overlaying of different sessions on the same map and the finding of spatial use patterns.
6. Phase six consisted of creating drawing to represent the locations and behaviors I observed. I used drawings instead of photography for several reasons. First, I found it necessary to preserve the anonymity of the spaces observed while still providing a sense of place in the discussed locations. Additionally, the drawings enabled the portrayal of intimate activities which I did not feel was appropriate to photograph. Unlike computer animation. these drawings do not provide a false sense of realism. They show the spaces as I see them, further reiterating the effect of my identity on the outcomes of this thesis. The idea of using drawings instead of photographs occurred to me after visiting the spaces, however, for future reference, I recommend quick sketching during site visits. This technique is popular in the landscape architecture field, but should be considered as viable methodology in research and planning for the purpose of capturing perceived sense of place.
7. Interpretation of data. I aggregated the behavioral maps, literature review, and the interviews to look for patterns which informed the analysis portion of this thesis. Once uncovering patterns, I synthesized recommendations which apply to the fields of planning, urban design, landscape architecture, and public policy.

to find places. I dug deep into past memories to recall where I observed teens and where myself and my classmates chose to spend time outside of the classroom. All three spaces chosen were familiar to me before I began to observe behavior in them.

My gender influenced site visits. Often, no one could accompany me on site visits which limited the times I was willing to visit the sites. For instance, I did not visit the stairwell during the late evening and night because of personal safety concerns. Perhaps intriguing interactions occur during those times, but the lack of visibility masks such interactions and marks them as more private than daytime interactions. The nature of my presence and observation could have been seen as more intrusive. This, coupled with my physical size and gender made me feel unsafe the one time I visited the park slightly after dusk. A group of boys made kissing noises in my direction, rendering the experience more uncomfortable. Whether my perception of the park after dark renders true or untrue does not matter in this instance, because it colored the way I interacted with the place and those in it. My gender and size also made me hesitant to approach certain groups, particularly large, all male, groups of skateboarders in their late teens and early twenties. Perhaps these skateboarders would have been friendly, and the groups I approached certainly were, but the notion of approaching them by myself required overcoming a lifetime of ingrained behavior of avoiding interaction with such groups.

As I viewed the teens and their spaces through the lens of my personal identity, they viewed me through theirs. I expected to map the spaces without other users caring about my presence there, but soon I noticed the teens watching me watching them. Site visits and interviews revealed that teens who use these spaces visit them several times a week. My repeated presence there, with my binder and pencil, captured their attention. Occasionally, I felt like an intruder, particularly in the skateboard plaza and the convenience store parking lot. The inhabitants of these spaces marked them in various ways, thus personalizing them. Interviews revealed strong attachment and communal connections to the space and its regular users. I sometimes felt like an intruder in a space where very personal interactions occur. Once I did approach the teens for interviews, they often reacted with an air of realization and expressed how they previously wondered who I was and what I was doing there. Even though the teens wandered about

me, they did not necessarily view me as an outsider or as a threat. A few expressed suspicion, but this dissipated to some extent as I explained my objectives and my reasons for not approaching them earlier. Many of the teens, especially the skateboarders, did not express any suspicion and instead told me that I should have approached them sooner.

My age, identity, and background allowed me to identify with the teens I interviewed, we certainly have much in common. The teens expressed their lack of suspicion and their indifference by openly smoking weed and cigarettes in front of me, by conversing with me about authoritative relationships and by asking me questions about my own life. Where do you live? Do you smoke weed (I bet you do)? What is New York like? How old are you? This openness may have originated from their comfort in their contextual environment. Other adults use these spaces and pass through them and the teens continue with their regular behavior. Several of the teenage boys took our interactions one step further, they saw me as a potential romantic partner. This was both extremely surprising and very flattering. On several occasions, before I initiated conversation, they asked for my number so they could take me on a date. One 19 year old skateboarder told me I had a beautiful face, and after our interview, invited me to join his group of 5 skateboarders on a nearby rooftop to just "hang out". On a different occasion a boy politely asked me for my number, I told him I live in New York and am too old, he clarified that he is over 18 years old, and therefore, I am just the right age.

In all of these instances, my identity became entangled with the research. If I was of a different age, gender, or nationality, perhaps our reactions to each other would have differed. Perhaps if a man had been conducting this research he would not hesitate to visit the stairwell after dark and would have approached groups more readily than I did. If the gap between my age and the teens' ages was wider, perhaps they would not have asked me to spend more time with them or maybe they would have answered my questions differently. My appearance may have aided in the interview process, particularly with the boys. Perhaps if an attractive young man had been conducting interviews, he would have collected more interviews from girls, as suggested by Warren and Rasmussen (1977).

Case Studies

I first sought to gain a better understanding of how the adolescents use the space through spatial mapping and then I interviewed the teens to understand why they chose these spaces to begin with. Aspects of both interviews and spatial mapping reflected findings of previous studies, however, asking the teens directly why they choose to use these spaces in particular revealed a complex relationships between the teens and the spaces they inhabited.

Stairwell and bridge

The stairwell is located on the highest edge of an urban park which sits on a hill (Figure D), the stairwell is fairly large and composed of four smaller stairwells connected by an elevated platform which turns into a bridge. In between the stairwells is a utility box perfectly dimensioned for sitting, the stairwell edges also provide perfect sitting places. On the other end of the bridge is a sunken stairwell which is perpendicular to the elevated city street. On either side of the sunken stairwell are walking paths shaded by trees which create a secluded atmosphere. Together, the stairwells and bridge can serve both as an intimate gathering space and as a look out spot. The elevated platform which connects all four stairwells is approximately ten feet higher than the hill on which it sits and is bordered by a wall on which one can lean and watch the view, but while sitting down on the stairs or the floor, this wall also hides the user from passer-bys. The sunken stairwell on the other end is only visible to those on the adjacent walking paths and to those on the bridge, it is not visible from the rest of the park. Even though the stairwell feels relatively secluded, it serves as a circulation corridor for many users.

This park is located in a lively neighborhood filled with trendy, young, cafes and shops and bordered by a high school. Upper middle class communities surround the park, but a few blocks away is a predominant working class immigrant community currently in stages of gentrification. This area contains a range of 12 to 24 dwelling units per acre. The park is slightly under 5 acres in size and mostly covered by lawn and includes courts, a playground, bathrooms, and sculptures. On sunny days, the park is heavily used. Blankets dot the lawn and visitors can purchase anything from cheap guitars to baked goods containing marijuana from sellers who wander around between blankets on the lawn. A 36 acre park is located under half a mile away

and another 30 acre park located under a mile away. Roads surround it on all four edges one of which is a boulevard.

I visited the park four times and each session lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. Over the course of the visits, I counted 72 people total using the site. Of those, 24 were female and 48 were male, so only one third of users were female. I only counted 7 adults using the site for purposes other than walking through it, most sat on the stair-wall. I did not count people walking through the site. I interviewed 7 teens, 3 of which were female. The teens observed at this site were a mix of White, Black, and Latino and all students from the local high school ages ranging from 15-18.

Teens, who were the primary users of the stairwell and bridge seemed to utilize the site after school, in the evening, and even after sunset. They stood and sat in large groups on the stairs and near the tall wall in front of the steps. Average group size was 4.94 for the teens, adults were either alone or in pairs. Predominant activities included chatting while sitting and standing, watching the view, and smoking weed. In this spot, I counted approximately 14 teens smoking weed even though only one of the teens interviewed openly admitted to smoking. In addition to the stairs and bridge, the teenage boys stood around on the nearby paths pictured in the map (figure C). These conversations seemed more intimate as the boys stopped their conversations when others walked past.

In addition to the stairs and the paths pictured in figure C, occasionally I observed teens sitting in a shaded area near a small building which contained bathrooms and a small office, playing in the playgrounds, and using the grass areas for sports. However, I did not find any teens sitting on the grass. Of all the areas in the park, only the small building was marked with graffiti which included a combination of large and small tags.

Interviews revealed that teens who use the site walk there every day or almost everyday after school. Several of the teens live out of town and must commute to school every morning using public transportation. Everyone interviewed said they come to the stairs to hang out with friends. Some mentioned listening to music. The interviewees particularly liked the natural environment provided by the greenery in the park and the soft breeze. One teen expressed his enjoyment of people watching in this location.

The teens interviewed did not provide a clear

reason for choosing the stairs as their spot in the park, their answers indicated that they hung out in several other spots in the park which included the playground at night, right behind the bathroom building (where some interviewees said teenagers like to drink), and sometimes on the benches.

