

Place Meaning and Attachment in Revitalizing Neighborhoods: A Qualitative Study of  
How Redevelopment Efforts Affect Residents' Assigned Meanings of Their

Neighborhood

by

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## ABSTRACT

Denver, Colorado is experiencing an unprecedented growth spurt, particularly in the downtown neighborhoods. As such, the city has proposed a multitude of urban revitalization projects in its urban core. This pattern of revitalization has unintended consequences including changes in residents' meanings assigned to their neighborhoods and subsequently changes in residents' attachment to those neighborhoods. Given this, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to use a symbolic interactionist perspective to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhoods and discover how redevelopment efforts are affecting those assigned meanings. Participants, recruited through the snowball sampling method in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods in downtown Denver, were interviewed during spring of 2017. Photo-elicitation techniques were used as part of the interviews. Additionally, secondary data available through public documents were analyzed to provide a context for understanding the changes that are taking place in the selected neighborhoods. This data aids in guiding future research, which may ultimately better inform the government agencies and private organizations who are looking to redevelop low-income neighborhoods similar to the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods in the given study.

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## BRACKETING

It is impossible to separate the researcher from the study due to the involvement and the overall interpretive nature of the research. Qualitative researchers have some sort of experience with the research problem at hand, which creates a vantage point which must be openly stated for the findings to be taken seriously. The researcher is a twenty-four-year-old who was born and raised in small, rural, Twin Falls, Idaho. She grew up in a lower socioeconomic group, which affected the way she sees the world. Upon her graduation from high school, she attended Utah State University with an ultimate goal of graduating with a degree in a helping profession. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Human Movement as to attend medical school. However, rather than attending medical school, she continued to pursue a master's degree in Community Resources and Development as to work in public service following graduation.

As an individual who grew up in a lower socioeconomic group, the researcher has a distinct interest in how lower socioeconomic groups live and how decisions made by the local and state governments affect these individuals' lives. On the other hand, as an individual who has an interest in working within public service—the very governmental agencies that make decisions that affect these individuals—the researcher has an interest in how best to improve these neighborhoods without harming or disturbing the attachments of the neighborhood residents to their respective neighborhoods. Individually, these experiences could have caused her interpretation to lean one way or the other. However, due to the bipolar experiences and academic training, the researcher aimed to remain unbiased in her interpretation as possible.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Following World War II, the great exodus of the middle and upper classes from the cities to the suburbs occurred (Boustan & Margo, 2013; Denton, 2014; Vicino, 2008). Consequently, a handful of problems transpired immediately, including the decay of several inner cities in the United States. Even more problems have appeared throughout the years since, including suburban sprawl, environmental and social degradation, complete automobile dependence, health problems, rise in crime rates, and “placelessness” (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2001, p. xxii; Kahn, 2000; Jargowsky & Park, 2008; Relph, 1976). However, following decades of avoidance and neglect, the downtown lifestyle has stepped back into the limelight. These urban areas have seen a recent surge in population—this trend is in part due to the housing bust, aging baby boomer generation downsizing their suburban homes, or desired lifestyle of the millennial generation (Karp, 2008), accompanied with a push from municipalities to reverse the lingering effects of this great exodus that took place so many decades ago (Denver Department of Planning and Community Development, 2003, 2008).

With an increase in population comes an increase in the tax base, and with an increase in the tax base comes an increase in proposals for, followed by implementation of, revitalization and improvement projects citywide. These projects are a means to appease the new residents’ desire for an enhanced and safer environment as well as attract new residents to Denver. Revitalization projects are not only occurring in Denver, but throughout the country. These revitalization projects are taking place in the form of

small-scale projects to city-wide plans, which can be privately or publicly (city, state, or federally) sponsored (City of Las Vegas, 2016; The City of San Jose, 2014; Schachtel, 2011). These projects are meant to improve the amenities and enhance the environments of the residents as well as attract new residents to the area. But what about the residents who never left the city for the suburbs? There is a substantial population of urban residents whose families grew up in the inner cities before this “take back the downtown” movement came into the picture. These individuals could easily, and more than likely, have an attachment to their respective urban communities and neighborhoods. How do these revitalization projects impact the meanings that these residents ascribe to their neighborhoods?

Specifically, this study focused on how urban revitalization projects such as light rail stations, improved infrastructure, mixed-use development, and an increase or improvement of parks and public spaces impact place meanings in the downtown Denver neighborhoods of Globeville and Elyria Swansea. These neighborhoods are located to the north and northeast of Denver’s urban core, as can be seen below in figure 1, and, aside from the large freeways cutting through them, are practically isolated from the rest of the city. Current demographics consist of mostly Hispanics, lower socioeconomic levels, and high poverty rates. The crime rate in these neighborhoods is higher than the Denver average (Denver Department of Planning and Community Development, 2003, 2008). Focus was placed on these two neighborhoods rather than all the downtown Denver neighborhoods collectively because these are the only two neighborhoods in the area that have not been gentrified. Gentrification is the process that involves the



reinvestment of attention and capital after a stint of disinvestment, the production of a desirable landscape and amenities, and increase in property values, and, thus, lower socioeconomic class displacement followed by middle socioeconomic class replacement (Bryson, 2013). While Globeville and Elyria Swansea are the only two neighborhoods in the area that have not been gentrified, these two neighborhoods are at risk of gentrification as they are located within a stretch of land along Interstate 70 from Downtown Denver to Denver International Airport now labeled the “corridor of opportunity” by the City and County of Denver. Given this label, it seems inevitable that companies and developers will see new opportunity for business expansion in these areas (North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative, n.d.). Some of the proposed changes have already begun. Within Globeville, many improvements to the parks and recreation locations within the neighborhood have been implemented including the Argo Park Walking Loop, Dunham Park, and the Stapleton Recreation Center. The Asarco Smelting Plant clean-up led to the development of Crossroads Commerce Park, an industrial park. The 41<sup>st</sup> and Fox light rail station has also been completed, although it is not yet open. Within Elyria-Swansea, the 40<sup>th</sup> and Colorado light rail station is complete and running, and 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue’s sidewalks received an upgrade as well. Finally, the Federal Highway Administration recently approved the Interstate 70 expansion, and The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has already begun purchasing and demolishing houses and businesses.

With the potential for change in the future, it is imperative to understand what these changes in the neighborhoods might mean to the current residents. The concept of

“Place” becomes a useful lens through which to explore these meanings. Place is more than just a geographic location; it involves human experiences, emotions, and meanings attached to the lived environment (Tuan, 1977). Given the notion that places are more than just a geographic location and that people draw meaning from places, the theory of symbolic interactionism becomes a very useful theoretical lens through which to view the concept of place. The foundation of the symbolic interactionist perspective is that people act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them, and those meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1962).

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Figure 1. Map of Denver Neighborhoods

Place is a scholarly construct that has important beginnings in human geography with the work of Tuan (1974, 1977, 1979), but has now been adopted among several other disciplines ranging from natural resources (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004), city planning (Manzo & Perkins, 2006), community engagement (Devine-Wright, 2009), to public administration (Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003). Place related studies in these fields have helped in understanding what natural landscapes mean to local communities and visitors (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004), how perceived environmental change has affected attachment to one's neighborhood or community (von Wirth et al., 2016; Madgin, Bradley, & Hastings, 2016), and how rapid urban sprawl has impacted communities (Walker & Ryan, 2008). These studies indicate how "place" as a concept can be useful in understanding people and their relationships to their communities as well as how these relationships affect individual's beliefs and life choices.

The information from this current study uncovered information that could be useful for Denver's municipal government, specifically the offices and departments related to neighborhood services, community and economic development, and urban planning. These municipal offices and departments are often involved with implementing urban revitalization projects and are charged with addressing all the accompanying benefits and setbacks. Knowledge of how urban revitalization efforts affect the longtime residents' attachment to their neighborhood would allow the city to incorporate the viewpoints of these residents into such efforts thus enabling urban growth while causing the least amount of damage, despair, and displacement to the longtime residents.

Therefore, the objective of this phenomenological study was to use a symbolic interactionist perspective to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhoods and discover how redevelopment efforts are affecting those assigned meanings.

### **Research Questions**

1. Have historical patterns of urban revitalization of development led to gentrification and displacement in Denver?
2. How have the historical patterns of urban revitalization in Denver affected neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects in Globeville and Elyria-Swansea?
3. How have urban revitalization projects affected place meaning that residents assign to their neighborhood in Globeville and Elyria-Swansea?
4. How do resident's place meanings affect place attachment in Globeville and Elyria-Swansea?

### **Delimitations/Limitations**

The delimitation of the study was that the only geographic region included in the study are the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods in Denver, Colorado. This is due to the fact that the remaining neighborhoods surrounding downtown Denver have already been gentrified (Denver Office of Economic Development, 2016), thus invalidating their relevance to the study.

The limitations of the study included limitations imposed by the very nature of research including human error and ambiguity, and external reliability. In addition, findings cannot be generalized and extended to a greater population to the same degree as

quantitative research. Due to the fact that qualitative research occurs within a natural setting, it is difficult to replicate studies, which limits the reliability and validity of the findings (Wiersma, 2000). However, member checking and use of an external auditor were employed to ensure the findings were valid as possible.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

I am interested in how urban revitalization projects affect place meanings in neighborhoods located in rapidly expanding and urbanizing cities and how those place meanings affect residents' attachment to these neighborhoods. This interest drove this research uncovering the effects of urban revitalization projects such as light rail expansion, improved infrastructure, mixed-use development, and an increase or improvement of parks and public space, on place meaning in the neighborhoods of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea in North Denver using the theoretical lens of symbolic interactionism. The following review of the literature will begin with describing the symbolic interactionist perspective. The second section of literature will explore the concept of place – what it is and is not. The final section of literature will discuss place attachment—the origins, contexts in which it has been studied, and the gap that currently exists within place attachment literature.

#### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Although most place attachment papers published do not directly state a theoretical framework, the very definition of place attachment lends itself to the underlying theory of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that is often used in microsociology—small scale human interactions—and social psychology. Due to the multitude of early representatives of this school of thought—including William James, Charles Cooley, John Dewey, and William Isaac Thomas— there is a bit of debate over who the official founder of symbolic

interactionism is (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). However, according to Reynolds and Herman-Kinney's chapter "Early Representatives" in the *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* (2003), George Herbert Mead "transformed the inner structure of the theory of symbolic interactionism, moving it to a higher level of theoretical sophistication" (pg. 67). They consequently label Mead as the founder of symbolic interactionism. However, the term "symbolic interaction" was not coined until later when Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead, proposed a significant summary of the symbolic interactionist perspective. According to Blumer (1962), the foundation of the symbolic interactionist perspective is that people act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them. These meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1962). Symbolic interactionism thus becomes a very useful theoretical lens through which to understand how individuals interact with their neighborhoods and thus ascribe meanings to their neighborhoods.

## **Place**

The everyday definition of place—an area or region bound by both time and space—is inadequate in the process of uncovering the meanings that places have for individuals. The everyday definition of place is more akin to what Gieryn states is *not* place; it better parallels the concept of space rather than place (2000, pp. 465-466). More appropriate definitions are those described and used by Tuan (Gieryn, 2000). Tuan first described place as a geographical space that has been endowed with meaning through perception and experiences (Tuan, 1979). Further, Gieryn (2000) stated that place must possess three different characteristics: geographic location, material form, and investment

with meaning and value. The first two characteristics of place as described by Gieryn speak for themselves. However, the third characteristic—investment of meaning and value—may be understood through the lens of symbolic interaction. Until an individual or group assigns some sort of meaning or value to a physical environment located at a unique spot within the universe, it will remain simply space; it is the interpreted meaning, values, and feelings assigned to a space by an individual or group that transforms that space into a place (Gieryn, 2000).

Research focusing on place is exceptionally broad. Early work on this began in the mid 1970's when phenomenological geographers such as Tuan and Relph began focusing on the meanings that places hold and the feelings that individuals have for places (Tuan, 1974; Relph, 1976). Over time, the study of place has branched into multiple paths as well as into various contexts. Place research has explored multiple place concepts such as place attachment (of which place identity and place dependence are core dimensions) and place meaning; it also transformed from a geographic focus to one that encompassed multiple contexts including natural resource management (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010), landscape architecture (Thwaites, 2001), environmental psychology (Fried, 2000), recreation management (Buta, Holland, & Kaplanidou, 2014), and urban and city planning (Woldoff, 2002).

