

Placemaking for an Aging Population:

Research surrounding design guidelines for senior-friendly parks



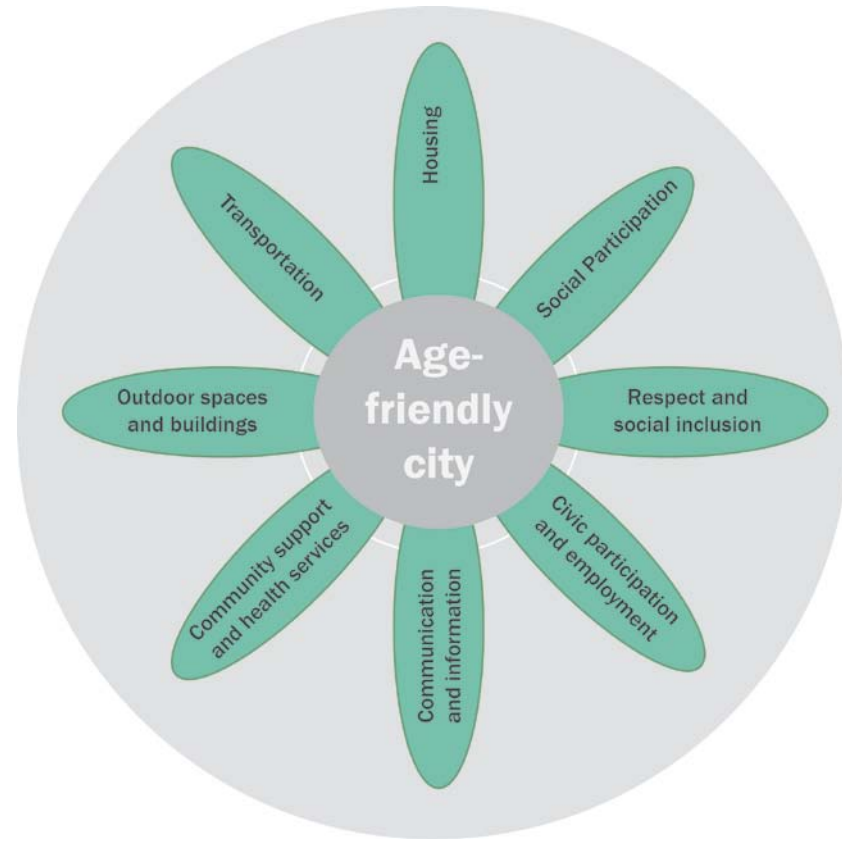
Madeline Brozen
19th Annual UCLA Research
Conference on Aging
July 25, 2014

Presentation Agenda

- Project background and overview
- Why focus on parks for seniors?
- Literature review: Elders needs for open space and physical activity
- Focus group analysis
- Selected design guidelines

Why Parks for Older Adults?

- Parks are an important part of “Age-friendly cities”
- Important mental and physical health benefits
 - Promote physical activity
 - Reduce social isolation
 - Reduce stress
 - Heal faster
- People over 65 are the most inactive and most underserved in terms of parks



Literature Review:

