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Waldo 101: Mapping the Intersections of Space, Place, and Gender in the Lives of Ten Homeless Youth

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There is a question that I remember fondly from my childhood. Consisting of a mere two words, it managed to consume the interest of just about everyone I knew. That question is: “Where’s Waldo?” Decked-out in a red and white striped top, round glasses, and a toque that sat atop flowing brown locks, Waldo was the iconic traveler. The purpose of the “Where’s Waldo?” game was to search for this cartoon man hidden among any number of people and objects. He could be in the top left corner, hidden behind an elephant, or standing smack-dab in the middle of the page. You just never knew when or where he would reveal himself.

Despite this little man’s constant wave and goofy grin, he actually has some very insightful lessons to teach. Waldo’s entire existence depends on the fact that he cannot make himself disappear. Despite his best efforts to hide, someone always manages to find him. That we are not asked, “Who’s Waldo?”, “How’s Waldo?”, or even the more philosophical “Why’s Waldo?” but rather, “Where’s Waldo?” implies that Waldo is someone to be found – someone to be searched out, looked at, and pointed to. The first thing that Waldo teaches us is that in public spaces we are nearly always seen, even when we do not want to be. Waldo shows us that occupying public space leads to being noticed. The only way to escape the gaze of others is to be well hidden – and even that only lasts so long before a person is ultimately found.

What one notices when searching for Waldo is that his surroundings matter a great deal in helping to either conceal or reveal him. In less busy pictures Wal-

do sticks out like a sore thumb. The background scene, the people and objects around him, and his location on the page all contribute to making him either very well hidden or particularly easy to spot. The second lesson Waldo teaches us, then, is that when dealing with space and place, context matters in determining whether a person is easily noticed or can remain somewhat hidden from view.

Waldo's talent for moving through any landscape with ease no doubt contributes to his ability to hide. There is a third lesson here. This sense of easy movement is made possible largely because Waldo is, in fact, a Waldo. Would the same unmatched access to these spaces and the ability to move through them with such ease be possible if the question were, "Where's Wanda?" Being a man in contemporary North American society allows Waldo a sort of bodily freedom that many women do not get to experience. Arguably the game would not be nearly as challenging if it were Wanda we were asked to seek.

Off the Page and onto the Street

For a cartoon character, Waldo offers some very interesting commentary on the lived experiences of human beings. This chapter offers up these observations as a way of thinking about the connections between space, place, and gender in the lives of ten homeless youth. At its heart, this is a discussion about embodied difference and spatial practices; that is, our daily routines and the ways in which we move through spaces and places are related to our physical bodies and the meanings that get attached to them. For instance, a person's body may be categorized differently depending on factors such as one's gender, age, race/ethnicity, and physical abilities (among others). The decision to focus on gender in this chapter is meant in no way to deny the many other distinctions that mark individuals as unique (such as age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, ability, religion, etc.). While some of these factors entered into this research, gender was the one that emerged most clearly¹. Throughout this chapter, I examine the ways in which being young, homeless/poor, and either male or female impacts one's experience of living in Toronto, Ontario while acknowledging that these experiences are affected by other factors that are not actively discussed here.

The research discussed throughout this chapter stems from a study conducted in the spring of 2010. Open-ended interviews were conducted, in which ten participants between the ages of 17 and 24 discussed their experiences of being homeless in Toronto. Five of the participants were female and five were male. It must be noted that with a small population of ten participants the goal is not to pro-

1. Arguably this could be because the participants in the present study were mostly heterosexual-identified, white, Canadian-born, of similar ages, and did not identify any strong religious affiliations or mobility challenges.

vide representative accounts that detail the lives of all young homeless men and women. Rather, the goal of this chapter is to examine the ways in which gender, space, and place intersect in the lives of these ten young people and to see what we may learn from their experiences to better inform our understanding of street life.

Each participant was asked to recall the 24 hour period (from 12:00 am to 11:59 pm) prior to the interview. With this information in mind, the participants sat in front of a map of Toronto and marked their destinations and pathways through the city. As they diagrammed, they discussed where they went, the routes they took, their means of transportation, why they chose to go to different places, and with whom they travelled. What resulted were ten distinct maps that accounted for a 24 hour period in the participants' respective lives. While these maps may not have been completely accurate down to the minute, they provided a sense of how these young people spent a typical day and the ways they travelled through space to get to places that had meaning to them.

