Gender, Place and Culture
Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 357–377, September 2005

In Place and At Home in the City: Connecting privilege, safety and belonging for women in Toronto

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ABSTRACT *In this article I theorize the connections between privileged social identities and women's sense of safety and belonging in a diverse urban environment, Toronto. Based on qualitative research with a small group of women who grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, and later chose to live in the city, this article is a preliminary investigation into the factors that make it possible for some women to feel 'in place' in the city. I suggest that confidence, a sense of belonging, and the ability to distance oneself from violence are all related to privileges such as whiteness and middle-classness. In the Canadian context, these identities function as the invisible norm, allowing women to feel at home in an ethnically and economically diverse city. Moreover, the ability to move into and through urban space may function in a reciprocal manner to reinforce privileged identities. I argue that it is important to examine interlocking systems of privilege and oppression in terms of both women's affective experiences of urban space, and the gendered constitution of urban spaces. This approach serves to problematize and complicate the concept of appropriation of urban space through an examination of the salience of privilege. I conclude by suggesting that this article may serve to open dialogue about the relationship of privileged identities to marginalized identities in the city, in order to add complexity to feminist research on women's everyday lives in the city.*

> Women are not merely objects in space where they experience restrictions and obligations; they also actively produce, define and reclaim space. (Koskela, 1997, p. 305)

Introduction

Women's ability to actively produce, define and reclaim urban space has often been circumscribed, negated and complicated by violence and a powerful fear of violence. Feminist researchers have documented fear as a force structuring women's everyday life in urban environments (Koskela & Pain, 2000; Listerborn, 2002; Pain, 1991; Valentine, 1990). Nonetheless, women have been able to appropriate and claim urban space in a number of ways (Wilson, 1991). In this essay, I suggest that social privilege, particularly the privileges of whiteness

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ISSN 0966-369X print/ISSN 1360-0524 online/05/030357-21 © 2005 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/09663690500202590

and middle-classness, structures several factors that allow some women to feel safe and to claim a sense of at-homeness (Koskela, 1997) in a particular urban space. This project began as an investigation into the ways that feelings of safety and fear structure or impact upon the daily lives of young white women in Toronto, a racially, culturally, and economically diverse city. My focus on the potential links between fear and difference gradually shifted to a focus on the links between safety and privilege, as participants articulated a sense of belonging and feelings of safety in urban space. In their recent review of Anglo-American feminist urban studies, Bondi & Rose (2003) suggest that the analytic divide (as identified by Wilson, 2001) over the notion of urban space as oppressive to women—'a spatial expression of patriarchy' (Valentine, 1989)—and the notion of urban space as shifting, contradictory, and open to appropriation by women, has been more 'confidently challenged in relation to containment than appropriation' (Bondi & Rose, 2003, p. 230). This article highlights a kind of 'everyday' appropriation of urban space: living in the city with confidence and security. Furthermore, I seek to complicate the concept of appropriation by suggesting the salience of privilege to women's sense of belonging in urban space.

Bondi and Rose (2003) document a movement within feminist geography from descriptions and analyses of women's affective experiences of urban space, in particular, women's constraints and fears, to analyses of the mutual constitution of gendered identities and urban spaces. They also maintain that there has been increasing attention paid to difference, both in terms of differences among women, and in terms of the social construction of difference in and through urban space. In feminist literature on women's fear of violence in urban space, there has certainly been an increase in work that examines intersections of identities, as well as work that examines fear from the perspective of racially and economically marginalized women (Gordon & Riger, 1989; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 2000, 2001; Stanko, 1990; see also Wekerle & Whitzman, 1995 for discussion of Toronto). However, there has been little work addressing interlocking systems of privilege and oppression with respect to fear of violence. Day (1999) represents an exception with her research on women's racialized fear in public spaces.[1] She suggests that gender, race and class interlock to structure a person's experience of fear of crime, and that these experiences are 'situated differently in public space, where encounters shape and reveal one's ideas about race' (Day, 1999, p. 307).

I maintain that this is not only an appropriate theoretical framework for this topic, but one that is necessary for bringing a discussion of privilege into a field that has primarily addressed gendered oppression. Fellows and Razack (1998) argue that feminists have had difficulty not only in understanding that systems of oppression interlock, rather than overlap, but in understanding relations of dominance among women. They suggest that projects which fail to acknowledge salient forms of privilege are participating in a 'race to innocence'. This competition to assert the significance of a particular form of oppression, without complicating the notion of oppression with an analysis of privilege, is perpetuated when women fail to acknowledge their implication in the subordination of other women. Drawing attention to fear as a form of gendered oppression, without a critical examination of privilege, creates the risk that research on women's fear of violence will participate in the race to innocence, by centring sexist oppression, downplaying the significance of race, class, sexuality and other differences among women, and ignoring hierarchical relations among women.

In this article I use an interlocking systems framework to analyze a small study conducted with a group of young women who embody salient social privileges in the Canadian context. All of these women grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, and moved downtown as young adults. This particular spatial dimension allowed me to investigate how these women came to feel 'in place' and at home in the city, at a particular stage in the life cycle. This article should be taken not as a widely generalizable account of women's everyday appropriation of urban spaces, but as a tentative opening for discussion and debate about the salience of privilege in investigating women's feelings of safety and fear, and the importance of continuing to develop languages and methodologies for addressing interlocking systems of privilege and oppression through feminist geography.

In the following section, I place this study in geographic context by locating these women in and around the extremely diverse and complex metropolitan area of Toronto. As well, I include a discussion of how gendered urban safety issues have been taken up at both the grassroots and municipal levels. I then discuss methods and methodology in more detail.

Context: Toronto, a diverse metropolitan area

Toronto is Canada's largest city, its financial centre, and an aspiring global city.[2] Like many other North American cities, Toronto experienced deindustrialization in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by a marked and continuous growth in the advanced tertiary and quaternary sectors (Ley, 1996; Bourne, 2000). Urban restructuring led to the creation of both a highly skilled professional labour force, and a large pool of de-skilled service sector jobs filled by marginalized members of the population. This kind of social polarization is characteristic of many restructuring economies; however, in Toronto the central city has remained ethnically and economically diverse. Unlike many American cities undergoing similar restructuring processes, Toronto did not see a 'white flight' to the suburbs or a concentration of poverty and visible minorities in the inner city (Bourne & Ley, 1993).[3] Indeed, as Toronto has experienced an increase in immigration from visible minority groups, ethnocultural and economic diversity has been increasingly decentralized (Siemiatycki & Isin, 1997).

