
Feminist Spaces

Gender and Geography in a
Global Context

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GENDERING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Risa Whitson

Introduction

Take Back the Night marches—held annually on hundreds of college campuses in North America and Europe, as well as in countries such as India, the Bahamas, and Japan—symbolize concerns about sexualized violence in, and women's lack of access to, public space. These marches, which began in the 1970s in response to violence against women in public spaces, also underscore the significance of a presence in public space for reclaiming rights and fostering a feeling of belonging. In recent years, other social movements have also highlighted the critical importance of access to, and control over, public spaces for functioning democratic societies, such as the Occupy movement and the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes rallies in North America. In addition to other locally-based movements present around the globe (for a list, see www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/online/), transnational programs to address these issues have also been established (for instance, the UN Women's Safe Cities Global Initiative: www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces).

The presence and proliferation of these movements, and others like them, highlight the ways in which the struggle over access to the city, representation in public space, and social belonging in the city continue to be gendered and sexualized. Feminist geographers have long focused on urban areas, and particularly urban public spaces, as sites of importance for examining social relationships and social justice issues. From the perspective of feminist geographers, the physical organization of the city, as well as access to and control over its spaces, are critical aspects of the construction of gendered and sexualized identities and inequitable power relations. In analyzing urban areas, feminist geographers have asked: How do these unique spaces play a role in constituting gendered meanings? Who has access to and control over these spaces, and to what end?

In this chapter, we address the gendered geographies of the city through the concept of the 'right to the city.' We discuss the ways in which feminist geographers have understood these rights (as well as cities themselves) to be gendered by exploring themes of public space and urban change. In particular, this chapter examines urban public space by considering the ways in which gendered public spaces affect people's behavior, identity, and mobility. Following that discussion, the chapter addresses urban change through an examination of the effects of neoliberal urban policies, including gentrification.

Gendering rights to the city

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), we are now living in the 'Urban Millennium' (UNFPA 2007). Since 2008, over half of the world's population has lived in urban areas, and the number of urban dwellers is continuing to rise dramatically. While countries in the Global North have had a large percentage of residents living in urban areas since the middle of the 20th century, cities in the Global South continue to grow dramatically. Researchers estimate that over 90 percent of future urban growth will occur in the Global South, with the majority of that taking place in Africa and Asia. While cities have long held the promise of new economic, social, and political opportunities, for many people (including women and sexual minorities), this promise is not always the reality of today's urban centers. Although cities may offer greater freedoms from traditional norms, and increased possibilities for education and employment, high rates of urban growth are also associated with high levels of poverty, a lack of adequate infrastructure, and the increased marginalization and vulnerability of large portions of the population, particularly in the Global South. Around the globe, urban areas are at the center of debates over the provision and availability of services, as well as access to and participation in public space. Indeed, it is in these contexts that critical struggles are being waged over who belongs to 'the public,' whose voice should be heard, and who has the right to control the spaces around them.

During the 1990s, urban geographers began to discuss the importance of this **right to the city** in discussions surrounding access to resources, political rights, and citizenship. From this perspective, cities are not just backdrops against which social action and relationships occur. Rather, cities are places of encounter for everyday life, where rights can be realized and social belonging achieved. Drawing on the work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1996), geographers thus argue that cities should constitute places of inclusion, participation, and access to resources. These ideas envision cities as central to the process of belonging to, and participating in, a political and social community.

According to Tovi Fenster (2005) and Mark Purcell (2002), the concept of the 'right to the city' has two primary components. First, it involves the **right to appropriate** urban space. This includes the right to 'live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize and occupy urban space in a particular city' (Fenster 2005, 219). For instance, the 'right to appropriate' the city means that people from all social groups can congregate in public spaces, such as parks,

streets, and commercial areas, doing the activities that they enjoy without fear of police brutality, or economic or racial exclusion.

Second, the right to the city involves the **right to participation**. This means the ability to engage in meaningful participation in the decision making, political life, and management of the city. In other words, this is the right not to simply live in the city, but to participate in making decisions that shape the city according to one's own needs and desires. This requires that the people who live, work, and play in cities be involved in decision-making processes that affect and produce urban space.

The concept of the 'right to the city' has not been limited to academic conversations. As evidenced by the World Charter for the Right to the City, which emerged from the World Social Forum meetings in 2004 and 2005, the concept has become a tool for social organizing, more broadly. At a time when the majority of the world's population now lives in urban areas, and the rates of urban poverty continue to skyrocket, the idea of the right to the city provides a way of understanding human rights that is place-specific. This place-based conceptualization of human rights can serve as an anchor for struggles over social justice. Yet the gendered aspects of these rights to the city are often overlooked. While the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 11 focuses on the right to the city, it does not have an explicit gender component. Similarly, while Sustainable Development Goal 5 reinforces global interest in achieving gendered equality, it does not consider urban space as an explicit site of action to meet this goal (UN 2014).

It is not only in policy, but also in academic and theoretical discussion of the right to the city, that issues of difference (including, but not limited to, gender difference) have been insufficiently explored. According to Fenster (2005), Lefebvre's understanding of the right to the city, which lays the foundation for much of the thinking on this topic in urban geography, does not 'challenge any type of power relations (ethnic, national, cultural) let alone gendered power relations as dictating and affecting the possibilities to realize the right to use and the right to participate in urban life' (219). This is to say that a generic understanding of the right to the city does not take into consideration how some people (such as men, the wealthy, the highly educated, ethnic and racial majorities) are more free both to use the city as they would like, and to participate in decision making regarding these areas (Box 4.1). Moreover, as Linda Peake and Martina Rieker (2013) argue, 'achingly little attention has been given specifically to the roles women are playing in these [urban] processes and the social, economic, and political implications of these new urbanisms and spatialities



Box 4.1 Who has the right to your city?



Figure 4.1 A march to protest police brutality during the second week of Occupy Wall Street in New York City. Photo taken on September 30, 2011. Reproduced courtesy of David Shankbone.



Figure 4.2 Black Lives Matter activists protesting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photo taken on November 15, 2015. Reproduced courtesy of Tony Webster.

The two images above illustrate moments in which two groups—the Occupy movement and the Black Lives Matter movement—have appropriated public space to confront social, economic, and political injustices. In moving their protests into public space, both groups also raised questions about who belongs in, and controls the use of, urban public spaces.

Activity

Consider the public and semi-public places in which you live, work, and play. Who has the right to appropriate these spaces? That is, who has the right to use them, and for what purposes? As you answer this question, consider a variety of social groups: women and men, sexual minorities and straight people, affluent and low-income people, people of color and white people. Who would be welcomed and who would be viewed with suspicion? Would some activities be considered allowed for certain groups, and viewed with suspicion for other groups? How is people's presence and behavior constrained through law or custom? The 2014 shooting of Tamir Rice and the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin, for instance, highlight the way in which race and class work together to restrict the access of lower-income African Americans to public space. Consider also who has the right to participate in the production of public spaces. In other words, who makes the decisions about these spaces? Who creates the rules about what public spaces should be used for, and by whom?

for them' (12). As a result, feminist geographers have worked to explore the rights of women and other groups to appropriate urban space and to participate directly and meaningfully in its production (Fincher and Jacobs 1998).