When prompted about relationships with authorities on site, all of the interviewees said they did not have many negative experiences in the park. Policemen occasionally bothered them. One teen did share stories about a classmate who was allegedly caught by an undercover policeman in the park, but none had significant personal experiences. They reported no to little interaction with other adults in the park. When asked about what they liked or disliked about this spot, all of the teens expressed content but had some minor recommendations for park

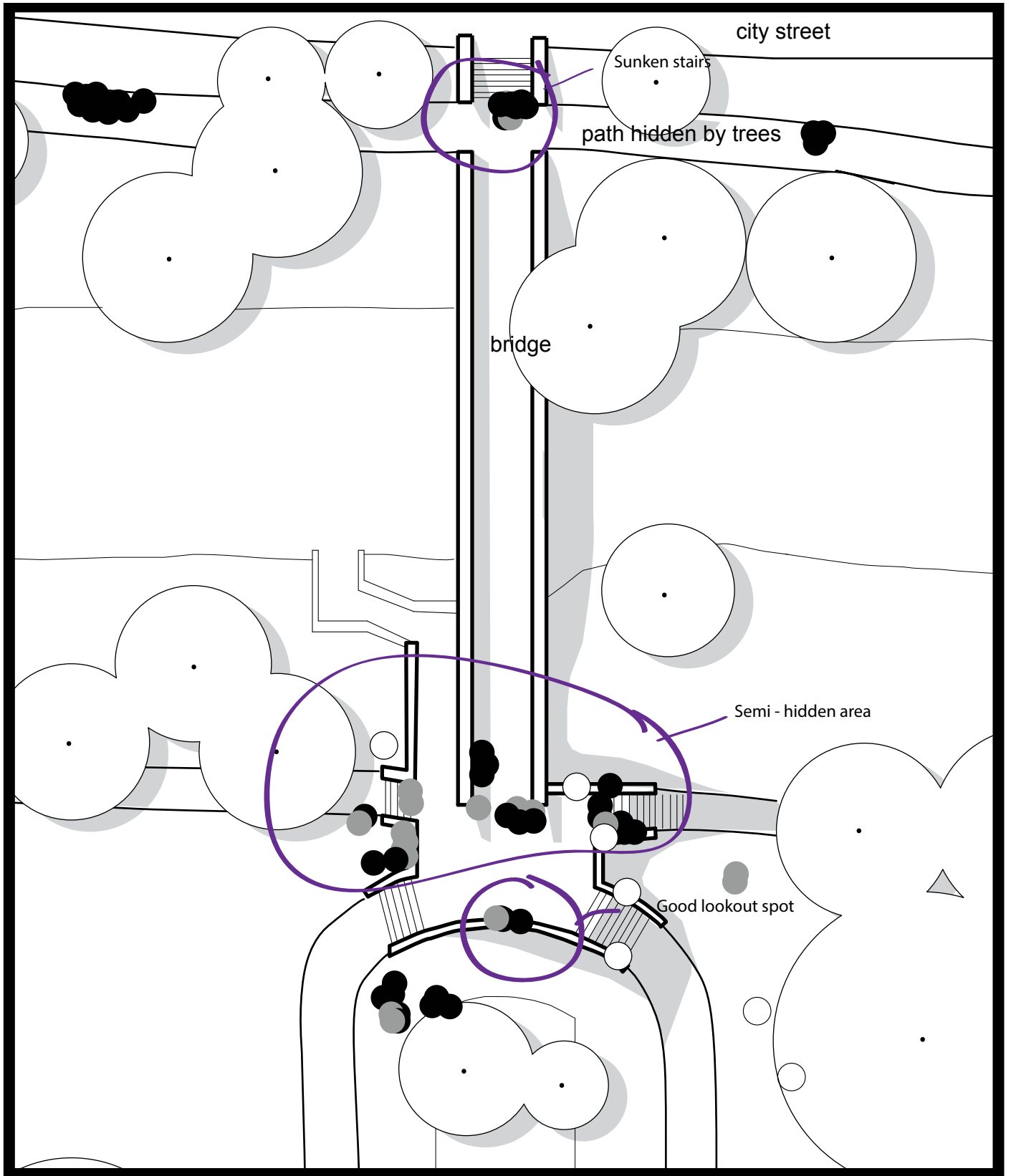
improvements such as installing more water fountains and adding benches.

In terms of particular reasoning for choosing this site as a place to gather, the interviews showed that adolescents came here because it is convenient, comfortable, relaxing, and because no one bothered or cared they used the site. One girl summed it up with “we like to look at the view and get high”. When I asked one of the teens how others felt about his presence there he just smiled and said “we are a community”, indicating his feelings of belonging and comfort in the park and on the stairwell and amongst both friends and other users. Overall, the teens interactions with each other seemed relaxed and casual. The sites physical structure allows them to look out at the rest of the park and to be a part of the lively park community. The site also allows them to hide away if they so choose.



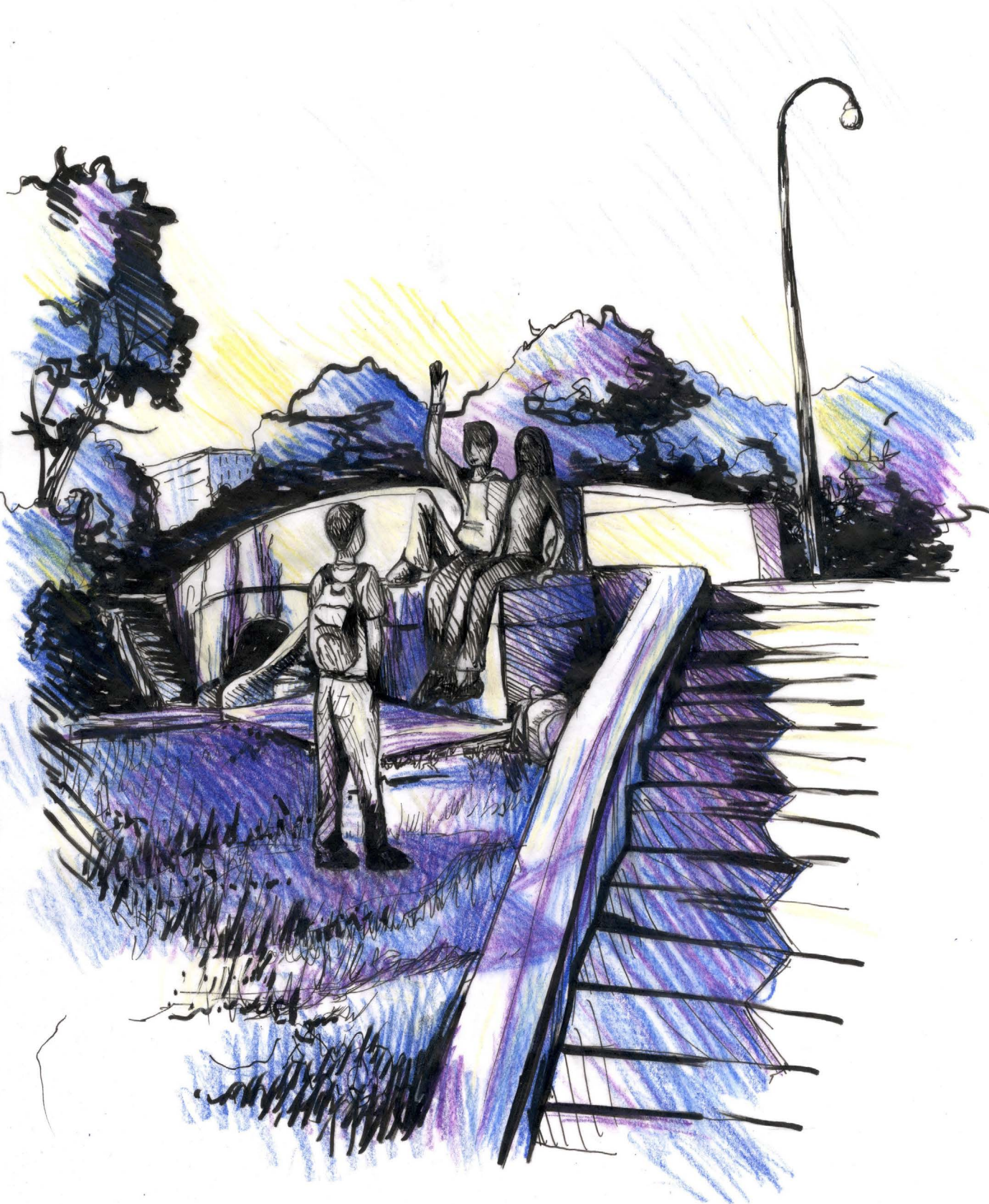
Figure C: Quick drawing of joined bathroom and office facility near the stairwell

Figure D: Stairs, a composite of four maps. It shows popular sitting areas.



