Race, Gender, Youth, and Urban Space: Young Men of Colour and Homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Geography
University of Toronto

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Abstract

What are the relationships between race, gender, homelessness, and urban space? This research explores these relationships through the experiences of Canadian-born young men of colour in the Greater Toronto Area. Foregrounding their lived experience through ethnographic methods, I ask how does homelessness affect the lives of young men in different spaces of a large city and in relationship to race and gender? How do these young men’s experiences of the city help us understand the city? This research draws upon diverse bodies of theory in urban, cultural, feminist, and anti-racist geographies. I expand these literatures to illustrate connections between systems of socio-spatial domination such as racism, sexism, and classism.

Through 40 interviews and 8 of what I call ‘Where-I-Live-Tours’, a tour of urban space I conduct with the participant, I explore the material and affective dimensions of space in the lives of these young men. By paying attention to the material and affective dimensions of homelessness, I illustrate how relationships between race, gender, homelessness, and urban space emerge in everyday experiences. In investigating the non-conscious affective dimensions of urban life, I combine representational and material understandings of the city to afford an understanding of the complex micro-geographies
of urban space. I investigate the affective forces that shape how people live in the city, moving them through some spaces and attracting them and repelling them from others.

Research findings indicate micro-geographic racial ‘vibrations’ that see race emerge differently around the GTA. Young men of colour also negotiate a variety of (in)visibilities in their lives in the city, including physical, imagined, political, and social. Their homelessness means they have atypical experiences of ‘home’ and they create multiple alternative forms of home or belonging. This research follows in feminist and anti-racist research traditions that examine marginalization and oppression to critique dominance and privilege. It allows us to see how marginalized actors can enact resiliencies and resistances and be creative and productive of identity and urban space. This research illustrates the multifarious relationships people have with city space and how an accumulation of forces shapes people’s everyday lives in the city.
List of Figures

Figure 3.1 – Our Place Peel.................................................................73
Figure 3.2 – Street context near OPP, shopping malls and residential towers.........73
Figure 3.3 – Evergreen Yonge Street Mission........................................76
Figure 3.4 – Street context, Yonge Street near Evergreen.............................77
Figure 3.5 – East Scarborough Storefront................................................81
Figure 3.6 – Street context for ESS, mid-rise residential towers and wide arterial roads.....................................................................................................................81
Figure 3.7 – The Church of the Epiphany, with Red Cross Homeless Drop-In in the basement .................................................................83
Figure 3.8 – Street context, Kennedy Road, just down from Red Cross Homeless Drop-In.................................................................84
Figure 7.1 – Academic’s corner spot in the internet café.................................207
Figure 7.2 - A Hart House reading room....................................................209
Figure 7.3 - A couch on which Academic sits and lays....................................210
Figure 7.4 - At Galbraith computer lab.......................................................211
Figure 7.5 - Academic puts two chairs together to show me a make-shift bed....212
Figure 7.6 - A very expensive coffee machine.............................................217
Figure 7.7 - A Ritzy café in the top floors of the Bay building.......................218
Figure 7.8 - The CN Tower, seen through the roof of an above-ground walkway....219
Figure 7.9 - Under Spadina Road............................................................222
Figure 7.10 - Tags and a place to sit under Spadina Road.............................222
Figure 7.11 - Stone retaining wall: A hidden spot......................................224
Figure 7.12 - 401 Games, a hobby-shop, just north of Evergreen Yonge Street Mission......................................................................................227
Figure 7.13 - Close-cropped, small-scale Tim Horton's………………………………..228

Figure 7.14 - Now presenting...Zgune Cluned's and James Crawford's bong………….231

Figure 7.15 - Zgune Cluned's snack, a doctored Jamaican patty………………………232

Figure 7.16 - 'SOS' is painted on the wall, barely visible in this photo below the word 'Slice'……………………………………………………………………………………234

Figure 7.17 - James Crawford and Zgune Cluned loading up on candy………………235
List of Maps

Map 3.1 – Location of Service Agencies in the GTA……………………………………72

Map 7.1 – Where-I-Live-Tour with Academic………………………………………..206

Map 7.2 – The first leg of the Where-I-Live-Tour with Matthew……………………215

Map 7.3 – Subway travel between first and second legs of the Matthew Where-I-Live-
Tour…………………………………………………………………………………………..220

Map 7.4 – Second leg of the Matthew Where-I-Live-Tour following subway travel from
Union Station…………………………………………………………………………………221

Map 7.5 – Where-I-Live-Tour with Zgune Cluned and James Crawford, first and third
legs……………………………………………………………………………………………..226

Map 7.6 – Subway travel between legs of the Zgune Cluned and James Crawford Where-
I-Live-Tour……………………………………………………………………………………229

Map 7.7 – The second leg of the Zgune Cluned and James Crawford Where-I-Live-
Tour…………………………………………………………………………………………..230
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

List of Figures ...................................................................................................................... iv

List of Maps ........................................................................................................................ vi

Chapter 1 - Introduction: Canadian-born young men of colour and spatial experiences of homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area ................................................................. 1

Chapter 2 - Conceptual Framework: Feminist Geographies and Geographies of Race and Anti-Racism .................................................................................................................. 19

Chapter 3 - Doing Feminist and Anti-Racist Research as a White Male Scholar: Methodological Concerns and Techniques in Research with Young Men of Colour .......... 53

Chapter 4 – ‘The vibe, yo!’: Racial Vibrations, Masculine Performances ...................... 97

Chapter 5 - ‘My place of residence’: ‘Home’ and homelessness ....................................... 126

Chapter 6 – ‘Gone, leave, go, move, vanish’: Public Space and (In)Visibilities .......... 160

Chapter 7 - Micro-Geographies of Material (In)Visibility ............................................... 204

Chapter 8 – Conclusions, Summaries, and Openings ....................................................... 240

Works Cited .......................................................................................................................... 265

Notes .................................................................................................................................. 280

Appendix A - Research Proposal to Evergreen Yonge Street Mission ................................. 284

Appendix B - Recruitment Poster ........................................................................................ 285

Appendix C - Front Line Volunteer Duties, Our Place Peel .............................................. 286
Chapter 1

Introduction: Canadian-born young men of colour and spatial experiences of homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area

Introduction

Yeah, the vibe, yo! That’s what it is. I feel so appreciated out here. That’s what it is.
-Cruz (19 years old)

This dissertation explores the racialized and gendered experiences of being homeless for Canadian-born young men of colour in the Greater Toronto Area. It is an exploration of the material, affective experiences of the spaces in the lives of these young men. These young men are marginally housed and as a result, spend considerable amounts of time living in public and pseudo-public spaces. In the above quotation, Cruz, a young man living in the region, identifies a particular vibe to the area where he and I are conducting an interview. The vibe combines many things but notably, is shaped by all of the above, the material, the affective, public space, race, gender, and so on. The feel, experience, and vibe of urban space figure largely in this dissertation.

This project began as an investigation into urban experiences of homelessness, but over time evolved into being as much, if not more, about race and racialized experience in the GTA. Part of this transition is due to my choice of subjects who, despite having unique experiences as people experiencing homelessness, also have very unique and important insights into racialized experience in the GTA. These insights do not necessarily come through directly in interview because they are often not conscious...
insights. Rather, insight into the relationships between race, gender, homelessness, and urban space comes through affective feelings of racial and other ‘vibrations’, the feeling of race and other things between perception and materiality. These are the important results of this study: The insights into the ways race and other identities operate to shape different racialized and gendered spaces across the same metropolitan area.

Of course, race and racialization are not innocuous concepts and processes. If they were, differential racialization of people and spaces would not matter. As it is, however, this differential racialization results in a complex interplay of marginalities and oppressions. For the young men of colour I interviewed for this research, these marginalities and oppressions come through in their stories of continued struggles, to find and secure and keep housing, to do the same with jobs, to finish school, and to navigate the system of homeless service agencies they use.

I am not unique in using experiences of homelessness to investigate other topics. Despite being a condition or experience with intense links to individual and structural ills, homelessness does not always get studied for its own sake. Rather, homelessness, as I use it here, is often discussed in the context of associated identity issues or as an experience that maps well onto other areas of research. The latter includes studies of various elements that are of particular interest for geographers, particularly urban and public space. While the present research does explore the relationship between homelessness and public spaces, most specifically as related to racial ‘vibrations’ (Chapter 4) and ‘(in)visibilities’ (Chapters 6 and 7), I also explore the relationship between experiences of home, idealized and normative ideas of home, and the broad spatialized homes these
young men create (Chapter 5). As such, the stories and narratives in the results of this research speak to the mutual constitution of spatial, social and individual subjectivities.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the research objectives and goals of the project. Secondly, I outline the urban and cultural geographies of homelessness in which this research is situated. Thirdly, I outline each of the subsequent chapters.

**Research Objectives, Goals and Questions**

The research objectives for this project are inspired by work in feminist, anti-racist, urban and cultural geographies. As such, the research questions I explore are inspired in large part by the current theoretical formulations related to racialized youth homelessness in Western cities. That said, there are few (if any) scholarly sources that explore this exact confluence of circumstances. Because of this I also explore the cracks in the existing theory in order to fill and shore up these bodies of literature. In the beginning stages of this research project, I was attempting to explore four main areas of investigation. These were experiences of race, masculinity, home and visibilities that in many ways straddled the bodies of literature by which I was inspired. I was also concerned with the ways in which theoretical and practical realities operate in concert, in relational ways.

With the aforementioned bodies literature in mind I explore the racialized and gendered aspects of identity for young men of colour. Two of my research objectives and questions take ‘identity’ as a starting point. The first begins with questions about race and
racialization in the GTA. How does race operate and/or emerge differently in different areas of the city? In answering this question I explore how their racialized experience is felt in different spaces and regions of the GTA, especially regarding their use of space (public, pseudo-public, and private). I also explore how racialization is a mutual process, with young men affecting the subjective composition of spaces they occupy. I explicate how ‘racial vibrations’ are differently felt and experienced in different areas of the city, shaping micro-geographies of race in the city. My second objective was to explore whether and how masculinity plays a similar role. As a product of gender identity, current geographical research illustrates that masculinity is locationally and relationally specific. This research explores masculinities for young men of colour experiencing homelessness and how their geographies of masculinity change based on their housing situations. It asks how masculinity is shaped and shapes their lives. How does their performance of masculinity change based on housing experience? How is it affected by their differential experience of race? Is masculinity shaped through their experiences of the different spaces of the city, public and private? Masculinity thus runs throughout this research as a central thread.

My third research objective was to explore a common focus in feminist and race research: the concept of ‘home’. Scholars understand home-spaces in the Western context as integral to subject formation and emotional sense of self. As for a counter point to the experience of homelessness, this research asks questions about how these young men imagine and experience home. How do they conceive of ideal homes? How are these conceptions similar or different to their experiences of home? What are the effects of this difference? Given the spatial character of home, are their other ways they create a sense
of belonging in the city? Thus, I explore Canadian-born young men of colour’s concepts and experiences of home and how their exposure to a variety of homes (including imagined) affects their lives.

The fourth research objective emerges out of contemporary debates about homelessness. Following the broadening of the concept of homelessness to include invisible forms of homelessness in policy, social service provision, and in media, I aim to explore this experience of being invisibly homeless. This focus accorded with research in race and gender research on varying racialized and gendered visibilities. Thus, I ask questions about how varying (in)visibilities relate. What are the various visibilities and invisibilities in the lives of these young men? What are the forces and how do they navigate these various (in)visibilities? To whom are they (in)visible and how do they move into and out of visibility? In answering these questions I explore the various practices and strategies of being visible or invisible (to social workers, employers, police, business owners, service providers, the general public, friends, enemies, and any variety of actors) these young men deploy/employ to navigate the social spaces of the city while not having a permanent home.

Fifthly, I investigate how individual young men’s experiences of homelessness illustrate broader patterns of oppression. These oppressions are based on race, gender, age, and class and all help position these young men marginally. However, in talking with young men of colour about their experiences of homelessness, I attempt to show how they speak back to domination. Though they find themselves in very marginal positions, their daily lives are composed of multiple resiliencies and resistances² to complex systems of domination. What are and how can we see these resiliencies and resistances?
Are they simply reactions to oppressive forces or can they be understood as creative and productive in their own right? These resistances entail more than ‘speaking back’, since often they involve material practices of occupying and living in spaces. I attempt here to highlight how they occupy and live in urban spaces and what their lives mean for the constitution of urban space.

Each chapter in this dissertation suggests how these young men relate to systems of domination. In doing this, this project helps to chart newly-developing racisms and sexisms by showing how they profoundly affect the lives of these young men. Moreover, this research also attempts to illustrate material oppressions and resistances in practice. In talking with these young men about their daily lives, experiences of housing and homelessness, and experiences in public spaces, we can see how race and racism plays into each of these. We can also see how these experiences are integral to understanding the regional geographies of race in the GTA.

My sixth objective is broad. In putting the focus on their lives as young men of colour, this research follows in feminist and anti-racist research traditions that look at marginalization and oppression to critique dominance and privilege. As such, I approach this research with explicit political goals that follow from those same traditions. I reject the masculinist traditions of objectivity and impartiality in research. Instead, I consider both how as a white man my body and identities might play a role in the conduct of the research and how I might be complicit with systems of domination.

In this research I also attempt to continue the dialogue on race in the local Toronto context, a context that is seeing popular retrenchment of such talk given the rise of ‘post-racialism’. Many of the young men of colour interviewed for this research themselves
espouse such post-racialism, suggesting the common ‘things are getting better’ mantra. While this may be putatively true, it denies the structural and institutional racisms apparent in the stories they tell about struggling with school, work, and housing. Such ideas also mask the influence of certain racializations, such as the different feel of racialized spaces in around the GTA, including the vibrating whiteness that they feel in many downtown Toronto spaces (more on the latter in Chapter 4).

As best I can while categorizing ‘young men of colour’ I try to avoid homogenizing them as a group. In no way am I suggesting that all young men of colour have identical experiences in the Toronto context. Instead I attempt to use their stories to critique the operation of race in the GTA and to illustrate how they have different relationships to both race and the racialization of spaces. They also have different relationships to whiteness, having grown up in the local context. For many of them it is something that they can feel in conflictory (or otherwise) events, but vibrates more strongly in certain areas of the GTA. Part of this research is discovering those different feelings and what impacts they have on these guys’ lives.

This research explores the relationship between affect and the socio-space of the city. Affect is important to understanding the city and people’s relationships to city space because it helps put the focus on the accumulation of forces that shape people’s material lives. This means that there are affective forces (such as the vibration of race I discuss in Chapter 4) that operate as forces shaping how people live in the city, moving them through some spaces and attracting them to and repelling them from others. Thinking through affect also helps bridge materialist and representational understandings of the city. Indeed, people experiencing homelessness have different understandings of the city
because of their atypical housing experiences. Those understandings provide useful inroads into seeing the relationships between the various forces that affect their lives (varied forces such as racism, gendered expectations, employment stresses, and so on). Conventional ways of approaching homelessness, such as primarily as a lack of housing, do not adequately address how this accumulation of affective forces uniquely and mutually shapes city form and city lives.

One final objective of this research is to discover and employ the practical theoretical understandings that these young men have of their world. This means that rather than applying theory to their lives in a uni-directional manner, I attempt in this project to meet them on the same ‘critical plane’, meaning to engage with their ideas as critical interpretations of the world, (Paradis, 2009: 42) and employ these understandings of the world as theory. Again, this follows from both feminist and anti-racist methods that regard marginalized people as producing theory that informs how they relate to their surroundings. This is what allows this research to speak back to academic literature using the words, voices, and theory of marginalized people.

**Urban and Cultural Geographies of Homelessness**

This research is situated in urban and cultural geographies of homelessness. To set the research context for a study of homelessness in the GTA, I will first introduce urban and cultural geographic research that fits into three frames: Economic changes and neoliberalization; Forms of homelessness; and Homelessness and the geography of the city.
Economic changes and Neoliberalization

Research on economic change in North America has largely shown how the homeless are now produced in great numbers, rather than being the result of personal failings (Layton, 2008; Hulchanski, 2008). Dear and Wolch in the early 1990s were among the first homelessness researchers to suggest the impacts of welfare state restructuring in the United States (1993) and further research suggested this process was ongoing into the 00s (DeVerteuil, Lee and Wolch, 2002). Welfare spending and services were widely retrenched and combined with concurrent deinstitutionalization of mental health clients to position people very tenuously in housing (Dear and Wolch, 1987, 1993). Kennett argues that the major structural reforms made to the American welfare state were part of an anti-collectivist orthodoxy (1999). The welfare state was commonly portrayed at the time as a barrier to economic recovery.

Similar changes occurred in Canada and more specifically, in Ontario. Welfare rates were cut by as much as 21% in one year (in 1996) (Gaetz, 2004). In Canada too, the combined effects of deinstitutionalization and welfare reform meant that more people were positioned precariously on the edges of homelessness. This shift to the ‘edges’ of homelessness saw researchers take up considerations of a wider range of experiences of homelessness that will be sketched in more detail below.

Other researchers showed how housing regulation underwent significant shifts in the 1980s and 90s resulting from an ideological shift (Wekerle, 1997). The shift to market provision of housing does not necessarily affect the overall production of housing, but it disproportionately affects affordable housing creation. Others have argued that
homelessness was produced through systematic dismantling of Canada’s federal housing system, as responsibility for social housing was downloaded from federal to provincial (and in the case of Ontario, to municipal) levels (Wekerle, 1997; Walks, 2006; Layton, 2008).

The privatization of housing provision and the retrenchment of the welfare state reflect a neoliberal economic shift. This shift, that has occurred and is arguably occurring at all three levels of government in Canada, results in business-first cities. Many scholars have approached this neoliberalization of the city with an eye towards citizenship and exclusion. Kennett argues that this model of cities as *entrepreneurial cities* results in the promotion of the active and consuming/producing citizen (1999). He suggests that even when recent policy has brought homelessness issues to the fore, it is in the promotion of a ‘productivist’ rather than a redistributive agenda, thus emphasizing the active rather than the passive citizen (1999: 40). Dossa makes a similar argument about agency and citizenship. She argues that the point of reference for citizens has become the market economy and not sociality (2006). This results in a marginalizing citizenship based on (neo)liberal ideals of rationality, independence, and market productivity. Cowen argues the spatiality of post-war cities are critical to this neo-liberal shift, with the creation of a suburban style of citizenship dependent upon privacy (of family and space) (2005). Large Canadian cities are also seeing extensive gentrification of the inner city, a trend that can create spatial exclusions, especially along race and class lines (DeVerteuil, 2011a; Kern, 2010; Smith, 1996; Walks 2008). Furthermore, liberal democracies, in utilizing such restrictive ideas of citizenship and personhood, exclude markers of difference such as race, gender, class, and ability (Dossa, 2006). Exploitative inclusion in marginal low paid
work contributes to income polarization and keeps some people more precariously housed than others.

**Forms of homelessness**

Homelessness has not always been as significant a problem in Canada as it is today (Hulchanski, 2008). Hulchanski emphasizes the *newness* of contemporary homelessness, suggesting that it did not exist in its current forms until as recently as the 1980s. As a throwaway concession to old stereotypes of homelessness, he admits that there always has been and always will be some itinerant people, predominantly men.

Although Hulchanski does not call these men ‘hobos’ or ‘tramps’, their itinerance suggests perhaps they may be. This concession runs counter to Tim Cresswell’s excavation of the ‘tramp’, a figure he argues was invented in the 1880s as a marginal figure (2001). Cresswell argues that marginality was itself being constituted in relation to deep notions of normality. Such a discrepancy between different notions of what constitutes a tramp suggests that what constitutes a homeless person is similarly complicated. Causes of homelessness (or pathways to homelessness) are convoluted and depending on who you talk to, can be simple (as Hulchanski argues as part of a housing-first framework) or complex (as others argue about structural neoliberal economic changes or embedded structural racisms - more to follow).

Del Casino Jr. and Jocoy suggest that recent policy in the United States utilizes a set of discursive neoliberal practices that narrowly defines homeless subjectivity as chronic homelessness (2008). Here, chronic homelessness is equated with ‘old
homelessness’, that of the single white male with some sort of disability (including social ‘disabilities’ such as alcoholism or drug abuse). Such constructions lend themselves to concept of what is real homelessness. Del Casino Jr. and Jocoy argue that instead of refocusing attention on the ‘new’ homeless, focusing on ‘chronic’ homelessness constitutes episodic or transitional homeless subjects as self-sufficient and thus the ‘new’ homeless receive less help.

As experiences of homelessness are understood in their variations, typologies of homelessness begin to diversify as well. Some of the more useful, if perhaps too general, typologies of homelessness are the structural versus individual causes of homelessness and the transitional, chronic, and episodic forms of homelessness. Structural causes of homelessness refer to housing and labour markets as systems that produce homelessness through a variety of processes (such as unemployment, deindustrialization, and housing privatization) (May and Walks, 2010; Walks, 2006). Individual causes of homelessness focus on personal issues such as mental health, domestic strife, disability, etc.). Transitional, chronic, and episodic forms of homelessness describe different durations and experiences of homelessness and suggest a continuum of how people experience being housed and being homeless (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998).

The realities of who experiences homelessness, how they do it, and where, have changed over the past ten to fifteen years. Increasingly researchers are focusing on ‘new homelessness’, a general subgrouping that is distinguished from the old stereotypical homelessness of North America (in Canada, and in Toronto, this old group is older and whiter than the general population). New demographics of homelessness suggest the need for more nuanced portrayals of homelessness that recognize that people will experience
both structural and individual causes of homelessness and that over the course of their life they may experience all of transitional, chronic, or episodic homelessness. Researchers have increasingly turned in recent years to studies of ‘new homelessness’ to understand the relationship between structural oppressions and urban space (Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008; Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2007; Klodawsky, Aubrey and Farrell, 2006).

‘New homeless’ populations are increasingly racialized, feminized, are more polarized in age (both younger – more youth – and older – more seniors), and are more suburbanized. While there are considerable problems with both the racialization of poverty and the feminization of poverty theses (as both deny the relationship between these and other system of oppression), the fact remains that more racialized people and more women and youth are experiencing homelessness than were previously believed (Gaetz, 2004; Hwang et al., 2009). There is also increasing homelessness in suburban areas because of gentrification and anti-homeless displacement in inner city areas, as suggested above.

Part of this newness has to do with changing definitions of who counts as experiencing homelessness. The concept of absolute versus relative forms of homelessness, besides creating an artificial binary similar to structural versus individual homelessness, allows for a broadening of the definition of who is homeless. Absolute homelessness refers to rooflessness, sleeping on the street or in parks, etc., while relative (or hidden/invisible homelessness) opens up the definition to include those living precariously with friends or otherwise (Klodawsky, 2006). Such a broadened definition is
important for social justice reasons, but also for research into urban marginality and its relationship to urban space.

**Homelessness and the geography of the city**

In the context of neoliberal economic shifts, research has shown how emergency and temporary solutions are increasingly used in cities with acknowledged homelessness problems (Bridgman, 2003; DeVerteuil, 2001a; Gaetz, 2004; Johnsen, Cloke and May, 2005; Layton, 2008). In Toronto, the City put together a fairly comprehensive and elaborate plan in 2004 entitled *From the Streets into Homes: A Strategy to Assist Homeless Persons Find Permanent Housing*. This document acknowledges the declining role of higher levels of government. It suggests that cutbacks to social assistance and minimum wage have made it difficult for low-income earners to pay rent and other necessary living expenses (City of Toronto, 2004). The City’s plan was criticized for talking well but amounting to little more than removing street-sleepers from public locations. Indeed, the critics were astute in noticing a trend in the City’s policy that tended towards punishment. *From the Streets into Homes* itself cites several bylaws that can be used to evict people experiencing homelessness from public spaces: the Trespass to Property Act, the Mental Health Act, the Safe Streets Act, and the Criminal Code. That the emphasis is on eviction should not really be surprising for it fits tightly with the neoliberal trends discussed above. The promotion of the City of Toronto as a business-first city explains why the City is most interested in ending ‘street homelessness’ (City of Toronto, 2004: 2). It should be acknowledged that there is some emerging work that
challenges the ‘punitive’ discussions of homelessness, such as by DeVerteuil, May and von Mahs (2011b), who suggest that ‘to frame homeless geographies exclusively in terms of ‘collapse’ [of homeless rights and spaces] is to ignore the increasingly varied and complex geographies of homelessness that characterize the contemporary city (2011b: 646). Such complexity is no doubt a reality in Toronto, but punition is also, especially in the more rapidly gentrifying spaces of downtown Toronto.

‘New homelessness’ also involves regional differences in where homelessness people live. In the context of Phoenix, Arizona, Brinegar notes a geographical discontinuity between where shelters and services are offered (in downtown areas) and where people experiencing homelessness tend to be (both downtown and in suburban areas) (2003). Walks noted that in Canadian cities in 2001 there was a lack of spatial variation for tenants in core housing need (those spending more than 30% of income on housing) between inner cities and in suburban areas (2006). Tenants in inner cities and in suburban areas are in similar need. In addition, it is unclear whether there is more homelessness in urban or in suburban areas. Whitzman too notes the incorrect assumption that housing affordability crises are concentrated in the centres of large cities (2006). Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield have pointed out that discourses of all kinds have limited discussions of homelessness to city limits, service concentration, and the conflation of homelessness with other ‘urban’ issues such as drunkenness, vagrancy, and begging (2000). What such conflations deny is the possible ‘suburbanization’ (Passaro, 1996) of homeless populations. DeVerteuil (2011a) provides evidence that suggests social services for people experiencing homelessness are being displaced from the center of large cities (in London and Los Angeles in his study). Moreover, his results suggest
that this displacement of services ‘entraps’ many people in gentrified areas after services are gone.

The regional geography of Toronto, with the GTA swallowing up surrounding cities [such as Mississauga, which maintains a distinct identity as Canada’s sixth largest city (City of Mississauga, 2012)], presents an interesting opportunity for an examination of the experience of urban poverty and homelessness. What does the lack of spatial variation for core housing need and housing stress that Walks identifies mean for people experiencing homelessness in different areas of the city? In many cities in North America there is a distinct spatial concentration of homeless-serving agencies in downtown areas (as Brinegar argues for Phoenix), and this is certainly the case in Toronto as well. More research should be conducted examining the differences between homelessness in downtown and suburban areas.

What is at stake here is whether the ways homelessness is produced are changing to reflect broader integration of forces – including racism and other structural inequalities. Literature on homelessness largely does an excellent job of excavating the varied buried causes of or pathways to homelessness. Where there is a gap is in exploring the tensioned relationships between why people are homeless and how it affects and shapes the socio-spatial constitution or creation of the city. Homelessness as an effect of structural neoliberal adjustments does not suggest much about how people experiencing homelessness resist or rewrite their city through their experiences of urban space. Through this research I attempt to look through homelessness to discover tensions created by varied marginalizations. Literature on homelessness, situated in broader work on
urban and cultural geographies, sets the foundation for which I can use homelessness as a lens to view other urban processes such as the racialization of space.

**Chapter Outlines / Structure of the dissertation**

‘Chapter 1: Introduction’, the present chapter, attempts to set the appropriate geographical and urban socio-economic context for homelessness in the GTA.

‘Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework: Feminist Geographies and Geographies of Race and Anti-Racism’ sets the theoretical background for a project on young men of colour and experiences of homelessness.

In ‘Chapter 3: Methodologies’, I locate myself as a researcher, while discussing the methodologies I used in the conduct of this research. I discuss how these methodologies are informed by anti-racist and feminist research and also offer a detailed exploration of the challenges I encountered conducting this research as a white man.

‘Chapter 4 – ‘The vibe, yo!’: Racial Vibrations, Masculine Performances’ is an exploration of the relationship between what I call racial ‘vibrations’ and masculinities. This chapter builds on existing literature on race and affect and on masculinities. In following these literatures and in showing how young men of colour talk about space, place, and race, I illustrate how race exists in immanence, but can be felt as a vibration, or a vibe. At some times and in some spaces it vibrates more strongly. While this is true, this chapter concludes that race remains always a dominant system structuring these young men’s lives.
In ‘Chapter 5: ‘My Place of Residence’’ I work through the geographies of home literature to show how, despite the widely varied non-normative homes the young men of my research experience, they still have expectations of the ‘ideal home’ based on white, middle-class, nuclear family values. Their alienation from this experience contributes to a continued feeling of being not-at-home that provides an affective undercurrent to material marginalization.

‘Chapter 6 – ‘Gone, leave, go, move, vanish’: Public Space and (In)Visibility’ is a discussion of the various ways that young men of colour experience (in)visibility in the public spaces of the GTA. I begin this chapter by analyzing the different ways visibilities have been conceptualized in the scholarly literature. This includes in homelessness literature and literature on race and space. Despite the various ways that they navigate between visibilities and invisibilities in public and other spaces, young men of colour experiencing homelessness maintain an explicit presence in urban street spaces. Understanding their experiences of (in)visibility in urban space helps us understand the geographies of race and racism in the GTA and North American cities more broadly.

In ‘Chapter 7: Micro-Geographies of Material (In)Visibility’ I expand on the ideas discussed in the previous chapter by presenting stories from three Where-I-Live-Tours I conducted with four young men. In taking these tours I was able to experience first-hand the materiality of socio-spatial experience in their lives. As such, this chapter explores the multiple overlapping and complicated ways that these young men negotiate visibility and invisibility in public space.

‘Chapter 8: Conclusions, Summaries and Openings’ offers a summation of the intentions, design, results, innovations, and possible next steps for the present project.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework: Feminist Geographies and Geographies of Race and Anti-Racism

Conceptual Framework

The research questions in this dissertation are inspired by scholarly work in several different bodies of literature. In addition to the work in urban and cultural geographies discussed above, I am deeply rooted in feminist geographies, drawing on theories of gender, masculinities, and both home and homelessness. I am also grounded by work in geographies of race and anti-racist theory on racialization, whiteness, and visibilities. I discuss both of these bodies of literature below, with special attention paid to theories and concepts most pertinent to this dissertation. I will begin by discussing feminist geographies of homelessness, masculinities, and home and homelessness. I will then consider geographies of race and anti-racist theory on race and affect, race and (neo)liberal whiteness, race and homelessness, and race and visibilities.

Feminist Geographies

My research with young men of colour on experiences of homelessness engages deeply with feminist geographies, both in terms of methodology and theoretical framing. One of the primary focuses of feminist geographies is lived experience, paying attention to people’s everyday lives. I follow this focus because it allows us to see the complex
workings of various structures of oppression while keeping the lens trained squarely on people’s lived experience. Indeed, one of my primary contributions to this body of literature is the portrait of the particular operation of racialization, gender and the relationship between the two in the spaces and lives of the young men with whom I spoke. This section shows how the feminist geographic lens helps illustrate the relationship between identity, experience, and homelessness. I first discuss feminist geographies of homelessness, then turn to work on masculinities, and finish with feminist scholarship on home.

**Feminist Geographies of Homelessness**

Much feminist scholarship on homelessness focuses on women’s experiences (Bridgman, 2003; Klodawsky, 2006; May, Cloke and Johnsen 2007; Novac and Brown, 1996; Passaro, 1996; Rowe and Wolch, 1990; Watson, 1999; Wekerle, 1996; Whitzman, 2006). Such work is important for revealing the gendered and masculinist character of mainstream service provision, public space, and visible homeless spaces and practices (such as ‘sleeping rough’ – outdoors – and panhandling). I draw from this work critical attention to such gendered structures and people’s experiences of them. I draw further from this work for their illumination of transgressive and insurgent practices of women in the face of such oppressive conditions.

While feminists still focus very much on women’s experiences, feminist research has seen a broadening scope to include social justice issues more generally. Feminists working on homelessness have also broadened their scope to include discussions of youth
homelessness concurrent with this change. This work follows very closely the experiential tact, focusing on youth experiences of homelessness and spaces of the city. Klodawsky, Aubry and Farrell (2006) offer an insightful analysis of neoliberal economic influences on the lives of youth experiencing homelessness, arguing that while ‘care’ figures largely in the well-being of homeless youth, recent policy over-emphasizes employability. Quilgars, Johnsen and Pleace (2008) offer a summary review of literature on youth homelessness experiences in the UK, arguing homeless youth need help with life skills and emotional and financial assistance, but again, employability figures largely in government policy. These authors recognize there exists a diversity of racial and gender experiences in homelessness, but focus more on service provision and employment than on identity and difference. Ruddick (1996) discusses ‘place-making’ tactics for different groups of young homeless people on the streets of Hollywood, Los Angeles, revealing the small-scale tactics youth use to live on the streets and in public spaces. Other work, such as by Gaetz et al. (2010 and 2011), while not explicitly feminist, share feminist focuses on experience and identity in discussing issues such as street youth and victimization.

Identity and homelessness

Feminists and feminist geographers have been at the forefront of research on identity and homelessness. Researchers have shown over the past twenty years that homeless experiences are broadening, to include more people experiencing homelessness invisibly (more detail on this later, but see Zine, 2002; Living on the Ragged Edges
Whitzman argues that ‘there are significant differences between homeless women and men in relation to comfort with emergency housing provision. Homeless women, whether single or with children, prefer strongly to avoid shelters, including shelters for abused women’ (2006: 389). She continues to argue that this is because of safety concerns and wishing to avoid stigma and life disruption. Clearly, there is a great variation in people’s experiences of homelessness depending on their gender. Such feminist-informed work has yet to address such gendered issues for men, who may also experience abuse in shelters. Indeed, many men perform masculinities that fall outside ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 2005), but research is slow to address homeless men who fall outside of this norm. More research needs to be done on the experiences of male shelters users and invisible male homelessness.

Scholarly and policy research on homelessness distinguish between visible and invisible (also called hidden) homelessness. Invisible homelessness refers to the experience of being obscured from public view, whether because of househopping/couchsurfing, living in temporary shelters, or living in unaffordable or inadequate housing (Whitzman, 2006). Visible homelessness refers to those who live in full public view which includes panhandling, sleeping rough, and washing (May and Walks, 2010). Literature on these visibilities widely suggest that in purely numerical terms, men are more likely than women to experience homelessness visibly. However, it is important to note that men do experience homelessness invisibly and women do experience it visibly, so the categories must not be completely collapsed along gender lines (May et al., 2007).
Researchers have also identified shifts in the demographics of who experiences homelessness, suggesting that there is a growing proportion of women, children/youth, and families experiencing homelessness. This shift towards ‘new homelessness’ (that is no longer that new) is often attributed to the neoliberalization of housing and employment markets that has been happening since the 1980s (Del Casino and Jocoy, 2008 and Klodawsky et al., 2006) and increasing racial stratification in the same (Galabuzi, 2006). This new homelessness is differentiated from ‘old homelessness’ in that it tends to be experienced invisibly and as such, ostensibly has smaller impacts on the politics of urban public space (I will show later that this last assumption is not true).

*Whitzman and feminist geographies of ‘visibility’*

I draw heavily on Whitzman’s (2006) discussion of ‘invisible’ homelessness for my analysis of shifting (in)visibilities. Whitzman offers a critical address of this undertheorized concept\(^3\), illuminating the difference between the different kinds of invisibility involved in invisible homelessness. Whitzman distinguishes between policy, material, and emotional invisibilities, suggesting three dimensions of invisibility. First, she acknowledges the conventional policy invisibility aspect, in which people are less visible to both public scrutiny and policy intervention because they are househopping, staying with friends, or simply living unaffordable. Secondly, she suggests a material and theoretical invisibility in which researchers and policy-makers focus too greatly on visible homelessness in the centre of large cities\(^4\). She notes that only recently has there been attention paid to housing stress in suburban or ex-urban locations (Bunting, Walks

Whitzman has an explicitly geographical focus; she argues that within invisibilities, there can be both spatial and policy invisibilities. In the former, she suggests that even visible homeless people can be excluded from using public spaces, such as by the municipal policing I suggested above. In the latter, people who experience homelessness invisibly (or hidden) may not be counted in statistics. This broadening of invisibilities brings us closer to the varied visibilities experienced by the young men of colour in the present research and to the ways that scholars working on the philosophy of race have articulated racial (in)visibilities.

Whitzman begins her article drawing on Leonie Sandercock (1998) and David Sibley (1995) as illustrative of how scholars have brought a focus on the social invisibility of ideas, people, and places in different kinds of popular accounts. Sandercock focuses on planning history, while Sibley in this case focuses on state policy. Both these authors, and Whitzman, suggest that there is a theory and policy invisibility of racialized groups, women, and other marginalized groups. But while Whitzman argues that this invisibility can be articulated both in terms of policy and in terms of space, these arguments tend to play out more in terms of ideology than in the material. What remains to be explored is how invisible homelessness is affected and relates to other forms of invisibility (such as racialized (in)visibilities), and how these play out in the material experiences of city space for people experiencing homelessness.
Finally, there exists a body of literature on experiences of homelessness. My research questions are inspired by this body of literature since like feminist and anti-racist geographies, it keeps the focus squarely on lived experience.

Paul Cloke, Jon May and Sarah Johnsen have published a series of articles in recent years based on ethnographic research on experiences of homelessness in the UK (Cloke, Johnsen and May, 2007a, 2007b; Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2007; Johnsen, Cloke and May, 2005; Johnsen, May and Cloke, 2008a, 2008b). This work ranges from explorations of emotion, performance, and care to responses to economic changes and changes in service provision. Specifically regarding experience and the space of the city, they argue that routines of movement of homeless people in prime and marginal spaces of the city offer the potential for spatial counter-inscription, meaning that spaces ostensibly coded for certain uses can be used and imagined in new ways (Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008).

As suggested previously, researchers and policy-makers working on homelessness make a distinction between visible and invisible (or hidden) homelessness. Visible homelessness refers to the conditions of living in public view, including sleeping rough (outside), panhandling, and washing (May and Walks, 2010). Invisible homelessness is the experience of being hidden from public view, which includes forms of homelessness that include couchsurfing/househopping, living temporarily in shelters, and living in unaffordable or inappropriate housing (Whitzman, 2006). In the rough dichotomous sense, men are more likely to experience homelessness visibly than are women and women
make up a larger proportion of the invisibly homeless than men. However, May et al. (2007) note that women experience homelessness visibly too, so we must be careful not to be reductive about these categories.

The unstable housing experiences of those experiencing homelessness invisibly also include youth. Robinson (2005) draws on literature about youth homelessness in suggesting that home strife (family breakdown, domestic violence, and sexual abuse) are central to youth homelessness. She argues that the initial trauma of leaving home combines with continuing ‘chaotic, marginal and unsafe housing’ (Robinson, 2005: 52) and contributes to feelings of displacement.

As research has expanded to explore ‘new homelessness’ and conceptions of both visible and invisible/hidden forms of homelessness, it has moved from rooflessness (and houselessness) to homelessness, with understandings of the loss of ‘home’ rather than simply the loss of shelter (Moore, 2007; Rivlin and Moore, 2001; Somerville, 1992). As Somerville influentially argued in the early 90s, ‘homelessness’ is an ideological construction that privileges material loss (rooflessness) and reinforces the associations of home with particular forms of dwellings (houses).

The slippage between home and homeless has seen some scholarly attention. Veness offers the conceptual tool ‘unhome’, a ‘messy middle ground’ (321) that illuminates the uneasy classifications of home and homeless that the lives of ostensibly homeless people destabilize. She too makes the point that many external definitions of home do not match up to people’s individual realities. Veness argues that people who are more willing to accept society’s definition of homeless may be better able to receive help
from institutional service providers. She makes this point in discussing people who have fashioned home-shelters from recreational vehicles, camper tops, tents, etc.

The ideological privileging of certain home-spaces in the context of awareness of diverse home experiences has led researchers to open up a wider meaning of home. May (2000) argues that there has been some work on homeless people’s understandings of home, but these focus on ‘home as residence’. He attempts to open this up to ‘home as place’, that articulates a wider sense of home and experience of homelessness. Robinson (2005) examines grief and trauma as key elements in the lives of young people experiencing homelessness. She argues ‘that this grief speaks of a fundamental need not just to re-structure an exclusionary political, economic and social landscape, but to develop basic avenues of coherence and healing through which to equip young people to engage in this landscape themselves’ (2005: 48). Robinson illustrates how bereavement is spatial, in the sense that youth experiencing homelessness have lost a ‘place in the world’ (2005: 49). As such, the acknowledgment and management of grief, and the necessity of spaces in which young homeless people can wrestle with it, are essential to managing their lives.

Robinson’s argument uses the experience of homelessness to examine connections to place and space. She argues that their homelessness colludes with their grief to make these youths less able ‘to “put down roots”, to feel at-home in terms of a sense of experiencing connectedness to physical place and community’ (Robinson, 2005: 52). There have been some other recent studies on people experiencing homelessness that account for the multiple ways and spaces in which people achieve a sense of belonging.
(such as the library – Hodgetts et al., 2008; historical public spaces – Sheehan, 2010; squats – Johnsen, May and Cloke, 2008; and hostels – Cloke, May, and Johnsen, 2008).

Attention to belonging and the diverse ways it is achieved combines work on home and homelessness. Robinson (2005) cites hooks’ evocation of ‘homeplaces’ in suggesting that youth experiencing homelessness need such places, the provision of which is taken for granted by people who are homed (including beyond the material provision of housing). She suggests that some of the spaces that are ‘made’ for street youth (like shelters) and other spaces that the youth themselves make help foster this relationship between space, place, and self:

In drop-in centres, parks, jail, in the street, young people begin to make sense of small towns and claustrophobia, of handbags and cups of sugar, of dangerous family members, of sexuality. This is a process of recognising spaces of rejection, violence, illness and using these spaces as part of the process of negotiating and ordering daily expressions of self. It is in space-full places, that young people are able to make fragile connections, to become-at-home, yearn-for-home, indeed, as James [a research participant] suggested, even experience a kind of homecoming (Robinson, 2002: 36).

Such tenuous movements between and within spaces and the complex negotiations of self are the stuff research on lived experiences of homelessness can provide. Indeed, this body of literature explores the ‘micro-tactics of belonging’ (Robinson, 2002: 37) created and exercised by people experiencing homelessness. Research that works across the boundaries between urban and cultural accounts of homelessness and those of feminist and anti-racist geographies can fruitfully explore relationships between homelessness, subjectivity, and structures of race and gender. It is in this context that my present research enters these debates.
The second main feminist geographic body of literature that inspired my research is geographies of masculinities. There is consensus among feminist geographers there are social, economic, and political changes happening in Western countries that affect traditional male identities and masculinities (Cowen and Siciliano, 2011; Longhurst, 2000; McDowell, 2002a; Nayak, 2006; Van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005). These changes multiply templates for masculine performances and also present feminist and other geographers with changing templates for studying masculinities (Van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005). Nayak, in his study of post-industrial youth masculinities in north-east England, suggests young men in such contexts ‘risk unemployment or…indulge in underground activity and criminal hyper-masculine displays’ (2006: 817). The latter suggestion of ‘underground’ or ‘criminal’ activities highlights their limited legitimate avenues for traditional male socialization. McDowell (2002b) mitigates this latter idea, suggesting masculinities for contemporary young men are complicated and combine not only ‘protest’ and ‘resistance’ masculinities (such as the underground and criminal inclinations), but respectability and domestic goals.

