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Exploring Immigrant Women's Fears of Criminal Victimization

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EXPLORING IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S FEARS OF CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Although a significant body of scholarship is available on women's fear of crime and criminal victimization generally, the study of racialized women's fear of crime remains under-researched. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap by exploring how immigrant women in Vancouver express their concerns about crime in the context of their specific gender, race and class location. Through interviews with immigrant women, I highlight how they understand their risks and vulnerabilities, their sense of safety and belonging. The aim of this paper is to lend insight into the different understandings and strategies around what it means to be safe and practice safety in public.

INTRODUCTION

"Women have a right to feel secure, at home or at work; until they do, we all have work to do."

(Vancouver Sun Editorial, September 4, 2003)

In response to a number of attacks by strangers against women in Vancouver, the above is a timely reminder that women continue to live in a world where their safety in the public or private realm cannot be assured and that complacency is not an option. As a social group, women continue to be singled out for attack because they are women. Seen as "easy" targets by their assailants, generations of women have learned what it means to "protect oneself" and the price to be paid if vigilance is not maintained. In the past few decades, women's campaigning and advocacy work have led to a wide array of programs and policies promoting greater awareness of women's criminal victimization both in the public and private spheres. For example, the battered women's movement has made significant inroads in dispelling the myths surrounding the perception that the home is the safest place for women. Equally, advice and suggestions currently abound about how women should protect themselves in public against the potential for attack. Not surprisingly, women have responded to these measures by noting a higher fear of crime than men, an increased sense of vulnerability to criminal victimization, and many have created self-imposed rules and practices to guard against being victimized.

Discussions with women about how they understand their risks and vulnerabilities, their sense of safety and belonging have highlighted the insecurities associated with being a woman. At the same time, women are not a homogenous group, and important differences exist in terms of how different

women articulate these understandings. For example, much of the research on women's fear of crime have focused on white women's perceptions of safety and fear. Less known is what women of colour have to say about these issues. With a few exceptions, research from developed, industrialized countries like Canada, the United States, England and Australia have yet to produce more varied accounts of women's understandings on criminal victimization. To be sure, many of the limitations can result from difficulties with locating research participants able and willing to discuss these issues. Researchers may not always have access to specific populations that can provide a wider or different range of viewpoints. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap by exploring how immigrant women in Vancouver express their concerns about crime in the context of their specific gender, race and class location.

Part One of this paper contextualizes the discussion of women's fear of crime through a review of the literature on women's criminal victimization in advanced liberal democracies. An emphasis is placed on how "gendered fear" acts as a mechanism of control and constraint in women's lives. Part Two highlights the key findings of interviews with immigrants women in the Greater Vancouver region. This includes a discussion of women's fears, anxieties and vulnerabilities and the strategies they employ to avoid criminal victimization. In Part Three, I argue that understanding immigrant women's anxieties about criminal victimization involves recognizing how, in addition to the fear of physical attack, immigrant women also fear racial discrimination and attack. As a social group, immigrant women identify themselves as more vulnerable to criminal victimization than non-racialized women. In their efforts to avoid being victimized, immigrant women engage primarily in individual self-surveillance and prudent decision-making when they are in the public sphere.

PART 1 – CONTEXTUALIZING WOMEN AND FEAR OF CRIME

Within the scholarly literature on women and fear of crime, several major themes dominate the research and debates. First, many scholars have challenged our thinking around the concept of “fear of crime” and its usage. Whether or not “fear of crime” sufficiently captures the various dimensions of people’s experiences has been challenged, with some writers opting to broaden the discussion to include risks, vulnerabilities and anxieties. Second, there is a strong emphasis on recognizing that while women are less likely to be victims of crime than men, women hold greater fears about being criminally victimized compared to men. Discussions of gender differences explore and seek to explain why this paradox exists. Third, feminist scholars have taken these gender differences to highlight how women’s fears have created a situation which permits, whether intentionally or not, the control of women’s behaviour. Women have learned over time to engage in practices of self-policing to avoid criminal victimization. Each of these themes are discussed in more detail below.

Conceptualizing “Fear of Crime”

As an object of inquiry, fear of crime holds an important place shaping the public’s understanding about crime and how governments manage the crime problem. The concept encompasses a broad range of ideas and impacts a variety of decisions at all levels of society. Programs and strategies for crime prevention, the selling of security and insurance, real estate purchases, public safety advice and security products are just a few examples of the way in which fear of crime influences these arenas. As a result, Goodey notes that it has become “a much used and abused term” (2005, 66). One of the key

sites of tension with this concept lies with how researchers have historically counted fear. Measurements of fear continue to be used which ignore "other" experiences that do not fit into conventional understandings of "who" can be afraid (Goodey 2005, 66). As some researchers seek to be more inclusive in their conceptualization of "fear of crime," it becomes clear that concepts like "anger," "anxiety" or "concern" cannot be easily separated from how people understand their fears. Thus, they express caution about how fear of crime surveys and statistics are interpreted since they cannot wholly capture these broader ideas and limits of what can be known about people's "fear of crime."

Alongside attempts to refine the process of conducting empirical inquiry in fear of crime research there is also the acknowledgement that whatever fear of crime is, it has multiple dimensions. As Sparks et al.'s review of the literature in Britain found, "fear of crime" involves vicarious and direct experiences, is open to a variety of conceptualizations, includes judgments about how competent governments are in delivering collective security, and lastly, it is also an expression of powerlessness and uncertainty (2000, 15). Murray Lee finds it helpful to understand "fear of crime" as a "contingent object of criminological inquiry" rather than a "prediscursive one" (2001, 481). That is, fear of crime isn't simply "out there" for one to document, but is constructed instead from a variety of discourses (e.g., media, political, academic) and then naturalized over time. This not only reinforces a particular understanding about fear of crime, it also lends legitimacy to governmental regulation and public concerns about being "fearful" (Lee 2001, 481). Taking this approach makes it possible to conceptualize and understand the variety of interests emanating from "fear of crime," moving as it does in a multidirectional pattern rather than in a simple chain of causation.

Extending the notion of "fear" to include experiences such as "anxiety" or "vulnerability" as well as the impact of victimization is another route researchers have taken to widen our understanding about fear of violence. Holloway and Jefferson (1997) use the concept of anxiety to explore how people express their concerns about crime. Using individual biographies, they attempt to map expressions of fear about crime with strategies employed to defend against anxiety. Their research highlights how ideas about fear as either rational or irrational fail to capture the ways in which people respond to external threats and safeguard their sense of security. Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996) take a different approach with the use of anxiety, arguing that anxiety is locally constructed and understood. They claim that perceptions of fear about crime are linked to people's understandings of their neighbourhood which then informs the management strategies that may emerge. There has also more recently been linkages made between fear of crime and expressions of vulnerability and risk of victimization. For researchers, the term "vulnerability" permits a better understanding of the interconnected meaning of risk, concern and worry (Goodey 2005, 74). For example, Jackson's analysis argues for viewing fear as an expression of many concerns that people hold, which is often funnelled through the concept of crime and includes expressions of threat and vulnerability (2004, 962). Adhering to a narrow conception of fear of crime such as that found in much of the quantitative research in this field has not been helpful since it cannot account for the differential experiences and expressions of fear that subsequently influences how people behave. Rather, what needs to be recognized, Jackson claims, is how expressions about fear of crime are connected to a wide range of attitudes and values (2004, 962).

Women and Fear of Crime

While the debate about conceptualizing fear of crime continues, there is also significant attention paid to “who” expresses significant concern about criminal victimization. During the 1980s, crime surveys revealed how women and other minority groups voiced greater concerns about their fear of crime, were more likely to change their behaviour and routines to avoid victimization, but were deemed less likely to experience crime directly. On the other hand, those who were more likely to be victimized did not fear crime to the same extent. Coined the “paradox of fear” debate, researchers attempted to theorize why groups who were seen to be less at risk of victimization would be more afraid. For the most part, crime surveys and its proponents were unable to offer much understanding of this problem.