Until the 1960s, Canadian immigration policy was designed to develop the country as a white settler society, and virtually all immigrants came from Britain, the United States, and Europe. Since the 1960s, fewer than 20% of immigrants have come from these places. By 2001, 44% of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area's population was categorized as foreign-born, and 39% of this population was identified as belonging to visible minority groups (Statistics Canada, 2003a, 2003b). Toronto also has the largest concentration of First Nations people in urban Canada, with numbers estimated between 40,000 and 65,000 (Doucet, 1999). Toronto is the most diverse city in Canada, and has one of the highest foreign-born populations of any city in the world. What is remarkable is the extent to which both the inner and outer suburbs have become primary immigrant reception areas in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

In 1998 the current City of Toronto was created through the amalgamation of six local cities (Toronto, York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, North York, and East York—see Figure 1). The five former municipalities surrounding the original municipality of Toronto are now referred to as inner suburbs. As noted above, immigration to Toronto did not spur a movement of wealth and whiteness to

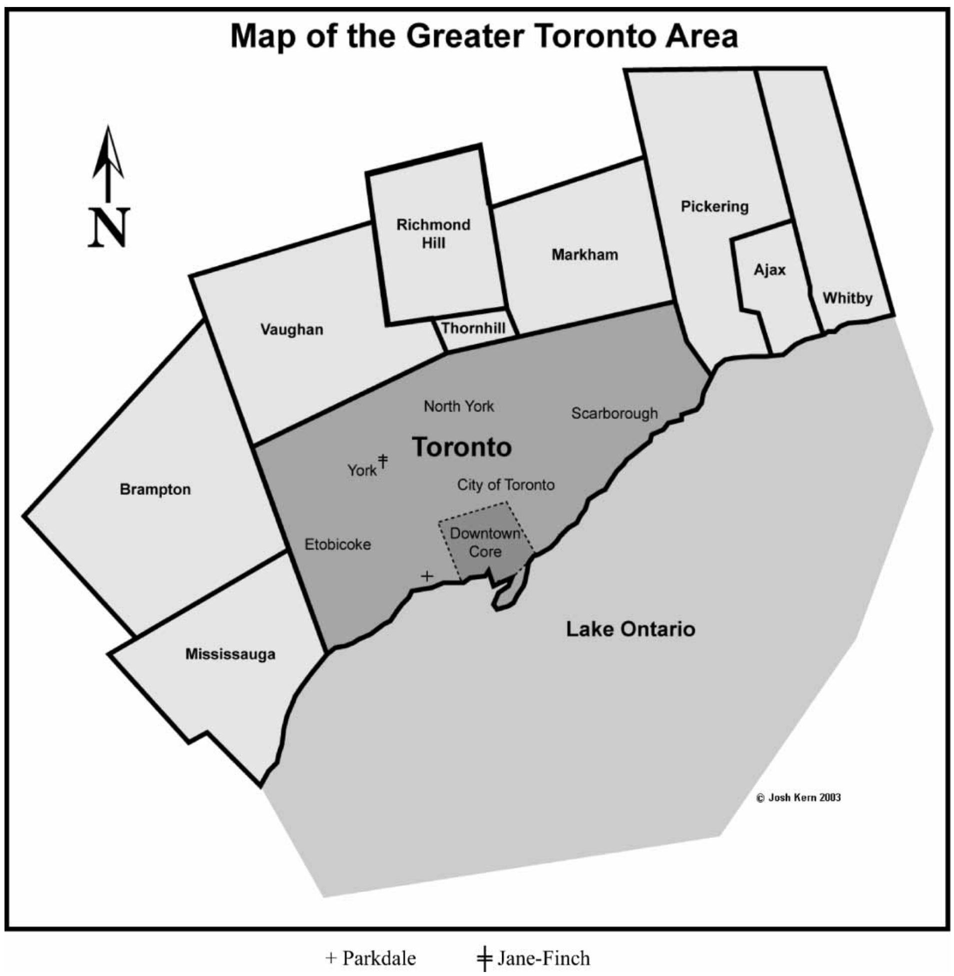

Figure 1. Map of the greater Toronto area.

the suburbs. Some of Toronto's most affluent areas are part of the downtown core, and these areas are home to very few of the city's recent immigrants. Indeed, the central city has become a site of reinvestment through public and private redevelopment projects. In contrast, the inner suburbs are quickly becoming the main immigrant settlement areas (Siemiatycki & Isin, 1997). There has also been a dramatic increase over the last 25 years in the number of higher poverty neighbourhoods located in the inner suburbs (United Way, 2004). While the poverty rate has increased in all five inner suburbs, it has decreased in the former municipality of Toronto (United Way, 2004). The diversity of the GTA includes outer suburban edge cities such as Mississauga. More than one-third of Mississauga's population belonged to a visible minority group as of 1996 (Statistics and Facts Mississauga, 2001). Indeed, Toronto is surrounded by 'ethnoburbs,' small suburban cities or towns with particular ethnocultural concentrations (Abbruzzese, 2003). Siemiatycki and Isin (1997, p. 82) summarize these trends by noting that the Toronto region 'is distinctive not only for its great number of immigrants, but for the diverse ethnocultural mosaic of communities dispersed across its metropolitan area'.

This diversity across the city and its suburbs makes it useful to rely on the popular notion of Toronto as a 'city of neighbourhoods' (Caulfield, 1994). Indeed, the neighbourhood is a common unit of analysis, and is used to direct funding and social programs in the city. For example, the United Way (2004) analyzed 'poverty by postal code', identifying concentrations of poverty by neighbourhood, rather than focusing on overall income trends across the city. As well, despite Toronto's relatively low citywide crime rate for a North American city, the municipality has recognized concentrations of crime by neighbourhood, launching a community safety strategy focused on specific neighbourhoods (Lorinc, 2004). The notion of a city of neighbourhoods is relevant to this study, as the participants identified specific neighbourhoods as areas where they felt safe or unsafe, in addition to comparing their experiences in the outer suburbs to experiences in the city.

