FEMINIST CITY

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CHAPTER 3 **CITY OF ONE**

Hardly a week goes by without the appearance of yet another op-ed, thinkpiece, or viral meme decrying our addiction to mobile digital technologies. As in previous technology panics over the home television or the video game, we're warned that all of the attention we're giving to our personal tech is creating anti-social children, fomenting the breakdown of intimate relationships, making us more superficial and individualistic, and breaking the very bonds of civility and sociability that hold human societies together. Urban thinkers have hopped on this panic train too: according to some, our use of smartphones, digital music players, and other wearable tech is contributing to a more atomized, hostile urban environment where people don't participate in public social life.

In these visions, it's never clear who these social urban subjects are or what kinds of bodies they inhabit. These critiques both romanticize an imagined past when city streets were open and amiable, and envision a present where plucking those headphones out of our ears would create modern versions of the agora, with a multiplicity of spontaneous social interactions

generating an urban renaissance. We're never told which magical spell banished sexism, racism, poverty, or homophobia from our civically-engaged streets. These rich fantasies certainly never consider that for some people, phones and headphones are part of our urban survival toolkit.

PERSONAL SPACE

Virginia Woolf wrote that "street haunting" in London was among the "greatest of pleasures."[138] Moving comfortably and silently through the city, drifting amongst fascinating strangers was a cherished pursuit. For women, however, being the flânuese is fraught. To enjoy being alone requires respect for personal space, a privilege that women have rarely been afforded. The idealized flâneur slips in and out of the urban crowd, one with the city yet also anonymous and autonomous.[139] Today, the flâneur might be blasting his favourite tunes through earbuds while strolling the city streets, enjoying his own personal urban adventure soundtrack.

I love having my headphones and music with me in the city too, but for me and many other women, they provide more than a form of entertainment. They may be small, but they create a social barrier against the all-too regular and almost always unwanted intrusions of men. It's impossible to know how many unwelcome conversations and incidents of street harassment I've avoided or been unaware of because of my headphones. I can, however, think of times when a little set of white earbuds might have saved me from humiliating and deeply sexist encounters.

I recall walking home one afternoon from a day shift at the pub where I worked in North London. A man sitting in a parked car waved me over. Because he was stopped in an odd place (and because I'm a helpful Canadian), I assumed he wanted

directions. In fact, he wanted to perform oral sex on me. His words were less polite. I can't remember what, if anything, I said back to him, but I walked the rest of the way home shaking and looking over my shoulder, afraid that he could easily follow me to my empty house.

Here I was, trying to be a good urban citizen. I helpfully emerged from the quiet bubble of a nice walk home after my bartending job, which involved hours of enforced chit-chat with inebriated men, to assist a stranger. Encounters like this can only diminish my sympathy for those who yearn for an illusory past filled with neighbourly sociability on the streets. For many, this has never been part of the urban experience. For us, the ability to be alone is an equally important marker of a successful city. The extent to which violations of women's personal space via touch, words, or other infringements are tolerated and even encouraged in the city is as good a measure as any for me of how far away we actually are from the sociable—and feminist—city of spontaneous encounters.

This gaping distance hit me recently when an article entitled *How to Talk to a Woman Wearing Headphones* was blasted across social media.[140] Written by a man who seems to identify as a pick-up artist, the article started to circulate in August 2016 and sent my feminist-heavy Twitter timeline into a meltdown. The author begins by insisting even "crazy feminists" "will pretty much instantly melt and be nice when a confident guy walks up and says hello," so men shouldn't hesitate to *repeatedly* ask a woman to remove her headphones. He assures his male readers that no matter what signals women give, they secretly always want men to interrupt whatever they're doing. In fact, the article suggests that men should persist even when women show obvious signs of disinterest.

Instant social media critiques of the advice article were often humorous, like this tweet from Amy Elizabeth Hill: "I'm just a girl wearing headphones standing in front of a boy asking him to fucking move out of my way because I don't want to talk to him" (@amyandelizabeth, August 30, 2016). Others used more traditional media outlets to provide incisive breakdowns of all the ways this advice perpetuates rape culture. For example, Martha Mills responded in *The Guardian* by evoking the escalating sense of fear that women feel when approached repeatedly, when our signals are ignored or misconstrued, and when our boundaries are violated. She explains, "My brain is in fight or flight, checking for escape routes, it's trying to figure out just how aggressively you're going to react to any further action I take to extract myself from a situation entirely not of my own making." Making the connection to rape culture, Mills goes on to note "the advice here is basically 'No doesn't mean no, it means keep going until you get what you want—the screaming will stop eventually.' Because apparently that's what women want."[141]

How to Talk to a Woman Wearing Headphones illustrates (some) men's inability to acknowledge that women have the desire or the right to exist in public space by themselves, for themselves. It's unfathomable to the author and his supporters that women do not constantly, if secretly, crave the attention of men. They're incapable of understanding that every such interaction is coloured by the enormous baggage of rape culture and a lifetime of contradictory gendered socialization: beware of strangers, but also, always be nice to strange men.