Gendered public space in an urban context

For those interested in the right to the city, consideration of access to, control over, and a feeling of belonging in public spaces is one of the areas of greatest concern. In the context of democratic societies, **public spaces** (such as parks, streets, plazas, and other spaces of supposedly open access) are especially important, as they provide an opportunity for interaction with those different from us outside of the direct control of the state or economic actors (such as businesses) (Bondi and Rose 2003). Equally importantly, they provide a space for people 'to go and just be' (Mitchell 1995, 110). Not only is this important for the organization of political movements, but a presence in public space also allows for different groups, including marginalized groups, to become visible and legitimate members of the broader public. As such, public spaces are a key site in claiming the right to appropriate and participate in urban space (Secor 2004).

While the ideal of public space is an inclusive concept, in practice it is, and has always been, exclusionary, limiting access to women, people of color, linguistic minorities, people who identify as LGBTQ, working-class and poor people, the elderly and children, and the disabled (Young 1989). According to Liz



Figure 4.3

Central Park in New York City. Parks are an iconic example of public spaces, where people may have the possibility of encountering those different from them. This image suggests, however, that while no formal restrictions may exist prohibiting the use of public space by certain groups, these spaces may nonetheless be used by people who are fairly homogenous in terms of class and race. Reproduced courtesy of Woody Wood.

Bondi and Damaris Rose (2003), 'public space is understood to be constituted by impositions, negotiations and contestations over which groups comprise the public that has access to these spaces, for what purposes these spaces are used, and what visions of society urban public space embraces, enforces, produces and promotes' (235). Feminist geographers in particular have argued that public spaces are constructed as masculine and heteronormative, effectively preventing the access, participation, and belonging of women and sexual minorities.

A number of feminist geographers have chronicled the historical development of gendered public space in the context of Western Europe and North America,

beginning with the importance of the separation of spheres to the masculinization of public spaces (discussed in Chapter 3). By the early 20th century, as Daphne Spain (2014) recounts, separate spaces were strongly entrenched in the city:

Department stores, settlement houses, and women's clubs were gendered spaces in the industrializing cities, as were saloons, restaurants, and business clubs. They gave men and women different destinations in the city. No signs were needed to indicate which sex belonged in which space; it was simply understood who belonged where. Thus, the idea of separate spheres became encoded within the public spaces of the city.

(584)

Gender was not the only category that was used to organize access to public space. As discussed in Chapter 6, race has also been a way of explicitly organizing urban space, in both the US and other contexts. While spatial segregation based on race was encoded in law, and often included visual markers such as signs, gendered spatial segregation was often less codified, but nonetheless had strong effects on people's access to, and use of, urban spaces.

In many parts of the Global South, patterns of public and private space have also historically mapped onto understandings of the masculine and feminine. This conceptualization can also extend to understandings of space as forbidden and permitted, as is evident in Bedouin communities in Southern Israel. According to Tovi Fenster (1999), in this context, rather than spaces being categorized absolutely as 'public' or 'private,' spaces take on different meanings for different individuals at different times. Thus, the private space of the home may typically be 'permitted' for women's space, but once a male stranger enters this space, it becomes 'forbidden' to the women who live in the house, who must then seek out more modest permitted space or use the 'portable seclusion' of the veil (Papanek and Minault 1982). Yet while Muslim women are often perceived as uniquely restricted in their use of public space, this is not necessarily the case. Rather, women in all contexts must negotiate issues of risk, cultural norms, and gendered household responsibilities in public spaces. These spatial mappings of public/private and forbidden/permitted are critical in understanding people's experience of the city, as they establish a spatial system of organization, within which people of all genders negotiate and inhabit the city. This in turn provides a context for the possibilities and constraints available to people of different genders with regards to urban participation and appropriation.

For those of us living in contemporary urban areas, the world that Spain (2014) describes above may seem to have little in common with our urban experiences today. Yet in contemporary cities, there continues to be gendered differences in the use, experience, and control of public space. That is, for people of different gender and sexual identities, there are distinct patterns of presence and mobility, behavioral norms, feelings of belonging, and ability to control and regulate the activities and behaviors of others in public spaces.

These differences may be manifested in various ways. In some places, customs and religious beliefs continue to exclude women from public spaces. For instance, in the context of Saudi Arabia, while women-only public spaces exist, interaction in public space between the sexes continues to be a subject of intense debate. In this context, Saudi women may also find it necessary to be accompanied by a male relative to enter public space, or may restrict their movement to women-only public spaces (van Geel 2016).

In other places, while no laws may exist to prohibit women's entrance into public space, gendered behavioral norms nonetheless continue to persist. Chapters 1 and 2 examine how these norms can affect one's experience of, and interaction with, public spaces, including by affecting one's dress, mobility, and leisure activities. For example, in some contexts it is less common or unacceptable for women to walk alone at night, be present in public space without a defined reason (that is, just 'hanging out'), or engage in public leisure behaviors considered to be 'masculine,' such as drinking and smoking. While these norms may be enforced through social expectations or the threat of violence (implicit or explicit), they are also frequently incorporated into gendered performances of femininity. As a result, women often internalize these gendered norms of behavior in public space in such a way that the norms do not need to be externally imposed. This means that women will police themselves to conform to these norms, thus removing any need for formal rules regarding what women can or cannot do in these spaces. Janaki Abraham (2010) argues that 'girls and women learn how to produce "respectability" through their use of spaces and clothing, while simultaneously testing the boundaries of this control' (201). These gendered performances are learned at an early age, as girls continue to have different experiences of mobility and activity in public spaces than boys (Figure 4.4).

