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Embassies and sanctuaries: women's experiences of race and fear in public space

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Abstract. Women's fear in public space has received considerable scholarly and popular attention. Such fear is typically constructed from a white perspective, which reinforces prejudice and ignores the role of race in the experience of fear. Women's race prejudice and race fear are shaped and reflected in their use of the physical environment. Characteristics of the physical environment further shape these experiences. In this paper I investigate middle-class white, black and Hispanic women's experiences of race and fear in public spaces in Orange County, California. I present a typology of public spaces in which women encounter racialized others, and I map race fear onto these spaces. Experiences of fear and comfort in public space are examined, and I consider the interaction of race, class, and gender with place type and location. Particular attention is given to the form of these interactions in a post-suburban landscape.

Introduction

Much is written in both popular and scholarly literature on the impact of fear on women's use and perception of public space. Although women's changing roles and lifestyles generate tremendous new opportunities, women's experience of public space is restricted by fear. Increasingly, scholars adopt a feminist framework to understand women's fear. These scholars emphasize the significance of fear of sexual assault to explain women's fear in public space—authors frequently conceptualize fear of sexual assault as a form of social control over women (see Bowman, 1993; Day, 1994; 1995; 1999; Gardiner, 1994; 1995; Gordon and Riger, 1989; Valentine, 1992; Wekerle and Whitzman, 1995)—yet minimize the significance of race and class in women's experience of fear in public space, without which fear cannot be understood.

The problem of fear in public space is typically constructed from a 'white' perspective. The consistently higher fear experienced by people of color, though well documented (see Baumer, 1978; Garofalo and Laub, 1978; Gordon and Riger, 1989; St John, 1995; US Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996), warrants less attention (see table 1, over). In a similar way to gender, race and class fundamentally shape feelings of fear and safety. The interlocking systems of race, class and gender generate experiences that differ materially for each combination of traits (hooks, 1995; Ruddick, 1996). Each such experience is situated differently in public space, where encounters shape and reveal one's ideas about race (Ruddick, 1996).

In this paper, I investigate how use of public spaces reflects and shapes middle-class women's understanding of race and their feelings of fear and safety. This investigation is based on in-depth interviews with white, black, and Hispanic women in Orange County, California. I draw upon a small sample of in-depth, semistructured interviews with 40 women—all English-speaking residents and/or employees in Orange County, California. Trained research assistants conducted the first half of the interviews; I conducted the second half. Interview questions investigated women's use and perception of public spaces, including spaces individuals used most often and a set of five common public spaces. Questions also explored women's feelings of fear and comfort in public space, especially related to race/ethnicity and class. After the first

Table 1. Percentages of positive responses to the question of whether respondents feel afraid to walk alone at night in their neighborhood by sex, race, age, income (data presented for selected years only) (source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996).

Variable	1973	1977	1984	1988	1991	1996
National average	41	45	42	40	43	42
Sex						
male	20	23	19	16	24	26
female	59	63	57	56	58	55
Race						
white	39	43	39	39	41	40
black/other	54	59	54	45	56	51
Age						
18 – 20 years	33	45	27	27	52	45
21 – 29 years	40	39	39	38	40	39
30 – 49 years	40	41	37	32	39	40
50 years and older	43	51	49	51	49	45
Income						
\$50 000 and over	na	na	na	na	na	34
\$30 000 – \$49 999	na	na	na	na	na	42
\$20 000—\$29 999	na	na	na	na	na	43
Under \$20 000	na	na	na	na	na	48

na, not available.

half of the interviews, preliminary data analysis was conducted and additional, more specific questions were added. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and content analyzed. Interviews were part of a large project on women's experience of public space, which included behavioral mapping of five privatized public spaces in Orange County.

Interview participants were solicited through snowball sampling. Participants were selected to range in age, occupation, home or work location, and racial/ethnic background. All participants were middle-class, broadly construed, defined by education (at least some college education), family or household income (most between \$30 000 – 120 000), and/or type of occupation (most white collar, managerial, or student). Participants identified themselves as white (20 women), black (10 women), or Hispanic (10 women).[1] However, these labels mask much diversity: some women identified with more than one racial or ethnic group, and members within each group varied in country of birth and country of ancestry. These three groups were chosen based on assumptions that (1) white women and women of color would articulate different experiences of race fear in public space, and that (2) black and Hispanic women would occupy relatively similar positions of marginality in Orange County relative to white women.

I begin the paper with a model of how race is understood in contemporary USA. This model is used to situate race fear in the context of race prejudice, and to tie race

[1] After some pilot test interviews, Asian-American women—a significant population in Southern California—were not included in this study, as they seemed to occupy a third position relative to the other two groups in terms of race fear. In present-day Orange County Asian-American women seemed to regard themselves as more closely aligned with white people than with people of color, in terms of race fear and being feared. Yet young Asian-American men were feared—like other young men of color—by women of all groups. This preliminary study focused only on the two positions of white versus black and Hispanic. Additional research is needed to incorporate Asian-Americans and other groups into this typology of race, fear, and place. Thus in this paper 'women of color' refers to black and Hispanic women, though certainly some of their experiences are shared by others. The experiences of black and Hispanic women also differed; though I focus on similarities, significant differences are noted.

fear to gender. By using this framework, I present a typology of public places in which middle-class women encounter racialized others at the scales of cities and individual spaces. Women's 'race fear' in each place is investigated. Throughout, I explore the meaning of a post-suburban geography for the location of women's race fear.

Examining race and fear in Orange County, California

To discuss race and fear, one must consider place and time. Orange County, the site of this study, is known for its affluence and its conservative politics. Some features of Orange County are key to this study, especially the County's racial/ethnic/class diversity and division, and its post-suburban 'centerless' geography.

Orange County is racially, ethnically, and economically diverse, but segregated. According to 1990 Census data, the 2.4 million County residents are 64% non-Hispanic white, 23% Hispanic, 10% Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and 2% non-Hispanic black. Residents are unevenly divided into the smaller, wealthier, and 'whiter' South County (the nine southernmost cities are 83% non-Hispanic white and 8% Hispanic, with a median household income of nearly $55 000) and the poorer, more racially and ethnically diverse North County (49% non-Hispanic white and 27% Hispanic, with a median household income of about $43 000). Here in the home of Disneyland, 'public' space may be a misnomer. Gated communities proliferate and privately owned public spaces abound (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Soja, 1996; Sorkin, 1992), especially in the more affluent South County. Many of the public spaces women discussed are privately owned and managed.

Californians today are acutely aware of race. Strained race relations are revealed in reactions to the O J Simpson trial and the Rodney King case; battles over affirmative action legislation in the University of California and the State; punitive new anticrime legislation; and a growing backlash against immigration. Residents of Orange County may be more conscious of racial diversity and racial tension than many other Americans.

In its geography, Orange County is the prototypical 'post-suburban' region (Kling et al, 1991). That it is known as a county rather than by an identifiable city is telling. In this centerless amalgamation of 31 municipal governments, people travel between competing cities to work, shop, and live (Baldassare, 1998). No central city holds sway. This geography shapes how women use and perceive public spaces. It is in this context that I explore women's experiences of race and of fear in public space, and I begin with a discussion of race prejudice.