This brief portrait illustrates that Toronto cannot be mapped by a suburbs/city binary. However, the fact that the participants grew up in suburban areas, and later chose to live in the city, is a relevant dimension for two reasons. First, although Toronto differs from the prototypical racially- and economically-divided American city, the ideology of suburbs and city as oppositional spaces pervades the news and popular media. As such, there is a discursive effect that influences what Torontonians expect of the suburbs and city. Second, the participants in this study all articulated differences between suburban and urban lifestyles and environments that were significant in their own perceptions of safety and danger, and in their own abilities to claim urban space as home space.

Gendered Safety Issues in Toronto

Toronto has a reputation for safety that is derived in part from feminist grassroots and municipal level efforts to include women's safety as a key planning and policy issue (Wekerle, 1999; Whitzman, 1995). However, feminist research into women's fear in the city shows that women in Toronto still express serious safety concerns. The Metro Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), alongside the municipal government's Safe City Committee, and the volunteer organization Women Plan Toronto, have examined Toronto's urban fabric in detail, to determine what environmental and design features contribute to women's feelings of safety and fear (City of Toronto Planning and Development, 1990; City of Toronto Safe City Committee, 1988; Grant, 1988; METRAC, 1987, 1989, 1991; Wekerle, 1991, 1992; Wekerle & Whitzman, 1995; Whitzman, 1988, 2002). It is important to note that while looking at planning and design issues, these groups have used women's everyday lives in the city as the starting point for change. This includes the recognition that while women are more likely to experience violence in private spaces from a known man than in public from a stranger, women nonetheless commonly locate their fear in public spaces (Stanko, 1990; Pain, 1997; Whitzman, 1995; Valentine, 1990).[4] Pain (1997) has successfully critiqued the notion that this represents a 'paradox', arguing that women are socialized to feel fear in public space, and that experiences such as harassment confirm a sense of being 'out of place' in the city. Whitzman (1995) has applied this critique to women's fear of crime in Toronto. These arguments suggest that both structural and symbolic elements of urban public space interact to produce a sense of safety or fear. As Bondi and Rose (2003) suggest, this field of work has successfully documented and analyzed women's affective experiences of urban space, particularly with respect to containment and fear. In this article, I shift the gaze to experiences of feeling safe, confident, at home, and 'in place' in the city.

Methodology

I characterize this study as a small-scale preliminary exploration using a combination of methods, namely, a focus group and in-depth semi-structured interviews. I suggest that there is also an element of embedded auto-ethnography (Letherby, 2003). Following a pattern present in many feminist research projects, I began this investigation from my own standpoint. Reflecting on my experiences as a young woman who had grown up in the suburbs of Toronto, and moved downtown as a young adult, I generated some initial research questions about women's fear of violence in urban and suburban environments, and informally canvassed acquaintances to gauge interest.[5] I set up a small focus group with three women in late 2001, acknowledging research which suggests that people, and perhaps women in particular, construct and produce understandings of their everyday lives and social contexts in conversation with one another (Wilkinson, 1998). The two-hour focus group was an open dialogue around the themes of fear and safety in different environments.[6] After reflecting on the group session, I contacted these three women, as well as three others, and conducted individual in-depth interviews in early 2002. The focus group and interviews were taped. Following transcription of the interviews, the women were provided with copies and encouraged to offer additional feedback. Three women submitted written responses.

All of the participants were known to me prior to this research; as such, I was aware that we shared the experience of growing up in the suburbs of Toronto and later choosing to live downtown. I grew up in the same large suburb as four of the women involved (Mississauga), although we were not acquainted until we lived in the city. This common experience certainly facilitated a smooth entry into the research situation, and fostered a sense of common knowledge about places, events, and local culture. Under these circumstances it was possible to conduct interviews in a semi-structured style, as a shared understanding of the topic meant that I, as the researcher, did not have to assert a particular control over the direction of the interview; participants identified and addressed the relevant issues with little prompting. For this reason, I would argue that this study is grounded in women's experiences and knowledge. I will also suggest that my own experiences, while not overtly represented, are embedded within the participants' narratives for at least two reasons. First, I was a participant in the focus group and interviews, in that I engaged in dialogue as well as questioning; and, second, I shared many of the feelings and experiences described by participants. As such, I suggest that there is an embedded auto-ethnography in this project.

The transcripts were analyzed in terms of contrasting perceptions about safety and fear in suburban and urban spaces. I found that the participants expressed a sense of at-homeness in the city; therefore, I coded the transcripts in terms of more specific factors (social, physical, symbolic, personal, and geographic) that contributed to at-homeness. I have noted that this article explores the salience of privilege to women's ability to feel at home and in place in urban space. The focus on privilege was possible because all of the participants (including myself) were white, from middle-class backgrounds, in their mid-twenties, able-bodied, English-speaking, born in Canada, college or university educated, and none were openly living as lesbian or bisexual. None were mothers, and therefore did not have safety concerns related to their children. I acknowledge that all of these sites of privilege are connected, and therefore what is discussed here (primarily race and class) is certainly intertwined with what is absent. Moreover, the absence of women of colour or other marginalized women in this study might be taken as an implicit suggestion that they are not able to appropriate urban space, or make a home in the city. This is not my assertion; it is an indication of important research projects yet to be done. Despite the potential limitations of working with white, middle-class participants, this composition allowed for critical self-examinations of sites of individual and systemic privilege.[7] My 'insider' status within this group allowed me to bring up topics such as race and class privilege, despite the fact that it is difficult to open up a dialogue about whiteness.[8] Although I critically analyze the participants' individual ways of speaking about privilege, I acknowledge their courage in being willing to speak to these issues.