Like Waldo, their surroundings were important in helping them either draw attention to themselves or essentially disappear. They moved between drop-in centres, shelters, city parks, shopping centres, back alleyways, and street corners with different levels of ease and purpose in each. When in public they used alternate strategies, trying to blend in with the general public at certain times and in some places, while highlighting their bodies, poverty, and need for support at others. Also like Waldo, the public gaze was upon them. When occupying public spaces and places these young people felt the presence of police officers and housed citizens. This was particularly true when they made themselves visible through their choice of places to hang out (such as in a public park or standing near a social service agency) or when situating themselves in high-traffic spaces (as when panhandling on busy street corners). Some of these youth possessed Waldo's ability to move fairly easily through more hidden spaces, like alleyways, in an attempt to avoid the public gaze. These were generally the Waldos – that is, the men – among the participants. The Wandas had a considerably more difficult time escaping the view of the public and the police. Their inability to freely access the city's hidden spaces without putting their physical safety at risk often left them visibly exposed with nowhere to hide.

Spaces and Places in the City of Toronto

Homelessness is experienced differently by different people. One shared characteristic for most, however, is that it is closely related to frequent movement, either within or between cities (May, 2000). Yet, as Shantz notes, "Despite the images conjured up by names like vagabond, drifter, or hobo, being homeless is an experience of bodily and spatial confinement" (2010:182). How is this contradiction possible? How can those who are homeless move around frequently and yet be

subject to 'spatial confinement'? The reality of street life is such that homeless individuals, while regularly moving, tend to do so in confining and routinized or repetitive ways (Snow & Mulcahy, 2001). For many homeless youth, life on the street is highly structured around visits to family, friends, and social workers, around social service hours, and on the best times to earn money through activities like panhandling and squeegeeing (Karabanow, 2004). Homeless youth are known to gather in the downtown core of a city, which often houses shelters and social service agencies, while also offering reasonable access to prime spaces (busy areas like main streets) and marginal spaces (such as parks, which are more removed from the heavy foot traffic of the sidewalks) (Ruddick, 2002).

The downtown core of Toronto is an appealing place to many people, whether homeless or not. The fact that the young people in this study spent most of their time there is not surprising. As a major city centre, downtown Toronto is an exciting place. People go there for the food, shopping, nightlife, culture, and people-watching opportunities. One of the biggest draws of moving to Toronto for the young participants was the chance to live in a big city. Once in Toronto, they all decided to use the many assistance programs that operate throughout the city and the social service sector. Despite being fiercely independent and proud of their ability to survive, homeless youth show extremely high reliance on social service agencies.

Living in poverty means that these young people depend on services for their basic needs. They provide a place where homeless youth can obtain food, shelter, and support, all while socializing with their peers. Yet, despite the help they provide, social service agencies in many ways work against their own goals of helping youth find housing, return to school, get a job, and become self-sufficient. They do so in two key ways. First, the geographical location of these agencies means that the youth who rely on them must spend their days contained within the downtown city core. Second, because of operating costs, all of these agencies are limited in the number and types of services they can offer and in the hours in which they can operate. This is particularly important in relation to meal programs, which vary in the days and times they are offered by each individual agency (Dachner et al., 2009). Young people frequently have to move through a circuit of service agencies throughout a given day in order to meet their needs. This creates a kind of enforced movement, as young people are drawn in at specific times (like dinner or shelter curfews) and driven out at others (as when the shelter closes in the morning).

Consider for a moment the two maps shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.2. The first shows the twenty-four hour maps created by the ten participants overlaid upon one another. The highest concentration of activity is clearly in the downtown core. The extended purple and orange lines show the distances some youth travelled to get to this area (while the light blue line shows the

only youth who began in the downtown core and travelled outside it).

Figure 1.1: Participant Maps Combined²



Figure 1.2: Location of Social Service Agencies



The second map, Figure 1.2, shows the placement of the agencies these ten youth collectively visited, as marked by yellow stars. The red square surrounding the majority of agencies indicates the area in which most of the youth spent their 24 hours. What these maps highlight is the degree to which homeless young people's movements are based on their need for services. "It's pretty simple," says Ben, a 24-year old man, (whose day is highlighted in red on Figure 1.1), "I do the same things. Like, see this?" he asks, pointing to the map of his day. "I do that every day."