Experiencing race: race prejudice and race fear

To examine women's race fear in public space, we must know how race is understood. The concept of race is based on the idea of difference (Frankenberg, 1993; Ruddick, 1996). In using public space, perceived difference is an end as much as a starting point (Ferguson and Gupta, 1992). The construction and the meaning of difference vary within and across groups.

In interviews, most women seemed to find race and fear somewhat difficult to discuss; they may have been especially uncomfortable when interviewed by someone of a different racial group. All women were anxious not to appear prejudiced. Black and Hispanic women seemed careful to avoid seeming defensive about white race privilege (as in Feagin, 1991). Thus women's feelings about race may be stronger than reported.

Race prejudice and race fear among white women

Frankenberg (1993; based on Omi and Winant, 1986) provides an excellent framework for understanding race prejudice among white people in the USA. She identifies *essentialist racism, race and power evasiveness*, and *race cognizance* as three overlapping

periods in the historical development of white ideas of race. Essentialist racism understands race difference as the biological inferiority of people of color (who is seen as 'other' changes with time). Essentialism is explicitly rejected by most contemporary middle-class white people (though new versions still appear—see, for example, Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). Race and power evasiveness supports the principle of color blindness—refusal to recognize race difference or to acknowledge one's own race identity. This is the most common and current white view on race. Yet in insisting on sameness, well-meaning adherents deny differences in power and privilege based on race. Last, race cognizance recognizes race differences, but defines difference, radically, as established by people of color. Here, race difference signals autonomy in culture, values, aesthetics, religion, etc (Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1995; Soja, 1996). Race cognizant white people name their 'whiteness', to diminish its invisibility and power.

Frankenberg's typology can be used to locate the origins of white race fear—this is experienced as fear of crime or violence associated with people of color. White race fear is highest among most prejudiced (that is, essentialist) white people (Skogan, 1995; St John, 1995). Essentialist racism perpetuates white race fear by characterizing people of color as inherently violent or dangerous (Goldberg, 1997):

> "I think, what would really, what would cause more fear than anything, rather than the ethnicity, it would be the size of the guy, how he's dressed, and it would be a guy ... and I think just, I would be a little bit more scared if it was somebody who was black, rather than Asian, just because I feel that they would be more tough, and they'd probably be taller and they would be more muscular" (white woman, age 18 – 25).

As mentioned, fear of sexual assault is a major contributor to women's fear in public space (Day, 1999; Gordon and Riger, 1989). Although white women's race fear is not always fear of sexual assault, white women's fear of sexual assault does target men of color (Day, 1999; Gordon and Riger, 1989; St John 1995). Men of color are demonized as aggressive and hypersexualized in relation to 'vulnerable' white women (Bowman, 1993; Davis, 1981; Frankenberg, 1993). Obviously, race fear sustains race prejudice and conflict (see Mano, 1992, for an example). White people denounce people of color—especially men—for their 'inherent criminality' rather than admit the perceived threat people of color pose to continued white dominance (Merry, 1981, page 15).

Race-evasive white people cannot reconcile 'color blindness' with the private belief that people of color are, in fact, more likely to commit crimes (Frankenberg, 1993). This belief is bolstered by supposedly 'neutral' crime statistics (Cose, 1993):

> "Oh, I know when I'm scared. I just thought of something. When I'm around a bunch of teenage boys, and first it would be a different race, I think that I would be most scared of an African-American group, because I know I would see them. I know that is a racist thing, I know. [But] I know statistics, they're more likely [to commit crimes]" (white woman, age 46 – 55).

Criminality among people of color is generalized from specific incidents, though criminality among white people is not (Cose, 1993; hooks, 1995). Because they ignore structural differences in power, race-evasive white people are 'blind' to the much greater effects of white violence against people of color. These effects include police harassment, sexual degradation, hate crimes, the racialization of poverty, and the impacts of colonialism (Bowman, 1993; Cose, 1993; Davis, 1981; Frankenberg, 1993). As Frankenberg explains, the race-evasive position is tenuous and eventually invokes essential racism, as race-evasive white people grope for explanations reconcilable with their liberal beliefs.

Race-cognizant white people focus their critique on race and class inequality as endemic to the US social structure, and understand crime and fear within this broader context. They ask, "How is contemporary US power structured to necessarily exclude and criminalize some groups?", and, "How does white fear and demonization of people of color reinforce white power?", not, "Why are people of color dangerous?" One of my key proposals in this paper is that race cognizance may be the key to eliminating white race fear. White people must recognize white race fear as a racist mechanism to protect white race privilege, if they hope to eliminate real and imagined anger at white people (Davis, 1981; Frankenberg, 1993; Merry, 1981).

As in Frankenberg's study (1993), most white women adopted ideas of race evasiveness, though positions were somewhat fluid. In interviews, young white women leaned more towards race cognizance than did middle-aged or older white women. This finding is supported by existing research, which finds strong correlation between white race prejudice and increasing age (see Firebaugh and Davis, 1988). Young women in the present study attributed racial cognizance to growing up in diverse neighborhoods, or to attending diverse schools, during a time when race difference was commonly experienced and often positively accorded in Southern California.

> "I think, because I've always grown up in LA County, I've always grown up with a very mixed racial environment. I think that I'm just used to being around a lot of, like, I think I never really think about it until I go somewhere. Like, last summer, I went to Seattle, and I noticed how white it was. And I've been talking to __ about Colorado, and how really, really white it is. You just don't realize that places are like that. I mean, having grown up here, you don't realize that, like, you wonder why people are so prejudiced or so racist still, because you think every place is like it is here, and it's not. So I think that having grown up here, I feel comfortable with all different kinds of people.... In the schools, there's always, you know, all different types of people" (white woman, age 18–25).

In the experience of fear in public space, different aspects of identity came to the fore under different circumstances. Though they were often aware of being gendered, white women in this study were typically not conscious of their racial identity except in circumstances of being a minority. White women's experience of being racialized was also an experience of being gendered—that is, they experienced their racial identities as vulnerable white women, subject to potential sexual advance or victimization by men of color.

Race prejudice and race fear among black and Hispanic women

Women of color in this study also understood race in terms of essential racism, race evasiveness, and race cognizance. Among women of color, essential racism described attitudes towards white people, towards other racial or ethnic groups, or towards one's own racial group:

> "If you lived in Cerritos for any length of time, there is a huge gang, Asian gang, that comes out of Shadow Park ... . What to me is unacceptable, which I thought didn't exist, were other communities which you put on a higher scale—because I always felt Asians were extremely smart in math, they all get along and love to live together, but I never affiliated them in gang activities that you would consider [more common among] the two prominent minorities, blacks, and Hispanics" (black woman, age 46–55).

Race evasiveness was widely held among middle-class women of color in this study. Only whiteness was powerful enough to remain unnamed, but women of color chose varying degrees of racial affiliation:

"[On her awareness of race in public space] I don't think about it 'till someone says something or draws me to it…. I don't go somewhere and think, "Oh, I'm only this", or "There's no one of these here. We're all this." I don't think that" (black woman, age 26–35).

Race-evasive women of color adopted the color-blind conviction that difference did not matter. Yet, hooks (1995) notes that in so doing women of color conform to norms established under white dominance. In this study, middle-class black and Hispanic women born outside of the USA were especially likely to forgo identification with stigmatized Southern California 'minorities'. The two black women born abroad, and the two Hispanic women from Columbia, carefully distinguished themselves from other US people of color (African-Americans and Mexican-Americans, respectively).