Site visited on:			● Teen Girl	▣ Foot Traffic	└── 10ft
Friday 1/10/14	2:00-2:45	n=24	○ Adult	● Teen Boy	
Friday 1/10/14	5:50-6:15	n=4			
Saturday 1/11/14	2:30-3:30	n=19			
Monday 1/13/14	3:30-4:30	n=25			

Figure E: Illustrative of stairs showing teenagers sitting on the utility box and relaxing.



Convenience store parking-lot

The most notable aspect about the convenience store is its immediate proximity to a suburban high school. The teens walk fewer than 5 minutes from campus to reach it. It is a typical building with a floor area of approximately 2,800 square feet with a small parking lot of approximately 4,000 square feet which off-sets it from the four lane street (figure G). Cars occasionally pull into the parking lot, but usually only 3 to 4 park there at a time. A narrow platform about 4 feet wide separates the parking lot from the storefront and on one side of this platform stands a video rental vending machine. Large windows welcome visitors in. Fences stand on both sides of the parking lot separating the convenience store from apartment complexes next to it. A large, lighted sign informs pedestrians and drivers passing by of the store's existence. A different sign fastened to the outside wall of the store says "No Loitering", teenage visitors largely ignore it.

The store straddles the border of two counties, each with different regulations. The surrounding community is suburban with a density of approximately 6 units per acre. A shopping center containing ample parking and popular chain stores is only a 10 minute walk away from the school and a popular 12 acre park is located a quarter mile away. Another 3 similar sized parks are located approximately a mile away from the site. This is an affluent community with a median income of over \$100,000. The total population for the two counties is around 200,000, but suburban sprawl caused these counties, along with those bordering them, to grow into each other. High school policy allows the teens to leave campus during lunch time.

I visited the convenience store three times and conducted behavioral mapping. Each session lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. During the lunch time and after school visits, I counted approximately 30 teens over the course of a 30-45 minutes period with a fairly even gender distribution slightly dominated by boys. Average group size counted was 5.93. I interviewed 15 adolescents total (9 boys and 6 girls), all of them students from the local high school. Racial distribution was mostly White, with some Black and Latino. A few of the teens were Asian, but this group seemed underrepresented in proportion to the Asian population attending the school.

Overall, foot traffic to and from the store was heavy during lunch and immediately after school. Many of the teens walked to and from the store without

lingering. However, a select number of teens stayed behind and gathered on and around the small porch in groups of two to fifteen. Spaces seemed to be claimed by different groups of teens who occasionally converged. Use was most heavy during week days other than Fridays. Adult use of the space differed from that of the teens. Adults drove up to the store, parked, made their purchase, and immediately walked back to their cars. Few adults stayed outside but several stayed and sat in their cars momentarily.

The ways in which the adolescents appropriated the spaces differed according to activities. This was most apparent during lunchtime in which 42 teens visited the convenience store parking lot, the largest number of teen visitors out of all the sessions. Some of the teens used the space solely as a convenient eating spot. They stood alone or in small groups on one end of the door for 10-15 minutes and left once they finished their lunch. Meanwhile, other teens, used this space as a smoking and hang out spot. They claimed the other side of the parking lot and the shaded bordering wall. They stayed for the majority of the lunch period and their group grew as more friends joined. I came to recognize many of these teens because they visited the store after school as well. They smoked and talked loudly and occasionally played and wrestled with each other. They seemed very comfortable in their allocated hang out spot. A few of the teens used the space as a pick up spot and stood around, sometimes playing with their phones as they waited for their rides to arrive. It seemed that most of the adolescents who use this spot, do not occupy it for more than 30 minutes at a time.

Both the teens who used the storefront as an eating spot and the teens who used the storefront as a hangout and smoking spot exhibited creative uses of the space. The adolescents who came to eat stood on the concrete sidewalk while resting their food and drink on the store's windowsill, using it as a table. The teens in the hang out and smoking group used the space in more ingenious ways they seemed to own the space. After school they would claim the shaded bordering wall and sit around while smoking, but during lunch they created a secluded space for themselves. A teenage girl drove her car and parked it in the spot near the wall creating a semi-private space between the wall and the car. The teens then turned on the car radio and stood around smoking, listening, and chatting with one another. The group grew to approximately 18 individuals over the course of lunch time. They created

an outdoor room out of the average suburban parking lot.

On Friday afternoons the weekday crowd in front of the convenience store was not there, and groups used the space in different ways. Several younger teens and a father and son used the platform as bike parking and some younger teenage girls sat on their skateboards on the platform in front of the store as they ate hot dogs. On weekends, I did not find any teenagers using the convenience store parking lot.

The interviews revealed additional information about how the teens use the space and about social dynamics within it. While conducting the site mapping, I assumed the teens only utilize the space due to its proximity to the high school. However, the interviews revealed strong connections to the space and complex relationships between different groups of teens and some strong attitudes about the convenience store parking lot, those who choose to linger there, and authority figures.

The adolescents I interviewed ranged from ages 15 to 18 and most walk to the store from school. Many of the adolescents visit the store every day or almost every day. The activities they mentioned included smoking cigarettes, eating and buying food, and hanging out with friends. Four out of the five groups interviewed mentioned smoking as a predominant activity in which many, but not all of the teens partake. Those who are over 18 can smoke legally, but younger teens sometimes acquire cigarettes from the adults who visit the store or from their older friends. According to most of the teens, the convenience store is a known smoking spot and one of the girls interviewed use the term "Cancer Circle" to describe the group who smokes there.

This common activity created a mixed reputation for the convenience store amongst the different groups of teens. While many of the regulars there said this is a great spot to meet up with friends and with different groups and to escape authority figures, some of the teens reported that this place is "sketchy, very ghetto" where "bad" teens hang out. A group of younger girls I interviewed said they like to avoid the teens who regularly use this space. The teens reported very negative reactions from authoritative figures in regards to the store parking lot. According to several boys, teachers know the teens visit and smoke there but mostly leave the teens alone. One of the girls mentioned that "(cops) drive by and look at at us weird- and I am like 'fine, I'll do something else to make you look at

me weird". The adolescents perceptions of parent attitudes varied. One girl said her parents approved of coming here, while one of the boys mentioned his parents know he comes to the convenience store to smoke but "they can't really stop me". One of the girls said her mom became upset when she found out about it. Most of the adolescents reported that they are indifferent to opinions of other teens and adults about their behaviors. One boy exemplified this notion, but his words showed some hurt, by saying "I don't give a fuck what people think about me, people here pretty much already hate me, because I'm me". While the teens perceive that authoritative figures disapprove, they feel that store employees like their presence there and that random adults are largely indifferent to their presence.

When I directly asked the teens why they choose the storefront instead of some formal space designed for gathering, such as the local park, their answers varied. Most adolescents mentioned proximity as a central factor, but answers given reflected that reasoning expands far beyond convenience. For instance, one of the boys said "sometimes I go somewhere else to get food but come back here". This hints that the space has other values tied to it. Many of the other teens mentioned that this is a space with a comfortable atmosphere where they see their friends from many different groups. Escaping from jurisdiction of authoritative figures present was another reason given. The teens' reported feelings about themselves in the space also revealed a sense of community and comfort. Many said they feel comfortable in the parking lot. When prompted about what they would change about the space, the teens found it difficult to answer and said they would not change anything about this particular space. I tried to prompt one of the girls with an example, "what if we added a table right here?". She quickly answered, "I don't care about the environment, if a table was added, it would get too crowded- like when everyone is standing". It would no longer be her spot because it would be taken over by other teens.

So, what purpose does the storefront serve to all of the teens who use it? As mentioned earlier, this depends on who is asked. The teens answers to my interview questions revealed that the storefront has an identity. It is a smoking spot and a gathering spot. A number of regulars who have a reputation amongst the high school community as a somewhat marginalized group appropriate this space. The teens who smoke

and are a part of this group felt ownership and comfort in the space in spite of disapproval from their peers and seniors. It is their sanctuary. This corresponds with their behavior in the space. They openly gather, some openly smoke. They make it their own by claiming parts of it through playing of loud music, parking their cars there, and by their lingering and repeated presence. The teens who did not identify this space

as their hang out place but still visited it had mixed to negative views about those who use it to smoke and as a regular gathering location. In this place, teenagers felt belonging within their group of friends, but not necessarily as a part of the entire body of site users. This is indicated by some teens' negative feelings about authority and about other teenagers who use the site.