This paradox was heartbreakingly illustrated by the murder of Mollie Tibbetts in July 2018. Jogging alone near her home in Brooklyn, Iowa, Tibbetts was murdered after she reportedly tried to ignore a man's attempts to speak to her. The suspect seems to

have a history of repeatedly harassing women who reject his advances. While much of the media focused on the immigration status of the accused, feminists have spoken out about the onslaught of harassment that women face. After CNN cited a *Runner's World*[142] study on harassment with a headline claiming that a "startling number of women say they have been harassed while running,"[143] women on social media responded with incredulity: "Startling to whom?" tweeted actress June Diane Raphael (@MsJuneDiane, August 23, 2018). Women cyclists also report sexual harassment in addition to (or layered throughout) the threats they receive as cyclists daring to take up space on the road.[144] Not only is this kind of harassment routine, it's dangerous. Women are told to ignore this obnoxious behavior, but when we do, we risk sudden and even extreme levels of violence.

In this cultural environment, being alone is a luxury for women, and one we rarely get to enjoy for long. We're always anticipating the next approach from a stranger and we have no way of knowing whether that interaction will be benign or threatening. Wearing headphones is one way that women can attempt to claim their personal space but even this little symbol of independence is easily ignored. For women, anonymity and invisibility are always temporary and must be jealously guarded. I'd love to live in a city of friendly, spontaneous social encounters too; but until I feel confident that men will respect my autonomy and safety, I won't apologize for wearing my anti-social earbuds.

TABLE FOR ONE

It takes an enormous amount of mental energy to navigate the public and private spaces of the city alone as a woman. In an episode of *Sex and the City*, the normally confident Samantha finds herself stood up at a fancy restaurant. She feels humiliated and

ashamed that she was forced to sit alone, withering under the pitying stares of other customers. Her anger at being stood up is secondary to the embarrassment Samantha experiences under the microscope of the public gaze. A man dining alone might be perceived as a business traveler or simply a confident person. He is unlikely to be harassed or pitied. A woman dining alone feels out of place, on display, and kind of sad. On the show, writer Carrie wonders why this has to be the case. She challenges herself to go out for a meal by herself, with no book or newspaper for company (the show takes place before smartphones existed). Nothing dramatic happens, but Carrie's trepidation illustrates how deeply fraught the choice to go alone for a simple meal can become.

The constant calculations and final "gut checks" associated with going out alone are difficult enough in your home city, but even more challenging when travelling. In 2015 I was doing research in Chicago and Atlanta and I had to spend most of my time alone in those cities, where I had few friends and research meet-ups didn't take up my whole days. At least once a day and usually more I had to venture alone into a bar or restaurant for a meal. Sometimes I'd plan ahead of time, looking at pictures and reviews on Google. I was curious about the menu and prices, of course, but more often I was searching for a clue about a category that isn't (but maybe should be?) included in a normal review: is this a comfortable place for a woman to sit in alone?

After the online search came the walk-by. This was also part of my routine for more "spontaneous" finds when I was already out and about. Sometimes the walk-by was actually three or four walk-bys, trying to get a glimpse inside through darkened windows or curtains. Were there lots of people in there? Was anyone else alone? Did the bartenders look friendly? The moment of entering is most stressful. Am I brave enough to turn around

and walk out if I feel awkward? Am I also brave enough to walk up to the bar and take a seat? Sometimes I haven't even been brave enough to walk in, settling instead for fast food and Netflix. But as an urban researcher (and someone who likes a decent meal) I can't hide away in my hotel room every time I go out to do research or travel for a conference. I confess that once I find a neighbourhood pub that feels comfortable, I often return multiple times. It's simply too much work and stress to scout out a new location for every meal. Again, I seem to be failing at the urban adventure.

I'm certain I'm not alone in feeling anxiety and second guessing myself when it comes to seemingly basic choices like where to grab a veggie burger at the end of the day. The anxiety isn't even necessarily related to fear of men or physical harm. Rather, it's a calculation made to figure out how likely my personal boundaries are to be respected at any given time. As a woman, the privilege of being able to mind my own business is a rare one. It's also true that I can't predict when a benign interaction will turn into a threat, which means that I have to be guarded. This daily reality paints a dismal picture of urban living, one that undermines so many visions of the "good" urban life.

Influential and much beloved critic of planning Jane Jacobs wrote about city neighbourhoods where a 24/7 liveliness and an engaged community meant that people would feel comfortable using the streets.[145] She believed that the ability to feel safe while alone amongst millions of strangers was the ultimate marker of a city's livability. Jacobs famously wrote about "eyes on the street" as an expression of this engagement and constant mixed use. However, she didn't mean the eyes of state surveillance, CCTV, policing, or harassment. Nor did she mean kinds of "eyes" that police things like gender expression, sexuality, or the behavior

of racialized minorities and youth. Too often however, the idea of "eyes on the street" has led to coercive forms of surveillance and harassment that make it impossible to be safe and alone among strangers.