Feminist analyses of women’s fear of crime have been at the forefront of demonstrating why crime surveys fail to explain the higher levels of fear women express. Stanko (2000) argues that early crime surveys led to the construction of a generic victim of crime and did not attempt to account for the shared anxiety women held about being criminally victimized. Even as crime surveys developed to explore differences amongst social groups, rarely did the social, historical and political context frame the analyses or further theoretical debates (Stanko 2000, 24). Moreover, the inclusion of risk calculations in fear of crime research did nothing to challenge the distinction between victim and non-victim—a distinction that continues to influence decision making in the criminal justice system. For example, those who engaged in risky behaviours would often have their victimization questioned. Fuelled by the idea of a generic victim, “true” victims were “blameless” while suspicion and blame would

be cast on those who did not fit this label. The shortcomings of this approach is, as Stanko notes,

. . . we fail to see the concentration of serious violence among certain categories of the population. We also fail to analyse the way fear of crime—as a contemporary discourse about inequalities and disadvantage—is the metaphor for contemporary life that has not rid itself of the persistent remnants of hierarchies founded in the historical legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, heterosexism and class (2000, 28).

Other writers concur, pointing out that structural inequalities shape the higher rates of fear for some groups (Carrington 1994; Young 1996). For women, many know that their ability to fend off an attack is less likely than men and they are all too aware that they pose a greater risk for victimization, particularly from men. Maxfield (1984) points out that a woman's calculation of perceived threats to her safety includes knowing that her risk of victimization may be higher, losing control, and enduring the consequences of victimization. For these reasons, women may express higher levels of fear even if their likelihood of victimization is lower. Feminist researchers suggests that official information about victimization fails to include the full extent and broad nature of women's victimization. As Chan and Rigakos note, women are required to endure a full range of public incivilities such as harassment, intimidation and assault that are part of their daily routine practices (2002, 743). Since many of these forms of victimization are not likely to be reported, their absence in official statistics and surveys suggests that the actual rates of women's victimization are likely higher than what is reported. Furthermore, since women are negotiating daily risks as a result of being out in public, they may be less likely to take even greater risks and this may also be a contributing factor to their perceived lower rates of actual victimization. What becomes clear from this body of literature is that women's fear of crime is influenced by a complex

range of factors associated with being a woman.¹ When they are understood in this context, their concerns about victimization are not irrational but instead, legitimate responses to threats about their safety.

The study of how women negotiate public urban spaces is one area which has highlighted how gender shapes women's decision-making about their fear of victimization and what constitutes safe conduct. Women's fear of male violence and the powerlessness many women experience in public urban spaces are two key themes raised by researchers (Gordon et al. 1980; Koskela 1997). Gardner's (1990) examination of crime prevention literature for women found that much of the advice suggested sought to have women portray themselves as helpless, inept, and apprehensive in public. She suggests that the literature operates to create a certain type of woman—one who experiences public space as an exercise in self-defence, thus sending the message that women ought to stay at home, where they are seen to be safer (Gardner 1990, 325). As well, she notes how women's fear of men in public affects relationships between men and women, as it is not only that women are unable to enjoy public spaces but relations between women and men are also, in the larger sense, negatively affected. Keane's (1998) study of Canadian women found that even though most women were only moderately or mildly fearful of crime, they nonetheless would constrain their activities by not walking alone at night or going out at night in order to feel safer. Many researchers note that the restrictions women place upon themselves as precautionary behaviour does little to ensure their safety and security and ironically, only increases the fear they may be experiencing. Furthermore, the normalization of women's fears has the consequence of reproducing their role as victims in the public realm. Keane argues that there is a need to increase women's feelings of safety in public if women are to have many more options

of lifestyle choices (1998, 71). One solution advocated by geographers is to “design out fear” in the urban environment. Yet Koskela and Pain (2000, 277) point out that this approach will only have a limited impact for women since women’s fear of violence is constituted from a more complex understanding of crime, risk, perception and fear. For example, it has been well documented that women are more likely to suffer victimization in private than in the public sphere. As well, the lack of protection they have received historically from the criminal justice system and related institutions has resulted in low reporting rates for crimes like sexual assault and rape. These factors all play a role in constituting women’s fear of criminal victimization.

The latest General Social Survey (Statistics Canada 2007) in Canada suggests that women’s feelings of safety have not shifted much over time. Women continue to report being more worried than men (21 percent vs. 10 percent) about being home alone in the evening or at night, and women were significantly more fearful about using public transportation alone after dark (47 percent) than men (23 percent). Roberts’ (2001) study confirms that women continue to remain fearful of being out in public at night. Over a 30-year period, the levels of fear expressed by women in Canada have remained consistent—29 percent in 1970, and 27 percent in 2000 (Roberts 2001, i). Within the immigrant population in Canada, while most did not seem any more fearful than the Canadian-born population, immigrant women did express more caution about using public transportation alone at night (Statistics Canada 2007).

Various institutions and practices have been cited for producing and reproducing women’s fear of crime in the public realm. Sexualized imagery in outdoor advertising, the physical appearance of a neighbourhood and media stories about crime are all contributing factors. Rosewarne (2005) argues it is

difficult for women to enjoy public space if outdoor advertising routinely displays sexualized and objectified images of women to sell products. A sexualized public space is a form of sexual harassment against women and thus reinforces women's fear of rape (Rosewarne 2005, 74). Even when public space isn't sexualized, it can still create problems for women. Alvi et al. (2001) found that living in a community of disorder characterized by graffiti, open drug use and violence raised women's levels of fear. Finally, the media has been strongly implicated in reproducing women's fears about criminal victimization. Madriz highlights how the media tends to over-represent women victims, particularly those who have been victimized by a stranger, which perpetuates the myth that women are safer at home than out in public (1997, 17). Gender roles have also been reinforced through media representations of the ideal woman victim. On one end of the continuum is the view of women victims as generally "good" but prone to faulty judgment. In contrast, at the other end is the "bad woman," the victim who somehow provoked her victimization by adopting an inappropriate lifestyle for example (Madriz 1997, 18). When women internalize these messages, many live in a constant state of fear where they believe they are too weak to do anything, they have no control over their lives and they are less able to see themselves as having rights to use public spaces whenever they want.

Koskela (1997) argues that women's continued fear of violence in public is an indicator of the gendered power relations that marks our society. She characterizes women's high rates of fear but low levels of victimization as "a sensible incongruence," a term which acknowledges how generations of women have been taught when and where to be careful and confident even though there is no measurable way to justify these decisions (Koskela 1997, 316). Rather, they simply reflect the gendered nature of our social world and

the role that women have (involuntarily) assumed within it. The internalization of the message that women are perpetual victims has served to act as a control on their perception of self and on their behaviour.

Women, Fear and Social Control

Many feminist researchers have acknowledged the powerful impact fear of crime has on reinforcing a certain pattern of behaviour for women as well as promoting specific images of women in the process. Madriz (1997, 343) argues that fear of crime is one of the most insidious sources of informal social control of women. Representations and narratives of ideal victims and criminals reinforce traditional understandings of gender such that women who violate appropriate codes of behaviour by drinking or staying out at night are less likely to be regarded as "genuine" victims. On the other hand, women who adhere to their gender roles are more likely to have their victimization validated, particularly if the perpetrator is a stranger. In addition, the victim's racial or ethnic background plays an important role in constructing who is a legitimate victim. Madriz (1997) found in her interviews with Latino women that there is a heightened feeling of vulnerability because their cries for help may be ignored if people cannot understand them. Their language barrier had a direct influence on increasing their fear of crime and their tendency to be more cautious and limiting in their daily activities (Madriz 1997, 349).

Crime prevention strategies for women have also been taken to task by feminists for promoting the notion of a "dangerous other" as the person to avoid. The stereotype of the fearless male and the vulnerable, fearful woman only reinforces cultural codes about how freedom can be expressed in public and private spaces (Pain 2000, 376). Such a message marginalizes the violence in women's private lives and the fears they have towards those closest

to them. Rather than challenge these stereotypes, the tendency by police and government officials has been instead to reproduce the image of women as weak (Stanko 1996). Thus the work of empowering women in the public and private sphere has been left to feminist organizations and activists. Koskela (1997) suggests that women's lack of spatial confidence and the strategies they employ to reassert their power highlights how resistance can occur. The presence of women at night in public or occasions like "take back the night" marches can be seen as political acts where women reclaim their spatial power.