Public spaces are also gendered through images, such as outdoor advertising. These images often work to sexualize women and present them as adornment in public space, rather than as the creators or authors of such spaces. Therefore, their inclusion in public space through visual imagery supports

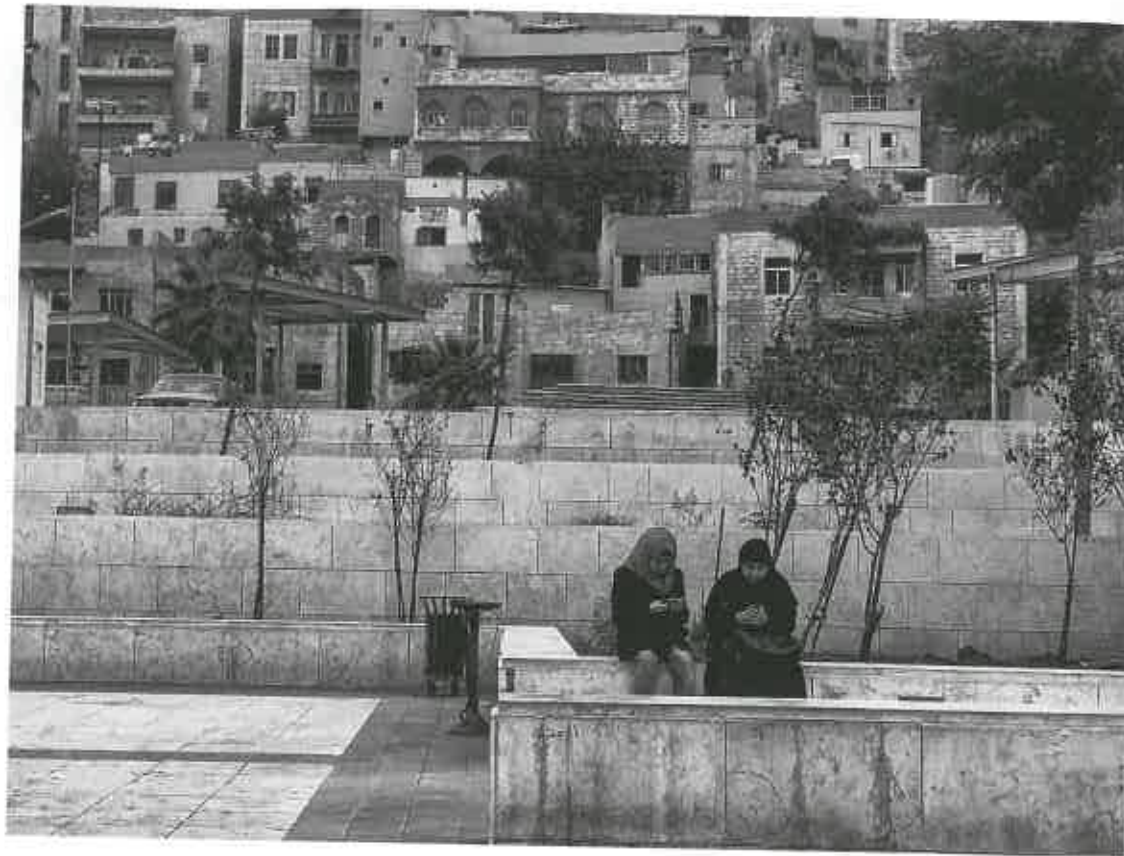


Figure 4.4
Hashemite Plaza in Amman, Jordan. While public spaces may be open and available to women, internalized gender norms continue to structure behavior in public spaces in all geographic contexts. Reproduced courtesy of Woody Wood.

women's subordinate status (as visual and sexual objects) and reinforces the masculine nature of these spaces (Rosewarne 2005).

In exploring the experiences of gendered individuals in public space, however, it is important to recognize the effect of not only gender on experiences of public space, but also other aspects of identity, including class, race, sexual identity, age, ability, and nationality. These factors also strongly impact individuals' ability to claim rights to participate in, and appropriate, public space. Further, because gender roles and expectations vary from one social group to another, not only do women in different places have different experiences of the city, but women of different races, ethnicities, classes, ages, and nationalities will also experience and subsequently produce public space in different ways. In spite of this complexity, gendered experiences of public space lead to, and are subsequently reinforced by, gender differences in feelings and symbolic meaning associated with public spaces.

Public space and the geography of fear

One of the most prominent themes that feminist geographers have explored in relation to public space has been women's experience of fear. In a groundbreaking article on this theme entitled 'The Geography of Women's Fear,' feminist geographer Gill Valentine (1989) argues that women's experience of fear in public spaces affects their use of these spaces in terms of engagement and mobility, and often results in them seeking 'protection' from men as they enter into public space (for example, by asking a man to walk them home). Valentine argues that not only are these behaviors an expression of women's disadvantaged position within a patriarchal social system, but that they also in turn maintain and perpetuate male dominance through reinforcing men's control over public space. Thus, Valentine concludes that women's 'inhibited use and occupation of public space is therefore a spatial expression of patriarchy' (389).

A number of other geographers have subsequently explored gendered experiences of fear in public space, examining the reasons for, and effects of, fear on individuals and social groups (England and Simon 2010). This body of work has concentrated on the various factors associated with fear in public spaces, how the experience of fear varies between different groups, and how men and women react to these fears. Important to understanding this subject is realizing that geographies of risk do not correlate with geographies of fear. That is, men are more likely than women to be victims of violence in public space, yet report lower levels of fear. At the same time, women's fearfulness in public spaces is ubiquitous and not closely related to risk of crime, as women are actually much more likely to be victimized in private spaces. While certain types of places are associated with women's fear (such as dark, isolated spaces, and local public spaces such as parks, paths, transit stations, and shopping centers), it is not these built environments that create the fear, but rather gendered social power relations—resulting in women's subordinate social, economic, and political status—that produce social vulnerability. This is consistent with research that suggests that fear is connected to social well-being, such that those who feel most vulnerable in society overall will tend to be the most fearful (Koskela 1997).

Women's experience of fear in public spaces has important consequences that affect social interactions and women's use of space and quality of life. In particular, women's strategies in the face of fear of violence cause them to limit their movements, avoid certain areas of the city at certain times of day, restrict

unaccompanied traveling, and keep to their homes (Box 4.2). These strategies reinforce social norms that associate the masculine with public space, normalize women's fear of such spaces, and perpetuate the discourses that function to produce this fear. In her research on women's experiences in public spaces in Mumbai, India, Shilpa Phadke (2005) explores how safety comes to take the form of surveillance for women. She states:

To be safe is not only to be policed externally, but also to internalize the panoptic gaze that demands normative behavior denoting a sexuality under control. Safety in the form of surveillance might in fact create a context within which women, too, could be more carefully monitored by families, communities and, in a more general sense, by the conservative sections of society.

(55)

Nonetheless, women also respond to these geographies of fear not only through avoidance, but also through boldness and the production of spaces where they feel safe. Just as fear is an expression of social vulnerability, women's boldness in public space works to open up these spaces for increased appropriation by women. As Hille Koskela (1997) argues:

The fact that some women are bold and confident shows that women are not only passively experiencing space but actively take part in producing it. They reclaim space for themselves, not only through single occasions such as 'Take Back the Night' marches, but through everyday practices and routinised uses of space. Their everyday spatial practices can be seen as practices of resistance. By daring to go out – by their very presence in [the] urban sphere – women produce space that is more available for other women. Spatial confidence is a manifestation of power. Walking in the street can be seen as a political act: women 'write themselves onto the street.'

(316)

Women's feelings of fear and safety are thus intertwined in public spaces, making women's everyday choices to engage in public space an expression of their ability to live with and move beyond feelings of fear (Panelli et al. 2005; Phadke 2005).