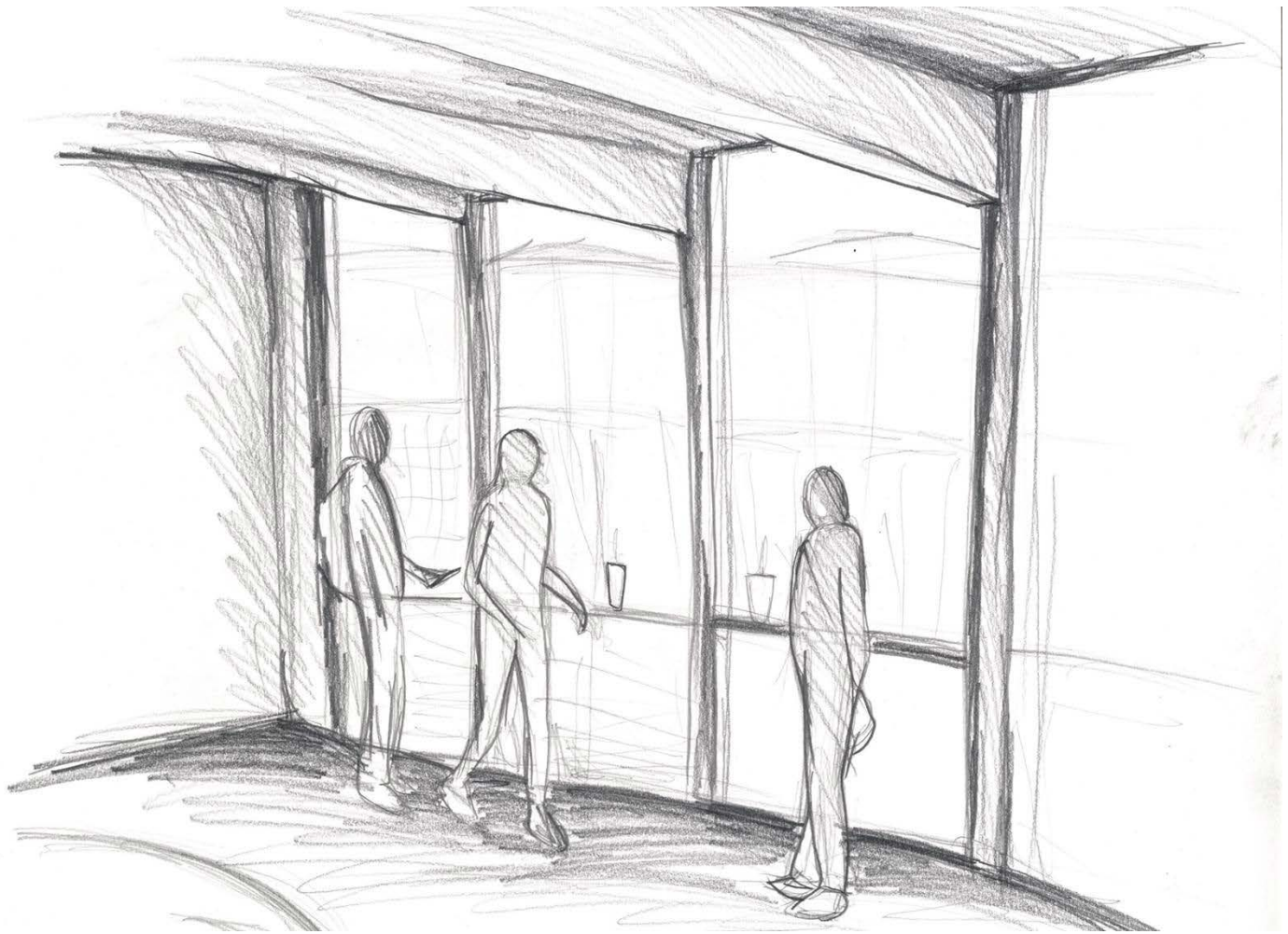
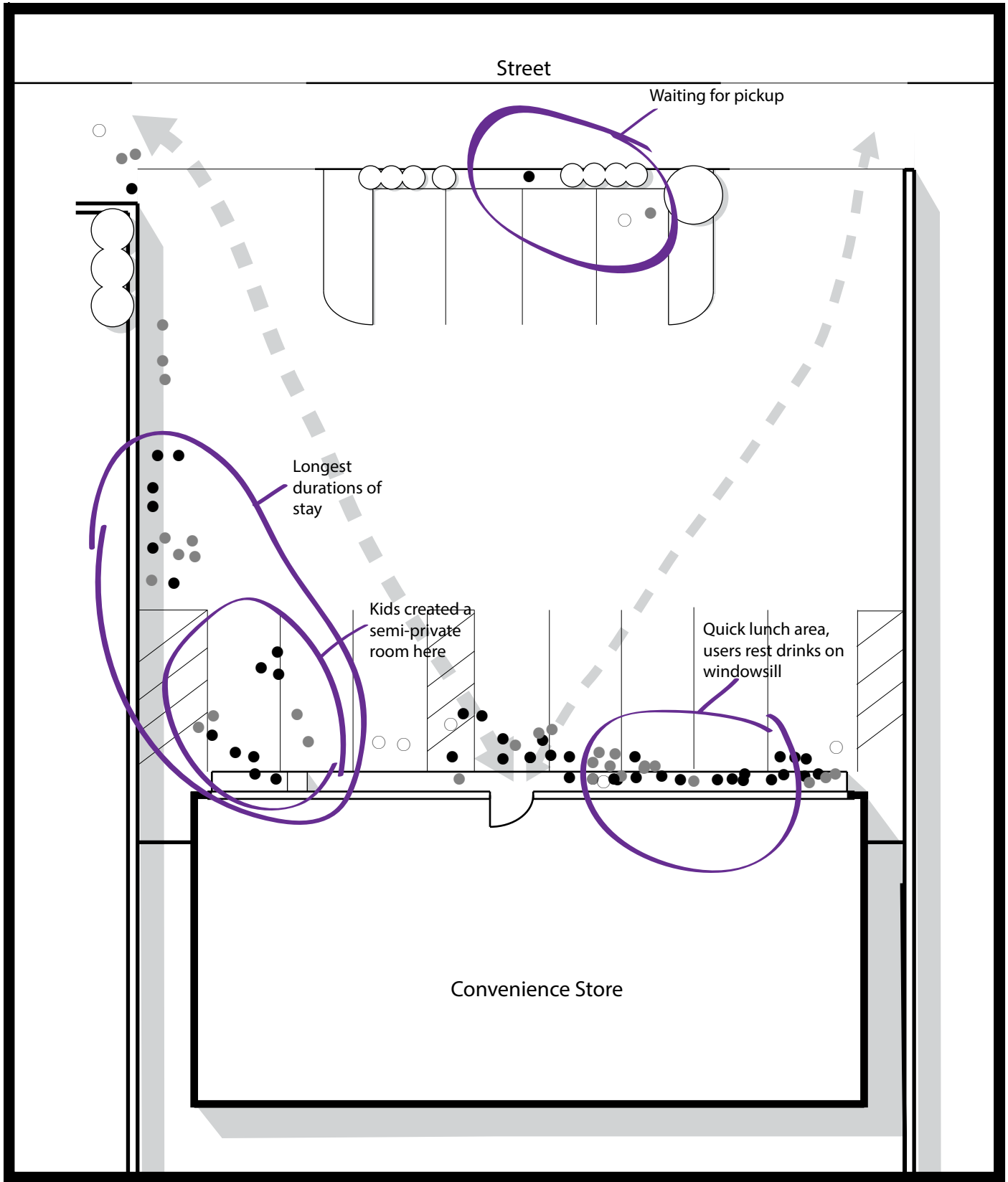


Figure F: Quick sketch of teens using store windows to rest their drinks. The facade of the store is otherwise bare.

Figure G: Convenience store parking lot composite of three visits. The map shows popular gathering areas and each dot represents one person. Arrows represent popular paths.



Site visited on:
 Tuesday 1/7/14 2:30-3:25 n=31
 Thursday 1/16/14 11:50-12:40 n=43
 Friday 1/17/14 4:50-5:20 n=7

Teen Girl
 Adult
 Teen Boy
 Foot Traffic
 5ft



Figure H: Illustrative showing teenagers using a car and a wall to create a semi-private space.

