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The two Torontos: Young people navigating the core-inner suburb socio-spatial divide

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Abstract

In 2014 Toronto was named 'Youthful City of the Year' by the global Youthful Cities initiative. The ranking was supposed to be indicative of Toronto's progressiveness and as a place where youth are equipped to thrive. Toronto also ranked number one for diversity. Much of Toronto's celebrated diversity exists in the inner suburbs of the city. The homogenous framing of Toronto as captured by the Youthful Cities initiative neglects the lived realities of young people who live on the fringes of the city. This is heightened in a context of increasing socio-economic inequalities that is spatially concentrated. In this paper I examine how divergences in the city are spatially produced and navigated by young people that live both symbolically and geographically on the fringes. I argue that Toronto is differentiated along lines of race and socio-economic status that is reified through the socio-spatial division between the core of the city and the inner suburbs.

Keywords: youth, space, race, abstract space, increasing socio-economic and spatial inequalities

Résumé

En l'an 2014, Toronto a fut nommé « Ville jeune de l'année » par l'initiative mondiale Youthful Cities. Le classement était censé être révélateur de la progressivité de Toronto et comme un endroit où les jeunes sont équipés pour s'épanouir. Toronto s'est également classée numéro un pour la diversité. Une grande partie de la célèbre diversité de Toronto existe dans les banlieues intérieures de la ville. Le cadrage homogène de Toronto tel que capturé par l'initiative de Youthful Cities néglige les réalités vécues des jeunes qui vivent en marge de la ville. Celle-ci sont accentuées dans un contexte d'inégalités socio-économiques croissantes et concentrées spatialement. Cet article explore comment les divergences dans la ville sont spatialement produites et naviguées par des jeunes qui vivent à la fois symboliquement et géographiquement en marge. L'auteur soutient que Toronto est différenciée selon des critères de race et de statut socio-économique entre le coeur de la ville et les banlieues intérieures.

Mots-clés : jeunesse, espace, race, d'inégalités socio-économiques et spatial

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Introduction

In 2014 Toronto was named ‘Youthful City of the Year’ by the Youthful Cities initiative, which ranked 25 global cities from a youth perspective. The ranking was supposed to be indicative of Toronto’s progressiveness and signalled Toronto as a place where youth are equipped to thrive. The news was received with a lot of fanfare from mainstream media applauding Toronto’s coveted number one spot. In addition to ranking number one overall, Toronto ranked number one for diversity. It also ranked top 5 for 9 of the 16 categories. The same year Toronto held a municipal election that saw an increase in voter turnout from 51% in 2010 to 60% in 2014, and up from 39% in 2006 (Leong 2014). Many attributed the increase in turnout to one particularly candidate (the incumbent) Rob Ford (due to health issues later replaced by his brother Doug Ford). Many commentators accused the Ford brothers of creating a divisive form of politics to gain power, pitting the suburbs against the downtown core. The Ford brothers came to personify long term alienation experienced by those in the suburbs of Toronto by the downtown core where political, cultural, and financial power resides. The suburbs or what is referred to as the inner-suburbs in Toronto also happens to be the more marginalized, racialized, criminalized, and economically poorer areas of Toronto, where most visible minorities and new immigrants reside. Much of Toronto’s celebrated diversity does in fact exist in these inner suburbs.

When taken together these issues capture the overlooked tensions that exists within the city. The issues bring to question how do young people in the fringes of Toronto society, economically, socially, and spatially navigate these tensions. What cleavages do rankings such as the Youthful City initiative miss, which purports Toronto to be both number one overall and in diversity. In this paper I argue that the homogenous framing of Toronto as captured by the Youthful Cities initiative neglects the lived realities of young people who live on the fringes of the city. This is heightened in a context of increasing socio-economic inequalities that is spatially concentrated. In this paper I examine how divergences in the city are spatially produced and navigated by young people that live both symbolically and geographically on the fringes of these global cities. I argue that Toronto is differentiated along lines of race and socio-economic status that is reified through the socio-spatial division between the core of the city and the inner suburbs.

The social production of space and embodied difference

For Henri Lefebvre (1991) the meaning of space is constructed through social relations of people both inside and outside of it. Lefebvre (1991) comes to understand space as a social product by building on Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism. According to Marx once commodities are exchanged on the marketplace the origin of their production is masked. Similarly, Lefebvre argues space is produced like any commodity and to avoid ‘spatial fetishism’ there needs to be a move towards understanding space as a production as opposed to simply a thing. Political and class elites dictate the realm of the social production of space. For Lefebvre (1991) space is produced through three moments, representations of space (conceived space), representational spaces (perceived space), and spatial practices (lived space). Representations of space is constituted by planners created through discourse. Representational space is constituted through symbols (Lefebvre 1991). Spatial practices are how people’s bodies exist in actual space everyday. Everyday life in spaces are produced through conceived space as articulated by planners and policy makers, bureaucrats, politicians, and people’s perception of space.