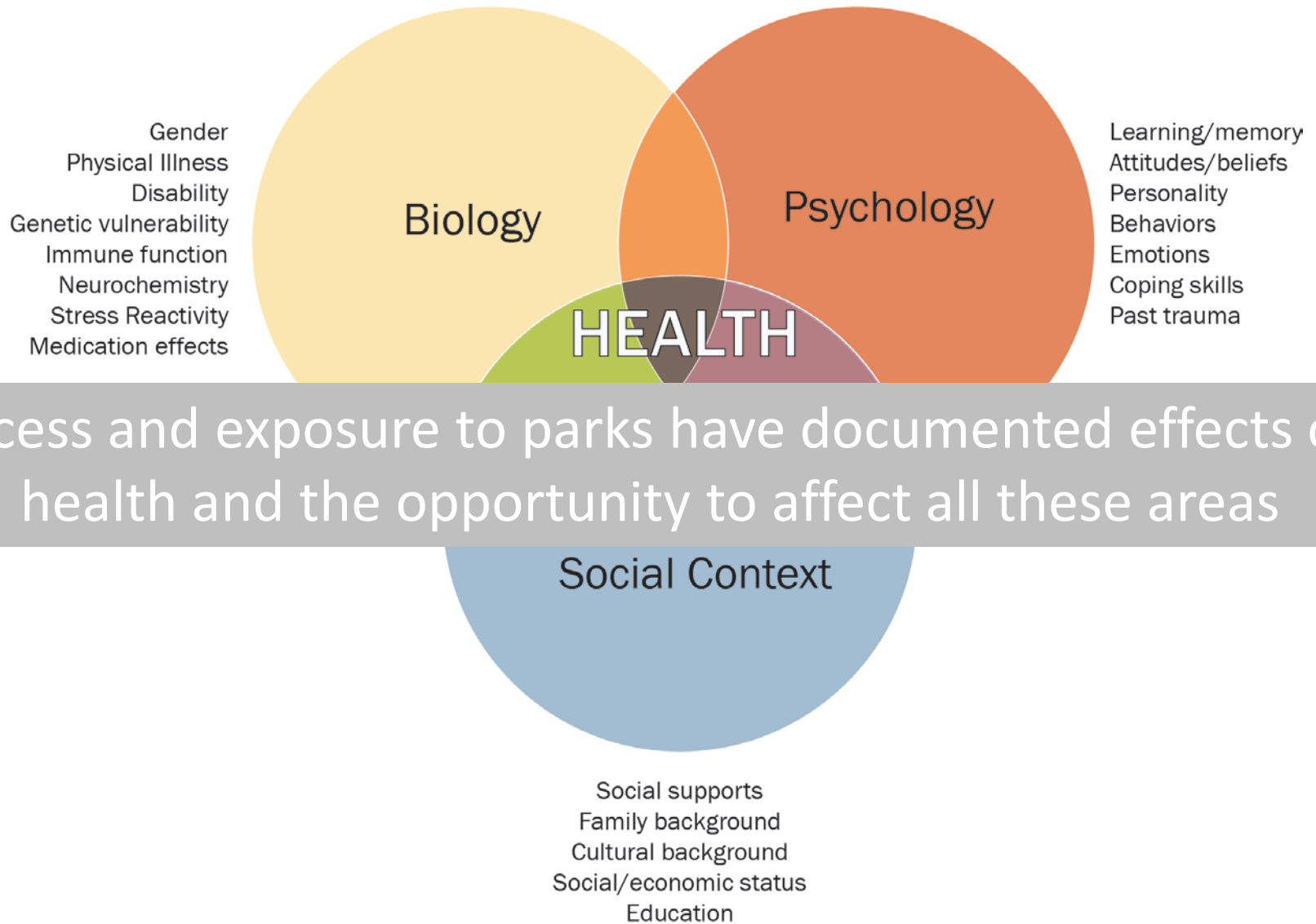
Elders' needs for open space and physical activity

- **Lack of research to understand:**

Do elders have different open space and physical activity needs relative to younger persons?

- **Preference to “age in place”**
- **Physical health benefits from outdoor spaces**
- **Limited case studies demonstrating difference in specific design preferences: toilet facilities, lack of nuisance and limited vehicular traffic**

Biopsychosocial Approach to Understanding Health



Access and exposure to parks have documented effects on health and the opportunity to affect all these areas

Literature Review:

Elders' needs for open space and physical activity

- Allow elders to give input on the park design
- Social aspects of parks may be more important over physical amenities
- Tension and question between interacting with peers only or preferring intergenerational interaction?



Conclusion

No need to explicitly create parks and open spaces for elders, but, rather, seek elders' participation with them, given their inherent geographical, demographic, and health diversity.

Focus groups Overview

- 8 focus groups at St. Barnabas Senior Service center (Westlake neighborhood)
 - Five with elders
 - Two with staff
 - One with caregivers



Focus Group Results:

Benefits of open space

- **Open space was an unfamiliar concept**
 - Driveways, getting off the bus early to walk more were their current experience
 - If they did have open space, they had concerns about existing nuisances
- **Recognized natural beauty of open spaces**
 - Referred to flowers, trees, fresh air, tranquil spaces
- **Importance of physical activity to their physical and mental health**
 - Tai Chi, dance, exercising with friends

“I think it affects a lot, because especially if you come here and you do your little exercise you do a little walking, it affects. You become alive and it does not matter how old you are. You do these routinely, like every day. We come here everyday. I think that is good enough for us, and it helps us [be] alive, healthy, and we become more sociable.”

