Public Spaces for Youth? The Case of the Jane-Finch Neighborhood in Toronto

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Abstract
This article examines how public spaces shape racialized youth growing up in a multicultural city. It focuses on youths in the Jane-Finch neighborhood of Toronto presenting their fears, sociospatial practices, and aspirations for social inclusion and urban spaces. Research data consist of interviews with stake-holders and social providers working with youth in Toronto, in general, and in Jane-Finch, in particular. In addition, the article relies predominantly on a focus group discussion with 13 young women and men that took place in The Spot Youth Centre located in Jane-Finch in June 2011. In August 2013, two Black teenagers were killed in the area of Jane-Finch in North-West Toronto. This article was inspired by these tragic losses.

Keywords
public space, youth, fear, violence, police, Jane-Finch, Toronto

Introduction
In Canada, multiculturalism has been embedded in official policies since the 1970s (Wood & Gilbert, 2005). The application of these policies has since given birth to a dynamic public sphere of criticism and agonistic discourse (Galanakis, 2013). A country internationally recognized for its multiculturalism, Canada has been internally criticized as a stratified society along various dividing lines (Boudreau, Keil, & Young, 2009; Galabuzi, 2006; Siemiatycki, 2011). Multiculturalism therefore remains a contested concept (see Goonewardena & Kipfer, 2005; Sandercock, 2009).

Toronto is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, a city shaped by immigration experiences with a well-established framework of multiculturalism (City of Toronto, 2006c). Torontonians, whatever their origins, generally appreciate the multicultural character of their city (Boudreau et al., 2009, p. 86), which, however, remains socially, economically, and ethnically polarized (Hulchanski, 2010). This polarization is experienced particularly by racialized youth, considered to be “abject” (Sharkey & Shields, 2008) and “a generation of suspects” (Giroux, 2003, p. 54). The case of racialized youth is particularly important because they often have to manage their own immigrant experiences against the multicultural assumptions of the city, as well as their racialized marginalization in increasingly policed public spaces.

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Public spaces are not simply containers of social interaction; we shape them and they shape us (see Lefebvre, 1997). Public spaces participate in the formation of the identities of marginalized immigrant youth. While they use public space, often these youth challenge what is acceptable. This empowers them as well as muddles the boundaries between social insiders-outsiders. In an international context such processes are demonstrated by L’Aoustet and Griffet (2004), who showed that sharing a popular park in Marseille facilitates youth socialization; van Lieshout and Aarts (2008), with their research about youth and immigrants’ perspectives on public space in the Netherlands; and Sharkey and Shields (2008), who researched the ways marginalized youth assert their civic rights in a small Canadian town. Within this context, this article contributes to the ongoing discussion about racialized youth, and the sociospatial exclusion in our cities. Without further victimizing these youth, we need to listen to them.

In 2011, my research into the physical and social characteristics of intercultural public spaces in Toronto took me northwest to Jane-Finch, one of the most stigmatized neighborhoods of the city. My fieldwork in the Jane-Finch neighborhood included in-depth interviews with social service providers¹ in the area, and a focus group discussion with 13, in their majority, racialized young men and women in The Spot Youth Centre.² Jane-Finch is one of the so-called “priority neighborhoods” identified as such by the City of Toronto (2006a, 2006b) and targeted for sociospatial support and development.³ Jane-Finch is a neighborhood with a high concentration of immigrants, high concentration of Black people of various nationalities and backgrounds, relatively poor households—an area warped by social tensions and occasional violence (Figures 1 and 2).

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¹ Source. Author.

Figure 1. Housing building type in Jane-Finch: High-rise apartment blocks, 2011, photograph.

Source. Author.
In this article, I interrogate the spatial relations of racialized youth of Jane-Finch area and present a testimonial analysis of my research participants working in the field of youth services, and most importantly of the young adults who participated in the focus group discussion at The Spot Youth Centre on June 16, 2011. The testimonies focus on research participants’ understanding of the realities of the City of Toronto and the area of Jane-Finch, in particular. While my account does not exhaust all of the issues raised in the focus group discussion, the following discussion builds on the issues that the focus group participants identified as most important regarding their experience in the city and in their neighborhood. The views presented and the analysis of the testimonies do not present the single truth of the city but they do present what my research participants perceived as true, relevant, and pertinent regarding people’s experiences in public spaces at that moment in time (Healey, 2006; Oakley & Hougaard, 2008).