Black and Indigenous people and people of colour are routinely viewed with suspicion in public places and are often interrogated about their presence, or worse. In April 2018, two Black men were arrested after a Philadelphia Starbucks manager called the police because they hadn't yet purchased anything. They were simply waiting for their friend to arrive. When he showed up a few minutes late, they were already in handcuffs. The men were taken to a police station and held for nine hours before being released without charge.[146] The arrest was filmed and the viral video led to public outcry and apologies from Starbucks. In the wake, author Teju Cole reflected via Facebook on what this means for Black people in public:

> We are not safe even in the most banal place. We are not equal even in the most common circumstances. We are always five minutes away from having our lives upended.... This is why I always say you can't be a black flâneur. Flânerie is for whites. For blacks in white terrain, all spaces are charged. Cafés, restaurants, museums, shops. Your own front door. This is why we are compelled, instead, to practice psychogeography. We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance. Can't relax, black (Teju Cole, Facebook, April 18, 2018).

The incident is an extreme version of the microaggressions Black people face in public, such that being alone requires a constant state of vigilance and self-surveillance. Toronto journalist

Desmond Cole, in his raw *Toronto Life* essay on his experiences of being "carded"[147] by police, writes about the "psychic toll" of regular police and citizen surveillance of Black people:

> I have come to accept that some people will respond to me with fear or suspicion—no matter how irrational it may seem. After years of needless police scrutiny, I've developed habits to check my own behaviour. I no longer walk through upscale clothing stores like Holt Renfrew or Harry Rosen, because I'm usually tailed by over-attentive employees. If I'm paying cash at a restaurant, I will hand it to the server instead of leaving it on the table, to make sure no one accuses me of skipping out on the bill.[148]

These examples illustrate how white privilege is bound up with the privilege of enjoying being alone. People of colour are made to feel like trespassers or criminals in their own cities, risking harassment, arrest, and even violent death for simple acts like hanging out at Starbucks or asking to use a public washroom. As Teju Cole says, the Black flâneur is an impossibility under white supremacy.

Disabled people experience a different kind of interference in their right to be alone. They often find themselves accosted by (mostly) well-meaning but ignorant strangers who insist on "helping" without asking for consent. This help typically involves unwanted physical contact such as taking hold of a wheelchair or grabbing the arm of a visually impaired person to guide them. Wheelchair user Bronwyn Berg recounts the terrifying experience of having her wheelchair grabbed from behind by a stranger who began pushing her along a busy street in Nanaimo, where

passersby ignored her cries for help.[149] Visually impaired activist Amy Kavanagh launched a campaign called #JustAskDontGrab after she began using a white cane and found people grabbing her on her London commute. Not only is this intrusive and rude, it may lead to injury. Moreover, it's often an expression of impatience or thinly veiled hostility. Wheelchair user Gabrielle Peters recalls the time a taxi driver pushed her rapidly towards the cab, causing her to tip out of her chair onto the pavement. Like Berg, Kavanagh wants disabled people to be asked for their consent before being touched and to have their bodily autonomy respected. Berg says, "Our assistive devices are a part of our body. We aren't furniture that can be moved around."[150] It's bad enough that the urban environment is full of physical barriers; Berg notes that after her chair was grabbed, she couldn't enter a shop to ask for help because of the steps outside. The lack of respect for basic personal boundaries makes it extra challenging for disabled people to exercise their right to move about urban public space in whatever ways they want or need to.

THE RIGHT TO BE ALONE

Being with friends in the city allowed me, as a teenager and young woman, to take up space, experiment with identities, be different, be loud, be myself. Friends are so important to this because while alone, women engage in all kinds of self-policing in order to avoid unwanted attention and hostile surveillance of their bodies and behaviours. It's still incredibly difficult for women alone to actually take up space. Think of the difference in body language and posture of a woman riding the subway versus the ubiquitous "man-spreader" who sits down and opens his legs so wide that he either occupies more than one seat or forces those around him to curl up into themselves. Women are

socialized not to take up space, especially as individuals. The best we hope for is to slip under the radar.

However, there's more to this quest for being alone than avoiding harassment. Walking along a city street or sitting alone in a crowded café is an especially delicious kind of alone time for women. I really noticed this when I became a mother and had the occasional opportunity to be out by myself. There were people all around me, but none of them had a right to demand my emotional labour. In fact, some were even taking care of me: bringing me coffee, cleaning my table. It was delightful to be out in public and realize that I didn't have to respond in any way to a child's whines or incessant questions. Perhaps being alone while out in the city is so precious for women because at home we're always in demand.