Skateboarding plaza

The plaza is a stage complete with captive audience. Unlike the two other sides, it is not located in a residential neighborhood or near a school (figure 1). It sits at the intersection of a commercial and office area and a large boardwalk promenade which provides plenty of open space. Housing in the area is at a density of 12 to 24 units per acre. Directly across the street from the plaza stands a large building. Two major parallel roads border the plaza and it is adjacent to another major road. Pedestrians must cross it on the way to and from the piers, cars pass it as they drive on the abutting major roads, and rail cars stop right in front of this plaza.

Its dimensions are approximately 500ft by 120ft, with a circular platform of steps located at each side leaving 200 feet open on each edge of the plaza. The lower five steps are 6 inches high, while the top step is 1.5 feet high, perfect for sitting. These platforms stand 120 feet apart with a large, flat paved space between them approximately 100 feet wide. "No Skateboarding Allowed" signs hang from streetlamps on the border of the plaza but no anti skateboard guards are installed on the platforms.

During busy hours, as many as 50 pedestrians cross this plaza every few minutes as they head to and from piers, so it serves both as open space and as circulation corridor. On certain days, fairs take place on nearby streets, thus adding to the heavy usage of this site. The plaza is well lighted after dark and although usage wanes in the evening, it still serves as a major path.

I mapped usage of the plaza three times and each session lasted between 30 minutes to one hour (Listed in figure 1). I interviewed 5 teens and one 20 year old who was in the same group as the teens. All of the interviewees were male. Ages ranged between 14 to 20. Over the course of all the visits, I counted 45 people using the plaza and 23 of them looked like teens. Only three of the total 45 were female. Overall average group size was 5.34, adult groups averaged at 2.8 while teen groups averaged 7.46. Here, racial distribution was mostly White with some Black, Latino, and a few Asian.

Skateboarders used everything, including the train platform handrail, as a skating surface. They watched their friends transverse the large plaza. I only observed males actively skate. Behavioral mapping

revealed that when older skateboarders are present, older and younger skaters use different spots in the plaza. The older skaters tended to occupy the center of the plaza and the side of the stairs facing the center while the younger skaters used the outwards facing sides of the plaza and platforms. Only two or three skateboarders used an area at a time while the rest sat and talked on the steps. They left their backpacks and other belongings on the stairs when their turn to skate came. In addition to backpacks, the stairs were covered with ink signatures and empty and half full bottles of alcoholic beverages. Occasionally, people walking past stopped and watch the skateboarders and sometimes people photographed them. This is a highly visible and well connected area.

Conversational interviews revealed that those who use the space come here often and convenient accessibility is not a factor attracting teenage skaters to the site. Three of the teens live in neighboring towns which are half an hour to 45 minutes away using public transportation, while the other three live in the town but not close by. They all used public transportation to reach the site. In spite of the commuting distance, the teens interviewed visit the plaza once or twice a week. All of the interviewees cited skateboarding as the primary reason for visiting the plaza but they also mentioned relaxing, smoking weed, and watching the view.

When asked about reasons for coming here instead of utilizing a designed skate park, the teens replied that they do use skate parks, but still like to come here, particularly because they like variety and because the plaza offers such great views of skyscrapers. One of the younger teenagers mentioned that he "gets kicked out" of everywhere and that only two formal skate parks exist in the city. Overall, the teens interviewed expressed content with the plaza and could not think of any major changes which would improve it aside from eliminating the homeless people from the area and making the plaza an official skate park.

All of the teens interviewed felt comfortable and welcome in the plaza and one even mentioned that others are "enthusiastic" about the skaters being here and are "friendly towards the skaters". One said, "police aren't a problem, even though this place is not for skating." Surprisingly, none of the teens reported any trouble from authoritative figures. Another teen drove the point home when he said that this is actually a legal space to skate. He said it with such conviction

that I believed him for a short moment. Others stated that even though it is illegal to skate here, police do not pose a problem.

The interviews, behavioral mapping, and my personal interactions with the skaters revealed that a strong community inhabits this space and those who use it know each other. The skateboarders leaving their belongings unattended on the steps also indicates their feelings of trust in other users of the space. When I started mapping behavior in the plaza, I sat on the stairs with all of the skateboarders. Once I finally approached them, they asked me why I did not approach them sooner and introduce myself because “this is a community and everyone knows each other”. Those I spoke to knew the older skaters even though the groups did not use the same spots in the plaza to skateboard. In spite of my initial faux pas, the older teens were quick to share their experiences with me and the interview started following a conversational direction. They passed a pipe around as we talked and they invited me to join them on a nearby rooftop. Interviewing some of the younger skaters proved to be

more difficult, their attention was focused on honing their skills. One teen said he would talk with me once he accomplished a particular trick. So, I sat and watched him repeatedly attempt to flip his skateboard while jumping from one of the steps. He eventually succeeded, which to a laywoman like me seemed like a pretty impressive accomplishment.

So, what purpose does the plaza serve to the teens who use it? It is primarily a place to practice a skill in the company of others who are also passionate about this skill. It is a place to be seen. Others watch and can serve as an audience. This can be interpreted as a way for the teens to acquire some validation from the public for their sport and for themselves, especially when a perfect stranger stops to watch or takes some pictures. Those who come to the plaza use it frequently and everyone I interviewed seemed to feel very positive and welcome in this place and extended this welcoming to me once I showed the interest in learning more about the community in this location. Here, teenage users felt connected with both their group of friends and with other site users.

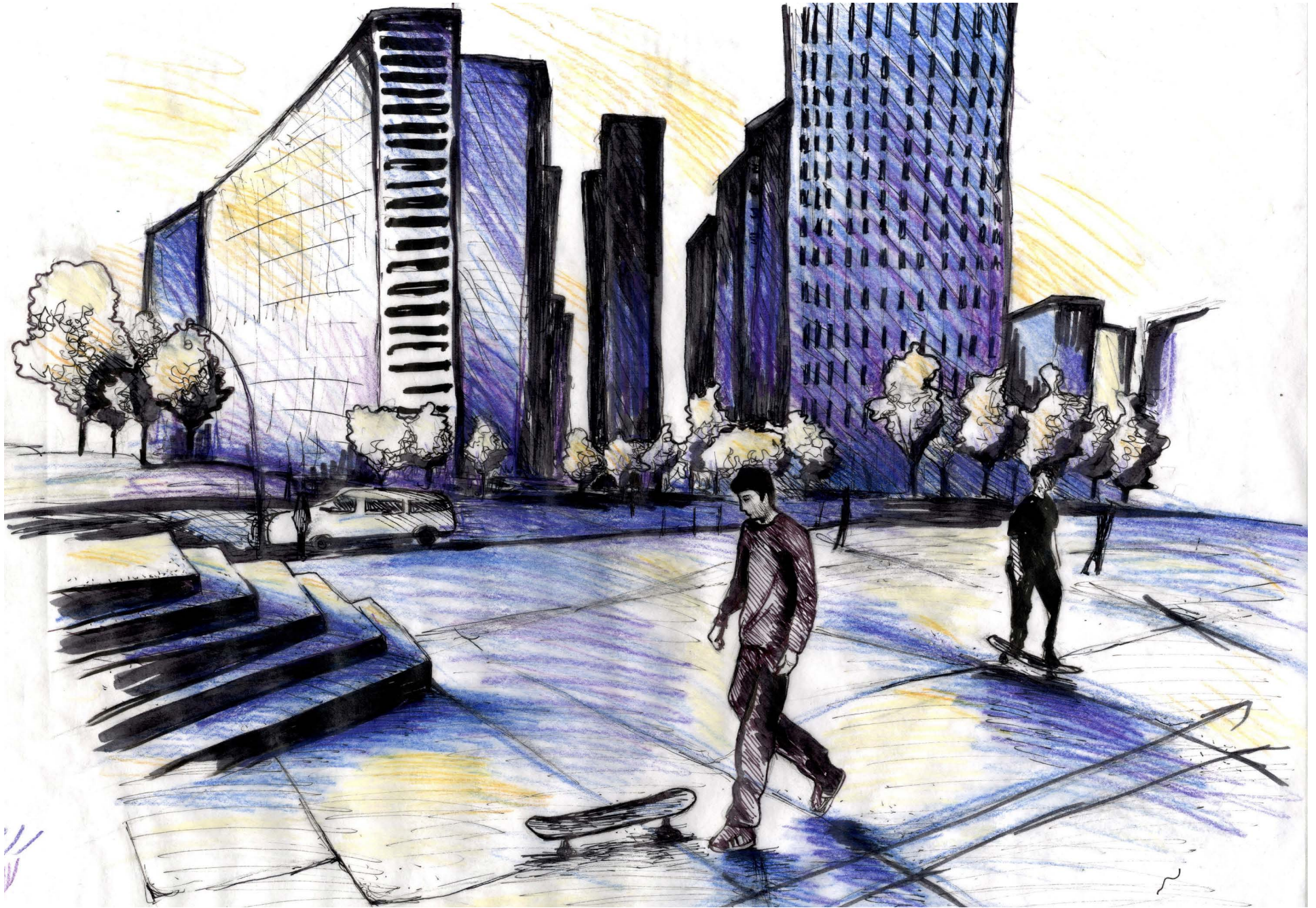


Figure J: Illustrative showing skateboarders using the middle of the plaza.