Race cognizant women of color acknowledge racial difference and the structural inequality of power in the USA. Race cognizant women positively affirm their own racial identities and reject internalized racism (hooks, 1995). In this study, race-cognizant black and Hispanic women were more likely to be younger (perhaps reflecting changing societal views on race) and more likely to have lived in places with significant racial diversity in the past, if not the present. For example, one race-cognizant black woman attributed her lack of fear in minority and low-income neighborhoods to her upbringing in cities with greater ethnic and racial diversity than Orange County—especially including more black people.

Existing research confirms that women of color share white women's strong fear of sexual assault (Davis, 1981; Day, 1999; Gordon and Riger, 1989). However, among women of color the relationship of race and fear is more complex than for white women. Women of color's race fear may originate in the historical sexualization and domination of women of color by white men and also by men of color (Bowman, 1993; Davis, 1981). In addition to sexual assault, women of color in this study also feared less-sexualized race conflict and race discrimination. For example, one young Hispanic woman described her fear of sexual hassling by Hispanic men in a shopping mall and swap meet; her fear of race harassment by white restaurant and coffee-shop patrons; her fear of race conflict in white and black nightclubs; her feelings of safety from race conflict in Hispanic nightclubs and from most non-racially motivated crime in a predominantly white entertainment center. Racial composition was key to each assessment. For women of color in this study, race fear took two forms: essentialist fear of nonracially motivated crime by members of one's own racial group and/or of other people of color; and fear of crime and harassment by race-motivated perpetrators, especially white people—the group most likely to commit hate crimes and race violence or harassment (see Feagin, 1991; St John 1995).

"[About an entertainment center] I walked in one time, and there is these kids, kinda 'skin-head' looking, and they were making comments to an Asian couple before us. They didn't say anything to us, but that time we left … . Because of them, we just left" (Hispanic woman, age 18–25).

"I don't feel there is any safety for me in Orange County as a black woman. I had an instance with some Caucasian men, and called the police department. And they came out there and I gave them the license plate number, and they never called me back. I finally hounded them, finally they explained that the car was reported stolen a week ago. They were lying, because my neighbor works for Lakewood Sheriff, and he ran that license plate, and that car was never reported stolen" (black woman, age 46–55).

For middle-class women in all racial groups, fear of the perceived threat posed by poor people was inseparably intertwined with the racialization of US poverty. As in Day's study (1999), race-evasive women of all groups carefully framed race fear as a less controversial fear of poor people. Many women spoke of fear of 'bums' or 'homeless' people, and left off racial or ethnic labels that were often implied. For example, one white woman described fear of homeless people in the cities of Santa Ana, Westminster, and Garden Grove—known for large Hispanic and Vietnamese populations—yet pointedly remarked that homeless people in (mostly white) Laguna Beach were harmless. In contrast, race-cognizant women in this study were more likely to critique race and class structure, and were less willing to adopt the essential racism of the 'underclass' explanation of crime: "I don't know what an unsafe person looks like. Just because you're poor and minority, doesn't mean you're threatening" (Hispanic woman, age 26–35).

For black and Hispanic women, the experience of being gendered and of being racialized were not always equally salient. In fear of sexual assault and harassment, gender identity was key. This fear was directed primarily towards sexualized men of color, including men of one's own racial group. In fear of race harassment and conflict, women's gender identity was less salient. This fear was directed primarily towards white men and men of other racial groups. We know from existing research that race harassment and crime against women often take sexual forms (see Bowman, 1993; Davis, 1981; Feagin, 1991). Yet no black or Hispanic women spoke to that specific fear in this study. Gender also mattered in the location of women's fear of race harassment, discussed later.

In the next section, I map women's race fear on to the physical environment, at the scales of entire cities and of individual public spaces.

Race fear at the city scale

In the interviews we asked women to discuss feelings of fear and safety in public spaces. Importantly fear was relatively rare as it was typically avoided *before* experienced. Women in the study anticipated—usually subconsciously—fearful spaces and situations, and avoided them:

> "Most of the places I go to, even when in Los Angeles, are places where you feel safe. You don't go to parts of town that aren't as safe" (white woman, age 36–45).

> "I have never felt unsafe. I really don't ... I don't go to places where people wouldn't welcome me, but I don't know of a place where I wouldn't go ... . Where I do go, I feel very comfortable and welcome" (white woman, age 76+).

(The consequences for women of avoiding these spaces and situations, and thus foregoing so many opportunities, are enormous—see Day, 1997.) Even among middle-class women, the ability to identify and avoid feared places varied with race, as I will discuss.

Race shaped women's experience of fear and safety in both cities and discrete public spaces. Among most middle-class white women in this study, race mattered most at the macroscale of the city. In what is called the 'new segregation', populations of many cities in US post-suburban regions are racially homogeneous (Dumm, 1993; Ford, 1994; Garreau, 1991; Massey and Denton, 1993). Women constructed race 'borders' around some such cities, ascribing racial identities to many of them. Characteristics of individual spaces beyond race borders mattered not. Public spaces were selected or avoided such that most places in some cities (especially 'white' cities) were seen as safe from crime, and most public spaces in others cities (especially 'Hispanic' or 'Asian' cities in Orange County) were seen as dangerous:

"I don't think about, 'I'm going to go to this place because it's safe.' I think I surround myself, where I live or where I entertain, where it's always safe.... I just don't know where I would go that is not safe. Unless I get out of Irvine [a mostly white city]. Yeah, Irvine probably would be the place" (Hispanic woman, age 46–55).

"[About a nearby swap meet] Why do I not feel unsafe? Maybe still 'cause it's kinda in my area, my living space, sort of. It's still in Orange County. It's still close to Irvine, that kind of thing. I think it's all 'cause it's still around. It doesn't mean I'm not thinking that something could happen. But usually the majority, I think, of people that live here feel safe here, because it's still not too far away. You're still feeling comfortable" (white woman, age 26–35).

Many women of color also identified 'white' cities as safe from nonracially motivated crime and cities 'of color' as dangerous because of nonracially motivated crime. Racialized cities were not always the poorest ones. For example, Westminster, identified as a 'Vietnamese city', was often feared. Yet many cities with lower median incomes—Costa Mesa, Tustin, Anaheim, La Habra, Seal Beach, Stanton—were not mentioned or were described as safe.

Racializing of entire cities may be especially salient in post-suburban regions like Orange County. Post-suburban regions have no clear downtown to draw people from all surrounding suburbs. Moving back and forth between equivalent cities for work, home, school, and recreation, it was relatively easy for middle-class women—especially white women, who were in the majority—to avoid feared racialized cities.

In this study, the process of racializing and avoiding entire cities seems automatic, mostly unconscious, and unspoken. Public places and people beyond borders became nonexistent. As Lofland's (1973) research indicates, race fear became encoded in geography, such that some *cities* were feared, not people. The most frequently mentioned feared cities included downtown Los Angeles, Santa Ana, and Westminster. The latter two especially are identified with Hispanic and Vietnamese residents, respectively. Women in all racial groups seemed uncomfortable or evasive when pressed to explain fear of these cities—as if place names should speak for themselves. Geographic reference allowed denial, even to oneself, of race fear or privilege. Though they may have had no interaction with feared groups, women could convince themselves they were not prejudiced, as hooks identified (1995).