The gendered expectations around parenting, domestic labour, household management, relationships, pets, and more mean that the family home is rarely a place where women can have solitary moments. Like other moms, I have plenty of stories of being regularly interrupted on the toilet or in the shower. Even in these most private of spaces intrusions are expected. It's surprisingly common for sleep-deprived moms to stay up well after the household goes to bed. A blogger and father of three small children shared his epiphany that his wife was extra exhausted because late nights were the only time she had to herself. The mom in the story tells her husband that she has "sensory overload" from constant touching, noise, and demands from the kids. After they go to bed, she spends time with her husband but has absolutely no time to be alone until he also goes to bed. She would rather sacrifice sleep for a few hours in which she can just be.[151] In addition to nocturnal "me time," many moms find that the only way to guarantee time alone is to leave the house altogether.

It's deeply pleasurable to pull out a novel or magazine while sitting in a café or bar, or on a park bench, particularly when it's an escape from the demands of home or work. Even working alone in public is sometimes a treat. The change of setting and background din can be productive elements for writing, editing, and planning research. Even grading papers can feel less daunting. If I lived in a city, I'd almost certainly be writing this book in a variety of my favourite coffee shops.

The rareness of time away from domestic demands and the general overload of gendered relational labour and care work makes intrusions even more annoying. I know that the simple act of sitting and reading in a public space will eventually draw the attention of a man who wants to know what I'm reading. Of course, I'm never interrupted when I sit to study or write with a man. The conundrum is this: a woman alone is presumed always available to other men. It links back to notions of women as men's property. If a woman out in public isn't clearly marked as property by the presence of another man or obvious signals such as wedding rings (which of course may symbolize non-heterosexual unions as well), then she is fair game. Women instinctively know that the quickest way to deter a man's unwanted advances is to tell him that you have a boyfriend or husband. Men will respect another man's property rights more readily than they'll respect a woman's simple "no."

Jane Darke, who posited that the city is "patriarchy written in stone," goes on to say that women are made to feel like "guests" at best in the city, knowing that they're effectively in men's territory and could be seen as trespassing if they do not "comport themselves in particular ways." Darke wearily notes the regular calls of "cheer up love!" directed at women alone.[152] I've been told (commanded?) to "smile!" by countless men as I try to go

about my business in the city. I've been admonished to be more "lady-like" when calling out men's rude behaviour. If I'm not smiling, and therefore indicating that I'm nice, submissive, eager to please men, then I'm a bitch or a cow or a dyke. Some might say that it's not sexist for a man to tell a woman to smile, but can you imagine a man telling another man on the street to smile?

Erin Wunker opens *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* with the statement: "I have a bitchy resting face."[153] She rues the automatic grimace-y smile that gets triggered like a reflex when she's told to smile. A reflex honed under patriarchy, sharpened within rape culture. For lots of us, this "smile" reflex eventually morphs into a "giving the finger" reflex, a true killjoy stance. A woman who isn't smiling is a woman who is in her own thoughts, has her own agenda, isn't there to simply please men or be an object for their gaze. A woman or non-binary person or gender-fluid person who isn't chasing particular standards of femininity isn't there to please or appease heterosexual men. Therefore, they're threats. They don't belong. They're not behaving like property.

WOMEN IN PUBLIC

The notion of women as property and restrictions on women being alone in urban public space have a long history. Elizabeth Wilson discusses the moral panic surrounding women's increased visibility on the city streets in Victorian London. The term "public woman" is of course an old euphemism for a sex worker. The idea that women of status could somehow be mistaken for poor women or sex workers was cause for much hand-wringing and the reassertion of the need for women to be chaperoned by their husbands, brothers, fathers, or older women.[154]

Women's increased desire for independence in the city ushered in the era of the department store in Paris in the 1870s, a

setting that was literally designed to be an appropriate public space for women. It would limit their contact with the unsavoury elements of the street but also allow them a measure of the freedom they so keenly sought. Émile Zola's 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des Dames* (The Ladies' Paradise) offers a glimpse behind the scenes of a fictional store based on the first department store in Paris.[155] Amidst the intrigues of the shopgirls, the owner's love life, and the politics of a big business competing against local shops, Zola's book shows how spectacles of consumption were designed to delight women's senses. Spaces of shopping were thus amongst the first spaces where women (in the west at least) were permitted to claim public space.

Feminist geographers Liz Bondi and Mona Domosh write about the gendered patterning of city spaces in mid-nineteenth century New York City, drawing on the diary of a middle-class visitor to the city, Sophie Hall.[156] Although always accompanied by a woman friend during her daytime activities, Sophie's detailed record of her visit illustrates how areas of the city were gendered in ways that allowed for some moderate freedoms for white women. For example, the "Ladies' Mile" centred along Broadway and Sixth between Tenth and Twenty-third was the "city's new consumer showpiece," a public space that was considered "appropriately feminine." Districts that included museums and art galleries were also part of Sophie's itinerary. Again, these were activities "sanctioned by Victorian standards" and settings that "had been patterned to make them safe and appropriate for women."[157]

The late nineteenth-century industrial order required not only a commitment to production and hard work, it required a commitment to values of consumption. The gendering of "separate spheres" meant that production could be aligned with the

world of men and consumption with the world of women. Women's active participation in consumption activities, however, challenged the notion that their proper place was confined to the home and meant that women would need access to typically masculine spaces of the city in order to fulfill their roles as consumers. Lest this be too disruptive to Victorian norms, this change was "neutralized by the development in the nineteenth century of 'feminized' consumer spaces within the city—if women had to be on the streets of the masculine city, then those streets and stores had to be designed as 'feminine'."[158] Importantly, this meant that women's white bourgeois identities could be safely reinforced through their visibility in these spaces of proper femininity.