These experiences of resistance and agency by women in urban public space are also reflected in the contemporary activism around this issue, including by the organizations discussed in the introduction to this chapter and Chapter 1,

Box 4.2 Fear in public space

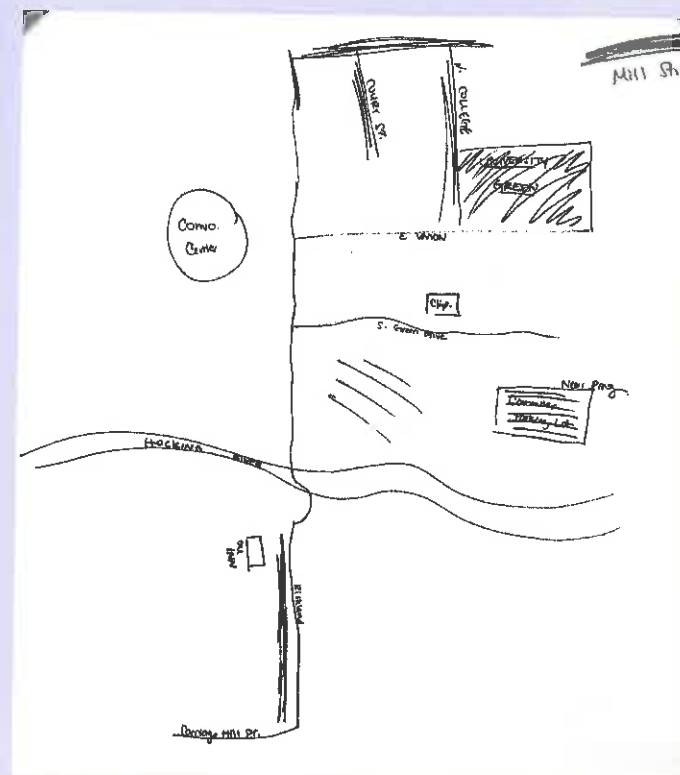


Figure 4.5 A mental map of spaces of fear produced by female college students. In this map, hashed areas indicate spaces of fear. Reproduced courtesy of Maria Panaccione.

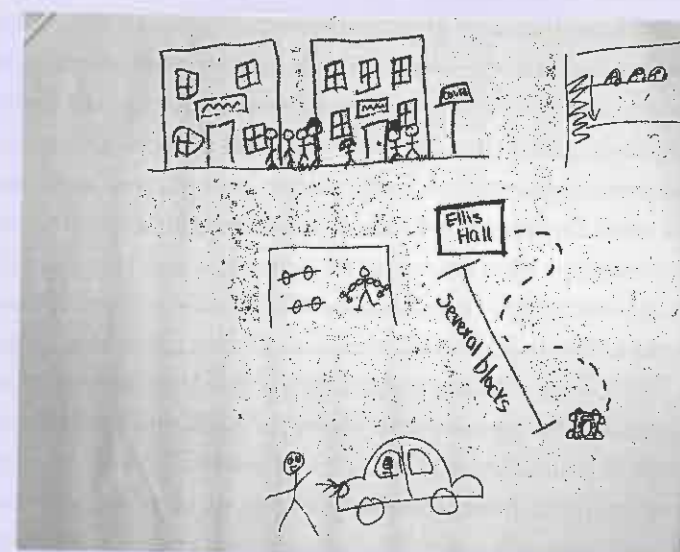


Figure 4.6 A mental map of spaces of fear produced by female college students. In this map, students illustrated spaces where they felt fearful, including images of people and activities within the spaces. Reproduced courtesy of Maria Panaccione.

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 were produced as part of a mental mapping exercise with female college students that was designed to illustrate what they perceive as spaces of fear on campus. In Figure 4.5, students clearly identify areas that are unsafe with hashed marking. In Figure 4.6, particular bodies, social relations, and activities are identified that make the women feel less safe.

Activity

In groups or as individuals, consider the ways in which you move through public spaces in your everyday life. What would your mental map of spaces of fear look like? Are there areas that you avoid? Do you take different routes at different times of the day? Are you careful to walk in groups, or do you feel comfortable walking alone? Do you have strategies planned for circumstances in which you might feel threatened? Have you ever decided not to do something that you wanted to do, as a result of these fears (for example, not taking a job with late hours, not going to the library at night, or not walking home alone from a party when you were ready to leave)? Consider how your experience with fear in public space is a result of your sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, race, or other aspect of your identity. Think about how your experience is similar to, or different from, people in other social groups. What conclusions can you draw from your personal experiences and those of your classmates about patterns of fear in public space and their effects on different groups?

such as SlutWalk, Take Back the Night, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, and the UN Women's Safe Cities Global Initiative. In some contexts, such as Mexico City, Jakarta, Rio de Janeiro, and Tokyo, governments are also working with local activists to organize women-only taxis, buses, and train cars in order to create safe ways of moving throughout cities. In other contexts, women are organizing through grassroots initiatives that blend online and physical activism, such as Hollaback! (www.ihollaback.org), an organization with a website and mobile app which documents harassment against women in public space, and encourages women to use mobile and social media to reclaim these spaces, and for mutual support. Similarly, the victimization of women in the Tahrir Square protests in Cairo, Egypt during and following the Arab Spring uprisings in 2012 and 2013 has also given rise to organized resistance movements focusing on the right to public space. One such organization is HarassMap (www.harassmap.org/en), which focuses on supporting women's right to the city, and their presence in public space, by in-person individual and group interventions designed to address and end gendered violence in public areas.

A third innovative initiative, Why Loiter (found at #whyloiter on Twitter and Facebook and whyloiter.blogspot.com), has begun in Mumbai, India. This initiative draws on the work of authors Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade (2011) and encourages women to intentionally loiter in public spaces in order to challenge the social restrictions on women's movement in public space.

Increasingly, researchers have also begun to explore the connections between masculinity, fear, and public space. This research suggests that while women's fear in public space is problematized, men's fear is normalized and, as such, often remains overlooked and unexamined (Day et al. 2003). Yet as a result of the way in which normative masculinities are constructed, men both experience and react to fear differently than women in public spaces. In particular, men's experience of fear in public space is often centered on concerns around physical confrontations that require them to 'prove themselves' through fighting (Day et al. 2003). Yet rather than engage in spatial strategies of avoidance that are common among women, researchers argue that men 'perform fearlessness' through strategies designed to maintain control over their environment (Brownlow 2005). These strategies 'assert authority, achieve power, and sustain patterns and modes of access to and control over the public sphere that are generally unavailable to women' (Brownlow 2005, 584). As such, men's experiences of fear, as well as their response to women's fearfulness, work to reinforce their presence in, and control over, public spaces rather than subvert them.