I Always Feel Like Somebody's Watching Me

In the City of Toronto, the response to youth homelessness primarily involves a clustering of services in the downtown core. As a result, many young people feel they have no choice but to spend their days in this area, making homeless youth a visible presence in this space. They can be seen sitting in parks, squeegeeing on street corners, and asking passersby for money. Their presence is disturbing to some, creating what Flusty (2001) calls unsettling social encounters with difference. This is not just because they are homeless, but because they are young as well.

Sadly, the unintended outcome of the system that aims to help these young people is that it also in many ways leads to animosity against them. The criminalization of homelessness has become an increasingly common strategy for dealing with the large number of young people living and working on the streets of To-

2. All maps were constructed using ESRI ArcGIS mapping software (student version) and on-line extensions. For more information please refer to <http://www.esri.com>

ronto (O'Grady et al., 2011). The high concentration of homeless youth in the downtown core means that police pay close attention to their presence and their actions. As Berti and Sommers (2010) note, however, from the point of view of a homeless person, the law exists to protect other people from them, not to protect them from other people. Although some homeless youth report positive experiences with the police, these kinds of interactions are rare (O'Grady et al., 2011). "I find that police feel that they have a lot of power and sometimes go on power trips," says Jordana, an 18 year-old participant who has been on and off the streets for three years. "I mean every once in awhile there's a good cop," she continues, "but there's a huge power trip going on and...everyone's just trying to get rid of us." The police are largely thought of by these youth as disciplinary, controlling, and not as a source of protection (Herbert, 2001).

It is not only police, however, who keep homeless youth under surveillance. Negative and accusatory news media portrayals of the homeless (Klodawsky et al., 2002) stir up the public imagination, making these young people seem threatening to those who are more privileged. As a result, many members of the general public, and often business owners, tend to look upon homeless youth with suspicion. Homeless bodies – those that appear disorderly, dirty, and dangerous – notes Wright (1997), are viewed as objects of repulsion but also as objects of fascination. These young people are not generally able to entirely escape the public gaze. Being fixed in the downtown core, as a result of reliance on services, means that completely disappearing is not an option for these youth.

As Kelly and Caputo (2007) suggest, as a result of police observation (and arguably the hostile gaze of other, housed, citizens), homeless youth sometimes attempt to make themselves invisible. They do so by blending in and not drawing attention to their poverty and homelessness. Mike, for instance, discusses a common approach he uses when he sees police, stating, "I just stand-up and look like I'm busy, like I'm on a phone or something...maybe like I'm looking through a phone or something like that or just, like, something like any other regular person would be doing." Hiding in plain sight is also a strategy mentioned by Paige, who at the time of the interview was actively avoiding police because of an outstanding arrest warrant. Says Paige, "Main streets I feel a lot less sketched on 'cause there's so many people...who aren't well off so, it's a lot easier to blend in. You can be a normal civilian." In downtown Toronto these youth sometimes try to blend in with other "regular" and "normal" people, as Mike and Paige have said. For homeless youth, this kind of blending is one valuable and common strategy (Radley et al., 2005; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004).

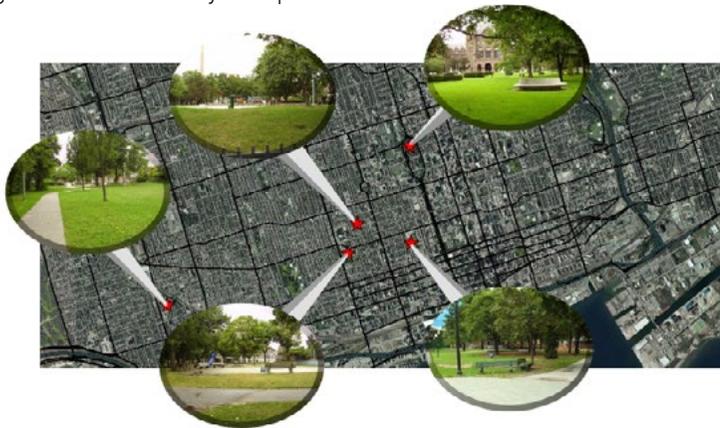
However, as these young people know all too well, it is not always easy to blend in. Some places and spaces are less suitable for hiding. Becoming invisible is

virtually impossible when spending long periods of time in public places and/or while engaging in non-traditional activities like panhandling and squeegeeing. The amount that one can hide (or conversely the amount that one gets noticed) is directly related to the amount of time spent in public places and spaces as well as the activities engaged in while in front of other people.