These spaces of consumption were open to women because in many ways they didn't challenge women's association with the home and the domestic sphere. By shopping for clothing, décor, and art, women were fulfilling their roles as caretakers of the hearth. Still today, a woman alone in these public spaces is properly "tethered" to the home. Even if she's shopping for herself, or indulging in what we like to call "self-care" activities, her alone-ness doesn't disrupt the normative gender order. The body, the intimate, self-care, and aesthetics are normatively women's realms.

While standards for proper femininity have loosened somewhat since Victorian times, the range of places where women can be comfortably alone without seeming "out of place" isn't so different. Although women today aren't as restricted as dear Sophie Hall, who wasn't even allowed to be seen eating or drinking in public, spaces of consumption, culture, and entertainment are still considered the most appropriate venues for women's public lives. When I studied condominium development in Toronto, I analyzed hundreds of condo advertisements in terms

of their gendered imagery. Images of women shopping, eating, drinking, and socializing were much more common than images of women going to work. There was a strong *Sex and the City* vibe to many of the ads: the excitement of city life for women was cast in terms of their access to the 24/7 leisure- and consumption-scape of downtown Toronto and other "up and coming" neighbourhoods.[159]

Bondi and Domosh compare the freedoms and restrictions experienced by Sophie Hall on her 1879 New York trip to the experiences of Moira MacDonald, a divorced middle-class white woman from Edinburgh whom Bondi interviewed in 1991. While Moira has a professional job, owns her own home, and lives alone in a desirable, gentrifying neighbourhood, she feels constraints on her ability to comfortably access public spaces of the city. Despite a strong belief in gender equality at work and in the home, Moira doesn't question the gendered norm that unmonitored city spaces (such as parks) are "imbued with a hostile masculinity" and thus are not safe spaces for her to be alone.[160] Moira and Sophie share the need to adapt their behavior to their sense of gendered vulnerability.

Although today women are much more free to move within these spaces in the same ways as men (depending of course on social class and race), women remain acutely aware that to be alone outside of these "sanctioned" spaces is to be made vulnerable to unwanted attention and the threat of violence. As Bondi and Domosh note, "the public spaces of late-twentieth-century western cities are spaces of commercial consumer activities" that are "surveyed to create environments in which middle-class, feminine identities are fostered and protected," much as the shopping spaces of the nineteenth century were.[161] In this context, we can see that the freedom offered to women by contemporary

city life is still bound by gendered norms about the proper spaces and roles of women in the city.

The feminization of urban space continues today. As global north cities have transitioned away from economies based on industrial manufacturing to economies based on knowledge and service work (so-called post-industrial economies), the more masculinized features of cities have changed. Spaces such as pubs, once either closed to women or gender segregated, have "softened" many of their more masculine attributes to appeal to women customers. Even donut shops (such as Canada's Tim Hortons) and fast food restaurants such as McDonald's have altered their aesthetics to embrace a homey, café quality suitable for families rather than truck drivers.[162] Changes to colour schemes, layouts, business names, furniture, and menus (more salads = more women!) alter the atmosphere to make them seem comfortable and safe for women. Geographers have linked these changes with gentrification, observing that working class sports bars and diners are closing and being replaced by "hipper" (and whiter) middle-class spaces without strong gender associations attached.

In one of my old neighbourhoods in Toronto—the Junction—I experienced firsthand how a formerly industrial, working class area was gentrifying through the rise of feminized spaces that stood in stark contrast to the traditionally masculine spaces that had once dominated the area. Greasy diners, porn shops, pawn shops, and bars that catered to a mostly male, working class clientele were gradually replaced by yoga studios, nail salons, cafés, and organic grocery stores.[163]

When I first moved to the Junction in early 2000, Dundas Street hosted few places that I'd have ventured into alone to have a coffee or a drink. Not because they were dangerous, but because they were clearly not catering to me as a young woman.

And that's okay—the neighbourhood didn't need to conform to my desires! But the Junction is an interesting example of how cities and neighbourhoods use women's comfort, pleasure, and safety as markers of successful revitalization. Indeed, women's lack of comfort in certain spaces can be used as justification for a host of problematic interventions that increase danger for others, for example homeless people and people of colour, in the pursuit of comfort for middle-class white women. In the Junction, the first sign of this feminization was the opening of a narrow little coffee shop called The Nook that had a small play area for children in the back.