### **Place Attachment**

Place attachment is a concept that originated within phenomenological geography and environmental psychology. Early researchers Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph studied place attachment by extension of their research on place and how it plays an integral role



in human experiences (Relp, 1976; Tuan, 1974). Place attachment has been defined in various ways due to its multidimensional and multidisciplinary application. This has also allowed for great confusion; there is no consensus on the differences, possible hierarchies, or synonymies between the various “place” constructs including: sense of place, place attachment, and place identity (Hernández, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007). However, the most common and widely agreed upon definition of place attachment is a positive emotional bond that is created with a place and progresses over time between individuals and their environment (Low & Altman, 1992; Kyle, Jun, & Absher, 2014). To organize the vast literature on the concept of place attachment, the tripartite conceptual framework of place attachment (figure 2) proposed by Scannell & Gifford (2010), becomes very useful. This model is a representative conglomeration of the differing definitions and representations of the underlying notions that make up place attachment i.e. the person, place, and the psychological process. The following place attachment literature will be discussed using this tripartite model of place attachment, (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

**Person.** The person dimension is focused on who is attached (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Is it an individual attachment based on a personal experience or a collective attachment stemming from historical knowledge and tradition?

***Individual attachment.*** It can be argued that all place attachment research focuses on individual attachments-either a sole individual’s attachment or a group of individual attachments to the same place. Everyone involved has their own personal reasoning behind their attachment to a place, even in cases of group or cultural

attachments that stem from historical reasoning. However, in certain instances, the bigger picture of the research is to understand how individuals' place attachments work together to create a community attachment, which was the focus of this research.

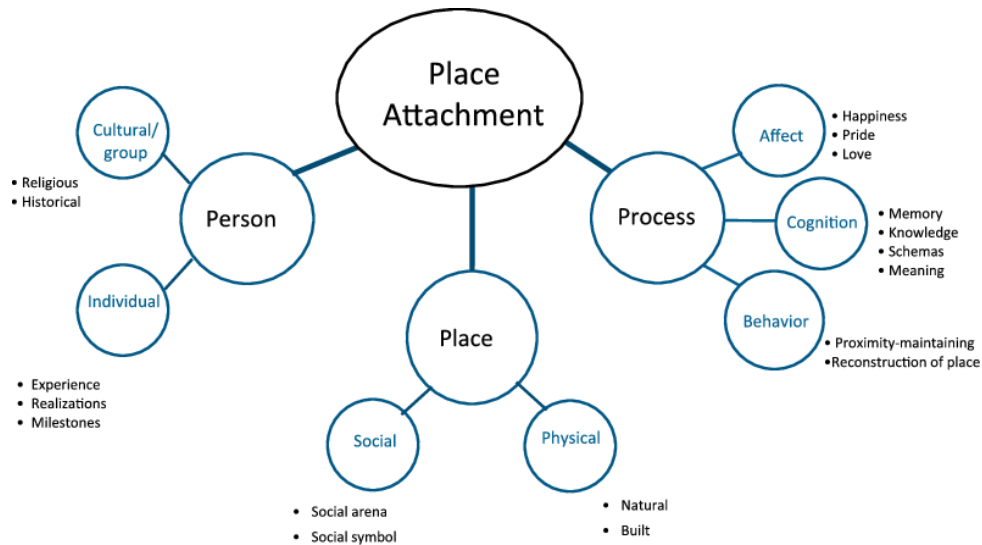


Figure 2. Tripartite Model of Place Attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010)

**Community attachment.** The concept of people-place relationships has also been useful in understanding people's relationships with their neighborhoods and communities. Manzo and Perkins (2006) found that affective bonds to places can help inspire action because people are motivated to seek, stay in, protect, and improve places that are meaningful to them. Their study also revealed that proposed development projects can be perceived by some community members as a threat to place attachments because they will change the physical fabric of the neighborhood (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Buta, Holland, and Kaplanidou (2014) drew on survey data to confirm the role of attachment in mediating the relationship between community attachment and pro-environmental engagement for natural resource protection. These studies, while focusing

on different areas of place attachment, demonstrate a general underlying idea that the more attached an individual is to a place, the more likely that individual is to continue using and protecting that place from changes.

**Place.** The place dimension is focused on what the individual or group is attached to (Scannell & Gifford, 2010); what is it about the place that the individual or group is connected to? Is it the social attributes or the physical attributes? This section will discuss the physical vs. the social aspects of place attachment, the current literature on environmental change and place attachment, and the gap within the literature: the role that changes within the physical dimension plays in creating and maintaining an attachment to a neighborhood undergoing revitalization.

*Physical place vs. social place.* Within the place attachment literature, there is some discussion as to whether attachment is to the physical place itself or the social relationships supported within (Stedman, 2003). While the belief that place attachment is a social concept is not unanimous, urban sociologists have traditionally viewed it as such (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). In other words, numerous studies indicate that attachment to neighborhoods is usually directed to other residents and the social networks supported in these neighborhoods rather than the physical amenities within those neighborhoods. This was observed in a study conducted by Fried (1966), who found that even in a physically deteriorating neighborhood, there is still a strong sense of attachment or bonding to that neighborhood. This was reiterated in another study by Fried (2000) who explained that while many physical features of communities—density, proximity to amenities, and the presence of amenities—influence social interactions in relation to

place attachment, the attachment is directed toward others who reside in the place rather than to the place itself. Other researchers, such as Woldoff (2002), also note that attachment to a place is partly due to attachment to those who live there and the social interactions that the place affords them. Other recent studies have presented similar findings. In a study exploring an attachment to neighborhoods, the social networks supported within the neighborhood were the best predictor of attachment (Lewicka, 2010). Likewise, Shaw and Hagemans (2015) who researched the concept of ‘positive gentrification’ or ‘gentrification without displacement’ reported that attachment to a place is due to attachment to the family, friends, and community members who live there and to the social interactions that occur within that place. They found that loss of place and the negative psychological aspects associated with loss of place can be achieved due to the weakening of social bonds and potential loss of cultural identity even without physical displacement that traditionally accompanies the process of gentrification (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). This finding reinforces previous findings (Fried, 2000; Woldoff, 2002; Lewicka, 2010) that resident place attachment is directed toward their social network within the neighborhood.

While the importance of the social relationships in the development of attachment has been clearly articulated within the urban sociology literature, the natural resource literature has focused more on the role of the physical environment. Mesch and Manor (1998) found that satisfaction with the physical characteristics of the environment can be used as a predictor of place attachment, thus noting the importance of the physical place. In a study on landscape preservation, Ryan (1997) utilized photographs to measure place

attachment to natural area scenes, and found a moderate correlation between landscape preference and place attachment, which suggests that while place attachment is affected by social experience, it is also affected by the physical aspects of the landscape. Walker and Ryan (2008) built on Ryan's study finding that the attachment to the social dimension was tied to length of residency, while the attachment to the physical dimension was similar between long-time and new residents. Likewise, Stedman (2003, 2008) discussed the role that the physical dimension plays in creating and maintaining an attachment to a place. He stated that "although social constructions are important, they hardly arise out of thin air: The local environment sets bounds and gives form to these constructions" (Stedman, 2003, p. 671). Stedman thus suggests that while social relationships are indeed important for place attachment, the importance of the physical place that supports those social relationships cannot be ignored.

Several researchers support Stedman's (2003) notion of the relationship between the physical and social attributes of a place in the development of attachment to that place. For instance, Burley (2007) agrees that the physical dimension shapes the meanings that we assign to places but asserts that the meanings assigned are not innate to the physical dimension but are, in fact, based on the sociological and historical meanings that change throughout time (Burley, 2007). Likewise, historical meanings associated with a physical place were found to be important in a study by Kyle & Chick (2007). In the realm of a multi-generational recreationist tenting festival, the physical place itself, (in this case an agricultural fairground), was not the cause of the human-place bond; rather, the multitude of history and memories formed while at the fairground combined

with the physical surroundings was the root cause of the bond. Similarly, in a study exploring the redeveloping of recreation spaces used during the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, it was demonstrated that the “embodied connections that stimulate attachments to places, such as memories and stories, are provoked by the visibility and immediacy of physical change” (Madgin, Bradley, & Hastings, 2016, p. 692). Given this literature on the importance of social networks in place attachment development, and the role of physical attributes in the embodiment of these social relationships, it does not make sense to solely focus on either the physical or social dimensions exclusively when they depend on and build upon one another.

***Environmental change and place attachment.*** This increased understanding of how the physical and social attributes of a place, affect place attachment development has resulted in a fair amount of research in relation to environmental change. Specifically, several researchers have been interested in the relationships between urban change and place attachment (von Wirth et al., 2016; Madgin, Bradley, & Hastings, 2016; Bélanger, 2012; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Porter & Barber, 2006; Brown, Perkins & Brown, 2003; Brown, Brown & Perkins, 2004; Billig, 2005). A few major themes appear when exploring this literature. These themes include: a) environmental change, whether it be the social or physical environment, impacts place meaning and, consequently, place attachment, b) place attachment is a prerequisite to long-term revitalization success, c) place meanings differ between old and new residents within revitalizing neighborhoods, and d) there are a number of predictors for place attachment in urban neighborhoods.

Each of these themes found in the place attachment and urban development literature will now be discussed in greater detail below.

*Environmental change, whether it be the social or physical environment, impacts place meaning and, consequently, place attachment.* The social and physical environmental change's impact on place meaning and attachment was demonstrated in a few studies. Porter and Barber (2006) studied the effects that redevelopment had on a community in Birmingham. They found that the redevelopment disregarded the sociocultural meaning of place and the social network that animate the community, which resulted in the displacement of two long-standing pubs as well as the customers they catered to (Porter & Barber, 2006). Ultimately, the redevelopment efforts succeeded in creating an aesthetically pleasing economic hub but failed in creating a socially and culturally diverse and sustainable neighborhood. In a study of place meanings in Canada during times of revitalization and gentrification, Bélanger (2012) found that even though residents in a poorer neighborhood openly welcomed the physical changes through revitalization, they were not as welcoming about the social changes that often go hand-in-hand with the physical change i.e. the arrival of wealthier residents. In an empirical study on the perception of urban change in Switzerland, von Wirth et al. (2016), found that residents do not assess the landscape change directly, but they assess the related change in the meaning of the landscape characteristics to be either positive or negative (von Wirth et al., 2016). These findings suggest that place attachment is an important mediator between urban environmental changes and the residents' assessment of the

changes. Again, in all these studies, the physical attributes and the social relationships supported through them were important for place meanings and attachment.

*Place attachment and Revitalization.* The second theme found was place attachment is a prerequisite to long-term revitalization success; long-term revitalization success takes into account the success of the economic and social aspects of the revitalization projects. Manzo and Perkins (2006) demonstrated that place attachment is necessary for revitalization success, however, they also proposed that development projects may be perceived by residents as a threat to residential place attachments due to the thought that the development projects could change the fabric of the neighborhood. This idea establishes that, because redevelopment projects have the potential to change the fabric of the neighborhood, the redevelopment projects have the potential to negatively affect attachment to the neighborhood. Brown, Perkins and Brown (2003) examined whether “social and physical indicators of decline” throughout a neighborhood relate to lower levels of place attachment and found that despite signs of neighborhood decline, place attachment can provide needed assistance to community development efforts. This is due to the idea that residents who are attached to their homes and neighborhoods are more likely to want to keep up appearances of their homes and neighborhoods. In a later study conducted by Brown, Brown and Perkins (2004), they investigated whether new residents report high levels of place attachment to a neighborhood when a new subdivision is used as a strategy to revitalize a neighborhood in decline. The new residents reported a high level of place attachment (Brown, Brown, & Perkins, 2004), and, although this leaves the original residents and their attachments



out of the picture entirely, this demonstrates the ability of new residents to dedicate assistance to community development efforts to revitalize a neighborhood.