As a result of the connection between social vulnerability and affect, experiences of fear in public space often reflect intersectional identities such as race, class, sexual identity, and age. For women, while fear in public space is something that cuts across identity categories, experiences of fear are very classed and racialized. This is true both in the sense that the places about which, and people of whom, they feel fearful are affected by class and race (for example, white women are more fearful of non-white, poor 'others'), and in the sense that these factors affect the form the fear takes (for example, fear of sexual assault, fear of racial hostility, a feeling of being 'out of place,' etc.) Thus, for women of color and poor women, fear in public space also may include a fear of racism and class prejudice, and may be heightened in majority white or affluent areas. Accounts of experiences of African American men in public space also vividly illustrate the way in which race informs men's feelings of fearfulness in public space. For instance, Ta-Nehisi Coates' (2015) account of his experience as a Black man in the contemporary US describes the ways in which his actions and interactions in public space have been informed from

the time of his youth by a fear of police violence, surveillance, and institutionalized racism. This experience of fear goes beyond that of a generalized concern with 'confrontation' as described above. Moreover, the research of Kristen Day (2006) highlights the way in which young men of color, in particular Hispanic men, experience and understand being feared by others as a result of their race. Additionally, for transmen and transwomen, concerns with anti-trans violence and being 'outed' also create distinct experiences of fear in public spaces (Doan 2009). As such, age, race, class, sexual identity, and gender presentation should be viewed not simply as characteristics of individuals, but as social processes that help to explain patterns of fear as a result of social power (Pain 2001).

Gendered experiences of neoliberal cities

In addition to considering gendered experiences of urban public space and their implications, feminist geographers have also been concerned with how changes in urban governance and economic policy have gendered implications. In particular, since the 1980s, feminist scholarship has focused on the role of neoliberal urban policies in the lives of women and LGBTQ communities. **Neoliberalism** refers to a philosophy of governance that prioritizes economic liberalization, thus favoring competitive, free-market-based systems over direct state intervention. As such, it is characterized both by privatization and deregulation, as well as the 'proliferation of regulatory systems through which quasi-market mechanisms have been extended into an ever-widening range of activities' resulting in 'market-style competition for public funds' (Bondi and Laurie 2005, 3). In the context of urban policy, this has resulted in not only the privatization of local public services, but also the restructuring of urban housing markets through the elimination of public and low-rent housing, the destruction of low-income neighborhoods, and the introduction of gated communities. It has also led to entrepreneurial urban revitalization programs, often resulting in gentrification and discriminatory surveillance and social control measures (Peck et al. 2009). This is because neoliberal policies that seek to reinvest in the city through the development of high-end consumer and business services catering to the affluent are accompanied by 'zero-tolerance' policies directed toward the poor, the homeless, prostitutes, and other urban residents who are viewed as unsightly in this new neoliberal landscape. As such, marginal groups are systematically pushed out of these spaces as 'they simply cannot afford to participate in leisure rituals that revolve

around designer shopping and the consumption of *caffè latte*' (Hubbard 2004, 669). Increasingly, this is occurring both in the Global North and the Global South.

Social reproduction and the city

While commonly perceived as gender-neutral, neoliberal urban policy in fact has gendered dimensions and consequences. Because the city provides access to the basic needs critical for daily life (such as housing, food, transportation, and work), it serves as a key site for **social reproduction**. Cindi Katz (2001) defines social reproduction as 'the biological reproduction of the labor force, both generationally and on a daily basis' (711). As a result of the continued central role that women play in social reproductive processes, they are disproportionately impacted by neoliberal urban policies (Box 4.3). Some of the policies that particularly impact women include the privatization of social services, the destruction of low-income housing, and urban revitalization that marginalizes those who cannot conform to the norms of elite, conspicuous consumption. This is especially the case for low-income women and women of color. As Matthew Desmond (2012) documents in the context of Milwaukee, for instance, African American women are the group most likely to be evicted and most disadvantaged by eviction. Because women, on average, have lower incomes, a greater number of dependents, and more resource-poor networks than their male counterparts, processes resulting in the removal of low-income and subsidized housing affect them more frequently and more intensely. Lack of adequate public transport can also adversely affect women, people of color, and low-income groups, as they have, on average, less access to privately owned vehicles. In contexts in which women are prohibited or discouraged from driving by law or custom, access to adequate public transport can become an even more important issue.

Similarly, while women are most likely to be responsible for social reproduction, they have the least access to urban housing and land, formal work that is well paid, and other critical public services such as sanitation and water (Chant 2013). This is especially true in the Global South, where these challenges pose urgent problems for low-income women (Chant and McIlwaine 2015). As neoliberal urban development projects increasingly seek to re-purpose urban spaces for high-rent activities such as upscale malls or condominiums, low-income housing or squatter settlements may be demolished and informal street vendors relocated to the margins of town, where they have less access to

Box 4.3 Access to infrastructure for social reproduction in Madrid

One way in which feminist geographers have explored the effects of neoliberal urban policy on women's lives is through the use of GIS, or Geographic Information Systems, to visualize and analyze women's access to resources needed for social reproduction in urban areas (Pavlovskaya and St. Martin 2007). In this example, feminist geographers Jose Carpio-Pinedo, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado, and Ines Sanchez de Madariaga engage in counter-mapping to visualize silenced narratives and reveal spatial inequities in access to critical infrastructure for social reproduction and everyday life. Figure 4.7 illustrates access to pharmacies, sports centers, and health centers in Madrid by highlighting walking distances to these facilities. Figure 4.8 maps a global score for all infrastructures for everyday life to help visualize general levels of spatial inequality in access to resources needed for social reproduction. While these maps are not explicitly gendered, because women are more likely to be responsible for social reproduction they will be differentially affected by this spatial inequality. Additionally, to the extent that women, immigrants, people of color, and low-income groups rely disproportionately on public transportation, access to walking-distance infrastructure for social reproduction will clearly reflect intersectional identities. As noted above, neoliberal urban policies can affect this access, as public transportation systems and the resources themselves may be run, funded, or subsidized by the state.