The participants' geographic genealogies are also significant. All of these women grew up in outer suburbs, rather than the inner suburbs that are now part of the City of Toronto. Four participants were from the western suburb of Mississauga; one participant was from Richmond Hill, north of Toronto; and one was from Whitby, a smaller town to the east (see Figure 1).[9] The urban neighbourhoods that participants moved into as young adults were initially located around the University of Toronto in the downtown core, and included areas that typically house students such as the Annex, Kensington Market, Little Italy and Chinatown. Although their choice of neighbourhood expanded as they entered the workforce, most of these women remained in the downtown core (see Figure 1). All of the neighbourhoods where participants have lived are diverse across race, ethnicity and class; however, none (with the exception of perhaps Chinatown) are characterized by predominant visible minority settlement and/or socio-economic marginalization.

The Study: Connecting privilege, safety, and appropriation

In the following sections I draw on focus group and interview material to illustrate how women's feelings of safety in the city are connected to the ability to claim a space and make a home in the city, and how this ability is linked to systems of privilege that are mutually constitutive of places and identities. Each section includes quotes from several participants; however, I do not identify the participants with individual pseudonyms or by their location in particular neighbourhoods, in an attempt to maintain confidentiality within this small group of subjects.

Constructing Safety in the City: Urban design and urban lifestyles

When asked to generalize about whether they felt safer in the suburbs or the city, the women interviewed here stated that they felt safer in the city. This finding relates substantially to feminist research that has problematized the design and ideology of the suburbs from a gendered perspective (Wekerle, 1984; Fava, 1980; Novac, 1995). It may also reflect the increasing rates of poverty and crime across Toronto's suburbs.

In the city, factors such as people on the streets, the ability to access phones, businesses or other services, and the availability of transportation were key reasons why women felt safer. One participant related her reaction when a male subway passenger made her nervous by staring at her:

> I felt that there was something I could do. . . . I'll just take a cab home. I'll get up[stairs], there's a lot of people, I'll get a cab. I felt totally uncomfortable, because this guy was really creepy, but at the same time I knew there were like five things I could do to make sure I was safe, to get home safely. But if I was in [the suburbs], it'd be like, go to a pay phone, call a cab, wait.

The wide range of resources available greatly increased her comfort level, even when faced with a form of harassment. Another participant concentrated on the design features of Toronto's urban public spaces, noting: 'Because of the street structure, it's very grid-like and there's always communities in every area, there's a lot more like stores, restaurants, coffee shops, and because of all those extra things, there's a lot more lighting . . .' For this woman a combination of structural elements and the more active social life of the city were important factors. Another participant expanded on the notion of community in the city by suggesting that she felt safer in an area if

> it's a place that's generally populated at all times, like people care about where they live, and they kind of care about the safety of the area. . . . I feel a lot safer in a community where I know people make it their home, so they make it their responsibility to keep it a safe area.

Thus, the particular qualities of urban living in Toronto (as a city of neighbourhoods or communities) contribute to feelings of safety in the city. These comments resonate further when compared to responses about feelings of fear and safety in suburban public spaces. The lack of activity on suburban streets, compared with the vibrancy of downtown life, led to a sense of isolation for several participants. For example:

> The quiet neighbourhood, where everybody is closed into their houses, where more than likely now their doors are locked at any given time during the day, I feel so much more alone walking around in suburbia now than, 'cause I feel no one sees me, you know, no one looking out a window, they're all in their own little world.

> No one walks in suburbia anyways, if you're on the street you pretty well have guaranteed yourself that you are the only one on that street.

> In the suburbs, walking is not a mode of transportation.

> If you're walking on the street, you're a little more suspect of other people walking on the street just because there are so few people out. And it's kind of few and far between the people that you're gonna see, so if something was to happen . . .

> Pretty much in the suburbs I don't really go out at night, unless I have a car. So far as being on the streets, I don't ever really go out in the streets in the suburbs. . . . I guess you think there's less crime in the suburbs, but

> then again you're also more often in isolated areas, where violence is more likely.

The perceived quality of environment and lifestyle in the city, and its relationship to feelings of safety, were key reasons why these women chose to live in Toronto, rather than the suburbs.

Choosing the City as Home

Participants' feelings of safety in the city were strongly linked to having chosen the city as their home. Choosing to live in the city fostered feelings of confidence in terms of personal safety. In the focus group, women maintained that once a place feels like home, it starts to feel safe.

> You become more confident about an area, feel more safe in an area once you know the corner you're turning on to go home, or you know the bus route. . . . It becomes your home, therefore it kind of has to become a safe haven for you. If you don't feel safe in your own home then there's no area you can go to that you feel safe.

> As far as my own safety levels went, once I got to know the area, and make it feel more like my home, I was fine, walking around.

> I think a lot of it is me feeling confident about where I'm going and knowing that I'm exuding that confidence in that area. People are less likely to approach you on your home turf because you exude a certain amount of confidence.

> [Through work] I got to see all these different neighbourhoods, it gave me more confidence to move around, and know that I could handle being in different places that might have sort of scared me to be in by myself.

In her study of women's 'bold' behaviours in urban space, Koskela (1997, p. 307) argued that 'an important aspect of being bold is "at-homeness" . . . often women in my research describe their courage as a product of knowing their environment and feeling at home there'. She argues further that 'in an urban environment, part of the feeling of taking possession of space is "an urban mentality" . . . being at home in the city and having roots there and being able to accept differences' (p. 308).

In this article, I complicate at-homeness by interrogating the factors that make this possible for women who actively choose to live in the city. Below, I describe several factors that are linked to claiming a home space, and discuss each factor in terms of systemic privileges. I expand on confidence, and also discuss belonging, distancing, and the links between privilege and safety.

Confidence: Safety strategy, social privilege

Appearing confident in public space has been identified as an important safety strategy that women employ in order to decrease their chances of being victimized (Koskela, 1997). In this project, all of the women echoed this finding. Significantly, the participants indicated that their confidence in public space had increased over time, as they became older, more educated, and took on professional careers. This exchange occurred in the focus group:

> 1: Having a [professional] degree has helped a lot for me, I think it's helped empower me . . . there's just a sense of empowerment that comes from being an adult to whom people will listen, there's a sense that if you have a complaint people will listen to you, you will be taken seriously.
>
> 2: Exactly. I think that has a lot to do with it, 'cause now if I went up to the TTC and said there's someone on the train who is harassing me, it will be taken seriously, whereas when I was younger, saying that, it probably wouldn't have been . . . and I think that comes with being older and having more resources too . . .
>
> *1*: It's practical stuff, like you have that power everyday.
>
> *2*: Confidence breeds confidence you know.
>
> *1*: Feeling capable in one area will probably rub off in another—
>
> *3*: And you're different, and it sounds, it sounds bad but like I'm in a different element of society. . . . Your confidence level boosts at different stages of your life, when you have different expectations of yourself and of where you live and of how you live your life. . . .
>
> *2*: . . . But I also think having more confidence, that also is a safety measure. You look like you know where you're going, you look like you know what you're doing.