"I have a lot of mixed-race friends, and I'm not a racist. So I don't, I guess, living in Laguna [over 90% non-Hispanic white], we have a lot of different people. We have Orientals that live down the street, we have Germans, we have people from East Europe. So it's a very mixed community" (white woman, age 26–35).

Residential segregation permitted white women especially to avoid thinking about race. White middle-class residents of segregated neighborhoods 'naturally' encountered little racial diversity. For example, one white woman reported that she attended an annual Hispanic festival, but thought she might be uncomfortable in a mostly Hispanic everyday shopping area:

"I think you would feel differently if you went into, like you said, a shopping district. I never had that experience ... where I felt uncomfortable because of race or ethnicity. But I think I might. [She had not been to such a shopping district because] I just tend to go to the closest thing" (white woman, age 36–45).

For most women in this study, convenience was a top priority in using public space. This finding is supported by existing research (see Harrington et al, 1992; Henderson et al, 1996; Tivers, 1988). Because everyday public spaces were selected by most middle-class white women primarily for their convenient locations near home or work, these women

infrequently crossed race borders. Scholars' claims of segregation in privately owned public space are thus somewhat misleading, especially in post-suburban regions like Orange County. Because of increased segregation by city, middle-class white women did not typically select between racially diverse publicly owned spaces and segregated privatized ones. In this study, the publicly *and* privately owned public spaces most white women used were often homogeneous by race and class.

As they were truly 'race-blind', most race-evasive white women noticed neither the presence or absence of people of color in predominantly white public spaces. White women's lack of attention to race during interviews was striking—whiteness was 'normal' and invisible. For race-cognizant white women and many black and Hispanic women, however, the whiteness of many Orange County middle-class public spaces was obvious.

City 'race borders' served another purpose for some middle-class black and Hispanic women. Cities with a history or reputation for race-motivated crime or hostility were deliberately avoided:

> "There's a city by my house called Fontana. And you know, it's probably a rumor, I don't know, but they say it's like a huge KKK place ... . I don't want to be a statistic. And they have, like, a lot of good shopping places, I've heard, and I want to go there so bad, but I just won't ... . It's fear" (black woman, age 26 – 35).

Such cities were evaluated on a case-by-case basis—not all 'white' cities were thus feared. Rumors, reports, or personal experiences prompted avoidance of falsely innocuous middle-class locales.

For most middle-class women of color, race mattered at both the city and the public-space scale. Middle-class black and Hispanic women frequently crossed race borders in the County. As Feagin notes (1991), middle-class status virtually requires use of predominantly white spaces and cities, whereas race or ethnicity prompted use of others:

> "[White people] don't tend to feel comfortable going into minority neighborhoods, and they don't tend to do things on the other side, if you will. So they don't have that same comfort level. Yet us, because we're thrust into that [white] environment, we have to. So we've learned to adjust and adapt" (black woman, age 36 – 45).

> "I was going to a predominantly Hispanic church, corner of 5th and Fairview in Santa Ana [mostly Hispanic city]. The area is not that great anymore. There were a lot of incidences at this church. I kept staying there for cultural reasons, for my children" (Hispanic woman, age 36 – 45).

City borders provided insufficient information to ensure safety from either race-motivated or nonrace-motivated crimes. Women of color in this study also previewed individual spaces within cities for racial composition and safety. Existing research clarifies this point somewhat. St John (1995) found that black women, at least, were most likely to fear black men in familiar nearby areas, and more likely to fear white male strangers in more distant or unfamiliar (that is, public) areas—presumably the places associated with fear of race crime and harassment.

The experience of race and race fear in public spaces

Women in this study were not always conscious of the racial composition of public spaces. When they were, the meaning of racial composition depended upon characteristics of spaces and individuals. In this section, I discuss white, black, and Hispanic women's experiences of fear and comfort in public spaces characterized by racial composition. Most important were racial composition of the space, racial composition of the surrounding area, participants' roles in the space, and function of the space.

White women: embassies, neutral zones, carnivals, and outposts

Public space is idealized as a forum for encountering unlike others (see Gottdiener, 1986; Shields, 1990). For most middle-class white women in this study, however, *conscious* experiences of racialized others was limited—and so significant, special—outside daily life. White women encountered racialized others in places I characterize as embassies, neutral zones, carnivals, and outposts. Labels reflect the separateness with which such settings were regarded. Among white women interviewed, gender mattered most for what was feared (especially sexual assault); who was feared (especially men of color, constructed as assailants); and how they viewed themselves in relation to racialized others (especially as vulnerable).

Embassy public spaces offer white women experiences of 'foreign' or exotic cultures without crossing city race borders. Many 'ethnic' restaurants, grocery stores, and tourist sites fit this type. Embassies were found in mostly white or nonracialized cities or areas. At least two types of embassy spaces were described. First were those spaces that market culture for consumption by 'outsiders'. Franchised Mexican and Chinese restaurants often fit this category:

"We go to different places like Mexican restaurants or Chinese restaurants. I don't feel like they make me feel uncomfortable. It may be that there are only a few Caucasian people there, but it's still a warm feeling. If anything, they try to make you feel more welcome" (white woman, age 46–55).

"It's kind of like a fast-food Mexican restaurant, over by ___ . We just happened to find it that way. Very good chips ... . It's not really decorated ethnic. There's Mexican-looking tiles on the walls and wood on the floor. Other than that, there's not really that much ethnic decoration" (white woman, age 26–35).

Embassy spaces do not exist for all of Orange County's significant racial and ethnic groups. In fact, even the racial or ethnic group to be represented by embassy spaces may be prescribed. For example, 'Mexican' restaurants are popular throughout Orange County (evidenced by listings in the county telephone directory), not only in cities with large Mexican-American populations. Yet Orange County's 'Vietnamese' or 'Korean' restaurants are much more centralized in cities with large Vietnamese-American or Korean-American populations. Mexican, Indian, Japanese, and Hawaiian are all groups that conjure stereotypical images that are readily incorporated into embassy public spaces.

This type of embassy space promises comfortable, *safe* encounters with racialized others. Safety stems from ascribed roles and from controlled, often commodified, presentation of 'culture' (de Oliver, 1997). Racialized others are typically servers or entertainers; it is their *job* to welcome patrons. White women face no sexual threat from subservient male 'others' here. As in de Oliver's (1997) analysis of the Paseo del Rio, San Antonio, such embassy spaces package culture in familiar nonthreatening clichés of gender and ethnicity. Clichés attract and reassure through predictability.

The second type of embassy spaces are nodes of 'culture' or 'ethnicity' directed towards particular nonwhite racial and ethnic groups and again located in predominantly white or nonracialized areas. Examples include Middle Eastern grocery stores and Korean-American churches in mostly white South County. As it caters to group members, this type of embassy public space is more reflective of the racial and ethnic composition of the County. White women in this study described this latter type of embassy as more intimidating than the former—culture and language were unfamiliar, and outsiders felt less assured of welcome.

"The first thing that pops into my head is the 99 Ranch Market ... . I actually haven't ever been inside. I went to the restaurant next door, but I've been afraid

to go inside because I don't know what to expect, and it's gonna be different, because it's an Asian market. I'm not sure what to expect, I guess, so I'd rather have a buddy, a bodyguard to go with me. So - the people might be fine, the place might be fine, but it's a fear of the unknown, and of the fact that it's gonna be different" (white woman, age 18–25).