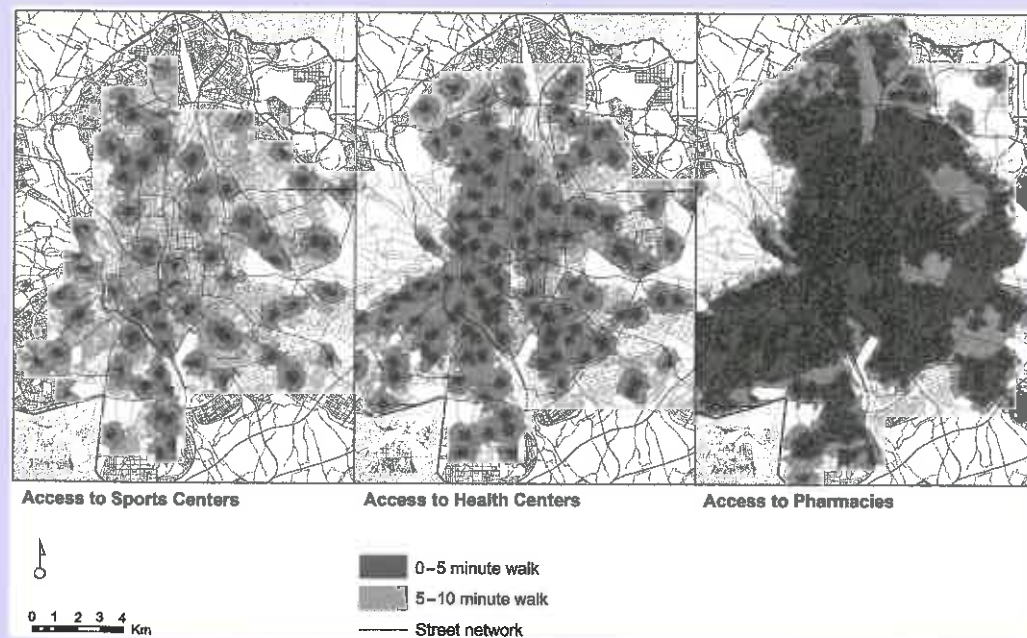


Figure 4.7 Walking-distance access to infrastructure for social reproduction in Madrid. Reproduced courtesy of Jose Carpio-Pinedo, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado, and Ines Sanchez de Madariaga.

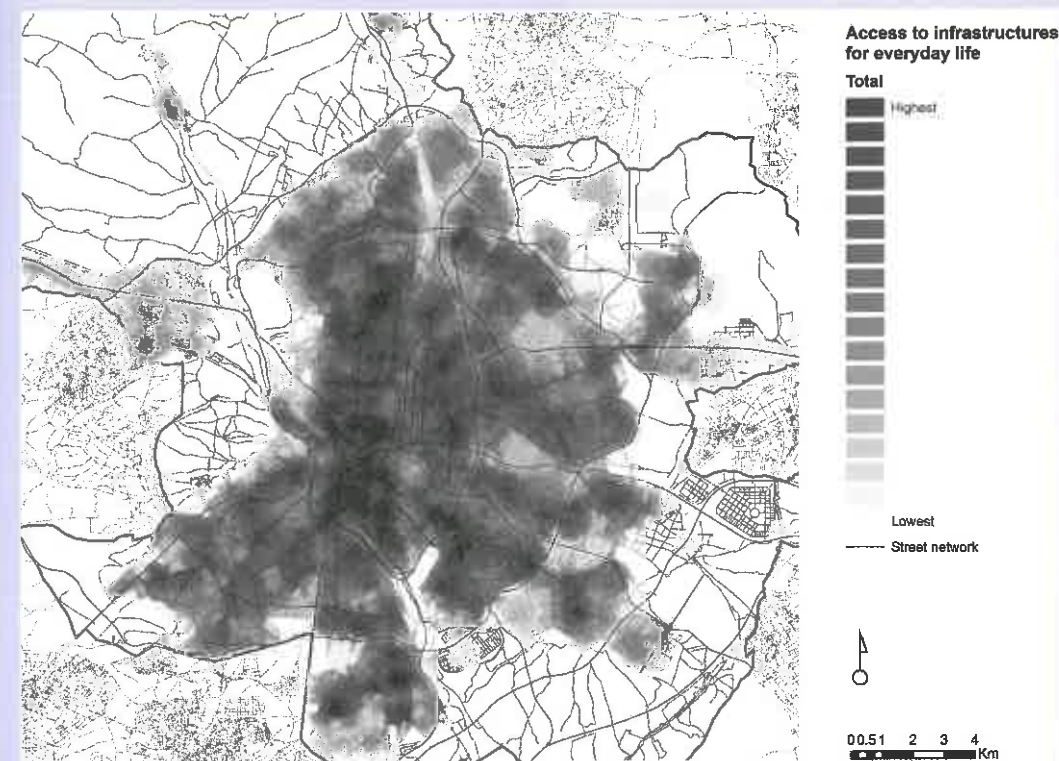


Figure 4.8 Global measure of access to infrastructure for social reproduction in Madrid. Reproduced courtesy of Jose Carpio-Pinedo, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado, and Ines Sanchez de Madariaga.

Activity

Consider the infrastructure for social reproduction in your town (such as health centers, doctor's offices, grocery stores, day care centers, and parks). What groups of people have greater access to these infrastructures? Has access changed over time?

customers and suppliers. The research of Sapana Doshi (2013), for example, examines the experience of slum resettlement processes that are driven by, and beneficial for, neoliberal urban redevelopment processes. In analyzing women's activism surrounding low-income housing in Mumbai, India, Doshi details the gendered experience of the loss of housing and forced resettlement due to slum clearance. Kate Swanson (2007) also highlights the ways in which such urban regeneration policies have not only gendered but also racialized consequences. She argues that the removal of informal workers, beggars, and

street children in an attempt to modernize and renovate Ecuadoran cities is in part to make them tourist-friendly but also fundamentally about 'whitening' the landscape of the city. Cindi Katz (1998) argues that, in this way, 'it becomes harder to find the everyday traces of lives spent among the monuments, as many are simply erased or removed from view' (42).

In addition to access to housing, transport, and income-generating opportunities, access to sanitation is another important element of social reproduction that is challenged by the increasing neoliberalization of global cities. As is also discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, in contexts in which neoliberal redevelopment is prioritized above the provision of basic needs for residents, a lack of access to sanitation can crucially shape women's experiences. While both men and women are affected by inadequate sanitation infrastructure, because of women's biological needs throughout their life course (including menstruation, pregnancy, and incontinence in old age) and because of their social responsibilities, a lack of access to sanitation infrastructure—especially working and usable toilets—can impact every aspect of low-income women's lives (Greed 2015; Penner 2013). This includes their access to work and education, as well as their ability to engage in basic activities necessary to social reproduction, such as cooking, cleaning clothes and dishes, and washing (McFarlane et al. 2014). Yet, as in the case of violence against women in public spaces, women are organizing around issues of social reproduction around the globe to address these issues (Box 4.4).

Box 4.4 The Right to Pee campaign

As in other growing urban areas in the Global South, over 50 percent of homes in urban India do not have toilets. The research of Colin McFarlane et al. (2014) describes the results of the lack of access to basic sanitation in the context of Mumbai. According to this research, this lack of access can result in complex gendered negotiations surrounding public toilets, leading to urination and defecation in open space. They argue:

The geography of open defecation is at once spatial and temporal and generally structured in this way: Children will use the lane outside houses or the roadside, an often dangerous space that sometimes leads to injury and even death due to reversing municipal garbage trucks on the main road; men will use the *kabrastan* (graveyard) or *maidan* (open

ground) nearby the neighborhood; and women—sometimes with children and often in groups—will go further afield and use the garbage ground. Men, too, sometimes use the garbage ground, although they tend to use the lower edges that run along the large open stormwater drain, whereas women climb the garbage heap that stretches a few stories high.