The Places & Spaces in Which Even Waldo Could Not Hide

To be in a public place or space subjects a person to observation (or at the extreme, surveillance) by other people. Ultimately, someone will be watching. This is definitely true in relation to homeless youth, who are frequently watched by police and the general public. Their reliance on services in the downtown core means they are often bound to this area and are present in relatively large numbers. While a single youth may be able to get by unnoticed, a group of youth sitting together makes their presence known. There are many places and spaces in particular should be highlighted in this regard – while youth are in parks, in front of or near social service agencies, and on street corners engaging in money-making activities. In some of these settings homeless youth do not try to hide, instead choosing to let their homelessness show and be put on display.

Figure 1.3: Parks Visited by Participants



Given their constant presence downtown, it is not surprising that youth favour the parks located within this area. Public parks provide a cost-free space where these young people can spend their time when agencies are closed. In the 24 hour periods mapped by the participants, many parks appeared (as seen in Figure 1.3). While gathering in parks may be an enjoyable way for these young people to spend time with friends, relax, and get fresh air, parks are also public spaces in which their presence does not go unnoticed. Young people are often under surveillance in pub-

lic (Sibley, 1995) and this is especially true of some youth more than others (Hil & Bessant, 1999). Because homeless youth often engage in personal and private activities in these parks, like taking a nap or relieving oneself, they become prime sites for the policing of homeless youth (Karabanow, 2010; Snow & Mulcahy, 2001).

Kelling and Coles (1997) write that when street people take over parks and make them seemingly unusable by families and children this is a police problem, even if street people are not committing major crimes. It seems that public spaces, like parks, are made more enjoyable for some by forcing out others who might try to share these spaces (Flusty, 2001). According to the study participants, the police frequently seek out homeless youth in public parks. Lucy, for instance, tells a story from her 24 hour period in which three police officers questioned her friends in a popular Kensington Market park.

Three bike cops came in and they went right to that group of twelve people [that I was with]. Like, directly to them 'cause it was a group of, like, twelve young kids, right. So, they're, like, "What are these kids doing in the park?" The police gotta understand that it's a park... Pretty sure that's what it's there for. They have benches and stuff.

At certain times members of the general public take on the role of supervising the activities of homeless youth as well, appointing themselves agents of the police. Paige, for instance, notes that she feels uncomfortable in public parks because, "there's always a chance there's a paranoid parent" who will see her with friends and report to police that, "there's a gang in the park." Public parks are one specific kind of space that resists attempts by homeless youth to hide. Police and some members of the general public tend to keep these young people under close watch. However, parks are not the only locations that draw the attention of on-lookers.

Social service agencies are an essential part of the response to youth homelessness in most cities. In many instances, homelessness agencies are distanced from mainstream social spaces (Radley et al., 2005), and located instead in unsafe neighbourhoods with entrances in back alleys (Thompson et al., 2006). However, as previously shown in Figure 1.2, the agencies these young people favoured were all located in the downtown core, with most housed in highly visible, accessible buildings with large signs. While this may be helpful in encouraging young people to access these services, it has the negative effect of drawing attention to those in and around the buildings as service recipients. For some this can be highly stigmatizing. As Takahashi (1997) notes, stigma is attached not just to the bodies of homeless persons, but to the service facilities they use as well. Some of the agencies accessed by the youth are pictured in Figures 1.4 to 1.6.

Figures 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6: Social Service Agencies



Service agencies are places that make it hard for homeless youth to hide. While youth may be able to go inside and find a degree of privacy, being in or around a building that is a known social service agency often makes them more visible to police and the general public. Marcus, a 24 year old man who works and goes to school, rarely encounters the police in the course of his day. However, while he has only limited experience with the police, the times he has encountered them have always taken place near the shelter in which he temporarily lives. Speaking of the last encounter, Marcus says, “I was in the [shelter], in the back and I was... eating some food or whatever... They go there sometimes...because it’s a shelter.”