"I like to go to food stores that are from other nationalities. And I know sometimes, when I go into stores, say like a Japanese place or a Persian place or something like that, it sells almost exclusively exotic food items that they would use in their own preparations. I can feel a little nervous because generally everyone that's there [is] speaking in the native tongue ... . They'll say hello, something they can help you?—you know. But I don't really know what I'm looking for, so I don't really know what to tell them, you know ... . Sometimes I can feel nervous, but I never felt ... like I had to leave at that moment" (white woman, age 25–28).

The function and location of these embassy spaces makes them unlikely spots for sexual assaults on white women—fear described was more like discomfort. Here, opportunities exist for white women to learn about authentic ethnic and cultural differences. If race cognizance decreases race fear (Frankenberg, 1993), then such spaces may play a useful role in increasing white women's acknowledgement and positive accord of race difference.

The two types of embassy spaces are sometimes blurred. A place may fit both types, or may fall between the two. For example, Olvera Street, in downtown Los Angeles, is a historic plaza that commemorates California's Mexican history. The plaza is used by LA's Mexican-American community for religious events, and it is also a destination for non-Hispanic tourists. The several Persian restaurants throughout Orange County, popular among both Persians and non-Persians, are another example. Though no one commented on it specifically, white women's race fear in such 'dual' places may be low owing to familiar packaging of some aspects of the culture and/or explicit welcome to 'outsiders'.

Neutral zones are public spaces that in contrast with embassies do not emphasize culture, and do not target particular racial or ethnic groups. Located outside safe or feared race borders, neutral zones are ambiguous 'mixing areas' open to all, where white women note the presence of racialized others. Train stations, sports stadiums, and regional shopping malls fit this description—off highway exits, outside defined neighborhoods, or public enough to be their own 'places'. Neutral zones were spaces that attracted users from all over the County.

"Tustin Marketplace seems to work. A lot of people like to go there .... But there are definitely other outdoor malls like that that don't work. I don't know if it is just the neighborhood they are in, that it just feels that it is not a safe place to be. Tustin Marketplace has a lot of empty space around it. So it is not really in a neighborhood. You don't think of it as being in a particular neighborhood" (white woman, age 36–45).

"[About the beach] The ocean makes it relaxing, the sun, I like to sit in the sun, and that's pretty much it. It is very crowded, so I wouldn't say it's the people [that drew me] because that makes it kind of hectic. There's lots of kids, and they're loud .... There's lots of different ethnicities of people that are there .... It's fine" (white woman, age 25–28).

Racial diversity in neutral zones was accepted by white women interviewed, but diversity was not described as a desired feature of these spaces: "I think mostly, if you felt safe in the environment, it wouldn't bother me if people were different race and ethnicities" (white woman, age 26–35). Difference contributed to the perceived

publicness of neutral zones, which was sometimes unsettling. For example, several white women described swap meets by noting the racial/ethnic and income diversity of shoppers. Although white women appreciated the bargains and casual atmosphere at swap meets, they also closely guarded their children and purses. White women described swap meet crowds as 'all kinds of people' and as unregulated and potentially unsavory.

Neutral zones sometimes revealed racialized others as similar—shopping, relaxing—yet not completely so. For instance, one white woman felt unsafe when strangers sat too close to her in public spaces. She tried to explain their behavior in terms of varying cultural norms. Such situations may undermine race-evasive women's determination to see everyone as similar. As Frankenberg suggests (1993), recognition of difference may be difficult and inconsistent for race-evasive women—and hence may create fear.

White women described some neutral zones as safe. Safe neutral zones served 'wholesome' functions or attracted specific groups (families, women, children, professionals) perceived as safe. Examples include libraries, Disneyland, book stores, and the zoo. White women characterized racialized others as safe in neutral zones which promoted virtuous activities and values (for example, reading, spending time with one's family). Positive connotations of activity or type of person overrode fear:

> "[Bookstore customers have a] common interest and knowledge in reading, and they're not there to torment, to party, or to cause problems. They're there for insights on themselves, or reading, or their children, so they're not there to cause problems" (white woman, age 26–35).

Safety was also associated with upscale neutral zones; in this study, women in all racial groups linked wealth with tight security and safety from crime:

> "[Describing why the mall is safe] I know they have a lot of security there. And I've noticed that, maybe because it's a fancier mall and maybe attracts a higher class of people. I feel lot safer going there than going to downtown Santa Ana, just because maybe there's a lower class of people and make me a little uncomfortable" (white woman, age 26–35).

Safe neutral zones may help reduce white women's race fear. To that end, emphasizing the similarity of racialized others may be less important than increasing interaction and understanding between groups. Another key to reducing race fear may be to enhance white people's consciousness of racial identity in safe as well as feared public spaces.

Middle-class white women also encountered racialized others in *carnival* public spaces, also outside perceived race borders. Carnivals were often cultural events as well as spaces—Vietnamese-American Tet festivals, Hispanic markets, African-American blues festivals. Carnivals were directed towards members of a particular racial or ethnic group, but 'outsiders' were clearly welcome:

> "[Describing a Cinco de Mayo festival] We go back year after year, so I guess I feel comfortable, I feel welcomed ... . I think everybody is welcome. I mean, I think that's the point of having a festival is to welcome everybody" (white woman, age 36–45).

> "[About a mostly Hispanic market] I like Grand Central Market ... . I like it 'cause it has a lot of history. And everyone's so friendly. And you're coming through, and they specialize, let's say in meat, or in tortillas, or in their juices ... . If someone comes and visits California, I'll take them there ... . I don't know if I would feel comfortable there alone. It's more out of interest than comfort ... . It's not that good of an area, I was told. So—and then I also feel like a minority there" (white woman, age 18–25).

My choice of the term 'carnival' for such spaces incorporates some (but not all) of the themes from recent writings in cultural studies, on repression and displacement of the European tradition of carnival (see Bakhtin, 1968; Shields, 1991; Stallybrass and

White, 1986). Explanations proposed here for white women's experience of carnival spaces follow these writings, but are speculative; interviews did not explore all of these topics directly, as I indicate below.

Carnival public spaces feature culture and ethnicity for insiders' benefit more than for outsiders' consumption (though carnival spaces can also become commodified - the distinction is one of degree). Unlike traditional European carnivals where activities emphasized the inversion and ridicule of middle-class culture (Stallybrass and White, 1986), carnival public spaces focus on self-referential aspects of culture or ethnicity. Activities in contemporary carnival spaces—music, food, religious events, etc—are not merely reactions to dominant white middle-class culture (hooks, 1990; Soja, 1996); they also exist independent of it.

In interviews white women discussed participating in carnival spaces as an indication of interest in other racial/ethnic groups. The publicness of carnival space activities—fairs, parades, etc—emboldened those who might otherwise fear to join. Women felt carnival spaces were *intended* to be used by all.

Participants' roles in carnival spaces may be more equitable than those in embassy spaces. White women seemed to be mostly passive participants (viewers, shoppers), but the status of active participants (performers, shopkeepers) may be highly regarded. A key feature of traditional carnivals was the inversion of hierarchy (Stallybrass and White, 1986)—high to low, hidden to exposed. White women in contemporary carnival spaces also invert positions—majority to minority, cultural dominant to cultural student—to participate.