While Jane-Finch was often mentioned in the testimonies, I sought to understand the ambiguous experiences youths have of public spaces in Toronto, and the focus group provided the most telling insights. Most participants knew each other since they all frequented The Spot. This, as we will see, created certain group dynamics and challenges consistent with focus groups as a qualitative research method (see Hopkins, 2007). At times, it was obvious that peer pressure did not allow for some of the participants to open up as much as they would have in individual interviews. Some participants were more laconic than others, although the discussion became quite animated as it progressed. It was evident that often the young adults seemed to influence each other, some felt the need to distinguish themselves, and at a particular case, as we will see, there was an uncomfortable moment of peer pressure. Despite the challenges of the focus group discussion, the voices of the young participants and some of their anxieties and aspirations were loud and clear. The testimonies of the focus group participants demonstrate a remarkable consensus with the informed opinions that many of my research participants expressed about racialized youth in Toronto, in general, and in Jane-Finch, in particular.

Figure 2. Housing building type in Jane-Finch: Low-rise housing rows, 2011, photograph.

Note. There are also affluent areas in Jane-Finch.

Source: Author.
Racialized Youth in Multicultural Toronto

Many of the tensions youths have to deal with growing up in a diverse city like Toronto revolve around the sociocultural dynamics that immigration brings to the city. Filomena Williams (Interview, June 25, 2011), Executive Director of Horizons for Youth (a shelter for homeless youth in North-West Toronto), pointed to the different ideas that different generations of immigrants have about integration into a multicultural society. Williams saw evidence of cultural parochialism inflicted by immigrant parents on their offspring, when the former insisted that the latter should adhere to the traditions and values from their countries of origin. Many Canadian youths with immigrant backgrounds resist and even rebel against parental demands and instead feel they should fit or want to fit into their new society (Interview with Williams, June 25, 2011).

The framing of inclusion has practical consequences for youths with ethnocultural backgrounds because laws and social policies influence how they are seen and raised in a multicultural society. Many of my professional research participants described the social networks dealing with youth as institutional, rigid, and not open enough. Experienced youth workers agreed that authorities and policy makers see youths as possible troublemakers who must be kept off the streets. Youths are, thus, prescribed as passing troublemakers who challenge the norms, social values, and ethics of adults, and are turned into targets for rehabilitation, discipline, and victimization. Youth expert Marlon Merraro (Interview, June 3, 2011) was critical of this criminalization of youth:

[ . . . ] the idea is that they’re gonna cause trouble, so let’s get them [young people] before they cause trouble. [ . . . ] we are creating spaces that are only designed to service young people, versus spaces that are there to encourage young people to be the person they want to be.

According to homeless youth worker Richard Haldane (Interview, June 25, 2011), youths need to be seen as part of social systems and environments that could better facilitate them in reaching their potential, instead of impairing them. Uzma Shakir (Interview, June 21, 2011), the Equity and Diversity manager for the City of Toronto, talked about revanchist urban planning that creates exclusive, or defensible spaces (see Newman, 1995).

Merraro (Interview, June 3, 2011) talked about the mechanisms of social exclusion he personally experienced as a Black young man in Jane-Finch where: “if you were a group of young people, you were a gang.” According to Pain (2001, p. 909), to cope with the perils of being in public, young people choose to go out in groups, which, paradoxically, create fear among other social groups. Such groups of youngsters in Jane-Finch are generally perceived through the lens of a threatening and potentially dangerous gang culture.

Salvatore (2004, p. 1029) argues that the “obsession” with surveillance, policing, and disciplining are “inimical to the encounter that is at the root of the notion of the public sphere” and don’t facilitate “agonic civility.” The deterioration of the public sphere results in public spaces that reproduce mainstream norms and rarely challenge our perspectives and prejudices (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). In Jane-Finch, public spaces concretize perceptions of youth as potentially destructive, not as actually creative.