Hopkins (2007) suggests that specific studies of how youth, masculinity, and race intersect are lacking. There have also been calls for studies of how masculinities relate to actually existing men (Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Nayak, 2006; Van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005). Such studies might help us understand how masculinities exist in flux and could illuminate ‘shifting dynamics of power’ in gender relationships (Hopkins
and Noble 2009, 813). Hopkins and Noble (2009) note there has been a shift from top-down social constructionist concepts of masculinities to the conceptualization of masculinities as strategic, ‘where masculinities are understood as performances which are undertaken in particular contexts, drawing on specific resources and capacities’ (813). This approach supports the spatiality of masculinities, focusing on how masculinities emerge in relation to space and place.

Feminist work on masculinity also stresses the embedded character of masculinity in structures and institutions including education, employment, law, and media (Connell, 2005; Datta et al., 2009). Such embedded masculinity affects male as well as female identities and has material effects in jobs, employability, and housing. Moreover, such work emphasizes the relational construction of masculinities in identity creation (Peake and Trotz, 1999). I use this work to help illustrate how despite varying performances of masculinity, the young men in my research are marginalized from power structures based on gender and race.

Finally, contemporary work on masculinities (inside and outside geography) are heavily indebted to the work by sociologist R.W. Connell and her ‘patterns’ of masculinity (1998 and 2005). Connell suggests there exist four ‘patterns’ of masculinity in the current Western gender order: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization. Hegemonic masculinity reflects the current answer to the problem of patriarchy; Connell suggests that this is the dominant form of masculinity in any culture and it supports masculine (and male) domination. Subordinate masculinity is the social and cultural inferiority of particular groups of men (such as gay men). Complicity reflects masculinities that realized the benefits of patriarchy, but do not require explicit
hegemonic performances. Lastly, marginal masculinities are those of certain racial/ethnic or class groups who lack the authority to decide on hegemonic masculinity (and Connell’s example is black athletes).

Connell has been criticized for developing too rigid a ‘typology’ of masculinities, even if she suggests there can be movement within these ‘patterns’ (Evers, 2011; Hopkins and Noble, 2009). Geographers have been critical of Connell’s arguments, most specifically around the lack of attention paid to the role of space in the formation of masculinities (Atherton, 2009; Hopkins and Noble, 2009). Atherton (2009) suggests that sociological accounts of masculinities such as Connell’s account for different situations but tend to insufficiently account for the role of space and place. He argues that the ‘dense symbolism’ of ‘sites and institutions within which bodies perform’ must be considered (Atherton, 2009, 822). This symbolism also helps mutually create subjects and spaces. Jackson (1991), who instigated the study of masculinities within geography, also noted the plurality of masculinities, and argued too for the role of place in their construction. Such work was taken up in the 90s and has periodically been reaffirmed, such as by Day (2001) and Berg and Longhurst (2003), all who called for more studies of the ‘spatial’ construction of masculinities. Hopkins and Noble argue that a geographical account of masculinities might better account for the ‘messy complexities of young men’s lives’ (2009: 816). Despite this work, it is still unclear exactly how space helps shape and inform masculinities.
Geographies of home

Home and meaning

A final explicit feminist focus in this dissertation is on the concept and materiality of home and the diversity of experiences that term entails. Blunt and Dowling (2006) indicate a consensus in contemporary understandings of home, suggesting that home is ‘a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two’ (2-3). That home involves a relationship between place/site and meaning is widely acknowledged, and many scholars point out the critical importance of the establishment of personal meaning for experiencing home (Blunt and Varley, 2004; Brueckner et al., 2011; Gorman-Murray, 2007; Manzo, 2003; Somerville, 1992; Valentine, 2001). This personal meaning must be continually remade, such that home is often understood as a process that involves continual engagement with home-making practices to be experienced (Blunt, 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2007, 2008; Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011; Walsh, 2011). These practices involve both material and affective aspects (Gorman-Murray, 2007).

In geographical scholarship, analysis of home as an important subject of inquiry emerged out of feminist work that illuminated the long masculinist scholarly exclusion of this valuable site for many women (Valentine, 2001). Indeed, much recent work on home and meaning is focused on women’s experiences of home, even as this research often attempts to decouple the home/femininity and work/masculinity binaries (Anderson, 2011; Meth, 2003; Quinn, 2010; Robertson, 2007; Yantzi and Rosenberg, 2008). However,
there is some emerging literature on men’s experiences of home that accounts for the multi-scalarity of home, meaning that home is often connected to residence, but also to broader scales such as neighbourhood, city, nation, and diaspora (Atherton, 2009; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2007 and 2008; hooks, 2009; Mifflin and Wilton, 2005; Walsh, 2011).

Gorman-Murray (2008) argues for the mutuality of home (or domestic) space and masculinities, and he follows Blunt and Dowling (2006) in noting there is not much work yet done in this area. He suggests this is problematic, as men’s experiences of home spaces contribute to their sense of selfhood: ‘As one ‘makes home’, one accumulates a sense of self’ (Gorman-Murray, 2008: 369). It is understood that since home is no longer imagined as the sole providence of women, men’s experiences, understandings and imaginations of home will be important to their sense of selfhood.

The ability to make and feel home is contingent upon one’s position in society. Veness (1993) argues that idealized conceptions of home in Western culture are heteronormative, ableist, sexist, racist, and ageist. She argues there is a relationship between access to these dominant ideas of home and the ability to generate them. Moreover, she argues that these dominant ideals of home that focus more heavily on the single-dwelling, nuclear family home, can be taken up by research and policy-makers in ways that marginalize those who cannot access that ideal in practice.

Gorman-Murray and Dowling (2006, but see also Gorman-Murray, 2007) build upon this argument, suggesting that the dominant Western Anglophone ideology of home ‘revolve[s] around the imaginary ‘ideal’ of white, middle-class, heterosexual nuclear family households in suburban dwellings’ (11). This revolving is in part a product of
Western ‘settler’ nations, such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, as Brueckner et al. argue: ‘The normalizing discourses of homeownership, predominantly found in Anglo-Saxon countries, find expression through evocative and emotional aphorisms of home’ (2011: 4). They argue further that the implicit connection between emotion and homeownership also is tied to good citizenship and parenthood, positing normative rules for ways of being at home. Such norms are political in character (as is stated explicitly by Veness in the conclusion of her argument) and are produced in local Western contexts through the complex dissemination of white, middle-class, heterosexual values. bell hooks, in her arguments about the ability of American black people to establish a sense of belonging regarding home, indicates that ‘in the contemporary situation…the paradigms for domesticity in black life mirrored white bourgeois norms (where home is conceptualized as politically neutral space)’ (1990: 47). Indeed, the idealization of home as politically neutral space has been challenged quite broadly within feminist and other analyses of the meaning of home.

*Ideal and Real/Lived ‘Home’*

In the context of the acknowledged political character of home, feminist scholars continue to show the differences between ideal and real or lived experiences of home. It is often pointed out that actual experiences of home do not often map onto idealized imaginations of home (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Domosh, 1998; Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008; Mallett, 2004; McDowell, 1997; Meth, 2003). Indeed, ideal imaginations of home are often rooted in normative ideologies as suggested above.
Watson and Austerberry (1986), in one of the first explicitly feminist analyses of homelessness, showed how women often distinguished between their living conditions and their ideas of what home means. This split is followed up in Somerville’s (1992) still-cited evocation of some central ‘meanings’ of home, including shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode, and paradise. ‘Shelter’ is the physical protection, the roof over one’s head, and ‘abode’ provides the physical space. ‘Heart’ and ‘roots’ refer to personal and familial connections, the emotional ties between place, self, and identity. ‘Hearth’ involves the emotional comfort and security provided by a welcoming atmosphere. ‘Privacy’ combines both material and emotional space, the space for one person to be. Finally, ‘paradise’ combines all of these into the potential ideal home situation that melds all previous meanings together.

Despres (1991), writing around the same time as Somerville, reviewed then-current literature on home to contribute her own list of qualities of home. These included ‘relationships with family and friends; refuge from the outside world; security and control; acting upon and modifying one’s dwelling; permanence and continuity; indicator of personal status; a reflection of one’s ideas and values’ (quoted from Rivlin and Moore, 2001).

Such idealized meanings are difficult to achieve in lived experiences of home. Brueckner et al. (2011), in their study of transitions to being ‘homed’ for youth in Australia, suggest that these young people fall between real and ideal in their experiences of home. This gap results in a yearning for the perceived ideals involved in feeling at home: security, comfort, privacy. They also indicated that the youth in their study yearned for the sense of normalcy that they thought would come with being housed
(particularly in a home-ownership situation), the latter suggesting the effects of the normative ideas I indicated above.

There is some current research that illustrates the ways people contest this disconnect between ideal and actual meanings and experiences of home. Yantzi and Rosenberg (2008) show how their work on women caring for children with long-care needs in Ontario, Canada follows this tradition of feminist scholarship showing how traditional meanings of home are contested in daily life. Gorman-Murray (2006 and 2007) does the same thing, showing how the normative links between home and the heterosexual nuclear family are challenged in gay and lesbian couples’ homes. Gorman-Murray argues that ideals of home are often conflated with the heterosexual nuclear family (this despite quite varied ‘Western’ housing experiences) and that the home has been ‘heterosexualized’ (2007: 231) by public policy and social convention.

This disconnect between actual and imagined experiences and meanings of home is now a classic feminist argument. The idealized conception of home as a safe space and a haven from what goes on outside it neglects women’s experiences of the home as dangerous and unsafe (Manzo, 2003; Rose, 1993; Varley, 2008). Indeed, much research shows that ideas of home as haven and nurturing do not map onto people’s lived experiences of home as traumatic (Brueckner, 2011; Mallett, 2004; Manzo, 2005; Paradis et al., 2008; Robinson, 2002; Somerville; 1992; Watson, 1999). For example, Paradis et al. (2008), in their study of non-status migrants, status immigrants, and Canadian-born women-led families, discovered many of these women were better off outside their home, living in shelters. This is because prior to living in shelters, their housing was unaffordable, unsafe, inadequate, isolating, and/or in poor condition. Paradis’ study
echoes a common point made by people experiencing homelessness: the home might be worse than being homeless.

*Home/Belonging/Race*

The important point is that home as a site of meaning can be experienced in a plurality of ways, with simultaneous positive and negative valences. Debates about what home means are tension-filled and this tension extends to the complexity and diversity of experiences of home (Moore, 2000). As suggested above, Gorman-Murray (2007) suggests that meanings of home vary across axes of difference (such as race, gender, class, age, disability, and sexuality). Moore (2000) pointed out that a shift occurred in studies of home away from developing lists of meanings of home (as in Somerville, 1992 and Despres, 1991) and towards examining particular homes in particular socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, one of the critical gaps in this literature is attention to racialized understandings of home, particularly as they relate to Western white and middle-class ideals of home. bell hooks has written extensively about race in the United States and offers her classic evocation of ‘homeplace’ to these debates. Originally developed in response to white feminists who stated that the home is very often a site of patriarchal violence and oppression for women, hooks (1990) suggested that in making a ‘homeplace’, black women could create an environment of respite and rejuvenation for black people. She suggests, drawing from her youth experiences of ‘homeplace’, that these were ‘places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and
comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls’ (hooks, 1990: 41). The development of homeplace came as the result of an explicit political goal, viewing home as a place of radical politics, in which

Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world (hooks, 1990: 42).

Thus, hooks offers homeplace ‘as a site of resistance and liberation struggle’, in direct opposition to the apolitical idealization of home in much of white culture.

hooks returned to the idea of homeplace in her 2009 book *Belonging*, in which she broadens the discussion of home to include a more localized connection between people and place. In *Belonging*, she articulates the need to develop a ‘culture of belonging’ (2009: 182) in the context of widespread alienation for many people of colour. hooks directly relates this alienation to widespread social and economic whiteness in North America and thus helps articulate the tensions between idealized and normalized white, middle-class, heterosexual nuclear family values of home and the lived experiences for many people of colour that may or may not match up with these ideals.

The effect of these normalized ideals is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, but the diversity of meanings, ideas, and representations of home are articulated nicely in Dionne Brand’s affective slice-of-life description of the feeling of home on Bathurst Street in Toronto:

The arteries of Bathurst Subway carry Black life and industry along its bus and streetcar routes up to Vaughan and St. Clair, Oakwood and Eglinton, and down to
Alexandra Park. All those faces, worried, anxious, waiting, eating, approving, disapproving, hurrying, wondering where the hell the Vaughan Road bus is and what to cook for supper tonight and why is that child in those big clothes and his mother must be working damn hard to pay for that leather jacket…all of that is home for me (Brand, 1994: 34).

Brand’s assemblage of buses, streetcars, faces, looks, anxiety, clothes, mothers, and so on, suggests that feelings of home can be manifested in very different ways from home-as-single-detached-house. Despite this, as the scholars above argue, the ‘ideal’ of home in Canada still remains in the form of house-as-home and is based on white, middle-class, and heterosexual nuclear family values. What remains to be answered is the full effect of ‘idealized’ versions of home and how they relate to ‘real’ experiences of home in the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Moreover, it is unclear how race and gender (particularly regarding masculinity) affect conceptions and experiences of home.

A word on Intersectionality in feminist studies

Finally, I should note that even though it has become the dominant paradigm within feminist studies, and despite that I do borrow from it, I do not frame my discussions of race or gender in intersectionality. Developed by black feminists in the 1980s in response to white feminists who were attempting to claim a ‘universal womanhood’ for all women despite important differences such as race, intersectionality is often regarded as the central framework for feminist analysis. However, recent years have seen some criticism of the hegemony and utility of intersectionality within feminist studies. Puar (2007) argues that in order to be effective, intersectionality should be augmented with other frameworks, such as affective assemblage, which she uses. Puar
also notes that despite intersectionality coming to the fore as a tool to make us cognizant of difference, it has often been utilized in terms of ‘different from’, and often in terms of ‘different from’ white women (2011). Thirdly, she points out that ‘much like the language of diversity, the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself’ (2011, No Page).

Others are critical about intersectionality’s utility for specific geographic lived experiences. Valentine argues:

The existing theorization of the concept of intersectionality overemphasizes the abilities of individuals to actively produce their own lives and underestimates how the ability to enact some identities or realities rather than others is highly contingent on the power-laden spaces in and through which our experiences are lived’ (Valentine, 2007: 19).

Moreover, the fact that Hopkins and Noble (2009) suggest that more intersectional analyses of masculinities need to be conducted might indicate the difficulty of utilizing the framework for studies on actually-existing people.

Finally, I am afraid that the intense individualizing focus of intersectionality (with each person being ‘identified’ at a specific intersection) could have too close ties with the individualizing ideology of liberalism. Such a move might render group politics ineffective, or worse, too abstract. Because of these reasons, I frame my feminism more in terms of ‘performance’ (as in my masculinities section) and my anti-racism more in terms of affect (as in my conceptualization of ‘racial vibrations’ – more to follow). While I discuss the essential relationship between these, I do not often do so in an explicitly intersectional manner.
Geographies of race and anti-racist theory

The next body of literature that helped inspire the questions for this research is geographies of race and anti-racist theory. Both of these challenge naturalized, constructed, or otherwise oppressive ideas or materialities of race. They conceive of ‘racialization’ as a process that de-naturalizes the ostensibly solid foundations of ‘race’ based on biology/physiology. While sociologists have conceived of racialization as happening through primarily discursive means (Omi and Winant, 1986), geographers argue that the process happens through space and spatialization as well.

There are several inroads from race literature into studies of homelessness. To a certain extent, the important parts of each of these inroads cover how race is made and what it does. Work on race within geography, while valuable, is not as extensive as it is in other disciplines and as such, I attempt to draw widely here, while keeping the focus on space and racialization. The research I draw on can be divided into four conceptual frames: race and affect, race and (neo)liberalism, race and homelessness, and race and visibilities. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Race and Affect

Philosophical work on affect has exploded in the humanities and social sciences in recent years. Within work on race and racialization, things are no different. Vigorous research on affect and race is important for discovering the workings of racialization and racism. As Lim argues, theorizing affect is ‘crucial for an antiracist politics’ (2010: 2407).
However, affectual geographers do not agree on a definition of affect or how it relates to the concept of emotion (Bondi and Davidson, 2011; Curti et al., 2011; Pile, 2009 and 2011). Following work on race and affect I understand the latter to mean the non-conscious, pre-cognitive that moves between and attaches bodies, shaping and structuring feeling while existing as potential with the capacity to affect and effect.

Such a schema enters into a more-than-representational understanding of the world that jibes with some newer materialist conceptions of race. Saldanha (2006) suggests that much contemporary theory looks at race as an epistemological problem of discourse and representation. He attempts to ‘rematerialize’ race by examining it ontologically and foregrounding bodies and corporeality. This material emphasis is taken up in recent geographical work on race and affect, but also in work on masculinities (Nayak, 2010). Saldanha argues paying attention to materiality and bodies allows race scholars a response when people focus on phenotype.

This renewed attention to bodies (human and otherwise) and corporeality allows for better understandings of why race matters and what race does. Moreover, this attention affords an understanding of the affective underpinnings of contemporary race and racism. Paying attention to bodies and corporeality helps us develop studies ‘alive to the happening of race’ (Nayak, 2010: 2370). Attention to bodies and things around bodies can show us that despite phenotype, race does not necessarily emerge in every encounter. Rather, ‘assemblages’ of things including ‘architecture, vegetation, minerals, sounds, tastes, smells and so on’ (Swanton 2008, 3) offer multiple connections. Assemblages involve relations between actors and forces human and non-human, and are positive collectivities with creative power. While temporary and contingent, assemblages share
common creative potential and a capacity to affect (Anderson et al., 2012; Robbins and Marks, 2010; Ruddick, 2012). For racial assemblages, their creative capacity is highlighted by the diverse forces and actors that might come together to invoke race (Swanton, 2010). However, as Lim argues based on a club-scene encounter, race may or may not come into force:

There are a multitude of ways in which bodies might connect with one another, other than those of ‘ethnicity’. An alliance may be made on the basis of sexual desire, friendship, political views, a shared enjoyment of dancing, tastes in music, or a complementarity of differences: ethnicity…might not even come into it. (2010, 2397)

Here, ethnicity exists in potential, but does not emerge to ‘define’ the bodies involved. It is merely one form of connection that can link or repel bodies. However, its potential to do both these things cannot be understated. A body, either an individual or a social body (such as the ‘body’ of the two people involved in the club encounter), is constantly being broken down and built up. Ruddick (2010) argues that a body only becomes aware of itself because of ‘traces’ other bodies leave on it. Bodies are relationally composed as assemblages of themselves, other bodies, and other things (living and non-). Race might be an active component of an assemblage, or it might not. Similarly, Saldanha (2006) conceives of race as an ‘event’. As with Nayak’s ‘happening’ of race, Saldanha’s ‘event’ means there is no essential race, nobody has a race, but rather race exists when it happens in encounters.

To show what race does, I follow Saldanha in his definition of emergence as ‘the nonnecessary, gradual, spontaneous, and constrained accumulation of organisation and a larger ‘agency' through the synergy of smaller forces’ (2006: 10). The creativity and
positivity of race and the potential for oppression, judgement and racism come from the ‘agency’ created by this synergy of smaller forces. Swanton argues race ‘might be better understood as a technology that locates and sorts human differences encountered as threatening or ‘unruly’’ (Swanton, 2010: 2334). Locating and sorting produces racial effects, including the alteration of some bodies’ capacity to affect and be affected (Swanton, 2010), which can result in oppressive racisms.

These theorists agree on the affective genesis of racialization. Swanton (2010) argues race operates at least partly in nonconscious thinking, ‘where affectively imbued racial summaries sort bodies and pass judgement’ (2340). Thus, race and racism operate from an affective potentiality that resonates around bodies, a ‘field of potential’ (Lim, 2010: 2398) that exists latently within and between things. That potential allows for the emergence of race if a racialized assemblage forms and its emergence might be involved in the creation of new forms of racism, oppression, and injustice.

I follow this literature in developing my concept of the vibration of race that I develop fully in Chapter 4. In that chapter (and in the rest of this dissertation), I attempt to illustrate how affect acts as the undercurrent for the lives of young men of colour in the city, shaping their experiences of city space and their sense of self as racialized and gendered young men.

**Race and (neo)liberal whiteness**

This conceptualization of race as emerging and existing in potential resonates with research on race and (neo)liberal whiteness. Arat-Koç (2010) argues that discussions
and discourses of race have in recent years become more sophisticated, especially with
the trend towards post-racialism. She argues that post-racialism has emerged out of a
‘neo-liberal multiculturalism [that portrays] a post-racist world of freedom and
opportunity’ (Arat-Koç, 2010: 147). The perpetuation of the post-racial myth results from
what she identifies as racial transformations along and beyond the colour line as a result
of geopolitical changes. This involves the upward mobility of some formerly third world
peoples (into transnational elites) and the downward mobility of some formerly middle-
or ‘underclass’ whites. This mobilization involves what she calls a relative ‘browning’ of
elite classes and a ‘whitening’ of the (still very racialized) ‘underclass’, which serves as
uncritical ‘proof’ of the declining significance of race and racism. The supposed
obsolescence of race combines with the individualizing characteristics of neoliberal
organization to allow whiteness, as the still-current system of racial dominance in many
North American cities, to build in force (or to vibrate more constantly, in my
conceptualization). Such race discourse is ‘privilege-evasive’, as Bailey argues, which
identifies the connections between discourses of the declining significance of race and the
rise of ‘pluralism and diversity’, suggesting that talking about the latter two masks the
terror of the former:

In contemporary society, white and black people alike believe that racism no longer
exists. This erasure, however mythic, diffuses the representation of whiteness as
terror in the black imagination. It allows for assimilation and forgetfulness. The
eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this
recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality, is a
response to the terror (2009: 103).

In the Canadian context, this diversity and pluralism come in the form of multiculturalism,
both in state discourse and in lived discourse. In the latter, a kind of popular post-
racialism operates in which (neo)liberal narratives and structures position race as declining in significance, all the while embedding racialized relations in structures of power in labour, housing, education and government. This popular discourse of post-racialism is different from the political utopianism of Paul Gilroy, who in Against Race (2000), argues for the abandonment and abolition of race in order to transcend it. Saldanha offers a materialist critique of Gilroy, suggesting that we need to understand the ontological character of race to fight against it:

Gilroy asserts the possibility and even burgeoning existence of racial transcendence, without first seriously addressing the question of what needs to be transcended. ‘Racial’ oppression, for sure; but if an ontology of race has to be abandoned altogether, how do we specify what needs to be fought against? (2006: 15).

There is a difference between the espoused post-racialism of Gilroy as a political endeavor and the espoused post-racialism of a race-evasive narrative. In this dissertation I critique the latter, while being attentive to the ‘pernicious politics of race’ (Gilbert, 2010 in Jones and Sage, 2010). The effects such post-racial discourses continue to be studied quite broadly in the social sciences (Bush, 2011; Glassman, 2010; Goldberg, 2008; Kaplan, 2011; Parks, Hughey and Ogletree, 2011).

Indeed, spaces of the city are affected by racialization and differential emergences of race. Following the mutuality Grosz suggests in her ‘bodies-cities’ theory (1998), Ahmed suggests that ‘public spaces take shape through the habitual actions of bodies, such that the contours of space could be described as habitual’ (2007: 156). This argument has importance for homelessness, since Ahmed suggests a direct relationship between public spaces and living. She turns to the concept of ‘habits’ to theorize ‘not so much how bodies acquire their shape, but how spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them’ and suggests ‘we could think about the ‘habit’ in the ‘in-habit’ (2007:}
In this inhabitation, racialization results when certain bodies become more associated with certain spaces. Specifically writing about whiteness, Ahmed argues that this inhabitation makes non-white bodies ‘around whiteness…feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space’ (2007: 157).

This result changes if those bodies begin to occupy or ‘in-habit’ the habits of whiteness. As Nayak (2007) argues, ‘studies of whiteness need not, and perhaps should not, be restricted to the analysis of those socially labelled as ‘white’. To do so risks and epistemological essentialism linking whiteness to the ‘white’ body’ (743). As such, the effects of whiteness on ostensibly non-white bodies are in need of study, as are studies of the relationship between whiteness and liberal rationality. Berg (2012) indicates how whiteness might be taken up by individuals when he critiques liberal rationalism: ‘I link…whiteness to the production of geographic subjectivity that is also produced in and through a hegemonic liberalism, a form of understanding of the Self as unified, monolithic, fully self-aware, and rational’ (509).

The effects of this whiteness and other racializations affect the regional structure of the city. The spatialization of race, McKittrick argues, is shaped by practices of domination, which ‘naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups ‘naturally’ belong’ (2006: XV). This is a material and figurative spatialization, with results for both material situations and social imaginations of the city.

I draw from these literatures in my discussions of racial vibrations and race and (in)visibilities. I focus on what Ahmed suggests are ‘moments of political and personal trouble’. She raises this in talking about people of colour occupying whitened spaces:
It is important to remember that whiteness is not reducible to white skin, or even to ‘something’ we can have or be, even if we pass through whiteness. When we talk about a ‘sea of whiteness’ or ‘white space’ we are talking about the repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others, for sure. But non-white bodies do inhabit white spaces; we know this. Such bodies are made invisible when we see spaces as being white, at the same time as they become hypervisible when they do not pass, which means they ‘stand out’ and ‘stand apart’. You learn to fade into the background, but sometimes you can’t or you don’t. The moments when the body appears ‘out of place’ are moments of political and personal trouble (Ahmed, 2007: 159).

It is very largely these latter ‘moments’ that make up the balance of most of this dissertation. Indeed, these moments are critical junctures in the production of race, gender, identity, and resultant marginalities, oppressions, and resiliencies. What remains to be discovered is the operation of post-racialism and whiteness in the small-scale lives of youth in the city.

**Race and Homelessness**

The third conceptual body of race literature that frames this dissertation is work on race and homelessness. This is one of the largest *conceptual* blindspots in homelessness research. There is very little literature on race and homelessness and what little there is comes from the American context and tends to be demographic in character. In the Western context more generally, research on race and homelessness tends to focus on racialized immigrant and refugee groups (DeVerteuil, 2011b; Kissoon, 2011; Living on the Ragged Edges Forum, 2003). Such research is important, but work on domestic-born people experiencing homelessness such as in my project are equipped to tell different stories about race and racism.
Other work in this area documents racial changes in the ‘new homeless’ that can be attributed to demographic changes in Canada more broadly. Galabuzi (2006) suggests that the changing racial composition of Canada has to do with immigration policy changes in the 1960s. A shift from explicit immigration from Europe to that based on credentials and education effectively opened up immigration to many other parts of the world. Population growth in Canada can now be attributed to immigration and that growing population is increasingly racialized (Galabuzi, 2006). Galabuzi also argues that this racialized population is embroiled in the shift towards neoliberal forms of governance and labour market deregulation aimed at the exploitation of labour. Racialized groups are disproportionately relegated to non-standard forms of work with low pay, unsafe conditions, excessive hours and low or no benefits (Galabuzi, 2006).

These marginal experiences are mirrored in the housing experiences of people of colour. Systemic barriers to housing exist for racialized people, immigrants, and refugees: ‘The results of these barriers are fewer choices of dwellings and neighbourhoods, higher rents, longer searches, hiding information from ‘gatekeepers’ (such as landlords, and realtors), more frequent moves, overcrowding, psychological impacts, and stigma’ (Living on the Ragged Edges Forum, 2003). The shift to market provision for housing allows for the ignorance of such issues (Wekerle, 1997). The result of such conditions for many are precarious housing conditions and homelessness. Because of these dangers and because of insufficient formal supports for housing and employment help, people are increasingly using informal networks to find shelter, food, and cultural friendship (Living on the Ragged Edges Forum, 2003). Unfortunately, there are dangers associated with informal networks as well, as people may not even have them, they may make people
vulnerable to smugglers, and these networks may be misinformed or have outdated or incorrect information (Living on the Ragged Edges Forum, 2003). With regard to housing, Novac et al. (2002) show how in the rental sector, people of colour are subject to structural discrimination in getting and keeping housing.

The growth of poverty in the GTA has undoubtedly affected racialized groups (in the GTA, this means people of colour). Galabuzi argues that when it comes to homelessness, ‘an extreme form of social exclusion[,]…racialized people are more likely to be homeless in Canada’s urban centres than they were 10 years ago’ (2006: 190). Despite this emerging reality, research on racialized homelessness is still slow coming. Moreover, what does exist tends to focus on recent immigrants or refugees, but very little focuses on the racialized experiences of homelessness for Canadian-born people of colour.

**Race and Visibilities**

The final body of literature from which I draw for work on geographies of race is not really a ‘body’ at all. Rather, disparate discussions about visibilities, invisibilities, and concepts and materialities of race help frame my discussions of (in)visibility that I take up in Chapters 6 and 7. These discussions also dovetail with the discussions of Whitzman (and others) about visibilities as discussed in my Feminist Geographies section above.

Following Whitzman in her discussion of different forms of visibility and invisibility, I draw on McKittrick in her analysis of black women’s geographic thought and resistance to domination. She questions the narrative idea that black women lead ‘ ungeographic’ lives (2006: X). She argues that black lives are ‘ rendered ungeographic’
by geographical narratives that create activities and presences of black people in Canada as ‘unvisible’ (2006: 96). McKittrick argues that such a characterization is a deliberate falsifying of geographic history and attempts in her argument to show how black women’s lives are necessarily geographic.

In talking about black Canada, McKittrick theorizes ‘unvisibility’ and attempts to ‘analyze elsewhere and absence for their critical geographic possibilities, specifically how elsewhere and absence are in Canada, how black Canada is lived as unvisibility’ (2006: 96). She uses ‘unvisible’ as different, as the absented presence, because blackness and black people are there, but are rendered not visible. This is a very particular kind of invisibility that results from the obscuring that occurs when certain *vibrations* (particularly whiteness) are felt. In this case, coloured bodies are whitened and rendered absent despite their continued presence. McKittrick argues that this ‘unvisibility’ is a result of the deliberate ‘concealing and/or obscuring [of] unexpected social and geographic narratives’ by the ‘Euro-white and colonial nation’ (2006: 96).

This argument has explicitly spatial overtones, as McKittrick argues that this narrative of the nation impacts on geographical landscapes: ‘Unseen black communities and spaces thus privilege a transparent Canada/nation by rendering the landscape a “truthful” *visual* purveyor of past and present social patterns’ (2006: 96). As such, this involves an overt spatial relationship in which black Canadians are rendered in/unvisible in the landscapes of Canadian cities (and elsewhere).

This in/unvisibility manifests representationally, materially, discursively, geographically, and so on. Importantly, the local context (Toronto, Canada) for my study is affected by such intentional and otherwise blind spots in which groups and individuals
are written in and out of the city. The post-racial (neo)liberal ideology discussed previously is stated more explicitly by Brand, who calls it a ‘common-sense racist ideology where white supremacy is consistent’ (1994: 125). Brand suggests this manifests in structural and institutional forms (‘para-statal’ bodies such as the CBC, the NFB, the Canada Council, private media, and cultural and education institutions), contributing to white supremacy. Regarding explicit (in)visibilities, Brand is critical: ‘What I want to say is that this city has a life that white folks, at least the ones that run things and the ones that write letters to the editor, don’t know about and can’t talk about because they’re too busy reading their newspaper for the latest validation of their stereotypes’ (1994: 36).

I do not deal explicitly with those stereotypes, but I do deal with the effects of the creation of race in the local context of Toronto. My research contributes to discovering the material effects of such creations. Again, I focus on lived experience to show the complex workings of structures of oppression that create boundaries and limitations on people’s lives based on race, gender, and homelessness.
Chapter 3

Doing Feminist and Anti-Racist Research as a White Male Scholar: Methodological Concerns and Techniques in Research with Young Men of Colour

Introduction

*I thought you were gonna be black, though...Kind of like, what does he know about it? I thought you were going to give me some Martin Luther King speech, you know? ‘I have a dream’.*

-Solo (19 years old)

In this chapter I locate myself as a researcher. I discuss the implications of conducting research with young men of colour as a white man. In the quotation above, Solo discusses locating me as a researcher prior to meeting me. He had seen my recruitment poster and because of the focus on ‘young men of colour’ assumed I would be a man of colour. Such pragmatic issues of expectation and ethics in research are the subject of this chapter. I base this chapter on the experience of researching the daily lives of Canadian-born young men of colour (aged 17-26) who have experienced homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area. Following the frameworks offered by anti-racist and feminist research methodologies, this chapter offers both a technical explanation of how the research was conducted (including 40 interviews and 8 ‘Where-I-Live-Tours’) and personal reflections on the challenges and benefits of conducting the research through these frameworks. This chapter includes three parts. The first is a discussion of the theoretical frameworks, the methodological challenges, and how these two relate. In this part I argue that for a white man to conduct successful and innovative research into race
and masculinities, he must consider anti-racist and feminist methodological tools such as reflexivity, positionality, paying attention to ‘voice’, the margins, and knowledge production. In the second section I provide details about the various homeless service agencies at which I found participants and the roles I played at these. In the final section I discuss in detail the specific methods I used to conduct the research.

**Part I: Methodological Theory**

**Feminism and Anti-Racism**

I enter into this research as a white man. I enter into every thought, interaction, encounter and plan with these identities. It could not be any more evident if ‘WHITE MAN’ was stamped on my forehead, black ink. Because of this, I must constantly struggle with my complicity with complex systems of domination: patriarchy and racism. If I did not struggle, if I did not investigate my complicity with these systems, and if I conducted otherwise solid academic research, my results might be greeted as legitimate. This is not hush-hush: ‘It is no secret that legitimacy is accorded to race research and scholarship when produced by members of the dominant group’ (Dei, 2005: 5). The long tradition of masculinist geographical knowledge production too could greet my research with open arms (Rose, 1993). It would be nice to be greeted as a producer of legitimate knowledge by these powerful traditions – their sugar is sweet. However, I like my coffee stronger, without sweetener, and the traditions in which I hope my research will be greeted make doing this research in my body a challenge. All of this means that I must work against the privileges afforded by my white male body. I must use my research to speak back to domination in feminist and anti-racist ways. So yes, the shackles I wear are
golden, loose, comfortable, the shackles of privilege, but I must attempt to work with them and must work in recognition of my privileges in order to wrest apart the powerful connections between race, gender identity and knowledge production.

I attempt to do this using the tools of anti-racism and feminism. The purpose of both is to understand how identities (racial, gendered, classed, and so on) are held up to support both privilege and oppression (Dei, 2005; Moss, 2002). The strength of both is founded on the opportunity for the researcher to put herself or himself into the research, to investigate how their experience becomes part of the ‘knowledge search’ (Dei, 2005: 2). This opportunity is one that I embrace and understand that it comes with a slew of problems because of my identities.

**Theory of the methods**

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationships between race, gender, homelessness and the space of the city for young men of colour in the GTA. Because this research is exploratory and because I did not know beforehand how these things interacted, it necessitated a research framework that made room for flexibility and change in the methods. Both feminist and anti-racist approaches embraces research as emergent and evolving as the project continues. Of particular note are the different expectations that researcher and subject might have about research. Despite the researcher’s ideals, subjects may take positions that upset or contradict the methods the researcher attempts to use (Shillington, 2007). Despite my efforts at muting the effects of my subject positions,
their reality ensures that I be constantly vigilant. No doubt, few, if any, of my participants have read the feminist and anti-racist scholarship that I have.

**Producing Knowledges**

Collins (2000) draws on Haraway’s (1991) notion of situated knowledge to show how black women’s thought is situated and embedded in their communities. Moreover, she shows how those same knowledges are ‘subjugated’, existing in relation to systems of domination (Collins, 2000: 234). Because of this subjugation, she argues that those knowledges provide an excellent vantage point for viewing systems of domination. This is of course a classic feminist argument: Such a vantage point offers multi-directional viewing, offering ‘an understanding of how…worlds are organized and determined by social relations immanent and extending beyond them’ (Smith, 1987: 106). Collins warns us, however, that the vantage point of black women’s knowledges, and any situated knowledge, is a partial perspective, because ‘no one group possesses the theory or methodology that allows it to discover the absolute “truth” or, worse yet, proclaim its theories and methodologies as the universal norm evaluating other groups’ experiences’ (2005: 234-235).

This statement of Collins’ runs counter to the masculinist tradition within geography that I mentioned previously. This tradition, while rightfully suffering the assault of feminism over the past twenty or so years (within geography), still facilitates meritorious acclaim for supposedly rigorous objectivity in research. While ‘objectivity’ is widely regarded as a myth more broadly in critical social sciences (Cope, 2002),
subjectivity and objectivity are still two hats that researchers must make sure fit simultaneously. This is the case even amongst qualitative researchers.

This research obviously enters into an arena with ongoing power struggles and relations. As many researchers have noted, research cannot exist outside these power relations (Shillington, 2007). Feminism and anti-racism are inherently political perspectives that require researchers to be forthright in declaring their expectations and assumptions. Moreover, the methodological tool that I pick up to conduct this research, critical ethnography, begins with the assumption that the cultural groups studied experience repression of some sort (Creswell, 1998). Dei argues that anti-racist research assumes there exist institutional racisms in mainstream social science research (2005). This includes racism in the topics that get studied, the concepts and methods that are privileged, and the authority granted to those who can produce research and knowledge that gets viewed as legitimate. A very simple way that these things are perpetuated is in the privilege granted the researcher to interpret the subjects of the research (Smith, 1987).

**The Margins**

Because of this privilege, researchers must be aware of the dangers of colonizing the experiences of those we study (Bondi, 2002). I have no intention of entering into their experiences and trying to put my stamp on the knowledges they produce. Rather, I hope to meet my participants where they are at and work with them in developing theory about how their lives and mine are structured. In this I follow bell hooks who famously offers the ‘margins’ as a space of ‘radical openness’. She suggests that we can address
domination and marginality in collaboration if we embrace marginality with people in the margins acting as liberators: ‘Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators’ (1990: 152). I attempt to enter the space of marginality, but not with the intention of transforming my participants. There will not likely be any revelatory transformations for the young men I talk to. Rather, when I enter into that space, I attempt to free myself from the shackles of colonial, racial, and sexist domination. This is because I too, as a member of the dominant, can decolonize my mind, learn not to think like a white man. Thus, the stories that the participants tell help me speak back to systems of domination. We can learn what whiteness does, what masculinity does, what sexism does, what classism does.

‘Voice’

An important issue within ethnographic research and work on marginalized groups more broadly is ‘voice’. bell hooks offers a useful and sobering caution: ‘When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination' (1989: 43). This consideration remains ever-present, which encourages a constant inventory of our use of other peoples’ voice. In methodological literature, ‘voice’ is often articulated from the perspective of the dominant as ‘giving voice’ (Creswell, 1998) or from the perspective of the marginalized as ‘coming to voice’ (hooks, 1994). Both begin with the assumption that because of oppression, marginalized people are denied avenues to vocalize their experiences, in
society and much more loosely in academic literature. ‘Giving voice’ and ‘coming to voice’ can be regarded as operating dialogically in an ongoing process, as Gilligan suggests: ‘To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act’ (1993: xvi). As such, while attempting to provide a venue for the stories of young men of colour to come through, I do this aware that, as hooks again argues, privileged white men like myself might continue dominance by depicting Others as abject (1990) or by perpetuating the ‘privileged voice of authority’ (1994). In order to mitigate these possibilities I attempt to take their stories seriously, avoid (overt, explicit) moral judgment, and attempt to create knowledge that begins with the understandings of the participants and uses those understandings to speak back to the relevant scholarly work. This might help enrich the theory in line with Nagar and Ali’s criticisms about ‘absences’: ‘The analyses we produce remain theoretically and politically impoverished in the absence of close scrutinies and critiques by those postcolonial subjects whose interests we want to advance, or whose histories and geographies we want to (re)write’ (2003: 360). Such scrutinies are particularly salient considering the disciplinary dearth in geography about the geographies of racism (Peake and Kobayashi, 2002).

Thus, the scrutiny begins with the voices of the young men with whom I spoke. Their stories often articulate intensely affective bodily experiences. Their ‘voice’, meaning both story and audible resonant sound (Gilligan, 1993), help to provide this critique of the spaces and society in which they live. As Paradis (2009) argues, this critique is essential to helping participant voices effect change; we must pay attention to how those voices point to various systemic dominations. Finally, this dissertation, in
working through representations of the world put forth by young men themselves, purposefully avoids explicit reference to other representations of city spaces, be they popular (such as in newspapers) or policy. I do this in recognition that these young men frame their representations of the world already from inside and informed by these other discourses and representations.

**Tools of Feminism and Anti-Racist Methodologies**

Dei argues that anti-racist research ‘calls for subverting the conventional processes of knowledge procurement, interrogation, validation, and dissemination. Anti-racism calls for renegotiating with our subjects the crucial issues of discursive power, control, and interpretive authority in research’ (2005: 7). Such negotiations first mean that the researcher must drop the pretense of authority and expertise and approach the research as an active listener (Creswell, 1998). Next they mean that the research is not unidirectional from subject to researcher and that the research is conducted with the participants, not on the participants (Ng, 2010).

**Critical Ethnography**

This crucial with is one of the central positions of ethnography and it means that for the researcher, experiential learning is as important as academic learning (Paradis, 2009). In ethnography, the researcher becomes part of the research and indeed, the various parts are viewed holistically (Padgett, 2008). Cultures can only be studied and
understood on their own terms, not with the beliefs or values of other (perhaps) more powerful cultures, and also not by the values of the researcher (Padgett, 2008).

In this research I employ critical ethnography, which goes further than standard ethnography by having explicit political aspirations (Creswell, 1998). This is directly opposed to the masculinist tradition of objective research that ostensibly removes the aims and goals of the researcher. Critical ethnographers with anti-racist and feminist aims often pursue politics based on the intersection of various subject positions (and view them holistically). The explicit politics of critical ethnography mesh perfectly with anti-racism and feminism, both approaches that also overtly politicize research (Jamal, 2005; Moss, 2002)

The holism and intersectional character of critical ethnography does not mean that it is not used to look at individuals. Rather, critical ethnographies tend to focus on the relationship between individuals and social structures (Jamal, 2005). They also tend to stress the accounts of these individuals in creating an interpretation of the social world (Jamal, 2005). This concern with human agency fits perfectly with feminist and anti-racist work that attempts to tell stories of people speaking back to domination. As Jamal argues, ‘critical ethnographers are concerned with unmasking dominant…social structures and the vested interests they represent, with a goal of transforming society and freeing individuals from the sources of domination and repression’ (2005: 235). As I suggested before, this ‘freeing’ does not allow the ethnographer to assume a heroic role; subjects are not passive victims. Instead, they are the primary progenitors of both theory and political possibility.
**Research subjects creating theory**

Both feminist and anti-racist methods place people marginalized by systems of domination at the centre of analysis (Dei, 2005; Moss, 2002). This is achieved through the direct focus on everyday lived experiences. This re-centering places the subjects of research as the ‘theorists of their own everyday lives and practices’ (Dei, 2005: 5). While the researcher might bring complex theorizations about structural and institutional systems to the research, the subjects generate most of the theory about the effects of these systems. As Dei argues, ‘local peoples live and create theory’ (2005: 5). This challenges the conventional role of the researcher going into the field and withdrawing data to be distilled in theory analysis sessions. As such, if one of the goals of academic research is to produce coherent knowledges for other academics, such methods require a serious engagement with the ideas and knowledges of the subjects. This might mean inductively re-writing the research questions if it discovered that a different set of theoretical or practical realities emerge during the fieldwork (Thomas, 2006).