*Place Attachment and Revitalizing Neighborhoods.* Brown, Brown and Perkins' (2004) study also demonstrated how place meanings could differ between old and new residents. Because the new residents are in a new and separate subdivision compared to the old residents, they are living through different experiences. Each group assigns different place meanings to the same neighborhood because of differences in experiences, including: visible decline, incivilities, and fear of crime (Brown, et al., 2004). This reveals that there can be many different place meanings within the same neighborhood, but it also exposes the lack of attention paid to the old residents and their place meanings before a new subdivision is used as a strategy to revitalize a neighborhood. Billig (2005) filled that gap in attention by focusing on six different new housing developments and the corresponding housing developments in the adjacent old neighborhoods during times of urban revitalization. Billig (2005) explored the different aspects of the changes occurring in each area, as seen through the eyes of the new residents who caused the change and the eyes of the old residents on whom this change was forced. Billig found that if the new housing developments were built in neglected or blighted areas of the old neighborhood, the long-time residents were satisfied. If the new housing developments were built in the middle of the old neighborhood, it created both a physical and social barrier and the long-time residents were negatively affected. Finally, if the new housing developments led to gentrification of the old housing development, it improved the sense of place in the old housing development (Billig, 2005). The final finding—if the new development led to

gentrification, it improved the sense of place in the old development—seems to go against what previous research would expect. However, it was also found that the developments that led to gentrification along with their adjacent old neighborhood development had no sense of belonging to a community, which could explain why residents of the old development were not negatively affected by gentrification (Billig, 2005).

*There are a number of predictors for place attachment in urban neighborhoods.*

The final theme, the predictors for place attachment in urban neighborhoods, is demonstrated through Ujang and Zakariya's (2015) review as well as Brown, Perkins, and Brown's (2003) study. In a review of the definitions and concepts of place attachment in relation to urban regeneration, Ujang and Zakariya found three things that influence place attachment in areas of urban regeneration: familiarity of the physical space, racial or class identities, and culture (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). In a study which examined whether residents' attachments to their neighborhood relates to perceived and observed decline, incivilities, crime fear and victimization, and low level of social cohesion, it was found that place attachments are often related to, but not determined by, changing neighborhood conditions (Brown, Perkins & Brown, 2003). However, it was also found that there are a number of characteristics that are more likely to lead to place attachment. These characteristics include: long-term residence, home ownership, Hispanic ethnicity, low levels of incivilities, low levels of fear of crime, greater levels of neighborhood cohesion and control (Brown, Perkins & Brown, 2003).

*Physical changes effect on place attachment.* What has yet to be explored in detail is the role that changes within the physical dimension plays in creating and maintaining an attachment to a neighborhood undergoing revitalization. As previously stated, the focus of many studies related to place attachment disruptions tend to be on the effect an environmental disaster has on place attachment (Burley et al., 2007; Chamlee-wright & Storr, 2009). However, the study conducted by von Wirth et al. (2016) focuses on the affect that environmental change in the form of revitalization projects similar to projects taking place within the neighborhoods of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea has on place attachment. However, the site of the study—Schlieren, Switzerland, which has a population of roughly 18,000—is far from an urban neighborhood such as Globeville and Elyria-Swansea. Nevertheless, the locations share a couple of similarities; they were both relatively ignored by the City and County of Denver until recently, and both have proposals for many new projects aimed at improving the lives of the residents. When exploring how changes in the urban environment affects place attachment, von Wirth et al. (2016) found that changes that are valued as beneficial to residents can strengthen individuals' or group's human-environmental bonds. They also found that following an urban environmental transformation, if there is a perception of familiarity with the urban environment then it may also strengthen the place attachment (p. 28).

Place attachment is built on the idea that to form a human-environment relationship or emotional bond, there must be assigned meaning to that environment based on feelings, knowledge, and behavior that is determined by and perpetuated through social interaction. Otherwise, individuals or groups would not be connected to

these environments because the places would mean nothing to them; they would not care if the city waltzed in and began rapidly redeveloping the community. Hence, the meaning that neighborhood residents assign to the physical characteristics of their environments and to the proposed physical improvements—such proposed improvements as light rail stations, parks and improved green space, improved infrastructure, and mixed-use development with a retail component—are key to understanding the community attachment to these neighborhoods. The essential issue lays in the question: do different populations assign different meanings to traditionally positive revitalization projects?

**Psychological Process.** Referring back to the tripartite model (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), besides person and place, the final organizing dimension is the psychological process. This dimension is focused on the ways that individuals and groups interact and relate to the place. The psychological process dimension consists of three psychological components of place attachment: affect, cognition, and behavioral intention (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004). The affective component reflects the emotional bond with the environment (Kyle, et al.). The cognitive component reflects the concept of place identity, which is defined as the process in which individuals label themselves in terms of belonging to a particular place due to interactions with that given place (Stedman, 2002). The behavioral component reflects the concepts of place dependence—how well an environment serves needs—and social bonding—the existence of meaningful relationships occurring in an environment.

*Place Meaning.* To supplement the essential issue of whether different populations assign different meanings to traditionally positive revitalization projects, a discussion of the relationship between place meaning and place attachment is necessary. There are researchers that believe place meaning and place attachment to be closely related yet separate and different (Spartz & Shaw, 2011). Alternatively, Tuan (1977) proposed that space becomes place when it is assigned meaning through lived experiences. This suggests that place meaning is a large and integral entity that is necessary for a place attachment to form. Stedman (2008) furthered Tuan's proposal when he suggested that place meanings are crucial foundations for place attachments. Meanings comprise the descriptive elements of the setting; they comprise what the place is rather than the emotions one feels toward the place (Stedman, 2008). Within Scannell and Gifford's (2010) tripartite model of place attachment, the cognition subsection of the process branch includes not only memories and beliefs, but also meanings. The placement of meaning within their tripartite model of place attachment demonstrates that, Scannell & Gifford, consider place meaning an underlying aspect of place attachment that, when combined with a place, person, and other process such as affect and behavior, creates an attachment to place. The conceptualization that will be used for this study, follows Scannell & Gifford's, (2010) model and as demonstrated by the symbolic interactionist perspective. To form an attachment to a neighborhood, residents must assign meaning to the neighborhood and its physical characteristics. Further, as the physical characteristics of a neighborhood are altered, place meanings may also be altered, which has the potential to affect residents' place attachment.

In summary, I am interested in using a symbolic interactionist perspective to explore the way urban revitalization projects affect place attachment in neighborhoods located in rapidly expanding and urbanizing cities. The foundation of the symbolic interactionist perspective is that people act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them (Blumer, 1962). By studying the meanings residents assign to urban revitalization projects, the attachment those residents have to their neighborhoods may also be studied. The concept of place attachment has been borrowed from human geography and has found a home in natural resource management, and focus has largely been placed on the social dimension of place attachment (von Wirth et al., 2016). Like the field of natural resource management, the concept of place attachment has also been useful in understanding people's relationships with their neighborhoods and communities. Similar to natural resource management, urban sociologists have traditionally viewed place attachment as a social concept (Kasarda, & Janowitz, 1974). However, Stedman stated that "although social constructions are important, they hardly arise out of thin air: The local environment sets bounds and gives form to these constructions" (2003, p. 671). This demonstrates that the social and physical dimensions depend on and build upon one another. Several researchers have been interested in the relationships between urban change and place attachment (von Wirth et al., 2016; Madgin, Bradley, & Hastings, 2016; Bélanger, 2012). A few major themes that appear in this literature include: a) environmental change, (whether the social or physical environment), impacts place meaning and, consequently, place attachment, b) place attachment is a prerequisite to long-term revitalization success, c) place meanings differ

between old and new residents within revitalizing neighborhoods, and d) there are several predictors for place attachment in urban neighborhoods. What has yet to be thoroughly documented is the role that changes within the physical dimension plays in creating and maintaining an attachment to a neighborhood undergoing revitalization. That is the gap this study aimed to explore further.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### **Research Design**

This study of the relationship between urban neighborhood revitalization and place attachment using a symbolic interactionist perspective lent itself to a qualitative research approach due to the focus on the lived experience of the neighborhood residents undergoing revitalization. This study utilized an illustrative phenomenological design. Phenomenology stems from the twentieth century school of philosophy which focuses on the lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Phenomenological research is based upon the concept that there is an “essence” to shared experiences; these essences may be defined as the core meanings which are mutually understood through a phenomenon that is commonly experienced (Patton, 2002, p. 106). The phenomenological approach is best suited for studies of affective, emotional human experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This made this strategy best suited for this study because the goal of the study was to understand the lived experience and how that affects the meanings assigned to places. Phenomenology is designed to discover phenomena, in this case overlooked issues, as it explores the lived experiences and meanings surrounding the phenomenon. The phenomenological strategy was a major factor in shaping this research. It allowed focus to be placed on the lived experience holistically by concentrating specifically on what this phenomenological relationship is and how it occurs as opposed to focusing on the reasoning why this phenomenon is occurring.



## **Study Setting**

Although Globeville and Elyria-Swansea are two separate neighborhoods northeast of downtown Denver, they are often combined by residents as well as the city, for planning purposes, to form the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea (GES) region. For this study, data from each neighborhood were analyzed based on the entire GES region. However, each neighborhood setting will be described individually to allow the unique cultural histories to shine through.

**Globeville.** Globeville was established when the Globe Smelter and Refining Company purchased the land, which was then inhabited by Slavic workers in 1885. The town of Globeville was incorporated in 1891; it was then annexed to Denver in 1902. The majority of Globeville's original residents were European immigrants stemming from Holland, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. The city soon became a melting pot of cultures and religions. Following World War II, the ethnic neighborhood of Globeville began steps toward integration of outside cultures. Since its establishment, Globeville has been an inwardly developed community, which can be explained by the physical barriers located between Globeville and the rest of Denver: the South Platte River and the Union Pacific Railroad. The construction of Interstate 25, which was completed in 1958, and the construction of Interstate 70, which was completed in 1964, resulted in the destruction of seven blocks of the neighborhood and 31 homes; construction left the neighborhood highly divided.

As of 2015, the total population of Globeville was 3,551 residents. Of those residents, 32.6% identified as Non-Latino White, 61.3% as Latino, and 3.6% as African

American. Globeville has a young population with nearly 75% under the age of 45 years and only 6.7% over the age of 65 years. The average household income in Globeville is \$40,210—compared to Denver’s metropolitan region average of \$89,176—and approximately 35% of the residents are living in poverty. Of the residents over the age of 25 years-of-age, roughly 29% do not possess a high school education, 32% have a high school education, 17% have some college education, and 22% have at least an Associate’s degree. In 2015, there were 1,193 housing units in Globeville, 74% of them single-family housing units and 26% of them multi-family housing units. Of those 1,193 housing units, 36% were owner occupied and 16.5% are publicly subsidized housing units. Additionally, 62.6% of renters within Globeville are spending over 30% of their income on housing, although, that is not uncommon in the greater Denver area where nearly half of renters are spending over 30% of their income on housing.

**Elyria-Swansea.** The neighborhood of Elyria-Swansea was once two separate settlements. Both were originally settled by Slavic workers who were attracted to the economic opportunities brought forth by the booming smelter business in the area. Elyria voted to be incorporated as a village in 1890, and it was annexed to Denver in 1902. Swansea was established in 1870, following the completion of the Kansas Union and Pacific Union Railroads. Swansea was annexed to Denver in two phases due to a complicated process, the first annexed in 1883 and the second in 1902 along with Elyria. Interstate 70 was built directly through Elyria-Swansea in 1964, although residents and business owners alike strongly objected to it because the viaduct was an eyesore that would certainly hurt neighborhood property values. Present day Elyria-Swansea retained

its industrial history; it consists of small sections of single-family homes interspersed within larger areas of commercial and industrial developments.

As of 2015, the total population of Elyria-Swansea was 6,676 residents. Of those residents, 12.4% identified as Non-Latino White, 82.9% as Latino, and 4.4% as African American. Elyria-Swansea also has a young population with 72% under the age of 45 years and only 6% over the age of 65 years. The average household income in Elyria-Swansea is \$46,844—compared to Denver’s metropolitan region average of \$89,176—and approximately 31% of the residents are living in poverty. Of the residents over the age of 25 years-of-age, roughly 45% do not possess a high school education, 29% have a high school education, 14% have some college education, and 12% have at least an Associate’s degree. In 2015, there were 1,901 housing units in Globeville, 85% of them single-family housing units and 13% of them multi-family housing units. Of those 1,901 housing units, 45% were owner occupied and only 3.3% are publicly subsidized housing units. Additionally, 54.4% of renters within Globeville are spending over 30% of their income on housing.