Social Spaces for Youth

MacNevin (Interview, May 30, 2011), the Director of Community Programs at the Jane-Finch Community and Family Centre, points to the lack of public spaces in the neighborhood of Jane-Finch and contends that “we don’t have social meeting places. We have to create them, with programs.” The Driftwood Community Centre in Jane-Finch, one of the few facilities that MacNevin perceived as a public space, is a very popular, tightly controlled and programmed
place for communal activities (Figure 3). MacNevin acknowledged the fact that these were very regulated spaces, thus highlighting the lack of open drop-in places in Jane-Finch (Figure 4). Gray (Interview, May 30, 2011), Youth Programs Manager at The Spot, argued:

Jane-Finch on the whole lacks [ . . . ] safe spaces where you have the freedom to do what you feel. We have spaces within the community which are city-funded, we have malls which are specific for shopping, but the loitering piece you’re not allowed to do. Or, if you’re in a Parks and Recreation space you have to be part of a program [ . . . ] but you can’t just be there and talk with your friends if you’d like because then you’re loitering, which they [authorities] feel breeds, idle time . . . idle time [allegedly] brings violence or mischief.

The fear with which we perceive youths’ pursuit of idle time represents our “moral panic” qua the prospect of losing control (Pain, 2001, p. 908). Research participants hinted at this aspect of “moral panic” and suggested that instead of chasing youths around in fear of the immorality of idleness, authorities should rather provide safe, not overregulated, spaces for youths to hang out. Merraro (Interview, June 3, 2011) understands that youths are aware of and frustrated about the absence of safe spaces when they say: “we feel that we’re not safe in our neighborhoods because of the police, and we feel that we can’t hang out in our neighborhoods because the adults don’t want it and the housing authority [providing social housing] doesn’t want it.” (Figure 5).

Research participants described how youths were excluded from public space, chased off the streets, into homes, schools and institutions. According to Valentine (1998, p. 201), “for teenagers the street is often the only private space they can carve out for themselves away from the regulatory gaze of family and teachers.” By eating, drinking, chatting, congregating, playing, kissing, fooling around, shouting, and pushing boundaries and challenging adults’ expectations, youths appropriate public space and in so doing blur the prescribed use of that space (see also Sharkey & Shields, 2008). In what follows, I discuss some of the most pressing issues pertaining to public space that the participants in the focus group identified.
Focus Group: The Cycle of Violence

Many of the 13 young adults missed a laid-back togetherness that would include everyone in their neighborhood. Pointing to the potentialities of multiculturalism, a young man spoke about a public space like a park as a “wonderland [. . .] where we’d have everybody, [. . .] various backgrounds, ethnic, whatever, it doesn’t matter where you’re from.” Experiencing freedom in public space as well as its various constraints, such as fear, was a predominant theme in the focus group discussion. The fears young people are socialized into, especially in stigmatized and marginalized areas like Jane-Finch, have a great impact on their present and future because fears affect their prospects in life (Bickford, 2000; Pain, 2001). Fear also conditions their mobility in the city (Figures 6 and 7).

In the words of a young woman participant:

I go downtown to [. . .] look at new things, cause downtown have a lot of shows, and people dancing, and stuff like that, so it’s kind of fun . . . sometimes I’ll go to Woodbine Beach.

Another young woman also goes downtown and insists of feeling safe: “I go to Centre Island, when it’s nice. I’m not afraid. And I go to the Harbourfront and walk around.” For a third young woman, the feeling of insecurity limits her moving around in the city: “I’ve heard so many bad things about going around in Jane-Finch, in Toronto overall—be careful of what you do on the street—so pretty much I just leave from home, come to the mall, and go back home.” The same person added a bit later: “I honestly think that’s the thing about downtown, you have a little bit more freedom.”

Young men in the group also mentioned that they liked to hang around the Woodbine beach and at the Harbourfront, the downtown entertainment district, and the shopping malls. Some young men mentioned the potential danger of their presence in places such as the entertainment district or shopping malls. In the words of one of them:
Figure 5. A graffiti-style mural in the interior of The Spot, 2011, photograph.
Source. Author.

Figure 6. A bus-stop shelter in Jane-Finch, 2011, photograph.
Source. Author.
I go to downtown just to chill with my friends [. . . ] drink, and everything. I experience good things and I experience bad things—bad things like, getting into a fight [. . . ] Some bad looks, or they just talk a lot of smack [offensive language] for no reason [. . . ] Yeah, I just go downtown, it’s just entertainment, and sometimes I go shopping there, [or] go to the movies.