Figure K: Pedestrians walking across the plaza.

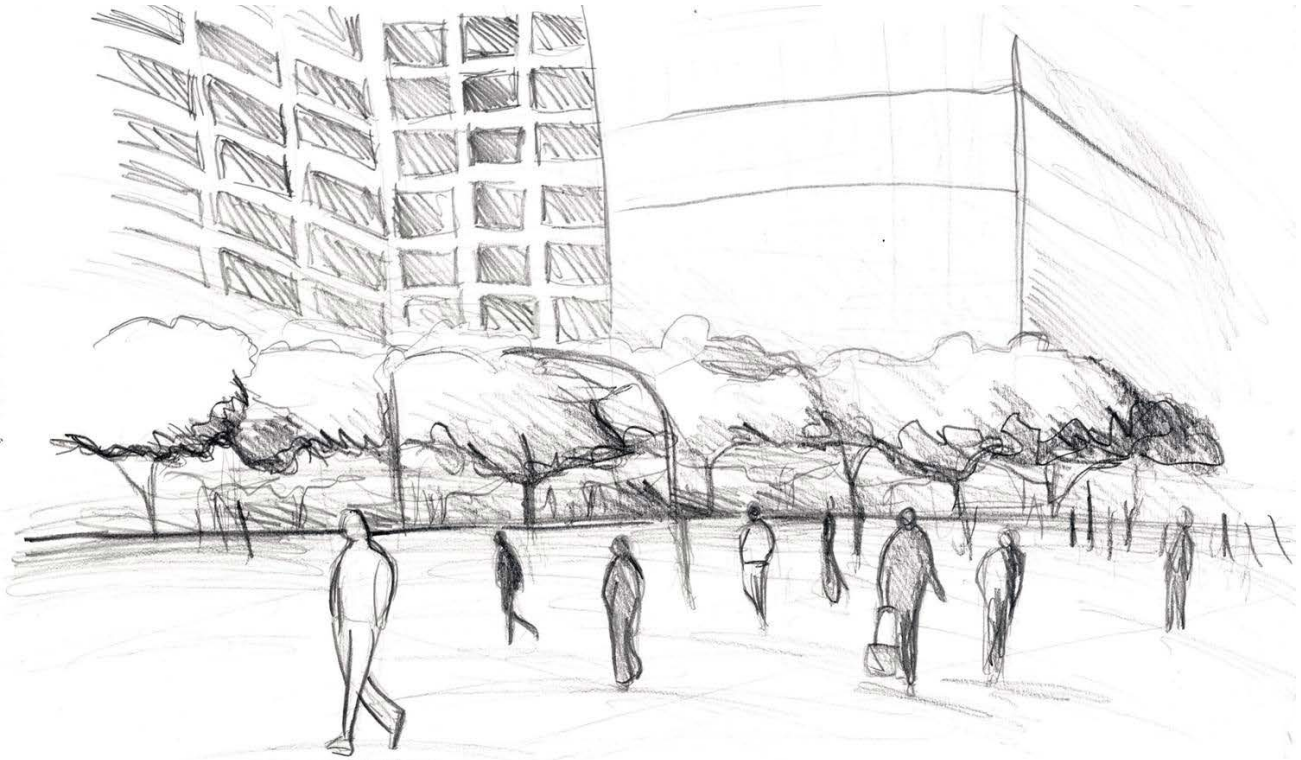
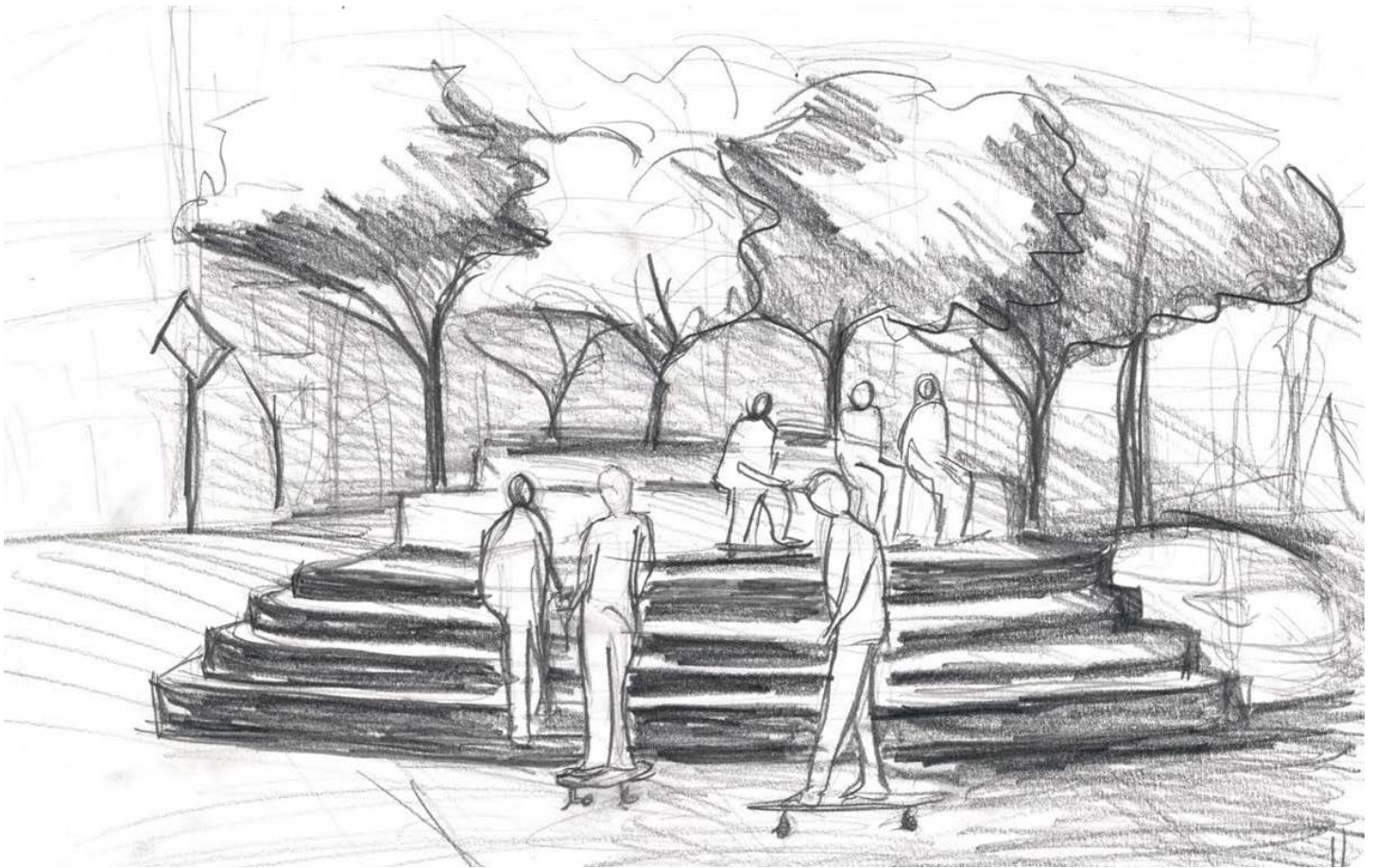


Figure L: Skateboarders sitting and chatting.



Discussion of overall trends

Overall, use in all three case studies revealed some telling patterns. Some of the studies mentioned above state that teenagers tend to appropriate spaces and use them in ingenious ways. However, few of the studies explain this process in detail or describe why teenagers use spaces. The exploration of allocated spaces revealed trends which correlate with previous research, but also some trends which require further analysis. For instance, users in both the plaza and the parking lot stood on the edges of the platforms as described in William Whyte's (1988) documentary.