In individual interviews, other participants expressed the links between confidence, place, and safety:

> If you look vulnerable then people will perceive you that way. So you're more likely to you know try something with someone who looks vulnerable than someone who looks like they know where they're going and they belong in the place. Cause if you belong in the place, then you know...
>
> Just knowing, just feeling like you're more in command of yourself, you know you're in places for a certain reason, you have a right to be there. . . . And I think I would just be able to present myself and articulate myself more clearly now if I needed help . . .

Without diminishing the importance of confidence, it must be recognized that it is related to privileges such as professional status and education. In relation to whiteness, I would argue that white privilege allows the women to feel more secure in their professional identities, and better able to challenge threats and access resources. At the very least, whiteness will never work against this ability.[10] In relation to urban space, confidence is related to familiarity with a space claimed as home. Reciprocally, the privilege of confidence is a factor in feeling less fearful and actively claiming that space.

Of course, being female complicates this privilege, as paternalistic discourses work against women who act with confidence or challenge threats. Moreover, privileged (white, bourgeois) female identities are often associated with weakness and vulnerability (Day, 2001). Confidence is therefore a complex intersection of gender, race, age and class. In terms of interlocking structures, it is important to note that the benefits of confidence for some women are experienced in the context of a denial of these benefits to other people. For example, the ability to be taken seriously, based on age, appearance, articulate speech and professional status, rests on the notion that there are some identities that will not be taken seriously.

Younger girls or elderly women, people with mental illnesses, or those who do not speak English as a first language are just some examples of others who are not often seen as justifiably confident (see Pain, 2001 for more discussion of fear across gender, race, and age).

Belonging in the Multicultural City: Fitting in through invisibility

An important element of safety, confidence, and feeling at home in the city is a sense of belonging. In this study, participants did not feel out of place in the ethnically diverse city; rather, they felt that whiteness was not typically recognized as a racial marker. One woman used her experience of living in Asia to contextualize this:

> [In Asia] it was very much the first time that my race in itself was used to judge what kind of character I was. And so it made me incredibly conscious of that, because in Canada, no one sees me. Well they see me but whatever, I'm just one of the crowd.

Being 'just one of the crowd' does not necessarily require the existence of predominantly white spaces. The diversity of Toronto and its surrounding suburbs fostered a sense of comfort and familiarity with diversity for all of the women in the study. The women indicated that their suburban neighbourhoods and schools were diverse, despite a higher degree of class homogeneity. As noted earlier, Koskela (1997) argues that part of a sense of at-homeness in urban space is the ability to accept differences. None of the women in this project related discomfort with Toronto's diversity. One woman indicated that her comfort level increased with greater levels of diversity:

> It's probably more, more safe with the diversity . . . you've got different people from all over the place, for the most part living together with no problem kind of thing, . . . they're just happy with where they're living . . . you're used to so many different types of people that you don't see someone, and because you're just not used to being around them you're not suddenly uptight.

Her experiences seemed to show her that in this city, people from different backgrounds lived in relative harmony. In fact, most participants could not think of any Toronto-based examples where racial, ethnic or class difference had made them feel unsafe. Participants either presented hypothetical scenarios where they might feel uncomfortable as a white person, or referred to other geographical locations that they had travelled to, for example cities in the American South.

I suggest that whiteness and other privileged social locations construct a sense of belonging and a feeling of invisibility in two ways. First, privileged identities operate as the norm in Canada, whether or not those identities constitute the majority in a particular place. While the participants all lived in areas that were very diverse, their identities as white, middle-class Canadian citizens place them within the norm. As the norm, these identities are constructed as invisible (in stark contrast to the notion of 'visible' minorities), in that they do not serve as markers of difference in most places. Other factors, such as the ability to speak English, and being able-bodied, would also contribute to relative invisibility in most Toronto neighbourhoods. Of course this perspective does not acknowledge that privileged identities may in fact be highly visible to marginalized groups. The second factor is that whiteness, and privilege in general, can act as a blind spot that frequently prevents white people from seeing the realities of the lives of minoritized subjects. This may result in a biased perception of ethnic harmony and peaceful diversity in Toronto.

One woman's experiences highlight the links between whiteness, place and invisibility by suggesting that visibility, in particular areas not typically frequented by the participants here, leads to feelings of discomfort:

> I think I've felt, being white partially, but female very much, there were a couple of housing projects that I would go into [for work] . . . But yeah being in places like that I really felt like I stood out. And I think part of it was being a girl, and being young and alone. But part of it was being a white girl, with blonde hair, like I felt kind of vulnerable there. Like I looked like I had 'suburbs' written all over me, like I was just a target [laughter].

Gendered vulnerability intersected with visibility as a young white woman in urban areas with low-income, government-subsidized housing projects, leading to a sense of fear. For women, safety strategies often involve an effort not to stand out. For example, women do not want to look lost or alone; or they may dress conservatively in order to downplay their sexuality (Stanko, 1990). Feeling visible based on race and class was an unusual experience in Toronto for the participant quoted above, and one that heightened her unease as a woman alone. I suggest that for this group of women, their ability to make homes in diverse areas of the city, and furthermore, to feel safe and confident in these areas, is related to the perception of invisibility based on race and class. Although sexist harassment may occur, whiteness and other unmarked privileges allow for a greater sense of belonging in a multicultural neighbourhood. Given that this article represents only the voices of a few relatively privileged women, it is important to note that in many North American cities, women of colour report both higher levels of fear, and more instances of violence, than white women (Madriz, 1997; Pain, 2000). Thus, invisibility may offer both psychological and concrete protection from fear and violence. This is a possibility that requires further research.