**Changes occurring in the GES region.** There are many changes occurring in the GES region. The Mayor of the City and County of Denver, Michael B. Hancock, created the North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative (NDCC) in 2013 to coordinate the six different planned projects aimed at the physical improvement of the northwest region of Denver. These six projects include: the Brighton Boulevard redevelopment, Interstate 70 expansion, National Western Center, Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhood plans, RiNo redevelopment, and RTD light rail station development. The RiNo

redevelopment is not included within the scope of this study due to the RiNo district's location within the stage of ongoing gentrification. Each of the remaining five projects will be discussed in greater detail.

Brighton Boulevard has served as a connector between I-70 and Downtown Denver for decades. This project aims to redevelop Brighton Boulevard to reflect the changing culture and character of the RiNo and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods that Brighton Boulevard winds through. The project includes plans to add protected bike lanes, continuous sidewalks with over 100 benches throughout, stoplights, protected turn lanes, pedestrian crossings, and new native landscaping. The redevelopment of Brighton Boulevard intends to generate growth for businesses as well as create a neighborhood that is safer, walkable, and more engaged.

Interstate 70, construction of which was completed in 1964, is Colorado's only east-west Interstate and, as such, moves a large quantity of residential, tourist, and freight traffic each day. The viaduct portion of I-70, which spans from the edge of Globeville through Elyria-Swansea, has degraded to the point of needing to be either reconstructed or torn down, from a safety standard and aesthetic point of view. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) conducted an extensive study to determine the best course of action regarding the I-70 viaduct. They determined that a below grade option with a partial cover is the best course of action. The partial cover will conceal the Interstate adjacent to Swansea Elementary School; it is also intended to reconnect the Elyria and Swansea sides of the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood. This project aims to implement a transportation solution that improves safety of the neighborhood residents as

well as drivers utilizing I-70, access to each side of the divided neighborhood, and addresses congestion on I-70.

The National Western Center project aims to turn the National Western Complex and Denver Coliseum into 250 acres of redeveloped land creating a year-round destination centered on education, economic development, tourism, and entertainment. It is being developed by a partnership between the City and County of Denver, Western Stock Show Association, Colorado State University (CSU), the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, and History Colorado. To accomplish this goal, the City and County of Denver must first acquire approximately 106 acres of private property, which has led to residential and business displacement (Murray, 2017).

Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhood plans align with each other and aim to ensure the future plans support the needs of a diverse and historic community. These plans provide a framework for assimilating the other major projects—the National Western Center, Central 70, and RTD Stations—into these communities. The Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhood plans were approved by the city council in 2014 and 2015. The plans revolve around four key principles: 1) a strong community, 2) a connected neighborhood, 3) a healthy neighborhood, and 4) a unique neighborhood.

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) and other city agencies worked together to coordinate the planning and building of the A line, N line, and G line that connect—or will connect—downtown Denver to the Denver International Airport, Thornton, and Wheatridge, respectively. The A line “Train to the Plane,” which opened in 2016, has a station located in Elyria-Swansea, as will the N line to Thornton, which is

in the process of being built. The G line to Wheatridge, which has been completed, but is not currently in operation, has a station located in Globeville.

### **Data Collection**

The data collected fell into three categories: public documents, newspaper articles, and semi-structured interviews, which included photo-elicitation. Research question one—have historical patterns of urban revitalization of development led to gentrification and displacement?—was addressed using content analysis of public documents and newspaper articles, specifically using the Denver Office of Economic Development’s Gentrification Study, as well as data provided through semi-structured interviews. Research question two—how have the historical patterns of urban revitalization affected neighborhood residents’ feelings toward urban revitalization projects?—was addressed using in-depth interview questions, particularly the questions found in section “A” and section “B” of the interview protocol found in Appendix A. Research question three—how have urban revitalization projects affected place meaning that residents assign to their neighborhood?—was also addressed using in-depth interview questions, but these questions can be found in section “B” and in section “C” of the interview protocol. Each type of data is now discussed in greater detail.

**Public documents.** There were two public documents used in this study: a) The Denver Office of Economic Development’s Gentrification Study, and b) The GES Coalition Organizing for Health and Housing Justice’s “The People’s Survey: A Story of Displacement” report, both of which were found on their respective organizations’ websites. The Denver Office of Economic Development’s Gentrification Study means to

research the magnitude of involuntary displacement in Denver. The GES Coalition Organizing for Health and Housing Justice’s “The People’s Survey: A Story of Displacement” report intended to address and attempt to understand the displacement and gentrification occurring in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea community.

**Newspaper articles.** The newspaper articles used consisted of three articles published in the Denver Post and one published on Denverite. Each of the articles used were related to Globeville and Elyria-Swansea, The North Denver Cornerstone Collective (NDCC), and gentrification occurring within Denver. Although many articles were initially analyzed for consideration in this study, the majority were outside the scope of this study as they focused on how to solve gentrification rather than discussing the historic pattern of gentrification in the City and County of Denver or residents’ feelings toward urban revitalization projects.

**Resident interviews.** The semi-structured interview questions with neighborhood residents were approved by ASU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection began to assure the study design reflected standards for ethical treatment of participants. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix E. The interviews consisted of a series of questions regarding the meaning of places and the relationship between neighborhood place attachment and urban revitalization projects (see Appendix C) in addition to photo elicitation methods. Photos used in the photo elicitation portion of the study included published photographs of the locations where the revitalization projects are taking place as well as artist renderings of the location following project completion (see Appendix D). Photo-elicitation methods are

particularly appropriate for the understanding of place attachment; they offer more than simply text and numbers and align with the symbolic meaning-based nature of place attachment (Stedman, Amsden, Beckley, & Tidball, 2014). Collier (1957) also found that when comparing photo and non-photo based interviews, photographs improved the informants' memory and improved reliability of the interviews.

The interview protocol was developed based upon the research questions, and was pilot tested for clarity. Section "A" of the interview protocol consisted of general questions relating to the neighborhood in addition to the surrounding neighborhoods, including: "what is your history with this neighborhood?" and "how have the surrounding neighborhoods changed over the past five years?" This section of questions was designed to get to know the participants' history with their neighborhoods, gain a greater understanding of their views on urban revitalization in their surrounding neighborhoods, and uncover whether they believe it led to gentrification and displacement.

Section "B" of the interview protocol consisted of questions relating to specific urban revitalization projects taking place in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods. Such questions included: "how does the I-70 Expansion affect the neighborhood?" This section also included the photo-elicitation method; the photographs that were utilized during the interviews were published photographs of the locations where the revitalization projects are taking place as well as artist renderings of the location following project completion. Each "before" and "after" photo was thoughtfully chosen to supplement the questions related to each revitalization project with the ultimate goal of unearthing the symbolic meaning each participant assigned to the location as it



currently stands as well as to what the location is planned to become. The photos allowed participants to visually grasp what is supposed to change in their neighborhood. In addition, the photos aimed to uncover how the historical patterns of urban revitalization affected neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects.

Section "C" of the interview protocol consisted of questions that sought to uncover the effects urban revitalization projects had on place attachment to the given neighborhood. This section included questions such as: "how will these projects affect the cultural dynamics of this neighborhood" and "how will the meaning that projects have for you affect your feelings toward this neighborhood." These questions were designed to uncover if and how urban revitalization projects affected place meaning that residents assigned to their neighborhood.

***Participants.*** Entry into the sites and access to participants was initially intended to be gained through neighborhood associations. However, due to an initial low response rate, access to participants was gained through the snowball sampling method using the early participants to gain further access to potential participants in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods. Following each interview, participants were asked if they could provide contact information for other members of the same population, a method used in exploratory research. To help better explore the research questions, the sample was selected using the following criteria:

- Participants were residents of the Globeville or Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods.

- Participants were residents of their given neighborhood for a minimum of five years.
- Participants were at least 18 years of age.

An introductory recruitment letter was sent to potential interview participants within Globeville and Elyria-Swansea via email (see Appendix A). Email addresses were gathered through neighborhood association administrators and later through the snowball sampling method. The potential participants were asked to respond to express interest in their participation. Each potential participant was given a week to respond before a follow-up email was sent. All who responded were enrolled in the study, and the interview time and location was scheduled with each participant. Recruitment was focused on participants that represented a wide range of ages, socioeconomic status, race, and location within the neighborhoods.

*Interview process.* Each of the interviews took place at the location of the participant's choosing. Upon arrival, interview participants read an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and gave verbal consent and permission to be recorded. This consent form informed participants that their participation was voluntary, that they could refuse to answer any question, and that they could discontinue the interview at any time. It also informed participants that their names and any identifiable characteristics would not be accessible to anyone beyond the researcher. This was to assure anonymity. Although interviews followed an interview protocol, questions were adapted to follow the direction of the interview. Participants was encouraged to share their

honest opinions to better understand the topic. Each of the interviews were conducted in English, and interviews averaged 40-60 minutes in length.

### **Data Analysis**

**Secondary data analysis.** Secondary data included the previously mentioned public documents and newspaper articles. This data was analyzed using content analysis. Each secondary data source was initially read through to gain a comprehensive understanding of the document; they were then read through a second time to analyze the content. The researcher assigned codes for content related to urban revitalization projects as well as gentrification. Patterns and ideas emerged during the analysis, which resulted in a representation of the most important themes from the secondary data.

**Interview data analysis.** Because the City and County of Denver treats the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods as one for planning purposes within the North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative, the same was done during the analysis of the interview data. The researcher completed a verbatim transcription of each interview using the oTranscribe software, and each was proofread to ensure accuracy. An objective during the analysis process was to minimize any potential for researcher bias. Therefore, multiple strategies were implemented to ensure validity and reliability. These strategies included “bracketing,” a strategy in which the researcher states personal details that may affect their personal assumptions and biases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These strategies also included utilizing inter-coder reliability methods, also known as peer debriefing. This involved a second researcher who assisted in establishing the codebook, independently coded the transcripts, and, finally, cross-checked the independently coded

transcripts to determine agreement and reliability. Agreement was determined based on both researchers independently assigning the same code to the main idea of a portion of text. The data was coded using the NVivo qualitative analysis software program. The data was then aggregated into emergent ideas, patterns, and themes. Subtopics were identified when appropriate, as well as appropriate quotes that stem from the emergent themes. This process resulted in a representation of the most important themes from the data.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the main findings and themes which arose out of the data analysis of public documents, newspaper articles, and interview process. This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section provides the results of the content analysis of the public documents utilized in this study. The second section provides the results of the content analysis of the newspaper articles utilized in this study. The third section provides the results of the content analysis of the interview data. The final section reports the results of the three content analyses through the lens of the research questions.

#### **Sampling**

The final sample consisted of 19 residents from the Elyria-Swansea and Globeville neighborhoods. If any participant held a secondary position within the community—business owner, activist, etc.—they were asked to answer questions from the perspective of a neighborhood resident as opposed to the perspective of that secondary position. Approximately 19 additional potential participants who were contacted refused to participate due to a myriad of reasons, including, but not limited to: survey/interview exhaustion, lack of trust in outsiders and their motives, and feeling as if nobody cares about their opinion on the discussed topic. Additionally, four potential participants scheduled an interview, but did not show up at their chosen location and time to be interviewed. Four participants who completed an interview also contacted the researcher during the data analysis stage requesting their interviews be withdrawn from

the study. Despite this setback, a total of 19 residents (10 from Elyria-Swansea and nine from Globeville) agreed to participate in the study. The researcher felt comfortable continuing with this final sample of 19 residents due to the attainment of data saturation (Bowen, 2008).

### **Public Documents**

**Gentrification Study.** The first of the two public documents used in this study was The Denver Office of Economic Development's Gentrification Study. The first theme that emerged was gentrification is an ongoing process that seems easy to identify, but it can be difficult to define what exactly gentrification entails. There is no consensus on what specific social and economic processes make up what is typically identified as gentrification, and to what extent each of those processes has a positive or negative impact on residents, neighborhoods, and the city. Involuntary displacement is the obvious negative side effect of gentrification, on not only the neighborhood of which displacement is occurring, but also the location they are being displaced to through contribution to concentration of poverty.