Much like the police, members of the general public may be aware of buildings that are clearly marked as social service agencies. Being near these buildings may serve to identify a person as a client. Mike, for one, was acutely aware of this and tried to hide his association with the shelter he was staying in by smoking his cigarettes in the nearby alley instead of out front.

I don't want to stand in the front...no one says nothing but it's just the overall, the overall vibe. It's...as if I feel like everybody knows what place that is and who you are and why you're there...And who knows if somebody might just happen to be passing by or driving by and notice you? It's like, [I'd rather] avoid all that right from the get-go.

Social stigma can result from making one’s association with particular places known (Pillow, 2000). Blending in is considerably more difficult when standing in front of or near places that draw attention. The use of social service agencies, while helpful and necessary, may have the unintended effect of reinforcing social stigma by drawing attention to individual clients and limiting their ability to blend into the crowd.

In public spaces and places people are inevitably seen. However, some places offer more cover than others. Public parks and social service agencies are not among them. In much the same way, busy intersections in downtown Toronto, while crossed by millions of people, offer little anonymity for those who choose to remain rather than pass through them. The money-making strate-

gies of some homeless youth demand that they make their presence known in these very public spaces. Many homeless youth are acutely aware that marketing their own poverty and homelessness can increase their earnings from panhandling and squeegeeing, by playing on the sympathies of passersby (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). In this regard, they avoid hiding and make themselves obvious instead. By sitting on the sidewalks of downtown Toronto, these young people place themselves directly in the view of authority figures. While being seen is the goal, being seen by everyone is not. Young people may earn more money by making themselves visible in these spaces, but it comes at a cost.

As a group, street youth tend to feel alienated and marginalized (Karabanow, 2004). For many, earning money in very public ways can be a further stigmatizing and demoralizing experience (Kidd, 2007). Ben, for instance, says, "Sometimes [I] panhandle. I don't like doing it, though...it's degrading." Panhandling is a source of stigma for many of these young people. They display their bodies, showcasing homelessness and poverty, to the people who pass by. Selecting a location in which to do so requires finding a balance between being seen (by those who might offer money) and not being seen (by police or those who might call the police). The youth understand this contradiction well, like Paige, who says, "I don't think you make the best money on main streets per se. You kinda gotta find a corner that's busy but not too busy." Some streets and intersections are favoured for their high traffic and familiarity, like the corner of Queen Street West and Spadina Street and in front of Much Music, as shown respectively in Figures 1.7 and 1.8.

Figures 1.7 and 1.8: Popular Panhandling Locations



While youth sometimes try to blend in with other citizens in the downtown core, it is not the best strategy to employ when trying to earn money through panhandling or squeegeeing. Instead these youth have to make their presence known in certain busy spaces. Of course, there is always the risk of being seen by the police and some citizens. The outcome of being seen, however, is not the same for all youth engaged in informal money-making practices. In this regard there are clear gender differences, with young homeless men and women drawing different responses. The most common public discourse around youth homelessness (in the media, for example) tends to portray panhandlers and squeegeers as aggressive people who hold the

public hostage (Hermer & Mosher, 2002). Vulnerable female citizens are identified as the victims of these supposedly dangerous young men (Glasbeek, 2010).

In the media, it is almost always men who are portrayed in this negative light³. However, very rarely are the young women who earn money in these ways recognized. When faced with females who panhandle or squeegee, it appears the police and public are at a loss about how to respond. It is generally believed that police officers treat homeless women better than homeless men (Novac et al., 2009). Part of this may stem from a belief that the street is a masculine space and not one that is meant for women. As Paige says, “There’s been a few times I was squeegeeing... [the police are] like, ‘Oh, you’re too pretty to be doing this. What are you doing with your life?’”

When women make themselves visible by engaging in non-traditional money-making activities in highly public spaces, they draw attention not only to themselves but to their violation of feminine gender norms. This behaviour can elicit strong reactions from the general public. Some passersby will try to go out of their way to help them by offering food or extra money. Relying on public sympathy in this way is a strategy many young women take advantage of (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004). Just as frequently, however, members of the general public will take offense to these women’s very public behaviour. As is often the case with women on the street, reactions are riddled with uncertainty, as observers try to maintain the expectations of femininity and womanhood they are used to, even as these categories are violated before their eyes (Cresswell, 1999).