Women's fear of sexual violence remains a central theme in examining the social control of women's lives. A rich body of literature has evolved documenting and theorising how women's fear of rape serves to constrain women. Specifically, women's fear of rape has been a successful mechanism of social control as women are made to be more dependent on men to protect them from other men (Radford 1987; Stanko 1995). Hollander's (2001) study of women's feelings of vulnerability and dangerousness locates women's fears with concerns around bodily integrity. She notes how women constantly monitor their environment for signs of danger, they are reluctant to go out at night, even in the company of other women, they will ask men for protection, they will modify their appearance and clothing and they will restrict their activities as a way to reducing the risk of a violent attack (Hollander 2001, 105). Her study noted that men rarely engage in such strategies when venturing out in public. Mehta and Bondi's study of college students found similar differences between men and women. The fear of violence led female college students to regulate their appearance and their movements, and place greater reliance on others for protection while male college students saw themselves as physically capable and "in control" (1999, 79). But it is not just men's ability to dominate

women that results from women's fear of rape, it is also the self-regulation of women that has been successfully internalized by women everywhere that is also noteworthy. Campbell (2005) points out how rape prevention literature keeps a woman locked into specific patterns of behaviour where she exercises a regime of disciplinary thoughts and actions that maintains the view of herself as a vulnerable subject in need of male protection. Fear of rape produces and reproduces the perception that this is the normative understanding of what it means to be feminine. For Campbell, disrupting women's vulnerability of being raped involves women using her body to reassert control and undermine the feelings of helplessness (2005, 135). Self-defence training is one such possible approach to regain confidence and "fight back." In doing so, women can begin to challenge the cultural script that asserts their vulnerability as natural and inevitable.

The control and regulation of women through fear of crime, and in particular, the fear of sexual assault, has retained a powerful stranglehold over women. Most notably, this can be seen in the embodiment of normative values about women which identify those who judiciously stay safe as a "good girl," "lady" or "nice girl" (Fox 1977, 805). The "nice girl" construct is in contradistinction to the "bad" or the "mad" girl, the person who has failed to learn that she should be chaste, gentle, passive, noncontroversial and above suspicion or reproach (Wykes 2001, 138). Fox notes that the problem with such constructions is that women are never assumed to have achieved the status of "nice girl." This identity is always in jeopardy and women must continuously prove that she is worthy of the label (Fox 1977, 811). Fox argues that the "nice girl" construct functions as a powerful form of social control because it operates through the mechanisms of shared values, norms and understandings (1977, 816). Not only are women more likely to conform and comply because they

are then offered protection and shelter should harm occur but this form of control neatly circumscribes women's potential to assert power and control in the world.

PART 2 – IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND FEAR OF CRIME IN VANCOUVER

While discussions around women's fear of crime have received significant attention from criminal justice agencies and academics, the focus on how the intersection of gender and other social identities such as race and class has been noticeably absent within this body of literature. There is a paucity of research in Canada which examines immigrant or racialized women's fear of crime based on their experiences as women and as people of colour. Similarly, research focusing on fear of crime within racial and ethnic communities note how individual communities manage problems of high crime, urban decay and personal safety, but they fail to consider how gender differences may create differential levels of fear and anxiety for members in these specific communities. An intersectional analysis would highlight the nuances of how immigrant women negotiate multiple sites of oppression and thus lend insight into the different understandings and strategies around what it means to be safe and the practice of safety in public. Recognizing how gender and racial/ethnic differences shape individual fears of crime is vital for developing policies and practices that can adequately address how best to reduce feelings of vulnerability and increase individual participation in civic society.

This study seeks to explore immigrant women's fear of crime in Vancouver. Through semi-structured interviews with 38 women, this project examines how immigrant women understand their fear of crime, the factors that contribute to these fears, the way in which these fears influence their daily routines and

activities, whether or not current crime prevention programs are helpful, and the safekeeping strategies that are employed to prevent their victimization.

The theoretical framework that informs this project draws on the scholarly writings in feminist criminology and critical discussions of race, racism and racialization in the criminal justice system. Feminist criminology is vital for situating how gender differences have shaped our understanding of crime and criminal justice. The problem of women's victimization, especially in the areas of sexual assault, sexual harassment and sexual abuse has been widely recognized due to the attention given to these important social problems by feminist writers and activists. Chesney-Lind (2006) states that the most tangible accomplishment of both feminist criminology and grassroots feminism has been to name the types and dimensions of female victimization, significantly influencing how public policy would be shaped in this area. In addition, scholarly writings documenting how racial and ethnic differences shape relationships with crime and criminal justice will also frame the following discussion on immigrant women's fear of crime. There are substantial theoretical and empirical writings charging the criminal justice system with the failure to protect members of minority racial or ethnic groups from harms that they suffer by virtue of their race/ethnicity. Many race-critical criminologists have long argued that law in modern western societies reflects the subjectivity of the dominant white, affluent, adult male. This can be seen in terms of whose behaviour law has in mind when it constructs its proscriptions and remedies and in terms of who constructs the law. Like sexualized harms, it has taken a length of time for racial injustices to be taken seriously. Consequently, immigrants are reluctant, for example, to report crimes to the police because they may fear retaliation or deportation or they may have a distrust of authorities (Davis and Henderson 2003). This body of literature will help to shape the

analysis regarding immigrant women's relationship with the criminal justice system.

The 38 women interviewed for this study represent a broad range of women from a diverse set of backgrounds from the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). The racial background of the participants were primarily Chinese (16) and South Asian (17) which are two of the largest ethnic groups in the GVRD. Approximately 21 of the participants self-identified as middle class or higher in socioeconomic status while 14 of the participants self-identified as lower middle or working class. All of the participants at the time of the interviews were working in the labour market, taking up a broad range of jobs from being a government employee to working in retail, education, health care and various service industries. Half of the women interviewed were either married or in a common-law relationship while the other half were single, widowed or divorced. Only four of the women mentioned that they lived alone, while the others either lived with their immediate family, their extended family (e.g., parents) or with their children. Most (25) of the women resided in single-family homes while the rest lived in apartments or condos. English was the first language for 11 of the women interviewed while the rest spoke Punjabi, Gujarati, Cantonese, or Mandarin. Within this latter group, 15 women claimed to be English bilingual. Finally, 26 of the women had a driver's license and drove regularly while the others did not.

Routine Activities

In order to get a better sense of their fears of criminal victimization, the participants in this study were first asked to describe the routine activities that they engage in. The results point to a group who spend a significant portion of their day outside the home. Two-thirds of the women said that they

go out of their homes every day, with only one participant indicating that she rarely left the home. The rest go out at least 4-5 days of the week. Half of the women (19) said that they usually go out by themselves while for the other women their activities outside the home were a combination of individual outings and outings with friends or family. Since a large portion of the women drive, many of them relied on their personal vehicles to get around while the remaining 16 used a combination of public transportation or had someone else drive them. Only five women walked or used public transit as their main form of transportation. Going to work and shopping were the main reasons identified by the women for leaving the home. They also cited social reasons—the need to exercise and spend time with friends. Half of the women (18) said that they did not feel there were any real constraints on their ability to leave the home. Some of the women did cite lack of time as the reason why they could not spend more time outside the home, while five women said that poor public transportation was a reason they could not go out. Two women noted that they prefer not to be out at night or when it is dark:

The transportation's not that great, the bus transportation... it's not that convenient... And then there's getting dark so early too right. And don't want to go out. (N18)

Most of the women did not view their neighbourhoods as so unsafe that they would consider moving:

... I think, most of the time, I feel safe in the daytime. But at night, after 10:00, I feel unsafe because of a lot of bad news from the TV and newspapers. There is so much bad news about crime, rape... for example, about the innocent kid who was kidnapped and killed... so much bad news from the media. Even though, myself, I haven't really experienced that kind of crime, but because I've overheard so much bad news, that's why I'm very conscious of myself and my daughter. Even my daughter does not go out after 8:00 p.m. She is very conscious about crime. (N30)

Only three of the women said that they were going to move and one was doing so for reasons other than safety. A few of the women did qualify their responses, and one woman stated that "I don't think any area is safe, it's relatively safe." These general expressions of being safe outdoors are reflected in the women's experiences of being in public. Almost all of the women said that they had either positive or mostly positive experiences outside the home:

Definitely positive. I don't feel any tension with people. Some people complain about... I lived in England 25 years or 27 years ago, and yes, at that time, you could sense that there was that undercurrent. People did look at you... I mean, you could tell. Even the taxi drivers would remark, "How can you speak English—fluent English—if you're from India?" But you would never, ever find that here, and I feel very safe even going out with girlfriends. I usually drive home alone at two in the morning, and it doesn't bother me at all because I feel quite safe... (N25)

Three women qualified their responses based on who they were interacting with or where they were and only one woman said that her experiences in public were primarily negative.

Responses to whether or not the women in this study went out at night were more mixed. While 21 women said they did go out at night, more than half of the respondents said they only went out three times or less during a week. The main reason for going out is primarily social, to meet up with friends, eat out, attend a movie or take classes. Those who had their own vehicles drove while the rest took a combination of public transportation and taxis.