The second theme found was there are certain characteristics related to areas vulnerable to gentrification in addition to certain characteristics related to areas at an increased risk of involuntary displacement. The characteristics related to areas vulnerable to gentrification include a history of disinvestment, geographical location within urban areas, and a population majority of low-income residents. Additionally, the risk of involuntary displacement increased for areas with desirable characteristics, such as desirable characteristics include proximity to planned and completed light rail lines,

proximity to a neighborhood currently undergoing gentrification, or designation as a public investment area. Based upon The Denver Office of Economic Development’s map of areas vulnerable to gentrification (Figure 3, neighborhoods that are in the current, ongoing, and late stages of gentrification are also the sites of public and private investment, while the neighborhoods that are currently at risk of gentrifying are sites of planned public and private investment (Denver Office of Economic Development, 2016).

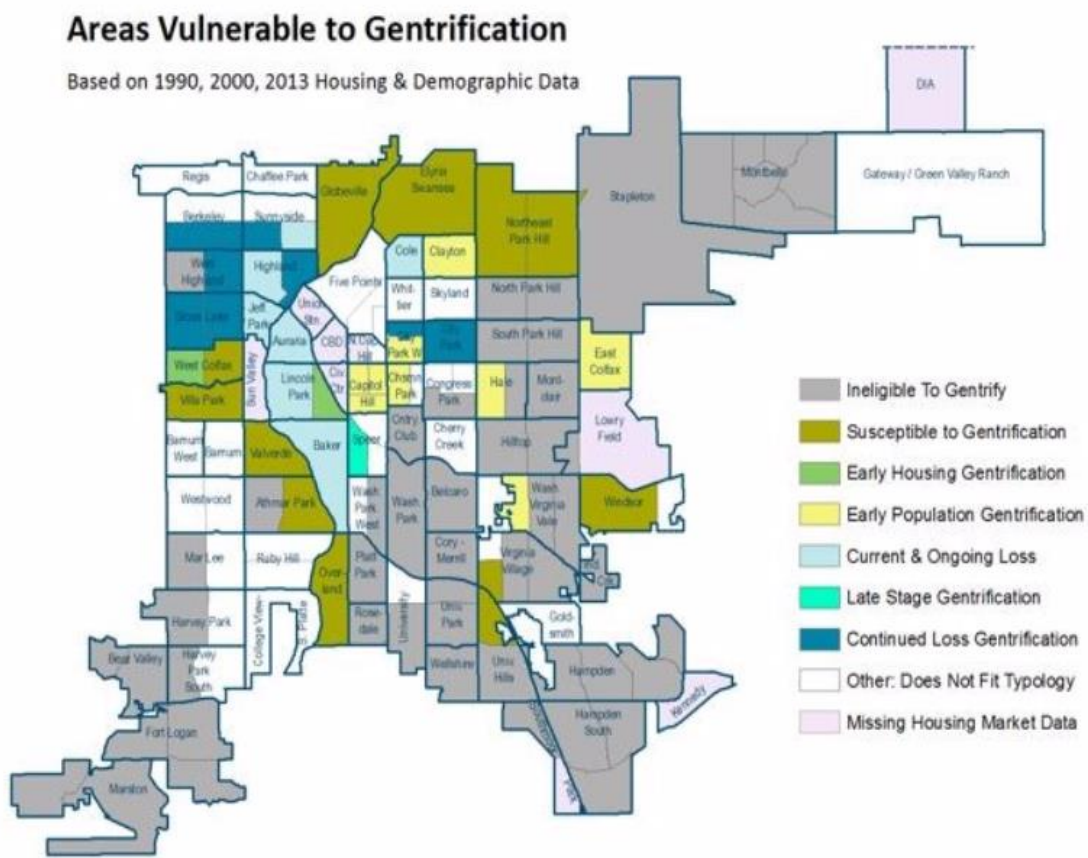


Figure 3. Areas Vulnerable to Gentrification (Denver Office of Economic Development, 2016)

The final theme is that, based on changes from the Census Tract data from 1990 to 2013, Globeville and Elyria-Swansea are both susceptible to gentrification. According

to this gentrification study, to be considered a neighborhood that is susceptible to gentrification, the neighborhood must be populated with a vulnerable population and be labeled as having an adjacent housing market. Both neighborhoods were labeled a vulnerable population because a) the percent of residents with less than a Bachelor's Degree is higher than Denver's percent of residents with less than a Bachelor's Degree and b) the median household income is lower than Denver's median household income in 2013. Both neighborhoods were also labeled as having an adjacent housing market. This was because they possessed the following characteristics: a) a low to moderate 2013 home value, b) a low to moderate increase in home value between 2000 and 2013, and c) be adjacent to a tract with a high home value in 2013, or adjacent to a tract with a high increase in home value between 2000 and 2013.

**The People's Survey: A Story of Displacement.** The second public document used in this study was The GES Coalition Organizing for Health and Housing Justice's "The People's Survey: A Story of Displacement" report. The first theme was that the public and private investments lauded as revitalizing and improving the community are creating a crisis of displacement. These public and private investments offer opportunity, however these opportunities and benefits come at a large cost to those currently residing in GES. The opportunity created does not balance out the loss of families, social networks, and community durability.

The second theme was that GES residents want and need investment in the community, but these investments need to consider the current residents. A lack of historic public investment is demonstrated by the poor infrastructure and industrial uses



surrounding the GES neighborhood homes. As was described by neighborhood residents in this report, GES is filled with pothole covered streets, absent sidewalks, dangerous shadowed underpasses, and broken street lights; children are left to maneuver between or under stalled trains as they walk to and from school. The past public and private investment, focused on dense industrial uses, served by highways carving the neighborhoods and leaving poor air quality and severe health impacts to the neighborhood residents. Residents are put in a difficult position of wanting improvements in their community, but not at the cost of having to leave their community. Residents have no other option but to contribute to the city's planning process of the neighborhood, sit aside watching as the investments come to fruition, and hope that they are not slowly priced out the community. Residents believe that promises for improvement only seem to be kept for people not yet residing in the GES neighborhoods.

### **Newspaper Articles**

The first newspaper article that was considered, was published in the Denver Post, and titled "Globeville, Elyria and Swansea could be erased without aggressive intervention." The article discussed how the residential and cultural makeup of the GES community will be displaced because of public and private investments, unless the City and County of Denver puts in place interventions—such as policies that allow current residents to remain—that were not put in place in past gentrifying areas of public investment (Cdebaca, 2017). This has happened in multiple other communities throughout the greater Denver metro area. The second article, which was also published in the Denver Post, titled "As Denver's neighborhoods gentrify, the poor are pushed to

new pockets of poverty” discussed how public investment is designed to create mixed-income neighborhoods, but it is actually spurring gentrification and creating pockets of concentrated poverty elsewhere (Schrader, 2017). The third article, also published in the Denver Post, titled “A great city isn’t just for the rich” discussed how the people who worked to make Denver into the blossoming metropolis it is today are the ones who are being moved elsewhere unwillingly (Board, 2017). The final article “How can we see redlining’s lasting impacts on Denver?” was published on Denverite. It discussed the history of Federal Housing Administration’s use of Residential Security Maps to decide where to approve mortgages and the effect it had on public investment and revitalization locations to this day (Arellano, 2016).

Within the three Denver Post newspaper articles and the Denverite article analyzed for content, one major theme emerged: public investments in historically poorer and racially diverse neighborhoods are creating a crisis of involuntary displacement. As the Denver Post Editorial Board eloquently described it:

“City policies and business practices meant to rejuvenate neighborhoods and business districts also play an adverse role in determining who gets to remain.”  
— “A great city isn’t just for the rich”

This certainly is not the goal of public investment, but it is an adverse side effect that, until recently, may have been a consideration during the planning process but not made a central issue of the planning process. Many residents within Globeville and Elyria-Swansea have called for the City and County of Denver to take more steps to help current

residents remain in their neighborhood. Schrader of the Denver Post furthered this discussion of public investment creating a crisis of involuntary displacement:

“This inevitable march of progress into neighborhoods that once were affordable for a city’s lowest-income workers was dubbed ‘a racial and class diaspora’ by Portland’s director of housing at Denver’s housing summit last month. And that’s no exaggeration. Class segregation was first driven by racist zoning and planning policies, then deepened by middle-class flight from urban cores during integration, and sustained by banks ‘redlining’ poor communities and refusing to lend money to businesses or homebuyers in the area. Now class segregation is being driven by a ‘new urbanism’ hunger.”

— “As Denver’s neighborhoods gentrify, the poor are pushed to new pockets of poverty”

Schrader also points out the historic patterns of poverty concentration in these now desirable areas. Racist zoning, middle-class flight, and the redlining of these communities expanded the concentration of poverty, which was only made worse over the years by public disinvestment. However, as Schrader stated, new urbanism is the newest concept leading to concentrations of poverty, but now, the concentrations of poverty are relocating to areas of disinvestment once again, involuntarily.

### **Resident Interviews**

First, a brief demographics profile of the participants is presented. Analysis of the brief demographics survey revealed interview participant characteristics. Participants included in this study consisted of 19 neighborhood residents, ten residents from Elyria-

Swansea and nine residents from Globeville. Three participants were African American; three were Caucasian; eleven were Hispanic; and two identified as both Hispanic and Caucasian. The bulk of the sample were females—14 out the 19 participants—with the remaining 5 identifying as male. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 years to 68 years of age, with the majority of participants being in their twenties or thirties. The length of residence of the participants ranged from five years to 53 years, and for the residents who had not resided in their given neighborhood their entire lives, the most stated reasons for moving to the neighborhood was a) for work related reasons and b) for a cheaper option close to downtown.

**Neighborhood perceptions.** There were questions that aimed to understand how residents perceive their neighborhoods within section “A” of the interview protocol. This section included questions such as: “how would you describe this neighborhood” and “is there anything this neighborhood is in need of.” The following is a description of the themes that arose from analysis of the interview transcripts for section “A” of the interview protocol.

The neighborhoods were described most commonly as tight-knit communities (57.9%) that are relatively ignored by the City and County of Denver (36.8%), are in need of public works and infrastructure improvements (73.7%), and are in need of grocery stores (52.6%). There appeared to be a relationship between residency length and positive perceptions of the neighborhood; the longer the length of residency, the more positively a resident perceives his/her neighborhood. Residents who had lived in a neighborhood for a longer length of time tended to describe his/her neighborhood in a

positive light. They discussed how the neighborhood feels like home; how the neighborhood does not need anything other than improved public works and infrastructure; and how they have multiple places within their neighborhood that hold positive meanings. Oppositely, the two residents with a shorter residency both described their neighborhood in a less than positive light. They both discussed how their houses felt like home but not the neighborhood; how they only moved to the neighborhood due to the relative cheapness and location; and how the neighborhood is in desperate need of grocery stores, restaurants, bars, and retail.

**Major themes emerging from interviews.** Interview participants identified how urban revitalization affected residents' feeling toward urban revitalization projects as well as how urban revitalization projects affect place meaning residents assign to their neighborhood. Because the City and County of Denver treats the two neighborhoods as one region for planning purposes within the North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative, and the interview results were similar between the two neighborhoods, results are combined for all 19 participants. Whenever comparisons need to be made between the two neighborhoods, a brief discussion will follow. Illustrative quotes are included for each section; each quote is designated by neighborhood. There were six key findings when analyzing the interview data, posed below.

***Residents believe the City and County of Denver are trying to modernize the entire city to entice more individuals to move to the area.*** A recurring statement that was made explicitly by six participants (31.6%) and indirectly by seven more participants (36.8%) was the belief that the City and County of Denver administration is purposefully

and strategically modernizing the entire city with a goal of bringing young, educated individuals and families to the area.

“I think they’re just trying to modernize everything, like you know, make the whole Denver area into one big downtown like New York or something, and we both know they ain’t doing that cause they think we deserve nice stuff. They’re doing it cause they want a certain type of people moving here; the type that wish they were living in New York.”