White women in this study described carnival spaces as risky but exciting. According to Shields (1991), part of the thrill and fear of such spaces lies in their liminal geography (between more stable proper places):

> "I stay away from fairs ... . I guess I always have a fear of, because it's [an] open field, and it's not permanent, it's very movable. If I don't hold on to somebody, I can move with it. It's not a comfortable place to be" (white woman, age 46–55).

It is possible that the transitory or ambiguous nature of many carnival spaces made them seem public—spontaneous gatherings or celebrations—and also unpredictable—unknown and changeable without warning.

White middle-class women may also be intrigued by the relaxed social norms associated with many carnival public spaces. An earthy, permissive, licentious atmosphere was a defining aspect of traditional European carnivals (Shields, 1990; Stallybrass and White, 1986), and is associated with many carnival spaces women described in interviews, such as festivals, parades, and fairs. Such abandon is the antithesis of everyday white middle-class US culture, especially for women. Historically, the permissiveness of the 'carnivalesque' both attracted and frightened repressed middle-class white women of the Victorian era (Stallybrass and White, 1986). Perhaps the same is true today. Race fear is a possible outcome among race-evasive white women, whose experience of carnival spaces may affirm perceived difference and fear of a sexualized, boisterous 'other'. Yet because they reveal and positively accord race difference, carnival spaces may also help reduce white women's race fear by increasing race cognizance.

Last, white women experienced racialized others by crossing race borders into *outpost spaces* where white people were minorities:

> "I remember one time, I don't remember if it was South Central [LA] or off of one of the Harbor freeway lanes, I stopped over to get some ribs in an African-American little shop. And I heard that they had really good food, and I went to taste some. And it was nothing that was said or nothing that was—not even a look. It was just a sense that maybe I didn't belong here. And that made me sad" (white woman, age 56–65).

"I feel unwelcome in Little Saigon. And why do I feel that way? I feel really different. When I'm there, usually me and my friends are the only whites. I feel like people are staring at me. I feel the service isn't what it should be .... I find it really rude .... I don't know enough about, you know, culture to know if it's normal. I know women are treated very poorly, so it could be because I'm a woman" (white women, age 26–35).

Outposts included everyday spaces in racialized communities of color. Outpost spaces embodied more or less 'cultural' content, according to white women—from culturally bereft convenience stores in mostly Hispanic cities to 'real' ethnic restaurants in non-touristic Chinese communities.

Use of outpost spaces was usually optional, and hence rare for white middle-class women in post-suburban Orange County. There are few places in the County that everyone must use—no downtown, no center, not even a significant public transportation system. Middle-class white women described a need to legitimate border crossing; outposts were not seen as normally accessible:

"If I go into an all black area, I figure I can look like a social worker, 'cause I can go out, passing out flyers [for a community project]. I go out to the black homes, they're almost all black, these housing projects ... . They never questioned why I was there, I never felt uncomfortable, and I just figured they thought that I was a social worker" (white woman, age 46–55).

Some white women employed essentialist stereotypes to justify avoiding outpost spaces. The assumption of universal hostility towards white people was one such stereotype:

"I wouldn't go spend a day in the middle of downtown Santa Ana if I knew that it was, again, for example, a Hispanic area, that they're not happy to have Caucasians in their area. And I understand that, that's just life itself. But I wouldn't put myself in that situation" (white woman, age 26–35).

Accordingly, people of color were imagined as violent, territorial, and powerful, and white people as innocent and vulnerable. Underlying these stereotypes is the deliberate myth of white women as the sexual victims of men of color (Davis, 1981). Certainly, anger towards white people exists. But such stereotypes ignore the nature of most violent crime (within, not across, racial groups) (hooks, 1995), and deny the greater harm inflicted by white people on people of color (Davis, 1981).

White women seemed to regard division of the County into racialized cities and outpost spaces as inevitable and equitable when in fact it was neither. I speculate that white women's use of outpost spaces probably will not reduce white race fear, as long as women view such spaces as (1) naturally segregated, (2) irrationally hostile to whites, and (3) equal in power and privilege to white spaces and people (see figure 1).

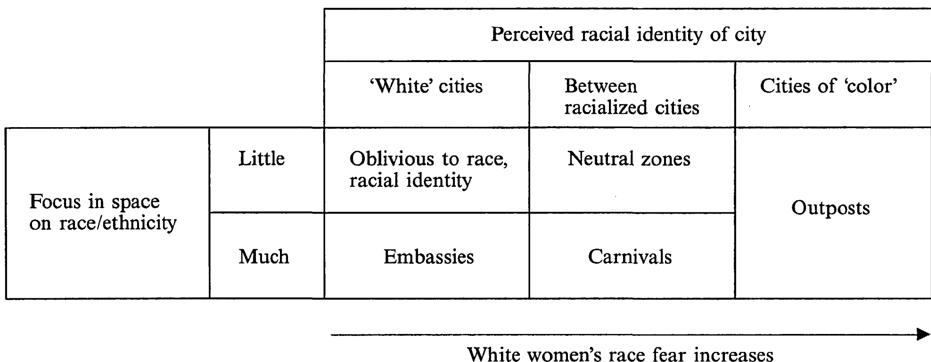

Figure 1. White women's experience of racialized others can be mapped onto physical space.

Women of color: sanctuaries, mixers, social clubs, and outposts

For the middle-class black and Hispanic women in this study the experience of race and fear was often unpredictable, difficult to map, and intimately intertwined with class. Race can become an issue in any middle-class space when attention is called to it through the discriminatory behavior of others (Feagin, 1991). Yet because middle-class status demands encounters with racialized others the experience of difference is involuntary (hooks, 1995). Black and Hispanic women in this study encountered race and fear in public spaces I characterize as sanctuaries, mixers, social clubs, and outposts.

Sanctuaries were protected public spaces shared by one's own racial or ethnic group. Examples included churches, restaurants, and places of celebration:

> "I wouldn't get the same comfort that I get in going to Tippens ... in going to any other restaurants, 'cause it's a black-owned establishment, and the people, the primary clientele, are black people, even though they have a mixed clientele. You know that when you go there, you're going to see some other black people. And you know that there's a comfort in that" (black woman, age 36 – 45).

> "In San Jose, they have parades, like on our Independence Day, which is September 15. They have a big thing, a big parade .... Yeah, it's fun. Everyone speaks Spanish. It's like a big swap meet. Everybody is selling things. I like that, I really like that. Also ... I go to see some parks that have Spanish singers, different celebrities, and you go there, and you hear the word, 'Viva Mexico!' Then I feel the culture! It is really nice" (Hispanic woman, age not given).

In describing sanctuaries, racial composition of the space itself was key. Racial identity of surrounding cities seemed immaterial, and was rarely remarked upon. (However, it is possible that some predominantly black or Hispanic middle-class communities could be experienced as sanctuaries.) In sanctuary spaces, women enjoyed a psychological safety and common understanding often missing in everyday life. One's own identity became racialized in defining 'outsiders'. The related phenomenon of black separatism is described by hooks (1995) as "an attempt by black people [and, I would add, other people of color] to construct places of political sanctuary where we can escape, if only for a time, white domination" (page 155). Women noted that sanctuary spaces offered retreat from race harassment, and from the weariness of guarding against it. (Other kinds of crime and fear might still occur in sanctuary spaces.) Such spaces of 'resistance' are critical for constructing cultural identity, which involves more than the opposition of white domination (Fraser, 1992; hooks, 1990; Soja, 1996).