According to another young man:

I used to live downtown, but I got the bad side of it, so, I don’t really see the good side of it. . . . It’s just a mix-up of bad people plus there’s some good excitements down there, but yeah, it consists of bad people still.

Another one raised an interesting point: “I actually prefer, if I’m going outside, to go downtown. I feel that places downtown have less tension [than Jane-Finch].” Finally a young man mentioned something which points to how some youth at Jane-Finch negotiate public spaces in the city:

I’ve heard a lot about downtown, some good, some bad, but I’ve never experienced the bad part of it, honestly speaking [. . . ] because the majority of the time, I go downtown just for [. . . ] very special occasions.

Most participants in the focus group tended to visit public spaces and especially parks particularly when there were special events and attractions. It was evident that their options of public space were limited. Qualitative evidence from research on youths using malls demonstrates exactly how limited their options of public spaces are (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000). As one young male participant put it: “You won’t really find me at the park ‘cause there’s only so much you can do at a park.” It is telling that most of the focus group participants did not identify public spaces in general as exciting places to discover; they were points of attraction for family...
gatherings or special events. The underlying issue of fear appears as more influential than most of the focus group participants were prepared to admit; however, it is probable that earlier parental advice and concerns about danger and violence in public spaces made these young people cautious (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000).

Young men presented their visits to downtown Toronto with ambivalent feelings. Some boasted that they are not afraid of anything, while others described their cautious and planned itineraries. A few mentioned potential dangers, but no young man openly admitted to feelings of fear. The point that a young woman and a young man made about downtown being a place of less tension and more freedom than Jane-Finch raises questions about the danger awaiting these youths when they venture outside their local territories. The social and youth service providers also pointed to the effects that social tensions, poor planning decisions, and overpolicing have had on the youth in Jane-Finch and their limited use of locally available public spaces. How do these youth experience the tensions in their area? A young woman stated: “if you don’t know certain people, you can’t go certain places around here.” But a young man contended that “if you know how to carry yourself, how to act around people, you shouldn’t be worried about anything.” Another young man linked everyday use of public space to his own experience of immigration:

> [W]hen I first came to Canada from Jamaica, I never knew what the Bloods and Crips was, and I just came into [this school], I don’t know nobody, and I start wearing the color blue because I like blue. So, people come up to me asking me why am I wearing the color blue? Am I a Crip? I’m like, what is that? And they’re like, you don’t know what the Crip is? And I’m like, no. So, I end up getting beat up for a color! [ . . . ] You don’t have to be scared [ . . . ] you have to know who you are as a person and know where you stand, and if you know you’re a person that don’t cause trouble, you don’t have to be afraid of nobody.

Another young man echoed this point when he said: “if you’re a braveheart, some man who wants to rob you or shoot you, they’re gonna be intimidated by just the fact that you’re being brave about who you are.” The issue of gang culture became a hot topic in the group discussion, and it became apparent that awareness of group boundaries (Ley, 2003), local know-how, and representation skills, all play a part in the experience of public space. A young man tried to play down gang presence in Jane-Finch by suggesting that: “people always look at the outside appearance. And they judge you for that. [ . . . ] I’ve seen people up here who claim that they are gangsters, and by the time the police come around they’re gone!”

Gang culture may or may not be paramount, but the legacy of the fear of violence thrives. Real or exaggerated, gang culture in Jane-Finch plays a big role in the everyday politics of identity negotiation and the right to the city. Sandercock (2009, p. 220) defines the right to the city as “the right to presence, to occupy public space, and to participate as an equal in public affairs.” The young women and men participants in the focus group discussion demonstrated that gang culture, violence, and fear influence the ways they use public space and curtails their right to the city.

A young woman summarized that fear by stating that: “nowadays you can’t go to parks [laughs]. Well, nowadays people don’t really go outside because there are shootings, yeah, shootings. That’s not good if you go outside.” Shootings and people killed in outdoor public spaces in Jane-Finch constitute a dangerous reality (Figure 8). MacNevin emphasized this point with the story of Breanna Davy: “the father had his daughter in the car, and they meant to kill the guy and they hit the little girl. A three-year-old girl, Breanna.” Breanna was killed in 1999.