Lefebvre’s work demonstrates how power underlies the production of space (Stillerman 2006). For Lefebvre representations of space are connected to modes of production. Like Marx who “makes the distinction between abstract labour, which creates exchange value, and concrete labour, which creates use value” (Gregory as cited in McCann 1999, 169), Lefebvre makes the argument that there is a struggle between “abstract space (commodified and bureaucratized space) over concrete space (the space of everyday life and experience)” (Gregory as cited in McCann 1999, 169). The abstract space becomes the dominant space by elites who have the power to define the space, view it as ahistorical, and erase struggles between it and concrete space (McCann 1999).

This paper draws on Eden Kinkaid’s (2020) re-reading of Lefebvre’s work through a critical phenomenological approach. She argues that albeit Lefebvre talks about the centrality of the body in understanding space and people’s perception of space his work ignores embodied difference. A critical phenomenological approach that centers people’s experiences of space and social relations from particular positionalities concretizes the abstract subject discussed in Lefebvre’s work (Kinkaid 2020). For both Lefebvre and phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty space is made sense of through the body. For critical phenomenologists “social space serves as a starting point for articulating how

different kinds of bodies—marked by forms of social difference—encounter space differently, embodying and enacting its rupture and contradictions. The work such bodies unwittingly and intentionally do” (Kinkaid 2020, 183–184). A critical phenomenological reading of space allows for a better understanding of the ways racialized bodies differently experience different spaces. A critique of Lefebvre’s work on difference and space is that it remains abstract without providing meaningful specificities such as race.

Similarly, McCann (1999) extends Lefebvre’s work on abstract space and the social production of space. McCann (1999) argues that Lefebvre’s work “must be contextualized in the racialized geographies of U.S. cities if it is to deepen our understanding of urban sociospatial processes” (164). McCann drawing on this conceptualization of Lefebvre’s work argues that “the production and maintenance of “safe” public spaces in U.S. cities is fundamentally related to representations of racial identities and to an ongoing process in which subjective identity and material urban spaces exist in a mutually constitutive relationship” (164). Grounded in these works I argue that the core of Toronto are exclusionary spaces that relegate racialized and economically marginalized youth bodies to the peripheries of the city. This paper examines how these spaces are produced, reproduced, maintained, and how youth in these spaces navigate these divisions on the peripheries. I focus on youth who live in the Malvern neighbourhood located in the northeast end of the city in the ‘borough’ of Scarborough (one of the six ‘boroughs’ of Toronto). This work is drawn from a larger 16-month ethnographic study whereby I conducted research at a community center in Malvern. As part of the study I conducted thirty-four semi-structured interviews with youth and youth service providers and a critical media analysis.

Malvern is home to 43,794 people (City of Toronto 2016, 1). In 2005, it was designated as a ‘priority’ neighbourhood, neighbourhoods that were identified as underserved with high rates of poverty and diversity. Special investments were promised to these areas. As of 2014 the priority designation has been renamed Neighbourhood Improvement Area. Top “visible minority” groups in Malvern are South Asian (Tamil), Caribbean Black, Filipino, and Chinese (City of Toronto 2016). Visible minorities make up 89.5% of the population compared to the city’s average of 51.5%. Immigrants make up 61.5% compared to the city average of 51.2% (City of Toronto 2016, 3). Individual income is \$31,240 versus \$54,032 compared to the city’s average (1).

Youth take up a particular positionality in the study of local space. Young people tend to be more bounded by their local neighbourhoods due to limitations of their mobility and lack of resources (Harris 2009). Making of social distinction has a powerful spatial dimension. Research has found that youth are more impacted by their neighbourhoods than any other demographic group (Kintrea, Bannister, and Pickering 2010). Local spaces figure centrally in young people’s self-making (Harris and Wyn 2009). It is in place that youth are both actors and acted upon. It is in “place where negotiation is forced upon up” (Massey 2005, 154).