Homeless women may draw more attention than men and this is not always beneficial to them. In one Toronto-based study, women were more likely to report having been verbally abused, attacked, or threatened because of their homelessness (Novac et al., 2009). One participant from this study reports that passersby frequently comment on her appearance and sexuality while she is panhandling. Jordana says, “I’ve been called everything. I’ve been called a homeless slut. I’ve been called a street whore. I’ve been called fat. I’ve been called a freak.” Working in any form on the street can lead to criticism about their failure to properly act “feminine”. Accepting money from strangers is a primary means of survival, but it also exposes women to predators who may expect something from them in return (Bender et al., 2007). For Anne this problem occurs often. She says,

There’s a lotta creepy people here. Especially when you’re trying to pan and [you] get, like, all these guys coming up like, “Oh, I’ll give you this much

3. One recent exception is the highly publicized trial of panhandler Nicole Kish, who was found guilty of second degree murder in the stabbing death of Ross Hammond.

[money] if you come and do this with me.” Like, I don’t do that type of stuff, sorry, keep moving along. And then they just keep bugging you and bugging you... You get those creepy men that want just... (laughs). I’ve seen some guys harassing my friends too and it’s just like, “Leave us alone. We’re saying no.”

When confronted with the hostile public gaze or the watchful eyes of the police, it is understandable that young people would sometimes want to find a way to escape. The ability to hide in this way, however, is often a privilege reserved for men. As Wardhaugh (1999) notes, men have the ability to claim the street as their own in a way women generally do not. It is this power that allows men to slip into the city’s hidden spaces, concealing themselves from view.

Living in Waldo’s World

As Wright (1997) notes, not all bodies are treated equally nor do they occupy the same social and physical spaces. This largely has to do with whether or not a person feels physically threatened. Whether exposed or hidden, the men felt relatively assured that they were not in danger. In contemporary North American society, men often have the privilege of not constantly thinking about where they put their bodies. This can lead them into a number of spaces where women may feel vulnerable, such as the downtown Toronto alleys in Figures 1.9 and 1.10. Ray, for instance, a twenty-one year old man, actively enjoys spending time in back alleyways. He says,

I like the alleys a lot more. I think that the art and the graffiti and you never know what you’re really going to see in an alley. “Oh look, a box of needles! Wahoo! Don’t step on that” (laughs) or something like a mattress that somebody slept on. It’s like, “Oh, wonder what that smells like?” or something. I don’t know. Somebody making a deal with somebody else or somebody just listening to music in an alley... Like, I find you can savour the moment more in an alleyway.

Figures 1.9 & 1.10: Alleys Frequentated by Male Participants in Toronto



This same sense of adventure and ability to fade into the shadowy spaces was not shared by the women. Victimization is common on the street and women

are very aware of the high risk of sexual assault (Gaetz 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010). This fear is especially pronounced at night, when darkness creates the ideal conditions for an attacker to hide. Jordana discusses the ways gender, space, and time can interact to threaten women and keep them exposed. She states, “Maybe I’m just being an insecure, scared, little girl but I hate going anywhere in this city after dark...I won’t go out alone.” Anne echoes Jordana’s sentiment, stating,

I don't really know much of the side streets and I know like some alleyways to go down to and cut through to make the trips a little shorter. It's just sometimes I don't like going down them 'cause I'm a girl and alleyways and stuff. Especially when it's, like, kinda getting later at night. You never really know.

Koskela (1997) warns against over-generalizing women’s fear, arguing that a woman’s awareness of danger signs means that she need not be afraid at all times and in all places. This is certainly true of the women in this study who showed no hesitation in walking down main streets and sitting in parks during the daytime. However, the geography of women’s fear must be compared with their geography of danger (Cresswell, 1999); in fact, the places and spaces women fear the most tend to be the ones in which they are most likely to be victimized.

Their own personal experiences have warned them of a dangerous dilemma – while men may not generally fear being outside at night, a woman on the street is at risk whether she tries to hide herself or remains exposed. Paige recounts one incident in which she tried to hide herself at night behind a church, stating, “The first time I slept alone I almost got raped...That was really scary and since then I’ve never slept alone...and before that I never slept alone...I guess I make sure I’m never alone.” The women were careful not to enter hidden spaces and even those they occupied freely in the daytime had the potential to become frightening at night.