(1006)

While the lack of access to sanitation thus endangers all of those who experience it, age and gender structure the experience as well. In particular, McFarlane et al. argue that, for women, needing to defecate in the more remote areas of garbage dumps may result in harassment and assault. For many other people who have access to public, shared, or private toilets within their home, the lack of public toilets within the city as a whole presents a different problem, particularly for low-income residents who cannot pay to use restrooms in privatized public spaces. These problems take a gendered form for women, whose embodied experiences as reproducers and caretakers result in greater health risks to themselves and their children. These challenges are compounded by the limited number of public toilets for women: New Delhi, for example, has 1,534 public toilets for men and only 132 for women. Moreover, higher fees for the use of paid public toilets for women, as well as stigmas against menstruation that result in women being turned away from public restrooms controlled by male attendants, also limit women's access to safe conditions of sanitation in Indian cities (Yardley 2012).

In response to this situation, a coalition of NGOs and grassroots activists, initiated by Mumbai-based activist Mumtaz Shaikh, began the Right to Pee campaign in 2011, with the aim of pressuring local governments to provide adequate, safe, free public toilets for women. 'Mumbai has 3,000 free public urinals for men whereas women do not have a single one . . . Do planners of towns think we are less human?' asks Shaikh (2015). Since its inception, the Right to Pee campaign has resulted in the creation of hundreds of public toilets for women, and the coalition continues fighting for more.

Gentrification in urban spaces

The relationship between gender and **gentrification** has been one area of particular interest to feminist geographers since the early 1990s. Gentrification is a critical feature of neoliberal urbanization and involves the revitalization of older, deteriorated urban areas. This process is often accompanied by the displacement of low-income residents by new middle- and upper-class residents and businesses. Women's increased participation in the workforce and changing family structures are two of the factors that have enabled gentrification to occur. Indeed, middle- and upper-income women are an important gentrifying constituent and have benefitted from increased access to what are perceived as 'safe' urban areas. Similarly, as will be discussed below, the development of gay neighborhoods has also played a role in the process of gentrification. However, not all women or members of the LGBTQ community benefit from this process of urban and neighborhood change. Rather, low-income individuals, including women and sexual minorities, are forced to bear the brunt of higher property values, increased code enforcement, and shortages of low-income housing that accompany the process of gentrification.

Feminist geographers have explored not only the differential gendered effects of gentrification, but also how gender itself is an organizing logic behind the gentrification process. Marguerite van den Berg (2012, 2013) uses the term 'genderfication' to describe 'the production of space for different gender relations,' which is a critical part of the gentrification process. She identifies the way in which women and families function as 'gentrification pioneers' in order to produce a space that is seen as family- and child-friendly and, as such, promotes urban regeneration. She also argues that in the context of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), state-led gentrification is being implemented through re-gendering the city itself, from working-class and masculine to an inviting feminine city associated with leisure, creative industry, and middle-class family dwellings: 'Rotterdam may have been a "muscleman" in the past, but . . . is now a creative temptress. The "city as woman" is a tempting femme fatale, luring new people with its virtues: "stylish, powerful, creative, inspiring, sparkling and full of surprises"' (van den Berg 2012, 161). Feminist geographer Leslie Kern (2010) similarly argues that gender narratives shape and help to justify new-build gentrification, in her study of condominium development in Toronto. In her analysis of the ways in which developers target women for urban condominiums, Kern argues:

Home ownership, condominium security, and the interconnectivity and freedom of choice found in city life are held up as ways for women to achieve independence and autonomy. Women's freedom in the central city is thus reified as a symbol of successful revitalization.

(375)

Overall, the presence of women may both promote gentrification through the suggestion that a neighborhood is safe and family-friendly, and it may also serve as a signal that revitalization has been successful (Kern 2013).

The process of gentrification is not only gendered, but is also sexualized, as it connects to sociospatial processes linked closely with sexual identification. In particular, early gentrification in many large urban areas in North America often occurred in areas that had large residential concentrations of gay men, as well as businesses catering to this community. During the 1970s and 1980s, primarily white, professional, gay men were, in many cases, the earliest gentrifiers as, constrained by social prejudice to live in deteriorating areas of the city, they used personal finances to support neighborhood revitalization. Yet, as with the presence of professional women discussed above, concentrations of gay men brought more than financial reinvestment in these older urban areas, as these neighborhoods became associated with alternative lifestyles, cultural opportunities, consumer amenities, and safe living spaces. Interestingly, however, while these **queer spaces** were among the earliest areas to be gentrified in the 1970s and 1980s, more recent neoliberal urban policy has resulted in continued redevelopment of these areas, such that gay men increasingly find themselves priced out of these communities, which have become expensive, trendy neighborhoods, appealing to wealthy investors, as well as local development, tourism, and urban planning offices. As a result, in some cities capital-intensive gentrification has resulted in the dispersal of LGBTQ residents, the closure of LGBTQ businesses, a loss of tolerance for the LGBTQ community, and a lack of participation by LGBTQ residents in the urban planning process. In addition to this, even in neighborhoods that remain enclaves for the gay community, members of other LGBTQ groups do not necessarily find spaces for themselves. While there has been some lesbian presence in many of these communities, the development of lesbian enclaves has been limited by women's lower incomes, their lack of access to capital, and concerns surrounding sexualized violence (Doan and Higgins 2009). Moreover, as in other parts of the city, these spaces remain strongly normative in other ways, such that queer women and gender-queer individuals may perceive them 'as supporting a certain form of mainstream gay

culture that privileges and promotes certain sexualized, gendered, classed and racialized identities' (Nash 2013, 204).

While some women and members of the LGBTQ community have thus benefitted from gentrification, as it has opened up access to participate in, and appropriate, the city in new ways, this is not the case for all individuals. As the research of Caitlin Cahill (2006) indicates, experiences of gentrification are predicated upon class and race privilege. Cahill's research documents the process of gentrification from the perspective of young, working-class women of color, whose neighborhoods are experiencing the disinvestment and change that gentrification signifies. She draws on the results of her participatory research with young women in New York's Lower East Side to argue that it is precisely the stereotypical representations of low-income women of color as promiscuous, lazy, uneducated, and a burden to society that 'play an important role in facilitating processes of gentrification' (346).

Similarly, Melissa Wright's (2014) research underscores the impacts of neoliberal policies resulting in gentrification on low-income, working-class women in Ciudad Juarez, a city that was built by and for the working-class migrant women who worked in the city's factories. She describes how, during the 1990s, as part of an urban revitalization plan that sought to gentrify the city center, city officials attempted the removal of the sex workers and other low-income women who frequented urban public spaces. In Wright's words:

They presented their plan as a way to 'clean up' the *centro* and 'reestablish' it as a place for upstanding families. That the downtown had never, in its entire history, been this kind of respectable place did not matter in their presentation of this formerly innocent past. Instead, the elites peddled their gentrification plan around a politics of forgetting about the working poor women and men who had established the *centro* as a place of commerce and tourism, where people of modest means worked, lived and relaxed. The development plan, in other words, presented the sex workers not as the city's original labor force, as is well documented in the city's historical record, but instead as invaders who had destroyed a formerly pristine social fabric.