Producing the inner suburbs (conceived space): The façade of neutral spaces

In North America, in the last two decades there has been a “suburbanization of poverty” due to the investments made in the core of the cities (Parlette and Cowen 2011, 797). In Toronto the gentrification of the inner-city has led to the pricing out of residents in the core, propelling many to be pushed out to the inner suburbs. This is partly because since the 1970s manufacturing jobs have moved from cities in the Global North to the Global South, which has resulted in the increase in low-wage service jobs (Rankin and McLean 2015). The ‘Future of Downtown Toronto’ report by the City of Toronto is one of many examples of official policies put in place to develop the core (Parlette and Cowen 2011). According to the report job growth has been faster in the core than in the inner suburbs. This is partially due to the fact that “lower value added functions” have moved out of the city (City of Toronto cited in Parlette and Cowen 2011, 799). This was done in order to make room for “higher value added activities” in the core (City of Toronto cited in Parlette and Cowen 2011, 799). This has created a scenario in which mostly only high-wage earners can afford to live in the core (Rankin and McLean 2015). From 1983 to 2013 the city lost half of its manufacturing jobs (117,000 jobs), during the same time there has been an increase in service jobs (78,000 jobs), most of which were concentrated in the core (City of Toronto as cited in Silver, Taylor, and Calderon-Figueroa 2020, 1).

Social services have historically been located in the core. However, as those with higher needs moved outwards the investment in social services did not travel with the population as they moved out (United Way 2004). One of the reasons for this is because financial, political, and media power remains concentrated in the core. Selective social policies also increase the spatialization of racialized poverty. One example include policies that encourage building lower rent towers in the inner suburbs that tend to attract immigrants (Ghosh 2014).

Bureaucratic and political decisions or conceived spaces inform the production of the racial geographies of the city. J. David Hulchanski's 2010 report "The Three Cities within Toronto" argues within Toronto there are three unofficial cities. In City #1 incomes have increased since the 1970s and most of these areas are concentrated in the core. In City #2, incomes have decreased and simultaneously it is where most racialized people live in Toronto. City #3 spaces are mostly concentrated in the inner suburbs, in the northeast and northwest peripheries of the city. In 1970, 19% of neighbourhoods were low-income, by 2005 this number had increased to 53% (6). White middle-class flight travelled out of Toronto or into the core. Middle-income areas have remained in the same geographic locations during this time (City #2). However, during the same time between 1970 and 2005, middle-income areas have decreased and high-income areas have increased very little. However, low-income areas have grown.

In Toronto poverty is concentrated by neighbourhood, much more now than 20 years ago (United Way 2004). Poverty grew as Toronto became more diverse. In 1971 five percent of Toronto was non-European (Gaskell and Levin 2011) versus 51.2% in 2016 (City of Toronto 2016). Increasing economic disparity can be explained by many factors, economic restructuring, growth in precarious work, discrimination against racialized immigrants in the workforce, restructuring of government taxes and income transfers (Hulchanski 2010). In 2005 individual average income for those who live in the core was \$88,400 compared to \$26,900 for those in the inner suburb (6). Both Hulchanski's and United Way's reports illustrate that poverty has moved from the core to the inner suburbs.

It is also important to note in City #1 the number of foreign-born people went down to 35% to 28% from 1971 and 2006. During this same time period, in City #3 the number of immigrants increased from 31% to 61% (11). However, this increase has mostly been felt in poorer neighbourhoods. For example, the "visible minority" population has increased in poorer neighbourhoods from 20% in 1981 to 29.5% in 2001 (United Way 2004, 49–50). In relation to children and youth, City #3 is also home to a higher percentage of children and youth: 33 versus 26 (Hulchanski 2010, 10).

The core as abstract space: Media framings of the core versus inner suburb divide (perceived media)

Elsewhere I have examined the role of the media in producing racialized urban spaces (for information on methodology please refer to Sriskandarajah 2020) looking at a 5-year coverage of Malvern in the *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Sun*, *National Post*, and *Globe and Mail* (2009–2013). The newspapers were chosen based on ideological leanings of the papers and geographic considerations. The findings revealed the media framed youth bodies in Malvern as an unruly urban underclass. Malvern was racialized, criminalized and othered. This paper focuses on another theme found in the course of the analysis on Malvern, the dichotomous framing of the core and the inner suburb. It is through the framing of peripheries as othered spaces that the core becomes synonymous with Toronto, as a cosmopolitan, progressive, tolerant society, antithetical to the unsafe spaces of the inner suburbs. Toronto in its hegemonic imaginings situates itself as a city that celebrates 'good' multiculturalism which highlights the superficial and celebratory aspects, while concealing the complex messiness of living with difference. In this abstracted space inequalities that plague the city are relegated to the periphery and seen as a deviation from the peaceful city. This abstracted space of the core erases the culpability of the core in its role in entrenching inequalities in the inner suburb.