In some times and places, sanctuaries have galvanized political resistance (Wilson, 1991). In present-day Orange County, however, middle-class black and Hispanic women described social and spiritual support as more common purposes. A possible reason why is suggested by hooks (1990). She contends that contemporary middle-class black people (and perhaps other people of color too) have abandoned the ethic of communalism with poor black people that would generate political race resistance. Instead, the liberal individualist agenda of middle-class black people suggests that most are primarily interested in assimilating into mainstream class-privileged white culture. It seemed that most middle-class black and Hispanic women in this study used sanctuary spaces for an occasional shot of 'ethnicity', more than as a central site of race resistance. That most black and Hispanic women interviewed used sanctuaries only occasionally supports this conclusion.

Among women in this study, sanctuary spaces were most valued by those with strong race identification; among some others, sanctuaries were not sought or missed. Sanctuaries eluded black and Hispanic women who prejudicially feared members of their own racial group. For some women, middle-class status also impeded affiliation with sanctuaries for working-class or poor people.

"Sometimes I go to El Toro. It's a grocery store ... . It's like a piece of rural Mexico. It's really nice to go there. You can go get meat cuts that are for Mexican dishes, and they have the best tortillas and actually take out already-made Mexican food that is fascinating. It's incredible ... . And I feel very uncomfortable because people see me like, you know, I have a fancy car and very well-dressed because it's from work, usually wearing a suit or something ... . They look at you like, you know. I don't know, I feel terrible" (Hispanic woman, age 36 – 45).

It is possible that, in Orange County, the nature of public discussions and recent policies related to race and ethnicity (such as propositions to dismantle affirmative action, and anti-immigration sentiment) further weakens racial identification among middle-class people of color.

Middle-class white women described no equivalent sanctuary spaces. That is not to say that white women did not use places where there were only white people or where middle-class white 'culture' featured prominently. Rather, white women were mostly unaware of the whiteness of many of their spaces (Frankenberg, 1993), and oblivious to their own racial identities, so they did not consciously equate such places with sanctuary. Further, middle-class white women need no such places to escape racial oppression in Orange County.

In *mixer* public spaces, racial or ethnic diversity rather than homogeneity generates welcome and safety for black and Hispanic women. According to women interviewed, the presence of significant numbers of different kinds of people makes mixer spaces hospitable, if other patrons are also middle-class. Mixers take different forms—bookstores, malls, pedestrian arcades. Racial composition of the space is more important than its function. Unlike the neutral zones described earlier, diversity is more than tolerated in mixer spaces. Diversity is a desired, accommodating feature:

"I feel safe in a mixed crowd ... because I figure if we all are mixed and together, then my understanding is we are more accepting of everybody around us" (Hispanic woman, age 18 – 25).

"[Describing swap meets] There's a lot of different kinds of people ... . Diverse group of people, and different cultures. Even the vendors are all different cultures. The people that go there, you see a lot of different people, and that makes me feel a bit more comfortable" (Hispanic woman, age 26 – 35).

Some race-evasive black and Hispanic women reported that places with diverse populations (especially including white people) seemed safer than those comprised exclusively of members of one's own race. This feeling is described later, under 'outpost' public spaces.

Middle-class women of color reported race fear in *social club spaces*, in which most middle-class or upper-class patrons were of the same dissimilar racial group—especially white people. Examples included gyms, coffee shops, and nightclubs. Social clubs were described by black and Hispanic women as unwelcoming and uncomfortable. Women felt conspicuous because of race:

"There's this restaurant that a friend of mine ... recommended to us. And we were there and I felt so uncomfortable. And I was convinced that it was because I was Mexican, and there was no one else with any, any other kind of background. You didn't see any Asian or Persian, or anybody except just, you know, what seemed to me very Caucasian people ... . It was a very uncomfortable experience" (Hispanic woman, age 36 – 45).

"[Describing the gym] I go right after work, so it's close. I don't really feel comfortable there ... there are not too many black people there, so I feel a little weird ... . People, you know, they're probably not really looking at me, but, I mean, I just feel that way ... . [later] If I go with friends, I have someone that I can talk to, at least.

Cause nobody else will talk to you. It just feels like, you know, you'll have somebody who's gonna be by your side if anything goes wrong" (black woman, age 26–35).

Social club spaces share several distinguishing characteristics that may enhance perceived exclusivity. Social club spaces support discretionary activities—no one *needs* to use them. As such, spaces attract specific identities—'yuppie', 'grunge', 'red neck'. Patrons seem to select social club spaces to support desired identities. Some identities are themselves racialized—for example, several black and Hispanic women commented on the perceived whiteness of coffeehouses. Further, places described as social clubs are typically occupied for an extended time, such as an evening or a meal. Patrons become a loose group during use, and are conscious of each other. Last, as the name implies, social club spaces support social activities sanctioned by the dominant group. Spaces encourage or allow interaction among strangers. These characteristics seem to enhance the 'cliquishness' of social club spaces, many of which would formerly have served only one racial or ethnic group (Feagin, 1996).

Loss of anonymity in social clubs can be disturbing. The right to be unknown, to blend into and observe the crowd, is a fundamental attribute associated with enjoyment of public space (see Whyte, 1980). Being 'not white' in some middle-class public spaces is enough to make one visible to others, in the same way that women lack anonymity in public space (see Borisoff and Hahn, 1997; Gardiner, 1995; Wilson, 1991).

"The majority of my friends are either Hispanic or black. And I've been at [restaurant], there's been a bigger mix crowd. But when I've been to coffeehouses, it seems that the crowd is mainly Anglo. And here we are, these black and Mexican girls walking in, and we stand out. And I don't like the feeling" (Hispanic woman, age 18–25).

Beyond discomfort, middle-class black and Hispanic women sometimes feared harassment or hostility in social club spaces:

"I was in Fullerton, and I went to a pizza place. I was with a guy, a black guy, and we walked in, and everybody just turned around. He said it too. I wasn't going to say anything. I thought it was just me. Everybody turned around and they looked at us. And so we were gonna order a pizza, and then we just felt weird [and left].... Like I said, I have to try to get a feel, you know. You don't want somebody coming after you for some stupid reason" (black woman, age 26–35).

"[About nightclubs] If I know that the crowd is more, anything else other than Mexican, I try not to go, because for fear of conflict. Because I just don't want conflict because of race, because that to me is scary. Like, I've been places and it seems like it starts because you are not whatever race the majority is, and that's not cool with me. That scares me. That can get out of hand. Nightclubs can get out of hand" (Hispanic woman, age 18–25).

Apprehension requires vigilance. Several women described the need, as people of color, to 'keep their guard up' in potentially uncomfortable places. Significantly, social clubs included several new forms of privately owned public spaces, such as coffee shops and fitness centers, perceived as extremely safe by many middle-class white women, for the same qualities of surveillance and control that make these spaces feel exclusionary to women of color.

Several women of color reported that fear of 'standing out' induced solidarity with other people of color in social clubs. Strangers were transformed into imaginary allies. Race-cognizant black and Hispanic women most often reported feelings of solidarity with other people of color. Solidarity was not always reciprocal, however. Women differed in designations of who counted as 'us' and 'them'. As Hoch notes (1993), potential allies are determined in an arena of persistent oppression, prejudice, and differential mobility.