Of course, we must also be careful not to move dichotomously from the all-knowing researcher to the all-knowing subject (Padgett, 2008). We must also be wary about objectifying the subject as a ‘legitimate knower’ (Dei, 2005: 8). Instead, we must understand that theory and knowledge emerge between people working on the same ‘critical plane’ (Paradis, 2009: 42). This relational method of knowledge creation allows us to account for both the position and privilege of the researcher and the lived and embodied theoretical positions of the subjects. Part of this mutual knowledge creation is
learning how we are perceived by others, particularly others who are situated differently from us (Bailey, 1998). This is an ongoing process in this research project.

Finally, in interviews and in many cases in this written work, I use language informed by my participants, taking care to understand the differing or multiple meanings that can arise when conducting ‘cross-cultural’ research (Umemoto, 2001). By adopting slang terminology common to my participants (such as ‘chill’ instead of ‘socialize’ or even ‘hang out’), I have attempted to live through feminist methodologies that put the researcher into the research (Van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005). I embrace the capacity to change and be affected, as Neal (2005) and Sachs (2011) suggest the male feminist must embrace vulnerability to reject patriarchy. This is also true of the white researcher who attempts to reject white privilege. In doing this I have attempted to allow the participants to affect me and my scholarship directly. This included altering my existing interview questions and adding new questions based on prior interviewee responses. Moreover, Chapter 4 revolves around the concepts of ‘vibe’ and ‘vibration’, based on their theoretical and metaphorical use first by participants in interview.

**Reflexivity and Positionality**

One of the primary tenets of a feminist and anti-racist research methodology is the critical self-awareness of the researcher. I put this portion near the end of this section on producing knowledges in the hope that it obviously permeates what has come previously. To be critically reflexive about the position of the researcher is something that I am coming to embody through learning about feminist methodologies within which the
concept of reflexivity evolved (Kobayashi, 2003; Moss, 2002; Shillington, 2007). To be
critical about race and gender, our positions of power and privilege and perhaps
marginality and oppression must be made clear and constantly reconciled with the
research methods. In this way, the researcher is written into the research.

At its most basic, reflexivity is the idea of linking the self to the knowledge
production that happens in research (Avis, 2002). Paradis argues that reflexivity means
putting ourselves as researchers ‘in the same critical plane’ as our interviewees (2009: 42).
It is through this equal planing that we allow our research to speak back to systems of
domination. This is especially true for researchers such as me who occupy so many
positions of privilege. As Rose points out, reflexivity returns situated knowledges to the
researcher, which makes the researcher a part of the ‘field’ like research subjects (1997).
As she points out, reflexivity is crucial for all critical geographies if we are to avoid the
‘false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge’ (Rose, 1997: 306).

In anti-racist methodologies, too, reflexivity and researcher position are crucial to
the political legitimacy of research. Dei argues that the researcher must become a learner
rather than a purveyor of expert knowledges, which means making the research a process
of self-discovery and self-examination (2005). As such, throughout this research I
endeavor to learn about both whiteness and patriarchy as systems of domination. The
tools of anti-racism and feminism described above put me in a good position to do this so
long as I remain vigilant about my position as a white man. Alcoff (1998) indicates that
often attention to whiteness by whites is focused on what it means for whites and what
whites can do. I accept this as a valid criticism of my method – the reflexivity is focused
inward on me, the white researcher – but attempt in the rest of the dissertation to focus on
whiteness and its effects on and what it means for people of colour. Reflexivity cannot be myopic, for as Kobayashi (2003) argues, it serves no purpose unless connected to a bigger political world. Still, my whiteness persists, and as black feminists such as bell hooks argue, research produced by white scholars might see easier legitimacy. As hooks argues, ‘white scholars can write about black culture or black people without fully interrogating their work to see if it employs white western intellectual traditions to re-inscribe white supremacy, to perpetuate racist domination’ (1990: 124). I fully understand the legitimacy my research might be afforded because the results come through me, who looks like a comfortable/familiar source of knowledge production.

Butz and Berg suggest that men working within feminism or with explicitly feminist agendas must be aware of the ‘ghosts of our [their] masculinity or those of patriarchy in general’ (2002: 100). This idea of the ghostly presence of privilege might usefully and easily be extended to anti-racist research, as whiteness problematically positions the researcher doing work with people of colour. Whiteness cannot be avoided, since as is the case for masculinity and patriarchy, ‘these ghosts are part of us, manifest in our (sub)consciousness, social relations, and material social practices’ (Butz and Berg, 2002: 100). Such hauntings might be differently experienced, articulated, or recognized by the researcher and those she or he interacts with. However, their presence must be continually dealt with by the researcher if there is any prescient hope of mitigating their effects.
Part II – The Ethnography

Choosing the sample

Research on homelessness in Canada and the Western world more broadly has not sufficiently broadened to match the diversity of new homelessness populations. In the past twenty to thirty years researchers have identified that homelessness is changing to include more women, more young people, and more families (Del Casino and Jocoy, 2008). More recently research has shown that homelessness is a growing problem among new immigrant and refugee populations (Living on the Ragged Edges, 2003). Both these lines of inquiry help explain the burgeoning hidden or invisible homelessness problem, that is, people living without permanent housing in unstable or unaffordable ways (May and Walks, 2010). Concomitant neoliberal shifts in the labour market have meant racialized groups are disproportionately relegated to flexible forms of work that include low pay, unsafe and intensive work conditions, and long hours with few or no benefits (Galabuzi, 2006).

It is in this context that I chose my specific target population: Canadian-born young men of colour. This population exists in a very sizeable gap in the academic and policy research. Recent feminist work on homelessness has tended to focus on women’s experiences, particularly in hidden/invisible forms (Klodawsky, 2006; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2007; Whitzman, 2006), while work on race and homelessness has tended to focus explicitly on immigrant populations (Kissoon, 2011; Living on the Ragged Edges Forum, 2003). There has been some excellent recent work on youth homelessness in the
Ontario context (Gaetz, O’Grady and Buccieri, 2010 and 2011), but in specific focus on youth tends to sidetrack issues of race and gender.

This dissertation attempts to fill this gap with an overt feminist and anti-racist focus on what race and gender do in Canadian-born young men of colour’s experiences of homelessness. In choosing to focus on men, I show how young men are also affected by sexist structural inequalities, though in different ways from women. In choosing to focus on young men of colour, and more particularly on Canadian-born young men of colour, I show how they are negatively affected by structural and institutional racisms and marginalized despite their lifelong Canadian experience.

Of course, as is always the case, there are more pragmatic and less literature-based stories behind a choice of sample. The first story was my need to play to my strengths as a relatively young male researcher, though it took some time to come to this story. During my Master’s work, also with homeless populations, I was nudged by my supervisor towards looking at youth populations. Might I not have an easy rapport with young men? I might have, but I was more interested at that time in contestations over public space and thus, the (mostly) older male panhandlers in downtown Toronto were calling. When I began my PhD and was well-entrenched in feminist geographies, it seemed apropos to study women’s experiences of homelessness. When I was exposed to more anti-racist and critical race theory work, I thought too, such awful oppression! I must study the experiences of people of colour. Problem was, I was getting very far from my bodily experience. Luckily enough, I was privy to some wise counsel from part of my committee who brought up two important issues: First, based on the history of feminist and anti-racist research, how would it look for this white man to position himself as an
‘expert’ on women of colour and experiences of homelessness? Second, gaining access to homeless populations is already hard enough. How difficult would it be to get access to women of colour experiencing the marginalization of homelessness?

I was fortunate for this sage advice and my project is stronger for it. I learned later that focusing on Canadian-born young men of colour allowed me to adopt those important principles of feminist and anti-racist research: putting the researcher into the research. My close (enough) position to these young men has afforded me insight into my own complicity with structures of inequality and domination. I am thankful, too, for that insight.

**The Sample (Canadian-born young men of colour experiencing homelessness)**

In all I interviewed 40 young men and conducted Where-I-Live-Tours with 8. Utilizing criterion sampling (Creswell, 1998), the sample set is based on five criteria: 1) Canadian-born 2) Young 3) Male 4) Person of colour 5) Experienced homelessness. The first of these, Canadian-born, was made the least flexible. I required each participant to be born in Canada, which is an attempt to allow for a clean cross-cut of shared cultural experience (Canadian multiculturalism, schooling, etc.). I debated including young men who had immigrated to Canada at very young ages, but decided to avoid this to skirt issues of child cultural identity formation. Because of this Canadian-born requirement, some young men who would have liked to participate were excluded, including a couple who immigrated to Canada as infants.
Participants were young, which I use distinctly from the perhaps more specific ‘youth’. In my initial field endeavors I had set my age parameters at 18-30 to capture the exit from legal ‘youth’ (18-19, depending on which criteria we use) and entry into adult waged labour. In psychological developmental literature, the age period 15-25 is sometimes called ‘emerging adulthood’ and is characterized as a period of transitions to physical maturity, developing readiness for committed relationships, parenthood and stable careers (Ryan and Thompson, 2013). I refined my initial parameter later to be more in line with the service providers through which I contacted the young men, which tend younger than my parameters. I finished with a sample set between the ages of 17-26.

Participants were required to be self-identified men. The self-identification was meant to allow for trans-men and other gender-minorities to be included in the research.

This research focused on people of colour, a somewhat troublesome designation because of the different ways that people in Canada denote the status of being effectively non-white (visible minority, racialized, non-white). The term people of colour is preferable to these other designations because it frames race positively as opposed to the negative designation of non-white. Race too was self-identified and was also sometimes a problem because potential participants were not familiar with the term ‘person of colour’. In most cases during the interview (or before or after) I either asked how the participant identifies himself racially or it was inferred from stories told. Of the 40 participants, 27 identified as black/African/Caribbean and the remaining 13 identified in a wide variety of ways (including Chinese, Peruvian, Sri Lankan, Egyptian, and mixes such as Indian/Guyanese, Jamaican/Ghanian/Argentinian, Guyanese/Italian, Panamanian/Argentinian, African-Canadian/Irish, Colombian/French, Jamaican/Irish, and
French/Spanish/Trini/Egyptian. Aboriginal Canadians were excluded from the study, based on their much longer and very complicated past within Canadian history. Of course, it should not be inferred from this exclusion that all non-Aboriginal people of colour share a common Canadian history or that they do not compose a significant portion of the homeless population.

Finally, participants needed to have some experience with homelessness, past or present. This was self-identified based on my question of whether they had experienced ‘unstable housing’ or ‘homelessness’. If they needed more prompting I would suggest ways that people experience homelessness invisibly such as househopping/couchsurfing, staying in shelters, or living temporarily with friends/family. In most cases this allowed for a sample that fits the broad criteria of homelessness.

**Getting Access and Finding Participants**

By definition, finding people experiencing homelessness invisibly or in hidden ways is a difficult task. Because of this they necessarily must be found in spaces where they become visible as people experiencing homelessness. I used homeless service agencies as points of initial contact for finding participants. Homeless service agencies include shelters, soup kitchens, drop-ins, and community centres. The young men that I contacted at these agencies become visible as experiencing homelessness when they visit those spaces, but despite this, they also have many and varied invisible and hidden experiences of homelessness. Without a doubt, finding participants was one of the most challenging aspects of this research project. It took great patience, tenacity, and
perseverance, as sometimes I was denied access to spaces where they could be ‘found’ and when I finally gained access to those spaces, it took hours upon hours of my presence to gain trust and to simply gather enough suitable participants.

In the summer and early fall of 2009 I began calling shelters and service agencies around the Greater Toronto Area to determine whether my target population could be found. This telephone work helped to narrow my suburban focus toward the suburban areas more heavily populated by people of colour (including Peel Region and Scarborough). Based on these phone calls I identified several agencies at which not only did my target population exist, but where management was receptive to my proposed study. What follows is a descriptive story of each agency at which I found participants.

**Points of Contact: Service Agencies**

I found participants at four service agencies in the GTA. The location of these agencies in the context of the region can be seen on Map 3.1.
At the beginning of April, 2010, I began volunteering at Our Place Peel, an emergency shelter in Mississauga for youth aged 16-21.
Figure 3.1 – Our Place Peel (Photo credit: Omega, research participant)

Figure 3.2 – Street context near OPP, shopping malls and residential towers. Not shown in this photo are the innumerable residential homes typical of the area (Photo credit: Omega, research participant)
Initially I contacted the Supervisor for Human Services in the Region of Peel, who met with me and was eager to help facilitate my research. I gather that he pitched me to the three shelters in Peel, but was able to get me access to only OPP for ‘political’ reasons. I made an appointment to meet the Executive Director on-site, but that person was not available when I arrived at the shelter. Instead I met with the Shelter Manager, who helped me circumvent the volunteer procedures to expedite my research. My volunteer and research time was longest at OPP, lasting from April, 2010 to February 2011, during which I volunteered and/or conducted interviews for two hours on Tuesday evenings and conducted interviews on Thursday evenings.

After completing a Toronto Police Clearance Letter, I began volunteering as a Front Line Volunteer, which primarily meant I was to chill in the kitchen. This is not really meant to be facetious: I was meant to be a positive and calming role model for the youth at the shelter. My primary duties were to hang out with the youth and the front-line staff and both ‘provide a positive environment’ and ‘model behavior in accordance with generally accepted societal standards’. More specifically, this meant playing cards, Wii games, and basketball with the youth, sharing conversation, and providing careful advice on housing and life situations.

One particular story about positive mentoring occurred when I helped facilitate one male youth’s transition from OPP to Peel Youth Village (PYV), an application-only long-term youth shelter. Volunteering for only two hours per week, I walked into the middle of many ongoing conversations and the one between a particular female staff member and this youth was one of these. The staff member had been trying to convince
the young man to apply to live at PYV, based on his lack of experience living alone and excellent qualifications (good behaviour, doing chores on time, etc.). The conversation was a week old when I entered. PYV sounded good to me and I told the youth so, after having him tell me what the shelter was all about. It seemed a small act, but apparently my small recommendation, combined with my gender, was enough to propel the youth to apply. The relieved staff member told me as much an hour later when the youth had agreed to submit his application.

Such small experiences made the volunteer work invaluable as an observational augment in my ethnographic project. I do not use any data from this observation, but it created an indelible impression of one aspect of youth homelessness.

Participants were recruited by a combination of postering, direct contact by me, or solicitations by staff members. In most cases it was a combination of all three, in which the poster and staff provided me with some legitimacy and the contact by me convinced the youth that I was cool. Every interview but one was conducted off-site, for which a waiver was created for the youth to sign releasing the shelter of any responsibility for what happened when they left the building for the interview.10

In all I conducted 12 interviews and 3 Where-I-Live-Tours with young men I met at Our Place Peel.

_Downtown Toronto: Evergreen Yonge Street Mission_

Almost at the same time as I began volunteering and conducting research at Our Place Peel I began doing the same at Evergreen in downtown Toronto. Evergreen Yonge
Street Mission is a drop-in centre for ‘homeless and street involved youth’. It incorporates a meal program, leisure activities, arts programs, employment help, a health centre incorporating sexual health and dentistry, and mentoring programs.

![Evergreen Yonge Street Mission](image)

Figure 3.3 – Evergreen Yonge Street Mission
My initial contact with Evergreen came in the fashion of ‘it’s who you know’. I have a friend who has a friend who went to school with a woman who works at the drop-in at Evergreen. I met with the drop-in staff member, who was receptive to my research and volunteer offering and pitched me to the Director of Evergreen. I then met with the Director and following another Police Clearance Letter and informal research proposal (by email – See Appendix A), I began volunteering at Evergreen.
My two informants at Evergreen thought the drop-in program would give me the best access to my target groups, since drop-in provides an informal atmosphere in which the staff and youth can mix. This turned out to be true, since the duties of drop-in put me in direct contact with the youth. My duties included serving food, cleaning the food service area, supervising the pool table, providing conversation and generally assisting staff members. Supervising the pool table proved particularly useful as it offered a neutral field in which youths who might not otherwise mix found themselves engaged in (mostly) friendly competition. This environment allowed me to strike up many fruitful conversations and directly helped me recruit participants.

Recruitment at Evergreen presented interesting challenges. The first method I used was posters that I put up in the front entrance (beside the free telephone) and above the plastic tubs where dirty dishes are placed. These posters did not directly result in any participants approaching me, but did work well as a legitimizing force when I referred to them. This means that youth seemed to feel that since I had a poster up on the official Evergreen boards, I must be legit. The second method I used was a direct approach by me. This involved introducing myself and very briefly explaining my research and the incentive ($15). The method that resulted in the most participants was getting drop-in staff to help me recruit. Staff had pre-existing relationships with many of my participants and thus, I was introduced as a trust-worthy individual.

One particular note about the messiness of research is the difficulty staff members and I had in identifying suitable participants. This has to do with the mutability and flexibility of race; on some level, we relied on phenotype to identify potential participants. Self-identification means that participants need to present themselves as suitable based on
the criteria. However, it was not practical to sit back and wait for participants to self-identify and approach me. This meant approaching young men who looked like young men of colour. For staff members, keeping my many criteria straight (Canadian-born, young, male, a person of colour) only complicated the issue. The use of terminology unfamiliar to the youth (and staff) also presented a problem. As I mentioned previously, the use of the phrase ‘person of colour’ confused many people, especially when to the person approached, they are obviously a person of colour. In other cases, asking ‘do you consider yourself a person of colour’ solicited responses such as ‘I guess so’ or ‘I don’t know, am I?’ Many times I reverted to the negative formulation of non-white, a much easier-to-understand idea, especially coming from a white man.

In one instance my exclusion of Aboriginals became an issue when an Evergreen staff member managed to get a young man to travel down via TTC from North York (a two-hour and $6 round trip) to be interviewed by me. The young man was a self-identified Aboriginal Canadian. We conducted an excellent hour-long interview and I paid him $15 for his participation, but none of the information/data he gave me is used in this dissertation.

I volunteered and conducted interviews at Evergreen on Tuesdays and Fridays for two to three hours per day. I began volunteering in April, 2010 and finished in early December of the same year. In all I conducted 18 interviews and 4 Where-I-Live-Tours with participants from Evergreen.

One final point about Evergreen also applies to my fourth site, Red Cross, which is proximity to a large youth shelter. In the case of Evergreen, that shelter is Covenant House, the largest youth shelter in Toronto. Almost without exception, the youth who
visit Evergreen have stayed at Covenant House. As such, conducting interviews out of Evergreen allowed me indirect access to youth living at Covenant House.

**Scarborough: East Scarborough Storefront (ESS)**

Gaining access to participants in Scarborough proved more difficult than in Mississauga and Toronto. This likely has to do with the relatively fewer number of shelters in Scarborough: there is only one youth shelter in Scarborough. That shelter, Second Base, declined my request and proposal to volunteer and conduct research there\(^{11}\).

I was recommended to ESS by a staff member at Evergreen. I contacted the Coordinator of their Volunteer Department and Civic Engagement Project, who suggested I try their ID Clinic, a weekly Identification clinic for people experiencing homelessness. I contacted the Coordinator of Community Resources at ESS, who helped set me up and distributed flyers in the Storefront lobby. ESS is a community service agency that holds office space for other service agencies that come in and directly provide services. That is, ESS does not directly provide services. Rather, they are a networking organization that deals with the community members and directs those people to the appropriate services.
Figure 3.5 – East Scarborough Storefront.

Figure 3.6 – Street context for ESS, mid-rise residential towers and wide arterial roads.
While I did not have a volunteer role at ESS, I was free to wait in the lobby to recruit participants for my study while the ID Clinic operated. Since ESS serves the community of Kingston-Galloway in Scarborough more broadly, the ID Clinic, which serves only people experiencing homelessness, allowed me to immediately satisfy one of my criteria. This worked very well, as the waiting room for ESS services swelled with people waiting for services, ID Clinic included. Recruitment at ESS was similar to my other sites, including posters/flyers, my direct contact, and staff solicitations. The Youth Resource Specialist, who sat at the front desk, was particularly active in promoting me and my research to potential participants, often approaching young men before even I would. The two ID Clinic workers were also extremely helpful in finding participants, going so far as to run out in the snow to yell after a potential participant who had not been approached while he was in the building.

In all I conducted 4 interviews out of ESS. I began sitting in on ID Clinic in December, 2010 and finished in March, 2011. ID Clinic operated Wednesdays from 1-4pm and I was there at those times, unless I left with a young man to conduct an interview.

**Scarborough: Red Cross Homeless Drop-In**

The ID Clinic workers at ESS were very helpful in finding participants, but were also full of suggestions and recommendations of where else I might find them. I was referred to the Coordinator of the Drop-In by one of these ID Clinic staff who also conducted the Clinic at the Red Cross Drop-In. I went to the Drop-In on a bitterly cold
winter morning, taking the drop-in moniker to heart, and was greeted by the Coordinator who was very receptive to my proposal of research. I began sitting in on the ID Clinic sessions the following week.

Figure 3.7 – The Church of the Epiphany, with Red Cross Homeless Drop-In in the basement. The church is undergoing construction, 2013.
The Red Cross Homeless Drop-In is a very conventional soup kitchen, offering meals, daily programming, and a comfortable environment in which people can relax. The space sees a very unusual social mix because of its attractiveness to more conventional soup kitchen patrons (older, more male, and predominantly, but not exclusively, white) and its proximity to Second Base, the youth shelter. Second Base serves a very racially mixed youth population who do visit the Drop-In at Red Cross, but tend to drop in, drop out quickly.

As at ESS, there was very little for me to do at the Drop-In, so I mostly engaged in idle conversations while waiting for potential participants to arrive. Initially staff at the Drop-In felt it would be more appropriate if they approached the young men with me, but
over the time I was there this formality fell away and I began to approach them on my own.

Similar to Evergreen, Red Cross Drop-In is immediately beside a large youth shelter and all of my participants were staying at Second Base. Often, word that I was there (and my $15 incentive was there too) spread and young men would come rushing into the Drop-In and come right up to me: ‘Are you the guy?’ Evidently I had been accurately described or I did not fit in at the Drop-In. In either case, this networking helped me find participants.

In all I conducted 6 interviews and 1 (brief) Where-I-Live-Tour out of Red Cross Homeless Drop-In. I was there on Wednesday mornings from 10am-11:30am, again exactly when the ID Clinic worker was there. I began research there in February, 2011 and finished at the end of March of the same year.

Part III: Interviews and Where-I-Live-Tours

Interviews

I conducted interviews in the ‘field’ insofar as Burger King and parking lots are the field of urban and suburban invisible homelessness. As such, they were primarily informal field interviews (Padgett, 2008) aimed more at being conversations around themes. Based on the anti-racist and feminist research framework in which I was working, interviews were semi-structured, using brief sketches of questions and themes I had written in a little brown notepad. Such a sketchy format for interviews allows for the
emergence of new ideas and new directions during the interview, particularly as the interviewee develops ideas. I explained the purpose of the research to the participants in a depth dependent on their interest in such explanations. Some participants were more trepidatious than others, with many of the latter taking to heart my assertion that the interview would be ‘more like a conversation’. In some interviews I found myself explaining the research more as the interview went on, when the participants’ nerves at being interviewed had calmed. In every case, however, I presented and explained my research ethics form, including one for the participant to keep\textsuperscript{12}. Names used in this paper are pseudonyms and most were chosen by the participants themselves when I gave them the option before or after the interview. If they declined I chose one for them. Interviews were recorded on an MP3 recorder and were transcribed by the author. Interview and Where-I-Live-Tour data were analyzed using NVivo software. NVivo was used to analyze correlations between themes (‘codes’ in the NVivo terminology). I determined the themes based on preliminary readings of the interviews and based on what questions I asked. Interview segments were then organized into themes/codes. Finally, I cross-referenced the codes to determine thematic linkages (such as between ‘race’ and ‘public space’). At this point in the analysis the themes/codes I utilized were ‘chilling’, ‘conflicts’, ‘housing situations’, ‘home’, ‘visibility’, ‘leisure’, ‘making money’, ‘masculinity’, ‘race’, ‘racism’, ‘random problems’, ‘regional experiences of space’, ‘relationships’, ‘school’, ‘skills’, ‘social services’, ‘street life’, and ‘transportation’. In the analysis portion of the NVivo work, new themes were identified that sent me back to the theoretical literature to find new ways to look at the new theoretical realities that emerged from the data. The additional new themes/codes that emerged were ‘affective

Informal and semi-structured interviews suited the immediacy of many of the interviews: when I approached most young men, if they wanted to do an interview, they wanted to do it immediately. The initial arrangements at my two volunteer sites, Evergreen and Our Place Peel, were based on my spending time volunteering and arranging interviews for other times. This proved very difficult, even when I tried to arrange interviews as little as an hour in advance. The siren call of more immediate gratification in the form of friends or otherwise often meant I had no interviewee, even though we had made a temporary arrangement. Because of this difficulty, I rearranged my volunteer schedule to accommodate immediate interviews, a mechanism that made my project immensely more attractive to potential participants. If they could wait the time it took to walk to Burger King or the park, do a one-hour interview, and walk back, friends would be greeted by another friend $15 richer.

Being a visible presence and able to conduct interviews immediately were two of the major mechanisms I used to attract participants. My availability worked immensely well in concert with the $15 I was offering participants. In all, participants were recruited by posters/flyers, word-of-mouth, staff solicitation and personal contact with me. I had initially intended to use snowball sampling, but the specificity of who I was looking for (Canadian-born young men of colour with experience of homelessness) meant that often, participants did not know or were unable to recommend another participant.
Paradis (2009) argues that traditional methods for recruitment such as posters are ineffective for homeless populations. While I think this is probably true and I never did have a participant contact me blindly after seeing my poster (see Appendix B), I often approached a potential participant who had had time to consider participating because he had read my poster or seen my flyer. I believe that the posters/flyers acted to prime participants for my approach by giving them an opportunity to consider their participation without the coercion of being asked directly by the researcher or a staff member.

Avoiding coercion in recruitment is a great challenge in qualitative research and is particularly challenging when working with ‘marginal’ populations (Padgett, 2008; Paradis, 2009). While I attempted never to put undue pressure on potential participants, there are two important points at which I believe some degree of coercion might have acted on the participants. First, the $15 honorarium for participation certainly acted as a lure, particularly since I was offering it in cash immediately on completion of the interview. As such, participants might have been coerced by circumstance, their poverty making the honorarium the only cash that might come their way that day. Second, as has been noted by other researchers working with marginal populations, connections with staff at agencies might inadvertently coerce people to participate if they anticipate it will help their standing with staff members. In this case, when potential participants were approached first by a staff member asking whether they could and would do an interview with me, participants may be reluctant to refuse for fear of losing rapport with staff or at worst, losing access to services. To mitigate this possibility, I asked staff members to merely point out to potential participants that I was available if they were interested. Of course, the small size of the spaces in which I was volunteering meant that I often
overheard these conversations. In one notable instance, a staff member told a young man it ‘would be good for you’ if he talked with me. While I think the staff member was honestly suggesting that the interview conversation might be fruitful for the young man to work through some of his issues in discussion, I see now how the comment could have coercive undertones. Of course, I am complicit in such coercion and the fault is mine for putting the staff member in a recruiting position.

The $15 honorarium also presented interesting challenges when I was approached by people who did not meet my criteria. On occasion I was approached by young white men or young women of colour, who on finding out my specific criteria, were either embarrassed or (perhaps jokingly) protested my overt discrimination. These accusations are true because research design necessitates discriminating between target populations and those excluded from the research. Even though in most cases the accusers were joking, I took their comments seriously and answered with what I am sure was likely an unsatisfying comment about ‘literature gaps’ in academic research.

Other times I had difficulty with my use of self-identification for racial identities. Teenagers are aware of the mutability of race and I was sometimes met with a young white man who told me he was a ‘person of colour’, though most often in the presence of friends eager to see volunteer Jeff go red in the face. One cheeky staff member at Evergreen convinced two young women to declare themselves to me as ‘young black men’, the joke of which was not revealed through their stone-faced approach, but was revealed by the staff member spasming in laughter twenty feet away. While such declarations never went so far as to constitute a problem beyond flushing my face, they do indicate one difficulty of self-declared identifications.
Other similar recruitment issues included young men of colour who did not know what ‘young men of colour’ meant, the confusion between ‘coloured’ and ‘person of colour’ leading many people to believe I was only conducting interviews with young black men. Also, one time on the crowded sidewalk outside Evergreen it was loudly declared that I had ‘free money for black guys!’

In addition to the interviews I conducted with the young men, I also conducted 9 interviews with service agency staff members. These interviews helped me understand the local and regional contexts in which the agencies are situated as well as the institutional context for youth homelessness. I interviewed both managers and front-line staff. I asked questions in several areas: their job, the agency, the demographics of who the agency serves, local geography, and more theoretical questions about how race and gender affect homelessness.

Finally, I should address how my use of interviews offers limits for my focus on affect. Because affect involves the non-representational and non-conscious dimensions of things, using the explicitly representational tool of interviews creates challenges for interpretation. In interview I asked participants (though not using these words) to represent their world how they see it. This certainly limits how my transcripts can be read for affective dimensions. However, two things augmented my interviews and made them more effective at reading affect in these young men’s stories.

First, the informal structure of the interview, combined with the participant-chosen and also very informal interview locations, allowed for the emotional contours of the interview material to emerge. For instance, many interviews with participants from Evergreen Yonge Street Mission were conducted on the benches and stairs around the
fountain in College Park, a location where many young men I talked to hung out. Such locations placed the interview within a certain vibe or atmosphere that infused interviews with an affective sense of place. I then did some of the work of ‘identifying’ or ‘placing’ affect myself in comparing interviews.

Secondly, my time volunteering at two service agencies provided me with valuable affective experience. In a sense, though certainly limited in scope, I was already inside the social world of young men of colour experiencing homelessness and this was an ‘inside’ experience we carried with us to the interview. Prior to asking questions about (for example) how race and masculinity operate in their lives, I was already observing how race and masculinity operate in their lives. While my ethics approval does not allow me to use this experience as ‘participant observation’ evidence, it undoubtedly serves as an affective and emotional backdrop to both my interviewing and analysis techniques.

Where-I-Live-Tours

With participants who seemed eager and more willing to talk at length about places they live in, visit, chill in, I conducted Where-I-Live-Tours. These too were conducted in the ‘field’, but again, the field for urban and suburban homelessness is almost everywhere. At times during discussion, interviewees would make comments such as ‘I should just show you’ or ‘It would be easier if you could see it’ in relation to places and spaces in which they conduct their lives.

The Where-I-Live-Tours are a form of ethnographic inquiry that focuses on observation of lived material conditions. Based on the socio-spatial character of the
research, I created and developed the ‘Where-I-Live-Tour’ as a method aimed at discovering experiential and affective understandings and feelings of spaces in the lives of these young men. In allowing for affective investigation, the tours allow the researcher to attempt to move beyond the explicitly representational structure of the interview format. The focus on lived material conditions allowed for an extension of the interview (though every tour was conducted at a later date than the interview) with the added benefit of material prompts for the interviewee. Paradis (2009) calls her use of focus groups for women to talk about and develop a political agenda ‘method-based’. My tours might also be considered method-based insofar as they were open-ended without an explicit agenda. Rather, the method is used to help open the participant to his own (sometimes hidden) sense of meaning while offering additional opportunities to tell stories. Investigating conceptual ideas of meaning by touring material sites of meaning can help bridge affective and representational understandings. As Tolia-Kelly (2004) shows through her use of tours of South Asian homes in Britain, looking at and experiencing local material geographies can help us understand extra-local or more abstract imaginations of meaning. Finally, Rosenthal (1991) illustrates how a simple activity such as ‘hanging out’ can have tremendous effects on understanding lived experiences of people experiencing homelessness.

I gave participants a camera and asked them to take me on a tour of sites of meaning for them, spaces in which they live that hold some significant meaning in their lives. I asked them to take pictures with similar directions: I would love pictures of things and places that have some significance for them. I also asked them to take me to places in which they would be comfortable showing me or being with me. This was based on an
ethics of non-interference, meaning that I endeavored to conduct these tours with a minimum of impact on the material lives of the participants. Most of the young men who took me on a tour understood this implicitly and unspokenly avoided places in which we would almost certainly encounter conflict. For example, despite the importance of parents’ homes for many of my participants, visiting a parent’s home was not an option during the tours. During the interview with Academic, when the subject of a tour came up, he expressed concern that showing me places where he spent some nights would jeopardize his use of those spaces:

Academic: What would you use it for? The pictures, the info?

J: I’d use it in my paper.

Academic: You’d actually show them? Oh, cool.

J: Oh, so that, if you didn’t want some of these spots to be connected to you then we wouldn’t take a photo.

Academic: Yeah, but would you shoot, would your…would your Prof or your supervisor say oh, this is a spot we need to monitor (laughs)? Maybe, that’s what I was thinking. Maybe, I was thinking, usually supervisors have…

J: Oh, no, my supervisors aren’t going to be no problem. It’s an interesting issue, though.

Academic: Maybe if people read it…

Academic has been spending some nights in a University of Toronto (U of T) computer facility, using the computers, sleeping, and so on. He is already concerned about his usage of the facility since the room is technically for registered U of T students and is protected by a key-card lock, though these technicalities present a small barrier. I reassured Academic that nobody would read my results for at least a year or two and this
assuaged his worries. When we finally conducted the tour, we visited the computer facility.

Despite my efforts at assuring participant comfort, it turned out that many of them were more concerned about mine. For example, Cruz was concerned I would be uncomfortable visiting a place he called ‘the spot’, a secluded passageway in a covered parking lot where youth go to smoke cigarettes and weed. While we were there I did feel a bit uncomfortable, conspicuous as I was as an older white guy.

Such concerns raise the issue of how participants chose where to take me. I left this entirely up to them, though if they were stuck for ideas I sometimes prompted them with options they had mentioned in interview. Such a structure afforded participants the agency to run the tour, in contrast to the interview in which my questions vectored discussion.

Because the tours took place in multiple sites of meaning for participants, it meant that some travel was involved. However, the travel is integral to the observational experience. Traveling between spaces meant that I was able to observe the pathways, the interstitial spaces, of participants’ lives, as well as get a sense of the rhythms and vibes of their everyday life. Though he might not choose it as an important site of meaning, the bus represents an important time-space in the life of a young man who regularly rides from downtown Brampton to Mississauga. Moreover, getting a sense of their travel mobility afforded me some understanding of the difficult reliance on transit for youthful suburbanites. At the conclusion of one tour I found myself in Brampton and wanting to get back to downtown Toronto where I live. Being without a car, this journey took a very
long time. The costliness of time spent on transit is an important part of what I learned through these tours.

Finally, it should be noted that only one of the eight tours I conducted was done in Scarborough and that that one was a very brief version of a tour¹⁵. I had a very difficult time getting young men in Scarborough to conduct a tour with me. Likely the most obvious reason for this is the lack of familiarity these young men had with me. In Mississauga and Toronto I was volunteering at the agency where they found me, whereas in Scarborough I did not occupy any such position. At both East Scarborough Storefront and Red Cross Homeless Drop-In I was there exclusively for research and these guys knew that. However, they did not know me. A second reason probably had to do with my whiteness. Many of the young men I talked to told stories about the spaces in which they live where white people are uncommon. Bringing a white boy to such spaces, and particularly a white boy with a camera, would undoubtedly provoke discomfort, confusion, and questions.

Conclusions

The research for this project was indeed very messy, happening in fits and starts, with some parts taking a very long time and other parts happening very quickly. The successes and failures of this approach fit within the methods provided by feminist and anti-racist research methodologies. I continue this work as a white man. I hope that this position has come through clearly in this methodological chapter, since it vibrated clearly through the time and spaces that I conducted the research. Feminist and anti-racist
methodologies require that I remain constantly vigilant about my positions of privilege and this too includes how I write about this research. I hope that the words I use can accurately communicate the relationships between power, privilege, oppression, race and gender in which I am implicated.

Finally, the mixed-methods used in this work offer insights into research on the affective dimensions of social life. One of the significant contributions of this dissertation and research is how the various tools I employed (including interviews, Where-I-Live-Tours, and the ways in which I attracted and interviewed participants, including volunteer time and the use of atypical interview locations within the social world of the participant) combine to afford a glimpse into the at-times unknowable aspects of unseen lives. The affective dimensions of homelessness, race, and masculinity are difficult to mine, see and feel. The mixed method ethnography I used affords researchers an original and specific understanding of this social and spatial world. The interviews I conducted show young men’s representational understandings of their socio-spatial world, which combines with the Where-I-Live-Tours that explore their affective socio-spatial lives. These understanding that would not be discovered by one of these methods alone or by other methods I did not use (such as the various quantitative methods). By mixing methods in this way I can target the situated function of systems of domination such as racism, sexism, and classism.
Chapter 4

‘The vibe, yo!’: Racial Vibrations, Masculine Performances

Introduction

In this chapter I explore racial and affective ‘vibrations’ and how these relate to masculinities and homelessness in the lives of young men of colour experiencing homelessness. This chapter uses vignettes and foregrounds the ‘emergence’ of race to illustrate how race and masculinity relate in helping structure the lives of young men of colour in Toronto. Further, I analyze the affective dimensions of race and performances of masculinities to show how these relate in creating different representations of the regional and social geographies of Toronto and also affect the racialization of space and experiences of city space. I argue that in the suburban spaces of the GTA in which my interviewees live, the experiences and expectations of race are common and everyday experiences, though these racialized experiences are diverse and micro-local. In comparison, their perceptions and experiences of downtown Toronto indicate belief in a post-racial ‘vibe’ that I attribute in part to a ‘vibrating’ whiteness that obscures the ‘event’ of race. In both situations - downtown and suburban - despite different perceptions and representations, these young men feel race, perform masculinities, and navigate racialized spaces in ways that highlight structural oppressions based on race.

Most importantly, this chapter is an evocation of what race and masculinity do and how they relate. Here I frame the racialization of people and spaces using affect to show how contingent, temporary assemblages of race and masculinity contribute both to
perceptions of racialized feelings and altered material experiences. To do this, I bridge interviewees’ perceptions and representations with their articulations about embodied experiences of the spaces in which they live. A distinct challenge for research on affect is the tension between representation and affective or embodied feelings. No doubt, the stories told in this chapter and dissertation are in large part representational. This is due to the largely representational character of storytelling. Wrestling with this complex tension is one of the contributions of this chapter.

There are direct links between contemporary work on race and affect and work on masculinities. Both are seeing resurgent attention to ‘in-the-flesh’ experiences (Nayak, 2010: 370), concurrent with cultural work on affect and also corporeal feminisms (Grosz, 1994). Van Hoven and Horschelmann (2005) suggest the key unresolved issue in the study of masculinities is the role of the body. Racial affective assemblages and masculinity are linked, but as of yet the affective formation of masculinities is undertheorized. Whether there is an affective basis for masculine performance, whether masculinity is consciously strategic, or some combination of these, studies of masculinities must be attentive to relationships between affect, bodies, and masculinity. Van Hoven and Horschelmann argue that ‘masculinity can attach to bodies, objects, places and spaces well beyond the apparent confines of biology and sex’ (2005: 10). Studies that follow the affective contingencies of people, places, and objects are thus integral to understanding subject formation. What remains unknown are the ways that masculine performances interact with racialized identities in place. More specifically, the role that space plays in affecting bodies and shaping identity affects is still unclear in both bodies of literature.
This chapter is divided into two sections: The first, ‘The Vibe’ develops the concept of ‘racial vibration’. Secondly, I provide evidence from vignettes of five young men of colour who have experienced homelessness in the GTA.

The ‘Vibe’

Vibration

This chapter is situated in debates about race and affect in geography that focus on how race ‘emerges’ in social practice (Lim, 2010; Saldanha, 2006, 2007; Swanton, 2008, 2010). However, in following Nayak’s (2011) argument for work on race that crosses the subdisciplinary boundaries of cultural and social geographies, I attempt to illustrate how affective sense and feeling help create representational understandings of the city.

In this chapter I build upon conceptions of race as ‘event’ and ‘technology’. Many of my interviewees stressed the ‘vibe’ of certain places, suggesting a variety of emotional and affective vibrations. Because of this emphasis, I conceive of race as existing in constant vibration, but vibrating more strongly at certain times and as part of certain assemblages. I define ‘racial vibration’ as the constant presence of race, existing just beyond feeling and perception, that is amplified under certain conditions (certain assemblages) to emerge as an event. The emergence of this event shapes the boundaries of ‘race’ and can lead to racism and racialization of spaces and people. The continued
presence of affective racial vibrations captures the potential that exists throughout every situation, though varied amplification allows it to vibrate softly without race emerging as an event. Moreover, the existence of constant racial vibrations without emergence of race as an event is potentially liberatory, as some spaces appear to allow for constant vibration without forming the assemblages necessary for the drawing of race boundaries. As such, I understand race as existing much more as a vibration than in phenotype. Vibration captures best the almost-feeling of an affective and emotional sense that becomes physical when an assemblage amplifies race into emergence. Lastly, racial vibration allows for the incorporation of representational ideas, with individuals having perceptions and ideas that feed back affectively without always vectoring the emergence of race.

I use the term vibration based on the conception of ‘resonance’ by Deleuze and Guattari (1996). I take the latter to mean an immanent feeling/relationship between bodies (living and non-living) that achieves the capacity to affect other things/bodies when certain conditions are met, such as in the creation of affective assemblages. I utilize the term vibration because it emerged out of conversation with participants who repeatedly used the word ‘vibe’ to describe a kind of ‘affective atmosphere’ (Anderson, 2009).

*Toronto and post-racial/(neo)liberal whiteness*

For young men of colour, not having a permanent home combines with the regional geography of the GTA to produce particular racialized and gendered experiences, which in turn produces particular micro- and cultural geographies of youth in the region.
The young men I interviewed tended to believe in the effects of racism a bit less in downtown spaces, suggesting a kind of dynamic mixing in which everyone gets along, which results from the ascendance of ‘post-racial’ ideas. This belief makes them unaware of the emergence of race that contributes to their continued marginalization (from employment, housing, education, schooling, etc.) as indicated in the literature on race, gender, and homelessness (Del Casino and Jocoy, 2008; Galabuzi, 2006; Klodawasky et al., 2006; Novac et al., 2002; Whitzman, 2006).

I argue there is a vibrating colour to some suburban spaces, whereas for the young men I interviewed, downtown Toronto is believed to be ‘post-racial’. The latter is a fiction borne out of the pervasive whiteness of downtown spaces, operating through a neoliberal ideology of universal individuality. As Ahmed (2007) suggests, the universalizing capabilities of whiteness emerge from its invisibility. For the young men I interviewed, this affects not only their sense of self, but their access to work, housing, school, and homeless services. In Toronto, and downtown in particular, there is a whiteness to service provision because historically and until recently, homelessness was constructed largely as a white problem in the city. This is not to say that all service providers are white or they only serve white clients, but that a (neo)liberal, individualizing ideology pervades service provision (in heavy focus on getting youth to be economically sustainable). This whiteness is also felt in commercial relationships and small-scale personal interactions. Indeed, whiteness and white culture is the basic, historical context of downtown Toronto and it is in this context that I identify a specific local ‘post-racial/(neo)liberal whiteness’. That spatialized vibe appears to be unique to downtown spaces. In suburban areas, racial vibrations are diverse, with some vibes
experienced as comfortable and others as alienating. However, no participant suggested the same kind of post-racial vibe existed in suburban areas. In some suburban areas, homeless services are fewer and there is emerging a new race culture different and emerging from the historical whiteness of most Canadian spaces. In many suburban spaces there exists a constant vibration of race and race emerges differently, outside of universalizing whiteness. Its constancy allows it to continually vibrate, without racial emergences (an ‘event’ of race).