Inner suburbs as undesirable space and home to the undesirable body

The inner suburbs are framed as antithetical to the core as well as the bodies that inhabit these spaces. Malvern and other neighbourhoods in 'fringe areas' are framed as dangerous and comparable to American ghettos. Simultaneously, they are contrasted with 'safe' areas of the city. It reifies both the undesirability of Malvern and the inner suburb and those whose bodies traverse these spaces and affirms the superiority of the core. In an article titled "Isolation on the outskirts" Rochon (2011) wrote:

People who live in the northern, unwalkable fringes of low-income Toronto, or across the border in the marginalized, dehumanized neighbourhoods of New York's East Harlem and South Bronx will live about 20 fewer years than those in downtown, vibrant neighbourhoods, according to a 2007 report by the City University of New York's Campaign Against Diabetes and the Public Health Association of New York City. But in the northeast and northwest quadrants of Toronto, in neighbourhoods such as Malvern and Rexdale that have few sidewalks and no sensory enticements such as the Art Gallery of Ontario or the dramatically lit CN Tower, there's little reason to engage in the outside world. We used

to call them ugly, but now social geographers and medical practitioners label the disconnected sections of the city «obesogenic,» meaning environments that promote obesity. My friends and I live in a healthy neighbourhood of affluence while, about eight kilometres north, other parts of the population are being increasingly doomed by urban wastelands.

The excerpt exemplifies common framings of communities in the inner suburbs and those who live in these spaces by mainstream media. In this article, the author self-identifies as living in the core, where most opinion makers and news creators live. The American context is quite different, informed by greater income disparities and inadequate healthcare. Yet, the author conflates Toronto neighbourhoods in the inner suburbs to American low-income neighbourhoods and their health outcomes. Presumably because they are both home to a large number of racialized bodies. The author called Malvern “ugly”. She situates herself as living in a “healthy neighbourhood of affluence” while only a short distance away people were living in “urban wastelands”. The writer states Malvern is visually and socially unappealing. However, she provides no context as to why these neighbourhoods are not invested in; why the core gets to house major art galleries and other attractions. At the same time, there is no discussion about the artists, community activists, cultural centers and the vibrancy that exists in the inner suburb. Those in positions of power dictate what is deemed appropriate cultural ‘enticements’ or legitimate, while the cultural capital that exists in the inner suburb are delegitimized by being seen as too ‘ethnic.’ Cultural centres that are not associated with Whiteness are ethnicized and therefore dismissed. No mention is made of local cultural centres (Malvern is home to a large Chinese cultural centre), temples, churches, mosques. The inner suburbs are framed as a space filled with decay, where life is short, undesirable, unexciting, and devoid of any real culture. This excerpt confirms Li (2003)’s argument that Canada supports multiculturalism at the ideological level but simultaneously overlooks cultural particularities. Racialized and multicultural others are deemed incapable of producing a culture deemed valuable to the mainstream (Li 2003).

The inner-suburb as criminalized space and home to the criminalized body

Violence in the inner suburbs is seen as an everyday accepted reality. When crimes occur in affluent places like Forest Hill, it is seen as an anomalous occurrence. Even when crimes are committed in affluent parts of City #1, Malvern is arbitrarily used to contrast these realities. In the process purporting it as a regular occurrence.

Forest Hill residents were stunned to learn a man was gunned down in the wee hours Wednesday in a sprawling park in their upscale neighbourhood...**Meanwhile, gunfire rang out again on the other side of town in Malvern Wednesday night** (bold added) (Doucette 2012).

Fear of social ills spilling out from the boundaries of these neighbourhoods into White spaces in City #1 is a constant trope. In the above example, acts of violence with no connections to Malvern are often indirectly linked to reiterate this fear.

This violence isn’t localized any more, and it’s not just criminals killing criminals, as some of the voices on the call-in radio shows would have us believe. It isn’t staying in places like Malvern or Rexdale. Or on Gottingen Street if you happen to live in Halifax. Or in Surrey if you live in Vancouver. It’s all over. It’s in the 905. It’s in the Annex. It reaches the Rosedales and the Forest Hills through murders like Dylan Ellis and Oliver Martin (Sutherland 2009).

Crime is something that happens in racialized periphery areas and “reaches” Forest Hills. It is not inherent to Forest Hill as it is in other neighbourhoods. It is also of interest to note the only victims that were identified by name are those in City #1. Those killed in the inner suburb areas of the city are dehumanized; their names do not warrant mention. Rarely are unfair representations and treatment of neighbourhoods in City #3 discussed. Few examples stood out:

“In the last four or five years I’ve attended 14, 15 funerals. And not once have I seen a politician from any level of government come out and make a statement,» he said. «Incidents of gun violence happen in inner-city communities all the time. It’s a shame that we don’t rally the same way as when it happens on Yonge Street.»[Major Street downtown] [Parenthesis added] (Paperny 2012).