Negotiating Fear and Public Space

When the respondents were asked whether or not they worried about their safety in public, two-thirds said they were not worried, one-third of the respondents said it depended on the time of day or that they were worried some of the time, and two respondents said they worried about their safety when out at night. All of the respondents did however mention that they practiced being safe while out in public:

I find out like I usually alert with people I'm talking to and like you don't tell people too many things of personal things... And usually I don't bring too much money. (N18)

I am aware where I'm going, so I'm not worried. But I will not go where I feel I won't be safe, because from the news you just know certain areas are not good to go to... So you avoid places were [anyways there's nothing], and you don't go where the streets are not lit properly. (N13)

Not at all if I drive. But walking, I do not walk at night, because I'm not sure what will happen if walking. (N36)

Concern for family members were raised by half of the respondents who pointed to random attacks and violence as a potential problem for their children:

Yes. Oh yes. Because people out there, really, even what you pick [up] from the news, it really does happen. And it has happened to so many of my friends' children, and it has happened [in our family], just people looking for fights. (N13)

Absolutely, absolutely... You could be at the wrong place at the wrong time and as much as you bring up your kids and teach them everything, there's too much violence right now, with the knives and everything. (N26)

On the other hand, the other respondents were not concerned about being out in public and did not express concerns about other family members. They felt safe enough and did not believe anything untoward would happen to them.

Practicing being safe for many women means not venturing into areas of the city that are known to be problematic. For Vancouver, the most stigmatized neighbourhood, the Downtown Eastside, was cited by almost all the respondents interviewed as too dangerous. However, some of the women more broadly identified the "downtown core" to be off-limits:

I will definitely not go to Chinatown alone at night... In that area there, because I find out there's a lot of nee-needle people. (N18)

Downtown, and Hastings, I don't want to go there; I am afraid that they will hurt me. While walking... But they look frightful to me. (N35)

Well you know, our famous Downtown Eastside... a few times when I was shopping in Chinatown, right on Hastings and Pender—I was walking by myself... and I could see, you know, street people with... they were injecting themselves, you know, drugs into themselves. Right? And there were times I actually have seen men holding a needle in their hands... I mean without a doubt, I would not be walking down there by myself. Especially on Hastings and Main Street... I mean when I was a teenager, when I was younger, that was my area. I used to live in Chinatown, right?... But now, what it turned into, I'm nervous. I mean I wouldn't want to be walking in that area unless I have to. (N15)

Many of the reasons the respondents cited for why they considered these areas unsafe had more to do with their perceptions of the people and the neighbourhood than with concerns with actual levels of victimization. There is a strong belief amongst the women interviewed that drug addicts are desperate and potentially violent, and they were concerned about being approached by a street person for money or that they might be robbed by someone wielding

a knife at them. They believed that crime rates were higher in the downtown area, especially in the Downtown Eastside, based on media reports and stories from friends and family about the area. They also cite the disorderly nature of the area with the increased visibility of homeless people that led them to believe that this was not an area they should be in:

[on Hastings and Main] I don't know. I've never been to there, just my teacher told me not to go. (N07)

When asked whether or not they carried protective devices to guard against their safety, 34 of the women respondents stated that they did not. Of the two women who did have a protective device on them, one woman carried a whistle on her keychain and another woman had a panic alarm on her car alarm remote.

Women's fears of public space are focused primarily on those they are required to share the space with. As such, the respondents described a wide variety of people they made an effort to avoid. They included people under the influence of alcohol or drugs, those who look "dirty" or "rough", panhandlers, drug dealers, young people and groups of people. Three respondents explicitly identified men and 8 respondents did not describe anyone in particular but did mention that they did not stray from familiar places. These characterizations are consistent with Madriz's (1997) findings of women's descriptions of the stereotypical image of an ideal criminal. They are typically identified by their physical characteristics and are seen as morally or psychologically different from "us" (Madriz 1997, 352).

These images act as a mode of control over how women behave. Indeed, the respondents in this study (26) did acknowledge that their fears shaped the way they behaved. These practices involved avoiding situations that might

result in conflict, not carrying a purse or a lot of money, particularly when they go out at night, being more aware of their physical surroundings which they labelled as being more "street-smart", and being more cautious if they are out at night. One woman contrasts her daytime behaviour with her behaviour at night:

A good example is, during the day I have my headphones on. During the night, I don't. I walk faster, and I keep my head up. And if I'm on the SkyTrain, I make it a point not to turn my head away if someone's staring at me. I try to look them in the eye, just so they know I know they're watching or looking at me. Because initially when I started using the SkyTrain I noticed I would just walk with my head down. I made no eye contact. And then I thought, "Well, that kind of makes me look passive and scared." So, I just make conscious effort to look at them. (N04)

Interestingly, while some women spoke about their "fears," other women spoke about being "vigilant" rather than being afraid:

I don't want to use the word "fear". Rather, it is vigilance. If we say "fear", I think it means of being blind or without taking certain protective measures. But vigilance takes caution. If you are scared, what do you think you can do? I think I would use vigilance. If you are vigilant, you will be thinking of many things and take precautions. For example, you are on SkyTrain, you would not choose to sit beside someone who looks weird. If you are vigilant, you find a place that you think is safer. You may say that changes your behaviour. But I don't think it is fear. I think it is carefulness or vigilance. (N34)

The respondents (11) who said that their fears did not change the way they behaved focused on the belief that they did not want their fears to take over their lives. One woman who states "I choose not to live in fear" highlights the desire for some women to resist the view of themselves as fearful and vulnerable individuals.

Two-thirds of the women respondents agreed that gender played a role in explaining why women are more fearful and in the types of issues that they tend to be worried about. The main themes the respondents pointed to were the physical differences between men and women, and with this, the lack of physical strength of women compared to most men. They believed that women tend to worry more about family members, particularly their children. Many women attributed the tendency to worry more than men to how they were socialized. This is consistent with the research on women's fears of crime where women see themselves as more vulnerable to criminal victimization (Gilchrist et al. 1998) and therefore, more likely to be fearful. Amongst the women interviewed, there was varied understanding about the role that race played in shaping their fears and worries. Some of the women acknowledged that being able to speak English and being understood was a significant advantage and that the lack of proficiency in English could act as a barrier to employment and general communication needs. One woman states:

Immigrant women I think are weaker than, [you know], the mainstream women, you know? At least language, if you have something that the native speaker [inaudible] [how] many ways to get help, but immigrant women, first you are limited by the language, second, you are limited by the knowledge. (N28)

The length of time spent in Canada was an important factor in terms of how comfortable the respondents felt about living in the country. Many agreed that the longer one has been in Canada, the less they worry. Newcomers cited that lack of knowledge about Canadian culture as one example of why they tend to worry more—not being able to decode the protocols of social interaction made them more reluctant and apprehensive of being in public. Those respondents who did not believe race mattered noted that they were able to “blend in” more with mainstream culture. This involved being able to “pass”

as a white person or dressing in expensive clothes. However, even where respondents acknowledged that while they did not worry as much, they did nonetheless worry about racial conflicts and the problem of racism. As several respondent stated:

... if you think women are considered second-class citizens, immigrant women are considered even lower. I find guys have an easier time taking advantage of you, and they try, because they think you're just going to be quiet and you're going to take it... So, yes. (N04)

I would say yeah because... I feel that we are a multicultural so-called, race over here and everybody's so accepting of each other. It's a pile of bull because somehow, I notice there's so much racism and I notice it more and more in schools and stuff. (N26)

Yeah, yeah I do, because some people in Vancouver are racist, and they will attack Chinese people or other racial people. (N30)

Most of the respondents noted that being an immigrant women was not a daily burden, but there were occasions when they were clearly being treated differently because of their racial or ethnic background. Stereotyping and the differential treatment that followed was a problem reported by many of the respondents:

[One respondent discusses how there is stereotyping, such as] another this, or, another Indian, or, another whatever... People think you are something when you're not, and you can kind of tell from the people's mannerisms, the way they talk to you, or something like that. (N20)

Vancouver is one of the most mixed cultures in the world, right? But yet I think there's still a lot of stereotypes. I think I was lucky enough where I never experienced racism. No... I shouldn't say I have not. I have. But not to the extent to what some of my friends tell me what they had experienced when they were young. (N15)

They think you can't speak fluent English and they think I am an immigrant from the [mainland] China, they are poor, they look down on you, this kind of thing. (N31)

A few of the respondents (4) denied that racism was a problem for them at all or that the problem is one of racism. Instead, they note that if a person cannot communicate effectively, then fair treatment cannot be expected:

If in government offices, if you come to a certain level, you may be treated equally, because at that level, things are done according to the law. But in everyday life, if they enter into conflict with others, you have language barrier, e.g., in a car accident, you are not able to express yourself clearly or to express what you really want to say, then you won't get the help that you need to get. So all this may become obstacle to them. So it is hard to say if this is prejudice. But it is your language barrier that bring you more difficulties. So it is not to say that you are treated unfairly. If you are not able to make yourself clear, you cannot expect to be treated fairly. (N34)

Here, language barriers are disconnected from the question of racism and identified instead as a practical problem of poor communication skills. The belief in formal equality and individual responsibility makes it possible to locate the issue as one of individual failing and to deny that racism is the problem.