The Nook was a clear example of what urban sociologists have called "a third place."[164] These are places that are neither home nor work, but are essential informal gathering spaces for communities. In her study of how Canadian urban dwellers understand their own use of specialty coffee shop chains such as Starbucks and Second Cup as urban spaces, sociologist Sonia Bookman notes that some consumers describe these cafés as "home away from home."[165] With a variety of soft furnishings, fireplaces, bookshelves, small tables for intimate conversation, and a general sense of hospitality, these cafés are quasi-public home spaces for many. It's perhaps then not surprising that such cafés are places where women out alone feel welcome, comfortable, and reasonably safe. As "third places," cafés carefully cultivate an environment (and of course a brand) where people can be alone, together. Given the long-standing restrictions on women's ability to be alone in public, coffee shops are places where women can experience, in relative safety, the psychic pleasures of urban life: being anonymous in a crowd, people watching, taking up space, being alone with your thoughts while surrounded by others.

The increasing numbers of "feminized" quasi-public, quasi-home places like The Nook and the eventual (inevitable?) arrival of a Starbucks in the Junction were clear signs of gentrification. Spaces I'd once avoided—the donut shop with its parking lot full of men sitting on their cars smoking, greasy diners, sports bars—began to close their doors. Parents with expensive strollers ambled along the dirty pavements and soon the sounds of construction filled the air as condo developers found a ripe new market. It's not lost on me that this transformation was in service of the preferences and desires of women like myself. And the link between a class transformation of city spaces and making them safer for women seems to have been accepted as common sense by developers, planners, and other boosters of "revitalization." Of course, this assumption has an image of a particular kind of woman at its centre: a white, able-bodied, middle-class, cis woman.

In the Junction, the limits of this vision were made clear via the experiences of women who resided for short-to-medium term stays at the Salvation Army's Evangeline Women's Shelter. These women experience serious, chronic poverty, even amidst the revitalization of the area.[166] Their presence gradually became more and more out of place on the neighbourhood's sidewalks as gentrification encroached. Often forced to be alone in public by shelter rules that don't allow them to stay inside all day, these women don't easily experience the pleasure of being alone in the crowd. Rather than enjoying some people watching, the women from the shelter find themselves watched constantly. Their physical appearance, habits, and occasional expressions of mental illness mark them as "other," even though the shelter has existed for many years and the Junction has long been home to a wide variety of poor, working class, disabled, or otherwise "different" folks.

In one example of how the simple act of being alone in public was made more difficult for the shelter's residents, a café next door to the shelter removed an outside bench because customers complained that women from the shelter sat there to smoke. Although the café owner was sympathetic to the women in the shelter and engaged in supportive projects like providing holiday meals, she was pressured by the gentrifiers who frequented the café to "clean up" the space.[167] This eliminated one spot where the women could safely be alone in public. In other cases, outward signs of trauma or mental illness exhibited by women were the subject of nasty diatribes by other community members debating the benefits of gentrification in the neighbourhood via online community forums. Terms like "freak show" conveyed the hostility that some demonstrate towards women who don't always behave in normative ways. These examples are reminders that as much as the freedom for some women to be alone in public has improved, the policing of others and the removal of safe spaces has simultaneously increased.

TOILET TALK

One of those spaces that has both been highly limited in its availability and highly policed is the public or publicly accessible bathroom. When we think of urban public space, bathrooms aren't likely to come to mind, and in fact this is at the heart of the problem. As a space where we want and often need to be alone, in a most pressing and sometimes urgent manner, the bathroom—or lack of a bathroom—generates all kinds of questions about safety, accessibility, gender, sexuality, class, homelessness, race, and more.

Like a lot of other issues, bathroom access became visible to me as an urban concern when I had an infant and then a

toilet-training toddler in tow. I quickly learned that department stores were our best bet for emergency diaper changes, spots to nurse, and a decent level of cleanliness and provisioning. As spaces built with the comfort of women in mind, department stores, while not always explicitly set up to best serve mothers, were spaces where the bathrooms were likely to be spacious, have lots of stalls, be elevator or escalator accessible, have a chair one could sit in to nurse, offer baby changing stations, be a safe space to leave a stroller outside, and so on. On particularly messy outings, they were also places I could buy a quick change of clothes to replace a poop-splattered onesie. In fact, department stores remain my go-to places to "go" whether I have a kid with me or not. Unfortunately, urban department stores are disappearing, and with them their comfortable and accessible bathrooms.