The performances of different masculinities downtown and in the suburbs differently amplify the vibration of race. Downtown there are scripts of masculine independence and individuality, which seem to stifle the vibration of race. However, I argue that this stifling obscures continued structural racism. In many suburban areas, race does not vibrate with the same level of amplified, invisible whiteness, allowing more comfortable experiences of racialized masculinities.

I turn now to my five vignettes, each exemplifying the vibration of race and the ways masculinity helps to amplify it. The results presented in the following section are based on close readings of five interview segments and one Where-I-Live-Tour. I follow Swanton in using narrative fragments to ‘draw out the affective dimensions of multiculture’ and also to find different ways of ‘engaging with, and understanding, race and multiculture’ (2010: 2338). This approach helps negotiate the tension between affective and representational methodological approaches. Swanton argues for this fragmentary approach:
Recognizing that writing is as much about the creation of effects and affects as it is about representation, my writing strategies seek to perform some of the fleeting and fragmentary ways that race takes form in interaction (2010: 2337).

Such a method follows the feminist, postcolonial, and poststructural critiques of the ‘objectivity’ and ‘masculinism’ of much social science method (Swanton, 2010; Haraway, 1991).

The interview segments utilized here were chosen for being representative of affective senses that pervaded many interviews. The ones chosen included discussions that best illustrated the ‘affective dimensions of multicultur[al]’ Toronto.

5 Vignettes

1. Cruz and the Square One ‘Vibe’

Cruz (19 years old) spent the first few years of his life in Canada, but moved with his family for some of his childhood years to Peru, from where his parents had initially emigrated. He came back to Canada and the GTA as a young teenager and has lived in Brampton and Mississauga ever since. Both Brampton and Mississauga are known for having racially-diverse populations and are both popular destinations for new immigrants. Cruz describes his feelings of surprise about the peculiar non-white character of the GTA:

Cruz: That’s when I started recognizing Toronto, how it was. Cuz the area already looked bad, I was just like, whoa. Like, this is Canada? I’m like, where’s all the white folks? You know? Cuz like, everybody, I had not met a Canadian person in my life. Like, a white…I’m not trying to be racist or stereotype, but I’d not met a Canadian person and I’d been here almost half my life.
Cruz’s assertion that he had not met a white Canadian seems absurd; Brampton and Mississauga have many white residents. What Cruz is more likely exaggerating is the racialized character of the neighbourhoods he has lived in and the relatively small number of white people with whom he associates in his everyday life. So while he represents the city as ‘looking bad’, his statements might actually have more to do with his material surroundings and the demographics of his neighbourhoods. These comments were made in the context of a discussion about poverty, criminality, and race. Cruz believes many of the social malaises in the GTA’s more ‘troubled’ areas are caused by heavy concentrations of people of colour (and their poverty): ‘Now they’re seeing youth, it’s mostly like multicultural sorts of people who are causing crimes and all that.’ Cruz directly correlates race and crime. The fact that he deals drugs on a small scale perhaps plays into his perceptions of racialized criminality in the area. Of note is that this type of criminality is not a problem for Cruz – not a problem for his enjoyment and satisfaction of the areas in which he lives. The general sense I got from Cruz is that he appreciates the character of these areas (more on this appreciation follows).

Cruz’s sense of the geography of suburban GTA is not monolithic. When he and I are talking about his finding a room to rent near Square One (a large shopping mall in central Mississauga), he contrasts the vibe of the area with the area around Our Place Peel (a more residential suburban area) and with Brampton, the suburb north of Mississauga (where he formerly lived):

Cruz: It’s hard to find places in the Square One area. There’s places, but they’re made expensive. People take control. Because like, Sauga City, Square One area,
it’s really demanding to get residing there. I don’t know what it is. I guess it looks nice or whatever. Everything’s there for you, you know? That’s why it’s really high demanding. I got lucky finding a bedroom. I was living, I was actually looking to be around here, Square One...Square one is kind of proper. Like, I just like how the scenery is.

J: What do you mean, the scenery?

Cruz: The scenery, Sauga City. I can see why they call it Sauga City. I can actually…

J: Like, downtown vibe\textsuperscript{16}.

Cruz: Yeah, the vibe, yo! That’s what it is. I feel so appreciated out here. That’s what it is.

Cruz’s comments about feeling appreciated and liking the scenery suggest an emotional satisfaction of the social connectivity that Square One affords. In addition, when he suggests the scenery, he likely refers to the high-rise buildings and large-scale commercial development that contrasts with the sprawling suburban character of the other areas of the region we talked about. As such, it is the assemblage of the buildings, the scenery, friends and acquaintances that contributes to this affective sense. That the vibe of Square One makes him feel appreciated suggests a constant racial vibration that allows for the embracing of his implied self-perception of deviance. The constancy of racial vibration in the Square One area means racialized deviance emerges rarely as a problematic event for Cruz.

In the Where-I-Live-Tour I conducted with Cruz, we met at the Square One bus terminal and he proceeded to show me the various places around the mall where he chills. In the following passage from my tour field notes, Cruz and I are headed to an aboveground parking lot that serves as a communal smoking spot. We are joined by X, Y,
and Z. X is a good friend of Cruz’s, and the two of them were to move into the above-mentioned apartment near Square One a few days after the tour.

We walked through the mall towards “The Spot”, Cruz’s informal name for a place to smoke cigarettes and weed in the aboveground parking lot. We met up with two other youths I knew from OPP who were with a female friend (one youth was X). The five of us reached “The Spot” which is an indoor alleyway that connects the underground and surface parking lots. There were five young black guys inside already smoking weed and cigarettes. The air was thick with smoke. Wrappers and ashes were strewn about the floor. We stood around while people smoked and Cruz and one youth made a transaction while X ran interference, asking questions about my research. Cruz took a picture of X, Y and me, surprising Y. X left, having to go back to work at a nearby job training facility.

We headed to an outdoor park beside City Hall, despite the -5 degrees weather. Y rolled the joint while Z asked about my research. She was concerned that I was a cop. Y was too. While they smoked weed and cigarettes, a security guard from City Hall came by asking us to move away from the daycare behind. He had had complaints. We complied and moved across the small park to an area with a contemporary sculpture and one bench. We complained that since nobody was outside, it was unlikely that they could have smelled the smoke.

My whiteness emerged in several of these encounters, the vibration of race amplified by my balding white head, style of dress, and voice (accent, slang), which marked me as an outsider for many of the friends Cruz encountered. This occurred despite my best efforts at adopting what I thought were appropriately masculine postures. I slouched, I rarely smiled, I dragged my boots lazily when I walked. I was uncomfortable in ‘the spot’, feeling I did not fit in.

However, I believe Cruz, in his acceptance of me and my difference as an older (29) white student, was making an unspoken argument about the level of ‘appreciation’ present in and around Square One. Indeed, for many of the youths we bumped into around the mall area, my presence was a minor intrusion, but one that was accepted
because I was with Cruz. The malleability of group identity meant that if I was cool with an ‘appreciated’ member of the group, then I was alright. As such, I was granted potential temporary membership because of my acceptable performance of my racialized masculinity and because of the relational formation of group identity (as Cruz-Jeff).

The ‘appreciation’ that Cruz feels in the Square One area was something I certainly felt; it vibrates strongly. Emerging from this tour is the sense that the ‘downtown vibe’ Square One provides vibrates a space of racial positivity, or racial constancy. The dynamic of racial mixing creates a situation for the constant vibration of race without the eruption or emergence of conflictual racial events. Notably, this vibe emerges in suburban space, suggesting an affective sense of the suburbs of racialized appreciation. However, it relies on the specific micro-local racialized geography of Square One, even while Cruz draws on a downtown ‘Sauga City’ narrative. This vibration also relies on the performance of certain embodied racialized masculine characteristics that ensure masculine socialization is carried through the space. For example, the baggy all-black clothes that Cruz and his friends wear, the fist-bumps that happen when anyone leaves ‘the spot’ (something even this white-boy did, learning quickly from two young men who left before Cruz and I), the ubiquitous in-ear headphones the youth wear even mid-conversation. All of these perform a racialized ‘marginal masculinity’ (Connell, 2005) that feigns being aloof, in control, and dominant. These performances contribute to an assemblage that is experienced as a constant and comfortable racial vibration. Notably, it is particular actions such as the fist-bump, a kinetic and specifically racialized performance of greeting and parting, that contribute to this vibration.
2. O and the Downtown Vibe, Scarborough Vibe

O (21 years old) and I met at Evergreen Yonge Street Mission in downtown Toronto, but spent equal time talking about downtown experiences and Scarborough experiences. At the time of our interview, he was living with his parents in Hamilton (a city southwest of Toronto), but came to Toronto for the interview and to connect with some friends. O was among the few participants who had direct living experience with both downtown and suburban areas in the GTA. Most participants, being young, have had limited experience of different areas of the region. In the following dialogue, O and I talk about the different feel at different shelters and he contrasts downtown Toronto with Scarborough, suggesting a distinct ‘Scarborough vibe’:

O: I don’t know, out here, Covenant House, mad downtown feel, people in and out, in and out, everybody’s just in their own thing zone. Scarborough in Second Base was like, Scarborough vibe, you know, cuz it’s Scarborough people there so it’s just like you know? Yeah, like, different…It’s just like, the way people get down in Scarborough is different and it’s known. Like you know, people are a lot more like, like, quick to address the issue. You know what I mean? Nothing is really kept, like, unsaid, you know? Cuz something that needs to be said and done, it’s like, I don’t know. It’s more sticky out there!

Jeff: Sticky?

O: Yeah. You get stuck quicker out there, you know?

O suggests downtown there is insulation between people, that they are ‘in their own thing zone’, a comment I read as suggesting (neo)liberal individualizing influences. This indicates that when race happens downtown, it happens at the affective level. People might not make conscious decisions about race, or based on race, and instead articulate
ideas of independence, individuality, and insulation that overwhelm conscious notions of race. Indeed, many of my participants stressed their individuality, arguing that ‘I’m different from other homeless kids’, ‘I’m not like other black guys’, etc. In downtown Toronto, the combination of consumerism, commercial density, social mixing and homelessness service provision amplifies a vibration of racial *invisibility* that drowns out the sound of the event of race. Stressing individual difference has the effect of denying difference, such as those made by race or gender. Downtown space is thus whitened by the vibration of invisible whiteness in downtown spaces, though its invisibility obscures the racial processes that shape the socio-economics of downtown life. As such the emergence of race downtown is much more surprising to the young men I interviewed, whereas in the suburbs race is comfortably taken for granted, emerging less often as a problematic event. That nothing is left ‘unsaid’ in Scarborough suggests the insidious ‘invisible’ character of downtown individuality, of white vibrations, that there are ‘unsaid’ processes operating. It also suggests the comfortable and constant vibration of race in the suburbs, such that race is not necessarily problematic in everyday events.

O’s suggestion that Scarborough is ‘sticky’ invokes Saldanha’s conception of the ‘viscosity’ of race, with ‘bodies gradually becoming sticky and clustering into aggregates’ (2006: 10). O feels people are quicker to both conflict and resolution in Scarborough, indicating the greater affective comfort he (and others) have in those suburban spaces. For him, Scarborough becomes stickier through the aggregate of common cultures, ‘the block’ (community housing), drug deals, gangsters, etc. To return to vibration, certain bodies become stuck in place as the vibe amplifies and attracts. When the ‘Scarborough vibe’ vibrates, O is seduced and finds it difficult to get unstuck,
to find places away from the things Saldanha suggests ‘chain’ certain bodies to spaces: ‘hunger, cold, darkness, mud, poverty, crime, glances full of envy and anxiety’ (2006: 20).

It was some of these things that coerced O to leave the Scarborough neighbourhood where he lived, to move downtown and eventually to move in with his parents in Hamilton. The following story illustrates the slippery difference between downtown and suburban racial vibes. Importantly, despite feeling an affective and racialized comfort in suburban areas, race still can emerge as part of a conflictual event. The ‘stickiness’ of Scarborough and combines with a police raid of the government housing in which O was living to force him from the area:

O: The place I was staying with, the person’s house who it was, the person whose name was on the lease of the apartment I was staying in was uh, I don’t know, he was having like, immigration status problems. He was in jail, he was gonna get deported and stuff, he didn’t end up getting deported, but he was in jail for immigration stuff and um, cuz it was a government housing place, once the cops found that out, they, obviously they can kick people out. So once they found out that he was in jail they just came and got everybody out of there.

The event of the police raid was especially problematic for a young man such as O, embroiled as he was in ‘everything…criminal’ around him. O relates this story with an air of resignation, implying that he anticipated or could feel this event coming. The encounter with the police vibrates with race, but it also intersected with youth, maleness and class. O got out, in dramatic fashion:

O: I came downtown cuz that’s one of the places, like, I had to move from Scarborough in like a real, real, real big rush and literally I ran with my two dogs in a wife beater from like, from Pharmacy and Eglinton to right here at Parliament and Gerrard.
Jeff: Seriously?

O: Yeah. And I was like, yo man, I gotta stay out here, it’s too crazy out there.

That O ran the eleven kilometres from the West side of Scarborough to the East side of downtown Toronto indicates very strongly that he needed a change in ‘scenery’ (as Cruz put it). His experience is a traumatic interruption of the Scarborough vibe. His flight to downtown Toronto is an attempt to escape a problematic new racial vibration and masculine performance in addition to more overt police pressure. Importantly, though, O does not really find solace until he moves in with his parents in Hamilton, allowing him to get away from both the Scarborough vibe and the ‘mad downtown feel’ of Toronto. In O’s stories, we can see how race plays a role in both downtown and suburban spaces, despite the constant and potentially familiar ‘stickiness’ of the racial vibration in suburban Scarborough.

3. King and ‘Rainbow’ Multiculturalism

King (19 years old) lives with his mother in the Bathurst and Lawrence area of North York, an area he identifies as predominantly Jewish. He identifies a different suburban vibe, one based on an alienating vibration of whiteness. Importantly, though, he still suggests the ostensibly liberating ‘multicultural environment’ of downtown Toronto, in distinction to the feeling of being ‘pressed down’ in his inner suburban neighbourhood. King and I are talking about the feel inside Evergreen drop-in downtown and he proceeds to talk about his neighbourhood:
King: It really helps having multicultural environment, workplace, right? Because…

J: You mean like the staff?

King: Exactly, the staff are very helpful and the way they didn’t judge was truly amazing. You go in there, anything you need, anything, I’m at your service, let me help you. I guess that could go different in society, because when you go into society and you go in with all white people are and when you’re trying, like, for example. I live in a Jewish area.

J: Right yeah, you do.

King: And when, I can’t relate to many people. Like, I go in there, like, they kind of want to be on their own and when I go there, like, it’s hard, like, it’s hard for me to communicate with them, right? Because they’re such a majority that I feel myself pressured down.

J: Is it like, restaurants, or what? What places are you going into that -

King: No, just my house. I live in a basement of this big mansion, right? It’s rent for seven fifty, big room and everything. And uh, like the owners, they’re white and then, the neighbours are white and then the other neighbours are white. The whole block is white. In their own way. And yeah, they all have Filipino maids, kind of, right? Their workers, uh, PSWs\textsuperscript{18}, things like that. And like, they’re always like, you always feel like it, yeah. So it’s like, it’s different, you feel different when you’re around like just one culture and when everybody is that different it’s doing a low job. Not low, cuz they actually pay pretty good, but just jobs like cleaning, you know, like, it’s the bottom.

The pervasive whiteness of his neighbourhood is something that has clear resonance for King. He identifies as different from the rest of his neighbours, even as he seems to point to the fictive and flexible character of race in noting they are all white ‘in their own way’. His identification of the whiteness of the area in which he lives mixes with his identification of a racially stratified labour system, invoking his sense of social injustice. This sense contributes to the constant vibration of race for King in his suburban surroundings. This constant racial vibration is associated with a lack of mixing, of uneven geographic racialization.
King has a predilection for racial diversity that comes from his recent past, growing up as a teenager in the inner-suburban Flemingdon Park area of North York, where he chilled with what he calls a ‘rainbow’ group of kids. This rainbow group emerged from a lack of appreciable connection with how they perceived their ‘own’ race was acting or was supposed to act. King likes the vibe downtown because of the ‘post-racial’ dynamic mixing of social and racial groups and he excitedly tells me about it:

King: The thing I get about downtown, like, by Covenant, Covenant House, Evergreen and even Turning Point being downtown is that there’s all different kind of people. Everybody behaves differently. Rockers could be with rappers and like, they could be chilling and like, they may have their different groups, right? And like, Spanish people may be chilling with the white people and vice versa. And, and uh, it’s normally in areas where you grew up, like, there’s like one kind of people and like, for me that was kind of like gangsters, it was normally black people.

King collapses and contrasts different cultural, social, linguistic, and racial groups (rockers/rappers/Spanish/white) to suggest that in these shelter and drop-in spaces downtown, there exists a harmonic mixing to the social environment. However, he has a sense for the micro-local geography of his ‘downtown’ characterization when he conflates spaces by Covenant House and Turning Point (shelter) with ‘downtown’. Such a conflation indicates that the post-racial vibe of downtown might be a perception abstracted from very small-scale successful ‘multicultures’ (such as the shelters and drop-ins). He compares the mixing that happens in these spaces with the cultural hegemony of black ‘thugs’ in the Flemingdon Park area in which he grew up. The conversation continues:

J: Yeah? That’s what it was like where you grew up?
King: Yeah, like Flemingdon Park was mostly populated with black teenagers so I’m sure you, we got along there. I played basketball and also, people from like, West Indian? Like from West...so like lots of Pakistani, Afghanistan people and there was times where I got into fights with like, all the, an Afghan, an Afghanistan person and he brought his entire family and friends to come find me and beat me up and beat my friends up...Me and my friends we always had a trio. And my trio, it’s so cool because we could be called rainbow because we have every nation inside us. My friend is white from Poland. I’m Panamanian from Panama. I consider myself more Panamanian than Argentinian. My family...Ah, uh, my other friend, he was from Korea. My other friend Bangladesh. And we all rolled together, right? And it was pretty cool. Because, and another guy, he was black. But he wasn’t like the others. None of us were like our own kind, right? We didn’t like chilling with thugs so we kind of submerged with each other and that’s why we got a, we were so different and that’s why we got in a lot of conflict.

King’s admission that he and his group of friends encountered a lot of conflict seems to belie his argument that multiculturalism creates harmonic mixing. He also articulates contradictory ideas about who lives in Flemingdon Park, suggesting both that it was ‘kind of like gangster, it was normally black people’ and also that there is a great diversity (including his friends and the West Indian, Pakistani, and Afghan groups he says lived there). When I ask about why there was conflict, King responds evocatively:

King: Because I guess difference is always made different. I, I considered us different because like, normally you would see like, black with black, African with African and that’s what they was. And Spanish with Spanish, but I never got along with Spanish people. And I guess he never got along with white people back in the day. Now I get along with Spanish people and now he gets along with white people. But back in the day we didn’t get along with ourselves well...but like, we always stuck together.

King perceives alienating racialized difference such as he feels in his current North York area are mitigated by the proliferation of difference in Flemingdon Park and in downtown Toronto. That King suggests ‘we didn’t get along with ourselves’ reveals his latent
awareness of the fictive character of race. King senses there is no real essence to race, but still admits to feeling alienated from people who are ‘like him’ (other Spanish people) in Flemingdon Park. His assertion that Flemingdon Park is populated mostly with ‘gangsters’ suggests there might exist there a hegemony of masculine gangster/thug culture that in the (also) multicultural spaces of downtown Toronto gets obscured by the invisible whiteness of commerce, service provision, and adherence to individualism and independence. As race scholars suggest, the perpetuation and performance of whiteness need not necessarily be performed by white people (Ahmed, 2007; Swanton, 2010). Similarly, the performance of gangster/thug masculinities is not something necessarily limited to young black men (as King seems to suggest), and in fact is something many of my black participants actively rejected.¹⁹

Racial vibrations exist in potential, and this potential emerges differently in different spaces of the GTA. For King, as a teenager in Flemingdon Park, the event of race emerged constantly, often in conflictual ways. The same happens where he lives currently, in North York, and although the event does not result in physical altercations, it still results in an alienating sense of difference. In downtown Toronto, where King spends less time, the presence of a pervasive white vibration obscures other racial vibrations. To many of my participants, it seems as if race is not an issue downtown, and instead what they articulate are the universalized, normalized ideals of a liberated individuality.
4. Sean and the question ‘Why can’t I have a job in my neighbourhood?’

Sean (26 years old) and I met at East Scarborough Storefront where he uses the computers. Despite on and off homelessness and joblessness for the past six to eight years, he has stayed in the Scarborough neighbourhood of Kingston-Galloway in which he was born and raised. Kingston-Galloway is one of the City of Toronto’s ‘Priority Areas’, with high levels of joblessness, crime, and concomitant problems for local youth. East Scarborough Storefront is located in the area for these reasons and as Cowen and Parlette illustrate, it is having effects on the area's ‘positive trajectory’ (2011: 4). Mid-way through the interview when it becomes clear that many of Sean’s difficulties in life are connected with Kingston-Galloway, I ask him why he still lives there, suggesting that my query might be ‘an obvious question’:

Sean: No, but it’s a good question. I ask myself this question too, but I, I do mostly because my family’s here. And that I know this neighbourhood, you know? And I know the people. If I go to different neighbourhoods, I have to get to know the people, try to know the people so I feel more comfortable, like the youth. Cuz the youth don’t usually like youth people coming in and they don’t like, present yourself. Try to be like them, you know? They kind of get bad-minded toward you, you know? So...I really just stay here to cuz I know this place. I know this place, I know the people, I just don’t chill with them, you know?

These comments echo O’s argument that Scarborough is ‘stickier’ than other places. For Sean, this neighbourhood likely contributes to his continued homelessness and joblessness, but his living there is consistent with the affective and emotional feelings and social ties he has in the area. Unlike O, who left Scarborough in an effort to escape the lure of a problematic (and probably criminal) assemblage, Sean suggests both having
social ties and an affective comfort with his neighbourhood (‘I know this neighbourhood…I feel more comfortable’). He has easy rapport with the youth in the area, something he thinks will be challenged if he moves to a new neighbourhood. Thus, places become sticky due to more than just the pragmatics of having a spot to sleep and eat. Rather, they are incorporated into the emergence of assemblages of place that include housing, friends, family, as well as affective and racial vibrations that discourage mobility.

The ways racialized masculinities are performed in suburban areas such as these also factor into the emergence of racial vibrations. Sean’s precarious position in the housing and job markets puts his marginality into sharp focus, something he blames on immigration and gender. In the following quotation, he openly talks through his frustrations:

Sean: Yeah, the Indians are moving right now and they come on the jobs. It’s okay, but, McDonalds will hire mostly black people and black kids, you know? Dark people, you know? But, here, even Indians are dark. But they just coming over here and I notice when they become manager they only hire their people, you know? In Tim Hortons if they become manager, watch out. They might hire one of us, but that’s not likely. They’re more likely to hire a Chinese girl, you know? But if you go in there in the morning, that Indian manager’s back baking and four, five Indian girls in the front. You know? And that’s mostly what I’ve notice about the Indian people taking over. In things that we used to you know, take over. We used to control. They control it. You know, but I don’t know if it’s just us don’t want to work at Tim Hortons20 or what the case may be. But that’s what I see with my eyes…but they didn’t even look at me.

Scholars have noted the tendency for young men to blame the ‘other’ when unable to find employment because of economic restructuring (Fine and Weiss, 1998). Sean’s assertions of racialized takeovers also resonate with ‘model minority’ ideas (Cho, 1993), which is
particularly salient in his off-hand reference to ‘a Chinese girl’. It is important to note Sean’s notion of commercial ‘control’ is as much based on the emergence of race as economic restructuring. As a result of his continued marginalization, Sean blames his joblessness on small-scale overt racism, the tight-knit racial control of certain local scale commercial enterprises (like the franchised Tim Hortons). Race emerges in encounters he has (‘they didn’t even look at me’) and is symptomatic of larger structural barriers. His perception of Indian economic control in Kingston-Galloway sees parallels with inter-ethnic conflicts such as between black, Latino and Korean residents of South Central L.A. in the Rodney King riots: ‘Korean Americans who open stores in the neighbourhood are resented by long-deprived residents and are seen as “outsiders” exerting unfair control and power in the community’ (Cho, 1992: 198).

What in the previous quotation looks like overt anti-immigrant sentiment and racism on Sean’s part becomes an affectively generated micro-regional argument when it hits closer to home, heart, and embodiment:

Sean: When I’m looking for work, for me as a brown skinned man with a beard, it’s very hard to get work. I looked around here my whole life and I’ve been living here, a resident. Been going in to No Frills trying to say yo, where’s my job, I need a job. I didn’t say it like that, but you know? Come on. I go in there and I see lotta Indians taking over, you know?...You know? And these things kind of bother me still, cuz I lived in this neighbourhood. Why can’t I have a job in my neighbourhood? Why do I have to go to the west end to get work? And I usually do that work, you know? I don’t understand. Why can’t life just be a little bit easier?

The embodiment of racialized masculine characteristics (‘brown skinned man with a beard’) is tied directly to the alienating experience of a neighbourhood Sean views as home. The latter question, ‘why can’t life just be a little bit easier?’ is his most primary,
emotional reaction to joblessness and homelessness, shaped from his affective sense of what the place could be like. However, the point he makes about the difficulty of finding a job in his neighbourhood is the most central to our understanding to the relationship between race, gender, and regional homelessness. There is a perhaps a lack of entry-level jobs available in the Kingston-Galloway area, causing young men such as Sean to travel great distances for jobs such as daily factory work\(^\text{22}\). Sean’s question reveals the affective genesis of his racist reaction to the ostensible ‘control’ of certain entry-level jobs in his neighbourhood. It is also a result of his inability to achieve a traditional breadwinning adult male role, something that comes into sharper focus when we consider his new fatherhood, his infant daughter in the custody of Children’s Aid Society. Thus, the performance of certain masculine characteristics such as the cool rapport he has with the other youth in Kingston-Galloway combines with the unavailability of other masculine characteristics such as the breadwinner role to amplify the racial vibration in his area of Scarborough. As a result of this amplified vibration, Sean sees constant racial emergences, events and encounters charged with race and racism. This is true despite his assertions of affective and emotional comfort with the area. There is thus a crucial difference between his representational and affective characterizations of the neighbourhood. Representationally, Sean articulates that this neighbourhood is bad for his socio-economic well-being. However, his affective feel involves a more complicated messy mix of comfort and racialized resentment with both revolving around the particular micro-local socio-economics of Kingston-Galloway.
5. C and the ‘Edgy’ Downtown

The idea that downtown Toronto is a place of ‘post-racial’ harmony in which young men are able to exercise their individuality is a common perception. While for some young men this might be a lived reality, for many the individualizing whiteness of downtown spaces does not provide liberation from the emergence of racially charged events. Instead, obscured by the vibration of the individualizing whiteness of downtown spaces and the perception that race does not happen downtown, the event of race might be just more unpredictable downtown.

C (21 years old), suggests that downtown is ‘edgier’ than surrounding areas, a place in which a person must be more careful of how one conducts oneself. When I ask him if there is there any difference around the GTA in terms of how he acts or how other people act, he suggests there is:

C: I mean, the only thing that’s different is maybe the people. Same shit. Like, like, I’m from the west end of the city. I’m from the Rexdale. I’m from Rexdale. Out there it’s a humble vibe. You’ll never catch somebody in the streets that’ll look at you and look you down and stare you and be like, yo, fuck you or be like, give you attitude or anything. More times it’s see you, nodding and keep it moving out there, you know what I mean? Oh yeah, yeah, you living here? Alright, keep it moving. Come down here, it’s less that way. Like, this is probably the worst place in the city but it’s the most edgy. You know, this is where the people are the most edgy, the most, like, ready to go cuz it’s downtown Toronto. Crazy shit happens out here. I’ll be standing there trying to sell drugs one day and the nigga just walk by me, said some junk and shit, I’m like, yo, just keep walking if you don’t want nothing from me. And the nigga swung at me, you know what I’m saying? He missed me, but he swung, you know? I’m like, what the fuck was that? Of course I’m ready with my knife in my hand, now I’m like yo, get the fuck out of here, yo. Like, what the fuck is there, what the fuck? Yeah, man, no, this place is a little edgier.
C was arrested for stabbing this man who took a swing at him. The physical altercation, which is the type of ‘crazy shit’ C argues happens downtown, is the type of racial emergence that results from the amplified vibration of drug dealing, brown bodies passing closely on the street, voices (‘said some junk and shit’), and masculine posturing. The disbelief that C displays (‘Like, what the fuck is there, what the fuck?’) indicates the expectation that his posture, his position on the street, and his implied patience would provide him with normal encounters (the transaction). The expectation is his position would be understood and his individual autonomy respected. The ‘edgy’ character of downtown, however, vibrates and amplified a racially-charged encounter through the relationship between his racialized masculinity and the social space of a downtown street.

Note, too, how the materiality of the swing, a swinging arm, the clutched knife helps increase the vibration. This event also suggests the simultaneous problematic operation of the racialization of space and performances of particular masculinities. For C, the racial vibration is formed through the disruption of expectations surrounding those masculine performances. The potential vibration of race in this event suggests the fiction of the post-racial characterization of downtown spaces.

C suggests that the performance of territorial masculinities in the suburban area of Rexdale (the north-west corner of the City of Toronto, just East of Mississauga and Brampton) creates expectations of the normalcy of certain racialized masculinities. The normal and constant vibration of a ‘humble vibe’ in Rexdale means that C’s posturing when he deals are understood.

The ‘edgier’ character of downtown space for C vectors another particular performance of racialized masculinity, one that he is trying to get away from. His strong
opinions about the best and worst places to live in the GTA cause me to ask which places
in the region he prefers. He suggests North York:

C: Yeah, I know the best place to go is north, Sheppard, Finch. They have some
nice…

J: Have you been up there?

C: Yeah, I’ve been up there. Um, Carabob, Birchmount and Sheppard. Yeah, W\textsuperscript{25}
used to live up there. A nice little area. There’s nice spots, you’ve just gotta choose
them. And the thing is, when you choose a nice spot it’ll be away from stuff that
you need to be close to, you know? So it’s gonna be a little bit out of your way, but
as long as you have those few stores near your house that are needed, necessity
stores, that’s what you gotta look for when you look for a place. No Frills and
Shoppers Drug Mart\textsuperscript{26} and that’s it. If you have that nearby, you’re golden.

The things C needs to be close to includes drug dealing connections, but also includes
some of the social services, like Evergreen, that provide employment opportunities, meals,
and social connections. The suburban street of Carabob Court, where C’s friend W lived,
afforded comfort and a ‘nice’ spot, but it lacked connection to those other aspects of C’s
life. As was common in interview, C suggests a disconnection between places where it is
good to be and places he needs to be. As a result, he spends time in volatile, ‘edgy’
downtown spaces with characteristics that amplify a racial vibration and make race
matter.

**Vibrations: Conclusions**

This chapter shows a variety of racial vibrations in suburban areas compared to
the more unpredictable volatility of racial vibration in downtown Toronto. Much of this
has to do with affectively-imbued expectations and perceptions of ‘post-racial’ downtown as having more dynamic mixing of people than the suburbs. Such post-racial invocations miss the invisible historical whiteness of downtown commerce, service provision, and consumerism. The point, as C’s vignette illustrates, is not that race does not exist downtown, but that it operates in ways surprising to these young men. This surprise is greater than in the suburbs, where race vibrates constantly but in different ways in different micro-local suburban areas. Moreover, as Saldanha (2006) argues, race is a decidedly material process, a point that the stories these young men tell highlight.

These stories also illustrate the affective genesis of racial vibrations and masculine performances. These stories add to the existing literature on race as emergent (Lim, 2010; Nayak, 2010), technological (Swanton, 2010), and as an event (Saldanha, 2006) by illustrating the immanence of race and the constancy of its potentiality. Indeed, the vibration of race is something that is never really absent, even if it is obscured by representational constructions such as ‘post-racism’. Through exploring these vibrations and performances, critical differences arise between young men’s representations of their lives and their articulated lived and material experiences. Despite their varying belief in race and racism as a structuring factor in their lives and despite the different emergences of race based on urban and suburban micro-geographies, these stories illustrate the material impacts of structural racism. These young men perform racialized masculinities that provide evidence of strong independence and individuality. They do this while simultaneously telling stories that highlight their marginalization by spatial and structural racisms. As such, despite assertions of freedom and independence, these young men tell stories about struggling to find work, the difficulty of securing housing, and the
challenges of negotiating racialized neighbourhoods and spaces. Their stories illustrate the material effects the neoliberalization of labour markets (Galabuzi, 2006) and housing markets (Novac et al., 2002) have for people of colour.

One of the most intriguing results that arises is the potential that multicultural diversity, such as exists in many areas of the GTA, achieves the most success when the dominant racial group is perceived as absent. In this context, in many of the suburban regions of the GTA where whiteness is not felt as the dominant racial vibration, race achieves a more comfortable feeling, even as it still operates to contribute to these young men’s continued marginality. In the downtown spaces of Toronto, where whiteness is felt as the dominant socio-cultural-economic force, race vibrates and emerges for these young men in more volatile ways, even as it is hidden in ‘post-racial’ representational rhetoric. This result complicates the current consensus on the affective genesis of race (Lim, 2010; Swanton, 2010; Saldanha, 2006), though perhaps only to indicate that representational discourses and strategies perhaps play a role in the racialization of people and spaces.

This chapter also contributes to work on masculinities as geographical (Atherton, 2009; Day, 2001; Evers, 2011; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Jackson, 1991). Indeed, masculine performances affected by racial vibrations are found to be localized based on assemblages that include affective feelings of place. Indeed, as King’s discussion about Covenant House and Turning Point indicate, these can be micro-localized, but operate within wider constructions of regional geographies (so King characterizes ‘downtown’ by how he characterizes those two shelter areas). This chapter also provides evidence for how masculinity is performed in relation to racialized assemblages (Saldanha, 2006; Swanton, 2010), based on feelings of geography as well as expectations based on past
experiences (as in C’s story about his fight and arrest downtown). Such performances illustrate the ‘messy complexities’ that Hopkins and Noble (2009) suggest should be the focus of studies of young men’s masculinities.

These stories also help fill gaps in urban and cultural geographic analyses of homelessness. They provide documentation of the experiences of suburban homelessness, which is important given what Passaro and Walks suggest, that homeless populations might be ‘suburbanizing’ (Passaro, 1996 and Walks, 2006). This chapter also focuses on ‘lived experience’, and as such, builds upon previous ethnographic research that illustrates the connections between homelessness, urban space, and urban life (such as Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008 and others by the same authors).

Finally, the apparent gap between these young men’s representational understandings and affective feelings of their lives suggests more work needs to be done that can reconcile these two. Indeed, many of the stories these young men tell hinge on their feeling of vibes. They affectively sense their surroundings, which vectors them into certain performances of masculinity, which then flows back through affective vibrations. There is concurrence to racial emergences and masculine performances that suggest the strong relationship between these two. The concept of vibration between bodies, living and otherwise, allows for a more versatile and fluid sense of racialized masculinities. It also allows us better links between perception, representation, and materiality. The thickness of the racial and affective vibrations that these young men articulate suggests a further need to understand the affective foundations for lived experiences of race, gender, and oppression.
Chapter 5

‘My place of residence’: Home and homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area

Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences of ‘home’ and being ‘not-at-home’ for Canadian-born young men of colour who have experienced homelessness in the GTA. I enter into debates in the literature about normalized meanings and practical experiences of home. Discussions of ‘homelessness’ begin with a biased conception of ‘home’, predicated on the absence of ‘housing’ (the house, apartment, flat, homeless shelter, and so on). Scholars have made similar arguments and have shown how despite the lack of conventional and normative ‘homes’ for many homeless people, they articulate broader place-making practices that emphasize the inherent spatiality to home-making (Johnsen, May and Cloke, 2008; May, 2000; Moore, 2007; Robinson, 2005; Whitzman, 2006).

‘Homeless’ is rearticulated in this chapter as being ‘not-at-home’ to emphasize the affective character of homelessness, the loss of homed meaning that many young men of colour suggest they experience. Despite continued experiences of being not-at-home, young men of colour articulate clear ideas about what an ideal home could or should look like. That picture looks very much like the ones painted by scholars who have done work on idealized conceptions of home (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Brueckner, 2011; Despres, 1991; Domosh, 1998; Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008; Mallett, 2004; McDowell, 1997; Meth, 2003; Somerville, 1992). I also utilize the important contribution made over twenty
years ago by bell hooks (1990) in her conception of ‘homeplace’, the nurturing place of respite that she suggests black women in the United States have historically been charged with making for black people. The racialized relationship between black people and white people in the U.S. roughly corresponds to the relationship between whites and people of colour in Canada insofar as it reflects relations of power. hooks argues: ‘an effective means of white subjugation of black people globally has been the perpetual construction of economic and social structures that deprive many folks of the means to make homeplace’ (1990: 46). ‘Home’, and the ability of people to create it, is inherently political.

Research on home has indicated the ‘ideal’ of home in Canada follows the house-as-home and is based on white, middle-class, and heterosexual nuclear family values (Gorman-Murray, 2007 and Gorman-Murray and Dowling, 2006). In the field of homelessness research, Somerville’s influential analysis of the meanings of home argues that ‘homelessness’ is ideologically created and privileges associations of ‘home’ with ‘houses’ (1992). Veness (1993) argues that idealized conceptions of home are normatively based on the above-suggested values and as a result are racially, sexually, and gendered constructions. Brueckner (2011) argues that Anglo-Saxon settler nations such as Canada emphasize home-ownership as the ideal for home life and as a result, many people yearn for this norm. hooks herself suggests this yearning and also that contemporary paradigms for black domestic life in North America mirror white bourgeois norms even as experiences of domesticity are quite different from those norms (1990).

Because of these normative conceptions of home and the fact that they damage people who do not achieve the norm, some scholars have suggested we need to broaden
our ideas of home. Robinson (2005) and May (2000) illustrate how people experiencing homelessness work to achieve a feeling of belonging and ‘home’, but often outside the norm of house-as-home. I follow these two and also Klodawsky (2007), who questions why studies of homelessness have not more frequently been taken up by feminist geographers. She suggests that feminist theory and methods are well positioned ‘to incorporate both an appreciation for the multidimensional, multiscalar nature of the meaning of ‘home’, to recognise that houselessness is not the same as homelessness, and that the latter signals a more existentially complicated set of needs and issues’ (Klodawsky, 2007: 378). Such a complicated existence requires an investigation into the interplay between idealized/normalized versions and actual experiences of home. May (2000) argues that there has been some work on homeless people’s understandings of home, but these focus on ‘home as residence’. He attempts to open this up to ‘home as place’, which articulates a wider sense of home and experience of homelessness. I enter into these debates to help illustrate the place-making tactics young men of colour practice in their yearning to feel both ‘home’ and a sense of belonging.

In my research, many of the young men I talked to did not see themselves as experiencing homelessness since ‘homeless’ is an abnormal category. In their view, their ‘home’ life, the types of housing situations they have experienced, are not necessarily abnormal. Rather, they articulate the experience of being not-at-home, while simultaneously suggesting notions of the ideal home and also alternate ways they create a sense of belonging.

The precarious housing conditions and experiences such as living in shelters, househopping, living temporarily in apartments, and so on position these young men very
well to reflect on experiences and meanings of ‘home’. They have been excluded from establishing and making home in the conventional, normative sense, but articulate clear ideas of what that convention looks and feels like. In this chapter I explore that conventional, normative sense through a discussion of their experiences of home and homelessness, their ideas of ‘ideal’ homes, and the ways they create and experiences alternate forms of belonging and home. Through this discussion I illustrate how ‘home’ is a racially, socially, and spatially constructed privilege. Despite the fact that they articulate disaffected experiences and senses of conventional home-spaces, they also articulate place-making practices that indicate the creation of alternative home- and belonging-spaces. Thus, Canadian-born young men of colour in the GTA suggest they do have home experiences, but not necessarily in the normative sense of white, middle-class, nuclear family home.

Interviewees were asked to reflect both on ideal homes and actual homes. Both these were approached with a series of questions including more abstract ones about what makes ‘home’ and more experiential ones about homes they have had or places they have lived. In both cases I attempted to elicit from interviewees ideas about physical homes and emotional understandings of home. I asked questions about current and past housing experiences, while trying to encourage interviewees to discuss the many forms of housed and homelessness experiences they have had. In presenting the results I continue along the trajectory identified by Moore (2000), who showed how studies of ‘home’ are moving away from developing lists of meanings of home (as in Somerville, 1992 and Despres, 1991) and towards examining homes in specific socio-cultural contexts.
The remainder of this chapter is split into three parts. The first, ‘My place of residence’, is on the lived experience of home and homelessness, emphasizing meanings of home as they evolve through the diverse housing experiences of these young men (including ‘househopping’, which I highlight in discussion). In the second part, ‘A home should be…’, I discuss my interviewees’ conceptions of ‘ideal’ homes. In the third part, ‘Common ground’, I illustrate some of the broader ways young men of colour make home and a sense of belonging through relationships with people and also a broadened sense of ‘home-making’, including through associations with differently scaled spaces.

‘My place of Residence’

Young men of colour experiencing homelessness have a wide variety of housing experiences. They stay in shelters, apartments, foster homes, they ‘househop’, are in jail or prison, sleep outside (‘rough sleeping’), and all of these with family, friends, parents, or alone (for further details on where youth stay when experiencing homelessness, see Kurtz et al., 2000; Ryan and Thompson, 2013; and Sanchez et al., 2006). This variety of forms of housing is in part a result of the non-normative reasons many of them have for leaving a parent’s home (assuming they did live with parents, as many did, though some did not). Brueckner (2011) indicates that in North America, normative reasons for youth leaving home involve going away to school (college, university) or finding permanent employment. None of the young men I talked to left home for these reasons, though many still have those aspirations.
In discussion about real or lived homes they have had, they articulate a variety of things, many of which are negatively valenced. These things include: childhood/past, negativity, dark/no light, trapped, bad future, institution, anger, disgust, stress, being ‘spaced out from people’ (family and friends), being alone, a ‘place of residence’, harassment, annoyance, confusion, threats, conflict, captivity, and belonging. This list is noticeably short on ‘happy warm fuzzy’ feelings (as interviewee Seth put it). It emphasizes the danger, anger, and frustration of (bad) homes. Some of this comes from living in abusive family situations, but some comes from living situations in which they might have lived alone or unaffordably. These articulations are overwhelmingly negative, suggesting that it is not only the experience of homelessness that weighs heavily on the mind. Rather, the experience of being housed can produce a strong feeling of being not-at-home. These include strong emotions (annoyance, stress, disgust, anger), as well as more specific articulations of a troubled materiality (captivity, conflict, threats, harassment, ‘spaced out from people’), and more metaphorical projections (trapped, dark/no light).