From March until August 2013, “five teens [were] shot and four have died within a one-kilometre radius in the Jane and Finch community” (Pagliaro & Ballingall, 2013). What are the systemic conditions that maintain this culture of violence? Many of the focus group participants described how the police behave in line with the culture of violence that they are supposed to be fighting against. Two young men described the hostility that youths attract from the police, who
see them as potential troublemakers just by being in public spaces. One young man participant confided that he avoided shopping malls because he felt that young people could easily get into trouble with the police. According to another young man, the police typecast groups of people as gangs and then proceed to ID them. A young man, explained how police harassment is annoying while two young women commented on policing in Jane-Finch as being substandard.

One would not be wrong to assume that the cycle of violence of the neighborhood extends to schools in Jane-Finch. During the focus group discussion there was one instant of crosstalk between two schoolmates that was indicative. The young woman (the youngest participant in the group) who earlier talked about public spaces being dangerous because of shootings stated:

[T]here’s a lot of school fights [. . . ] over nonsense, just for you stepping on their shoe or you brushing them or looking at them the wrong way. [. . . ] It’s outside the school too [. . . ] after school sometimes, people wait for you and beat you up and rob you. [laughs]

But a young man who attended the same school disagreed and related a different story:

I go to [the same school], that stuff usually doesn’t happen to me. I think she [the previous speaker] goes to a different [school], it’s not my school. But yeah, there’s a lot of people in [this school] who, they talk smack [badly] about other people, things happen to other people, because [. . . ] some people just don’t know how to keep their mouth shut. Yeah, things like that happen a lot. Over stupidness, half the time.

Despite the initial disagreement, the young woman concurred: “No, it’s just stupidness. I made it seem, like, so bad.” And a second later the young man approved: “[This] is not a good school.” The two schoolmates ended up agreeing about their school being the ground for bullying and peer intimidation. This exchange created an uncomfortable moment. One wonders about the role that coercion plays in keeping oneself silent for fear of retribution. Silence on these issues of the real and imagined fear of psychological and physical violence that youths also inflict to each

Figure 8. The sitting area/memorial dedicated to Breanna Davy, 2011, photograph. Source. Author.
other seems to be a catalyst for sustaining the cycle of violence in Jane-Finch. Ley (2003, p. 546) argues that “ingrown communities of all kinds” develop their knowledge based on boundaries and solidarity. Youths who are socialized into assumed gang cultures, extreme peer pressure, and bullying acquire a twisted sense of the world they live in (Back & Keith, 2004). The code of honor against snitches that some focus group participants implied may be seen as a self-serving strategy orchestrated by adult and young bullies, who possess the power to devastate lives. The intimidation suffered is either literally buried along with the victim (in the case of killings) or dragged along with one’s life.

Both public and private traumas of violence affect feelings of security at an individual level as well as at a social level (Pain, 2001). According to Shakir (Interview, June 21, 2011), shared trauma has the potential to unite people. For this to happen, however, safe places are essential for people to discuss their experiences. Such places are scarce in Jane-Finch where racialized youth are stereotyped as threatening and consequently victimized (see also Pain, 2001; Sandercock, 2003). Safe forums for youths are necessary to discuss, and imagine alternative environments and lives.

The Spot has an explicit agenda for being a safe place for youth to hang out. It does, however, seem like an island “of renewal in seas of decay” (Berry, 1985, p. 69). The Spot, as a paradigm space, requires nurturing and multiplication. This is a possible way to break the cycle of violence in Jane-Finch: to make existing and new places safe for youths in a way that would enable them to engage in the place-making process itself, and to feel that they have partial ownership of and take pride in such places. Whether these spaces are public, semipublic, or even private carry little consequence as long as they facilitate living together in difference (Young, 1992). In a socially diverse setting such as Jane-Finch, the hybridization of private–public space better facilitates multilevel integration between new and old immigrants, indigenous (First Nations) populations, youths, and seniors, and so on. This coexistence is challenging since integration often asserts the subordination of minoritized groups into a dominant culture. It is not self-evident nor is it obvious what this kind of integration implies vis-à-vis traumas and conflicts as well as community building and engagement. Asad (2003, as cited in Salvatore, 2004, p. 1024) demonstrates the importance of first discussing “conflict and mobilisation” and then considering “coexistence and cohesion.” In socially diverse settings, building conditions for living together in difference requires safe—but not aseptic—public spaces constructively mirroring social solidarity in conflicts and traumas.8 These are spaces and places for civic conversation (Hracs & Massam, 2008) that are not preordained as public (Mitchell, 2003) but often result from grassroots activism (Pask, 2010) and may engender elements of domesticity (Galanakis, 2013).