As Beneke (1995) argues, the fear of rape changes the meaning of the night, making the same parks, agencies, and streets these young women visit during the day sources of fear. This is true for Lucy, who says, “I avoid parks at night when I’m by myself just ‘cause, like, I know how it can be...I’ve had it happen to my friends before where they’ve gotten raped and stuff in parks.” Julia reports being sexually assaulted twice while on major downtown streets just steps away from a social service agency she frequents. Of the second encounter, Julia says, “These guys, like, they came up to me...late at night...it was actually down Queen Street, like right down here...They, like, held this weapon against me.” She adds, “I just try to stay away from those spots.”

In general when faced with the threat of victimization, it has been noted that women restrict themselves, staying indoors at night, not walking alone, and avoiding

certain parts of town (Pain, 1991). While these are practical options for housed women, they are not all possible for those living on the street. Being young and homeless means that street youth, whether male or female, often lack the means to protect themselves (Gaetz, 2004). However, men are generally less concerned for their safety and can navigate the streets in different ways than women. This inequality is something both men and women are keenly aware of. For instance, when asked if he worries for his safety when travelling alone at night, Marcus responds,

No, I don't think so. I think it's the other way around... like, 'cause I'm a male, right? So it's really it's the female that, you know, they're alone. That's the typical scenario... I don't think I've ever heard any stories in the paper where, I don't know, a man getting attacked or whatever you know at midnight so... That's not even on my mind. That's the least of my worries.

Unless faced with an immediate threat, the men generally felt free to engage in Waldo's sense of unrestricted adventure.

Many, however, felt it was their duty to protect their female friends and were willing to relinquish their freedom of movement to ensure women were comfortable. Women's perceived vulnerability is believed to evoke a kind of chivalrous masculinity in some men (Day, 2001). Many of the young men in this study talked about changing their own routes when in the company of women. Rather than taking shortcuts through alleys, they reported staying on the main streets to ensure the woman's sense of safety. For example, when asked if he changes his routine at all when with female friends Ray responds, "Oh, yeah, definitely because I'm not scared to go certain places and a woman might be." Mike agrees, stating, "Most of the time [females] are just not... willing to... go to places that they're not really familiar with." The threat of sexual violence has a tremendous impact on the ways in which women experience their surroundings (Beneke, 1995). By adapting their movements when in the presence of female friends, men get a slight glimpse of the oppressive social and spatial conditions that frequently limit women's movements through the city.

More often than not the women credited men as being their protectors. However, spending time with male friends and boyfriends was only one strategy the women used to protect themselves. Whereas the men in this study remained in the downtown core after nightfall, the women all travelled to more suburban parts of the city where they could stay either in a shelter or with a boyfriend. When comparing the maps of the men's movements (Figure 1.11) with the maps of the women's movements (Figure 1.12), it is clear that the women in this study travelled considerably greater distances to get to – and then out of – downtown Toronto.

Leaving this area was a safety strategy for the women – one that required access to transportation (which they often could not afford and were forced to sneak onto). All but one female travelled with a dog, which was a source of security and comfort but also made it difficult to access necessary social services (which often do not permit pets on the premises) and could interfere with taking public transportation (when drivers refuse entry). For instance, Lucy noted that only some drivers allow her dog on while others do not. Jordana, as well, stated that she often tries, “not to take [transit] during rush hour” when drivers are less likely to let her dog on. When she has to take transit during peak hours, she says, “Sometimes I’ll just sneak him on the back.” The safety strategies of women, while meant to protect them, unfortunately at times increased the risks of victimization by making them travel long distances at night, denying them access to social services, and leaving them without access to public transportation to get around the city.

Figure 1.11: Male Participant Maps Combined



Figure 1.12: Female Participant Maps Combined



Putting Research into Action: Locating Waldo in Policy Decisions

From Waldo’s adventures it is possible to extract some valuable insights into the lived experiences of homeless youth. First, he shows that in public spaces we are nearly always seen, even when we do not want to be. At times the young people in this study tried to hide themselves by blending in with what they called “regular” and “normal” citizens. Unlike Waldo, however, at other times they chose not to hide, making their presence known by highlighting their poverty through panhandling and squeegeeing. Second, where one stands largely determines whether one will be seen. As a result of social services being clustered in the downtown core, many homeless youth gather there and are seen by the police and general public. Some of the places and spaces favoured

by these young people, like parks, social service agencies, and street corners make it impossible to hide. Finally, Waldo's ability to conceal himself matches the homeless men's experiences of accessing hidden spaces like back alleyways without fear, even at night. The women, on the other hand, felt they had to limit their access to certain spaces and places, especially when alone after dark.