Often, these young men experience ‘home’-as-residence only fleetingly, as a passing sensation they might try to hold on to. Bonton (23 years old) and I are discussing what home feels like and he narrates a long story about visiting his brother, where conflict arises when he gets close to feeling ‘at home’. He describes going to live with his brother and a fight they got into around Christmas:

Bonton: Right, so it’s like, I remember my brother told me this, like I went to his house, stayed there a night and he told me where do you stand between family and friends? I go you guys are my family no matter what. I’ll do whatever it takes, right? And they look at me and they go well, you don’t really come around, so how are you family? We see more friends than you! And I’m like you’re my flesh and blood
I don’t care, like, you know? And me and my brother got into an argument at Christmas time and we were on the fourteenth floor, like, high story building, right, chilling, right? We were about to burn a couple joints and we got into an argument. It was about, over this, our friends, like, who was who and they made me, like, my brother wanted me to stay, but inside it broke me down so much that I couldn’t stay in the premises of them so I ended up leaving and he really wanted to throw me over the fourteenth floor balcony! That’s how much he wanted to fight. You know, at the same time I left and as soon as I walked out the door he’s like if you leave right now, never come back. So I picked that decision because he picked his friends over me, you know? So I was like, fine, you know, if you want to do that I’m going to leave, like, I’m not gonna come back. But I do come back, you know what I mean? I catch him on his happy days, try to, you know? I’ll bring a, like when I go visit, I don’t go empty handed, I’ll bring a weed or juice, or something, spark it up maybe, keep it a little bit fresh. If we’re drinking, we’ll have a good time and if he gets angry after that by then it’s time to go anyways, I’ll just leave, right? It works both ways. But…it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work at all.

Bonton appreciates blood ties. Blood is what ties him to family in ways that keep him coming back, despite not feeling appreciated by them. That ‘it doesn’t work’ cripples Bonton’s ability to achieve a feeling of home, despite his efforts. His story is intriguing for it reveals a long-standing contestation between the brothers. We can feel his brother’s perspective – the transient Bonton, only coming around when it is to his benefit – and the suggestion that he tries to bring something when he visits indicates the mutual familial guilt and responsibility. The profound sense of being not-at-home is very clearly stated in this story: despite desire and effort, Bonton is unable to achieve a feeling of home when he stays with his brother.

The emptiness and lack of family love and company comes through in discussions of lived home experiences for these young men. Dwayne (21 years old) and I transition from talking about his ideal home to some of the places he has lived recently. He suggests that they do not give him a feeling of being-at-home, but rather a feeling of emotional emptiness:
Dwayne: Every place since I moved out of my parents’ house. (Pause) Cuz I have, I have three brothers and one sister down in Toronto living with my dad, single parent, you know? So, I been growing up with them basically my whole life so when I left that I tried to find a comfortable spot. The emptiness always remained there.

The emptiness that remains results from the lack of material family contact in Dwayne’s recent residences. It suggests the connection between the space of the home (the ‘spot’) and the emotional and affective comfort that comes from living with family (‘comfortable’). For Dwayne, since he moved out of his parents’ house, he has not been able to realize those circumstances, despite living in several different apartments.

Seth (20 years old) too describes a situation of affective emptiness when he suggests that he feels like a ‘nowhere man’:

Seth: I always, I kind of felt homeless cuz I always had to househop and shelter-hop so for that time being I was homeless and I was walking around, wandering around the streets and looking for places. I kind of felt like pretty much a nowhere man. Someone who doesn’t really have a straight future, but um, he’s just doing what he can right now so I guess in that sense I kind of felt homeless also.

The implication of directionality applies to home and work situations as well as personal motivation. The placelessness suggested in the grounded ‘where’ of the ‘nowhere man’ suggests that for Seth, homelessness destabilizes him, ungrounds him. Most notably, the experience of homelessness contributes to this, producing a distinct feeling of being not-at-home.

This placelessness, the lack of connection with an idealized home environment, reduces some young men to what they perceive as elementary existence. Thus, not only is Seth ‘nowhere’, but he becomes a ‘nowhere man’, with the placelessness folding into his subjectivity. Others, such as Blackjack (23 years old), identify the emotional alienation that results in the absence of ‘belonging’ that can be provided by ‘home’. He identifies
this emotional alienation when he distinguishes between having a home and not having a home:

Blackjack: Yeah, you have family, you kind of have a sense of belongingness, you know. But when you’re homeless, you don’t really have belongingness, you’re just kind of doing your own thing, but nothing really going on so you’re just there. Like, really, you’re just there and nothing to like….you probably wanna go look for food cuz there’s no food where you are. It’s a constant problem.

For him, a home provides a sense of ‘belongingness’ and he directly mixes family and home. He identifies homelessness with the lack of ‘belongingness’ and the elementary spatial existence of just being in a space: ‘you’re just there’. The lack of meaningful feeling imbued in the places he has lived recently contributes to this sensation, which reads similarly to Seth’s ‘nowhere’. ‘You’re just there’, but there’s nothing there without affectively-imbued meaning.

Others identified a similar sense of belonging as important for feeling ‘home’ and their lived experience as lacking this sense. John (19 years old27) agrees with Blackjack, suggesting some idealized aspects of home that help create a sense of belonging: ‘Yeah, a place where you know you can feel comfortable, you know, secureness. You’re not, it’s not you have to share it with someone. It’s where you have belongingness.’ The lack of a sense of belonging separates the man from the place, producing the alienating experience of being not-at-home.

The elementary existence and placelessness suggested in the above quotations is echoed in the anti-consumerism Solo (19 years old) expresses when talking about concepts of home. He and I are talking about his frequent moves to different places around the city and what this means for his understandings of home:
J: So like, do you consider Mississauga, does it feel like home to you? Considering you’ve been so many different places?

Solo: Almost, but the thing about moving, what it taught me, is don’t get attached to nothing. Yeah. Naked is how I came out of my mother’s womb and naked is how I’ll return to the earth. So it was said, let there be the name of the Lord. So anything that you not born with don’t get too attached. Don’t give value to material possessions. You know? Cuz I don’t know where I’ll be tomorrow. I thought I was gonna be in my bed. Probably like a week ago I thought I was gonna be living with my mom, but now I’m here. Know what I’m saying?

Such disenchantment with material possessions is in stark contrast to how some other interviewees articulated home (such as those who suggested a home includes ‘a place to put your stuff’). Solo does not suggest what home means to him, but this anti-materialism might indicate a breaking from the material and affective understandings of home of contemporary scholarship (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2007). However, I argue that this is not the case. Instead, his rejection of material possessions should be read as symptomatic of his rejection of conventional or normative meanings of home. His profound alienation from the structures (wealth, property, nuclear family structures) that allow home-making to happen causes him to reject those structures and meanings. As such, he replaces the absent feeling of home with a relatively more comfortable not-at-home feeling.

Perhaps because of the traumatic experiences of previous family (and other) homes, these young men articulate a variety of feelings about living with other people. As suggested earlier, some participants expressed the desire for freedom, space, and a solitary home life. Others expressed that home meant having other people with whom to share feelings. Still others suggested a complicated mix of these, with the need for sharing living spaces with other people, but room for privacy and independence.
TJ (19 years old) is relatively unsuccessful at living with others, suggesting that when he househops it never lasts very long. However, in a lengthy monologue, he outlines in the second person what someone needs to do in order to successfully live with other people. The following quotation is part of this monologue in which TJ suggests how a person might househop well:

TJ: At the end of the day you really have to be loving for others to be allowing you in their house. You can’t really be in someone’s house and be disrespecting them. You can’t really be in someone’s house and not washing dishes. Are you stupid? You think you can come in my house and not wash dishes? Are you stupid? The dishes will outside the house and so will your things, you know what I mean, like? Go wash the dishes and go wash your clothes, like, at the end of the day you have to be at someone’s house cleaning, working. When they come home they shouldn’t have a whole bunch of shit to do. You’re there, right? Before you weren’t there they had things taken care of. But you’re there now so they said hey, son, you don’t need to do that. There’s a person here, just moved in. He lives here, he can do some stuff too. I want to see the dishes and the…know what I mean, like. If you can’t do the dishes, clean up the bathroom. If you bathe in the fucking bathtub and you can’t clean out the bathtub when you’re done, you’re nasty. You don’t live where you fucking sleep. You’re just there at the present time. Your mother wants to take a shower. She’s gonna wash the bathtub out. After you’re done, she doesn’t want to see your dirt because she had the decency to clean up her dirt. So what makes you think she wants to see a stranger’s dirt and not even her own son’s? (Laughs) Joker! No, guy. Know what I mean, like, what’s going on? Like, you really have to do something.

TJ’s comments show the geographical and temporal limits of feeling at-home (and feeling not-at-home) when househopping. His comment ‘you don’t live where you fucking sleep’ is revealing, suggesting the impossibility for him of creating a homespace, of making home in such places. The irony is in the apparent contradiction between his acknowledged lack of success in househopping and his espoused practical wisdom. TJ has an evident sense of how to live with other people, perhaps borne out of past experiences, but he also acknowledges he cannot really do the things necessary (‘if you can’t do the dishes…’). He uses ‘live’ in the sense of making home; a person ‘lives’ in a
space in which they have an emotionally-invested sense of belonging. His inability/unwillingness to wash the tub/dishes at his friend’s house mirrors his inability to cook, clean and otherwise provide for the family at his parents’ house:

TJ: Live right when you want to live right. And when you can live right, when you’re with your mom and your dad, don’t take advantage. Clean, cook. If you’re a fucking hustler, bro, show your mom you can bring fucking money in the house, know what I mean, like, don’t just be hustling and buy your stupid shit and don’t give your mom fucking money so you can get kicked out the house.

His rationalization about how to live with others very likely has to do with his disaffection with conventional or normative meanings of home as much as it does with his unwillingness to abide by homemaking practices derived from that meaning. As such, he can understand it intellectually, but his inability to feel home in such environments alienates him from those same environments. This alienation comes through in the angry and frustrated way TJ tells this story. Again, he knows these things, but does not or will not follow this advice.

The sense that they need help from other people drives many young men looking for places to crash. However, very often their social network is too small, or gets taxed when their homelessness extends over too long a period. This leaves many young men feeling as if they need to solve their problems on their own. Anthony (22 years old) discusses the limited options he feels when trying to find a place to live:

Anthony: Like, every time you stay with somebody you just feel like you wanna leave, but sometimes I have nowhere to go or it’s hard and you don’t want to try to do it on your own but when you do, sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn’t. It’s hard, man.

The statement that sometimes you ‘don’t want to try to do it on your own’ indicates the isolation and alienation of experiencing homelessness. The repetitive search is shown in
the comments about ‘every time’ and ‘sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn’t’. Often what happens is the continued housing instability and also the instability of home life as they must keep active when househopping in order not to seem lazy:

Anthony: Anybody’s house I’ve stayed at, when I wake up I have to go. I have to go out, you know? And even if it’s for a bit and then I’ll come back, I can’t stay there the whole night. If I sleep there I can’t wake up. I can’t do that. I have to be active, I have to be doing something, you know? Even if it’s go help my sister for a little bit, help my mom, my brother. Help my auntie, whatever.

This felt need to stay active resonated through many of the interviews. These young men often have a great sense of guilt at not contributing to household expenses and duties (as in TJ’s story above). A large assumption that exists around househopping is that if a person is staying at someone’s house as a place to sleep, that person should only be sleeping there. Because of this assumption, many of the things guys articulate about ideal homes, such as relaxation, freedom, comfort, and security, are not available. This contributes to the feeling of being not-at-home.

These young men feel they are imposing when they ask friends or family if they can stay for a few nights. Curious about this, I ask Sean about the moment of asking:

J: Is it hard to ask people, yo, can I stay at your place for a week, or even a night?

Sean: Well, it is, kind of, when you’re at the moment asking them, can I stay with you? But they usually say yes, you know? Because they know what I’m going through. And, but what happens is stay too long, you know? And then they start to get fed up. Especially if you’re not working, you know? Yeah. Kind of get fed up.

The ‘too long’ is a big part of the problem. Often unstated, the length of stay and feeling of imposition plays on these young men’s sense of propriety. Although people often agree, as Sean suggests, when the length of stay drags on their patience wears thin. The constant search for a place to sleep becomes all-consuming, disabling the househopper
from finding or even looking for work. When this combines with structural inequalities in
the labour market (such as the changes suggested by McDowell, 2002 and 2003) and the
relegation of racialized populations to non-standard forms of work (Galabuzi, 2006), their
alienation from a house-as-home foundation is very problematic.

The temporality of househopping comes up frequently in interviews, with friends
tolerating househoppers for a limited, but uncertain amount of time. John comments on
this and on the need to stay mobile, which includes when staying at a friend’s house
(spending the day outside) and also between stays at different houses:

John: Like, in times, like, you have no place to go, you know, you’re trying to not
be a burden, you’re trying to househop, ‘til you can find somewhere that’s stable,
you know, pay rent or something. But until you do you just stay with friends and
stuff. Yeah, you can stay with me for a couple days, but you only want to stay for
one or two and you start to like, get on each other’s nerves, you know, like, why are
you in my house? Yo man, I don’t have anywhere else to go. You know, you just
make sure you’re mobile, cuz if you’re not you’re just sitting there and people think
you’re not doing anything.

The assumption here is that househopping is inherently unstable. This instability means
that the gratification of having a place to sleep is only temporary and is sandwiched
between days of ‘mak[ing] sure you’re mobile’, for fear of aggravating the host and
losing the bed.

Attending school presents another challenge for househoppers: the need to find
places to sleep close to their school. John goes on to note some of the difficulties of
balancing househopping and school:

John: Well, usually if I get kicked out and I’m househopping, I can’t really go to
school, cuz if I go to school I won’t have a place to stay, cuz you’re at school all
day and you’re not really hanging out with anybody to see like, where you can go.
And you don’t really ask some people at school, cuz your school friends aren’t
really the same as like, your friends especially when you live far from your school. Like, not the same as your friends from your area, right? So like, it’s different. You’ll be like, hey man, can I stay at your place tonight. Yeah yeah sure. Stay there for a couple days and then, you be like, okay well, now I gotta go somewhere. If you go to school that day then you’re kind of screwed cuz then you have nowhere to go that night and you’re outside and you’re just walking around eleven o’clock at night on a Tuesday and nobody’s gonna be like, yeah, you can come over especially when you have no phone. You can’t call anybody. Figure it out.

The inability to attend school is obviously a problem given the limited job prospects for young men who do not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development diploma. The injunction ‘figure it out’ indicates John’s sense of the impossibility of the situation. His daily life turns into a strategic game in which he must socialize to gain access to places to stay and must do it regularly because he cannot stay with one person for too long.

For some youth, the disengagement from previous routines (like school) provides a sense of liberation. Indeed, several young men articulated a sense of freedom at having separated from the overbearing control of parents or family. Seth has recently moved out of his mom’s place and has been househopping and living in shelters. Like some of the young men I talked to in downtown Toronto, he is relishing the newfound freedom and lifestyle that street-involved youth can experience (albeit briefly and tenuously):

Seth: It’s nice, uh, it kind of feels nice househopping cuz when I was living with my mom she would always call me all the time to see, to pinpoint where I was and she’d always get me to baby-sit for the kids. When I was househopping I didn’t have to do that anymore, I didn’t have any responsibilities. I was free to go wherever, whenever. Not having to hear her complain to me. And you get that feeling that, the nice feeling about househopping is you know your friends care about you and they have your back so that was always a comforting feeling staying over at their places.

The distinction between his mom’s harassment and the responsibility-free life of househopping translates into enjoyment of this liberation. However, this freedom is
relative. The lack of responsibilities and the freedom to ‘go wherever, whenever’ is a liberation from his mom’s restrictions. As the other stories I have presented suggest, there were new responsibilities and restrictions presented with Seth’s househopping. He suggests as much:

Seth: When I stayed with my friend X I would hear his parents giving him a hard time about it. It’s their house, not his house, so…that would make me feel guilty like I’m intruding on their family. And um, it makes me wonder how much longer can I be here cuz I really don’t want to go back to my mom. That was like, not an option for me. Always the feeling of intruding and not being…

Jeff: Is that feeling, does that go over all the places that you stayed? You kind of feel like you’re intruding a little bit?

Seth: Yeah, kinda, yeah. Like, it makes me feel that, deep down, I’m not really wanted here.

This feeling of intrusion contributes to a continued feeling of being not-at-home, despite his earlier suggestions of freedom (that many young men articulated as part of ideal homes). This is perhaps not contradictory. Seth might identify the freedom of househopping as ideal in an effort to capture a feeling of being-at-home that he did not feel when living with his mom. That is seems illusory is less important than his yearning to escape the not-at-home feeling.

The gap between these young men’s articulations of ideal homes and real homes suggests their alienation from conventional or normative ideas of what makes a home. Their transience and unstable housing situations flow from their oft-identified feeling of being not-at-home even when they were previously housed (often living with parents). What results is their continued separation from the mechanisms that empower home making in terms of home-as-residence. Their disaffection with notions of home is palpable. Sometimes they adopt notions of home that lack the affective grounding of the
ideal homes they desire. For a young man like Zgune Cluned (22 years old), this means adopting a functional, pragmatic view of home:


This returns us to house and home. For Zgune Cluned, the site that offers such basic amenities becomes home, despite its lack of affective or emotional meaning. Such is the powerful longing to escape the feeling of being not-at-home.

‘A home should be…’

In contrast with what these young men articulate about real/lived homes, when they talk about idealized homes, they suggest uniformly positive-valenced meanings. These include fun, eating food, ‘head space’, peace, sharing feelings with people, routine, ‘a place to put your stuff’, security, ‘belongingness’, certainty, permanence, comfort, love, freedom, personal space, privacy, a partner, family, relaxation, safety, being alone, or a ‘loving mom’. Thus, in describing what an ideal home is, these young men consistently articulate feelings and senses that emphasize permanence, comfort and safety. These match up with previous scholarly work that has evinced normative and conventional definitions of ideal homes (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Domosh, 1998; Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008; Mallett, 2004; McDowell, 1997; Meth, 2003). Notably, however, depictions of ideal homes do not always include family or even other people. Sometimes these young men will indicate that an ideal home does not include family, other times it does, and still other times it includes family but also personal and private space.
The emotional and affective dimensions suggested here are captured nicely by Alex (18 years old) when I ask him what makes ‘home’. He responds:

Alex: A home should be somewhere you’re at home, where you’re at peace. People you love there. There’s like, family, you know? Usually it’s not even necessarily blood, it’s people you consider family. They can build a home, you know? What’s left to you. So home is like, it’s like, love.

Alex also indicates the process involved in making home, suggesting that one can ‘build a home’. While he indicates that this might involve family, he backs off that, suggesting that it can be with ‘people you consider family’. Many participants articulated similar feelings about friends and family, such as Webbz (19 years old), who suggested home is about having a ‘family environment’:

Webbz: Home where you can call home is basically a family environment, family or friend environment if you call it, if you’re renting with friends. Basically, something, you know? That you just, come back to the den and appreciate together. If I have a house, I don’t have many people come to my house cuz why? It’s not the chilling house, know what I mean? That’s a place I can call home. Just me and my people and we do whatever we’re doing, you know?

The exercise of control Webbz suggests, in limiting how many people are coming to his house, is important for many young men. Despite the fact that many of them suggest having family or others to live with, they also indicate the importance of privacy and personal space. George (18 years old) stresses the importance of these while simultaneously suggesting how ‘love’ can be found in a multitude of places other than home:

George: Like well like, I think it has to be yours, you know? No one can tell you that you have to leave. You have to have some privacy, your own personal space. Um, pretty much I wouldn’t say love and all that stuff cuz there’s love here, there’s love back at your house and there’s love at your friend’s house. I wouldn’t say it’s
necessary, but...it is necessary but like, you know, it’s just not a main factor for home. Yeah. It’s just like, any place that’s yours or it’s private.

This tension between privacy and living with others was very common in discussion about ideal homes. The Winged Pig (17 years old) was very succinct when I asked who is present in his ideal home. He replied ‘Well, alone. By myself’, which was common among young men who disliked the people with whom they have lived recently. Still, many young men acknowledged the need for living with other people to achieving a sense of home. C speaks from a position of more experience than many of my interviewees, and he suggests that

C: Somebody has to be home. Somebody has to be home. It doesn’t have to be a man, but somebody has to be home. To, like, keep the home together. That’s some real shit. My mom was like that person back when we were young. At a very young age she started working too and I was out at my grandparents’ place. That’s how my grandparents and I got into that, you know, good relationship that I didn’t have with my parents. That’s the main thing, I think. Honestly, as a grown man watching the world, that’s what it is. You know, we focus so much on these financials and the ability, and making sure you got a good credit score and all that shit.

His final sentence points to an awareness of the financial aspect of ‘home’, of the economics of middle-class nuclear familyhood. He disagrees with these conventional norms, however, and indicates simply that to experience home is to do so with other people, but also suggests the presence of a parent at home as being important for raising children (C has a young daughter)

These other people, as indicated previously, are not always family, but in many cases they are. LL (21 years old) and I are talking about what makes a good home, what makes an ideal home. In talking about the home he grew up in, living with his mom, he utters the line I used as the title of the previous section, about any home other than that one being his ‘place of residence’: 
LL: I would say home is...you have a comfortable feeling when you’re in the location. Um, to me I would say home is my mom’s home because that’s where I grew up and that’s where all my past is, like my childhood. I have people around there that I could share my feelings with and it’s not just anybody that’s around me. It’s my family. So I would say that, I would call that my home. Like, other places where I move to I would say that’s my place of residence right now, you know?

This distinction is integral to understanding LL’s conception of how feeling and emotion play into his ideas of home. For him the affective pleasure that vibrates through his mom’s home includes comfort, memories of childhood and familiar people. This sensation is noticeably stripped from the unsentimental representation of LL’s subsequent homes as ‘place[s] of residence’. Such a formal designation suggests his inability to make a home for himself in the three years since he has lived with his mom.

For several of the young men I talked to who had children, fatherhood figured prominently in their conception of what home life should look like. Sean (26 years old) has a new baby daughter, held at the time of the interview in the custody of the Children’s Aid Society, and the baby’s mother is in prison (but to be released soon\(^1\)). When he and I discuss his future and I ask him if he imagines himself living with them, he suggests he does and wistfully elaborates on the ‘type’ of life he wants:

Sean: I would love, love that. That’s what I’m trying to show this girl, you know? I’m trying to show her that’s the type of man I am. She has a little sister still with her and I want her to move in when I get that place over there, you know? So I can have that family. When I told her that she kind of got quiet, you know? And I had an understanding, you know? And that’s what I want. And that would brighten up, that would shine the light again, you know? Yeah, I wanna have a family, you know? I wanna come home like a dad and my kids are there. That’s the type of life I want. But that girl, I don’t think they know that I even think like that, but that’s what I want.

Despite the fact that Sean is a dad, he feels the need to build a more conventional family home situation, indicating his sense of what an ideal home would look like. The use of
the light/darkness metaphor indicates his feeling of the rightness of a traditional home situation in which the father works outside the home (‘I wanna come home like a dad’) and returns home in the evening.

Bonton, too, closely ties his ideal home with a loving relationship with a woman. Having grown up in foster homes and lived in and out of shelters as a teenager, he closely ties his relationship to a potential partner to what the home might look like. As the following conversation demonstrates, Bonton idealizes both partner and home together:

Bonton: I want to get my own housing, I want…

Jeff: Like, an apartment or something like that?

Bonton: Yeah, get my own apartment just like a one room, you know, a little kitchen, you know, a little living room and just build off of that, you know? Me personally, my structure of living at home is that I’m trying to find somebody who is actually willing, you know what I mean, who doesn’t smoke drugs, like, who’s clean…

Jeff: Why’s that? Why do you want that?

Bonton: Because like all, like, through living in group homes and foster homes, living place to place, place to place, it’s like you go to all these places, you know so many people, it’s not really home, you know? It’s somewhere you had to be, somewhere that you were trying to change but it never changed. Everybody does the same thing no matter where you go. It’s not like you find a normal [girl], drink who doesn’t smoke weed, barely drinks, drinks like from time to time, she can relax, you know, she wants to live life, she wants a job, she wants school, you know what I mean? She wants everything, yeah. And that’s what I want, like a structure like that…

Jeff: So wait, but for you then home might be having your own place, maybe living with a girl?

Bonton: That I could understand, you know, you’re not trying to get her pregnant, she’s doing her own thing and you’re doing your own thing and at the end of the day you know you got somebody to come home to who loves you and you love them, you know? And it’s not a constant war back and forth, like where are you at? Who you with and blah blah blah. It’s normal, you know? Like, ‘Hey, where you at? You out with a couple friends? That’s cool, I’ll see you in a couple of hours’, not
that thing ‘Where you at? Are you with this guy? I don’t like that guy! I want you to leave right now!’ Blah blah blah, you know?

Bonton has ideals for both his potential partner and potential home and these two are thoroughly mixed. He puts significant pressure on this ideal woman, a person who would seemingly be present at the house when he gets home, but does not pressure him with undue expectations. Elsewhere in the interview Bonton develops his ideas about his ideal woman, the moderate drinker who can relax, but also has career and scholastic aspirations. The desire for such a woman mirrors his goals for himself. As such, his ideal home, his partner and his self become enmeshed in this one idealized construction.

Finally, many other interviewees derive a sense of being-at-home not from the external creation of a home atmosphere (such as the created-by-mom in LL’s depiction), but from the freedom to do what they will with the space. This includes the simple materialism of deciding where the furniture is placed in the bedroom or whether the bed might be better placed in the living room for late-night bouts of PS3-playing. For John, this ability to change the home environment is important for making home:

John: You have to be able to know you can change things about it, that it’s not stuck the way it is forever. You can always change it, you can always manoeuvre it, it can always be whatever you want it to be. It’s your house, it’s your home. It’s where you live. No one can tell you what you can do in your own place, especially if you’re paying rent. It’s just like, besides your landlord, sign some agreement if you sign some agreement that says you can’t do something you can do right about whatever you want next to the laws, you know? So it’s just freedom, you know? Like, home is where you feel free and calm and like, you feel like you can do things on your own schedule, you know, you don’t have to always work the schedule of the world, you know?

John is not so specific to suggest what it means to ‘manoeuvre’ a home, but flexibility and freedom to choose figure clearly in his depiction of the ideal home. He also senses that what he might choose to do with his home (or could potentially choose to do) is
affected by the lease he signs and the laws that govern society. Such invocations of nearly unadulterated freedom suggest that John has rarely enjoyed such freedoms. By invoking the legal framework of laws and leases, John indicates that in the time he was living with his family, he could not exercise such freedoms. Now that he is away from his mom, he can (potentially, ideally).

‘Common ground’

There is clearly a great disjuncture between the idealized notions of ‘home’ and actual lived experience of it for the young men of colour in this study. This is unsurprising, given that researchers have argued this is often the case for many people (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Domosh, 1998; Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008; Mallett, 2004; McDowell, 1997; Meth, 2003). The stories they tell about their lived experiences of ‘home’ make the house-as-home the primary referent, a product of taking on the signifier ‘homeless’. Despite their experiences of alienation and being not-at-home in the many home-spaces of their lives, they often tell stories about spatialized home-making practices that occur outside the normalized house-as-home. This broadened sense of ‘home’ moves beyond the space of the house or apartment to take shape in ‘friendly spaces’, neighbourhoods, communities, the city, and the nation. These alternate belongings allow for alternative developments of feeling-at-home in the context of homelessness and being not-at-home. They articulate a place-making and home-making on different scales from the normative ways of thinking about home, the latter of which guided even the conversations I had with these young men.
Friendly Spaces

The first of these alternative ‘home-spaces’ are what I loosely call ‘friendly spaces’, meaning not necessarily spaces that are friendly to homeless youth, but micro- and medium-scale spaces formed through the association with friends and peers. In the following quotation, Bonton and I are discussing his friends with whom he ‘grew up’ and the emotional and physical support network they provide. Doing the interview in the space of College Park in downtown Toronto, he looks around and takes in ten people he knows and suggests that network functions as a ‘family’ removed from blood ties:

Bonton: Mostly all my friends, he’s over there, my next friend’s over there, he’s just over there, like right now I’m looking at like ten people I know in this park alone. You know what I mean? I grew up with these guys, so every time I see them I feel that they’re a little bit more family to me cuz like, we always see each other and you know, they’re there. When I’m down they’ll try to cheer me up, when they’re down I’ll cheer them up, you know, we’ll smoke weed together, we chill, we party, we relax, like, you know. If you don’t have nowhere to go at least one of us will try to pick up and try to put us somewhere, you know?

The latter point is in regards to housing, but the broader conception involves home-making in the space of College Park and downtown more generally. Bonton suggests his friends satisfy in some ways some of the idealized meanings of ‘home’ discussed previously. This sentiment is representative of several discussions I had with young men about groups of friends, particularly in downtown spaces. The seemingly simple function ‘they’re there’ creates a social network that contrasts with what Blackjack suggested in saying ‘you’re just there’. The collectivity of downtown street youth provides a sense of home even outside home-as-residence spaces.
Other young men found belonging in ‘gang’ subcultures, which tend to be quite spatially-organized (and territorial). DH (26 years old) discusses his childhood and teenage years and reflects on how relationships with other young men in the area allowed him to achieve a ‘common ground’ and ‘family feeling’:

DH: Take for instance, okay, my childhood I was pretty much neglected. I’m trying, so with that neglect you’re trying to find something to keep you steady and when I went, when I was introduced to my area in that sense and I saw the sense of stability, the sense of common ground and the family feeling of it, you know? You tend to nurture it, you know? You tend to wanna, you know? You wanna be involved, so if one of the older guys, we call them the older heads, one of them if they tell you, oh, this guy did something to me, we have to do something about it, you wanna be the first one be like I’ma do it! I’ma do it! Because you wanna make sure. It’s like having a father figure in place or having a mother figure in place to nurture you to health. If you have, if I had that structure, that family structure, even in the area that I grew up in, if I didn’t have that mother or father to be like, don’t worry, we’re gonna get through things, talk about, you know. To nurture you instead of those guys, then I wouldn’t be the way how I am.

DH’s analysis of his life is a psycho-social interpretation of the spatiality of friendship and social place-making. His explicitly spatial metaphor ‘common ground’ is only a metaphor insofar as it abstracts from the local space of the Scarborough neighbourhood he is talking about to incorporate social relationships into a home-making spatiality. Notably, DH, like Bonton, invokes notions of ‘home’ such as nurturance and family, which mirror what scholars articulate about idealized notions of home.

These are localized relationships. The connections between people and places are what allow for the manifestation of these ‘nurturing’ relationships. As such, DH articulates a spatial politics that is tied to the small-scale space of the ‘area’, but the home-making and sense of belonging that results is produced outside of the space of the ‘house-as-home’.
Neighbourhood and Community

Many young men of colour have very close emotional ties to particular neighbourhoods in spaces of the GTA. These ties come up in discussions of ‘home’, but also in discussions of family, work, school, and practices of navigating street-space. Entering into discussions about ‘home’, after participants and I worked through broadening ‘home’ to beyond the house-as-home, ‘neighbourhood’ was the second most popular reference for a home-space. Moreover, neighbourhood affiliations and emotional and affective ties were commonly cited.

Roger and I are discussing if and where he feels at home. He cites the neighbourhood of Jane and Weston in the Weston area of Toronto as a ‘home’:

Roger: I consider a neighbourhood like my home. Yeah. Jane and Weston, that’s where I was born and raised. That’s my house, that’s my home. I’m most comfortable in that area.

J: So what type of things, what type of feelings does that place kind of make you feel? Know what I mean?

Roger: Just memories from kids growing up. Just reminds me of all my good, happy days when I didn’t have to give a shit about nothing. Just makes me, I don’t know, makes me feel good. I didn’t have a care in the world. Just had to chill with my friends. Hang out, go to school, get suspended, come home. Pig out, that was my life back then. Nothing.

Roger does not live in Jane and Weston neighbourhood, but because it is the area in which he grew up, the feeling of home remains. Some of the aspects of the neighbourhood that help create the feeling of home are comfort, happiness, lack of responsibility, friends, and food. There is thus a temporal-spatial relationship Roger has with Jane and Weston, since many of the feelings and aspects of the neighbourhood that
generate ‘home’ are unlikely to remain if and when he returns. Home is a past space for Roger in this case.

Roger does not return with any regularity to his old neighbourhood, but the feeling of home lingers. Others who suggested a ‘home’ feeling to a particular neighbourhood talked explicitly about going back and what that return might mean. Omega (19 years old) has a similar temporal-spatial relationship with the neighbourhood in which he grew up, but feels that he could return because he maintains a ‘cool’ relationship with the place and the people in it. We enter the discussion when I ask him what feels like ‘home’ to him:

Omega: The neighbourhood. Yeah, everyone knew me. Cuz everyone knew who I was since I was a kid, you know. I walked past the neighbourhood, walk through the plaza, I see two people I already know, say from school, something like that, say hi to them, we’ll meet up from there, all three of us go to the plaza. These are not even my best friends. These are people in the neighbourhood that I know. We’ll go to the plaza, get something to eat, come back, I’ll see my best friends, now it’s five of us instead of three of us, you know, like I’m cool with the neighbourhood since I was a kid. Now I moved out. I could still go there sometimes, say hi, what’s up. See some of the people, like all the friends who are…all the people I knew, like right now they’d probably be like your [Jeff’s] age or like, twenty-five or twenty-four. Like, I knew a lot of them. I’m the type of guy who was friendly. Like, I’ll talk to people who are my age or older than me, you know? Sometimes even younger than me, doesn’t matter, I’ll talk to them.

The emotional comfort expressed here is similar to that suggested by Roger. Omega meets with friends, goes to school, goes to the plaza, but all with friends, suggesting the integral character of friends (and relationships more generally) to crafting a neighbourhood space as ‘home’. There is an intensely socio-spatial aspect to the story, as he suggests he walks through the neighbourhood, meets two friends, then moves further through the neighbourhood, to the plaza, where they meet two more. This trajectory suggests that movement through the neighbourhood might result in the comfort and
familiarity that often come with feelings of home. In the latter part of the quotation Omega reflects on the character of the neighbourhood today, indicating that the people with whom he socialized would be older (and older than him), though he thinks they would still be friendly because he is and has always been friendly. I did not clarify whether ‘I could still go there sometimes’ meant he does return, but as in Roger’s story, the neighbourhood as home again appears to be a home in the past, but providing an affective anchor (a spatial referent) in the city.

Many young men I talked to had experience with gangs, a result of the socio-spatial structure of poverty in the GTA. Solo reflects on the role gang culture plays being comfortable with a neighbourhood. Notably, he suggests that while gang territoriality helps forge strong neighbourhood affiliations, he implies that it also has an effect even outside the gang. Having heard from many young men the important role ‘neighbourhood’ plays in the feeling of comfort in the city, I ask Solo about it:

Solo: Yeah, you can definitely get used to your neighbourhood, yeah. I’ve been part of a gang and the neighbourhood is everything. You don’t come over here if you’re not from here. You’re not supposed to. So yeah, the neighbourhood does become. When you grow up with nothing, it becomes everything you’ve got. The name becomes very, means a lot to you, you know? Cuz you have nothing else, you know? Other kids have cars, scholarships to go to college. You have nothing, you have your moms giving you business and a little weed to get your mind straight, that’s it. Other than that you have your name and your word and those two things mean a lot, you know? And so, you just find a couple other kids that are like you around the neighbourhood and next thing you know, we’re like family. And I won’t let anyone disrespect your name and you won’t let anyone disrespect my name and we’ll keep it like that.

Here, neighbourhood works its way into personal subjectivity. Solo suggests that a person ‘has’ her or his ‘name and word’ and they work to protect that association. He offers a fairly sophisticated interpretation of gang culture and territoriality and why these exist,
suggesting they are the result of material lack. Note also the production of alternative families, as neighbourhood friends very quickly become ‘like family’ and they defend each other from disrespect. The sense of belonging and feeling of home is thus very spatialized, associated and felt in the space of the neighbourhood.

The association of people in social space might actually help tie people to particular areas where they have built (or made) a feeling of home. As with Sean and O’s arguments about the affective ties to certain areas (from Chapter 4), there is a ‘stickiness’ that develops when people form emotional ties to neighbourhoods. DH suggests it has to do with being raised within a community in Scarborough and developing a kind of familial love for that community:

DH: It’s how I was raised. We were raised in a community. Communities fight with other communities. You either fight with the communities or you have love for the communities, you know? I think being in prison helped strengthen the love of the communities, but for me to go to another block and mingle with them and be friends with the, I can’t do that, cuz I’ve known my people for so long and my people we already fight with each other, we already backstab each other, we already, do stupid things to each other. Why am I gonna be doing that in another place, to go find new friends to do the same stupid shit I’m doing with new people. I might as well do with my own people and ride with my people. Instead of going somewhere else, that’s just how I was brought up.

Again, the socio-spatial relationship between particular people (‘my people’) and place creates the affective and emotional (as well as practical and pragmatic) ties between young men and their neighbourhoods. Many young men articulated these neighbourhood connections even when they have long moved away from the area (as had Roger and Omega). The issue of mobility between different neighbourhoods (and communities of people) came up when young men were forced to move for various reasons. Cruz moved from his parents’ home in Brampton to OPP, the emergency shelter, and explains to me
the lack of connection he has to the area, which goes beyond pragmatics such as not knowing people. He discusses the people in the area of Mississauga around OPP:

Cruz: I don’t know, they’re just doing their daily lives, you know? They’re either working, you know, like, you just bump into people a lot, especially if I’m around in the community, you know? And I’m not from the community. I lived out here, but I don’t, like, you know, like, say I am from around here. You know, like, I’m just, I’m pretty, I like to consider myself a tourist out there. It’s different out here. There’s different people. I’m doing other things, I’m trying to get back into school. There’s a whole bunch of different people. It’s like a new life for me.

Cruz makes an important distinction between ‘living’ and being ‘from’ a certain neighbourhood/community, suggesting that he feels like a ‘tourist’ in the area around OPP. This too suggests the temporal-spatial connection between time spent in an area and generating the feeling of home. Thus, even though the OPP area is technically where Cruz is ‘living’, he maintains his spatial ties to other areas of Toronto (such as Brampton, where he would likely suggest he is ‘from’). Feeling like a tourist indicates that Cruz builds his sense of belonging elsewhere.

The City, the Nation

Finally, several young men articulated feeling ‘home’ on a very large scale including both the city (of Toronto) and the nation (Canada). Mr. Anonymous explicitly states that he has never had a house that felt like a home, indicating that his residence spaces were ‘shattered’: ‘It was just broken, that’s the only way I can describe it, it was broken and the pieces were too shattered even to try to figure out where to begin fitting them together’. When I press him on the issue of feeling ‘home’, he suggests the ‘whole city’, invoking connections to the ‘underworld’ of the city as an entirety:
Mr. Anonymous: If I could, if I was to consider anywhere a home I would say this whole city is my home. Nowhere in particular in this whole city, I know that, I know, I know these, uh, what people refer to as, like, I believe it’s the underworld, like, I know that, you know what I mean, like, I know that just as well as I know myself to the point that it’s natural for me to be able to move within that corrupted environment more than it is to be doing what I’m doing now.

This idea of city-as-home goes beyond the specificity of neighbourhood as home, but still incorporates a spatiality: that of the underground. Here Mr. Anonymous is referring to gang culture, drugs, alternative economics, violence, and so on. He refers to his present situation (‘what I’m doing now’) in a work mentorship program at Evergreen Yonge Street Mission that ostensibly uses his experience in such cultures to help other young men transition to more ‘normative’ lives. He argues that this goes against his learned ‘nature’, however, and that the ‘underground’ of Toronto has provided a make-shift home for most of his life.

Other young men, particularly those who have spent time outside of Canada or those whose parents who were born and/or have lived extensively outside Canada, suggested they felt ‘Canadian’, an affinity for nation-as-home. This was not particularly common, but warrants inclusion here since it functions as a home-space beyond the structures of home-as-residence. Academic and I are discussing what makes ‘home’ and he relates a story about how his ideas of home are relational to his mother’s ideas of home. He opens by suggesting that most people have similar ideas of what makes home, an explicit recognition of the ‘normative’ ideas of home, and then moves on to contrasting his and his mother’s ideas:

Academic: I think most people have the same ideas of what home is like. I know for my mom, her version of home, it’s Trinidad. When I was in Trinidad my version of home was in Canada. So I said, oh, I want to go home. Because I’m
Canadian. My mom said this is home for her. She loved it. This is where she grew up, she had friends. It was home. For me, I liked it for, you know, a weekend it was a nice tropical country. I used to have smoothies, whatever, underneath the trees eating, you know, fruits, mangoes, climb the trees, watch somebody fall, laugh. There was a guy, he was spinning, uh, a piece of meat, what’s that? He’s like, oh, it’s iguana. Like, iguana! You’re eating iguana?... Whereas in Canada, uh, when I came back my version of home was just being in Canada. It was like, a fast kind of pace kind of lifestyle in comparison to Trinidad where everything’s slower, you know?

This story relates to Cruz’s idea of being a ‘tourist’. Academic literally was a tourist in Trinidad when he visited with his mother, which helped him develop his sense of belonging to the Canadian nation as ‘Canadian’. Such a suggestion challenges normative understandings of home and homelessness that privilege the site of the house or apartment.

**Conclusions**

The young men of colour I talked with articulate a wide range of experiences and ideals of ‘home’. They feel both alienated by the disjuncture between their idealized notions of home and their lived experiences of being not-at-home. Having grown up in the Canadian context of Toronto, they have been exposed to the normative discourse of the idealized white, middle-class, nuclear-family household that privileges the site of the house or apartment. Their lived experiences of homes, both their own and others’ (through househopping, etc.), point to a different set of affective responses (including captivity, confusion, and stress). However, despite this distinct feeling of being not-at-home regarding the site of the house or apartment, the young men in this research
articulate feeling ‘home’ as a spatial connection with other spaces, such as ‘friendly spaces’, neighbourhood/community, and city/nation.

These latter connections support research that argues for a broader conception of ‘home’ than normative conceptions allow. Moreover, the stories these young men tell about being alienated from home-spaces suggest that such normative ideals can actually be damaging to young people. The connections between place and people suggest the intensely spatial character of these alternate home feelings. This also provides evidence that home is structured by both feeling and place. As Gorman-Murray suggests, home is material and affective (2007). Robinson, in her research with homeless youth, zeroed in on the words of one interviewee, who suggested that home should be ‘spaceful’ (2005). Robinson indicates that such spaces encourage ‘different ways of inhabiting the world’ (2005). My research provides further evidence of this notion, by illustrating the various ‘spaceful’ ways young men of colour create ‘home’ despite being alienated from what even they cite as the ‘normal’ form of home.

This chapter also provides evidence for the spatial constitution of ‘normative’ ideas of home. ‘Home’ in the normative sense is revealed as a spatially and racially structured privilege that is unequally accessible. For the young men of colour in my research, as they move away from normative idealized forms of home (because they find themselves unable to make it), those norms gain power in imagination, reinforcing the idealization. Homelessness helps to spatially reify normative ideas of home.

Finally, the idealized versions of ‘home’ these young men articulate are different from what bell hooks argues for ‘homeplace’. This is because the idealized versions of home suggested here are based on normative white, middle-class, nuclear family values
that specify narrow emotional criteria for the creation and maintenance of home. It is thus particular aspects of their idealized notions of home that serve to produce the feeling of being not-at-home, despite the fact that many of them can simultaneously articulate a sense of belonging and feeling of home in a variety of spaces.