Focus Group Results:

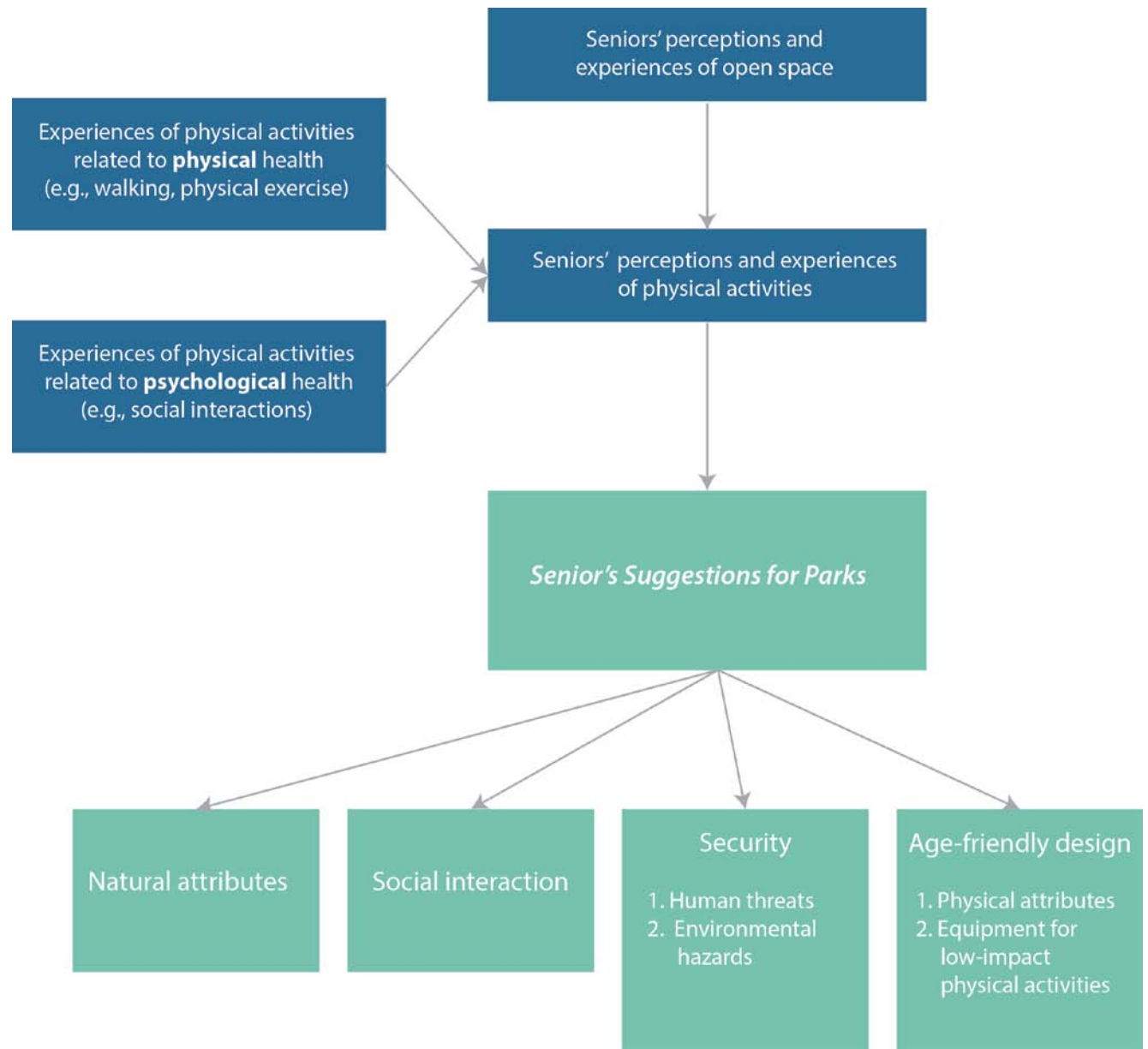
Perceived dangers

- Elders perceived a lot of dangers in existing open spaces
 - Unsupervised children
 - Skateboarding
 - Victims of crime
 - Lack of respect
- Perceived dangers due to tripping and falling



Focus group results

Seniors' perceptions and experience of open spaces and physical activities.



Focus group results



Essential features from the perspectives of the elders.