(7)

Together, the work of van den Berg, Kern, Cahill, and Wright highlights the importance of intersectionality to women's experience of neoliberal urban change. While high-income women may have increased access to 'safe' spaces (including work spaces, high-end residences, and sanitized public spaces

of consumption) within urban areas, these spaces are increasingly created through the removal of those women who do not fit the neoliberal norm, such as prostitutes, the homeless, and the poor.

Despite these obstacles, marginalized groups who are affected by neoliberal urban policy are actively working to re-create urban spaces according to a different vision of urban space. Organizations such as Red Habitat (www.red-habitat.org), which functions in Bolivia, engage women in not only envisioning and lobbying around the theme of sustainable low-income housing, but also involve women in planning and building social housing that meets their needs. Similarly, in the context of the US, Roberta Feldman and Susan Stall (2004) document the decades-long activism of African American women to counter disinvestment in public housing in Chicago. Such activism is the on-the-ground expression of the struggle for the right to the city, as women appropriate, create, and participate in the cities they envision.

Liberatory potential of urban public space

In spite of women's experiences of fear and subsequent limitations on their behavior in public spaces, and despite the negative repercussions of increased neoliberalization, feminist geographers have also understood the city as an important venue for promoting the rights of marginalized groups. This is because the city is a unique place of possibility for the expression of identities that are outside of the mainstream. An early expression of this argument is present in Elizabeth Wilson's book *The Sphinx in the City* (1991), which explores the potential that cities hold for liberation, choice, possibility, and freedom. The city's liberatory potential is based on the possibility of increased encounters with others that cities, and particularly public spaces, offer. Cities may also be understood as 'modern' places in comparison to rural or provincial areas, allowing people to challenge norms and adopt identities that would otherwise not be open to them.

One example of this is provided in the research of Carla Giddings and Alice Hovorka (2010), exploring the gender performances of young women in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. This research shows that young men and women associate the city with modern gender roles, and as such, when moving to the city, may perform gender in ways that challenge traditional roles. The possibility of challenging gendered and sexualized norms in cities is often connected to the increased possibilities that cities provide for interaction and exchange with unfamiliar ideas, groups, and individuals. Using

the example of Pakistani Muslim women's experiences of living in urban areas in the UK, Robina Mohammad (2013) argues that multiethnic, multicultural cities represent new 'shared spaces of interaction and exchange to open up possibilities for experimentation with cultural styles promoting new cultural practice, patterns of consumption, and alternative repertoires for a cosmopolitan Muslim identity informing feminine Muslim spatialities' (1819). As a result of this, she argues that the city provides young women with new ways of 'remaking the self' that may challenge not only traditional cultures in their homes and communities, but also work to normalize visible Muslim identities in public spaces (Figure 4.9).

Cities may be liberating not only for women, but also for sexual minorities (Huang and Yeo 2008). Places that disrupt the dominance of heteronormative space are increasingly found in urban areas. The best example of this is the establishment of **gay enclaves** (discussed above in association with gentrification) in cities in the Global North from the 1960s to the 1980s, through



Figure 4.9 Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris, France. Feminist geographers argue that urban areas not only provide an opportunity for encounters with people different from us, but also open up the possibility of remaking ourselves in ways that may not be possible in homes or traditional communities. Reproduced courtesy of Woody Wood.

the concentration of LGBTQ residents and businesses catering to them in specific urban neighborhoods. Well-known examples of these include Boy's Town in Chicago, the Castro District in San Francisco, Toronto's Village, and Vancouver's Davie Street Village. These neighborhoods have historically provided a space for the production of identity and community, not only for gay men but also (albeit to a lesser extent) for lesbian women and gender-queer people. Gay enclaves also serve as a visible marker of the existence and strength of the LGBTQ community to the larger public. As Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray (2014) explain, these neighborhoods provided a venue in which 'gay movement politics promoted support of gay businesses as a political act in tandem with arguments around the need to protect and preserve political territory for economic and social strength' (759). Increasingly, queer identities are also being accepted outside of these enclaves, as expanding spaces of LGBTQ residence, leisure, and business are gradually blurring the boundaries of gay/straight space (Browne and Bakshi 2011).

While urban public spaces have been theorized as having unique possibilities for the expression of marginalized identities, some research suggests that privatized public spaces (such as malls, coffee shops, etc.) can be equally, if not more, emancipating, depending on the geographic context. Nazgol Bagheri (2014), for example, discusses affluent Iranian women's use of privatized public spaces, arguing that 'women in Tehran use modern and often privatized public spaces such as shopping malls in unexpected ways to enjoy a sense of freedom that is not usually available in traditional urban locations' due to heightened public scrutiny of them as women in public (1298). And indeed, in this context, women's presence in these types of spaces also shapes their meaning: their mixed-gender atmosphere indicates their modern, global, and cosmopolitan nature (de Koning 2009). However, while affluent women enjoy freedom in such spaces, malls and other privatized public spaces often remain off-limits to many women, including migrant workers, the poor, and ethnic minorities. Indeed, it is often the precise absence of people from other class, ethnic, or racial groups that results in these spaces being considered safe and appropriate for affluent women's use. As discussed in Chapter 3, similar dynamics play out in many urban locations in Latin America and Africa, where commercialized public spaces such as shopping malls are highly segregated by class and, as such, are seen as safe spaces for (affluent) women and children to recreate while pure public spaces such as parks and streets are considered risky. This example highlights both the possibilities of urban spaces, as well as their potential to reinforce and re-inscribe gender, sexual, and class norms.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the ways in which urban areas are sites of critical—and contradictory—gendered processes. Far from viewing cities as wholly liberating or exclusionary for women, contemporary urban feminist geography recognizes the complex ways in which gendered experiences and identities arise from, and help structure, urban processes. In particular, feminist geography helps us to understand the connections among individual identity, social experience, and processes occurring at the urban scale, such as the creation and use of public space and neoliberal urban policy. Women's intersectional identities are critical to how they engage and experience the city: experiencing the city as a safe place for living, working, and recreating often reflects a privileged race and class position. These privileges are supported through urban policy and the creation of privatized or gentrified spaces reflecting the interests of the elite.

Nonetheless, feminists and other activists continue to confront, resist, and change gendered exclusions in urban areas. In addition to activism surrounding women's access to public space, women are also at the forefront of collective attempts to challenge the marginalizing effects of neoliberal urban policies for themselves and their communities, through protest, community building, and arts intervention. The challenges of modern urban space are being confronted as well through individual actions in people's everyday lives, including walking confidently, enjoying public leisure spaces in new ways, and surviving neoliberal urban change day by day. Through these collective and individual actions, those traditionally left on the margins of city spaces insist on their right to participate in, and appropriate, urban space.

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