—Elyria-Swansea Resident

***Residents like the idea of revitalization projects, but are afraid of gentrification accompanying them.*** When asked of their feelings toward urban revitalization projects such as increased light rail lines, creating mixed-use buildings, and improving the neighborhood infrastructure, 16 participants (84.2%) stated that they had positive feelings toward such projects in general. However, when asked how such projects would affect the neighborhood, 13 participants (68.4%) described how those projects would lead to displacement and how they would never be given the opportunity to benefit from such projects. Globeville and Elyria-Swansea residents believe that the city’s vision for the Northeast Denver area does not include them.

“I will say this; however, we must think about whether or not this opportunity they are speaking of is opportunity for the people who live here or for the people they hope to bring here.” —Globeville resident

However, this does not apply when discussing neighborhood infrastructure.

While residents said they had positive feelings toward revitalization projects yet a fear of

displacement, when asked of their feelings toward urban revitalization projects, seven participants (36.8%) specifically stated that improving the neighborhood infrastructure are the only projects they are supportive of.

“The whole infrastructure thing I’m all for. Like I said before about the sidewalks and streetlights that we lack. Everything else doesn’t seem necessary to me. Those are the sort of things that have made every other part of the city unaffordable.”

—Globeville resident

Another resident believed that infrastructure improvements should not be considered a revitalization project. As residents of the City and County of Denver, each of the participants are paying taxes, so they believe that the city should use that money for infrastructure investments that benefit them rather than continuing with the same pattern of disinvestment that plagues many of the low-income neighborhoods that are at risk of being gentrified.

“Infrastructure improvements shouldn’t be lumped together with all that other stuff. We pay taxes to improve that kind of stuff, and what do they do with our tax money? They fix other people’s problems first cause we are nothing more than an afterthought for them. That other stuff is unnecessary. It just makes more people wanna move here, and that is the last thing we need.” —Elyria-Swansea resident

***Fear of physical and cultural gentrification is a determining factor for whether projects have a positive or negative impact on place meaning.*** The participants who feared that revitalization projects will cause gentrification considered these projects negative because they take away from the meaning the place has for the participants.

These participants stated that although these projects make the neighborhood aesthetically pleasing, meanings of gentrification, both physical and cultural, are assigned.

“I mean, if a bunch of people who wanna live downtown move here then they could ruin the culture like I said, and they could make everything more expensive here. If the projects don’t ruin anything, then I don’t see anything wrong with them trying to make life better for us, but I don’t want them to do it and kick us all out.” —Elyria-Swansea resident

The participants who did not believe revitalization projects will cause gentrification considered these projects neutral or positive because they add to, or accentuate, the meaning the place has for the participants. The participants who fell into this category can be divided into two subcategories: participants who do not believe their neighborhood will gentrify and participants who are new to the neighborhood and do not care if the neighborhood gentrifies. The first group included two participants who have lived in their neighborhood for years but believe nothing could cause their neighborhood to gentrify—not even projects that led to gentrification elsewhere in the Denver metro area. When asked about how the participant believed the urban revitalization projects would affect the culture of the neighborhood and the meaning the participant assigns to the neighborhood, a lifelong resident had this to say:

“They won’t affect it in any way. Our community is strong, and nothing could change our community or its cultural dynamic.” —Elyria-Swansea resident



The second group included two participants who have not lived in their respective neighborhood for a great length of time. They assigned a positive meaning to urban revitalization projects, but not like the lifelong residents' belief that nothing would cause their neighborhood to gentrify. On the contrary, they assigned positive meaning to urban revitalization projects because they believed the projects will make the neighborhood a better place to live, and they do not care if the projects cause the neighborhood to gentrify. During discussion of the effects that urban revitalization projects would have on the meanings assigned to the neighborhood, a participant with a residency length of six years had this to say of the meanings she assigned to her neighborhood:

“Well if they go through with all those improvements, it will definitely improve my feelings toward the neighborhood. These renderings all make the area look amazing.” —Globeville resident

Furthermore, one participant with a residency length of six years who was in favor of urban revitalization projects in general discussed the fact that the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods have not always looked the way they do now, both physically and culturally, and that revitalization should be allowed to happen without worrying about physical and cultural gentrification.

“Okay, so... most people in the neighborhood, actually the entire GES area, would say that we need to keep our neighborhoods the way they are, keep the culture the way it is, all that sort of stuff, you know? The issue I see with that is stagnation. It's not like this area has always been this way. It used to be a vibrant area that was filled with, uhm, I think they were Polish immigrants. They

had their own culture, but the people who moved in after them and moved them out didn't care about their life and culture and keeping it intact. I personally, believe that everything is constantly changing, and trying to stop it does more bad than good. I might sound like an asshole, but it's just the way it is."

—Elyria-Swansea resident

***Residents are adamantly against the I-70 expansion.*** Participants were most passionate about this topic. With the exception of three participants, residents were outspoken in their disapproval and overall hatred of the expansion. They argued that it would displace many of the current residents and permanently change the physical and cultural makeup of the region. Residents were also vocal in their belief that moving I-70, as opposed to expanding it, would improve place meaning through allowing the community to flourish both physically and culturally. Additionally, three residents brought up the pollution this expansion would add to the region and the effects it would have on the health of the residents.

"Well, look at that. It looks super nice, right? No. That means placation. They're trying to make up for putting 70 through these neighborhoods in the first place, and they're trying to, like, pass it off as they're doing something so good for us. It's not, what would be good for us is not having it here at all. They want to put the school playground on a park on top of it. Do you know how bad that would be for my brother's asthma? His doctor told us once that this neighborhood is, like, one of the most polluted zip codes in the country. Should they add to that pollution? Uhm, no. No, they should not." —Elyria-Swansea resident

Of the three participants who did not voice disapproval of the expansion, one participant asked not to talk about this topic, and the other two participants were both young Caucasians who had resided in their neighborhoods for six years and had only moved there due to its proximity to downtown for a much more affordable price tag. Both participants who voiced their support for the expansion discussed, at length, their belief that the expansion would improve place meaning through making the entire area more aesthetically pleasing and modern, similar to downtown Denver, where both participants stated they would rather live. The only aspect of the expansion they wished they could change would be if the expansion would also displace the Purina dog food factory.

“I know a lot of people are upset about it around here, but I’m a big fan. I hate the stupid viaduct. It’s an eyesore, and I can’t wait for it to be gone. I just wish that the expansion would make Purina have to move. Oh, I also love the idea of putting a park on top of it. Great place to go for a walk with my baby, and someday if I have kids it would be nice. I mean, we do have Dunham Park, but it’s basically just a large patch of grass. The plans for this new park look amazing!” —Elyria-Swansea resident

***Residents like the idea of light rail expansions, but they are afraid of transit-oriented developments displacing them.*** Every single participant mentioned the usefulness of light rail stations. Light rails provide much needed public transportation in an area with little access. However, every single participant also mentioned how new light rail stations also bring in developers to build apartments—more often than not, luxury apartments—which may cause displacement. What participants did not

unanimously agree upon is whether or not these luxury apartments are a positive or a negative thing. A participant who has resided in Globeville for over 40 years mentioned how this theme is currently playing out in the area surrounding the National Western Complex, posing it in a negative light as a catalyst for displacement.

“I got a friend who lives over by the Western Complex, and once the people decided to build a station over there, they decided to build a big ol’ apartment building that’ll probably be high-scale and pricey. That’s gonna mess stuff up over there. I know it, you know it, everybody knows it.” —Globeville resident

Another participant who has resided in Globeville for six years posed the light rail debate in a more positive light discussing not only the beneficial transportation aspects but also the modernization and improvement aspects.

“It will be so helpful in providing more transportation options. It will also bring in developers who are interested in building transit-oriented developments. That could lead to increased housing options, grocery and retail options, and...and so much opportunity for expansion and improvement.” —Globeville resident

The debate within this subtheme is whether or not all the aspects that accompany light rail developments are positive for the current community or for another, more affluent community.

***Residents view mixed-use revitalization projects—The National Western Complex and The Corridor of Opportunity—as an improvement in overall place meaning, but they also see it as a catalyst for displacement.*** Participants believed that revitalizing the National Western Complex would improve place meaning, but the

addition of new, modern buildings and a light rail station causes fear of residential demolition and subsequent displacement.

“It makes that area look a little nicer, and it gives space for community gatherings and all that. I don’t know if they’re expanding the complex though, so maybe they’ll have to tear down some houses or buildings or something to do it. That would be a major negative on the neighborhood.” —Globeville resident

Participants also believed that the Corridor of Opportunity improves place meaning, but causes fear of business displacement and the spreading of up-scale modernism and subsequent displacement.

“I don’t live close to where they’re doing it, but that might just be the first step of redeveloping the whole area. That would definitely affect me by making everything more expensive. Current businesses along Brighton might get the boot to make room for fancier businesses that match the new façade. And like I said, that redevelopment might spread.” —Elyria-Swansea resident

This finding was the only topic in which there were measurable differences between the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods. While discussing mixed-use revitalization projects such as the National Western Complex and the Corridor of Opportunity, both of which are located within the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood boundaries, three of the nine Globeville participants (33.33%) mentioned that they did not know if the two mixed-use projects would affect them at all due to their location. As one Globeville participant replied:

“Well does it really affect Globeville at all? It isn’t in Globeville. It’s in Elyria-Swansea. So, yeah, I don’t think it does.” —Globeville resident

However, the remaining six Globeville participants (66.66%) did not specifically state whether they believe the effects of the two mixed-use projects would remain within the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood boundaries or spread to the surrounding neighborhoods, including Globeville.

### **Research Questions**

Based upon the key themes and findings from the content analysis completed on the public documents, newspaper articles, and resident interview transcripts, the data will now be looked at through the lens of the four research questions.

**RQ 1: Have historical patterns of urban revitalization of development led to gentrification and displacement in Denver?** Given research question one, reports—specifically the Denver Office of Economic Development’s Gentrification Study—indicate that neighborhoods that are in the current, ongoing, and late stages of gentrification. So also the sites of public and private investment, while the neighborhoods that are currently at risk of gentrifying are sites of planned public and private investment (Denver Office of Economic Development, 2016). This was not only indicated in the Gentrification Study, but also in the interview results. This pattern of public investment leading to gentrification was referenced 33 times through discussion of public and private investment leading to young, educated “hipsters” moving in, which leads to more public and private investment and a continuation of gentrification and

involuntary displacement. As such, it is clear that historical patterns of urban revitalization has led to gentrification and involuntary displacement in Denver.

**RQ 2: How have the historical patterns of urban revitalization affected neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects?** Given research question two, interview results indicate that residents would be supportive of revitalization projects in general if they believed that they would benefit from them. “The People’s Story: A Story of Displacement” report backs up this indication. Both the interview results and “The People’s Story” report also indicate that while residents would support revitalization projects if they believed they would benefit from them, residents were supportive of public works and infrastructure improvements since those are improvements they are entitled to due to the taxes residents pay.

Regarding the I-70 expansion project, interview results shows that residents are adamantly against this expansion project. Newspaper articles illustrate that residents remember the displacement and pollution caused by the building of I-70 and are cognizant of that happening again. Regarding the expanded light rail lines, interview results shows that residents would appreciate more transportation options, but the Denver Regional Transportation District fares are too expensive and there is too high of a risk of luxury transit-oriented developments for the additional transportation options to be worth it. Regarding the National Western Complex, interview results and newspaper articles show that residents are in support of improving the appearance of the aging complex, but they do not support the destruction and displacement that will occur in the process of expanding the complex. Finally, regarding the Corridor of Opportunity, interview results

shows that residents support the portions of the project that make Brighton Boulevard a safer street. These projects include sidewalks, crosswalks, stop lights, and bike lanes, as well as the appearance improvement. However, residents do not support the idea of business and residential displacement or the spreading of modern revitalization as has been found in surrounding neighborhoods. As such, it is determined that the historical patterns of urban revitalization affect neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects by making residents fearful of projects and the displacement that may follow.

**RQ 3: How have urban revitalization projects affected place meaning that residents assign to their neighborhood?** Given research question three, interview results indicate that a fear of physical and cultural gentrification is a determining factor on place meaning. Residents who fear physical or cultural gentrification tended to assign negative meaning to the revitalization projects themselves and to the location in the neighborhood undergoing physical changes, while residents who did not fear physical or cultural gentrification tended to assign positive meaning to the revitalization projects and to the location in the neighborhood undergoing physical changes. Additionally, interview results indicate that residents believe these projects have and will continue to negatively impact neighborhood culture through resident and business displacement.