Outside of the reasonably comfortable world of "The Ladies' Paradise," the quest for good places to go in the city is daunting. In *No Place to Go: How Public Toilets Fail Our Private Needs*, journalist and writer Lezlie Lowe asks, "Why are public toilets so crappy?"[168] Recalling her own experiences of facing "public" bathrooms that were locked, down steep flights of stairs, filthy, dangerous, and long distances from main streets and activity centres, Lowe investigates the history of how and why cities have, or have not, made public bathrooms a priority. Lowe notes that in the Victorian period, growing cities recognized a need for urban restrooms; however, these weren't at all attentive to the needs of women, children, or disabled people. Over time, though, cities increasingly relied on private or quasi-private entities—department stores, government institutions, cafés, etc.—to provide these spaces. As most of us know, though, these spaces rarely guarantee access and indeed may be protected by security guards, payment machines, and door codes designed to limit

who can enter and what activities can happen. The ordeal that the two Black customers faced in Starbucks began, apparently, when one asked for a bathroom key before either had made a purchase. Having to ask permission to access a space for one of the most basic and universal human needs led to a situation that could have ended in the injury or death of either man.

Bathroom needs and access are also deeply gendered issues. Some of these issues have to do with the complex mix of biological and cultural factors that shape how people with different body parts use the bathroom. For most women, relieving ourselves takes longer, will regularly involve addressing menstruation needs, and requires the removal or major adjustment of clothing. We need more toilet paper, places to hang coats and purses, stalls with doors, and are more likely to be responsible for helping with the bathroom needs of babies, children, disabled people, or elderly family members. Yet as Lowe points out, most public bathrooms fail miserably at acknowledging and serving these needs.

In part, this problem stems from fact that most architects and planners are men who have taken little time to really consider what women might want or need in a restroom. But it also has to do with taboos around talking about "bathroom stuff" and in particular menstruation. Lowe writes that menstruation "has been almost perfectly unknowable to the (mostly) cisgender men designing and installing bathrooms in public buildings and public spaces."[169] No one wants to talk about blood, sanitary products, or the need for clean and comfortable places to perform basic menstruation care. No one wants to acknowledge that bathroom use takes longer when menstruating, causes more frequent urination, includes cramping that can lead to urgent bowel movements, and can include "flooding" that needs to be dealt with immediately. No one wants to recognize that some

trans men might also need products and facilities to deal with menstruation. No one wants to help homeless women by addressing both the cost of pads and tampons as well as the lack of freely accessible bathroom space in cities (although a major drug store chain in Canada will soon offer boxes with free menstrual products for women in need).

Around the world women have taken action to assert their rights to equitable and appropriate access to bathrooms. Women like Clara Greed and Susan Cunningham in the U.K. and Joan Kuyek in Canada have become known as "toilet ladies" for their work pushing to put bathroom access on the agendas of governments, planners, builders, and architects. In New Delhi settlements, women community leaders advocate for sanitation to become a local priority, noting that women wait in lines for upwards of twenty minutes each time they queue to use the only facilities available: public toilets. In India more generally, toilet access has been central to women's activism against sexual assault. The shocking rape and murder of two girls who'd gone into a field to relieve themselves at night in 2014 sparked nationwide protests and drew global attention to a long standing problem: the lack of safe facilities for women and girls put them at even greater risk of violence. Sharmila Murthy explains:

> An estimated 2.5 billion people globally lack access to proper sanitation, with the largest number living in India. . . . Many poor women living in rural villages or urban slums wait until nightfall, reducing their food and drink intake so as to minimize the need for elimination. Girls often do not attend school if there are no private toilets, and this is especially true after the onset of menstruation. Approximately 2,200 children die every day as a result

> of diarrheal diseases linked to poor sanitation and hygiene, which impacts women as mothers and caregivers. Finally, waiting until nighttime to urinate or defecate is not only dehumanizing, it makes women vulnerable to sexual assault.[170]

The United Nations has recognized sanitation as a both a women's rights issue and a human rights issue, but little progress has been made on this particular development goal.

Trans people have been pushed to the frontlines of toilet activism by the exclusion, danger, and violence they often face in trying to use an appropriate facility at work, school, and in public buildings.[171] Lowe writes: "If there's any revolution happening in public bathrooms now, it's being driven by the transgender community."[172] While disability advocates succeeded in making changes to the physical form of bathrooms such that accessible stalls, sinks, and doors are mandatory features of all new buildings, trans people are at the forefront of what will likely be the next big change in bathroom access: the partial desegregation of bathrooms by gender and the rise of more single user, all-gender/gender-free toilets.

My university residence had co-ed multi-stall washrooms and shower facilities back in the 1990s. It took a day or two to get used to the sight of a dude strolling up to the sink in boxers or coming out of the shower stall. The few problems we had couldn't be attributed to gender differences. The gender of the person who pooped on the floor *right next* to a toilet one long weekend was never discovered, for example. Yet this kind of fully desegregated arrangement remains extremely rare. Binary gender segregated washrooms are the norm, and the formal and informal policing of who enters each space means that trans

folks as well as anyone else who doesn't conform to strict gender norms approaches this basic daily need with stress, fear, and the looming threat of harassment and violence. The bogeyman figure of the cis man who dresses like a woman to enter women's washrooms in order to spy on or assault women has been used as a perverse justification for trying to determine the genitals of anyone using a gender-segregated bathroom. If cis men actually had to spend enough time getting into drag that they passed as women in order to sexually assault women, I suspect there would be a lot less sexual assault. I'm not making light of actual violence here. Rather, I think the fear of "fake" trans women is rooted purely in transphobia, and not in any actual concern for the real violence that women—trans and cis—experience regularly.