The divide is entrenched and affects formal city politics. [Headline] “Toronto’s Great Divide: On Oct. 25, when voters choose their next mayor, their decision will likely be rooted in where they live” (Doolittle 2010). Difference is reiterated through the cultural aesthetics of the body, for example how people dress and where they buy their clothing.

“Too bad the two Torontos don’t see eye to eye, but I guess that’s life in the big city. We dress differently in the two Torontos. Downtown, Guess means designer denim. In Malvern or Mimico, it means «Guess what I paid for these at Zellers?» [Zellers is a former large discount department store] [Parenthesis added] (Strobel 2012).

The core versus inner suburb divide is as much about differentiating bodies on the margins as it is about the construction of a superior core space that is constituted through the containment and representation of the ‘other’s’ place.

Living the divide (spatial practices): Embodied difference

In the following section large excerpts are reproduced from interviews with youth and youth service providers. This is to allow the youth to share their views in their own words about their everyday interrogations of living in a marginalized space. The young people interviewed were aware of the stereotypical representations of their neighbourhood. The inner suburb-core divide discussed in the media played a defining role in articulations of neighbourhood identities, and had implications for neighbourhood attachment, embodied differences, and negotiations of difference and belonging. Youth in the inner city are marginalized and have less interaction with dominant members of society (Ghorayshi 2010). Many of the participants recognized symbolic power remains in the core. According to Nish, a youth service provider, power brokers who inform mainstream Toronto identity live in the core. When power is concentrated spatially, it informs the core’s identity but also defines who is ‘the other’, which they have the power to define. The ability to define also has material implications. It effects where resources are distributed.

Nish: [T]hose who inform what is Toronto are primarily live downtown and they view the identity through a downtown lens where I see it as obviously being much broader, involving the inner suburbs, one of which is Scarborough and I feel that question is an evolving question...I want it to go to a space where there is a balance between the suburban and the core, that the media and the, those who inform Toronto identity and wield power on and in Toronto come to that recognition, that the way Scarborough is framed is obviously a big concern to me. It needs to be addressed. I don’t think there is a sense of unity between the core and suburb. Rob Ford’s you know prominence to power is recognition of that. I don’t believe campaigned downtown, he was strictly campaigning in the suburbs, you know. Easily won on that. (Youth service provider)

Youth recognized racialized bodies in their neighbourhoods were unfairly treated compared to residents in the core.

Manuela: Um, I have seen police, I have seen this community being patrolled on horses, there is no riot mind you and there is no reason to bring out police officers on horses, like if they are on a plantation. I don’t understand that. I have seen this community policed by helicopters uh you know. I have seen a government official come here and after a shooting, tell people that their lives should go on. I am pretty sure you would never say that up in Davisville or [inaudible], in fact there was a shooting up in Yonge and Eglinton, up in Davisville, there was so much sympathy before anybody knew the story about what had happened. (Youth)

Entering the core: Everyday phenomenological experiences of spatial difference

Participants confronted the disparity when they ventured out of their inner suburb neighbourhoods or met residents from the core. Randy discussed the first time he realized the differences that existed in the quality of education in Malvern compared to neighbourhoods in City #1.

Randy: There are schools like in the Bayview area, Bayview is predominately a more rich area you know, you call it a rich area right. So. Um. One of my friend that I met last year he was like when I was in grade 11 I took a anthropology and I was like what, how did you get anthropology and I didn't. I was upset 'cause it was like why am I being marginalized. In one thing I noticed is that in Toronto they marginalize you. I am not saying I am a genius and only I found this out on my own but because Malvern is what it is they only provide a certain education. Most people in Malvern are not going to be doctors and lawyers, because this area is more factory workers and general labourers so that is what they provide... (Youth)

Many young people from these spaces rarely went to the core. Some, in fact, had never gone.

Randy: Some people in Malvern have never stepped out of Malvern or never stepped out of Scarborough, so that is really unfortunate. Some people have never went downtown like seriously you know so ya. (Youth)

Angela: [I] told them we are going to an art exhibit downtown they were just so excited. They were like oh my God we are going downtown. It was such a big deal because downtown is so far away. Even once they get there, where do they go. They don't know where they are going. They are not connected so. (Youth)

Most youth in these neighbourhoods rarely ventured to the core. They recognized the core had more resources and investments. I saw this first hand when I accompanied a small group of girls from the community centre on a trip to an art exhibition downtown. It took us 1.5 hours on public transportation (which would have been a 25-minute car ride) from Malvern to downtown, exemplifying both the social and physical distance from the core. The distance is aggravated by the fact that there has not been sufficient investment in transit to connect the inner suburbs to the core. When we emerged from the subway onto the street, three of the young girls exclaimed with excitement. Shonda, one of the girls, was amazed at the creative architecture of the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) building. The building was an architectural wonder that structurally stood out in the core. It looks like a white polka-dot table with multi-coloured legs looming high in the sky. Shonda stated that seeing such attractive architecture was the reason she loved downtown and lamented that "this kind of thing" was missing in Scarborough. Some youth reproduced tropes that framed downtown as the only place where exciting culture existed. Many did not question why these investments were made in the core.