Overall, boys outnumbered girls in all three spaces. Girls only made up 32% of the total teens counted (n=164). The ratio of boys to girls was almost even in the convenience store parking lot. This might be caused by presence of the adult employees in the convenience store who welcome the teens and might provide the feeling of safety to those who visit the site. Safety, according to Gearin and Kahle (2006), and Owens (1998) is an important attribute of sites attractive to teens.

Even though the Bay Area has a significantly large Asian community (23%), I only observed a few Asian teens using these spaces. Most teens observed on site were white, black, and Latino. Several of the teens interviewed were mixed race. Observations, particularly in the stairwell, showed that teenagers using the site were largely African American and Latino, which contrasted the racial composition of other users, which were predominantly white. I did not specifically count race during site visits, but it warrants further analysis.

In all three cases, teenagers used the spaces in different ways than the adults who also gathered in smaller groups. In both the stairwell and the skateboard plaza, the teens cited the view as one of their favorite site attributes, which supports with the Owens 1988 study. In all three spaces, the teens cited "hanging out" and being with friends as one of their top reasons for visiting the particular location, which correlates with findings of Gearin and Chris Kahle (2006), and Owens (2002). Teens mentioned escaping authority only in the convenience store parking lot case study. Similarly to the findings of the Owens et al. study (unpublished), the teenagers expressed no issues with adult presence in these locations.

Convenience played a large role in teen

allocation of two of the three spaces, but it was not a deciding factor. Both the stairwell and the convenience store parking lot were located within walking distance of a local high school and the teens who used these sites visited them often and mostly after school. However, answers given and use patterns on site showed that teens also used these spaces when not particularly convenient. One girl mentioned sometimes driving to the convenience store parking lot to see friends, while I also found teenagers using the stairwell during weekends. The skateboard plaza case study showed that allocated spaces can also be inconvenient. Many of the skateboarders interviewed traveled there from neighboring towns and visited multiple times a week. So, accessibility is important but not determinant.

Some of the studies mentioned that teens tend to use appropriated spaces in ingenious ways and in all three case studies, teenagers used their allocated spaces in creative and ingenious ways. The stairwell case study is the least dramatic example of creative use of space because here, the teens mainly used the stairs for sitting. However, the plaza and the parking lot case studies revealed some very creative uses. In the plaza, the skateboarders used all surfaces for their sport and claimed the stairs and the platforms as their own sitting areas. They also ensured the existence of an ever present audience by choosing a very busy location. In the parking lot, the teenagers used cars, walls, and fences to create semi private gathering spaces. They used the windowsills of the storefront as a place to rest their drinks. These ingenious uses are important because they exemplify ways in which this group views its environment. Where an adult saw a place to leave her car, a teenager saw a great place to listen to music with friends.

The prevalence of anti-socially sanctioned activities in all three sites is another big trend observed. Out of all the observations (n=164), approximately 35 teens smoked weed or cigarettes which equals to approximately 20% of teens using these spaces. This indicates these are popular activities, but the majority of the teens do not participate. None of the literature examines in depth how the built environment supports or hinders such activities, with the exception of Childress' book (2001). Each space exhibited different patterns of such uses. The stairwell is a popular weed smoking location, but this is a common activity in which all age groups visiting the park participate. The parking lot is a known cigarette smoking location, but only for a subgroup. The plaza serves as an illegal

skateboarding, smoking, and occasionally public drinking location. Is it possible that some of the teens choose allocated spaces particularly to participate in such activities? Or, are the groups who use these locations for these purposes more prone to partaking in anti-socially sanctioned activities? Further research on allocated teen spaces might better answer these questions. It is not sufficient to conclude these spaces serve to amplify occurrence of such activities for youth. Previous discourse about privatization of public spaces (Arefi, 1999) explains that groups with less social power, such as the poor and teenagers, depend more heavily on public spaces. Therefore, adults and other groups of teenagers might be engaging in the same activities, but they might have access to private, less visible spaces. Even though these activities are deemed unacceptable by mainstream society, they serve important functions for the teens as illustrated by Ponton (1997), and Owens (unpublished)

The teens perception of authority in all three sites differed. In both the stairwell and the skateboard plaza, the teens using the site reported little to no interference from authoritative figures. So, the question of whether they come to this site to assert sovereignty is moot. It is possible they will move somewhere else or change their behavior if authoritative figures interfere. In the suburban convenience store parking lot, the teens know that authorities disapprove and had been approached by authoritative figures, yet the teens continue to use this highly visible location. Some teens deal with disapproval by ignoring it, some by hiding their behavior from their parents, and some by wanting to aggravate this disapproval. In this case, the teens using the space to smoke assert their sovereignty by simply continuing to smoke and by coming to this space regularly.

Perhaps the most overarching trend found amongst all three case studies is the overwhelming sense of belonging. Two studies Owens et al. (2014) and Driskell et al. (2008) mention the importance of adolescents developing a sense of connection and belonging with their environment and that teens lack spaces in which they feel they belong. All three of these case studies provide examples of spaces in which teenage users feel they belong both within their own group of friends and within the general environment. Additionally, they feel welcome by certain adults who use the site. The word "community" came up in both the plaza and the stairwell case studies. In the plaza, the interviewees informed me that everyone knows each

other because this is a community. In the stairwell, one interviewee used the word as an answer to my question about adult interaction with the teens. In the convenience store parking lot case study, feelings were more polar. While some of the users disliked the spot, a select few of the interviewees expressed feelings of comfort and relaxation in this spot and a sense of ownership. Aside from words exchanged with interviewees, the body language of many of the teenagers expressed comfort. They talked loudly, played together, engaged in anti-socially sanctioned activities, and felt comfortable enough (in the case of the skateboarders) to leave their belongings unattended.

Tying findings to the hypothesis

Comparison of the three case studies does not fully support the hypothesis that teenagers use these locations because they have nowhere else to go. Some of the interviewees mentioned feeling excluded from other locations, these are the younger skateboarders in the plaza who said they come here because they are "kicked out" of everywhere else and a few of the teens interviewed in the convenience store parking lot who expressed wanting more spaces in the area to socialize and to skateboard. Most of the teens interviewed said they come to the spaces because it is convenient, because others do not bother them there, because this is a good place to see friends, and because they like certain physical attributes of the sites.

The hypothesis that teens use these spaces because they want to assert their sovereignty is partially supported by the case studies. None of the interviewees in the stairwell and the plaza said they have any issues with authority figures. Comparison of the case studies might actually support the notion that teenagers benefit from approval or indifference from authorities. As adolescents in both the plaza and the stairwell expressed positive feelings about their surroundings and about adults and others in the space and saw themselves as part of a larger community. However, teens in the convenience store parking lot did say that they come to these areas to escape authority and to conduct activities which parents, teachers, and the police do not approve of. Furthermore, teens conducted these behaviors in spite of authorities' awareness and disapproval. Although this is a sign

of assertion of independence, it is unclear whether the teens come here to be assertive or because they simply like to smoke cigarettes and chat with their friends. The mere act of choosing such a visible and known space as a smoking spot could be seen as proof in itself that teens sometimes choose to use spaces to assert their independence. Perhaps if these teens were only smoking for the sake of smoking, they would hide it from authoritative figures by choosing a less visible location. However, these teens might not have access to private spaces to smoke, especially during and right after school.

Furthermore, the teens' identifying these spaces as "theirs" can be seen as a form of sovereignty. In the convenience store parking lot, the teens expressed their ownership of the space both verbally and with their actions. In the plaza, the skateboarders as a group appropriated the space which inhibited its use for other purposes. The act of claiming these spaces as their own can be seen as an act of control because ownership infers control.

Implications for Planning, Policy, and Urban Design

These case studies apply to planning because they exemplify instances where users benefit from less planning, less policy, and less urban design. These are examples of users playing an active role in place making which can be seen as a more profound way of interacting with the landscape than merely acting as a user. Active place making contributes to the feelings of ownership and belonging (Lawson and McNally, 1995). Users simply act upon the landscape and completely surpass formal processes of place making. This can be seen as a form of empowerment for certain groups who may not have the means to formally participate in the planning process. The places serve an important function to the teens who use them because they aid this group in achieving developmental needs. Adolescents appropriated spaces and gave them identity. Such places can only exist as created by users, they fall outside of the designed and planned spectrum of the built environment but they do need to be incorporated into city plans and policies as legitimate social spaces.