Distancing: Other people, other places

Distancing from violence and victimization has been identified as a psychological strategy that allows women to cope with real and perceived dangers (Gordon & Riger, 1989; Pain, 1997). When asked about feelings of safety in public space, participants made the implicit assumption that as white, middle-class women from the suburbs, they were less likely to be involved in street violence.

> If there's like a drive-by shooting . . . or someone's gotten stabbed or whatever, it's usually people that know each other . . . So that probably makes me feel safer . . . I'm less of a target . . .

> Urban violence is always [portrayed] more like, 'oh well it was gang related', or 'we're pretty sure it had to do with drugs', so you kind of think to yourself, okay I'm not in a gang, I'm not doing drugs . . . well I'm not going to be involved in this kind of violence.

The particular acts mentioned, such as drive-by shooting and gang-related violence, are typically associated with notions of a non-white urban underclass. Whiteness and middle-class privilege make it possible to psychologically and spatially posit violence as an other phenomenon. Ruddick (1996) suggests that in Toronto, spaces of whiteness and middle-classness are constructed through the assumption that urban violence occurs elsewhere. Pain (2000, p. 373) notes that the 'notion of the "dangerous other" can be seen in the geographical and social distancing of threat which many people employ in order to feel safer—the belief that violence happens to people unlike ourselves, in places we would not use'.

'Places we would not use', or bad areas, as some participants labelled them, function as other spaces that define and delimit a sense of being in place in the city. For example, some participants indicated that there were areas where they would not attempt to make a home:

> There are definitely some areas that regardless of how familiar I think I might become with them I wouldn't move to, because from the beginning I would feel unsafe.

> I believe that I could probably walk around pretty well anywhere and be fine. That being said, I know enough about economics and stuff like that to know that certain areas breed more violence, because of other societal factors. So there's a balance. I don't believe that necessarily if I lived in one of those areas that bad things would happen to me, I just don't. . . . But I would also like to live, and I think everyone does this, like to live in the best possible area that you can afford. . . . So if I don't have to live in a place where I know there is a higher rate of crime, and I can afford to live elsewhere, I will do that.

> My perceptions of bad areas come from the media, unless I myself have experienced the area. I mean there are certain areas where I don't feel comfortable because I have been there at night and I don't like, you know I don't like the feel of it, . . . Actually, there's one place that I—Lansdowne and Bloor, and I never got over feeling uneasy walking there. . . . But it just, there was something about it, just always gave me a pause. Maybe it was the people who thought I was a prostitute. . . .

In the last quote, the particular gendered visibility of being mistaken for a prostitute gave this woman a lingering dislike of this west-end area. Two other areas that typically function in popular discourse as Toronto's *other* neighbourhoods, Parkdale and Jane-Finch, were also identified as problematic neighbourhoods. I argue that these places are constructed in oppositional relation to the places claimed as home. The ability to feel at home in certain spaces exists in relation to *other* spaces, particularly those marked as different and dangerous. Jane-Finch has a high immigrant and visible minority population. Its reputation has been affected by sensationalized media accounts of gang and drug-related violence in the area. This has contributed to its status (both officially and symbolically, although not geographically) as an 'inner-city' area (see Figure 1).[11] Comments regarding Jane-Finch reflect an awareness of the way the media has skewed this neighbourhood's reputation; nevertheless, the neighbourhood still functions as an *other* area, even if this otherness has been unfairly constructed:

> Jane and Finch consistently comes up in the news as a 'bad part of town'. I have a friend who lives there and she agrees that it's rough but it's her home. It's what she knows so she doesn't feel unsafe. . . . Yes, bad things

> happen there, and apparently, often. But what news broadcast will tell you that a seemingly more 'high-class area' area is full of crime? Maybe not street violence but robbery or abuse in the home, much less visible violence.

> I have not really spent a lot of time in Jane and Finch but for some reason when I think of a dangerous area to be, I think Jane and Finch, and that's the result of mainly media. Jane and Finch is a symbol of Toronto's urban violence.

> I definitely have the sense that there are some areas where that's all you hear about and that's probably all you're going to hear about. Everyone's like, oh Jane and Finch. Everyone knows, that's where things always happen, and it is a lower class—the racial make-up is a certain way, so people just, well not expect it, but aren't surprised as much by it.

Jane-Finch is a neighbourhood that 'you hear about' in the media, rather than a neighbourhood to be experienced or enjoyed. This distancing from an area with a (perhaps undeservedly) rough reputation functions to legitimize a sense of security in neighbourhoods chosen as home.

One participant drew on the negative reputation of Parkdale to achieve distance from violence, and to legitimize claims to safety in other urban spaces. Parkdale's reputation has been affected by the presence of rooming houses and an institution for people with mental and physical disabilities. These people were seen to constitute a threat through their presence on the streets, the prevalence of alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and prostitution, and of course through social stigmas against mental and physical illnesses. This participant struggled to reconcile her 'common sense' knowledge about Parkdale with a desire not to engage in victim-blaming. This exchange in the focus group was preceded by a discussion about whether Toronto was generally a safe or unsafe place for women:

> *Participant:* …You just shouldn't be in Parkdale at two in the morning.

> *Leslie:* Is that your feeling or is that—

> *P:* Well that's my feeling. I just wouldn't have a reason to be in Parkdale at two in the morning.

> *L:* Would you feel like you were to blame if something were to happen to you there?

> *P:* I wouldn't feel like I was to blame, but I would feel like if I wasn't there it wouldn't have happened, and in my life, there's no reason for me to be there. Do you know what I'm saying? Like I don't go out of my way to go to Parkdale or anything like that, I'm just using it as an example. I'm not saying, actually that's quite a safe area now, it's not as bad as it used to be. … I personally wouldn't feel to blame, but at the same time I'd be kicking myself, what was I doing there anyways? I mean that probably wasn't the smartest move. … Honestly, I think my first reaction would be, to be completely honest with you, if someone got attacked, mugged or whatever in a really bad part of town, really late at night, would just seem to me, in my sensibility, the wrong place to be.