Another youth, Thomas also discussed the core versus inner suburbs divide. He revealed that youth rarely left their communities or ventured to the core. They felt out of place in these spaces. They were not able to navigate these terrains. This is particularly troubling considering most of the intellectual, financial, political, and cultural power in Toronto remains concentrated in the downtown core. There were segments of the population that was both socially and spatially alienated from this centre. Participants recognized their neighbourhoods were often left out. They desired an incorporation of their neighbourhoods into the wider positive imagining of Toronto. Youth also reproduced dominant framings that othered the inner suburbs from the core. It informed how they traversed through their city. However, alienation from the core did not mean youth were inward looking. Albeit youth from the inner suburbs might not travel to downtown, they were not necessarily restricted to their neighbourhood. Many young people mentioned traveling to their 'home' countries and living transnational lives. This is also indicative of the reality that for many racialized youth their social and cultural capital dictates a closer connection to the Global South than to certain hegemonic spaces of their own local city.

Thomas: There is cool things going on downtown. But at the same time you don't hear about a lot of stuff... A lot of the cultural festivals Toronto already sponsors. I appreciate what the government already does. But maybe on a more local level they can do that stuff. Like if they brought more stuff into Malvern. Because there are people fighting and advocating to get stuff in Malvern. But maybe it shouldn't be so much a fight, maybe the government should be open to going into smaller neighbourhoods and bringing stuff that is always happening downtown for some reason. I don't know a lot of people that go downtown as often as I do. Yea, they are comfortable in the neighbourhood. They comfortable with the people here. You kind of know everyone's face when you have been here for so long. It is kind of a nice

thing. At the same time they have family all over the world, so they get to to Guyana for the holidays. So well-travelled, but love to stay home [local neighbourhood]. (Youth)

Navigating the divide in everyday life: “Spatial disorientation and bodily alienation” (Kinkaid 2020, 180)

Participants were cognizant of the divide and how it affected their way of being, how their bodies were perceived when they traverse city spaces. Deque discussed feeling unease when he left Malvern and travelled to wealthier neighbourhoods. It explained why the participants often did not leave their neighbourhoods, where for the most part they felt safe. Deque recognized that when he ventured out of his neighbourhood, he was in a different place. He acknowledged there was a different way to exist in these spaces; a different way to talk.

Deque: Um, I wish the government didn't have such a segregation in housing cause when like you have your typical neighbourhood like Malvern right and then you go somewhere else it is like there are suburbs and all these rich areas where it is like. Like the type of people there they are not comfortable with other people even walking through it. It is like, it is like these filters that everybody has to go through as soon as they step into a new environment. I feel that everybody should be living in on a common ground. (Youth)

Deque was part of a local grassroots youth organization which engaged in art and community action projects. Both as a performer and activist Deque depended on funding agencies. These agencies were mostly located in the core. It was in his interactions with these organizations where he most directly experienced the power imbalances that exist in the city. For Deque, these organizations did not value people in the inner suburbs. They expected those in Malvern to come to the core for opportunities. The relationship between those in the core and those in the inner suburbs were unequal, with power lying predominately with those in the core. There was a sense youth had to behave and speak differently to access resources from the core. Deque discussed how those in the core thought they did not need to travel to the inner suburbs. It was partly because of fear and partly because they thought they were superior.

Deque: There is, it goes back to what I was saying about how there is so many different environments so it is like outside of Malvern there is, there is a different way you have to articulate yourself. You have to communicate differently... when you meet someone from Malvern from downtown core it is like there is a certain communication barrier there...

Anu: Do you think the core makes enough effort to come out?

Deque: No.

Anu: Why do you think that is?

Deque: I think um it is just because there is still a fear aspect, there is still um, like a way of thinking where it is like I am, I am this person and I shouldn't need, I shouldn't have to come down there, type of thing. Let me just, let my company come down. You don't need to see my face, you can see the logo or type of thing. It is like, we are, we are um being um bombarded with all these company logos and all these great initiatives, but it is like.