For many of the respondents however, their anxieties of being in public are related to both their role as women and as racialized individuals. Gender and race intersect to create complex and unique problems for immigrant women in terms of what they may fear and who they fear. Kern (2005) argues that whiteness constructs a sense of belonging and feeling of invisibility that can lead to lower levels of discomfort for women in public. Privileged identities operate as the norm in Canada, whether they constitute the majority or not, and that identity is a white, middle-class Canadian citizen (Kern 2005, 367). Racialized women are more vulnerable because they are more visible, even in

a diverse city like Vancouver, and the inability to articulate oneself clearly will only exacerbate the problems they may confront.

Fear of Crime

Concerns over crime has an ongoing presence in the lives of many women. The responses from respondents regarding their views of crime reflects the wider public sentiment that crime remains a pressing issue. The experiences and views of the respondents are shaped by media attention to crime problems and drawn from their own experiences or the experiences of those close to them who have been victims of crime. Almost all the respondents pointed to various forms of the media as a key influence for their concerns around crime and the types of crimes they feared most. Altheide and Michalowski (1999, 499) note that media outlets made fear a pervasive topic of discussion such that more and more people perceive life to be fearful and risky. Fear, they point out, "is even bigger news than mere crime or even violence" (Altheide and Michalowski 1999, 499). Where crime is concerned, the tendency is for the media to focus disproportionately on violent crime and leave the impression that crime is often random and inexplicable (Surette 1998). It is not surprising then that fear of interpersonal violence such as murder and rape feature heavily in the responses provided by the respondents as did concerns about property crimes:

someone following you or stalking because you hear about it every day
(N2)

Murders, especially Asian women. That's the worst. [I don't know why the] reason they kill Asian women. (N19)

Approximately one-third of the respondents said that they try not to think about crime too much, if at all, but that it was difficult due to the heavy media attention given to the issue. As several women note:

It's always in the back of my mind, but I don't really think of it that often. (N16)

No, only when it comes on the news. (N19)

Yes. Constantly. When you look at the newspaper during the day, when you turn on the radio, when you turn on the TV, that's all you hear. And that's all that we discuss when we're in groups. (N02)

Hearing about crime taking place caused mostly negative feeling for the respondents. A sense of despondency takes over, and they point to feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, and disappointment. The respondents note how discussions of crime make them feel as if they are even less safe than before, and that not enough is being done by various levels of government to address the problems:

It's no longer in certain parts of the city or it's not any longer in certain areas, good, bad. It can come to your doorstep, and that's scary. (N20)

If the crime is too serious, I think we should deport those people home. Canada doesn't need these people. Life in Canada shouldn't be so unsafe. (N35)

I think Canadian laws are weak towards criminals. The criminals are given chances. Especially the murderers. I think they should be in jail... Like USA there should be death penalty. In China these kind of criminals should die. Canadian laws are weak. And the police work is not sufficient enough. (N36)

We cannot take for granted that Canada is a peaceful country, no crime. [Sometimes] we should know any country, any society has such a problem and we should know how to protect ourselves. (N28)

One woman did recognize the role that the media played in exacerbating the public's fears over crime but at the same time, she is not immune to how it does shape her concerns:

Sometimes I think it's overdone by the media. Sometimes, I don't know, it seems like there's more and more of crime being reported today than before. I have lived here for so many years now and I feel like every year it seems to just somehow... doesn't get worse but it kind of looks like it's out there more... Some of it is pretty scary. Some of it is... I think sometimes I get a little bit desensitized by a lot of it. Some of it kind of hits home because you have children and they go out and it happens to youths mostly. So it just kind of brings more awareness to me more than anything. (N33)

The media has been widely implicated as an important source of fear by researchers seeking to understand the relationship between media content and its effects on audiences. One approach suggests that consumption of media messages distorts audience beliefs about the world and influences their cognitive and emotional states (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli 1980). Repeated exposure can then generate fear and insecurity (Gerbner and Gross 1976). Given the media-saturated lives we currently lead, it is reasonable to conclude that the media plays an important influence on immigrant women's lives whilst also recognizing that this effect is not uniform since women's gender, racial and lived experiences (e.g., victimization) will also shape how the media impacts them.

The location of where criminal activity occurs also impacts the levels of fear held by immigrant women. When crime takes place in the respondents' own neighbourhoods, they expressed greater fears because it is "too close to home" for many and a few women said that they would likely become more cautious and vigilant about their surroundings:

Then you just try to don't go at night and or don't talk to the strangers.
(N18)

You would never know if you could be a target. You could be a mistaken house and you could be a target for something. (N16)

Asked if they would consider moving as a result, one woman noted the futility of doing so:

How many boundaries would keep going over in order to move?... Why should I move? Something should be taken care of before we keep going on and on. I shouldn't move because I'm scared. (N20)

Women's fear of criminal victimization by men has been widely acknowledged as a key source of fear. Women have been socialized not just to fear men, but strangers and public places (Burt and Estep 1981). Feminists point out that while this may seem irrational to some, it is entirely consistent with women's lived experiences whereby they encounter the routine threat of physical and sexual violence on the street, at work and in the home (Stanko 1990). Having to also endure the incivilities of men via sexist and sexual comments and innuendos reinforces their fears. Almost all the respondents agreed that women have more reasons to be afraid of being criminally victimized than men. As noted earlier, gender is a significant factor in constituting their fears and the differential physical and power relations; this combined with the belief that more women have past experiences of criminal victimization reinforces their view of women as more vulnerable than men:

Because we're generally thought to be physically weak and then mentally weak, sometimes, so people just take advantage of us. (N29)

Because we live in a society where men have power. I feel some men have a sense of losing that power as well. And I think that has a lot to do with it also. (N04)

Criminals are men, of course, some women are also criminals. But what we hear and see are that men kill women. Rarely, we see women kill men. (N36)

Immigrant women, most of the respondents claimed, were even more vulnerable when compared to non-immigrant women. As previously mentioned, the lack of knowledge about one's environment, culture and country can result in stress and depression for many immigrant women, and hence increase their fears and anxieties about going outdoors and their fears of becoming a crime victim. They noted that immigrant women's needs are different, particularly if they are new to the country or if they are dependent on their spouses. Length of integration and cultural assimilation were key themes in explaining not just why immigrant women are more fearful, but also worry more about becoming a crime victim:

Because I think more white women may have education... I think more and more white women—maybe from when they are very young—they are starting to work. They are more independent. But for immigrants—for women from different countries—because the background of these countries, some women when they get married, they never go out to work anymore. So they move to the new country they are completely dependent on the husband. So that's more fear. (N10)

Depends on how long that immigrant woman has lived in this country. Depends how fully assimilated, integrated that person is. When you're an immigrant yeah, it's scary especially when they don't have language and they don't have the same aspect of... from where they're coming, they're coming to this mainstream culture. They have to adapt and adjust and learn and all the social skills. So it's pretty scary for an immigrant woman I would think. Just even answering the phone is scary, just to go out on the streets, get on a bus, make conversation with somebody is scary. (N33)

In addition, they also noted that there were other structural barriers for immigrant women such as difficulties in securing paid employment and vulnerability stemming from financial dependence:

Of course. Money is one of the problems, unless you are very rich. Things are difficult. White women, it is their native land, they were born here and grew up here... and it is easier for them to find a job, not like us immigrants, unless we have a specialty, otherwise it is hard to find a job. (N38)

If there are immigrants coming here who are working class and they can't get jobs, chances are there will be marital problems and if there is physical violence then the woman will suffer and the poor woman, if she is in the working force and trying to look for a job and if she is an immigrant, again there will be these issues about minority abuse and she might get a lot of verbal abuse or she might go through some kinds of emotional or mental abuse outside. Yeah, so definitely. (N13)

These factors contribute to the view that immigrant women will continue to occupy a position of vulnerability that is unlike non-immigrant women. As one respondent notes:

Yeah, yeah I do feel that... because of the races, people would be more likely to attack immigrants than they would white people. Besides, it is the white people's culture. They have been here for their lifetime, and so they know what places are safe or not safe. Even though we have been here—I have been here for 15 years—I don't really know about Western culture. There are many places where I have not been. I don't know which places are dangerous and which places aren't—I don't really know. I only know that Hastings is not a safe place, and some places in Surrey, like the Whalley area, are not safe. I only know these two places, but when I talk to white women, they tell me about so many places that are not safe. They told me that the area along Lougheed Mall is not safe. There were so many places that I didn't know about, but they have told me so many things. That is why, I said, they know better than I do. (N30)

The lack of comfort and knowledge of one's surroundings is what differentiates immigrant women's fear of crime from non-immigrant women. It is clear that the sense of belonging to a place and feeling comfortable and safe in one's community shapes immigrant women's fears and that reducing their fear of victimization will be more challenging.