Some public institutions such as university campuses and businesses with publicly accessible washrooms have begun to make single-stall washrooms gender-free, a move that certainly makes sense and requires few resources beyond new signage and perhaps sanitary item disposal units. However, converting all bathrooms into single-user spaces is costly and inefficient, space-wise. It's likely to lead to long line ups and may disadvantage people with disabilities that require more immediate access to facilities. Converting all multi-stall bathrooms into gender-free spaces can be problematic for people with religious restrictions. In short, there's no single solution that can come entirely from changes to our built forms. Like so many other issues in cities and beyond, social changes are also required. Single stalls won't eliminate transphobia or end gender-based violence. In the meantime, however, ensuring the greatest possible bathroom access for all bodies across gender, ability, and class is a necessary step in creating a feminist city.

WOMEN TAKING UP SPACE

The limitation that accompanies an inability to know you can relieve yourself in the city is just one more reason why I don't wax nostalgic for an urban street life that either didn't exist or was limited to a privileged few. Instead of romanticizing a time before earbuds and smartphones and smartwatches, I prefer to imagine a city where a woman can wear her headphones without fear of intrusion or choose not to wear headphones at all with the same result. In some cases, portable technologies are innovative tools that allow women to assert their presence in urban space. Feminist geographer Ayona Datta noticed that women research participants in slum resettlement colonies outside Delhi were "avid selfie takers." Datta theorizes,

> the selfies show that being in the city is liberating for women, as they represent a new-found freedom outside the home and the constraints of traditional gender roles. Through these selfies, women curate the city at arm's length, placing themselves in the centre of the frame as they stage their own arrival in many different public places.[173]

With or without portable technologies, I'm not fantasizing about a city where everyone walks around in a little bubble, snapping selfies, having minimal interaction with other humans, non-humans, and the environment itself. Rather, I'm suggesting that the freedom to do so in comfort, safety, and autonomy is foundational to the kind of city where people will *want* to socialize with one another and interact fully with the environment. Imagining this freedom for women also compels us to attend to other groups who routinely have their right to simply exist in public violated and aggressively policed.

The right to take up space is where the pleasure of being alone meets a wider politics of gender and power. Being socialized to go unnoticed affects women's inclination (or lack thereof) to take up public roles and voice their opinions, whether that's through running for political office, becoming a professor, or being vocal on the Internet. This socialization is then aggressively reinforced by the misogynist discourse faced by women who do dare to stand up as individuals. Alberta's former Premier Rachel Notley, for example, is regularly targeted for harassment based on her gender rather than her policies (or rather, these get conflated: her "bad" policies are the result of her gender). Misogyny clearly played a role in the negative press coverage and lack of support among many for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. These women are seen as fair game for such attacks because they have dared to *be* noticed. Women like Anita Sarkeesian and Lindy West who put their (feminist) opinions out on social media are told that they should expect and just accept violent insults, rape threats, and even in-person harassment as "natural" responses to voicing their thoughts and taking up virtual space.[174] This is intimately connected to the local, urban scale, where everyday women who insist on taking up public space are also seen as fair game for harassment and even violence. In this way, restrictions—self-imposed and otherwise—on women in public have far-reaching implications and connections to other forms of gendered oppression and inequality.

Earlier in this chapter, I wrote about the two Philadelphia men who were arrested while waiting for their friend at Starbucks. In the intervening two or three weeks since typing that paragraph and this conclusion, stories broke about a parent calling the police on two Native American men on a campus tour because they were "too quiet;" a white woman calling the

police on a Black woman student at Yale who had fallen asleep in a study room; and neighbours calling the police on Black women checking out of an Airbnb because they assumed they were stealing. I could list more, all from the last two to three weeks. It's glaringly obvious that people of colour are routinely viewed as trespassers in the city. Just as patriarchy is enshrined in the urban environment, white supremacy is also the ground upon which we walk.

The extent to which anyone can simply "be" in urban space tells us a lot about who has power, who feels their right to the city is a natural entitlement, and who will always be considered out of place. It reflects existing structures of discrimination in society and is therefore a good indicator of the remaining gaps between different groups. As a cisgender white woman, I'm highly unlikely to be asked to leave a public space, to have the police called on me, or to be followed through a department store. At the same time, however, I police my own clothing, posture, facial expressions, and other cues to avoid male harassment and unwanted attention. Rape culture teaches us that to be alone in public is to open yourself to the threat of sexual violence and thus vigilance is a part of the experience of being alone in the city for most women. But could it be otherwise? And how do we fight to make that happen?