The liberal idea of home, based upon the normative standards suggested above, functions within broader structures of oppression such as racism and sexism. hooks developed a term for the intersection of these structures of oppression that I think is appropriate here: ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ (2009: 20). The normative discourse of home in Western countries (and North America and Canada more particularly) is imperialist because it colonizes minds and imaginations (Thiong’o, 1968), is white supremacist because it is based on white nuclear family values, is capitalist in emphasizing middle-class relations, and is patriarchal because it suggests the role for men is to provide for the ‘household’. Despite suggesting a variety of home-space associations, young men of colour feel this norm and feel the failure of not living up to it. What results is a complicated alienation from the city in which they exist, leaving them to dream of what many of the city’s denizens have, a place in which they can ‘live where [they] fucking sleep’.
Chapter 6

‘Gone, leave, go, move, vanish’: Public Space and (In)Visibilities

Introduction

There are many dimensions to visibility for young men of colour experiencing homelessness. The first we must wrestle with because it comes with their precarious housing is the experience of ‘invisible homelessness’ in distinction from ‘visible homelessness’, the latter of which refers to people living their lives in full public and policy view. One problem with such a designation is that it threatens to write the material experiences of ‘invisibly’ homeless people out of public spaces. This research shows such ‘invisible’ people have decidedly material and visible experiences in public spaces. As such, it is important to consider the varied other forms of (in)visibility that they occupy and manifest. First, there is the varying visibility of race and racial processes in their lives, which depend in part on their feel of racial and affective vibrations. Secondly, there is the invisibility of internal struggles, the figurative invisibility of what Dear and Wolch called ‘landscapes of despair’ (1987 – Whitzman notes this invisibility for women experiencing homelessness in her 2007 study). Thirdly, there is the material visibility of an ‘undesirable’ with multiple ‘identities’. Finally, there is their varying occupation and presence in public, pseudo-public and private spaces. These literatures do not consider the various ways these (in)visibilities relate and whether they overlap or are coincidental. Are young men of colour experiencing homelessness affected by each of these invisibilities? Do some have greater impacts on their lives than others? Are (in)visibilities
something they can tactfully manage? This chapter illustrates the indeterminate character of the relationships between multiple (in)visibilities. At times these young men become hyper-visible, such as in encounters with police, but more often (and even during those police encounters), (in)visibilities operate fluidly and thus relate in dynamic and contingent ways.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, ‘(In)Visibilities’, I develop my conceptualization of (in)visibilities. In the second, ‘How it’s done: (In)Visibilities’, I provide evidence for this conceptualization from the lives of the young men with whom I spoke.

(In)Visibilities

Visibilities and Public Space

Much of the literature on public space and homelessness focuses on the political potential and necessity of public spaces to the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Don Mitchell, one of the key proponents of this line of argument, argues that public spaces serve as ‘spaces of representation’ where homeless people can make themselves (and their issues) visible (2003: 33). In this manner, I suggest public spaces serve a visibilizing function as spaces for the materialization of invisible or intangible issues. The term visibilizing suggests a process or a shifting instead of the staticity and polarity inherent in the terms ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’. It also allows for greater attention to
corporeality in what public space means for people’s identities and bodies than is suggested in Mitchell’s representational framework.

This visibilizing function and the political importance of visibility for homelessness in public spaces have been criticized for being gendered. May et al. argue that work done on social identities, citizenship and urban public spaces present mostly accounts of men ‘carving out a space for themselves (both materially and figuratively) on the streets of a ‘revitalised’ central city’ (2007: 122). Because, they argue, these accounts result in the characterization of street space as masculinized, they take this angle as the jumping-off point for an investigation into women’s experiences of visible homelessness.

Clearly, there are many more complex dimensions to ‘visibility’ than ‘invisible homelessness’ will allow. As such, people’s experiences of multiple simultaneous visibilities and invisibilities must be accounted for in investigations of material experiences of public spaces.

Finally, individuals have political agency when it comes to visibility and invisibility. As I show in this chapter, the young men of colour I interviewed occupy a complex system of invisibilities that they navigate in their daily lives. While they do not have universal control over whether they are visible or not, and to whom, they do illustrate what Cloke, May, and Johnsen (2008) argue: that homeless people are not political or cultural dupes only looking to survive within the current sociospatial order. Rather, they make choices and act upon individual or collective knowledges, both in tactical and haphazard ways. Cloke, May, and Johnsen also argue for alternative futures, as affected by the continued presence of homeless people in the public spaces of postindustrial cities. They argue that this presence can potentially undercut the ideology
of the neoliberal city and can suggest alternative workings of the city and political ideologies. I would suggest that for such alternatives to come to fruition, for public spaces to play this role, we must investigate the complicated relationships between how people do and do not occupy spaces (visibilities), and how this may produce marginalities and exclusions.

In the present case, young men of colour experiencing homelessness certainly experience a kind of ideological and policy invisibility, but it is the complex manner in which they engage with material visibilities that impacts their relationships with urban public spaces. It is this (im)materiality/(in)visibility that I will engage with here.

**Vibrating Whiteness and (In)visibility**

As various invisibilities come together, overlap, intermingle, and intersect, oppressions and racial marginalizations can come to be understood. Invisible homelessness allows for a fruitful engagement with the connections between racism and invisibilities and how both are structured. We must contend with the invisibility of racial processes that are central to the lives of the young men of colour experiencing homelessness in the present research.

Following from the arguments I made in Chapter 4, I argue that this (in)visibilizing influence vibrates in the downtown spaces of Toronto as whiteness. This vibration is not one that is readily noticed as it vibrates constantly and comfortably for many people, including people without white bodies. As Ahmed (2007) argues, many proponents of critical whiteness studies suggest that whiteness gains currency by not
being noticed (such as Dyer, 1997). She also cautions that while this may be true, whiteness only goes unnoticed by white people. I accept this caution, but believe that often when whiteness vibrates, it is not always (or even often) noticed as whiteness. In the spaces of Toronto where it is most strong, I think whiteness is felt and perhaps embodied and/or performed by young men of colour (following Ahmed, 2007).

The varying visibility and invisibility of young men of colour in the GTA has in part to do with this vibrating whiteness. In its stronger vibration in downtown spaces, it shapes how these young men socialize, where they go, and where they do not go. In suburban spaces, where whiteness does not vibrate as strongly, the experience of visibility is different, as their occupation of urban spaces is shaped more strongly by surprising racial emergences of whiteness (in relationships with police and otherwise). In terms of the regional geography of the GTA, the vibrating whiteness of downtown Toronto helps to orient people in specific directions. As Ahmed argues, whiteness ‘orients bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space’ (Ahmed, 2007: 150). Of course, how they ‘take up space’ is also affected by their performances of masculinity and by their youth. I turn now to my discussions of what young men of colour said about visibility and invisibility.
How it’s done: (In)Visibilities

Visibility/Invisibility and hiding

The stories that these young men tell about their experiences in public and pseudo-public spaces suggest variable visibilities and invisibilities. These variations proliferate and materialize in different ways depending on the feel of certain vibrations and composition of affective assemblages. This is different from the ‘invisible’ homelessness of which these guys are ostensibly a part. Depending on their affective feel of vibrations such as the whiteness of some downtown spaces, or the comfortable vibe of Square One (that Cruz feels), they are able to materialize differently, articulating both visibility and invisibility.

On occasion I explained in interviews the scholarly/policy definitions of invisible homelessness to get a sense of how interviewees saw themselves in that context. DH has a better sense than most young men for invisible homelessness, having experienced it for longer (DH is the oldest of my participants). Talking to him about these things, he suggests a balanced conception, including emergences of both visibility and invisibility:

J: Are there times where you’re trying to be more visible, and times where you’re trying to be less visible to whoever or whatever.

DH: Yeah, to my friends. My friends know that um, I don’t have a steady income. I think when I become visible is when I ask for money. Because it just, I don’t know. If you look at it in a different, okay, like, yeah, a visible homeless person would have a sign out there, they’ll be, have a cup maybe, you know? They’re just asking anybody, but like, when I come out of that visible shell is maybe when I ask my friends for a couple, for a dollar, for three dollars to go home. Or if I have to ask the bus driver can I please just get on the bus to go home, I don’t have any money right
now. Those are signs to visible homelessness to me. If I have to call my friend and say I need something to eat, can you come and buy me something to eat, know what I mean? I think, yeah, within myself that’s a sign of visible homelessness.

The first thing to notice in DH’s articulation of visibility/invisibility is the sense of their dynamic and indeterminate character. Neither is a fixed field that a subject occupies, but rather, a person ‘become[s] visible’ based on certain actions or behaviours. For him it is asking for help such as money, a ride on the bus, or food. This sense of dynamic emergence is continued when DH suggests he has a ‘visible shell’, indicating that although his body is visible (phenotype, clothing) as a shell, his sense of self as ‘homeless’ is invisible, suggesting simultaneous (in)visibilities. Notably, this metaphor suggests that this is something he has moderate control over, though like an animal with a shell, he might retreat into it for strategic reasons.

DH also takes the scholarly definition further to include those living in poverty as ‘homeless’, people such as himself. It seems he imagines that he is mostly living his homelessness invisibly, but when his poverty becomes apparent in public spaces and interactions, he becomes visible. We come back to the discussion later in the interview when talking about stress:

DH: Um, cuz the way how I’m taking invisible is, invisible homelessness is where I’m not showing my struggle. That’s how I took invisible homelessness when you were telling me about it. More times like, we’ll say, seven times out of ten, seven times out of the ten, um, percent, no. Seventy percent of my life. Seventy percent of my day is to deal with invisible homelessness. I think, you know? Um…

J: Don’t…but…

DH: I’m just hiding my stress. I do that a lot.
DH offers a significant quantification of the material dimensions of the abstract concept of invisibility. What this hiding indicates is an affective invisibility of the emotive dimensions that make up DH’s daily life. Hiding his stress is how he experiences invisibility and when he does not do it, by showing or reminding people of his poverty, his homelessness materializes as an affective relationship.

The emotional honesty DH irregularly expresses suggests an articulation of (in)visibility as being tied up in bodily expressions. His struggle is continuous (‘seventy percent’ of the time), but the material actions of pleading with the bus driver, extending a word or a hand to a friend, are the bodily responses to the affective environment of homelessness. The body remains visible in public spaces, but certain aspects of his identity are made invisible: he hides while visible.

This sense of ‘hiding’ is something that on occasion comes up in interviews and often involves a mix of material and affective ‘strategies’. Such hiding can be decidedly geographical when it involves strategic invisibility to people or relationships to which a young man does not want to be seen. Matthew (21 years old) describes Toronto in all-encompassing terms as a ‘hiding place’:

Matthew: And it’s such a big place.

J: What’s a big place?

Matthew: Toronto. Toronto’s a hiding place for anyone.

J: Interesting. So do you…a hiding place.

Matthew: You want it to be a hiding place it can be a hiding place.
Invocations of the sheer size of the city are reminiscent of discourses about cities being dense, complex, and chaotic. For Matthew, this feeling likely comes from the experience of having lived elsewhere in Canada, including much smaller towns. The suggestion that the city can be a hiding place if a person wants it to be creates a sense of belonging in the city based on variable invisibilities. This includes the geographical privilege of evasion, whether of material things (people, conflicts) or emotional things (as in DH’s avoidance of visibilizing conflicts). Such avoidances are often based on the material feel of affective dimensions of homelessness. Though they might be able to use the city as a hiding place, the city offers an entirely new set of conflicts, such as challenges to the use of public spaces or problematic racial emergences. As such, ‘hiding’ involves multiple contingencies, racialized, spatialized, and gendered.

**Hiding in Plain Sight**

Kaid (18 years old), too, describes Toronto in terms that suggest the hiding in plain sight of young men of colour. He describes feeling relatively anonymous in Toronto (and Scarborough, to a lesser extent) compared to Peel Region, something he attributes to his inability to find a ‘spot’ in which he feels comfortable and alone in Peel. I ask him about places he goes to be alone, responding to his suggestion that he prefers to be alone rather than with large groups of people:

Kaid: Um, I don’t really have, oh yeah, I guess that was another reason why I didn’t like Peel. I didn’t really have much of my own spot here because it was all malls, houses. But when I was in downtown Toronto or even in Scarborough there were a lot of parks, uh, sort of, you could, in downtown Toronto I could just walk out of
the house and go two streets down to the coffee shop, something, sit there. I guess for me it would be like, a park, um, a coffee shop or yeah, mostly a park or coffee shop.

His suggestion that downtown Toronto affords him his ‘own spot’ indicates material visibility. Indeed, he is sitting in public parks and coffee shops. However, it is the affective dimensions of invisibility, the emotional satisfaction of finding a good ‘spot’, that lead him to prefer Toronto. Notably, he does not suggest homes as places where he can be alone. Rather, public spaces serve as this spot for Kaid. He might be feeling the post-racial whiteness vibration of downtown, suggesting the possibility of untrammelled individuality. This might be why he feels in his ‘own spot’, in place, despite the public and pseudo-public character of the spaces he suggests.

The potential anonymity offered by downtown space is felt too by Roger (18 years old), who is relatively new to street homelessness, having only recently moved away from his mother’s place. Roger is one of the ‘street youth’ in Toronto who prefers the relative freedom of outdoor sleeping to the hostel scene in the city. The following quotation reveals the rhythms of the day for Roger and how those rhythms interact with his visibility/invisibility. When I ask him about how he spends his days, he suggests a routinization:

Roger: Well, I wake up in Ryerson elementary school in the back corner of the playground. Nobody can see, well, they see us, but nobody cares, right? So far back. And then once everybody woke up at like ten o’clock, something like that we go to YouthLink and then when YouthLink closes at twelve we come up to the Apple Store. We go to the Apple Store for about ten minutes. Come up to Evergreen, chill at Evergreen for like two hours, then we go to Covenant House and then back down to the Apple Store and then whatever happens from there happens from there. Kind of spur of the moment, kind of.
Roger’s visibility in the school yard where he sleeps with some friends should ostensibly exclude him from the ranks of the invisibly homeless. However, his narrative suggests several interrelated kinds of (in)visibilities in which he lives. First, his visibility is questionable in the school yard. As he suggests, there is a difference between being seen and being cared about. This indicates a somewhat strategic sense of the space of the school yard: as long as they are away before the school children arrive, they are ignored. Secondly, his use of the Apple Store, which was common among youth I talked to downtown, indicates his sliding in and out of visibility. Young men such as Roger use the Apple Store for the internet, checking email, Facebook and making phone calls, all of which happens for free. It also happens in a social environment in which they can talk with friends (unlike the library, which also offers most of those services). At the Apple Store, Roger slips into visibility insofar as he appears in public space, dressed perhaps in the clothes he wore last night, but he slips also into invisibility contingently as a ‘street youth’. Thus, there exist simultaneous (in)visibilities that Roger variously occupies and moves into and away from. When Roger suggests that his days are ‘kind of spur of the moment’, the metaphor applies to his visibility, as it shifts and adapts as he moves through the city.

An important part of Roger’s success at sleeping in public spaces is the friends he chills with, who are primarily white. Roger himself is mixed-race, telling me when we met that he is half-black (Guyanese and Italian). This is important because sleeping in public spaces in Toronto is a racialized activity. The presence of white bodies sleeping in public spaces, while not accepted, is at least understood and expected. This understanding and expectation contributes to the vibrating whiteness downtown that affects the lives of
the young men of colour to whom I talked. For Roger this means entrance into a social group (‘street youth’) with which he must adopt the universalized individuality that allows for the temporary acceptance of certain types of bodies in spaces in which they ostensibly do not belong.

**Vanishing**

As a counter-point to the idea of ‘hiding in plain sight’, some youth suggested the need to be hidden from certain eyes, at certain times or in certain circumstances. For some, such as TJ (19 years old), this is described in ghostly spatial terms: vanishing. While TJ is cagey in describing why he might want to hide from the cops, the over-policing that many of these young men suggested in interviews makes the reasons obvious. Their relationships with cops are contentious and they often characterize the cops as predatory. TJ describes attempting to hide from the cops, which involves hiding indoors as well as away from the immediate area:

J: What are some of the types of things you have to do to avoid the cops?

TJ: Hide.

J: How do you hide, though?

TJ: How do you hide? Get the fuck out the area (laughs). That’s how it is. Get the fuck out. You don’t put yourself outside, that’s how it is. You don’t come outside. You have everything you need. Once you’re inside, you have it, you’re inside. It doesn’t matter where. Cuz no one knows where, it’s just anywhere. Get the fuck out, you know?

J: Does it make any difference…summer of winter?
TJ: Who cares, gone, leave, go, move. Vanish. Your mom’s not supposed to even talk to you. Much less the feds.

The list ‘gone, leave, go, move…vanish’ suggests a relationship to the city that emphasizes dynamism, mobility, and intentionality. It also suggests a relationship to city space based on coercion. Even though young men like TJ might not be doing anything illegal, their position relative to the cops means that they must be ready to ‘vanish’ on the spur of the moment. Such an edgy relationship to urban space can potentially alienate them from affective environments in which they are comfortable. An important part of TJ’s vanishing is staying indoors, away from cop eyes on the street. When I ask about something he suggested earlier, going to the mall, he replies that there is a spatial component of proximity to the hiding:

J: But you just said you go to the mall to hang out. That’s kind of outside, right?

TJ: No, the mall doesn’t have to be in the area. The mall can be like north, way up north. A little cubicle mall. Yeah, come on, the mall can be like that, bro. You just walk the place, look around, then you go back. Who cares! This is what it is! Gotta deal with it. Get out, where I’m going, transportation. Don’t stop, bro.

This strategy of continued mobility, of not remaining in one place, suggests an avoidance of the cops and the racial emergence that they often force. In this way young men such as TJ are able to form a fluid relationship to city space, though one in which they might need to be aware of their race and gender and the ways those might assemble into significance in their navigation of those spaces. It is important to note that there is a power imbalance implicit in this relationship to city space and to other users of city spaces. TJ’s indication that ‘this is what it is’ suggests that his performance of masculine
evasion, of individual autonomy in avoiding cops or other people, is not based on his sole purview. This continued mobility and variable visibility contributes to their continued homelessness and makes finding permanent housing difficult.

The invisibility that vanishing implies is not unique to TJ. Bonton (23 years old) describes using the public transit in Toronto with very limited income and access to TTC tokens. Though he stresses that he often pays his fare, he relates a story of a time he was caught attempting to sneak into the subway station:

Bonton: Yeah, I’ve been caught. But I never got the ticket. I was at main station and I was on the outside cuz I was coming up, right? I decided to pull out a cigarette, right? I had a cigarette and I pulled it out and I sparked it and I was waiting at the front. You know, like, the guideline where smoke beyond this...I was sitting there smoking and then then I walked back in, making it look like I walked out to have a cigarette and come back in and they pulled me over. They’re like yo, they were gonna give me like a $400 ticket! It was like, $500 but they were going to give me a $400 ticket cuz they were like, how’d you come out? I’m like, yo, I came out to have a cigarette. They looked at me, like, no you didn’t. We just were watching on the camera. I’m like, if you guys were really watching on the camera, you would have seen me walk out. I was making up a lot of bullshit, you know? And then after these two security guards looked at me and they were just like, let this go. They just pulled me into the station and walked me down to the train and told me to get on. They were like, next time you do it we’re going to give you a ticket. And I was gone, man.

There is a lot going on in this story. One possible reading is that this story describes a forced emergence of race based on the increase in racial vibration. Bonton’s efforts are to slip invisibly into hopping the train, though it fails when his act is interpreted as transgressive by the security guards, who likely were watching as they said. His final comment ‘I was gone, man’ indicates a return to the ethereal from which he was forced. Such invisibility is attempted as strategic, though, and the security guards’ interruption of this invisibility actually seems to suggest their recognition of Bonton’s situation (poverty,
homelessness). This indicates an emergence of a racial event based on the assemblage of Bonton, his clothes (baggy), his ‘bullshit’, the guards, the cigarette, platform, and so on. As such, he might never have emerged as visible, but what materialized was the vibration of race, relating to his homelessness and poverty through the event of the confrontation.

His attempt to get on the train is framed in this story by one failed effort. This failed effort also depicts an edge, one edge of the ‘edgy’ downtown (as C calls it). It is perhaps on these edges where the boundaries between visibility and invisibility are shaped. Bonton experiences the simultaneity of various forms of his in/visibility: as homeless, as a man of colour, as a young man, as a fare-shirker. As he moves through the city, he experiences each of these in varying degrees, dependent on his feeling of different vibrations and his relationships with urban space.

‘Activities’ in Public Space

The variable visibility and invisibility that these young men experience and enact gets negotiated in large part through public and pseudo-public spaces. The relative mundane character of what most of them do in public space does not mean that their relationship with public space is innocuous. Rather, the things they experience in public spaces are relational with their racialized and gendered selves and performances. In great part, this relationship depends on their perception of affective/racial vibrations, which shape how and what they do in public space.

The relation between race, public space and marginality means that despite often wanting to simply be in public spaces, their presence is challenged by multiple forms of
contestation. The things these young men do in public space are often similar to their ‘housed’ counterparts, young men of colour and white people alike who use public spaces for leisure, work, resting, and otherwise. In what follows I discuss some of the things these young men do in public space that reveals their fraught, but formative, relationships with the spaces of the city.

**Chilling**

Irrespective of the area of the city in which they were living, most of the young men I spoke to spent a significant amount of time outside in public spaces simply chilling. This involves gathering with friends, going to malls, or otherwise being idle. One thing that was common, though by no means ubiquitous, was smoking weed. Because of the drug’s illegality, smoking weed presents obvious problems if it is done in public. However, because of the precarious housing situations in which many of these young men find themselves, their best option for weed smoking is public spaces such as parks and streets.

Matthew and I were sitting in Green Fusion restaurant, across from College Park, the latter a spot very common for the downtown youth who frequent Evergreen drop-in. When I ask Matthew about good spots to chill with friends (‘leisure activities’, I suggest), he indicates that finding good spots to smoke weed is important:

J: You’re hanging out with your friends…what is the, uh, what is your leisure activity? What stuff are you doing and like, where? You know?
Matthew: Uh, well, most of the time like, if I'm with my friends, that’s not with me anymore, most of the time we would go around and we’d just walk. Find places to smoke weed.

J: Mmmhmmm. What are your favourite places? You’re talking outside, obviously.

Matthew: There’s actually a park just behind here. Go there all the time.

J: The park behind Covey.

Matthew: Can’t go to College Park, that’s a no no.

J: Way too busy.

Matthew: Security up the ass, so no.

I suggested that the places they would go to smoke were ‘obviously’ outside, but that is probably an over-statement. However, it builds upon Matthew’s idea that he and his friends would ‘find places to smoke weed’, a suggestion that indicates the visibilizing character of smoking weed. Though the friends Matthew chills with are of different racial groups, the presence of a group of young men, and particularly young men of colour is already under threat of being over-policed. Adding the element of weed only makes it more so. Thus, Matthew and his friends try to avoid the visibilizing character of smoking weed as it enters into a racialized assemblage that can be immediately understood by security guards or cops as a ‘problem’

Part of this involves the strategic efforts at remaining invisible, which involves finding the spots that are invisible to certain people (and not necessarily invisible to Matthew and his friends, who ‘read’ city space in ways different from security guards and cops).
Sleeping

Very few of the young men I spoke to had any experience sleeping outside in the conventional homeless sense, involving sleeping bags and the like. Instead, they articulate stories that suggest nightly itinerancy in which they move about city streets, sometimes stopping to rest in parks, outside office buildings, or in yards.

James Crawford (21 years old) does not really suggest how much experience he has sleeping outdoors, but he offers some wisdom based on his experiences among ‘street people’ in downtown Toronto:

James Crawford: Most common area is Nathan Phillips square. There used to be an area where there were trees, except they cut down the trees. Well, here, there are two trees and there is enough space for two or three people to sleep here, but they just cut down those trees, so it’s not a good area. Most of the street people, the older ones don’t really care anymore. They just find a bench and sleep. The younger ones, they find a smaller area, like somewhere enclosed that they feel confident enough that they can fight if they need to. It’s all about knowing what your limitations are, basically. If you feel you can handle yourself then fine, sleep on the bench. But if you don’t feel safe, find some enclosed area. Know the exits. Just like in the fire escape plan.

He indicates a generational difference in terms of safety and exposure, with older street people able to ‘find a bench and sleep’, while younger people need to have a more systematized security system. While his reasons for suggesting that older street people can simply sleep on benches (they ‘don’t really care anymore’) is dubious, and he does not suggest who street youth might have to ‘fight’, his ideas do suggest the fraught difficulty that young people have if they attempt to sleep outdoors. It also reveals the
necessary strategic invisibility that some youth can enter into, the ‘enclosed area’ with predetermined exits.

More revealing of the relationship between ‘undesirables’ and urban space is the efforts on the part of the City to remove such people from city spaces. Nathan Phillips Square was a primary site targeted by the City in the 2000s when it began several initiatives aimed at reducing ‘street homelessness’\(^3\). These invisibilizing practices set the broader context for the efforts of street youth looking for a public space in which to sleep.

Of course, such clampdowns on urban public spaces require active agents on the street. Roger and I discuss the efforts he and his group of friends to sleep in various spaces around downtown Toronto, both public and pseudo-public. In the following discussion, he is telling me about a confrontation he had with a Ryerson University security guard.

Roger: Yeah, well I used to go to Ryerson, but I got an infinite ban from Ryerson.

J: Infinite ban!

Roger: Yeah, security guard asked my name and I said I don’t give my information to rent a cops. I don’t like rent a cops. The guy was a prick too, so he deserved it. But then actually, I ended up giving him my ID. Yeah, I just wanted to be an asshole, cuz he was an asshole to me. I think you deserve what you get, right?

J: So he kicked you out?

Roger: Yeah, he gave me an infinite ban.

J: Well, what, I don’t even understand what that means.

Roger: I’m not allowed on property ever again.

J: And what if you’re caught on property?
Roger: I guess you get a ticket or some crap. I was like, ‘Oh no! There goes my university scholarship!’ I was like, ‘What am I supposed to do now? Fuck it, let’s go do drugs’ and I took my friends and left.

The ironic and sarcastic suggestion that he lost his university scholarship (that he never had) suggests some of the small, minor resistances that young men of colour such as Roger can employ. It reveals both his sense of his marginality and the contradictions between formalized spatial citizenship (Ryerson students) and who uses the space (him, his friends). Because he has no formalized or accepted ‘right’ to use the space, he offers playful, sarcastic resistance to the security guard, a recognized agent of spatial boundary-making.

Security guards are not always agents of such direct spatial oppression. Roger also told me a story about some friends of his who attempted to sleep as a group in Cloud Gardens, a ‘park for business people’ near Richmond and Adelaide Streets in downtown Toronto. He was discussing his reactions to private security guards disrupting his sleep in pseudo-public spaces when he brought up the ‘success’ case of Cloud Gardens:

Roger: Leave me the fuck alone. Those are usually the first words out of my mouth.

J: And what are some of the reactions you get when you say that?

Roger: I’m sorry you can’t stay here. Or okay, I’ll give you ten more minutes. Something like that. Never, okay you can stay here. Sorry for bothering you.

J: Right.

(Pause)

Roger: But apparently, a couple of my friends yesterday, like, we have different groups, but we always end up chilling together. They went to Cloud Gardens and…

J: Went to what?
Roger: Cloud Gardens, it’s like a little park for business people. But the security guard bought them Tim Hortons and let them go inside and sleep after.

According to Roger, the security guard let his friends sleep inside a building adjacent to the park and purchased them coffee and donuts. Such positive interactions are rare, as spaces are usually more strongly coded than simple sympathy allows. The suggestion that Cloud Gardens is a ‘little park for business people’ shows Roger’s scepticism about the ‘public’ character of public spaces and instead shows a quite nuanced understanding of the affective social character of city space. Again, he understands the spatial associations of certain spaces with certain publics, associations that render him, a young man of colour, placeless or aspatial, which is something he actively resists.

Once again, Roger asserts that his friends are primarily white, which perhaps indicates a racialization of the ‘deserving’ homeless. It is certainly beyond the scope of his story to suggest that his friends were given preferential treatment from the security guard because of their whiteness. However, it does invoke ideas of appropriate and inappropriate visibilities and how these are affected by race. The appearance of a group of white homeless youth in a business-district park does not force a racial emergence the same way that a group of young men of colour might. It is notable that Roger was not with his friends for this surprising and lucky event.

Doing Nothing

Despite the implications sleeping outdoors has for the young men who do so, and the relationships it helps shape between visibility/invisibility and race, most of the young
men I talked to did not sleep outside. More often than not their relationships to urban space and visibility/invisibility were shaped by doing nothing. That is, not even the doing of looking for a good place to smoke weed.

In many cases it was the young men living in suburban areas that emphasized the nothingness of urban space. This character, in which there is not much for young men do do in suburban space, shapes a certain kind of invisibility that is predicated on transitory appearances in public spaces. Young men and their homelessness are made invisible by the sheer sprawl and decentralization of suburban space. Blackjack (23 years old), who spent some time at Halton Lighthouse shelter (formerly called Lighthouse shelter) in Oakville, emphasizes the ‘nowhere’ of suburban Oakville and the ennui he feels when living there:

Blackjack: The middle of nowhere. It’s kind of like we’re living in a house among buildings.

Jeff: Just like, other houses and stuff?

Blackjack: No, like, like, industry that’s actually old, and buildings and then the highways there, it’s the middle of nowhere.

Jeff: So you couldn’t…could you walk anywhere?

Blackjack: No, you couldn’t even walk anywhere, it’s like, walk five, ten minutes to get to the bus stop…(inaudible)...nobody wanted to. Just stay inside. You’re sitting there quietly and you’re reading, doing nothing at all, you sit there you gotta play and you hope somebody gives you a phone call. For some people it was like living in heaven cuz they were off the streets and had a place and had something to eat. Some people liked it, some people kind of took advantage of it. Me personally I don’t really like staying at that kind of place. It’s kind of like a high class place. You walk down the street and there’s like lakeshore. Bike paths, something.
The spatial layout of Oakville, combined with the residential isolation of the shelter among commercial/industrial sites, meant that there was no significant street life for Blackjack. There is an intersection of values in Blackjack’s description and it seems he can feel the reasons why the shelter is located where it is. For him the assemblage involves solitude, boredom, lakeshore, bike paths, high class, reading, being inside, and presumably other shelter residents. The location of the shelter is shaped by a deliberate invisibilizing strategy, in which homelessness, and invisible forms of homelessness, are kept so through shelter segregation. Further than that is the way in which young men of colour like Blackjack are forced into invisibility by a racialized character of classed space. Through this space, Blackjack’s homelessness is made invisible to the general public in both Oakville and the rest of Toronto. As Blackjack identifies the area as ‘a high class place’ he feels alienated from those spaces in part because of the invisibilizing of aspects of his life important to him.

It is important to note that the ways young men of colour slip into and out of invisibility and visibility are variously intentional and inadvertent. Often they have an affective sense of a space, such as how Matthew and James Crawford can feel the spaces they live in and act strategically in accordance. In other cases, the ways that they become more or less visible have to do with the spaces themselves. There might be something in the space that encourages invisibility, such as the spatial isolation and ‘high class’ character of the spaces surrounding Lighthouse shelter in Oakville. In either case it depends on their sense of affective and racial vibrations, the vibe of a spatial assemblage.
Strategic being

The things that vector movements between visibility and invisibility for these young men, whether they regard these movements as intentional or not, are their affective sense of racial vibrations. As a result, what guides their movements through and impacts on urban spaces are affective strategies that move seamlessly between intent and accident. So while their spatial movements and occupations are often not based on intentional ‘strategy’, they are based on affective understandings of spatial and racialized assemblages.

Nickolas (19 years old) and I are talking about different areas of North York and Scarborough and whether there is any fundamental difference in character between different neighbourhood spaces. He suggests that there might be and that different areas help shape racialized and masculine exercises and performances that he and others like him need to adopt in those areas. While Nickolas has spent time in both North York and Scarborough, it is unclear whether he visits firsthand all the areas he cites. He might instead be creating a general representation of ‘trouble’ areas, whether he has been there or not. Regardless, he disagrees with my suggestion there might be strategic performances these places call for:

Jeff: So you could go wherever you want? Chill wherever you want?

Nickolas: Well, not really. We never really had to pick what to do, my parents were strict. After school, come home do homework, but we barely got any. If you were able to whatever back then, you could, without a care or worry about anything. Unless you went by certain areas or bumped by certain areas where you know violence was kind of the norm. So, for example Jane and Finch. There’s other places not as known like Glendower, Chester Le, Malvern, known to have
supposedly gang members or whatever. Whenever you go to those general areas you have to think first, somehow, think cautiously about everything because there are those kinds of people there.

Jeff: So would you say that you try to avoid these types of areas?

Nickolas: I wouldn’t really say try to avoid, it’s just know how you act there. You just have to know how to carry yourself when you’re in certain areas.

Jeff: Oh yeah? So there’s like a strategy of how you be.

Nickolas: Kind of. I wouldn’t really label it a strategy. Somehow you have to act, be aggressive, be a certain way. Don’t act stupid or careless or anything.

Nickolas shirks both my suggestion that he tries to avoid these areas and that there is an intentional strategy of how to be in them. He indicates that it is not so much a strategy as a masculine performance based on an affective understanding of a racial vibration. The vibration, shaped in part by ‘supposedly gang members’, vectors the emergence of certain racialized masculine performances. This ‘act’, different from a strategy, is not central or even part of his being. The suggestion of ‘carrying yourself’ indicates the edginess of the place, in which a man such as Nickolas must ‘carry’ through a racial vibration, being careful not to force the emergence of a troubling racial event. The ‘carrying’ suggests the need to pick oneself up and move through a vibration without vectoring such racial emergences. These areas are thus ‘spots’ in the city in which a certain racial vibe encourages a kind of boundary straddling (on the edge). The lack of intentional strategy also indicates the multiple and contingent overlapping of (in)visibilities. As Nickolas cannot control how he moves into and out of visibility to different people and groups, he cannot control whether or how he becomes visible.

Nickolas resisted my suggestion of a ‘strategy of how you be’, which conflates existence and performance/comportment. Instead, he employs the material metaphor of
‘carrying’ oneself, which is based on the sensibility of place. In this way, one manipulates his body as it moves through urban spaces, pulling and pushing it (carrying it) to avoid or assimilate into varied vibrations. In this way he ensures he is not ‘careless’ in ‘carrying’ his body.

The mutuality of individual and spatial visibilities comes into play when he suggests specific areas where he alters his behaviour/act: Glendower, Chester Le, Malvern. Nickolas suggests that these places are not as well known as Jane and Finch, but it might be better to suggest that their reputations are more localized. In those spaces, he suggests a person has to be careful of how one acts, which indicates an affective strategy that is about managing visibility. In some ways, the invocation of the lesser known character of these spaces is irrelevant. This is because the alteration of behaviour suggested by Nickolas is wisdom particular to certain bodies in those spaces (read: younger men of colour, specifically). The vibration can and need only be felt by these people since it is their presence only that might vector the emergence of a racialized event.

Nickolas does not try to avoid these areas, though it is unclear whether he actually visits these spaces. In my questioning, lack of evasion of particular ‘trouble’ areas was a very common response. Much has been written about the ability of white people to move through any spaces they like (Ahmed, 2007) and perhaps this ubiquitous mobility of whiteness affected my questions. However, the young men I talked to either suggested places they might avoid but could not, or that they simply did not need to avoid these places. The latter is an observation integral to the composition of the sociospatial character of these types of spaces. There is a geographical break between perception and the material reality of the racialized character of these spaces. Young men such as
Nickolas can feel this racialized character, even as they build and perpetuate the image of these spaces as dangerous and violent. This occurs despite the reality that, as I argue in a later section on their relationships with cops, young men of colour experiencing homelessness are just as likely to experience harassment or violence outside of these so-called ‘trouble’ spots.

As often as not, these sociospatial ‘trouble’ spots are the exact spaces in which these young men conduct their lives. The assumption that they would try to avoid these spaces presupposes the geographical privilege of universal choice as to where a young man lives his life. When talking with Blackjack, he suggested that there are places downtown he finds ‘hectic’, meaning that there is violence, robbery, a heavy police presence, and so on. When I asked him if he tried to avoid these spaces, he was surprised and suggested that he does not have that option:

Jeff: So…another thing I wanted to ask about is like…are there places in the city that you try to avoid?

Blackjack: Avoid? Well, I can’t really avoid too much places cuz I’m on the streets so places I want to avoid I can’t avoid.

Jeff: What are those places?

Blackjack: Sherbourne….

Based on his descriptions of the Sherbourne Street area, it seems like if he could, he would avoid the area entirely. However, this area houses his current shelter and meal service agencies. Because of this, his homelessness is visibilized to other people at service agencies and also cops in the area.
In suburban areas these spots can be much larger than the one- or two-block range of Sherbourne Street. In those areas, such as those that Nickolas suggests, there is a distinct material component to the racial vibe. The materiality of a sociospatial racial vibe means that it is often interactions with people and things that vector the emergence of an event. In some cases the vibe can become abstracted to the city as a whole, as is the case for O (21 years old). O and I are talking about his current living situation in Hamilton with his parents. He suggests a metaphor of ‘the mix’, a toxic assemblage writ large over the entire city that he can avoid or remove himself from if he leaves the GTA. His metaphor and story suggest an intermingling of affective vibrations and the materiality of social confrontation:

O: I don’t know anybody in Hamilton. Which is good because when I got out there…that’s what I mean like I’ve been out in Hamilton for ten months and like, when I got out there it was like…it took a good ten months to detox, Toronto detox, get out of here. You know, like, get out. Get out of the mix.

Jeff: The mix?

O: That’s what it is, it’s like, you know, that’s kind of like the bullshit of it all. You can wake up and have like the best intentions to go do whatever it is you’re doing on the day and you know, you get on the train and you see that person from last year, you guys kicked off and he’s er, whatever, you know? It’s nice to go out there and not know anybody. Anybody, except for my family.

O does not suggest whether the encounter on the train is a thing that happened to him or a suggestion of what could go wrong. However, he does indicate that ‘the mix’, ‘the bullshit of it all’ is a kind of invisible vibration that exists in potentiality. ‘Best intentions’, advertent goals, are thwarted by the shift into an assemblage involving transit, historicity, an old rival, and so on. ‘The mix’ could also indicate a latent awareness (an affective
sense) of the lie (‘bullshit’) of the vibrating whiteness of downtown Toronto, the fiction of the post-racial city.

‘The mix’ might also suggest a musical vibration, a metaphor borrowed from hip hop recording, that indicates O is only a part of what goes into the vibe, but his part is indeed integral, essential to the functioning of this particular mix. ‘The mix’ could also be a drug reference, suggesting cutting drugs, which dovetails nicely with his ‘detox’ metaphor. In the conversation, I press on about the difference between Hamilton and Toronto, where he has identified this mix:

Jeff: Is that the biggest difference? Is that, like…

O: Yeah, there’s no…I have no…there’s no social, there’s nothing socially, er. Social is not even the word. You’re stuck out here it’s not even social interaction it’s like, I just, there’s nothing…I’m nobody out there. I don’t influence anything and nothing influences me. I’m just there, which is good. I like it.

His input into ‘the mix’ is evident to him when he leaves Toronto. In Hamilton, he clearly feels out of the mix, out of the racialized (and perhaps drug-influenced) vibration he feels in the Toronto area. The assertion that he does not influence anything and is not influenced by anything likely reflects the short time he has been in Hamilton, but also reflects his abandonment, the wresting away from the vibration of ‘the mix’. Invisibility here means a complete abandonment of the social spaces of Toronto. Though he tries to remain invisible to people or things that might trouble him in Toronto, his incorporation into assemblages based on history and geography make this hiding difficult. Conflicts such as the quarrel on the train can be racially-charged, though this is not always the case. In relationships with cops, as I will show, it is always the case.
**Cops**

The young men I talked to almost universally have contentious relationships with cops. These contentious relationships contribute to the amplification or the manipulation of vibrations that affect their ability to be in public spaces. Often encounters with cops force the emergence of racialized or gendered identities that disrupt comfortable vibrations or affective strategic performances of these. As the previous stories in this chapter have shown, these young men contingently move into and out of visibility and invisibility in fluid ways that are sometimes intentional, accidental, or part of a felt assemblage. Their relationships with cops are no different from other relationships, vectoring both shifts into and out of visibility. However, in encounters with cops, they always emerge explicitly as young men of colour, despite their varied investment in narratives of the post-racial city or the vibrating whiteness of downtown spaces. As such, cops agitate racial vibrations across city spaces (downtown, suburban, etc.) and show the limits of these young men’s inputs into the affective assemblages of which they are a part.

Anthony (22 years old) describes the blanket surveillance that he feels makes hiding from the cops unnecessary and impossible. He suggests that the cops are somewhat indiscriminate in their searches and that this makes avoiding encounters with cops impossible. In response to my suggestion that he might hide from the cops when they are about in his Scarborough neighbourhood, he suggests this indiscriminacy:

Anthony: You can’t hide from them, you can’t hide from them.

J: They’re gonna find you?
Anthony: There’s no point, not even find you. They’re looking for anybody. They don’t care who the hell it is, but if they find that person they’re gonna book them. Like, they look for me and all the time they find me, I’m not hiding nowhere, they know where I am. It’s not hard to find me. But they do, they stop me, they search me. I give them the benefit of the doubt. I give them the benefit of the doubt. I could, I could say no, call my lawyer. Say no, you’re not searching me, I know, I know. I know a few lawyers still. Like Y, my friend’s mom is a lawyer. She’s like, yo, anytime you need you call me, 4, 5, in the morning, whatever. She’ll come out of her bed.

The only solution would be to do what TJ recommends: vanish. However, what aggravates Anthony is that he gets stopped by the cops in his neighbourhood irrespective of what he is doing. The specificity of their search (‘if they find that person’) is not geared to individual ‘criminals’, but rather is blanketed over large areas (‘they don’t care who the hell it is’). Such a blanket creates a geographical and racial profiling that places young men of colour squarely under the profile. This visibilizes both racial and gender identities and vectors the emergence of a racial vibration that is volatile and unstable.34

Deliberate vanishing is not really a possibility for Anthony. His frustration at random stops by police is expressed in his resigned reference to his mom’s lawyer friend Y. He senses that there is some illegality and certainly some indignity to the stops and searches, but has no choice but to ‘give them the benefit of the doubt’. However, he feels that those sentiments are not reciprocated by the police. This last feeling is very common among interviewees as many of them talked about being hassled by cops in public spaces.

The ‘hassle project’

Blackjack explicitly stated that there exists a ‘hassle project’ on downtown streets, a semi-formal endeavour by cops to remove ‘undesirables’ from urban public spaces. He
describes this project as being in full-swing the summer he moved to Toronto. Our conversation about this project is worth quoting at length. Notably, Blackjack relates this with resignation and frustration – clearly this ‘hassle project’ troubles him:

Blackjack: When I first came I was staying in Regent…in Moss Park, it was horrible! Because that summer they started trying to clean up the streets for this summer, so um, there’s kind of a hassle project.

J: A what?

Blackjack: Hassle project. Every hour the cops just go down Sherbourne here and like everyday I was getting tickets.

J: Tickets? Like for…loitering or something?