These findings alert us to the need for several policy-based initiatives and interventions. Specifically, this research shows that there is a need for diversely located services, stigma reduction initiatives, improved police engagement, and additional supports for women and the dogs they travel with for companionship and protection.

Diversely located services. The young people in this study were all drawn to the downtown core of Toronto during daytime hours because of the concentration and number of accessible services. While there, they were largely limited to areas near the agencies, not wanting to travel too far away and miss crucial operating hours (such as mealtimes). Unfortunately, being in large numbers, they tended to attract the attention of police and the general public. Locating more social services throughout the city of Toronto could help in three key ways. First, young people would not be bound to one area but could travel more freely, knowing agencies would be accessible to them throughout the city. Secondly, this would decrease the number of young people downtown and consequently the attention they draw from the public and police. Finally, young people would not have to rely as much on public transportation, which would reduce their financial burden and decrease the number of women alone downtown at night. This recommendation is not to suggest that services be taken away from the downtown core or decentralized completely, but rather that more service agencies be added to suburban areas of the city.

Stigma reduction initiatives. Social service agencies are a necessary resource for homeless youth. However, as many participants stated, accessing highly visible services can be a source of stigma for those who become identified as clients. The solution is neither to make these agencies less visible nor to have entrances in hidden areas like alleyways (this is both a source of further stigmatization and a threat to the safety of clients). Social service agencies must make their presence known in the local community in positive ways. This could be accomplished directly through public education campaigns or indirectly by participating in events like community clean-up days. The main priority is to dispel misunderstandings the public may have about the clientele and reinforce the need for the agency and its services.

Improved police engagement. As one consequence of clustering service agencies, homeless youth gather in one area and become more visible to the police. Research has shown that there is a great deal of contact between homeless youth and the police and that these encounters are generally negative (O'Grady et al.,

2011). The youth in this study often felt harassed for simply being in public spaces and places. As a highly victimized population, homeless youth should feel they can rely on police to protect and not harass them. The police are an essential service and should be available to protect all citizens, including those who are homeless. Efforts must be made to bring police together with youth representatives, perhaps through a formal council with regular discussion meetings. This should include not only those personnel at higher levels who make policy decisions but also those who work in the primary and community response units.

Additional supports for women and their dogs. Suggesting that there is a need for additional supports for women is in no way intended to suggest men are not in danger on the street or that they do not need essential social services. However, as this research has shown, men and women experience the street in different ways. While the men feel they have considerable freedom, the women tend to be restricted in the places and spaces they can go and the times of day in which they can travel alone. As a result, many women rely on three strategies – they leave the downtown core at night, travel with dogs, and travel with boyfriends or other men. Women need to have access to safe places they can go once it gets dark. While shelters help in this regard, not all women live in (or want to live in) shelters. Night-time drop-in hours (whether available to everyone or women only) must be made available in the downtown core. This could be the responsibility of one agency or operate on a rotating basis.

As a further measure of safety, social service agencies need to change their policies to allow dogs to accompany women. Travelling with a dog can offer a considerable degree of protection but it can also serve to isolate a woman who is unwilling to leave her dog unattended outside an agency. Offering women the opportunity to bring a dog inside shelters, drop-in centres, and other agencies could increase the chances that women will use these services, especially in the evening. This small initiative could go a long way to improving safety for women on the street.

Sometimes lessons come from the most unexpected sources. In his own way, Waldo has opened the door for a conversation about space, place, and gender in the lives of homeless youth. The ability of ten young people to navigate the city of Toronto reconfirmed what Waldo has taught us – that to be in public is to be seen; that the ability to blend in depends on one's surroundings; and that gender is a critically important factor in one's visibility and freedom of movement. It seems that Waldo's uncanny ability to hit the road can teach us a lot about life on the street.

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