The idea of a place where one should not be at two in the morning, or where one would not want to live, highlights the relational identity of places where making a home is possible, and the importance of simultaneously distancing oneself from dangerous, or other, spaces. In the above quote, this participant does not acknowledge that Parkdale, or any other 'bad part of town', is actually home for many people. Thus, arguing that it is 'the wrong place to be' functions to distance this participant from both the area and its inhabitants. This is possible because of her multiple sites of privilege (such as whiteness, middle-classness and ability). In claiming safety, and the related sense of at-homeness in certain urban spaces, women are able to rely on the notion that urban violence is distant from both themselves, and the spaces they choose to claim. The privileges of whiteness and middle-classness help make this distancing possible.

Recognizing Links between Privileged Identities and Safety

Several participants articulated explicit connections between sites of privilege and feelings of safety. Interestingly, they conceived of privilege as both a material reality, and a subjective experience. As well, the women noted freedom from fear of racist violence, and the general invisibility of whiteness.

> I certainly don't deserve better because I'm white or because I live in a good neighbourhood. But that's not to say that it doesn't happen 'here' or to 'upper class' and 'white' people. . . . It's a sense of false superiority and false comfort for some to believe that they aren't inclined or exposed to such base behaviour as violence.

This woman conceptualizes the ability to live in denial about the existence of violence in your family or neighbourhood as a function of privilege. This viewpoint posits privilege as an aspect of subjectivity, as well as a material reality. She argues that whiteness and a higher standard of living cannot fully protect one from violence, but they can protect from the subjective effects of dealing with violence as a daily reality. 'There's not a heck of a lot of racism against white people [laughter] . . . we don't have to fear about that. . . . It personally took me a while to figure out that that [racist violence] still happened. . . . Like "what, we're racists in Canada?"'

For this participant, whiteness was experienced as a safe identity in the Canadian context. This view of white privilege also illustrates that privilege can come from simply not having to worry about racism or racist violence. Whiteness can also act as a blind spot that hides racism and racist violence from white people. A sense of security afforded by whiteness makes feelings of safety in urban space more feasible. Other participants noted class privilege as a factor in their abilities to make choices about how and where to live in the city:

> I definitely feel I'm at the point where I can [make safe choices], in that I have a bank card and now I have money in my bank account and I can take a cab . . . I could move, I can pick the area I want to live in.

> If I feel not safe then I will take a taxi, and I do have the economic means to be able to make that choice. Which is lucky. . . . But at this point definitely safety comes over economics.

Thus, some participants articulated their own understandings of how privileged aspects of their identities contributed to their personal feelings of safety in the city.

Conclusions: Unsettling space and subjectivity

> To question how spaces come to be, and to trace what they produce as well as what produces them, is to unsettle familiar everyday notions. (Razack, 2002a, p. 7)

In this article, I have attempted to unsettle notions of the female subject as fearful and constrained in urban space, and to trace how privilege might influence women's affective experiences of urban space. While the limitations of this small study prevent any claims to 'know' the experiences of a broader group of women across different geographic areas, I suggest that this study represents a chance to open a critical dialogue about privilege in the framework of interlocking systems of oppression. As Bondi and Rose (2003, p. 234) note, 'much work remains to be done to understand how constructions of race, ethnicity and class interweave with gender and sexuality to shape everyday experiences of inclusion in, and exclusion from, urban spaces'. An interrogation of systems of privilege is integral to this project. In this conclusion, I will discuss some relevant theories of privilege, space and identity in terms of the tentative conclusions drawn from this study.

I have suggested that salient forms of privilege in Canadian society facilitated an ability to make a home in the city with confidence and security. In her study of young white female suburban identities in Long Island, New York, Lorraine Kenny (2000) uses Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital* to explain access to the privileges of whiteness and middle-classness in most spaces, under most circumstances. Kenny argues that although women are often placed on the margins of the white middle class due to gender subordination, race and class privilege still allow access to most spaces. I maintain that this cultural capital is extremely valuable in terms of constructing a sense of belonging in urban space. Not only does it offer invisibility by allowing one to blend in both physically and socially, it also allows whiteness to act as a blind spot prohibiting whites from seeing the violence (including racist violence) in the lives of minoritized subjects. The participants' sense of Toronto as a relatively harmonious, safe and diverse city was evidence of this effect. However, this cultural capital can be undermined at many points, particularly through gendered harassment in public spaces (see Koskela, 1999; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1991, 1997; Rice & Russell, 1995). Thus, intersections of privilege and oppression work to produce a complex subject positioning in relation to safety and fear in different spaces.

The notion of cultural capital is useful in explaining the ability to access and to feel at home in urban space; however, it must be recognized that a sense of belonging in urban space does not simply reflect sites of privilege. It also produces and reproduces privileged female identities. As Razack (2002b) argues, privileged subjects can come to know themselves as privileged (and dominant) through their ability to move in and out of spaces marked as *other*. In this project, I argue that the women's ability to move into racially, ethnically and economically diverse urban areas from suburban areas and claim a home space is related to white privilege and class status. Given the reciprocal conditioning of place and identity, these privileges may be reinforced by movement into and through urban space. Razack (2002b) maintains that a key element in the construction of white bourgeois subjectivity was mobility in and through foreign space, and that this mobility was related to a colonialist sense of entitlement. I suggest that feminist work on appropriation of urban and other spaces should consider the implications of this in terms of a gendered white bourgeois subjectivity. The ongoing constitution of privilege in relation to marginalized places and identities is a key process in reproducing interlocking systems of privilege and oppression.

The tension between owning cultural capital, and nonetheless experiencing gendered fear as a constraint, suggests that with respect to fear of violence in public spaces, gendered subjectivity can be understood 'in terms of multiple, shifting and potentially contradictory subject positions' (Mehta & Bondi, 1999, p. 69). In this project, women embodied different subject positions across urban space, and these positions were influenced by women's own identities, and their feelings about particular spaces. For example, there was a sense of vulnerability that occurred in unfamiliar or disreputable spaces, which was replaced by confidence and the capacity to own space in familiar spaces. Whiteness and middle-classness were sites of privilege that contributed to greater feelings of safety in everyday life; however, in relation to particular notions of bad areas, privileged identities themselves became markers of difference that contributed to a feeling of potentially being 'targeted'. Gendered subjectivity can also be affected by past experiences of violence, whether in public or private spaces (Stanko, 1990). Although this dimension was not explored in this study, it is important to note that these experiences might cause a shift in women's subjective experiences of urban public space, regardless of privileged social locations.