Blackjack: Yeah, loitering….and a little bit of alcohol.

J: Oh, like public drinking.

Blackjack: Yeah. Like, loitering, or there’s a next one called like vandalism. For like, sitting against stuff. They gave me a $300 ticket for that.

J: Wait, what? Sitting?

Blackjack: Yeah. I don’t know it’s kind of crazy, the cops coming like three times a week, asking my name….they call it filing report, where they stop people, random stops and they ask you your name and whatever….it was to like pick out the drugs and whatever and just people causing trouble and whatever. The first month was really, really bad and after that I don’t know. It wasn’t too….like once a month, maybe twice a month. But before it was like two, three times a week.

The ‘hassle project’ is certainly in line with the City of Toronto’s efforts to punish street-involved people right out of public spaces. As mentioned before, this project is ostensibly for the betterment of the people living and/or sleeping on the streets, but is more insidiously tied to an ideological agenda of ‘clean streets’ for international tourism and
investment of global commercial capital. In the context of this agenda, the over-policing of homeless people is well-documented (Gaetz et al., 2011).

However, the hassle project is different when written and read in racialized terms. This agenda aimed at ‘cleaning’ city streets is primarily a downtown Toronto initiative, where street culture is more common and vibrant than in the suburbs. Cops’ harassment of young men of colour, however, is reported across the GTA. Blackjack describes his appearance as having something to do with the attention he gets from police:

J: How’d that make you feel? Like, it feels like maybe you’re just sitting around hanging out, drinking a beer, whatever.

Blackjack: Walking the streets!

J: Yeah.

Blackjack: I guess from the way how I look, but…I’m not too sure really.

J: What do you mean how you look? What do you mean?

Blackjack: I don’t know. Maybe if you like dress a certain way or you’re black or something they’ll pull you over.

Though he initially indicates he is unsure why he gets stopped by cops, he settles on physical dress and race. There is certainly an element of geographical profiling happening in this area as well. Blackjack identified this immediately upon moving to the Sherbourne area. Of course, other people in the area, non-blacks included, are hassled by cops; my other interviews attest to this. There are different reasons related to different aspects of identity and in Blackjack’s case, when he moved into the area, his race shifted into visibility, vectored by other identifiers such as age and geography.
There are different ways young men such as Blackjack can mitigate the influence their race has on encounters with police (or how it instigates encounters with the police). Solo describes altering his comportment and dress in order to avoid attention from the wrong kind of people:

Solo: I try not to draw attention to myself.

J: How do you do that?

Solo: Watching the way I dress. Today I’m kind of flashy. I was out with a woman, so you know. But usually I don’t have earrings, no jewellery, just black sweater and shoes and some jeans, that’s it. No flash. You know, very low key. Once you show someone you have money, they might try something funny. Right? But, it all depends on how you behave yourself, as well. Your attitude, you know? If you don’t start something there won’t be something.

J: Even if you just start something is just dressing flashy?

Solo: Yeah, that’s why I don’t try dressing flashy, you know? Keep low key, keep a low profile and you’ll be good, you know?

Solo does not indicate who the people are who ‘might try something funny’ and it might be other young men. However, combined with the stories the other men about hassling by the cops, it can easily be suggested that such dress and attitudinal adjustments are made to avoid conflict with police. The idea of keeping one’s ‘profile’ low is difficult: the young man himself is not the only one responsible for the profile since it is based on so many components. Often this results in a tension they feel between their inaction (doing nothing) and the perception that they must be doing something wrong if they attract police attention. Omega has a complex understanding of the challenges faced by young men of colour in the public spaces of the city. When I suggest that the cops hassle people
Omega: Well, different areas are different, different people, different kinds of people, environment, just feeling. When you go, especially like in Toronto. Toronto and Scarborough are two totally different places is what I think cuz when I went to shelters in Toronto you had downtown and all these places, you know. People are not right but they’re too reckless. You know they tend to do whatever they think, like, they don’t care. When the cops come to pick them, something like that, especially like in a complaint, saying what are you doing this for, yeah yeah yeah, the way they treated you you know you’re doing something wrong, you know?

Omega has lived in different areas around the GTA, though he has spent more time in suburban areas. Here he makes a distinction between the ways people act in downtown Toronto compared to Scarborough. Downtown he suggests people are ‘reckless’ and are deserving of police attention. I did not ask what the reckless behaviour involves and he did not elaborate. He continued, however, to suggest that despite his relatively less reckless behaviour, he has been hassled by the cops:

Omega: But, I’m not going to lie, I had my times with the cops too, like, like, they really got me pissed off saying that, oh, cuz some reason they always tend to stop me and say that oh, I’m doing something wrong, but really I’m not. You know the mall in downtown? Um, that…

Jeff: The big one? Eaton Centre?

Omega: Yeah. Like, I’ll be outside Eaton Centre and this cop would stop, no reason, no reason whatsoever. And when I was at Eva’s Satellite guy just comes to me with this question like, oh, what are you doing right now? Why you just walking around the area for? Do you have something you could be doing? This, that, this that. I just tend to ignore ‘em. Ignore ‘em. Cuz I know like as soon as I talk to them they’re gonna have me pissed off, you know?
Omega’s story suggests the difference between other youth’s ‘reckless’ behaviour that attracts the attention of the cops and his own behaviour is racialized. The presence of an idle young man for the cops perhaps suggests youthful masculine deviance, but this combines with race to shape the emergence of a racial vibration.

The sense that other youth (and likely mostly young men) are doing wrong and are deserving of their policing is a product of local Toronto/Canadian socialization. Omega has a strong sense of what appropriate and inappropriate behaviours are, but not necessarily why or how this construction of ‘appropriate’ affects him. Rather than view his sense of the just policing of others as contradictory to his inability to understand the policing of himself, I view it as a kind of affective moralization. Having grown up in the local context, Omega is in part shaped by the vibrating whiteness of downtown Toronto. As such, he has an affective understanding of the roles race and masculinity play in his marginalization, though he would not suggest he is marginalized. Since he views himself as an individual, he places himself outside the collective of Toronto youth and is able to moralize what the others are doing as ‘wrong’.

Racial and Geographical Profiling

It is unclear whether young men of colour have more encounters with police than do white young men if both groups are ‘street-involved’. What is clearer is that there is a geographical relationship between race, visibility, and encounters with the cops. Young men of colour in downtown Toronto indicate police harassment, but do not always make a racial distinction. In the suburban areas of Scarborough and Mississauga, the irruption
of race in an encounter with the cops strongly suggests a racial event. James Crawford describes the geographical relationship in the former, between street-involved youth and cops in downtown Toronto:

Jeff: So wait, are interactions with the cops, is that a part of street life?

James Crawford: Yes, the cops are generally...okay, I’m gonna have to say they target, they more target the street youth than, let’s say you were walking down the street and then there’s, let’s say you just stole something from the store at the same time as a street kid stole something else from the same store. Chances are you’ll get away scot free and the cops’ll go what are you doing, why did you steal that?

J: Does it have to do with the cops’ familiarity with people on the street?

James Crawford: They are familiar with a few people cuz there are, well, repeat offenders, I have to say.

J: Well, but otherwise, my question is, how do they know, how would they know who’s who.

James Crawford: Well, where do they hang out? Where they hang out. The look of them. Cuz most of the time when cops come by the street involved people kind of get rather stiff. Are they coming for me or someone else? Whereas just you walking down the street, a once-over and keep going.

James Crawford suggests a kind of geographical profiling of street youth. The ambiguity of ‘the look of them’ leaves open for interpretation whether he is talking about the various subcultural styles that street youth display or whether he is talking about race. He also suggests a bodily comportment is exhibited by the street youth that is different from how I hold myself, which suggests a very complicated mix of profiling involving place, race, and youth.

James Crawford is another young man who attempts to distance himself from a certain kind of blackness that interviewees often identified as ‘gangster’ or ‘thug’. He
describes the different approaches to cop encounters that street youth take, with his being an initial transparent honesty and (feigned) respect for authority. This tact is different than the one taken by ‘gangsters’:

James Crawford: Well, lots of cops, I’ve noticed if you are smoking weed and they come up to you and say what are you doing, the only time I’ve noticed is that they’re gonna be assholes about it is if you just start lying. If you, if they come up to you and say why are you smoking weed, don’t bother saying no, I’m not, say yes I’m smoking weed. Here’s my reason, this that or the other, here’s what I have, can I keep it please?

J: So there’s a little bit of strategy going on here.

James Crawford: Yeah, it’s mostly, most people, mainly the gangsters don’t get it, they think being tough and belligerent is the only way to act with the cops, but one way of doing it, be as polite as you can until they’re rude to you. The moment they’re rude to me, then I’m rude to them.

It is important to note that his comportment only goes so far and when the cops are rude to him, he abandons the pretence of respect. This is an effort to invisibilize aspects of himself that might lead to the kind of racial/geographical profiling that occurs in downtown spaces. These aspects include other ‘identities’ such as youth, gender and class, but also incorporate aspects of the assemblage into which the cops enter: weed cigarettes, racialized/gendered bodies, groups of youths, how bodies are held, police uniforms and the emotional menace the cops present to these young men (to name a few). James Crawford also attempts to mitigate the racialization that happens in those encounters by removing himself from associations with ‘gangsters’.

The universal profiling of street youth in downtown spaces includes both white youth and youth of colour, according to some downtown youth. This would seem to suggest profiling based on youth and geography. However, young men of colour in the
suburbs, who ostensibly do not bear the characteristics of street youth (hair and clothing styles, group gathering, etc.), also suggested being pulled over by cops. Sean (26 years old) describes getting pulled over by the cops while riding his bike around the streets of Scarborough:

Sean: Down here, down here I usually get pulled over on the bike, they usually harass me and give me tickets.

J: Tickets, for what?

Sean: For some stupid stuff like not having a light or a reflector or my brakes is not working. Stuff like that. Nobody wears a helmet down here. Know what I mean?

J: How many times have you got stopped for stuff like that?

Sean: A lot. A lot. I must have probably two thousand or more dollars worth of tickets out there.

J: Do you see other people get stopped too? Other people?

Sean: Yeah, I do.

J: Yeah, it happens?

Sean: Yeah, I’ve seen a police tail me down, you know? And followed me and was waiting for me to slip up, so I crossed the street, when it was at a yellow. I just knew, cuz I knew there was no car coming. They came over and gave me a ticket, you know? I usually fold up the ticket and throw it back in their car, you know? Or throw it at their car. You know? Cuz it’s ridiculous.

That Sean gets stopped by cops for such minor infractions suggests close monitoring of young men of colour in the public spaces of Scarborough. When the cops do not overlook minor offences such as not having lights or reflectors, or having insufficient brakes, they are very likely looking at the cultural collision that makes up race. In these encounters, Sean’s homelessness is visibilized by his continued presence in public and pseudo-public
spaces, in concert with the vibration of his race and young manhood. As such, while he may be briefly housed at any one time (at a family member’s or a friend’s place), he is continually forced into these public spaces for lack of a place of his own.

Similar to the way young men of colour must remain mobile when househopping, they also describe having to remain mobile when in public spaces. Because of this, they do not have the privilege of remaining, of staying, in city spaces, but rather must move between spaces as those spaces become inhospitable. Though very few young men I spoke to described sleeping rough outside, many told stories of passing nights outside walking aimlessly around downtown and suburban spaces. Bonton describes getting forced by the cops into mobility when he tries to sit to rest at night:

Jeff: Where, where did you sleep?

Bonton: I used to sleep in like, Brampton, Oakville, Newmarket, Aurora, just walking the streets all night, just doing nothing productive, like you know what I mean? Get pulled over like five, ten times a night. You don’t get arrested or nothing, sometimes you’d just be sitting on a building, you know what I mean, like you walk in, I know where to go, just sit down, relax, a cop will pull up and be like, hey what are you doing, you live here? I’d be like, no. They’d be like, okay, can you move on? I’d be like I got nowhere else to go tonight.

Jeff: Yeah, you tell them that?

Bonton: Yeah, I tell them and they just look at me and go I don’t care, just keep going, just keep doing what you were doing before, move on, you know? And it’s like, okay, you know, like what do you have to move on to when you got nowhere else to go? They try to tell you other places to go, like different shelters, but sometimes you just don’t want to be in a shelter. You might hear they have bedbugs, people smell, people don’t take showers.

Whether or not there is some exaggeration about the frequency that he gets pulled over is beside the point. The frequency of stops is actually mirrored in my presumptive question
‘where did you sleep?’ Bonton does not sleep, but instead suggests that he walks around, occasionally stopping to rest. My questions and the harassment by the cops indicates an overall assumption: suburban street spaces at night should be empty. The transgressive presence of a certain type of body on those spaces triggers the purging action of the police. Bonton is thus forced into visibility at night, a concert of his body, comportment, race, suburban street space, cruising cops, and so on forcing his emergence. It is also one of those contradictory moments when he becomes visible as invisibly homeless, something that could potentially remain true in that same space during the daytime.

Conclusions

Young men of colour in urban spaces thus occupy a complicated twist of (in)visibility. They occupy invisibility and visibility simultaneously, with multiple forces vectoring their shifts into and out of visibility. Some of these forces are intentional on the part of the young men, such as hiding and vanishing. Other activities they practice in public and pseudo-public spaces, such as chilling, sleeping, and doing nothing, seem less directly advertent strategies of invisibility. However, even such innocuous activities indicate their ghostly material presence in these spaces. As actors such as police and other antagonists challenge their presence, young men of colour enact a strategic being based on their sense of affective assemblages of which they are a part. This ‘strategic being’ is not an intentional plan that operates in conscious thought. As illustrated above, many of the men I talked to refuted my suggestion that they operated ‘strategies’. This research highlights that the strategy enacted is affective, non-conscious, operating as an everyday
thing or experience. As they move through the city, they non-consciously and consciously move through visibilities and invisibilities.

Experiences of homelessness are characterized by innumerable complicating factors. Previous feminist, urban, and cultural geography approaches to the experience of homelessness have focused on a variety of things such as women’s experience of invisibility (Whitzman, 2006), homeless ‘performances’ (Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008) and neoliberal influences on homeless youth (Klodawsky, Aubry and Farrell, 2006). This chapter contributes to the body of literature on experiences of homelessness by contributing to the flowering of the concept of ‘invisible homelessness’. This chapter has revealed that there are innumerable dimensions of (in)visibility to homelessness, which contributes to the broadened invisibility suggested by Whitzman who importantly helped open up this debate.

This flowering allows for the fruitful crossing of seemingly disparate literatures, as debates within work on geographies of race and anti-racist research come into play. I build upon McKittrick’s work on ‘ungeographic’ lives (2006) to show how despite characterizations of marginality (including my own), young men of colour experiencing homelessness occupy simultaneous positions of visibility and invisibility that reveal them as important actors in the socio-spatial creation of urban space.

This chapter also contributes to scholarly work within urban and cultural geography on urban and public space. The variety of (in)invisibilities these young occupy are shaped in large part by the visibilizing function of public spaces, in which otherwise intangible or invisible issues (such as racism or poverty or struggle) gain materialization through their exposure in public space. The great variety of things that produce
homelessness (such as unemployment, housing privatization – May and Walks, 2010) can be seen related to urban spatial functions that contribute to oppression of young men of colour. This chapter gives a sense for the shifting and contingent (in)visibilities young men of colour experience as members of the ‘new homeless’. They experience these shifts sometimes by force (for example, in relationship with cops), but other times as part of a material or affective strategy of existing in the city. This chapter also contributes to work on visibilities and invisibilities in indicating the indeterminate character of these. Despite insights into the working of simultaneous (in)visibilities, this research illustrates how we cannot always know which aspects of (in)visibility are coming into play at any one time.

One final insight from this chapter is the provocative description of often unseen lives. Indeed, in variously occupying (in)visibilities, young men of colour experiencing homelessness occupy lives that Brand suggests many ‘white folks’ in Toronto do not know about. To repeat a quotation from my introduction, ‘this city has a life that white folks, at least the ones that run things and the ones that write letters to the editor, don’t know about and can’t talk about’ (Brand, 1994: 36). These stories are descriptions of some of those lives.

Despite attempts to write them out of the city using overt and covert spatial controls, young men of colour such as those I interviewed live explicitly geographical lives and have an explicit urban presence. Similar to the women of colour McKittrick writes about (2006), these young men’s lives are ‘geographic’, opposed to the popular rendering of their lives as ‘ungeographic’. However, these are threatened with being written out of urban spaces in formulations that suggest they are invisible and with
material actions that challenge their presence in these spaces. Despite these invisibilizing influences, young men of colour experiencing homelessness maintain a consistent presence in urban street spaces. They maintain this presence not only through intentional actions, but also through the everyday business of living their lives. It is this business that is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 7

Micro-Geographies of Material (In)Visibility

Introduction

The themes and complications of (in)visibility from Chapter 6 continue in Chapter 7. In conducting the ‘Where-I-Live-Tours’ for this research, I was able to experience first-hand the materiality of some socio-spatial experience for the young men in my research. This chapter puts into focus three tours I took with four young men to illustrate some of the spaces they use, occupy, and live in during their daily lives. I have written this chapter in a near-narrative fashion in an attempt to evoke the story-telling that pervaded many of these tours. What comes through in these stories is the multiple overlapping and contingent ways that these young men engage with public spaces and (in)visibilities.

Academic at the University of Toronto

Academic perhaps best occupies a conventional position of being ‘invisibly homeless’, particularly since he adopts the identity ‘homeless’. His pseudonym is one of the rare ones not chosen by the participant himself, but rather is one I chose for him based on his higher education aspirations. Academic has a very strong sense that he must surround himself with the type of people who will inspire him and not drag him down.
When he and I are discussing various places to sleep, he brings up the idea of self-discipline, something that for him is under constant erosion:

Academic: The problem with being homeless is that it eats away at your, at your self, at your self discipline. You have to have really good self discipline to avoid all the stumbles.

J: What are these stumbles?

Academic: Like I said, sleeping down at Queen’s Park with people who smoke drugs. Or hanging with people who smoke drugs. Or choosing not to have friends over friends that are gonna invite you to do drugs.

For academic, avoiding these types of drug users involves an explicit spatial strategy. When he takes me on a Where-I-Live-Tour, we meet at Palmerston library in the downtown of Toronto, just west and north of the University of Toronto campus where we will eventually spend much of the tour (see Map 7.1).
Academic maintains a strong online presence in forums and various social media, something that requires constant maintenance. Because of this presence, it means he must maintain a real world presence near a computer, something difficult because he does not own one. Public libraries, despite having time limits for computer usage, offer fairly unfettered access to computers. When Academic and I meet, I arrive fifteen minutes late
and wait a few minutes more for him to finish his online conversations. When he does, I ask him about computer access and he admits yes, it is extremely important.

He decides to show me a nearby internet café where he sometimes spends the night at the overnight price of $10. Academic suggests this is expensive, perhaps because it only affords snatches of real sleep amongst the glow and hum of electronic equipment. I ask the clerk if he minds if we take some photographs of the café. He does not, but also does not want us to capture people in the shots. Academic takes me to the computer he used the night before, tucked into a corner so as to limit people trafficking back and forth behind him (see Figure 7.1).

![Figure 7.1 – Academic’s corner spot in the internet cafe](image)
An important part of maintaining strategic invisibility is remaining inconspicuous and not ‘looking homeless’, the latter a common colloquial phrase that holds weight even among my participants. This desire is central to the places Academic chooses to frequent. As such, the strategy involves not exclusive invisibility, but selective visibility of certain identifiers. It also might involve becoming visible to staff or other customers if one’s not-homeless comportment slips, sleeping too long at the computer, and so on.

We do not stay at the internet café very long. Academic has been there all the past night and plus, we do not want to pay. Instead we head to the St. George campus of the University of Toronto immediately to the south. The twenty-four hour availability of indoor university spaces such as libraries and computer labs, plus the ubiquitous presence of students of similar age to Academic, means that with some effort, he can blend in and gain access to these spaces despite not being a student at the university. This blending is part of the selective visibility. In this case, Academic strategically mobilizes his age (19), to look as if he belongs amid undergraduate students. He also attempts to mitigate other aspect of his identity, such as ‘homeless’, by adopting proper student comportment (reading, quiet chatter, and sleeping, though not too much of the latter). Part of this is the comfortable vibration of an affective assemblage that comprises sleeping students, books, pens, reading, laptops, loose-leaf paper, typing, coffee cups, and so on. The pseudo-public of university space is loosely and informally policed based on shared affective appreciation of the constancy of this vibration.

Academic first takes me to Hart House, where he sometimes uses the reading rooms for reading, sleeping, and chilling. When we arrive, he wants to get a picture of a particular couch on which he has spent considerable time. A woman is sitting there,
though, so we walk back outside the room and Academic snaps a shot from a distance through the doorway (see Figure 7.2).

![Figure 7.18 - A Hart House reading room.](image)

The resulting shot inadvertently but beautifully reveals the position Academic is in: on the outside, looking in. At the time of the tour, he was applying for undergraduate studies at various southern Ontario schools. The image captures the open door and the (anonymous but presumably undergraduate) young woman in thoughtful repose and makes visible the outsider’s longing from behind the camera.

We visit a second reading room in Hart House and again, places to sit/lay feature prominently in Academic’s tour. He takes wonderfully literally my suggestion that he show me the spaces and places in which he spends his life, however small scale. Much of
this amounts to where he puts his body, the micro-geometry of his body’s mobility and staticity. He snaps another photo of a couch, placing his backpack in the shot at the foot of the couch to suggest what it would look like if he was there (see Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.19 - A couch on which Academic sits and lays.

Academic takes more photos of the reading room, including the stained glass and clear glass windows with a view he admires. The camera begins to run out of batteries and makes a loud beeping noise, which he ignores. Our too-loud conversation forces us into too-clear visibility and a student admonishes us: ‘Hey guys. Library.’ Clearly our tour disrupts the quiet student assemblage suggested above. Academic snaps one more photo and we move on.
We continue across campus to Galbraith, an engineering building. Academic likes sciences and computer science in particular, so he likes to be around students studying these things. We arrive at a computer lab that is protected by a card lock. I have a U of T student card and while we stood at the door, debating whether my student card would let us into the room, a girl saw us through the window and opened the door for us. Academic found a computer in a corner (again, he likes the corners) and logged on using a password he got from a high school friend who is now a U of T student. He took a photo of the computer station (see Figure 7.4) while I attempted to log onto a nearby computer.

![Image of a computer screen with options to fill out a survey for a chance to win an XBOX 360 Kinect](image)

**Figure 7.20 - At Galbraith computer lab.**

We both laughed when we realized that while Academic could log on with his borrowed password, I, a U of T student, could not get on the computer with the passwords I had.
Academic put two chairs together to demonstrate to me how he sometimes fashions a make-shift bed during slow times at the computer lab (see Figure 7.5).

![Academic puts two chairs together to show me a make-shift bed.](image)

**Figure 7.21 - Academic puts two chairs together to show me a make-shift bed.**

We do not stay long in the lab since there are other things Academic wants to show me, but when we leave the lab and stand immediately outside the room discussing the irony of him having access to the computers and me not, a second student gets up and opens the door for us. We apologize to her and move away from the door so nobody further bypasses the security of the lab and opens the door for us. The irony does not escape Academic and it extends to his appreciation of the character of the space. The pseudo-public character of University spaces must be strategically navigated and is flexible based again on strategic mobility and strategic comportment, though Academic does not always
have control over how he is seen and made visible. Still, Academic’s fluid occupation of (in)visibility challenges the ostensibly rigid private character of these spaces.

However, as he is the first to admit, his access to these spaces is conditional on his proper ‘fit’ in the spaces, involving both proper comportment and an affective sense of how the student assemblage works. In interview, Academic tells me a story about a midnight conversation he had with a security guard in one of these University labs:

Academic: ECE lab is open all night and you sleep in there. But it’s difficult to sleep in there cuz you don’t have any type of…and you’re embarrassed cuz if the guard thinks you’re sleeping he might think you’re homeless and will kick you out. One time the guard came in there and I had to talk my way out of it. I talked with him for three hours! He was like, yeah, yeah, really. Three hours I had to entertain him!

J: He had nothing else to do, I guess, right?

Academic: He had nothing else to do. And he asked me why are you here? I’m like, yeah, I’m working here. He’s like, yeah? What are you doing? I had to answer all these questions. I had to make all these things up. I knew some details, but didn’t go too deeply into it. I’m like, oh, engineering. He’s like, what? Engineering, uh, I know this is civil engineering lab, so I said I’m a civil engineer…I’m planning on going into grad school. Ah, I see. And then he asked all these questions. And then I tried to switch [the conversation].

Academic later admitted that three hours was a bit of an exaggeration, but the point remains the same: his access to these spaces is not based on explicit belonging to a certain citizenship (U of T students), but rather is based on proper comportment and affective understanding of the space. This involves the strategic manipulation of not only other users of the spaces who might police the space in small ways (frowns, minor admonishments such as the ‘Hey guys. Library.’ comment we received on our tour), but also official agents who overtly police the space such as security guards. This involves
the strategic invisibilizing of certain identifiers (‘homeless’, though looking unclean or sleeping) and the visibilizing of others (youth, being computer savvy). As such, the very presence of young men of colour such as Academic in these spaces in which they ostensibly do not belong is premised on their affective understanding of the temporary and contingent assemblages that comprises the socio-spatial environment of university spaces.

**Matthew and Strategic Visibilizing**

In their strategic enactment of both visibility and invisibility, the experiences of ‘invisibly’ homeless young men of colour highlight the racialization of social and economic processes. As Academic strategically manipulates his bodily comportment in University spaces, he stifles potential racial emergences, which allows him to more easily conduct his daily life. However, such strategic conduct also reveals the neoliberal whiteness of downtown spaces such as U of T and the constant white racial vibration that vectors such performances.

The tour I take with Matthew similarly produces a feeling for the interstitial, marginal spaces\(^{35}\) in which he lives his life and the deliberate and sometimes calculated ways that he moves through those spaces. We meet at Evergreen, forty-five minutes later than we had planned to meet (see Map 7.2). Matthew was seeing a friend off at the bus terminal. Throughout this tour he stays in contact with that friend by text.
We set out southbound to check out the Eaton Centre and almost immediately Matthew presses into a story about getting a refund for a pair of jeans from a large department store in the mall. Such stories, ones regarding questionable morality, are common in the interviews I conducted. I view them as a test that I need to pass in order to properly enter into the morally grey area of youth homelessness. I often pass: my politics allow me to enjoy the greyness that comes with socio-economic marginality. With
Matthew too I pass, but he likely knew I would — we have had many personal conversations at Evergreen. He relates this story in complicated piecemeal, opening with the remark ‘Jeff, I did a bad thing’. It turns out the return of the jeans is not as simple as it sounds. Matthew never purchased jeans, but rather, picked them off the shelf and went to the customer service counter to return them. Before long, but after he has been shifted to the centralized customer service department, he found himself with a sizeable three-digit gift card for the store. The fact that he never had a receipt for the jeans suggests Matthew can summon the appropriate masculine assertiveness, righteous indignation and persistence that it takes to pull off such a stunt.

I am impressed and I tell him so, even if I also joshingly say he is ‘terrible’. He finishes the story as we walk through The Bay, another large department store. Matthew snaps a photo of a $1400 coffee machine and we laugh because the price helps highlight the Canadian poverty/wealth disparity we were just discussing (see Figure 7.6).
Matthew’s homelessness and his poverty are made invisible in his jeans return scheme, but the relatively upscale department store constantly reminds us of these realities. The price of the jeans, the price of the coffee machine, the décor and advertising in the store, all of these vibrate with the soothing upmarket whiteness of ritzy downtown commercial spaces.

Matthew intends to show me the café on the upper floors of the Bay building, something I did not know existed. When we arrive at the café, I can see why he wanted to show me: the surroundings continue the income polarization argument. There are actually two separate cafés on the eighth floor, though we have to pass through the fancier one to get to the (relatively) more proletarian one. Passing through the first, Matthew snaps photos of the piano and pianist as well as the chandeliers (see Figure 7.7).
Matthew suggests that he comes here to sit and chill, sometimes with friends and sometimes alone. He admires the view down and across Queen Street looking at Old City Hall through the large bank of windows on the north side of the building. When I remark that he chills at some really fancy places, Matthew tells me his tour is deliberate: he does hang out at the places stereotypical to street youth, but he loves the idea of showing me this contrast. Indeed, he chills here also.

There is clearly a performance aspect to the tour Matthew gives for me. He wants to show me that the spaces of the city in which he lives are both prime and marginal (Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008; DeVerteuil, Marr and Snow, 2009; Hodgetts et al., 2008 Lees, 1997). Because of this duality, his straddling of polarized spaces, Matthew comes
to occupy an in-between position. In his strategic visibility and hiding of his (invisible) homelessness, he internalizes the interstitial character of space and reveals the deliberate ways the city is constructed in such polarizing ways. Matthew explicitly reveals this polarity in a photograph he takes of the CN Tower through the glass window ceiling of a covered above-ground walkway (see Figure 7.8).

![The CN Tower, seen through the roof of an above-ground walkway.](image)

The dirty windows contrast well with the Tower behind, iconic in its reference to Toronto’s affluence and upward-mobility in global city hierarchies. Matthew is deliberate in both taking me to the spaces he does under my direction to ‘show me spaces and places where he hangs out and lives’. He is also deliberate in shooting this photo, which shows
his relative position, both in terms of wealth (poorer) and spatially (on the floor, looking up).

We spend some time sitting outside in a vacant park near the base of the CN Tower where Matthew decides he should show me some of the other kinds of spaces in which he lives his life (the marginal kind). We ride the subway up to St. Clair West Station and visit St. Clair Reservoir, a nature-in-the-city artery of joggers, dog-walkers, and sometimes, youth like Matthew (see Maps 7.3 and 7.4).

Map 7.3 – Subway travel between first and second legs of the Matthew Where-I-Live-Tour (Map Data Copyright 2013 Google)
Matthew takes me down under the Spadina Road bridge to look for spots where he and his friends used to come to smoke weed and cigarettes. The underside of the bridge is readily identifiable as a marginal urban space: graffiti, mud, concrete, litter (see Figures 7.9 and 7.10).
Figure 7.25 - Under Spadina Road.

Figure 7.26 - Tags and a place to sit under Spadina Road.
However, there is a feeling that resonates under the bridge: it is liberatory, for me at least, to be away from the feeling of neoliberal wealth, which itself vibrates with whiteness. Matthew snaps some pictures of the underside of the bridge and we move on into the undergrowth, looking for a smoking spot of particular significance for Matthew.

The underpass is significant as a symbolic space of homeless lived experience. As a space away from admonishing eyes as well as offering some insulating privacy and security, underpasses have long served as resting places for itinerant urban campers and people with few other options for places to sleep. For Matthew, the underpass and surrounding wooded areas in the past few years of his life have been a space of concealment and visibility. It is removed from the streets that are rife with random stops for young men of colour and offers a transitory hidden spot for collective group smoking and identity/relation work.

Not far from the underpass, Matthew and I find a spot that he has not visited for a while, but used to be a common spot for him and his friends to chill. It is the butt-end of a stone retaining wall on the side of a steep hill that crawls down from Spadina Road (see Figure 7.11).
The spot offers a kind of emancipation from the vibrating whiteness of much of downtown (or in this case, mid-town) space, offering instead a feeling of what another young man (Sean) calls 'nature vibes'. Indeed, while Matthew suggests he has no practical problems with police or other punitive authorities, the existence of such a spot shapes the emergence of a transitory time-space moment (that he helps to shape with his use of it). His strategic visibilizing of certain relations problematic to authority – pot-smoking young man of colour – helps create this space with a comfortable vibration ('nature vibes’ or otherwise). This assemblage is temporary, though, forming more frequently and distinctly in the twilight and night-time hours of the day, indicating its contingent and temporal character.
In interview, many young men I talked to had difficulty discussing what they do on a daily basis, which challenged my ability to understand their ‘everyday geographies’. I attribute this difficulty to several things, including the vague question (they did not understand what I wanted to know), they assumed I might think their lives were boring, they are afraid I would judge them (based on a presumed ‘lack’ of effort for ‘getting out’ of homelessness), or they simply do not have a routine.

The Where-I-Live-Tours somewhat mitigated these problems, providing me with an opportunity to see firsthand what they do, the places they frequent, and how they act when they do these things.

When I meet with Zgune Cluned at Evergreen, he is not exactly sure what I want to see. When I suggest just some of the places and spaces in which he spends time in his life, he suggests we bring James Crawford, his closest friend. For me this is great – James Crawford was an interviewee as well and while both are forthright and seemingly honest, they are decidedly more ‘in their element’ when together. We wait for James Crawford to finish a program he is participating in at the drop-in and we set out (see Map 7.5). James Crawford is reluctant to do a tour since he has to meet his housing worker at home in a half hour. They agree that it would be okay if I come along (and plus, I am offering free transit tokens).
Map 7.5 – Where-I-Live-Tour with Zgune Cluned and James Crawford, first and third legs. This map shows the first leg (from 1 to 3) until we took the subway from College Station and the third leg (from 8 to 11) after we returned on the subway at Wellesley Station (Map Data Copyright 2013 Google)

On the way to the subway, Zgune Cluned snaps some photos under my direction to ‘take photos of places that have some meaning to you’. He takes one photo of 401 Games, a hobby shop that serves ‘nerds’ such as these two36 (see Figure 7.12). Not far from Evergreen, the hobby shop houses an upstairs games-room in which gamers can sit and play for hours.
Zgune Cluned takes a different approach to photography than does Academic. While Academic focused on the nitty-gritty (such as the seats in which he sits or the corner where he uses a computer), Zgune Cluned centres the camera on the shop name, a larger-scale interpretation of place-meaning. He takes an even closer cropped photo of the Tim Horton’s we visit inside the College Park Mall where the subway lets out (see Figure 7.13).
Such larger scale photo-work suggests an attachment to the city on a much smaller scale. As counter-intuitive as it seems, Zgone Cluned’s attachment to such places suggests an affective attachment to the local region on a micro-geographic scale. As such, the shops and cafés they visit represent the downtown of Toronto more broadly, resonating with place-making for the two young men. These are some of the primary sites that vibrate strongly with the neoliberal whiteness I identified in the Chapter 6. Shops such as Tim Horton’s do work in insidious ways that contribute to the whitewashing of their image and the space of their shops. As Zgone Cluned states in interview, ‘I’m quote, unquote, whitewashed. It’s what happens!’ It does happen, and the socio-spatial environment, the material spaces that racially vibrate, contribute to this potential whitewashing, the embodiment and performance of whiteness.
As part of a system of domination, this whitewashing approaches cultural dominance in certain spaces, such as these downtown spaces. But there are alternative vibrations that allow for reinscription of cultural spaces in resistance ways. When we finally depart the subway, at Christie station (see Maps 7.6 and 7.7), Zgune Cluned exuberantly hops over the exit gate. He nearly plows into a woman entering the station at an adjacent gate and this near-collision causes him and James Crawford to excitedly chatter as we exit the station building.

Map 7.6 – Subway travel between legs of the Zgune Cluned and James Crawford Where-I-Live-Tour (Map Data Copyright 2013 Google)
Map 7.7 – The second leg of the Zgune Cluned and James Crawford Where-I-Live-Tour. The large number ‘6’ on this map deliberately obscures the location of the home where the two live (Map Data Copyright 2013 Google)

The chatter continues for a couple minutes as we cross Christie Pits park (‘The Pits’, James Crawford calls it), moving in as straight a line as possible towards the house where they are living. We only stop, just off a gravel roadway, between two baseball diamonds, to seek the privacy and calm of a maintenance building. As Matthew and his friends sought the marginal spaces of woodsy and underpass areas, Zgune Cluned and James Crawford have chosen this spot to smoke their bong (see Figure 7.14).
Such an activity, somewhat visible to public view, reinscribes the space in ways that create a subtle space of resistance. In this situation, Zgune Cluned and James Crawford help the emergence of a comfortable vibe of which youthful raced masculinity is part. This vibe creates the shelter of the building as ‘the spot’, an assemblage composed of shade, shelter, trees, the gravel path, lighters, concentration, smoke, racialized bodies, and the bong itself. The vibration is disrupted, however, when someone walks too closely by and the assemblage changes. The bong is hidden, the path is crossed, and the vibration resumes.

The point is not to get completely stoned since James Crawford still must meet with his housing worker. James Crawford and Zgune Cluned live in a supportive housing
building for queer youth, but James Crawford has reached the maximum length of his tenancy and must move out at the end of the week. In his words, he is being ‘evicted’. We arrive at this house and I am left in the front hall, while the two of them spin off in different directions. After a pause, I follow Zgune Cluned upstairs, who is sorting things in his bedroom; he has been asked to clean his room by the house supervisor. The ‘tour’ character of the afternoon unofficially stalls, as the space of their home ostensibly is not tourable. As Zgune Clune spies me glancing around surreptitiously, he says in a grand welcoming manner, ‘Oh yeah! This is my bedroom!’

James Crawford’s housing worker is late; we sit in the kitchen waiting while Zgune Cluned prepares something to eat (made of a Jamaican patty, a bun, ketchup, and mayonnaise - see Figure 7.15).

Figure 7.31 - Zgune Cluned's snack, a doctored Jamaican patty.
I ask Zgune Cluned if this is a typical meal or snack for him. He replies that if there is food in the house, it is. The house supervisor pokes his head in and reminds for the third time there is a house meeting at 7pm. This is in less than an hour and a half and I worry that the tour will be cut short. Zgune Cluned and James Crawford, however, have no intention of being at the house meeting, though they do not tell me this at the time. The daily ‘routine’ begins to come into focus for me, structured as their days are by temporal specificity and geographical distance: they must be downtown at Evergreen to eat at Noon and 5:30pm, but also be at home at 5:00pm and 7:00pm for meetings. The time clashes mean more meals like in the photo above.

James Crawford’s housing worker is very late (though so were we in returning home – might he have showed up and left before we were here?), so Zgune Cluned manages to persuade James Crawford to leave so we can get on with the tour. Zgune Cluned wants to take me to see Dueling Grounds, another hobby shop on Roncesvalles Avenue, but James Crawford and I think it is too far a walk. Bike Pirates, a community-run bicycle repair shop on Bathurst near College receives a similar reaction. Instead we take the subway (my tokens again) back downtown to Wellesley Station. On the subway we talk seriously about grenades and how long they take to detonate (‘Minimum five to six seconds, maximum ten’ – James Crawford). We depart at Wellesley Station and walk north to take a photo of the building where James Crawford’s housing worker works. James Crawford does not want to approach too closely in case the worker sees him, but wants me to have the photo since I missed the worker himself (see Figure 7.16).
We walk south and Zgune Cluned took a few photos until we reached Sugar Mountain, a candy store. I look around the store while Zgune Cluned and James Crawford start packing huge bags of two cents per gram bulk candy (see Figure 7.17).
When we get to the cashier, Zgune Cluned groans and draws out a ‘Whaaaat…’ when the scale tips and the cash register flashes the price: $20. He pulls out his cash and falls very short, having only $6. The teenage cashier tells him he can put the candies back that he does not want into the corresponding bins. He proceeds to do so while James Crawford comes to the till with his relatively smaller bag of candy: $15, five more than he has in his pocket. He asks me to give him part of his $15 tour honorarium now, which I do.
When Zgone Cluned comes back, he has whittled his bag down to $16 and he and I make the same ‘deal’.

I am unsure what to make of our experiences in the candy store. Does it suggest the youth of the two men? Their (large) sweet tooths? What about Zgone Cluned’s very compliant reaction to the cashier’s suggestion that he put individual candies back into their corresponding bins (there are probably fifty bins!)? I think perhaps the trip into the candy store is in part a performance for my benefit. Their youthful exuberance performs a racialized masculinity that elides both stereotypes about urban young men of colour and scholarly conceptions of visible and invisible homelessness. It strategically places them outside whatever perceptions their urban goth clothes elicit and emphasizes the multiplicity and fragmentation of their identities, placing them on more of a relational plane. As such, their relationships to urban space are revealed as more complicated than ‘invisible’ homelessness allows, and the lives and experiences of young men of colour are seen to be irrevocably geographic (as McKittrick argues about black lives). Indeed, while their homelessness might be variably visible or not, their lives in the city are decidedly visible and the ways that they rewrite socio-spatial meanings are decidedly real and material.

Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated some of the lived experiences of urban space for young men of colour experiencing homelessness. In it I have revealed the multiple overlapping ways that these young men negotiate (in)visibilities, often in simultaneous
ways and based on the contingencies of race, gender, class (homelessness). The negotiation of these (in)visibilities happens within a context of a racial vibration of whiteness, particularly when they occupy downtown spaces. This vibration contributes to their marginality by forcing them to occupy whitened spaces and affecting their identities (‘whitewashed’, as Zgune Cluned says) in ways that do not extend to them the privileges of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007; Bailey, 1998; Nayak, 2007). Zgune Cluned’s example provides the most obvious example of the potential perpetuation of the racist domination of whiteness that hooks suggests when she argues that ‘white supremacy…has proven to impact the psyches of white dominators of all classes as well as people of color, especially black people so those of us who have not decolonized our minds collude in perpetuating the very structures of racist domination’ (2009: 182). If they do not receive the privileges of whiteness, they do espouse the liberal and post-racial ideology of individualism, despite the potentially alienating affect this has on their lives. The invisibility of much of this racial process also contributes to their marginality.

This chapter contributes to literatures on the material lived experiences of race, gender and homelessness in all of urban, cultural, feminist and anti-racist geographies (Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008; Del Casino and Jocoy, 2008; Klodawsky, Aubry and Farrell, 2006; Living on the Ragged Edges Forum, 2003; Novac et all, 2002; Whizman, 2006). All four young men’s stories suggest the critical importance of ‘bodies’, including their own, for their occupation and use of public spaces. The literatures on race and affect as well as feminist geographies (masculinities, bodies, etc.) indicate the central importance of bodies to the creation of assemblages (Grosz, 1998; Lim, 2010;
Nayak, 2010; Ruddick, 2010; Saldanha, 2006; Swanton, 2010). For these young men, they negotiate their racialized and gendered bodies in ways that involve occasional intentional inputs to affective assemblages. Their advertent response to the affective alienation that ‘homelessness’ might cause them to feel indicates their experience is critically *sensual*. They can *feel* a sense of belonging as it emerges in temporary and contingent assemblages of which they and their bodies are part. This also has implications for work within urban and cultural geographies and race theory on visibilities (Ahmed, 2007; McKittrick, 2006; Whitzman, 2006). The (sometimes) strategic mobilization of certain racialized and gendered characteristics involves altering their bodily comportment and behaviour in order to ‘fit in’ with affective assemblages (such as the ‘undergrad’ assemblage Academic feels at U of T).