Not Just Dreaming of Wonderlands

Focus group participants were asked about their ideal public spaces and answers unanimously emphasized inclusivity and safety. Was it because they influenced each other, or did hanging around in The Spot (located in a neighborhood mall) mean that they already had an understanding of the social and spatial problems rife in Jane-Finch? Regardless, their testimonies are undoubtedly indicative of their everyday life experiences. Voices such as theirs are rarely heard in decision-making boardrooms, and this absence makes them even more important (see Sharkey & Shields, 2008; van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008). Young women and men of the focus group shared different takes on personal aspects of utopian thinking (see Miles, 2008). In doing so, they demonstrate their sociospatial awareness and point to practical planning issues. A young woman said that her ideal public space would be a

[...] combination of indoor and outdoor. I’ve always wanted the malls to have couches, somewhere that you could just relax. I’m thinking of a room within the mall that’s just for napping [...] Here
it’s like go-go-go and there’s nothing to just relax. So, something like that here would be good, [ . . . ] a huge mall that you could do anything and everything.

A second young woman agreed: “[L]ike a forest inside.” Another one elaborated:

My ideal thing of a park—or public place—would be something like they’re doing to Downsview Park [a large urban park located on the edge of Jane-Finch neighborhood], but just [ . . . ] go way better than them. You see they’re making a man-made lake, so everybody can just come there and enjoy themselves and not have to worry about nothing.

A young woman suggested a different type of public space:

I like freedom, I like being myself, so I picture more like a mall where you see different events going on, you see a section of youths dancing, a section of youths singing, or just doing their own thing. I would love to see outside Jane-Finch Mall a skating rink where you’ll see the youths skating around [ . . . ] well-trained security, who do their job and not follow you around. [ . . . ] They know their thing, they know where to stay. And not just walk around with you! Just, freedom, you come in and you’re allowed to do whatever you want to do, I mean just keep it real.

Echoing the carnivalesque as a symbolic reversal of strict urban order and control (Jackson, 1988), two young Caribbean men wanted to introduce some laid-back and warm island-like atmosphere. Someone else talked of “an indoor recreation center, where people can ventilate [ . . . ] their anger through sports.” Another young man insisted that public spaces needed to “be better. Easy. No cops. No cops at all!”

One young man we saw spoke of a “park-like wonderland,” while another stated:

My ideal public space will probably be somewhere where everyone can feel comfortable. Where not necessarily I would say just sports, or you’re gonna go here to study, but everything in one where everyone could just come together and work together.

Finally, one young man suggested a “basketball tournament like, when all the schools were playing basketball tournament, they win trophies and that. So I want to do the same thing, down here at the Spot versus other community centers.” A way of seeing the “tournament” would be as a quasi-object that could bring together youngsters from different territories and enable them to build, and re-build, their alternative histories and geographies, contrasting the “dominant narrative of inner urban poverty” (Back & Keith, 2004, p. 67).

Safe Places

Taking into account the dominant culture of heterosexual masculinity, it is understandable how fears are expressed and/or downplayed according to gender lines (Pain, 2001). In addition, the young participants’ ideal public spaces seem to vary. For instance, only a few young men, but no young woman, mentioned sports, with the exception of the reference to an ice-skating rink. Justifying gender differences should not obscure a crucial commonality in the focus group discussion: the desire for inclusive and safe places to be. Such places would have codes of conduct that would be facilitative and conditional rather than forbidding or revanchist (Smith, 1996). Free from police harassment, these places would be for fun, emphasizing interactive learning and sociability. These places would be “home away from home” (young woman, Focus Group, June 16, 2011), and combine the best from private and public spaces. For these young adults, the clear-cut distinction between public and private did not matter maybe because their need and desire for a meta-space surpassed strictly delineated planning practices. Young women and men in
Jane-Finch longed for places that would be inclusive and where traditional divisions along racial lines would not exist. Pain (2001) demonstrates that living in a climate of fear does not facilitate quality of life and social equality, and focus group participants shared their experiences and awareness of that. What sustains the fear of crime and inequalities in Jane-Finch? The answer cannot be simplified, but as long as there are no safe places for an open and transparent dialogue to evolve, youths will continue to use public spaces in their neighborhood at their own risk.