These subject positions exist in tension with one another. Koskela (1997) argues that for women, being afraid in the city is like being in 'paradoxical space',[12] that is, in the centre and on the margins at the same time. For the women in this project, their positions of privilege placed them at the centre, allowing them to feel in place in the city. Furthermore, distancing from marginal areas works in a relational sense to centre these women in the particular areas they choose as home spaces. However, as women they are marginalized by the many physical and social characteristics of cities that allow men the privilege of not having to claim urban space.[13]

Even as privileged women experience fear and violence as oppressive forces, it is important to use the framework of interlocking systems to see how, for example, fear of racist violence, and racist fear of violence, work to simultaneously oppress people of colour, and confer privilege on white people. Frankenberg (1993, p. 135) states that 'white women's position in a society that is racially hierarchical must be analyzed in relation to the subordinated positions of people of color'. Day (1999) approaches women's racist fear of violence in this way; moreover, feminist authors such as hooks (1990), Lorde (1984) and Davis (1983) have long argued that white privilege is reproduced by racist fear of violence, in particular, the myth of the black rapist. Racist fear of violence can be expressed through spatial processes such as suburbanization and gentrification, through which privileged groups can maintain racial segregation, white privilege, and class privilege. These processes have negative effects on minoritized groups, who are often subject to criminalization, racist violence in the name of social control, a lack of social programs, and urban environmental racism (Madriz, 1997; Pulido, 2000).

In drawing attention to privilege as a salient factor in both women's affective experiences of urban space, and in the constitution of gendered identities in urban space, I aim to open dialogue about women's appropriation of urban space. I suggest that this project has links to other ways of thinking about how women claim urban space, for example through their participation in urban social and environmental movements, their campaigns for a gendered planning perspective, their participation in processes of gentrification, and their organizing for urban social services such as housing, child care, and transportation. Wekerle (1999, 2000) has recently connected women's urban participation to modes of insurgent citizenship, as women draw on human rights discourse to make their claims for rights and services in the city. Safety remains an important item on this agenda; however, notions of safety are being expanded to include private and public spaces, and to include other marginalized groups that may experience fear in urban space.

To expand the scope of feminist research on space and fear, I suggest that notions of space need to be informed by theory that addresses interlocking oppressions. We must continue to explore the ways that places and identities are mutually constituted by multiple practices and ideologies, including racism, classism and homophobia. It is only through an interrogation of the symbiotic structuring of privilege and subordination that oppressive forces such as fear can be effectively understood.

Acknowledgements

Helen Lenskyj and Sherene Razack provided invaluable guidance during this research project. Gerda Wekerle's insightful comments aided in the revision of an earlier draft of this paper. I also thank the editor and three anonymous reviewers for their feedback. A version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, New Orleans, 2003.

Notes

1. Nonetheless, Day does not explicitly discuss privilege and safety.
2. The population of the amalgamated City of Toronto is 2.36 million.
3. 'Visible minority' is an official term (used in legislation and other state discourses) in Canada for referring to people of colour.
4. Urban public space is not the only kind of public space where women may experience fear; feminist research has also looked at rural spaces (Burgess, 1996; Pollard, 1989).
5. Initial questions included: Do women have different perceptions of safety and danger in urban and suburban spaces? How do differences in suburban and urban lifestyles, environments, social contexts, and economic contexts, affect these perceptions?
6. Examples of focus group topics included: comparing feelings of safety and fear in the city and suburbs; safety and fear in particular urban areas; racial/ethnic and class diversity across the suburbs and city; impact of whiteness on feelings of safety and fear; factors that lead to increased feelings of safety and fear; changes in these feelings as participants moved into adulthood.
7. Maynard (1994) notes that it is not always necessary to have a diverse group of participants in order to say something about racism and white privilege.
8. Discussing whiteness is often conflated with admitting to racism, or identifying with white supremacist ideologies (Frankenberg, 1993).
9. The city of Mississauga has a population of 625,000. Richmond Hill is a town of 149,000. Whitby is a town of 92,000.
10. Peggy McIntosh (1990) notes the privilege of never having race work against you as a white person.
11. In Toronto, the designation 'inner-city' is a social, rather than geographic, description. It is applied to areas that are dealing with problems such as low high-school completion rates, lack of social programs, unemployment, and poverty.
12. Koskela borrows Gillian Rose's (1993) notion of 'paradoxical space.'
13. Certainly men's ability to take possession of urban space is also affected by sites of privilege and oppression. However, the city is built upon many masculinized assumptions about the nature of work, family and social relations in general.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

En sitio y en casa en la ciudad: Conectando privilegio, seguridad y pertenecer por mujeres en Toronto

RESUMEN En ese articulo, teorizo las conexiones entre las privilegiadas identidades sociales y los sentidos de seguridad y pertenecer en un ambiente urbana diverso: Toronto. Basando en una investigación cualitativa con un grupo de mujeres que se crecían en los suburbios de Toronto y luego decidieron a vivir in la ciudad, este articulo es un estudio preliminar sobre los motivos que hacen posible para algunas mujeres para sentirse 'en sitio' en la ciudad. Sugiero que la confidencia, el sentido de pertenecer, y la capacidad para distanciarse de la violencia todos están relacionados a los privilegios como de ser blanco y del clase medio. In el contexto canadiense, esas identidades funcionan como la norma invisible, permitiendo mujeres para sentirse 'en casa' en una ciudad diversa étnicamente y económicamente. Además, la capacidad para mover en y por el espacio urbano puede funcionar en una manera recíproca para reforzar las identidades privilegio. Argumento que es importante para examinar los sistemas entrelazado de privilegio y opresión en cuanto a las experiencias afectivas de mujeres en espacio urbano y la constitución de género de los espacios urbanos. Este enfoque problematiza y complica el concepto de la apropiación de espacio urbano a través de un examen de la prominencia del privilegio. Concluyo sugiriendo que este artículo puede servir para abrir el diálogo sobre la relación entre las identidades privilegió y la identidades marginados en la ciudad, y como resultado para complicando la investigación feminista sobre la cotidiana de mujeres en la ciudad.