If you come to me as a human being and I am unaware of who you are and we have a discussion I think that is the best way for you to help me and for me to help you because I don't need to, I don't have his perception of you this high person on the throne and it is like I have to be on my knee, I really want this grant... Yea. I mean downtown Toronto there is, that is where all the venues are. That is where all the headquarters of grant organizations and all that is. So it is like where all the money is, pretty much. But, really and truly the money is in the community. Not in the community, the money is hovering over the community... (Youth)

Service providers also recognized the core-inner suburb divide in their work. Prudent (youth service provider) recalled one particular incident when she helped plan a ‘meet and greet’ with a financial donor from Rosedale (one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in Canada). The meet and greet was to be held at the donor’s house. The donor wanted to meet the youth they helped through the programs they funded. Prudent disapproved of “parading” the youth around for donors. It was particularly disconcerting for her because the students had to take a leave from school to attend. However, it was beyond her control. Before the meet and greet, Prudent’s colleague voiced her concern about Prudent’s preference for wearing high heels. Her colleague feared Prudent’s heels would scratch the floors of the Rosedale house. Prudent interpreted this to mean that because she was a Black woman from the inner suburbs, she did not understand appropriate household etiquette.

Prudent: So my first time ever being in Rosedale I was responsible for this project that was funded um by a donor that came through United Way Toronto. And um United Way have an interesting approach to donor stewardship and has nothing to do with altruism. It is very much based on the charity model, where when you fund something you go to the benefactor and you showcase them to um their donor and they want us to tell us the story about this youth and how their existence is in so much dire strait, and thank you and thank you, you save our lives. So this one time The United Way arranged for in the middle of the day no doubt, kids in school, um, I even refused but the agency that was the operator for the project I was responsible for agreed to do it. So I met the woman who was responsible for it at Sherbourne and Bloor and of course I am always wearing heels so she looks at me and of course she is a liberal White woman with Birkenstocks or whatever they wear and she looked at me and said you are not going to walk inside their house with your shoes are you? I said pardon? She said you wore heels and we asked you not to wear heels. I said I thought you were joking, this was on the conference call before. I just walked away from her as she rode her bike. Yea. That was my, my first experience in that.

Anu: So did they make you take your shoes off?

Prudent: Yea, and I wouldn’t mind it because her concern was about the fact that I have heels on and I am going to ruin their floors. It was, it was me to dictate what I wear and um. (Youth service provider)

Prudent found that the meet and greet was insensitive to the needs of the youth. There was also an undertone of racial indignation. Prudent did not like that the youth had to be ‘paraded’ in front of their ‘White saviours’, to make the donors feel good about themselves. According to her if they wanted to see how their donations were being spent they should visit the centres or attend one of the special events the youth organize in the inner suburb. She was further antagonized by the fact that those that lived in the core dictated how to dress appropriately for activities in the core. Prudent always stood out in a crowd with her beautiful bright clothes and her staple high heels. The incident made her feel she was being disciplined in order to assimilate to a particular way of being. A way of being that was more appropriate for those in the core. Her body was being policed to be made suitable for a particular space. She did not want to partake in their respectability politics. Her mentioning of the woman’s bicycle was a reference to the disconnect between those in the core and the inner suburbs. In this case, the bicycle was associated with downtown liberals, which was a sharp contrast to Prudent’s Range Rover SUV. Prudent’s judgment was not trusted by those who policed the boundaries that separated those who lived in the privileged spaces of the core from those in the spaces in the peripheries. This is an example of how racial and class disciplining occur in everyday interactions and how spatial differences are embodied experiences. It was also an example of a clash of racial and gendered expressions of femininity.

The core versus inner suburb divide also informed how participants navigated their friendships. For example, Channel found it hard to reconcile her relationships with her activist friends from the University of Toronto (in the core) and her friends from high school. Despite her activist friends being ‘progressive,’ she recognized they occupied both a different physical and social space. Those in the core who she considered ‘White-liberals’ did not account for intersectionality in their progressive agenda. It caused tensions for Channel who negotiated both aspects of her inner suburb life and the core, where she attended university.

Channel: Not being able to like, I don’t really know how I, my other friends would socialize with my other

friends from like Eastern Commerce [her high school] you know, it would be two completely different world, but at the same time it is kind of like a test, they are very activist you know, that is the thing about activist community, they are community themselves, like it is very leftist, it is very social justice, like how do we treat each other... If I was to bring in somebody from Eastern Commerce into that group like I don't know how the dynamic would be. Because it would be like, maybe they would treat them great but at the same time that person at Eastern Commerce doesn't know all these differences we have been taught, they don't know not to say oh that is gay or like the n word or things like that because that is how the community is, they talk like that, they don't see the repercussions of that. If they were to say that in that group dynamic then maybe they would judge them, they might be like this person is racist or this person is homophobic, you know completely judging a person just based on those things. I don't think that is the way to go about things when you are wanting to help people. Especially, cause like if you are going to the real world that is kind of how everyone talks, especially if you are not educated. Even if you are educated sometimes, you say those things and it is just you are not conscious of it, but that doesn't mean that you are a bad person. So, I think it would be those are the negative things about community that are very conscious but they don't want to be accepting of people who aren't educated of those things because they want to protect their community, they want to protect that bubble, that positive space, but how do you do that when someone is not educated on a topic. You have to be willing to accept a person for them to actually take you seriously and want to apply those rules to their life. (Youth)