In the testimonies of the focus group participants, one senses fear, hope, imagination, idealism, and pragmatism all at once and all worth inspiring and informing our imagination. Most of the focus group participants missed places that would bring people together to enjoy living together in difference. Facilitating safe and ongoing dialogue among various age and social groups in Jane-Finch would certainly help dismantle “the mutual lack of understanding” that characterizes conflicts over space (Pain, 2001, pp. 910-911). Instead, young women and men in Jane-Finch express alienation and fear of the risks of violence. Therefore, decision makers together with local youth need to first discuss sociospatial identities and conflicts, and then spatial planning and organization. Working together systematically may build multilevel trust and empower people to feel ownership and appreciation for their communal spaces. Otherwise, planning tactics for “safe spaces” will continue aggravating social exclusion, as it does not encompass the safety of marginalized people (Sandercock, 2003). To help realize the dream for inclusion of the young people in Jane-Finch, nonpatronizing and concerted emotional, structural, and financial support is needed. Change, however, will take time.

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Notes
1. The first interview I conducted in Jane-Finch in 2011 was with Wanda MacNevin, a veteran local activist and social worker in the area. It was MacNevin’s enthusiasm to show me around the area and to talk to me about the resourcefulness of its residents, as well as the social problems that sensitized me early on to the sociospatial inequalities in Toronto. Wanda MacNevin was in 2011 Director of Community Programs at Jane-Finch Community and Family Centre. The second person I interviewed in Jane-Finch was Byron Gray, who in 2011 was the Youth Programs Manager at The Spot Youth Centre in Jane-Finch area.

2. Most of the focus group participants were Black from various ethnic and social backgrounds. Racialization here refers to the sociospatial marginalization inflicted on visible minorities (Galabuzi, 2006, p. 251). One of the premises of this article is that racialization as a discriminatory process has spatial consequences (Galanakis, 2008).
3. Jane and Finch is an area spilling over three city wards (seven, eight, and nine). In all these wards, there is high concentration of immigrants and visible minorities, particularly Black people. Despite the demographic diversity of the wards (City of Toronto, 2006a), the democratically elected city councilors in all four wards were White, of Italian origin. The political underrepresentation of immigrants in Toronto is the research focus of Myer Siemiatycki (2011, p. 1226), who argues that multicultural policies in Toronto have served to keep immigrants and minorities relatively content, and therefore the “identity composition of the city’s governing municipal council” remains largely unchallenged.

4. Interviews and the focus group discussion were on average an hour long and were digitally recorded, transcribed, and manually analyzed. The Ethics Committee of York University (Decision: 2011-124) approved my research, and all participants read and signed written consent forms. The 19 research participants were given the choice of anonymity (no participant chose anonymity), while all the young women and men participants in the focus group are to remain anonymous. All participants of the focus group were older than 16 years of age. The anonymized transcripts of my interviews and the focus group discussion are submitted to the Finnish Social Science Data Archive of Tampere University (FSD 2926).

5. Sharkey and Shields (2008, p. 253) call this type of methodological approach “snapshot ethnography.”

6. The stakeholders who were interviewed for this research are purposefully referred to as “research participants” because they were instrumental to reorienting my research approach.

7. On Friday August 2013, the Toronto Star reported that two Black teenage boys were shot dead in a chain of killings of young people in Jane-Finch (see Pagliaro & Ballingall, 2013).

8. Sennett (2002, p. 376) argues that, in order for the civic body to emerge, pain as a human experience requires a place to be acknowledged.

9. Kaartinen (2002) conceives meta-space as a space in-between public and private.

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**Online Resources**

http://www.janefinchcentre.org/content/about-us
http://www.thespotyouth.org/thespot
http://www.yorku.ca/act/foryouth.html
http://ecommunityjanefinch.wordpress.com/
http://www.yunorthyork.com/community-partnerships/jane-finch-collaboration/

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