The promotion of integration into one's community and broader country is a long-standing policy strongly advocated by all levels of government in Canada. What is different now compared to previous times is that immigrants are required to integrate with less state intervention (Frideres 1996, 7). Thus the challenge of integration falls heavily on the non-profit sector, on market-driven services, and on individual self-sufficiency. For immigrant women wanting to establish themselves in Canada, it is a challenging process as the respondents recognize. How well immigrants can integrate contributes to reduced levels of social problems and in this case, can help some women to be less fearful of being out in public.

The respondents saw the problem of crime as largely located with men in general, young people, poor parenting, unstable families and the lack of a good social network. The lack of parental supervision and proper socialization were the reasons why so many felt that young people got into trouble:

I don't know. I think it's just the fact that maybe marriages are breaking up more than they ever have and there are a lot of single parents and they are not always around so the children get out and do what they want. They aren't monitoring their children enough to know what's happening because they're so caught up with their own lives. So a lot of people, like a lot of young people, are getting out and getting into the whole smoking and you know... I've heard that weed is so totally available because it's a port city, so I guess a lot of children start messing with that and eventually these things do mess you right up completely, like chemically... So I just think it's just a lot of children going wrong, not knowing what they're doing, getting ad-

dicted to the wrong things and maybe the parents are just too caught up in their own lives to get it. Because it's become so hard now, right? It's so hard to work here and make money here and everything is so expensive. The standard of living is so high that everybody just cares about making money and becoming rich so that they can live comfortably. (N05)

Broader structural problems were also mentioned by respondents who spoke of poverty, the lack of jobs, addictions, societal pressures and competition, mental illness and lack of resources or education as factors for crime. Many respondents acknowledged that social inequality was a significant factor:

Well, for me I think it is all because of the unbalance of the financial status, maybe, from my point of view... I mentioned before that I saw some homeless people on the corner of Hastings and Main Street. And I used to talk with my friends about that. I said, "Why the local government doesn't help them? Offer some opportunities to get a job, or even to clean the street or doing some... create some job opportunities, and make those homeless get a little bit of money. And let them get back their dignity, their personal respect..." I mean, for me I think that it is the unbalance of the financial status. Because they don't have money. What can they do? They have to live, they have to keep warm. And even though the local government gives them some support, I don't think it is enough. (N01)

I think it is a cycle of things that begin with poverty. Lack of education, poverty... then I think it starts in families... if there is no education, there is no good jobs, there is no way to sustain a family, there's struggles, there's strays and all the things that come with not having enough to provide and not having the education to make good choices in life. So then if you're not educated, you can't bring your children up the best way possible. And children get ostracized, children get... what is the word... neglected. Children are given freedom that they don't need because parents are trying to survive. Maybe having to work two jobs, both parents or one parent leaves them left alone. And then it's just a big circle of little events, but I feel that it all begins with a lack of education. (N08)

Despite being immigrants, the respondents noted that immigrants were also part of the problem. Factors such as failing to integrate into Canadian society, the diversity of values in Canadian society, and an overly generous support system were seen as playing a role in causing crime:

... I think there are related reasons, one, Canada is a multicultural country. Therefore, people here come from different countries, nations, and they have brought to Canada their own religion, beliefs, cultural background, values, not like one culture country, the values, beliefs are similar, the background are similar. But Canada is a multicultural, there is no unifying standard. So you cannot blame schools for not giving children a moral views or blame society for not having that. There is not a unifying standard of behaviour. (N34)

When I talk to the folks that live here, they don't... the crime has come in so slowly and systematically that they even don't realise... And the kinds of crime that I see, as I said before, but now gangs and really high-powered in high-powered places... But I don't see much being done about it... I mean, I'm just overwhelmed with it, I really am... Lots of new immigrants come in. I'm an immigrant, I know how I came to this country and what I did in this country as far as being a part of the country, how I embrace the country. I as an immigrant see other immigrants coming in now and just using the country. [identifies affluent young adults coming to the country with too much freedom and money; and don't see their parents working hard] So suddenly now you've got pockets of people who have their own little countries set up within the country and are demanding a piece of the pie. (N20)

I think the Canadian government is very nice, and they allow some poor immigrants from certain countries—I don't mean that they are bad, but I think that increases the poverty rate in Canada. Some of those immigrants—I'm not looking down on them—are part of the reason. (N30)

The theme of personal responsibility echoes throughout the responses given for how the respondents understand the problem of crime. This is not surprising since the discourse of personal responsibility has been heavily pro-

moted by all levels of government and its institutions. Crime, in particular, has been re-packaged as a problem located with individual dysfunctions rather than regarded as structurally or biologically produced. Both criminals and victims are now required to regulate their own behaviour as rational choice actors and the punishments meted out assume citizens are calculating the risks and exercising prudence (Garland 1996). The call by some of the respondents for stiffer penalties and punishments to manage the problem of crime reflects their belief in the view of crime as an individual choice. This discourse of neo-liberalism has been embraced as the way to understand crime and has significantly influenced the ideas and practices of crime prevention.

Crime, Gender and Victimization

Another key source of fear is the lived experiences of immigrant women. Criminologists note that living with past experiences of criminal victimization can directly shape how one may behave in the future (Miethe 1995; Daems 2005). Those who have experienced past victimization are more likely to alter their everyday behaviours in response to their victimization (Goodey 2005). The fear of repeat victimization is partially affected by victim attributes such as gender, class and racial/ethnic background which can leave individuals within these groups feeling more vulnerable to the risk of re-victimization (Daems 2005, 93). In this study, one-third of the respondents stated that they had been a crime victim at some point in their lives. The types of victimization they experienced were broad. Property crimes were the most common forms of victimization of the respondents but interpersonal attacks, sexual harassment, and robbery were also cited. The respondents said that it made them "feel horrible," "really hurt ... disturbed and angry," "violated and scared," and

“traumatised”. One respondent who had her car broken into several times considered herself lucky because she had escaped being a victim of an interpersonal attack thus far. As she notes, “I guess I’ve got away easy, you know?” The General Social Survey (Statistics Canada 2007) found that the emotional and psychological impact of being a crime victim tends to impact women more negatively than men. Women are more likely to report feelings of being afraid, in shock and cautious (Statistics Canada 2007, 5).