Size of each circle is proportional to relative importance

Low-impact exercise machines from around the world



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Pictures top row L to R: Spain, London, Berlin. Bottom row L to R: Beijing, Finland, Spain

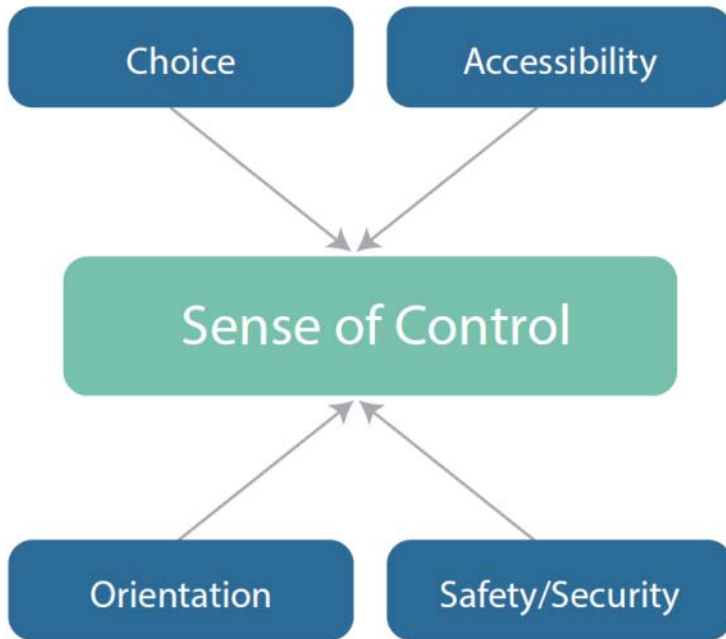
Design Guidelines for Senior-Friendly Parks

- **Combined results:**
 - Literature review
 - Agency interviews
 - Case studies from U.S and international cities
 - Focus groups
 - Design literature about healing gardens and therapeutic landscapes

- Control
- Choice
- Safety and security
- Accessibility
- Social support
- Physical Activity
- Privacy
- Contact with nature
- Comfort
- Aesthetic and sensory delight

Control

- Orientation
- Legibility
- way-finding



Prominent park sign



Distinctive feature that can serve for orientation

Choice

- All park users, young and old, value choice
- Variety of places to wander, things to look at, passive and active recreation opportunities



Places to sit and places to walk



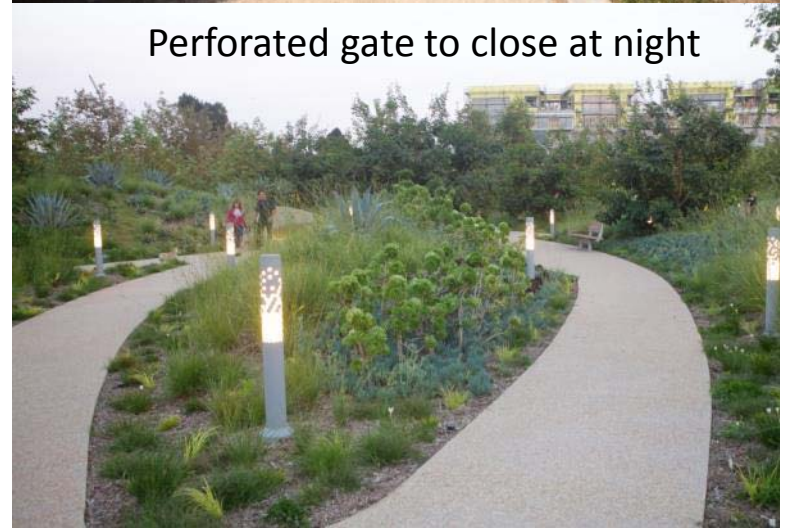
Places in the shade and the sun

Safety and Security

- Examining the surrounding environment; are busy streets a barrier?
- Good maintenance helps discourage potential criminals
- Pay attention to slope on ramps and providing handrails and other minute details



Perforated gate to close at night



Smooth walkway with clear path

Social Support

- Design can support the human need of wanting to be connected to others
- Strong connection between social support and health
- Connect to the community, other generations and each other



Sociopetal seating



Little free library



Card games and interaction

Conclusion

- Peer reviewed health and open space literature has not documented specific design features in parks for elders
- Focus groups revealed many elder preferences in park programming and design
- Design guidelines should be taken into consideration for parks and could extend to other senior facilities as well

Acknowledgments

- **Co-authors:**

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Department of Urban Planning

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- **Funding support:**

- Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation

- Archstone Foundation

Thank you



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