'Standing out' in terms of race was also uncomfortable for middle-class white women in this study—though in Orange County it was comparatively easy to avoid. White women were easily anonymous in middle-class spaces here. They spent little time in outpost spaces, by choice. In this relatively segregated, post-suburban landscape, whiteness is so pervasive in many middle-class cities that the burden of 'representing white people' is nonexistent. Importantly, white women rarely worried that their middle-class status would be challenged. For black and Hispanic women, middle-class status offered unreliable protection (see also Cose, 1993; Feagin, 1991). Many women of color had experienced race discrimination in shops, restaurants, and so on; their fear of race harassment or discrimination in middle-class places was reasonable.

For the middle-class black and Hispanic women interviewed, racial identity was most salient in privately owned public spaces. Gender shaped the significance of race here. Feagin (1991) locates greatest fear of racial discrimination for middle-class black people in the most public spaces (for example, outdoors, streets), where middle-class status offers least reliable protection. But locations of fear depends upon the form of discrimination feared. For middle-class men of color, racial discrimination can easily take the form of violence, such as police harassment or hate crimes (Feagin, 1991). Such violence is often located in very public spaces, marking the street as a feared site of discrimination. Among the women of color in this study, however, racial discrimination was more often described as nonviolent acts, occurring in less public places, such as shops or restaurants. That does not mean women of color did not fear the outdoors; far from it. All US women report greatest fear of the outdoors, owing to the mistaken belief that most sexual assault occurs outside, at night (Day, 1999; Gordon and Riger, 1989). However, few women of color discussed the racial component of sexual assault and harassment. They were more likely to fear racial discrimination in indoor privately owned public spaces.

In sanctuary, mixer, and social club spaces, black and Hispanic women's fear of race harassment and conflict followed their own experiences of discrimination and feeling unwelcome along with others' reports of such experiences. Reducing black and Hispanic women's fear of race crime, discomfort, and conflict will likely depend on changing the prejudices and behavior of others, especially white people. Increasing white race cognizance may thus indirectly reduce race fear among people of color as well.

Last, in *outpost spaces*, located across race borders, black and Hispanic women described fear of crime, a fear targeted at people of color. Outpost spaces were similar to those described by white women:

> "Unsafe—I would think Santa Ana. I don't like Santa Ana, especially at night. I go through there flying. I noticed that there are a lot of Hispanic boys in their low riders cars, and I can't stand the way they're always staring or looking at you.... I always feel like they're going to carjack you" (black woman, age 46–55).

Black and Hispanic women's fear of racialized cities included those in which their own racial group was the majority.

> "Downtown Santa Ana, I feel unsafe going there anytime after 7 pm or 8 pm ... . I attended a [museum event], and it was over at 10 pm and it was nice, because valet parking people would say 'Just turn left and there is the freeway'. They would know you needed to go through there ... . I don't go there if I don't have to" (Hispanic woman, age 36–45).

> "Sometimes, I don't know how this is going to sound, but sometimes I don't like to go—I like to go where there's a mixture. I don't like to go where there's one race, like all black people. I don't really, sometimes, I don't really feel safe there. You know, like sometimes, you go to Venice Beach, and there are a lot of black people, then you know, some of them are like gang types" (black woman, age 26–35).

In these instances, middle-class women of color's fear of poor people sometimes took the form of essentialist race prejudice. (Fear of poor white people was never similarly extended.) It may be that in Orange County black and Hispanic middle-class women rarely encountered public spaces occupied exclusively by *middle-class* members of their own groups. In interviews, when black and Hispanic women described fear of places comprised solely of members of their own racial group, examples given usually indicated fear of *poor* people of color. Black and Hispanic women may not have feared middle-class black and Hispanic public places and cities, respectively, if such spaces existed (see figure 2).

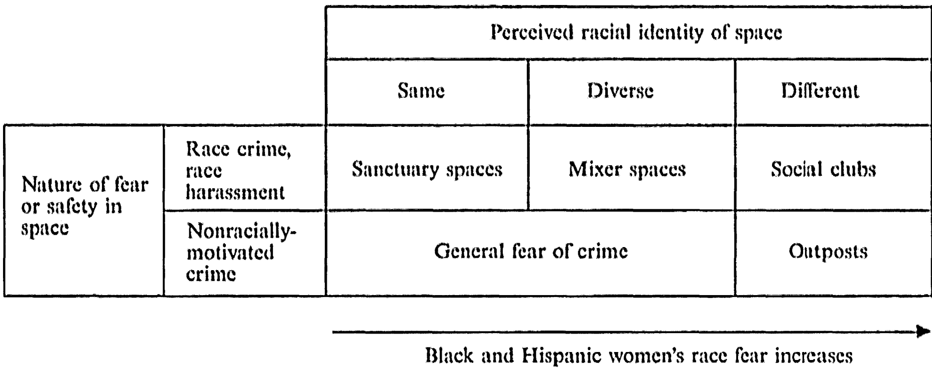

Figure 2. Black and Hispanic women's experience of fear and safety in public space include both fear of race crime and harassment and fear of nonracially motivated crime.

Conclusions

The findings of this paper bear important implications for theory and research on race, gender, and fear in public space. First, as this discussion demonstrates, space matters in the experience of race and of race fear. Use of public space reflects and shapes women's understanding of race and of fear. Race difference and race identity are experienced in the context of spaces at the microscale and the macroscale. The experience of racialized public space is that of embeddedness as much as separation, as characteristics of the surrounding city interact with characteristics of the space itself. Within particular spaces, the same features communicate differently to varying audiences. For instance, characteristics of social club spaces can simultaneously signal safety to white middle-class women and unease to middle-class women of color.

Second, this paper confirms that race fear is not an exclusively 'white' experience. However, *what* is feared and *where* differs with race and with race cognizance. Most white people may be unaware of how fear of hate crimes or of race harassment impacts the lives of people of color. The experience of being a racial minority in public space is disconcerting for most middle-class individuals, but the likelihood of being in that position varies dramatically with race. Importantly, middle-class status buys only partial protection for women of color in many public spaces (see also Feagin, 1991), though white women's middle-class status is rarely challenged. Fear in public space is shaped by one's complete identity—including race, class, and gender. It is misleading to speak of 'women's' fear as if it were uniform, though race, class, and gender are not always equally salient in this experience.

Experiences of race and race fear are impacted by regional geography. In this case, Orange County's centerless post-suburban form minimizes the number of common places used by all. Further, this post-suburban geography allows assignment of race boundaries to entire cities, with differing consequences. Orange County's centerless

network of equivalent cities lets middle-class white women avoid and overlook people of color in the public spaces of mostly white cities. Middle-class women of color in Orange County have more varied and perhaps more fractured experiences of race in public places; they too avoid cities with ascribed identities of 'race danger'. In some ways, regional geography matters more than the specific characteristics of a public space in the experience of race and fear. For instance, race and class homogeneity in Orange County public spaces may be attributed more to the County's post-suburban geography than to the public or private ownership of individual spaces.

Finally, not all racialized public spaces are feared. Diversity can also signal safety, and some racialized public spaces are highly regarded by insiders and/or outsiders. Nor is safety limited to places where race or ethnicity is commodified. Equitable, genuine experience of racialized others is possible in public spaces where race difference is positively accorded and is defined by the group itself. However, post-suburban geography may limit widespread dispersion of such places throughout the region.

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