Channel described her inner suburb friends as engaged in “hip hop” culture. They often used homophobic rhetoric and the “n’ word”. She recognized this culture emerged out of a sense of alienation. However, her ‘progressive’ White downtown friends did not understand the nuances and intersections of oppression. She felt they would negatively judge her high school friends for being homophobic. However, her ‘White progressive’ friends did not interrogate their own social fields and the different cultural framework that existed among her friends in the inner suburbs. They did not contextualize the socio-economic reasons for the way her inner suburb friends spoke. There was little thought to the fact that in urban street cultures, where survival is most pertinent, a particular hyper-masculine culture develops. In this case, homosexuality is often associated with weakness. It was an example of the manner in which different forms of habitus clash. These differing habitus were informed by socio-spatial differences.

Prudent (youth service provider) also discussed how the core-inner suburb divide limited young people’s political engagement. For example, the City of Toronto hosts a youth cabinet where young people can participate in formal avenues of government. However, Prudent found youth from the inner suburbs did not participate at the same rate because most formal avenues of engagement were in the core. Youth from the inner suburbs were more reluctant to get involved because they were both socially and spatially distant. Issues that were important to youth in the inner suburbs, for example, police harassment, was not championed by these groups. Mainly because it did not concern the youth that typically got involved.

Prudent: You have the Toronto youth cabinet but I am not sure how many of these young people would feel comfortable going downtown. The way they are set up they have their collective strategy so if a young person comes, or if young people in specific area they are not going to take it on so you know youth and police relationships they have never taken that on as an issue. So, I am not sure. I am not sure, there are different avenues but I think we need to be, to rethink to do some analysis on that and to kind of rethink how. (Youth service provider)

Conclusion

This paper drawing on Kinkaid’s (2020)-examination of Lefebvre’s work on the social production of space through a critical phenomenological lens has illustrated the role of embodied difference, in this case racialized youth bodies in Malvern inform how spaces are experienced and (re)produced. For Kinkaid (2020) abstract space that ignores embodied differences reconfirms the false truth that space is neutral and devoid of hegemonic prescriptions of space. This paper by examining how racialized bodies experience space in the city illustrates how some bodies are deemed as belonging in particular spaces while others are relegated to the margins.

Concerted efforts to develop the downtown core has partially come at the cost of disinvestments in the inner

suburbs. Toronto's official motto, "diversity is our strength" is further complicated by the spatial reality of the everyday life of those who occupy the periphery of the city. The hegemonic, sanitized, ahistorical image of Toronto as a tolerant, multicultural, youth friendly, cosmopolitan city that is projected to the world conflicts with how difference is produced, managed, reproduced, and spatially relegated as experienced in everyday life. 'Toronto proper' as the core is often described, takes on a double meaning in this context. The Toronto that is proper, culturally, socially, economically, geographically sets itself apart from the 'deviance' that lives on the peripheries of the city, or the 'improper'. The inner-suburbs are viewed as unsafe spaces that are contrasted with the safe space of the core. By constructing the core as safe space, it erases the struggles of the marginalized from the dominant imaginary of the city. The dominance of the core is produced through the body of racialized people. As Lefebvre (as cited in McCann 1999) contends abstract space is paradoxical in that it values sameness, but this is only possible by highlighting differences. This is done through policies and hegemonic representations.

However, these spaces are not without contestation. For Kinkaid (2020) it is also in these spaces and through these embodied experiences that there is potential to disrupt hegemonic space. Young people that live in the inner suburbs are aware of the divisions and its material and social implications. By leaving confines of the inner suburbs and redefining their spaces these youths are in their own way resisting dominant spatial ideologies. Through their everyday practices they contest dominant framings. The social productions of space have implications for the constitutions of their identities, in particular their racial identities and their embodied experiences. Space becomes a coded way for speaking about race and racialized bodies as demonstrated in the media framings of the inner suburb in contrast to the core. For racialized youth the core-inner suburb divide qualifies their sense of belonging to the wider city. It is therefore imperative we analyze how space informs racialization, belonging, and opportunity and how embodied differences inform experiences of space.

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