With these statements I do not aim to suggest that organization through planning and design are harmful to communities and societies, to the contrary, these allow communities to flourish and created vastly improved living quality for the majority of inhabitants. Delineation and enforcement of rules play an important role in ensuring public safety and quality of life. Additionally, many studies show (Owens, 1997, Larson 2001) that teenagers need and benefit from involvement of positive role models and from participating in meaningful structured, after school, activities. There is no doubt that some popular activities, such as smoking cigarettes, are harmful to one's health. However, independent time fulfills important identity forming tasks. As we plan and design our landscapes and thus facilitate how and who should use it, we need to incorporate unstructured time, spontaneity, and active placemaking into the mix. Design and planning which incorporates such uses into the landscape can accomplish the endeavor.

The first big hurdle to overcome is social perceptions about this age group. Many studies and public perception views this group as a nuisance and as a danger to itself and to society. How can we change perceptions of teenagers as trouble makers? Such perceptions have existed for many generations. Planners and decision makers can take the initiative

by relaxing laws and regulations that restrict teenage use of public spaces to allow teenagers to use these spaces more freely. Planners need to advocate for this group's rights even in the face of public complaints. Educating the public about this issue falls within the role of planning. Allowing teenagers to use public open spaces enables other groups to interact with them which can break down social prejudices about teens.

Malone (2006) emphasizes that other groups also benefit. We must embrace otherness instead of merely tolerating it and that exposure to otherness and to general disorder also teaches us how to deal with conflict. We learn about "others" by interacting with them. Confining teenagers to far flung skate parks and youth centers only serves to exclude them and to perpetuate nonacceptance. Owens mentions an example of this in her 1997 study and uses an example of adults observing skateboarders in action and realizing that a high level of skill and determination are required for this sport. Changing social perceptions is a complicated issue which spans beyond the scope of planning and policy and involves social equity, public safety concerns, and the tendency to identify this group, and other disenfranchised groups, as homogeneous. As mentioned previously, it is not teenage behaviors that are problematic but societal definitions of problematic behavior. Identifying teenagers as a social group with a different set of values than the norm is another step that must be taken to overcome existing social perceptions (Malone, 2006). As these spaces became more common, more rules have been defined for teens, which means that teens have more rules to break and to make them feel unwelcomed.

As manufacturing of spaces increasingly occurs, it is increasingly necessary for planners, policy makers, and urban designers to identify and enable spontaneity and appropriation by recognizing the legitimacy and importance of appropriated spaces and by preserving and allowing such processes to occur specifically by not designing or planning uses in these spaces. This sounds contradictory, but it simply means that planners need to identify certain areas and to leave them as they are. From a regulatory perspective, it means turning a blind eye to certain illegal activities (like underage smoking) and relaxing regulations of petty nuisances (like loud groups).

Specific design implications

Specifically in regards to design for teenagers, this is an effective approach because the combination of teen territoriality mentioned in the literature review section and the need for teens to not do as they are told, means specific designs for this group may be unsuccessful. They need a general, inclusive, approach that does not restrict uses. Aside from preserving already appropriated spaces, designed spaces can aim to encourage user interaction by creating places that can be used in many different ways. For instance, large, open plazas can serve a variety of functions and allow for free circulation. Movable seating as mentioned by William Whyte (1988) can allow users to decide on their group size, location, and arrangement. This sort of design does not directly apply to teens, it applies to all social groups because it enables users to decide how their environment is oriented. My own observations exemplified the general approach because both the plaza and the parking lot are fairly open spaces. Both contain a large flat area with a potential for standing or sitting. The plaza is a simple design open platform, while the convenience store parking lot is an open concrete lot accompanied by a minimalist platform designed for momentary standing. These flat surfaces allowed users to decide on their orientation. Similarly to observations by Whyte, users gathered along the edges and sat wherever potential for sitting existed.

Aside from legitimizing and encouraging appropriation, we can learn from appropriated spaces and use them as examples of successful open spaces. Both planning and landscape architecture seek to evaluate projects for success amongst users, this adaptive approach allows these professionals to learn from previous projects. Studying spaces used outside of design intent can help designers, planners, and policy makers understand the underlying reasons that groups choose to appropriate space. Since these appropriated spaces are successful, we can study them and use information gathered to inform future designs. If we aim to understand what teenagers want, why not approach them on their own turf and study the spaces that they actually use? Behavioral mapping and interviews utilized for this thesis and also other methods such as video are viable methods for gaining an understanding of spatial patterns.

Specific planning implications

In regards to planning, these case studies provide implications for process, outcomes, and policies. Sometimes planning policy does not need to be specific and restrictive, but can be general, inclusionary, and non specific to allow users to freely interact with their surroundings. Here, I emphasize that sometimes less regulation is the best policy. As mentioned above spaces appropriated by teenagers can be incorporated into planning documents such as general plans as areas to preserve because they are already being used for a legitimate purpose. This can also be a cost effective approach to inclusion of teens because it does not necessitate constructing spaces for teens to socialize or implementation of anti teenager policies which require police regulation. This way, teenagers can continue to use spaces as they deem fit and not feel criminalized.

Planning strives to incorporate community involvement into the planning process. This means accepting and representing values different than the predominant ones or even from that of the planners themselves. This thesis presents a method of community participation. Often planners involve the community through public meetings, surveys, and design charrettes. Studies such as Malone's (2002) state that teenagers and youth are underrepresented in the decision making process. Conducting meetings and design charrettes will only capture a certain subset of teenagers, particularly those who are interested in planning and activism, however the majority of teenagers do not fit this category.

By approaching teenagers in their own gathering spaces, planners can better involve teens who would otherwise be disenfranchised from the planning process it can also dilute the system of social hierarchy present in formal institution. It can affect answers given during school hours or in similar settings. Approaching them on their turf is particularly important because it can show teenagers, particularly those who feel like outsiders, that their opinions matter and perhaps encourage them to participate in some form of community activism. For this to work however, teenagers must be approached not as children to be lectured, but as individuals with sensible needs and concerns.

Limitations and Next Steps

Conclusions and observations obtained from these case studies cannot be applied to every appropriated space and may differ across geographies. A limited time frame for collecting data affected quality of interviews and the types of spaces observed. All three case studies are visible and public areas, perhaps if I had more time to look, I would have found spaces that are more private. As mentioned in the methodology section, my identity and opinions colored observations and interactions with the teenagers, so this study is biased.

The scope of this study is very limited. I do not address the topic of whether or not illegal activities are endangering teen safety and the safety of other users. Further research needs to be conducted to clarify the nature of the relationship between anti-socially sanctioned activities and appropriated public spaces. Further interviews with the teens will be helpful in this endeavor. Additionally, interviews with authority figures might illuminate relationships between them and the

teenagers.

The question of race and identity of these teenagers frequently came up during discussions about this thesis. I did not collect sufficient data to successfully identify whether certain races or income backgrounds used appropriated spaces. It is necessary to conduct further research on the topics of race, gender, ethnicity, and class in regards to appropriation of places because this thesis only begins to address such topics.

This study brings forth many questions for future research. Aside from being mostly used by boys, do teens using these spaces share other characteristics? Do use patterns differ across geographies? The pilot study in New York City suggested that teenage perceptions and gathering spaces do differ. What percentage of teens in general appropriate public spaces? How does appropriation of space affect private property and is there a conflict between property owners and teenagers?

Conclusion

The three case studies exemplify situations in which adolescents saw mundane public spaces as far more than just that. It might seem contradictory to plan for spontaneity and social appropriation of spaces, but it is a worthy endeavor. By recognizing the importance of these spaces we can legitimize uses that deviate from design intent, embrace creativity, and allow another form of user interaction with the landscape. All three locations examined in this thesis served important functions to the teenagers using them. Behavioral analysis and interviews revealed complex relationships amongst users and strong ties between them, their surroundings, and other users. When I began my research, I expected to find groups of discontent and alienated teenagers occupying spaces due to exclusion and convenience. Instead, I found groups of content teenagers who feel connected to their environments and to society. This thesis provides some insight into why teenagers choose to claim places and into what sort of spaces certain teenagers enjoy. Further research should be conducted on the subject of informal gathering spaces. In her article, Karen Malone concludes by challenging researchers “to explore and learn more about the potential for viewing, in new ways, young people and their relationship with the community through their interactions in the street (Malone, 2002, pages 167-168)”. I extend the scope of this challenge to include informal gathering spaces.

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