Regarding the I-70 expansion project, interview results and newspaper articles show that residents assign negative meanings to both the current I-70 viaduct and the proposed below-grade I-70. Negative meanings are assigned to the expansion project due to residential and business destruction and displacement, pollution, and because it hinders



the community's ability to grow. Residents stated that they would assign positive meanings if I-70 was moved to a different location and 46<sup>th</sup> Ave could flourish into a community oriented main street. Regarding the expanded light rail lines, interview results show that residents assign positive meanings to light rail lines but assign negative meanings to everything associated with light rail lines—transit-oriented development, eminent domain, and displacement. Regarding the National Western Complex, interview results show that proposed renovations to the complex means innovation and modernization. However, due to the displacement it has already begun to cause, residents assign an overall negative meaning. Finally, regarding the Corridor of Opportunity, interview results show that residents believe the proposed changes to mean modernization, expensive, and business displacement. While residents assign an overall negative meaning to the project, they would assign positive meanings to adding sidewalks, crosswalks, stop lights, and bike lanes. As such, it is determined that urban revitalization projects have and will continue to negatively affect the place meanings that residents assign to their neighborhoods.

**RQ4: How do resident's place meanings affect place attachment?** Given research question four, interview results indicate that residents who assigned negative meanings to revitalization projects due to fear of displacement would always be attached to their neighborhood, but stated that if their neighborhood changed so much—if all projects are completed—it would no longer be their neighborhood, and they would lose meaning and subsequent attachment to their neighborhood. Additionally, residents who assigned positive meanings to the projects stated that they would be more attached to

their neighborhood if all the projects are completed. As such, it is determined that positive or negative place meanings affect place attachment by either increasing attachment or decreasing attachment, respectively.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The analysis of the public documents, newspaper articles, and the resident interview data yielded 12 major themes ranging from Globeville and Elyria-Swansea both being susceptible to gentrification to residents liking the idea of light rail expansions, but being afraid of transit-oriented developments displacing them. The analysis of the research questions yielded a number of realizations. First, historical patterns of urban revitalization have led to gentrification and involuntary displacement in Denver. Next, historical patterns of urban revitalization affect neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects by making residents fearful of projects and the displacement that may follow. Third, urban revitalization projects have and will continue to negatively affect the place meanings that residents assign to their neighborhoods. Finally, positive or negative place meanings affect place attachment by either increasing attachment or decreasing attachment, respectively. A discussion of these results within the context of previous literature is explored in chapter five.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to use a symbolic interactionist perspective to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhoods and discover how redevelopment efforts are affecting those assigned meanings. A limited number of previous studies have identified the effects of urban revitalization projects on place attachment. The unique situation that the neighborhoods find themselves in may suggest that their history with urban revitalization and gentrification causes their views of urban revitalization and the effects of urban revitalization to differ from other neighborhoods. Given the importance of connection between person and place detailed by many (von Wirth et al., 2016; Madgin, Bradley, & Hastings, 2016; Bélanger, 2012; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Porter & Barber, 2006; Brown, Perkins & Brown, 2003; Brown, Brown & Perkins, 2004; Billig, 2005), an investigation of the effects of urban revitalization on place attachment was warranted. This chapter critically examines the connections between the findings and the literature. This chapter consists of three sections. The first section discusses the summarized findings from the previous chapter in light of previous research. The second section presents the implications of the findings. Finally, in the third section, suggestions for future research are presented.

#### **Discussion of the Findings**

The first question this study explored was whether historical patterns of urban revitalization led to gentrification and displacement in Denver. While there is a lack of previous studies exploring the historical patterns of urban revitalization and gentrification

in Denver, scholarly interest in the patterns of public and private investment and displacement dates back to the 1970's following the first wave of urban renewal. The second wave of urban renewal is currently ongoing, which has produced an accompanying second wave of scholarly interest exploring the patterns and relationships between public and private investment and gentrification. (Zuk, Bierbaum, Chapple, Gorska & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2017). These patterns and relationships include: government financed amenities, or investments, have a direct effect of improving the local quality of life, which is capitalized into higher rent prices; this creates a snowball effect as neighborhood gentrification brings in better stores and restaurants, which attracts even more high-skilled people to live in the neighborhood (Waldfogel, 2008). Findings of the current study reflected a similar pattern with study participants bringing up this pattern a total of 33 times during the interviews.

Additionally, the Denver Office of Economic Development's Gentrification Study produced a map of neighborhoods that have, or are at risk of, gentrifying, which echoed this relationship once again. According to the Gentrification Study, the locations in which public and private investment is implemented are also the locations of current, late stage, and continued gentrification. Additionally, the locations that are currently in the planning phase of public and private investment are also the locations that are most susceptible to gentrification. Previous studies have similarly found that locations in which public and private investment were implemented end up gentrifying or were at least susceptible to gentrification (Porter & Barber, 2006; Bélanger, 2012). Bélanger found that poorer neighborhoods openly welcomed the physical changes through

revitalization, but they were not as welcoming in regards to the social changes—more affluent residents moving to the area and spurring gentrification—that accompanied the physical change (2012). Findings of this study mirrored these past studies. When participants were shown before and after pictures of the locations of the urban revitalization projects, they unanimously felt that the aesthetics of the after pictures were welcomed, but, regardless of the positive aesthetic meanings, they assigned an overall negative meaning of gentrification to the after pictures due to fear of displacement accompanying the physical changes. Participants said nothing about the social changes related to the before and after pictures without probing. Once the social changes were brought up, participants brought up the concept of cultural gentrification. Participants discussed that regardless of the positive aesthetic meanings assigned to the after pictures, they knew that those after pictures were designed to cater to a different population of residents, not the current population of residents.

The most commonly mentioned public investment brought up by participants while discussing the relationship between urban revitalization and gentrification was expanded light rail lines. Each participant discussed that, while light rails are extremely useful, they also bring in housing developers as well as retail and restaurant developers to the area, hence causing widescale displacement; they believed light rail stations to be the cause of neighborhoods transitioning from low-income havens to gentrification hotspots. This specific relationship between light rail expansion and gentrification' was reiterated by multiple studies. Kahn (2007) found that locations near “walk and ride” subway stops experienced increases in local home prices. Additionally, Santiago et al. (2008) found

that a mere announcement of a new subway station in a neighborhood is capitalized into local property prices. This was found to be similar to Denver. Prior to the completion, or beginning of construction in the case of the light rail station that will be located at the National Western Center in the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood, neighborhood residents are being displaced from their homes to make way for new development. Following the completion of data analysis, resident in the immediate vicinity of the National Western Center and its accompanying light rail station received eviction notices to make way for the upgraded complex and amenities.

The second question this study aimed to explore how the historical patterns of urban revitalization affected neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects. Unlike the three other research questions, this is not a research question that had scholarly attention dedicated to it. Much of the scholarly focus has been placed on studying how urban revitalization affects residential place attachment or how it affects sense of place in a neighborhood (Billig, 2005; Kou, 2013). There is a lack of scholarly attention in how the past patterns of urban revitalization and gentrification affect how people view urban revitalization projects. Findings of the Denver study therefore offer new insight into how past experiences of urban revitalization leading to gentrification affect the feelings residents have toward urban revitalization projects.

While the majority of participants liked the idea of urban revitalization projects, the participants stated that they could not be supportive of the urban revitalization projects because they believe that they will never be given the opportunity to benefit from the projects. Similarly to the first research question, participants were most fearful of

expanded light rail lines due to the historic patterns of light rail stations spurring increased housing prices and higher-scale retail surrounding the station. The most noteworthy key finding within this study was that residents differentiate between urban revitalization projects and general infrastructure improvements; not all physical development is the same. They made this clear when asked about feelings toward urban revitalization projects. It was stated that while they were against urban revitalization projects due to fear of gentrification, they did not include infrastructure improvements because they adamantly believed that infrastructure improvements should not be considered an aspect of urban revitalization due to the fact that these residents pay taxes and, in turn, have a right to those infrastructure improvements. This differentiation may be due to the historical lack of infrastructure improvements within Globeville and Elyria-Swansea although the residents of these neighborhoods were still paying taxes during those years.

The third question this study aimed to explore was how urban revitalization projects have affected place meaning that residents assign to their neighborhoods. Past research shows that residents do not assess the environmental change caused by urban revitalization projects directly; residents assess the related changes in the meanings assigned to the urban landscape characteristics to be either negative or positive (von Wirth et al., 2016). The participants in this study, similarly, assessed the characteristics of the urban revitalization projects rather than the changes directly. This is demonstrated by the participants stating that they would appreciate the urban revitalization projects—the light rail expansion, I-70 expansion, and the National Western Complex upgrade and

expansion—generally speaking, but they then state that they assign negative meanings to them because of the negative characteristics of gentrification they associate with the urban revitalization projects.

The biggest finding related to this research question was that a fear of physical and cultural gentrification is the largest determining factor on changes to place meanings residents assign to their neighborhoods. Many interview participants reacted to the urban revitalization project “after” photographs in a positive manner until the question of gentrification surfaced. As was previously mentioned, Bélanger found that poorer neighborhoods openly welcomed the physical changes through revitalization, but they were not as welcoming in regards to the social changes that accompanied the physical change (2012). Bélanger’s finding was also mirrored in this study. Due to residents’ fear of gentrification, when urban revitalization projects occur within the neighborhood, residents assign negative meanings toward the project and the neighborhood. This is backed up by the finding that familiarity of the physical space is the largest influence on resident place attachment in areas of urban revitalization (von Wirth et al., 2016; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015).

On the other end of the spectrum, for those participants who see the urban revitalization projects as a positive, they assign positive meanings and feel more attached to their neighborhood. This is in stark contrast to previous findings that familiarity of the physical space (von Wirth et al., 2016; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). However, it is a similar finding to that of Ujang & Zakariya (2015), who found that in addition to the familiarity of the physical space, familiarity of class and racial identities as well as familiarity of



culture influence place attachment in areas of urban revitalization the most (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). At first glance it would appear that these findings are not comparable because the physical space, class and racial identities, and the culture of the studied neighborhood are undergoing changes, and hence, would not be considered familiar on any of those accounts. However, the participants who see the urban revitalization projects as a positive change in the neighborhood are residents who have lived in the neighborhood the least amount of time, residents who moved to the area to be close to downtown while living in a more affordable area, and residents who come from a higher-class neighborhood. Because of these realizations, it appears that these changes in class and racial identities, as well as the changes in culture are transforming the neighborhood into a more familiar place for those particular residents.

The fourth and final question this study explored was how resident's place meanings have affected place attachment. Using the symbolic interactionist perspective, place meanings must be assigned to a neighborhood and its physical characteristics for an attachment to be formed to a place. Also, according to the symbolic interactionist perspective, as the physical characteristics of a neighborhood change through urban revitalization, place meanings may also be altered, which has the potential to affect residents', place attachment.

Resident interview results demonstrate that the relationship proposed by using the symbolic interactionist perspective holds true for this study. Residents who assigned positive meanings to the urban revitalization projects stated that they would be more attached to their neighborhood if all the projects are completed. Conversely, residents

who assigned negative meanings due to fear of displacement stated that they would always be attached to their neighborhood, but furthered that by stating that if their neighborhood changed so much—if all projects are completed—it would no longer be their neighborhood that they know and love. This finding that positive or negative place meanings affect place attachment by either increasing attachment or decreasing attachment, respectively, backs up the relationship put forth by the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1962). Similarly, von Wirth et al. (2016) found that following an urban environmental transformation, changes that are valued as a positive can strengthen place attachment, while changes that are valued as negative can weaken place attachment.

An interesting finding within the scope of this research question was how residents who assigned negative meaning to the urban revitalization projects thought of the urban revitalization projects changing the neighborhood from “their neighborhood” to a completely different neighborhood of which they have no attachment. They claim that while they will always be attached to the memory of “their neighborhood,” it will simply no longer exist.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have multiple practical implications for government agencies and private organizations involved in urban revitalization. Cities across the country are currently faced with large volumes of individuals and families moving toward the city centers. This creates a supply and demand issue, and because of this, cities are faced with the dilemma of adjusting to the population increase, the additional demand on transportation, and the additional need for grocery stores, retail options, and demands for

additional amenities. This study provides practical implications for government agencies to address these issues in a more equitable way for all.