The image of a typical or ideal victim held by the respondents corresponds to widely held views of people who are regarded as the most vulnerable in society—the poor, the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and immigrants. Most of the respondents did not believe that someone who has been victimized should be blamed for their victimization, but further probing suggests that the respondents were more divided than not. Some women did view victims as precipitating their misfortune while others refused to blame the victim. Those who saw victims as somewhat blameworthy stated:

I don’t think they should be blamed... You always hope that they didn’t do something stupid, or they didn’t put themselves in places where they shouldn’t have been and stuff like that, and the sympathy maybe goes down a little bit sometimes. (N20)

But then sometimes, but in a way sometime the way they dress up it seems like they’re asking for it really... Because they do draw attention to those bad people to... like you know, “look at me, I’m so sexy” right. Things like that. So you have to do your part too really, you know. (N18)

I see many women walking at 12 and one o’clock at night all by themselves. If they are with somebody or.. then it would be kind of a protection for them. But yes, they are causing crimes because of that. (N19)

The view that one's lifestyle choices increases one's exposure to the risks of victimization is a popular theory within the literature on victimization (see Gottfredson 1981). If individuals choose to engage in risky behaviours, then they are seen as contributing to their victimization. These comments are in contrast to those respondents who did not wish to blame the victim on the grounds that some events are out of our control:

... No, I don't think so, because they are the victims... we should support these people—give them more resources, and support these people—to become stronger people, so they don't have to be the victim. (N30)

... I know people [feel] they have it coming, and I don't think that's fair to say. I bet they were doing what was best under the circumstances. Sometimes you say, "Oh, the woman asked for it. She led him on," but I don't agree, because the bottom line is, "No means no." (N25)

The respondents confirmed the widely held view that women were marked as more vulnerable and more likely to be victimized compared to men. Respondents noted that social expectations about women combined with gender and racial stereotyping enforces and reinforces a particular view of women:

It seems that way... I guess again just based on society's expectations of the way that it's felt women are seen—the more vulnerable sex. And so we seem like a more likely target. (N09)

Of course, because they think you are weak. And also immigrants, he thinks that things are not in your favour. Your conditions will not be of threat to him, and your English is also a problem. He thinks you... not like the white, can easily pick up phones to call and ask for help... (N38)

Again, the whole vulnerability question, the way we're handling kids. Forget about where we live but all over the world... I mean, when it's so... when it's happening like this all over the place... I mean, you think at this day and age, that cannot happen. When you see women that are so vulnerable still, that's scary. That's really scary. You know, we think we've gone past that and we can talk to anybody and anybody can, we can go ask for help and,

you know, all that kind of stuff, but really it's sad... Like, this can't happen in this day and age. But it does, so to me I think women are much more vulnerable. (N23)

Thus, while women are more likely to be fearful of victimization compared to men, immigrant women's fears are increased by broader social barriers such as language, culture, employment, and racism.

Coping Strategies

Preventing oneself from being a victim of crime preoccupies many of the respondents in this study. Actively engaging in preventative strategies gave many of the women an increased sense of control over their fears of victimization, although it did not eradicate those fears. When asked what were the main strategies employed to prevent being victimized, the respondents named many different strategies. Having a strong social support network was seen by one respondent as empowering because she knew that she could call on them in case of an emergency:

because I have some friends from church, and they make me become strong. Emotionally and mentally, we really support each other. They make me feel secure: I feel secure with them, and that makes me feel safe. If something happens, for example if there is a break-in at my home, I can phone them and they will help me. (N30)

Other approaches cited by the respondents focused on target-hardening through installing alarms or locks, and carrying personal anti-attack devices such as pepper spray or holding keys between one's fingers. However, the most common responses emphasized behavioural changes such as not working late at night, walking down dark streets or alleyways, walking alone, or carrying a purse, and avoiding unfamiliar places or dressing inappropriately, parking in safe and bright places, and finally not going out at night. Keane's (1998)

Canadian study also found similar results. Most women said they would likely restrict or change their behavioural patterns to manage their fears (Keane 1998, 71). Only one-third of the respondents in this study said that they had actively sought out crime prevention advice by the police or other community groups. Most of the information the respondents received about what they should do or how they should act were conveyed by family and friends concerned about their safety.

Increasing women's sense of safety would involve an increased police presence in neighbourhoods, particularly at night, as well as faster response times from the police. This was the key theme the respondents said they would like to see in place, although a few of them acknowledged that this was unlikely to be implemented since it would involve significant resources from the government. Other responses included more security cameras and tougher legal penalties for criminals. Stanko (1994) argues that a broad range of action is required to create a woman-friendly environment. Whether it is more policing, better lighting, cleaning graffiti, safe houses, or safe relationships, all of these measures are necessary if we are to take women's fear of crime seriously (Stanko 1994, 83).

In an ideal world where women did not have to fear for their safety public, the respondents talked about the freedom they would be able to enjoy. Being able to wear what you wanted or engaging in activities such as travelling abroad, going anywhere in the city, engaging in more outdoor activities or taking public transit were mentioned:

I guess I would be freer. I'd be comfortable taking the SkyTrain at like, midnight on my own. I wouldn't have to worry about what I'm wearing and I wouldn't have to think twice about the jewellery I have, or the purse I have on me. (N04)

I would... take the SkyTrain at night and not worry about it. I would go out for walks at night without worrying about it, get my exercise that I need. Yeah just, I wouldn't have some of the restrictions that I do have on life right now, that I put on myself. (N26)

I probably will do more stuff, outgoing stuff. You know, if the transportation better I probably would go to Chinatown more or to the park more. Because now you don't really want to go to a park, because so many bad things happen to the park. You don't really want to go out alone, you know. (N18)

I'd like to see more of those kinds of activities at night where on a Friday night, weekend stuff, we could do things as opposed to just kind of come home and watch TV or something. You know, just do things... [like fireworks or strolling around parks]... Yeah, and actually sometimes just watching people having fun without caring whether when they get back if their car is there or not or whether their purse is going to be stolen or not or personal harm's going to be done or not. You know all those kinds of things. Just to enjoy that freedom would be good. (N20)

Indeed, fear of crime has significant constraining effects on women. That many of the respondents spoke of having an increased sense of freedom if they were not afraid points to their awareness of the costs associated with staying safe. However, there was less consensus as to whether the safety practices that women are required to engage to stay safe were fair to women. Some respondents stated that it was unfair for women to have to be so afraid, especially when they had no choice but to take public transit at night or work late:

No, it's not fair. It's not fair, because some of her friends, they go work at night. They have to come home at night by the bus and stuff, so no it's not. She worked for a little while—for a month—she was taking the bus and coming at night, so there was a worry there. [interpreter] (N11)

On the other hand, a few respondents believed it was a woman's responsibility to take care not to make herself a target by dressing inappropriately or staying out late at night:

I think, during night time, women shouldn't go out so often. They shouldn't go to the pub or those kinds of places. (N30)

Maybe it's the way they dress. I think that's the only thing that I feel kind of gives women that rep, where people say, "Oh she had it coming to her." When they wear very revealing clothes, or their behaviour, or when they drink and they lose control of what's going on... that's where I have a problem when I see young women flaunting their bodies and [when they] hear the shows on TV all the time, [saying] she was raped because she was [inaudible], wearing a very skimpy outfit. I think that's the only thing that bothers me, and then I feel, "Oh why? Why do we ask for trouble?" (N25)

Other respondents stated that it was unfair, but the problem was systemic and unlikely to change therefore women also needed to be realistic and practical:

Nothing in life is fair but you know what? You have to do what you have to do and yeah, I'm... don't get me wrong. Geez, I'm all for, being a woman myself, fighting for my own rights for equality in a lot of things. But you know, let's not get stupid here and say, "Rah, rah, rah, women are just as strong and we're just as..." this thing of protecting ourselves and whatever. That's wonderful but physically, you have a drunk or somebody that's stoned out of your mind, that's physically stronger than you, there's nothing you can do. So you better be... yeah, change. Learn. Maybe self-defence is a good thing. Or be careful, protect yourself. Nothing wrong with that. (N26)

...no, it's not fair. But you know what? That's never going to be fair. So you have to weigh your pros and cons, whether or not it's worth it. (N20)

It's not fair, but then, such is life, right?... You've got to live within the parameters. (N25)

The respondents' recognize all too clearly that being a woman means the impossibility of being completely free. An undercurrent in their responses is an awareness that it is not just about being safe, but also protecting one's status and reputation. The pressure to be seen as a "nice girl" or "lady" ensures that women practice self-surveillance (Fox 1977, 809). Stanko (1997, 489) concurs, pointing out that women fear not just the possibility of being a victim of crime, but they also worry about being judged or blamed for being imprudent. As a result, exercising vigilance is not an option, but a necessary requirement for all women.