It should also be reiterated that their stories display the remarkable ability to rewrite social/public spaces for use by young men of colour such as themselves. Their mobility through the spaces of the city and transient occupation of small-scale public spaces contributes to a micro-geography of resistance. This resistance is intentional and not, but it operates to push back against the forces that would write them out of the public spaces of the city. These sources are many and varied, including cops and security guards, but also discursive and spatial constructions embedded in structures and institutions (such as the school, or ‘homeless’ service provision). This chapter explores the micro-geographic navigation of urban space, contributing to debates on interstitial or prime/marginal urban space (Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008; DeVerteuil, Marr and Snow, 2009; Hodgetts et al., 2008; Lees, 1997; Mitchell, 2003). It also illuminated some of the micro-geographic ways that those at the bottom of the income
polarization of contemporary Western cities navigate urban public spaces. As incomes further divide and ‘new homelessness’ becomes the main form of housing insecurity, research such as this, which shows how these things play out in ‘lived experience’, will become more valuable.
Chapter 8

Conclusions, Summaries, and Openings

Introduction

What I set out to do in my research was to show the relationships between race, gender and urban space in the lives of young men of colour experiencing homelessness. I was inspired by work in feminist, anti-racist, urban and cultural geographies. Each of these bodies of literature contributed to the research objectives that guided this research, but none alone have seen research conducted on young men of colour experiencing homelessness. Thus, I explored where the gaps were in the literatures, attempting to shore up holes, but also to draw connections between seemingly disparate bodies of sub-disciplinary literature.

In this conclusion I have four main purposes and the structure of the conclusion follows these. First, I reiterate the central findings of each of my empirical chapters. Secondly I discuss some of the main contributions to the bodies of literature from which this research was inspired. Thirdly I transition to the future with a section discussing some of things I feel did not go so well in conduct of this project. I discuss four limits/gaps that help set up what this project suggests for future research. The final section discusses some of these potential future endeavors, opening up the findings of the project to further areas of investigation on the socio-spatial impacts of racism, sexism, and homelessness.
What I did: Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of this research revolve around the complicated resolution of my research objectives. In what follows I discuss what I did by discussing the key findings of each of my four ‘content’ chapters.

‘Chapter 4 – ‘The vibe, yo!’: Racial Vibrations, Masculine Performances’ illustrates that racialization happens all around the GTA, but differently in different regions and areas and often on a micro-geographic scale. It provides answers for several of the research questions I asked in the introduction, including the following. How does race operate and/or emerge differently in different areas of the city? How is these young men’s performance of masculinity affected by their differential experience of race? This differential racialization, and how young men experience their race, depends on racial vibrations, which can by micro-local. This experience depends on the emergence of race as an event, which happens differently in downtown Toronto than it does in Scarborough or Mississauga. In downtown Toronto, race vibrates and emerges as an event in ways surprising to the young men, in contrast to the constant and more comfortable vibration of race in many suburban areas of Scarborough, Mississauga, and North York. The former surprising emergence of race is a result of a vibrating whiteness in downtown spaces, an adherence to the dominant cultural belief in (neo)liberal individualism that affects these young men’s ideas of themselves and others. Despite these different racial vibrations, young men of colour experience their everyday lives as racialized young men and this is fundamental in structuring their socio-economic opportunities. They articulate stories that suggest the presence of racist structural exclusions in work, housing, and school.
‘Chapter 5: ‘My Place of Residence’ explores the difference between perceptions and experiences of ‘home’ for the young men of colour. It answers questions I asked around masculinity and home. These include the following. How does their performance of masculinity change based on housing experience? Is masculinity shaped through their experiences of the different spaces of the city, public and private? How do they conceive of ideal homes? How are these conceptions similar or different to their experiences of home? What are the effects of this difference? Given the spatial character of home, are their other ways they create a sense of belonging in the city? Young men of colour articulate ideas of the ‘ideal’ home that reflect their youth in the local Toronto or Canadian context. This ideal is based on normative white, middle-class, nuclear family ideals. Despite these ideas about ideal homes, young men of colour experiencing homelessness articulate actual experiences of home that are fundamentally different from those ideas. These include the feeling of being not-at-home with regard to home-as-residence or house-as-home ideas, but also include the creation of alternative ‘home’ spaces such as in ‘friendly spaces’, neighbourhood/community, and city/nation spaces. Despite the latter spatiality, the distance between the idealized version of house-as-home create the feeling of being not-at-home that provides the alienating foundation for their homelessness.

‘Chapter 6 – ‘Gone, leave, go, move, vanish’: Public Space and (In)Visibilities’ explores the complexities and nuances of what it means to be ‘invisibly’ homeless and how this interacts with identity and social space. This includes answering research questions I asked around race, (in)visibilities, and resiliencies/resistances. These questions include the following. What are the various visibilities and invisibilities in the
lives of these young men? What are the forces and how do they navigate these various (in)visibilities? To who and how do they move into and out of visibility? What are the various resiliences and resistances these young men exhibit? Are they simply reactions to oppressive forces or can they be understood as creative and productive in their own right?

In this chapter I illustrate how various (in)visibilities (material, emotional, policy, racialized, etc.) shift as young men of colour navigate the urban (often public) spaces of the GTA. They navigate the in-between and interstitial spaces of (in)visibility in purposeful and inadvertent ways. Often they or their visibility are forced into emergence by external forces (such as cops). Despite these varying (in)visibilities, young men of colour experiencing homelessness maintain an explicit presence in the urban street spaces of Toronto and contribute to the material culture and socio-spatial composition of those streets.

‘Chapter 7: Micro-Geographies of Material (In)Visibility’ uses the Where-I-Live-Tours I conducted for this project to reveal how visibility and invisibility in urban space are affected by race and gender again in micro-geographic ways. It further answers the questions I asked around (in)visibilities and resiliencies/resistances articulated above.

There are multiple and overlapping (in)visibilities that these young men negotiate in public space. Moreover, the stories of the tours indicate the invisibility of much racial process that contributes to their continued marginalization. However, the stories here also suggest the ways these young men adapt and resist the vibrating whiteness that exists in many of the spaces of the GTA (but particularly in downtown Toronto). The force of structural racisms and punitive racialized anti-homeless and anti-youth policies attempt to ‘write’ them and their lived experiences out of the city and its built form. Despite this,
they display a vibrant resiliency in occupying and living in spaces in which these forces operate.

Each of these chapters has addressed in some way the relationship these young men of colour have to systems of domination. In various ways, the innovations of this research are found in the rather prosaic ‘realization’ that these young men are not ‘passive dupes’ (Smith, 1987: 152), but rather are active agents in the socio-spatial milieux of contemporary Toronto.

**Contributions to the literatures**

This dissertation contributes to literatures within feminist geography, anti-racist geographies and race theory, and urban and cultural geographies. The results in Chapters 4 through 7 straddle my four main areas of investigation: race, masculinity, ‘home’, and ‘visibilities’.

My conceptualization of the ‘vibration’ of race contributes to the emerging work on race and affect (Lim, 2010; Nayak; 2010; Saldanha, 2006; Swanton, 2010). As I point out in Chapter 4, there exists a perception of comfortable racial vibration in some suburban areas of the GTA, which is compared to the more volatile racial vibration of downtown Toronto. The stories in this chapter (as well as Chapter 6 and 7) suggest the materiality of the vibration of race (Saldanha, 2006), indicating that race exists more in the feeling within an assemblage than in other conventional sources (culture, phenotype, etc.). The vibration of race remains fairly constant, but is often obscured (and not ‘felt’) because of representational constructions such as post-racialism. As such, this work
contributes further to the representational construction of post-racialist ideas (Arat-Koç, 2010) and also the very real, material effects of ‘race’ (Ahmed, 2007; Galabuzi, 2006; McKittrick, 2006; Novac et al., 2002). Lastly, the ostensibly ‘comfortable’ vibration of race in many suburban areas might suggest that ‘diversity’ or ‘multiculturalism’ perhaps works best when away from the dominant culture. In the case of Toronto, ‘whiteness’ is the central force, situated as the city is in the country of Canada [a ‘white settler state’ ((Berg, Evans and Fuller, 2007)). The affective comfort that many young men feel in the more colourful (and less white) areas of the GTA indicates this might be true. Paying attention to affect and the ways that multiple forces shape lives in the city helps us see how materialist and representational understandings of the city can combine. As Cloke, May and Johnsen (2008) argue using Nigel Thrift’s term, geographies of homelessness are too often understood as restrictive, which ignores some of the ‘strange maps’ of the city. This research explicates some of those affective and strange maps.

In exploring the wide variety of (in)visibilities and how they are structured, forced, or strategically-manifested by young men of colour, this work also contributes to continuing discussions on ‘invisible homelessness’. While most of the research on invisible homelessness relates specifically to gendered (female) homelessness (Bridgman, 2003; Klodawsky 2006; May, Cloke and Johnsen 2007; Novac and Brown, 1996; Passaro, 1996; Rowe and Wolch, 1990; Watson, 1999; Wekerle, 1996; Whitzman 2006), my work opens up ‘invisible’ to include additional structures of invisibility – including racialized. I illustrate how in addition to the classic ‘landscapes of despair’ argument forwarded by Dear and Wolch (1987) and followed up by Whitzman (2006) in her evocation of two more kinds of invisibility (the focus on the centres of large cities and ‘invisible
homelessness’) there exist varying spatial (in)visibilities in urban space and the (in)visibility of racial processes that affect urban lives. Thus, my research shows how (in)visibilities can be simultaneously intentional/forced and material/emotional. Lastly, following McKittrick (2006), I depict how the lives of these young men are already geographic and they affect the sociospatial composition of the spaces in which they live. This occurs despite the fact that they often live unseen lives, at least insofar as Brand (1994) suggests in commenting that Toronto has a life that most white people do not know about.

Similarly, Cloke, May and Johnsen (2008) argue that the continued presence of homeless people in urban spaces can undercut the current sociospatial order. While my research follows this line of thought to suggest that this is perhaps true, the lives of young men of colour further complicate the issue. In addition to highlighting and in some ways undercutting present (neo)liberal structures, their lives also illuminate already-existing micro-geographic resistances and a consistent presence in that order. As such, young men of colour are shown to have already-existing roles in the constitution of urban social space, even as they are marginalized by various structures of oppression.

My conceptualization of the feeling of being not-at-home as emerging from the disconnect between idealized and lived experiences of house-as-home contributes to literatures on the plural and overlapping ways that people experience ‘home’. As I illustrate in Chapter 5, young men of colour create differently spatialized formations of home in relationship with people (friends, peers, and family) and places (at different scales – neighbourhoods, the city, the nation). The latter result provides evidence to support research that argues for a broader conception of ‘home’ and also research that
suggests studies of homelessness can illustrate these broadened views (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Klodawsky, 2007; May, 2000; Robinson, 2002, 2005). Despite the wider experiences and ways the young men in my research are able to create a feeling of home, I also provide evidence of the damaging effects of the normative discourse of white, middle-class, nuclear family ideals of home that are prevalent in Canada and Western nations more broadly (Brueckner, 2011; Gorman-Murray, 2007; Gorman-Murray and Dowling, 2006; hooks, 2009; Veness, 1993). Young men of colour articulate these norms in their idealization of ‘home’s they yearn for, despite many of them also articulating home in other ways. Thus, this work contributes to ongoing research on the differences between idealized and lived experiences of home (Brueckner, 2011; Mallett, 2004; Manzo, 2005; Paradis et al., 2008; Robinson, 2002; Somerville; 1992; Watson, 1999).

As such, the results in Chapter 5 contribute to work within feminist and urban and cultural geographies on home and homelessness. As many argue, ‘home’ is both material and affective (for example Gorman-Murray, 2007), but my work opens up the material to the wider spaces of the city, showing how home can be conceptualized by individuals in localized urban public and pseudo-public spaces of the city. What results is a complicated mix of belonging and alienation from the spaces in which they live. If these young men do create a ‘homeplace’ (hooks, 1990), it is not necessarily in the form of house-as-home, but reflects connections between people and places in a broader relationship with the city.

This dissertation also contributes to the continuing work on masculinities within geography and in particular, illustrates of certain micro-geographies of race and masculinity vector certain performances of masculinity. These results help answer the call for more research that explores both the spatial constitution of masculinity (Atherton,
2009; Berg and Longhurst, 2003; Day, 2001; Evers, 2011; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Jackson, 1991) and also work that explores the ‘messy complexities of young men’s lives (Hopkins and Noble, 2009: 816). Moreover, those complexities are revealed to be quite racialized in particular local contexts and can be based very much on affective feelings of place. This research also follows up on Van Hoven and Horschelmann’s (2005) suggestion that the key unresolved issue in geographical analyses of masculinity is the role of the body. This project clearly illustrates that the body and where it sits, lays, or is mobile, affects both sense of self, emotional well-being, and the constitution of urban space. This focus on bodies contributes also to work on affect and assemblages as well as race that suggests bodies (importantly, both human and non-human) are integral for the creation of ‘race’ (Grosz, 1998; Lim, 2010; Nayak, 2010; Ruddick, 2010; Saldanha, 2006; Swanton, 2010).

Finally, this research helps fill gaps in urban and cultural geographic studies of homelessness. First, it provides evidence of suburban homelessness, something that has been pointed out (Passaro, 1996 and Walks, 2006), but as of yet, is under-researched. Secondly, it approaches homelessness ethnographically, focusing on ‘lived experience’, which helps get at the material and affective dimensions of homelessness and how homelessness relates to structures of oppression. As such, I follow previous ethnographic research that shows the connections between urban life, urban space, and homelessness (Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008). Focusing on lived experience also means that micro-geographic processes in urban spaces are illuminated that might be missed in larger scale geographic scholarship.
Limits/Gaps

There are many limits and gaps in this research project, as in any project. Some are intentional, such as the limitation of participants to certain ages, certain locations, and certain experiences. Others were not intentional, such as the few awful interviews or ‘failed’ attempts to gain access to homeless service agencies. The former were gaps present at the very beginning of the research, built into the research design and a result of the fact that a doctoral project simply cannot cover every aspect of its subjects’ lives. These gaps occasionally popped up during the research such as when white youth wondered why I would not interview them for their homelessness experiences. Despite this occasional hiccup, these gaps do not bother me. However, the limitations and gaps that developed or became apparent as the project went on I take more seriously. Still, I do not view these as failures either. Rather, such things I believe are useful avenues for further research and reflection. Many of the research’s limitations are positive, existing at the limits of the project and producing new areas of research.

In this section I discuss four of these limits/gaps/failures. I suggest how they happened and what might be some of the significances of their happening.

A) Second Base

Early on in the research when I was trying to secure locations to find young men of colour experiencing homelessness to interview, I met with two staff members at
Second Base, a youth shelter and drop-in centre in the west end of Scarborough. I had emailed the director of the shelter and was connected with the two staff members to discuss my potential research and volunteering. I proposed to volunteer in their daily drop-in centre and solicit participants using the same methods I was using elsewhere – personal contact, poster, staff referrals. I also proposed to develop a geographical component for their ‘Men’s Group’, which runs once weekly. Both staff members expressed enthusiasm for my volunteering, excited at what I might contribute, but also expressed reservations about what my research might mean for the youth. They were concerned in particular that through talking to me, youth might awaken old traumas and be upset. I did my best to assuage them and I left encouraged when they said they would bring up my case at the next staff meeting.

I did not hear from them until a week after that meeting when I contacted them. They turned me down, re-emphasizing their concerns about me stressing out participants and how I might not be a good fit for their program. I think they might have been correct. One of the primary differences between Second Base and the other sites at which I conducted research is the much higher proportion of people of colour at Second Base, both in terms of staff and those using the services. Indeed, both of the staff with whom I discussed are people of colour. What I am suggesting here is that my whiteness, that irrevocable fact of my presence, vibrated in the space of the shelter. In rejecting me, they might have considered why would these young men need yet another white man in a position of authority in their lives? I agree: why would they? In discussing the difficulties and challenges of conducting ethnographic research from an ‘oppositional’ position, Ju Hui Judy Han argues that ‘normative presuppositions’ may never be overcome (Han,
My position as a white man could be read as ‘oppositional’ to many of the young men of colour to whom I was trying to gain access. Following what Han argues, even where I did gain access, such normative ideas may always have been acting.

This example points me to the pervasiveness of whiteness, that vibration that cannot be stifled, despite my assertions of conducting anti-racist research and so on. I am not suggesting that the staff at Second Base are guilty of an individual racism, but rather that they might recognize the potential of that ‘terrifying whiteness’ that bell hooks identified in the gazes of the white people on her grandmother’s street (hooks, 1990).

This Second Base example reveals challenges for conducting anti-racist research that accounts for whiteness. It also reveals some of the methodological challenges for conducting ethical research that sees as much or more benefit for the participants as the researcher.

Later, after achieving access to Red Cross Homeless Drop-In, literally adjacent to Second Base, I went back to Second Base to see if they would put up my recruitment poster. In the end they put my poster up in the foyer and several of the guys I met at Red Cross said they had seen the poster. If they were fine subjecting their residents to my research, but not to having me in the program, perhaps the issue was more a liability one – they might find residents upset after my interviews – or perhaps they felt that my involvement in programs might move into coercion. Still, it vibrates with race. The presence of (more) white bodies in their Men’s Group social spaces was not something they desired.
Another ‘failed’ research experience that illuminates the socio-spatial and lived experience of whiteness is the very brief tour I took with Alexei in Scarborough. I met Alexei on my way to the Red Cross drop-in and suggested we do a tour, something we had considered together at the end of our interview a couple weeks prior. He agreed and we started walking slowly northward, towards Eglinton Avenue, talking about places he likes to go to chill. When I suggested we visit some of those places, including parks and another drop-in centre, Alexei balked and became noticeably anxious. He suggested that he could not go to those places with me. Instead, we briefly visited a convenience store where I bought us juice and talked a bit more. It became clear that Alexei was not going to take me to any of the places in which he lives and was increasingly checking his watch. I paid him and we finished the tour, parting on Kennedy Road, across from where we had met up. Half an hour later I saw Alexei from a distance in the alley behind the church, smoking a cigarette.

Alexei clearly did not want to visit the spaces in which he lives with me. He was definitely attracted by the $15 I was offering for a couple hours of hanging out and talking, but when it came to taking me to his spots, he balked. My successful attempts at getting Where-I-Live-Tours were likely attributed to the participant liking me and being willing to spend a bit more time with me in a research capacity. For Alexei, it seemed that he liked me, but when it came to the physical experience of taking me to the places in which he lives, he was unwilling. While it is impossible to discern why (we did not talk about it), it is plausible to suggest I would not have fit (I would have been out of place). I
am older than him, I am white, and I do not speak the street slang. Again, this is wrapped up in the confluence of whiteness, something Alexei was willing to wrestle with, but only in the context of a research conversation, not in the spaces of his life.

C) Queer youth, drugs and youth

Two aspects of homelessness that are notably backgrounded in my results are drugs and the experiences of queer youth as queer youth. Both of these are aspects that could be the subject of a thorough investigation for the role they play in the lives of youth experiencing homelessness. Indeed, there are considerable data that suggests queer sexuality plays a very significant role in producing homelessness in the lives of youth in Toronto (Gaetz, 2004 and Gaetz et al., 2010). There is a need to conduct research with this subpopulation as there is considerable overlap between homelessness and queerness for youth. Also, to my knowledge there is very little work done on queer youth of colour experiencing homelessness.

Many of the young men I interviewed identified as queer, though it was not always something I asked about. Like race, sexuality was often not something that these young men brought up unless I did so first. Oftentimes it forced itself into the narrative if it was a primary ‘cause’ of a participant’s homelessness, but it was not a part of my research questions. As such, sexuality remains an important omission or rather, something that the present research dances around, particularly as it helps govern youth social organization and how social spaces are organized and maintained. The comparative aspect of my project (downtown and suburban) would be improved with a fuller analysis
of how sexuality plays into the social organization of homeless youth’s social worlds in both milieux.

Drugs also play a considerable role in the lives of the young men with whom I talked. In the preceding chapters they do come up, such as in weed smoked by Zgune Cluned and James Crawford on our tour, or in the dealing during which C had a conflict for which he was arrested. However, I have deliberately avoided playing up the drugs angle to avoid stigmatizing and moralizing. Indeed at times when a participant told me about some involvement with drugs (using, selling), they did so in a manner that suggested they thought it would shock me. I report these stories in such a way as to help normalize these experiences; they are not shocking anecdotes, but rather drugs are very much a normal part of daily life for many of these young men. This is not a popular point at any of the agencies at which I contacted the young men, which might serve to explain why they thought it would shock me when they expressed use or sales.

Very few young men I talked to seem to have any more than minor drug usage, though this depends of course on who is defining ‘minor’. That said, the role that drugs play, particularly for the young men who sell, can be fairly significant in their lives. It is my intention here to account for that significance just in case it is underplayed in the body of this research.

\textbf{D) Whiteness and white supremacy}

This research project has also made it readily apparent how difficult it is to account for my own privileged male whiteness. Despite designing my research methods
with explicit feminist and anti-racist aims, this methodology still required constant vigilance and attention to maintain these aims. This struggle is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3, my methodologies section.

To reiterate, I was committed to these frameworks before, during and after the research process. As I write this, I am still committed to feminist and anti-racism. However, what this research has revealed to me is the overwhelming impact of whiteness in the lives of some of the young men of colour whom I interviewed. In Chapter 4 I discuss how race vibrates more strongly in some spaces of the city and does so in such a way that it emerges as an event. In the downtown spaces of Toronto, I have argued that there exists a vibrating whiteness that masks what are actually racial emergences. The particularities of this whiteness are yet to be studied. This research has shown that this whiteness, or white supremacy (as feminists of colour have long called the effects of whiteness)\textsuperscript{38}, affects the lives of these young men, affecting both their sense of self and their socio-economic well-being.

In designing my research project I was heavily embedded in accounting for my own whiteness, but perhaps forgot to account for the whiteness of the spaces around me (and us, in doing the research). This might be the case even though I was explicitly looking at racialized experiences. This focus on my individual whiteness made me a bit slow to discovering the effects of structural whiteness in shaping the lives of young men of colour. In its socio-spatial effects on everyday experiences and its damaging racist limits imposed on the lives of people of colour, whiteness and white supremacy need to be more seriously investigated in the GTA.
Next Directions

I have always taken it as a measure of success for a cultural product to raise more questions than it answers. I believe this dissertation, as a cultural product of my ongoing scholarship, succeeds in this regard. There are a number of ‘openings’ that I have identified, even among the parts of the project that I feel hold limitations.

These openings are research questions raised but not necessarily covered fully by my research. They are the useful avenues for future research, both my own and by like-minded scholars. These openings are where I can suggest improvements in homelessness policy, in academic scholarship, and in the lives of the young men I talked to (or men like them). The final pages of this conclusion will address these potential avenues for future research.

A) Homelessness

This project began as one ‘about’ homelessness. But as anti-homelessness advocates and housing experts such as David Hulchanski will tell you, homelessness is quite simple (Hulchanski, 2008). In studying homelessness for the past eight years, in my Master’s work and my present doctoral research, I have come to both agree and disagree. As Jack Layton argues, ‘homelessness is not some mysterious affliction visited upon us by unseen forces. It is the tragic, but inevitable, outcome of a series of policy decisions’ (2008: XXV). It combines individual and structural causes into a mess of housing
insecurity for large numbers of people in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Canada. As such, what is simple about homelessness is what causes it, but what is not is what it does.

The *relationship* between homelessness and other kinds of identity proved particularly fruitful for exploring socio-spatial organization. In particular, the vagaries of homeless lives mean that young men are subject to discriminations and prejudices on a constant basis. As such, it is the relationship between homelessness and other things (such as sexuality, race, whiteness, wealth, and so on) that will form particularly useful research topics in future geographical homelessness research. My present project considers only some of these. Moreover, work that continues the geographical attention to the materiality of homelessness experience will be particularly valuable for discovering the effects of these relationships.

**B) Whiteness**

Scholars of race and racism have always argued that embodied and lived experiences are essential to understanding how racism operates (Fanon, 2008; hooks, 1990; Lorde 2007). Geographers and other scholars have illustrated how spaces are racialized in addition to people and groups of people (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). Moreover, scholars have researched and continue to research a wide range of experiences of racism in Canadian cities (Aguiar and Marten, 2011; Baldwin, Cameron and Kobayashi, 2011; Darden, 2004; Galabuzi, 2006; Hier and Bolaria, 2007; James, 2010; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Teixeira, 2011; Zaman, 2012).
In the past ten to fifteen years geographers have joined in the study of whiteness (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). The majority of these geographical studies have been of the germinal kind, suggesting the need for other geographers to conduct work on the spatial effects of whiteness (Berg, 2012; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000), or they are indicative of the insidious discursive construction of whiteness (Aguiar and Marten, 2011; Baldwin, Cameron and Kobayashi, 2011).

As I suggest in Chapter 4, some scholars argue that work on race goes too far towards discursive and representational discussion. Saldanha (2006) suggests that much contemporary theory looks at race as an epistemological problem, one of language, discourse, and representation. He attempts to ‘rematerialize’ race by looking at it ontologically and foregrounding bodies and corporeality. Other scholars are attempting this ‘rematerialization’ as well, such as Nayak, who suggests we need to pay close attention to ‘encounters in-the-flesh’ to understand how race affects social structures (2010: 2370).

Geographers are thus pointing at interesting and useful avenues for research on race and whiteness. My research in original design did not pay explicit attention to whiteness. I did not ask questions about whiteness, white people, or whether the young men I interviewed thought there existed a white supremacy or white hegemony in the GTA. Still, the material effects of whiteness were readily apparent in their lived experiences of social space in the region.

The lived experience and socio-spatial effects of whiteness in urban areas on people of colour are one of the openings of this research. Geographers’ work on the spatialization of whiteness needs to be more specifically applied to the micro-spaces of
urban areas, particularly in cities such as Toronto that have a very racially diverse population. The vibrating whiteness that my research identifies in downtown Toronto and the effects it has on the lives of young men of colour is an example of a phenomenon in need of study. It also needs to be investigated how the socio-spatial practices, attitudes and behaviours of people are colour serve to strengthen white supremacy through the embodiment and performance of whiteness.

C) The Right to the City

The socio-spatial effects of race and the lived experience of racism in cities affect the lives of people of colour in urban spaces. The right to effect what kind of a city one wants to live in and what that city looks and feels like are central tenets of ‘right to the city’ literature. The right to inhabit and to exist and see oneself reflected in the spaces of the city are regarded as essential to constructing a just city (Lefebvre, 1996; Mitchell, 2003; Thrift and Amin, 2004). But who is constructing this just city? What are the forces, the agents, the actors?

This research illustrates that in their lives in the city, young men of colour experiencing homelessness are engaged in rewriting the city. This rewriting is complicated. These young men exist at a complicated nexus of marginalities mixed with what they often perceive as privilege. Many of them manifest macho individuality and profess feeling free because of the individualism of the white liberal culture of many aspects of Toronto life. It is this spirit, this sometimes assertion of dominance that affords them personal agency in rewriting the city. It is not only dominance, though. Often it is
the marginality, and the legitimate sensing of it, that they take with them as they move through the spaces of the Toronto. As Sean said to me, ‘Why can’t life just be a little bit easier?’ It can, but not yet for Sean and many other young men like him. If we continue to shake how we do, we will continue to create a city with vibes like this.

I asked Mr. Anonymous about the potential for optimism in his life. He replied, quoting rapper Tupac: ‘It’s hard to be optimistic when your homies are laid out in chalk outlines on the pavement twisted’. Though Mr. Anonymous claims to be a devout pessimist, he is still charming, intelligent, thoughtful. I think this has to do with resilience, the iron-will resilience of young men whose lives have not been easy. This resilience involves a continuation, a being-positive, a keep-on-keeping-on in the face of insidious and overt forces of oppression. DH offers a concluding message, suggesting that despite things having been bad for him and him having acted badly, there is resilience:

It’s like, if I didn’t do bad, how would I know what’s good? My whole experience, my whole negative experience, I turned it around into something positive and even though I’m still not stable with housing and, I still, I’m still, in a sense homeless, I’m still happy, I’m still content with my life. I’m still happy with the people I’m around. I’m around beautiful people and I surround myself with positive people. I think that’s one thing I learned after the whole, after everything. Being around negative things brings you down, negatively, right? That’s just what happens. When I, five years ago, being around that negative aspect and just, fucking, staying negative, even after I got out, I was still over there in that negative nature, you know? Negative things was happening, you know? You gotta translate all that negative energy into something positive.

Though DH is likely speaking about himself and his life, the ‘something positive’ could be metaphorically stretched to include the positive creative potential of a right to the city politics. This research project illustrates how despite explicit and implicit attempts to write them and their experiences out of the city, through policing, or being invisibly homeless, young men of colour experiencing homelessness are integral to the
socio-spatial composition of the city. Their experiences navigating areas of the GTA in which they live reveal structural racism and sexisms that limit their life opportunities (in housing, work, education) and fix them in certain spaces of the city. These structures represent a constant attempt to reduce these young men’s space-making impacts. Despite this, their everyday geographies reveal counter-hegemonic micro-geographies as their lives encompass alternative pathways through and occupations of the city.

The struggle for the right to the city is not an even struggle fought evenly by all denizens of the city. This research has revealed that even though they do not often or always do it intentionally, the everyday lives of young men of colour in the GTA show their struggle to exist in urban space. This struggle is far out of proportion to the privilege afforded other city residents for whom housing, jobs, education seem to come much more easily. Their struggle runs across or through the city, through traditional geographic divides such as public/private. Valentine has shown how urban public spaces offer space for the being together of teenagers separate and autonomous from overbearing adult control (2004). She also suggests that those spaces, particularly at night-time, offer spaces of potential, where youth look for things that are happening.

My research suggests that youth are the happening. They are the constant everyday cry for the right to city space, the right to see it used and built as they/we see fit. This research also reveals that the politics of belonging and right to the city includes more than simply the public spaces of the city. While conventional right to the city literature (of the Lefebvrian vein) posits public spaces as the primary fora for the struggle, young men of colour experiencing homelessness reveal a creative fusing of city space, public and private and the spaces in-between. Certainly right to assembly and the right to use of
city public space is important for politics of representation, redistribution and publicity. But these young men’s lives suggest an incorporative and inverse right to the city in which the need for city space includes mental and physical places of belonging and affective spaces of anti-oppressive assemblages. Such spaces might include those vibrating with racial constancy, though without the irruptions that cause racialized oppression.

When I volunteered at Evergreen Yonge Street Mission for this project, I learned of two initiatives built upon the recognition that the spaces of the city became more dangerous at certain times, that there is a spatio-temporal aspect to youth city lives. The first initiative was a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu mixed martial arts class that ran late nights and on weekends. Similarly, there was a basketball program that ran late nights. The purpose was explained to me by a staff member: that by doing BJJ or playing ball, youth might not be doing other things that could be bad for them (drugs, gangs, and so on). This seems like a simple time-diversion tactic of the idle-hands variety. However, under broadened right to the city thinking, we might view such initiatives as revisionist imaginations of the city, what might or does already exist for young people in the city. A late night basketball game, instead of a community centre closing promptly at 9pm when many late-sleeping young people are gearing up for nightfall, operates as part of a city in which young people are integral to the socio-spatial and spatio-temporal structure of the city.

The right to collectivity, the being together of young people in the spaces of the city points to what Kipfer understands as Lefebvre’s ‘maximal’ difference: the ‘festive, creative, affective, unalienated, fully lived forms of plurality and individuality that
assume rich social relations’ (2008: 203). This is opposed to ‘minimal difference’, which
tends towards formal identity (young, male, person of colour, etc.). The former, such as
might be found in a lively late night game of basketball or a noisy youth drop-in, involves
the dynamic mixing of people in the city, based not simply on homelessness or being ‘at-
risk’, but on the organic-but-engineered creation of social spaces where surprise and
affect might reign. Such programs might open up the city to open up homeless or at-risk
youth of colour to a more broadened right to the city, based on none of these categories.

Some of this is already happening, though it tends to be clustered in downtown
spaces, the old space of homelessness. Drop-in centres for youth in suburban areas that
recognize the alternate time-spaces of youth geographies would help. If it needed to be
formalized, supports in addition to housing assistance could help youth transition from
youth through young adulthood to adulthood, focused on shaping productive economic
capacity as well as a healthy and balanced personhood. Such spaces might be designed to
recognize that for many youth, there is often not much difference between their troubled
home life and their troubled public life. As they move through the spaces of the city, they
are actively creating their home in their urban life.

Such centres might offer spaces from which young people could resist practices
that attempt to write them out of the city. Recently the Toronto Police have ceded to
handing out receipts for their already problematic and frankly oppressive practice of
‘carding’ people they stop on the streets for supposed suspicious behaviour. This comes
only after pressure from a Toronto Star investigation that revealed the disproportionate
 carding of black and brown people on the streets of the city (Toronto Star, 2013). My
research revealed this as well: Sean, who says he likely has $2000 worth of tickets
outstanding. More drop-in centres, where young people might informally run into one another and discuss such issues, coupled perhaps with social workers who might help them with such issues, would work well.

All of this involves reshaping the city into one that looks more like these young men. As Harvey states, the right to the city is ‘an active right to make the city more in accord with our heart’s desire, and to re-make ourselves thereby in a different image’ (2004: 239). This remaking, rewriting is a fundamental urban ethical and political issue. Saldanha argues that in conducting research, ‘rather than ending with questions ethical and political, perhaps we should start with them’ (2012: 197). I take such suggestions seriously and hope I have accomplished this. I might also revise the statement to suggest that we start, continue, and end with such questions. The everyday lives of the young men I talked too clearly vibrate with ethical and political issues and they often even must actively wrestle with them. This wrestling indicates that as I finish here connecting their lives to a broader politics of the city, they live it, engaged in their everyday lives in the writing and rewriting of the city. Surely, the city writes back. What might we have it say?
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279
Pseudo-public space is a term used by Mitchell (1995) to refer to private spaces that are largely open to the public, such as shopping malls.

I use the terms resistance and resilience aware of the distinction made by Katz (2001). Resilience involves a continuation of practices in the face of new realities, while resistance means struggling against those new realities. Often, people engage in both simultaneously.

It is only undertheorized in the literature on homelessness. In race literature and philosophy more generally, visibility/invisibility are much more thoroughly developed theoretically.

This invisibility is also noticed by Nayak (2010), though he focuses on the attention paid to people of colour and their association with inner-city spaces. Both the focus on visible homelessness in downtown spaces and on the lives of people of colour in downtown spaces denies the important materiality of lives in suburban spaces.

Most of this research focuses on the disproportionate demographics of American homelessness, with many more blacks experiencing homelessness in American cities than the population proportions suggest they should (Marcuse, 1996).

The methods I use are more accurately described as ‘ethnographic’ rather than ethnography. This is because my methods are shared with ethnography (such as reflexivity and attention to small-scale cultural activity), but what I conduct is not really a study of a uniform or whole ‘ethnic’ group.

These calls included ones to youth shelters like those in Aurora and Newmarket, by which I was told that there did not exist a sufficient number of young men of colour. Or rather, to paraphrase from memory, ‘I would say we’re uh, 99.9%...uh, Caucasian’. Granted, this number was probably represented to dissuade me, but I did interview a young man in downtown Toronto who had stayed at the Newmarket shelter, which means that 999 white people must have stayed there with him. This might have to do with white spaces and the erasure of experiences of people of colour in those spaces.

‘Political’ was his word, though he did not explain what it meant. Peel Region at the time was implementing a couple new shelters (for youth and for families) and perhaps wanted to distance themselves from critical scrutiny of these efforts.

The list of duties specific to a Front Line Volunteer at Our Place Peel can be found in Appendix C.

Unfortunately, I do not have a copy of this waiver.

I met with a staff member of Second Base to discuss the possibility of volunteering in their drop-in, which is in the basement of the shelter. The staff member seemed interested in my work and receptive to the possibility of doing research, but had reservations about the impact the interview conversations might have on the young men. Our meeting ended with her suggestion that she would present my proposal to the shelter committee. A couple weeks later I received an email from the staff member suggesting that they could not fit me into their program.
Often I found my carefully crafted informed consent form being used as a tool for idle hands, though not in devil’s work, but in folding, tapping, and fingernail picking. These uses are very revealing of the differences in knowledge, interest, and expectations of academic research.

An example of my recruitment poster/flyer can be found in Appendix B.

The exact honorarium value ($15) was also chosen to satisfy the University of Toronto ethics review, which sets upper and lower limits so as to set reasonable accommodation.

The one tour I did in Scarborough was brief because the young man was unsure of what I wanted to see, where he should take me. I reassured him that I only wanted to see places where he hung out, chilled, or were special to him. After about forty five minutes, he grew too uncomfortable and we had to stop the tour.

While here I am the one who introduces the word ‘vibe’, it emerged out of many previous interviews with other young men of colour (including those featured in the other vignettes in this chapter). The word refers to a cultural and affective feeling or intuition of an atmosphere. In most cases, the vibe acts on people, shapes bodies, and informs their relationships and actions.

A ‘wife beater’ is a sleeveless undershirt.

Personal Support Workers.

The reasons for this rejection were not really discussed in interviews. However, it is clear that for young men who reject such identifications, the rejection is important for their sense of self. As John suggests, gangster/thug styles and identifications can be something to be avoided: ‘Yeah, they’re all oh, I’m so gangster or whatever. I’m not whitchu man!’

Tim Hortons is a coffee and food chain.

No Frills is a grocery store.

Sean suggests he has difficulty getting a job in Kingston-Galloway, but as scholars have argued about ‘spatial-mismatch’ theories, it is unclear whether ethnic and racial minorities are spatially separated from work in North American cities (Bauder, 2000). Bauder points out the conventional spatial mismatch hypothesis is that ethnic and racial minorities are disadvantaged in the labour market because they cluster in inner-city areas away from suburban job opportunities. In the case of Kingston-Galloway, it might be that, as Bauder points out about the urban/suburban dynamic, that the area is removed from the ‘economic growth corridors’ of the GTA.

C’s age is an educated guess based on descriptions of his life chronology and relationships.

There is a chance this was a territorial struggle over a drug-dealing spot. C is vague in suggesting the other man ‘said some junk and shit’ and does not suggest if they knew each other previously.

W is a pseudonym for a close personal friend of C’s.

Shoppers Drug Mart is a drug/grocery store.
27 John’s age is a guess based on the stories he tells and conversations with OPP shelter staff.

28 TJ’s age is a guess based on the stories he tells.

29 The disaffection that TJ feels matches up with the argument Gorman-Murray (2008) makes about the role home-making plays in the accumulation of sense of self. TJ is alienated from such accumulation, but can likely feel it happening in homes he has been in.

30 Anthony’s age, too, is a guess based on the stories he tells.

31 It is unclear whether Sean’s baby mother is in a conventional prison or a mental health institution. While he called it a prison, he suggested that it might be a mental health facility.

32 Henry and Berg (2006) have argued that banal reproductions of ‘the nation’ are a key component of hetero-masculinity. This is worth noting for the potential interrelationship here between masculinity, home, and nation for Academic.

33 These included the Safe Streets Act, actually a Provincial initiative, enacted in 1999 and From the Streets into Homes: A Strategy to Assist Homeless Persons Find Permanent Housing, enacted in 2004.

34 Ahmed argues that ‘the ‘stop and search’ is of course a technology of racism, as we know. The stop and search does not stop there: the search itself can be extended by practices of indefinite detention. Stopping is both a political economy, which is distributed unevenly between others, and an affective economy, which leaves its impressions, affecting those bodies that are subject to its address’ (2007: 161).

35 As Matthew’s tour shows, these young men often have a sense for which spaces are ‘prime’ and which are ‘marginal’. This distinction comes from the body of literature that focuses on the role of public space in citizenship, belonging, and emancipation, such as is discussed in Hodgett et al.: ‘Contemporary cities comprise an uneven patchwork of ‘marginal’ (under bridges) and ‘prime’ (shopping districts) spaces where the urban landscape reflects the arrangements and contestations of social power to include and exclude (Lees 1997). Although such distinctions between spaces can be experienced in tangible ways, the distinctions are not fixed and can vary over time as particular urban spaces fall in or out of favour with investors or local authorities. Prime urban spaces can also become marginal according to the season, time of day, or who is there. Reflecting the complexities of space and the politics of inclusion, homeless people can resist exclusionary practices, for example, by appropriating marginal spaces, journeying across prime spaces, or occupying prime spaces at marginal times (Mitchell 2003’ (2008: 934).

36 Zgune Cluned is the one who calls himself and James Crawford ‘nerds’. I get some credibility and rapport with both when I cop to some nerdy activity myself. Indeed, I have shopped at 401 Games.

37 James Crawford did not elaborate on the length of his tenancy and I did not ask.

38 I use the phrase ‘white supremacy’ in the ways that feminist scholars of colour have been doing for decades (hooks, 1991; Collins, 1990), referring to the social structure that values and privileges the role white people play in society and devalues the role played by people of colour.
This usage is picked up by Berg (2012), who suggests that it more accurately reflects the social impact of whiteness than ‘white hegemony’.
Appendix A

March 24, 2010

Proposal for Study:

Gail,

My name is Jeff May and I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto. I am at the beginning stages of a research project entitled “Racialized young men’s experiences of homelessness in the GTA”. This project is ethnographic/experiential in character, which means that it is qualitative and is about young men’s personal experiences of homelessness. Moreover, the qualitative character of this study means that I am not interested in quantitative data (such as how many men of colour are homeless or live in shelters or not, etc.).

In brief, the areas I am looking to explore with the youth are their concepts of home and masculinity and strategies of visibility and invisibility. The former two are concepts which have dominant social norms and I am interested in seeing how racialized young men experiencing homelessness view these. The latter two are more about the practical nature of living without a permanent and traditional "home": are there places and times where these young men try to be more visible and places and times where they try to be less so?

I am hoping to volunteer at Yonge Street Mission to get to know the youth before I begin interviews and to help to refine my research questions. I am hoping to conduct informal/conversational interviews (without a question script) with approximately 15-30 men of colour between the ages of about 18-30. These interviews could be conducted over the next six months. I would like willing participants (maybe 5-10) to take me on a tour of places and spaces where they spend time (locations completely up to them) and with some participants I would like to have a second interview if I feel there is more to discuss. First round interviews would last about an hour and for these I will compensate participants with $15. I do not necessarily have an space requirement of YSM because I will likely conduct interviews at a nearby coffee shop (but the exact location is to be chosen by the participant).

I would really appreciate it if you and YSM would be willing to participate with me in my study. Let me know if you have any questions at all.

Thanks,

Jeff May
PhD Candidate
Department of Geography
University of Toronto
416-203-3884
Want to earn $15?

You can if you are:

- male
- between the ages of 16 and 25
- a person of colour (non-white and non-Native)
- were born in Canada
- have some experience with unstable housing (living with friends, staying in shelters, sleeping outside, etc.) or homelessness

Jeff May is a student at University of Toronto and can pay you $15 for a one-hour interview. If you are interested please contact Jeff and leave your name and phone number at:

416-203-3884

Or if you do email you can contact him at:

mayj@geog.utoronto.ca
Appendix C

OUR PLACE PEEL

POSITION TITLE: Front Line Volunteer

POSITION REPORTS TO: Tim Stevens (Youth Support Coordinator)

Duties, Responsibilities, and Related Tasks:

1. **Front Line Volunteer:**
   - Provides a positive environment to all the youth coming to the shelter
   - Interacts with residents on all shifts, modeling behavior in accordance with generally accepted societal standards.
   - Runs youth groups for residents according to interests and teaching abilities
   - Supports staff on shift by interacting with the youth; playing games, assisting them with housing searches, employment searches, and offering other support where needed
   - Create and implement programs related to the population served at Our Place Peel
   - Provides support to staff with dinner preparation, completion of chores, house laundry
   - Reports all incidents to the primary staff on shift
   - Maintains open and professional communications to identify and resolve issues and to encourage positive life decisions.
   - Promotes involvement in program activities and participation in workshops to address areas of need previously identified with resident