First, this study exhibits to city planning and development agencies that residents differentiate between urban revitalization projects and general infrastructure improvements. This was a major finding from this study that, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been found in the related body of literature. Utilizing this important finding, city planning and development agencies can focus their budgets on things that neighborhoods need and rightfully deserve based on their payment into the tax base. If city planning and development agencies do not count general infrastructure as urban revitalization it could lead to the creation of more equitable neighborhoods without the usual accompanying displacement.

Second, this study demonstrates that cities should be more cognizant and involved with the developments that occur surrounding new light rail stations. Participants made clear that they are supportive of the idea of increased light rail lines and other transportation options, but they do not support the accompanying transit-oriented developments that have been found to lead to gentrification (Kahn, 2007; Santiago et al., 2008). This finding suggests that the individuals who have the most need to live adjacent to a light rail station are the ones who are often the individuals who get displaced, and the city should be more involved in ensuring that original residents do not get displaced during the process of development. Participants do not approve of the luxury apartments that appear the moment a light rail station is completed, and the city would be smart to

take notice and begin requiring more affordable or mixed housing to be built surrounding the light rail stations.

Lastly, this study exhibits the need of cities to make improvements to a neighborhood more fitting to the current residents as opposed to the residents they are hoping to attract to the area. These neighborhoods have an existing social fabric that the government must be aware of; they need to be aware of the changes that occur during revitalization and be responsive to maintaining key elements of the social fabric as this change is occurring. Participants stated that it was clear that the city planning and development department was creating redevelopment plans for the poorest of neighborhoods to redevelop them for future residents—not the current residents—in hopes to bring a different group of residents to the neighborhoods. This study makes it clear that the current residents do not feel that the rampant modernization is necessary. They would appreciate the needed improvements—the improved infrastructure—over the modernized urban revitalization. Again, to create a more equitable community, the city should certainly take these issues into consideration.

### **Future Research**

Due to the exploratory, qualitative nature of this study, future research is needed to determine the degree to which the findings are in fact representative of the beliefs and opinions of the larger local community affected by urban revitalization. Future studies should include a larger sample size to better represent the beliefs of the greater community. Additionally, future studies should clearly distinguish between types of physical development happening in the neighborhood. Urban revitalization should not be

considered the same as general infrastructure improvements in future research. Finally, future studies should account for length of residency or familiarity with the neighborhood when studying effects of physical and cultural changes on meanings assigned and feelings toward residents' neighborhoods.

Photo-elicitation methods that were utilized for this study were found to be exceptionally useful in studying assigned meanings and if meanings are altered when a location is altered. The use of photos reveals the core construct of symbolic interactionism and place meaning: people act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them. When participants view photos of their neighborhood, both before and after revitalization, they are able to easily remember the location and the meanings they have assigned to that location. Future studies utilizing the photo-elicitation methods should, however, expand on the use of photos. A set-back of this study was use of only a before and after photo. In retrospect, a more ideal utilization of photos would have included a before photo, an after photo of the proposed changes, and an after photo of solely infrastructure improvements. While this could not have been known prior to the beginning of this study due to prior lack of knowledge of residents differentiating between urban revitalization and infrastructure improvement, it should be taken into account in future research when utilizing photo-elicitation methods.

The key findings in this study was that residents differentiate between urban revitalization projects and common infrastructure improvements; not all physical development is the same. This is due to the belief that general infrastructure improvements is a right because they are tax paying citizens, and the urban revitalization

projects are a catalyst for cultural and physical gentrification. This is a finding that has not been discussed in the related body of literature, and it is a finding that deserves more focused attention as opposed to an unexpected finding that was brought up organically in neighborhood resident interviews. Is this a phenomenon unique to this small region of Denver, or is this a culture-wide phenomenon that could lead to an improved and differentiated view of what should and should not be included in a neighborhood revitalization plan?

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This qualitative, phenomenological study was designed to use a symbolic interactionist perspective to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhoods and discover how redevelopment efforts are affecting those assigned meanings in the neighborhoods of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea in northern Denver. Nineteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with neighborhood residents, ten residents from Elyria-Swansea and nine residents from Globeville. The interview data, public documents, and newspaper articles underwent a thematic content analysis to identify emerging themes and patterns, which were then organized into four categories to answer the four research questions.

Results of the analysis of the public documents, newspaper articles, and resident interview data indicate that historical patterns of urban revitalization have led to gentrification and involuntary displacement in Denver. Results of the analysis also indicate that historical patterns of urban revitalization affect neighborhood residents' feelings toward urban revitalization projects by making residents fearful of projects and the displacement that may follow. Additionally, results indicate that urban revitalization projects have and will continue to negatively affect the place meanings that residents assign to their neighborhoods and that length of residence might affect one's meaning assigned to the neighborhood. Finally, results indicate that positive or negative place meanings affect place attachment by either increasing attachment or decreasing attachment, respectively.

The purpose of this study was to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhood and discover how redevelopment efforts affect those assigned meanings and subsequent place attachments. Place attachments are emotional bonds between a person and a place, and to form a place attachment, meanings must first be assigned to a given place. These meanings are assigned and change over time based on human experience and social interactions. It was not expected that displacement and gentrification would be such a large and recurring theme throughout this study, particularly in relation to meanings assigned by residents to the revitalization projects and neighborhoods. As such, the magnitude of this theme should make it evident that residents are not supportive of these urban revitalization projects and that they fear for their future within their current neighborhoods. While residents are currently attached to their neighborhoods based on assigned meanings of familiarity and home, they assign negative meanings of modernization and displacement to revitalization projects and the change in their neighborhood. Further, residents cite a lack of attachment to their post revitalization neighborhoods based on the environmental changes and consequent change in meanings. This demonstrates that redevelopment efforts negatively affect residents assigned meanings and place attachments to their neighborhood, which should be a consideration for future neighborhood revitalization efforts.

The emerging themes presented in these results begin to demonstrate the impacts that urban revitalization projects cause the residents of these neighborhoods, in addition to identifying how these urban revitalization projects affect place attachment to their neighborhoods. This data aids in guiding future research, which may ultimately better



inform the government agencies and private organizations who are looking to redevelop similar low-income neighborhoods.

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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Megha Budruk in the School of Community Resources and Development at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhoods and discover how redevelopment efforts are affecting those assigned meanings.

I received your name and contact information from your neighborhood's association. I am recruiting individuals, ages 18 or older, to participate in an interview that will ask about your personal experiences while living in your respective neighborhood (Globeville/Elyria-Swansea), the meanings you assign to places within the neighborhood, and your feelings toward these places before and after revitalization, which will take approximately thirty minutes to an hour to complete. I would like to audio record the interview, but the interview will not be recorded without your permission. The audio recordings will be permanently deleted once the transcription of the interview has been completed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (720) 499-5399.

Thank you,

Olivia Humberger

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## **Place Meaning and Attachment in Revitalizing Neighborhoods: A Qualitative Study of How Redevelopment Efforts Affect Residents' Assigned Meanings of Their Neighborhood**

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Megha Budruk in the School of Community Resources and Development at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to uncover resident meanings of their neighborhoods and discover how redevelopment efforts are affecting those assigned meanings.

I received your name and contact information through your neighborhood's association due to their belief that you would be interested in participation in this study. I am inviting your participation, which will involve approximately a thirty minute to an hour long interview that will ask about your personal experiences while living in this neighborhood, the meanings you assign to places within the neighborhood, and your feelings toward these places before and after revitalization. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

It is expected that this project to benefit you by promoting a more thorough understanding of the effects urban revitalization has on neighborhood resident place attachment, which may lead to revitalization projects in the future that better serves the needs of all residents. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your anonymity and privacy will be protected by not collecting any personal identifiers—name, address, email, etc.—in the data. This way the responses you provide during this interview cannot be connected back to your participation in this study. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. The audio recordings will be permanently deleted once the transcription of the interview has been completed.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: (602) 496-0171 for Dr. Budruk or (720) 499-5399 for Olivia Humberger. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human

Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Do you give your permission for me to interview you? Do you give me permission to audio record you? Are you happy to take part?

Ok, thanks, in which case let's start.

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## **Place Meaning and Attachment in Revitalizing Neighborhoods: A Qualitative Study of the Relationship Between Urban Revitalization Projects and Place Attachment**

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of places and the relationship between neighborhood place attachment and urban revitalization projects. The following questions will help us get a better understanding of the affective relationships that exist between neighborhood residents and the places they live as well as the role urban revitalization projects play in this relationship. In this interview, I hope to hear about your experiences within this neighborhood.

The following questions will ask about your personal experiences while living in this neighborhood, the meanings you assign to places within the neighborhood, and your feelings toward these places before and after revitalization. There are no right or wrong answers to questions in this interview, and you may skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any point you wish to stop the interview, please let me know, and we will terminate the interview immediately.

Your anonymity and privacy will be protected by removing any identifying information from the transcriptions of this interview. This way the information you provide cannot be connected back to your participation in this study. The audio recordings will be permanently deleted once the transcription of the interview has been completed.

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### **Interview**

#### **A. General Questions Relating to Neighborhood**

1. Tell me about your history with this neighborhood (Globeville/Elyria-Swansea).  
*How long have you lived here? Why did you move here?*
2. How would you describe this neighborhood (Globeville/Elyria-Swansea)?
3. What aspects of this neighborhood do you like best/least? *Is there anything the neighborhood is in need of? Do you feel at "home" in this neighborhood?*
4. What places within this neighborhood hold a lot of meaning to you? *Why?*
5. How has your neighborhood changed over the past \_\_\_ years? *How have the surrounding neighborhoods changed?*
6. How would you describe the availability of affordable housing in this neighborhood (Globeville/Elyria-Swansea)? *The Denver Metro area?*

B. Specific Urban Revitalization Projects

a. I-70 Expansion

7. Tell me about the I-70 expansion. *How does it affect you? How does it affect the neighborhood? What lasting effects will it have upon the neighborhood?*

8. Based upon the before and after pictures of the I-70 expansion, what meanings do you assign to each of them?

b. Light Rail Stations

9. Tell me about the new light rail lines passing through your neighborhood and the accompanying public transportation stations. *How does it affect you? How does it affect the neighborhood? What lasting effects will it have upon the neighborhood?*

10. Based upon the before and after pictures of the station locations, what meanings do you assign to each of them?

c. Mixed-Use Development/Corridor of Opportunity

11. Tell me about the "Corridor of Opportunity". *How does it affect you? How does it affect the neighborhood? What lasting effects will it have upon the neighborhood?*

12. Based upon the before and after pictures of the corridor, what meanings do you assign to each of them?

d. National Western Stock Show

13. Tell me about the National Western Stock Show revitalization project. *How does it affect you? How does it affect the neighborhood? What lasting effects will it have upon the neighborhood?*

14. Based upon the before and after pictures of the National Western Stock Show, what meanings do you assign to each of them?

C. Effects on Place Attachment

15. How will these projects affect the cultural dynamics of this neighborhood (Globeville/Elyria-Swansea)?

16. How will the meaning that projects have for you affect your feelings toward this neighborhood (Globeville/Elyria-Swansea)?



APPENDIX D  
PHOTO ELICITATION

I-70 Viaduct Before



I-70 Proposed Expansion



Light Rail Stations Before



Light Rail Stations After



Brighton Boulevard



## Corridor of Opportunity



National Western Stock Show Before



National Western Stock Show After



APPENDIX E  
IRB APPROVAL





EXEMPTION GRANTED

Megha Budruk  
Community Resources and Development, School of  
602/496-0171  
Megha.Budruk@asu.edu

Dear Megha Budruk:

On 2/13/2017 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Place Meaning and Attachment in Revitalizing Neighborhoods: A Qualitative Study of How Redevelopment Efforts Affect Residents' Assigned Meanings of Their Neighborhood
Investigator:	Megha Budruk
IRB ID:	STUDY00005690
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None

Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview Photo Elicitation.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Recruitment Script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• ThesisProtocol_Humberger.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Informed Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> </ul>
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The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 2/13/2017.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Olivia Humberger