Many of the respondents called for increased education for women as the best approach for increasing women's confidence and raising awareness about how to protect themselves. For one respondent, this education should start early:

Educate them. Maybe make self-defence courses mandatory in the schools. I think it starts with the young girls, teenagers, I think it would be excellent to be part of their PE whatever, to have self-defence... I think we need to take care of each other somehow and watch out for each other. And I think the neighbours, the neighbours are so... we don't even know our neighbours... So the kids have lost that support system of their neighbours, that unit of, not just the family unit but the extended. The friends and the neighbours have disintegrated I think. We don't have time. We just get in and out of our cars at these houses with garages. (N33)

They also suggested that women should be encouraged to take self-defence classes and create activities where women can build self-esteem or share experiences and tips with each other. At the same time, several respondents said that women have to help themselves by behaving "sensibly". A few respondents recognized that increasing women's social, economic and political

status would help to challenge the view of women as second-class citizens. As one respondent notes:

The way men and women think—gender stereotypes. Just the whole patriarchal culture, it all feeds into it. Women are considered weaker, they're perceived as weaker. And as long as that happens they're going to be exploited more than men. (N04)

They cited the need to prevent discrimination against women, create better economic options for women, and provide more social programs to help women as the way forward. The responses here reflect a recognition that all parties need to be involved in crime prevention and that changes at all levels are required to create a society where women may feel safer in public. This starts, as one respondent believes, with immigrant women being aware that they can be victims of a crime:

Basically, it's the conscientiousness. If we have the conscientiousness of how to prevent crime and how to avoid being a victim, that is the first step to help immigrant women not become the victim... the police are the last step. The first is conscientiousness, the second is action, and the third is the support from the police. (N30)

Many feminists cite female empowerment as the key to reducing women's fears. Where women are able to engage in activities that can boost self-esteem, decrease their sense of isolation, and enhance their sense of physical and psychical self, women report having more positive feelings about themselves and more confidence in the public domain (Wood 1999; Hollander 2004; Campbell 2005).

PART 3 – UNDERSTANDING SAFETY FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Fear of criminal victimization for immigrant women is fraught with multiple layers of concerns shaped by issues of gender, race and class differences. The respondents in this study have shown that while they share similar concerns with women generally over fears of being in public, they have also highlighted more nuanced differences in how their fears are influenced by their identities as racialized women. Their responses echo those of other researchers who note that the interlocking systems of race, class and gender generate experiences that differ materially for each combination of traits (Ruddick 1996). Day (1999) argues that it is misleading to speak of "women's" fear of crime only, as though it were a uniform experience. It is a person's entire social identity and the way they work together that comes to shape her fear of crime.

The fears expressed by women in this study are a product of daily incivilities, mixed media messages about women's responsibility for "protecting themselves" and the underlying threat of personal and/or sexual attack. For racialized women, these incivilities include the possibility of encountering racist conflict or racial discrimination in public. Day (1999) encountered similar responses in her interviews with women of colour in the USA. Her interviewees feared non-racially motivated crime but also race-motivated crime and harassment in their daily activities (Day 1999, 313). Two surveys carried out in Britain found that South Asian women reported that the possibility of racial attack as well as sexual attack constrains their use of public space (Burgess 1998, Scraton and Watson 1998). For the respondents in this study, the process of racializing their fears and avoiding certain places and people is not a completely conscious act nor an issue that they speak about regularly. As many of the respondents mentioned, they don't see themselves as afraid of going out in public, but their self-regulating behaviour suggest that their fears do indeed influence when, where and with whom they interact with publicly.

Many of the respondents never had to confront their fears because they were able to avoid them before they were experienced.

The women in this study were perhaps more consciously aware of how class differences shaped their use of public spaces than did race differences. Their concerns about the downtown core, particularly the Downtown Eastside, points to an understanding that poverty creates conditions and environments that make them feel less safe and as places to avoid. Those who had access to a vehicle were aware of the privilege it afforded them in being able to go out at night and not have to rely on public transit which was deemed to be more risky for women. The emphasis on low-income neighbourhoods and the people who inhabit them is not surprising given the ongoing attacks on the poor by all levels of government and the media, and the laws and policies that have been enacted to criminalize poverty. The public has been made to fear poor people and poverty in general through a relentless campaign that constructs the problem of poverty as an individual choice (Hermer and Mosher 2002). In the attempt to exile poor people out through a campaign of criminalization, the public is led to believe that poverty is equated with dangerousness. The responses from the women in this study are testament to the folkloric status the Downtown Eastside has acquired as a "dangerous" neighbourhood, contrary to those who actually live and work there.

Lupton argues that it is impossible to single out people's fear of crime from their concerns, anxieties and fears about other aspects of modern social life and social relations (Lupton 1999). The concerns expressed about crime by the respondents, where many of them identified social pressures, stress, poverty and unemployment as key factors in why crime takes place, highlights how they view crime as part of a larger network of social decay and change. Our increased sensitivity to "risks" and general fear and anxiety about how

the world is evolving leaves many with the belief that life is more dangerous than before. Furedi (2002) claims that we currently live in a "culture of fear" where access to a comfortable lifestyle is also met with greater anxieties and insecurities about our everyday experiences and sense of belonging. The generation and subsequent commodification of fear has led to channelling the public's attention towards practices that are seen as lower risk whilst dismissing or downplaying genuinely higher risks (Furedi 2002, Glassner 1999). Fear of crime, for example, is one area where the problem of "fear of crime" is seen as more widespread than crime itself (Garland 2001, 45). According to Garland (2001), late modern societies' two main responses to increased fear and anxiety about crime and other threats to security has been increased punitiveness and pragmatism, a course of action that has been strongly promoted by advocates of the "law and order" agenda. Certainly the women in this study reflected these approaches in their response to what they believed needed to be done to control crime. Tougher sentencing practices combined with a need for women to exercise caution were central themes voiced by the respondents. They have embraced what Garland identifies as the partnership model of crime prevention where the state and private actors are seen as collaborative partners in crime control (Garland 2001).

The self-regulating behaviours the respondents engaged in are not just a response to their fears, but it is also a way make daily life manageable so that they are able to engage in their normal routines and activities. In the absence of their ability to stop crime from occurring, the respondents take the only action they can—imposing limits and boundaries on their own activities to prevent the possibility of becoming a crime victim. While many of the women said they would like to see more police officers in their communities and tougher penalties for criminals, they also expressed a need for a wider under-

standing of how their fears are connected to other social and economic issues. Whitzman (2007) found in her study with new-migrant women that recognizing the fear and violence issues women encounter in their homelands and in their new country of settlement is important. As well, affordable housing, employment, learning English, adapting to the dominant cultural norms and values were also linked to issues of fear and violence (Whitzman 2007, 2726). These are all factors that the respondents in this study cited as well in helping to make immigrant women feel more safe. Indeed, individual crime prevention strategies may be necessary, but so too are broader community initiatives that help immigrant women to feel more comfortable in their communities and neighbourhood. Immigrant women are more vulnerable as a social group and if the notion of "safer" public space is to be taken seriously, then it is vital that initiatives taken go beyond enacting crime prevention programs to also include broader state and institutional support for the general social and economic well-being of women.

CONCLUSION

In a letter to the editor of the *Now* (Surrey) newspaper by Translink's Information Officer regarding the conviction of the man responsible for attacking five Asian women near SkyTrain stations, the author commended the police for implementing the Whistle Blower program.² The pink whistles, free to women, has given them back their confidence to use the SkyTrain. He argued that "security based on confidence, and not fear, goes much further than the presence of armed police at every SkyTrain station ever could" (*Now*, February 8, 2008). When the program was first implemented, Vancouver Rape Relief stated that they did not believe the whistle program would make much difference for women. They noted that "women are already alert when they're

walking in public, especially at night,” and “women don’t need further warnings. We know we’re unsafe” (Vancouver *Province*, May 31, 2007). Contrary to the previous claim, Vancouver Rape Relief called for more security officers at SkyTrain stations and more arrests if women are to feel safer.

The different views expressed about how to make women feel safer in public highlights the tensions over resource allocation for crime prevention and the perceptions about what makes women feel safe. Feminist scholars have argued for a “gendered” approach to crime prevention—one that includes the voices of women in planning and implementing preventative strategies—as the way forward (Shaw 2002). Whitzman argues that it is crucial to involve vulnerable and marginalized groups, which includes not only gender but other forms of identity and socioeconomic disadvantage, in the preparation and implementation of crime prevention programs (2007, 2728). Such an approach would, it is believed, have a higher probability of delivering more effective services to a broader range of women. The issue over the whistle program points to the conflict that can and likely will occur within the process of defining how to make women feel safer, but potential conflict is a necessary first step in creating inclusive processes for defining safer communities for women (Whitzman 2007, 2729). Thus, for immigrant women in this study, developing strategies that recognize their issues and concerns to address their fears about crime involves understanding what these issues are, how and why they differ from other women, and what they see as potential solutions.

ENDNOTES

1 It should be noted that the discussion here focuses on women’s fear of crime in public. Most women are more often victimized in their own home by a known person than in public by a stranger. Any discussion of women’s fear of victimization which gives centrality to gender must necessarily include the wide range of factors that make women fearful.

2 Translink operates and maintains the SkyTrain transit system.

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